

We Were Liars



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF E. LOCKHART

E. Lockhart (or Emily Lockhart) is the penname of Emily Jenkins, born in New York City in 1967. Her father, Len Jenkin, is a novelist, playwright, director, and screenwriter. He and Emily lived briefly in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and then settled in Seattle, Washington. Emily attended the Lakeside School, a prestigious private high school in the city, and spent her summers attending drama camps throughout the Midwest. She went to Vassar College for her undergraduate degree, later going on to earn a Ph.D. in English Literature from Columbia University. She has written children's books, young adult and adult fiction, and she currently teaches creative writing at Hamline University in Minnesota.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel is set in modern-day New England, as the members of the Sinclair family are sprinkled around the area, and they all converge on an island off the coast of Massachusetts. There are references to old New England families and their wealth, as well as the fact that Harris Sinclair, like many wealthy Democrats, voted for Barack Obama in both presidential elections. The Sinclair family saga reflects certain socioeconomic trends in American culture, including the sense that the old New England aristocracy is in decline, and that people of color are penetrating in the American upper class.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In 2015, *We Were Liars* made the American Library Association's top ten list of Best Fiction for Young Adults. Many of the other books on this list touch on issues of family and deception, including [The Crossover](#) by Kwame Alexander, [The Gospel of Winter](#), by Brendan Kiely, and Jandy Nelson's [I'll Give You the Sun](#). Other winners include [The Boy in the Black Suit](#) by Jason Reynolds, [The Sun is Also a Star](#) by Nicola Yoon, and [Burn Baby Burn](#) by Meg Medina; like *We Were Liars*, these young adult novels portray adolescents coming of age and learning about the world through their experiences of tragic events.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *We Were Liars*
- **When Written:** 2014
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2014
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary American

- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** Beechwood, a fictional island near Martha's Vineyard
- **Climax:** The Liars burn down Clairmont, the main house on the island.
- **Antagonist:** Harris Sinclair
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

A Family Affair. An interest in writing and literature runs in Lockhart's family: her father, Len, also has a Ph.D. from Columbia University, though his is in American literature, and hers is in English literature. The father and daughter even co-wrote the children's book *The Secret Life of Billie's Uncle Myron*.

You Don't Know Me. Lockhart's website includes a section titled "Twenty-One Things You Don't Know About Me, Even If You've Read Through This Whole Website." This list includes tidbits about her life such as the fact that Lockhart was her maternal grandmother's maiden name, that she wrote two novels in the third grade, and that she is a fan of both rollercoasters and wax museums.



PLOT SUMMARY

Eighteen-year-old Cady Eastman has spent nearly every summer of her life on the private island of **Beechwood**, near Martha's Vineyard, along with the rest of the wealthy Sinclair family. The summers of Cady's childhood were uneventful, as she played with her two cousins, Johnny and Mirren. Everything changes during Year Eight, however, as Cady's aunt Carrie brings her boyfriend Ed and his nephew Gat. Gat is about the same age as Cady, Johnny, and Mirren, and the four become fast friends, calling themselves "the Liars"; Cady and Gat also eventually fall in love and begin to spend more time alone together during their teenage years. However, while Gat—who is South Asian and therefore an outsider in this Old New England family—is superficially welcomed into the family, it is clear that the budding romance between him and Cady creates tension among the Sinclairs, especially for the patriarch of the family, Harris.

The Sinclairs are an old New England family: Harris and Tipper have three daughters, Penny, Carrie, and Bess, each of whom has a large house on Beechwood island and an enormous inheritance. The Sinclair clan attempt to maintain a façade of absolute perfection, but as Cady notes at the beginning of the novel, that image is built on lies and fantasy. Beneath the

surface, the Sinclair sisters are deeply dependent on their father, needing both his money and his approval to survive. The insular family structure is overwhelming to outsiders, and on the day that Cady's father decides to leave her mother, he notes that he cannot stand the pressure of being a Sinclair any longer. In fact, all of the sisters' marriages end in divorce, and when Carrie brings Ed to the island, Harris is reluctant to accept him as one of the family. While Harris pays lip service to equality and considers himself educated and enlightened on social matters, his reaction to Gat's racial difference reveals a surprising degree of bigotry. He is happy to vote for Barack Obama yet is unwilling to accept that his granddaughter is in love with a South Asian man.

Any semblance of family harmony is dissolved when Tipper Harris dies, leaving Bess, Carrie, and Penny to argue over their relationship with their father and, more importantly, his vast fortune. Each of the women believes that she is owed a larger share of the inheritance, and they even involve their children—Johnny, Mirren, and Cady—asking them to lobby Harris for more money or prized possessions. The Sinclair sisters depend heavily on this money, as none of them are able to support their families on their own: Penny's job breeding dogs brings in very little money, Carrie's jewelry boutique was a failure, and stay-at-home mom Bess has no income of her own. To make matters worse, Harris often pits the women against each other in order to maintain control over their lives.

The summer that Cady is fifteen years old, she is involved in some kind of accident that lands her in the hospital with a serious head injury, with no memory of exactly what happened to her. She recalls waking up on the beach but has no idea how she got there; when she asks about the accident, she gets no concrete answers and is continually frustrated by her mother's refusal to tell her the whole story. Cady spends two years recovering from her injuries, suffering from chronic migraines and wondering helplessly what happened that night on Beechwood. Instead of returning to the island the following summer, Cady is forced to travel to Europe with her father, Mr. Eastman. She misses the rest of the Liars—Johnny, Mirren, and Gat—and writes to them constantly; she never hears back from any of them, which leaves her confused and sad.

The summer she turns seventeen, Cady returns to the island with her mother, and is elated to be reunited with her closest confidants—especially Gat, who is still deeply in love with her. Due to the constant infighting among the adults, the Liars isolate themselves in a house on the far side of the island, and Cady and Gat continue their teenage romance away from the prying eyes of their parents. A number of things have changed while Cady was away, but the most disturbing is the drastic change to **Clairmont**, the main house on the island: Harris made extensive renovations to the charming old house, turning it into something modern, austere, and antiseptic, and re-named it New Clairmont.

While she is glad to be back with her family for the summer, Cady is intensely focused on finding out what happened on the night of her accident—she asks everyone in her family, but they have all been advised not to tell her anything, and to let her recover those memories on her own. Frustrated but determined, Cady maps out all of the clues to that night on the wall of her bedroom, like a detective working to solve a crime.

With the help of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat, Cady eventually begins to recall the events leading up to the accident. She learns that years earlier, Ed had proposed to Carrie but that Carrie had refused, fearing that she would lose her inheritance if she married an Indian man. Cady also recalls the anger with which she and the other Liars discussed their plan to destroy Clairmont, the big house on the island that—to them, at least—represented the bigotry and greed that was tearing apart their family. They had decided that without Clairmont and all the valuable possessions inside it, the Sinclair sisters would no longer have anything to feud over. Finally, Cady's memories of that fateful night return to her: how they forgot to let the dogs out of the house before setting it on fire, how they each took a different part of the house, and how the fire spread more rapidly than they expected, trapping Johnny, Mirren, and Gat in the building, killing them.

It is only when Cady has recovered the memories of the accident, and her role in the deaths of her closest friends, that she realizes that she has been spending the summer with the *ghosts* of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat. She speaks with them one more time to say goodbye, and they disappear forever. Grief-stricken but ready to heal, Cady returns to the rest of her family in New Clairmont.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cadence “Cady” Eastman – The narrator and protagonist of *We Were Liars*, Cady Eastman is the oldest grandchild of the wealthy and ostensibly perfect Sinclair family. She lives in Burlington, Vermont, with her mother, Penny. Cady's father, a college professor, left them to live with another woman when Cady was fifteen. She spends her summers on the private island that her family owns, known as **Beechwood**. It was there that Cady met Gat and slowly fell in love with him, much to the chagrin of Harris, who views Gat as beneath Cady. The nephew of her aunt Carrie's boyfriend Ed, Gat arrived on the eighth summer and bonded so deeply with Cady, Johnny, and Mirren that the family began to think of them as a unit—and dubbed them the Liars. Gat was invited to return every summer after that. During her fifteenth summer at Beechwood, Cady suffers a mysterious accident that leaves her with a serious head injury and no memory of the events leading up to it. She spends the next two years recovering from the accident and trying to solve

the mystery of what really happened to her that night—she asks her family for details, but they inform her that she must recover those memories on her own. She is happy to finally be reunited with the Liars, but they seem to be keeping secrets from her as well. With the help of the Liars, Cady explores the darker secrets bubbling under the surface and threatening to destroy the façade of perfection that has been so important to the Sinclairs. She begins to recall that greed and materialism were tearing apart the Sinclair family, which prompted the Liars to set fire to **Clairmont**, the main house on the island. Finally, Cady is faced with the devastating realization that Johnny, Mirren, and Gat died in the fire, and that her unexpressed grief and guilt were causing her to act strangely—including giving away nearly all of her personal belongings. Once she is faced with the reality of the accident, Cady understands that she has spent the summer communicating with the ghosts of her closest friends—and knows that to heal, she must let them go and move on with her life.

Gatwick “Gat” Patil – Ed’s nephew and Cady’s love interest. Although he is not related to the Sinclairs by blood, Gat begins spending his summers at **Beechwood** when he is eleven. His uncle Ed is in a relationship with Carrie, one of the Sinclair daughters, and when Gat joins the Sinclair family on the island, he becomes inseparable with Cady, Johnny, and Mirren, and the four become known to the family as the Liars. Cady and Gat fall in love over the course of the next few summers, and during the summer of their fifteenth year, they begin a romantic relationship. Both Gat and Ed occupy a strange place in the family: while Harris Sinclair is ostensibly welcoming to them, he is uncomfortable with the idea that the two of them—as men of South Asian descent—could marry into his family and therefore sully the racial and ethnic purity of the Sinclair bloodline. Harris’s bigotry is subtle enough to go unnoticed by most of the family, but Gat is well aware of his place as an outsider. In contrast to the wealth that Johnny, Mirren, and Cady take for granted, Gat comes from a working-class background and is suspicious of the materialism and elitism he observes around him on Beechwood. His connection to the Sinclair family becomes even more tenuous when his uncle Ed proposes to Carrie and she rejects him. Carrie knows that if she marries Ed, she will lose her share of the inheritance from her father and that she, Ed, and Gat will be cut off from the family. Worried about losing their special bond, the Liars decide to burn down **Clairmont**, the main house on the island, which contains all of the financial documents and many of the prized family possessions. Without his financial control over his daughters, they reason, Harris will not be able to separate Ed and Gat from the family, and they will all be able to be together. Unfortunately, their plan goes awry, and Gat, Johnny, and Mirren die in the fire, leaving Cady without the young man she was attempting to hold on to in the first place.

Harris Sinclair – The patriarch of the Sinclair family, Harris and

his late wife, Tipper, have amassed a considerable fortune. They use their wealth to buy a private island that they call **Beechwood**, where they build separate houses there for their three daughters—Penny, Carrie, and Bess—and their children. This allows them all to spend each summer together on the island, and as a result, the family is close-knit and closed off to outsiders. This becomes clear one summer when Carrie arrives on the island with her new boyfriend, Ed, and his nephew, Gat, both of whom are of South Asian descent. While Harris is superficially welcoming to the men, he subtly attempts to ensure that they do not really become part of the family. In addition, Harris has promised each of his daughters a large inheritance and has allowed them to become dependent on his money—none of them is financially self-sufficient. When Tipper dies, the family begins to unravel as the sisters openly fight over her possessions and try to curry Harris’s favor in the hopes of receiving a larger share of the inheritance. In the midst of this family unrest, his three oldest grandchildren and their friend decide to burn down the main house on the island, killing Johnny, Mirren, and Gat in the process. While their act of rebellion was designed to strip Harris of his power over the rest of the family, it is questionable as to whether it worked at all. He has New Clairmont built on the ashes of the old house, and the new building is bereft of the memories and home comforts of the original. In addition, Harris begins to lose his hold over much of the family, anyway, due to the onset of dementia.

Penny Sinclair Eastman – Cady’s mother, Penny, is the oldest of the Sinclair sisters. She lives in Burlington, Vermont, with Cady and spends her summers with the rest of the Sinclair family on their private island near Martha’s Vineyard. She was married to Cady’s father, a professor of military history, but he abandoned his wife and child for another woman, telling Penny that he could not handle the pressure of being part of the powerful Sinclair family anymore. Penny is concerned with outward appearances and takes great care to teach Cady not to express her feelings publicly and to hide any emotional troubles from outsiders. When her husband leaves her and Cady, Penny reminds her daughter not to show signs of sadness, because silence “is a protective coating over pain.”

Johnny – The second-oldest Sinclair grandchild and one of the Liars. His mother, Carrie, is divorced and began dating Gat’s uncle Ed when the boys were eleven years old. Because of this, Johnny and Gat have lived almost like brothers for the entirety of their adolescence. Johnny is good-natured and generally carefree, and his easygoing disposition contrasts with Gat’s seriousness within the group. When they discuss wealth and possessions, for example, Gat is deeply concerned about the excessive consumerism he observes in American culture, while Johnny asks if the Liars “I dunno, want to own stuff?” Along with Mirren and Gat, Johnny dies in the fire that the Liars set during their fifteenth summer on the island.

Mirren – One of the older Sinclair grandchildren, Mirren is Cady’s closest female cousin and her good friend. Cady describes Mirren as irritable and bossy. Mirren, in turn, is deeply jealous of Gat and Cady’s relationship, going so far as to invent a fake relationship to impress Cady. She is often the naysayer among the Liars, worrying about the consequences of their more outrageous adventures. Surprisingly, however, it is Mirren who first broaches the idea of setting fire to **Clairmont**, the main house on the island, noting that the house was “the symbol of everything that was wrong” with the Sinclair family. Mirren dies in the fire, along with Gat and Johnny.

Ed – Carrie’s long-term boyfriend and Gat’s uncle. Ed is of South Asian descent, which is secretly an issue for Harris Sinclair, the family patriarch. Harris has threatened to take away Carrie’s share of the inheritance if she marries Ed, despite the fact that he is relatively polite and welcoming to Ed.

Tipper Sinclair – Harris Sinclair’s wife, and mother of Carrie, Bess, and Penny. Tipper is the glue holding the family together; after her death, the sisters argue bitterly over her possessions and their shares of the inheritance. Cady notes that Tipper was involved in philanthropic activities, and that unfortunately, her daughters had inherited none of her generous spirit.

Mr. Eastman / Cady’s Father – Penny’s ex-husband, Cady’s father, and a professor of military history. He abandons his wife and child for another woman, which Cady considers a major betrayal of her family. She spends one summer with her father, in Europe, the year after her accident—but the two are not close, and Cady has a terrible time and regrets going in the first place.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carrie – One of the Sinclair daughters, she had Johnny and his younger brother Will with her ex-husband and is currently dating Ed. Ed asked her to marry him, but she refused because Harris threatened to withhold her inheritance.

Bess – One of the Sinclair daughters, and the mother to Mirren, Liberty, Bonnie, and Taft. Bess relies heavily on Harris’s money, as she is a stay-at-home mom and thus doesn’t have a steady income of her own to rely on.

Will – One of the younger Sinclair grandchildren. He is Carrie’s son and Johnny’s younger brother.

Taft – One of the younger Sinclair grandchildren. He is Bess’s son and Bonnie, Liberty, and Mirren’s brother.

Bonnie – One of the younger Sinclair grandchildren. She is Bess’s daughter and Liberty’s twin sister.

Liberty – One of the younger Sinclair grandchildren. She is Bess’s daughter and Bonnie’s twin sister.

Raquel – Gat’s girlfriend in New York City. Gat is torn between his feelings for Cady and his desire to be faithful to his girlfriend back home. Despite Raquel’s existence, however, Gat

and Cady continue their summer romance in their fifteenth summer at **Beechwood**.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



WEALTH AND GREED

E. Lockhart’s novel *We Were Liars* documents the wealthy Sinclair family’s fall from grace. The Sinclair sisters—Penny, Carrie, and Bess, all of whom stand to inherit a lot of money from their father, Harris—become greedy and jealous of one another after their mother, Tipper Taft, dies, and they begin to split up her prized possessions. Such greed dominates their lives, as the sisters spend most of their time drinking and fighting with one another. When Cady Eastman, the eldest Sinclair grandchild, suffers an accident that leaves her with significant memory loss, her investigation into the accident further reveals the ways in which wealth can destroy family ties. Through the stories that Cady uncovers in her investigation, the novel ultimately demonstrates the destructive power of greed and the ways in which extreme wealth can tear a family apart.

Lockhart quickly establishes the Sinclair clan as an upper-class family highly concerned with wealth and privilege. This wealth is evidenced not only by the Sinclair sisters’ top-quality educations, but also by the fact that none of them has a real job or provides for herself; they are all, in one way or another, living off of their father’s trust fund. Carrie ran a jewelry boutique until it failed, Bess was a divorced stay-at-home-mom, and Penny ran a dog-breeding business that hardly brought in any income at all. None evidence a particularly strong work ethic, which connects their wealth to a sense of entitled laziness.

Penny, Carrie, and Bess also spend their summers on **Beechwood Island**, the island their father owns near Martha’s Vineyard. They have houses built especially for each one of them but often bicker about whose house is due for renovations, seeing the state of their summer homes as a symbol of their father’s love for them. Clearly this family has wrapped up its sense of value with material possessions, further setting the stage for the sisters’ bickering over their inheritance. While their mother had been involved in many different charities in her lifetime, the Sinclair daughters have no such interest in using the family money for charitable causes, and are only concerned about using their inheritance to maintain their lifestyles. Growing up in an atmosphere of extreme wealth and privilege, Tipper’s daughters never learn

the value of charity or generosity, and instead focus on their own needs and wants.

It comes as no surprise, then, that after Tipper's death, the sisters spend most of the following summer arguing about money and possessions. They argue about who took care of Tipper when she was ill, suggesting that their respective convalescent care has helped them earn a larger share of the inheritance. Bess argues that she should have their parents' house in Boston because she was with Tipper in her last days: "Who drove Mother to her doctor's appointments? Who sat by her bedside?" The sisters are essentially monetizing the love and care of their own parents in an effort to gain more money. Their desire for money and privilege is an essential part—possibly the most essential part—of their relationship with their parents, by which the novel further reveals how wealth and greed erode familial ties.

The sisters also use their own children as pawns in this scheme. Penny, for example, wants her daughter, Cady, to support her argument that the Eastmans should hold on to Windemere, one of the larger summer houses on the island. But Cady refuses, telling her grandfather that the house is too large for the two of them, which upsets Penny. Cady's cousin Johnny feels the same pressure from his mother and also refuses to play the family game. As this new generation of Sinclairs begins to diverge from the family obsession with wealth and privilege, the sisters' narrow-minded greed fractures the family further still. This intergenerational tension ends in tragedy when three members of the younger generation of the Sinclair clan are killed in a fire, symbolically illustrating the devastating effects of greed on families. Gat, who is not actually a member of the Sinclair family but rather the nephew of Carrie's boyfriend, Ed, is the first to rail against the Sinclairs' rampant materiality. One evening, he asks how it is possible that Harris owns land—not in the legal sense, but philosophically. He mentions the level of poverty that he saw on a recent trip to India, which changed his perspective on ownership. Gat's influence helps the Liars—as the family calls the younger generation—recognize the destructive potential of wealth, and eventually turns them against the greed their parents are exhibiting.

As the Liars observe the corrupting influence of money that surrounds them, they hatch a plan to destroy the main house on the island, known as **Clairmont**, which they describe as "the symbol of everything that was wrong." Harris had threatened to withdraw Carrie's inheritance if she married Ed, Gat's uncle, and the Liars are worried that this will tear apart the family and separate Gat from the cousins. The four decide to burn Clairmont down, figuring that without anything left to fight over, the family will come together.

The Liars' plan goes awry, however, and the fire kills all of them but Cady, who is left with little memory of the incident and symptoms that are consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. In her fragile state, Cady begins giving away all her

possessions, almost as an attempt to purge her connection to the family and its material excesses. It is only when she has rid herself of nearly everything she owns that she begins to recuperate her memory and starts to come to terms with the tragedy. Cady's cathartic process helps her to find redemption and freedom through simplicity and suggests that countering the corrosive influence of greed is possible if one rejects wealth, privilege, and materiality.



BIGOTRY AND EXCLUSION

In *We Were Liars*, the Sinclair family is obsessed with keeping up appearances, which is manifested in a clan-like mentality that breeds racism and bigotry.

The novel suggests that this focus on appearances is inherently exclusionary, and that the traditional image of old, powerful New England families belies dangerous beliefs about ethnic and cultural superiority. In particular, Harris's need to keep up appearances only serves to hurt those he loves, including his own children and grandchildren. Like a king trying to preserve his rule, Harris rails against the changing demographics of world around him and holds on more tightly to a traditional image of the all-American family—a practice the novel asserts is outdated and doomed to fail.

We Were Liars presents the Sinclairs as the epitome of the perfect American family. Throughout Cady's narrative, however, she reveals the cultural superiority and eurocentrism that this family image is built upon. Harris Sinclair is constantly reminiscing about past events and re-casting them in a more positive light, making his family life seem quaint while failing to recognize the iniquities at the base of his fortune. As he shows Cady his ivory mementos from a trip to China, for example, she reminds Harris that it is illegal to buy ivory, but he just shrugs her off, noting that despite being illegal, "you can get it." He refuses to let his memories of his trip to China with his late wife, Tipper, be marred by the seedy realities of the ivory trade. Likewise, he lectures his grandchildren on the value of hard work, noting, "We work for what we want, and we get ahead. We never take no for answer, and we deserve the rewards of our perseverance." In this way, his vision of his own wealth denies the possibility of exploitation or historical imbalance, as he believes his fortune is solely due to hard work and traditional values. Harris further constructs his self-image through his use of mottos. Harris is able to use these mottos to gloss over details that do not fit into his vision of the world. Cady notes that she once saw his mottos as a bold and ambitious way of living, but upon recalling his story about his trip to China, her perspective on her grandfather changes. His motto "don't take no for an answer" suddenly seems more like "the attitude of a privileged guy who didn't care who got hurt," which no longer impresses her the way it once did.

Harris's pride in his family lineage also reveals a sense of racial purity that is highly exclusionary, leading him to shun anyone or

anything that is outside of his vision of the perfect family. Harris talks often about the values and traditions of the Sinclair family, and notes his disappointment in his daughters for not living up to his expectations. Specifically, he criticizes them for their failed marriages and what he describes as “broken homes,” suggesting that blended families threaten his sense of tradition and values. Much more sinister, however, is Harris’s latent racism and its effects on Ed and Gat, who are of Indian descent. Ed is Carrie’s boyfriend, but she refuses to marry him because she knows that she will lose her inheritance. Gat explains this to Cady, noting that Harris is a Democrat and voted for Obama, “but that doesn’t mean he’s comfortable having people of color in his beautiful family.” People of color would not fit into Harris’s image of the all-American family. While Harris welcomes Gat onto **Beechwood** in the summers, when he and Cady fall in love, Harris lets Gat know he is an outsider and not welcome within the family itself. Cady’s mother pressures her to stay away from Gat, and soon Gat is also asked to stop attending family dinners at **Clairmont**. The fact that the Liars—a younger generation of Sinclairs—rebel against this exclusionary tactic exposes Harris’s image of the perfect family as outdated and unrealistic.

There is a clear understanding among the rest of the family members that they must keep up this image—something Cady’s generation struggles with. During the summer after Cady’s accident, when she begins spending time alone trying to recuperate her memory, her mother scolds her for hiding out. She tells Cady that she expects her “at Clairmont for supper in an hour with a smile on your face for Granddad.” This family image explicitly excludes any hint of weakness, vulnerability, or mental illness.

In her attempts to come to terms with the dynamics of her family, Cady also creates a series of **fairy tales** for herself, in which the Sinclairs are royalty and her grandfather is the King. This portrayal of the Sinclairs as royalty is in line with Harris’s image of the family, and gives a universal, timeless air to their constant infighting over Harris’s affections and money. More importantly, however, these fairy tales are a good way for Cady to create emotional distance from the Sinclair family dynamics, and to examine some of the larger family issues in a more theoretical context. In each of Cady’s fairy tales, at least one member of the royal family is deeply unsatisfied in some way, or longs to escape the castle for a different life. For example, in one story, the most beloved daughter is in line to be queen, but soon finds that privilege may not be all it seemed, as she will be “stuck tending to a crazy old tyrant for the rest of her days.” In one of the most revealing stories, the King’s grandson—who is half human, half mouse—runs away, only to return to burn the place to the ground. Cady’s invented image of her family reinforces the idea that their image is based on exclusion—most of the stories involve the intrusion of someone “different” as the main source of conflict—and also suggests that a more

inclusive attitude towards outsiders may change the family image somewhat but will bring greater happiness overall.



DEATH, LOSS, AND MEMORY

The Sinclairs respond to death and loss by denying them entirely, choosing to block painful memories rather than deal with them directly. In her search for answers about her mysterious accident, Cady explores the question of whether it would be easier to forget the past or to recognize and learn from it. While the Sinclair family adheres to the idea that “silence is a protective coating over pain,” Cady’s experience of recovering her memories demonstrates that the past can never really be forgotten or left behind. Through this transformative process, *We Were Liars* argues that it is necessary to truly experience the pain of loss in order to move past it.

The Sinclair family clearly represses its emotions following loss to its detriment; those who leave the Sinclair family, either through divorce or death, are almost immediately forgotten or simply purged from the family’s collective memory. When Cady’s father leaves her mother, the two women swiftly get rid of all of his gifts to them, as well as their furniture and decorations, starting over as if he had never existed. Cady does not understand why she isn’t allowed to mourn her parents’ separation—her mother even tells her not to cry—and would rather not shield herself from these authentic feelings. This erasure is much the same with the other Sinclair sisters. Their failed marriages are simply left behind as they spend summers on the island, not mentioning the men who once formed part of the family. This seems to be the coping mechanism built into the Sinclair family, giving them a selective memory of their lives and relationships. Even the death of Tipper, the family matriarch, is mourned only briefly. The Sinclair sisters seem to enter into an unspoken agreement to stop talking about Tipper, and the only person who brings her up in conversation is Gat. Gat is notably something of an outsider to the family and represents a kind of emotional openness that could lead to growth and healing, but that is completely foreign to the Sinclairs.

The deaths of Johnny, Gat, and Mirren become something of a family secret, as the family moves on from the tragedy in the same way they always have. Although they are not completely erased from the family history, the story of their deaths remains shrouded in mystery. After the fire, Harris Sinclair requests that there be no investigation, and does not talk about the incident. He sends Cady to Europe with her father the following summer, and builds a house he calls **New Clairmont** on the ashes of the old one. As with all of the other losses in his life, Harris ensures that he and his family move on as swiftly as possible. The fire and subsequent deaths become part of the mystery and legend of the Sinclair family, both vague and somewhat glamorous. Friends, neighbors, and acquaintances only know that the island caught fire, that a house burned

down, and that three teenagers died. And as Cady notes, in death they “became more beautiful still in the eyes of their beholders,” which satisfies Harris Sinclair’s sense of family image. But for Cady, the deaths of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat are not glamorous at all, and as the sole survivor of the fire, she must live with the guilt and memories for the rest of her life. She spends the summer imagining their presence around her as a way of mourning their deaths and keeping herself from forgetting them.

When Cady wakes up in a hospital room one day, having suffered a terrible accident that she does not remember, she is determined to find out what happened. As she recreates a timeline of events, she also learns how memories can be both painful and cathartic, allowing her to finally heal in the end. In the days following her accident, Cady asks her mother what happened to her, and is frustrated when she gets no real answers. She writes down what she does remember, and then asks everyone in her family to help jog the rest of her memory. Cady believes that her family is keeping an important secret from her. Her cousins tell her that Penny has advised them not to talk about it with Cady and to let her memories come back on their own. Time and time again, she must confront her family’s inability to discuss the past and make themselves vulnerable to painful memories and feelings. Eventually, Cady’s memories do return to her, and she slowly begins to realize that the fire that burned down **Clairmont** also killed the other three Liars, leaving her alone. Her three companions have existed in her mind for the summer, and it is through her interactions with Johnny, Gat, and Mirren that she remembers what happened that night. This process is healing for her, as she is able to cry for the loss of her closest friends and—in her mind, at least—say goodbye to them and leave them behind peacefully.

Like the rest of the Sinclairs, Cady initially represses difficult memories. However, it is only when she begins to recover her memories and face them head-on by reliving the night of the fire, that Cady is able to mourn the loss and move on with her life.



LIES AND INVENTION

We Were Liars is a meditation on the nature of objective truth. As the title itself implies, lies, misrepresentation, and fabrication are woven

through the novel. Although Lockhart never explains why Cady, Mirren, Johnny, and Gat are called the Liars by the rest of the family, the constant use of this moniker reminds readers to maintain a certain level of skepticism. And whether the characters in the novel are lying to get what they want—as Gat and Harris Sinclair do—or simply deceiving themselves to avoid painful truths, this manipulation of truth calls into question whether or not it is possible to establish a reliable set of facts, separate from the experiences, motives, and incomplete memories of the people involved.

We Were Liars is told mainly from the perspective of Cady Eastman, who should be considered an unreliable narrator for a number of reasons. Cady is a gifted storyteller who narrates using surreal imagery that might be confusing to readers at first. For example, when her father leaves her mother for another woman, Cady adds that as he left, “he pulled out a handgun and shot me in the chest.” While at first, readers will take this information at face value, it soon becomes clear that her father did not actually shoot Cady with a gun; rather, his actions made her feel as though she had been shot and left for dead on the lawn. She continues this imagery throughout the story, as she mentions bleeding into Gat’s hands, when she is simply feeling an excess of emotion for him, or a giant using a rusty saw to slice through her head to describe the intensity of her migraines. Cady’s experience on the island after her accident is part real and part illusion, as she interacts with Johnny, Gat, and Mirren—who have been dead for more than a year—entirely in her imagination. Not only does she talk with them, but they also go on adventures together around the island, and she and Gat even share intimate moments alone. Even when she realizes that they are figments of her imagination, Cady continues to talk with them, blurring the line between reality and fantasy. When the details of the house fire come back to Cady, the story changes perspective temporarily, and the “facts” of the fire are told in the third person. This strongly suggests that what comes from Cady is not reliable information, reminding readers of the subjectivity of truth and memory. Cady’s actual memories of the fire are interwoven with fantastic elements like fairies and magic, again blurring the line between fact and fiction. It seems clear that she is using this fantastic reinvention of the past as a way to deal with the harsh reality of what actually happened to the people she loves most.

Cady is not the only character in the novel with a tendency to lie—in fact, many of the people around her lie in order to obtain what they want. Gat’s love for Cady leads him to hold back the truth from her—a form of lying—because he wants to be with her even though he has a girlfriend at home. He acknowledges this later on, conceding that he should have told Cady about Raquel, his girlfriend in New York City, but that he wanted to hold on to both of them. Although Cady had found out about Raquel on her own, and knew that Gat had a girlfriend all along, she never mentions this to Gat, and they maintain a relationship despite—or perhaps because of—the deception.

Even within Cady’s imaginary relationship with the other Liars after they have died, Mirren, Gat, and Johnny keep secrets from Cady and lie about what they are doing when she is not around. When Cady spends a few days in bed with a migraine, she wonders what her friends are doing without her; later, when she asks them about what they have done, she catches them in a lie. Gat tells her that they went to the Nantucket doughnut shop for jelly doughnuts, but Cady knows that

“Downyflake only makes cake doughnuts. No glazed. No Boston cream. No jelly.” The fact that Cady imagines her friends deceiving her suggests how deeply dishonesty is embedded in her world, and how little she is able to trust those around her.

Harris does not lie, per se, but manipulates the memories of those around him in order to reinforce his idealistic image of the family. Family memories are wiped clean of arguments or discomfort, and Harris replays those edited images on a loop in his head, creating a false set of memories for himself. He also lies to the rest of the family about his plans for his inheritance, exacerbating their conflicts. For example, when Cady talks to him about how much she loves Windemere, he tells her that he will not give it to Bess, whom he calls a “grasping wench.” But she finds out that Harris has also promised to the house to Mirren, asking for “a little time to get Penny out.” In the end, no one knows what he plans to do with his money, and realize that they have been fed lies. The patriarch uses the illusion of truth to manipulate those around him, further blurring the line between fact and fiction in the world of the novel.

The novel presents facts as subjective, muddled by the motives and flawed memories of whoever is telling the story at any given time. *We Were Liars* also highlights the possible motives for presenting an altered version of the truth. In the case of Harris Sinclair, those motives are rooted in a desire to manipulate and control his family members; for Cady, however, these lies provide her with a way of dealing with memories and events that are too harsh and painful to confront head-on.



ROMANTIC LOVE VS. FAMILY

In many ways, *We Were Liars* is a story of star-crossed lovers, as Cady is forced to choose between her all-encompassing love for Gat and her

place within the family. Many of the characters—especially Harris Sinclair—see romance as inferior to their primary dedication to family, and in consequence, attempt to thwart any budding romance that threatens their family bond. Throughout *We Were Liars*, family ties and romantic love are portrayed as conflicting desires, and the novel illustrates the cost of such intense familial loyalty.

The Sinclair girls are daughters first, wives and mothers second. Harris and his money force them to privilege family over love, at times against their will. All of the Sinclair daughters are divorced, and while that may not be a remarkable occurrence in many families, in this family, there is clearly something sinister behind the failure of their marriages. While it is not stated explicitly why Bess’s and Carrie’s marriages ended, Harris clearly had little respect for either of their husbands, recalling that the Sinclairs had always been tall, “until Bess married that short fellow, and Carrie made the same mistake.” He does not approve of their choice of mates, and even says “good riddance” when discussing their divorces. His desire to control his daughters’ lives makes it difficult for the women to develop any

sense of independence, especially in their love lives. When Carrie meets Ed, who is even more of an outsider because he is not white, Harris only grudgingly accepts his presence on the island, but does not consider him a suitable partner for his daughter. When Ed proposes to Carrie, she says no, because she knows that Harris will disinherit her if she marries Ed. When Gat talks to Cady about the proposal, he laments the fact that Carrie, a grown woman and a parent herself, would need her father’s approval to marry the man she loves. But once again, the Sinclair family bond conflicts with any sense of romantic love or devotion, as Harris does not want an outsider replacing him as the family patriarch. The Sinclairs are clearly threatening and unwelcoming to romantic partners who could potentially disturb the family dynamic.

Cady’s love for Gat is a significant threat to the family dynamic for many reasons, including the fact that he is a person of color and hails from a lower-class background that does not fit into traditional Sinclair family image. Cady and Gat fall in love almost immediately, and their feelings for one another are clear to others in the family and particularly upsetting to Harris. The patriarch is annoyed by the amount of time the two spend together, and feels the need to insert himself in their relationship in order to re-assert his control over the family. One day, when Harris happens upon Cady and Gat alone in the attic, he subtly warns Gat away from his granddaughter. “Watch yourself, young man,” he says, under the guise of ensuring Gat doesn’t hit his head on a low beam. “You could get hurt.” After this, Gat is aware that Harris is watching him and does not approve of their relationship, but Cady does not notice until much later, when her mother asks her to stop seeing Gat. In the conversation between the two of them, Penny tells Cady that “love doesn’t last,” revealing a powerful truth about her priorities as a Sinclair daughter.

Tragically, it may be Cady’s love for Gat that brings about his death in the fire. The Liars are convinced that Ed’s marriage proposal will mean that Gat will not be coming back to **Beechwood** Island. On one hand, if Carrie doesn’t marry Ed, the two may break up, which would also separate Gat from the Sinclair family; on the other hand, if Carrie were to marry Ed against her father’s wishes, none of them would be welcome on the island at all. This scares Cady, whose only contact with Gat is during the summers, and plants the seed for their decision to burn down **Clairmont** in the first place. In the Sinclair family, it appears that there is not room for these two competing forms of love—a deep emotional connection with someone outside of the family is at odds with Harris’s demands for complete devotion and loyalty.

Cady’s crush on Gat becomes the main source of tension within her family, revealing the Sinclairs as insular and controlling. Harris’s blatant disdain for his daughters’ romantic partners is his way of reasserting his role as the central male figure in the family, and pushing out all possible interlopers. Harris’s need

for control over the women of the family verges on incestuous, as he actively blocks their romantic endeavors and attempts to connect to men outside of the family. This idea is strongly reinforced in the tragedy that emerges from Cady's relationship with Gat: Gat's death could be interpreted as Cady's punishment for rebelling against her grandfather and the family bond. *We Were Liars*, then, offers a criticism of insularity and blind loyalty, especially when it comes in conflict with healthy romantic relationships.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



BEECHWOOD ISLAND

Beechwood, the private island that Harris Sinclair owns near Martha's Vineyard, and where he and his family spend their summers, symbolizes the family's insularity, which Harris is largely responsible for. Literally separated from the rest of the world by water, the island is a world unto itself and represents a refuge for the Sinclair family. In addition, spending each summer on the island allows the family to further isolate themselves from the outside world, keeping strangers at a distance and ensuring that Harris has some degree of control over who comes into the inner circle of the Sinclair family.

The island is also a clear symbol of the Sinclair family's immense wealth: one summer, Gat wonders out loud how it is possible that one person can actually own an island. Cady, Johnny, and Mirren have hardly given any thought to this question, as if this option were available to just about anyone. After the fire takes the lives of Gat, Johnny, and Mirren, Harris declines to have the police come to the island to investigate and is very careful about what details of the tragedy are released to the press—once more, he uses Beechwood Island as a means to maintain the private, insular nature of the Sinclair family.



CLAIRMONT

The largest and most important house on **Beechwood Island**, Clairmont represents—to the Liars, at least—the root of all the Sinclair family's problems. After Tipper Sinclair dies, the Sinclair sisters spend most of their time on the island in Clairmont, arguing over their mother's possessions as well as the wealth they will inherit when Harris dies. As the Liars—Gat, Cady, Mirren, and Johnny—rebel against the family's growing obsession with wealth, they decide that the destruction of Clairmont could resolve all their problems. As it houses many of the family's prized possessions and financial documents, they believe that

they can reunite their damaged and splintered family by burning the house to the ground. The fire they start ends in tragedy, though, as Gat, Mirren, and Johnny end up trapped in the house and are killed. However, in some strange way, the Clairmont fire *did* eventually bring the Sinclair family together as they mourned the death of the three teens and helped Cady recover from shock. In the year following the fire, Harris builds New Clairmont, an austere building that represents a sharp turn away from the traditional and ostentatious home that had once been the family's gathering space.



FAIRY TALES

In *We Were Liars*, the almost mythical wealth and beauty of the Sinclair family is represented through fairy tales. Cady Eastman often employs the structure and tropes of fairy tales in her narration, casting the Sinclairs as a royal family that works to shield itself from the threat of outsiders. In many ways, Cady sees her life as a fairy tale, in which she is wealthy and privileged like royalty, but also trapped and lonely within the confines of the castle. She portrays Gat, the love of her life, as a mouse who has been expelled from the castle because he is different and—according to Harris, the king—inferior to the royal family. The fairy tales evolve along with the narrative itself. Toward the end of the novel, Cady has decided that the only way for the young girl in her story to find happiness is to escape the castle and reunite with the mouse, therefore relinquishing her wealth and privilege forever. This, of course, parallels the decision to burn down **Clairmont** and extinguish the family fortune.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *We Were Liars* published in 2014.

Part 1: Welcome Quotes

☝ I am nearly eighteen. I own a well-used library card and not much else, though it is true I live in a grand house full of expensive, useless objects. I used to be blond, but now my hair is black. I used to be strong, but now I am weak. I used to be pretty, but now I look sick.

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 4


Explanation and Analysis

Cady Eastman introduces herself at the beginning of the novel, giving readers an idea of who she is, what her background is, and some of what to expect from the story they are about to read. She uses the terms “I used to be” and “but now I am” to establish a clear before and after—it is only later on in the novel that readers find out about the pivotal event that prompts such a major change in Cady’s life and character. Yet without knowing about the event itself yet, readers are aware of the fact that Cady comes from an affluent background—living in a grand house filled with expensive items—but she does not value money or possessions. And although she is relatively young, Cady has obviously suffered some sort of major trauma that has changed her, both physically and emotionally.

“Maybe land shouldn’t belong to people at all. Or maybe there should be limits on what they can own.” He leaned forward. “When I went to India this winter, on that volunteer trip, we were building toilets. Building them because people there, in this one village, didn’t have them.”

“We all know you went to India [...] You told us like forty-seven times.”

Related Characters: Johnny, Gatwick “Gat” Patil (speaker), Mirren, Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 19-20

Explanation and Analysis

Gat, Johnny, Cady, and Mirren are sitting around a bonfire on the beach, when Gat brings up the question of whether it is morally right to own private land, as the Sinclair family owns the island they are staying on. Clearly, he has taken to heart what he saw in India—and as an Indian-American, he likely feels a deep connection to the people he met there. But Johnny brushes aside Gat’s thoughts and ridicules him for talking about it too much. This is a common dynamic between the boys, which highlights the fact that to Johnny, his family’s wealth is a given that is not worth examining, while Gat is an outsider—from a poor, non-white family—looking in on the Sinclairs’ affluent lifestyle with a critical eye. As the novel progresses and the destructive forces of wealth and greed become apparent to all four of the Liars, they begin to see the wisdom in Gat’s words and rail against the materialism they see around them.

“Watch yourself, young man,” said Granddad, sharp and sudden.

“Pardon me?”

“Your head. You could get hurt.”

“You’re right,” said Gat. “You’re right, I could get hurt.”

Related Characters: Gatwick “Gat” Patil, Harris Sinclair (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Cady and Gat are in the attic at Windemere, ostensibly to look through Cady’s father’s things, but mainly as an excuse to be alone together. They are looking through the books her father left behind when they lean in and share a kiss—and at this moment Harris Sinclair enters the attic, interrupting their private moment. Yet rather than apologize for the interruption or offer to leave them alone, Harris sits down in the center of the room. Gat is standing awkwardly, bending to keep from hitting his head on the rafters, when Harris warns him to watch himself. While their exchange appears to be about ensuring that Gat does not hit his head, it is a thinly veiled threat by Harris—he warns Gat to watch himself around Cady and keep his distance. Harris is very protective of Cady, especially in terms of her blossoming romance with Gat, but Cady does not recognize this until much later in the novel. She does not see the double meaning in this threat, and at this point remains innocently unaware of her grandfather’s bigotry and sense of superiority over Gat. Eventually, Cady will come to view her family’s elitist attitude as a threat to her relationship with Gat—a realization that serves as a catalyst behind her decision to burn down Clairmont with the other Liars.

“Do you understand, Cady? Silence is a protective coating over pain.”

Related Characters: Penny Sinclair Eastman (speaker), Harris Sinclair, Tipper Sinclair, Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 32


Explanation and Analysis


Cady is in her grandmother’s craft room, looking through

her things and mourning Tipper's death, when Penny comes in and finds her there. Tipper died a few months earlier, and this is Cady's first opportunity to process the fact that she is gone and to grieve the loss. Penny, however, tells her daughter that she should pull herself together and act normal, especially in front of Harris. She argues that the only way to support Harris in his time of need is to stay strong for him and put on a happy face—reminding him of the loss of his wife will only make things worse. This is generally the philosophy of the Sinclair family: when a member of the family is absent for any reason—whether through death or separation—the rest of the family acts as though that person never existed in the first place. Even as an adolescent, Cady recognizes that bottling up pain and grief is an unhealthy coping mechanism, and pushes back against her mother's advice to forget about the things that upset her. Cady's attitude here is ironic, since she herself is repressing memories of the fire at Clairmont and the deaths of the other Liars. This foreshadows the fact that Cady, too, will eventually have to come to terms with her grief.

☝ I am not immune to the feeling of being viewed as a mystery, as a Sinclair, as part of a privileged clan of special people, and as part of a magical, important narrative, just because I am part of this clan.

Related Characters: Cadence "Cady" Eastman (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

After her accident, Cady becomes frustrated by many of the changes to her daily life: unlike other kids her age, she cannot drive, play sports, or attend school on a regular basis. These changes separate her from her peers and make her feel lonely and isolated. She recognizes that her mysterious accident shrouds her in a cloak of tragedy, and that the drama is only heightened by the fact that she comes from the rich, glamorous Sinclair family. Just as her father declared that he could not bear to be a part of the Sinclair clan any longer, Cady feels trapped in a position that she did not have the freedom to choose. Her description of her life as part of a magical narrative brings to mind the world of fairy tales—and Cady will repeatedly re-tell the story of her family as a fairy tale, casting her grandfather as the king, as a means of escaping from her difficult reality after the fire.

Part 2: Vermont Quotes

☝ "Beauty is a valid use," Mummy argues. "It creates a sense of place, a sense of personal history. Pleasure, even, Cadence. Have you ever heard of pleasure?"

Related Characters: Penny Sinclair Eastman (speaker), Cadence "Cady" Eastman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

One of the major changes that occur as a result of Cady's accident is that she suddenly becomes obsessed with giving away her possessions, one at a time. She mails a scarf to Johnny, and an old Barbie to Mirren; she gives her pillow to a homeless person, and even donates a photo frame with the picture of her grandmother still inside. Penny is bothered by this compulsion, and the two argue about the value of material possessions: on one hand, Penny suggests that these items help define who a person is, but Cady is convinced otherwise—that these items only get in the way. Cady is also heavily influenced by her relationship with Gat, who argues very strongly that wealth and accumulation of material goods is morally wrong, and not only does Cady feel convinced that Gat is right, she likely sees it as a way to distinguish herself very sharply from her family. Finally, as a reaction to the tragic accident, Cady is also ridding herself of painful memories that are attached to those items. Later on, she will regret giving away so many of her things, when she has finally come to terms with her sense of loss, and actually wants to be surrounded by her memories.

☝ You began asking me the day you woke in the hospital. "What happened? What happened?" I told you the truth, Cadence, I always did, and you'd repeat it back to me. But the next day you'd ask again.

Related Characters: Penny Sinclair Eastman (speaker), Cadence "Cady" Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 54



Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between Cady and her mother demonstrates the depth of Cady's selective amnesia. She

has spent nearly two years trying to find out what happened to her, but her mother has been telling her all along. This suggests that Cady is not yet ready to remember the tragedy that she has been through, and that she would have to come to terms with the truth on her own. Cady thinks that her family has some sinister reason why they want to hide the truth from her, but in reality, she has been hiding the truth from herself by repressing her own memories. The process of repeating this truth to Cady on a regular basis also had a negative effect on Penny, who was mourning the deaths of her niece, nephew, and family friend, but had to re-live that experience on a regular basis by telling Cady over and over, knowing that she would not remember it the following day.

“Cadence was the first, and it didn’t matter that she was a girl. I would give her everything. Just like a grandson. I carried her in my arms and danced. She was the future of our family.”

Related Characters: Harris Sinclair (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 57


Explanation and Analysis

Harris Sinclair is visiting Cady in Burlington, Vermont, a year after the accident. Cady has changed quite a bit since the accident, but the most noticeable aspect of that change is that she has dyed her blond hair black, which Harris does not approve of at all. He is still dedicated to the image of the Sinclair family as tall, blond, athletic, and successful. But Cady will have to repeat a year of high school because she has missed so much, and she has also had to drop out of sports as well—so dying her hair black only completes the transition from perfect Sinclair child to something else. For his part, Harris takes refuge in his memories of Cady’s birth, when she was all potential and could not yet disappoint him with her individual imperfections. Harris is also slipping slowly into a state of dementia, and he will begin to live more and more in the past, especially as he realizes that his power over his family has decreased, and he is no longer the strong patriarch that he imagined himself to be.

Part 3: Summer Seventeen Quotes

“I have a boyfriend named Drake Loggerhead,” says Mirren. “He’s going to Pomona like I am. We have had sexual intercourse quite a number of times, but always with protection. He brings me yellow roses every week and has nice muscles.”

Related Characters: Mirren (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Cady and Mirren are catching up from their time apart, and Mirren is excited to tell Cady about all of the changes that have happened in her life since they last saw one another—she has a boyfriend, much more sexual experience than Cady does, and she will be going off to college on the other side of the country in the fall. Cady feels jealous of her cousin’s present and future, especially because Cady knows that she will be repeating a year of high school, and that college feels like an impossible goal at this point. However, it is important to note that Cady is not actually talking to Mirren at all, because Mirren, Johnny, and Gat all died in the fire two summers earlier. Cady survived, and spent a long time in the hospital recovering, but left with selective amnesia that blocked out her memory of the fire and the deaths of the other Liars. This means that every conversation she has with Gat, Mirren, and Johnny throughout this section of the novel is a figment of Cady’s imagination. It is ironic, then, that Cady is jealous of Mirren for her maturity and bright future, since Cady is the one with open potential while Mirren, having died in the fire, will never be able to achieve any of these milestones in real life.

A witch has been standing there behind me for some time, waiting for a moment of weakness. She holds an ivory statue of a goose. It is intricately carved. I turn and admire it only for a moment before she swings it with shocking force. It connects, crushing a hole in my forehead.

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker)

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 84


Explanation and Analysis

Cady has been suffering from migraines ever since the accident two summers earlier, and they seem to be worse whenever she has spent some time trying to remember what happened that evening on the island. She describes this pain using metaphors involving witches and ogres smashing her head with blunt objects, giving a very graphic description of the onset of the pain and its strength. In addition, Cady's narration style is such that many of her metaphors are described in a way that makes them seem real, and make readers question what is fact and what is fiction. This blurred distinction between truth and invention is important throughout this part of the novel, as Cady searches for answers, but spends most of her time in the company of people who do not actually exist—she reunites with Johnny, Mirren, and Gat on the island despite the fact that they have been dead for two years. Her search for the truth requires Cady to wade through fiction and invention—the reader must to do the same alongside her, thus drawing Cady's reliability as a character into question.

“I started over with this house,” he says simply. “That old life is gone.”

Related Characters: Harris Sinclair (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

One of the most visible changes to the island is the construction of New Clairmont, a sharp and austere-looking building that seems the polar opposite of the original house. Cady is disgusted by the look of it even as she takes the boat to the island for the first time; when she goes inside, she is even more unsettled by how stark and unwelcoming it feels. The house is missing so many of the items that made the original Clairmont feel like the center of the Sinclair family, like books, items Harris bought during his travels, and the myriad family photos and paintings that hung on the walls. Cady does not know, of course, that these items were lost in the fire, and so she feels that this new minimalist aesthetic is a choice that Harris made on his own. When she asks him about it, he does not go into details, but instead he simply notes that he had to move on from the life he had. This is sad, in a way, because Harris is so deeply attached to

memories and his image of his family, and has lost elements of his past (the items in the house) and his future (two of his grandchildren) in the fire. Harris, like Cady, has rid himself of his sentimental belongings in order to diminish the pain his pre-fire memories now bring.

“Oh please,” snapped Mummy. “Only yesterday you were saying how busy you were and now you’re helping remodel the Boston house?”

Related Characters: Penny Sinclair Eastman (speaker), Bess

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of Cady's recovered memories from summer fifteen, when the family was together having dinner. Harris asked his daughters what they thought about renovating his house in Boston, and this ignites a huge fight among them. Harris asks if Bess would help him remodel the house, and she volunteers enthusiastically, which angers Penny. Penny has been drinking, and is feeling confrontational, so she points out that Bess does not actually have the time to help Harris, but that she is volunteering because she wants to inherit the house someday. The sisters have been arguing all summer about their inheritance, in large part due to Tipper's death. Tipper held the family together in many ways, and without her presence, the girls are all focused on winning Harris's love and making themselves worthy of a larger share of the inheritance. Harris plays into their fears, of course, by bringing up the issue of his wealth and how it will be distributed, which only makes the situation worse. This argument is important in showing the greed, resentment, and perfectionistic control that permeates the Sinclair family. It also gives additional context to the Liars' ultimate decision to set fire to Clairmont—they want to destroy the family's legacy in order to prevent further fights like this one, and their lofty goal of saving their familial relationships is noble despite the tragedy of how the fire really plays out.

“You feel like you know me, Cady, but you only know the me who comes here,” he says. “It’s—its just not the whole picture. You don’t know my bedroom with the window onto the airshaft, my mom’s curry, the guys from school, the way we celebrate holidays. You only know the me on this island, where everyone’s rich except me and the staff.”

Related Characters: Gatwick “Gat” Patil (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Gat and Cady have a moment alone together, and when Cady kisses Gat, he pulls away, which is uncharacteristic of him. He tells Cady that they should not be doing this—that is, they should not be pursuing any kind of relationship during the summer. He tells her that he is a mess emotionally, and then explains that Cady does not know him except for when he is on the island in the summer. To Gat, this is a huge distinction, because there is so much about him that she will never see during the summers. His life is very different in New York with his mother, which is where he feels that he fits in. While Cady feels that they know each other very well, Gat is pointing out to her that while he knows her well—he is immersed in her lifestyle, knows her family well, and is in a space where she feels comfortable speaking her mind—he is not fully himself on the island, and therefore she does not know him. For Cady, this conversation will remind her that their relationship is likely only possible while he is on the island, and later on in the story, it will mean that she is willing to do anything to make sure that he is able to return every summer.

Now, at the breakfast table, watching him eat my toast, “Don’t take no for an answer” seemed like the attitude of a privileged guy who didn’t care who got hurt, so long as his wife had the cute statues she wanted to display in her summerhouses.

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker), Harris Sinclair

Related Themes:  


Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

At breakfast Harris, Cady reflects on her grandfather’s privilege and the materialism she perceives in him and the rest of the Sinclair family. For most of her life, Cady has seen her grandfather Harris as the leader of the family and a role model for her. He is known for his motivational mottos such as “Don’t take no for an answer,” which once seemed like very good advice to Cady. Since she started talking to Gat and absorbing his ideas about wealth and materialism, Cady is much more suspicious of her grandfather’s success—she sees these motivational statements as excuses for him to do whatever he wants in order to get ahead, regardless of the consequences to others. This is actually the situation that plays out with his daughters—he is using his money to pit them against each other and fight for his favor, despite the fact that it is hurting them and the rest of the family. It is this dysfunctional relationship between Harris and his daughters that eventually pushes the Liars to retaliate and set Clairmont on fire.

I wish I had her life. A boyfriend, plans, college in California. Mirren is going off into her sunshine future, whereas I am going back to Dickenson Academy to another year of snow and suffocation.

Related Characters: Mirren (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 128



Explanation and Analysis

Cady and Mirren are in Edgartown, a larger island near Beechwood, and Mirren is telling Cady all about her first sexual experiences with her boyfriend, and Cady cannot help but compare Mirren’s life to her own and feel jealous of her cousin’s future. Cady feels condemned to only half a life at this point, with her mother hovering over her, very few friends from school, and another year of high school to go before she can even consider escaping to college. However, it is very clear that Mirren’s experiences are not reality—the name Drake Loggerhead sounds obviously fake, and even the way that Mirren describes sex, like fireworks and roses, sounds fabricated. In fact, all of Mirren’s future prospects are simply part of the imaginary world that Cady has constructed to keep herself from facing the reality that Mirren and the others are dead. While she may feel envious of other young people with exciting futures ahead of them, Cady knows on a deep subconscious level that Mirren will

not be doing any of these things because she is dead.

“Someone did something to me that is too awful to remember.”

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker), Gatwick “Gat” Patil

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 152



Explanation and Analysis


Cady is sitting with Gat, who has come into her room and found her wall of notes. All summer, she has been taking notes and posting them on the wall of her bedroom to help jog her memory of the events of summer fifteen. She reminds Gat how frustrating it is to be kept in the dark about the accident, and wonders why no one will talk to her about it. Gat agrees to talk to her about that summer, but he only tells her about his girlfriend from home, and how guilty he feels about trying to have relationships with both of them at the same time. He tells her that he is at fault for wanting something he cannot have, and Cady interprets that to mean something about the accident. She begins to believe that something tragic has happened to her and that is why no one is talking about it. This assumption is significant because Cady, along with the reader, will come to find out that it is *she* who has done something “too awful to remember.” Though she has assumed that Gat and the other Liars did something to her that caused her accident, this is likely just a reflection of her own internalized and deeply repressed guilt that she feels over the Liars’ deaths.

Part 4: Look, a Fire Quotes

“Look. A fire. There on the southern tip of Beechwood Island. Where the maple tree stands over the wide lawn. The house is alight. The flames shoot high, brightening the sky.”

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Part 4 opens with the memory of the fire that consumed Clairmont. Once again, Cady cannot simply hear about what happened that night, she has to re-live the experience completely. This experience is so emotionally overwhelming for her that she feels like falling down into the bottom of the ocean—and then she wakes up in her bed in Windemere. This is a very big discovery for Cady, and from this moment on, the memories will come flooding back, and all of the vague snippets of memory she that had come back to her before will suddenly make sense in the context of the house fire. This memory will also change the way that she looks at New Clairmont, which she originally viewed as Harris’s punishment to himself and the family, but now she understands that—like Cady getting rid of her possessions—her grandfather is protecting himself emotionally by leaving behind some of the more painful memories.

“Carrie lived with Ed. The Two of them bought art that might or might not be valuable later. Johnny and Will went to private school. Carrie had started a jewelry boutique with her trust and ran it for a number of years until it failed. Ed earned money, and he supported her, but Carrie didn’t have an income of her own. And they weren’t married. He owned their apartment and she didn’t.”

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker), Will, Johnny, Ed, Carrie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 176



Explanation and Analysis

Cady is thinking about the constant fighting among her mother and aunts about the inheritance, and it prompts her to think about just how much they rely on Harris’s money to keep them afloat, financially. She uses the example of Carrie, who has two sons in private school and no job, and has to rely on both Ed—who has a job and can support her—and her father’s trust fund money. This highlights how much control Harris has over his daughters, as well: if they were to make their own money and become independent from him, his opinions would not matter as much. However, because all of his daughters are financially dependent on him and have no way of fending for themselves, he is able to have a stronger hold on them and influence their decisions almost completely. In the case of Carrie, when Ed wants to marry her, she has to choose between the man she loves

and her father, because Harris will not support her financially if she marries someone he does not like.

“He knows he’s not supposed to be that guy. He’s a Democrat, he voted for Obama—but that doesn’t mean he’s comfortable having people of color in his beautiful family.”

Related Characters: Gatwick “Gat” Patil (speaker), Harris Sinclair, Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Cady and Gat are playing tennis when Gat brings up the fact that Harris does not like him at all, and never even calls him by his name. He calls Gat “young man,” refusing to acknowledge him as a person. Cady is confused by this, and still doesn’t understand why her grandfather would do this, when Gat explains that Harris is a bigot, despite his allegiance to liberal national politics—he is okay with people of color in general, but does not want them in his inner circle, and he certainly doesn’t want men of color sully his pure family lineage. Gat even goes on to explain that Ed proposed to Carrie but she refused, because she was scared to lose her share of the inheritance. This information is important, because it signals to both Gat and Cady that there could come a time when Gat is no longer part of the Liars—if Carrie and Ed break up, Gat will no longer have a link to the family, but if they did get married, Harris would likely ban Ed and Gat from the island anyway.

“You chose Ed; you chose to live with him. You chose to bring Gat here every summer, when you know he’s not one of us. You know the way Dad thinks, and you not only keep running around with Ed, you bring his nephew here and parade him around like a defiant little girl with a forbidden toy.”

Related Characters: Bess (speaker), Gatwick “Gat” Patil, Ed, Carrie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 189



Explanation and Analysis

Gat and Cady are in Clairmont and overhear a drunken

conversation between Bess, Carrie, and Penny, which soon escalates to an argument over who is more deserving of Harris’s love and money. Bess feels that she is doing all of the work—helping Harris get over Tipper’s death—and gets none of the credit. She then turns on Carrie for bringing Gat and Ed to the island, which she sees as a form of rebellion against Harris rather than an act of love towards Ed. Rather than blame Harris for his bigoted ideas about race, Bess takes his side and excoriates her sister for going against their father’s wishes, regardless of how illogical they are. This illustrates how much the sisters are willing to accept their father’s behavior in order to get his money, and how much they have internalized his dysfunctional thinking. And because Cady and Gat overhear this conversation, they are even more convinced that they must act quickly before Gat is forced to leave the island and never come back. This particular argument and their subsequent desperation, then, is the final push that leads them to burn down Clairmont.

“This is the United States of America,” he said. “You don’t seem to understand that, Penny, so let me explain. In America, here is how we operate: We work for what we want, and we get ahead. We never take no for an answer, and we deserve the rewards of our perseverance.”

Related Characters: Harris Sinclair (speaker), Penny Sinclair Eastman

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis



This conversation is part of another argument among the Sinclair sisters, but this time Harris is present as well. Penny complains that she is unloved, and voices concerns that she will not get any of her father’s inheritance, and even threatens to keep Cady away from Harris if he doesn’t include her. Instead of trying to understand Penny’s point of view, Harris simply lectures her in front of everyone, scolding Penny for not upholding Sinclair family values. His statement about how “we operate” in the United States reinforces all of the things that Cady has begun to think about Harris—he is unaware of how much his privilege has influenced his success, and believes himself to be a self-made man, climbing to the top through sheer hard work. This is part of the image that he wants to project to the outside world, and it is the image that bothers Cady the most, because she has finally come to see it as false—the

glamorous, perfectionistic image that Harris and the rest of the Sinclair family try to uphold is starting to lose its credibility for Cady.

Part 5: The Truth Quotes

☝☝ Cadence Sinclair Eastman was present on the island at the time of the fire but did not notice it until it was well underway.

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

The final section of the novel, titled “the truth,” begins with a clear and direct description of the events that took place on the night of the fire. While the title and the style of narration would suggest that these are the facts, they are not. This is Harris Sinclair’s version of the truth, and the version of the truth that will become gospel within the family. While many of the details are correct, the most glaring error is the assertion that Cady was not involved in the fire, and that she only noticed it after it was too late. This version of the story is designed to ensure that Cady is never blamed for the fire or the deaths of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat, but it is unclear whether anyone in the family believes it. Regardless of whether or not it is true, and whether the family believes the story, it is what everyone hears, because Harris Sinclair maintains his control over the image of his family even in moments of grief and loss. It does more harm than good for Cady, however, since it reaffirms her false notions and suppressed memories of the Liars’ deaths.

☝☝ I cry for my aunts, who lost their firstborn children. For Will, who lost his brother. For Liberty, Bonnie, and Taft, who lost their sister. For Granddad, who saw not just his palace burn to the ground, but his grandchildren perish. For the dogs, the poor naughty dogs.

Related Characters: Cadence “Cady” Eastman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment when Cady is finally able to grieve, right after she re-lives the entire fire and its aftermath. This is the first time that she has cried since the accident, because the enormity of the tragedy has finally hit her, after two years of selective amnesia. She has spent much of the summer trying to figure out what has happened to *her*, but in the end she realizes that the rest of her family has suffered just as much, if not more. And while throughout the novel, Cady, Mirren, Johnny, and Gat have been thinking of the rest of the Sinclair family as the enemy and criticized their retrograde ideas, Cady now sees her family in a new light. She realizes that the punishment—the deaths of Mirren, Johnny, and Gat—does not fit the crime. Her aunts and grandfather do not deserve to mourn the three adolescents, and her cousins do not deserve to face this kind of tragedy at such an early age. This marks Cady’s realization—unfortunately too late—that she could have chosen to resolve her family’s situation differently (or escape them entirely) and spared the Liars’ lives. By trying to destroy her family’s legacy in order to protect her relationship with Gat, she ultimately lost both her most beloved family members and the romantic relationship she cherished.

☝☝ I love you in spite of my grief. Even though you are crazy. I love you in spite of what I suspect you have done.

Related Characters: Penny Sinclair Eastman (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 238


Explanation and Analysis

Cady has spent days in her room alone, recalling the night of the fire and then dealing with her feelings about it, when her mother finally comes to talk to her. As Cady has just begun to view her family in a new light, she recognizes that her mother has been taking care of her while still dealing with her own emotions about the tragedy. While previously, Cady resented her mother’s close attention and constant reminders that she loves her daughter, she is now able to appreciate it because she understands the complex thinking behind it. Penny does not say these things to Cady directly; when her mother says that she loves her, Cady fills in the unspoken thoughts she must have been having all along. Penny is grieving and is worried about Cady’s mental health. Deep down, she does not believe the story that Harris tells about the fire, and suspects that her daughter may be an

arsonist and accidental murderer. Yet, Cady realizes, her mother loves her unconditionally (despite Penny's seemingly selfish behavior throughout the novel), and is willing to do anything to support her.

“I want to be an accepting person, but I am so full of leftover rage. I imagined I'd be saintly and wise, but instead I've been jealous of you, mad at the rest of my family.”

Related Characters: Mirren (speaker), Cadence “Cady” Eastman

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Cady has goes back to Cuddledown to talk to the Liars one last time, as she knows that it is time for them to go. Her imaginary versions of Mirren, Johnny, and Gat have served

their purpose in helping Cady remember what happened the night of the fire, and she has had a chance to say her final goodbyes over the past few weeks. First, Cady talks to Johnny, who tells her that it is not her fault and that she should let go of her guilt; her conversation with Mirren is slightly different, however. Mirren is very honest with Cady, admitting that she still holds on to some anger and cannot be as forgiving. She does not suggest that she blames Cady for her death, but is honest about her own feelings. Once again, these are Cady's projections rather than real people talking to her, so it is clear that Cady is trying to forgive herself for her part in the fire and for being the sole survivor, without absolving herself completely. Although this conversation with Mirren seems harsh compared to Johnny's forgiveness, it is important for Cady's healing. Rather than suppressing her memories and distancing herself from reality through fairy tales, this conversation allows Cady to gain a new, more balanced perspective on her past mistakes that is sympathetic to herself but still realistic about the irrevocable consequences of her actions.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1: WELCOME

The Sinclair family appears perfect: there are no criminals, addicts, or failures, and no one is needy or depressed or unloved. They are wealthy New England Democrats with beautiful blond hair, athletic builds, and wide smiles, despite the fact that their money is running out, and that there are pill bottles hidden in the house. The Sinclairs seem perfect, and they spend their summers on a private island off of the Massachusetts coast.

Cadence Sinclair Eastman lives with her mother and their three dogs in Burlington, Vermont. The summer she is fifteen, her father leaves them for another woman, announcing as he leaves that he could no longer bear to be part of the Sinclair family. Cady feels this like a gunshot to the chest, causing her to bleed out onto the lawn; her mother tells her to get ahold of herself and not show her pain.

Cady and her mother, Penny, pack up all the belongings that remind them of Cady's father and get rid of them. Then they pack up and go to **Beechwood**, the private island that Penny's father, Harris, owns, to forget about the whole thing. Harris Sinclair bought the island for his family: his wife, Tipper, and his three daughters, Penny, Carrie, and Bess. He had a house built on the island for each of them, and now all three generations of Sinclairs—Harris and Tipper, their daughters, and the grandchildren—spend each summer there.

Cady spends her summers on **Beechwood** with her three closest friends: Johnny, Mirren, and Gat. They are all about the same age, and the rest of the family calls them “the Liars,” though no one seems to recall exactly why. Johnny, Mirren, and Cady are cousins, and for their first seven summers on the island, they play together but aren't particularly close. Gat arrives for their eighth summer, along with his uncle Ed. Carrie's husband left her with two young boys, Johnny and Will, and she soon met Ed and brought him with her and the boys to spend the summer on Beechwood.

The novel begins with an outsider's view of the Sinclair family before exposing the significant imperfections that are visible from the inside. It hints, however, at the idea that there are cracks in the veneer, such as the pill bottles (signifying pain and mental illness) and less affluence than outsiders would imagine.



Cady is the protagonist of the novel, yet from the very beginning it is clear that she is not always a reliable narrator: she initially makes readers think her father shot her in the chest, when it only felt that way due to the intense pain of his leaving the family for another woman.



After her husband leaves her, Penny's first inclination is to erase him from her life and memory, and escape to her family's island. Beechwood has always been a refuge for the family, and its seclusion has helped them maintain their insular family relations for decades. Cady has no choice in how her mother deals with the separation and will later realize that ignorance is not bliss.



The introduction of Gat, an outsider, to the Sinclair family will bring about a significant change to the dynamics. While the Liars would not have existed without Gat, and he is therefore an important part of their group, he will always be considered lesser among the Sinclair family. In addition, Gat becomes the voice of reason in many situations, offering a different perspective than the conventional wisdom among the Sinclairs.



Gat Patil comes along with Ed that eighth summer—Gat’s father recently died, and he and Johnny are close friends, so Ed and Carrie think he might enjoy a summer on the island with them all. When Gat steps off the boat onto the island, he and Cady lock eyes for a moment, and without quite realizing it at the time, they fall in love. That summer, the four of them spend all their time together; the following summer, Gat comes back to the island. He also returns the summer after that, until it is assumed that he would be there every summer.

When they are fourteen, Cady and Gat realize how much they like each other. They take a boat out on the water and swim together in the cold water, huddling under a fleece blanket to keep warm. Gat tells her that she is so pretty it is distracting him. They spend more time alone together, walking through the lawn or on the beach in the evenings, and Gat begins to lend her books. They write each other’s names on the backs of their hands, and Cady feels as if Gat belongs to her.

The following year, Cady’s father leaves, and Cady and Penny are busy cleansing him from their lives, so they arrive at **Beechwood** a week later than the rest of the Sinclair clan. Emotionally raw from her father’s departure, Cady is excited to see Gat again. They haven’t seen each other since the previous summer, but Cady’s feelings for Gat have not changed. She feels pure love when she sees him standing at the kitchen sink holding a dried rose. But as she watches, he puts the rose in an envelope, seals it, addresses and stamps it—the rose isn’t for her, as she hoped, but for another girl. Cady runs from the house, crestfallen.

Cady learns more about Gat’s girlfriend, Raquel, from Johnny, who has met her. She lives in New York, is a modern dancer, and wears a lot of black. Gat doesn’t mention the girlfriend to Cady, but he acts different around her. After a night of anger and frustration, Cady decides to pretend she knows nothing about this girlfriend and act normal. The Liars spend the summer doing their usual activities: playing tennis, making ice cream, sailing, and having bonfires. Cady notices that instead of their names on the backs of his hands, Gat has the titles of philosophy books, like *Being and Nothingness*. On her own hands, Cady writes “live in today.”

Perhaps Gat’s most important role in the novel and in the Sinclair family is that of Cady’s love interest, which causes extreme tensions within the family over the years. From Cady’s perspective, their love is both pure and innocent, but Harris Sinclair sees the relationship as a dangerous threat to his control over his family.



The relationship between Cady and Gat builds slowly as they get older, and also seems to develop out of their friendship—Gat is comfortable telling Cady his feelings from the beginning, and they almost immediately become comfortable in this blooming romance.



Unfortunately, the relationship between Gat and Cady does not extend beyond the island of Beechwood, and during the school year they live very separate lives. This becomes clear to Cady in this moment: while she has been silently suffering from her father’s departure, Gat has been living an entirely separate life in New York City. Cady’s belief that Gat “belongs” to her, even when she is not around, is shattered.



Cady sees Raquel as worldly and sophisticated, which intimidates her as a girl from small-town Vermont. Beyond that, however, Cady is also faced with the reality that Gat exists outside of their time together in the summer, and their time together is precious and scarce. Thus, instead of staying upset about Gat’s hometown relationship, Cady resolves to live in the present and enjoy the time they have together, regardless of what happens back in New York City.



One evening as they sit around a bonfire, Gat raises the question of how it's possible to own a whole island, or how anyone can say that a piece of land belongs to them at all. Johnny laughs him off, but Gat continues—he was in India earlier in the year, and saw people living in rural towns without toilets. Johnny responds that Gat has already talked more than enough about his trip to India, and Cady thinks about the fact that Gat is so deeply interested in the world that he cannot imagine anyone finding these discoveries boring. She understands that Gat wants to make them think.

Johnny and Mirren are not interested in what Gat is saying, however, and they tell him to stop talking forever. Angered by this, Gat walks into the ocean in his jeans, and Cady follows him, hoping to rekindle the connection they had the previous summer. Standing in the waves, Cady tells Gat that she doesn't want him to shut up, and she likes what he has to say. And that when the others told him to shut up, they meant that they love him because he reminded them how shallow and selfish they are. Gat holds her hands and asks if that is what she meant, too, and Cady says yes.

Later that night, Cady can't sleep, and goes out to see Gat after her mother has gone to sleep. They lie together and look up at the stars, holding hands. They talk about God and religion and wonder if they are good people and how they should be living their lives. Gat gives Cady his hunting jacket to keep her warm, and Cady wants to kiss him but doesn't. She thinks about Raquel for a moment but manages not to worry.

The following day, Cady and Gat are in the attic at Windemere—Penny's house on the island—to go through Cady's father's possessions and get rid of them. They are sorting through books when Gat interrupts Cady and tells her to shut up, which has become their code word for saying "I love you." He then falls to his knees and tells her he loves her. Cady kisses him. At that moment, Harris Sinclair walks into the attic, interrupting the private and romantic moment between the two teens.

When Harris enters the attic, Gat jumps up awkwardly, as all three of them know what Cady's grandfather saw. Gat tries to stand out of the way, bending to keep from hitting his head on the slanted roof of the attic. Harris warns him to watch himself, and that he could get hurt. He then clarifies that he is warning Gat against hitting his head on the rafters, but Gat recognizes the veiled threat behind the seemingly innocent comment. Without another word, Gat leaves the attic, leaving Cady and Harris alone.

One major aspect of Gat's personality and his role in the novel is that of the skeptic: while Johnny, Mirren, and Cady take their affluence for granted, Gat is able to look in from the outside and question the lifestyle and worldview that Harris has imposed upon his family. This is annoying to Johnny and Mirren at first, but Cady is very receptive to Gat's critical evaluation of wealth because she admires him so deeply.



While Cady is swept up in Gat's ideas about challenging the concept of wealth and loves hearing about his travels in India, her cousins are not. Their sharp words hurt Gat's feelings, but it also gives Cady the opportunity to demonstrate how understanding she can be by redefining Johnny and Mirren's words for him. Rather than conforming to what her family thinks, she chooses to align herself with Gat. This is also an opportunity for Cady to express her love for Gat for the first time.



Cady and Gat sneak out to be together after everyone else is asleep, in order to spend time away from the prying eyes of the rest of the Sinclair family. They will soon find, however, that their relationship is very public, and that they are under close scrutiny by the rest of the family.



Once again, Cady and Gat search for a private moment to express their burgeoning feelings for one another—while Cady is supposed to be sorting through her father's possessions, all of her attention is directed at Gat and her newfound love. Cady's sense of security has been disrupted by her father's abandonment of the family, and Gat serves as an escape from this turmoil. While picking through remnants of the past, she and Gat are clearly looking towards the future.



While Gat and Cady are surprised to see Harris, it is likely that he has been keeping an eye on the two teenagers and has intentionally interrupted their time alone. His warning to Gat—a not-so-subtle hint to stay away from Cady—is the first of many signs that Harris does not consider Gat to be a suitable boyfriend, likely due to his ethnicity.



Harris reminisces with Cady about taking her to her first baseball game when she is four years old. Cady knows that her grandfather wants her to join in on the memory, adding in details and turning it into a more significant event than it had been at the time. She notes that this is a common pastime of her grandfather's: talking about their family of "legendary Sinclairs, what fun we'd had, how beautiful we are." But Cady isn't as interested in participating this time, as she is preoccupied with thoughts of Gat—whether he'll break up with Raquel, when she'll see him again—and hurries the story with her grandfather. When they see each other again, she and Gat kiss immediately.

Tipper Sinclair dies of heart failure after the fourteenth summer, and when the Sinclairs arrive the following year, the island feels empty without her. She has been a central figure in the lives of her children and grandchildren, and **Clairmont**, the main house on the island, is filled with memories of her. Cady recalls a photo of her and her grandmother at a benefit party on Martha's Vineyard, which is one of Tipper's charity projects. Cady goes into the craft room at Clairmont to look around at the fabric and sewing accessories Tipper used, and the flood of memories make her melt into a puddle on the floor.

Penny finds her daughter in the craft room and immediately tells her to act normal and to pull herself together. She advises Cady that she should never remind people of a loss, and that they all must be strong for Harris. Cady and the rest of the family manage to erase Tipper from their lives, just as they have done with anyone else who leaves their inner circle—including Penny's, Bess's, and Carrie's ex-husbands. They simply act as though these people never existed in the first place.

While the family has an implicit vow of silence, Gat constantly mentions these people, recalling that they did exist and had actually been on the island in the past. He brings up memories of Cady's father and the quality time they spent together; once, he mentioned a favorite memory of Tipper at a family dinner, and Johnny had to talk loudly over him in order to distract everyone from the taboo topic. Cady's reaction to these memories is to "bleed" emotionally, and Gat kindly attends to her wounds. But he continues to talk about Cady's father, and about Tipper, which always reminds Cady that he is not really a part of the Sinclair family.

With Gat out of the way for the moment, Harris is once again free to make himself the center of Cady's attention and reinforce his sense of importance within the family. Cady recognizes the ways in which her grandfather attempts to construct a sense of legacy and self-image through the re-telling of stories, and even plays along somewhat. But as before, she is uninterested in thoughts of the past and is instead focused on the possibilities the future holds—like a relationship with Gat.



In terms of their relationship to their wealth, Harris and Tipper are in stark contrast to one another: while Harris uses his money to control his children and grandchildren, Tipper was altruistic, focusing on using their money for good. Consequently, her death brings out the selfishness in the rest of the family and shows that they value money above their relationships with one another. In fact, Cady's private moment in the craft room is one of the only times that a family member visibly mourns Tipper's death.



Although Penny believes she is only helping her daughter provide a picture-perfect image for the outside world, her demands that Cady suppress her grief will prove harmful to her daughter's psychological development. Just like when her father left them, Cady is unable to fully process her feelings regarding her grandmother's death.



Gat's outsider status is reinforced here, as he chooses not to suppress his grief despite the family's obvious discomfort. He is asserting his individual perspective, just as he has done when talking about wealth with the other Liars. This tendency to revisit the past is in direct conflict with Penny's advice to bottle up painful feelings, and consequently, Cady finds herself stuck between her loyalty to her family and her love, admiration, and complete belief in Gat.



Cady and Gat spend most of that summer alone together, finding moments during the day or even at night to sneak off and kiss. Gat writes notes and leaves small, insignificant gifts for Cady, and she reciprocates with drawings of the two of them in crayon. He puts the drawings up over his bed, surrounding himself with stick-figure images of the two of them. They find every chance they can to touch each other gently and innocently, enjoying their closeness.

One evening that summer, Cady finds herself swimming alone. She is only wearing a camisole and underpants, with no towel. She has no idea how she got there, or where Johnny, Mirren, and Gat are. Cady hit her head on a rock off the shore and went under, and when her mother finds her on the beach, she is shivering uncontrollably. The adults take care of her and eventually bring her to a hospital on Martha's Vineyard, where she stays for several days. There are lots of tests and visits from family members, but there is no Gat, Johnny, or Mirren.

At home in Vermont, Cady writes emails to the other Liars, but she doesn't receive a single response. She wonders if she and Gat are really in love, as previously believed. She deletes her emails from her sent folder and tries to forget about Gat, deciding that it was only a summer fling, and that he has abandoned her in her time of need.

Meanwhile, the process of healing from her head injury is long and slow for Cady, and extremely painful. She suffers from migraines that cause her to vomit and black out, and endures CT scans, MRIs, and other tests to find out what is wrong. She misses so much school that she has to repeat the 11th grade, and drop out of all of her sports, and she loses contact with many of her friends.

Cady's father decides to take Cady to Europe the following summer: 10 weeks touring Scotland, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy. Cady doesn't want to go—she wants to return to **Beechwood** and see the Liars, and anyway, her father had not kept in touch with her in the year since he left, and Cady isn't interested in reconnecting with him. But her mother insists, so Cady suffers from migraines, vomits, and blacks out throughout the Europe trip. She also leaves the Liars voice messages and emails in which she alternates between sounding lonely and needy and being falsely upbeat and positive. But none of them ever reply.

In a different context, the blossoming romance between Cady and Gat would be a positive development, but it is clear that Gat does not fit in with the Sinclair family. Cady's mother and grandfather want to maintain as much control as possible over her and her choices. Their innocent romance will soon become a threat to the family.



This evening on the beach is a pivotal moment in Cady's life and in the narrative. She will later refer to this as the mysterious accident, and her search for answers will consume her for the next two years. It is also significant that she is alone in this moment, signaling the fact that she will have to rely on herself, and not her family or Gat, to find out what happened to her that night.



In the months after her accident, Cady experiences something she has never felt before: loneliness and abandonment. Always surrounded by family on the island, she is now at home and alone, reaching out with no answers from the ones she loves.



This section of the novel highlights the extreme change in Cady's life, and the reason she separated her life into before and after in the first few pages of the story. In addition to the fact that she has no memory of the accident, Cady's entire world has changed for the worse.



Another major change to Cady's life is the fact that she no longer appears to be in charge of her time: while she wants to return to the island—as she has done every summer since childhood—she is being forced to travel with her father, and she has no choice in the matter. She also feels very alone, as her attempts at communication with Johnny, Mirren, and Gat go unanswered.



PART 2: VERMONT

When she is eight years old, Cady's father gives her a collection of **fairy tales** to read, and although they are from many different cultures, they all seemed to have the same structure, beginning with three characters—three bears, three pigs, three princesses, etc. When she returned from her summer trip to Europe, Cady began to write her own fairy tales.

Once upon a time, begins Cady, there was a king with three beautiful daughters. One day, he asked each of his daughters to tell him how much they love him. The first two daughters gave him answers that satisfied him, but the youngest told him that she loved him “as meat loves salt,” so he banished her from the castle. She became a cook at an inn, and years later she found herself serving roast pig to her own father. She didn't salt the meat, and when the King complained, the cook reminded him of what his youngest daughter once said to him, and how he banished her. The King realized that the cook was his daughter and that she did, indeed, love him best.

The youngest daughter was reunited with the King, but the story does not have a happy ending. The two older sisters were constantly fighting for their father's favor, but he suddenly gave the kingdom to the youngest daughter, which enraged her two older sisters. The youngest quickly realized that the King was a tyrant, and that as Queen, she would be stuck with him for the rest of her life. But she knew that she would not leave him.

After returning from Europe, Cady begins to give away her possessions, one at a time—she mails off old toys and accessories she no longer has any use for, hands out books at school, and gives a homeless girl the pillow from her bed. Her family had always been deeply attached to their possessions, and when she asks her mother why she needs so many useless objects, Penny replies that they provide her with beauty, a sense of personal history, and pleasure. Cady disagrees, however, and thinks that the accumulation of valuable objects makes her mother feel powerful and more than just a Bryn Mawr dropout.

Cady knows that selective amnesia is a common side effect of her traumatic brain injury, but she does not want to continue to feel disabled any longer and tries to pull together her memories from that summer. Mirren's hand holding a jug of gasoline for the motorboats, Johnny running down the stairs from **Clairmont** to a boathouse, and Harris holding on to a tree while watching a bonfire. She had nothing but snippets, and when she asks her mother to tell her what happened, Penny would get frustrated and complain that she had already tells Cady a dozen times. So Cady doesn't ask again.

The second part of the novel begins by introducing Cady's deep connection to fairy tales, which will become her coping mechanism for coming to terms with the issues within her family, her relationship with Gat, and the mystery surrounding her accident.



All of Cady's fairy tales have a similar structure—a king and his three daughters—that reflects her feelings about her family. In her eyes, Cady's grandfather is a grand, royal figure, but he also puts his daughters through a series of trials so they can prove their love to him. In this first story, the youngest daughter is clever, which at first causes problems for her, as the king is unable to understand the metaphor she uses—that of meat and salt.



In this fairy tale, the traditional format is turned on its head when it is revealed that the king is not worthy of his clever daughter's love. Through this retelling, Cady questions whether it is right for the family to strive so hard to please Harris, and whether he is worthy of such admiration.



Cady's compulsion to rid herself of everything she owns is another way for Cady to question her family's values and traditions. Until she began spending time with Gat, Cady didn't think critically about her family's wealth, but is now viewing this affluence from a different perspective. She may also be responding to the grief and guilt she feels—though she does not consciously recognize it yet—for her part in the tragic events the previous summer.



What Cady does not yet remember about that summer is that she and the other Liars set fire to Clairmont, and that Johnny, Mirren, and Gat all died in the fire, and she was the only one who survived. This explains the snippets of memories she can recall: Mirren is holding a jug of gasoline they used to ignite the fire, for example, and Harris is watching the burning house, not a bonfire. But she is not yet ready to remember it all.



Cady's father wants to bring her to Australia and New Zealand for the following summer, but Cady refuses—she is ready to return to **Beechwood** and find out what happened the night of her accident. But the trip is already paid for, and Penny will not let her back out of it. Harris comes to Burlington to stay for a few days, and Cady is surprised to see how thin and weak he seems now, compared to the invincible man she remembers from childhood. While he is visiting, Harris reminisces about Cady's birth, recalling that Penny brought her to see him in Boston when she is just a baby, dressed in a pink romper.

Cady tells another **fairy tale**: there was once a king with three daughters. One day, a three-headed dragon began to attack the kingdom, and the king promised one of the daughters to anyone who could slay the dragon. Many brave men tried, but the dragon ate them all; the king then decided to send his own daughters to beg for mercy, but the dragon simply ate them all before they could say a word. The question is, who killed the princesses—the dragon or the king?

After Harris leaves Burlington, Penny cancels the Australia trip and decides to let Cady go to **Beechwood** for the summer. She then has many hushed conversations with her sisters, and Cady can only hear snippets. Penny is telling them how fragile Cady is, and how everyone must be gentle with her. A few weeks later, right before they are ready to leave for the island, Cady gets a call from Taft, one of her younger cousins. He wants to know if it is true that she is a drug addict, and then asks if he can sleep with her when she is on the island. Cady tells him to sleep with Mirren instead, and he says okay and hangs up.

PART 3: SUMMER SEVENTEEN

As Cady arrives on **Beechwood**, she sees that **Clairmont**, the main house on the island, has been completely rebuilt. In the place of the old Victorian with a turret and wrap-around porch, there is a cold, modern building made of glass and iron with a Japanese garden on the side. Harris spent two summers building the house, which they call "New Clairmont." Cady is struck by a deep sense of sadness for the old house and the old maple tree with the swing they all had used for years.

Cady is beginning to recognize her grandfather for the flawed human he really is, as opposed to the legendary figure he makes himself out to be. Yet while she sees him as old and frail, he prefers to remind himself and his family of their storied past, when he was likely as invincible as Cady believed. He is also using his money to help Cady come to terms with the accident: by funding a trip to Australia, he believes he is giving her time to heal away from the island.



Again, Cady uses the fairy tale format to try and come to terms with various unanswered questions about her family. Once again, her grandfather is the king, who is both revered and imperfect—but this time, he puts his daughters at risk and is punished for it. Cady sees Harris as responsible for letting his daughters down in some way.



Cady is still unaware of the fact that the other Liars have died, and Penny is attempting to protect her from that discovery and the pain and shock it will cause her. Because she does not realize the real reason Penny is being so careful, Cady is annoyed by her mother's behavior and will continue to rebel against it. Her phone call with her younger cousin is a sneak peek into the changes that have gone on in her family since the accident.



It is fitting that the first thing Cady sees as she nears the island is the new version of Clairmont, since it was her fault that Harris had to rebuild the house in the first place. Of course, Cady is still unaware that the original Clairmont burned down, and sees the construction of New Clairmont as an example of strange behavior on her grandfather's part.



Penny sees that Cady is upset, and commands her to be normal and not to cause a scene for the rest of the family. Cady looks toward the shore from the boat and sees her friends, Mirren, Johnny, and Gat, waiting for her, welcoming her home. When Penny and Cady finally get into Windemere, their house on the island, Harris and Bess are waiting for them. Harris welcomes Cady back to the island, but he calls her Mirren. Cady's younger cousins ask about her hair, which she dyed black during the school year, and one of them tells Cady she looks like a vampire. Everyone reminds the girl that she needs to be nice to Cady, but Cady responds that it's okay, because she doesn't care what anyone thinks anymore.

Once the rest of the family leaves, Cady goes out to find the Liars, and they greet her lovingly. Cady is happy to see Gat, but feels upset at the same time, because while Cady has been spending the past two years alone and in pain, she knows that Gat has been in New York City, dating beautiful and sophisticated girls. The Liars comment on her hair, and on how much taller she is now; they ask her about where she plans on going to college, and she has to tell them that she didn't graduate. Mirren tells Cady about her new boyfriend, Drake Loggerhead, who will also be at Pomona in the fall. They have had sex already, and Mirren and Cady make plans to talk about the details when the boys aren't around. The Liars tell Cady that they will not be having their meals at **New Clairmont** this summer with the rest of the family.

They go out to the beach, and Mirren and Johnny go into the water, leaving Cady and Gat alone to talk. They flirt casually for a while, and then finally Gat tells her that he worried he might never see her again. Cady asks him why he never writes back to her, but he doesn't answer her, just noting that he is glad she is back on the island. Cady is upset with him and thinks he's a jerk for deserting her, but she is still in love with him. So when he asks to hold hands, she wavers for a moment but then agrees, and they lie on the beach holding hands.

Later, Cady stands in her room, looking around at her belongings and trying to spark some memories from two summers earlier. She looks at the patchwork quilt, the artwork on the walls, and the books she used to read, and then begins to pull the books off the shelves to get rid of them. Her mother comes in and asks her not to give away her books, commenting that they have so many good memories attached to them. Penny reminds her of how she read *The Lives of Christopher Chant* to Cady and Gat when they are eight years old, and that she might want to hold on to that one. Annoyed, Cady reminds her mother that when her father left, Penny got rid of all of his things, leaving no trace of him in the house at all.

For Cady, the other Liars still exist on the island despite the fact that they are dead in real life. She needs them to exist in order to come to terms with the loss, and her family will allow her to believe that they still exist as well, because they are invested in letting Cady heal slowly. Her first interactions with the rest of the family are strange—Harris is showing his age by forgetting names, and while the adults want to treat Cady with kid gloves, her younger cousins are less gentle with her. This changed family dynamic shows just how much everyone's lives have changed in the aftermath of the fire.



Cady continues her relationship with the Liars exactly where she left off two summers earlier—she is still in love with Gat and feels possessive and jealous around him, and she and Mirren immediately dive in to typical teenage girl subjects like boyfriends and college plans. But Cady still feels isolated, as she believes that she was the only one affected by the accident and imagines that they are moving ahead with their lives without her. And because they only exist in Cady's imagination, they will not be part of family events and will only be with her when she is alone.



After two years of not seeing Gat, Cady finally has time alone with him and can ask him all of the things she has been wondering about. But Gat does not have any answers for her, and she is not yet ready to dig deeper. This entire process is Cady's gradual way of coming to terms with what happened, but it is also her only chance to connect to the friends she lost; therefore, she is content to just spend time holding hands with Gat at this point.



Cady is on a quest to recover the memories she lost—or suppressed—after the accident. Yet she is also compelled to give away many of the items that spark memories for her. Her relationship with memory at this point is complex: on one hand, she believes that she wants to remember the past, but she is also pushing away many of those memories by giving away the items that spark them. When Penny questions this tendency, Cady reminds her that this is the way her family deals with loss.



They are about to argue but are interrupted by the three golden retrievers bounding up the stairs. Penny, who is dressed and wearing fresh makeup for dinner, informs Cady that she has the right to give away all of her books, and she can do what she wants with her time on the island, but that she is expected—no excuses—for dinner at **Clairmont** with a smile on her face for her grandfather, Harris. Cady ignores her mother and decides to write down all her memories from summer fifteen, and then makes a special list for her memories of the accident. She then tacks up the lists, along with another list of questions she hopes to answer.

There is a witch behind Cady, and suddenly she swings an ivory statue of a goose right at Cady's forehead, smashing her skull. The witch keeps attacking her until Cady decides to take some pain pills and turn off the light. Penny calls from the hallway, reminding Cady that it is time to go to **Clairmont** for family dinner, but Cady refuses. Penny lists all the reasons why Cady should go with her to dinner, but Cady can only sink deeper into the migraine. Finally, Penny leaves Cady alone in the dark.

Cady wakes in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep, so she slips outside. Her aunt Carrie is wandering along the path between the houses, only wearing her nightgown and shearling boots. Carrie says that she has trouble sleeping when Ed isn't there and asks if Cady has seen Johnny recently. She then tells Cady that her younger son, Will, has been having nightmares and wakes up screaming on a regular basis. He thinks the houses are all haunted.

In the morning, Cady goes to **Clairmont** and has breakfast with her mother and grandfather. She asks where Fatima and Prince Phillip—two of the golden retrievers—have gone, and Harris tells her that they died a while back. Sad, Cady asks if the dogs suffered, and he tells her that they did not, not for long. He then tells Cady that he doesn't like her new hair color, and that he prefers her as a blond Sinclair girl. Harris tells Penny that she should make Mirren change her hair back to the way it is, again confusing Cady for her cousin.

Cady is spending the morning with Mirren, and finally decides to ask her why she never wrote back to her when Cady was in Europe the previous summer. Mirren responds that she hates email, and then attempts to change the subject. Cady asks her if she received the Barbie doll she mailed to her, and Mirren says no. Mirren asks Cady about her migraines, saying that the aunts have been talking about them, and Cady asks Mirren not to feel sorry for her. Mirren tells Cady that Johnny and Gat are staying at Cuddledown, another house on the island, and asks Cady to come so that they can all stay together. Cady responds that her mom will not let her.

While Penny is trying to be respectful of Cady's healing process, she is still loyal to the Sinclair family value of masking pain in front of others. Cady believes that she does not have to go to dinner at Clairmont because the other Liars do not attend—again, she is not consciously aware of the fact that they are dead, and that she is only interacting with them via her imagination. She continues her quest to recover those experiences and commit them to memory.



Cady describes her migraines using images of witches, monsters, and other villains, often in ways that make it difficult to distinguish reality from fantasy. It is also interesting to note that her migraines are more frequent when she is working to recover lost memories—this suggests that in addition to being hard work, this process of remembering is emotionally painful for Cady.



Cady is so deeply immersed in her own painful journey that she does not recognize the signs of grief all around her: Will's nightmares and Carrie's insomnia are likely directly connected to Johnny's death. It is also clear from Cady's conversation with her aunt that Carrie knows Cady believes that Johnny is alive and on the island with them.



This conversation introduces some sad irony into the story, as Cady asks about the dogs without realizing that she was responsible for the fire that led to their deaths. In addition, Harris refers to Cady as Mirren again—only this time, it is unclear whether this confusion is due to the onset of dementia or to grief over the loss of two of his beloved grandchildren.



Cady's conversations with Mirren, Gat, and Johnny are complex: on one hand, she is creating entire scenarios in her mind, inventing both sides of her dialogues with them and truly believing that they are alive and with her. On the other hand, this is a process of recovering repressed memories for Cady, which means that subconsciously, she does know what happened and that Johnny, Mirren, and Gat have been dead for two years.



Throughout her conversation with Mirren, Cady wants to tell her that she has no memories of the accident and beg her to explain what happened. She also wants to tell Mirren that she's upset about the emails and the Barbie, though she assumes the lost Barbie isn't Mirren's fault. But Mirren offers her the handfuls of purple rocks she has collected along the shore, reminding Cady of how much she loved those purple rocks when she is little. Cady doesn't want to take anything she doesn't need, but finally she accepts the rocks, and Mirren gives them to her and yells, "I love my cousin Cadence Sinclair Eastman!"

Johnny interrupts their conversation and asks Cady about the laundry basket of belongings at her feet. She tells him that she is giving away her possessions and reminds him that she sent him a scarf over the winter. She goes on to talk about her disdain for materialism and her new enthusiasm for charity. Johnny seems confused, asking Cady why she doesn't want to own things. He says that he wants things all the time, like a car, video games, watches, real art for his walls, and wooly clothing. Mirren chimes in that she would want to keep sentimental items, and Johnny calls her a "mushball."

Later that day, Gat finds Cady and brings her to the beach. He pulls her to him and hugs her, telling her that everyone else has had the chance to hug her but him. He then asks if she remembers the last time they are on the beach alone, which she doesn't. She is frustrated by her faulty memory and the fact that she is still in love with him and wants to forgive him for his silence. But she is not ready to forgive him, because she doesn't know what he did to her the night of the accident. So Cady tells him that the memory must have slipped her mind, and that it must not have been that important to him in the long run, either. Gat asks if she is angry, and she says yes, of course she is angry at being deserted.

Gat asks Cady if they can start over, and that his actions are "suboptimal." Cady is bothered by his use of the word "suboptimal," and tells him that the words he should use are "thoughtless and confusing and manipulative." He begs her to let him start over, and they agree to do just that, right after lunch. Cady has lunch at **Clairmont** and gets a tour of the renovated house. She thinks the house feels too "sharp" and empty—it is missing the floor-to-ceiling books, family photographs, and paintings of the golden retrievers. At least the younger cousins' rooms are personalized now, with toys and magazines strewn all over the floor, and Bonnie's books on ghosts, angels, and psychics piled in a corner. When Cady mentions all the missing items, Harris tells her that their old life is gone, and he has started over.

Cady's imagined interactions with Gat, Mirren, and Johnny mean that there was no one to receive the Barbie that Cady mailed to Mirren's house during the school year, and no one to reply to the emails she sent, either. Cady's attempts to control the world around her—and hold onto her deceased cousins and friend—is finite, and soon she will have to come to terms with the fact that she is alone, as the sole survivor of the fire.



In addition to the sense of rebellion against the family's excessive wealth, Cady's obsession with giving away her belongings offers her a connection to the people she has lost. It brings her closer to Gat, whose rants against materialism she has internalized out of love for him; it also makes her feel connected to Tipper through her perceived sense of charity, which was a salient aspect of her grandmother's personality.



Of all the loss Cady has had to deal with, her relationship with Gat may be the most difficult for her. His death leaves so many questions unanswered for her, and here she also notes that she is angry at him for deserting her – for dying—when their relationship was just beginning to take shape. At the same time, Cady wonders what Gat did to her on the night of the accident, as she still believes she is the only victim of the events of that evening, and that the other Liars escaped unharmed.



Cady invents her interactions with the other Liars down to the smallest details—such as the argument over the use of the word "suboptimal," in this case—as a way of continuing her life with them, because she is not ready to let them go quite yet. In contrast, during her lunch at Clairmont, she is faced with the aftermath of the fire in the form of a stark and unwelcoming house. It is interesting to note that Harris is viewing his life in a before versus after dichotomy, just as Cady has done. And, like her, he is living in a world with few material comforts—he and Cady both seem to want to rid themselves of anything that reminds them of life before the fire.



Harris asks Cady where “the young man” is, and she thinks he is referring to Johnny, but he means Gat. He looks faint and clutches a nearby desk, and Cady asks him if he is okay. He says that he is okay, and that he had a book he promised to give to Gat. Cady reminds him that there are no books in the house anymore, and he yells at her. Carrie comes in to help, and Cady asks her about the previous night when they saw each other on the path. She asks if Carrie found Johnny, and Carrie responds that she has no idea what Cady is talking about.

The younger cousins ask Cady if she will take them tubing, but Penny tells Cady that she is not allowed to drive the boat. After lunch, Cady goes into the living room with the younger boys, Will and Taft, and tries to ask them about the previous summer. When she asks if they went boating with Johnny and Gat, they stop jumping and simply say no. She continues to ask questions, when Will responds that they are not supposed to talk to her about the accident because it will make her headaches worse. Cady tells them that she just wants to know about the previous summer, when she was in Europe, but the boys tell her they don't want to talk to her anymore and leave to play Angry Birds.

Cady goes over to Cuddledown and helps the Liars rearrange the furniture. She asks if Bess will be upset that they are redecorating, and Mirren tells Cady that Bess hates the house—she wishes that Harris would remodel it and feels like the least loved daughter because her house has been ignored. When Cady asks if Bess actually asked Harris to remodel the house, Johnny gives her an odd look and asks how she doesn't remember. Mirren scolds Johnny and reminds him that they are supposed to go easy on Cady for forgetting things. Mirren comments that Johnny is being “feeble.” Cady says that he has just had a “suboptimal” moment; at the word “suboptimal,” Gat touches Cady's shoulder, and she knows that they have started over.

The Liars play tennis, and on the way back Gat asks Cady how her trip to Europe is. Cady informs them that she spent most of her time vomiting in the bathrooms of tourist sites. Mirren asks how Cady can ask them not to feel sorry for her and then tell a story like that. Gat and Johnny also tell her that they are jealous, because they have never been to Rome; Cady responds that they will go at some point, either in college or afterwards. When Cady is back at the house, her mother asks her if she is playing tennis, and praises her for getting back into an activity she used to love. Penny offers to play with her any time, but Cady is not interested.

This interaction between Cady and Harris is strange and uncomfortable, mainly because Harris has information that Cady does not—knowledge of the fire and the deaths of Mirren, Gat, and Johnny—but his memory is often faulty due to the onset of dementia. Thus, they are both momentarily under the impression that Gat still exists and are both living only partially in the present.



Cady's quest to learn more about the events leading up to the accident, and to find out more about the summer she was away, is not going well and she does not understand why. As she is missing a key piece of information—she asks Will and Taft to talk about their dead family members—she is unaware that her attempts at conversation are distressing to the young boys. They have been advised not to tell Cady anything, but beyond that, they have no interest in discussing such a painful subject, anyway.



This reference to Bess's feelings about Cuddledown, and her jealousy of her sisters for having nicer summer homes, is one of the first signs that Cady is beginning to remember the drama that led them to burn down Clairmont. It is important to keep in mind that Cady is not conversing with Mirren, Johnny, and Gat, but rather with versions of them she has created in her head—therefore, when Johnny reminds her of a forgotten memory, it is really that Cady is recovering those memories on her own.



Despite some minor recovered memories, Cady is still mainly in the dark about what has happened to her and the other Liars, and this is very clear in their conversation about her trip to Europe. She continues to see herself as the main victim—or possibly the only one—and feels jealous of the Liars. She tells them that they will get to see Rome and other foreign lands when they are older, suggesting that she ironically feels they have opportunities for the future that are unavailable to her now.



Cady suddenly has a recovered memory of a dinner on the **Clairmont** lawn. She and Gat are sitting next to each other, and Harris began to talk about renovating his house in Boston, and his daughters began arguing about it. They know that Bess wants the Boston house—it is worth \$4 million, and the girls grew up in it. Harris asks Bess what she wants him to do with the house, and if she would help him remodel it. Penny, who is drunk at that point, accuses Harris of cutting the other sisters out, and Harris accuses them all of acting crazy. Now, two years later, Cady looks at her mother and aunts as they sit together happily, and she wonders what has changed.

At midnight that night, Cady and the Liars are playing Scrabble and talking about their younger cousins. Cady announces that Taft has a motto, just like their grandfather does, and they all talk about Harris's various mottos: "don't take no for an answer," "no one likes a waffler," and "never take a seat in the back of the room." Taft's motto is "drugs are not your friend," likely from his drug education class at school. Mirren comments that Bonnie and Liberty are kleptomaniacs now, and that they seem beyond help. The Liars then discuss possible mottos of their own, like "be a little kinder than you have to," or "never eat anything bigger than your ass."

Gat claims not to have a motto, then decides that his would be "do not accept an evil you can change," but Mirren does not like that one because she believes in accepting the world as it is. She and Gat have a sharp discussion about this, until Johnny breaks the ice by announcing that his motto is "never eat yellow snow." Cady says that her motto is "always do what you are afraid to do," and she writes it on the backs of her hands. Mirren disagrees with this motto as well, as she notes that it is dangerous, and someone could die for it.

Cady follows Gat out of the room and kisses him, and he kisses her back, only to pull away and tell her that they should not be doing it. He tells Cady that he is a mess, and then claims that she doesn't know him at all, because she has never met his mom or been to his apartment in New York City. He is a different person on **Beechwood**, where he is the only non-white person, with the exception of Ginny and Pablo. Cady asks who Ginny and Pablo are, and Gat points out that this is precisely the problem—Ginny and Pablo work on the island but are invisible to Cady. She feels ashamed by this, but tells Gat that she wants to see the world through his eyes, but he claims that she wouldn't understand it anyway.

This is Cady's first real memory of the events leading up to the fire at Clairmont, and begins to give her some context and perspective on what happened. Penny, Bess, and Carrie are all vying for their father's possessions and are using them to measure Harris's love for them. For his part, Harris—like the king of Cady's fairy tales—is a flawed human being and guilty of using his money to increase his power over his daughters, even if it tears them apart.



In this story, many of the characters choose a motto as a way of establishing and defining themselves as individuals. Cady will have a number of epiphanies about what Harris's mottoes say about him later on in the narrative; in this moment, however, the Liars grasp on to their own mottoes in an attempt at self-definition. Meanwhile, the reference to the twins' kleptomania shows yet another manifestation of the Sinclair family's obsession with wealth and possessions.



Each of their mottoes helps to define one aspect of the Liars: Mirren's main concern is keeping others pacified, and Gat is focused on changing the world, while Johnny refuses to take the idea seriously. Cady's motto reveals the complexity of her situation—she needs to be brave to face the memories she has suppressed. She knows that there is something in her past that scares her, though she doesn't yet recognize it.



This conversation between Cady and Gat is a continuation of the tensions that were building when he was alive—Cady has long been concerned about the fact that she only knows Gat in the context of Beechwood, and that he has a separate life in New York City that she doesn't know about and is not a part of. She is struggling with her sense of privilege and her sheltered upbringing, especially now that she has internalized so many of Gat's ideas about the need to fight inequality.



Gat continues, telling Cady that to Harris, Gat is like Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*: he is the “gypsy boy” in the novel who is taken in by the wealthy Earnshaw family. Heathcliff falls in love with Catherine, the daughter, and although she loves him as well, she and the rest of her family can’t help but see him as beneath them because of his background. Despite his efforts to turn himself into a gentleman, he is always an animal in their eyes; in the end, he becomes what they expect of him. Cady responds that she thinks the novel is a romance, but then realizes that Gat’s point is that Harris sees him as a “brute.” After a moment of silence, he says that it turns out that Harris is right all along.

Cady begins another **fairy tale**: once there was a king with three beautiful daughters, and when the first granddaughter was born, she was so tiny that her mother kept her in her pocket, and the rest of the family promptly forgot about her. One day, when the tiny princess was older, she wandered into the palace library and met a mouse who loved reading as much as she did. They fell in love, but when the tiny princess introduced the mouse to her family, they could not accept him, because he was an animal trying to pass himself off as a person. The tiny princess left the palace with the mouse and they traveled all over the world and lived happily ever after.

Cady has learned a lot about her family: Harris keeps confusing her with Mirren, the younger cousins are kleptomaniacs, the aunts argue over the house in Boston, Will regularly has nightmares, and Gat is like Heathcliff. She is crushed by her migraines and spends two days in bed. When Cady finally feels better, Harris takes her to Edgartown, a small village on Martha’s Vineyard, where they see Harris’s lawyer, who greets Cady warmly and tells her that he has heard a lot about her. Harris says that Cady has a good head on her shoulders, which sounds canned to Cady and bothers her. It also bothers her that she currently does not have a good head on her shoulders, and Harris is pointedly ignoring that.

While Cady has been unaware of this tension, Gat reveals to her his frustrations over his relationship with Harris, and hence with the rest of the Sinclair clan. Just as Heathcliff is a “gypsy boy”—a derogatory term that points to his lower-class upbringing—Gat is seen as inferior to the wealthy and glamorous Sinclair family. It seems that no one is good enough for the women of the Sinclair family in the eyes of Harris—he is exclusionary and competitive with all of the men who attempt to enter the family.



Cady’s fairy tales now include the granddaughter of the king—this is Cady’s way of thinking about her place in the family. Here, Cady represents herself as the king’s exceptionally tiny granddaughter, suggesting again that she is jealous of the advantages her cousins have that she does not, due to her migraines and memory loss. The mouse is Gat, of course, and he is rejected by the family for being different and inferior. But Cady ends the story by having the two of them escape the palace and the family in favor of their love. Even after so much time as passed, it is clear that Cady is still using her romantic (now imaginary) relationship with Gat as an escape from her family life.



The infallible and glamorous image of the Sinclair family that Harris is attempting to promote to outsiders is very different from what Cady sees from within. Harris talks to his lawyer about Cady, and she realizes that his words do not match her perception of herself at all, and she is frustrated by this misrepresentation. In addition, she has realized that the family is plagued with troubles and is far from perfect, despite what others might assume about them from a distance.



Cady has a recovered memory from summer fifteen—she asks about a goose statue in **Clairmont**, and Harris tells her about how he and Tipper went to China and brought back many beautiful things, including an ivory statue in Cuddledown. Cady mentions the fact that the ivory trade is illegal, and Harris brushes it off and notes that it is still available for sale for the right price. Suddenly, Cady is struck by her grandfather's privileged attitude, and his motto "don't take no for an answer" takes on a different meaning. She begins to tell him about something Gat read about the ivory trade, and Harris snaps at her that he doesn't care what Gat has read, calling him "that boy." Cady suggests that he sell the statues, and he chastises her, telling her that she cannot tell him what to do with his own money or possessions.

Later, Cady and Gat have another conversation about starting over—Gat feels bad about lecturing her, but Cady notes that they cannot start over every day. Gat tells her just to be normal and act like friends, just for a few days until things feel right again. Cady doesn't want to act normal—she wants to find out what happened to her. But she has been raised to pretend that things are okay when they are not. She agrees and hands him the fudge she bought with Harris.

The following day, Cady and Mirren take a boat to Edgartown without the boys. Mirren talks about her boyfriend, Drake Loggerhead, and what it's like to have "sexual intercourse," as she calls it. She says that it feels like roses and fireworks and rollercoasters. She also talks about going to Pomona College in the fall, and how she wants to ride horses this summer. Cady can only think about the fact that she must go back to high school for another year. Then she recalls the time they all went to Edgartown two years earlier, and how Gat bought her a book she wanted to read and inscribed it for her.

Cady tells Mirren about her memory, and how she remembers arguing with Harris about ivory statues, and how the aunts are fighting over the estate. She then asks Mirren why Gat disappeared after the accident, whether he went back to Raquel, and whether they fought, but Mirren just insists that she doesn't know. Cady asks Mirren why Gat seemed to be angry at her, but Mirren only says that Gat has good reason to be mad but won't say any more. When Cady sees her mother, Penny knows that she has taken the boat out without permission and lectures her about being reckless. Cady apologizes and then runs back to Windemere to write down everything she remembered on the chart above her bed.

Cady's conversation with Harris during summer fifteen is another pivotal moment in her understanding of the events leading up to the Clairmont fire. She has a tangible example of her grandfather's bigotry and disregard for others in pursuit of his own wants or needs, and this feeds into her growing disdain for the Sinclair family wealth and the greed that accompanies it. In addition, the fact that Cady references Gat's ideas when disagreeing with Harris angers him even further because he considers Gat to be beneath him, and again he refuses to even use his name.



Although Penny often reminds Cady to put away her feelings and "act normal," Cady is surprised to hear that from Gat, as well. Once again, since this is a conversation she is creating in her mind, this is Cady's manifestation of her concerns about her lack of freedom and self-determination.



Cady imagines her cousin Mirren, who has generally been very careful and risk-averse, taking big steps toward adulthood and freedom. In addition, when Cady later comes to the realization that the other Liars are dead, she will grieve the futures they have lost—not in vague, general terms, but rather in vivid detail, based on imagined conversations like this one. For the moment, though, she can only feel envy.



Still deeply concerned about her relationship with Gat and the questions that his death will leave unanswered, Cady begs Mirren for information about his mental state. This is information that she will never learn, because she wasn't able to talk to Gat about Raquel and his feelings for her before he died in the fire. As Cady returns to the island, her mother realizes that she has been out on the boat alone, despite the fact that Cady believes that she spent the entire time with Mirren.



The Liars discover that they can climb onto the roof of Cuddledown and get a view of nearly the entire island. Cady tells the others that when she dies, she wants her ashes scattered in the water on the small beach. Johnny and Mirren like the idea, but Gat says that he doesn't want to have his ashes there at all. Cady then asks if the other Liars have ever planned out their own funerals, like in *Tom Sawyer*, when everyone thinks that Tom, Huck, and Joe Harper are dead, and the boys attend their own funerals. She jokes that she wants to be remembered for winning a Nobel Prize and the Olympics—in handball, though she has never actually played the sport. Mirren notes that she would rather plan her wedding to Drake Loggerhead.

Mirren insists that it is too morbid to plan a funeral, so the Liars decide to plan Cady's Olympic medal party, including a gold dress for Cady, champagne flutes with gold balls inside, and gold handball goggles. Gat is excited about the prospect of a crew of female handball players celebrating along with Cady, and also notes that the party will have to be revamped if she only wins a silver medal. Cady feels that life is at its most beautiful on that day, and tells herself that no matter what happens in the future, in that one moment on the roof of Cuddledown, they are young forever.

This feeling of beauty and youth does not last, and the following days are not as good—the Liars do not want to go anywhere, and Mirren feels sick. Johnny creates a game in which he throws used tea bags into a mug of orange juice to see which one creates the biggest splash. Gat is reading through a list of the hundred greatest novels ever written, and Cady is starting to feel upset because he hasn't touched or kissed her since they agreed to act normal around each other. She is aching for him, but when she indulges in her feelings for Gat, her migraines come back to her like a "gnarled crone" scratching at her brain.

One afternoon, Cady finds Johnny alone, building something out of Legos. The two of them have lunch together, and Cady asks Johnny why he never contacted her after her accident. She worries that it is because she is asking about Gat too much, but Johnny admits that he disappeared because he is a jerk and doesn't think through his decisions. She asks why Gat disappeared, and Johnny says that that is a completely different question. Cady tells Johnny about how Gat has been acting towards her, and Johnny explains that Gat is a jerk for cheating on Raquel with Cady, and that he hated himself for it. But when he abandoned Cady, he hated himself even more.

This conversation between Cady and the other Liars about death, ashes, and funerals is a moment of sad irony—Cady brings up the topic in a lighthearted manner, without knowing that Johnny, Mirren, and Gat already have their ashes buried in the Beechwood soil. Gat's comment—that he would not like to have his ashes spread across the island—is a small but poignant reminder that he never got to return home to his family at the end of summer fifteen. Again, Cady is getting closer to recognizing what really happened to her friends.



A pattern is slowly developing in the conversations between Cady and the other Liars—they will discuss topics that refer to the events of summer fifteen for a while, and then will move on to lighter topics, go for a swim, or play a game. This reflects Cady's internal process of engaging with these difficult memories: she comes close to understanding what happened that summer, and then needs to step back to relieve some of the emotional pressure of those memories.



Like many people who have experienced the death of a loved one, Cady wants to recapture the feelings she had when the Liars were alive, and re-live a perfect moment with them. The day on the Cuddledown roof is her opportunity to do that. But the malaise that sets in afterwards is a sign that she is getting closer to remembering what happened and coming to terms with the fact that they are gone and will never be in her life again.



Like her conversation with Mirren, Cady's chat with Johnny is about dealing with the loneliness of loss. She wants to understand why he never contacted her—that is, why he will never be around for her to communicate with again. She also asks about Gat, once again returning to the fact that she will never be able to understand or resolve some of the more complex aspects of their relationship. She can only imagine how Gat might have felt about it.



Cady finally finds herself alone with Gat one evening at Cuddledown and decides that this is the time for them to talk about their relationship. Gat tells Cady that she is beautiful and asks if she has a boyfriend in Vermont. Cady replies that her boyfriend's name is Percocet, the name of a painkiller that she takes for her migraines. Gat tells Cady that she keeps asking everyone not to feel sorry for her, but then she says things that make it clear that she does, in fact, want people to feel sorry for her. Yet Cady has no idea how lucky she is: Harris sent her to Europe for eight weeks. Cady is surprised because she doesn't realize that it is Harris who paid for the trip, but knows that it is the truth, that her father never would have been able to afford such an expense.

Cady wonders why Harris would fund such a trip, and why he wouldn't send Penny along as well. She tells Gat that she knows she is privileged and lucky, and that she shouldn't be ungrateful, but she also knows that it is awful to suffer from migraines like hers and that she sometimes wishes she was dead, just to make the pain stop. Gat responds harshly that she does not wish she were dead, and that she shouldn't ever say that. Cady admits that she knows that one day, her migraines will go away, and she just has to wait for that to happen. Gat puts his arms around her and suddenly Cady feels that everything is the way it should be.

Mirren is getting sick all the time and refuses to do anything but listen to the same song over and over, singing along. Cady tells her that she has to stop singing that song, and Mirren turns serious and tells Cady that she and Gat shouldn't be together. She asks Cady to leave Gat alone, because she will only make things harder for him and hurt him in the end. Cady responds that it is Gat who will probably hurt her, and she is willing to accept that pain rather than lose Gat altogether. Mirren admits that she lied about having a boyfriend—she envied the connection that Gat and Cady had, and wanted it so much that she ended up making up a lie about Drake Loggerhead.

At that moment, Penny calls for Cady to come and help make lunch, and Cady tells Mirren that she has to go. Penny hands Cady a tomato to slice and asks why she is always spending time down at the beach. She says that Cady should spend more time with the younger cousins and with Harris, because he won't be around forever. She also scolds her for having a sunburn.

Cady's conversation with Gat helps her get closer to the truth about the accident—she realizes that Harris was involved in keeping her away from Beechwood for the summer following the accident, which is important. She originally believed it was only because her father wanted to spend more time with her. But she is beginning to understand that her whole family was involved in the process of helping her heal by keeping her away from the island, which could have potentially brought back painful and overwhelming memories for her.



Thanks to her conversations with Gat over the past few years—and especially during summer fifteen, before his death—Cady is more aware of her own privilege and the number of opportunities she has that others (like Gat) do not. But then, when Cady makes a comment about wishing she were dead, Gat is outraged because she does not yet realize that her life itself is a privilege that Gat, Johnny, and Mirren do not have either.



Mirren's warning to Cady that she should leave Gat alone is important, because Cady is slowly beginning to realize that she will need to say goodbye to Gat and leave their relationship behind. Yet all of this is happening on a subconscious level, as she still consciously believes that Gat is alive and that they can continue their relationship. She also realizes that Mirren does not have the perfect life she once thought, and instead has lied to Cady about it, further piercing the veneer of perfection that Cady's family and friends so desperately try to maintain.



Cady's imagined conversations with Mirren are interrupted by Penny, who brings her back to real life. From Penny's perspective, Cady may have lost the Liars in the fire, but she still has the rest of her family around her, and she will need to re-connect to them if she is to fully heal.



It is Cady's third week on **Beechwood** Island, she is still getting migraines, and her supply of medicine is getting low. She wonders if her mother or cousins are taking her pills and considers the possibility that she is taking more than she realizes. After a few days alone in her room, Cady comes to see the Liars and asks what they have been doing while she was resting. They tell her that they went to the Nantucket donut shop for glazed twist, Boston crème, and jelly donuts. Cady accepts their answer, but knows that they are lying to her, because she knows that this particular donut shop only sells cake donuts.

One evening while Cady is resting in her room, she wakes to find Gat standing over her bed, looking at the notes she has been keeping to help jog her memory. She reminds him that no one wants to talk to her about what happened the summer of the accident, but Gat tells her that he is ready to talk. He apologizes for being cruel to her, because he had a girlfriend at home but is also in love with Cady. He tells her that he feels guilty because he wants things he cannot have, but Cady still does not understand what he means. She tells him that she believes someone did something to her that is too awful to remember, but Gat only kisses her and tells her he loves her.

The following day, the Liars decide to take the kayaks out to a secluded spot on the far side of the island. At first, Mirren doesn't want Cady to go because she worries that she will hit her head again, but Gat says that Cady should come, and that ends the argument. When they get to the secluded spot, Gat and Johnny climb up the rocks to a cliff and decide to jump the twenty-five feet into the water. Cady wants to join them, but everyone advises against it. Cady gets angry and wants to know why they can jump into the water and she cannot—she decides that she must do it in order to prove herself strong and brave. She jumps, plunges into the icy water, and swims back to shore. She is fine, and feels more alive than ever.

Cady thinks about a book she gives to Gat, called *Charmed Life*, in which there are parallel universes with different events happening to the same people simultaneously. She wonders if this is possible in real life: if there is a parallel universe in which Cady dies jumping off the cliff, and her family is currently attending her funeral. And another in which Johnny hurts himself and has to be airlifted to the hospital to care for his injuries. And finally, another, in which Cady doesn't go with the Liars to the secluded cove at all, and they grow apart and are no longer close friends.

This reference to Cady's use of medication to combat her migraines is an important note in this story: she is self-medicating and possibly abusing the medicine, and this may be the reason she is able to immerse herself so deeply in a fantasy world. This may also make her slightly paranoid around them as well—like when she catches them in a lie about where they have been while she was resting.



Finally, Cady has gotten Gat to agree to talk to her about summer fifteen and all of the things she does not yet remember. But first, before he can lead her towards the truth of what happened that night, Gat needs to reassure Cady that he loves her and that he is sorry for trying to pursue a relationship with both Cady and Raquel, his girlfriend from home. These are things Cady needs to hear before exposing herself to the painful memories of the fire, since she will need her full emotional capacity to cope with the trauma.



As she nears the moment when her memories will finally resurface, Cady must remind herself that she is brave, and that she is capable of doing things that scare her. The metaphor is strong here: Cady must jump in and submerge herself, only to come back up and find that she has survived. Likewise, she must re-live her memories of the fire, feel the pain and guilt of losing the three people closest to her heart, and only then will she resurface as a survivor and find a way to heal the wounds.



The fantasy of experiencing parallel universes is completely understandable when someone has experienced a tragic accident that changed their life. Cady wonders how life would have been different if she—or the other Liars—had made different decisions and their summer had taken a different path. Of course, Cady is already experiencing her own parallel universe, in which the Liars survived and are on Beechwood with her.



Cady has another recovered memory, in which her aunt Carrie is crying, and wearing Johnny's blue windbreaker. Cady can't figure out why Carrie is so upset, or why she is wearing Johnny's jacket; she ends up talking to Mirren about the memory and then asking her, again, what happened during summer fifteen. Mirren reminds Cady that the doctors have advised against talking about what happened until Cady recovers her memories on her own, but Cady is impatient to find out as much as she can. She suddenly asks Mirren why she never leaves Cuddledown, wondering if she has become agoraphobic. Mirren responds that she just doesn't feel well, but when Cady suggests that Bess take her to the doctor, Mirren refuses.

Cady wakes to find a tire swing hanging from the tree in front of Windemere, just like the one that used to hang in front of **Clairmont**, that Tipper would swing Cady on when she is younger. She recalls squeezing into the tire swing with Johnny, Gat, and Mirren during summer fifteen, and how they hardly fit. They yelled for a push and finally convinced Taft and Will to push them once, and their combined weight made them swing around and around until they are dizzy. Cady looks inside of the new tire swing and finds an envelope addressed to her from Gat. Inside, she finds a dozen dried roses.

Cady tells another **fairy tale**: there once was a king with three beautiful daughters, and they began to have children of their own. One of the daughters gave birth to twins—one human and one mooseling, which brought the daughter shame. As the children grew up, so did the mooseling, and he became smarter than his human brother and cousins, but the king and queen still felt disgusted by him. When he was old enough, his mother packed him a bag and sent him away from the castle, and he was happy to escape. Cady ends the story by noting that maybe, just maybe, the mooseling will return to burn the castle to the ground.

After weeks of attempting to bring back her memories, Cady is finally picturing moments from the night of the fire, though she is still unable to connect them or understand their context. This snippet of memory must be from the night of the fire or perhaps days afterwards, as her aunt Carrie is grieving for her dead son and desperately clinging to his possessions. At the same time, Cady begins to wonder why she is the only person who interacts with the Liars—she has not seen them with anyone else for the entire summer, and finally begins to question why.



The appearance of the tire swing is the catalyst that will bring Cady's memory flooding back—while it has nothing to do with the fire itself, this swing is a tangible item that connects Cady to summer fifteen. In addition, the dried roses from Gat that she finds in the tire swing will also bring her back to that summer and will help her come to terms with all of the unresolved issues in her relationship with Gat.



As the final fairy tale of this section of the novel, this story brings together Cady's feelings about her grandfather, her family's money and glamour, and the bigotry that seemed to be keeping her and Gat apart. As in the previous story, the young princess falls in love with an animal who is eventually sent away from the castle. But this time, Cady incorporates her memory of summer fifteen by suggesting that the banished animal will start a fire.



PART 4: LOOK, A FIRE

There is a fire on the southern part of **Beechwood** Island. **Clairmont** is on fire, and there is no one to help. Cady can see firefighters coming in from the Vineyard and Woods Hole to try to put out the fire that she set. She, Johnny, Mirren, and Gat set fire to Clairmont—they burned down the castle of the king with the three beautiful daughters. Cady remembers this so suddenly that she falls over and plunges into the ocean and all the way to the bottom. She wakes up in her bed in Windemere at dawn and realizes that it is her last week at Beechwood. She looks over at New Clairmont, built on the ashes of her family history: the life her grandparents built together, the many items of great value inside, the family portraits and history. Cady knows that she and the Liars waited until everyone was away, and they burned it all down.

Cady goes to Cuddledown to tell the Liars about this memory and reveal the fact that she knows they are criminals. Johnny asks her what else she remembers, and she realizes that the snippets of memory that she has had all along—Mirren holding a gas can, Harris standing by a tree watching a bonfire—they are from that night, but she hadn't put them together correctly before this moment. Johnny helps her fill some of it in: the aunts were getting drunk and fighting throughout summer fifteen, and Harris only egged them on by turning them against one another. Carrie wanted Johnny to help her convince Harris to give her the majority of the inheritance; she asked him to talk badly of Cady as the eldest grandchild.

Cady remembers Penny asking her to write a sympathy card to Harris to remind him that she cares about him. Cady felt that this was false—she cared about her grandfather, of course, but she didn't like having to write to him and remind him all the time. Penny also suggested that Cady remind Harris of all her success in school to show that she was well rounded and an asset to the Sinclair family. When Cady pressed her mother about why writing these letters is so important, Penny explained that Harris is “very impressionable” and needed reminding that Cady is the eldest grandchild, despite the fact that Johnny is only three weeks younger, and a boy.

Cady's recovered memory of the fire is a major turning point in the novel, and immediately gives her a different perspective on the construction of New Clairmont. In addition, she goes from believing that something happened to her to understanding that she was one of the main actors in the tragedy. She also recognizes the significance of Clairmont as the home base of her family history. She feels a pang of guilt for depriving her family of its central gathering place, but that is only a small peek at the pain she will feel when she realizes all they have lost.



Cady's knowledge of the fire opens the floodgates of her memory, and she is able to put pieces together that she had all along. She and Johnny talk about the events leading up to the fire, which are as important as the fire itself, in terms of understanding why it happened. Her memories of the aunts fighting over inheritance, and the way they used their children as pawns to vie for Harris's attention, all give Cady a hint of why the Liars felt they needed to set fire to Clairmont in the first place.



One of the many tactics that the Sinclair sisters used to compete against one another was to pit their children against each other to vie for Harris's admiration and favor. They knew that they had to play into his image of the family as a line of successful, glamorous, and well-adjusted people, and they used Johnny, Cady, and Mirren to perpetuate that image for Harris, even if it involved telling white lies about their lives.



After Tipper's death, the sisters took turns supporting Harris, but instead of cooperating as they had in the past, they are constantly fighting. Tipper had held the family together, and without her, her daughters fought over her possessions. Bess had inventoried all of the items of value, and they would get drunk and argue over nearly every item on the list. This would also turn into an argument about which sister had been most helpful to their parents in the past and is thus more deserving of their possessions. They would involve their children, as well—Penny asked Cady to tell Harris how much she loves a certain set of tablecloths, and Bess did the same with Mirren. In the end, neither Cady nor Mirren asked Harris for the tablecloths, because they didn't want them.

That summer, Cady and Gat fell in love, and Cady doesn't ask about Raquel. One evening, as the whole family is celebrating the twins' birthdays at **Clairmont**, Cady and Gat sat next to one another at the table. Harris came over, wedged himself between them, and began to ask the Liars whether they thought he should leave the majority of his estate to Harvard to fund a student center. Penny overheard and was upset by this idea, but the grandchildren played along, suggesting that he name it The Sinclair Center for Socialization and Snacks. They felt good that was is asking their opinion, and were offended when Penny commented that they were only children and didn't understand the importance of the conversation.

The conversation helped Cady recognize how much the aunts needed Harris's money. As she looked around the table, she thought about how Carrie doesn't have any income of her own since the failure of her jewelry store, yet both of her sons went to private school. Bess was a stay-at-home mom with four kids to support and had lost her house when she divorced. Penny had a dog breeding business that hardly paid anything at all. All of Harris's daughters were living off of his trust and needed the inheritance money. So when Harris suggested that he might donate that money to Harvard, he made a veiled threat to his own children.

Without the influence of their mother—who viewed wealth as something to share with others—the Sinclair sisters were only focused on the family possessions. In addition, the sisters monetized their love for their parents, suggesting that each past act of kindness to Tipper and Harris came with a price attached. The most disturbing aspect of this competition among the sisters was that they no longer had any reason to be together or to love one another beyond these arguments about material possessions and their future inheritance.



This scene at Clairmont very clearly juxtaposes the pure and genuine love between Cady and Gat with the Sinclair family relations, which devolved into pettiness and greed. Once again, Harris positioned himself between Cady and Gat as a reminder to Gat that he, as the patriarch, was the center of every family gathering, and that he had the power to keep Gat from Cady if he wants. He also manipulated the conversation to keep the family focused on his inheritance, thus making him the center of attention.



While Cady previously took her family's money for granted, the ongoing arguments about inheritance between the aunts caused her to look more critically at their finances and how it affected the family dynamic. On one hand, his daughters were unable to support themselves and just assumed he would provide for them; on the other hand, Harris set up this system himself in order to maintain control over his daughters even as adults.



Later that summer, when the family was gathered for cocktail hour at **Clairmont**, Harris casually commented that according to Bess, Penny and Cady were probably very lonely in Windemere on their own. Bess tries to deny it, but Harris reminded her that she had mentioned Windemere's five bedrooms and renovated kitchen, and that Penny wouldn't need all of that anymore. Penny replied that she and Cady were not lonely at all and loved Windemere, turning to Cady to confirm this statement. Cady knew that she was supposed to say she loved Windemere and **Beechwood**, and Harris, and everything he stood for, but she was not interested in playing the game that had been going on all summer. Cady looked at her grandfather, told him that Windemere was too big for the two of them, and walked out of the room.

Penny was upset with Cady on the walk home, and asked her why she didn't back up the statement that Windemere was just right for the two of them. She asked if Cady wanted to lose the house, reminding her that it was Bess's own fault that she had such a big family and no husband to support her. She reminded Cady that the two of them had to look out for themselves, a statement that Cady found ridiculous. She reminded her mother that they had a trust fund, and that there are many people in the world who have nothing. Tipper is the only person who wanted to do anything good with the money, and now her daughters were arguing over her pearls and other meaningless items.

Penny responded that Cady was acting superior and just parroting what she had heard from Gat. Neither Gat nor Cady had to pay bills or had a family to support, yet they were passing judgement on Penny and her sisters. She demanded that Cady return to **Clairmont** to tell Harris that she wanted to live in Windemere, but Cady refused. She told Penny to tell Harris to stop manipulating the family. She suggested that the sisters get jobs and make their own money so they wouldn't be so dependent on his inheritance. But Penny replied with an ultimatum: if she wanted to continue to see Gat, she needed to talk to Harris about Windemere. Recognizing her mother's power over her, Cady did as she was told. Harris told her that she and Penny would keep Windemere, but later Cady found out from Mirren that Harris had also promised Windemere to Bess.

This conversation illustrates exactly how much Harris fanned the flames when it came to his daughters' arguments over money and possessions. He brought up details from a private conversation with Bess in order to bring the tensions to the surface, almost forcing them to argue over who would get which summer house. As usual, Harris's manipulations were successful—Penny felt the need to defend herself and her right to Windemere. Cady, on the other hand, could see through the manipulations and was unwilling to play the same games her mother did.



Later in the evening, as Cady and Penny talked about the incident, it was clear that Penny's deepest fear was the loss of her lifestyle, and she saw the money available to her as finite and scarce. Cady's view was much more relative, as she noted that in comparison with many other people in the world, their financial resources were plentiful. She also criticized her mother by suggesting that this scarcity mindset made the daughters inferior to Tipper.



Penny correctly guessed that Cady's new attitude towards material possessions was directly linked to her conversations with Gat, and used this against her daughter. First of all, while Cady saw Gat as worldly and sophisticated, Penny reminded her that regardless of what he had seen so far, he was still looking at the world from a child's point of view, unaware of the complexity of adult responsibilities. But it was Penny's ultimatum that carried the most weight, as it reminded Cady that regardless of how mature and independent she and Gat believed themselves to be, the Sinclairs had the power to keep them apart. This reality likely played a significant role in Cady's decision to destroy her family's legacy in hopes of improving the relationships between them and changing how they treated Gat.



Cady and Gat were tossing around tennis balls one evening, when Gat mentioned that Harris never called him by his name—he only calls him “young man.” When Cady wondered why that was, Gat responded that by using his name, Harris would then acknowledge him as the Indian boy whom he caught kissing his precious granddaughter, and whose Indian uncle is corrupting Carrie, his “pure white daughter.” Harris wanted to consider himself liberal—and he even voted for Obama—but deep down, he didn’t want people of color in his family. So he accepted Gat and Ed superficially, but made sure to use words like “sir” and “young man” to cement their status as outsiders.

Gat told Cady that Ed proposed to Carrie the previous fall, which was news to Cady. He went on to explain that Ed and Carrie had been together nine years, that Johnny and Will considered him a father figure, and that Ed wanted to make it official. He prepared everything in advance, from flowers and candles to Carrie’s favorite meals, to the boys all dressed in white to witness the event. But when he produced the ring and gets on one knee to ask her, Carrie said no. Regardless of how she felt about Ed, she knew that marrying him could anger Harris and she could lose her share of the inheritance—she wasn’t willing to take that risk.

In that moment, Cady looked at Gat and felt that she knew him completely, and leaned in to kiss him. She asked him why he hadn’t mentioned all of this before, and Gat responded that he didn’t want to ruin the joy of being on **Beechwood** for the summer—he wanted to imagine that life is perfect while he is there. The two of them walked out to the water, climbed up onto a rock, took off most of their clothes, and held each other, trying to forget about everything that was wrong with the Sinclair family.

Cady tells another **fairy tale**, about a wealthy merchant with three beautiful daughters. One evening before leaving for a journey, he asked his daughters what he could bring back for them. The first two asked for silk, lace, rubies, and emeralds, but the eldest only wanted a rose. On his way back from his trip, the merchant found a rose along a fence and cut one for his daughter, when a cloaked figure scolded him for stealing the rose. He took off his cloak to reveal his hideous, monstrous face, and told the merchant that he must bring him the first thing he saw upon his return, in exchange for the stolen rose. Of course, when the merchant arrived home, he saw his eldest daughter first, and knew that he must give her to the beast. The daughter came to love the beast, as everyone already knows from the original tale—she saw his charm, intellect, and sensitive heart. But her father would always see him as a hideous monster.

Cady was finally starting to see how much control Harris had over the entire family, and how he was able to impose his own biases and prejudices on them. She had very little reason to think about her grandfather’s politics or his thoughts on race until Gat and his uncle Ed entered the family. Gat unmasked Harris as a hypocrite who espoused one set of values for the general public, but maintained a separate, less liberal set of values for his own family.



The story of Ed’s proposal to Carrie is bittersweet—on one hand, it demonstrates how genuine Ed’s love for Carrie was, and how much he wanted to provide for his girlfriend and her family. This scene humanizes Ed and underscores the fact that his values were likely more honorable than Harris’s. But it also highlights how dependent Carrie was upon her father’s approval, and what was at stake for her if she went against his wishes, even if those wishes were unreasonable.



While Cady remained blissfully unaware of the quiet bigotry directed at Ed and Gat, Gat did not want to talk to her about it and ruin their summer fun. It is interesting that Gat chose to hold back that information from Cady, who only craved a deeper connection to Gat and to know as much about his life and thoughts as possible.



The fairy tale that Cady tells this time is the basic plot of Beauty and the Beast, which she acknowledges near the end of the story. She notes that while the beautiful girl could see the beast for the person he was on the inside, in this version of the story, her father could never accept him or see beyond his monstrous looks. This story can refer to both Cady and Carrie, who fell in love with men who Harris considered monstrous on the outside. The point of this retelling, of course, is to call into question the validity of the fairy tale’s happy ending, especially in this case, when the beautiful young girl is not in control of her life or her choices of partners.



One night, Gat woke Cady up by throwing pebbles at her bedroom window. She came out and they decided to raid the pantry in **Clairmont** to find chocolate. When they got into the pantry and began rummaging for snacks, they heard the voices of Carrie, Penny, and Bess, who were drunk and arguing in the kitchen. They were fighting over the inheritance, of course—Bess was telling the others that she did all of the funeral arrangements for Tipper and stayed with Harris while he mourned her death, so she should be compensated in some way for her extra work. The others countered that she lived close by and it was easier for her to do it, to which Bess replied that she also had to work and take care of four children—and Penny reminded her that it is only a part-time job, anyway.

The sisters continued arguing: Carrie reminded them all that Harris called her all the time to talk, and that she also came to visit him when he is mourning. Bess doesn't consider that a real effort, and she reiterated that she did all of the hard work but as still stuck in Cuddledown, the worst of the houses because of its old, run-down kitchen. Both Windemere and Red Gate got renovations, but Cuddledown was neglected—just as Bess feels she was being neglected, despite all of her work. She then tore into Carrie for bringing Ed and Gat to the island every summer, “parad[ing] [them] around like a defiant girl with a forbidden toy,” despite the fact that she knew Harris did not approve. In response, Carrie slapped Bess across the face. Overhearing the entire conversation, Cady and Gat held hands on the floor of the pantry, unsure of what to do.

A few days later, Harris talked to Johnny privately to ask him a favor. He wanted Gat to stop coming to family dinners at **Clairmont**, and when Johnny refused to do his bidding, Harris withdrew all of the money from Johnny's college fund. Eventually, he convinced Carrie to talk to Gat: she told him that it was “riling Harris up,” and that it would be better if he just ate alone at one of the other houses. Gat agreed not to come to dinner at Clairmont, and all of the other Liars boycotted the family dinners in protest. Bess began to push her children to talk to Harris about moving into Windemere—they were to remind their grandfather that they were the future of the family, because Johnny and Cady weren't smart enough to get into Harvard, but Mirren was. Mirren refused.

This scene is also a significant moment in Cady's memory of her fifteenth summer on the island, because while the Liars witnessed a great deal of fighting among their aunts, in this moment they were overhearing the women's intimate and unfiltered conversation. The Sinclair sisters were programmed to present a different version of themselves in public, and that even extended to the conversations at family dinners and gatherings—it is only when they were completely alone that they were truly honest with each other.



The argument between the sisters is very similar to the ones that they have when Harris and the children are present, but they consumed more alcohol and were more aggressive towards one another. This is a side of the women that neither Gat nor Cady had seen up to this point, and it made clear to them that the family's money was damaging the relationship between the sisters. All of this came to a head when Bess mentioned Ed, reminding Carrie that she was not in control of her love life, and that Harris disapproved of this relationship that made her happy and secure.



In contrast to the aunts, the Liars were unwilling to let Harris control their lives and impose his bigotry on them. When Harris asked him to disinvite Gat from the family dinners, Johnny was willing to risk the loss of his inheritance to stand his ground—something his own mother (Carrie) was unable to do. All of the Liars felt that when it came to Gat, they were willing to disobey their parents and grandfather, and recognize that they were being pushed to choose between Gat and the Sinclair family.



Penny spoke with Cady about her relationship with Gat, explaining that her “summer fling” was putting everything at risk, including their summer home and their future inheritance. She then demanded that Cady stop seeing Gat, which she refused to do. That night, the Liars took a few prized possessions from the houses—including the ivory goose Harris purchased in China for Tipper—and took them to the dock and smashed them to bits. They then got a bucket of water from the ocean and rinsed the dock clean, washing away the remnants of the destroyed items.

The Liars began to fantasize about **Clairmont**’s destruction via a natural disaster, as a way for God to punish the family for their greed, pettiness, and bigotry. After that, they reasoned, the family would learn to love again and would be purified.

The following day, the Liars were in the garden of Red Gate and could hear Harris and his daughters arguing at **Clairmont**. Penny was drunkenly complaining about how she had to repeatedly win Harris’s love, and that she was sure that her sisters would get all his inheritance and she would end up with nothing. She even threatened to take Cady away if she didn’t get what she wanted, which prompted Harris to yell at her about how she should be working for what she wants, rather than waiting for it to come to her. He directed his speech at Will and Taft, as well, although they were nearly crying at this point. Harris reminded those around him that the Sinclairs were a grand old family with strong values and traditions, and that his daughters were sullyng the family name with their divorces and lack of work ethic.

Cady asks Johnny for more memories like these, as they sit in Cuddledown talking about summer fifteen. Johnny tells her that after the argument, Carrie left the island with Will, Penny went to see a friend of hers on Martha’s Vineyard, and even Harris left the island. The Liars stayed behind and planned the fire. They convinced Bess to take the younger kids to the mainland to see a movie, and then they got drunk on wine and talked about what they were going to do. Gat was especially angry, because he knew he wouldn’t come back to **Beechwood**. If Carrie ended up marrying Ed, they would be cut off, and if she left Ed, Gat wouldn’t have any connection to the Sinclairs.

Harris’s campaign to rid himself of Gat would not be complete without ensuring that he no longer spent time alone with Cady—but when Penny asked her daughter to stop seeing Gat, she refused. This was the final straw for Cady, as she knew that she would not be able to see him during the school year and did not want to lose him during the summers. They smashed some valuable items of Harris’s as a prelude to their real act of rebellion.



The Liars focused their anger not on a person, but on Clairmont itself, as a symbol of what was destroying the family. The first step was to hope it is destroyed, and later this progressed to them taking action on their own.



Penny’s drunken comments highlight the fact that the Sinclair sisters conflated money with love—she believed that she would not get any of the inheritance, and interpreted that to mean that Harris did not love her as much as her sisters. Harris was annoyed by the argument despite the fact that he was fueling the flames for the entire summer. His way of resolving the problem was to remind everyone of the image that he has constructed of the Sinclair family and to remind them of how far they strayed from the façade he worked so hard to create.



The narration returns to present day, as Cady is talking to Johnny about these recovered memories. Now that she has clearly understood the context of the summer, she is ready to remember the events leading up to the fire at Clairmont. She knows that it happened, but she will need to re-experience it in order to understand it and come to terms with her feelings of guilt and grief. Johnny reminds Cady that they chose to burn down Clairmont in order to save their friendship and her relationship with Gat.



The Liars decided that **Clairmont** was a symbol of everything that was wrong with the family—Gat described it as the “seat of the patriarchy,” which Johnny laughed at, but he was right. Clairmont housed the family possessions and the paperwork, and with those items lost in a fire, there would be nothing to fight over. They thought of it as a way to unite the family. Cady remembers some of this, like how Gat cried—like a man, not a boy, like he had experienced the bitterness of life. Someone brought up the fact that they could still see one another even if they didn’t have this special time on the island, but they weren’t convinced. They wanted to make a bigger statement and force the family to change their ways.

Cady was in love with Gat and couldn’t bear to have him taken away from her, and this was really fueling her desire to take action. She was determined not to let their love be threatened—inspired by Gat’s motto, she would not accept an evil she could change. She even thought of herself as a hero. She and Gat convinced Mirren and Johnny, and they all decided to do it together. They made their plan: they would soak paper and cardboard in extra gas from the motorboats, and then they would light a roll of paper towels and throw it all into the pile. They would do this on every floor of **Clairmont**—Gat in the basement, Cady on the ground floor, and Johnny and Mirren on the upper floors.

Johnny and Mirren told Cady that the fire departments from Martha’s Vineyard and Woods Hole took a long time to arrive, which is what they had hoped for. They were planning to call the fire department and tell them they were all at Cuddledown watching a movie when they finally saw the smoke. They felt safe knowing that the fire department as made up of volunteers, and they would probably assume it was an accident. And even if the family knew what really happened, they wouldn’t prosecute. They would want to shield the family from bad publicity, though the truth is, Cady feels a certain thrill from knowing that she is an arsonist.

Cady is excited as she remembers the buildup to the fire: she sees herself as a rebel, and someone who changed history. She wonders, fleetingly, if this makes her a criminal and therefore a failure, but she still feels buoyed by the fact that they took action. However, Mirren notes some of the less exciting consequences of their actions: Carrie wanders the island at night, and Bess cleans obsessively until her hands bleed. Penny watches Cady’s every move, and they all drink way too much now. But Cady reminds Mirren that at least they are together now, which is what they wanted in the first place. And now Harris doesn’t have the same power he did in the past.

The Liars decided that their rebellion against their mothers—specifically, not letting themselves be pit against one another in the family fight over inheritance—was not enough. Throughout the summer, they all began to adopt Gat’s perspective on wealth and materialism, and even though Johnny made a joke about Gat’s use of the word “patriarchy,” he was no longer as skeptical of these ideas as he was at the beginning of the summer, seeing how their wealth damaged the family.



Throughout all of summer fifteen, Cady was faced with the fact that her relationship with Gat was exclusive to their time on the island—he had a girlfriend back in New York City, and their lives during the school year were so different that they likely would not be able to maintain the same sense of romance. She was determined not to lose her time with Gat on the island, and this made her even more sure that burning down Clairmont was right decision. Her dedication to this plan will later be the nucleus of her grief over the Liars’ deaths.



The Liars believed that they had covered all of their bases by establishing an agreed-upon alibi. It will turn out that they had hardly thought at all about the logistics of this plan, but their main concern was not getting in trouble for setting the fire, and as adolescents, the idea that they could die simply did not occur to them. Cady’s side note, that she is thrilled to be an arsonist, also suggests that they were too filled with adrenaline to think carefully about their plan.



Cady begins to romanticize the act of setting fire to the house, especially as it changes her perception of herself as a member of the Sinclair family—she desperately wants to shake off the Sinclair family image and decide who she is without that family pressure. This speaks to her burgeoning sense of individualism and desire for self-definition. Mirren’s response, however, gives Cady only a sneak peek into the negative consequences of their actions.



Cady comes to the conclusion that the Liars have committed the perfect crime—admittedly, there have been some negative outcomes, like her own migraines and Mirren’s constant illness—and have gotten what they wanted. But Mirren argues that Harris is now powerless because of the slow onset of dementia, and Gat notes that **New Clairmont**—the one he built on the ashes of the old house—seems to be a punishment, with its cold, uncomfortable atmosphere. Cady wonders why he would do that to himself, and the Liars turn the question back on her, asking her why she is determined to give away all of her belongings. She replies that she just hates clutter, but the answer is met with silence.

Cady finds her mother at Windemere, and Penny lectures her about spending so much time at Cuddledown. She tells Cady that the place is such a mess, she can’t ask the housekeeper to clean it. Cady apologizes and asks why Penny tells everyone not to talk to her about the fire. Penny is surprised to hear that Cady remembers the fire, and Cady acknowledges that she only remembers parts—that everyone had been fighting, and the Liars are the only ones on the island when they set the fire. Her mother asks if she remembers anything else. Cady asks again why Penny doesn’t want anyone to talk about it, and she replies that it is because of the pain.

Cady is annoyed that her mother is shielding her in this way, just because she has headaches and has lost some memories. Penny tells her that the doctor advised against adding any more stress to Cady’s life, but Cady announces that she is not a child and can be trusted with basic information, and that Penny should have told her. Penny replies that she *did* tell her about the fire, two years earlier, over and over, and Cady never remembered the following day. Penny felt that she was upsetting her daughter anew each day, and the doctor told her that she should just stop. Cady can’t believe that her mother would let the whole family keep secrets from her, and asks if she seems so fragile she can’t hear the truth. Penny replies that yes, she does seem that fragile.

Mirren comes to see Cady and asks to read the emails Cady sent to her in the past year, admitting that she never read any of them. Cady is very angry to hear this, but lets Mirren read the emails anyway—there are 28 of them. She writes to Mirren about leaving for Europe and how much she would miss the Liars that summer, and how much she dislikes spending time with her father. There are some that are very dark, in which she describes dreaming of someone hacking away at her head with an axe: sometimes it is Harris, sometimes it is Gat, and sometimes it is Cady herself. She admits that sometimes she wants to die. When Mirren finishes reading them, she apologizes and then leaves.

Without a full understanding of the actual consequences of the fire—that is, without knowing that she is the only one of the Liars to survive it, and that she isn’t even talking with living beings at this point in the conversation—Cady is able to continue feeling heroic for their actions. Through this conversation with Mirren and Gat, Cady is mentally debating with herself, trying to come to terms with the fact that something she considered heroic was actually a bad decision with tragic consequences.



Cady has done an enormous amount of work to recover the memory of the fire, and when she speaks with Penny, her mother is surprised by how much she remembers. However, Cady still has no idea that the Liars are dead, while it is clear from their conversation that Penny knows Cady has been spending time alone at Cuddledown. Also, despite the fact that she knows about the fire, Penny is not ready to reveal anything more to her about that night.



Once again, Cady is reacting to her mother’s actions based on her limited knowledge of the situation. She feels that she is capable of handling the truth at this point, yet the fact that she is still seeing the Liars—and believing that they are alive—proves otherwise. In addition, Penny reveals that Cady does, in fact, know what happened on the night of the fire, but that she has suppressed those memories. This offers rare insight into Penny’s feelings as a mother—though she has been portrayed as a selfish character throughout the novel, she is clearly looking out for her daughter’s mental health.



Cady’s conversation with Mirren about the unanswered emails is her way of preparing herself for the deep sense of loneliness that she will feel when she finally faces the fact that Mirren and the others are dead. Going through her own emails also helps Cady reflect on how she was feeling the previous summer in Europe, especially when she reads about the dreams she had—Cady was subconsciously alternating between blaming Harris and Gat for the tragedy and blaming herself.



Cady opens her laptop and writes out everything she remembers, ignoring typos and omitting punctuation, making sure to get everything down before she forgets again. She puts down all the memories of the fights and the awful things her mother tries to make her do for the inheritance. She also writes memories of the dogs, Fatima and Prince Philip, recalling suddenly that the golden retrievers died in the fire. She now knows that they died in the fire that she set, and that it is her fault. The dogs were badly trained and would eat starfish on the beach and throw them up in the living room, beg at the table, ignore basic commands from the family. They were often locked into a bedroom at night to keep them from causing a mess, and they were trapped in there when the Liars started the fire. Cady is wracked with guilt over the fact that she killed the naughty, but beloved, dogs.

Cady runs from Windemere crying, thinking about the dogs and the consequences of what she did. She imagines them looking at the door of the bedroom as the smoke comes in, hoping to be rescued. Cady doesn't know where to go at the moment—she doesn't want to see the Liars, and when she thinks about all of her options, she realizes that she is trapped on the island, the same island where she killed the family dogs. She realizes that all of their big ideas about taking down the patriarchy, and all of her boasting about being a hero and purifying the family feel false. She thinks about how innocent the dogs were, and wonders what kind of person could have burned the house down without remembering that the dogs were upstairs.

When Cady returns to Windemere, she sees Gat sitting on the steps waiting for her. She walks up to him and tells him that she knows they she killed the dogs. He lets her sob into his shoulder and consoles her. Finally, he asks if she remembers anything else, and she can't imagine that there is more to come, but Gat's silence assures her that there is, in fact, more for her to remember. She comments that there is more that people are not telling her, and Gat says that they have been telling her, but she can't hear it. She wants someone to tell her directly, but Gat says that he had faith in the fact that Cady would remember on her own once she is surrounded by her family on the island.

After all of this fact-finding and soul-searching, Cady must try to organize her thoughts and create some sort of coherent narrative out of the jumbled memories and feelings that have resurfaced in the past few days. This activity points to the importance of writing as a method of understanding the past and coming to terms with painful memories. It is also significant that Cady transitions from writing fairy tales (which she has used to make sense of her emotions while keep her trauma at a distance) to writing directly about her own memories. It is through writing that she recalls the death of the dogs, working through the first phase of pain and guilt at having taken the lives of others. This is also preparation for the bigger realization that is yet to come: that she has also killed other human beings.



The feelings Cady is experiencing in response to the death of the dogs is a preview of how she will feel later on, when she realizes that the fire killed the Liars as well. And it is interesting to note that Cady has been searching for answers—which she thought would free her from the isolation of her amnesia—but instead, those answers make her feel trapped and enclosed. In part, this feeling may stem from the knowledge that the truth is inescapable, and that there is no doubting it, putting it out of her mind, or escaping to an alternate reality through a fairy tale.



Cady's conversation with Gat about the death of the dogs and her recovered memories shows that she is getting very close to remembering the whole truth. Gat's note that everyone has been telling Cady but she can't hear it can be interpreted as Cady recognizing the slow and careful process of recovering these painful memories. She cannot have someone just tell her directly, unless it is one of the Liars, who are simply figments of her imagination—and thus, she must learn to tell herself the story of what happened.



Cady tells Gat that she remembers so much leading up to the fire, but she doesn't remember what went wrong or why Gat wasn't with her when she got hurt. She asks if they had an argument or something, and tells Gat that she deserves an answer. But Gat can't answer her and tells her he has to go back to Cuddledown. He tells Cady that he messed up, that he shouldn't have kissed, given her roses, or told her she was beautiful. She replied that she wanted him to, and he insists that he should have stayed away. She kisses him and tries to get him to stay, but he leaves.

Cady remembers being in the hospital on Martha's Vineyard, under blue sheets with an IV in her arm. Her mother and Harris were there, with fudge from Edgartown, and Cady was touched that Harris remembered that she liked their fudge. Cady looked at her hands and noticed they are bandaged—both hands and feet were badly burned.

Cady begins another **fairy tale**: once there was a king with three beautiful daughters. No, once there were three bears living in the woods. No, once there were three billy goats near a bridge. Three soldiers, three little pigs, three brothers... no, none of that is what she wants. The right version is this: once there were three children: two boys and a girl. There was also a witch, the same age as the children, and she was jealous of them. They were blessed with fairy gifts and she was not, and she was lonely. She gave away all of her belongings, but that did not make her charitable or good. She got sick, and is not brave.

The witch visited the other children on their tenth birthdays and cursed them: when they are 16, they would strike matches and die in the flames. The children's parents were afraid of this curse and tried to avoid it by bringing them to a castle on a private island, with no matches in sight. They thought they would be safe there, and the witch would never find them. But she found them, when they are 15, and she brought her hate and evil into their lives, disguised as a young blonde maiden. She befriended the children and gave them a box of matches, telling them that the flames would purify their souls. She demanded that they take action, and they did exactly that. The witch watched them burn.

In this conversation, Gat is dealing with his own feelings of guilt over how he treated Cady and his part in the events leading up to the fire. Of course, as Gat is part of Cady's imagination, this is Cady's interpretation of how Gat might have felt, and it is her way of resolving many of the unanswered questions from their relationship. She will never know exactly what he is thinking, but she can imagine.



Once again, Cady must not only remember the events of that night, but she must re-live the experiences in order to understand them. In this case, she remembers small details like the fudge that bring the events back to life for her.



As she gets closer to the darkest memories from summer fifteen, Cady returns to the fairy tale format as a way of distancing herself from the pain. The characters in this fairy tale are slightly different from before: there is no king or princesses, but rather a group of kids and a witch. While the stories in the lead-up to the fire were focused on Harris's relationship with his daughters, this is now about Cady and the other Liars.



In this story, Cady portrays herself as a witch who curses the children out of jealousy. The witch is lonely and scared, and takes it out on the children, condemning them to death. Clearly Cady sees herself as the villain in this moment, taking responsibility for the entire tragedy—she feels that she forced the others to set the fire and that she killed them. This does not seem likely, as it was a group decision, but Cady is experiencing survivor's guilt for not dying along with them.



PART 5: THE TRUTH

The true story of the Sinclair family never made it to the newspapers, but Harris Sinclair knows it. The truth is that on a July evening two summers earlier, Gatwick Matthew Patil, Mirren Sinclair Sheffield, and Jonathan Sinclair Dennis died in a fire in **Clairmont**, caused by an upturned gas can in the mudroom. The house burned to the ground before fire fighters could arrive. Cadence Sinclair Eastman was on the island but did not notice the fire until it was too late. She entered the house and sustained burns on her hands and feet while attempting to rescue the people and animals trapped inside. She was later found on the beach, curled into a ball and unable to recall anything from that night.

Harris Sinclair declined formal investigation of the fire, and the family held funerals for Gat, Mirren, and Johnny in their hometowns. Cady did not attend, as she was still suffering from a head injury. The following summer, the Sinclair family returned to the island to mourn: they fell apart, drank too much, and finally decided to build a new house on the site of the old one. Cady had no memory of the fire, and believed that she had hit her head while swimming. She suffers from migraines, which the doctors thought were due to subconscious guilt and grief over the deaths of her closest friends and family.

The doctors suggested that Cady should recover the memories on her own, rather than hearing from her family, and that she should not go back to **Beechwood** immediately, until she had time to heal—both physically and mentally. She also displayed a strange need to give away all of her possessions, possibly as a form of penance for her crime; this, however, was considered a healthy part of the grieving process. Finally, after another year, Cady was deemed fit to return to the island, and was adamant that she wanted to spend the summer there. The doctors and her family thought that this would help her finish healing.

On the night of the fire, as they walked into the house, the Liars reminded each other: don't get your feet or your clothes wet, soak everything with the gas, and keep the can away from the kindling, because you'll need to grab it on your way out. Watch the fire catch, and then run out via the kitchen stairwell and the mudroom door. They were planning to meet up again at Cuddledown to wash their clothes and call the fire departments. But that is the last time that Cady would see Gat, Mirren, and Johnny, as they went to their respective floors. They are all a bit drunk on the wine they had stolen and were probably not thinking as clearly as they should have been. Cady looked at the objects around her, all of which reminded her of why she needed to burn down the house, and she punched a portrait of Penny, Carrie, and Bess as children.

This section begins with a reference to the “truth,” suggesting that what has come before in the narrative is a lie, or some manipulation of the truth at the least. However, the use of the word truth is deceiving, as the story it tells—of an accidental fire and of Cady discovering it and going in to save her friends—is not an accurate retelling of the events, either. But this is the version of the truth that the Sinclair family tells themselves in order to maintain their own family image.



Harris Sinclair may know the truth about how the fire was started, but he is unwilling to let anyone question the version that he tells himself. This is for Cady's sake, first of all, so that she will not be seen as a murderer or an arsonist by the rest of the family or the outside world. But it is also for his own benefit, as Harris is prepared to protect the image of his family no matter what the consequences, and would rather have people believe that this fire was an accident.



This section of the novel is told from a more distant point of view, from a more omniscient narrator who can put the pieces together more easily than Cady can. This helps to clear up many of the questions from Cady's version of the story, like why she was suddenly whisked off to Europe after her accident, and why she was slated to go to Australia but eventually convinced her family to let her come back to the island for the summer.



This scene focuses in on the moments before the fire was set, and Cady begins to remember some of the details, such as the warning not to soak their clothes in the gas and the plan to meet up at Cuddledown when they finished. Cady also recalls punching a family photo, revealing her state of mind in the moment—she was ready to destroy her family to save her relationship with Gat, and therefore saw all of the Sinclairs as the enemy. But, as the narrator mentions, they had all been drinking, which is likely the real reason that three of the Liars ended up dying.



As Cady began to pour the gas throughout the first floor, she realized that she should have started in the room farthest from the mudroom, since that was their exit. She decided that she would use the back door near Harris's study, which led to the staff building next door. She started her fire and watched it burn, and then suddenly heard a scream from above her—Johnny was on the second floor above the study, and it burned too fast. Cady panicked, tried to open the back door, but found it bolted shut and stuck. She ran back through the kitchen, which wasn't burning yet, and skidded on the floor that was slick with gasoline. She saw that her jeans were on fire and knew that she had to get out immediately. She yelled to anyone who could hear her that they should get out too, and then found herself rolling in the grass to stop her jeans from burning.

Outside of **Clairmont**, Cady called for the Liars, but they were nowhere to be found. She told herself that they must have gotten out, and ran towards the boathouse to find them. When she found no one there, she ran to Cuddledown, expecting to find them there. They weren't there either, and Cady ran back to Clairmont, which was burning from top to bottom. She went in through the mudroom door and went into the basement to find Gat, but there was a wall of flames and she couldn't get down there. She went to save Johnny and Mirren, but the stairwell caved in as she was going towards it, and she knew she could not save anyone.

The memories are flooding back to Cady as she sits on the steps of Windemere where Gat left her, and she feels a cold fog enter her body. She thinks about all the things she did wrong when lighting the fire, like not setting a time for all of them to light their fires. She should have insisted that they stay together, and she never should have gone to the boathouse and Cuddledown, as that lost her time when she should have been getting the others out of **Clairmont**. She thinks about the life she wants for herself and the other Liars: a life in which they are free to love each other without prejudice. But now, Cady realizes, they will never have futures at all, because she has killed them. She feels frozen, even though she thinks she deserves to burn.

Cady realizes that the plan they put together was not well thought out, but it is too late at that point, and she quickly makes a secondary plan (to go out the door of Harris's study), but even that doesn't work out for her. Soon she is making decisions in a state of fear and panic, which diminishes her ability to understand the logical consequences and make rational choices. This illustrates that the deaths of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat were not due to any malicious actions on Cady's part—as her fairy tale seems to indicate—but rather to bad decision-making, too much alcohol, and a lot of adrenaline.



Like the story that Harris tells himself about the fire, Cady does actually go back into Clairmont to try and save Johnny, Mirren, and Gat, but she is too late. Again, there is nothing malicious in Cady's actions—despite her portrayal of herself as a witch who cursed them to death—and instead she is simply making a series of bad decisions that pile on top of one another and make it impossible to save her friends. In fact, Cady risks her own life in the attempted rescue, showing that her intentions were focused on the wellbeing of her friends all along.



While many of Cady's recovered memories were mediated in some way—that is, Johnny, Mirren, or Gat “talked” her through what happened—this final memory is one that Cady has to experience on her own, without the help of the other Liars. She is finally coming to the realization that her feelings of jealousy towards them are unfounded, as they will not have a chance to do any of the things she imagined them doing, like having boyfriends, going to college, or traveling to Rome and other European cities.



Cady thinks about how she shouldn't have pressed them all to take matters into their own hands; soon enough they would have been old enough to drive and go off to college, and the island and its controversy would be a far-off memory. Cady wishes that she could have been the voice of reason, but she knows that she can't take any of it back. She climbs into bed and shivers under the covers, as pieces of her body seem to break off onto her pillow. She cries, finally: for her aunts who have lost their children, for the younger kids who have lost their siblings, for Harris who has lost his house and grandchildren, and for the dogs, who were innocent victims. She begins to miss all the things she gave away.

Cady realizes that her aunts now hug one another not out of freedom and love, as the Liars had once hoped, but out of shared suffering. She thinks about how she let down her family, especially the people she loves, but most of all she let down Gat, who could have grown up to fight evil in the world. She mourns the version of Gat who she never got to know—the one off of **Beechwood Island**—and now she will never know. She then thinks about how it must have felt for them in the last moments of their lives, and how much it must have hurt as their bodies burned and shriveled. They have been on Beechwood Island with her this summer to say goodbye, to give her this last summer together, and to let her know that they love her. She needed them, and they were there.

Penny knocks on Cady's door, asks if she has a migraine, and tells her that she loves her. Cady realizes that when she says that, she means that she loves Cady despite what she has done, and in spite of her grief. She tells Cady that Bess made a blueberry pie and Cady can eat it for breakfast if she wants. Cady opens the door for her mother and says no, she cannot come out now, and Penny notices that she has been crying. Cady apologizes for not being able to come out, and Penny tells her that she never has to say she is sorry again.

Cady goes to Cuddledown to see the Liars, and when Johnny appears, he can tell that she remembers everything. She tells him that she doesn't know if they would still be around, now that she knows. Johnny tells her that he can't stay much longer, and neither can Mirren or Gat. Cady asks him where they will go, and Johnny describes it as a rest, or like nothingness. He tells her that he is very tired and just wants to lie down and be done—he has been waiting for two years to rest, and is ready. He also tells Cady that it is not her fault, that they all chose to set the fire together, that she can be sad and sorry, but she should not think it is all her fault.

This scene makes the reason for Cady's intense guilt very clear: she feels that she pushed too hard, or at least that she failed to prevent the other Liars from setting the fire, and is searching for a way to make the tragedy her fault. Cady describes losing parts of her body onto her pillow, again returning to metaphor to describe how broken she is feeling at the moment. But when she finally cries—that is the moment when Cady's healing begins.



This is the moment that Cady's family has been waiting for since the accident: Cady has finally remembered—and understood—what happened the night of the fire, without help from any of them. This is the culmination of three weeks on the island with the other Liars existing in her mind in order to guide her slowly and carefully to this moment. Cady also immediately understands how it has been possible to spend the summer with Mirren, Gat, and Johnny, despite the fact that they are dead—she has known this all along, and it just realizing it now.



Having finally recovered all of the memories from summer fifteen, Cady is able to see her current interactions with her mother, aunts, and other cousins in a very different light. She reinterprets Penny's words and actions in a new context, and is no longer annoyed or angry at her mom for the way she has been acting for the past two years. This, in turn, changes Penny's attitude towards Cady as well.



Cady seems to understand that the Liars only existed in order to help her recover those suppressed memories, and therefore she is ready to say goodbye to them and let them go. She says that she worried they will already be gone, but they have one last job to do for Cady—she needs to hear their feelings about the fire, to be able to understand what they were going through emotionally in that final moment. Johnny forgives Cady for her part in his death—the first of her interactions with the Liars that brings her closer toward emotional closure.



Cady talks to Mirren, who tells her that she wants to accept her fate, but is still full of jealousy and anger at Cady and the rest of the family. She tells Cady that she has to go, and Cady wants to beg her to stay, but she doesn't. She also wants to "bleed across the great room floor" or "melt into a puddle of grief," but she only cries and hugs Mirren one last time. She then sees Gat, who runs to her and swoops her up into the air, swinging her around like they are a happy couple on the beach. They hold each other as Mirren and Johnny walk out into the ocean, and when he finally has to leave as well, he kisses her. Then they dive into the water and are gone, leaving Cady alone on the beach.

Cady sleeps for days, waking a few times to find that it is light, and then dark, outside her window. She looks at herself in the mirror when she finally gets up, and notices her rusty brown hair with blonde roots, and doesn't recognize the person she sees. She goes to **New Clairmont** to find her aunts making sandwiches for a picnic. Ed is there, and he waves to Cady as he helps put together picnic supplies. Bonnie asks her if she is feeling better, and Liberty tells her that they are going tubing in the morning, and Cady is invited. Everyone knows Cady has remembered everything, though she hasn't mentioned it yet. Penny can tell.

Harris takes Cady to Edgartown, where he buys her a book of **fairy tales** at the bookstore. Cady mentions that Ed has returned, and tells Harris that she knows he doesn't like him, but he is there with Carrie. Harris acknowledges this and tells her to stop bothering him about it so they can go get fudge. When she is back on **Beechwood Island**, Cady goes to Cuddledown and cleans up the mess she made; when she finishes, she begins to draw a simple picture of the Liars and puts it on the fridge next to the old drawings they drew when they are younger.

Cady tells herself another **fairy tale**: once there was a king with three beautiful daughters. They grew up and had children, but something terrible happened. All the children died in a fire, except for one, and she was left alone. No, that's not correct—the children died except for three girls and two boys. There are Cady, Liberty, Bonnie, Taft, and Will. The three princesses raged and cried, drank and shopped, and cleaned obsessively. They also forgave each other. The fathers were angry too, but they were all far away. The children are grieving were, and had nightmares and migraines. But the tragedy did not mean the end of this family.

When Cady talks to Mirren, she is not nearly as forgiving as Johnny is, and shares her feelings with Cady. This helps Cady find balance between forgiving herself, as Johnny has done, and grieving over the lives she helped cut short. These goodbyes also help Cady learn to stand up to the pain she is feeling, rather than sinking into it and retreating from reality. Her saddest goodbye is Gat—she does not want to lose the feeling of being with him, and holds on tight to him until he must finally leave her for good.



This kind of emotional experience is as exhausting as anything Cady has experienced, and she needs to let her body and mind rest a bit. She wakes into a new world, in which she knows that she is the lone survivor of the fire and can finally return to the rest of her family with that knowledge. The world is unfamiliar to her, and the fact that her mother and aunts are talking peacefully and that Ed is there demonstrates the shift that has occurred.



Cady is finally able to talk to Harris differently, now that she knows what has happened. She is no longer angry at him because she now understands how much he has lost—when they talk about Ed, for example, Harris maintains some of the same prejudices as before, but Cady is no longer determined to change his mind or show him the error of his ways. He has experienced enough in the past two years, and she can now feel sympathy for her grandfather, rather than the resentment that drove her to set fire to Clairmont in the first place.



Cady's final fairy tale breaks from the formula in order to expand her definition of family—there are not just three children, as before. There are other people who can become part of the story, because they are also alive and members of her family. She is coming to terms with the fact that the Liars' deaths are just part of their family story at this point, and that it will change them, but it will not destroy them.



The story of the fire became mysterious and glamorous to outsiders, and the surviving family also became glamorous—but they know that tragedy is not glamorous, it is ugly and confusing. Cady is nearly eighteen, and committed a foolish crime. That is the main thing to know about Cady, and will be for a long time. But she knows that there will be more to her identity in the future.

Finally, Cady is aware that this tragedy will ensure that her family image will never reflect reality, and that no one will ever quite understand what happened. But she is also able to recognize that she is in charge of her future, which is one positive thing she has taken from this experience.





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