

Before I Fall



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LAUREN OLIVER

Lauren Oliver was born Laura Suzanne Schechter in Queens, an outer borough of New York City, and raised primarily in Westchester County, New York—in a town she has described as being “very similar” to the town of Ridgeview depicted in *Before I Fall*. The child of two literature professors, Oliver developed a love of reading at a young age, and after studying literature at the University of Chicago she attended the prestigious Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing at New York University. Oliver worked in young adult publishing for years before leaving in 2009 to pursue writing full-time, and *Before I Fall* was published in 2010. The novel launched Oliver into YA stardom, and she followed her successful debut with over ten more novels, including the popular *Delirium* trilogy, a science fiction saga set in an alternate-universe United States in which love has been classified as a disease. Oliver now resides primarily in Brooklyn, NY, where she founded and continues to operate Glasstown Entertainment, a media and content company that develops innovative storytelling across several media platforms including film, television, and novels.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before I Fall is a contemporary novel that leans heavily into the moment in which it takes place. While authors often limit their in-text references to popular brands, celebrities, technology, or media in order to prevent their novels from becoming dated, Oliver instead decides to use the cultural moment of the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium to provide a portrait of late-2000s teendom, and the status-conscious, label-obsessed world in which Sam Kingston and her friends live. With references to popular social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram and near-constant name-dropping of high-end labels such as Dooney & Bourke, Tiffany & Co., MAC, and Bebe, Oliver creates a world in which being of the moment is a kind of lifeblood. Her characters are obsessed with their self-images, and long to stamp out their teenage insecurities through a constant stream of posturing both on and off of social media. *Before I Fall* is a novel about larger themes of friendship, cruelty, loyalty, goodness, repentance, and faith, but it is also very much a novel about millennial concerns and how teens in a largely affluent community assert and cement their social status through two major facets of contemporary teen life—consumerism and social media.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Before I Fall is not the only young adult novel to deal with complicated themes of life, death, rebirth, and examining one’s life and choices carefully. *If I Stay*, a 2009 novel by Gayle Forman, tells the story of Mia, a teenage girl who is the only member of her family to survive a catastrophic car accident (*Before I Fall* also revolves largely around a fateful car accident.) Mia is left in a coma, and through an out-of-body experience she is able to watch her friends and family deal with the fallout of the accident, and must decide whether to return to her loved ones on Earth and live on without her parents and her brother, or join them in the afterlife but leave behind the chance at an earthly future. Additionally, the repetitive structure of *Before I Fall* mirrors the plot structure of the popular Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day*, in which Phil Connors, a newscaster who is disappointed to have been assigned to cover the titular holiday alongside his beautiful coworker, must repeat the events of Groundhog Day over and over, eventually learning lessons of empathy, compassion, and self-reflection. Sam even mentions *Groundhog Day* when she realizes what is happening to her, and in the end it is Sam’s examination of her life choices—and her desire to subvert her past cruelties and make a difference in the lives of those around her—that delivers her from her time loop, just as Phil Connors was delivered from his through self-reflection, love, and goodwill toward others.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Before I Fall*
- **When Written:** Late 2000s
- **Where Written:** New York, NY
- **When Published:** March 2nd, 2010
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult fiction; mystery; speculative fiction
- **Setting:** Ridgeview, Connecticut
- **Climax:** Samantha Kingston, having relived the last day of her life for six “days” in a row, trying to save herself with each reset, realizes that in order to close the time loop she has fallen into she must sacrifice herself and die in the place of her often-bullied classmate Juliet Sykes.
- **Antagonist:** Lindsay Edgecombe
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Big Screen. In 2017, *Before I Fall* was adapted into a major motion picture, directed by indie darling Ry Russo-Young and starring teen favorites Zoey Deutch as Sam and Halston Sage as Lindsay. Though the film received mixed reviews, it was one of the highest-grossing independent films of the year, and was

nominated for several Teen Choice Awards, demonstrating its success with its target audience.



PLOT SUMMARY

In a brief prologue, the teenaged Samantha Kingston says that though many people claim that just before you die your life flashes before your eyes, that is not how things happened for her. Rather than seeing a slideshow of her life, Sam saw only one thing in the moment of her death: the face of Vicky Hallinan, a classmate her best friend Lindsay had tormented in elementary school. Lindsay was driving the car which crashed, resulting in Sam's death—Lindsay, Sam, and their friends Elody and Ally were on their way home from a party. Sam regrets that earlier that morning, she was too busy worrying about her school's annual Valentine's Day celebration, "Cupid Day," to even wish her parents goodbye.

It is Friday February 12th—the morning of Cupid Day. Lindsay calls to Sam from the driveway, and Sam hustles out of the house, ignoring her little sister Izzy and her parents altogether. Lindsay is waiting outside to take Sam to school. The girls next pick up Elody for school, and they psyche Sam up for her "big day"—she is planning on losing her virginity to her hot, popular boyfriend Rob Cokran tonight. Elody hands Sam a condom, and though the mortified Sam says, "Kill me now," Lindsay proclaims that she'd never let her best friend die a virgin.

During Cupid Day, underclassmen pass out **roses** with little notes attached, or "Valograms," and one's popularity is determined by how many roses one gets. As Sam goes through her first few classes, she is stressed to only have received five roses—last year, Lindsay got twenty-two—and upset by the lukewarm note attached to Sam's rose from Rob. In calculus class, Sam flirts with her young, handsome teacher Mr. Daimler, himself once a student at this very school, and then she receives a rose from Kent McFuller—a genial nerd who was Sam's best friend, and first kiss, back in elementary school. After class, Kent approaches Sam to tell her that he's having a party that evening and asks if she will come, but she brushes Kent off, telling him her plans will depend on what everybody else is doing. Once Lindsay texts Sam that she wants to go to the party, though, Sam is all in.

At lunch, Sam, Lindsay, Elody, and their friend Ally sit together at their usual table—Rob comes over to say hi to Sam and ask if she received his rose. Rob makes Sam more nervous than happy, and Sam finds herself wondering if she even really loves him—or if he even really loves her. When Juliet Sykes, the class weirdo, enters the cafeteria, Lindsay begins singing the song "Psycho Killer" by the Talking Heads and making stabbing motions with a fake knife. Sam, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally torment Juliet in this way every day, and each year on Cupid Day, they send her a single rose with an attached note which reads "Maybe next year, but probably not." Sam knows that their

behavior toward Juliet is mean, but she believes Juliet deserves it for being a "freak." The girls have always been mean to Juliet—Lindsay gave her the nickname "Mellow Yellow" after she peed her sleeping bag on a Girl Scout trip in fifth grade, and has hated Juliet with a strange intensity ever since.

After lunch, Lindsay and Sam cut class to walk to TCBY. On the way, they pass a cheap Chinese restaurant where a class bad-boy, Alex Liment, and the class "slut," Anna Cartullo, are eating together, despite the fact that Alex has a goody-two-shoes girlfriend named Bridget McGuire. Lindsay and Sam briefly harass the two of them before going for their yogurts. When they return to school, they spot Alex and Anna again—this time, arguing in a secret smokers' area behind the tennis courts while Lindsay smokes a quick cigarette. Ms. Winters, a teacher with a vendetta against all smokers begins approaching, but Sam and Lindsay don't warn Alex and Anna that she's coming, and instead make a run for it themselves. As they run gleefully back toward school, Sam remembers the day she and Lindsay became friends—they played a cruel prank on a girl at a pool party, throwing tampons and pads at her after realizing she'd gotten her period.

After school, Sam joins Lindsay and Elody at Ally's house, where the four of them get ready for the party and take shots of vodka until it's time to leave for Kent's. At the party, Sam flirts with Rob and drinks with her friends, promising herself she'll always remember this night and the fun times she's had in high school. At the height of the evening, though, Juliet Sykes walks into the party. She goes straight for Lindsay, Sam, Ally, and Elody, and calls them all "bitches" to their faces. Ally pours her drink on Juliet, and soon everyone else gathered around her is doing the same. Sam pushes Juliet toward the door, and she leaves, humiliated. Kent has seen everything—as Sam hustles out of the room to look for Rob, Kent intercepts her and berates her for being so cruel to Juliet. When Sam finds Rob, she realizes that he is too drunk to have sex, and she leaves dejectedly with Lindsay, Ally, and Elody. As the girls drive home, they listen to music and smoke cigarettes. Suddenly, Lindsay screams a word Sam can't make out, and the car flies off the road. As Sam experiences the moment of her death, she is full of heat and sound and pain.

Sam wakes up from a dream in which she is falling to her alarm going off. Her sister bursts into her room and wakes her up—Sam protests that it is a Saturday, but when she checks her phone, she sees a text from Lindsay and notices the date. It is Friday, February 12th—again. Sam, disoriented, attempts to get into the shower, but Lindsay comes upstairs from the driveway and tells Sam there's no time to get ready; she doesn't want to be late for Cupid Day. Confused, Sam follows Lindsay to the car, and as they pick Elody up from her house, Sam experiences an intense feeling of unease as the jokes and conversations from the previous day repeat themselves. As Sam goes through her morning classes, she notices that though many things are the

same, some small things are different—she begins to suspect that something bigger and more sinister than mere déjà vu is going on.

At lunchtime, Sam is relieved to see Rob, and confides in him that she's not feeling well. Rather than reacting with sympathy, he accuses her of trying to get out of their big night. Lindsay and Rob both tell Sam that they want to go to Kent's party, and though Sam is reluctant to go back to the party, she ultimately agrees. That night, as the girls get ready at Ally's house, Lindsay tells Sam urgently that she needs to confess something to her—Sam is relieved, thinking that perhaps Lindsay is experiencing the same thing she is, but instead Lindsay just pranks her by burping in her face. Feeling more alone than ever, Sam begrudgingly goes along to the party, but the whole time she feels weak, lightheaded, and insecure. Sam tries to get Rob or Lindsay to leave with her so that she can avoid what is coming next, but it is too late—Juliet Sykes shows up, repeats her tirade, and is again harassed and humiliated by everyone at the party. Shortly after the confrontation, Sam and her friends leave—again in Lindsay's truck, with Lindsay at the wheel—and again, they see a flash in front of the car just before Lindsay drives them off the road and into the woods.

Sam dreams that she is falling once again, and when she wakes up, she realizes that it is, for a third time now, February 12th. Sam remembers what has happened to her two nights in a row now, and wonders if both days were real. She feels she is stuck in the “after-death equivalent of the movie *Groundhog Day*,” and begins to consider that she has died and is stuck in some kind of time loop. Sam begs to stay home from school—her mother agrees to allow her to sleep in a little bit, but drives her to school before lunch. When Sam gets dropped off at school, she vows to herself that tonight there will be no accident—she will close the loop for good. The events of the day repeat themselves—Sam receives her roses, Kent invites her to his party, and she joins her friends in the cafeteria. Over lunch, she tells the girls that she doesn't want to go out tonight, and begs to stay in like they used to as underclassmen. Her friends agree. That evening, they all gather at Ally's house to eat sushi, watch movies, and have a sleepover on Ally's giant couch. The girls go to bed as the clock ticks past 12:39, and Sam is convinced that she has done it—she has escaped death and closed the loop. Soon after lights-out, though, Ally's mother comes downstairs to wake them up—she has just gotten a phone call telling her that Juliet Sykes is dead: she shot herself in her bedroom. The girls wonder aloud whether Juliet killed herself because of their constant torment, and Ally and Elody, frightened, head upstairs to sleep in Ally's room. Sam gets up from the couch and goes down to the basement to look at old yearbooks—as she does, she notices that Lindsay and Juliet were together in every single picture from kindergarten through the fourth grade. She realizes that Lindsay and Juliet were once friends, but when she confronts Lindsay about it, Lindsay deflects, explaining that

Juliet and her entire family are “totally wacked.” Sam returns to the couch and falls asleep, feeling herself pulled through darkness once again.

Before Sam even opens her eyes, she knows her plan did not work. Sam is angry with Lindsay, angry at her own failure to fix things, and angry at the banal repetitions of Cupid Day. On the drive from Elody's house to campus, Sam picks a fight with Lindsay for being so cruel to everyone around her. Lindsay kicks Sam out of the car, and she is forced to walk the rest of the way to school in the cold. Sam knows that the fight doesn't matter, and wonders if anything matters anymore. Sam cuts class for the first few periods, and when she arrives at calculus class, her handsome teacher Mr. Daimler makes a flirtatious remark about her outfit. Sam flirts right back. When the Cupids deliver Sam's roses, she throws them in the trash at the front of the classroom, shocking all of her classmates, who view the roses as valuable markers of status and popularity. Mr. Daimler tells Sam that she's “breaking hearts,” and Sam asks Mr. Daimler if she's breaking his. She openly flirts with him in front of the whole class until he demands she retake her seat. After class, Mr. Daimler asks Sam to stay back—he reprimands her for being so inappropriate, but Sam pushes things even further, telling Mr. Daimler that she “wants” him, and soon he is kissing her and pushing her on her back on a student's desk. Sam manages to push Mr. Daimler off of her, and he asks her to keep quiet about what just happened between them. Sam hurriedly leaves, wishing she could tell Lindsay, but remembering that the two of them are in a fight. Sam skips lunch and heads for an out-of-the-way bathroom to be alone. There, she finds Anna Cartullo holed up smoking a joint. Sam joins her, and the two of them bond as they discuss the obscure mechanisms of popularity, and Sam obliquely apologizes for her role in having damaged Anna's social status. After school, Sam goes to the parking lot but sees Lindsay, Elody, and Ally leaving without her. Sam is approached by three girls who are on the fringes of her social circle, Tara, Beth, and Courtney, and they invite her to the mall. Sam accepts. On the way, Sam asks them to stop at her house—she sneaks inside and steals her mother's credit card. At the mall, Sam takes herself on a shopping spree, spending wildly and knowing that none of it will matter. Sam treats the girls to a fancy dinner and then they all head to Kent's party. Sam does not speak to Lindsay, Elody, or Ally, but when Juliet shows up, Sam finds Rob and drags him into a bedroom, desperate to avoid watching the whole spectacle again. Rob, who is very drunk, falls asleep before the two of them can have sex, and Sam retreats to another room, where she begins crying. Kent comes into the room and asks Sam if she's okay; he offers her a glass of water, and tells her that she can talk to him if she needs to. He confesses that he only had a party because he hoped Sam would show up. Sam apologizes for her cruelty to Kent over the years, and asks if she can stay in one of Kent's guest bedrooms rather than going home. Kent leads Sam to a spare bedroom and tucks her in, and she feels safe and warm.

Sam wakes up gasping, relieved for the first time to be waking up on February 12th yet again. When Izzy comes in to jump on Sam's bed and rouse her, she tickles her sister playfully. Sam's mother comes to get them both and instruct them to get ready for school, but Sam pleads with her mother to let them both stay home—Sam tells her mother a white lie, which is that she and Rob have broken up. Sam agrees to let the girls stay home from school, but tells Sam she needs to take care of Izzy. Sam happily agrees. Sam takes Izzy to one of her favorite childhood hideaways—a big rock in the woods which Sam named Goose Point. As Sam spends the day with her sister, she marvels at Izzy's intrepid spirit and independence, and wishes that she could know who her sister will grow up to be. That night, rather than going out with her friends, Sam accompanies her family to dinner—it is the first time they've all been together on a Friday night in years. They have a joyful meal, but towards the end of it, a group of students from Sam's high school walks in—among them is the blond girl who gave Sam her roses in calculus class. Sam realizes she must be Juliet's younger sister. Sam approaches the girl, who introduces herself as Marian, and asks her to tell Juliet not to "do it"—Sam tells Juliet's sister that she is referring to a science project, and Juliet will know what she means. Juliet's sister says she'll deliver the message, but not until tomorrow morning—Juliet is out tonight. After dinner, Sam returns home with her family, but is bothered and concerned about Juliet. She takes her mother's car and drives to Juliet's house, where she meets Juliet's parents—who seem normal, if a little sad—and, under the guise of being Juliet's lab partner and needing to get some notes from her, asks Juliet's mother to call Juliet. Juliet's mother can't get through, though, and Sam leaves, heading for Kent's party. When Sam gets to the party, Juliet has already delivered her tirade and left. Sam chases Juliet through the woods, and finds her standing at the edge of the highway. Though Sam pleads with Juliet, begging her to come away from the road, come home with Sam, and talk everything out, Juliet throws herself into oncoming traffic—directly in front of Lindsay's Range Rover. The car crashes into Juliet just as Kent reaches Sam. The two of them watch as Lindsay and Ally stumble from the wreckage, and the police and ambulances arrive to take two lifeless bodies away from the scene—Juliet's, and Elody's. Kent takes Sam back to her house, comforts her with hot chocolate, a shower, and fresh pajamas, and puts her to bed. As she falls asleep, Sam believes she can feel Kent kiss her, but is quickly pulled under into sleep. Sam wakes up in the morning in an uncharacteristically good mood—she hugs her parents and her sister goodbye as she rushes out of the house to meet Lindsay, planning to save to lives today: Juliet's, and her own. As Lindsay and Sam drive to school with Elody, Sam thinks of how much she loves her friends despite their imperfections. Sam goes to the room where all the Cupid Day roses are stored and makes a few alterations, buying Juliet Sykes a huge bundle of roses. At lunch, Sam waits for Juliet to walk into the cafeteria with the bouquet,

but is disappointed when Juliet enters the room with no roses. Sam urges her friends not to tease Juliet today, but they call her a hypocrite. Sam follows Juliet out of the cafeteria, but is unable to catch up to her—instead, she runs into Kent. She flirts openly with him until Lindsay cuts in to drag Sam away to TCBY. That evening, as the girls get ready for Kent's party, Sam rehearses what she'll say to him at the event. She volunteers to be her friends' designated driver for the evening, hoping that she'll still be able to change the course of events. At the party, Sam humiliates Rob by telling him to wait in a spare room for her, naked, and then sending the school's biggest gossip into the room, and tells Alex Liment's girlfriend, Bridget McGuire, that he's cheating on her. She feels as if she is doing everything right today, and gears up for Juliet's arrival. As soon as she spots her, she drags Juliet into the nearest bathroom and tries to apologize for all the hurt she's caused, but Juliet won't hear any of it. Juliet enumerates the countless hurts Sam and her friends have inflicted upon her over the years, and reveals that it was Lindsay who peed her sleeping bag in the fifth grade, not Juliet. Juliet waited for years for the harassment to stop on its own, but it never did, and now it is too late for Sam to fix anything, according to Juliet. Juliet leaves the bathroom and the party—Sam chases after her, following her through the woods to the road, where she begs her not to jump out in front of Lindsay's car. Juliet tells Sam that she never meant to jump in front of Lindsay's car specifically—not everything is about Sam. Juliet then leaps in front of a random truck, and is killed. Sam drives Lindsay home, and confronts her about her lies concerning Juliet. Lindsay confesses that she, too, thought that the teasing wouldn't last. Kent has followed Sam to Lindsay's house so that Sam could drive Lindsay's truck home, and now Sam gets into Kent's car so that he can drive her home. When they arrive, Sam confesses that the best part of her whole day was her short car ride with Kent—the two kiss, and Sam feels time seem to freeze.

Sam wakes up on the seventh February 12th knowing at last that the time loop was never about saving her own life—at least not in the way she thought. Sam says goodbye to her parents and to Izzy, knowing she will never see them again. As Lindsay, Sam, and Elody drive to school, Sam takes in the sights and sounds of her hometown one last time. Sam once again goes to the rose room to adjust the Valograms, and then heads to class. When it's time for calculus, Sam arrives early—Mr. Daimler attempts to flirt with her, but Sam shoots him down, berating him for hitting on high school girls. After class, Kent approaches Sam to ask about the mysterious rose she sent—the note attached urges him to pay attention to his phone tonight, so that he can come to her need and "be [her] hero." Kent tells Sam that he can count on her for whatever she needs, and Sam resists the urge to kiss him. At lunch, Sam breaks up with Rob—he reacts cruelly, but Sam is glad to be rid of him. As Juliet walks into the cafeteria, Sam sees that she has a single rose with her—Sam altered the note to read, "It's never too late."

That night, when the girls arrive at the party, Sam urges her friends to head inside while she drives Lindsay's car home. They protest, but Sam insists they trust her. Sam texts Kent to pick her up at Lindsay's—he does, as promised, but doesn't ask any questions. When the two of them pull up to Kent's house, Sam thanks him, and kisses him intensely. She tells Kent that he has saved her life, before jumping out of the car and heading inside for the last party of her life. Sam waits in the doorway for Juliet—when she arrives, Sam tells her that she knows what she's planning to do. Juliet, alarmed, slips away from Sam and out into the woods. Kent approaches Sam to ask why she would kiss him and leave, and Sam apologizes for not having the time to talk to him right now. She runs off after Juliet, calling for her, and hears Kent, calling her own name. Sam at last comes upon Juliet at the side of the highway. Sam tries to talk Juliet away from the road, but fails. Juliet runs out into oncoming traffic—Sam follows her and pushes her out of harm's way, and is herself struck by a vehicle. As Sam lies in the road, dying, she sees Juliet's face appear above her. Juliet's blond hair appears as a halo to Sam, and though Juliet marvels aloud that Sam saved her, Sam knows that the “opposite” is true.

In her final moments, Sam watches her “greatest hits” pass her by—all the best moments of her life speed past one by one. Sam says she isn't afraid to die, and remarks that the moment of death is full of light, warmth, and beauty. One day, she says, her readers will see for themselves.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Samantha Kingston – The protagonist of the novel, Sam Kingston is an average teen girl: she is more popular than most, but she has a lingering insecurity from years of having been bullied as a younger girl. This insecurity often drives her to engage in cruel or petty behavior in the name of upholding her social status and newfound popularity. Sam Kingston seems to have it all at the start of the novel: a solid place on the social ladder, a loyal group of girlfriends (including the fearless, sexy, ultra-popular Lindsay Edgecombe), and a hot, popular boyfriend to whom she is preparing to lose her virginity. However, at a party on “Cupid Day” (her school's Valentine's Day), her life unravels: her boyfriend Rob becomes too drunk to have sex, the school weirdo Juliet Sykes calls out Sam, Lindsay, and their best friends Elody and Ally for being “bitches,” the four girls publicly humiliate Juliet, and then the girls get into a car crash in which Sam dies. When Sam wakes up in her bed the next morning, she assumes that she survived the wreck, but as the day begins Sam realizes that the events of the previous day are repeating themselves: she is living Cupid Day all over again. Over the course of the next “week,” Sam will live out the events of Cupid Day again and again, and, as she struggles to understand what is happening to her and why, she begins

reevaluating her role in the suffering and demeaning of many of her classmates, thinking about how she can try to turn things around and change the course of fate. As Sam manipulates small or large aspects of her behavior on Cupid Day, attempting to avoid her own death, she realizes that it was Juliet Sykes she and her friends hit in their car that first night: Juliet was suicidal, attempting to die by throwing herself into the road. As the days go by, Sam connects with many classmates to whom she'd never given the time of day, including the nerdy Kent McFuller (her childhood sweetheart), and even Juliet Sykes herself. Sam eventually and somewhat begrudgingly realizes that she was never meant to use the repeating time loop to save herself—she was always meant to try to redeem herself by saving Juliet, so she ultimately gives her own life to keep Juliet from dying.

Lindsay Edgecombe – Lindsay Edgecombe is Samantha Kingston's best friend—and, formerly, her worst enemy. Lindsay is the ultimate cool high school girl—she is popular, sexy, funny, and turns heads in any room. Sam Kingston, having been not just uncool but actively bullied—and bullied by Lindsay herself—throughout elementary and middle school, now seeks refuge in Lindsay's shadow. Sam idolizes her best friend, but as much as she loves her there is always an imbalance of power and an undercurrent of distrust between the two of them, despite the loyalty the two girls purport to have for one another. Lindsay is easily the most popular member of Sam's clique, and probably the most popular girl in all the school. Despite her wealth of social capital and high-status popularity that allows her to get away with anything and everything, though, Lindsay has had a difficult and often painful life, and has developed a series of facades and defense mechanisms to hide her true self away from the school and the world. When Lindsay was young, her parents went through a messy divorce, and at the height of the discord, her best friend at the time—Juliet Sykes—witnessed much of Lindsay's pain, distress, and reactions both emotional and physical to the stress and trauma. When Lindsay began wetting the bed due to stress, she was deeply embarrassed, and when it happened on a Girl Scout camping trip, Lindsay blamed Juliet for the mess. Lindsay then began leaning into the ridicule her friends and classmates easily heaped upon Juliet, and played an instrumental role in deeply ostracizing and “othering” Juliet as the years went on. Lindsay has nursed a bevy of problems and insecurities herself since then—she lost her virginity to a much older stranger, and Sam, who once walked in on Lindsay throwing up a just-eaten meal in the bathroom of a Mexican restaurant, believes that Lindsay is struggling with an eating disorder. Nevertheless, Lindsay puts on a brave face for her friends, and attempts to remain the cool, strong, and utterly fearless leader that Sam, Ally, and Elody want and need. Lindsay's arc most closely ties in with themes of status, popularity, and social capital, as well as cruelty and loyalty.

Elody – Elody is one of Sam Kingston’s closest friends. Flamboyant, confident, and somewhat promiscuous, Elody is the “nicest” member of their clique, according to Sam, though her playful and unabashed preoccupation with sex sometimes veers toward obsession, and her party-animal personality seems to point to a deeper problem with—and possibly an addiction to—alcohol. Nevertheless, Sam speaks of Elody fondly, and on the fifth night of the time loop, when Sam avoids driving home from the party with her friends and as a result Elody, sitting in the passenger seat of Lindsay’s car, is killed instead of Sam, Sam becomes wracked with horrible grief despite her knowledge that the loop will reset itself in the morning. Elody is a loyal friend, and her sunny, outgoing disposition stands in stark contrast to her friends’ more prevalent cruelty and cliqueness.

Ally Harris – Ally is a member of Sam Kingston’s core group of friends. Sweet, lovesick, and, like Sam, still a virgin, Ally engages in the cruel behaviors she sees her friends and classmates perpetrate against one another in hopes of maintaining the social capital she has. Ally is fanciful and idealistic, often appearing to be the dreamer of the group (she muses aloud about chaos theory: the idea that a butterfly’s wings flapping in South America could create a thunderstorm in Tulsa, or vice versa, unknowingly raising questions of fate, chance, and inevitability in Sam) but hides behind a cruel, defensive exterior. Notably, she is the first one to throw a drink at Juliet Sykes at Kent McFuller’s Cupid Day party, and is often the first to warn the group that Juliet is approaching in the cafeteria or in the halls at school by singing The Talking Heads’ popular song “Psycho Killer” whenever she comes near. Ally’s character most deeply ties in with themes of popularity, status, and social capital, as well as cruelty and loyalty.

Izzy Kingston – Izzy is Sam’s eight-year-old sister. The intrepid and independent Izzy talks with a pronounced lisp and refuses to go to speech therapy despite the fact that the other kids in her class make fun of her. Sam pities Izzy, and wishes she could influence her sister toward a decision that would allow her to fit in—but as Sam relives Cupid Day again and again, she decides to spend one day of the loop skipping school and spending time with her baby sister. As Sam and Izzy bond, Sam comes to realize that Izzy’s independent thinking and shirking of social norms is actually an inspiration—Izzy is entirely herself, and does not change anything for anyone. Through her younger sister’s example, Sam learns a little bit more about who she herself is, and begins to focus on how she can honor her inner self and stop relenting to the social pressures at her high school.

Rob Kokran – Samantha’s hot and popular but cruel, vapid boyfriend Rob has been pressuring her to have sex with him for months, and on Cupid Day, Sam finally feels prepared to lose her virginity to Rob. She tells herself that Rob is what she has always wanted—someone cool, attractive, and with social

capital to boot. Sam ignores the fact that Rob wouldn’t give her the time of day for years, and actually teased her actively when they were younger. As Sam travels through the time loop and repeats Cupid Day again and again, she has to figure out how to navigate her relationship with Rob as it deteriorates more and more each “day.” As Sam learns more about herself and begins the attempt to become a better person, to help people other than herself, and to figure out what kind of person she wants to be—and to be remembered as—she realizes that Rob simply isn’t part of the picture.

Kent McFuller – Kent is Sam’s childhood sweetheart, and an offbeat but nonetheless likable nerd who attempts, despite the social divisions now dividing them, to connect with Sam even after all the years of estrangement between them. Kent throws a party on the night of Cupid Day—his parents are out of town, and, as he eventually reveals to Sam, he knew that if he had a party, she would probably show up to it. At the beginning of the novel, Sam can hardly stand Kent, but as she relives Cupid Day over and over again, she comes to see how deeply Kent cares for her and how easily he sees past the cool veneer she has crafted for herself over the years. Despite her relationship with Rob, Sam begins developing feelings for Kent, and though she grows increasingly frustrated and disheartened by the repetition of the time loop, she begins looking forward to connecting with Kent every day. Kent is an empathetic and genuinely kind friend, whose reluctance to engage in the cruelty and social posturing that is the norm at his high school makes him a truly unique character.

Juliet Sykes – Juliet Sykes is a social outcast at Thomas Jefferson High, a strange and quiet girl with no friends whose odd demeanor and unreadability have garnered her the nickname “Psycho”—or perhaps the nickname, and the cruel bullying she endures at the hands of Lindsay, Sam, Ally, Elody, and virtually every other student in school are what have *made* her so silent and inscrutable. At the party on the night of Cupid Day, Juliet shows up and makes a scene by berating Lindsay, Sam, Ally, and Elody for being “bitches.” The girls turn the tables on Juliet, however, and throw their drinks at her, and soon all of the other attendees are joining in. Juliet leaves, humiliated. That night, Sam and her friends get into a car accident, and the next morning, when Sam wakes up, she realizes that she is stuck in a time loop in which the events of Cupid Day are doomed to repeat themselves. As Sam navigates day after day, she soon realizes that it is Juliet she and her friends hit with their car that very first night—Juliet had been jumping out into the road, committing suicide. Juliet kills herself each night of the time loop, and though Sam tries to stop her, she fails again and again. Eventually, Sam realizes that the purpose of her loop was never to save her own life—it was only and always to save Juliet’s. In the end, Sam is successful, and though Juliet hovers over Sam as she loses consciousness for the last time and proclaims that Sam saved her, Sam insists that it is Juliet who saved her.

Juliet's pain is explored more deeply with each "day" that goes by, and it eventually comes to light that Juliet and Lindsay had been close friends as young girls, but the friendship ended when Juliet, who had borne witness to Lindsay's pain during her parents' divorce, was forced to bear the shame associated with Lindsay's having wet her sleeping bag on a Girl Scout trip when Lindsay blamed the incident on Juliet. That shame and misery followed Juliet around for her entire life as a student, and Oliver uses the cruel irony and pettiness of the origin of Juliet's ostracizing as a way of highlighting the unforeseeable but often inescapable effects of cruelty and bullying, even between young children.

Anna Cartullo – A junior at Thomas Jefferson who is both outcast and well-known for her promiscuity and her "white trash" background. At the start of the novel, Anna is having an affair with a fellow student, Alex Liment, who is already attached to a girl named Bridget McGuire, and this behavior makes her an object of Lindsay and Sam's derision and cruelty. On day five of the time loop, Sam—fed up with her inability to change her fate and determined to behave as recklessly and uncharacteristically as possible—finds herself in a bathroom with Anna Cartullo, and the two share a spliff and bond over the cruel, arbitrary hatreds and divisions that crisscross the social stratosphere over their high school.

Tara Flute – The de facto leader of the "Pugs" clique—secretly named so by Lindsay Edgecombe, who believes that Tara and her friends Courtney and Bethany are pretty from far away and ugly up close. The girls are on the fringes of Lindsay and Sam's social circle, and are in awe of Lindsay, Sam, Ally, and Elody, desperate to become closer to them.

Mr. Daimler – "The hottest guy at Thomas Jefferson is on the faculty," says Sam Kingston, speaking about her calculus teacher Mr. Daimler. A former student—and one-time prom king—at Thomas Jefferson, Mr. Daimler is tan, tall, and he dresses just like his students do, in trendy clothes. Sam nurses a serious crush on Mr. Daimler, but it is a totally hypothetical one—until day five of the time loop, the day on which Sam, frustrated by the repetitious events of the day and her inability to change her fate, decides to lash out and act recklessly all day, knowing that nothing she does will matter. She flirts recklessly with Mr. Daimler during class, and oversteps a serious line—he holds her back after class to reprimand her, but when Sam tells Mr. Daimler that she "wants" him, he throws himself onto her, kissing her and pinning her against a desk. Sam is not turned on by the experience, though, and finally realizes what a predatory sleazeball her teacher is—unable to move on from his high school glory days, he roams the same halls he did as a teenager, stuck in his own kind of purgatorial time loop.

Ms. Winters – The vice principal at the school who has a "crazy vendetta" against smokers, and is always lurking around parking lots and secluded spots on campus trying to catch students in the act of smoking cigarettes. When hiding from

Ms. Winters one afternoon after cutting class, Sam eventually discovers that she and Mr. Shaw, the athletic director, are having a torrid affair.

Vicky Hallinan – A girl whom Lindsay bullied in fourth grade. Lindsay nearly ruined Vicky's reputation forever by calling her fat. Though Vicky overcame the bullying and now is on the fringes of Lindsay and Sam's social circle, no one has ever forgotten Lindsay's cruel words about her. As Sam, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally crash their car on the night of Cupid Day, Sam finds herself shocked by the fact that she doesn't see her life flash before her eyes in the moments before death, but rather sees only Vicky Hallinan's miserable face on the day that Lindsay first bullied her publicly.

Patrick – Lindsay's on-again, off-again boyfriend. The two of them have broken up thirteen times in the span of one school year at the start of the novel—and it's only February. Lindsay is hot and heavy with Patrick, and says that Patrick is her "first and only," but in reality Lindsay lost her virginity under suspicious circumstances when visiting her stepbrother in New York City.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lauren Lornet – A fairly unpopular, not particularly smart—but generally kind—classmate of Sam Kingston's.

Alex Liment – A member of Sam's class who is well-known for seducing girls and being a general sleazebag.

Bridget McGuire – Alex Liment's girlfriend. Alex repeatedly cheats on the "super-Catholic" Bridget, who is saving herself for marriage, with the promiscuous Anna Cartullo.

Courtney Walker – A member of the "Pugs" clique who is desperate to befriend Sam Kingston.

Bethany Harps – A girl on the fringes of Sam's social circle, and a member of the "Pugs." Bethany is agreeable and changeable with no discernable personality, and according to Sam, "her only role in life is to agree with whatever has just been said."

Mr. Shaw – The athletic director at Thomas Jefferson High School. The girls at school all think he's a pervert, and Sam eventually discovers that he is having an affair with Ms. Winters, the vice principal.

Marian Sykes – Juliet Sykes' younger sister Marian has the same odd, ethereal beauty as her older sister, but seems significantly more popular and well-adjusted socially.



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.



FATE VS. AGENCY

When teen Samantha Kingston and her friends Lindsay, Ally, and Elody are involved in a car accident on a Friday night at the beginning of *Before I Fall*, it seems like just that: an accident. Sam wakes up the next morning and believes that the accident was a nightmare—until the prior day’s events begin repeating, and she realizes that the accident may have been more than just chance. Each day for seven days, Sam relives the last day of her life, hoping that she will be able to beat fate by altering the course of the events in her day, and taking some pretty radical chances along the way. As Sam struggles against what increasingly seems to be an unavoidable fate, she gradually recognizes that she is powerless to change the final outcome of her own death, but she can change how she acts in the face of that unavoidable fate, and redeem herself by saving Juliet’s life. While the higher power behind the logic of Sam’s fate is left unexplained (i.e., why she’s allowed a sort of purgatory to replay the last day of her life), the overarching message of the novel is that fate—particularly the ultimate fate of death—cannot be avoided, but one should try to act as kindly and lovingly as possible within the confines of that fate.

As Sam Kingston realizes that the last day of her life is repeating itself over and over, she sees herself as doomed. The repetitious days follow the same basic outline of events: Sam wakes up, her best friend Lindsay arrives to drive her to school for Cupid Day, and Sam nervously anticipates losing her virginity to her boyfriend Rob Cokran. Later, Sam goes to a party where an outcast named Juliet Sykes shows up to publicly berate Sam and her friends for ruthlessly bullying her for years, after which Sam and her friends leave the party, with the slightly intoxicated Lindsay driving, and crash. As each day passes, Sam attempts to change small variables here and there in order to attempt to change her fate. One day, she speaks however she wants to her friends, excoriating them for their selfishness and laying bare their many deceptions of themselves and of one another. One day, she attempts to avoid the party by convincing them to all have a sleepover at Ally’s instead—Sam avoids her own disaster that day, but as she and her friends head off to sleep, they are informed by Ally’s mother that Juliet Sykes shot herself in her bedroom after she arrived at the party to find that Sam and her friends weren’t present and thus failed to confront them. One day, Sam stays home from school altogether and spends the day with her younger sister, Izzy, planning on avoiding the party once again until, when she and her family go out for dinner, Sam encounters Juliet Sykes’s younger sister Marian and feels moved to attempt to intervene once again. Sam eventually realizes that it was Juliet that she and her friends crashed into when leaving the party; Juliet had jumped in front of the car,

seeking to kill herself.

Sam fails to save Juliet from this fate again and again until, on the final day, Sam realizes what must be done: she has to sacrifice herself in order to save Juliet. Death was her own fate all along, and no amount of attempting to assert agency over the course of events within the time loop would ever have altered that. Sam’s eventual acceptance of her fate, after seven days of attempting to deny it, signals the change her character undergoes over the course of the novel. She has gone from being someone obsessed with manipulating every facet of her activities, her friendships, and the way she appears to others to being someone who surrenders to the powers of fate and accepts that some situations require one to simply act as morally as possible within the confines of one’s agency, and then let destiny shape the rest of the path forward.

Sam’s *Groundhog Day*-style repetitions of February 12th are seen at first as a fate she is doomed to—and later, as a chance to make things right and save a life, even if that life is not her own. By exploring the complicated, changeable nature of free will and the seemingly hardwired, solid trajectory of fate, Oliver creates a parable to which young readers can look as a guide for how to move through the complicated, fraught world of their teenage years.



POPULARITY, STATUS, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Sam Kingston and her friends Lindsay, Ally, and Elody are the queen bees of Thomas Jefferson high school in the affluent community of Ridgeview, Connecticut. Obsessed with fashion, social media, social *capital*, and, indeed, themselves, the four girls torment underclassmen, nerds like Kent McFuller, and “freaks” like Juliet Sykes. The social ecosystem of Thomas Jefferson is both fragile and rigid, and it often seems there’s only one direction in which one can move on the social ladder: down. As the novel progresses, Sam Kingston, realizing that she is trapped in a kind of purgatory, begins to consider how small and petty the social trappings of her high school are, and tries to impress her newfound perspective on her oblivious friends and classmates. Her friends, however, find it difficult and sometimes even impossible to see beyond the popularity contest, and in the end it is only Sam who is able to prioritize acting righteously towards others over advancing her own social status. The novel ultimately shows that wealth, popularity, and status don’t matter in the grand scheme of life, and that it is instead kindness, generosity, and goodwill toward others that truly make a life worth living.

“Popularity’s a weird thing,” Samantha Kingston says in the early pages of *Before I Fall*. “You can’t really define it, and it’s not cool to talk about it, but you know it when you see it.” She goes on to describe how she and her friends—Lindsay, Elody, and

Ally—“can get away with everything” because they are popular, and are popular because they can get away with everything. “It’s circular,” Sam says matter-of-factly. She’s grateful for how easy things are for her and her friends—very grateful, in fact, because she knows what it’s like to be on the “other side” of the high school food chain. Samantha spent her childhood getting bullied by many of her classmates, including her current best friend Lindsay and super-popular boyfriend, Rob Cokran.

Popularity affords Sam lots of perks. She gets to kiss the cutest boys, attend the best parties, cheat off her smarter peers like Lauren Lornet, and feel superior to nerds like Kent McFuller (her grade-school sweetheart) and outcasts like Juliet Sykes. Despite all her social capital and power, Sam is self-aware when it comes to the delicate nature of her social status, painfully cognizant of the fact that while a few years ago she shot up the social ladder through her friendship with Lindsay, she could just as quickly slide back down at any moment simply by wearing, saying, or doing the wrong thing.

At the beginning of the novel, readers see Sam trying desperately to cement her social status. She is obsessed with how many **roses** with attached notes from friends and admirers—known throughout school as Valograms—she is going to receive on Cupid Day, and both nervous and excited about the prospect of losing her virginity to her hot and popular boyfriend, Rob Cokran. Though Sam knows something is wrong in her life—she’s not as in love with Rob as she feels she should be, and she knows that her friends’ cruelty toward others isn’t right—she’s too afraid to rock the boat or appear like an outsider by admitting any of her doubts to herself or to anyone else. As the novel progresses, and Sam lives Cupid Day over and over again, she begins to see the seams and imperfections in her social life, and she reflects more deeply on the warning signs that have always been there. She thinks back to when Rob and Lindsay teased and bullied her in elementary and middle school—Lindsay even made up an embarrassing song about Sam’s tendency to blush when nervous, and for years it followed her around and served as a major source of shame for her. She remembers walking in on Lindsay purging after eating dinner at a Mexican restaurant one time, though Lindsay assured her it was an accident and she’d just eaten too fast. Sam also recognizes that Lindsay’s inner demons—including her parents’ messy divorce, her less-than-perfect first time having sex, and her insecurities about the unforgiving nature of the social climate at Thomas Jefferson—are more serious than her fearless best friend ever lets on.

By the end of the novel, Sam has decided to dump Rob Cokran after realizing that she has had long-dormant feelings for her childhood sweetheart, Kent McFuller. After bonding with him at his house party, Sam understands that Kent alone can see the real her, and that the silly, pointless social cliques that have kept them separate all these years are ultimately

inconsequential. As Sam begins to follow her heart and flout social norms, she finds herself deepening the friendships she has with Lindsay, Ally, and Elody, and forging new ones with Kent and several other “outcasts” at school. She even makes efforts to become closer to the socially isolated but deeply sensitive oddball Juliet Sykes—and she does it all in order to set things right and try to show her friends and classmates that there is more to life than popularity.

Though at first Sam is reluctant to accept the fact that she is stuck in a time loop, slowly but surely she begins to see that there is a chance each day to make connections she’d never made before, befriend even the most unlikely souls, and transcend the simultaneously rigid and fragile boundaries of status and social class in order to better the lives of everyone in her school and teach even her stuck-up, status-obsessed friends that there is more to high school than seeming cool. Sam comes to understand that it is only through connecting deeply with others and performing acts of empathy and goodwill that a life is made whole. Although in the end she must rise to meet her devastating fate—sacrificing herself for Juliet Sykes—she does so having mended relationships with those she’d once hurt, stood up to those who hurt her, and made her life, in its final “days,” whole through acts of kindness toward others.



CRUELTY AND LOYALTY IN FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE

Samantha Kingston’s friendships, romances, and familial relationships—the relationships that lie at the heart of *Before I Fall*—are all defined by her competing instincts toward cruelty and loyalty. Haunted by a childhood of being bullied by the very girl who has, in high school, become her best friend—the sexy, cool, and mega-popular Lindsay Edgecombe—Sam understands that cruelty is often random, and that loyalty offers an escape from that randomness. Her loyalty to Lindsay has spared her from Lindsay’s cruelty, but in turn, Sam herself has become a cruel person in many ways, desperate to keep herself from once again becoming a victim. Sam is cruel to those who most deserve her love and loyalty: her mother, her sister, her childhood friend Kent McFuller, and the bullied and put-upon Juliet Sykes. Meanwhile, she remains loyal to those who are most cruel to her: her boyfriend Rob Cokran, Lindsay, and her well-meaning but desperate-to-fit-in friends Ally and Elody. As Oliver charts Sam’s mysterious journey through seven repetitions of her final day of life, however, this trend reverses, and Sam makes a shift toward righting her relationships and learning to act out of care, not fear or shame, toward others. Through Sam’s reckoning with the forces of cruelty and loyalty, Oliver shows that true friends and lovers do not use cruelty to extort loyalty—and that those who do are almost always doing so out of their own fear and insecurity.

Lindsay is Sam's best friend, and the de facto "leader" of their little clique. Lindsay is "mean and funny and ferocious and loyal," and though Sam knows that Lindsay uses cruelty to leverage her friends' loyalties toward her, Sam feels that Lindsay herself is a loyal and steadfast friend. Lindsay is a more complicated character than she seems to be at first glance, and as the novel progresses, Oliver turns a sharp eye to both Lindsay's cruelties and loyalties in order to investigate the nature of the two competing—but often twinned—impulses. At first glance, Lindsay seems to be a shallow, sex-crazed, sarcastic teen. She's obsessed with her status as a trendsetter and social butterfly, and comes off as cruel and callous toward anyone who isn't her "bestie." Lindsay ruthlessly makes fun of Juliet Sykes, a quiet loner and outcast at the school. Together with Sam, Ally, and Elody, Lindsay sends Juliet a **rose** every year on Cupid Day with a note that reads "Maybe next year, but probably not." Lindsay's assault on Juliet—having given her the nickname "Psycho" and essentially bullied her into total silence—is unspeakably cruel, but Lindsay inspires such loyalty in her friends that at the start of the novel even Sam herself claims that "Juliet deserves her nickname. She's a freak." Lindsay "hates" Juliet, but no one knows why—the only thing that's clear is that Lindsay is using her cruelty towards Juliet to band her friends together around a common enemy, whom they use as a punching bag.

As the novel progresses, it comes to light that Juliet and Lindsay were fast friends in elementary school. Juliet was there for Lindsay during the dark days of Lindsay's parents' divorce, and when things got so bad that the stressed and upset young Lindsay started wetting the bed, she lashed out in shame and began spreading rumors that Juliet was the crazy one, the bed-wetter, the freak. Lindsay's cruelty, therefore, is revealed to be aimed at inspiring two kinds of loyalty—a desire to be cool, condescending, and invincible on the part of her friends Sam, Elody, and Ally, and a desire to coerce Juliet into remaining loyal to a lie of Lindsay's own making. If Lindsay—whose popularity allows her to get away with "everything," as Sam states early on in the text—can make Juliet into enough of an outcast, no one would believe the truth even if she were bold enough to speak it out loud. Thus, cruelty is shown to be a very effective weapon for Lindsay—as a method of securing loyalty and her own sense of self-worth.

Sam Kingston's hot, popular boyfriend Rob Cokran is another cruel figure who somehow inspires loyalty in those close to him. Sam believes she is in love with him at the start of the novel, though as she prepares to lose her virginity to him on the night of Cupid Day, she second-guesses whether she really loves Rob as much as she thinks she does. Rob is, to put it plainly, a bad guy—he is chauvinistic, shallow, and cruel, and his loyalties, like Lindsay, lie with the advancement of his own social status. In other words, Rob is only ever looking out for himself. Nevertheless, Sam is torn by her feelings of loyalty towards Rob—but soon, she comes to realize that this loyalty is more

toward an idea of Rob than Rob himself. As a social outcast, bullied and unwanted, the younger Sam dreamed of one day being able to snag a guy like Rob, so now that she has found herself in a relationship with him, she feels compelled to stay with him despite his cruel nature. Eventually Sam finds herself pulled away from Rob and toward a more unlikely, but certainly much more loyal partner: Kent McFuller. Kent has been in love with Sam since grade school, and despite the mistakes she has made and the cruelties she has perpetrated, Kent is able to see the true Sam shining through. When Sam realizes that Kent has always wanted to be there for her, despite her abandonment of him, she understands more intimately the true meaning of loyalty: it should come from a place of desire, not obligation, and it should never be forced or leveraged in the face of cruelty.

At the close of the novel's first chapter, Sam asks her readers, "Is what I did really so much worse than what anybody else does? Is it really so much worse than what you do?" She poses this question in the context of wondering whether she "deserved" to die in a car accident after she, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally humiliated Juliet at Kent's party. Sam's questioning of whether her own brand of cruelty is really all that bad, and her desperate attempt to justify her cruel actions, betrays her knowledge that her cruel behavior is not just wrong, but inexcusable. As the novel progresses, Sam interrogates the factors that motivated her and those around her to act cruelly, and comes to understand that although cruelty and loyalty are opposites, they are also often inextricably linked. The lesson Sam learns—and that Oliver, in turn, seems to want her readers to absorb—is that true friends don't treat others with cruelty, nor attempt to extort loyalty from others through cruelty and deception.



REBIRTH, RENEWAL, AND REDEMPTION

The plot of *Before I Fall* plays out in a time loop that rewinds, resets, and replays each day. This loop repeats seven times in total, and although it often ends in death, pain, and suffering, the events of Friday, February 12th restart the next morning as if nothing has happened. The narrative of *Before I Fall* is designed to frustrate the reader just as deeply as it frustrates its protagonist, Samantha Kingston, who must repeat the same fateful day over and over again for a full "week" before she finally figures out the secret to breaking the time loop in which she has become stuck. Samantha is "reborn" each day, but retains her memories of the previous cycles of the loop, along with the different changes she has been able to make as the days have dragged on. Sam ultimately realizes that nothing will allow her to escape the cycle other than repentance for her cruelty through great personal sacrifice. Sam comes to understand that only through dying nobly, exchanging her life for that of another, can she be free from the painful and frustrating loop. Thus, Oliver ultimately uses this loop to argue that true redemption and

rebirth cannot be won through small gestures or half-measures; rather, they require self-sacrifice and a total abandonment of everything one once knew.

As Samantha Kingston realizes with fear, confusion, and dread that she is locked in a time loop, and is being made to relive Friday, February 12th over and over again, she considers what approach she is meant to take to navigating the loop, and what outcome she might be able to secure. She is, of course, determined to save her own life and prevent herself from dying. Her first few days through the loop are marked by selfishness and even recklessness as she attempts to “trick” the loop and cheat death. By day four, Sam is frustrated, anxious, and angry. She lashes out and acts recklessly, excoriating her friends for their cruelty, trashing all of her **Valogram roses**, seducing her sleazy math teacher Mr. Daimler, and attempting to sleep with her boyfriend Rob Cokran at Kent McFuller’s party rather than face, once again, Juliet Sykes’ meltdown and subsequent humiliation. By day five, Sam is, for the first time, relieved to be awake on February 12th, grateful that none of her reckless actions from the previous day stuck. Day five represents a change in Sam, as she begins to realize fully what is happening to her, and consider what it is that she still wants out of her life. She begins to think about how she can effect meaningful change rather than just making desperate attempts to subvert fate or escape the loop, and she begins to view the loop as an opportunity to seek renewal and redemption.

By the time Samantha wakes up on the seventh day of the time loop’s repetition—what will be its final day—she feels “wonderful” and peaceful rather than full of dread, fear, or confusion. “I am falling,” she says, describing her first waking moments that day, “tumbling through the air, but this time the darkness is alive around me, full of beating things, and I realize that I’m not surrounded by dark but have only had my eyes closed all this time. I open them, feeling silly...” As soon as Sam wakes up, she knows that “it was never about saving [her own] life”—not, at least, in the way that she thought it was. After watching Juliet desperately attempt to end her life—and succeed at it—six nights in a row, Sam understands at last what has to happen. Sam lives day seven as righteously as she can. She is kind to her family and showers her friends with compliments, declarations of love, and reassurances that she will always be there for them, while simultaneously attempting to lessen the extent of their cruelty towards Juliet Sykes and all the other students they see as outcasts. That night, after Juliet’s outburst at the party, Sam follows her into the woods, and when she realizes that begging Juliet not to run out into the road won’t work, she flings herself in the path of an oncoming truck, sacrificing herself so that Juliet can live. As Sam’s life fades, she sees a “halo” of white hair above her, and hears a voice asking: “Why did you save me?” to which Sam replies, “No. The opposite,” before falling once again and for the last time. In other words, Sam has been “saved” by Juliet in the

sense that Juliet has shown Sam that she needs to atone for her cruelties in order to escape the purgatorial time loop in which she has found herself. Sam believes she would have remained in the loop forever had she not recognized that the only way toward renewal and rebirth was to forget herself, abandon fear, and discover meaning in helping others.

Samantha’s journey through the time loop is a journey toward rebirth, renewal, and redemption, though at the beginning of the loop she does not understand this. As the days pass by, Sam examines her actions deeply, and comes to understand that she can use the loop as a chance to better herself, be good to the people she loves, and hopefully inspire change in the friends and classmates she knows could be doing better for both themselves and their fellow students. On the seventh day—a symbolic number, and the Biblical day of rest—Samantha at last decides to fully devote herself not to the salvation of her own earthly life, but to the salvation of her soul. She knows that the loop has, through all its twists and turns, led her toward a deeper understanding of herself and the community around her, and accepts that the path toward redemption requires her to march bravely into the unknown, abandon her ego and her desires for worldly goods, and devote herself to the betterment of others and the salvation of someone in need.



SYMBOLS

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



ROSES

The central symbol in the world of *Before I Fall* is the long-stem roses with little notes attached, or “Valograms,” that are exchanged between students at Thomas Jefferson High school on Cupid Day and are used as a marker of a student’s status and popularity. The roses are passed out by “Cupids”—according to Sam Kingston, “usually freshman or sophomore girls trying to get in good with the upperclassmen.” This quotation from the novel’s first chapter demonstrates how powerful the roses are—just being a messenger who delivers them has the potential to elevate one’s social status. On Cupid Day, February 12th, the roses are handed out all day long, and those students who amass the most are seen as popular and high-status (Sam’s cool and sexy best friend Lindsay Edgecombe once got twenty-two roses, and this year is “going for twenty-five”) while those who get less than ten—or, heavens forbid, less than five—are left feeling humiliated, knowing that their low number of roses “basically means that [they’re] either ugly or unknown.” Sam Kingston notes that “sometimes people scavenge for dropped roses to add to their bouquets,” so desperate are Thomas Jefferson students to gather up as many Valograms as they can and publicly, physically assert their social

status and thus their social capital.

The roses represent more than just what they symbolize in the world of Thomas Jefferson High, however. Overall the roses symbolize the petty anxieties and desperate attempts to change one's image, status, or place in the world, which Sam Kingston and her fellow classmates engage in not just on the frenzied Cupid Day celebration, but every day of their lives. At the start of the novel, Sam herself is concerned about how many roses she'll get, and from whom—she forces her boyfriend Rob Cokran to send her one, and when it arrives, she is grateful for it even despite the lukewarm note attached. By the novel's end, however, Sam has lived Cupid Day over and over again, and she comes to see how pointless the roses are. On the fifth Cupid Day she re-experiences, she even rebels against the social order and protests, in her own way, the obsession surrounding the roses by dumping her plump bouquet of Valograms in the trash in front of all her classmates. As Sam learns the lessons of goodwill and empathy toward others and deliverance through repentance and changes in her once cruel, petty behavior, she sees through the sham of the Cupid Day tradition, and her lessening interest in the roses she acquires—who they're from and how many of them there are—comes to symbolize her growth as a person.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *Before I Fall* published in 2010.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“Last year I got twenty-two roses.” Lindsay flicks her cigarette butt out of the window and leans over for a slurp of coffee. “I’m going for twenty-five this year.” Each year before Cupid Day the student council sets up a booth outside the gym. For two dollars each, you can buy your friends Valograms—roses with little notes attached to them—which then get delivered by Cupids (usually freshman or sophomore girls trying to get in good with the upperclassman) throughout the day.

“I’d be happy with fifteen,” I say. It’s a big deal how many roses you get. You can tell who’s popular and who isn’t by the number of roses they’re holding. It’s bad if you get under ten and humiliating if you don’t get more than five—it basically means that you’re either ugly or unknown. Probably both. Sometimes people scavenge for dropped roses to add to their bouquets, but you can always tell.

Related Characters: Lindsay Edgecombe, Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

At the start of the novel, Sam Kingston and her friends are preparing for Cupid Day—their school’s Valentine’s Day celebration, which is really just a thinly-veiled popularity contest. At this point in the text, Sam is still deeply self-centered, naïve, and feels invincible due to her popularity. As she gears herself up for the day ahead—a veritable frenzy of clamoring for social status and tangible evidence of one’s worth and wealth within the ecosystem of high school—she examines the lengths to which people go to try and change their social fate, going so far as to scrounge for dropped roses in order to try and exert some agency over their social lives and status.

“The point is, we can do [embarrassing] things. You know why? Because we’re popular. And we’re popular because we can get away with everything. So it’s circular. I guess what I’m saying is there’s no point in analyzing it. If you draw a circle, there will always be an inside and an outside, and unless you’re a total nut job, it’s pretty easy to see which is which. I’m not going to lie, though. It’s nice that everything’s easy for us. It’s a good feeling knowing you can basically do whatever you want. [...] And believe me: I know what it’s like to be on the other side. I was there for the first half of my life. The bottom of the bottom, lowest of the low. I know what it’s like to have to squabble and pick and fight over the leftovers. So now I have first pick of everything. So what. That’s the way it is. Nobody ever said life was fair.”

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam considers the nature of popularity, she notes that it is circular and often ineffable—what’s cool or uncool, and why, can’t be put into words. “There’s no point in analyzing it,” Sam says, because the rules of popularity are stark but somewhat esoteric. There are arbitrary divisions throughout her high school that are at once faint lines in the

sand and great chasms or valleys: social status is difficult to change, and hardly ever “fair.” Sam herself knows the pain of being an outsider and a loser, but now that she has done the impossible and crossed the divide into popularity, she is eager to forget her past, or at least attempt to ignore it—she accepts the perks of her fairly recent popularity matter-of-factly, trying not to betray the uncertainty and lack of confidence she no doubt still feels as regards the permanence of her status—or lack thereof.

☝ I know some of you are thinking maybe I deserved it. Maybe I shouldn't have sent that rose to Juliet or dumped my drink on her at the party. Maybe I shouldn't have copped off Lauren Lornet's quiz. Maybe I shouldn't have said those things to Kent. There are probably some of you who think I deserved it because I was going to let Rob go all the way—because I wasn't going to save myself. But before you start pointing fingers, let me ask you: is what I did really so bad? So bad I deserved to die? So bad I deserved to die like *that*? Is what I did really so much worse than what anybody else does? Is it really so much worse than what you do?

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Rob Kokran, Kent McFuller, Lauren Lornet, Juliet Sykes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 80-81

Explanation and Analysis

After Sam Kingston recounts the final day of her life, which culminates in a bloody, fiery car accident, she reveals many of her crueler, more callous behaviors, thoughts, and actions. Despite all of the pain Sam has caused—to Juliet, Kent, and others—and all of the questionable things she has done (skipping class, cheating on tests, getting drunk, allowing herself to be pressured into wanting to have sex with a less-than-honorable guy), Sam doesn't believe it all amounts to her deserving to die. Sam doesn't understand why her destiny is to die so horribly—she knows that her choices don't add up to a great track record, but nonetheless feels that she shouldn't be resigned to such a horrible fate. As the novel progresses, Sam will attempt to balance out her actions and do some good in an attempt to change the fact of her death, but will learn that perhaps the universe doesn't keep score—perhaps larger, unseen forces are at work, and that attempting to exert agency over one's destiny can only do so much.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ I read once that you get déjà vu when the two halves of your brain process things at different speeds: the right half a few seconds before the left, or vice versa. Science is probably my worst subject, so I didn't understand the whole post, but that would explain the weird double feeling that it leaves you with, like the world is splitting in half—or you are. That's the way I feel, at least: like there's a real me and a reflection of me, and I have no way of telling which is which.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam navigates the second day of the time loop, she finds herself confused, disoriented, and feeling ill and off-balance. As the events of Friday, February 12th repeat themselves, with conversations and events occurring nearly exactly the same as the day before, Sam tells herself she must just be experiencing déjà vu. But as the school day progresses, Sam realizes that the feeling goes deeper than just a momentary confusion: she feels cleaved in half completely, uncertain which version of events is the real one and unable to even begin to discern the difference. Sam feels powerless and frightened—things she hasn't felt in a very long time, shielded from them as she has been by her popularity and resulting self-confidence.

☝ Lindsay, Ally, Elody and I are as close as you can be, but there are still some things we never talk about. For example, even though Lindsay says Patrick is her first and only, this isn't technically true. Technically, her first was a guy she met at a party when she was visiting her stepbrother at NYU. They smoked pot, split a six-pack, and had sex, and he never knew she hadn't done it before. We don't talk about that. We don't talk about the fact that we can never hang out at Elody's house after five o'clock because her mother will be home, and drunk. We don't talk about the fact that Ally never eats more than a quarter of what's on her plate, even though she's obsessed with cooking and watches the Food Network for hours on end. We don't talk about the joke that for years trailed me down hallways, into classrooms, and on the bus, that wove its way into my dreams: “What's red and white and weird all over? Sam Kingston!” And we definitely don't talk about the fact that Lindsay was the one who made it up. A good friend keeps secrets for you. A best friend helps you keep your own secrets.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Patrick, Elody, Ally Harris, Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106-107

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam examines her relationships with her three best friends, she can't help but remember the secret, hidden parts of their lives—the parts that no one talks about. The girls are best friends, which means their duty towards one another goes beyond protecting each other from their school, or the world—they must protect each other from their own selves, as well. Each girl harbors at least one major secret, one large shameful burden, and their group, tight-knit and in love with one another as they are, has an unspoken commitment to help one another push away the things they cannot deal with or don't want to think about. Sam sees this service they provide for one another as a mark of loyalty and devotion, rather than as a means of denial or a sign of distance. Keeping the truth from one another—and themselves—is a necessary means of suppressing dark, embarrassing, or painful secrets which would individually threaten each girls' claim to popularity, status, and the effortless brand of cool their group is known throughout school for. Even alone among themselves, they cannot ever be as truly close and open as they otherwise might be, because doing so could affect how they are seen by others.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ Here's one of the things I learned that morning: if you cross a line and nothing happens, the line loses meaning. It's like that old riddle about a tree falling in the forest, and whether it makes a sound if there's no one around to hear it. You keep drawing a line farther and farther away, crossing it every time. That's how people end up stepping off the edge of the earth. You'd be surprised at how easy it is to bust out of orbit, to spin out to a place where no one can touch you. To lose yourself—to get lost.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 194-195

Explanation and Analysis

As the events of Cupid Day—Friday, February 12th—begin repeating themselves over again for a fourth time, Sam is angry and frustrated. Despite her attempts to change the course of events and remove herself from the time loop, she finds herself starting at square one, and the anger she feels at the knowledge that nothing she does seems to matter at all spills over. She begins acting out—she dresses provocatively for school, landing herself in a fight with her parents, and then on the way to school she berates Lindsay for her cruelty and chastises Elody for constantly putting up with it for fear of getting booted from the group. As she crosses all these lines while remaining aware of the lack of consequences she'll face, Sam realizes that in the “real world” people cross these lines all the time and find themselves drifting farther and farther away from who they once were. Sam both longs to “get lost” within herself—and within the time loop—and to find her way back to reality and normalcy. The tension between these two impulses makes itself seen and felt constantly as day four goes on.

☝☝ Anna's face gets serious, and she takes a long pull of the joint, then stares at me through the cloud of blue smoke.

“So,” she says, “why do you guys hate me?”

Of all the things I expect her to say, it's not this. Even more unexpected, she holds the spliff out in my direction, offering me some. I hesitate for only a second. Hey, just because I'm dead doesn't mean I'm a saint.

“We don't hate you.” It doesn't come out convincingly. The truth is I'm not sure. I don't hate Anna, really; Lindsay's always said she does, but it's hard to know what Lindsay's reasons are for anything. [...]

“Then what's the reason?” She doesn't say, *For all the shitty things you've done*. For the bathroom graffiti. For the fake email blast sophomore year: *Anna Cartullo has chlamydia*. She doesn't have to. She passes the joint back to me. I take another hit. [...] “I don't know.” Because it's easy. “I guess you need to take things out on somebody. The words are out of my mouth before I realize they're true.

Related Characters: Anna Cartullo, Samantha Kingston (speaker), Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 217-218

Explanation and Analysis

On day four, at lunchtime, Sam finds herself excluded from

her friend group with nowhere to go, so she heads for an out-of-the-way bathroom in the science wing. There, she finds Anna Cartullo—the class “slut” whom she and her friends have bullied and spread rumors about for years. Sam, with nothing to lose and aware that nothing she does will last beyond the bounds of the day, stays with Anna, and the two have a long conversation about the nature of Sam’s group’s “hatred” of Anna. It’s not hatred, though, Sam insists—it’s simply the way things shake out sometimes, and their treatment of Anna is a casualty of the sad fact that there will always be insiders and outsiders, and those in power get to choose who is who. Sam is admitting in this passage that she and her friends have ostracized and humiliated Anna at every turn for no good reason—they simply needed to “take things out on somebody.” Sam is forced to confront the sick, flawed logic behind this statement, and what it says about her as a person.

“It’s not my fault I can’t be like you, okay? I don’t get up in the morning thinking the world is one big shiny, happy place, okay? That’s just not how I work. I don’t think I can be fixed.” I meant to say, *I don’t think “it” can be fixed*, but it comes out wrong, and suddenly I’m on the verge of crying. [...] There’s a moment of silence that seems to last forever. Then Kent rests his hand on my elbow just for a second, [and] just that one little touch gives me the chills.

“I was going to tell you that you look beautiful with your hair down. That’s all I was going to say.” Kent’s voice is steady and low. He moves around me to the head of the stairs, pausing just at the top. When he turns back to me he looks sad, even though he’s smiling the tiniest bit. “You don’t need to be fixed, Sam.” He says the words, but it’s like I don’t even hear them; it’s like they go through my whole body at the same time, like I’m absorbing them from the air. [...] I’m a nonperson, a shadow, a ghost. Even *before* the accident I’m not sure that I was a whole person—that’s what I’m realizing now. And I’m not sure where the damage begins.

Related Characters: Kent McFuller, Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

At the fourth night of Kent’s party, he confronts Sam about her behavior throughout the day. She becomes defensive, and through a slip of the tongue states that she cannot be

fixed. Sam, who at the beginning of the novel saw herself as unimpeachably cool, the object of everyone’s envy, now sees herself as someone—or something—broken beyond repair. Kent reassures her, though, that she doesn’t need to be fixed—but the words don’t stick. Sam feels so low, so hollow, and so helpless and hopeless both that she sees herself as a “ghost.” Seeing herself in this light forces her to question who she was before the accident—and whether the feelings of hollowness and rootlessness she feels now have been part of her all along. She cannot discern where the trouble started or “where the damage begins,” but realizes that things have been broken for perhaps much longer than the time loop has been going on.

Ally takes a sip of the vodka she’s holding, then winces. “Lindsay was freaking out. I told you, she was really upset.”

“It’s true though, isn’t it? What I said.”

“It doesn’t matter if it’s true.” Ally shakes her head. “She’s Lindsay. She’s ours. We’re each other’s, you know?”

I’ve never thought of Ally as smart, but this is probably the smartest thing I’ve heard in a long time.

Related Characters: Ally Harris, Samantha Kingston (speaker), Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ally approaches Sam at Kent’s party to urge Sam to make things right with Lindsay after Sam picked a fight earlier that morning. Sam, who has grown frustrated with the unspoken things in her friendships and the ways she and her friends treat other people, believes that exposing the truth and getting her qualms about Lindsay’s behavior out in the open was the right thing to do, but Ally has another point of view—she believes that friendship comes first, and that the girls “belong” to one another—and that this bond needs to come before exposing the harsh truth for the truth’s sake. Sam, against all odds, finds herself agreeing with Ally, realizing that friendship and loyalty to a person are perhaps more important than strict loyalty to an ideal.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“I thought Cupid Day was one of your favorites.”

“It is. Or, I mean, it was.” I sit up on my elbows. “I don’t know, it’s kind of stupid, if you think about it.”

[My mom] raises her eyebrows.

I start rattling on, not really thinking about what I want to say before I say it. “The whole point is just to show other people how many friends you have. But everybody *knows* how many friends everybody else has. And it’s not like you actually get more friends this way or, I don’t know, get closer to the friends you do have.”

My mom smiles a tiny bit. “Well, you’re lucky to have very good friends, and to know it. I’m sure the roses are very meaningful to some people.”

“I’m just saying, the whole thing is kind of sleazy.”

“This doesn’t sound like the Samantha Kingston I know.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I’m changing.” I don’t mean those words either, until I hear them. Then I think that they might be true, and I feel a flicker of hope. Maybe there’s still a chance for me, after all. Maybe I *have* to change.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 271-272

Explanation and Analysis

By day five of the time loop, Sam has begun to change in meaningful ways. She now sees the frivolity of many of the traditions and routine behaviors she once held dear, or simply never even questioned. She understands that Cupid Day, while fun for her and her ultra-popular friends, is ultimately a means of perpetuating the social divisions that run through her high school, and a day rife with pain, humiliations, and feelings of insecurity and inadequacy for most of the student body. Sam’s articulation of this realization surprises her mother, but Sam realizes that perhaps she is becoming someone new—and that perhaps she needs to keep up with this becoming, with this renewal, if she is to have a chance at surviving the loop and restoring things to normal.

“It amazes me how easy it is for things to change, how easy it is to start off down the same road you always take and wind up somewhere new. Just one false step, one pause, one detour, and you end up with new friends or a bad reputation or a boyfriend or a breakup. It’s never occurred to me before; I’ve never been able to see it. And it makes me feel, weirdly, like maybe all of these different possibilities exist at the same time, like each moment we live has a thousand other moments layered underneath it that look different. Maybe Lindsay and I are best friends and he hate each other, both. Maybe I’m only one math class away from being a slut like Anna Cartullo. Maybe I *am* like her, deep down. Maybe we all are: just one lunch period away from eating alone in the bathroom. I wonder if it’s ever really possible to know the truth about someone else, or if the best we can do is just stumble into each other, heads down, hoping to avoid collision.”

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Anna Cartullo, Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 285-286

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam, who on day five has stayed home “sick” from school on Cupid Day, receives a text from all of her friends telling her that they love her. On day four, however, Sam fought horribly with her friends, and found herself excluded from the group for the first time. As she now considers that somewhere, in an alternate universe, Lindsay is still mad at her, she considers the tiny moments that can change a life forever, and the alternate version of all things that lies just below the surface of reality. Sam realizes how quickly one’s position can change now, having overstepped several boundaries and altered her social standing in the course of just one day on day four, and considers it absurd and ludicrous that she is, at all times, just one mistake away—just as her friends are all one mistake away—from a totally different world.

“Maybe the whole point is I have to prove that I’m a good person. Maybe I have to prove that I deserve to move on. Maybe Juliet Sykes is the only thing between me and an eternity of chocolate fountains and perfect love and guys who always call when they say they will and banana sundaes that actually help you burn calories. Maybe she’s my ticket out.”

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Juliet

Sykes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

By the end of day five, Sam has begun to wonder if she is in a type of purgatory—if the time loop is a fate she has been condemned to until she can find a way out of it by learning a lesson or proving her goodness. Sam, at this point, still believes that the loop is all about her—that the goal is to deliver herself from it rather than focusing on making things better for anyone else. Sam sees Juliet, at this point in the text, only as her “ticket out”—she doesn’t yet understand that in order for things to change in a meaningful way, Sam will need to try to save more than her own life, and look out for more people than just herself.

☝ The wind shrieks, and I suddenly realize that Juliet's only a half inch from the road, teetering on the thin line where the pavement begins, like she's balancing on a tightrope.

“Maybe you should come away from the road,” I say, but all the time in the back of my head, there’s an idea growing and swelling, a horrible, sickening realization, massing up and taking shape like clouds on the horizon. Someone calls my name again. And then, still in the distance, I hear the throaty wail of “Splinter” by Fallacy pumping from someone's car.

“Sam! Sam!” I recognize it as Kent's voice now.

Juliet turns to face me then. She’s smiling, but it's the saddest smile I’ve ever seen.

“Maybe next time,” she says. “But probably not.”

Related Characters: Kent McFuller, Juliet Sykes, Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 323-324

Explanation and Analysis

Sam has finally managed to get a hold of Juliet Sykes, and to find out what exactly it is she did each night after her strange, uncanny tirade against Sam, Lindsay, Ally, and Elody. As Sam realizes with a “sickening” new awareness that it is Juliet whom she and Lindsay hit that very first night, she begins to believe that Juliet intended all along to

kill herself and take as many of the girls with her as she could—or at least make it so that they were responsible for her death in every single way possible. As Juliet bids farewell to Sam, she echoes the cruel Valogram the girls sent her each year—“Maybe next time, but probably not”—and the words now take on a sinister new meaning: maybe next time, or “tomorrow,” Sam will at last be able to save Juliet... but probably not.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ “Do you want any breakfast, Sam?” my mom asks. I never eat breakfast at home, but my mom still asks me every day—when she catches me before I duck out, anyway—and in that moment I realize how much I love the little everyday routines of my life: the fact that she always asks, the fact that I always say no because there’s a sesame bagel waiting for me in Lindsay’s car, the fact that we always listen to “No More Drama” as we pull into the parking lot. The fact that my mom always cooks spaghetti and meatballs on Sunday, and the fact that once a month my dad takes over the kitchen and makes his “special stew” which is just hot dog pieces and baked beans and lots of extra ketchup and molasses, and I would never admit to liking it, but it’s actually one of my favorite meals. The details that are my life’s special pattern, like how in handwoven rugs what really makes them unique are the tiny flaws in the stitching, little gaps and jumps and stutters that can never be reproduced. So many things become beautiful when you really look.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 343-344

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam’s sixth day in the loop gets off to a start, she finds herself feeling a new kind of tenderness toward the life that she for so long saw as annoying, banal, or unremarkable. The time loop has, of course, made Sam more sensitive to the repetitive nature of her days, both at home and at school, but on this day, something starts to shift. Sam is no longer alarmed or annoyed by the repetitions, and instead is able to look within them to see that they all add up to her life’s “special pattern,” and that the consistency and comfort she gets from her friends and her family alike have been the bedrock upon which Sam has relied for so many years.

●● [Lindsay] doesn't hate [Juliet.] She's afraid of her. Juliet Sykes, the keeper of Lindsay's oldest, maybe her worst, secret. And it all seems absurd now, the chance and randomness of it. One person shoots up and the other spirals downward—random and meaningless. As simple as being in the right place, or the wrong place, or however you want to look at it. As simple as getting a craving for Diet Pepsi one day at a pool party, and getting swept away; as simple as not saying no. “Why didn't you say anything?” I ask, even though I already know the answer. My voice comes out hoarse from the effort of swallowing back tears.

Juliet shrugs. “She was my best friend, you know? She was always so sad back then.” Juliet makes a noise that could be a laugh or a whimper. “Besides,” she says more quietly, “I thought it would pass.”

Related Characters: Juliet Sykes, Samantha Kingston (speaker), Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 393

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sam is locked in a bathroom at Kent McFuller's house with Juliet after stopping Juliet from delivering her tirade against Lindsay, Elody, Ally, and herself. Sam and Juliet have had a long conversation about the torments the friend group have inflicted upon Juliet over the years, and Sam has come to understand that she was always an unwilling pawn in Lindsay's long game against Juliet. Always afraid that Juliet would reveal her deepest, darkest secrets—the ugliness of her parents' divorce, the fact that it was Lindsay who wet the bed at Girl Scout Camp and not Juliet—Lindsay launched a years-long campaign to flatten, discredit, and ostracize Juliet, so that even if she dared to speak Lindsay's secrets out loud no one would believe her. Faced with this knowledge, Sam is devastated at the part she has played in perpetuating this cruelty, and desperate to know how things could have gone on for so long. She marvels at how unfair the social hierarchy of her school is, and how it allows certain people to suffer tremendously while others are shielded entirely from pain and suffering—and how it seems that often no amount of effort can change one's fate in this regard.

●● At the same time the more I think about it [...] the angrier I get. This is my *life*: the whole big, sprawling mess of my life in all its possibilities—first kisses and last kisses and college and apartments and marriage and fights and apologies and happiness—brought to a point, a second, an edge of a second, razored off in that final moment by Juliet's last act: her revenge against us, against me. The farther I get from the party, the more I think, *No. It can't happen this way. No matter what we did, it can't happen this way.*

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Juliet Sykes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 398

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam chases Juliet Sykes through the woods, yet again attempting to save her from committing suicide by jumping into the road, Sam reflects on how unfair it is that her entire future hinges on Juliet's desire for revenge. She doesn't want Juliet to die in such an awful way, and vows that she won't let things happen “this way” once again. Sam is attempting to change fate—her own and Juliet's—through exertion of agency over the situation; she doesn't yet realize that she cannot bring about all the change she wants to, and that some things are beyond her control despite her best efforts. Notably, Sam is still concerned more with making things right for herself at this point than focusing purely and nobly on saving Juliet. Though she's been through the loop many, many times, there is still more she needs to learn before she can get things right.

●● She wants me to tell her it's okay. She needs me to tell her that. I can't, though. Instead I say, quietly, “People would like you anyway, Lindz.” I don't say, if you stopped pretending so much, but I know she understands. “We'd still love you no matter what.”

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Lindsay Edgecombe

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 410

Explanation and Analysis

Sam has discovered the truth about Lindsay's hatred and fear of Juliet, and when she confronts her about it, Lindsay attempts to lie before admitting that she, too, thought that

Juliet's ostracism would eventually pass or die out. Lindsay ruined someone else's life in order to keep a secret of her own safe—in this passage, Sam tells Lindsay that there was no need for her years of fear and cruelty; people would love the fierce, fearless, funny Lindsay no matter what her past looked like. It is only through her cruelty that Lindsay has made herself into someone people don't like; the pain and suffering she endured in her youth and the ways in which she tried to cover it up would probably be forgiven if only Lindsay could find the strength to own up to everything and remake herself.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ The last time I have the dream it goes like this: I am falling, tumbling through the air, but this time the darkness is alive around me, full of beating things, and I realize that I'm not surrounded by dark but have only had my eyes closed all this time. I open them, feeling silly, and at the same time a hundred thousand butterflies take off around me, so many of them in so many brilliant colors they are like a solid rainbow, temporarily obscuring the sun. But as they wing higher and higher they reveal a landscape below us, all green and gold and sun-drenched fields and pink-tinged clouds drifting underneath me, and the air around me is clear and blue and sweet smelling, and I'm laughing, laughing, laughing as I spin through the air because, of course, I haven't been falling all this time.

I've been flying.

And when I wake up it's wonderful, like I've been carried quietly onto a calm, peaceful shore, and the dream, and its meaning, has broken over me like a wave and is ebbing away now, leaving me with a single, solid certainty. I know now.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 416

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam wakes up on the seventh day of the time loop, she again experiences the dream of falling that has haunted her every night all week—but this time sees it in an entirely new light. She realizes that she was never falling—she was flying. Sam had seen herself as “condemned” to the time loop, and conceived of it as a kind of purgatory, for many of the days she relived it. Now, however, Sam sees it for what it has been all along—a chance to remake herself, to understand the people and the world around her a little bit better, to lift

herself up. In the process, she is no longer frightened by the idea of dying, but sees it as something fascinating and beautiful.

☞ In my head I've been saying good-bye to everything, all these places I've seen so often I start to ignore them: the deli on the hill with perfect chicken cutlets and the trinket store where I used to buy thread to make friendship bracelets and the Realtor's and the dentist's and the little garden where Steve King put his tongue in my mouth in seventh grade, and I was so surprised I bit down. I can't stop thinking about how strange life is, about Kent and Juliet and even Alex and Anna and Bridget and Mr. Shaw and Ms. Winters—about how complex and connected everything is, all threaded together like some vast, invisible netting—and how sometimes you can think you're doing the right thing, but it's actually terrible and vice versa.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Bridget McGuire, Anna Cartullo, Alex Liment, Juliet Sykes, Kent McFuller

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Sam rises on the seventh Friday, February 12th, knowing what must happen—she knows that she must sacrifice herself for Juliet Sykes. As she begins to accept her fate and understand that not only will this be the last day of the time loop, it will very likely be her last day alive, she takes everything in in a new light; she has been reborn, in a way, and sees everything through fresh eyes. She is grateful for everything around her—the town that has made her who she is, and the people who have touched her life—and recognizes now that it was always all interconnected: fragile, changeable, and thus all the more precious.

●● Floating images, moving in and out: bright green eyes and a field of sun-warmed grass, a mouth saying, *Sam, Sam, Sam*, making it sound like a song. Three faces blooming together like flowers on a single stem, names ebbing away from me, a single word: love. Red and white flashes, tree branches lit up like the vaulted ceiling of a church. And a face above mine, white and beautiful, eyes as large as the moon. *You saved me*. A hand on my cheek, cool and dry. *Why did you save me?* Words welling up on a tide: *No. The opposite*. Eyes the color of a dawn sky, a crown of blond hair, so bright and white and blinding I could swear it was a halo.

Related Characters: Samantha Kingston (speaker), Juliet Sykes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 468

Explanation and Analysis

As Sam lies in the road, dying, having just flung herself in front of an oncoming truck in order to prevent Juliet Sykes from committing suicide by doing the same, she feels herself at last approaching the moment of death—of her true death. Sam accepted her fate at the beginning of the day, and has now risen to meet it. As she does, Juliet hovers above her, wanting to know why Sam sacrificed herself to “save” her, but Sam thinks that the opposite is true: Juliet has saved *her*. Sam ultimately did save two lives—she saved Juliet from death, and she saved herself from dying a shallow, unreflective, unrepentant girl. Now, as she approaches the moment of death itself, Sam feels delivered—she has repented for her wrongs, restored the balance of things, and reclaimed her fate happily this time, understanding that her goal was never to save her life: it was to save her soul.



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.

PROLOGUE

Samantha Kingston states that, although people often say that “just before you die your whole life flashes before your eyes,” that is not how things happened for her. Sam admits that actually, she would have been fine with skipping the “whole final-moment, mental life-scan thing,” but wouldn’t have minded revisiting her life’s greatest hits—her first hookup with her boyfriend, Rob Cokran, as well as her drunken antics and daily pranks with her friends Lindsay, Elody, and Ally. Before she died, however, Sam thought only of one thing, of one person: Vicky Hallinan.

Sam thought of a time in fourth grade when Lindsay announced that she didn’t want Vicky Hallinan on her dodgeball team because Vicky was too fat. Though Sam and Lindsay weren’t friends at the time, Sam found the moment hilarious back then—it was only in the instant before her death that Sam remembered Vicky’s embarrassed face with a sense of shame and sadness. As Sam reflected on the moment, she considered how “the whole point of growing up” was to learn how to place oneself on the side of the people doing the laughing, not the person being laughed at, and noted that over the years, Vicky had gained some modicum of popularity, and now she laughed herself about the incident in fourth grade whenever it came up.

Another “weird” thing that happened to Sam in the moments before her death was the realization that she and her friends had just been talking about death on the car ride home from the party they’d been at. Sam was sharing her “greatest hits” theory while Elody and Ally fought about the music playing in the car. Suddenly, there was a flash of white on the road ahead, and Lindsay yelled something that Sam couldn’t make out—“sit or shit or sight”—and suddenly the girls had flipped off the road and into the woods. It was at that moment that Vicky Hallinan’s face “came rising out of the past,” and then Sam heard and felt nothing at all.

Sam notes that “you don’t get to know” when you’ll die. The moment is unpredictable and unforeseeable. The morning of her death, Sam says, she woke up just seven minutes before she was supposed to get picked up for school, and was too busy worrying about how many **roses** she’d receive at her school’s Valentine’s Day celebration, Cupid Day, to even tell her parents goodbye.

From the very first lines, Oliver establishes through her irreverent protagonist that this book is going to subvert expectations about the experience of death and dying. Sam is established right off the bat as someone who isn’t interested in the minutiae of life—she is interested only in the flashier bits, in the parts of her life which make her seem happy, popular, and successful.



Despite Sam’s desire to see only the coolest, flashiest moments of her life, she finds herself surprisingly ruminating on her best friend’s cruelty toward a classmate. Sam seems to believe that it is important only to ensure that one is on the right side of the social divide, but in her final moments of life, her regret, sympathy, and concern betray her.



Sam was talking about her “greatest hits” theory with her friends just moments before it was tested. Sam’s desire to relive her greatest moments will not come to fruition, and Oliver denies her protagonist the very thing she wants in the first few pages in order to demonstrate the struggle between fate and agency which the book will chart.



As Sam prepares to tell the story of her life—and death—she establishes that her priorities at the time of her death were wildly askew, demonstrating even more profoundly the roles cruelty, agency, and redemption will play throughout the novel.



CHAPTER 1

Sam's best friend Lindsay calls to her from the driveway—it is six fifty-five in the morning, and Lindsay is at Sam's to pick her up for school. Sam struggles to put her coat on, pack her backpack, and get out the door, but Izzy, her eight-year-old sister, stops her as she is almost out of the house. Sam, frustrated that Izzy always manages to interrupt when she is busy or late, snaps at Izzy to ask her what she wants. Izzy tells Sam that she forgot her gloves (which Izzy pronounces *gloveths* due to the lisp which has made her the butt of many of her classmates' jokes) and then hands Sam her favorite cashmere pair—Sam yells at Izzy not to touch her stuff and shuts the door on her.

Outside, Lindsay is leaning out the window of her “tank” of a car—a silver Range Rover. Lindsay is the only one of Sam's friends other than Ally whose car actually belongs to her. Sam sometimes borrows her mother's reasonable, mid-size sedan, and poor Elody is stuck driving her father's ancient jalopy. Sam hops into the passenger seat—Lindsay is smoking a cigarette, and gestures with it to the coffee and bagels she got for Sam. The two girls are wearing the same outfit—the two of them, plus Ally and Elody, are deliberately dressing the same today, in black skirts and red fur-trimmed tank tops, for their school's Cupid Day celebration.

Although today Sam and her friends are deliberately dressed the same, everyone in her high school pretty much looks the same. Students dress themselves in brand-name clothing and an unofficial uniform of jeans, sneakers, t-shirts, and fleece jackets is almost required. In her small Connecticut town, “being like the people around you is the whole point,” Sam says. She doesn't mind the hegemony of her hometown, and though she and Lindsay occasionally dream aloud together of running away to New York City, Sam finds Ridgeview reassuring.

Lindsay is an erratic driver, and as she goes straight through stop sign after stop sign, she muses aloud about how her on-again off-again boyfriend Patrick (with whom she's broken up and gotten back together thirteen times since the start of the school year) had better send her some Cupid Day **roses**. Sam commiserates, telling Lindsay that she herself had to sit next to her boyfriend Rob while he filled out the form for her own rose. Sam explains that she and Rob have been dating since October, but she has been in love with him since the sixth grade—back when he was “too cool” to even talk to Sam. Rob was Sam's first-ever crush, and though she'd kissed a boy named Kent McFuller on the playground in third grade, she'd never had feelings for anyone until she noticed Rob.

As Sam starts her day, she is obsessed only with getting to her friends. She ignores her family completely, and sees her sweet younger sister's helpfulness as a nuisance. Sam's priorities are very clearly out of whack, and Sam's every thought—even those about her little sister—relate to how she or others might be judged.



This passage establishes the routines and rules by which the girls' lives are calibrated. Cars are a major status symbol, and hegemony and sameness are highly valued. Sam's community seems to be an affluent one, and appearances in this world are everything to Sam and her group of fashionable, popular friends.



Sam continues underscoring the complicated mechanisms behind popularity and status within her hegemonic community. Being the same as everyone else is not just a way to thrive socially—it's the way to survive in such a judgmental place. Despite this fact, Sam finds this sameness, and the compulsory desire for it among all her classmates, oddly reassuring—she has a place in the social framework, and a good one at that, and wants to keep it.



Sam and Lindsay's relationships are a major focal point of both their lives. They commiserate together about the ways in which their relationships are lacking or imperfect, and want for their boyfriends to send them roses as symbols of their care for and loyalty towards them. Roses, a recurrent symbol of status and popularity throughout the novel, are things by which Lindsay and Sam have begun to judge not just others, but themselves as well.



Lindsay tells Sam that she is shooting for twenty-five **roses** this year—last year, she got twenty-two. Sam tells Lindsay that she'd be satisfied with receiving fifteen roses. Sam explains that the roses delivered on Cupid Day, or Valograms, cost two dollars each, and often come with a little note attached to them. The Valograms are delivered by Cupids—freshman and sophomore girls trying to “get in good” with upperclassmen and make themselves noticed. The roses are a big deal, and serve as markers of popularity. If a student gets less than five roses it's “humiliating,” meaning they are “either ugly or unknown.” Sam has, in years past, seen her classmates scavenging on the ground and in the trash for dropped roses, hoping to add them to their bouquets and create the illusion of popularity.

Lindsay switches the subject, asking Sam if she's ready for “opening night.” Sam shrugs, deflecting, but privately notes that tonight is the night she is planning on losing her virginity, at long last, to Rob Cokran. Though the two of them have gotten close to doing the deed a few times, the moment has never felt right—this weekend, though, Rob's parents are out of town, and the two of them will have total privacy at his house. As Lindsay teases Sam about finally “growing up,” Sam begins to blush—she remembers how, when she was younger, kids used to sing a song that went “What's red and white and weird all over? Sam Kingston!” due to her serious and uncontrollable blushing.

Lindsay condescendingly assures Sam that everything will go fine between her and Rob, and Sam privately thinks about how a major reason behind her desire to lose her virginity is so that Lindsay and Elody will stop teasing her. Sam is grateful that their friend Ally is still a virgin, so Sam will escape being the last virgin in their friend group. As the two girls drive through the streets on their way to pick up Elody, Sam wonders if having sex will change her—if things will look different to her tomorrow, or if she will look different to those around her.

Lindsay and Sam arrive at Elody's house to pick her up. Despite the cold, Elody is wearing three-inch heels and a thin jacket, and she shimmies her breasts at her friends as she hops into the car. As soon as Elody is inside, Sam feels herself start to relax—it is impossible, she says, to stay stressed whenever the fun, flirty, and carefree Elody is around. Lindsay razzes Elody about her latest “victim,” a boy she's been hooking up with whom she has nicknamed Muffin. Sam states that Elody is the most “experienced” of any of their friend group—Elody lost her virginity first, and so the other girls regard her as an expert about sex, turning to her for advice and tips. As the girls approach school, Sam closes her eyes and thinks back to her first kiss with Rob, that past fall at homecoming—she grows dizzy and delighted with the memory.

As Sam goes deeper into detail as to the significance of Valograms, it becomes clear that the intricate and complex social mechanisms within Thomas Jefferson High calibrate every aspect of life there. On Cupid Day, there is a chance for students to externalize their popularity and give form to their desire to be wanted, loved, and well-known. Social capital is so valuable within the school that students often end up humiliating themselves in search of amassing more of it, while those who are popular look down on their desperate peers.



In this passage, the juxtaposition between Sam's insecurity about still being a virgin and her lingering humiliation about having been teased as a younger child are shown to be deeply intertwined. The full extent of Sam's social history hasn't been revealed yet, but it's clear from this passage that she still feels uncertain and insecure about the social capital she has gained, afraid that any vulnerability, slip-up, or uncool move will cause her to slide back down the social ladder.



Sam takes comfort in the fact that she is not the last of her friends who is still a virgin—virginity is a burden in Sam's world, and she longs to shake herself free from the ways it holds her back from being more like Lindsay and Elody. In this passage, Sam also displays her longing for a kind of rebirth and renewal—she hopes that losing her virginity will bring about this change.



This passage demonstrates how sex, too, is a measure of social status in this world—clearly, Elody is admired and respected for her experience, which presumably makes her seem mature, wise, and daring. It's notable, though, that Elody probably doesn't know that much more about sex than any of the other high school girls, so their status differences are based on small variations that they read big significance into. Nevertheless, Sam is obsessed with how sex relates to social status, and what increased social status having sex with someone as dreamy as Rob could bring her.



Sam muses on the “weird” nature of popularity, and attempts to analyze it. Popularity can’t be defined, Sam says, and it’s “not cool” to talk about it, but one knows it when one sees it.

Popularity isn’t necessarily about looks, Sam says: Lindsay is gorgeous, but the rest of their friend group isn’t all that much better-looking than their less popular peers, and the girls are by no means “shiny perfect.” They actually embarrass themselves often at school, but Sam notes that popularity is circular: they can get away with “everything” because they’re popular, and it’s *because* they’re popular that they get away with everything.

Sam wonders if there’s even a point in trying to analyze popularity before stating that, regardless of the answer, she is grateful that everything is easy for her—she can do “basically” whatever she wants. If high school were a game of poker, she says, she and her friends “would be holding 80 percent of the cards.” Sam knows, though, what it is like to be on the other side—for the first half of her life, she was “the bottom of the bottom” when it came to social status. Now, though, she has first pick of everything. “Nobody ever said life was fair,” Sam ultimately concludes.

Lindsay pulls into the school parking lot ten minutes before first bell, hoping that she will still be able to secure a choice parking spot. There are only twenty “choice” spots in the lower lot, and the only other option is parking in the upper lot, which is a far walk—nearly a quarter of a mile—from the school’s main entrance. Lindsay sees a spot and erratically steers her car in, cutting off another girl in a brown Chevrolet.

As the girls gather their things and prepare to head into school, Elody passes Sam a condom, and wishes her luck on her “big night.” As Sam accepts the condom, she starts feeling nervous all over again. Elody kisses Sam’s cheek and warns her: “No glove, no love.” Sam starts to blush and quickly gets out of the car. Mr. Shaw, the athletic director, is standing outside the gym when the girls hop out, and he urges them to hurry to class. The girls all giggle—they think Mr. Shaw is a perv and possibly a pedophile. As Sam and her friends glumly head into school, dreading the long Friday which stands between them and the weekend, Sam says: “Kill me now.” Lindsay replies that she’d never let her best friend die a virgin.

This passage is central to Oliver’s establishment of the world of the novel. She has created who a protagonist who is baffled by the mechanisms which dictate who’s popular and who’s not; but because she benefits from them, she is loath to question the obscure rules and restraints which have placed her, unexpectedly, at the top of the social food chain. Sam is notably self-aware here—she understands that she doesn’t exactly deserve her popularity—but she’s not self-aware enough to break free of social norms that don’t fulfill her.



Sam doesn’t want to think too deeply about the reasons why she is able to get away with the things she gets away with and enjoy the security she does—all she knows is that if high school were a game, she’d be winning. That’s good enough for Sam, who knows what it’s like to have to grovel before the popular kids and constantly worry about being bullied and humiliated. It doesn’t matter what twist of fate has brought her to where she is now; all that matters is that she manages to stay there.



This passage demonstrates Lindsay’s egregious sense of entitlement. Because she is popular, Lindsay believes she deserves the best of everything, and she is willing to throw her other classmates under the bus to get it. It’s also clear foreshadowing of the accident that Lindsay is such an abysmal driver.



Elody is passing the torch, so to speak, to Sam, encouraging her to have sex with Rob and thus cement their relationship, ensuring that Sam’s social status will endure and perhaps even grow. As the girls walk into school and Sam darkly and facetiously wishes for death, Lindsay seems to agree with Sam’s greatest fear—there’s nothing more embarrassing than failing to lose one’s virginity.



During her first two class periods, Sam only gets five **roses**, but she tries not to stress about it—despite the fact that she sees one of her classmates receive four roses from her boyfriend. It hadn't even occurred to Sam, she says, to ask Rob to send her more than one. In third period chemistry, Sam and her classmates are greeted by a pop quiz from their stern teacher who is always threatening to phone in his senior students' poor grades to college admission committees. Sam is disappointed to find that she must sit next to Lauren Lornet—"the only person in the class more clueless" than Sam herself is when it comes to chemistry. Sam arrived late and missed her chance to sit near the class brain, so now she won't be able to cheat off of him.

Sam does not know the answer to a single question on the quiz, so she tries to peek over Lauren's shoulder to copy her answers (despite her fear that Lauren doesn't know much more than she does). When she can't quite see, she taps Lauren on the shoulder and asks her to borrow a pen. When Lauren leans over to grab a pen out of her bag, Sam copies down her answers. Lauren gives Sam a pen and whispers to her, insisting she keep it. Sam attempts to give it back to her after the quiz, but Lauren seems to really want Sam to have the pen. Sam accepts it, and sees this as an act of charity toward Lauren—Sam's mom always tells her that she should do one nice thing a day, and Sam decides that this is it.

After fourth period life skills, Sam heads to fifth period calculus. Cupids—underclassman girls dressed in playful costumes—come to class to pass out **roses**. Sam receives three—one from Elody, one from a girl named Tara Flute who is on the fringes of Sam's friend group, and one from Rob. "Happy cupid day. Luv ya. Happy now?" says Rob's note. Sam worries that "luv ya" doesn't mean "I love you"—she and Rob have never said the words out loud, but she is "pretty sure" that he will say it to her tonight. Sam thinks that she's done receiving Valograms, but a Cupid comes over and gives Sam one more rose—the Cupid who delivers her final rose has pale blond hair and near-translucent skin, and Sam thinks she looks familiar, but cannot remember her name. The girl introduces herself as Marian, and she tells Sam that her roses are beautiful before leaving.

Sam checks the note attached to the rose—there is a cartoon of Cupid shooting a bald eagle out of a tree, where it is poised to fall directly on top of a couple sitting on a bench. Underneath the cartoon the card says "Don't drink and love." Sam knows immediately that the rose is from Kent McFuller—a classmate who writes for the school humor paper. Sam looks over at Kent's desk—Kent smiles and waves at Sam, but she only folds his note and shoves it into the bottom of her backpack.

As Sam goes through her morning, she worries that, on this important day, she won't be able to prove her popularity through the roses she receives. Sam doesn't really care about any of her classmates who aren't her core group of friends—they only represent a means through which she can take advantage of them in order to continue advancing her own social standing and academic career. It's funny that, for someone so obsessed with popularity, it doesn't occur to Sam to have Rob send her more than one rose.



Sam's bar for what constitutes doing a "nice thing" for someone else is lamentably misguided. Sam thinks that accepting an act of kindness from someone else is a kind thing in and of itself—because she is popular, she feels that she can't help that the world (or at least the world of her high school) revolves around her. She takes advantage of her classmates and calls it charity—Sam is popular, but not because of her good nature.



As Sam's roses start coming in, they still don't fulfill her—she knew that her friends would send her some, and knows that she has had to essentially beg Rob for one of them. The roses (which are supposed to represent people's love of and care for their classmates) thus represent, for Sam, blind loyalty, obligation, and rote duty. The final rose is a surprise, though, and seems to indicate that someone—a surprise someone—actually does want to show Sam they care, and the thought excites her.



The rose from Kent is not a welcome surprise—he is lower than Sam on the social ladder, and for Sam to interact with anyone below her represents a kind of threat to her own status. That is something she feels she simply cannot afford to do, as insecure as she is in her own popularity. Kent's note, though, is one of the first genuine gestures in the book (much like Izzy's concern about Sam's gloves), and it foreshadows the accident to come.



As Mr. Daimler, the calculus teacher, collects homework, Sam checks him out shamelessly. He is only twenty-five, and Sam thinks he is “gorgeous.” He was once a student at Thomas Jefferson himself—he was prom king. Mr. Daimler comments on Sam’s many roses, and she somewhat flirtatiously retorts that she still hasn’t gotten a rose from him. Her classmates giggle, and Sam watches Mr. Daimler’s ears grow red. She believes that he secretly likes her.

After class, Kent approaches Sam to tell her that his parents are going away for the weekend, and he’s having a party tonight. Sam considers the invitation and reflects on her friendship with Kent—they were best friends when they were children, and were also each other’s first kiss—but since freshman year, Sam thinks Kent has gotten weirder and weirder, and the two are no longer friends. Sam knows that Kent has nursed a crush on her for years, but even so, she dismissively tells him that she doesn’t yet know if she’ll make it to his party—it’ll depend on what everyone else is doing. As Kent walks away, however, Sam receives a text from Lindsay, asking if Sam is “in” for Kent’s party that evening. Sam writes back, “Obv.”

As Sam arrives at the cafeteria for lunch, she sees Rob standing by the register with a plate of fries. She reflects on how, before they started going out, she liked him so much that she sometimes got lightheaded when he simply looked in her direction. Now that they’re together, though, Sam often finds herself thinking that Rob is gross or annoying—these thoughts make her worry that something is wrong with her, because every girl in school would love to go out with Rob. Sam has to remind herself frequently of the reasons she started liking Rob in the first place, but after running through them, she always concludes that she is definitely in love with him.

Sam joins Ally at their favorite table, and they compare **rose** bouquets—each of them has received nine so far, but both of them admit that one rose each doesn’t count, since they came from nerdy guys. Sam asks Ally if their group is really going to go to Kent McFuller’s party, but Ally insists it’ll be okay, since she’s heard that there will be a keg there.

Throughout her conversation with Ally, Sam has been watching Rob come closer and closer out of the corner of her eye. Now, he kisses her on the side of the head and greets her, asking if she got his **rose**. Rob pulls his backpack off and unzips it, revealing half a dozen crumpled roses at the bottom of his backpack. Sam remembers one time when she and Rob were kissing and she opened her eyes only to find that Rob’s eyes were open, too, and he was staring out into space.

Sam sees her teacher Mr. Daimler as a peer, almost—she is attracted to him, and the fact that he comes from the same complicated (not to mention vetted) social environment that she does creates the illusion of a kind of kinship between them. Her comment is a way to assert power over him publicly, without regard to whether this will embarrass him or undermine his ability to do his job.



Despite their shared history and innocent childhood love for one another, Sam now sees Kent not just as different from her but almost untouchable. She is embarrassed to have been friends with Kent and afraid that even a hint of friendship with someone less cool than herself has the potential to drag her back down. Sam is a hypocrite, though—as soon as Lindsay implies that it’s okay to associate with Kent and even attend his party, Sam is “obv” down for whatever her best friend has in store.



Sam’s ambivalent feelings about Rob demonstrate just how far she is willing to go to cement and advance her social status. She was drawn to Rob in the beginning because he represented a life and a social standing she wanted—now that they are on the same plane, however, Sam finds her feelings for Rob are diminished, and she must again and again remind herself of all the reasons she fell in love with him in order to keep her feelings, distant as they are, alive. Sam is more loyal to the idea of Rob than to Rob himself. Even though she believes that she is in love with him, she clearly is not.



Sam’s musings on the complicated nature of popularity come back into play in this passage, as the nerdy Kent McFuller is suddenly seen in a new light as someone throwing a desirable party.



Sam’s ambivalence about Rob is palpable as she sees him for the first time all day. Her thoughts are not of how excited she is to celebrate Cupid Day with him and consummate their relationship, but instead of how fearful she is that he’s not into her—and how fearful she is that she’s not that into him, either.



Lindsay clears her throat—she is standing by Rob, and she tells him that he is in her seat. Rob gets up and makes a big show of ceding his chair to Lindsay. Rob kisses Sam goodbye and tells her he'll see her later—he whispers in her ear that she should remember that tonight is all about the two of them. Sam tells Rob that she hasn't forgotten, hoping that her voice sounds sexy rather than scared—which she is. Rob kisses Sam deeply and then walks away, and Sam thinks to herself how much she hates the way Rob kisses. Elody has assured her, though, that all her reservations about Rob stem from the fact that they haven't "sealed the deal yet," and that as soon as they do, Sam will feel better. Sam believes Elody is right—Elody, after all, is the expert.

Elody arrives at the table and sets her bouquet down—she has twelve **roses**. As the girls tease her about having slept with people to get the roses, Ally sees something over Sam's shoulder and starts singing a Talking Heads song: "Psycho killer, qu'est-ce que c'est." The girls turn around and see Juliet Sykes—a classmate whom they have all nicknamed Psycho—walking through the cafeteria. Juliet is pale and ethereal, with a long curtain of pale blond hair. The girls all start making screeching and stabbing noises, imitating the movie *Psycho*, not even caring if Juliet overhears them.

As Juliet exits the cafeteria, Lindsay wonders aloud if Juliet received her Valogram **rose** from the four of them. Ally says that she did—she herself was sitting right behind Juliet in biology when she got it. Ally was amazed by the fact that Juliet threw the rose in the trash right in front of her at the end of class. Sam reveals that every year, she and her friends have sent Juliet a single rose with the same note attached: "Maybe next year, but probably not." Sam doesn't feel bad, though—she insists that Juliet deserves her nickname, because she is a "freak" who never speaks and seems to live in her own world.

Lindsay hates Juliet—the two of them were in elementary school together and have been enemies ever since. It was Lindsay who first started making fun of Juliet in fifth grade by calling her Mellow Yellow after Juliet peed in her sleeping bag on a Girl Scout trip. It occurs to Sam as she watches Juliet walk away from the cafeteria that she doesn't know why Lindsay hates Juliet so much, and she prepares to ask her, but then realizes that the group has moved on to a new topic.

Sam can feel her misgivings about Rob mounting, but she tries to push them away, afraid to face what her life looks like without the increased social status and sense of security Rob has given her. Sam chooses to believe Elody's questionable advice about how, as soon as Sam and Rob have sex, things will instantly improve between them, because it is easier to believe than the idea that things might actually improve faster without Rob.



Sam and her friends are the big fish in the sea—the most popular girls in school. Their polar opposite—and, seemingly, their mortal enemy—is the strange and disconnected Juliet Sykes, whom the girls have made into the object of their ire, developing a careful routine which they use to demoralize the poor girl and keep her away from them. It's sad that Sam would do this, since she so acutely remembers being tormented by popular people herself.



The girls' repetitious name-calling, which it seems they do each and every day if not several times a week, is buffeted today by their annual tradition of sending Juliet the exact same message every single year, knowing that nothing will change and she will not retaliate, just as she never takes the opportunity to retaliate in daily life.



In this passage Sam considers how the lore surrounding Lindsay's vendetta against Juliet does not match up with what she knows about Lindsay—this strikes Sam seemingly for the first time, but before she can investigate, she is shamed out of doing so, afraid to rock the boat of her social circle.



The girls are now talking about how the girl Lindsay cut off in the parking lot this morning, Sarah, is being barred from swimming in an upcoming meet because she was late to homeroom after Lindsay took her spot and she received a detention. The girls make fun of Sarah for being so obsessed with a sport, and then begin teasing Sam for having been into horseback riding as a little girl.

Ally starts talking about how Lindsay's taking the parking space has now affected Sarah's life, and about chaos theory, and how everything in the whole world is connected. The other girls make fun of Ally and ask her if she's been smoking pot. Soon Ally herself is laughing and joking with them, and all four girls are hysterical.

After lunch, Lindsay and Sam decide to cut class and go to TCBY for frozen yogurt. The two of them do this often—as second-semester seniors, they are, Sam says, hardly even expected to go to class. Though technically a special pass is needed to leave campus during the school day, Lindsay and Sam sneak out through a hole in the fence behind the gym near the tennis courts, near a spot where all the smokers hang out.

The girls walk the half mile to a little strip mall where there's a gas station, a TCBY, and a questionable Chinese restaurant which once gave Elody food poisoning. As Sam and Lindsay pass the restaurant they spot two of their classmates inside—Alex Liment and Anna Cartullo. Both girls know (as does the whole school) that Alex has been cheating on his ultra-religious girlfriend Bridget McGuire with Anna for months. Anna Cartullo, though only a junior, is rumored to be highly promiscuous, and is one of the few kids in town who doesn't come from money—the other students make fun of her for being poor and sleeping around.

Lindsay drags Sam inside the restaurant and goes up to Anna and Alex's table. She is sort of friends with Alex, though Sam hardly ever talks to him. Lindsay asks Alex if he is going to the party tonight—Alex's face goes red, and Sam knows that he is embarrassed to be caught “blatantly” hanging out with Anna. Lindsay snidely asks Alex if he is going to bring Bridget with him. To change the subject, Sam warns Anna not to eat the food at this restaurant—in response, Anna makes a big show of taking a huge bite of her orange beef. Lindsay drags Sam back out of the restaurant, giggling at the mischief she's caused.

The girls see the practical effects of how their actions affect those around them, but they do not have any empathy for those they hurt—they only seek more and more opportunities to be cruel, derisive, and condescending.



Even an attempt to seriously think about how their actions affect others is shot down and immediately discredited and lampooned.



Sam and Lindsay make their own rules—as the veritable queens of their high school, they turn their noses up at restrictions and regulations and instead feel free to move through the school on their own terms, believing that their popularity allows them to get away with “anything.”



Sam and Lindsay encounter a pair of students who are below them on the social food chain, and take the opportunity to judge them. The girls are so wrapped up in gossiping about and destroying the reputations of others that they pay no mind to what they may be doing to their own.



Anna, unlike so many of her classmates, is contemptuous of Sam and Lindsay, and wants to take the opportunity to show them that she doesn't give a whit about their influence or their status—she is living her life on her terms, and she will not be shamed by them.



The girls go to TCBY and order ice cream and, despite the fact that they're both freezing, eat their treats on the way back to school. Once they get back to campus, they see Anna and Alex arguing near the smokers' area while Alex smokes a cigarette—Lindsay smokes a quick cigarette, too, but puts it out when she sees Ms. Winters, the vice principal who has a “crazy vendetta” against people who smoke. Sam wonders if the two of them should go back and warn Alex and Anna that Ms. Winters is coming, but Lindsay drags Sam back to class, telling her that Alex and Anna can take care of themselves. Sam agrees, and notes that it's not like the two of them have ever done anything for her.

Sam recounts the history of her friendship with Lindsay. In seventh grade, “after years of trying,” Sam had clawed her way up to the middle of the social ladder—it was then that Lindsay “picked” her to be her friend. Lindsay had always been popular—she has a magnetism and a magic to her, and Sam notes that Lindsay is “the kind of person who makes you feel drunk just by being around her.”

In seventh grade, at a pool party at Tara Flute's house, Lindsay pulled Sam upstairs into Tara's room to show her two tampons she had found in another girls' bag. Lindsay and Sam concocted a plan, and ran through the house checking all the bathroom cabinets for pads and tampons. Sam knew what they were planning was cruel, but she was so excited that Lindsay wanted to talk to her that she pushed her feelings aside. The two girls collected all they could and then ran out onto the deck and threw feminine products down onto the pool party below, making fun of Beth, the girl who'd originally brought the tampons with her. After that day, Lindsay and Sam were best friends—Ally and Elody joined their group over the next couple years, and soon the four were inseparable.

After school, the four girls all go to Ally's house. When they were younger, the girls used to stay in, order Chinese, and watch movies all night, but now there is hardly ever a Friday night where the girls aren't out at a party. The girls primp and prep themselves for the party in Ally's room, doing each other's makeup and taking shots of vodka. Once Sam is ready, she locks herself in the bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror. She is nervous about tonight, but calms herself by thinking that this time tomorrow, she will “finally be different.”

As the girls load themselves into Lindsay's car and drive to Kent's house, Sam has a strange feeling—as if she is “floating above everything.” Elody howls along to the radio, already wasted, while Lindsay, who Sam claims is hardly ever affected by alcohol, drives down the twisting roads of their town.

Sam sees her high school through a convoluted lens of prostration and retribution. She can't recall a time when Alex or Anna directly helped or served her, and so she refuses on principle to do the same for them—ignoring the fact that it would simply be the decent thing to do, and that a little bit of kindness could go a long way, especially coming from someone as “influential” as Sam herself.



Sam feels special to have been singled out by Lindsay, a “magic” person whom others just have an ineffable but strong desire to be around. Lindsay makes Sam feel special.



It is significant that Sam bonded with Lindsay through an act of petty and needless cruelty. Sam idolized Lindsay from afar, but her first introduction to the real Lindsay was aiding her in another girl's humiliation. This should have tipped Sam off as to what she was getting into, but Sam was just so excited for the attention that she of course went along with Lindsay's plan—and she has continued to do so as the years have gone by.



The girls' pre-party routine has become second-nature to them; their whole lives consist, it seems, of repeating actions, behaviors, rituals, and conversations which have become familiar. Sam, as a result, looks forward to an opportunity for change—a chance to see things with fresh eyes and even become a different person.



Sam, perhaps out of nervousness, feels disconnected from everything around her, imbued with a lack of agency. She is only able to focus on what lies ahead of her.



Kent's house is far back in the woods, and as the girls drive down the long twisting driveway, Ally says aloud that "This is how horror movies start." The drive, however, is familiar to Sam, who used to come over to Kent's house all the time when she was little. When the girls finally arrive at the main house, they are all stunned by its opulence and beauty. The girls all take one more shot from a bottle of vodka and then head into the party.

Sam loves walking into parties: she always gets the feeling that anything could happen. Inside the house, the party is in full swing—Sam and her friends say hi to a few people but ignore most of the guests, their popularity affording them the chance to pick and choose whom they'll pay attention to. Sam quickly gets separated from her friends in the throng of people, and she gets nervous, but soon she feels Rob's arms around her. She turns around to face him and sees that he is very drunk, though it's only ten o'clock.

Rob leans into kiss Sam, but she turns away and looks for her friends. Instead she spots Kent McFuller talking to a girl—Sam feels annoyed that he hasn't noticed her yet. Rob whispers to Sam that the two of them will leave for his house after half an hour, and then kisses her. As he does, he paws at her breasts and snakes his hands up her shirt, while Sam tries to force herself to enjoy the sloppy kiss. She ruminates on the fact that she has decided to have sex with Rob tonight only because she wants to get it over with—she is uncertain about the act itself and she is worried that things will be awkward afterward, but she wants to put the loss of her virginity behind her.

Ally approaches Sam and Rob, telling them to "get a room." Rob goes off to refill his beer. Ally tells Sam that Elody is hooking up with her newest fling, Muffin, while Lindsay and Patrick are fighting. Sam laughs, noting that Ally always makes her feel better. The two of them head off to "save" Lindsay from Patrick, taking in the party on the way. As they walk through the crowds, Sam reflects on the deep divisions within her high school, and the popularity contest which has created two different worlds: "the haves and the have-nots."

By the time Ally and Sam get to Lindsay and Patrick, the two of them have made up. Elody is hanging on "Muffin," seemingly oblivious to the fact that he is hardly even paying attention to her and is talking intensely to another girl. Lindsay jumps up and throws her arms around Elody and Ally, and the girls laugh together and rib one another. Sam closes her eyes and promises herself she will never forget this moment: the wild party, the embrace of her friends, and a fine mist of rain coming through a nearby open window.

Despite Kent's nerdy demeanor and low social status, as the girls approach his house, it stands out as a symbol of his wealth and value, intriguing the girls and validating their decision to come to the party in the first place.



The night begins on a note of chance, excitement, and possibility. Sam relishes this feeling—little does she know that that feeling of endless possibility will come back to haunt her in ways she can't yet possibly imagine.



Rob is all over Sam, but Sam's attention is pulled just slightly in Kent's direction—more out of a desire to have her own desirability and social status validated. Nonetheless, it's clear that she wants to get away from Rob in this passage—all she can think about is getting sex over and done with, making evident the fact that she is not actually attracted to or interested in, let alone in love with, Rob Cokran.



Even at a communal social gathering where everyone seems to be on the same plane, Sam can't help but obsess over the deep chasms which have stratified her high school and created two distinct groups which are inherently distrustful of and derisive towards one another.



The raucous party is Sam's true element—she feels alive, invincible, and grateful for her popular friends, her elevated social status, and the knowledge that she is living her best life and making incredible memories with her high school friends.



When Sam opens her eyes, she is greeted with a massive shock: Juliet Sykes is standing in the doorway, staring at Sam and her friends. Sam is shocked more by the fact of how beautiful Juliet looks than the fact that she has shown up, at last, to a high-school party. As Ally, Elody, and Lindsay notice that Juliet is there, Sam observes that Lindsay “goes pale” and actually looks frightened for a moment before her expression grows angry.

Soon, everyone in the room is aware of Juliet’s presence, and they stare at her as she walks “slowly and confidently” toward Sam and her friends. Juliet stops just in front of Lindsay, looks her in the eye, and calls her a bitch. Juliet then turns on Ally, Elody, and even Sam, calling them all bitches. Lindsay leans in toward Juliet and tells her that she’d rather be a bitch than a psycho before shoving Juliet backward. Lindsay starts screaming “psycho” over and over again, and as the crowd joins in, Ally dumps a beer on Juliet’s head. Soon everyone is throwing drinks at her, and as she stumbles toward the door, Sam notices that Juliet is looking at her almost pityingly. Sam, caught off-guard, lunges at Juliet and shoves her hard, pushing her back toward the door.

At that moment, Kent enters the room. He locks eyes with Sam, who immediately feels hot and uncomfortable. Sam feels like she is about to be sick, and tries to push her way out of the room to get some air. Kent confronts her, asking her what she did to Juliet, and though Sam tries to push past him, he blocks her. Sam screams at Kent and tells him to stop “obsessing over [her],” stating that he is such a loser that she shouldn’t even know his name. Kent barely reacts—he just leans in close to Sam and tells her that he sees right through her. Sam tells Kent that he doesn’t know her at all; he replies, “Thank God,” before telling Sam that her boyfriend is downstairs puking in the kitchen sink.

As Sam heads downstairs to find Rob, she has a sinking realization that tonight is not “the night” after all. She feels both disappointed and relieved, but as she considers waking up tomorrow morning and feeling exactly the same, she begins to cry. She thinks that the whole night is Kent’s fault, and Juliet Sykes’s.

The party begins to wind down after about half an hour. Sam leaves with Elody, Ally, and Lindsay; on the way out, they see couples drunkenly making out in corners and pass by an open bathroom door in which Bridget McGuire is crying at the edge of the tub—Lindsay tells Sam that Bridget dumped Alex Liment after Ms. Winters caught him and Anna Cartullo together, smoking near the tennis courts.

Sam is disoriented by Juliet’s presence, but is more in awe of her than anything else. Lindsay, on the other hand, is seemingly visibly frightened of Juliet—there is something Juliet represents to her which is threatening, and though Sam can’t discern what it is, Lindsay can’t manage to hide the fear behind her eyes.



The crowd at the party’s cruel taunts and even physical violence toward Juliet are jarring, unsettling, and dehumanizing. Juliet has been tortured by her classmates for years, and her desire to finally rise up against that cruel treatment is only met with deeper and increasingly wide-scale cruelty. Even Sam, who has up to this point considered herself a passive participant in Juliet’s suffering, physically lashes out, punishing Juliet for daring to overstep the invisible bounds of the divide between popular and unpopular.



Sam knows that Kent sees her for who she truly is, and that his calling her out is serious business. She doesn’t want to admit this to herself, though, and instead chooses to cruelly leverage her newfound popularity against him. Kent, though, is having none of it—he knows that Sam’s status is all a sham, and that she has become just as cruel as the people she’s chosen to surround herself with.



Sam is eager to place the blame on anyone other than herself and to wallow in self-pity rather than reflect on her own actions.



The events of the night continue to spiral into strangeness and sadness as Sam watches her classmates fight and break up. The small, seemingly inconsequential choices they’ve made throughout their days at last catching up with them as their choice not to warn Anna and Alex of Ms. Winters’ approach has led to the end of Alex and Bridget’s relationship.



As the girls leave the party, Rob stops them, and asks Sam where she's going. Sam tells Rob to let her go and pushes him away from her. Rob, drunk and confused, asks Sam if she's cheating on him. Though Sam tells Rob not to act "stupid," he becomes enraged, and seemingly at random picks the nearest guy to him and asks if he is sleeping with Sam. As Rob and the random guy get into a fight, Lindsay pulls Sam out the door and towards the car, reassuring her that everything will be better tomorrow.

Outside, it is raining, and the girls run toward the car, trying not to get wet. They are all soaked by the time they reach the Range Rover, laughing hysterically, and Sam has practically forgotten about how bad the night was. As Lindsay begins driving, Sam notices that she is going faster than usual, but doesn't think anything of it. Sam drunkenly begins sharing her theory about the slideshow of "greatest hits" she believes ones sees before they die, though her friends mostly ignore her and turn on some music. Lindsay lights a cigarette but drops it onto her seat, and takes her eyes off the road for a second as she tries to put it out. Sam notices out of the corner of her eye that it is 12:39 a.m.

Suddenly, there is a flash of white in front of the car, and Lindsay shouts something Sam can't make out—something like "sit" or "shit" or "sight." Suddenly, their car is flipping off the road into the woods, and Sam hears a horrible screeching noise and smells fire. The moment of death, she says, "is full of heat and sound and pain bigger than anything," but after a second or two she feels nothing.

She realizes that some people might think she deserved to die—that after she sent the mean **Valogram** to Juliet, dumped her drink on her at the party, cheated off Lauren Lornet, and said awful things to Kent, many people will think she got exactly what she deserved. But, Sam begs her readers, before pointing fingers, they should ask themselves if what she did is "really so bad," and if it's actually any worse than "what anybody else does." She urges her readers to "think about it."

CHAPTER 2

Sam is dreaming. She is falling, but there is no up or down—she is frightened, but cannot scream, and she wonders if she will keep falling forever. She wakes up suddenly and realizes that her alarm has been going off for twenty minutes—it is six fifty in the morning. Sam sits up in bed, covered in sweat. She remembers all the horrible events of the night before.

Rob is a drunken mess, and Sam is distraught by the fact that he would rather party than share a night of intimacy with her. Still, it seems as if this is, to some extent, what she expected all along—she removes herself from the fight almost immediately, unable to even bother herself with setting the record straight or attending to her mess of a boyfriend.



The evening has been tumultuous and at times frightening, but as Sam and her friends head for home, they experience relief and joy at being together. Sam has been picking up on strange, small details all night, and now her thoughts take a turn toward the macabre as she considers Lindsay's recklessness, Juliet's pain, and her own cruelty.



It is ironic—cruel, even—that just moments after broaching the topic of death, Sam and her friends are flung off the road and, for at least one of them, plunged straight into the moment of death itself.



Sam is indignant about her death, and believes that despite her cruelty and badness, she didn't really deserve it. Nothing she did was all that bad, she believes, and she attempts to throw into relief the banal but cruel mistakes people make each and every day as justification for her own actions. Sam is still naïve, defensive, and self-centered at this point, but, as she is thrown into something bigger than herself and beyond her comprehension, all of that will soon change.



Sam experiences a terrifying dream in which she is falling endlessly—as she wakes up, she believes that the entire night, car crash included, was all a part of the unsettling dream.



Izzy bursts into the room and tells Sam that their mother has sent her to wake Sam up. Izzy tugs at the necklace Sam wears—a gift from their grandmother. Sam protests that it is a Saturday, but Izzy only giggles, bounces off into the hallway, and shouts that Sam refuses to get up. Sam hears her mother’s voice urging her to get out of bed. She checks her phone and sees a text from Lindsay: “I’m outside. Where r u?” it says. Sam catches the date in the corner of her phone—it is Friday, February 12th.

Sam is disoriented, and when she tries to stand up, she nearly falls over. She rushes to the bathroom, sure that she is going to throw up, but nothing happens. She turns on the shower, but there is a pounding on the door—it is Lindsay, and she tells Sam that there is no time to shower. Sam asks Lindsay what happened last night—Lindsay apologizes for not calling Sam back, as she was on the phone with Patrick until the early hours of the morning. Lindsay seems to have no recollection of the events of the night before, and even asks Sam if she is excited for her big night with Rob.

Sam again tries to get in the shower, but Lindsay insists that she can’t be late for Cupid Day. She tells Sam that she looks like “shit,” and offers to lend her some MAC makeup, which she has waiting in the car. Lindsay goes back out to the truck, while Sam, hurriedly, begins getting dressed for Cupid Day—again.

On the drive to school, after the girls pick up Elody, Lindsay swerves and jerks her Range Rover. Sam begs Lindsay to drive carefully, and Lindsay, echoing the very thing she said the day before, promises she’d never let Sam “die a virgin.” Sam wishes she could tell Elody and Lindsay what’s going on, or ask them if they’re having a similar experience, but she can’t think of any way to broach the topic.

Elody picks up on Sam’s nervous energy, but, assuming it is because she’s nervous about losing her virginity, reassures her that she’ll be fine. Lindsay jokingly tells Sam it’ll be just like riding a horse, and begins to tease her about her childhood riding obsession. Sam, unable to handle being teased, goes quiet and looks out the window. As Lindsay puts on an upbeat song for the rest of the drive to school, Sam leans back in her seat and tries to focus on the music.

As the events of Sam’s previous morning repeat themselves, in her disoriented state she still believes that perhaps she was dreaming it all before—or perhaps she is dreaming things now.



Sam is disturbed to realize that Lindsay has no recollection of the night before—this knowledge isolates her, and she is unable to connect to her funny, bold best friend’s excitement for her.



Cupid Day is important to Lindsay—so important that she’s willing to let Sam’s morning get off to a hurried, unfinished start in order to make sure that she doesn’t miss a second of the frenzied popularity contest.



Sam has an uncanny experience on the drive to school—Lindsay’s swerving reminds her of the danger she was in the night before, while Lindsay’s repetition of the things she said yesterday echo strangely in Sam’s ears. Sam is too afraid to appear weird, spastic, or uncool in her friends’ eyes to say anything to them despite her own discomfort.



Sam is disoriented, confused, and isolated, and her friends, rather than attempting to soothe her when they pick up on this energy, only harass and tease her more. Sam cannot handle the cruelty, and retreats further into herself, now for sure feeling like she can’t say anything about what’s happening to her to anyone.



As the girls pull up to school, running late, Sam takes in the familiar outfits her classmates are wearing—everything looks exactly the same as it did yesterday. Sam actually feels a wash of relief, believing that perhaps all of the previous day's events were nothing more than a bad dream. Lindsay searches for a choice spot in the lower lot, but the girl she cut off the day before has snagged the last one. Lindsay begrudgingly drives to the upper lot, and as she does, Elody remarks that she's having déjà vu. Sam says that she is, too, but the conversation doesn't go any further.

Elody digs through her purse and passes Sam a condom. Before Elody can say it, Sam does: "No glove, no love." As the girls step out of the car and head into school, Sam tries to ignore the foreboding feeling within her, and focus on the fact that today is her day.

As Sam begins her school day, she feels as if she has been split in half—she knows that there is a real her and a shadow her, but cannot tell which is which. As the morning goes on, Sam realizes that she is having more than déjà vu—while the uncanny feeling, which she knows is caused by the two hemispheres of the brain processing something at slightly different speeds, lasts only a few seconds, her "déjà vu" goes on for hours. She watches her classmates have the same conversations, use the same words, and do the same things. Even weirder than the repetitions are the small things that have changed—the girl Lindsay cut off in the parking lot the day before is no longer disqualified from the swim meet because she made it to class on time today.

Feeling shaken up, Sam ducks into a bathroom, where Ally is waiting for her. Sam goes into a stall for some privacy, but Ally wants to know why Sam's acting weird. Sam opens the stall door and asks Ally why she thinks Lindsay wrote mean graffiti about Anna Cartullo in the stall—Ally says, though, that there are now "copycat artists" imitating the graffiti Lindsay has written in other bathrooms throughout the school. The bell rings—though Sam wants to hide out in the bathroom all day, she dutifully heads to class.

Sam already knows what happens next: she goes to chem class, takes the last available seat next to Lauren Lornet, and begins the pop quiz. Though Sam has now seen the quiz two days in a row, she still doesn't know the answers to any of the questions. Again, Sam asks to borrow a pen, and again Lauren makes a big deal of insisting Sam keep the pen for the rest of the day. As Sam moves through her classes that morning, she feels as if she is going insane.

The events of the morning are going slightly differently as the girls arrive to school—they have missed out on their spot, and this combined with Elody's expressing her feeling of déjà vu makes Sam begin to think that perhaps she's just been confused all this time—perhaps yesterday really was just a dream.



Still, some of the events are too similar to ignore, and Sam can even predict what her friends are going to say as she heads into school to begin her day.



Sam cannot ignore the uncanny, foreboding feeling within her, despite all her best efforts. She believes that one reality is false and one is true, but can't yet see which is which—she can't understand what is happening to her, unable to keep track of the repetitions and differences between the two days, which seem to Sam entirely random.



The "copycat artists"'s graffiti which lines the walls and stalls of the bathroom seems to mirror the motif of duality, facsimile, and repetition which has dogged Sam throughout the morning.



Sam is unsettled by her ability to predict what is going to happen to her again and again, certain that what is happening to her signals that she has become unhinged in a terrifying way.



In calculus, when Sam's **roses** get delivered, she feels a wild bit of hope that Rob's note will say something different and more romantic, but instead his lukewarm note is exactly the same. The pale, blond Cupid delivers Sam's rose from Kent, again, and though the Cupid comments on how beautiful the rose is, Sam snaps at her and tells her to move along. When class is over, Sam deliberately leaves Kent's rose behind on her desk. As their class floods into the hall, Kent catches up with Sam to tell her that she forgot her rose from him, but Sam cruelly states that she didn't want it. Kent jokingly asks Sam whether she's heard that on Cupid Day, roses equal popularity, but Sam tells Kent that she doesn't need any help "in that department," especially from him. Sam cannot help but replay the tense, cruel conversation she had with Kent at his party.

Kent, deflated, nevertheless still invites Sam to his party that evening, but before he can get the details out, Sam spots Rob and takes off down the hall calling his name. She catches up with Rob and embraces him—she tells him how happy she is to see him and confides that she is not feeling well. Rob tells Sam, however, that she is "not getting out of" their planned evening—he's been looking forward to it for too long.

Sam tries to convince Rob that they should hang out earlier that evening, but Rob tells Sam that he wants to go to a party he's heard about tonight. Sam tries to manipulate Rob by telling him that attending the party will mean he gets less time alone with her, but Rob insists on going. Sam feels her phone buzz in her pocket—it's the same text from Lindsay as yesterday, asking if she is in for Kent's party. Sam writes back her same reply, "Obv," and then heads into the cafeteria for lunch.

That evening, at Ally's, Sam and Lindsay lie on Ally's bed. Sam has had four shots of vodka and is feeling sick and feverish—Lindsay is giving Sam slightly foreboding and unhelpful advice about sex while Elody and Ally sing along to the radio in the next room. Lindsay asks Sam if Rob has told her that he loves her yet—when Sam hesitates, Lindsay assures her that Rob will say it tonight. Sam asks Lindsay if she was nervous the night she lost her virginity—the question catches Lindsay off-guard. Lindsay tells everyone that she lost her virginity to Patrick, when in reality, she had a one-night stand with a stranger while visiting her stepbrother in New York City.

The true story of how Lindsay lost her virginity, though, is never talked about among their friend group—just like the girls don't discuss Elody's alcoholic mother, Ally's eating disorder, or the fact that Lindsay was the one who made up the cruel song about Sam back in elementary school. Best friends, Sam says, help one another keep their own secrets safe.

Sam has seen a mix of repetition and change throughout her morning as it compares with the events of the previous day, and she hopes now that Rob's half-hearted note will be one of the things that changes. It is not, and Sam realizes that perhaps these things aren't up to her, though she cannot shake the lingering knowledge of the things that happened last night in the alternate universe—or the true universe, perhaps. Even with that knowledge, though, her behavior is not becoming less cruel or more self-aware.



Sam thinks that Rob will bring her comfort and understanding, but instead he cruelly berates her for putting her own needs above his wants.



Sam feels powerless to change things as she realizes the day is headed in the same direction as the previous one—everything is converging around the party at Kent's house, just as it did yesterday.



Sam's friends interpret her nervousness as being related to losing her virginity, and Sam herself seems to still believe that perhaps the events of last night won't repeat themselves, and she will actually get the chance to be alone with Rob. In this passage, virginity is again shown to be something Sam and Lindsay see as a thing which needs to be erased or eradicated as soon as possible.



Though Sam and her friends seem in love with one another and on top of the world with regards to their social status, Sam reveals in this passage that each of them have dark secrets which the others help them keep safe (or ignore).



Lindsay insists she wasn't nervous the first time she had sex, and begins making lewd jokes about how "horny" she was. Both girls dissolve into giggles, until Lindsay suddenly gets serious, and asks Sam if she can tell her a secret. Sam's heart flutters—she thinks that Lindsay is having a repeat of yesterday, too, and is about to confide in her. Instead, Lindsay gets close to Sam's face and lets out a large burp. Sam is disappointed and suddenly feels very alone—she wonders whether she has really gone insane. Elody and Ally burst back into the bedroom and ask whether it's time to go to the party. Sam, dizzy and unsteady, stands up and proclaims that she's ready to go, though her friends make fun of her for being so drunk so early in the night.

The girls, once again, pull up to Kent McFuller's house and enter the party, heading upstairs to the center of the action. Lindsay tells Sam she's going off to find Patrick, but Sam doesn't want to be alone, and asks to come with her. As the girls push their way through the party, Sam convinces herself that she is dreaming, and that as soon as she wakes up, the strange events of the day will be washed away. As she believes her own lie more and more, she starts to relax, feeling as if she could do anything she wanted and none of it would matter—she spots Kent McFuller and thinks that if she wanted to she could just go up to him and kiss him. She is instantly startled by the idea, and shakes it away.

Sam realizes that someone is talking to her—Bridget McGuire is asking about whether an assignment was passed out in English class. She is asking for her boyfriend, Alex Liment, who had to skip class to go to the doctor. Sam knows that Alex is lying about the doctor, as she and Lindsay saw him, once again, sitting in the Chinese restaurant with Anna Cartullo when they cut class to get ice cream. Today, however, Lindsay hadn't gone inside to mess with them, and they apparently weren't busted by Ms. Winters for smoking.

As Sam realizes that the events of today are different than yesterday, she at last understands that the events of Cupid Day are really and truly repeating themselves. Sam feels her body turn to ice, but then a pair of arms wrap around her—it is Rob. Sam tells Rob she needs to talk to him privately, but Rob is drunk, and assumes she wants to pull him away from the party to have sex. Sam tells Rob that she's not feeling right, and Rob retorts that Sam "always" has an excuse for why she doesn't want to have sex. Sam starts crying, and Rob apologizes. He tells her that the two of them can find somewhere to talk, but he wants to top his beer off first. He promises to come back in five minutes, and Sam waits for him.

In this passage, Sam thinks for a fleeting moment that perhaps she is not alone in her disorientation—she thinks that she is going to discover that she and her friends are all in this together, and that whatever has happened to time is happening to all of them. Lindsay is just playing another of her cruel pranks, though, and Sam, once again feeling hopeless and alone, agrees to go along with the events of the night despite knowing, or fearing, what they'll hold.



Sam experiences, for the first time all day, a strange sense of comfort in the uncanny events taking place around her. She believes at last that she is really dreaming, and that nothing she does within this strange space will have any repercussions either in her own life or in the lives of others. Sam is relieved, and begins to wonder how she can wield this new power she feels.



Despite the powerful feeling Sam experienced just a few seconds ago, she is again confronted with how the events of "today" differ in small but significant ways from yesterday. Where major things were altered in the "other" world, they remain the same here, and Sam is perturbed by her inability to understand how or why.



Sam is no longer able to hide away or falsely comfort herself in the belief that she is simply dreaming. She understands that somehow, impossibly, both versions of Cupid Day are actually real, and the knowledge overwhelms her to the point of hysteria. Rob is no comfort to Sam in her moment of need, and instead he berates her for not bending thoughtlessly to his will.



After ten minutes have passed, Sam realizes Rob isn't coming back for her. She begins feeling more and more anxious, but tries to force herself to calm down. She hears some nearby sophomore girls talking about how Rob is downstairs doing a keg stand—one of them says he is “so hot” before realizing that Sam is standing nearby. Sam notes that if Lindsay were there, she would call the girls whores and have them thrown out of the party, but Sam doesn't have any energy to give the girls attitude.

Sam, feeling weak and lightheaded, wants to find somewhere dark and quiet to be alone. The line for the bathroom is long, though, and she tries to let herself into a bedroom—it is locked, and Kent McFuller comes up behind her to joke that it is the “VIP room.” Sam, overwhelmed, goes to find Lindsay, planning to ask her if they can leave. When Sam finds her friends, she tells them she doesn't feel well, but they tease her about having been upstairs having sex with Rob. Sam insists that she's leaving with or without them—she is angry at all of them for making fun of her, and angry at Rob for abandoning her. As Sam's anxiety mounts she looks to the door—where she sees Juliet Sykes standing at the edge of the party.

Once again, Juliet approaches Lindsay and calls her a bitch. One by one, she calls Elody, Ally, and Sam bitches, too. The events of the previous night repeat themselves—everyone at the party calls Juliet “Psycho” and throws their drinks on her. Once again, Sam pushes Juliet hard. Sam begins pushing her way out of the room, and when she finally makes it to the front door, Kent is standing there, ready to confront her. “Don't even think about it,” Sam says, and pushes her way out the door, wondering why these things are happening to her.

Sam and her friends are all in Lindsay's car, heading home from the party. It is 12:38 a.m. Sam is nervous, and her heart pounds in her chest. Lindsay drives erratically, and Sam reaches over to steady the wheel. She pleads with Lindsay to pay attention to the road, and then suddenly asks her friends how they would want to die, if they knew they were going to. The girls flippantly express their desires to die while having sex or eating lasagna before putting on some music and lighting up cigarettes. The clock strikes 12:39, and, once again, Lindsay drops her cigarette on the seat. Once again, there is a flash of white in front of the car, and once again Lindsay screams before driving off the road.

Sam feels isolated both internally and externally, abandoned first by reason and then by Rob. She is so confused, upset, and disoriented that she doesn't even have the “energy” to behave in the cruel ways Lindsay has encouraged—she is too exhausted and frightened to engage with the world around her.



Sam's anxiety is mounting rapidly and exponentially as she senses the most painful, uncanny moment of the night growing closer and closer. Her friends won't listen to her, though, and she is unable to change them in any way—she feels like a pawn in a cruel game of fate she can't understand, and when Juliet walks into the room, Sam realizes that she is powerless to change what is about to happen.



Sam doesn't know why what's happening to her is happening, but she feels compelled to keep some of her actions the same and change others. She is not yet clear on how she can keep her actions consistent while avoiding consequences, but she senses that she has some modicum of agency in this “world,” whatever the rules of it are.



Sam gives herself over to the timeline of the previous night, despite knowing what will happen to her and her friends as they drive home from the party. She thinks that maybe if she encourages Lindsay to drive more carefully, things will change, but Sam's actions in this part of the night have no effect—she has no agency when it comes to preventing this particular occurrence, and again finds herself face to face with death itself.



CHAPTER 3

Sam is falling again, convinced that she is dreaming. Her alarm goes off, and she wakes up trembling and sweating once again. She steadies her breathing while she listens to the sounds of her family making breakfast and getting ready for their days. Sam reaches for her phone and checks the date—again, it is Friday, February 12th. Izzy pokes her head in the door and tells Sam to wake up—Sam asks Izzy to tell their mother that she's sick.

Sam remembers being in the car and going off the road, but after that, she remembers nothing. She wonders if both of the accidents were real—and if perhaps she didn't make it out of either of them alive. She wonders if she is in “the after-death equivalent of the movie *Groundhog Day*,” and whether she is actually dead. She asks her readers not to judge her for taking so long to catch on to what was happening to her—she was naïve, and she thought she would “live forever.”

Sam's mother appears in the doorway and urges her to get ready—Lindsay will arrive any minute. Sam protests that she can't go into school, and her mother asks her if something happened that would make her not want to go in—Sam loves Cupid Day. Sam can't confide in her mother, though, and answers her mother's repeated questions about whether she fought with her friends or with Rob condescendingly. There is a thin, faded stripe of red nail polish just inside the doorway—freshman year, after a big fight with her mother, Sam drew the line and instructed her mother never to pass it. Now, Sam is a little sad that her mother has never since stepped foot inside her room.

Sam's mother agrees to tell Lindsay that Sam will be going in late, and urges her to get a little more sleep. Sam's mother leaves the room, and Sam turns over and reflects back on her final memories of the evening before beginning to sob, angry and frustrated. She remembers the last time she cried this hard—an afternoon in sixth grade when Rob Cokran told everybody that Sam was too big of a dork for him to go out with. Sam cries herself back to sleep, feeling completely alone.

The recurring dream Sam has, now for the second night in a row, seems to evoke that she is falling through time again, back to the start of the loop. Sure enough, when Sam opens her eyes, it is—for a third time—the morning of Friday, February 12th.



Sam begins to consider in earnest what could be happening to her. One repetition of the day's events was startling and disorienting, but two seems as if it's trying to tell her something—or at least that there's a pattern at work within the framework of the repetition. Sam fears she has died, and as she reckons with her mortality, she confronts both her naivete and her self-absorption.



Sam's mother is skeptical of her daughter's reluctance to go to school on her favorite day of the year, but Sam is either too frightened or embarrassed to communicate to her mother the truth of what is happening to her. Sam reflects on how fractured the relationship between her and her mother has become, and though she regrets it, she does not know how to even begin to fix it.



Sam is miserable and lonely as she confronts the realization that she will have to live through February 12th a third time. She is unsure of what is happening to her, or what she is supposed to be doing—or how she can stop things from repeating again tomorrow a fourth time. At her lowest, most insecure moment, Sam is reminded of her humiliating past and feels even more isolated.



Sam begins to believe that perhaps she is lying somewhere in a coma—she is filled with hope at the thought that maybe if she isn't dead yet, there could be a way to stop herself from dying. Sam's mother drops her off at school late, and as Sam gets out of the car, she thinks about how there must be a reason for her being stuck in the time loop. As she says goodbye to her mother, she worries that this is the last time she'll ever see her. Sam tells her mother she loves her, and as she walks into school, she vows to herself that there will be no accident tonight—she is going to bust out of the time loop for good.

Sam arrives late to chemistry class, and the events of the class repeat themselves—there is a pop quiz, she borrows a pen from Lauren Lornet, and at the end of class Lauren insists she keep the pen. Today, however, Sam tells Lauren that Lauren shouldn't be so nice to her, because she herself is never nice to Lauren. Lauren blurts out that Sam doesn't "have to" be nice to her. Their teacher reprimands them for talking, though, and the conversation goes no further.

By calculus, Sam is in a good mood—she has started to feel that everything is going to be okay. She flirts a little bit with Mr. Daimler, and after class, she knows that Kent will come up to her in the hallway. When he does, she talks to him with a little more kindness. Kent asks Sam why she flirts with Mr. Daimler—he tells her that Daimler is a "perv." Kent invites Sam to his party, again, and again, Sam sees Rob down the hallway. She doesn't feel like going to see Rob, and she extends her conversation with Kent, asking him where his house is, though she knows the answer. Kent reminds her that she used to play there all the time when they were little, and asks if she remembers the huge maple trees in the front yard.

Sam experiences a vivid memory of playing with maple seeds with Kent, adorning themselves with the pellets so that "everyone would know [they] were in love." Sam snaps herself out of the reverie and tells Kent she doesn't remember the trees. Kent asks if Sam will come to his party, and she tells him she doesn't think she will. She heads toward the cafeteria, and Kent calls after her that he knows she'll come in the end.

Sam isn't sure what is happening to her, but she has some theories. She knows there must be a way to end the loop and set things right, and though it pains her to think that she might never see her mother again, she doesn't breathe a word of her thoughts, fears, or plans.



Sam wants to test the boundaries of what she is able to do and change as she goes through the loop a third time. She changes her conversation with Lauren Lornet, urging Lauren not to idolize her. Though the conversation only changes in a small way, it will come to have a much bigger effect than Sam intended or foresaw. This also shows that Sam is becoming more self-aware and independent. She no longer mindlessly assents to the rules of popularity.



Sam is feeling unmoored and uncertain today, haunted by memories of how Rob has treated her at the party at Kent's two nights in a row and unsure of whether she should disregard this behavior with the start of a new day. Rather than confronting her fears and feelings, Sam chooses to use Kent as a means of distraction, not realizing that their conversation will flood her mind with memories of a simpler time and force her to confront who they each have become over the years.



Though Sam experiences a tender and vivid memory of playing with Kent, whom she loved as a child and who loved her, too, she pretends not to recall the special friendship they shared as children, instead deciding to take her chances in the cafeteria with her cruel friends.



In the cafeteria, Sam tells her friends that she can't go out that night. She insists that she wants to stay in, the way they used to. When her friends ignore her wishes, she pleads with them, telling them she's having trouble with Rob. Earlier, Sam had texted him that they needed to talk about tonight. Now, she looks at him across the cafeteria and realizes how little she actually knows Rob. Her friends protest that Sam is supposed to lose her virginity tonight—Sam shows them the **rose** Rob sent her, pointing out how lame it is that he won't say the words "I love you." Sam tells her friends that she is not going to have sex with Rob just to get him to say the words, and she surprises even herself with the stark admission.

Rob comes up to the girls' table and asks Sam what she wants to talk about. She tells him that she doesn't want to talk about it here and now. He replies, sarcastically, that he will "wait" until she's ready to talk and would never "pressure" her to have a conversation she wasn't ready to have before turning and walking away.

"Psychopath alert," says Lindsay—Juliet Sykes has just walked into the cafeteria. Sam has been so focused on herself today that she forgot about Juliet entirely. As she watches Juliet float through the cafeteria, Sam wonders if Juliet is already planning the big scene she'll make at the party tonight. Sam's friends sing "Psycho Killer" and make fun of Juliet, and Sam interjects to ask Lindsay directly why she hates Juliet so much. Lindsay deflects the question, though, and Sam doesn't pursue it any further. Ally asks despairingly whether their group is really going to stay in tonight. Everyone looks to Lindsay for the answer: she says that the party will probably be lame anyway, and that they can all do whatever Sam wants to do. Sam is elated and relieved.

Lindsay and Sam cut class again and head to TCBY. Sam is happy that everything is working out the way she wants it to—she is sure that by eliminating the drive home from the party, Sam will be able to fix everything and "iron out" the "kink in time." Lindsay and Sam get in a playful fight, throwing ice cream at one another, and on the way back to school they are both in great moods. Lindsay insists on having a cigarette behind the tennis courts, but is almost immediately spotted by Ms. Winters. Lindsay drops her cigarette and runs. Sam runs, too, though the two go in opposite directions. Sam enters the gym through a back door, which opens into a storage closet.

On day three, Sam is beginning to question the social ties which bind her to certain people and keep her from others—Rob, in particular, is a source of concern for Sam. She doesn't believe he actually loves her, and though there are things about Rob that Sam can convince herself she loves, ultimately she is not desperate enough to make things work that she is willing to give him a part of herself which he does not deserve.



Rob's cruel wordplay is meant to pressure Sam further, and make her feel bad about her decision to wait so long to have sex with him.



Sam has always gone along willingly with Lindsay, Ally, and Elody's cruel torturing of Juliet Sykes. Today, though, it occurs to Sam that there is no real reason—at least not one she can remember—for the torment. She tries to ask Lindsay, but when her inquiry is met with deflection, she does not push the issue for fear of setting Lindsay off. Sam is relieved when Lindsay takes her side, though, and so this passage demonstrates the ways in which Sam allows her fate to be determined, over and over again, by Lindsay's whims.



Sam wants desperately to fix whatever has gone wrong with time, but even as she makes plans for how she will change things, inadvertent variations are happening all around her. Her day takes a turn when she is nearly caught by Ms. Winters, and is forced to improvise, placing her in a new situation which she hadn't encountered the previous days.



One wall of the closet is windowed and looks into Mr. Shaw's office. Suddenly, the office door opens, and Mr. Shaw walks in. Sam ducks and stays silent, hoping she won't be caught. She hears the bell ring, but knows there is no way to sneak out and make it to class in time. Shaw's office door opens again, and Sam thinks perhaps he is headed off to teach his own eighth period—instead, Ms. Winters walks in, lamenting that she couldn't catch the smokers she spotted.

The two teachers lament the smoking epidemic on campus and discuss how rebellious and difficult teenagers are—then Sam hears the two of them kissing and moaning. Sam is disgusted, but after a few seconds the second bell rings, and she hears Ms. Winters proclaim that she is late for a meeting. She hears Mr. Shaw smack Ms. Winters on the butt as she goes, and Sam can barely contain her laughter. The room next to Sam goes dark—then the door opens and closes, and she knows that Shaw has left and she is in the clear.

Sam heads to her locker to grab her Spanish textbook, and is walking down the hall texting Elody, Ally, and Lindsay when she runs into Lauren Lornet and drops her phone on the ground. Sam tells Lauren to watch where she's going, and scrambles to pick up her phone, afraid it's busted, but Lauren grabs Sam by the arm. She begs Sam to tell the principal that she didn't do anything wrong—Lauren confesses that she was called into the principal's office and accused of cheating off Sam in chemistry. Lauren is desperate for Sam's help, but Sam coolly tells Lauren that she can't help her.

Lauren begins to sob and tells Sam that she's a bitch. The words—echoing Juliet's—make Sam go cold. Lauren immediately apologizes to Sam and begs Sam not to be mad at her, but Sam cannot stand hearing poor Lauren Lornet groveling at her, and she runs full-speed down the hall away from her. She hides in the girls' bathroom and tries to calm down. She can't stop thinking about how she feels "caught up in some enormous web," and that every move she makes affects someone else who is "wriggling around in the same net." Sam doesn't want any of it to be her problem anymore. She cuts Spanish and stays in the bathroom. She washes her face and reapplies her makeup; as she does, she thinks that she hardly recognizes herself.

Sam now gets to be witness to something she hadn't even known had happened on either of the previous February 12ths. This scene demonstrates the chaotic way we move through the world, unaware of all that is happening under our noses, and it represents the age-old question of whether a tree falling in the forest with no one around to see or hear it will make a sound.



Sam is amazed to find that two of her teachers are embroiled in the very same kinds of love affairs, secrets, and desire that she and her classmates are. The situation is both funny and repulsive to her, its uncanniness and humor both deeply palpable.



Sam's slightly different conversation with Lauren Lornet this morning was brief and clipped—Sam was even trying to do a little bit of good by urging Lauren not to look up to her. However, the conversation has had ramifications which Sam could not have foreseen—caught off-guard and still numb to the needs of others, Sam refuses to get involved any further, even though Lauren's predicament is Sam's fault.



In this passage, up against the desperate and hysterical Luaren Lornet, Sam realizes the interconnectedness of all things, and the ways in which things don't literally repeat, but rather echo one another throughout different configurations of time. She understands that she and her friends and family are caught in a "web," and that her actions may have consequences which she can't imagine or foresee—the fear of this paralyzes Sam, causing her to question everything she knows and everything she does and plans to do.



Lindsay, Elody, Ally, and Sam are all enjoying tuna rolls and movies on Ally's giant couch. Sam can't relax, though—it is past midnight, and she is waiting for something horrible to happen at 12:39 a.m.; she believes that despite her best efforts, the time loop will just reset itself. As the minutes tick by, the girls listen to music and joke with one another—soon, it is 12:38, and then 12:39, but nothing catastrophic happens, and Sam believes she has broken the loop.

Ally's mom comes to the door and asks the girls to quiet down—it has been a long day for her, and she is going to bed. She bids the girls goodnight, and as she leaves, they all laugh and resume their fun. Sam laughs with them—she believes she has broken the loop at last. An hour later, the girls are all asleep in the living room—all except for Sam, who can't get to sleep. She's too exhilarated by having at last escaped the loop. As she tries to fall asleep, she thinks of which day she would actually choose to relive over and over again—she imagines the perfect day, and soon she is on the edge of sleep. Just then, Ally's house phone rings, and all the girls jolt awake.

Sam hears footsteps upstairs—Ally's mother is answering the phone. The girls wonder who is calling at two in the morning. They hear Ally's mother's concerned voice upstairs—Ally turns on the light, knowing that something is wrong. After a few minutes, Ally's mother comes downstairs. The girls all ask her what has happened. She asks them if they all know Juliet Sykes, and they answer that they do. Ally's mother tells them that she's just gotten a call from the neighborhood busybody, who happens to live next door to the Sykes—Juliet Sykes has shot and killed herself. Ally's mother kisses her daughter on the head and then leaves the girls alone.

Elody wonders out loud if Juliet Sykes killed herself because of their **rose** and the cruel note attached to it. Lindsay scoffs at this, but Ally worries that that's the reason, too. Lindsay shuts the girls up by telling them that Juliet is "better off this way." Sam is in shock—both at Lindsay's words and at the violent way in which Juliet Sykes took her own life. Elody wonders if they all should have been nicer to Juliet Sykes—Lindsay tells her to stop being a hypocrite, and then settles in on the couch to go back to sleep. Ally and Elody, disturbed by Lindsay's words, decide to go sleep upstairs, leaving Lindsay and Sam in the living room.

Sam is relieved beyond measure in this passage, knowing that her actions and agency have affected fate and have allowed her to break out of the loop. Sam is with all her friends, safe inside, and is finally, for the first time, alive past 12:39 on Cupid Day.



Sam resumes her evening with her friends and even goes back to being her old self, laughing and joking with Lindsay, Ally, and Elody until all four girls have worn themselves out. Sam is relieved to the point of bliss as she falls asleep, not questioning for even a second her success in having broken the loop and saved herself from a cruel fate.



Sam and her friends are shocked and devastated by the realization that Juliet Sykes has killed herself—and in such a violent manner. Sam begins to feel the creeping dread of realization that perhaps she has not been as successful as she thought—perhaps there are other things at work in the loop than just her own death and desire for salvation.



Lindsay's enormous and enduring cruelty toward Juliet, even after the news of Juliet's suicide, seems to reveal that there is something deeper between her and the dead girl than just banal high school mockery. As all the girls but Lindsay wonder if they are the reason Juliet died, they are forced to confront that they didn't care what happened to Juliet when she was alive—they are only regretful of their behavior now that she's dead and there's no way to redeem themselves.



Sam, now doubly restless, gets up off of the sofa. She tells Lindsay that she is just going to the bathroom, but she makes her way through the halls of Ally's house and heads down to the basement. Sam searches for Ally's collection of all their school yearbooks, and sits down to flip through them. Normally Sam hates going through these—they fill her with bad memories of being bullied as a child—but there is something she can't quite name which she feels she is looking for. As she flips through the pages, she sees that Juliet and Lindsay were pictured together, thick as thieves, in every yearbook through the fourth grade. In fifth grade, the year of the Girl Scout trip, the two are standing far apart.

Sam is seized by a sudden need to get out of the basement as quickly as possible. As Sam makes her way back through the living room, she is afraid to encounter an apparition of the dead Juliet. Instead, she runs into Lindsay. Sam reveals what she has discovered; Lindsay retorts that she realized at a certain point that Juliet was "totally wacked," as was her "whole family." Sam notes that Lindsay is already using the past tense—she tells Lindsay sadly that Juliet is not anything anymore.

Sam returns to the couch—after a little while, Lindsay does, too. Sam lies down and tries to get to sleep, remembering a happy night from last year when she and Lindsay snuck out one night and simply drove, feeling alive and powerful, until Lindsay decided to play chicken with an oncoming vehicle—the other car swerved at the last minute, and Sam and Lindsay were safe. Sam feels her dreams pull her under—for a third time, she is falling through darkness.

CHAPTER 4

Sam knows before she even opens her eyes in the morning that her plan did not work—the loop has reset. She dresses and slides into Lindsay's car, barely able to look at her best friend. Sam is angry—she knows that Lindsay is a fraud, and feels it is unfair that Sam is the one being punished when Lindsay is the bad driver, the mean girl, and the one who lied about being friends with Juliet Sykes and "tortured" the poor girl for so many years. Sam didn't do anything—she was just following along.

Sam is pulled by something she doesn't understand to the basement—perhaps it is fate, or just intuition, which leads her to the yearbooks, where she learns Lindsay's big secret—she and Juliet were friends for years and years and years before Lindsay's vendetta, whatever its root, against Juliet began.



Sam is plagued by guilt, and feels that Lindsay should be feeling the same—she was, after all, her best friend, and perhaps has more to do with Juliet's having been branded a "freak" than any of them knew. Lindsay, however, seems to feel no remorse or sadness, despite the fact that Juliet is gone forever.



Sam is dogged by half-dream, half-memories of getting into trouble with Lindsay, and of the feeling of something inevitable but dangerous approaching just as she is pulled into her dream of falling, portending yet another reset of February 12th.



Sam is no longer confused by the time loop, or even hopeful that she could possibly change it—she feels hopeless, ineffectual, and more than that, indignant at the fact that she is the one being forced to relive the day when Lindsay is the one whose behavior is at the root of Juliet's suicide.



Lindsay comments snidely on Sam's outfit—Sam has rolled her skirt to make it shorter and is wearing five-inch platform heels and a rhinestone necklace that says SLUT. Sam is “in the mood to get looked at”—she feels she could do anything now, knowing that there are no consequences now that she's dead. Lindsay comments that she can't believe Sam's parents let her leave the house looking the way she looks—Sam reveals that she had a huge fight with both of them, actually, over her outfit, and yelled at her mother for wanting to protect her “now” of all times. Lindsay asks Sam if she got up on the wrong side of the bed—Sam replies that she has for a few days now.

Sam leans her head against the window and wonders how she is going to survive an eternity of Cupid Days. She plans to start cutting school, stealing someone's car, and driving as far as she can get before the loop resets, running far away from her problems, and her fate, each and every day.

Elody gets into the car and greets Sam and Lindsay sunnily, but Sam does not return Elody's happy energy. Elody tells Sam that she has something that will cheer her up, but Sam warns Elody not to dare give her a condom. Elody, already holding the condom, frowns, complaining that she got it as a “present” for Sam. Lindsay urges Sam to take the condom lest she turn into a “walking STD farm.” Sam mumbles that Lindsay would know all about being one. Lindsay asks Sam what she said, but Sam insists she didn't say anything. Elody continues to press the condom onto Sam, but Sam feels that losing her virginity seems “absurd” to her now—like a distant plot point in a movie about someone else's life. She realizes that nothing matters anymore.

Sam turns around and accepts the condom from Elody. As she faces front again, Lindsay slams on the brakes, not having stopped soon enough for a red light—the coffee in the cupholder nearest Sam splashes her thigh. Sam freaks out—she asks Lindsay what is wrong with her, and berates her driving, saying that “they could train monkeys to drive better.” Sam excoriates Lindsay for not caring at all for anybody but herself.

Sam is acting out in an egregious, over-the-top way. She knows that nothing she does matters, so she is taking things to the extreme, dressing provocatively and picking fights with her parents before the day has even really started. Sam feels abandoned by everyone who should be protecting her, and as the day begins anew, she feels like if nothing is going to change her fate despite all her best efforts, she might as well give up.



Sam believes that reliving Cupid Day for eternity is the fate she has been doomed to—rather than continuing to try and escape it, she begins planning how she can manage to live within it.



Sam has realized that there are bigger things at work than the banal, quotidian concerns which once seemed so important to her. She has been so traumatized and so devastated by the disappointment of being unable to change her fate that something like losing her virginity now seems like a very faraway concern—she has called into question who she was doing everything in her “old” life for, and why.



Sam has for years walked on eggshells around Lindsay, fearing that one wrong word or move could ruin their friendship forever. Now, knowing that nothing she does matters, Sam lashes out at Lindsay, releasing all of her pent-up anger at her best friend.



Elody quietly asks Sam to stop. Sam turns on Elody, then, asking her why she never stands up for herself when she knows that Lindsay is a “bitch.” Lindsay tells Sam to leave Elody alone. Sam turns back to Lindsay and calls her out on constantly making fun of Elody for drinking too much and pathetically chasing the wrong guys behind her back. Lindsay slams on the brakes again, then reaches over and opens Sam’s car door. She orders her to get out, despite the fact that it’s freezing cold and they’re still over a mile from school. Sam turns to Elody for some kind of support, but Elody just looks away. Sam gets out of the car and Lindsay speeds away with the door still hanging open. Sam walks to school, telling herself over and over again that the fight doesn’t matter—nothing does.

Sam is frustrated not just with Lindsay, but also with Elody—and herself—for standing by and constantly letting Lindsay get away with saying and doing whatever she wants. Sam understands now that words and actions have far greater consequences than any of them realized, and she is frustrated by her friends’ inability to see how the ways in which they act cruelly to those around them or enable one another to behave out of cruelty are actually dangerous.



Sam skips her first four periods, walking the halls without any goal or destination. She half-wishes a teacher would stop her and ask her what she’s doing—fighting with Lindsay didn’t satisfy her urge to do something reckless. She arrives at calculus, and Mr. Daimler jokingly—but inappropriately—tells her that it’s “a little early in the season for beach clothes.” Sam looks Daimler right in the eye and says “If you got, it flaunt it,” causing Daimler to blush. He asks Sam why she doesn’t have any **roses**—she tells him that she’s “over it.”

Sam is feeling reckless and wants to get into trouble. Crossing a line with Lindsay isn’t dangerous enough—Sam wants to do something really wild, and she recognizes the potential for drama and intrigue in her long-held crush on the hot—or, depending on how you look at it, pervy—Mr. Daimler.



Daimler returns to his desk and gestures for the class to take their seats. As the lesson begins, Sam fantasizes about kissing Mr. Daimler—until Kent walks in, late and disheveled, complaining about a printer problem at the school newspaper. Kent smiles right at Sam and heads for his desk. The Cupids come in just seconds later and begin delivering **roses**—Sam accepts her first three, and then when the blond Cupid prepares to hand her the rose from Kent, Sam tells her not to say the rose is beautiful—“it’s just going in the trash.” After the Cupids leave, Sam makes good on her word, and takes her roses up to the front of the room to toss them into the bin.

Sam is so over the false trappings of her high school and the pointless grab at physical emblems of popularity that she tosses her roses, signifying the fact that she has moved beyond caring about the banal little things of her old life completely. Sam knows that none of it is important, none of it matters, and most of all, none of it will save her life in the end, so there is no point.



A few people gasp, and a couple girls tell Sam that she can’t throw out her **roses**—it just isn’t done. Sam tells the girls she can have them, if they want them, and watches them weigh the benefits of more roses against the humiliation of “dumpster-diving” for them. As Sam prepares to walk back to her desk, Mr. Daimler remarks that Sam is breaking hearts left and right. She asks if she is breaking his heart, and sits on the corner of her desk, causing her skirt to rise up. Mr. Daimler orders Sam to take a seat—she asks him if he isn’t “enjoying the view.” Sam hears Kent, in the back of the classroom, swear under his breath. Mr. Daimler tells Sam to sit down one more time, and she sits in Mr. Daimler’s chair, ignoring her classmates’ gasps and giggles.

Sam is provoking everyone around her today, seeing just how far she can push the envelope and how much drama she can cause. She knows that everything will simply reset the next day, so she might as well lean into chaos—at least it’ll give her some variety to live through.



Mr. Daimler orders Sam to sit in her own seat, and she returns to it. Throughout the rest of class, people whisper and giggle about Sam and pass her notes which are alternately admiring (“You are awesome”) and cruel (“Whore.”) Sam almost feels embarrassed, but quickly remembers that none of what’s happening to her is real. Kent sends her a note which reads “You are too good for that,” and Sam, despite her bravado, finds herself feeling “something [she] can’t understand or describe.”

At the end of class, Mr. Daimler reminds his students to study over the weekend, and sternly asks Sam to hang back and talk to him. After the rest of the class has left the room, Sam, alone with Mr. Daimler, has a brief flash of her memory of playing chicken on the road with Lindsay. She understands at last why Lindsay wanted to play—for the thrill.

Mr. Daimler asks Sam what she was thinking, but she replies that she doesn’t know what he means—she asks if she did something wrong. Mr. Daimler tells Sam that she could get him in a lot of trouble. Sam approaches Daimler and tells him that she doesn’t mind trouble. Daimler asks Sam what she is doing, and what she wants—Sam feels suddenly that she has lost control of the situation, but she leans into it—she tells Mr. Daimler that what she wants is him.

Mr. Daimler hesitates, then walks up to Sam and begins kissing her, bending her backward over a student desk. Sam feels tiny and defenseless, and though she is fulfilling her dream of kissing her hot teacher, something feels wrong. All of a sudden, her recklessness isn’t fun anymore. She tries to push Mr. Daimler off of her, but has trouble—finally, she wrenches her mouth away from him, and tells him that they “can’t do this here”—though what she really wanted to say was, simply, “stop.”

Mr. Daimler backs off of Sam, and tells her that what happened between them needs to stay within the classroom—he practically begs her not to tell anyone, admitting that he has made a mistake. Sam tells Mr. Daimler that he can count on her, and he sends her off to lunch. Sam is grateful that when she steps outside of class, she finds the halls empty. She takes out her phone to text Lindsay and tell her what happened, but then remembers that they are in a fight. She thinks about texting Ally, but she can’t find the words to describe what just happened to her. Sam drops her phone in her bag, deciding that she’ll simply tell Lindsay later, after they’ve made up. Sam puts some makeup on her face to cover the spots where Mr. Daimler’s beard rubbed her face red, and then heads to lunch.

As Sam continues pushing the envelope, she ignores her classmates’ reactions—all except for Kent’s. There is something about Kent—their shared past, the latent attraction between them—which forces Sam to realize that perhaps Kent sees a side of her that no one else does. Even in this alternate reality where nothing matters and nothing remains, Sam, on some level, doesn’t want to disappoint Kent.



Sam was never a goody two-shoes, but she always tempered Lindsay’s recklessness—now, though, Sam at last understands the dark impulse behind danger-seeking behavior, and leans even further into it herself.



Sam is playing with fire, but she wants to see how far she can push things with Mr. Daimler. Though there is a part of Sam that has long entertained a crush on Daimler, she knows that things are veering into very different territory now. She feels like she has gone into a nosedive and is unable to pull herself up out of it.



As soon as Daimler kisses Sam, she realizes that something is very wrong, and that her innocent crush has now become something much more sinister, reflected back at her as clearly as it is now. Sam is finally taking action in her life, but she still hasn’t learned how to think through what she actually wants and how her actions will affect her and others.



Sam is exhilarated, confused, upset, and transported by what has just happened to her—it was so over the line, so completely out of character for her, and so reckless and dangerous that she doesn’t know how to process it. She can’t turn to her friends, though, for help—her recklessness has alienated them from her today, and now this decision has only pulled Sam further and further away from the “old” her.



When Sam enters the cafeteria, she finds that her usual lunch table is empty—she knows she has been ditched. She ducks back out of the cafeteria, feeling like everyone is staring at her, and heads for the old bathroom at the far end of the science wing, where there’s hardly ever anyone. Anna Cartullo is in the bathroom, though, smoking a cigarette. Anna asks Sam not to tell on her, and Sam realizes that Anna is smoking a joint, not a cigarette. She sees Anna’s lunch spread out in front of her on the floor, and realizes that Anna must eat lunch in here all alone every day.

Anna asks Sam if her high heels are hard to walk in. Sam insists she can walk, but cedes that she originally bought the shoes as a joke. She wonders why she is defending herself to Anna Cartullo of all people, but then realizes that “nothing is the way it’s supposed to be today.” Anna hops up on the counter and wiggles her comfortable steel-toed boots at Sam, telling her she should get a pair. Sam asks if the girls can trade shoes, and Anna agrees to. The girls are surprised to find they have the same size feet. Anna rolls a second joint, having finished her first, and the two banter about how Anna should bring some pillows into the bathroom and decorate, since it’s her frequent hangout. Anna jokes that she’d love to hang M.C. Escher prints on the walls, and Sam says that her father, an architect, owns “like, ten” M.C. Escher books.

Anna and Sam smoke the joint together, and Anna asks Sam why Sam and all her friends hate her. Sam tells Anna that her group doesn’t hate her, but even she admits that her voice doesn’t sound very convincing. She admits to herself that “it’s hard to know what Lindsay’s reasons are for anything,” but she and her friends nonetheless do what Lindsay says and exclude the people she wants to exclude. When Anna pushes Sam to explain the reason behind their constant bullying of her, Sam, slightly buzzed off the joint, replies, “I guess you need to take things out on somebody.”

The bell rings, and Anna jumps up, exclaiming that she has somewhere to be. She knocks over her stash of rolling papers and Sam helps her collect them all up off the ground, remarking as she does that Anna had better hurry—she doesn’t want to keep Alex waiting. Anna asks Sam how she knew that she was going to meet Alex, and Sam quickly improvises, saying that she’s seen Anna and Alex smoking by the tennis courts. Anna asks Sam not to tell anybody, but Sam finds the idea of ratting out Anna Cartullo after what she herself has just done with Mr. Daimler hilarious. She begins laughing, as the absurdity of everything begins to hit her. Once she settles down, Sam confesses what happened with Mr. Daimler to Anna. Anna tells Sam that Mr. Daimler is sick and a pervert, and then turns to go.

As Sam stumbles upon Anna in the bathroom, she sees her pitiful lunch setup and realizes, once again, the practical effects of cruelty. She and her friends have been complicit in perpetuating rumors about Anna, and as a result, Anna is so deeply ostracized that she does not have anyone to sit with at lunchtime. Sam’s actions are shown again to have reverberations beyond what she ever knew.



Sam and Anna’s bonding over shoes and M.C. Escher has a symbolic weight. In switching shoes, the girls each betray their underlying desire to be more like each other, to understand one another, and even to switch places—the M.C. Escher paintings they discuss are real-life, famous drawings which depict uncanny scenes of endlessly looping staircases and inescapable mazes. The Escher drawings, then, mirror Sam’s purgatorial entrapment in the time loop.



Sam confesses to Anna that, although Lindsay and their group don’t hate Anna, their systematic dismantling of her reputation has been driven by something even worse than hatred: their own insecurity. In a way, this makes their behavior even crueler. Sam implies that every social hierarchy is only able to exist because the people at the bottom balance out those at the top—popular people need scapegoats and punching bags, and that balance is needed to perpetuate the harmful structure.



Sam, needing to confide what has happened to her to someone, chooses Anna Cartullo—perpetuating the sort of randomness she herself had admitted to in the previous passage. Anna is there, so Anna gets the information—friendship and loyalty are revealed through this to be much more about circumstance than anything else, just as the “origin story” of Lindsay and Sam’s friendship, outlined earlier, proved as well.



Sam tells Anna that she's too good for Alex, and Anna jokingly replies that Sam is too good for Mr. Daimler. After Anna leaves, Sam stays in the bathroom, very stoned. She spots two cigarettes on the floor and picks them up. The bathroom door opens and Sam, assuming Anna is coming back, holds the cigarettes up. It is Ms. Winters, though; she reminds Sam menacingly that smoking on school property is forbidden.

Sam gets off with a warning after she threatens Ms. Winters with revealing her relationship with Mr. Shaw. She leaves Ms. Winters's office just as the last bell rings, and begins searching the throng of students for Lindsay. She exits the building and searches the parking lot just in time to see Lindsay's Range Rover tearing off campus without her. Sam realizes she has no ride, and thinks about how despite being "really popular," she doesn't have very many friends.

Sam hears someone calling her name—she turns around to see three girls coming toward her. Tara Flute, Bethany Harps, and Courtney Walker are a trio of friends Lindsay refers to as "the Pugs," because they are pretty from far away and ugly up close. Their de facto leader, Tara, asks Sam what she's up to, and they invite her to the mall to go shopping with them—later, Tara says, they're all going to Kent's party. Sam, not wanting to go home or to Rob's and knowing she won't be welcome at Ally's, agrees.

On the drive to the mall, Sam tells the Pugs all about Ms. Winters and Mr. Shaw, and how she leveraged her knowledge of their affair to get out of detention. The girls listen to her story rapturously, and Sam feels a renewed burst of confidence. Sam asks Tara if they can stop at Sam's house on the way, and Tara agrees. At Sam's house, she sneaks into the kitchen through the back door and steals her mother's credit card from her purse, which is in the mudroom. Her mother is upstairs, in the shower, and before she gets out and comes down, Sam slips back out the kitchen door and runs to Tara's car.

At the mall, Sam takes herself on a shopping spree. At Bebe, she buys herself a three-hundred-dollar dress, and forges her mother's signature on the receipt. When Courtney remarks how lucky Sam is to have a credit card, Sam boasts that she stole it from her mother. The girls all think Sam is cool for doing so. At the MAC store, Sam gets a full-on makeover. At Neiman Marcus, Sam tries to buy a faux-fur shrug and a pair of earrings, but the saleswoman asks to see her I.D. Sam remembers that she has her membership card to her mother's gym, which only has her last name and her initials printed on it: "Kingston, S.E.," it reads, and Sam explains that E stands for Ellen—her mother's name—and the S stands for an obscure German name. The saleswoman begrudgingly processes the transaction while Courtney, Beth, and Tara look on in awe.

Sam and Anna, who have torn each other down for years and years due to the arbitrary structures which divide them, now share a tender and real moment in which they lift one another up.



Sam uses the knowledge she has gained on other days of the loop in order to help herself out of a tricky situation—it is not necessarily moral, but it works for Sam, demonstrating her allegiance to her own trajectory and safety above all else.



Lindsay's cruel nickname for the Pugs paints them as undesirable hangers-on, but nonetheless, Sam is desperate for attention, company, validation—and something to do as she waits for this fourth day of the loop, at once strange, thrilling, dark, and boring, to at last come to an end.



Though Sam clearly looks down up on the Pugs, she still longs to impress them—because she longs for the validation which she knows they will give her no matter what she does. Sam is realizing that high school is a lot like the time loop and always has been—sometimes, her actions just don't matter, as her popularity will allow her to get away with almost as much as the time loop does.



Sam continues her streak of recklessness and defiance, knowing that racking up an insane bill on her mother's credit card won't actually hurt anyone—it'll all reset tomorrow. Sam is leaning into her basest desires throughout the day—for cruelty, for sex, and now for material indulgence—knowing on some level that even giving into these impulses won't ever satisfy her.



As the girls pull out of the parking lot at the mall, they all gush about how “awesome” Sam is. As they leave the lot, they see a group of four guys driving next to them—when Tara remarks that the guys are “so hot,” Sam lifts her shirt and flashes them, and then Tara guns the gas pedal. Sam cannot believe the irony of the fact that *this* is what it’s like to be dead.

At Tara’s house, the girls help Sam put on her fancy new clothes and accessories. Sam is amazed by how old she looks, and how different. After everyone’s ready for the party, Sam takes the girls out to an expensive French restaurant, and they order a bottle of fancy wine—no one asks for their IDs, and the girls get drunk quickly. As the girls prepare to leave the restaurant, Sam sees that she has gotten an angry text from Rob, asking where she is, and whether she remembers that they had plans tonight. Sam texts Rob back, telling him she’s on her way.

Sam and the Pugs arrive at the party—Rob spots Sam almost immediately and pushes his way toward her, pinning her against a wall. Rob tells Sam that she looks hot, and offers her a beer. He notices that Sam is still wearing Anna Cartullo’s shoes—he tells her they don’t look like her, and Sam retorts that Rob doesn’t know everything about her. Rob brings Sam a beer, and she starts to head upstairs with him. On the staircase she collides with Kent, who starts talking to her—he tells her to stay away from Daimler, who is a “dirtbag.” He insists that Sam is too good for all that. Sam reacts defensively, saying she doesn’t need to explain anything to Kent—they’re not even friends.

Kent, disappointed, tells Sam that everyone’s right about her. Sam berates Kent for pretending he’s better than anyone else and says she’s sure he does bad things, too. As soon as the words are out of her mouth, though, she knows it’s not true. Sam tells Kent that the fact that she can’t be like him isn’t her fault—she just doesn’t see the world the way he does, and she can’t be fixed. She meant to say “it” can’t be fixed, meaning her worldview, but the words came out wrong, and now she is about to cry. Kent tells Sam that she looks beautiful with her hair down, and insists tenderly that she doesn’t need to be fixed.

The moment is ruined when Tara bounds up the stairs and pulls Sam back down to get some liquor—they come to a door which is covered in signs that ask people to stay out, urging them to drink instead of going in. Tara opens the door, anyway—Courtney and Beth are inside the dining room, raiding Kent’s parents’ liquor cabinet. As Sam takes in the massive dining room and thinks about how beautiful the house must look in the daytime, Tara shatters a vase. The girls scurry from the dining room into the kitchen, and Sam’s stomach “jumps into her throat” as she spots Lindsay.

Sam is beginning to get sick of her choice to behave recklessly today—she is almost disappointed in the fact that nothing she does matters or will stick, and that none of her actions have any repercussions even when they are outlandish and dangerous.



Sam doesn’t really like these girls, but because nothing matters, she is happy to go through the motions of friendship with them and treat them to a dinner. They are all she has right now, and, as Sam is terrified of being alone, being in the company of the Pugs is better than nothing.



Sam resists Rob’s advances, realizing more and more that it is true that he doesn’t know her at all—he knows the version of herself she has presented to him in order to make herself seem cooler and more attractive, but ultimately less than the sum of all that she is. When Sam runs into Kent, he validates her latent feelings even as he calls her out for stooping lower than she should—though Kent is right, Sam grows defensive.



Sam and Kent have a tense moment in which Sam attempts to posture against Kent and bring him down to her level. Kent responds with empathy and kindness, though, realizing that piling on Sam will do no good when she is obviously so confused, ambivalent, and insecure about her own actions, motivations, and personality.



Sam is not really enjoying spending time with these new friends, the Pugs, as they ignore Kent’s signs begging people to stay out of his dining room and drunkenly desecrate his parents’ things. Sam both longs for Lindsay and is afraid to have to encounter her again.



Sam recounts a story from last year: Lindsay went to visit her stepbrother at NYU, and when she returned from the trip, she was acting cruel and on edge, making fun of Elody, Ally, and Sam constantly. Sam knew something bad must have happened in New York, but none of the girls pressed the issue—"you don't push things with Lindsay," Sam says.

One night, toward the end of the school year, the four girls went out to a Mexican restaurant where the waiters never card to eat and drink margaritas. Lindsay would barely touch her food, and halfway through the meal she blurted out the fact that she had drunkenly lost her virginity in New York to a random guy at a party. Sam knew as soon as Lindsay finished recounting the story that their group would file it away "under Things We'll Never Talk About." After confessing to her friends, Lindsay loosened up and ate and drank heartily. Lindsay paid for everything with her mother's credit card at the end of the meal and then went off to the bathroom to fix her makeup. Sam followed her in and found Lindsay kneeling in front of the toilet, purging her meal.

Lindsay insisted she'd just eaten too fast, but Sam had no idea whether or not Lindsay was telling the truth. After the girls were done at the restaurant, they went to a party, where Lindsay kissed Patrick for the first time—months later, after she had sex with him for the first time, she recounted it to Sam, Elody, and Ally as if it had been her first time ever. The girls pretended along with Lindsay "to make her happy," knowing that she would have done the same for them.

Back at the party, Sam has lost track of Lindsay, Elody, and Ally. She's been drinking for an hour since she first saw them, and at last decides to make her way upstairs to find Lindsay. The two of them make eye contact, but Lindsay does not approach Sam—Ally does. She tells Sam that Lindsay is upset about what happened that morning. Sam urges Ally to agree with her about how mean Lindsay is, asking her to admit that it's true. Ally insists that it doesn't matter whether or not it's true—the four of them belong to one another. Ally advises Sam to tell Lindsay she's sorry, but Sam tells Ally that she's *not* sorry. At that moment, Ally fixates on a spot over Sam's shoulder—Sam feels time seem to freeze, and when she turns around, she spots Juliet Sykes in the doorway.

As Sam begins recounting a story from her past, she reveals that the unseen, unspoken rules about how to relate to and handle Lindsay have been in place for a long time—now, Sam has broken them, and she is facing the consequences.



Sam's recollection of a tense, painful night in her and Lindsay's friendship reveals the depths of Lindsay's inner pain and insecurity. Sam is one of the only people who has witnessed Lindsay at her lowest of lows, and this gives Sam a kind of power over Lindsay—a power which she has never exerted, and which she has repeatedly denied even exists. Despite having witnessed Lindsay being vulnerable, Sam still has a hard time accepting that her shiny, gorgeous, fierce best friend is just as lonely, frightened, and fallible as any of their classmates.



Sam reflects on the ways in which she has helped Lindsay to live in denial about her choices and her failures—it is almost pathological, the ways in which the girls have aided Lindsay in creating a series of myths about her own life which allow her to live with herself, as she remakes herself in an image she can stomach.



Despite all the calamity which has occurred between Sam and Lindsay today, Ally insists that there is still a way to make things right—she urges Sam to cast her pride aside and be a good friend to Lindsay, despite all of her shortcomings. Best friends keep each other's secrets and love each other no matter what—Sam is struck by the truth of this statement, but is still unable to kowtow to Lindsay anymore for fear of being complicit in the mechanism which keeps people like Lindsay in power while people like Juliet suffer.



Sam feels she cannot watch this moment unfold yet again. She stumbles through the crowd of people now taking note of Juliet's presence—she notices that Juliet's eyes are locked on Lindsay, and realizes it is Lindsay whom Juliet hates the most. As Sam pushes past Juliet, Juliet puts a hand on Sam's wrist and tells her to wait, but Sam refuses, making her way down the hall. She runs straight into Rob, who is drunk. Sam urgently tells him that she wants to leave, but Rob insists on smoking a cigarette first. In response, Sam kisses Rob passionately, and the two of them begin staggering down the hallway. As Sam hears the crowd upstairs begin chanting "Psycho" over again, she tells Rob that they need to find a room—she just wants to attempt to shut out the calamity upstairs.

Rob drags Sam into a dark room, and the two of them begin making out on the bed. Sam can still hear the chanting upstairs, and she kisses Rob harder and begins undressing herself. Rob asks Sam if she's sure she's ready, but she just continues kissing him, removing his jacket and shirt. After a while Rob gets quiet, and Sam is concerned—normally he is the one who is in charge of things any time they are hooking up. After a moment, Sam realizes that Rob has fallen asleep. Disappointed, Sam feels around in the darkness for her clothes, dresses, and slips back out into the hallway—the party has returned to normal, and Juliet Sykes is gone.

As Sam moves through the party, people give her suspicious looks, and one girl snidely warns Sam that her dress is unzipped. Sam ignores all the taunts that come her way as she roams through the halls, making her way to a part of the house which Kent has deemed off-limits to partygoers. The living room is dark, and one wall is almost completely windowed. Sam sits down in the moonlight-streaked room and begins to sob. After several minutes, she becomes aware that someone else is in the room—she turns around and sees Kent behind her. He asks Sam if she's okay, and if she wants to talk about anything. Sam asks for a glass of water, and Kent fetches her one.

Sam apologizes for coming back to the living room despite the do-not-enter signs, but Kent insists the sign was for "other people." Sam asks Kent why he threw his first party now, and Kent confesses that he thought if he had a party, Sam would show up. Sam doesn't know what to say, and instead comments on how much light the room must get during the day. She then apologizes for being cruel to Kent earlier, and then tells him she should go. Kent asks if Sam is sure she's okay, and Sam confesses that she doesn't want to go home. Kent doesn't ask why, but offers to let Sam stay in one of his guest bedrooms. Sam accepts his offer, and Kent reaches out his hand. Sam takes it.

Sam has watched Juliet's cruel humiliation so many times, and has participated in it herself again and again. She doesn't want to be a part of it anymore, and doesn't even want to bear witness to it, so she seeks oblivion anywhere she can—even with Rob, for whom her feelings are ambivalent at best and repulsed at worst.



Rob is a disappointment to Sam yet again—she longs to lose herself in him and just give in to what he wants in order to escape the hellish spectacle going on outside the room, but Rob is incompetent, even after all his pressuring of Sam and his repeated insistence with regards to his desire for her.



Sam feels isolated both physically and emotionally—the choices she has made today and the reckless ways in which she has behaved are finally catching up to her. Though Sam knows her choices won't stick when the loop resets, this, too, is an isolating thing to know, and as the weight of all of this knowledge comes tumbling down on her, she breaks down and cries, only to be seen by the one person who always makes a point of trying to see her: Kent.



Sam is touched and astounded by the realization that so much of Kent's actions have revolved around her—there is something between them after all these years, which Sam has purposefully been ignoring and suppressing in order to live the cool, popular life she always dreamed of. Kent has remained steadfast, though—his loyalty towards her has been the one constant in all the chaos she's endured these last several days.



Kent leads Sam through his giant house to a secluded guest room where the sounds of the party completely fade away. Kent guides Sam to the bed and tucks her in. As he crouches over Sam, she feels a “spark” inside of her. Kent secures the blankets around Sam’s shoulders “like he’s been putting [her] to bed every night of [her] whole life.”

The tenderness that Kent shows Sam in this moment is the first good thing that has happened to her all day—and the first real moment of peace she’s felt since the time loop began. Her relationship with Kent feels easy and natural, as opposed to the constant social posturing and pretending that goes on between Sam and her “real” friends.



CHAPTER 5

Sam says that back then, she was “still looking for answers”—she still wanted to know why she was going through the things she was going through. She wasn’t able to see it then, but soon after, she would begin thinking about time, and its endless flow forward, “all of it leading to the same place.” Sam says that there are some people who can afford to wait—there are tomorrows laid out for them. For some people, though, there is only today; the truth is, Sam says, “you never really know” how much time you do have.

As Sam experiences her dream yet again, she muses within it on the nature of time and the unknowability of what the future holds. She laments that she did not know what would happen to her, and that she would only have a certain number of tomorrows, but she knows that this is the way things are for everyone—no one can cheat fate.



Sam wakes up gasping, her alarm pulling her up out of sleep. Though it is now the fifth time she has woken up on February twelfth, today, she is relieved. She is happy that the events of her hellish day “yesterday” have been erased, and that she gets to start fresh. Sam lies in bed, thinking of all the things she’d still like to accomplish in her life, both fanciful and mundane. Izzy slips into Sam’s room and hops up onto her bed, waking her up for school. “I’m not going to school,” Sam says, and states that those five words would kick off the best—and worst—day of her life.

Sam, after leaning into disaster, cruelty, recklessness, and oblivion, is relieved for the first time to know that she gets yet another chance to make things right. Sam no longer wants to spend her days leaning into badness and seeing how far she can push the envelope—she wants to do the things she’s always longed to do, and live on her own terms rather than trying to beat time or fate.



Sam playfully tickles Izzy, and the noises of their laughter bring their mother to the door. She warns Sam that Lindsay will be there to pick her up any minute. Izzy proudly declares that Sam isn’t going to school, and she herself isn’t either. As Sam watches her little sister stand in proud defiance of their mother, she wonders what Izzy will look like when she’s older, and whether people will remark that she looks like her older sister—or whether people will even remember what Sam looked like once she’s gone.

Sam has been cruel to her mother and her sister, but now, there is a tenderness which she shows them at long last. She has come to appreciate them, despite everything, having seen how fragile people are and how terrible things can get without love and support.



Sam's mother sends Izzy downstairs to eat breakfast, and once Izzy is gone, she asks Sam if she's feeling okay—she knows her daughter wouldn't want to miss school on Cupid Day. Sam begins telling her mother how stupid Cupid Day actually is, and how the whole point is just to use **roses** demonstrate how many friends one has—even though the whole school of course already knows how many friends everyone else actually has. Sam's mother tells her that she doesn't sound like herself, and Sam suggests that perhaps she's changing. As she says the words, she realizes they might actually be true—maybe, this whole time, she has had to change.

Sam's mother asks her if something bad has happened with any of her friends, and Sam tells a white lie—she says that Rob dumped her. She tells her mom that the two of them wanted different things, and that she thinks perhaps Rob never really liked her. Then, Sam's mother—breaking the protocol of the last four or so years—steps over the nail polish line on the floor and kisses Sam on the forehead. She tells Sam that she's allowed to stay home. Izzy appears in the doorway, half-dressed for school in mismatched clothes, begging to stay home with Sam. Sam wonders if the other kids at school make fun of Izzy for her lisp and her strange style, but then realizes that Izzy doesn't care: her eight-year-old sister is braver than she is. Sam hopes wildly that Izzy's confidence doesn't get “beaten out of her” as the years pass.

Sam's mother tells Izzy she can't stay home, but Sam implores her mother to let her. Sam's mother tells Sam that if Izzy stays home, she'll just annoy Sam all day—she asks Sam if she'd rather be alone. Sam knows that her mother is expecting her to say yes—for years, Sam has been desperate for any alone time she can get. But “things change after you die,” Sam says, and today she does not want to be alone. Sam's mother begrudgingly agrees to let the girls stay home together. Izzy, thrilled, immediately begins bouncing on Sam's bed. Sam smiles at her mother.

Sam reflects on the things she loved as a child which she abandoned or forgot as she grew older: horses, nature, and delicious food became replaced by friends, boys, and clothes. Sam recalls her hideaway from when she was younger, a place called Goose Point which she discovered while running away from home after her parents refused to buy her a bicycle. Sam packed a bag and ran through the woods, eventually coming upon an enormous rock with a flat top, which she named Goose Point. Sam felt Goose Point was special: she believed that time didn't move there.

Sam, in lying to her mother, actually stumbles into a deeper and more valuable truth. She has known all along that Cupid Day was an inane ritual with no real purpose other than to make people feel good about themselves—or bad about themselves—for entirely the wrong reasons. Sam understands now that the purpose of the time loop is to change her, to cause her to encounter truths like this one and then do something about them.



Everything is different today already, and Sam hasn't even left the bed. She has experienced a change of perspective, and this has caused her mother to catch a glimpse of who her daughter really is beneath the cruelty and pretension. Sam doesn't even find Izzy's lisp annoying anymore—she simply wants for her sister to be who she is, and to be able to live free of the torment and cruelty which calibrates so much of her own social life.



Sam has cruelly rejected her family's love, interest, and affection for years now—but today, profoundly changed by the things that have happened to her, Sam finds longing not just for company but also for connection, and Sam knows that she owes her little sister and her mother much more than what she has been giving them.



It is ironic—or fateful—that the place which became a haven and a hiding spot for Sam, Goose Point, is a place where she felt she was able to manipulate or live inside of time itself. Time has come to calibrate so much of Sam's life, and her early desires to change the flow of time seem to be too much of a coincidence to be completely random and unconnected to what is happening to her now.



Sam returned to Goose Point over the years to reflect, to be alone, or to get away from her problems and console herself when she was sad. After her friendship with Lindsay started up, though, Sam stopped going to Goose Point. She hasn't been there in years—until today, when she decides to take Izzy, despite the cold weather. Sam wants to see if Goose Point still feels the same.

Sam leads Izzy through the woods, and as they go, Sam is struck by how small everything is—when she was younger, the woods, creeks, and hills seemed much, much larger. As Sam nears Goose Point, she notices that the woods are being built up, and a lot of big, fancy new houses now look out on her special spot. She considers turning back, but Izzy spots the rock and runs toward it. Goose Point is just as Sam remembers, and Izzy agrees that it is a great hiding place. As she goes on and on about how wonderful it is, Sam notices her sister's pronounced lisp.

Sam asks Izzy if the other kids at school make fun of her for her voice—Izzy concedes that sometimes they do. Sam asks Izzy why she doesn't try to change her lisp—there are things she could do to help make it less noticeable. Izzy protests that her voice is her voice, and if she changed it, no one would be able to tell it was her talking. Sam can't think of a response, and instead just wraps her sister in a hug. There are so many things Sam wants to tell Izzy, but Izzy becomes distracted by a feather at the edge of the rock. Izzy gives the feather to Sam, and Sam pockets it.

Izzy asks Sam about the necklace she is wearing—Sam replies that it was a gift from their grandmother, who died before Izzy was born. Izzy says she wishes that no one ever died. Sam feels a sad ache in her throat, but she smiles through it.

When Sam gets home, she has three new texts: Lindsay, Elody, and Ally have all texted her the same happy Cupid Day wish. Sam doesn't reply. She has been overwhelmed this morning with thoughts of how somewhere out in the world there is a universe where Lindsay is still mad at her, and she can't stop thinking about how easy it is for things to change—how “one false step” can totally change one's life and reputation in the course of a day.

Sam's friendship with Lindsay catapulted her out of her childhood, and the world in her head, and into a world of popularity and banal concerns. Sam lost her connection to who she was and the things she loved, and now she wants to check for herself whether reestablishing a connection to that part of herself is still possible.



Sam is afraid, as they approach Goose Point, that it won't be the same to her—that it won't be comforting or magical or safe or any of the things it was to her in her youth. However, when she arrives there with Izzy, she is relieved to see that it is the same after all these years—and, even more, that it is just as magical to Izzy.



Izzy's profound declaration that without her lisp she wouldn't be who she is strikes a chord with Sam. Sam's whole life has been about fitting into a mold, doing whatever she can do to make herself popular, and pleasing others—she is struck by her little sister's independence and allegiance to the things that make her who she is, even at a young age.



Sam knows the sad truth—she is, sooner rather than later, going to have to leave her sweet little sister behind. But she has learned from Izzy today and will carry forward the knowledge Izzy has unknowingly imparted.



The loop is still managing to throw Sam for a loop—she can't quite get her head around the strangeness of the repetitive but isolated days, and she struggles with the knowledge that though nothing that happens from one day to the next matters, the knowledge of it all lingers within her (and her alone).



Sam feels that a thousand possibilities exist at the same time and wonders if perhaps multiple things are true—maybe she and Lindsay are best friends and hate each other at the same time, and maybe Sam is just one flirtation away from being branded a slut, like Anna Cartullo. Sam realizes that everyone in her school is just one mistake away from eating lunch alone in the bathroom, and thinks about how hard it is to ever really know the truth about someone else.

Sam and Izzy spend the rest of the day watching old cartoons and snacking, and when their mother gets home, they beg her to go out to dinner. Sam's parents can't believe she is staying in with them on a Friday night, but they gladly take her and Izzy out to dinner at a crowded neighborhood sushi restaurant. Sam has fun with her parents and her sister, and can't believe how perfect a day she's having despite the fact that nothing particularly special has happened. Sam thinks that she could keep living a day like this one over and over again forever.

A large group of freshmen and sophomores from Sam's high school file into the restaurant—it is the swim team, fresh from a meet. Sam watches as a couple of the girls recognize her and stare at her. Sam eats dessert with her family, but hears one of the students call another by her last name: Sykes. One of the swimmers is a thin, pale, blond girl whom Sam recognizes as the Cupid who handed her Kent's **rose** in math class—she realizes the girl is Juliet's little sister.

Sam gets up and goes over to the girl—the whole table of students grows silent as Sam approaches. Sam asks the girl what her name is, and when the girl timidly asks if she's done something wrong, Sam replies that she recognizes her because she looks so much like her older sister. Sam lies, and tells the girl—who introduces herself as Marian—that she and Juliet are lab partners. Izzy runs over and throws her arm around Sam's waist, asking her to come back to the table. Before Sam leaves, though, she tells Marian to tell Juliet “not to do it.” When Marian asks what Juliet shouldn't do, Sam replies that it's a science project thing, and that if Marian says those words to Juliet, Juliet will know what she's talking about. Marian smiles and says that she'll tell Juliet tomorrow—her sister, she says rather proudly, is going out tonight.

As Sam considers the time loop and its effects more carefully, she realizes how fragile the whole ecosystem of her high school—and her world—is. The boundaries which separate people from one another are thin and porous, and even small changes and happenstances can have unimaginable ripple effects.



Sam has managed to completely avoid the stressful and shallow world of her high school for a day, and she is surprised to find that she feels renewed, restored, and happy in the presence of her family, whose affection and attention she'd avoided for so long out of fear that not putting enough time in with her friends would result in her declining social status. Now, all Sam wants is a quiet day like this, lived over and over.



Sam's knowledge of how interconnected everything is has physical, tangible form in this scene, as she realizes that the people around her are more connected than she thinks—the realization that Juliet has a life and a family, too, hits Sam particularly hard, and it bursts the blissful bubble she has found herself in today with her own family.



Sam tries to manipulate things in a hands-off way by putting the onus of saving Juliet's life, at least for tonight, on Marian—but Sam soon realizes that the burden will always fall back on her. Marian is oblivious to the extent of her sister's suffering, and instead seems to believe that Juliet has at last made some friends—the guilt of this realization cuts Sam to the core.



The whole way home, Sam can't think of anything but Marian Sykes. Even after her whole family goes to bed and silence fills the house, Sam is tortured with visions of Juliet bleeding and dying. This morning, Sam swore there was "nothing in the world" that could make her go to Kent's party again, but now, she leaps from bed and dons a jacket and sneaks out of the house. She tells herself that Juliet Sykes isn't her problem, but she knows that if the situation were reversed, and Juliet were living this day over and over again, she would deserve to have a better ending.

Sam dawdles on the way to Kent's house, though, unsure of what to do, and finds herself navigating to the street where Juliet lives—she remembers hearing the name from Lindsay mentioning it a long time ago. She sees the Sykes mailbox, and as she looks at Juliet's house, she thinks that there is nothing visibly different about it from any other house, though it exudes a "desperate" quality.

Sam pulls into the driveway despite knowing that she shouldn't be there. She runs up to the door and rings the bell—Juliet's mother answers, in a bathrobe, already dressed for bed. Sam tells Juliet's mother that she's looking for Juliet—they're lab partners, she says, and she needs to pick up the work she missed in school today. Juliet's father comes to the door—he and Juliet's mother are both shocked that someone has come to the house looking for their oldest daughter. Juliet's mother tells her that Juliet isn't home, but she invites Sam in. Though Sam offers to go up to Juliet's room and look for the "assignment," Juliet's mother states that Juliet doesn't like anyone in her room, and she leaves Sam alone while she goes to the kitchen to call Juliet.

Sam considers leaving while Juliet's mother is in the kitchen, but instead she stays and looks around. She sees a picture frame which still has the stock picture it was sold with inside—Sam realizes that perhaps the Sykes family "doesn't have too many shiny, happy moments to remember." Sam peeks into the living room and sees a terrifying mask perched on a side table—it scares her badly, but she nonetheless goes over to it and lifts it up. Juliet's mother appears behind her and tells Sam that Juliet made the mask. Juliet was always crafty as a child, her mother says, but now has lost interest in "that stuff."

Sam, disturbed by Marian's obliviousness and her own knowledge that she cannot escape the role she has played in Juliet's suffering, resolves to go against her better judgement, step outside of her own concerns, and try once and for all to make things right for Juliet.



As Sam approaches Juliet Sykes's house, she has trouble reconciling its normal outward appearance with the deep strangeness she has seen in (or, perhaps, projected onto) Juliet for all of these years.



Sam is desperate to stop Juliet, and in visiting her home at such an odd hour, Sam risks exposing to Juliet's parents the seriousness of what is happening to their daughter. Sam knows, as one of Juliet's primary tormentors, that she has no business visiting her home and her family, but she is so desperate to prevent Juliet's suicide from happening that she feels she must go straight to the root, to the cradle, of who Juliet is.



Sam is entranced and also off-put by the strange and uncanny trimmings of Juliet's family home. The eerie stock photo still in its frame suggests apathy or misery—or both—while the mask Juliet has crafted, terrifying to behold, seems to reflect Juliet's outward externalization of her own interior torment.



Juliet's mother tells Sam that Juliet didn't pick up her phone—she seems concerned, but Sam cheerfully reassures her that Juliet is probably fine. Sam is seized by a sudden desire to get out of the house—she doesn't want to lie to Mrs. Sykes anymore. Mrs. Sykes walks Sam to the door and tells her she can come back tomorrow. As Sam walks back to her car, she decides to go to Kent's house and find Juliet, doing whatever she can to stop her from trying to kill herself. As Sam drives to the party, she realizes she hasn't really done something good for someone else in a long time—she remembers studying purgatory in English class while reading Dante, and wonders if she herself is in purgatory; maybe, she thinks, saving Juliet Sykes is the only thing standing between Sam and an eternity of bliss.

Sam parks on the shoulder of the street and runs through the rainy woods with a flashlight, toward Kent's house. Upon entering the party, Sam is greeted with stares—she doesn't blame her classmates, as she looks disheveled and unlike her usual self. She runs through the party, asking people if they have seen Juliet Sykes. The music is so loud, though, that everyone assumes she is looking for Lindsay, so they direct Sam her way. When Sam finds Lindsay, she asks if Juliet Sykes is here—Lindsay reveals that Juliet has already come and gone, after calling Lindsay, Ally, and Elody bitches in front of everyone.

Lindsay calls to Elody and Ally, telling them that Sam is here, but is busy looking for her “best friend” Juliet. Sam, full of anger, reveals that she knows that it was Lindsay who was Juliet's best friend in their younger years. Lindsay tells Sam that Juliet is a freak, and Sam fights her way back downstairs, ignoring her friends and classmates who try to talk to her. She continues asking everyone where Juliet Sykes is, and eventually someone tells her that Juliet is in the bathroom. When Sam gets to the bathroom, a girl waiting outside tells her that Juliet has been inside for a long time. Sam calls for Juliet, but there is no answer, and Sam worries that Juliet has killed herself inside.

Sam sends someone to get Kent—when he comes back, Sam asks him to pick the lock and get Juliet out. He uses a safety pin to do so, but when the door swings open, it is empty—the window is open, though, and Sam knows that Juliet has gone out of it. She immediately runs out of the bathroom, down the hall, and back out into the woods, searching the forest and calling Juliet's name. The rain is coming down hard, and Sam struggles to make her way through it. Sam is overcome with anger toward Juliet for wanting to kill herself—she is angry that Juliet had a choice to live and didn't take it, when “not all of us are so lucky.”

Sam has come to realize certain things about the time loop—one of them is that perhaps it is a mechanism purposely designed just for Sam, just to keep her repeating February 12th until she learns something, changes something, or delivers the universe the ineffable thing that it wants from her. Sam sees Juliet as her ticket out of the loop, which brings together Sam's desire to make things right with the desire to get herself out of whatever twist of fate she's become stuck inside of.



Sam arrives at the party and questions everyone she can only to realize that she is too late—she was not able to stop Juliet from going on her tirade against the girls, and now Juliet has snuck off god knows where to do god knows what. Sam wants badly to be able to redeem herself through Juliet, and Juliet is valuable to her for this reason more than by virtue of her own precious human life.



Sam tries to confront Lindsay about the truth of her friendship with Juliet, but Lindsay is on the defensive, and is not willing to admit anything or change her position on the “freak” she has made her reputation by torturing for so many years. Sam is convinced that she can still save Juliet, despite her late arrival, but every second she grows more and more fearful that there won't be enough time.



Sam's desperation to find Juliet mounts as she begins to fear the worst. She wants to save Juliet, but she is also angry with her for throwing away the precious gift of life, when Sam has been living in fear every day for almost a week that her own life has been taken from her unwillingly.



Sam hears a car honk and realizes she is close to the road. Relieved, Sam heads toward the noise, and eventually finds the main road. Juliet is huddled there, about eight feet from the blacktop, and Sam confronts her, asking her what she is doing. Juliet asks Sam the same, and Sam admits that she has been looking for Juliet. Sam offers to take Juliet back to her house, let her dry off and warm up, and talk about what happened inside the party, but Juliet doesn't answer. She stands up and says only "Sorry." Sam grabs her wrist, and begs Juliet to come with her. Juliet asks Sam why she's doing all this—Sam tells Juliet that she wants to help her. Juliet accuses Sam of hating her—Sam insists she doesn't hate Juliet, she just doesn't know her, and would like to change that.

Juliet grimly smiles and agrees—Sam doesn't know her at all. Another car shoots by, and Sam realizes that Juliet is very close to the road. Sam asks her to step back from it, but she already on some level knows, with a terrible sinking feeling, what is going to happen. Sam hears Kent's voice calling her name, and sees Lindsay's car coming down the road. Juliet turns to face Sam. "Maybe next time," she says, "but probably not," and then throws herself into the road, directly into the path of Lindsay's silver Range Rover, which sails into the woods, crashing against a tree and catching fire.

Kent comes up behind Sam, and asks if she's okay. Sam is in shock, and can only say that Lindsay, Ally, and Elody were in the car that hit Juliet. Kent pulls his phone out and calls the police as other cars passing by on the road come to a stop. People get out of their cars and stare at the "tiny crumpled body" in the road—Juliet's. Sam feels as if she is in a dream—she can't feel the rain, or even her body, as she realizes that the word Juliet was calling out on the previous nights was not "sit or shit or sight" but Sykes.

Sam hears a scream coming from the woods and watches as Lindsay stumbles up to the road, crying. Kent is supporting Ally as they walk up to the highway. Lindsay screams that Elody is still in the car and begs someone to help her. An ambulance approaches, as do police. Sam watches as everything unfolds in short, choppy moments—Juliet is placed on a stretcher, as is Elody's lifeless body. Elody was sitting in the seat Sam was in the first night. Lindsay and Ally sob hysterically, but Sam doesn't seem to be able to react—she doesn't even realize that soon it is just her and Kent standing in the road.

Sam wants to be kind to Juliet and help her—she really wants to know her and give her the chance to express her feelings. Nonetheless, Juliet is not interested in that; Sam and Lindsay's cruelty has taken a significant toll on her, and she is unable to believe now, even for a second, that Sam would actually want to help her, connect with her, or repent for her ways.



As Sam realizes what is going to happen—what has always happened, and what is always going to happen—she is confronted by Juliet's cruel but apt twisting of the words Sam and Lindsay have used to torment her for years. "Maybe next time" Sam will be able to get out the time loop—"but probably not." Sam and her friends caught Juliet up in a loop of torment and trauma, and now Sam is caught up in one of her very own.



Sam can't believe what she's just seen—she can't believe that, all along, it was Juliet seeking revenge that had caused her and her friends' gruesome wreck. Juliet succeeded in her suicide mission and managed to effect other casualties as well, demonstrating the strength of her agency and the cruel twists of fate which Sam is still just beginning to reckon with.



Actually looking at the aftermath of the horrible accident in which she herself was involved is almost more than Sam can bear, and her consciousness seems almost to shut down in an attempt to protect her from what she's seeing. She knows that Elody's fate is her own in one of these realities—that somewhere out there, it is her body on a stretcher.



Kent places his hands on Sam's arms and she tells him she needs to go find Lindsay at the hospital. Kent tells Sam that she's freezing, though, and tells her to come back to his house to get dried off and warmed up. Kent's house is empty, but still a wreck from the party. Kent makes Sam a cup of hot chocolate and offers her a blanket. Sam, disoriented and confused, asked what happened to Lindsay and Juliet. Lindsay is fine, Sam says, and was taken to the hospital just to get checked out—Juliet, though, is dead, as is Elody, who was sitting in the seat Sam had occupied that very first night. Sam breaks down, distraught, and Kent wraps her in a hug, comforting her. Despite her grief, Sam feels a “zip of electricity” at his touch.

Realizing that Sam's clothes are soaking, Kent urges Sam to take a warm shower and put on a pair of fresh pajamas. Kent tells Sam that he wishes he could make everything better—Sam appreciates the honesty and simplicity of his words and demeanor. Though Sam knows that everything will reset tomorrow and both Juliet and Elody will be fine, she is still shaken up, and tries to calm herself down in the hot shower. When Sam returns to the kitchen, Kent offers to drive her home, but Sam asks to stay at Kent's. He offers her a guest room, but Sam tells him she wants to stay in a room that feels lived in.

Kent leads her to his own bedroom—a giant room bathed in beautiful moonlight. Kent helps Sam into his own bed, and tucks her in. Sam asks if Kent will stay with her until she falls asleep, and he agrees to. Sam asks Kent if he thinks that it's “weird” that she's here—Kent tells Sam that it's all right. She asks him why he's being so kind to her, and he reveals that, since the second grade, when Sam stood up to a bully on Kent's behalf and acted like his “hero,” he has been waiting for the day when he can repay her and become her hero as well.

Sam asks Kent to promise he will stay beside her throughout the night, and he agrees. Sam thinks that as she falls asleep she can feel his lips against hers, but all too soon, she is pulled back into her dream, like a flower folding in on itself.

CHAPTER 6

In tonight's dream, Sam can hear music. The music in her dream is coming from the guidance counselor's office at her high school. She can see the cheesy inspirational posters which hang on the wall in the office and for some reason they cause Sam's feeling of terror to drain away. She realizes that, in all of her dreams, she hasn't been falling—she's been floating.

Horrible things have happened, and though Sam is aware that she is still in the time loop, she is torn apart by grief. She feels a lot of competing things, and on top of all her complicated feelings, there is the added strangeness of knowing that none of it is “real,” though it feels real at the time.



The benefit of the loop is that Sam is able to shake her sadness off quickly, knowing that things will reset tomorrow. The trauma of having witnessed such awful things lingers, though, and Sam wants to be comforted in order to stave off the pain of what she has seen and learned.



Kent's kindness toward Sam is revealed in this passage to be the product of a kind of debt he feels he owes her. He has wanted to repay her for many years, and has simply been waiting for his chance to do so. Kent is enduringly good, even in the face of cruelty, and this makes him very different from most of his other classmates. It is not about status for Kent—it is about doing actual good.



Sam's day ends on a quiet, intimate note—though she has failed to change the events she wanted to avoid, she has succeeded in creating something new.



With each “reset,” Sam is growing less and less afraid of what is happening to her. By day six, she has begun to realize that there is nothing sinister at work in the loop—instead, she is being encouraged toward something, and lifted up to meet it.



Sam is thrilled to be awakened by her alarm clock in the morning. She's grateful for everything around her, and she comes downstairs to greet her family in an uncharacteristically good mood. Sam's mother asks her if she wants breakfast, like she does every morning, and Sam declines, like *she* does every morning. Sam realizes how much she loves the small, everyday routine of her life—"the details that are [her] life's special pattern." So many things, she thinks, become beautiful when you just slow down and take a look.

Sam hugs her parents and kisses Izzy on the head, showing them all a measure of affection, which she knows has been rare lately. She is "filled with love" all throughout her body, love for all the small, drab details around her—she feels as if she is seeing everything for the first time. As she rushes out of the house and runs down the driveway toward Lindsay's waiting car, she knows that today, she is going to save two lives—Juliet Sykes's, and her own.

Sam hops into Lindsay's Range Rover and greets her best friend happily. Sam thinks that Lindsay looks "clearer" to her than she ever has before—Sam sees Lindsay at last for all that she is, "mean and funny and ferocious and loyal." When the two of them pick up Elody and Sam sees her coming down the driveway, "radiant and alive," Sam is again overcome by happiness and bliss. Sam wishes she could express the gratitude and love she feels for her friends, but she doesn't want to throw them off or weird them out. As they drive to school, Sam reflects on how grateful she is for her life, "screw [and] imperfect [and] damaged" as it is.

When the girls arrive in the lower lot, Sam screams for Lindsay to brake quickly, allowing the girl from the swim team to get the parking spot. Sam doesn't want to do anything wrong today—she wants to do good where she can. While Lindsay and Elody head to class, Sam goes off to the room where the **roses** are stored, planning on making some adjustments. Sam heads straight for the roses in a tray labeled "St-Ta," looking for Juliet Sykes's last name. Sam removes Juliet's "maybe next year, but probably not" rose from the bin and approaches a group of Cupids in the corner of the room, telling them that she needs to purchase a lot more roses.

After replacing Juliet's one **rose** with a huge bouquet—and an added note which reads "from your secret admirer"—Sam leaves the rose room elated. She is sure that her benevolent move will make things right, and she imagines how Lindsay will react when she sees that Juliet Sykes has more roses than she does.

Sam has watched a lot of pain and suffering unfold over the last several days, and now, she is so grateful for the mechanism which has been causing her days to reset themselves. It allows her to renew not just her circumstances, but also her perspective—here, she finds herself feeling grateful for things she once took for granted.



Sam is determined to set things right once and for all today, and she believes she knows how to do it. This gives her an increased confidence that not only will she be able to escape the loop, but that she will be able to leave things better than they started and change circumstances for everyone for the better.



Sam has seen Lindsay's dark side and secrets over the last few days—she understands her best friend now not as a shining paragon of coolness and popularity, but as a messy, flawed girl who is just trying to survive high school like everybody else. Sam has come to realize that she doesn't need to make everything perfect—it never will be—she just needs to do her best for her friends and those she cares for.



Sam doesn't just want to help herself and her friends today—she wants to set things right for everyone she can. Helping classmates she's not familiar with is just as important to her as saving Juliet Sykes. Sam isn't distracted by the divides in popularity, or the false idea that she can only help someone who has helped her in the past—she truly wants to do a good turn towards everyone she can.



Sam, despite her good intentions, still believes that popularity is the key to some things and hopes that by giving Juliet a symbol of status, she'll be able to brighten her day—and maybe even her life.



As Sam moves through the halls between classes that morning, she finds herself scanning the crowds for Kent—she has an “incredible urge” to be around him. Before calculus, when Sam knows she’ll see Kent, she ducks into a bathroom to fix her makeup. Inside, she overhears some sophomore girls talking about what a “slut” Anna Cartullo is. Sam tells the girls that they shouldn’t believe everything they hear—she warns them that most rumors start just “because somebody feels like it.” As the girls scurry out the door, Sam finds herself considering the derogatory graffiti all over the bathroom stalls—she checks under the sink for cleaning supplies, and then begins scrubbing the writing off each and every stall. Sam is full of pride and happiness as she revels in the feeling of being alive, and being capable of doing things—of doing good for once.

At lunch, Sam laughs with her friends, but scans the cafeteria repeatedly for signs of Kent or Juliet. Sam zones back into the conversation when Juliet’s name is mentioned—Sam knows that Ally, who has biology with Juliet, must be about to tell their group about how Juliet got a massive bouquet of **roses**. All of a sudden, though, hands clamp down over Sam’s eyes, and she knows from the smell of lemon balm that they are Rob’s. Rob uncovers Sam’s eyes and asks if she’s avoiding him—she tells him she isn’t, but in her head, she is preparing to break up with him.

Rob asks Sam if she got his **rose**—she tells him that she cut fifth period. Rob indignantly says that he didn’t get a rose from Sam. She thinks back to how she removed it earlier that morning in the rose room. Rob chastises Sam for making such a big deal out of needing to get roses on Cupid Day but not sending any to him. Rob tells Sam that she has an imperfect history of keeping promises, implying that he is frustrated by the fact they haven’t had sex yet.

At that moment, Juliet walks into the cafeteria. Sam watches her intensely, and Rob walks away. Juliet does not have a single **rose** with her, and Sam is deeply disappointed. Ally finishes telling the group all about the huge bouquet Juliet got, and Sam asks what she did with them. Her friends ask her why she cares. She denies caring to save face, but as her friends speculate that Juliet probably sent the roses to herself, Sam berates them for constantly making fun of her. The girls point out that just yesterday, Sam herself was ruthlessly teasing Juliet, suggesting she had rabies—Sam has no way, though, of explaining to her friends that “yesterday” was a whole world ago. Sam wonders how it is possible that she could change so much and still not change anything at all, and she is overwhelmed by a feeling of hopelessness.

Sam is still a little bit self-centered, seeking out Kent because of how good he made her feel the night before. But as she seeks her own fulfillment, she finds herself—for the first time ever—getting distracted by the impulse toward goodwill and righteousness along the way. Doing the right thing is starting to become more important to Sam than seeking out her own happiness, marking a major change and renewal in her character.



Once again, Sam is more interested in and excited about hearing how her actions have improved the lives of others than she is in engaging in the repetitious (and, at this point, slightly annoying) moments of her own life. She wants to know that she has effected real change, and despite her goodwill, there is still a bit of self-aggrandizement at work as a motivator.



Rob proves himself, in this passage, to be so concerned with his popularity and image after all that he is willing to sink to outright cruelty in front of all of Sam’s friends in order to make his point.



The Sam of a few days ago would not recognize her life as it is now—brushing off Rob Cokran to pay attention to Juliet Sykes. Even now, Sam is reluctant to admit to her friends outright that she’s become invested in Juliet, and when she hints towards that fact, she’s called a hypocrite. Sam fears that all of her good intentions won’t amount to anything, and she begins questioning how far her agency can take her within the loop.



As her friends raise their **roses** like glasses of champagne to cruelly “toast” Juliet, Sam leaves the cafeteria, looking for Juliet in the parking lot behind it. Sam is relieved, though, to find that Juliet has seemingly disappeared—Sam isn’t quite sure what she would have said to her if she’d caught up with her. Sam looks forward to that evening, when she will finally “get free” of this whole thing. She looks forward to all the things she’ll do once she’s out of the loop—hang out with Izzy, spend real quality time with her friends rather than just gossiping, and kiss Kent McFuller.

At that moment, amazingly, Kent comes right up behind Sam. He tells her that it’s too bad she wasn’t in calculus earlier—she missed some **roses**. He pulls his special rose for her out of his bag and hands it to her—she tells him it’s beautiful. Sam wonders what Kent would do if she grabbed him and kissed him right now. She thinks about what Ally was saying days ago about chaos theory, and about all the random steps, missteps, and coincidences which have brought her face-to-face with Kent right now.

Sam tells Kent she’s heard he’s having a party tonight, and that it’s the “place to be”—but she tells him that even if it weren’t, she’d come anyway. Kent begins rattling on about the party, but Sam interrupts him, saying she has something to tell him. Kent leans in close to Sam, and she becomes dizzy with desire. As Sam is about to say something to Kent, she hears Lindsay calling her, wanting to know if the two of them are going to cut class and head to TCBY. Sam is actually grateful for the interruption, unsure of what she was about to say or do, and Kent ducks away. Lindsay asks why Sam was talking to Kent, but Sam doesn’t answer—and she certainly doesn’t tell Lindsay that she is feeling “light and invincible, the best kind of tipsy.”

At Ally’s house, Sam obsessively checks and re-checks her makeup. Her friends tell her she’s “Freaking out,” and offer her shots of vodka. Sam declines, though—this is “the first day of [her] new beginning.” She tells herself that, from now on, she is going to do things right—she is going to be the kind of person who is remembered well.

As the girls drive to the party, Sam goes over what she is going to say to Kent in her head again and again—she’s planning on asking him to hang out. At the party, Sam, dead sober, is shocked by how “ridiculously packed together” everyone is, and how uncomfortable the party seems. The girls push their way upstairs, and as Sam passes her classmates, she is unsettled by the fact that, despite having been in class with these kids forever, they now look different and unfamiliar. She feels “like a curtain has dropped away” and she can now see people for who they really are.

Sam is now ditching her friends for Juliet Sykes—the unthinkable has truly happened. It becomes a little more clear in this passage that Sam is, after all, still more invested in fixing things for Juliet Sykes so that things will turn out all right for herself—her actions are not truly selfless yet; they’re still tinged with self-centeredness.



Sam sees her relationships now through the haze of the events of the loop—she is very sensitive to how all things are interconnected, and how small threads pulled in one part of the day affect the outcome of small—or large—parts of the rest of it.



Sam is indeed loosening her grip on the importance of social divisions and boundaries—she would not have been caught dead flirting with Kent McFuller a few days ago, but now she flouts the invisible rules and regulations which hold dominion over her high school in pursuit of being herself and developing her own burgeoning friendships.



Sam’s bouncy, exhilarated energy has carried her throughout the day—she is as determined now as she was this morning to continue on her path of setting things right. Things are still a lot about her, though, and rehabilitating her own image.



Sam realizes now how much of the social divisions that plague her high school are not just arbitrary, but false. She and her classmates have known each other since childhood, but they’ve let those bonds and that intimacy fall away in service of ridiculous divisions that have no bearing on who a person is. Sam is able to peer past the “curtain,” and she wishes everyone else could, too.



Sam sees Kent in the corner of a room upstairs, talking to another girl. Sam turns around to find Lindsay, but can't—she knows that Lindsay will have gone off to find Patrick. Sam knows that this means that Rob will be coming up to her soon, and sure enough, there he is. He tells Sam that he wasn't sure she would come, since she was acting "crazy" all day. Rob asks Sam if she is going to apologize—he tells her that they can figure out a way for her to make things up to him. Sam is angry with Rob, and the "years and years of fantasy" she indulged about him fall away in that instant.

Sam tells Rob she'd like to make things up to him. She tells him they need some one-on-one time, and then instructs him to go wait for her completely naked inside the nearby bedroom with stickers all over the door—Kent's room. Rob stumbles quickly toward the room, and Sam calls that she'll be there in just five minutes.

Ally comes up to Sam, who has by now lost sight of Kent. Sam asks Ally if she's seen Kent anywhere, but Ally hasn't, and besides, Sam decides that Ally is too drunk already to be useful. Sam and Ally circulate through the party—they spot Amy Weiss, the biggest gossip in school, making out with a guy, and Sam drags Ally toward her. Sam tells Amy that if she wants a better spot with more privacy, there's an available room—it's the one with stickers all over the door. Having set Rob up for humiliation, Sam continues to make her way through the party.

A few moments later, there is a scream, and Sam fears with a dread that Juliet has already arrived—instead, the scream is followed by laughter, and Ally calls Sam over to her—Rob is in the hallway in nothing but underwear and sneakers. Sam is too amused to feel bad for Rob. She laughs with Ally, who then tells her that Kent is behind them. Sam attempts to drag Ally with her towards him, but Ally scoots off to find Lindsay. When Sam turns around to head for Kent, he has disappeared into a room, and Bridget McGuire and Alex Liment are behind Sam instead. Bridget approaches Sam and asks if she knows what the assignment was from Alex's English class—Alex had to miss class to make a doctor's appointment.

Sam feels duped by Rob—she harbored feelings for so long not necessarily for him, but for the idea of him (and the promise of the status and social capital he could bring). She is angry with him for not being better, and angry with herself for having changed the course of her life and sacrificed so much in service of a mere "fantasy."



Sam decides to use her agency to serve Rob his just desserts, once and for all. She knows how precious social standing is to him now, despite his cool demeanor, and she knows just how to hit him where it will hurt most.



Sam continues to set her plan in motion as she moves through the party, realizing now that the small strings she pulls and choices she makes will have certain outcomes—she knows that she can change things, and she uses that newfound power in a way that many of her classmates are still scared to do.



Sam has spent this day trying to set many things right—but she's trying to make things bend to her idea of what "right" is. Sam has become an agent of change in this chapter, but not necessarily an agent of fate, as she meddles in the affairs of her classmates again and again in pursuit of her own idea of truth and justice.



Sam, wanting to fix things for poor Bridget, asks if anyone smells Chinese food. Alex acts like Sam is crazy, but he is also visibly uncomfortable. Sam asks Alex outright what is wrong with him. When he squirms, she clarifies that she means what sent him to the doctor. Alex says it was just a general checkup—Sam looks pointedly at Alex’s crotch and tells him she hopes they were thorough. She then goes on to say she’s been looking for a new doctor, and it’s hard to find a good one—especially one that doubles as a restaurant with a cheap lunch special. Sam tells Bridget that she’s sorry, but her boyfriend is a “slimeball,” and walks away, leaving the two of them to figure things out.

Sam moves through the party, wondering if she is doing things right—and if she is still going to be able to save Juliet, who should have been her main focus that day despite all the other good she’s doing. She worries that talking to Kent will be hopeless—she doesn’t have words to describe how wrong she’s been about everyone and how she’s been changing.

Sam feels a hush fall around her, and sure enough, when she looks down the hall, Juliet Sykes is there. As Juliet passes Sam, Sam grabs her arm and drags her back down the hall, pulling her into the nearest bathroom. Sam asks Juliet what she’s doing—Juliet simply says that “it’s a party” and she’s allowed to be here, just like everyone else. Juliet confesses that she came to tell Sam, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally something. Sam and Juliet say that they’re all “bitches” at the exact same time. Juliet, shocked, stares at Sam.

Sam tells Juliet that she is sorry for having made fun of her for so many years, and she tries to explain how the girls never even really thought about doing it, or about how it would affect Juliet—“It’s just the kind of thing that happens.” She tells Juliet again that she and her friends just didn’t think. Juliet calmly begins recounting all the horrible ways Sam and her friends have teased her over the years—stealing her gym clothes, taking pictures of her while she was showering and posting them online for everyone to see, hacking her email account and publishing embarrassing exchanges with someone she’d met in a chat room, starting rumors about Juliet selling her virginity for a pack of cigarettes. Sam tries to protest that the other girls did those things, not her, but she soon realizes that it doesn’t matter, anyway—it was all of them, every student in the school, who was responsible for Juliet’s pain.

Sam believes that the right thing to do is to out Alex as a liar and a cheater and rescue Bridget from him. There’s no way to know if this is truly the right thing to do or not, but in this chapter, Sam feels she has become both judge and jury—the calls are hers to make and the strings are hers to pull, and so she proceeds with her mission of setting everything right for everyone she can.



Even as Sam confidently meddles in the affairs of others, she has some cognizance of the fact that she might not actually be doing what’s right. Moreover, her quest to do good has distracted her from what should have been her real focus, Juliet.



Sam is able to head Juliet off at last, shocking her enough that she will perhaps listen to Sam, even if just for a moment. Sam believes that if she can just get through to Juliet she can really change things, and as she sets her plan in motion, she is clearly feeling confident and in control.



Sam’s apology is honest, but cruel at the same time. She basically says to Juliet that they didn’t pick on her for any real reason—she was just an easy, random target. The trauma they have inflicted upon Juliet, though, runs deeper than Sam ever realized—or ever was willing to let herself see and believe—and the idea that all of this hurt was caused just for a random lark is not an apology but yet another cruel stab in the heart for Juliet. Sam tries to exonerate herself, riding on her high of being a do-gooder and a fixer-upper, but in the end she cannot deny that everyone is complicit in Juliet’s suffering.



Sam is on the verge of tears, both sad for Juliet and frustrated that she herself can't make her see that Sam is trying to make things right. Sam assures Juliet that things will soon get better. She reminds her of the **roses** she got today, hoping to cheer her up, but Juliet's eyes fill with hatred. She asks Sam if the bouquet was yet another joke. Sam promises Juliet she wasn't trying to mess with her, but Juliet believes Sam sent the roses to remind her that she was "nobody." Sam, now crying, insists that she was just trying to make Juliet feel better. Juliet derisively replies that no one can make her better.

This reminds Sam of what she said to Kent a couple days ago about how she herself couldn't be fixed, but now she knows she was wrong. Sam is trying to think of a way to communicate this all to Juliet, but Juliet calmly pushes her way past Sam. She hesitates at the door, though, and begins telling Sam about how she and Lindsay were once best friends. Juliet explains that right before Lindsay's parents got divorced, their fighting was so awful that Lindsay would have nightmares and even wet the bed. Juliet recalls finding an embarrassed Lindsay sitting in the tub one morning, scrubbing a soiled pillow with bleach. Sam, with a flash, remembers Lindsay throwing up in the Mexican restaurant.

Juliet goes on to tell Sam that it was Lindsay who wet the sleeping bag on the Girl Scout trip, but blamed everything on Juliet, despite the fact that they were best friends. Sam realizes that Lindsay has always been afraid of Juliet and has teased her so ruthlessly in order to discredit her—Juliet is the keeper of her worst secret. Sam considers "the chance and randomness" of how one person shoots up while another spirals downward.

Sam asks Juliet why she never said anything, and Juliet says that she thought the harassment would pass, but that it doesn't matter now. She pushes her way out of the bathroom at last, and Sam follows her, desperately trying to keep up as she is stopped by an angry Alex Liment and then an elated Kent McFuller, who is thrilled to see that Sam has come. All day, Sam has just wanted to see Kent—now that she has found him, there is no time. Sam tells Kent that she's sorry, but she can't talk to him right now, and she runs for the front door.

Sam foolishly believed that Juliet's disconnectedness from her classmates was easily fixable—she didn't understand how deep the pain ran and how difficult it would be to pull Juliet back from the edge. Even Sam's well-intentioned actions now read to Juliet as mean, petty, and spiteful, all in the name of further humiliating her.



Sam has felt the kind of things Juliet is feeling—loneliness and hopelessness—for many days now. She wishes she could make Juliet to understand, but she foolishly wasn't prepared for any other outcome than Juliet's gratitude and rebirth as a happy, popular girl. The real truth, when Juliet begins to reveal it, is almost more than Sam can handle—she begins to realize that she has been a pawn in a much larger game and has been a tool of Lindsay's torment since the day they became friends.



Sam knows now that her cruelty toward Juliet was loyalty toward Lindsay—and loyalty toward Lindsay always has, and always will, mean perpetuating that cruelty. Sam considers how profoundly Juliet has been beaten down, all in service of protecting a stupid, banal secret so that Lindsay could, unimpeded, just grow more and more popular.



After this disastrous encounter with Juliet, Sam is at last fully ready to push aside all her selfish impulses and desires in order to make things right, and in abandoning Kent, she demonstrates the new maturity she has come into.



As Sam heads into the woods, the rain is heavy and she feels hopeless, but the thought of the vulnerable Juliet pushes her onward. Sam feels Lindsay's car keys in her pocket—she is the designated driver—and she feels relieved that, at least tonight, they won't be the ones who hit Juliet if something bad happens. As Sam stalks through the woods, she realizes that the “whole big, sprawling mess of [her] life” has been brought to a point, a final second—Juliet's last act of revenge against Sam and her friends. Sam tells herself that things simply cannot happen this way and she continues on.

Sam reaches the main road and scans the woods for Juliet. She finds herself in the road, and a car comes toward her—the car swerves and Sam falls onto the pavement, cutting up her palms. When she stands, she sees Juliet fifty feet ahead of her, emerging from the woods. Sam goes toward her slowly, watching as Juliet lifts her arms as if she is preparing to dive into a pool. Sam screams Juliet's name, but Juliet does not respond. A truck is approaching, and Sam runs to Juliet and pushes her into the woods before she can throw herself out in front of it.

Juliet asks Sam what she's doing, and Sam asks Juliet what she's doing—Sam thought the whole point, she says, was to wait for Lindsay's car as “revenge.” Juliet laughs humorlessly and tells Sam that, “for once,” things aren't all about her. She asks Sam to leave her alone. Sam asks Juliet why she came to the party in the first place—what the point of it all was. Juliet insists there was no point, just things she wanted to say. She's not afraid of anything anymore, she tells Sam.

Sam knows, though, that Juliet came to the party to use the girls' reaction to her tirade as a “final push” toward suicide. Sam pleads with Juliet to come away from the road, telling her that “this isn't the way.” Sam begs Juliet to think of her family, and her sister, but Juliet is not listening to her. As the roar of an engine approaches, Juliet tells Sam that she's “too late,” and wrenches herself away from Sam and into the road—she is launched into the air when the car hits her, and Sam screams.

An hour and a half later, Sam and Lindsay, having already dropped off Elody and Ally, are sitting in Lindsay's driveway. Sam remembers being questioned by the police, who asked if Juliet said anything to her about what she was feeling—Sam replied only that Juliet wasn't feeling “much of anything.” Now, when Lindsay asks her the same question, Sam replies that it's not the “kind of thing” you can explain. Sam feels empty.

Sam keeps making small strides in the direction of maturity, but she still, at this point, wants to make things right more for her own benefit than Juliet's. She sees Juliet's trajectory as a direct reflection of her own actions, and she believes her own agency can still change things for Juliet.



Sam knows Juliet's plan and is desperate to stop it from happening. Even though this isn't Lindsay's car, Sam knows that Juliet is desperate to end her life regardless of her desire for revenge, since she simply shot herself on one of the February 12ths that Sam has already lived.



Sam's belief that Juliet was purposefully planning to throw herself in front of Lindsay's car, however, proves to be yet another self-centered fallacy which Sam has indulged. Not everything is about Sam and Lindsay—Juliet is in pain, and is simply seeking a way out of it, with no regard for the girls who have tormented her.



Sam understands that Juliet was always going to kill herself tonight but she wanted to be spurred toward the action even further by forcing herself to endure a party full of taunting and torment. Sam understands at last that, despite all her good intentions, she cannot change Juliet's will.



Sam has been through something—yet another thing—that she can't even begin to explain to her friends. This leaves her feeling lonely and isolated, and she knows that there's no use in trying to connect with her friends over this—things will just reset tomorrow.



As Lindsay gets out of the car, Sam stops her, asking if she remembers the time when Sam walked in on her purging at the Mexican restaurant. Sam asks Lindsay if that was really the only time—Lindsay replies that it was, but Sam knows that Lindsay is lying. Sam realizes at last that Lindsay is not fearless—she is always, always terrified, just like the rest of her classmates. Sam confesses that Juliet told her the truth about the Girl Scout trip. She begs Lindsay to tell her why she spread such hurtful lies about Juliet. Lindsay answers that she “always thought [the teasing] wouldn’t last” and that Juliet would eventually have enough and stick up for herself.

Lindsay leaves the car and nods at the car idling behind them—it is Kent’s car. He has been parked behind them the whole time, waiting to take Sam home after she drops Lindsay’s car off. As Lindsay prepares to head up toward her house, she apologizes to Sam. Rather than offering Lindsay absolution, Sam simply tells Lindsay that everyone would still love her, even if they knew the truth.

Kent opens the passenger-side door of his car for Sam and she slides in. On the drive back to Sam’s house, neither of them says anything—there is a lot Sam wants to say, but she can’t bring herself to speak. When they reach Sam’s driveway, she thanks Kent for driving her home, and then blurts out that everything tonight was awful except for these few minutes in the car with Kent.

Kent reaches out and cups Sam’s face in his hands but then pulls them away, apologizing. Sam feels her body “humming.” Kent says he’s got the timing all wrong—he doesn’t want to kiss Sam after everything that happened tonight, and when she’s still together with Rob. Sam tells Kent that she broke up with Rob, and Kent says that that’s at least one good thing, because he needs to kiss her. As he presses his lips to Sam’s, she feels as if it is her first kiss—her first *real* kiss.

The two break away and confess how much they like each other. After a moment, though, Kent realizes how tired Sam is, and helps her out of the car and toward the house. Sam asks Kent if he’s ever afraid to go to sleep—Kent confesses that sometimes he is afraid of what he’s leaving behind. The two of them kiss once more, on the steps of Sam’s porch, and she feels time and space “recede and blast away,” leaving only the two of them together in the darkness.

Sam tries to confront Lindsay about all her lies and all the pain she has caused, but Lindsay is a master manipulator. What’s sadder than that is that Lindsay seems to almost not recognize that she is so adept at lying and so powerful at controlling others; she, too, is completely baffled by how long the torment went on and how deeply it has now grown to affect all of them.



Sam wants Lindsay to know that, even if the truth were to emerge, it’s not too late—people would still forgive her, still cherish her, and still see her as the same old Lindsay. Sam also doesn’t offer forgiveness here, because Sam knows that the suffering Lindsay caused in others is not Sam’s to forgive.



At the end of a night which proved long, horrible, and completely the opposite of everything Sam wanted, she finds herself once again face to face with the only person, perhaps, who can see the real her, and it is a balm against the night’s events.



Sam is done denying the electric pull between her and Kent—she leans into it now, wanting to explore it fully. She finds that the connection between them is purer than anything she’s known—she knows for sure now that what she was doing with Rob was just wasting time.



Sam has been a pawn of time for so many days, but now, as she kisses Kent McFuller, it seems as if she is the one in control of time, able to find ways to make it stop, or expand, or bend to her will.



CHAPTER 7

The last time Sam has the dream in which she is falling, the darkness is at last alive around her—she realizes that she is not actually in darkness, but has only had her eyes closed the whole time. She opens her eyes and feels butterflies taking off all around her, flying higher and higher. Sam realizes that all this time she hasn't been falling—she's been flying. When she wakes up from the dream, she knows that the time loop was “never about saving [her own] life”—or at least not in the way she thought.

Sam reflects on how, when moving through life, you just don't know when the last time you'll do something will be—she, however, knows that she is about to do everything for the last time, and she likens it to “being asked to step off the edge of a cliff.”

Sam says goodbye to her parents, after telling them that she loves them. As she heads for the door, she takes one last look at them—they are happy, and she watches her father kiss her mother on the forehead. Sam knows that Izzy will follow her to the door with her gloves—this time, she thanks Izzy for bringing them to her, and asks what she would do without her. She hugs Izzy tight, and then gives Izzy her charm necklace. Before leaving, she tells Izzy to be good—Izzy runs back into the house to show her parents that Sam has given her the necklace.

Outside, Sam takes in the cold air and the beautiful sunlight before joining Lindsay in the Range Rover. On the drive to school, as Lindsay complains to Sam and Elody about Patrick, Sam thinks of how much she loves her best friend “despite everything.” Sam savors the perfect drive, and wishes that she could ride around with her best friends forever. She asks to take a detour to Starbucks to extend the drive—Lindsay is reluctant, but ultimately concludes that Sam gets to do whatever she wants: today is her “big day.”

At Starbucks, the girls place their orders and then head back to the car—Sarah, the girl who Lindsay has been fighting for a spot in the lower lot each morning, is now waiting for their spot at Starbucks. Sam laughs at the irony of the situation, and considers how deeply interconnected everything is.

At school, Sam splits up with Lindsay and Elody and heads to the room where all the roses are being held. Afterwards, rather than heading to class, she wanders through campus, taking everything in one final time. She reflects on how, for most of her life, each school day has dragged by—now, though, time is “pouring away” through her fingers.

On this new—and what Sam hopes will be final—day of the time loop, Sam knows she has at last unlocked the meaning of the loop and what she is meant to do within it. Her breaking through to flying in her dream represents this breakthrough in the “real” world—she is not doomed to the loop, but has been given an opportunity to save a life.



Sam is both exhilarated and frightened by the realization she's had—she wants to rise to meet her fate, but there is nonetheless a part of her which is afraid.



Sam, once again, tries to express as best she can the love and gratitude she feels toward her family, wanting at least to lessen the pain of the cruelty and ignorance she's shown them in the past. Sam is brimming with love for the life she's leaving behind, and attempting to show it is the only way she knows to redeem herself.



Sam's love for the world around her isn't just for other people—it's for the places and things that she has seen every day growing up and which have helped to make her into who she is. Sam is full of gratitude and abundant joy, even as she prepares to meet a fate which threatens to erase all that she has come to hold dear.



The small points of connection which terrified Sam at the start of the time loop now comfort and reassure her and strengthen her confidence in her belief that she is doing the right thing.



Sam repeats actions she has taken on previous days, but now they all seem imbued with a new wistfulness and a preciousness. Sam is watching her life slip away, but even as she wishes she could hang on to it, she is eager to take the steps she needs to advance her fate.



When it's time for calculus, Sam arrives early—she is the first person in Mr. Daimler's class. Daimler comes over to her desk and asks her if she's enjoying Cupid Day and if she has any big plans for the evening. Sam answers that she's not sure yet, and then asks Daimler if he's going to be all alone at a "table for one." Daimler flirtatiously asks Sam why she would assume that. Sam smiles at him and replies that if he had a real girlfriend, he wouldn't be hitting on high schoolers. Daimler jerks away from Sam, but doesn't reply—other students are beginning to file into the room. He angrily orders the rest of the class to take their seats while Sam stifles her laughter.

Kent walks in, and Sam watches lovingly as he slides into his seat and fiddles with his hair. Sam can barely focus on the lesson—she is excited and anxious as she awaits the Cupids' arrival, knowing that Kent McFuller is getting an extra **rose** today. After class, Sam waits for Kent in the hall. He holds the rose out to Sam and asks her what it's all about—Sam feigns ignorance. Kent shows her the note attached to his Valogram—"Tonight," it says, "leave your phone on and your car out, and be my hero." Sam asks Kent if he has a secret admirer, and can barely resist reaching out and pulling him towards her for a kiss.

Kent tells Sam that he's having a party tonight—she tells him she's heard, and that she might need for him to pick her up from somewhere later tonight. She assures him it won't take long, and that she wouldn't ask if it weren't important. Kent flirtatiously asks what's in it for him—Sam promises that later she'll tell him a secret. She reflects on how deeply she wants Kent, and how she was never this into Rob. Kent asks Sam how she knew about "the hero thing," but she deflects, thanking him for his rose—she reveals that she gave all of her **roses** to Marian Sykes to take home and keep fresh in a vase.

Sam asks Kent if she can count on him tonight, and he says that she can. Sam realizes that they are alone in the hallway, and she wonders if Kent will lean in and kiss her—instead, he only touches her shoulder and warns her that her secret had better be good. Kent starts to walk away, but then turns back to ask Sam why she's talking to him all of a sudden—she tells him that she's making up for lost time.

Sam is doing everything today with the hopes that the effects will last—she wants Mr. Daimler to feel humiliation for his actions and perhaps even recognize the fact that he is stuck in a sick, twisted "loop" of his very own, still chasing the glory of his high school days.



By this point in the novel, Sam is over the whole concept of Cupid Day roses as a symbol of status and popularity. She is using them in a practical way now to bolster the self-esteem of those she loves and those she wants to help. As we'll later find, she's also using these roses as tools for meting out just desserts.



Though Sam knows that Kent has no memory of the past two nights, she is nonetheless aware that he has a crush on her and will therefore be receptive to what she asks of him. Sam isn't using Kent, though—she's engaging him in conversation and involving in her life because she wants, at last, to know him and to grow closer to him, and to prove to him that she is the kind of person worthy of his attention and affection.



There is an easy camaraderie and even a sense of loyalty between Sam and Kent, despite the confusion Kent is no doubt feeling about Sam's plans and the motives behind them.



In the cafeteria, Rob approaches Sam to say hello. He tries to put his arm around her, but she steps away. He asks if she got his **rose**—she tells him she did. There is a single rose hanging from her messenger bag, and Rob asks if that's his rose. Sam shakes her head. He asks her where all her other roses are, and she tells him they're "in storage." Rob tells her that he liked what she wrote in her rose to him—the note said, "You don't have to wait for me anymore." Rob lays out a plan for the evening, but Sam tells him he can do whatever he wants—she doesn't care. Rob asks Sam if she's still sleeping over at his place, and she tells him she's not. He doesn't have to wait for her anymore, she says, because she's breaking up with him.

Rob protests that Sam can't break up with him—he's been waiting for her for months. His face contorts with rage, and he cruelly tells Sam that he should have slept with another girl when he had the chance before walking away. Sam sits down with her friends and begins eating—a few minutes later, when Juliet Sykes walks into the cafeteria, Sam sees that Juliet has a single **rose** on her lunch tray, and is scanning peoples' faces, seemingly looking for clues. Sam knows that the note attached to Juliet's rose bears a message different from the one she's received all these years: it says, "It's never too late."

On the way to TCBY, Lindsay asks Sam why she's acting so weird today. Lindsay also tells Sam that she heard a rumor that Sam and Rob broke up—Sam confirms the rumor, and Lindsay is incredulous that Sam wouldn't have told her first. Sam replies that she didn't want to tell Lindsay because she knew Lindsay would make a big deal out of everything—Lindsay retorts that a breakup with Rob on the night they were supposed to have sex for the first time is a big deal. Not wanting to spook Lindsay more, but needing to give something to Anna Cartullo, Sam apologizes and ducks into the Chinese restaurant next to the yogurt shop.

Sam greets Anna and tells her she has something for her—she gives her a book of M.C. Escher drawings and apologizes for not being able to explain how she knows it'd be just the kind of thing Anna would like. Anna looks up at Sam and half-smiles, and Sam leaves the restaurant, rejoining Lindsay outside. Lindsay tells Sam she's gone crazy and asks since when she's on speaking terms with Anna Cartullo. Sam tells Lindsay playfully that Lindsay doesn't know everything about her, and though Lindsay is still confused, the two head into TCBY for some yogurt.

Here, Sam is using the rose as an inversion of its original purpose. Roses are meant to signify social status and dictate popularity, love, and attention—with the rose she has sent to Rob, though, Sam has used a rose for the opposite purpose: to bring someone down a rung on the social ladder and deliver news not love or affection but of revulsion.



Rob reveals his cruel inner self to Sam very plainly in this moment—he sees himself as better than her, and he is incensed that she would act as if she has more social capital than he does. Sam is unbothered, though, and is more focused on continuing to right wrongs and steer the day in the direction of benevolence. Sam is pleased to see that today, Juliet has her rose—her plan, perhaps, has worked. The roses being used as a tool rather than a flimsy symbol of status parallels Sam's use of her own social capital to effect real, meaningful change.



Sam is so bold in her renewed sense of purpose that even the fear of Lindsay's judgement no longer holds her back from doing the things she wants to do and doing them at her own pace, in her own way. This demonstrates major growth on Sam's part, as at the start of the novel Lindsay was the north star by which Sam navigated her life—often to her own detriment, and to the detriment of those around her.



Sam delivers the M.C. Escher book to Anna, symbolically representing Sam's relinquishing of her conceptualization of the loop as an endless, inescapable, confusing maze. The act is more than symbolic, though—it's one of goodwill, meant to demonstrate to Anna that there are those who see her as more than the sum of the rumors about her.



At Ally's house after school, Sam privately lists the things she loves about each of her friends. She loves that Ally is obsessed with porcelain cows, is an incredible cook, and sticks her tongue out when she yawns just like a cat. She loves Elody's beautiful singing voice and the way she snorts when she laughs. She loves that Lindsay will dance anytime, anywhere, even without music, and that Lindsay once toilet papered a guy's house every day for a week after he told everyone in school that Elody was a bad kisser. Sam regrets not having told her friends how much she loves them, but knows that there's no easy or un-awkward way to say it now.

The girls pull up to Kent's house, and Sam tells them to go inside—she's planning on driving Lindsay's car back to Lindsay's house. Lindsay protests—she points out that without the car they won't have a ride home—but Sam insists she'll find them one. The girls at last begrudgingly agree to head into the party while Sam takes the car back. Sam planned to drive straight to Lindsay's house, but once she's behind the wheel, she finds herself driving to her own house. She pauses in front of it and looks at the faint lights coming from her parents' room. Sam is overcome with grief for all that she is losing, but quickly remembers that everything is at last going to be right.

Sam texts Kent to pick her up at Lindsay's, and then heads there herself. She worries, though, that he won't hear a text in the noise of the party, and so she calls him—he answers, and she tells him that she's "in desperate need of a ride."

Kent picks Sam up at Lindsay's, and doesn't ask any questions—why Sam was there, or why she needed him specifically to pick her up and bring her back to the party. As they pull back into Kent's driveway, Kent reminds Sam that she owes him a secret. Sam leans forward and tells Kent that his kiss was the best she'd ever had in her life. Kent replies that he hasn't kissed her since the third grade. Sam tells Kent that he'd better get started—they don't have much time. The two of them kiss for what "seems like hours" before pulling away from each other. Sam thanks Kent for the ride—she tells him that he has saved her life, and then jumps out of the car and heads to the house for the last party of her entire life.

Sam is bursting with love for her friends, and as she prepares for her last night ever with them she gives thanks for all the qualities which have entertained and enriched her over the years. Sam knows she can't possibly express everything she wants without giving the game away—just as she had to demonstrate restraint around her parents and Kent earlier, she now must do so with her girlfriends.



As the fateful hour approaches, Sam experiences sadness, but never hesitance, about the events to come. She boldly and bravely shoulders the responsibilities which she knows will keep her friends safe, and in doing so demonstrates how much she has grown—she is willing to put her social capital at risk at last to pursue what truly matters.



Sam worries that Kent won't be there for her—not, perhaps, because she doesn't have faith in him, but because she has so little faith in herself.



Sam and Kent's connection in this scene comes out of their mutual desire for one another and the shared history between them. Sam and Kent, Sam sees now, have always been drawn to one another, and their romantic kiss seems to be both an act of agency and a moment of pure fate.



Inside, Lindsay, Elody, and Ally all welcome Sam warmly. They offer her a drink, but Sam tells them she wants to head outside for some air—they tell her she’s been acting weird all day and ask to know what’s up. Sam claims she’s just been having a weird week—she pulls them all into a group hug and reassures them that nothing is the matter. The girls begin drinking, and as they all get busy talking to one another, Sam slips away, tearfully looking back at her friends for the last time. She checks her cell phone: it is 11:45.

Sam’s friends all want to know what is going on with her, but she herself understands that what is happening to her is bigger than them; she does not want to upset or confuse any of them, and she chooses instead to focus her interactions with them on love, gratitude, and celebration of the friendship they have shared.



Downstairs Sam stands at the doorway, waiting for Juliet. When she walks in, Sam catches her and asks to talk to her. Juliet says she has somewhere to be, but Sam retorts that she knows Juliet was looking for her—Juliet insists that she’s “not here” for Sam. Sam tells Juliet that she knows what she has planned for the night. Juliet whispers that Sam is a bitch. Sam says that she knows she is, and apologizes. Juliet tries to get away from Sam, but Sam refuses to leave her alone. Someone shouts Sam’s name, and in the instant she turns to look, Juliet slips away and out the door.

Sam now knows how to properly head Juliet off—the answer is not in apologizing, and tearing open years of old wounds, but in simply deflecting, and getting Juliet to realize that her tirade is unnecessary. She can’t let Juliet get away from her, knowing now as she does that Juliet is the answer to breaking the time loop.



It was Kent who called Sam—as he makes his way over to her, Sam is torn between going after Juliet and staying for a dance with Kent. Kent wants to know why Sam ran away from him before, and though she tells him she has somewhere to be, Kent insists on knowing why Sam would, after ignoring him for years, start paying attention to him and then kiss him, “rip[ping his] world up.” Kent asks what Sam meant when she said she didn’t have much time—Sam wants to explain, but knows that Juliet is getting farther away with each second. She tells Kent that she has to help someone, and begs him to trust her, before kissing him once more and running out the door.

Sam is, in this passage, bearing witness to how her good intentions have inadvertently hurt and confused Kent. The last thing she wants to do is upset or hurt anyone on this day—this day during which she is supposed to be doing only good—but she knows that there are bigger things at work than her relationship with Kent. Sam makes the choice to complete her mission rather than pursue her desires.



Sam runs through the woods behind Kent’s house, calling for Juliet, while behind her, she hears Kent’s voice calling for her. There’s no time, though, to go back to Kent, and Sam knows she has said everything she can say to him. She hears other voices, too, screaming her name, but tells herself that she is just imagining them. Sam at last comes upon Juliet standing drenched near the side of the road. Sam call’s Juliet’s name one more time, and Juliet turns to look at her.

Sam loves Kent and wants to get as much time as she can with him, but she is no longer motivated by selfish desires—she ignores her nagging need for Kent in favor of going after Juliet, knowing that it is the right thing to do.



Sam hears a truck engine approaching, but Juliet isn't moving into the road—she is just standing there, looking at Sam. Sam runs up to Juliet and grabs her shoulders, pulling her farther back into the woods. As the truck roars by, the woods quiet, and Sam hears Lindsay calling her name—along with Kent, Elody, and Ally. Juliet, frightened, asks why Sam couldn't just leave her alone. Sam tells Juliet she wants to talk, but Juliet insists she has nothing to say. Juliet heads up toward the road, and Sam follows her, feeling calm. She knows that what is about to happen is how things were supposed to happen all along.

Sam tells Juliet she doesn't have to do this—Juliet retorts that Sam could never understand her. As Sam's friends' voices grow louder, Sam pleads with Juliet to let Sam help her. Juliet, though, says that she can't be fixed. Sam thinks of standing on the stairs with Kent and saying the same thing—she remembers the way he told her she didn't need to be fixed.

Juliet tells Sam that it's too late, but Sam replies that it's never too late. Still, Juliet launches herself into the road—Sam runs out with her, slamming into her, and pushes her toward the opposite shoulder just as two vans come down the road. Sam hears someone screaming her name, and feels heat spread through her body. She has the sensation of being lifted or thrown by a huge hand, and sees disparate images floating before her.

She sees faces looming above her, calling her name. One of the faces, white and beautiful, says: "You saved me." Sam feels a hand on her cheek. She tries to speak and tell Juliet that "the opposite" is true, but cannot make the words come out. Juliet's "crown" of blond hair above Sam is "so bright and white and blinding" that Sam swears it's a halo.

EPILOGUE

It's often said that before you die, your whole life flashes before your eyes—but Sam, in her final moments, sees only her greatest hits: the things she wants to remember and be remembered for. She recalls spending time with Izzy on Cape Cod; cooking with Ally and Elody; embracing Lindsay; enjoying Christmas with her family; and lastly, she remembers kissing Kent. That, Sam says, was the moment she realized time didn't matter—that certain moments go on forever, and that those moments are "the meaning."

Sam has finally obtained the clarity she needs to approach the situation head-on. Though what is about to happen is not pleasant, Sam has come to accept that it is the only outcome which allows everyone to be "saved," and she marches toward it bravely, despite the voices of her beloved friends calling her back towards them.



Everything is interconnected, as Lauren Oliver has demonstrated multiple times. Now, she shows how all of her characters are wrestling with the same fear, despite their disparate social statuses—they are all afraid of being broken, beyond repair, unfixable, unsalvageable, unlovable.



Sam makes the ultimate sacrifice in choosing to give her life in order to save Juliet. She knows that it is the only way to close the loop, and the only way to truly save Juliet and thus her own soul.



Sam sees Juliet as a literal angel in this passage—the girl who has saved her soul has become holy to her, in a way, as Juliet herself is the vessel for Sam's renewal and redemption.



In the end, Sam doesn't remember the way her own actions figured in her life's greatest hits—it is the people she loves, and their kindness toward her, which stands out. Sam has understood at last that time, fickle and fragile as it is, has the power to unite friends and loved ones even as it often tears them apart.



Sam says she isn't scared to die. The moment of death is full of sound, warmth, and light—she feels like singing and laughing. She doesn't want to spoil it for her readers, though—the rest, she says, they'll have to find out for themselves.

Sam has the same invincible feeling she had at the start of the novel, but now it does not come from a false sense of popularity and self-aggrandizement; it comes from the knowledge that she ended her life on her own terms, doing as much good as she could in the time she had, and surrounded by love and light.





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