

# **Unteachable Study Guide**

**Unteachable by Leah Raeder**

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## Plot Summary

Maise O'Malley yearns for adulthood as she enters her senior year of high school in the novel *Unteachable* by Laura Raeder. A fling with a man she meets at a carnival leaves the two questioning if their love is real when Maise discovers the man is her teacher. Amid the dangers of being caught, the two continue the relationship. At the same time, Maise struggles against the events of her life that seem to be pushing her in the direction of becoming like her drug dealer mother.

The novel flirts just on the edge of taboo as eighteen-year-old Maise has an active sexual relationship with her film studies teacher Evan Wilke. The two met at a carnival, hooking up before he knew she was a student and she knew he was a teacher. Since Maise is of age, the relationship is legal; but, a jealous classmate who is a minor threatens to expose the relationship and claim that Evan had sex with her as well.

The student named Hiyam blackmails Maise into selling her drugs in exchange for her silence. Maise sells Hiyam drugs, both to keep her quiet and also to keep herself and her mother out of trouble with a drug lord to whom her mother owed money. As an intelligent girl, Maise uses the opportunity to film Hiyam using drugs. She confronts the girl with her drug addiction and sends a copy of the tape to the girl's father. Maise uses the money she earns during her short stint of selling drugs to pay off her mother's debts and arrange for her to attend a drug rehabilitation program.

Meanwhile, Maise has been befriended by Wesley Brown who has similar interests in film. Maise uses Wesley's film knowledge to help her confront Hiyam. Most importantly, Wesley's family becomes like a family to Maise. His mother had fallen in love with and married her teacher, a man older than herself, in a much similar situation to Maise's. Siobhan supports Maise in her relationship, becoming almost a surrogate parent to the teen who'd never had a close relationship with her own mother.

As the book concludes, Evan surprises Maise by appearing next to her on the plane as she prepares to fly to California for college. His decision to travel to California indicates he is serious about their relationship. Additionally, Maise had received a ten thousand dollar check as a thank you from Hiyam's father for alerting him so discreetly of his daughter's drug use.



# Chapter 1

## Summary

### Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, Maise wants to feel like an adult before she begins her senior year of high school. In her southern Illinois town, though, there is nothing to do but attend the carnival. Guys, mostly older, eye her long legs. She rides the merry-go-round before she faces the roller coaster, a source of fear. She is forced to get into the front car because all the others are full. A man sits in the car with her. She realizes he is very attractive. At the first drop, she and the man reach for each other's hands at the same time.

When the ride is finished, the man asks Maise how old she is. She replies, as she usually does, that she is old enough. She tells him it matters only if she thinks he is a creep. She then suggests they ride the Gravitron. Maise bets him five dollars he'll scream. She wins, then uses the money at a game booth where she wins a velvet pony.

The guy buys Maise a beer, then suggests they go somewhere they can actually talk. They seem to become uncomfortable when the man tells Maise he thinks that she is seducing him. He offers to take her home. Once they get into the man's car, Maise takes a break to tell her reader that she has slept with older men before. She has never been satisfied with boys her own age. Since she slept with an older man who made sure she enjoyed the experience, she decided older men were the way to go.

She and the man kiss in his car. She feels the kiss more intimately than she's ever felt a kiss. As their motions move toward sex, the man tells Maise that he does not just want a hook up. Before he will penetrate her, the man, who introduces himself as Evan makes Maise tell him her name. After they are finished, the man obviously doesn't want to encounter to be a one-time thing. However, Maise lies, telling him she is going back to the Gravitron. Instead, she leaves.

## Analysis

Although the book appears to be written in the present tense, it is obvious Maise is recalling her experiences after the fact as she incorporates bits of information about Evan that she wouldn't have if she were truly narrating her story from the time it was happening. One of the main clues that Maise is writing after the fact is that she notes that Evan could have told her right off the bat that he was a teacher instead of flirting with her and asking how old she was, afraid he would get into trouble for having sex with a minor. Maise also uses her mentions of Evan in this first chapter to indicate that despite her attempts to make a clean break from him, they do continue a relationship. Foreshadowing indicates their relationship will be that of a teacher and student.



Maise fights against her own emotions as she leaves the man after they have sex together. Even though she doesn't want to admit it, the sex felt different with this man than it ever had before. She cries as she rides away, knowing that the man, who insisted on knowing her name before he slept with her, did not want just a one-night stand.

One of the issues that Maise discusses is her attraction to older men. She says that her psychotherapist has told her this attraction was caused because her father abandoned her. While Maise acknowledges that she probably does have issues because she hasn't had a father, she does not allow herself to take full advantage of this as an excuse for her behavior. Right off the bat, the reader learns that Maise wants to be in charge of her own life. She does not ascribe to blaming others for her own bad habits. She sleeps with older men because she likes the way they make her feel and the way they treat her. Even though Maise recognizes something different about Evan, she is scared to stick around and see where the relationship might go.

Interestingly, both Maise and Evan decide to ride the roller coaster for the same reason. They are both hoping to overcome a fear. For Maise, the fear is a childish one connected with the loss of a stuffed animal. Evan, is trying to build up his courage to face his new job. The two have also come to the carnival for a similar reason. Maise is looking for an experience to catapult her into adulthood. Evan, who can see the lights of the carnival from his house, has come because he wants to be with other people who are happy. Although they are searching for different things, both Evan and Maise visit the carnival trying to find some elusive thing they are looking for to fill the holes in their lives.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Maise's loss of George figure into her fear of roller coasters?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the author use foreshadowing in this first chapter? Cite a specific example.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Maise lie to Evan and leave him alone? Is she more afraid of having an adult relationship than she realizes?

## Vocabulary

Eulogy, operative, sauntering, cynical, inconspicuously, ascended, fey, spontaneously, hypothesis, burnished, pastiche, centrifugal, amiably, patrician, levitating, flaccid,



fixated, averted, pantheon, chagrined, languid, endeared, wrested, surreal, fulcrums, lugubriously.



# Chapter 2

## Summary

### Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Maise decides to remake herself. This makeover includes removing herself from the sleazy crowd she'd always talked with, applying for college, and facing one fear each month. She also decides to get a job and stop waiting for her mother to know what she needs and wants.

By the time Maise is allowed to register for her classes, film studies is already full even though Maise reserved the class a year ago. Maise can see by the reflection in the registrar's glasses that she is playing Angry Birds. When Maise suggests she'll have to sleep with the Dean of Admissions to get into the class, the registrar pretends as if a spot has opened up. Maise is so happy as she walks out of the building that she doesn't notice Evan's car in the parking lot.

Although part of Maise's plan for renewal includes forgetting Evan, she can't get him out of her head. She's thinking about him when she bikes to the town's water tower and climbs up to a crow's nest. She hears movement and boy's voice asks who is there. Even though she asks him to go away, he persists in talking to her. He tells her that she has taken his seat in the film studies class. She is friendly only after he tells her who he is. He asks her to give him a reason why she needed the class so badly. She says it is so she can get out of town. Wesley walks her home, the two of the talking about movies. They trade phone numbers.

On their first day of school, Wesley texts Maise about having lunch together. She agrees. She wonders if Evan has started his new job yet. When she walks into Room 209 for her film studies class, Maise sees Evan first. She realizes Evan's new job is as teacher of the film studies class at Riverland. When Evan recognizes Maise, his expression is one of shock. After he recovers slightly, Evan asks to see Maise outside. He surprises her by first telling her that he is sorry. He tells her he will do whatever she feels is best if she want to transfer to another class, or wants him to resign. Maise tells him she should be the one apologizing, then tells him they'll be able to handle the class together with no problem.

Maise masturbates in the bathtub that night, pretending it is Evan who is manipulating her. The rest of the week is a blur until Thursday comes again. Maise is surprised to discover that Wesley has gotten into the class. She is disappointed, then happy when she catches Evan's eye. She gets angry when she sees Wesley taping her but realizes he is harmless. On their way out of class, Evan asks to see Maise. They agree their position is weird. Maise begins kissing him. They don't stop until they are interrupted by a student looking for the projector.



The following day Maise's mother drives her to school. She asks Maise if they can go out together that weekend. Maise doesn't tell her "no" as she wants to. In their film class, Evan tells the students he's giving them only one assignment. They are to make a short film, any genre and any subject they desire. At lunch, Wesley tells Maise he knows she has a crush on Evan. Maise decides to be honest with Wesley, and she tells him that she is attracted to their teacher. When Wesley indicates it's gross, Maise basically tells him she thinks he's immature. To smooth things over, she agrees to work on the film project with him. She flicks his ear, a sign she didn't mean to hurt him with her comment.

After school that day Maise is waiting for Evan by his car. He gets in his car. Maise stands there looking at him until it begins raining. Evan reaches over and opens the passenger door. He drives her home. They make out in the car even though Evan admits to her that what they are doing feels wrong.

## Analysis

In the beginning of this chapter Maise believes that her encounter with Evan is behind her. Even so, she can't stop thinking about him. Her foreshadowing gives no question that Evan will appear again and in what role he will appear. A hint that his new job is at Maise's school is given when the author notes that Maise is too happy about talking her way into the film class to notice Evan's car in the parking lot.

As Evan and Maise try to determine what direction their relationship should go, Evan seems more compromised about it than Maise. As she thinks about their situation, she even talks through her own defense as if she is called on trial for a crime. She thinks to herself how she would tell the judge that she was eighteen, she was consenting and that neither of them had known he would be her teacher. Although this teacher-student relationship touches on the taboo, Maise rationalizes there is nothing wrong with it because she is of age.

A couple of different love triangles seem to be developing in this chapter. Hiyam, another girl in Maise's film studies class, is also coming on to Evan as well. She seems to sense that Maise is interested in Evan as she gives the girl a chilly look during their class. Similarly, Wesley appears to be attracted to Maise. Notice his interest in her crush on Evan as well as his habit of recording her with his cell phone. These cell phone recordings will be important later in the novel.

Even though their relationship is not quite typical, Maise goes through all the emotions of a young girl who is falling in love for the first time. She has already used the roller coaster as a physical symbol of them falling in love with one another. In this chapter Maise describes how in the first stages of love, one is happy just to be around the symbol of their affection.





## Discussion Question 1

Is it illegal for a teacher to have a relationship with a teacher? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Evan instructs Wesley to always ask permission before videotaping someone?

## Discussion Question 3

What does it mean for Maise that Evan is now in her film studies class? How might this affect her relationship with Evan?

## Vocabulary

Fetish, adjunct, skew, iconic, rhetorical, presumptuous, flippant, retrospect, abrading, assiduous, stratification, unequivocally, imminent, rapturous, oblivion, utilitarian, banal, peripheral, angst, ballast, untoward, reparations, demagnetized, desaturated, catharsis, genre, lupine, enigmatically, ethereal, zircon, espionage, morose.



# Chapter 3

## Summary

### Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, Maise's mother wakes her early to take her shopping. Maise is suspicious of her mother's intentions. Maise is surprised when her mother pays the bill for more than \$240 without balking. Her mother buys lunch at the food court. Maise expects a blowup at any time but her mother suggests they see a movie.

That night Maise tries to find information about Evan on the Internet but is unable to find little. She also researches information on age of consent laws in their state. Even though they are legal, Maise realizes if they are caught, Evan would probably be fired and not allowed to teach again. She hears a loud crash and goes downstairs. A man is there with her mother, trying to help her to the couch. Maise knows her mother has taken drugs. She leaves the man, who identifies himself as Paul, alone with her mother. She instructs him in how to take care of her until she comes down then leaves the room. Paul comes out, puts a hand on her back, then slides it down to her bottom. She threatens him.

Outside the house, her phone buzzes and she has a photo text from Evan, a picture of the lights of the carnival. The man comes out of the house and Maise heads for the water tower. Wesley is there. She hangs off the ledge of the water tower making him think she wants to jump. He "saves" her but then tells her not to try to hurt herself in front of him. Wesley leaves, then Maise sends Evan a photo text of the carnival lights. He responds that he wishes she were with him.

On Monday, Wesley offers a cupcake as a peace offering. He tells Maise she can always come to his house if her's gets too tough. They agree to go to Hiyam's party together. In film studies class, Evan is not there. Maise and Wesley slip out to work on their project together. Maise texts Evan and learns that he is in court. He gives her a pickup address when she tells him that she wants to see him. Evan picks her up at a closed gas station. They go to a hotel. They have sex, but then talk, trying to get to know one another. When Evan learns that she wants to go to film school, he tells her that he needs to give her an education. The first thing Maise learns from Evan, she says, is how to make love. When they sleep together, Maise feels as if something is happening to her whole body, not just her sexual organs. They don't leave the hotel until late that night.

## Analysis

The first point of note in this section of the novel is Maise's relationship with her mother. Perhaps it might be better to say her lack of a relationship with her mother since Maise thinks so badly of the woman who gave her birth. Because Maise knows how to identify



the symptoms of a drug overdose, she has apparently dealt with her mother's poor decisions on various occasions. Although she had steeled herself for disappointment all during their shopping trip, Maise still seems surprised when her mother overdoses that evening. Maise already seems suspicious of her mother's intentions by taking her out shopping. She is even more surprised when her mother does not balk at the cost of the clothes that she picks out. When her mother passes out, leaving her alone with a man who tries to make a move on her, Maise's mind flashes back to the number of times that her mother has done that same thing to her.

Although they are both concerned where their relationship might lead, Maise and Evan see one another again in this chapter. This time it is in a hotel room. Maise notes the differences between Evan and the other men with whom she has been. She says that when she is having sex with Evan, it is more than just a stimulation of what she calls her "useful parts." She says their relationship feels like something they do with their entire bodies. When Evan learns that Maise is interested in directing, he tells her that he needs to give her an education. What he has in mind is a syllabus of films she needs to watch to grow her appreciation for the art of film making. This interest in her future and her interests shows that Evan thinks of Maise as something more than just a body that he can use to fulfill his desires. Note in this section that when Maise tries to research Evan on the Internet, he is not able to discover much about him. Note also Maise's realization that she is beautiful. Although she's always struggled with men who have seen her only as a sex object, Maise realizes that part of falling in love with someone else involves falling in love with one's own self.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Maise suspicious when her mother offers to take her shopping?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Maise misreads Evan's text when she sends him the photo of the carnival lights? Why is the difference important?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think that Maise is leading Wesley on without realizing it? How would you characterize her behavior toward him?

## Vocabulary

Tentative, menarche, brazen, ostensibly, tepid, sinuous, oblivion, nebula, derelict, ricocheting, trepidation, pumice, poignant, viperous, magnanimous, askance, conspiratorial, kismet, immaculate, dregs, chevron, leverage, languidly, detonated, annihilating, cumulative, culminating, visceral, insatiable.



# Chapter 4

## Summary

### Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, the next day at school Wesley picks up that Maise was with Evan. When she sees her teacher in the hall, their fingers touch briefly. Maise goes to Wesley's house that evening so they can start working on their project. She recognizes just by her first look in the house that Wesley's mom cares. Wesley's mom is Irish as well, and beautiful. They drink lemonade and Siobhan talks to the two about their film project. In Wesley's room, they look at the footage he's shot. Much of it involves Maise. She notices how her yearning for Evan is clear in the way she looks at him. She comments there isn't much he could do with the footage he has except make a film about her. Maise has plugged her phone into Wesley's computer to charge. He tells her that she has a phone call with the caller ID identifying the caller as "E." Maise pretends it is her father and takes it outside. Evan wants to see her so she lies to Wesley telling him she has to take care of something family related, then leaves.

She and Evan meet one another at the water tower. She admits to herself that some of what is drawing her to Evan is that having a relationship with one's teacher is forbidden. Evan admits to her that he hadn't wanted to be a teacher, he had instead wanted to be an actor. They are afraid of getting caught because so many kids, including Wesley, come to the water tower. Maise offers to pay for a hotel room. They agree to meet after school the following day.

Maise takes the money out of a trust fund that her grandmother set up for her before she died. The teller at the bank indicates Maise's mother is the one she usually sees in connection with the account. Maise asks if she can take her mother's name off the account but does not have time to set up a new account, as the teller suggests. Maise feels a little bit embarrassed thinking what her grandmother would think if she knew Maise was withdrawing the money. To make herself feel better, Maise promises herself she will pay the money back.

She and Wesley are formally invited to Hiyam's homecoming party. Wesley's mother drives them to the party. She and Wesley drink, then dance before running into Hiyam. Wesley slips off, and Hiyam tells Maise she wants to talk to her. Hiyam tells Maise she knows that Maise has a crush on Evan. Maise admits he's hot but lies and says she already has a boyfriend. Hiyam gets down to business and tell Maise she wants her to get her some cocaine. Maise suddenly realizes why she's been invited to the party. She tells Hiyam she doesn't deal, and then walks away to find Wesley. She tells him that Hiyam only invited them here so she could get Maise to supply her with cocaine. They talk for a while. Wesley kisses her. She kisses him back, but she suddenly pulls away. She tells him that she's with someone, and he gets angry because she won't say who.



He reasons that if they were really friends, Maise wouldn't feel that she needs hide things from him. Wesley walks off when Maise continues to refuse to tell him.

Maise buys the remainder of the bottle of alcohol and gets drunk. She calls Evan, telling him that her ride has left her and that Hiyam tried to buy drugs from her. Evan comes to get her. Britt, Maise's friend asks if she is okay. As they walk toward the gate, Maise realizes that by calling Evan, she has let others in on their secret. Evan has to find her address in her phone in order to take her home. He stays with her until he is sure that she is all right. When she wakes up the following morning, Maise has a letter from Evan telling her that he is going to treat her better from that point on. He has a friend in St. Louis whom he will try to sublet a loft from during the weekends so they can spend real time together.

## Analysis

Although Maise has been trying to kid herself into believing Wesley only had a sibling-like affection for her, she realizes when he tries to kiss her that he feels more than what she'd guessed. Wesley tries to force her into telling him who she's dating, a trick for which she won't fall. He tries to tell her that if she has to keep the relationship hidden, it isn't a good relationship. When she continues to stonewall him, he leaves.

Being left by herself at the party without a ride causes Maise to make one of the first major mistakes in their relationship. She calls Evan to come get her. At least one person sees her being picked up by her teacher. Maise suddenly realizes that by calling Evan, she has put their relationship into jeopardy. She acts out of anger because Hiyam has asked her to supply her with drugs, a request that makes Maise realize people think she is the same type person as her mother. Also, she is disappointed that Wesley has gotten so angry with her. These two factors combine to keep her from thinking about her actions rationally.

In about the middle of this chapter, the author uses a fast forward technique to move the action of the novel along without actually skipping anything. Just as a person watching a video could fast forward, just getting the highlights of what is happening, Maise gives just the highlights of what is happening in her life besides her relationship with Evan. Wesley has picked up on her habit of ear flicking. She and Britt have become friends. She and Wesley have applied for jobs online, and Maise and Evan have been making out during school days in the dark classroom.

A final aspect of this chapter that stands out is Maise's wish that Siobhan were her mother. Although she tries to portray herself as a tough teen, Maise wishes deep down that she had a mother who really cared about her, just as Wesley's mom cares about Wesley. She cries when she leaves Wesley's house and wishes that Siobhan would adopt her.



## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Siobhan and Yvette.

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the way that Evan treats Maise when she is drunk and the way that Yvette's boyfriends have treated her when she is drunk or high.

## Discussion Question 3

What does it mean for Evan and Maise that Evan is looking for a place in St. Louis that they can spend weekends?

## Vocabulary

Vignettes, chaste, censure, defeatist, starlet, sibilant, pastoral, incest, primal, narcissistic, intrigued, tungsten, discretion, droll, chardonnay, dubiously, enigmatic, iota, flotsam, recalibrate.



# Chapter 5

## Summary

### Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, Maise and Evan drive to St. Louis to talk to the friend. They have arranged the meeting in a club that Maise is too young to enter so she is left alone for a couple hours. As Maise thinks about her place in the world, she realizes what her senior project will be about. When she meets Evan again, he tells her the friend agreed. They are to pay him two hundred dollars a month for the right to use the loft on weekends. Evan lets Maise drive home. They get there late and Evan gives her directions to his apartment. After sex Evan asks her to stay with him but she goes home.

On Monday, Wesley is not in their film studies class. Maise begins working on her project alone, finding the shots that she needs on her phone. She misses Wesley and his mother. On Thursday, Maise's mother announces that she will be cooking on Friday, the night Maise and Evan are to go to St. Louis for the first time. Her mother insists that Maise be there saying that Gary Rivero wants to meet her.

The night of the dinner, Maise's mom makes her wear the new clothes she had bought. Maise believes that Rivero is a drug lord. As she helps her mother with dinner, she thanks her for the clothes. Her mother tells her that she looks beautiful. Two men come to the house, Rivero and Quinn. As they eat, Rivero gives Maise compliments as she tries to fend off his comments. When he goes outside to smoke, he asks Maise to come out with him. He starts by telling Maise her mother owes someone a lot of money. He tells her that because Maise is her daughter, Maise is involved in the problem as well. Maise is too dazed to process much of the rest of the weekend. When she checks the balance on her account, she sees that there is no longer any money in it.

## Analysis

Maise realizes her mother has gotten her deeply involved in her drug dealings. Because her mother owes money to a drug dealer, Maise can be held accountable for her debts. The drug lord, Rivero, does not tell Maise exactly what he expects her to do, but it is clear that she is involved in her mother's business more than she wants to be. After Rivero leaves, Maise realizes why the teller at the bank was so surprised to see her instead of her mother. Her mother has cleared her bank account. It also appears that her mother took her shopping and bought her clothes in an attempt to butter her up for her meeting with Rivero.

Maise's relationship with Evan moves to the next level as they plan to spend the weekend together in St. Louis. They both fight against the idea they are attracted to one another only because of the danger and taboo of their relationship. Wesley, meanwhile,



doesn't seem to want to have anything to do with Maise at all as he skips their film studies class and eats lunch somewhere else.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What do you think that Rivero wants from Maise? What might she be called upon to do?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What signs have there been that Maise's mother has been tricking her? Were you surprised to learn that Yvette has cleared out her bank account?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Wesley disappear? Do you think he is embarrassed or mad?

## **Vocabulary**

Stropped, diaphanous, busking, voyeur, morose, ephemeral, audacity, cynical, cusp, palpable, retrospect, discordant, discrepancy, beatific, destabilization, cajole, clandestine, crude, concocting, cauterized, feral, aquiline.





# Chapter 6

## Summary

### Chapter 6

On their way to St. Louis in Chapter 6 Evan notices how somber Maise is but doesn't say anything. Once they are in the loft, he asks her what is wrong. She cries, then tells him they have to stop. She explains that her mother is a drug dealer. She tells him she might be on a hit list somewhere. Evan tells her he plans to cook for her and then she can re-evaluate if she wants to break up with him. Maise later learns that Evan's mother was an alcoholic. She had basically ruined their family. He tells how his little sister had drowned in their family pool because his mother was passed out drunk at ten in the morning instead of watching her. He believes they are attracted to one another because they both lost their childhoods.

The following morning, Evan gives Maise a silver Claddagh ring. It begins raining and they head back to the loft. In the bathroom, Evan sits her on the counter and begins making love to her. He pulls out before she comes frustrating her and making her ask what is wrong. He tells her that he does not want to put her future at risk. She tells him her plans, assuring him that she doesn't want to get pregnant until she's nearly thirty. He admits she has things just as under control as he does. They talk and he tells her that she is the first girl he has given a ring. They make love again, and this time they use no condom. Maise tells him she was insistent on this because she wanted all of him.

They begin Maise's film education watching "The Lost Boys" and "The Breakfast Club." When the time to go home comes, Maise begs him to allow them to stay there. He warns her that running away never works. Inside the car, some papers fall out of the glove box when Maise tries to put her sunglasses in. She notices the car is registered to Eric Wilke. Evan says Eric is his brother. On the way home Evan tells Maise that if things don't work out with her mother, she can stay with him. On the way home, Maise has Evan stop at a Walgreens for tampons and condoms. She is surprised when Wesley comes out to check her out. He treats her coolly. She walks out to Evan's car and tells him she plans to stay until the end of Wesley's shift so she can ambush him.

When Wesley comes out later, he asks Maise why she is there. She says she's trying to save their friendship. He tells her that if she really wants to be friends, they have to be equal. They walk together, winding up at the water tower. Maise tells Wesley about her problems with her mother. As they talk, they are suddenly friends again. Wesley asks what the relationship feels like. Maise describes it as being intense, like hanging over infinity.



## Analysis

Much happens in this section of the novel with Maise and Evan beginning to address topics that are endangering their relationship. Maise finally tells him the truth about her mother. Surprisingly, Evan has a similar story. His mother was an alcoholic who allowed his sister to die under her watch. Evan has struggled with anger toward his mother and guilt that he was not the one who died for years. He believes their similar backgrounds might have drawn them to one another.

It is important to notice in this chapter that when Evan tells Maise about his sister, he says that her death left him an only child. However, when the papers fall out of his glove box with the name Eric Wilke on the registration for the car, he tells her that Eric is the name of his brother. This claim directly contradicts his claim that he was left an only child when his sister died.

Another issue that seems to be a problem for Evan is his determination to use a condom each time they have sex. When they have a spontaneous encounter, Maise is frustrated when he pulls out just before she has an orgasm. He tells her he is worried she will get pregnant, a situation that would be detrimental to her future. She tries to convince him she's already prepared for that possibility by being on the birth control pill. Evan seems so stressed by the situation that it leads one to believe there may be more to his determination to use a condom than just the fear that Maise might get pregnant.

### Discussion Question 1

How were Evan and Maise's childhoods similar?

### Discussion Question 2

Considering the name on his car registration and his determination to use a condom during sex, do you think Evan is hiding something from Maise?

### Discussion Question 3

Why is it important to Maise that she and Wesley patch up their relationship?

## Vocabulary

Poltergeists, maestro, sepulchral, protocol, spawn, stiletto, sycophant.



# Chapter 7

## Summary

### Chapter 7

Maise tries to confront her mother in Chapter 7. Her mother begins crying when she sees Maise with her bank statement. Maise tells her the worst thing she'd done was to steal the money that her grandmother had given her for her future. She asks if her mother is able to get the money she owes or if it is up to her to bail them out again. When Maise's mother asks if she hates her Maise says she is disappointed in her. Maise decides not to leave yet, but to make back the money her mother owes, then leave and never look back. She doesn't think, though, that if she leaves, she'll leave the good things as well.

It is a few days before Halloween when Maise goes to visit Evan in his classroom during lunch. Both are aroused. He asks her to come over that night but Maise complains that is too far away. He doesn't stop her when she makes advances on him. He begins penetrating her with his fingers. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. It is Hiyam. She is clearly suspicious of what they have been doing.

That night in his apartment Evan goes over the short list of people who might know what was going on. Maise doesn't seriously believe anyone who has any suspicion of them would expose them. She suggests they go to Los Angeles together. He tells her instead that they have to stop seeing each other in school. He suggests that she drop his class, which she believes she needs on her transcript in order to get into a good college. He offers to resign his position. Maise starts to laugh and cry, causing Evan to begin kissing her. They have sex. Afterward, Maise suggests that she finish the semester in his class. He agrees but is not completely happy as he is afraid that the taboo nature of their relationship might be all that is driving their attraction.

On Halloween night, Wesley and Maise decide to go to the fair together one last time. Siobhan goes with them. Maise leaves them for a moment under the excuse of going to the restroom and looks at the roller coaster. She is surprised to hear Evan's voice behind her. He has just moved forward to touch her hair when Siobhan and Wesley appear. They talk for a moment and Siobhan suggests Evan join them. He makes a lame excuse about grading papers. When Siobhan looks at Maise again, Maise realizes that Siobhan knows what is happening between Maise and Evan.

## Analysis

More people become aware of what is going on between Maise and Evan in this section of the novel. It is at this point that Wesley is probably certain that it is Evan with whom Maise is having a relationship. After spending just a minute with the couple, Siobhan also realizes what is happening. Additionally, Hiyam interrupted the two as they were



being intimate in Evan's classroom, something they'd never done before. Maise suspects that Hiyam knows what is happening but doesn't think that she'll tell because it would mess up her opportunity to get drugs from Maise.

It is in this chapter of the novel that Maise begins to seriously wonder what will happen with their relationship once they are no longer student and teacher. She tries to look up possible outcomes on the Internet but so many are negative that she becomes discouraged. She has no one with whom she can discuss her feelings and her uncertainties. To make matters worse, Evan seems to struggle with the same uncertainties. Even though they began their relationship before they knew the teacher-student relationship would develop between them, it seems to be this relationship that is bringing a good deal of meaning to their time together.

Additionally in this chapter Maise finally decides that it is time to try to stand up to her mother. She is angry because her mother has cleared out her bank account and also put her in jeopardy by trying to draw her into a relationship with a drug lord. In a convoluted sort of way, it seems that Maise's mother actually thinks that she is doing what is best for her daughter. She believes that because the man, Mr. Rivero, has money they'd be taken care of. She chides her daughter for dating an older man with an old, beat up car, saying that Maise could do better. In the end of their argument, Maise decides to stay with her mother at home and work to pay off her debt. She plans for this to be the last time she will do so for her mother, however.

Notice also Maise's recognition that Wesley is a better friend to her than she is to him. While she becomes angry with him for planning to go to Hiyam's party, he gladly skips to party to go the fair with her. Additionally, she recognizes that he is deeply attracted to her, an attraction that she cannot return. Despite his feelings, he remains friends with her even though he knows their relationship will remain platonic.

## **Discussion Question 1**

From those who know, or think they know, about the relationship between Maise and Evan from whom do you think Maise and Evan have the most to fear?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What aspects of their relationship are making Maise and Evan doubt one another?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How plausible do you think Maise's plan to get her mother out of debt is? What might you have done in a similar situation?



## Vocabulary

Obligatory, trysts, montage, scintillating, exorcized, mewled, lucid, brazen, resilient, ravished, languorously, meticulous, entendre, faux, stigma, operative, commiserating, crypts, tranquil, pensive, disembodied, frisson, parallax, platonic, enigmatic, piqued.



# Chapter 8

## Summary

### Chapter 8

Maise buries herself in her semester project hoping to escape from her obsession with Evan. She and Wesley are working on their projects in the library. Wesley offers to let her see his work, but she tells him to surprise her. She and Evan try to avoid each other during the week, spending only weekends together. Sometimes she can't stay away, and she visits him in his apartment at night. One day in St. Louis, she recognizes the driver of a car, Quinn, who nods at her before driving away. She doesn't mention the incident to Evan.

She spends Thanksgiving with Wesley and his family. She has the feeling that she has finally found her real family. When she gets teary, she goes outside. Siobhan follows her. Siobhan tells Maise how much she loves her children, and that Maise is beginning to feel like a daughter to her. Siobhan admits that she knows Maise's secret, but he also assures her that she will tell no one unless Maise wants her to do so. She then tells Maise about Wesley's father. He was her economics teacher in college. Siobhan tells Maise she understands more than Maise realizes. Before she leaves Maise alone, she kisses her cheek. She tells her that she deserves happiness.

In the loft one weekend, Evan shows her a video of himself as a college student. It is his acting demo reel. What strikes Maise is how alone Evan looks even with the people with whom he is interacting. To Maise's question, he says that he stopped acting because it didn't make him happy. They talk about what has attracted them to one another, then Maise asks to watch "Casablanca." Like Evan, the movie makes her cry. She sees parallels in the relationship between Rick and Ilsa, and Evan and herself. Evan tells her she's crying because she is in love. He then tells her that he loves her. After this climax, Maise takes a moment to talk about the uses of revelation and reversal in Greek tragedies. As if she is writing directly to a class of students, she states the information will be important.

On the week that they are to show their films, Wesley seems unusually quiet. She tries to joke with him, but he tells her very seriously that she is his best friend. When she realizes he is being serious, she replies that he is her best friend as well. She feels uncomfortable. She shows her film in class on Friday. It shows images of her semester, her romance with Evan, and other things like Paul on her porch and Mr. Rivero's hand on her wrist. No one is identifiable. Among the comments from the other students, Hiyam suggests the movie is about being found out. Evan gives her an "A" on the project.

Wesley is the final student to show his film. He has no words of introduction. He just hits play. The video shows scenes that Maise recognizes as shots of herself with Evan



though no one else would. At first, Maise believes the film is about Wesley's obsession with her. As the clips continue, she realizes it is about her obsession with Evan. When the film is finished, Wesley responds to the classes' shock saying it was a reenactment. It is Hiyam's comment that angers Maise the most as she says she wants to know Maise's reaction to the film since hers was about being in love with a teacher as well. Evan mentions to Hiyam that her comment is tinged on bullying, but Maise agrees to answer the question. She says it is easy to make judgments about people before you really know them. She says that she realizes that it isn't Hiyam's parents' fault that she is a spoiled coke head. She also tells Wesley she thought he was a good person. Evan asks her to leave the room.

Maise goes across the hall to a boys' bathroom until the bell rings. When Wesley comes out of the class, she grabs his shirt. They go into the boys' bathroom. She tries to hit him accusing him of stalking her. She tells him that he gave Hiyam the ammunition she needed to use against Evan. Wesley seems to think his video was an attempt to teach Maise that what she is doing is wrong. Wesley has also done research about Evan and thinks it is suspicious there is nothing about him online until 2011. He pushes Maise, asking what she knows about Evan's background. He tells her he stalked Evan because he is afraid for her. Maise tells Wesley he has betrayed her and asks him not to talk to her again.

## Analysis

Emotions come to a head in the relationship between Maise and Wesley when he shows his film about her obsession with Evan, during their class. The worst part of the timing is an aspect of which Wesley is not even aware. Because Maise has not told him who it is she's seeing, she also hasn't told him that Hiyam walked in on them together. When Hiyam sees the video, she's smart enough to put two and two together and see that it is true that Maise is having a relationship with Evan. Maise is angry with Wesley as well for following her, for filming her without her permission, and for stalking both her and Evan.

From Wesley's point of view, however, he believes that he is helping Maise to recognize the truth about her relationship with Evan. He believes the relationship is dirty and wrong. He is suspicious of Evan because he can find nothing about him on the Internet before 2011. He wonders how the man could have come from nowhere. Wesley also is working on his knowledge of his mother's relationship with her teacher. Even though they were older at the time, Wesley has seen that their love did not stand the test of time. He may believe he is protecting Maise from a disappointing relationship. This still does not make the way that he addresses the issue in such a public way any more acceptable.

Who will ultimately win the argument between Maise and Wesley really hinges on one aspect of Maise's relationship with Evan? Is their love real or is it not? While there is a fifteen year age difference between Maise and Evan, the age gap will not seem that wide as they get older. Because of all that Maise has gone through with her drug-



addicted mother, she is much older and more mature than the boys her age, making an older man's maturity more equal to hers. Maise and Evan also began their relationship, though it was only a one-night stand for Maise at the time, before they ever realized they would be teacher and student. If it turns out Evan gives up on Maise at the end of the school year because the provocative nature of the teacher-student relationship is no longer there, then Wesley will be correct. Evan was just using Maise.

## Discussion Question 1

Wesley has been admonished once before about taping people without their knowledge. Should the fact that he taped and displayed the private scenes between Evan and Maise cause him to be punished?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is it so bad that Hiyam has seen Wesley's film? What could this mean for Evan and Maise?

## Discussion Question 3

How was it a risk for Maise to put together the film that she did? How does her film compare and contrast with Wesley's?

## Vocabulary

Infatuated, spontaneous, tedious, ironically, façade, respite, paradoxically, acerbic, dulcet, fatalistic, ambiguity, incorrigible, modicum, nefarious, austere, reciprocal, perturb, dais, sulfurous, prerogative.





# Chapter 9

## Summary

### Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, Maise gets a text from Evan asking her to meet him at home. She ignores the text. When she closes her locker in preparation for going to her next class, Hiyam is waiting for her. She takes Maise up to the school roof. Hiyam tells Maise she will supply her with the drugs she wants in the quantity she wants them. Hiyam even offers to pay street price in exchange for not telling the principal about Maise and Evan. She even says she won't lie and say that Evan had sex with her as well, which would be a felony since she is only seventeen.

At his apartment, Evan tells Maise he is leaving the school, taking a job as a permanent substitute at Carbondale. Maise tries to talk him out of his decision, but he suggests that she should move in with him. Maise finally works up the courage to tell Evan that she does love him and she's scared when he tells her that he's quitting his job so she can move in with him. Although Maise insists she's still a kid with no idea how to have a grown up relationship, Evan tries to convince her that everyone feels that way.

Maise stays with Evan that night, but then leaves the following morning. Because she is afraid that Hiyam will put him into a position where he'll have to go to court, Maise believes the best thing to do is to leave, to cut the relationship off cleanly. At home, Maise uses her mother's phone to set up a brunch date with Gary Rivero. Rivero wants to know what Maise is like as a person. She tries to tell him that she is trustworthy by telling him that she's been keeping the secret of her relationship with Evan. Rivero wisely tells her that trust is built on actions, not words.

Evan calls, texts, and even shows up at Maise's house. Maise tells him that she cannot see him anymore. Two days later she walks to his house. She waits for hours, but he doesn't come home. The next day he's still not there, so she uses money Rivero has given her to go to St. Louis. In the street, she sees the lights in the loft are on. When she walks in there is another man there with a woman. She apologizes and says she's there looking for Evan. The man realizes who she is, calling her Eric's girlfriend. His friend leaves, saying a friend has had an emergency. Park insinuates to Maise he's been trying to get rid of her ever since they started dating.

Park first starts off by asking Maise if she is in trouble, specifically if she's pregnant. When she says she isn't, Park leaves her alone for the night. Maise searches Eric Wilke on the Internet and finds all sorts of information, all matching up with what he told her about himself. She cannot figure why he changed his name from Eric to Evan. She texts Evan on Monday, telling him she wants to talk. She calls him Eric and tells him she talked to Park. He tells her he had his name changed legally because he needed to separate himself from a situation. He had been in a relationship with a high school



student two years prior. The relationship had ended badly although they'd had sex only once. She had gotten pregnant. The girl had miscarried the baby, but her friends had made his life miserable, causing him to move away and change his name.

He tells Maise that previous experience was why he had been so careful with her. She asks where he had been on the days they hadn't been together, as Wesley had asked her. He tells her that he'd been going to see his mother because he'd decided not to carry his dark feelings about her around anymore. Maise is angry believing she is just another student that he has seduced. Evan suggests they should be away from each other for a while in order to process what they've learned. Maise leaves but accuses him of thinking of her as just another student he's slept with.

It is on New Year's Eve that Maise makes her first sale to Hiyam. In the beginning of the spring semester of classes, there is a note taped to Evan's door stating that film studies has been discontinued. Maise goes to her apartment, but Evan is gone. When she gets home, Louis is sitting on her doorstep.

## Analysis

Things continue to fall apart for Evan and Maise as he makes up his mind to give up his teaching position at Riverland. He asks Maise to move in with him, but the proposition scares her as she knows that Hiyam can still cause trouble for him. However, she does not tell Evan that Hiyam is blackmailing them. She makes excuses to Evan, telling him that she is afraid of having a grown up relationship. After they spend one last night together, Maise leaves the following morning, believing she is doing what is best. Maise also arranges in this section to begin supplying Hiyam with drugs in order to keep Evan safe.

Maise visits St. Louis intending to tell Evan the truth about Hiyam and her fear, but Evan is not there. Instead, Park and his girlfriend are in the loft. Maise meets with Evan to talk about his name change and learns she is not the first high school girl with whom he has had a relationship. Maise believes this is a habit for Evan and is angry, seeing herself as no different from the other girl besides the fact she didn't get pregnant. Evan tries to convince Maise he had sex with that girl only once and that the relationship was a mistake because she was infatuated with him but Maise will not listen. At the beginning of the next semester of school, he is gone.

## Discussion Question 1

What difference does it make to Maise that she is not the first student with whom Evan has had a sexual relationship?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Maise decide to supply Hiyam with drugs despite her determination not to become like her mother?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Evan leave town without saying anything to Maise?

## Vocabulary

Plangent, dissonant, myocardial, infarction, gossamer, arabesques, annihilation, gibbous, suffused, semantics, duotone, subdural, hematoma, coherent, stoic, fixated, stipend, glibly, gullible, dolefully.



# Chapter 10

## Summary

### Chapter 10

In Chapter 10, Maise spends her lunches filling out college applications in the library. Hiyam asks her if she wants to hang out after school. She laughs in her face. She sees Wesley in the halls, but the two don't talk. Hiyam pushes Maise for larger and larger quantities of cocaine, but Maise doesn't want to get charged with intent to deliver if she is caught. Plus, Rivero doesn't trust her with that much drug. Because Evan is no longer around, Maise figures she doesn't have to deal to shut Hiyam up, but she never got a job from the applications she and Wesley filled out. She figures maybe she should just accept her role in life.

One Saturday she finds Wesley sitting in her living room. Her mother says he wants to apologize then prepares to listen as the two talk until Maise tells her to get lost. He does apologize, saying that he wanted to believe that Evan was trying to hurt her. She tries to go upstairs but notices he's crying. He tells her she was right. She is the only person he cares about outside family. His mother has told him how stupid his actions were. He apologizes for putting her private life on display and being a creep. Maise lets Wesley know that he was right about Evan and that he didn't mess anything up. Wesley and Maise repair their friendship. She is invited to their house for Valentine's Day. She cries because she missed Siobhan so deeply.

Hiyam asks Maise for a larger supply of cocaine. This time she threatens to tell on Maise if she doesn't supply. She tells Wesley what is happening. Maise knows it is time to get out of her connection with Hiyam. She tells Wesley that she needs to use his skills in stalking and film making to help her get free.

In March, Maise surprises Evan with a visit at his new school. He looks amazed and bewildered when he sees her sitting on the hood of his car. They drive to his apartment. She walks through his empty apartment. He asks if she's come to look at his empty life. He tells her that he isn't over her. They start to fight about who left who. Then, Evan asks what they are doing. They eat Chinese on the floor. Maise leaves without having sex with Evan. On the way home she gets a text from Evan asking her to come again the following weekend. She agrees.

At his apartment, Maise helps Evan get settled in. She keeps telling herself that she needs to tell him she's not staying in the area but doesn't find the right time. They have sex, then Maise tries to sleep on the couch. Unable to sleep, she goes into his room. He is awake as well. He asks about colleges, and she tells him she got into USC. Evan tells her how proud of her he is. She wishes he would ask her not to go. She asks him to come to Los Angeles with her. Although they agree they are still in love with one another, Evan suggests they take it slowly.



Maise tells Rivero that if her friend comes through for her again, it will mean her mother is even and Maise will be out of the game. Because he knows she isn't in it for the drugs, Rivero tries to lure her to stay with the promise of more money, but Maise doesn't bite. She arranges for Hiyam to meet Rivero. On their way to the meeting she taunts Hiyam with the information that she's still seeing Evan. Wesley is dressed as a waiter at the restaurant. Hiyam pays him no attention.

## Analysis

Things begin to be reconciled in this chapter of the book. Maise and Evan get back together. They are unsteady and unsure of one another. Maise knows that she plans to go to Los Angeles. She wants Evan to come with her. Evan hesitates. She seems to think he would move if he really loved her but at the same time, tells Wesley she would not give up her dreams for any man. In a way, it seems she's asking Evan to do something she isn't willing to do herself. In Carbondale, he at least has a job. In Los Angeles, he would be dependent on her and her dreams until he was able to decide what he wanted to do with his life there. She accuses Wesley of gender role subversion, but she is doing much the same thing herself.

Now that Maise has sold enough drugs that she has paid off her mother's debts, Maise is ready to get out of dealing. Hiyam is no longer threatening to tell Evan, but she is now threatening to tell others about Maise selling drugs to her if she tries to stop. Maise employs Wesley to help her get free of Hiyam's blackmail, though it isn't clear how this will happen yet. Maise takes Hiyam to meet Rivero in person. At the beginning of the meeting, Maise trades glances with a waiter, who is apparently Wesley in disguise.

## Discussion Question 1

Are Maise's reasons for selling drugs reasonable? Is she becoming the person whom she dreaded becoming or is she making the best of a bad situation?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider Wesley's apology to Maise. Is he being honest in his regret?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Evan and Maise's reunion. At this point in the action, how do you think the story will end?

## Vocabulary

Timorously, unsavory, banal, assuaged, moot, vulpine, penance, mundane, minutiae, talisman, claret, immaculate, bombastic, restive, subvert, siphon, ilk, divulging.



# Chapter 11

## Summary

### Chapter 11

In Chapter 11, Maise and Evan spend another weekend in St. Louis. They party and play. Then, when they are alone in the loft, Maise asks why Evan won't come to Los Angeles with her. She tries to convince him that her life will not be complete without him with her. They make love.

After spring break, Maise asks Hiyam to meet her in Room 209. Wesley is waiting for them with his laptop and the projector already on. When Hiyam tells them she didn't realize they were into getting high, Maise tells her they are into revenge. Hiyam is confident until there is a shot of her doing drugs in her bedroom. The title of the movie is "Addiction." The climax in the movie is Hiyam making a deal with Rivero for a half kilo of cocaine. Hiyam gets up, but Wesley tells her to sit back down. Hiyam warns them that her father will destroy them, but Maise has beaten her to the punch. Maise tells Hiyam she sent the same video to her father 30 minutes ago. Hiyam leaves the room. Wesley comments that he is glad the confrontation is finished. Maise realizes she has one more person to confront.

Maise sits up in the kitchen, waiting for her mother to get home. Her mother mentions that Rivero says Maise had taken care of things. She asks how, but Maise tells her it is none of her business. She tells her mother she's going away to college. She slides a paper about a rehabilitation center across the table to her mother. She has paid for her mother to stay at this clinic for sixty days. Her mother acts as if she is going to refuse, and Maise tells her that this is her one chance to get clean. If she does so and stays that way, Maise will still come to visit her for holidays. If not, she will never see her again.

Maise spends her weekends in St. Louis with Evan. She waits for him to bring up the move to Los Angeles. Maise's mother doesn't come to graduation, but all the Browns are there as well as Evan. Wesley leaves with Natalie the day after graduation to go to California. Maise stays with Siobhan after Wesley and Natalie leave. When Maise does go home she first discovers that her mother had checked herself into the clinic. She also apologizes for being such a bad mother. Along with her mother's letter is a letter from Hiyam's father. He has sent her a ten thousand dollar check thanking Maise for letting him know about Hiyam's addiction.

She spends her last week in St. Louis with Evan. One night he tells Maise he cannot do to her what she wants him to do. He doesn't want her to spend her life trying to fix a broken man. It is at lunch the following day that Maise finally asks Evan to stop lying about not being scared. She pushes him for an answer to her question. She tells him that her life is not problem-free with her drug addicted mother and Hiyam's blackmail.



He asks about Hiyam and she changes the subject, forgetting she hadn't told him. She gets angry, believing that he is trying to play the age card with her. She runs away to a park. Evan finds her. She wishes he would do something, but he only stands there. She walks away and he follows her again. Standing in traffic, she asks if she is coming with him or not. He says nothing. She demands his keys and gets her luggage out of his car, hails a cab, and leaves.

Maise goes to Park's apartment. Park tells her how much Evan has changed since he met Maise. Maise reschedules her flight, asking Park to drive her to the airport. Park suggests that she should wait; but, Maise says she's been waiting for two months. She struggles to get to her seat on the plane without crying. She's in the first row of coach, which gives her the idea of getting on the Death Snake. Someone sits next to her, but she does not look at the person. The man next to her tells her she's brave for sitting up front all alone. She realizes it is Evan. They reach for each other's hands, just like on the roller coaster.

## Analysis

While Maise is able to bring many of the troubling circumstances in her life to a conclusion in this final chapter, her relationship with Evan is one aspect that is not reconciled until the very end of the novel. Maise has made up her mind that Evan will not join her in California, prompting her decision to leave for college early. There is, however, a surprise ending in store when Evan sits next to her on the plane. The parallels between their ride on the carnival roller coaster and the airplane are obvious. Just as they began a relationship together when they first met one another on the roller coaster, Evan and Maise are starting an important new chapter in their relationship when they head to California together.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Evan's decision to travel to California with Maise so important to her? Why does she seem to think their relationship is over when he refuses to commit?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Maise's mother decides to attend the rehab program? Do you think it was Maise's decision to give her mother an ultimatum that brought about the decision?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Maise's trouble with Hiyam and her handling of Hiyam's addiction pay off for Maise at the end of the novel?



## Vocabulary

Arduous, ephemeral, quasar, burgeoning, epithet, azure, discretion, vestige, infinitesimally.



# Characters

## Maise O'Malley

Maise O'Malley is the narrator and heroine of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, she is starting her senior year of high school with the hopes of leaving behind her childhood fears and becoming an adult. She gets more than she bargains for when she has a fling with a man at a carnival. This man turns out to be the teacher for her film studies class. Because Maise is eighteen, there is no danger that Evan Wilke, the teacher, can be charged with the rape of a minor. Maise is concerned because the relationship could cause him to lose his job as a teacher. Regardless, Maise cannot stay away from Evan. He is the most mature and caring man with whom she has ever been.

Maise's goal for her life is to attend college for film studies where she wants to study to be a director. She does not want to become like her mother, who is a drug dealer. For a short while, Maise is forced to supply drugs to a classmate to keep her from lying to school officials and saying that she and Evan had sex. Maise cooperates with Hiyam's blackmail until Evan takes a teaching job at another school. At that point, Maise and Wesley make a video showing the details of Hiyam's addiction. Maise sends this video to Hiyam's father.

With the money that Maise has made selling drugs, she is able to replenish her college fund, which her mother stole from her. Maise additionally makes enough money that she is able to pay to put her mother into a rehabilitation program. Maise's final fear is that Evan does not care enough for her to go with her to California, where she plans to go to school. At the end of the novel, Maise and Evan start the next chapter of their journey when Evan surprises her by joining her on the plane on the way to California.

## Eric Evan Wilke

Most often referred to as Evan Wilke, this character is Maise's love hero. He could be considered as a Byronic hero as he has several characteristics of this type of character including a troubled past, struggles with identity, an emotional conflict and a high level of intelligence. Even though Maise believes her encounter with Evan at the carnival will be a one-night stand, Evan never intends for it to be inconsequential. He wants what is best for Maise, but at the same time, cannot resist her. Like Maise, Evan has a past scarred by drug use as his mother was addicted to alcohol. Her alcohol use caused the death of Evan's younger sister, a tragedy he has never completely overcome.

Although Evan accuses Maise of being fearful of their relationship and running away when things get difficult, Evan does the same thing to some extent. When Maise breaks off the relationship without telling him why, he quits his job in their town and begins teaching at a different school. Additionally, when Maise suggests to him they can make



a clean break from the troubles that they have faced and start again in California, Evan does not commit until the last minute.

Perhaps the most damning thing Evan does during the course of the novel is his reluctance to tell Maise the truth about his past. He is afraid that if Maise learns that he had an affair with a student prior to his relationship with Maise, she will think that he is a sexual predator who preys on students. His unwillingness to share anything with Maise about his past, however, makes him seem more suspicious than he might have if he'd been truthful in the beginning. Evan does finally come clean with Maise about his relationship with the student at his prior school, her pregnancy and her miscarriage. He also tells her that he has legally changed his name from his first name "Eric" to "Evan" in an attempt to separate himself from that part of his life.

## Wesley Brown

Wesley Brown is the boy who works to befriend Maise after she takes his place in the film studies class. Although Maise isn't completely thrilled with the idea, Wesley is able to join the class when another student drops. Wesley has a crush on Maise and is deeply hurt when she does not return his affection. When Maise tries to rekindle their friendship, Wesley tells her she can no longer keep any secrets from him, including the identity of the man with whom she is having a relationship. In a turn that embarrasses Maise and lets Hiyam know who is having a relationship with their teacher, Wesley makes Maise's obsession with her unknown lover the topic of his class project. Because of Wesley's project, Hiyam is given the ammunition that she needs to blackmail Maise. In order to make up to Maise his mistake in airing her private feelings so publicly, Wesley agrees to help Maise make a film about Hiyam's drug addiction. Wesley dresses as a waiter at the restaurant where Maise introduces Hiyam to Mr. Rivero in order to film their interactions.

## Hiyam Farhoudi

Hiyam Farhoudi is a girl in Maise's film studies class who also has a crush on Evan. It can be inferred that Hiyam is the leader of the "mean girls" at Maise's high school. During a homecoming party Hiyam tries to get Maise to supply her with drugs. Maise refuses, which makes Hiyam angry. When Hiyam discovers Maise and Evan alone in a locked, darkened classroom, she begins to suspect the two are having an affair. When she sees Wesley's film, Hiyam's suspicions are realized enough that she feels she can use the leverage to blackmail Maise. She tells Maise if she does not supply her with drugs, she will tell not only about Maise's affair with Evan but will also lie and say she slept with Evan, a felony since she is only seventeen. Maise gets her revenge on Hiyam by having Wesley help her make a film about Hiyam's drug addiction. Maise not only shows Hiyam this film but also sends it to Hiyam's father. As a result, Hiyam does not finish school with the rest of the class but is instead taught by a private tutor while she goes through drug rehabilitation.



## Yvette O'Malley

Yvette O'Malley is Maise's mother. Yvette is a drug addict who has never spent much time with her daughter. Maise knows that her mother loves her in some twisted way but wishes they didn't have to acknowledge it. Through the course of the novel, Maise's mother first clears out Maise's trust fund to help pay her own drug debt. She tries to get Maise involved with a drug lord as her idea of a good future for her daughter. Although Maise does not want to be like her mother, she sells drugs for a short while to pay off her mother's debts and get out from under Hiyam's blackmail. Maise earns enough money during this stint to send her mother to drug rehab. To Maise's surprise, her mother attends the program she selected for her.

## Siobhan Brown

Siobhan Brown is Wesley and Natalie's mother. She is the kind of mother Maise always wished that her mother had been. As Maise spends time at the Brown home with Wesley, she becomes more and more fond of Siobhan, seeing her as a mother-figure. Another factor that bonds the two is Siobhan's relationship with her college professor in light that Maise is having a relationship with her film studies teacher. Siobhan is able to give Maise an understanding ear to her confusion with her relationship with Evan.

## Paul

Paul is the man who is with Maise's mother during her drug overdose that takes place after she and Maise go shopping together. Maise leaves Paul to take care of her mother, giving him instructions on what to do if she does not get better. After Maise leaves her mother's room, Paul follows her. He puts his hand on her shoulder, then slides it down to her bottom. Maise threatens him before leaving the house.

## Natalie Brown

Natalie Brown is Wesley's older sister and Siobhan's daughter. She is not a vital part of the novel as she is in college in California. Wesley and Maise plan to go to college near Natalie. Natalie does visit during Thanksgiving. During her visit, she treats Maise like one of the family, kidding with her and helping her gang up on Wesley.

## Gary Rivero

Gary Rivero is the drug lord with whom Maise's mom tries to get Maise involved. Although Maise refuses to be sexually involved with the man, she does sell drugs for him for a short while in order to pay off her mother's debt and replenish her college fund.

## **Quinn**

Quinn appears to be Gary Rivero's bodyguard. He accompanies him the night the two eat at Maise's house. Quinn sees Maise once in St. Louis with Evan.

## **Britt**

Britt is Maise's friend from her history class. They work on a project together. It is Britt who sees Evan come to pick Maise up and asks if Maise is okay the night of Hiyam's party.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## George

George is a stuffed bunny that Maise apparently dropped from a roller coaster, which causes her fear of the ride.

## The Deathsnake

The Deathsnake is the name of the roller coaster on which Evan and Maise meet. They both ride the coaster hoping to overcome their fears.

## A Velvet Pony

With the five-dollar bill that Maise wins from Evan in a bet, she plays a shooting game. She wins and chooses this weepy eyed pony as her prize.

## Chevy Monte Carlo

Evan's car is a Chevy Monte Carlo. It is in this car that they first have sex.

## Film Studies

Since Maise wants to work as a director, she feels she must have this class in high school in order to get into a good college.

## Docufiction

Docufiction is the genre of film that Wesley and Maise plan to put together for their film studies class project.

## Trust Fund

Maise has a trust fund her grandmother set up for her for college expenses. Before she even goes to college, Maise realizes her mother has cleaned out the trust fund in order to try to pay off a drug lord.



## **A Silver Claddagh Ring**

Evan gives Maise this Irish symbol of affection as his first gift. Maise continues to wear it even through the ups and downs of their relationship.

## **Casablanca**

Evan tells Maise that the movie Casablanca always makes him cry. After Maise watches the movie with Evan, she begins to compare their relationship to that of the main characters in the movie.

## **Addiction**

Addiction is the name of the film that Maise and Wesley make about Hiyam's drug use. They show the film to Hiyam to get her to stop blackmailing Maise. Maise also sends a copy of the film to Hiyam's father so he will be aware of his daughter's drug problem.

## **Check for Ten Thousand Dollars**

Hiyam's father sends Maise a check for ten thousand dollars as a thank you for alerting him of his daughter's drug use in such a discrete way.



# Settings

## Carnival

The carnival is a major setting in the novel as this is where Maise and Evan first meet. The lights of the carnival remind them of one another throughout the course of the novel.

## Water Tower

Maise often goes to a water tower as a place where she can be alone with her thoughts and emotions. It is at this water tower that she meets Wesley Brown.

## Room 209

Room 209 is the classroom at Riverland High where Evan teaches his film studies class.

## Riverland High School

Riverland High School is the school Maise attends. It is the same school at which Evan is hired to teach a film studies class.

## Derelict Gas Station

Maise waits at a derelict gas station for Evan to pick her up in his car so they can go to a motel together during their second sexual encounter.

## Hiyam's Party

It is at Hiyam's party that Hiyam first approaches Maise about supplying her with drugs. After Maise gets drunk, she calls Evan to come pick her up, a mistake that she later realizes alerts others to their relationship.

## St. Louis

St. Louis is the city where Maise and Evan go on the weekends so they can spend time together without having to watch their backs.



## **Park's Loft**

Park, Evan's friend, lets them use his loft apartment in St. Louis during the weekends.



# Themes and Motifs

## Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing throughout the novel gives a sense that Maise and Evan's relationship is doomed. Even from the first chapter, it is foreshadowed that Evan will be Maise's teacher. It is not much of a surprise for the reader when Maise discovers that Evan is her film studies teacher. Maise searches information about statutory rape, making sure they are legal by age. Even though they are, Maise thinks much about the implications that it would have for Evan if they were to get caught since she is his student.

It is in Chapter 4 that Maise is first afraid that she has made a mistake in their relationship. She calls Ethan to come pick her up when she gets drunk at Hiyam's party. This seems to precipitate her fears they will be discovered. When Maise first spends the night at Ethan's apartment, she is afraid they are purposefully sabotaging their relationship. On their first trip to spend with weekend in Park's loft, Maise believes that all the red lights they encounter are a sign that she should stop the relationship.

These fears are multiplied when Hiyam does confront Maise about the relationship. It is Hiyam's blackmailing of Maise that makes her break up with Evan without telling him why. The hints and forecasting that Maise's and Ethan's relationship will end badly throughout the book leads to a point where there is doubt that Evan will join Maise on the plane to California.

## Real love

Throughout the course of their relationship, Maise debates whether or not their relationship is based on real love or on some sort of weird attraction to each other just because they are student and teacher. Maise often uses the knowledge that they were attracted to one another before they knew Evan would be her teacher to prove to herself that their love is real. However, she still has her doubts.

As the two continue to work through their relationship troubles, age becomes an issue between the two as Maise worries that Evan is trying to pull the age card on her. The fifteen year age difference leaves some, like Wesley, to wonder if Evan is attracted to Maise only because she is so much younger than he. Although Evan is older, Maise feels as if he suits her because she finds males her age to be very immature. Evan is one of the few men she has been with who seems to be on the same maturity level as she.

Throughout the course of the novel, Maise makes several poignant realizations about herself and the emotions of being in love. Although she recognizes the commonality of the parallel, she realizes that her love for Evan began on a roller coaster as they both tried to overcome their own individual fears. Later, when Maise looks at herself in a mirror, she realizes that a great deal of falling in love is about falling in love with one's



own self. She learns that it is impossible to love another if you don't also love yourself. Through her relationship with Evan, Maise learns the difference between having sex and making love. As she says, what they had together felt like more than just stimulating the "useful" parts, as it had with others. Despite her aversion to the idea of a man making a girl "melt," she finds herself feeling as if she is melting as she talks to Evan one day on the phone.

## Family

Family is a powerful theme in this novel as both Maise and Evan feel they have come from deeply disturbed families. They believe their backgrounds may be what draw them together. Maise has grown up with her drug-addicted mother. Maise's father left when she was young and apparently has never meant anything to her. Maise feels as if she has had to raise herself. She's felt no love or affection from her mother. Most recently, in fact, Maise's mother has drained the trust fund that her grandmother set up for her college fund.

Maise does find a mother-figure in Siobhan, Wesley's mother. The woman is intelligent, beautiful, and Irish. Additionally, Siobhan has been in a similar teacher-student relationship. While she is not able to advise Maise on what she should do in her case, she does offer a sympathetic and truly understanding ear. Maise fantasizes that Siobhan is really her mother, or that Siobhan decides to adopt her. For a short while after Wesley and Natalie leave for college, Maise even stays with Siobhan as she wants to stay away from her own mother whom she has given an ultimatum to get clean or expect Maise to cut her out of her life.

Evan tells a similar story about his family. His mother was an alcoholic who was cruel when she drank. His father was physically abusive. Evan broke off ties with his family shortly after the death of his little sister. His mother, who was supposed to be watching the child, had drunk to the point she passed out unable to hear her daughter who had gotten a foot hung in the family swimming pool and was drowning. Although Evan had believed it best to get away from his mother at the time, he decides to start going to see her again shortly after he meets Maise and hears her story.



# Styles

## Point of View

This story is told from the first person point of view of Maise. She is both the narrator and heroine of the story. As this is a story of Maise's maturity and her developing knowledge of the difficulties that are a part of life as an adult, it makes sense that the novel would be written in the first person point of view. None of the other characters could tell Maise's story in the way that she does. While another character might have been able to record what she does and the reactions she has to certain events, they could not give a full description of how she is feeling and why she is acting as she is.

The story is told through a great deal of exposition as Maise considers her relationship with Evan, her friendship with Wesley, her goals for her own life and what she must do to achieve these goals. The time line of the novel covers a period just before the beginning of school to a point in time just after that school year. The story is told in a linear fashion. Although there are portions of the novel where time passes quickly, this passage of time and the point at which the reader is in the action is usually made clear with references to things such as weather and holidays, making it clear at what point of the year the action is taking place.

## Language and Meaning

Since this is a story about a sexual relationship between a student and teacher, there is a great deal of description of sexual encounters, desire and such. The coarse word "fuck" is highly popular with nearly 300 uses through the course of the novel. It's used as verb, an adjective, and an adverb. Maise uses the term to describe the sexual encounters that she and Evan have, but at the same time acknowledges that what she has with Evan is not the simply physical encounters that she has had with some men.

Even with the regular use of this one word, the novel does not fall short in colorful and descriptive writing. Similes and metaphors are used often. For instance, at one point in the novel Maise describes her mother's voice as a "raven screech" she also says the light that hits her face when the windows are opened in her bedroom as "holocaust sunlight." During a rainy day Maise describes the world as looking "like an ashtray full of soft soggy grayness." Instead of saying that her mother breaks things when they have arguments, Maise says these arguments cause "molecular destabilization of household appliances."

## Structure

This novel is divided into 11 relatively long chapters. Each chapter is about 30 pages with the longest 38 pages and the shortest 27 pages. Each chapter is divided into sections separated with pound signs. The story is told by Maise in a linear fashion

though it is clear that she is telling her story after the fact. In the first chapters she gives information foreshadowing the relationship that she will have with her teacher.

The novel has a main plot, which involves Maise and Evan's relationship, as well as several integrated subplots. One of these subplots deals with Hiyam's blackmailing of Maise first because she knows about her relationship with Evan then next because Maise has been selling her drugs. Maise uses her knowledge of Hiyam's drug addiction to confront the girl and to let Hiyam's father know she needs help. An additional subplot involves Maise's work to get her mother's debts paid and her college fund replenished. A third subplot is that of Maise's relationship with Wesley and his family.



## Quotes

So maybe part of why I was out here tonight was because I was tired of being a kid, stuck with kid fears and kid memories.

-- Maise (Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote is significant because in it Maise describes why she goes to the carnival the night that she meets Evan. She hopes to overcome the fears of her childhood and move on with her life.

He could have said, I'm a teacher, and everything would have been different.

-- Maise (Chapter 1 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** In the first chapter, the author foreshadows that Maise will encounter Evan again but this time he will be filling the role of her teacher. Maise seems to believe that if he'd told her he was a teacher, their relationship might have gone a different direction.

Mission: Remake Myself.

-- Maise (Chapter 2 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Maise's goal for her senior year seems to be to rediscover herself. Though she's had little parental support or encouragement, Maise has high hopes for her future. She realizes, though, in order to achieve her dreams, she will need to overcome her hang ups with her past.

I kept thinking it was the guy — once I found a nice guy, it would be different. Fulfilling. But I left the nice guy like I'd left all the others, and I was still empty.

-- Maise (Chapter 2 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** Here, Maise realizes she may be at fault in all of her failed relationships. While she'd always thought she wouldn't leave if she met a nice guy, she realizes that she has just left the nicest guy she ever met.

He was like me: not fully part of the adult or child world. An exile, watching wistfully from the outside.

-- Maise (Chapter 2 paragraph 280)

**Importance:** After Maise learns that Evan is her teacher, she is still attracted to him. She believes even though he is much older than she is, they both feel that they are neither children nor adults.

I thought I'd been reinventing myself, choosing who I wanted to be, but I was so naive. I'd always be my mother's daughter.

-- Maise (Chapter 4 paragraph 297)

**Importance:** Although Maise wants to separate herself from her mother's reputation of



being a drug dealer, Maise realizes when Hiyam asks her to supply her with drugs that it may not be as easy to break from her mother's reputation as she'd thought it would be.

No, but you're part of her life. And when someone owes a lot of money, the people in their life become collateral.

-- Gary Rivero (Chapter 5 paragraph 175)

**Importance:** In this quote Mr. Rivero tells Maise that even though she has no part in her mother's drug sales business, she can still be used as a pawn to pay her mother's debt.

Trust is something you earn by actions, not words.

-- Gary Rivero (Chapter 9 paragraph 148)

**Importance:** Although these are the words of a drug lord, they teach an important lesson. Trust is not something that can grow on words, people must follow through on these words with actions in order to prove their trustworthiness.

Out of everything I ever learned from Evan Wilke, I think that lesson was the most important: that none of us actually grow up. We get bigger, and older, but part of us always retains that small rabbit heart, trembling furiously, secretively, with wonder and fear. (Chapter 9 paragraph 110)

**Importance:** This quote simply sums up the idea that it doesn't matter how old people get, they never really grow up.