

# **Whispers from the Dead Study Guide**

**Whispers from the Dead by Joan Lowery Nixon**

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## Plot Summary

Whispers From the Dead by Joan Lowery Nixon, prolific author of mysteries and thrillers for young adults, focuses on teenager Sarah Darnell. While out swimming with friends in her hometown of Spring, Missouri, Sarah almost drowns when a friend's cannonball into the water pushes her down into the weeds at the bottom of the lake. This experience leaves her with an intense fear of water and swimming, as well as a newfound sensitivity to "the other side." When Sarah mentions her newfound sensitivity to spirits to her friends they are afraid of her, and her parents put her in therapy. Sarah learns to keep her problems to herself.

When the family moves to Houston, Sarah begins having visions of the murder that took place in their new house. The family was not told about the murder prior to moving in, and feel betrayed by their new neighbors. Meanwhile, Sarah befriends her next-door neighbor Dee Dee and begins dating Tony, a mysterious older boy from across the city. Sarah slowly unravels the sad story of Rosa, the Mexican house maid who was murdered in the house. Although the rest of the world knows that Adam Holt killed Darlene when she tried to deliver a pizza, no one knows about the death of Rosa. Sarah learns to use her spiritual sensitivity to communicate with Rosa, piecing together the crime that ended her life. Sarah also learns that someone wants Rosa to stay hidden and even Tony warns her to be careful. She is startled by the extent of her attraction to Tony, and ends up sharing more of her experiences with him than she normally would. After much searching and putting pieces together, Sarah realizes that Tony is actually Adam Holt. She has been in incredible danger every time that she has been in his company. The story ends with a police showdown: Tony/Adam has Sarah trapped in a police car with a knife, but she is rescued by the officers.

Ultimately, Sarah learns to believe in herself and trust herself. The feeling of not fitting in and the hurt of her old friends abandoning her fades away with her newfound confidence and Sarah is finally able to overcome her fear of the water.



# Prologue, Whispers From the Dead

## Prologue, Whispers From the Dead Summary

Sarah, the main character, sits down to write her own story. She is tall with dark hair and is almost seventeen years old. She takes a swimming trip with best friend Marcie, as well as Kent, Barbie, and Andy. The friends have known each other since childhood. Sarah has feelings for Andy, who is two years older than she is. Sarah is musing under the water and comes up for air, but unfortunately Kent slams into her, driving her down into the weeds at the bottom of the lake. He did not know where she was swimming and was showing off with a "cannonball" trick. Sarah is caught at the bottom of the lake and struggles to get free, but soon feels the pain ebbing from her body and floats above the scene as an observer. She watches the other kids free her from the weeds and pull her to the surface. Andy, who spends his summers lifeguarding, begins to give Sarah CPR. She begins to see dreamlike faces and hear voices, and her out-of-body experience ends. She wakes up in a hospital bed, her mother and father waiting in the room with her.

Sarah begins to experience a presence, like someone following her except no one would be there. She never tells her parents about the presence, but does mention it casually to her friend group. This is a big mistake. They do not understand her experience and Marice comments that it is "creepy" and Sarah should tell her parents. She does, which leads to a meeting with the family doctor. Dr. Clarke suggests that Sarah is experiencing a "haunted feeling" resulting from her near-death experience and a desire to remain close with another dimension. She may have become more sensitive to otherworldly beings, or ghosts. He thinks after Sarah's traumatic event fades, her experiences will be as well.

Sarah wishes she had never mentioned the presence, since it makes her self-conscious and makes her friends feel uncomfortable. Her recollection of the drowning fades over time but her nightmares do not. Eventually the presence leaves her. Her father gets a promotion and the family must move from Springdale to Houston, Texas. Sarah is sad to leave her home and friends but knows things must change. Sarah wishes she had never brought up the spirit, since it has alienated her friends and family and vows never to talk about one of these experiences again.

## Prologue, Whispers From the Dead Analysis

The prologue introduces Sarah and her situation. She is sensitive to the "other side" due to her near-drowning, and feels ostracized by her family and friends because of her experience. Not only has Sarah had a traumatic experience, she also must move away from her childhood home and the friends she has known all her life. Despite all the changes she handles everything with maturity and grace, although her family and friends' negative reactions to her sensitivity leaves her determined never to open up to

anyone again. This is an important character trait about Sarah and foreshadows some of her behavior in later chapters. Her fear of water is tied in with her fear of talking about her new power.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

Dad has found the family a beautiful house in Houston for a below-market price. Mom marvels at the home and the price point and begins to talk to Sarah about the difficulties of the move. Sarah cuts her off, unwilling to discuss the situation. As soon as Sarah walks into the house she experiences icy cold and panic. She senses the echo of a scream and knows something is horribly wrong with the house. She mentions it to Mom, who asks if the feeling might be Sarah's imagination. Sarah agrees. They do not tell Dad about the experience. He is excited to show them around the house and seeks praise from Sarah and Mom. He and Mom have a strong relationship, and Sarah can see how much they love each other despite her observations that they are both fairly ordinary. Their real estate agent Evelyn Pritchard lives next door.

As they tour the house Sarah hears whispers that Mom and Dad apparently cannot. She mentally demands that the whispers stop and to her surprise, they do. As they tour the house Dad admits he bought it for way under market price, and that the previous family who lived in the house got a divorce. Sarah wonders if she was sensing residual unhappiness from that situation. The family notices the entry hall has been renovated, including new tiles, carpet, and repainting. Sarah's room is upstairs, and she chooses the back bedroom because the front bedroom seems filled with cold. The movers come and the family is consumed with tasks to move into the house. They reminisce about moving into their last house and Mom gets teary-eyed when discussing their old neighbor, Claire. Mom and Dad leave to get takeout while Sarah stays behind to finish unpacking. She looks at a photo of her old group of friends and begins to cry. After her sobs die down she hears someone else softly crying. Thinking it must be Mom, Sarah follows the sound to the head of the stairs and looks down at a changed entry hall. She hears someone yell "Ayudame" and witnesses blood splattered walls and a pool of blood at the bottom of the stairs.

## Chapter One Analysis

Dad is very pleased with himself for finding the family such a lovely home for such a low price. Though they question briefly why the house is offered for such a steal, no one really dwells on it. Mom and Dad are happy to have the new home. Though Mom tries to talk to Sarah about her feelings about the move, Sarah does not want to talk about it. Her experiences with the wraith made her afraid to talk with anyone about her feelings, even when they have nothing to do with the accident or her senses. Mom and Dad are uncomfortable with Sarah's power and desperately want her to be normal again. When Sarah experiences the scream and sense of panic upon entering the home, Mom suggests it is her imagination, even though she is clearly witnessing something happening to her daughter. She hopes there is a simple solution for Sarah's problem, and the possibility that her daughter is actually experiencing something from the other



side frightens her. Sarah is surprised that when she demands the whispers stop, they do—this implies that she is not only hearing and experiences something from the other side, but she can actually communicate as well.

Mom and Dad clearly have a love relationship, and even Sarah notices how much they care about one another. Dad is eager to show Mom the new house—basically, he is giving her a giant gift. Dad does not pay as much attention to Sarah, but his mind is on many things and he is trying to make sure everything is settled with the house. When he mentions the previous family left the house and divorced, Sarah hopes that she was sensing residual unhappiness from that situation. She does not want to be living in a house when she will have to deal with the other side. Sarah is preoccupied with her feelings about the move and her frightening experience upon entering the house, but when she sees Mom get upset at the mention of their old neighbor Claire she realizes that she is not the only one who has been affected by the move. She reevaluates her situation in this moment and sympathizes with Mom, who has lost her friends too. Sarah does not allow herself to be upset in front of Mom and Dad—she waits until they leave to get takeout before she lets out the feelings she has been holding in. A photo of her old friends triggers it, and she sobs in her new room, missing her old life. Her sobs give way into other sobs, and Sarah gets an eerie feeling. She goes searching for the other cryer hoping to find Mom, but instead sees a vision of the entryway furnished differently and covered in blood. The cry she hears, "Ayudame," is Spanish for "help me." This is proof that something is happening in the house, and the coldness she felt upon the first entrance was not leftover energy from the divorce.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Sarah recovers from the vision. She knows she is linked to the other world now. She wants to tell Mom and Dad but knows she cannot. Sarah worries that the call for help was not an echo and that it was someone actually calling to her for help. Mom and Dad return with Chinese takeout and Sarah ponders the experience she just had. It feels like a dream to her as she eats with her family. The next day Sarah decides to take a bike ride and meets Dee Dee Pritchard, daughter of Evelyn and Sarah's new next-door neighbor. Dee Dee invites Sarah over for a soda. Sarah wants to put her bike away and asks Dee Dee into the house for a moment, but Dee Dee hesitates. She asks about the interior of the house and Sarah asks if Dee Dee has ever been inside. Dee Dee admits she hasn't, but peeked through the front door once. She seems to be referring to some event but cuts herself off. Dee Dee talks about her dog Billy and Sarah admits they have a cat, Dinky.

When she enters the house Dee Dee hesitates in the entryway and seems afraid. The girls go to the kitchen to get a Coke and Mom asks Dee Dee about the previous family, the Holts. Dee Dee says they were not very friendly people and had a son named Adam. His best friend was Eric Hendrickson, and Dee Dee thinks Sarah will meet him soon because he likes pretty girls. Dee Dee is eager to go back to her house when Mom leaves. She asks Sarah about her pets again, and Sarah answers her question again. Dee Dee tells Sarah about Memorial High School. Sarah can tell something is wrong and Dee Dee is uncomfortable. Sarah gives Dee Dee a tour of the house, and Dee Dee is relieved that Sarah has taken the back bedroom. Sarah confronts her about her strange behavior and Dee Dee tells her about Adam, who she described as "seductive" and "strange." He was accused of rape but nothing came of the accusation. Dee Dee suggests they go over to her house and Sarah follows. It is a large Colonial-style home. Sarah meets Lupita, who is startled that she is living in the Holts' old house. Lupita is an illegal alien who Mrs. Pritchard has hired because she is an inexpensive employee. Dee Dee is teaching her English so she can get a better job. Mrs. Pritchard remarks that Sarah has a ring of gold around her green eyes so she must be part fairy. Dee Dee works part time as a lifeguard at the neighborhood pool and invites Sarah to go. Sarah admits that she is afraid to go in the water after her near-drowning. When she leaves the Pritchard house, Lupita crosses herself.

## Chapter Two Analysis

After the vision, Sarah is convinced that the channel between her and the other side is still open. Her urge to tell Mom and Dad is quickly quelled by the last time that she remembers the humiliation she felt when sharing her experiences, and is more afraid of feeling that again than she is of dealing with the situation herself. Mom and Dad





desperately want Sarah to be untroubled, so instead of taking her experiences seriously, they suggest she is imagining it.

Sarah notices Dee Dee's strange behavior regarding the house. Dee Dee almost refers to an event but stops herself, changing the subject. Inside the house Dee Dee is obviously uncomfortable, repeating questions and constantly looking around her. When she makes the remark about the back bedroom Sarah confronts her, eager to know why Dee Dee is being so secretive. Dee Dee admits that Adam Holt was troubled and possibly raped a girl, also describing him as "seductive." This description is important, and Sarah takes note of the word as an odd way to describe someone. Dee Dee lies about being afraid of the actual house, which confirms to Sarah that something else happened besides Adam being accused of rape. Sarah's suspicions are driven further when she meets Lupita, the Pritchard's illegal housemaid. Lupita seems afraid of Sarah, even crossing herself as Sarah leaves the Pritchard's house.

Not only is she confronted with the mystery of the house, she also must admit to Dee Dee her fear of swimming when the girl innocently invites her along. Sarah isn't really ready to share this part of her life with Dee Dee but surprisingly Dee Dee takes the new information in stride, making a joke about her poker face. Sarah is happy to have the start of a friendship.



# Chapter Three and Chapter Four

## Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary

Mom and Sarah discuss Margaret Taylor, who Mom met at the grocery store. Margaret seemed embarrassed and got flustered when Mom invited her over for a cup of coffee sometime. Sarah tells Mom there is something wrong with the house and admits that Dee Dee has acted strangely as well. When Sarah presses the subject Mom gets defensive, immediately blaming Sarah's imagination even though she was the one to bring up the neighbor's behavior. Sarah decides she must find out about the house, even if Mom doesn't want to. They continue working on the house. Mom goes upstairs to clean bathrooms and Sarah is given the task of cleaning the live-in maid's room. When she enters the maid's room Sarah feels the presence again and someone whispers "Ayudame." When she tries to communicate with the spirit she gets no response. She realizes the experiences are directed at her. She decides to help the spirit.

Dee Dee comes over with Eric Hendrickson. He asks Mom for a beer and she refuses. He is argumentative with Dee Dee and it makes Sarah uncomfortable. Eric questions Sarah about the house and Dee Dee calls him a creep. Sarah asks if anyone in the Holt family spoke Spanish and if the family had a maid. Eric is the only person who may know because he and Adam were friends. He says Adam is living in California. Sarah asks him to stay and he says he never dates girls who are taller than him, which makes her laugh. He then suggests she meet Anthony Harris, or Tony, who likes tall girls. Dee Dee doesn't know him. Eric seems up to something. Later that night, Dad drops a bombshell on the family: two years ago, a murder took place in the house.

In Chapter Four, the family realizes the neighborhood has been avoiding them because of the house, and wanted them to move in because the empty house affected their property values. They cannot afford to put the house back up on the market. Mom is concerned that Sarah's episode upon first entering the house was due to the murder, but Sarah denies it, claiming a "tension in the air" of the entryway. Mom and Dad are upset and depressed that they are living in a house where a murder took place, but Sarah cheers them by stating the reality of the situation: things happen in houses, then those people move out and new people move in. Dad relates the story of the murdered pizza girl, and Sarah briefly raises their suspicions by describing blood spatters on the walls. Mr. and Mrs. Holt did not call the police upon seeing the blood, instead hiring an attorney for Adam. Though Adam confessed to the police he made no written or taped confession, which according to Texas State Law a jury needs for a conviction. His case was thrown out when it went to a higher court, Adam claiming that he had a reaction to flu medication and couldn't remember anything. He also lied to police about where the girl's body was.

Mom is worried about Sarah's hallucinations after finding out about the murder, but Sarah reassures her, even though she has a vision and realizes the presence she has



felt is the woman who was murdered. Sarah makes the decision for the family that they will stay. Eric calls to tell her that Tony wants to meet her and he's arranged dinner plans for the three of them. Sarah is hesitant but decides to go. Before she leaves she feels the ghost woman's fear.

## Chapter Three and Chapter Four Analysis

Mom is terrified of Sarah's abilities. She blames an overactive imagination and trauma from the near-drowning for Sarah's experiences, refusing the idea that there could possibly be something otherworldly communicating with her daughter. Mom wants everything about the house to be perfect and is hoping that a fresh start may help her troubled daughter. She is quick to suggest doctors and medicine for Sarah, but as a result has made her daughter feel uncomfortable about her experiences and afraid of talking about them. Mom is trying to help Sarah but doesn't know what her daughter really needs from her.

Sarah is determined to find out about the house, whereas Mom would rather not know. Instead of being afraid of her spiritual encounters, Sarah decides to try and help the person reaching out to her from beyond the grave. This is a huge turning point for Sarah, who is deciding to solve her problems herself. She stops seeking help and is embracing the challenge. Her sympathy for the poor ill-fated woman asking for help wins against her fear of the unknown.

When Dad tells the family that a murder has taken place in the house, Mom's immediate reaction is to move. She feels they were lied to and bought the house under false pretenses. Mom and Dad are both worried about Sarah's sensitivity as well, and that something so negative in the house will affect her negatively. There is a role-reversal here: Sarah keeps her struggles to herself and is the strong, mature figure, reassuring her parents and making the very adult decision that the family should stay in the house. Mom is still intent on calling Sarah's visions "hallucinations," suggesting something is wrong with Sarah herself, but Sarah understands that whatever is happening in the house needs her help. She is willing to venture into the unknown for it. By deciding to stay she is allaying her parents' fears, both for her and the financial burden of a new house, and also taking on the responsibility of being in communication with someone from beyond the grave who is seeking her help.

Eric's call is strange, as is the arranged date. He is a spiteful person and probably still reeling from being put in his place by Sarah in the earlier chapter. His setup seems suspicious, especially after Sarah's spirit seems afraid.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Eric picks Sarah up in his white BMW. Eric swerves the car when Sarah admits the family knows about the murder. Sarah confronts him but Eric claims it would not bother him to live in a house where a murder took place. When they arrive at the restaurant Sarah is immediately infatuated with Tony. As the three sit down to dinner, Eric recounts numerous practical jokes he has played on friends in the past. Sarah learns that Tony likes biographies and mysteries, like her. When she sees the birthmark on his wrist he seems embarrassed. Eric suddenly has to leave and Tony offers to take Sarah home. She tries to tell them that Mom expects Eric to take her home but she is stymied by her attraction to Tony. Tony's car is new. He takes Sarah on a drive around Houston and they talk. Tony says he's a year older than Eric and they went to school together. He has a mustache, and is deciding whether or not to go east to college. He asks Sarah what about the house makes her uncomfortable, but she plays it down, remembering what happened when she told her last group of friends about it. He knows about her conversations with Eric and Dee Dee asking about the housemaid who speaks Spanish. Sarah refuses to tell him anything else, and he asks her if she's ever been in love, provoking a very physical reaction from her. Though she invites him in to meet her parents, Tony is late to pick up his own Mom. He promises to call her; he's gotten her number from Eric. Mom is uncomfortable that Tony brought Sarah home and not Eric, but she lets it go, remembering her own first crush. Sarah does not think what she feels for Tony is a crush at all. Mom and Dad have a bonding moment over the move. Sarah asks the murdered girl's name, and Dad says it's Darlene Garland. Sarah is confused when it isn't a Spanish name, since the voice she has been hearing is Spanish.

## Chapter Five Analysis

Everything about Eric is suspicious. He is far too anxious to set Sarah up on a date, especially since he barely knows her and he's lied to her about the history of the house. Though he is briefly startled when Sarah confronts him about the murder, he claims it would not bother him to live in a house where a murder took place. This is odd since everyone else in the neighborhood is embarrassed and hypersensitive about the murder.

Though Sarah is immediately infatuated with Tony, he raises suspicions as well. Similar to questions about Eric, why is Tony so eager to date the new girl living in the horror house? Sarah ignores her common sense because she is so taken with Tony. Though Sarah is basically a sensible girl she is also a teenager under the influence of a crush. This is also partially why Mom can brush off Sarah's abnormal behavior and the strange date. She attributes everything to a simple teenage crush.

The spirit Sarah has been communicating with is Spanish. So, when Dad identifies the murdered girl as being named Darlene Garland, Sarah is confused. This is an important event in the story, and the first time that the reader gets any hint that the murder in the papers and Sarah's spirit might be different people altogether.



# Chapter Six and Seven

## Chapter Six and Seven Summary

In Chapter Six while daydreaming about Tony, Sarah's spirit communicates with her again, saying, "Trate de encontrarlo." Sarah decides to buy a Spanish-English phrase book later in the day. Before going for a bike ride she encounters Dee Dee, who asks her about the date with Tony. Sarah tells Dee Dee that she and Tony talked about the murder, and that she is mad at Mrs. Pritchard. Dee Dee tries to explain the view of the neighborhood to Sarah, who is still angry but wants to be friends. They discuss Tony and Dee Dee promises to come over and help them unpack. After her bike ride Sarah purchases the phrase book and learns that "Trate de encontrarlo" means "try to find it." Later, Sarah and Dee Dee discover a packet with a religious medal, money, and a calendar highlighting March 3rd—the day of the murder. The packet belonged to Rosa Luiz and included a letter informing her of her uncle's death. Sarah is sure that Rosa is the spirit she has spoken with, but Dee Dee wants to call Mr. Holt and try to forward Rosa's belongings. Sarah speaks with him. He is uncooperative and theorizes that Rosa has probably gone back to Mexico—she worked for them when they first moved into the house for only a few months. Sarah is sure he is lying.

In Chapter Seven, Sarah wants to research more about the murder, but Mom is uncomfortable with the idea. Sarah takes the car over to the library and looks through the microfilm. There is a picture of Adam Holt, who looks blonde and chubby. According to the paper Darlene Garland showed up with the pizza and he stabbed her. A neighbor had heard screams but hadn't called the police, and they had been too early to have possibly been the murder victim. Type O and type A blood was found in the entryway, Darlene's and Adam's blood types. Adam orally confessed to the crime to police, but in the state of Texas a written or taped confession is needed to be admissible in court. Sarah finds nothing about Rosa. Later, back at the house, Rosa says to Sarah "Es para usted," or "This is for you." Sarah waits for Rosa to communicate further and she tries, but then Dee Dee comes to the door and breaks the spell. Dee Dee thinks Sarah was meditating, and asks her not to be mad because anyone who comes to the door could have seen her. Dee Dee asked Lupita about Rosa and thinks she may have been deported.

## Chapter Six and Seven Analysis

In Chapter Six, Sarah and Dee Dee's discovery of the packet gives a concrete name and identity to the spirit: Rosa Luiz. Her mysterious message for Sarah to try and find something leads her to the packet. This is physical proof that the spirit Sarah is hearing lived in the house, and Dee Dee bears witness. Sarah tries to look past her anger with Mrs. Pritchard and be a true friend to Dee Dee, despite the girl's motormouth and the general dishonesty of the neighborhood. Sarah is relieved to have a new friend—especially one she can start over with in a way. Losing her friends after the drowning



incident still weighs heavily on Sarah, and even though Dee Dee has flaws, Sarah is willing to try and see past her anger to have a new friend. Dee Dee's insistence that they call Mr. Holt is odd. She may simply be playing mischievous. However her unwillingness to speak with Mr. Holt means that Sarah makes an important discovery and leads her further into the mysteries of the house. He would have no reason to lie to her and yet he does.

In Chapter Seven, Sarah delves into researching the case. She is unwilling to sit around and wait for Rosa to be clear with her—she's ready to start trying to understand the mystery herself. Things aren't adding up. There are some inconsistencies in the story—the only potential witness heard the screams too early. Adam confessed to the police but the confession didn't count in the courtroom. Sarah makes note of Adam's physical appearance but cannot see his eyes. She is confused why Rosa would say "this is for you." Sarah is the one trying to help Rosa, not the other way around. What could Rosa be trying to do for Sarah? Sarah is relieved when Dee Dee brushes off the "meditation." She is initially very embarrassed, thinking of herself as Strange Sarah again, but Dee Dee is unphased.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

While they think Sarah is asleep on the couch, Mom and Dad discuss how they still feel lied to by the entire neighborhood. Dad suggests they try to take Sarah's example and make some friends. Sarah heads upstairs to bed and reexamines Rosa's medal. Sarah dreams that Rosa is in the room with her and covered in blood. Sarah asks Rosa not to come to her in dreams. The next day Mom invites Sarah to the plumbing store but Sarah opts to stay home and put the books on the bookshelf. Sarah wishes Marcie would write but she is afraid to be the first one to write between the two of them. Tony arrives asking to meet Sarah's mother, and the entryway gets colder and presses down on Sarah. Tony offers to help unpack the books, and when they need a break he asks Sarah about what frightens her. He claims Adam was overmedicated and depressed and did not know what he was doing during the murders. He asks Sarah why she was frightened when he first arrived, and she asks him if he knew the Holts' household help. Tony claims he does not, but is startled when she physically describes Rosa and admits she found the packet. She also admits to him that she saw Rosa in a dream. Tony says he hopes the packet is hidden, and Sarah tells him where. Tony urges her not to tell anyone or pursue the matter further, claiming she might make trouble for herself.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

Although Tony has behaved strangely before, some of his actions in Chapter Eight are bizarre. His reaction to Rosa, the packet, and the dream indicate that he is more interested in the topic of Adam Holt than he initially let on. He also seems to deliberately avoid meeting Sarah's mother: he shows up after she leaves and has to go right before she returns. Tony also asks Sarah very serious questions, including what frightens her. Though she is drawn to his intensity, this encounter triggers a tiny but of fear and suspicion in her mind. It's strange how concerned he is with how widespread the knowledge of the packet is, and strange that he wants to make sure it's hidden well. The feeling Sarah gets when he walks into the house is significant—some reaction or warning from Rosa.

Sarah is more cautious than before but still taken with Tony, and her teenage infatuation is ruling over her common sense.





# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Mom is slightly concerned about Tony and tells Sarah that she and Dad want to meet him before they go out again. Mom has signed the family up for a membership at the community swimming pool, but Sarah is not ready to swim yet. The next day Dee De comes over and invites them to the pool. Sarah reluctantly goes but is uncomfortable and doesn't want to swim. When Mom wants to stay and swim longer Sarah decides to walk home. When she arrives Dinky bursts out of the house, upset. Sarah goes to the kitchen to get water and hears someone moving overhead. She calls the police and tries to exit the house through the back door, but it has been locked and the key taken. Sarah makes a run for her parents' room to hide, but has no time and must run to the hallway bathroom instead. She hears the intruder run after her and sees him stop in front of the bathroom door. He leaves just before the police arrive. They search the house but find nothing missing and no sign of forced entry. They think it is Sarah's imagination. She does not know why someone was in the house, but the question that concerns her more is who it was.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Sarah's fear of the water is a huge subplot in the story, although she is taking on the responsibility of solving a murder, she is still too traumatized by the memory of drowning to set foot in a swimming pool. Mom's overt encouragement and Dee Dee's innocent invitation is enough to get her to sit at the pool with them, but she can't stand it for long and decides to go home. The sense memory is still too strong for her.

It's ironic that earlier, upon bringing Dinky home to the new house, Sarah remarks that she is surprised Dinky has no sixth sense reaction to the place. When Sarah comes home from the pool Dinky shoots out of the house right away, seeming angry or disturbed. Sarah realizes quickly that someone is in the house, and while her first reaction is to run, her second reaction is anger. She is angry that someone has invaded their home and wants to fight back. This fighting spirit is apparent in Sarah: she is a survivor and will fight back when threatened. It is lucky that she beats the intruder to the bathroom, and also lucky she had the foresight to call the police. If the intruder had been able to get the bathroom door open, Sarah may have been in trouble. Though the police brush off her story, Sarah is certain someone was in the house. She is less concerned with why they came into the house—what she wants to know is who came into the house.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

Mom gets home just as the police leave and Sarah has to reassure her that she is fine and nothing was taken. Mom asks why Sarah didn't run out the back door and Sarah explains the deadbolt was locked and the key was gone. When they each look at the door the key is clearly visible. Mom, like the police, doubts Sarah's story. They split up to survey the house for anything missing, and Sarah heads upstairs to her room. Rosa points Sarah toward the bottom drawer of her dresser, where Sarah discovers the packet is missing. She briefly considers Tony as the thief but decides that is unlikely. She knows Dee Dee talks too much and perhaps word got around that way. In the guest bedroom she notices a window ajar because of a broken latch. She fears that Adam Holt himself may have learned of the packet and broken into the house. She calls Eric, angry, and asks him about Adam's true whereabouts. Eric lies to her again but she tricks him into admitting he knew about the packet. She then calls Mrs. Holt and asks to speak with Adam, but Mrs. Holt is rude and claims she doesn't keep track of Adam's hours. Sarah is certain that Adam does not actually live with his mother.

She decides to visit Mark Hardison, the lead detective on Adam's case. He advises her to simply forget about the murder. Sarah suggests they further test the blood samples taken from Adam against the type A blood found in the hallway. Sarah explains what she has learned so far to Sergeant Hardison but he is unreceptive, telling her that nothing can be proven in a court of law. Sarah asks him about Adam's fingerprints and Sergeant Hardison explains the murder weapon was never found.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Sarah is frustrated that the police do not believe her, and she is hurt when Mom doesn't believe her either. She cannot explain to anyone specifically what she is going through. The police think she imagined the intruder and her mother thinks she has had another hallucination. Sarah is determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, especially when she discovers the packet has been stolen. It is significant that her first thought is Tony, although she dismisses that thought immediately since she cannot figure out a motive for him. Sarah is deeply entrenched in the mystery now, and tries to fit the pieces of the puzzle together right after she finds the packet missing. Dee Dee was the only one who knew about it besides Tony, and Dee Dee loves to talk. Sarah calls Eric and demands Adam's whereabouts, but Eric of course claims to know nothing. She does trick him into admitting he knows about the packet, which is an admission of guilt on Eric's part: somehow, he is involved in Adam Holt's story and is concerned about Sarah's part in it. Eric seems to enjoy being in the thick of the mystery and playing with Sarah's emotions, never giving her a straight answer. This makes him very suspicious.



Sarah tries to take her theories to Sergeant Hardison, but he is unreceptive. She cannot get support from any of the adults in her life, including her family and law enforcement. This leads directly to the events later in the story. Sarah is forced to take matters into her own hands so things get out of control. The later events of the story could have been prevented if someone had simply listened to her and helped her look into her theories. She has been threatened and turned up new evidence in a case, but is dismissed because she is young and is seen as having psychological problems. This treatment of Sarah directly leads to her endangerment in later chapters.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

When Sarah returns home Mom is at the swimming pool. She sits briefly with Dinky but begins having a vision of Rosa's murder. She is distraught and disoriented after being shown the horrible scene. "Peligo," Rosa warns her, just before Tony shows up. Upset, she tells him that Rosa showed her the murders. He seems frightened. Mom arrives home as well and makes Sarah sit down and tell them everything. Tony verifies that there was a Rosa who worked for the family but he does not remember when she worked for them. Tony accuses her of being a witch, and Mom decides to take her to a doctor, still convinced she is hallucinating. Mom asks how Tony got into the house if Sarah was incapacitated and he claims the door was unlocked. When Mom points out that it was locked when she arrived, he claims he must have locked it out of habit. Sarah wonders if Tony could have entered the house through the window upstairs with the broken latch. She worries that he must think she is strange, but he surprises her by apologizing and kissing her before he leaves. Mom schedules a doctor's appointment for Sarah the next morning and admits she is afraid. Sarah considers Rosa's "danger" warning and is confused—the murders already happened and Tony was there during her episode to help her.

Dr. Fulton tells Sarah that houses are not haunted—people are haunted by their internal fears. Dr. Fulton thinks the packet may be the stimulus for Sarah dreaming up Rosa. Since Sarah's dreams of drowning have stopped, he thinks her fears have taken on a new form through Rosa. Sarah maintains after the appointment that her fear of drowning did not create Rosa, and is still resolved to help her.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

Sarah has a very traumatic experience with Rosa in this chapter—the most intense one thus far in the story. Rosa is warning her of something but Sarah does not understand what she means. Rosa's appeals seem to be growing more intense with Sarah. Tony has show up, again, unannounced and when Sarah is alone. Mom is uncomfortable to find him in the house with her distraught daughter, and suspicious that he says he entered through the unlocked front door and locked it behind him. His reaction to Sarah's story is multi-faceted: he is frightened how upset she is, and clearly disturbed at the extent of her knowledge about the murder. He lashes out at her verbally, accusing her of being a witch. This is out of character for the mild-mannered Tony: he has been intense before but never mean to Sarah. His comment hurts her because it is one of her deep fears, and psychological bruise left by her former group of friends in Springdale. They dropped her when they found out she was different, and she intensely anxious about becoming Strange Sarah again. However, before he leaves Tony apologizes and kisses her. This complete change in attitude takes place very quickly, but is enough to reassure Sarah that Tony does not think she is strange. It is important to note how



mercurial Tony is—he has the ability to completely change his mood in the blink of an eye.

Though Sarah has just had a very real experience, Mom still cannot accept that her daughter is communicating with a dead person. She immediately makes an appointment with Dr. Fulton to address Sarah's "hallucinations." Mom is afraid of Sarah's experiences—though it seems like she's being unsupportive by denying that what Sarah is experiencing is real, she's actually so frightened for her daughter that she has to believe Sarah's problems are medically treatable. She wants to help Sarah and taking her to a doctor is the most immediate way she can think of. Unfortunately for Mom, Sarah's visit with Dr. Fulton only serves to strengthen her resolve to help Rosa.



# Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Sarah gets a phone call from Tony as soon as she arrives home. He asks what the therapist thought about Rosa and whether Sarah tells the therapist everything. He then suggests they go for a swim in a lake he knows to help her overcome her fear. Mom is hesitant to allow Sarah to go swimming with Tony, but she relents. Dee Dee and Eric both call Sarah as she is getting ready, and Eric asks her to call him back as soon as possible. In the car Tony says that he remembers Rosa because of Sarah's description of her. He thinks Sarah is psychic and she is going to use her visions to prove that Adam killed Rosa. On the walk to the lake Sarah has a terrifying episode. She wants to leave but Tony says he wants to share his special place with her. Tony cryptically speaks about Adam, telling Sarah that she could never understand Adam and would not be able to recognize evil because she is a good person. He kisses her, and while she is distracted he carries her into the lake.

In Chapter Thirteen, a passerby catches Sarah and Tony in the lake. It is private property and they must leave. The lake is unsafe to swim in: there are too many weeds to be tangled in and cottonmouth snakes that live in it. Sarah is angry and yells at Tony on the way home. She arrives home and learns Eric has called her again. She tells Mom that she and Tony had a fight and she goes upstairs for a shower and a nap. In her sleep Rosa sends her the Spanish word for photograph, and Sarah realizes she needs to see a photograph of Adam. She and Dee Dee go to Sergeant Hardison at 9am the next morning, immediately telling him that Dee Dee saw Rosa's packet too. Sergeant Hardison shows Sarah the photograph, and when she darkens the hair she realizes it's Tony. She realizes he tried to kill her at the lake and Eric probably saved her. She also realizes the lake is where Rosa's body is buried. They suspect Eric set Sarah and Adam up as a joke. They go back home to interview Lupita, and she admits she saw Adam carry two large trash bags out of his house around 2:15. She rang the bell for Rosa but she was not at home. She is afraid of being deported, but Sergeant Hardison needs her as a witness. Sarah decides to wait for him in his police car, but Adam is waiting in the car with a knife.

## Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Tony is highly suspicious in Chapter Twelve. He asks Sarah pointed questions about Rosa regarding her therapy session instead of asking her how she is feeling about everything. He seems more concerned for Adam's safety than Sarah's, defending his friend in an intense way. Pressuring Sarah to swim with him indicates that he does not have her best interests in mind: she needs time to deal with her fears and does not need to be pushed into anything. Sarah's Mom is suspicious of Tony as well, but lets Sarah go to the lake out of the hope that she will actually overcome her fear of water with Tony. This is another mistake by Mom—the first being that she refuses to



acknowledge Sarah's ability to communicate with the dead. Especially in the car and on the walk to the lake Tony seems to be studying Sarah, asking her strangely specific questions. He knows full well his physical power over her, and uses that attraction to his advantage while taking her into the lake. Sarah has put herself in a dangerous situation here: she does not really know Tony well at all. He is behaving strangely and she has followed him to a secluded lake, and she sensed something awful on the way. Though Sarah has made excuses for Tony up until this point, carrying her into the lake is a very bold and very wrong step for him to take.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Chapter Fourteen Summary

Adam has her cornered in the car, but Sarah flips on the microphone switch. Adam does not realize that everything he is saying to Sarah is being transmitted. As Sergeant Hardison approaches the car, Adam tells Sarah to roll down the window and demand him to throw her the keys. Sarah talks him down and Adam drops the knife just before the police close in, afraid of witnesses to his crime. Sarah is pulled from the car and safe. She runs to her mother. Later, police find Rosa exactly where Sarah says she is buried. Sarah tells them to rebury Rosa on consecrated ground. She is free from her ordeal, and decides to call Dee Dee.

## Chapter Fourteen Analysis

Sarah's journey comes to a head in this climactic chapter. She finally knows that Adam and Tony are the same person, and she has been fooled by him the entire time they have known each other. Though she is terrified when he corners her in the car, she still have the presence of mind to turn the microphone on. This way their conversation is being broadcast. Though he demands that she ask for the keys from Sergeant Hardison, in the end Adam knows that he's been beaten and he drops the knife. The fun for him is killing others, not being killed himself. Sarah cannot help but be horrified at her former feelings for Tony/Adam, and Sergeant Hardison comforts her by admitting that evil is often fascinating. It isn't necessarily her fault that she was drawn to Tony. Wrapping up Rosa's story has a therapeutic effect for Sarah. She seems to leave her traumas behind and finally move on with her life.





# Characters

## Sarah Darnell

Sarah is the main character and the story is recounted from her perspective. She is sixteen (almost seventeen) and is described by the author as having dark hair and being slightly underweight. Sarah's life changes in the blink of an eye after an accident she has while swimming. She is accidentally pushed to the bottom of the lake and gets tangled in the weeds at the bottom. Her friends save her but not before she stops breathing, and Sarah witnesses her friend Andy giving her body CPR. While this experience is traumatic enough, afterward Sarah noticed she has a "spirit shadow." She has become sensitive to the "other side." Though she tried to deal with her newfound awareness herself, when she mentions it to her friends they react very negatively, as do her parents. Their reactions humiliate Sarah, making her feel like a "weirdo." She decides to keep her experiences to herself, since sharing them with others provokes such strong and unsavory reactions from her friends and family. Like any teenager, Sarah is concerned with fitting in and does not want to be different. Her near-death experience sets her apart from the friends she has had since childhood, and even her best friend Marcie is uncomfortable around her.

When Sarah's family moves to Houston it is another difficult event for her, although her friend relationships in Springdale have become so altered that it's almost a relief for her to be leaving. In the family's new house in Houston, Sarah immediately senses something is wrong. She knows something awful happened in the house, but she hides her knowledge from her family in fear that they will be upset or frightened by it. Though she herself is frightened by the spirit and the darkness in the house, she decides to face her fears and help the spirit of Rosa who is reaching out to her. Sarah solves the mystery herself by putting together Rosa's clues one by one. She learns to believe in herself and what she is doing, even though her Mom suggests that she is hallucinating and takes her to see another doctor.

Sarah's realization that Tony is Adam is a big turning point for her - up until that realization she has been charmed by Tony, happy to have a friend and someone who is interested in her. She likes him despite their strange set-up date by Eric, and ignores the warning signs she gets from Rosa and her own intuition. In the end Sarah solves a crime and solves her own problem as well. She handles extraordinary situations with relative calm and grace, considering her age and the awful circumstances she faces. Sarah learns to believe in herself and use the spirit awareness to her advantage, and by helping Rosa she ultimately helps herself.

## Tony/Adam

Adam Holt is a deeply unhappy and disturbed boy, evident by the double murders he committed in his house. It is unclear whether Mr. and Mrs. Holt's divorce was in the



works before Adam's murders or after, but it is possible that an unhappy home life may have contributed to Adam's psychological issues. Adam is described as being blonde and pudgy, but as Tony he has a mustache and is darkly charismatic. Perhaps Adam is the victim of a deeper psychological problem, like schizizophrenia or multiple personality disorder. This would better explain how he could go from someone so charismatic, charming, and smooth to someone who threatens, intimidates, and kills.

Tony is playing a game with her from the beginning, although the initial setup may have come directly from Eric. Tony only comes around when Mom has left and Sarah is alone, which makes it seem like he is watching her. He was probably the one who snuck into the house and stole Rosa's packet, and probably would have done Sarah some harm if she had not called the police. Tony knows that Sarah is attracted to him, and uses her attraction to his advantage whenever possible. He especially exploits Sarah's feelings once he finds out she is onto the Rosa mystery—he lets her believe she can trust him while all the while gathering information, just in case she gets too close to the truth. He even uses her own greatest fear—the water—against her, attempting to drown her in the lake. This is a completely sadistic scare tactic. Instead of simply threatening her, he puts her up against the thing she is most afraid of in the world. He is completely manipulative with Sarah, making her think he cares about her when he is at best playing a game with her and at worst directly threatening her.

When Tony tries to drown Sarah in the lake his purpose is clear to everyone but Sarah, and he tries to backtrack when his plan doesn't work out,

## Mom

Dorothy, Sarah's mother, tries her best to be there for Sarah. She is supportive during the move and tries to give Sarah as normal of a life as possible after the accident, but is at the same time afraid of Sarah's newfound sensitivity to the other side. Described as being middle-aged with salt and pepper hair, Mom and Sarah are obviously close. Since Sarah is an only child she gets a fair share of attention from both her parents. Though the move is hard on Dorothy, she tries to make things easier for Sarah, encouraging her to make friends though Dorothy herself is missing her old friends from the neighborhood. Dorothy and her husband have a close relationship as well, as evident by the family's commitment to each other and to the move.

Dorothy is afraid of Sarah's experiences, and prefers to think of them as a medically treatable condition, like hallucinations or severe reactions to trauma. To think there is anything supernatural about her only daughter is too much for Dorothy to handle. She hopes the move to Houston will be a new beginning for the family, but when they find out about the house she is furious at Mrs. Pritchard and their other neighbors. She is horrified at the events that occurred in the house and at her neighbors' dishonesty, but also very worried about Sarah living in a house where such a traumatic event happened so recently. Dorothy tries to give Sarah space as a teenager, but be there for her as a role model and a support system. She eventually accepts Sarah's power, but prefers for everything to be normal and orderly.



## Dee Dee

Dee Dee Pritchard is the neighborhood gossip. She cannot keep a secret, even when she tries, and things that she has been told just fly out of her mouth unbidden. Dee Dee is very friendly and bubbly, a little flighty at times but ultimately well-meaning. Dee Dee is the first friend Sarah makes in her new neighborhood, and even from the very beginning it's obvious to Sarah that Dee Dee is keeping something from her—not necessarily in a malicious way, but Dee Dee cannot hide her thoughts from appearing on her face.

It is unclear why Dee Dee, such a sweet and bubbly person, is friends with Eric. Eric comes off as a know-it-all, and he and Dee Dee start fighting almost as soon as they sit down at Sarah's. Despite sounding so scatterbrained at times, Dee Dee is also a lifeguard at the local pool. This indicates that she can handle some measure of responsibility. Being in charge of safety at the pool takes more focus than initially one would think that Dee Dee has.

She also feels very guilty about everyone lying about the Holts' house. She worries that Sarah will not want to be friends with her because of her mother lying to their family. She is obviously relieved when Sarah makes it clear that is not the case. Dee Dee is a sweet, caring girl, and truly wants to be Sarah's friend despite the house and the neighborhood's reaction to their new neighbors.

## Eric

Adam Holt's friend, Eric is a vain and sarcastic boy who sets Sarah up on the first date with Tony.

## Dad

Dad is part of Sarah's close-knit family. They have moved to Houston because he got a new job.

## Andy

Andy is the boy who saved Sarah's life by giving her mouth-to-mouth after the drowning incident. He is older than Sarah and she had a crush on him before.

## Marcie

Marcie was Sarah's best friend before the accident, but when Sarah admits she has a shadow Marcie becomes distant.



## **Dr. Clarke**

Dr. Clarke tells Sarah that people who have had near-death experiences can have experiences similar to hers, but they eventually fade.

## **Kent**

Kent is the friend who accidentally killed Sarah by jumping on her while she was swimming underwater.

## **Mrs. Evelyn Pritchard**

Mrs. Pritchard, Dee Dee's mother, sold Sarah's family the Holt house without telling them about the murder.

## **Mrs. Holt**

Adam Holt's mother, who moved out of Houston after her divorce.

## **Mr. Holt**

Adam Holt's father, who lied to Sarah on the phone about Rosa.

## **Mark Hardison**

Mark is the detective that was originally assigned to investigate the murder.

## **Rosa**

Rosa is the spirit that Sarah senses in the house. She is looking for her and warning Sarah against possible danger.

## **Darlene Garland**

Darlene Garland is the pizza deliveru girl who Adam Holt killed in cold blood.

## **Lupita**

Lupita is the Pritchard's illegal Mexican maid. She later helps solves the mystery of Rosa.

## **Barbie**

Barbie is part of Sarah's old friend group. She was with everyone on the day of Sarah's drowning.

## **Dinky**

This is Sarah's cat.

## **Dr. Fulton**

This is Sarah's psychologist in Houston.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Springdale, Missouri**

Springdale is the town where Sarah grew up and where the drowning occurred.

### **Houston, Texas**

Houston is the town where Sarah's father gets a new job and where the family moves into the Holts' old house.

### **Rosa's Packet**

Rosa's packet contains letters, money, and a religious necklace. The packet tells Sarah whose spirit has been contacting her.

### **The Pizza Box**

The pizza box in Adam's garage is a piece of circumstantial evidence that links him to the murder.

### **The broken window latch**

The broken latch is how the intruder is able to sneak into the house. Adam/Tony knew exactly where it was and was used it to his advantage.

### **The Lake in Springdale**

This is where Sarah drowned and was brought back to life by Alex.

### **The Lake in Houston**

This is where Sarah is carried into the water by Tony, but he is stopped from going further by the watchman.

### **The Swimming Pool**

This is where Dee Dee is a lifeguard in Houston, and Sarah's first attempt at proximity to water after the accident.



## **The Front Entryway**

In Sarah's new house in Houston, the Front Entryway is where Adam murdered the pizza girl and Rosa.

## **Rosa's Grave**

When Tony takes Sarah to the lake, she has an episode passing over a spot on the ground. She later learns this is where Adam has buried Rosa's body.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Sarah must overcome a number of obstacles in the story. The initial event is the drowning, which causes her to have an intense and visceral fear of water, but the repercussions of Sarah's brush with death add even more layers to her journey. The newfound ability to sense communications from the dead becomes the Sarah's main conflict: she has not asked for this power and does not necessarily want it, but when faced with Rosa's situation she decides to help. Sarah makes a big choice by deciding to try and solve Rosa's murder: she is not only venturing into disturbing subject matter, she also is taking control of her abilities. These same abilities ostracized her from her childhood friends and spurred her mother to take her to a psychologist, but Sarah gains strength enough in herself to believe that what she is experiencing is real.

At the beginning of the story she has vowed never to share her experiences with anyone again because of her friends' reactions, and her parents' reactions reinforce that decision. She feels completely alone, and like no one with ever understand her. However when confronted with Rosa's situation, Sarah is able to look beyond her fear and help the person in need. She stops dwelling on her problems and actively uses her ability to help someone else, though she is afraid. In the end not only does Sarah bring to light another murder, she also helps apprehend the killer and proves to her family that she was right. She overcomes her fear of swimming and her ordeal does not frighten away her new friend Dee Dee. Sarah also learns how dangerous love and attraction can be. She admits that no one ever affected her like Tony could, and she learns to be more cautious. She comes out of the entire experience a stronger, more well-adjusted young lady rather than a confused teenager, and by the end of the story has gone through a complete transformation.

## Things Aren't Always What They Seem

Sarah's story is full of twists and turns. She must navigate the complications of life, death, lies, and murder, and also the difficulties of moving to a different state and being a teenage girl. Sarah learns first-hand that things are not always what they seem, starting with the drowning and the reactions of her friends and family. Though Marcie and the others are her best friends, when she mentions her shadow they almost immediately abandon her, afraid of her now that she's "different." Even though Marcie seemed to be her best friend, when Sarah really needed her Marcie basically abandons her.

Sarah's entire perception of the world changes after the accident. Whereas before she would never have imagined she would have a "shadow" following her around, after the accident she senses the presence and must learn to live with it. This lead to more questions for Sarah about the "other side" that would never have come up had she not





drowned. She has a different perspective from her old friends and even her family members because of her experience. It can be compared to a mirror: her whole life Sarah has looked into the mirror at her reflection, but after the accident, it's like she is looking out. The other people in her life sense that she is different. Though her family tries to help her, Sarah's friends turn their backs.

The major twist in the story is the Tony/Adam dichotomy. Sarah's attraction to Tony is immediate and baffling for her. Even Alex, her old crush from home, never drew such a reaction out of her. She is attracted to Tony's mystery and is able to ignore the red flags about him. There are various reasons for this: firstly, she is a teenage girl with a crush on a mysterious, older boy. She is looking for friends in her new town and still hurting from the abandonment of her old friends after the accident. She is vulnerable after the move, and experiencing frightening things in her new home. Sarah wants a friend and someone who can be a real companion for her, someone she can share her problems with. She hopes that this person will make her feel better and not like a freak or the way her old friends made her feel.

## **Evil vs. Good**

Description



# Style

## Point of View

The story is in the first-person perspective from Sarah's point of view. The reader sees the story through Sarah's eyes, including her terrifying encounters with the other side. This form allows the reader to follow along with Sarah's every thought, impulse, and reaction. The point of view is important because the story is about Sarah overcoming her fears and learning to believe in herself, and the reader is able to experience her growth firsthand. Especially since the novel is meant for a younger audience, it's important that the ultimate message of the story comes through Sarah's perspective loud and clear.

Since Sarah communicates with Rosa mentally, it's important that the story take place from a first person point of view so we "hear" her conversations. The reader is also able to completely understand Sarah's visions, since she vividly describes them in the first person. This tense is also adds suspense and intensity to the events of the story—the reader connects with Sarah's use of first person and is automatically present in her situations with her. The choice of first person point also keeps readers in the dark about the inner thoughts of other characters. In this case, if the reader had known Tony or Adam's thoughts and intentions throughout the entire story, the mystery aspect of the story would have been lost. Instead, since the reader only sees the story through Sarah, the twist at the end of the story is much more effective.

## Setting

The main action of the story takes place in Houston, Texas, in the new home of Sarah and her family. Their old town of Springdale is referenced often, especially because Sarah's accident occurred in that town. The prologue takes place in a flashback, with Sarah speaking directly to the reader. Specifically, most of the action takes place in Sarah's new neighborhood, either in her house or around it. The scenes outside this area include Sarah's dinner with Tony and Eric, Tony taking Sarah to the lake, and Sarah's visits to the police station, library, and bookstore. The time is present day, although some of the styles described in the text are dated.

When Sarah and her family move into the new house, it's clear they have moved into a higher socioeconomic circle. Mom remarks that she is amazed they were able to afford the house, and Dad admits he got it for a great deal. Sarah remarks that it is the nicest house they have ever lived in and they should enjoy it. The architecture on their cul-de-sac seems grand, with large pillars described on the Pritchard's house next door. Very little description is given of the family's Springdale neighborhood, but the Houston neighborhood seems fairly affluent—it even includes a neighborhood swimming pool. The neighbors are concerned about the empty house lowering their property values,



and are willing to keep their new neighbors ignorant of the horror that happened in the house.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly straightforward. This book is meant for younger readers, so the vocabulary is easy to intermediate, and any difficult words have plenty of context clues. The story does make use of specific terminology, including medical/psychiatric, law enforcement, and spiritual terms and phrases. Since Sarah sees a psychiatrist and a detective in the story, it is important to include specific medical/legal phrasing in the plot to aid believability. The younger characters sometimes speak with slang terms, including Sarah and Dee Dee, while the older characters like Mom and Dad do not. This difference in vocabulary solidifies the characters' roles.

A big part of the language of the story is Spanish, since Rosa only speaks to Sarah in her native language. The Spanish phrases offered in the story are simple and common phrases. Anyone who has learned a small bit of Spanish would understand most of the words used in the story, although they are all translated within the plot to aid non-Spanish speakers. Rosa's language also helps solidify the change in setting when the family moves. Houston is much closer to Mexico than Springdale, and therefore would be home to more native Spanish-speaking people. Even readers with no Spanish skills at all can come away from this book with a few key phrases: "Ayudame" and "Peligroso" mean "Help me" and "Danger," among many other short, easy phrases that Rosa uses with Sarah.

## Structure

The book is divided into fifteen chapters and a prologue. The chapters have similar amounts of pages. The story takes place in the present day except for one flashback in the prologue. The main plot of the novel revolved around solving the murder, and all the subplots feed into the main event: Sarah exposing Adam and the double murder. The book is structurally very straight forward: introduction, conflict, action, climax, resolution. It is a fairly formulaic mystery, but the addition of Sarah's ghosts and the twist at the end of the novel spices up the story.

The initial event in the story is Sarah's drowning accident, which leads to her fear of water which she must eventually overcome. Clues to the mystery of Rosa and the house in Houston are given bit by bit, allowing the reader to piece the story together along with Sarah. All the pieces come together in the climax of the story, where Tony is revealed to be Adam and Sarah is briefly taken hostage. The straightforward structure helps the reader focus on the events of the story, and on examining clues along with Sarah. Overall this novel is easy to read and moves quickly.



## Quotes

"But no matter what happened to me in the future, I'd keep it to myself, even keep it from Mom and Dad. I'd never be humiliated like that again" (p. 10).

" I felt as though I'd been sucked into a cold, smothering mist that surged forward, its thudding heartbeat racing, pounding against my forehead like hammer blows" (p. 12).

"Directly below me, under the brown-red splattered walls, lay a pool of blood" (p. 21).

"There was something strange about this house, and Dee Dee knew what it was" (p. 28).

"It was obvious to me that there was some unhappy story connected with this house, and people who knew it were trying to keep it from us" (p. 38).

"I realized I could no more walk away from this unseen spirit than I could if she were flesh and blood standing before me, begging for my help" (p. 41).

"As he reached across the table for the bowl of salsa, the sleeve of his long-sleeved sports shirt pulled back from his wrist and I noticed an irregular purple mark the size of a quarter" (p. 66).

"You even managed to reassure your mother with your sensible, practical attitude, and that took some doing." (p. 74).

"Inside this hollow was a bundle of papers with a thin silver chain wound around them" (p. 83).

The medical examiner testified there were two kinds of blood found in the Holts' hallway, type A and type O" (p. 92).

"In spite of her words, I could see the doubt in her eyes, and it hurt" (p. 120).

"There's a new way to match blood to a specific person through DNA, but we didn't have the information or equipment to take test at the time" (p. 128).

"She was screaming, struggling against the tall blond boy who bent over her, his right hand clutching a kitchen knife" (p. 133).

"This hallucinating is very dangerous, Sarah, and we're going to get help immediately" (p. 138).

"Houses are not haunted, Sarah. People are, and not by preternatural or supernatural beings but by their own fears" (p. 143).



"He was serious when he asked, "What did he say when you told him about Rosa" (p. 146).

"I realize now that yesterday Tony—Adam—tried to kill me. He would have succeeded, but someone—I'm pretty sure it was Eric—interfered" (p. 168).

"Evil is often fascinating" (p. 179).



## Topics for Discussion

How do Sarah's friends react to her admission that she is communicating with something from the other side? How does this make Sarah feel? For teenagers, how important is social acceptance in everyday life?

Discuss Sarah's fears throughout the story. What is the fear she must ultimately overcome? How does she accomplish overcoming her fear? What events specifically lead to this accomplishment?

Do you think Tony/Adam is evil? Why or why not? Could his behavior be affected by a medical problem such as psychosis or multiple personality disorder? Why or why not?

Juxtapose Sarah's group of friends in Springdale to her group of friends in Houston. How are they similar? How do they differ? How does Dee Dee react when Sarah tells her about the drowning accident?

What is a phobia? Does Sarah have a phobia about drowning? Why or why not? What is the difference between having a phobia and having post traumatic stress?

How is Sarah's situation complicated by her attraction to Tony? How is her attraction to Tony different from her attraction to Alex? What is Mom's reaction when Sarah admits she has feelings for Tony?

What does Sarah think about the neighborhood in Houston employing illegal immigrants for cheap labor? What is the neighborhood's attitude toward the practice? This is still a hot-button issue today. When was this book written? Could the attitudes in the novel be a precursor to modern-day sentiments? Explain.

Discuss Sarah's relationship with her family members. How does Mom react to Sarah's accident and subsequent events? Why is Mom insistent that Sarah is hallucinating? How do Mom and Dad react to the information about the house?