

The Twisted Window Study Guide

The Twisted Window by Lois Duncan

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Overview

The Twisted Window showcases Duncan's classic detail-filled narrative. Suspense and mystery build from the first sentence when the heroine notices a stranger watching her. From that moment forward, the reader is unsure which characters to trust; personalities which should be obviously "bad" or "good" are not. Duncan accomplishes this confusion with skillfully plotted clues which do not fit neatly together.

Even the window through which the heroine gazes confuses her due to an irregularity in the glass; hence the book's title. This "twisted" point of view becomes the major theme of the story as the reader follows the heroine in attempting to make sense of confusing bits of information. The characters are well developed, something unusual in a suspense novel. Background information about Tracy and Brad, the story's main characters, is crucial to a plot highlighted by miscommunication and misidentification.

Such ideas may be applied to readers' lives. Tracy learns to distrust first impressions, as her judgmental nature leads her into a potentially dangerous situation. Her realization that her father, as well as the other adults in her life, may not deserve the "bad rap" she has assigned them will hopefully cause some readers to reevaluate certain of their own prejudices. The lack of a "villain" in this story is a pleasant enhancement, one only possible through Duncan's considerable rhetorical skill.

Although all her normal thrills are present, readers will find themselves entertained by a novel where appearances are most definitely deceptive.

About the Author

Lois Duncan began writing as a child, selling her first short story at age thirteen. From her first novel, *Debutante Hill*, she has gone on to write many different kinds of books, over thirty in all for young readers. Most noted for her predominant characters and plot, Duncan's style is simple and intriguing. Her plots involve normal teen-agers in normal surroundings suddenly caught up in something totally unexpected, from the weird to the terrifying. Her subject matter covers anything and everything happening in the modern teen-ager's life, including drugs, sex, divorce, crime, identity crises, and peer pressure. Some of her characters are convincingly evil, depicted in chilling clarity by narration with a wealth of detail. The danger her teen-agers face develops quite believably, giving her stories a shade of reality making them simultaneously frightening and appealing. Even in the instances when Duncan uses the supernatural, her presentations seem realistic, the type of experiences anyone might have.

She is said to draw upon her family and acquaintances for characters, and she writes books she would enjoy reading herself. Admitting to having caused her younger brother nightmares by telling him spooky stories, Duncan has been a fan of the supernatural for years. She was a loner as a child and describes herself as an overweight, shy, daydreaming bookworm who enjoyed exploring wooded areas and isolated Florida beaches. Many of her characters and settings are based on those experiences.

Her works have won multiple awards, including The National Press Women's Award, New Mexico Press Women's Zia Award, Theta Sigma Phi Head Liner Award, Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, and the California Young Reader's Award. *Stranger with My Face* was named Best Book of the Year for Young Adults by the New York Times, Library of Congress, and by the University of Iowa.

Although her plots may seem somewhat shocking, most young readers enjoy the fine style and imagination that has boosted Lois Duncan to amazing popularity.



Plot Summary

The Twisted Window, by well-known author Lois Duncan, is a contemporary story of how seventeen-year-old Tracy Lloyd gains a new perspective on life and matures after being swept up in Brad Johnson's dangerous plot to kidnap his little sister, Mindy, from his stepfather, Gavin. Initially, Brad's mission seems noble, as he seeks Tracy's help in finding Gavin Brummer and his sister. Tracy's own emotional turmoil makes her vulnerable to the falsehoods Brad presents, and she agrees to help him, but the results are far from what she expects. The tale is a study of maturation, responsibility, and how emotional pain can distort reality.

As the story opens, Tracy is living with her Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory Stevenson in Winfield, Texas, but misses her mother, Danielle, a divorced actress, who was killed in New York, months ago. She also feels abandoned by her father, Richard Lloyd, a famous actor, because he has sent her to live in Texas, rather than take her with him as he travels the world.

Tracy first meets Brad in the high school cafeteria, when he approaches her and her friend, Gina Scarpelli. Although Brad is good looking and articulate, Tracy distrusts him. Her instincts tell her to avoid him, but she allows herself to be drawn into his plan to kidnap his little sister, Mindy, from his stepfather, Gavin. Tracy and Brad locate Gavin's apartment and the home of Doug and Sally Carver, Gavin's sister and brother-in-law. The teens plan for Tracy to get a job as the Carvers' babysitter, so Brad can come for Mindy when they are out, but Doug returns, surprising them both. After Brad forces Doug into a pantry at gunpoint, the teens flee with the girl they think is Mindy. Feeling that she has nothing to lose, Tracy agrees to go with Brad to Albuquerque, so he can return Mindy to his mother, Laura.

When Tracy stops at a gas station, she hears a radio broadcast, announcing that the police have issued a warrant for her arrest, on charges of kidnapping Julianne Carver, daughter of Doug and Sally Carver. With growing dread, Tracy realizes that she and Brad have taken the wrong child and that Brad has lied to her. Instead of confronting him, she suggests they stop for breakfast in a small town called Rock Springs.

While Brad and Julianne wait at a table in a restaurant, Tracy calls Brad's mother and learns that Mindy was killed on her second birthday. Laura Brummer tells Tracy to keep Brad and Julianne in Rock Springs and that she will send Brad's friend, Jamie, to get them. When Tracy returns to the restaurant, she finds them gone and learns that Brad took off after seeing her on the phone. With few options, Tracy waits for Jamie, who turns out to be a girl. From Jamie, Tracy learns that Brad's life has been difficult in many ways, which helps explain some of his actions. The girls find Brad, with Julianne, at his family's cabin in the Pecos Mountains, where the terrain is very rugged. Jamie approaches the cabin's porch from a meadow, to engage Brad in conversation, while Tracy sneaks into the rear of the cabin to get Julianne.



As Tracy reaches the cabin's kitchen, Julianne struggles out of her arms to retrieve a stuffed monkey. The little girl trips on a chair and falls. The crash startles Brad, who turns toward the sound, with the gun in his arms. He fires the gun accidentally and thinks that he has killed Julianne, when he sees her sprawled on the floor. The event causes him to flashback to Mindy's death, which he accidentally caused. A moment later, Julianne rises, unhurt, and runs to Tracy, who tells her that she is going home. As she hugs Julianne, Tracy realizes that her personal perception is the key to finding happiness in life.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The Twisted Window by well-known author Lois Duncan, is a contemporary story of how seventeen-year-old Tracy Lloyd gains a new perspective on life and matures after being swept up in Brad Johnson's dangerous plot to kidnap his little sister, Mindy, from his stepfather, Gavin. Initially, Brad's mission seems noble, as he seeks Tracy's help in finding Gavin and his sister. Tracy's own emotional turmoil makes her vulnerable to the falsehoods Brad presents, and she agrees to help him, but the results are far from what she expects. The tale is a study of maturation, responsibility, and how emotional pain can distort reality.

In the first chapter, Tracy and her friend, Gina Scarpelli, meet Brad in the cafeteria of Winfield High School, where they are juniors. The school is in Winfield, Texas, a small town. Brad says that he is a new student, having come from Albuquerque with his father, a geologist, who has taken a local job. Gina says that she has never been outside of Winfield; however, she tells Brad that Tracy has moved there recently from New York. Brad learns that Tracy lives with her aunt and uncle, because her mother passed away the prior summer. As the teens leave the cafeteria, Brad says he is going to his class on Shakespeare. Tracy behaves coolly, but later gives him the names of her aunt and uncle, Cory and Irene Stevenson, so that he can call her later.

Brad's thoughts show that he is pretending to be a student so that he can find a girl to help him accomplish some unrevealed objective. He is attracted to Tracy because she is pretty and seems more mature than her age. Brad also worries that he has only five days before spring break ends at his school in Albuquerque and expects his mother to report him as missing after that time, but his goal remains undisclosed.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Tracy Lloyd and Gina Scarpelli may be friends but they are shown in such a way that their differences are quite apparent. In this sense, Gina's role in this chapter is to highlight Tracy's characteristics and reserved nature. She has not grown up in Winfield and is aloof, where flirtatious Gina is a symbol of carefree youth. It is apparent through her behavior that Tracy has suffered emotional traumas. Brad is shown as a manipulator and a liar, as he searches the student body of Winfield High School for an accomplice of some kind. The falsehoods he presents to the girls appear to be accepted by Gina, highlighting a certain naivety; however, his goals are not revealed. It is also clear that Tracy does not believe him, showcasing her intuition.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

At the end of the day, Tracy takes a route through Lamar Park to Cotton Road, where she lives with her Uncle Cory and Aunt Irene, who is a real estate agent. Although she usually enjoys the walk, she regrets giving Brad the names of her aunt and uncle, so he can call her. Tracy does not believe Brad is who he claims and senses that she is being observed as she walks through the park. In a panicky state, Tracy decides to run through the deserted park, until she reaches an open area, near homes. Turning back, she is flooded with relief as she sees no one chasing her. Her relief is short lived, as she hears a car door slam and an engine roar to life. The sound of the car convinces her that she is not suffering from paranoia, but she is disappointed that she did not see who was following her. At the chapter's conclusion, Tracy thinks that what she felt must have been similar to what her mother experienced before being stabbed - a new fact which reveals the cause of her mother's sudden death.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Tracy's instincts are screaming during her flight through a familiar park, which foreshadows many events to come. She is troubled by the fact that Brad has enough information to contact her, which foreshadows upcoming problems. Tracy's sprint through the park also showcases her sense of vulnerability and distrust of strangers, building curiosity about the reasons for her emotional state. The violent cause of her mother's death, the previous summer is also revealed at the chapter's cliffhanger closing, which is designed to entice attention for the coming chapters.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

After leaving the school, Brad goes to a phone booth to look up Tracy's address. After finding it, he fills his time by going to the movies and a mall, where he sees a display of handguns. Brad wishes he had one instead of the hunting rifle he brought from Albuquerque, but decides against buying one, as he is unfamiliar with gun laws in Texas. When he observes a group of boys engaged in horseplay at the high school, he struggles to recall a time when he was carefree, but he does remember good times in New Mexico with a friend named Jamie Hanson.

Brad spots Tracy walking home on his way back to the Trade Winds Motel. He follows her, but resists calling out to her. When Tracy breaks into a run, he is stunned because he has done nothing to give his presence away. Silently, he chides himself for having upset her and takes off. At the motel, Brad looks longingly at a photo of a blond girl, named Mindy, promising the image that Gavin cannot have her and vows to gain Tracy's help. After a nap, Brad goes to Tracy's house.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The obvious danger increases as the author shows that Brad is armed and has come to Winfield to find help in locating a girl named Mindy; however, his relationship to her is unclear. She is with someone named Gavin for unknown reasons, but what is clear is Brad's determination. Brad's reaction to Tracy's flight through the park shows that he is unsettled by her intuition. His return to the high school and observance of boys roughhousing with each other is significant, as it leads to the assumption Jamie Hanson is a boy. This foreshadows a later chapter, when Jamie is revealed to be a girl.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Tracy agrees to have a Coke with Brad at a local restaurant, but insists on walking there, because she will not ride in cars with people she does not trust. As they walk, she confronts Brad, telling him that she is aware of his lies, because she checked at the school's office and found that he was not enrolled as a student. Brad admits following Tracy in the park, but says he does not want to hurt her. He offers his driver's license as proof of his identity and explains that he is looking for Mindy, his two-and-a-half year old sister.

Following the sudden death of Brad's father, his mother, Laura, married Gavin Brummer and had Mindy. Brad says that Gavin disappeared four months ago with Mindy. Although Brad and his mother contacted the police they were not given much help. Brad decided to track Gavin down and found that he had a sister living in Winfield. The discovery made Winfield seem like a place where Brad could find Gavin and Mindy, but Brad describes his mother as "not exactly with it right now." Tracy theorizes that Gavin took Mindy just so that Brad's mother could not have her. She explains that her own father, a famous actor, named Richard Lloyd, seemed to want her when her parents divorced, but sent her to live with her aunt and uncle following her mother's death.

Brad explains that he thinks Gavin is living at an apartment complex named the Continental Arms, having seen the names Brummer - Tyler on one of the building's mailboxes. If Gavin does have Mindy, Brad believes he is keeping her hidden because kids are not allowed to live there. He needs Tracy's help because he cannot let Gavin see him. Although Tracy thinks that she does not want to be a part of Brad's plans, she pushes her instincts aside and agrees to help him.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Tracy ignores her distrust for Brad and joins forces with him to find his little sister, Mindy. His experiences with Gavin, who is portrayed as an evil stepfather, and his mother, whom he describes as rather useless, resonate with Tracy, who has her own sad tale. The child of two actors, Tracy is living with her aunt and uncle, whom she does not like, because of the violent death of her mother and her father's perceived disinterest in her. Young readers who have experienced divorce may identify with the experiences of the two main characters, as well as their determination to find a child who must surely be in distress.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

When Tracy returns home later than anticipated, Uncle Cory chastised her; however, Aunt Irene offers her comfort when she stomps off to her room. She tells Tracy to invite Brad to their home on the weekend. Tracy wishes her aunt a good night and closes the door to her room, where she is filled with sadness over the loss of her mother and her life in New York. Although she has never met Gavin Brummer, Tracy views him as a traitor and an evil man.

Meanwhile, Brad lies awake at the motel. He sleeps fitfully and dreams about his friend Jamie, whom he had invited to come to Winfield. Jamie told Brad that his plan would not work. Brad thinks of how he told Jamie and Laura Brummer that he was going to his father's old cabin in the Pecos Mountains. Although Laura Brummer protested, he told her that the cabin needed work, so that it would be in good shape when they sold it. Brad broods over the fact that neither Jamie nor Laura listened to him, while Tracy, a stranger, gives him her trust.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory are shown to be sympathetic to Tracy and all she has been through, but Uncle Cory is clearly the disciplinarian, while Aunt Irene tries to comfort Tracy. While their intentions appear honorable, Tracy's disdain for them and the small town ideals they represent is clear.

Brad clearly feels betrayed by his mother and his best friend, as he marvels over the fact that he has attained Tracy's help. His thoughts are shown in order to encourage questions about why Tracy dismissed her concerns about him after a single conversation and to show that her experiences in the past have made her very vulnerable to his predicament.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Brad takes Tracy to the Continental Arms and shows her how to get into the complex. He asks her to find out if the Brummer listed on the building mailbox is Gavin. Once inside the complex, Tracy goes to the apartment labeled Brummer - Tyler and asks to use the phone. A young man answers the door and introduces himself as Jim Tyler. Posing as a new tenant, Tracy pretends to make arrangements to have a phone installed in her apartment, but notes no evidence of a child living in the apartment. Jim and Tracy chat at the conclusion of her fake phone call, but their conversation is interrupted when he receives a call. On the phone, Jim is invited to some event, but says that he cannot go. He tells his caller to invite his roommate - a guy he describes as "really bummed out," and in need of a "little R and R." As Jim talks, Tracy searches the bedrooms and overhears Jim telling his caller that his roommate is having dinner with a sister that evening. He goes on to say, "He was telling me that Friday is Doug and Sally's anniversary. I know they've been having a hard time finding sitters. If they're planning a big night out, he might be stuck with the kid." Tracy overhears Jim telling the caller that Doug and Sally's last name is Carver. Leaving the bedroom, Tracy spots a photo of Mindy.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Tracy displays a clever means of gaining entrance to Gavin Brummer's apartment and learning the names of his sister and brother-in-law. She is shown as courageous, when motivated by the mission she now shares with Brad. She is also capable of lying as easily as he is and appearing believable in stressful situations. This foreshadows her interactions with other characters in upcoming chapters. When Tracy sees the photo of Mindy in the apartment, it is clear that the child is present in some way in Winfield, but the question of what she and Brad will do next is unclear.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

After leaving the Continental Arms, Tracy and Brad find the address of Doug Carver and find Gavin's Jaguar parked in the driveway of the house when they arrive there. Brad is surprised that the car is not well kept, as Gavin was once obsessive about its appearance. He also tells Tracy a story about how Mindy was once burned while Gavin worked on the car's speakers.

Looking through the home's kitchen windows, Brad spots Mindy eating dinner with Gavin, Doug, and Sally. Outside the window, Brad asks Tracy to get a job as the Carvers' babysitter, so he can snatch Mindy while they are out. Tracy points out that she would go to jail on a felony charge, but Brad insists that she would not, because she would be found tied up and say that he forced his way into the home. He also says that these people would not want the police involved anyway, but Tracy refuses.

The diners in the kitchen conclude their meal, interrupting Brad and Tracy's conversation. Gavin ruffles Mindy's hair as he unfastens her safety seat. Brad is filled with hate, but Tracy notices that Gavin appears to be crying. Brad corrects her, saying that he is laughing at something Mindy said and tells Tracy that she must have been looking through a warped windowpane.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Several events in Chapter 7 foreshadow important occurrences in upcoming chapters. Tracy and Brad find the home of Sally and Doug Carver, bringing them closer to Mindy, whom they see having dinner with Gavin. Obviously, the story could not progress without this event; however, what is symbolically important is Brad's interpretation of what he views through the kitchen window of Doug and Sally Carver's home. Tracy sees a tearful Gavin ruffle Mindy's hair. Brad says that she must be looking through a warped windowpane and maintains that Gavin is laughing. They are both seeing the same event, but their interpretation differs greatly. The event is a direct reference to the book's title as well as the book's universal message that how one interprets what happens around one is what is most important in life. It is a theme that will be revisited often throughout the story. The poor condition of Gavin's Jaguar is also relevant as a testament to his mental state, which foreshadows upcoming chapters.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

When Tracy arrives home, Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory confront her about being late again. Uncle Cory is particularly angry, saying that she should not plan to see Brad again on the weekend. Tracy responds angrily, calling her aunt and uncle, "landlords," because they are paid for her to live with them. After her outburst, Tracy flees to her room, where she finds a letter from her father, Richard, who is filming a movie in Italy. He invites her to come to Italy for a month at the end of the school year, but Tracy is insulted that he wants her for only a month. She wanders to the window, thinking about Mindy and Gavin, but her thoughts are interrupted by her aunt's knock and directive to unlock the door.

Tracy refuses Aunt Irene's offer of dinner. She also tells Aunt Irene that she does not want to see her father and says a summer camp may be a better idea. Aunt Irene advises her to avoid such bitterness, but Tracy ignores what her aunt says and asks if she is grounded. Aunt Irene says that she is not, but agrees with Uncle Cory that seeing Brad is not a good idea. Tracy explains that she may apply for a job as a babysitter for a family named Carver and asks if her aunt will attest to her ability to be responsible if they call her. Aunt Irene says that she will, but again presses the point that Brad seems to have a negative affect on her. Tracy tells her aunt that Brad is leaving to live with his mother in New Mexico soon, but says that she must call him to tell him that their plans have changed for Friday.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Tracy's response to her father's invitation to visit with him in Italy for a month is shown to highlight the depth of the pain she feels at his decision to have her live with Irene and Cory Stevenson. She feels that a month is not nearly long enough for them to be together and it is this pain that is shown to make her more vulnerable to Brad. If Richard Lloyd can reject her, then Tracy will reject him and refuse his invitation to come to Italy. The letter and the emotional distress that it causes Tracy is the catalyst that causes her to change her mind and agree to get a job as a babysitter with the Carvers'. Irene Stevenson is shown as a sympathetic woman, who is trying diligently to reach Tracy, but is being blocked consistently.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Brad returns to the motel, but cannot sleep. He decides against calling his mother with the news that he has found Mindy, but calls Jamie instead. Jamie's mother, Barbara Hanson, says that Jamie is asleep, as it is the middle of the night. Sensing that something is wrong, she tells Brad to hold on while she wakes Jamie. Brad asks her to tell Jamie that he has made a great catch while fishing, and that he can't wait to show it to his mother. As he hangs up, Brad tells Barbara that he expects to be back by the weekend.

Brad falls asleep and dreams that he is riding a child's bounce horse with Mindy in the saddle in front of him. In the dream, Jamie pulls up beside them in a car to warn them to go back. Ahead Brad sees the city of Albuquerque, but Gavin's car appears to block their path. The toy horse bounces up into the sky, leaving Gavin and Jamie behind. When the horse lands, Mindy has disappeared from the saddle. Gavin appears again, looking distraught. The dream concludes when the ringing phone wakes Brad.

The caller is the motel manager, who tells Brad that Tracy wants him to meet her at school at lunchtime. Brad dresses and drives to the house on Sweetwater Drive, where he saw Mindy and Gavin. The house seems deserted, but Brad is seen by an old lady. She assumes that he is Sally's brother and says that she noticed his car's out-of-state license plates. Brad says that he left his wallet at Sally and Doug's house. The lady tells Brad that Sally should be home soon and that he can wait at her house, but Brad refuses, saying he will call Sally later.

When Brad returns to the school, Gina Scarpelli tries to engage him in conversation, but he tells her that he is looking for Tracy, so he can get her notes on *Macbeth*. When he says that he thought Gina might know where Tracy is, Gina informs him that they are not really friends and that Tracy is not interested in developing friendships.

When Brad finds Tracy, she tells him that she has a job as Sally Carver's babysitter. Brad is surprised, but Tracy says that her father's letter made her realize that fathers can be "rotten," which changed her mind.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Brad's call to Jamie is a way for him to reach out to someone he cares about, but it is also a means for him to show that Jamie was wrong about his plan not working. In a way, he is gloating. His dream is laden with symbolism and functions as a window into his subconscious and shows that he knows that Gavin is distressed. He also knows that Jamie did not want him to come to Winfield. Mindy's sudden disappearance from the saddle foreshadows the climax of the book in a later chapter. The old lady who sees Brad at the Carver home and her observance of Brad's license plates foreshadow an

event that occurs in an upcoming chapter, as it will create a trail leading to Brad. His conversation with Gina Scarpelli highlights Tracy's self-imposed alienation from her peers, again showing that Tracy has few ties to anyone in Winfield who might influence her decisions.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Doug Carver comes to Tracy's house to pick her up on Friday evening and renews an acquaintance with Aunt Irene, who sold him his house. When Aunt Irene asks if the couple has started a family, Doug says they received a "surprise package." Doug hurries along with Tracy, saying that he and his wife are planning to go to dinner with friends and a play at a local theatre. At the Carver home on Sweetwater Drive, Doug and Sally refer affectionately to Mindy as Cricket, a nickname given to her because of her high energy level. Sally says the child is asleep and that she expects her to continue sleeping.

After the Carvers leave, Tracy leaves the door unlocked and goes to Mindy's room. Brad arrives quickly and the teens start to gather clothing and look for Bimbo, Mindy's stuffed toy. Brad notes that it is odd that Mindy is sleeping with a stuffed monkey and not Bimbo, a stuffed bear. Tracy is in the bedroom, while Brad is in the living room, when they hear Doug Carver shouting, angrily.

Tracy runs to the living room to find Brad facing Doug, who yells at Tracy for allowing a stranger to come into his home. Tracy says that Brad is a friend, but Doug tells her that she will never baby-sit for them again. He says that he left Sally at the restaurant and returned to the house for forgotten theatre tickets, only to find Brad's car in the driveway. He says Brad is lucky he does not call the police, but Brad says that he should. He goes on to say that he would not be arrested, while Doug is an accomplice to a felony. Doug tells Brad to get out, and at Tracy's urging, he does. Doug tells Tracy to call her Aunt Irene to take over babysitting for the remainder of the night. Tracy dials the phone, but as she hears Uncle Cory say, "Hello," she hears Brad telling her to hang up. *"My God, the kid has a gun!"* says Doug Carver, as the chapter closes.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Tracy and Brad put their plan to abduct Mindy into motion when Doug and Sally Carver hire Tracy to baby-sit on their anniversary. All goes according to plan, until Doug returns to get forgotten theatre tickets and confronts the teens. Although the situation is tense, Brad dares Doug to call the police, accusing him of being an accomplice to a felony. He also displays a willingness to use the gun he brought from Albuquerque, surprising Tracy as she has not known until this point that he was armed. The danger is increased through the appearance of the gun and the chapter closes with another cliffhanger, leaving the question of whether Brad will use the gun or not unanswered.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Doug Carver tries to reason with Brad, asking if he wants money or drugs. Brad says that he only wants what is his. Doug pleads with Brad not to harm the "little girl in one of our bedrooms," adding that he does not care what Brad does to him or what he takes. He also says he will not call the police if only Brad will leave, but Brad forces him into a pantry at gunpoint, before taking Mindy. As Brad lifts her from her bed, he recalls that he was angered when Laura Brummer announced that she was pregnant with Gavin's child and that he was surprised at the depth of his feelings for Mindy when she was born near Christmas.

Tracy is astonished and distressed to see Brad with a gun, but helps him to gather food and Mindy's belongings after Doug is in the pantry. After they are in the car, Brad tells Tracy that it is impossible for her to remain in Winfield and invites her to live with his family in New Mexico. After a few moments consideration, Tracy agrees that Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory will probably be happy to be rid of her, and they take off.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Brad and Tracy's plan to take Mindy from the Carver home is successful, but it does not go smoothly. Doug's return to his home is an unexpected variable that they had not planned for, and complicates matters considerably. Tracy's instincts are screaming again, when she sees the gun, but she seems unable to prevent the progression of Brad's plan. The rapid developments and her lack of firm foundations in Winfield lead her to allow herself to be swept along and agree to accompany Brad to New Mexico, even though she might have made other decisions.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

As Tracy and Brad travel toward New Mexico, Sally Carver worries over Doug's long absence while she remains at the restaurant with friends, Kerry and Kenneth Mahrer. She says her brother Gavin is too attached to "Cricket," as she is nicknamed. Sally also describes his marriage to Laura as a mistake, describing Brad's mother as helpless. Sally explains that Gavin wanted to have Mindy with Laura to help their relationship, but all her brother appeared to be was a "wage earner."

Cory and Irene Stevenson wonder if the odd phone call they received was from Tracy, but their efforts to reach her at the Carvers' home are futile. Irene theorizes that perhaps they have tried to be too strict, but Cory reminds her that Tracy considers them to be landlords. Irene says that Tracy has embellished her mother's memory to be more than Danielle was in real life, adding that her sister's jealousy of her husband's success as an actor caused the disintegration of her marriage. She also defends Richard's decision to have Tracy live with them as a sensible alternative to having her live by herself in Los Angeles while he traveled. Sensing something is wrong, Irene says that she is going to call the Carver home and plans to drive there if she receives no answer.

Barbara Hanson is worried over the strange call she received from Brad and approaches Jamie to discuss her concerns. She thinks that Brad needs counseling, but the suggestion angers Jamie, who says that Brad has been traumatized. Barbara tells Jamie that she does not think Brad went to the mountains to fish and confronts Jamie directly about what the teen knows. Jamie admits that Brad wanted help in looking for Mindy. Barbara yells at Jamie for not revealing the information earlier and insists that Laura Brummer be told about Brad's intent immediately. As the chapter closes, Barbara says that she thinks that there is something wrong with Brad, forcing Jamie to agree reluctantly.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter shows the actions of the people around Tracy and Brad, as the teens flee with Mindy. Sally Carver assesses Laura Brummer's marriage to Gavin as ill fated. She also says that Gavin is too attached to Cricket; this is an odd statement which foreshadows an important event in an upcoming chapter. Irene Stevenson laments Tracy's bitterness and worries that she does not answer the phone at the Carvers' home, before saying that she will go to the house if Tracy does not answer soon. This clearly shows that she is an intelligent, compassionate woman, who is not completely ignorant of how Tracy feels and thinks. She also assesses Danielle Lloyd as jealous of Tracy's father's success, which she says caused the end of the marriage. Barbara Hanson sensed something was wrong with Brad when he called and confronts Jamie directly, forcing Jamie to agree. This assessment, and Jamie's reluctant assessment

with it, foreshadows events in upcoming chapters, where Brad's thinking is shown to be highly irrational.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

On the way to New Mexico, Tracy and Brad discuss how they will celebrate with Jamie when they reach Albuquerque. Brad tells Tracy that she will live with his family and that his mother will welcome Tracy's company, particularly when he leaves to go to college, because she hates to be alone. Tracy finds the idea of living with strangers attractive, because she longs to be with people who do not remind her of her past. Brad describes the best times of his life, with his father, fishing at their cabin in the Pecos Mountains. As Brad shares memories, Tracy relates how she spent time with her mother in New York, but realizes that it was actually her father who had done these things with her. She recalls how her mother hated Winfield and how different she was from Aunt Irene. Tracy falls asleep and wakes to find that Brad detoured from their route when he saw a police road block ahead. He says they will travel north, before trying to find a road west, but doubts Gavin would have called police.

Mindy wakes in the back seat, wet, disoriented, and upset. She calls for her mother, but does not seem to recognize Brad. Tracy gets into the back of the car to change and comfort Mindy. As she goes about changing the girl's clothes, she realizes that she has no scar on her stomach, where Brad said that she had been burned.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The fact that Mindy does not recognize Brad, bears no scar and calls for her mother instead of her Aunt Sally or Gavin foreshadows the events that lead to the revelation that she is not Mindy. Brad's mental instability is on display in Chapter 13. His plan to have Tracy live with his family in New Mexico is clearly irrational and unlikely to be possible, but the conversation showcases the strength of his delusions, which are growing. He even suggests that Tracy will be a good companion for his mother, when he leaves for college, indicating that she is little more than a prop in his plans. If the events of the plot have not made clear that Tracy's decisions and vulnerability have landed her in a dangerous, unstable situation before, this chapter showcases how deep Brad's delusions are and the level of danger Tracy faces.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Brad asks Tracy to take over driving while he sleeps. Tracy suspects that they have made a terrible mistake, but Brad insists that she cannot see Mindy's abdomen clearly because of the poor light. At a gas station, Tracy hears a radio broadcast, including a description of Brad's car and New Mexico license plates, which seems to be an alert of some kind about them. She is sick with terror, but Brad insists they have done nothing wrong. He theorizes that the old lady, living next to the Carvers, must have supplied the information about his license plates to the police. On the road again, Tracy turns on the radio and hears a report about three-year-old Julianne Carver, the daughter of Doug Carver, who was kidnapped by her babysitter, Tracy Lloyd. A description of Tracy and Brad's car follows with a statement that a warrant for Tracy's arrest has been issued. The shock of this new information causes her to nearly lose control of the car. As Brad sleeps, Tracy asks the little girl if her name is Julianne. The child says her name is "Juicy Yan," and that she wants her mother. Tracy promises that she is going to get Julianne to her mother, as she is forced to question everything that Brad has told her. Instead of confronting Brad, when he wakes, they go to a small town called Rock Springs for breakfast. There, Tracy finds a phone number for Brad's mother in a phone directory and calls her, while Brad and Julianne wait in the restaurant. Laura tells Tracy that her daughter, Mindy, was killed four months ago.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Although Tracy now has strong suspicions that the little girl in the back seat is not Mindy and is aware that a warrant has been issued for her arrest, she displays strength and intelligence when she does not confront Brad directly. Stopping for breakfast in Rock Springs is a good tactic to buy time and allows her to obtain the information that Mindy Brummer is dead. Brad appears more and more unstable as he continues to insist that the child is his sister, never directly addressing Tracy's growing doubts.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Laura Brummer tells Tracy that Mindy was killed on her second birthday after being run over by a car, but demands to know Tracy's identity and connection to Brad. She also says that her psychologist has told her that Brad is dealing with the pain of his sister's death by denying it. Laura is stunned that Brad is not fishing in the Pecos Mountains and even more astonished to learn that he managed to gain Tracy's help in kidnapping Julianne Carver. Laura begs Tracy to prevent Brad from leaving Rock Springs, and as Tracy listens over the phone, gets Jamie to agree to go to Rock Springs to pick them up. She tells Tracy that she will call Gavin to gain his help in dealing with the Carvers.

Thinking that the only way to keep Brad in Rock Springs is to sabotage the car, Tracy goes outside, but the car is missing. When she returns to the restaurant, the waitress tells her that Brad left with Julianne after seeing Tracy on the phone. Feeling sick, Tracy calls Aunt Irene. After outlining the situation, Tracy learns that her aunt and uncle had driven to the Carver home when their calls were not answered. Cory Stevenson found Doug Carver in the pantry, who called his wife and police. Cory also called Richard Lloyd, who is on his way to Winfield from Italy. Tracy tells her aunt that Laura is sending someone to Rock Springs and hangs up. She tries to reach Laura Brummer again, but there is no answer at her number. With few options, Tracy returns to the dining room to order food and wait for Jamie. When she is approached by a pretty, dark haired girl, she is surprised to learn that she is Brad's best friend, Jamie.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Laura Brummer learns for the first time that Brad is not fishing in the Pecos Mountains and arranges for Jamie to go to Rock Springs. In this action, she displays strength and her sense of responsibility for her son's decisions. Brad leaves with Julianne before Tracy can prevent his escape, leaving Tracy to wait helplessly for Jamie to arrive. Brad's decision to leave the restaurant displays his true feelings for Tracy, as someone to be used and discarded when she no serves his purpose. Reality is crashing in on Tracy and the errors of her previous decisions are clear, but she can do little until Jamie arrives.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

After Tracy expresses her surprise that Jamie is a girl, Jamie demands to know where Brad is. Tracy explains why she does not know and tells Jamie about all that has happened to this point. Tracy also explains that Julianne must have resembled Mindy to Brad's eye because they saw her for the first time through a distorted windowpane. Jamie says that Gavin was a good father and that the burn that Mindy suffered was actually her fault because she had been babysitting her that day. When Tracy asks if Brad was told what happened, Jamie says that he was, but that Brad chose to believe that it was Gavin's fault because he did not like Gavin. Jamie expresses pity for Brad, but Tracy is angry. Jamie explains that Brad does not "consciously lie," but distorts things in his mind.

Jamie also says that Brad loved his biological father, but that his marriage to Brad's mother may have ended in a divorce eventually. She adds that she knows that Brad has mental problems, even though he is her friend, and tells Tracy how Brad was taunted mercilessly by peers when he was younger because he was as "pretty," as a girl. He was also troubled by his parents' marital problems and developed intricate coping skills. Jamie describes Brad's delusions as "wishful thinking," because he believes what he says. She explains Brad's father suffered a fatal heart attack while hunting with his son, forcing Brad to hike back to a village for help. By the time Brad returned, his father was dead, something Laura Brummer blamed Brad for. The girls decide that Brad has probably headed for the cabin in the Pecos Mountains and decide to go there. The waitress returns, noting that the girls look like sisters. The observation explains why Brad chose Tracy as an accomplice; she looks like Jamie, his best friend.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Jamie supplies Tracy with answers to a number of questions about Brad's troubled past in an attempt to explain why he is unstable. The death of his biological father, which his mother blames him for, his poor relationships with peers, his mother's remarriage, and Mindy's death have led him to the precarious mental state he is in. It appears that Jamie is the one person he trusts despite the fact that she tried to dissuade him from going to Winfield. His choice of Tracy as an accomplice is explained by the observation of the waitress who notes that Tracy and Jamie could be sisters. He simply chose someone who looked like a person he trusted, who cared about him. Tracy's assessment that Brad must have assumed that Julianne was Mindy because they saw her through a distorted windowpane is also significant, as it is another reference to the book's title.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

As Brad nears the cabin, he regrets asking Tracy to leave Winfield with him. In his mind, she becomes a traitor, who impeded his progress and anticipates gloating to Jamie that he had found Mindy. He imagines how he will offer Jamie a chance to live at the cabin with him and Mindy. Brad envisions how he will impress Jamie with the number of trout he catches and thinks about how they will live with the little girl, who has become Mindy in his mind. Brad also thinks of how he wanted to take Mindy back to his mother, but now thinks that Laura Brummer does not deserve to see the child. He classifies his mother as "unsupportive, uncooperative and uncaring."

Julianne wakes up, asking for breakfast and Tracy, but Brad says the restaurant they left had bad food that would have made them ill and that Tracy could not come with them because she was talking on the phone. He promises to buy cereal at a store soon, where he also plans to call Jamie. When they arrive at the store, Brad talks with Renzo, a clerk. Renzo expresses sympathy for Brad's family, having read about Mindy's death in a newspaper. Brad replies that everything will be fine because he got Mindy back and that she's in his car. This surprises Renzo, who looks out the window to see the little girl. The clerk admits that he may have been mistaken in understanding what he read in the newspaper and that someone else must have been killed.

Brad returns to the car with the food to find Julianne sucking her thumb. He chastises her for it and addresses her as Mindy. As Brad drives to the cabin, Julianne cries when tree limbs brush the sides of the car. Brad simply tells her to stop crying, as they will be home and safe soon. He wonders who Tracy was calling at the restaurant, but he is distracted by the rutted road and parks a fair distance from the cabin. Taking the gun, groceries, and Julianne, Brad leaves the car to walk the rest of the way to the cabin.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Another assault on Brad's delusions appears in the form of Renzo, a clerk at a store near the cabin, where Brad's father died. Although Renzo offers sympathy on Mindy's death, Brad tells the man that Mindy is outside, in his car. Renzo says he must have been mistaken and Brad continues with his plan to go to the cabin. His callous treatment of the child's distress in the car is evidence that he views Julianne as an accessory, as opposed to a person, deserving comfort. Tracy has now become a traitor and in Brad's mind, Jamie takes her place as companion and accomplice. Since Tracy has turned her back on him and his plan, Jamie will assume the role of his partner, as they live together with Julianne, who has become Mindy.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

As the eighteenth chapter opens, Tracy and Jamie are on their way to Brad and Julianne at the cabin. They meet Renzo at the village store, who confirms that Brad was headed for the cabin. The girls drive as far as Brad's car and see the cabin from where they are parked, although it is distant. Jamie gets out of the car, spots Brad on the cabin's porch and calls to him. Brad thinks that Jamie is Tracy and yells back, to ask where she got the car. Jamie tells Tracy to stay inside the car and tells Brad who she is, but Brad says that he will not be tricked; he has no intention of giving Mindy to Tracy and reminds her that he has a gun. Jamie gives up trying to convince Brad that she is not Tracy and yells that she does not believe that he has a gun, adding that she does not believe that he would shoot anyone. Tracy urges Jamie not to antagonize Brad because he is "crazy," and does have a gun. Jamie tells Tracy there is more that she does not know. Tracy wants to get the police, but Jamie says that she will go to the cabin and create a diversion by talking with Brad. While she has his attention, Tracy will sneak into the cabin and take Julianne.

As Jamie hikes across the field to the cabin, Tracy makes her way through the thick forest surrounding the field's perimeter to the rear of the cabin. She quietly enters and finds Julianne in a bunk bed. Seeing that she has been crying, Tracy urges Julianne to be quiet as she carries her toward the kitchen. When Julianne insists on going back to the bedroom for Monk Monk, her stuffed monkey, she bumps into a chair and falls. As the chapter closes, Tracy hears the gun being fired.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Jamie and Tracy may be at odds over how they feel about Brad, but they form an effective plan to rescue Julianne, displaying courage and resiliency. Once again, a plan is thwarted by the unexpected. In this case, Julianne's desire to retrieve Monk Monk causes her to bump a chair and fall. The crash startles Brad, who turns and fires the gun, providing another cliffhanger closing. What is not shown is whether anyone is injured or killed.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The final chapter of the book is focused on Brad's recollections and an important flashback. He recalls talking with Jamie on the front porch of the cabin, as she tells him that he cannot expect a small child to live for any length of time without indoor plumbing. The sound of the chair falling inside the cabin causes Brad to turn and fire the rifle that he cradles. He does not know how the gun went off, but runs into the house to find Julianne on the floor. Numb with horror, Brad collapses and has a flashback to Mindy's actual death on her second birthday.

At noon on Mindy's second birthday, Gavin arrived. Brad was annoyed by his presence but Laura Brummer told him that she would rather have him there to celebrate than have him go off to celebrate without her. Brad sensed this to be an accusation; if he and his father had not left Laura to go to the cabin on the day of Brad's father's fatal heart attack, he would have received medical attention in time to save his life. Brad behaves in a friendly manner at the party, but loses his temper when Gavin gives Mindy a stuffed bear, similar to Bimbo, the one Brad had given her a year ago. Gavin's bear sings Christmas songs. When Gavin says that the new bear "beats old Bimbo," Brad is furious. Enraged at the negative comparison to his gift, Brad jumps into his car, planning to head for Jamie's house. Instead, he hits Mindy, killing her.

At the cabin, Julianne rises, unhurt, from the floor and runs to Tracy. Jamie takes the gun from Brad and comforts him, as Julianne asks why Brad is crying. Tracy says that Brad was scared because he thought he had killed her, but that it is time to go home. As Brad has had his epiphany, Tracy realizes that Winfield is her real home and whether life appears to be happy or not depends on how she chooses to perceive it.

Chapter 19 Analysis

In the final chapter, the author reveals that Brad accidentally killed his sister, a fact he has not come to terms with at all. His desperate, sad effort to bring Mindy back to life through Julianne, a child that physically resembled his sister, were so that he could find a way to go on with life and possibly absolve himself from the guilt associated with her death and the death of his father. Jamie and Tracy emerge as heroes, who rescue both Brad and Julianne, without anyone coming to harm.



Characters

Tracy Lloyd

Tracy Lloyd, a main character, lives with her Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory in Winfield Texas, where her relationship with Brad Johnson and the story unfolds. Although Tracy does not lack material possessions or people who care about her, her traumatic past and emotional distress lead her to maintain a pessimistic, cynical view of life, until the story's closing. Tracy lived happily with her mother, Danielle Lloyd, in New York until the summer before the story opens. Danielle had divorced Tracy's father, Richard Lloyd, and the woman's violent death plunges Tracy into the small town of Winfield, Texas. Richard places Tracy with her aunt and uncle for reasons that are unexplored; however, she interprets his decision as a rejection. In a way, Tracy has lost both parents and dislikes everyone and everything in Winfield, because it is an environment that is so alien to her. This isolation and pain makes her vulnerable to Brad Johnson's manipulation and the decisions she makes to help him with his plan to kidnap his little sister, Mindy, lead her into increasingly dangerous situations. Even though Tracy knows the difference between right and wrong, her anger at the losses she has suffered make her feel that she has nothing to lose by helping Brad and she may be subconsciously getting back at her father through her involvement with Brad.

Brad Johnson

At the opening of the story, Brad Johnson appears to be on a noble mission to rescue his little sister, Mindy, from the clutches of his evil stepfather, Gavin Brummer. He is articulate, smart, and good looking, all of which makes him more believable when he tells Tracy of his plight. As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that Brad is mentally disturbed because of the tragic death of his biological father, difficult relationships with his mother and peers, and other severe challenges. Unable to face the reality of Mindy's death, which he caused, he creates a different reality for himself. In Brad's mind, Gavin kidnapped Mindy. She is alive in Winfield and he must bring her back to their mother in Albuquerque. Far from being a common liar, Brad believes what he says, making him extremely credible to those he meets. He also portrays himself in his own mind as a hero, yet he treats the little girl and Tracy as accessories to his delusions. As the story closes, Brad emerges as a tragic figure who has suffered losses that are more severe than Tracy's. Where Tracy initially pulls away from those around her to cope, Brad simply refuses to accept the reality of the tragedies, until the very end of the story, when he has a flashback about Mindy's death.

Cory and Irene Stevenson

Cory and Irene Stevenson are Tracy Lloyd's well-meaning aunt and uncle. Cory Stevenson attempts to assume the role of the disciplinarian in his niece's life, while



Irene is more forgiving of Tracy's sometimes harsh words and lack of respect. When Cory yells at Tracy, Irene appears in her room to offer dinner and comfort. Irene also attempts to provide her niece with a sympathetic ear, encourages her to make friends in Winfield, and decorates her room in the most feminine style, but Tracy remains aloof. Irene assesses Tracy's mother Danielle as selfish and envious, a view that Tracy would never share.

Richard Lloyd

Richard Lloyd is Tracy's father and a famous actor. His fame, which was greater than his wife, Danielle's, might have cost him his marriage, but his unexplored decision to have Tracy live with her aunt and uncle cost him his daughter's affection. Richard does not appear directly in the story, but his presence is felt when Tracy discusses him with Brad, when Irene and Cory Stevenson discuss him, and when he flies from Italy to Texas, near the book's conclusion. His words are felt when he writes Tracy a letter inviting her to come to Italy at the end of the school year for a visit, which angers Tracy so much that she increases the level of her involvement with Brad.

Danielle Lloyd

Danielle Lloyd, Tracy's mother, is deceased when the story opens. Her impact is as a very fond memory of Tracy's, who recalls her mother and their life together in New York as something very precious that has been lost. At one point, Tracy seems to recall that Richard Lloyd took part in enjoyable activities with her, but it is her mother whom she remembers as being most dear to her. Irene Stevenson's memory of her sister is much more negative and she thinks that Tracy is exaggerating the positive memory of her mother.

Gina Scarpelli

As the story opens, Tracy is eating lunch with Gina at Winfield High School, where both are juniors. It seems that they are friends when they meet Brad, but Gina later tells Brad that Tracy is not friends with her or anyone else in Winfield. Gina is Tracy's opposite in almost every way. As such, she is a character designed to showcase Tracy's isolation from her peers and reserved nature.

Gavin Brummer

Gavin Brummer is Mindy's biological father. Like Richard Lloyd, he is seen, discussed, and recalled by other characters. Initially, Brad describes him as a selfish kidnapper, yet there are subtle hints that he is more than a villain. Jim Tyler, Gavin's roommate at the Continental Arms, describes him as depressed. When Brad and Tracy see him for the first time, through a window at the home of Doug and Sally Carver, Tracy observes Gavin in tears, while Brad says that he is laughing. In a dream of Brad's, Gavin is



tearful, another clue that he has been touched by tragedy. Brad clearly hates Gavin, but Gavin's sister, Sally, says that he was a good father and husband, describing her sister-in-law, Laura, as an unmotivated opportunist.

Laura Brummer

Laura is Brad's mother and is described as somewhat detached from life or emotionally fragile by a number of characters, including Brad and his best friend, Jamie. The reasons for her emotional state are not explained until the last chapters of the book, where it becomes clear that she has lost her first husband to a fatal heart attack, her second husband through a divorce, and her young daughter to a tragic car accident. Her relationship with Brad has been strained because she feels he is responsible for the death of his biological father, as well as Mindy, her daughter. Although she is described in negative terms, Laura acts quickly to get Jamie Hanson to Rock Springs to pick up Tracy and Brad, once she learns that Brad has lied to her and has gone after Mindy. Considering the amount of difficulty she has faced and what she considers Brad to be responsible for, her actions denote her sense of responsibility for him.

Mindy Brummer

Mindy is Brad's two year old sister and the center of the story, although she is deceased, as a result of Brad's rage at Gavin Brummer. Without exception, she is recalled in the most positive terms of beauty and innocence. As such, she is a symbol of the perfect beauty and innocence of childhood, because she will remain a child forever. The tragedy of her death is what makes the story and it's conclusion that much more electrifying.

Doug and Sally Carver

Doug and Sally are Gavin's sister and brother-in-law and try to support him in his efforts to recover from the tragic loss of Mindy and his marriage to Laura. They encourage him to live near them in an apartment complex where children are not permitted to live. They invite him to dinner and seem to care about him, although Sally says that he is too entranced by her daughter, Julianne. Doug is understandably enraged when he finds Brad in his home, but his pleas to Brad to not hurt his daughter, Julianne, showcase his understandably strong parental instincts.

Julianne Carver

The daughter of Sally and Doug, Julianne serves the author's purpose in two ways. She is Mindy in Brad's mind and without her to kidnap, the story could not proceed. Julianne intrudes upon Brad's delusions a little with her natural demands, when she cries, asks for her mother, sucks her thumb, demands food and her stuffed monkey. Brad seems to find all of this a little irritating, which may point to the fact that he has embellished his



memory of Mindy and his relationship with her, in his mind, in much the same way that Tracy improved her mother's image, following her tragic death in New York. In this way, Julianne also becomes a reminder that living children have needs and a symbol of the reality that Brad would like to forget.

Jamie Hanson

Jamie Hanson is Brad's best friend who discouraged him from going to Winfield. She is a voice of reason and reality in Brad's life, but is only discussed or recalled late in the story. When she appears, it is to go to Rock Springs to bring Brad and Tracy home. Finding only Tracy at the restaurant, Jamie becomes a source of information about Brad for Tracy and defends his behaviors, because of all he has suffered. In this way, she seems to be the personification of compassion in the story and unique among the characters, who frequently criticize each other. Although she and Brad disagree, Jamie is also a rescuer when she goes to the Brad's cabin, where he has taken Julianne, just as Tracy is, when she takes the little girl from the bunk bed.



Objects/Places

Winfield

Winfield is the small, picturesque town where Tracy lives with Irene and Cory Stevenson. It is a backdrop, as the story could take place in any town that Tracy would dislike and that would be different from New York, where she lived with her mother.

New York

New York is viewed through Tracy's memories. It is pertinent because her recollections of it are surprisingly positive, despite the fact that her mother was stabbed to death there. These memories coincide with one of the book's messages that perception is everything and one remembers what one chooses to remember.

Albuquerque

Albuquerque is Brad's home and is shown to be beautiful through very descriptive passages. It is tainted with tragedy for Brad, but the characters never actually make it there.

Rock Springs

Rock Springs is a small town where Tracy stops with Brad and Julianne to get breakfast. It is important because it is where she learns that Mindy is actually dead and hears a number of truths about Brad.

The Cabin / Pecos Mountains

The cabin where Brad takes Julianne is the place where his father died unexpectedly. It is a symbolic sanctuary for Brad, where he can indulge completely in his delusions, simply because it is remote and very idyllic.

Letter from Richard Lloyd

When Tracy receives a letter from Richard Lloyd, inviting her to Italy at the end of the school year, she is so outraged by what she considers to be a token invitation that she rushes headlong into Brad's plan to kidnap Mindy. The letter is the only direct communication between Tracy and her father that the author shows, and represents a catalyst for the story's progression.



Lamar Park

Lamar Park is a place of peace that Tracy enjoys on the way home from school each afternoon. Her terrifying flight through the park, on the day she meets Brad, is shown to illustrate her foreboding sense of trouble to come.

The Carver Home / Sweetwater Drive

The home where Tracy and Brad see Gavin with the little girl they believe is Mindy for the first time is significant because the kitchen window where Tracy and Brad spy is a direct reference to the book's title. It is also the place where Tracy first learns that Brad has a gun.

The Stevenson Home / South Cotton Road

The home of Cory and Irene Stevenson is a symbol of the pleasant life that they have tried to offer their niece, including the frilly bedroom, where Tracy sleeps. It is also a symbol of what Tracy rejects, by keeping her family and surroundings at an arm's length.

Bimbo / Monk Monk

Bimbo is a stuffed bear that Brad had given to Mindy before she died. It is important because Brad does not find it with the child he thinks is Mindy in Winfield and its absence is a clue that he has not found her. It is also a symbol of the dissension between Brad and Gavin and their fight over it caused Brad to accidentally kill his sister. Monk Monk is Julianne's stuffed monkey. When she fights her way from Tracy's arms, to go back for Monk Monk in the cabin, Brad nearly kills her and relives Mindy's death.

Setting

The story takes place in Winfield, Texas, although this is not the traditional home of either of the main characters. Tracy is transplanted there when her mother is killed in a New York City mugging, forcing her to live with her mother's sister and her husband while her actor father is on location in Europe. She vows never to get close to anyone again and views Winfield as a temporary stopover in her very unsettled life. Brad's home is in Albuquerque; his search for his "kidnapped" half sister has brought him to Winfield. The fact that both Tracy and Brad are outcasts of sorts is what unites them. Winfield is foreign territory to which neither teen-ager has any attachment at the book's beginning.

Social Sensitivity

Although Duncan reputedly incorporates murder and violence into her suspense novels, this trait is almost nonexistent in *The Twisted Window*. While a rifle is introduced as a potential threat, it is used only in an accidental way which actually benefits the characters and acts as a caution to readers against handling a loaded gun. The problems of divorce and separation of children from their natural parents is thoroughly presented, but most young people of today are familiar enough with this topic to have little problem dealing with its importance in this plot. The confrontation of death of a beloved family member is a problem the two main characters share, and by the end of the book, both have come to terms with their losses.



Literary Qualities

This particular Duncan novel will not disappoint suspense fans. All of the author's usual strengths are here, especially the author's eye for detail which greatly enriches her plot. Duncan's trademark "surprise" is present in large doses, and the lack of a truly "bad" character makes this novel enjoyably distinctive.

Her reference to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* is most appropriate to her own theme of deceptive appearances, evidenced by Brad's reflection in the twisted window, and by Tracy's view of the supposedly evil Gavin and his daughter. The theme of Alice's looking-glass world is further emphasized by the humorous comparison of Tracy's aunt and uncle to the characters from that fantasy, Tweedledee and Tweedledum. While such symbolism is unusual in this type of novel, its incorporation is very naturally accomplished.

Duncan's mention of familiar places and names such as a McDonald's restaurant, *Seventeen* magazine, and the artist Picasso allows readers to relate to Tracy's world. As usual, the author goes out of her way to make her teenage audience feel comfortable, presenting scenes from a typical high school cafeteria and locker hall.

All these aspects challenge the reader more than the typical suspense novel would, making the reading of *The Twisted Window* a memorable experience.



Themes

Perception and Reality

The title of the book, *The Twisted Window*, refers to the nature of how one perceives factors in one's lives, versus the reality of how things really are. When Brad and Tracy first see Gavin at the kitchen window of Doug and Sally Carver's home, they interpret his interactions with a child they think is Mindy in very different ways. While Tracy thinks Gavin is weeping, Brad interprets the look on the man's face as joy. When their opinions differ, Brad insists that Tracy's view is positive because she is looking through a distorted pane of glass or literally, a twisted window.

This theme is visited often as the story unfolds. Richard Lloyd's letter to Tracy is meant as an invitation, expressing his desire to see her, yet she interprets the letter as an insult. Irene Stevenson tries to befriend her niece through decorating her bedroom and making time to talk with her after school, but Tracy views her efforts as offensive and intrusive. In Brad's mind, Mindy has been kidnapped. In truth, she is dead. Gavin is described as a villain early in the story, by Brad; however, his sister, Sally, says that he was a good father.

It is not until the end of the book that Tracy realizes that her perception of life is what she chooses it to be, and that life is worth living. In the same chapter, Brad is forced to confront the reality that Mindy has been dead for some time, because he believes for an instant that he has killed Julianne. The underlying message is that life is worth living when one makes the effort to see the positive possibilities in it.

Maturity and Responsibility

Brad and Tracy are both teenagers and appear physically mature, as most seventeen or eighteen year olds do. They are both intelligent and articulate; however, they also make many decisions based on emotional pain, which comes from the tragedies they have struggled with, before meeting in Winfield. Tracy pushes her instinctive distrust of Brad aside when she first agrees to go with him for a Coke. She decides that she will help Brad further, after she receives a letter from her father, which angers her deeply. Although she has caring people around her, Tracy decides that she has nothing to keep her in the small town and agrees to travel with Brad to Albuquerque, even though the probability of being able to remain there is realistically low. In some circles, Tracy might be viewed as a disturbed young woman who is making a gigantic plea for help through her actions.

Brad's attempts to resurrect his deceased sister are a determined but sad effort to save the life he had, prior to her death. His journey to the cabin where his father died is an attempt to find safety, as well as closeness to his dead father that can no longer exist. While the story ends with Jamie and Tracy rescuing Brad and Julianne at the cabin, the



author hints that both characters have matured through the events of the story, when both Brad and Tracy have enlightened moments in the last chapter. Brad finally confronts the pain of Mindy's death, while Tracy realizes that her perception of her life in Winfield has been distorted.

Life and Death

The fragility of life is explored in *The Twisted Window*, through the struggles Brad and Tracy face as a result of sudden, tragic deaths. Brad has lost his biological father to a fatal heart attack and Mindy in an accident he caused. His mother blames him for both deaths and as a result he has lost a part of her as well. Tracy's mother was stabbed to death in New York and she is disenchanted with her father because he has forced her to live with her aunt and uncle following her mother's death.

Although they have lost loved ones, Tracy and Brad have also struggled with the living because of those deaths. Both are mourning more than the loss of a loved one, as they have lost portions of their lives. Brad copes through his effort to bring Mindy back to life, while Tracy copes by remaining aloof from those around her. It is through their struggle and efforts in the story that they are forced to confront their pasts and the pain of their losses, making healing and growth possible in the future. These are extreme tragedies, by any standard, and point to a larger message that life may be short, so it is best to make the most of what time is left.



Themes/Characters

The characters found in *The Twisted Window* differ from the normal characters of a suspense novel. Each one occupies two varying points of view before the book's conclusion. When goodlooking Brad arrives in Winfield, Tracy, as a normal teen-age girl, is flattered by his attention, but knows he is not what he seems. Although he introduces himself as a new high school student, a little investigation proves he is not enrolled at Winfield High. Tracy discovers that Brad is there not to socialize, but for the very serious business of reclaiming his half sister. She is sympathetic to Brad, but due to her mother's recent death, and what she feels is her father's rejection, Tracy distrusts everyone's motives. Even so, she soon comes to identify with Brad, as she discovers he is also from a divided home. Her early rebellious attitude toward adults leads her to join Brad in his outlandish scheme to kidnap a local youngster, but Tracy's intelligence later allows her to understand there is a problem with Brad's story.

Finally, her empathy for Brad helps her aid him in a crucial, life-saving realization.

At his first appearance in the novel, Brad is a self-confident brave young man. He relates to Tracy the "kidnapping" of his half sister by his bum of a stepfather. His vivid imagination leads him to describe a picture of his mother's suffering at his stepfather's hands.

This causes Tracy to immediately identify her mother with Brad's mother, because she blames her own father for many of her dead mother's problems.

Seemingly sincere about reclaiming his "stolen" half sister for his mother, Brad is convincing enough to make Tracy an ally who helps him take his half sister from her present home. But immediately, Brad develops a curious "blindness" toward what Tracy sees as the facts. When she understands she has helped kidnap a child who is in reality not Brad's half sister, her discovery forces Brad to confront some disagreeable facts. Rather than a villainous kidnapper, Brad is instead a long-suffering victim of his own guilt. His true identity is revealed in a suspenseful plot twist which includes a new character who will also surprise Duncan's readers.

The supposed "bad guys" at the beginning of the novel: Brad's stepfather, Gavin; Gavin's sister and her husband, the Carvers; and Tracy's own aunt and uncle, Rene and Cory, assume different personalities as the reader's perspective alters. Brad's family's negative history is revealed to be only a product of his fantasy, and Tracy's father's sincere concern emerges by the end of the book. Brad's own mother is revealed only through the conceptions of others and one long-distance phone conversation with Tracy. Her personality, also, differs from that which Brad describes.

The book's theme is not difficult to detect. Appearances are all important, as evidenced by the scene Tracy views through the flawed window. Forgiveness of oneself is displayed when Brad finally confronts truth in the final pages of the novel. The loyalty of

true friendship is represented by Jamie, and ideas about home and family become most positive when Tracy finally associates "a vision of Winfield" with the word "home."

Style

Point of View

The story is told in the omniscient, third person point of view. The narrator and author relates the events of the story as well as what the characters are thinking, feeling, saying and doing, even when they are not in view of each other. She also presents events that are happening to one character at the same time that events are taking place involving other characters in other locations. For example, in the second chapter, Tracy is moving through Lamar Park, worried that someone is following her. The third chapter shows Brad, at the same time, watching Tracy, as she does this. In the twelfth chapter, the thoughts and actions of Doug and Sally Carver, Irene and Cory Stevenson, and Barbara and Jamie Hanson are shown, at the same time that Brad and Tracy are traveling toward Albuquerque with Julianne Craver.

The use of this point of view is significant because of the nature of the characters and contributes to the rising suspense as each chapter progresses. It is clear that Brad is lying to Tracy to manipulate her, from the very beginning of the story, but Tracy has to have time to come to that realization. By the time she does, she is already in grave danger, and a warrant has been issued for her arrest. Cory and Irene Stevenson know that something is wrong when they receive no answer at the Carver home on the night that Julianne is abducted, but Doug has already been forced into the pantry at gunpoint, and the child is on her way to Albuquerque with Tracy and Brad. Through this presentation, the author takes readers into her confidence to show them more than the actual characters know at times.

Setting

The Twisted Window was written in 1987 and takes place within the same time frame, in the American Southwest. One significant aspect of the plot in this time frame is the lack of technology. Characters are often able to locate people and places by paging through bound, paper phone directories in phone booths, which are less commonly used since the Internet changed how information can be accessed. Characters do not have access to cell phones or global positioning devices, which might also change the story if they were to be added.

The natural beauty of the American Southwest is clear in the author's descriptive passages and provides a bright contrast to Tracy's fond memories of the sophistication of New York, where she lived with her mother. Where Winfield annoys Tracy with its small-town atmosphere, her memories of the art galleries and parks in New York are precious to her. The contrast between the two locations is vital to the plot, because it adds to her unhappiness and serves to make her even more accommodating to Brad's requests. Winfield, Rock Springs, and Albuquerque could be anywhere in America and



are less important to the plot than the fact that they are within driving distance of each other.

The cabin where Brad spent time with his biological father, and where he takes Julianne, is significant for several reasons. Its remote location and the rugged terrain surrounding it offer Brad a sense of protection. Tucked away at the cabin and free from the realities of the world around him, Brad envisions a life with the child he believes to be Mindy and his best friend, Jamie. His feelings for the cabin are surprising, as his father died there; however, he shares an attraction to the location of a parent's death with Tracy, who recalls New York fondly even though her mother perished there.

Language and meaning

The language of *The Twisted Window* is contemporary American English, making it easily understandable to teens and adults. Characters engage each other through lively conversational dialogue, moving the plot forward. Imagery, with vivid descriptions of what characters perceive through the five senses, adds to the narrative, yet what characters think about what they perceive is an integral part of the story. Brad and Tracy both see Gavin interacting with the child they think is Mindy through the Carvers' kitchen window, but they interpret the scene very differently. When Tracy and Jamie meet in Rock Springs, Jamie shares information about Brad's life with Tracy. While Tracy views Brad as a liar, Jamie swears he is not, because he believes what he says.

The author presents characters in such a way that they seem to be categorized in one fashion initially, but as the story unfolds, hidden aspects of their lives are brought forward to evoke sympathy. Initially, Brad seems like a conniving liar. By the story's conclusion, the challenges he has faced before arriving in Winfield encourage empathy and sympathy. In the opening chapters, Tracy's life and the traumas she has faced make her seem like someone deserving pity. By the story's conclusion, she emerges as a courageous young woman who succeeds in making amends for her poor decisions.

Structure

The Twisted Window is told in nineteen numbered chapters. The chapters are short—some with as few as six pages—yet they are action packed. Events are sequential and as chapters progress, dialogue, symbolism, exposition, flashbacks, and foreshadowing, revolving around the main characters, reveal the story in tantalizing portions. Many chapters feature a cliffhanger ending, which successfully pulls a reader forward. At the conclusion of the first chapter, it is clear that Brad is lying to Tracy and looking for an accomplice of some kind, but his motives are a mystery. At the end of the second chapter, the murder of Tracy's mother is revealed, but whether this will impact her future is not shown. As the third chapter closes, Tracy has survived a terrifying run through a park, as someone followed her, yet the author does not confirm the stalker's identity, and so on.



Through exposition in the first five chapters, the author introduces the main characters, Tracy, Brad, and their families, as well as their aims, situations in life, and the story's settings. The rising action takes place in the sixth through the ninth chapters, when Tracy and Brad find that Gavin is living at the Continental Arms and the location of Doug and Sally Carver's home. The climax of the story begins in the tenth chapter, with Julianne's abduction, and extends through the eighteenth chapter. Throughout these chapters, the level of Brad's mental illness and determination are shown and the suspense is increased through his flight from Rock Springs. At this point in the story, it is unclear what will happen to Julianne, Tracy, or Brad. The nineteenth chapter is the story's resolution, where Brad's mental illness is explained and both he and Julianne are rescued, through a joint effort by Jamie and Tracy.



Quotes

"She was tall and pretty, with an air of subtle aloofness that made her appear more mature than the average high school student. If the quality of her voice was in keeping with her appearance, she might easily be able to pass herself off as old enough to have her own apartment" (3).

"There was no specific reason for the awareness, but it was as undeniable as the feeling she had experienced at lunchtime when she felt Brad Johnson staring at her"

(15).

"Let's not play games, Brad - if your name actually is Brad,' Tracy said. 'If you're looking for someone gullible, then Gina's your better bet. She believed everything you told us in the cafeteria. She's a small town girl who doesn't know much about con men'" (30).

"I've been through it myself,' Tracy told him. 'When my own folks got divorced, my father made a big production about wanting custody. Dad's an actor, a lot better known than my mother was. The case was written up in the Hollywood tabloids - 'Richard Lloyd Devastated by Loss of Daughter.' After Mother was killed, though, he pulled a total about face. He decided he didn't want me with him in Los Angeles. Instead, he sent me here to live with Mother's sister and her husband'" (36).

"Even after all these months, she still had not become accustomed to the absence of sound in adjoining apartments and the lack of traffic noise in the street beneath her window" (43).

"How ironic, he thought, that a stranger would listen and believe him, when the people he should have been able to count on had failed him. Well, he did not need any of them now - not his mother, not fair weather Jamie, not Lieutenant Souter. Now, that he had Tracy, he would not be alone any more" (45).

"He had been so riveted upon the challenge of locating Mindy that he had not planned for the second step of the recovery mission" (64).

"One month out of the whole year!' Tracy murmured sarcastically. 'That's so good of you, Dad - to sacrifice four whole weeks for your daughter'" (71)!

"I think the only reason Laura married my brother was because she couldn't exist without a man to take care of her" (107).

"She's so bitter,' Irene said with a sigh. 'It's frightening to see a young girl so bitter. She made up her mind before she ever got here that she was going to hate Winfield and everybody in it(109).



"You don't have to be crazy to crack under pressure. It seems to me Brad is looking at life in a twisted way. What I'm worried about is that he might lose all touch with reality" (114).

"If they know their child is unharmed and will soon be returned to them, maybe they can be persuaded not to press charges. I simply can't believe this! What a nightmare" (138)!

"The windowpane was warped,' Tracy said, remembering. 'Everything we saw through it seemed to be distorted. When Gavin was lifting Cricket out of her high chair, I actually thought for a moment I saw him crying'" (149).

"If the two of you had stayed here at home as I begged you to, we could have summoned an ambulance in a matter of minutes" (179).

"It's however I choose to see it, Tracy thought suddenly, as she gazed at the painful but glorious world that surrounded her" (183).

Topics for Discussion

1. When Tracy discovers that Brad has lied about his identity, she hesitates to spend time with him. Why do you think she eventually does associate with Brad?
2. What does the surprise identity of Brad's best friend, Jamie, add to the novel's plot?
3. Why does Tracy think of her aunt and uncle as Tweedledee and Tweedledum?
4. Discuss the appropriateness of the book's abrupt ending.
5. Compare and contrast the various adults in the book.
6. Project what you think happened to the book's characters "after" the novel ended.



Essay Topics

Tracy is suspicious of Brad from the moment they meet, even though he seems very credible and is easily accepted by Gina Scarpelli. Are instincts a valuable tool in avoiding danger?

Tracy's father, Richard Lloyd, places her with Aunt Irene and Uncle Cory in Winfield after the death of his wife in New York. Although Tracy sees this as an act of betrayal, why might his intentions be in her best interest?

Tracy seems to view Irene and Cory Stevenson with disdain, despite their efforts to treat her well. Why do you think she dislikes them?

Have you ever had a friend pressure you to do something that you felt was wrong? How did you handle the situation?

Tracy has lived in New York and Texas. Which living environment would you prefer: big city or small, rural town?

When Brad and Tracy see Mindy at the home of Sally and Doug Carver, they think very different things about what they are viewing through the window. Why do you think their views differ? Is it the glass itself or something else?

What do you think might happen to Brad and Tracy in the future? Will they go to jail or will they be treated leniently by the legal system?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Lois Duncan is said to be a master at the use of detail. Choose two or three well detailed scenes from the story and discuss their importance.
2. Discuss the symbolism of the book's title.
3. Compare Tracy's experience to that of Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) by Lewis Carroll.
4. Compare and contrast your original impression of Brad's family members with your final impression.

Further Study

Chevalier, Tracy, ed. *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*. Chicago: St. James Press, 1989. A complete listing of Duncan's works is supplied, along with reviews of several books and an overview of her life and attitudes.

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something About the Author*. Vol. 36. Detroit: Gale Research, 1984. Contains a lengthy narrative by Duncan, revealing her personal history and thoughts about writing.

Related Titles

Unlike many of Duncan's books, *The Twisted Window* does not focus upon the supernatural. Like all of her books, this novel does feature teenagers caught up in unusual situations.



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