

Everything, Everything



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NICOLA YOON

Nicola Yoon was born in Jamaica and grew up in both Jamaica and Brooklyn, New York. She received a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Cornell University, though an elective creative writing class sparked an interest in writing. She attended a master's program at Emerson College for creative writing, though she spent 20 years as a programmer for investment firms. She published her first novel, *Everything, Everything*, in 2015 after the birth of her daughter, who is biracial. Her husband, David Yoon, drew the illustrations for the novel. It spent 40 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and her second novel, *The Sun Is Also a Star*, received even more awards than its predecessor. Yoon and her family have been very involved with the organization We Need Diverse Books, a group that works to increase and promote diversity and representation in literature. The Yoon family lives in Los Angeles, California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As Maddy explains in the novel, severe combined immunodeficiency, or SCID, is extremely rare (estimates suggest about 1 in 100,000 babies born have the disorder) and extremely dangerous. Though there are several different types, the disorder essentially means that a person doesn't have a functional immune system or doesn't have one at all. Sufferers are extremely vulnerable to infectious diseases, so untreated babies often die from some sort of infection before their first birthday. Curative treatments, especially bone marrow transplants in the first three months of life, have been very effective—and if the disease can be detected before birth, it's possible to perform in utero transplants, which allows the fetus to develop a functional immune system in a sterile environment. Non-curative treatments, such as reverse isolation (which Maddy's mom uses by installing the airlock and ventilation system in their home) are less effective, as it simply creates a pathogen-free environment without treating the problem. The most famous individual with SCID was David Vetter, who was born in 1971 and spent his life in a sterile chamber. He died in 1984 of mononucleosis, a few months after receiving a bone marrow transplant from his sister. His autopsy revealed that his sister had Epstein-Barr virus, which can be detected in pre-transplant screenings and thus caused his fatal infection.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nicola Yoon has been very vocal about the need for literature,

particularly young adult literature, that represents issues of diversity not as the problem as in a novel like Becky Albertalli's [Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda](#), where the conflict revolves around a gay teen coming out. Rather, Yoon believes it's valuable to present characters' diversity as unproblematic fact, and not as what the main thrust of the novel is about. To help amplify authors writing books like this, Yoon has been very involved in the organization We Need Diverse Books, which promotes books like Margarita Engle's *Enchanted Air* and Brandy Colbert's *Little and Lion*. As romantic young adult fiction, *Everything, Everything* shares a number of thematic similarities with novels by John Green ([Turtles All the Way Down](#); *The Fault In Our Stars*), especially in that both Maddy and Olly in *Everything, Everything* are extremely precocious and well read, a quality that many of Green's characters share. Within the novel itself, Maddy's favorite book is [The Little Prince](#) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, though she and Olly also read classic works such as [Flowers for Algernon](#) by Daniel Keyes and [Lord of the Flies](#) by William Golding.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Everything, Everything
- **When Written:** 2012-2015
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles, California
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Novel; Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** Los Angeles, California and Maui, Hawaii in 2015
- **Climax:** Maddy discovers she doesn't have SCID.
- **Antagonist:** Olly's dad; Maddy's mom; SCID
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Lab Rats. Humans aren't the only beings that experience an immunodeficiency disorder similar to SCID. It occurs in mice, which means that mice are often used as "model organisms" so scientists can test treatments for SCID in humans. Similar genetic disorders also occur in specific dog breeds like Basset Hounds, Canadian Welsh Corgis, and Jack Russell Terriers, as well as in Arabian horses. In animals, the condition is nearly always fatal.



PLOT SUMMARY

Maddy is 17 and lives in a room that's entirely **white**. She loves to read, but all of her books come to her decontaminated. In

every book, she writes her name and fantastical rewards for anyone who might find one, despite the fact that nobody will ever find a lost book of hers. Maddy has SCID, an autoimmune disease that renders her unable to leave the house, since doing so would mean risking death. She lives with her mom, Dr. Whittier, and her nurse, Carla, is the only other person Maddy sees regularly. On Maddy's 18th birthday, Mom and Maddy make Maddy's traditional birthday cake—a white cake with vanilla frosting—and they play games. This birthday is especially hard: since although Maddy is now a legal adult, because of SCID nothing about her life is going to change.

A few days later, Maddy hears a rumble and beeping outside. Carla is concerned, but Maddy rushes to the window. She sees a family with two kids about her age moving in next door. The boy wears all black and is extremely handsome. Over the next week, Maddy learns the family's schedule. The boy, Olly, is unpredictable, while his sister, Kara, smokes and spends time on her phone. Olly's mom gardens while Olly's dad goes to work. When the father gets home in the evenings, he yells for hours. During one of Mom and Maddy's Friday night dinners, Olly and Kara knock on the door with a Bundt cake from their mom. Mom refuses the cake and when Olly's dad learns about this, he throws the cake at Olly. Olly's window is right across from Maddy's, but he refuses to look at her that night. Because of her interest in Olly, Maddy finds it hard to be happy with just her books, especially when, a few nights later, Olly stages a weeklong drama on his windowsill in which the Bundt cake—which is, according to Olly, indestructible—attempts to commit suicide and dies in the hospital. After this, he and Maddy exchange email addresses and begin to talk online. Maddy admits that she's too ill to leave the house. Olly is both cynical and charming, and he admits that his dad hits his mom regularly.

Maddy prepares for a rare in-person critique with her architecture tutor, Mr. Waterman. He arrives, studies her model buildings with delight, and finds the **astronaut** that she always hides in each model she builds. This time, astronaut in an ice cream shop surrounded by food, but Mr. Waterman notes that the astronaut won't be able to eat any of it with his helmet on. Later, Carla realizes that Maddy has been talking to Olly and after two days, agrees to let him visit in the sunroom as long as Maddy doesn't touch him. During their visit, Olly tells Maddy what it's like to swim in the **ocean**. The next morning, Maddy is convinced she's sick, but Carla declares that she's just lovesick. Terrified of her desire for more, Maddy asks Olly not to email her over the weekend—but on Monday when she finds no emails waiting for her, she's distraught. Carla encourages Maddy to understand that love won't kill her, so Maddy resumes communication with Olly on the understanding that they'll just be friends.

Carla allows Olly to visit again a week later. Maddy deliberates over what to wear and decides that it's time to change up her

closet of white tee shirts, Keds, and blue jeans for more **colors**. She tells herself that it's okay to lie to Mom about this. Olly suggests that in theory, it's possible to find and change one moment that would fix everything and make things better. Maddy knows she's falling in love with him and begins to cancel movie nights with Mom so she can chat with Olly. She realizes that she and Mom are growing apart because Maddy has a secret. Maddy witnesses a night of violence at Olly's house, and when he visits the next day, she feels the urge to touch Olly and comfort him. Olly explains that his dad only became violent about a decade ago, after he was fired from his job. Young Olly was too afraid to comfort his dad and a few months later, when Olly's dad hit his mom for the first time, Olly wondered if comforting him would've changed things.

A few days later, Carla threatens to not let Olly visit if Mom continues to notice changes in Maddy. She points out that Olly will go back to school soon and get a girlfriend, and that Mom is lonely and distraught. Despite Carla's warning, Maddy just wants to be able to have secrets, so she applies for a credit card. When Olly visits next, he teaches Maddy to do a handstand. When she wobbles, he grabs her ankles and when she's standing on her feet again, they hold hands. On instant messenger later, Olly suggests that they could kiss. During Olly's next visit, they do just that. Maddy feels her world change instantly. Several days later, as Maddy plays a game with Mom, they hear screaming outside. From the window, Maddy and Mom see Olly's dad swing at Olly and Olly's mom. When Olly's dad manages to punch Olly in the stomach, Maddy races outside without thinking and screams at him to stop. Realizing that Maddy has been seeing Olly, Mom is distraught and takes action: she fires Carla and takes away Maddy's internet privileges. Olly and Maddy take to miming and writing on Olly's window to communicate.

Mom hires a new nurse named Nurse Janet, who annoys Maddy to no end. Olly messages Maddy when he can during school and Maddy remains morose and upset. When Mom visits Maddy one night, she offers her a framed photograph of herself, Maddy, Maddy's dad, and Maddy's brother on vacation in Hawaii, one month before Maddy's dad and brother died in an accident and two months before Maddy's SCID diagnosis. Maddy begins to realize that the "experiences" she has in books are no substitute for experiencing things firsthand. Her life doesn't make sense anymore, and strangely, she finds that she's willing to die if it means she gets to live. She writes Mom a goodbye letter and sneaks out in the middle of the night. She lies to Olly that she purchased pills from Canada that will delay her symptoms and asks him to go to Hawaii with her. He doesn't really believe she has pills, but he agrees to go. Before they go to the airport, they stop to visit Carla. Carla seems aware that Maddy is lying about the pills, but tells Maddy about her experience leaving Mexico. It gave her freedom, but she regrets leaving for various reasons—and she suggests to

Maddy that experiencing regret is a part of living.

Maddy and Olly land in Hawaii. At the baggage carousel, Olly proposes that baggage carousels are a perfect metaphor for life and that people are the suitcases. He suggests that his dad is the carousel, but when Maddy takes offense to this, he sweet-talks a greeter into giving Maddy a lei. They get a taxi to their hotel and the driver agrees to stop so that Maddy can wade into the ocean. At the hotel, the receptionist welcomes them to Hawaii for their “honeymoon” and shows them to their room. They awkwardly note that there’s only one bed as Olly flips through [The Little Prince](#), which Maddy brought because it’s her favorite book. Suddenly, Maddy experiences vertigo and chest pain. She realizes she’s hungry.

After they eat, Maddy and Olly buy souvenirs and beach gear. Maddy chooses to send Mom a postcard, feeling weird about making memories without Mom for the first time ever. Maddy and Olly snorkel and dive off cliffs, which surprisingly doesn’t scare Maddy. In the afternoon, they meet up with Zach, a friend of Olly’s. He’s gay and wants to be a rock star, but he hasn’t told his parents either of these things in order to keep the peace. Olly receives emails from Maddy’s mom saying that she’s on her way and asks Maddy to deal with them. Maddy is angry and asks Mom not to come. When Olly goes to the bathroom, Zach ascertains that Maddy lied about the pills. He suggests that part of growing up is disappointing the people they love. Back at the hotel, Maddy and Olly regard the single bed again and Olly admits that he’s nervous. They lie down, say they love each other, and eventually decide to have sex. The experience makes Maddy feel like she knows all the secrets of the universe, and she feels very close to Olly. After dark, they eat and then sit on the beach. They discuss Olly’s dad’s violence and Maddy tells Olly he needs to escape his household for his own safety.

Maddy wakes up in the middle of the night, seriously ill. Her heart stops in the ambulance. Mom arrives and against Dr. Francis’s advice, insists on taking Maddy home. Maddy takes a few weeks to recover and decides that love is awful—she wants nothing to do with it. She breaks things off with Olly, knowing that she can’t go back to non-touching visits when she now knows what the world is like. She deletes all of his emails and spends lots of unhappy time with Mom, who allows Carla to return to work. A month after the trip, Maddy sees Olly, his mom, and Kara frantically moving out during the day. Around Christmas, Olly’s dad moves too. Maddy goes through all the deleted emails from Olly. He thinks that his mom may have decided to leave when Olly told her about Maddy and tells her how brave she is for wanting to live, even if it might kill her.

Not long after, Maddy receives an email from Dr. Francis. Dr. Francis writes that she doesn’t think Maddy has SCID, includes test results, and suggests that Maddy get a second opinion. Maddy researches by herself and takes the printed email to Mom. Mom reacts strangely and says disturbingly that she had to protect Maddy. The next day, Maddy shows the email to

Carla. Carla’s reaction is even more disturbing: she thinks that Mom might not have recovered after losing her husband and son, and she’s suspected at points that Mom is unwell. That night, Maddy goes through Mom’s office looking for her SCID diagnosis. She finds nothing but proof that she was a sickly baby and annotated articles on SCID off of the internet. When Mom arrives and accuses Maddy of taking the diagnosis papers, Maddy vomits outside and screams at Mom.

Four days later, Maddy meets with a SCID specialist named Dr. Chase. He confirms that Maddy doesn’t have SCID, but says that Maddy’s immune system is fragile nonetheless—growing up in a sanitary environment means that Maddy’s immune system has no practice fighting off common bacterial and viral infections. Maddy yearns for answers, considers emailing Olly, and installs a lock on her door. She paints her walls different colors, opens the windows, and purchases goldfish. Mom begins to seek counseling and Carla gently tells Maddy that she needs to find another job since Maddy doesn’t need her anymore. Though Maddy is angry with Mom, she accepts Mom’s gift of a cellphone and purchases tickets to New York City. As she leaves, she tells Mom that she’s not sure their house is her home anymore. Maddy arranges a surprise for Olly in a used bookstore. There, he discovers her copy of [The Little Prince](#) and reads that the reward for finding it is Maddy herself. Maddy steps out from behind a shelf.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Madeline “Maddy” Whittier – A precocious 18-year-old with SCID, a severe autoimmune disease that means she cannot leave the house without risking her life. Because of her illness, Maddy has grown up extremely sheltered: the only people she sees regularly are Mom and Maddy’s nurse, Carla. Any “experiences” Maddy has are experienced vicariously through movies or her books. She’s an avid reader and loves architecture. When Maddy was eight, a family with children moved in next door and sparked Maddy’s curiosity in the outside world, but when they moved away, Maddy dedicated herself to being happy with what she has in books. She and Mom are extremely close and have, as far as Maddy knows, no secrets from each other. This begins to change when Olly moves in next door. He’s the first boy who Maddy has ever had a crush on, let alone seen in person, and he begins to open her eyes to the world around her. Though Maddy is scared, she pushes through her reservations and begins seeing Olly and getting to know him in person and over instant messenger. As she gets to know Olly better, she also begins purchasing clothes in bright **colors** and pulling away from Mom. Though she’s initially disturbed to be keeping things from Mom, Maddy also discovers that she likes being able to have secrets. After Mom discovers Maddy’s deception, Maddy applies for a credit

card and purchases tickets for her and Olly to go to Hawaii, reasoning that seeing the world and being a part of it are worth the possibility of her death. The trip is transformative for her. She feels at one with the world after swimming in the **ocean** and having sex with Olly, but she also becomes deathly ill on the trip. At home six weeks later, during her recovery, Maddy is distraught to learn from the doctor who treated her in Hawaii that Mom fabricated her SCID diagnosis (she got sick for reasons other than SCID). Maddy begins to figure out who she is as a healthy person in the weeks after. She does whatever she can to be independent, including traveling to New York to meet up with Olly after he moves away. She never entirely forgives Mom.

Olly – Maddy’s love interest. He’s a teenager who moves into the house next door with his family. Olly wears only black clothes and is interested in parkour, a type of street gymnastics, which means that he can climb buildings and perform other physical feats. As they get to know each other, Olly proves himself to be cynical and dark, but though he won’t admit it, he’s also a romantic. He eschews capitalization and punctuation in their instant messages and insists that limericks are his favorite form of poetry. Math is his favorite subject and he spends a lot of his time trying to figure out how to put together equations to describe people and events, such as his dad’s violence. Because Olly isn’t as manly as his dad would like him to be, and because Olly is nevertheless big enough and headstrong enough to stand up to his dad, Olly is often a target of his dad’s verbal and physical abuse. Olly spends much of his time at home trying to defend his mom and his sister, Kara, from his dad’s abuse. Though Olly has been intimate with girls before, his relationship with Maddy feels like an entirely different experience and they soon fall deeply in love. Olly demonstrates his sensitivity and his sense of responsibility to the people around him when he initially refuses to go to Hawaii with Maddy on the grounds that she might die. He eventually chooses to believe that Maddy truly does have pills from Canada that will keep her well, even though he knows this is probably a lie. In Hawaii, Olly shows himself to be more affectionate and warmer than Maddy had previously seen, given how beaten down Olly feels because of his dad’s behavior. Olly is unwilling to break things off easily when Maddy becomes ill and breaks up with him, though he is able to convince his mom to leave his dad. Though Maddy sees nothing of him until months later, his appearance when she meets him in a New York City bookstore suggests that he’s been able to heal since escaping his dad’s abuse.

Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier – Maddy’s mom, a third-generation Japanese doctor and a single mother. Mom and Maddy have an extremely close relationship, as Mom has dedicated her entire life to caring for Maddy. After losing Maddy’s dad and brother in a traffic accident when Maddy was five months old, Mom struggled to cope and ended up creating a fake diagnosis of

SCID for baby Maddy. She used the settlement money from the accident to create an environment that would be safe for Maddy and hired Carla to care for her. For much of the novel, Maddy takes this as proof that Mom cares deeply for her and genuinely wants her to be healthy and safe. This begins to change when Maddy begins seeing Olly and Mom finds out about it. To Mom, Olly represents all manner of dangers for her daughter—in addition to possibly introducing germs into their sterile home, a relationship with Olly also opens Maddy up to heartbreak like Mom experienced when she lost her husband. Because of this, Mom cracks down on Maddy in an effort to protect her and discourage her from keeping secrets. This backfires, however, when Maddy goes to Hawaii without telling Mom. Mom takes Maddy’s actions as a personal affront and accuses Maddy of trying to hurt her personally, which suggests that Mom doesn’t see Maddy’s burgeoning independence as something normal and expected. Later, when Maddy discovers that Mom fabricated her SCID diagnosis, it comes to light that Mom is mentally ill and never recovered after losing her husband and son. She faked Maddy’s diagnosis so she could care for her and keep her safe from everything that might hurt her emotionally or physically. Mom begins to seek counseling after Maddy discovers the lie and still seems unwell by the end of the novel. However, she does behave in ways that suggest she may be able to come to terms with Maddy’s newfound independence, such as buying Maddy a phone and not trying to stop her from leaving for New York City.

Carla – Maddy’s beloved nurse; Carla’s job is to spend eight hours per day monitoring Maddy’s vital signs. Carla has a 17-year-old daughter named Rosa, whom she dotes on and loves dearly. She’s been caring for Maddy since Maddy was a toddler and over the years, Carla and Maddy have developed a genuinely close, caring, and trusting relationship. Unlike Mom, Carla recognizes that it’s normal for a teen Maddy’s age to be interested in boys and in the world around her, and she’s adamant that love and loss are a part of life and aren’t deadly. Because of this, she allows Maddy and Olly to see each other in person. Though she makes it very clear that they’re not allowed to touch each other, she also doesn’t supervise them or enforce this rule. When Mom discovers Carla’s leniency, she fires Carla and insists to Maddy that Carla was supposed to keep Maddy safe from everything, both health-wise and in terms of heartache. Due to their close relationship, Maddy insists on visiting Carla before she and Olly go to Hawaii. Carla understands that Maddy is lying about having pills from Canada, but she offers Maddy a way to think through her choice when she tells Maddy about her own decision to leave Mexico as a young woman. It simultaneously gave her the much better life she lives now, while also cutting her off from her family and her heritage in a way that pains her. She suggests that regretting is a part of living. After Maddy returns home and recovers from the serious illness she comes down with in Hawaii, Carla returns to care for her. When Maddy discovers

that her SCID diagnosis may be incorrect, Carla is instrumental in helping Maddy find a doctor, undergo testing, and uncover the truth. Carla ultimately leaves Maddy to find another job, as she recognizes that Maddy doesn't need her anymore.

Olly's Dad – An abusive person both physically and verbally. To the best of Olly's knowledge, his dad first became violent about a decade before the novel begins, after he was fired from his job in New York City for possible fraud. He's an alcoholic who drinks at least three drinks per night, and he takes issue with anything either of his children do that marks them as different. Because of this, he refuses to allow Kara to paint her nails black and a few years before the novel begins, he pulls Olly out of the mathletes and tries to get him to join football. Though he's not physically abusive every night, he's always verbally abusive. Much of his physical abuse is directed at Olly's mom. Maddy notices that he seems subdued and even drunker after Olly's mom and his children leave him. It's unclear where he goes when he moves away.

Zach – A good friend of Olly's whom Olly and Maddy meet up with in Maui. Zach is gay, and wants to be a rock star, neither of which he feels he can tell his parents about, as they're homophobic and don't see music as a viable life path. Zach helps Maddy come to terms with her choice to lie to Mom and to Olly, especially in regard to the supposed pills she purchased from Canada in order to take the trip. He suggests that sometimes, lying is the only way to be a part of a family, and that it's easier to lie than live one's truth.

Mr. Waterman – Maddy's architecture tutor. He's Maddy's favorite tutor, the only one whom Mom has ever allowed to enter the house and tutor Maddy in person. Mr. Waterman delights in Maddy's work and encourages her to create fantastical and detailed model buildings. He does his best to respect the rules surrounding Maddy's care, even though he appears to be a naturally affectionate person and even stops himself from hugging or touching Maddy at several points. Maddy hugs him after she discovers she doesn't have SCID.

Olly's Mom – Olly and Kara's mom is a stay-at-home parent. She spends her days gardening and tries to convince her children to do their chores so that they don't make Olly's dad angry, but she nevertheless is the primary target of his abuse. According to Olly, his mom believes that his dad is going to change and stop being violent. Late in the fall, she finally agrees to secretly move to New York City with Olly and Kara, leaving her husband behind.

Nurse Janet Pritchert – The nurse Mom hires to replace Carla. Maddy recognizes that Nurse Janet is authoritative and delights in being more of an authority and less of a friend, as Carla was. She's a fan of leaving disgustingly cheesy sticky notes for Maddy telling her to lighten up and smile, none of which go over well. Maddy sometimes refers to her as Nurse Evil.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Rosa – Carla's 17-year-old daughter. Rosa never appears in the novel herself, but Carla mentions Rosa often and Maddy understands that Carla loves Rosa and wants her to have anything that will make her happy.

Dr. Chase – The SCID expert whom Maddy sees to confirm that she doesn't actually have SCID. He helps her develop a plan for introducing her underdeveloped immune system to the world, though Maddy often doesn't take his advice.

Kara – Olly's sister. She smokes several cigarettes per day to cope with Olly's dad's abuse and, like the rest of her family, Maddy observes that she tiptoes around her dad but still cannot escape his wrath.

Dr. Melissa Francis – The doctor who attends to Maddy in Maui. She's the one to identify that Maddy doesn't actually have SCID and encourages Maddy to seek a second opinion.

Maddy's Dad – Maddy's father; a black man who gave Maddy her curls. He was Mom's soul mate, but died tragically in an accident along with Maddy's brother when Maddy was an infant.

Maddy's Brother – Maddy's older brother. He died in a car accident with their dad when Maddy was an infant.



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.



COMING OF AGE

Everything, Everything follows 18-year-old Maddy Whittier, a precocious and observant teen who also has SCID, a severe autoimmune disorder. Since Maddy's diagnosis at a few months old, she hasn't been able to safely leave her purified, sanitized, air-locked house. Maddy's life, however, is a comfortable one: she spends her days reading and doing homework for her online classes, supervised by her nurse, Carla. In the evenings, she plays games and spends time with her single mom, who is a doctor. Maddy's condition means that for her, coming of age and growing up aren't especially interesting or compelling concepts, as she understands that for her safety, her life can't change in substantial ways as she becomes an adult. Because of this, the novel questions what adulthood looks like for someone like Maddy—and when the questions of boys, romance, and the truth of Maddy's diagnosis come into question, it suggests that coming of age doesn't simply mean turning 18 and becoming a legal adult. Rather, coming of age is about developing independence and making

one's own choices about life, even if those choices are difficult, painful, and even hurtful to others.

Maddy's condition complicates normal coming-of-age milestones by rendering them relatively uneventful for her. She celebrates her 18th birthday early on in the novel, and while this is the age at which people in the U.S. are considered adults, Maddy's birthday means little to her or to Mom in this sense. Instead, her birthday is a bittersweet day every year, and Mom and Maddy are both aware that she's lucky to see her 18th birthday—SCID means that Maddy could become seriously ill and die at any moment. Because of this, Maddy says little about her impending life as an adult, even if it's only as an adult based on age. She gives no real insight throughout the novel into what she might want her life as an adult to look like, as her illness means that in all likelihood, nothing *can* change. For her safety, she must remain in her sanitary home under Mom and Carla's watchful eyes. All of this gives the impression that Maddy is a young woman essentially stuck in time. While she may have made the transition already from child to teenager, there's little indication that she even has the desire to make the transition from teenager to independent adult—perhaps because she is afraid to admit that desire to herself and be let down. The thought of coming of age, in this sense, simply isn't something Maddy allows herself to think about.

All of this begins to change when a boy named Olly and his family move in next door. Maddy is immediately attracted to Olly, and this attraction brings up a number of important questions for her—namely what, if anything, she will ever do about love and romance. The only people allowed in Maddy's house on a regular basis are Mom and Carla—anyone else who enters isn't allowed to even sit next to Maddy, let alone touch her. As these questions about romance and relationships arise, Carla offers what is, for someone like Maddy, a controversial and potentially dangerous view: that desiring romance and falling in love is a normal part of growing up. Because of these convictions, Carla allows Olly to visit regularly and even lets Olly and Maddy hang out with each other without supervision, something that gives Maddy the opportunity to begin to figure out her identity separate from who she is around her mom and Carla. In this sense, Olly is important to Maddy's journey of self-discovery in terms of more than just romance. He represents Maddy's first chance to be around someone her own age, and their bond starts to impress upon Maddy the importance—and the fun—of developing friendships and sharing opinions and conversations with new people. Through her interactions with Olly, Maddy is able to better determine who she wants to be and how she wants to act around people.

As Maddy and Olly's relationship progresses and deepens, Maddy takes a flying leap forward in terms of maturity when she secretly books a trip for her and Olly to Hawaii, a place she's always dreamed of visiting but where her illness has prevented her from going. In doing this, Maddy asserts her

independence from Mom and recognizes that it's neither healthy nor fulfilling to remain, in practice, a teenager forever. Instead, if she wants to exist in the world as a whole and contributing member of society, she decides that it's important to experience it as an independent adult—even if it might kill her. The trip to Hawaii is an experience of growth and independence for Maddy in a variety of ways. It's the first time she's been on her own, let alone out of the house, and she and Olly also take the very adult step of having sex. However, most important for Maddy's coming of age is that she becomes suddenly ill—this causes her to discover, a few months after the fact, that she doesn't have SCID after all. This discovery gives Maddy something she's never had before, given the fact that Mom has been the one overseeing Maddy's care since her diagnosis: independence and autonomy over her healthcare decisions. Maddy chooses to pursue testing that reveals that she indeed doesn't have SCID—Mom gave Maddy a fake diagnosis when she was a baby, a product of the trauma, grief, and desire for control that Mom experienced when she lost Maddy's dad and brother in a car accident a few months after Maddy's birth.

Though Maddy's journey of discovering she doesn't have SCID represents an extreme example, it does suggest more broadly that an intrinsic and necessary part of coming of age entails declaring one's independence and questioning some of the things that parents present as fact. Even if doing so is difficult, dangerous, and in this case, damages Maddy's trust in her mom, the novel makes it clear that it's impossible and unhealthy for teens to remain dependent on their parents and unthinkingly trusting of them forever.



TRUST AND LIES

When readers first meet Maddy, she completely trusts the two people with whom she has the most contact: Mom and Carla, her nurse. Mom and Carla prize trust, openness, and honesty over all else, and they teach Maddy to do the same. However, Maddy has new revelations about honesty as she grows up, falls in love with the neighbor boy Olly, and embarks on a secret trip with him to Hawaii. She begins to see the truth as more of a gray area than Mom in particular has led her to believe but learns that while lying may have its place (and may, at times, be worth it), that doesn't mean that lying doesn't bring major consequences along with it. Ultimately, *Everything, Everything* situates lying as something that everyone does, no matter who they are—but while lying may be a normal part of growing up for teens, the novel suggests that an adult using their authority to lie to a minor is unavoidably egregious and damaging for all.

Throughout Maddy's life, her relationship with Mom has been open and trusting by necessity. Aside from Carla, there's no one else Maddy sees in person regularly, which means that Mom is Maddy's sole source of entertainment, wisdom, and love, aside

from the internet. This has, over the years, created what seems at first to be a close and tender relationship between mother and daughter. They have weekly fancy dinners together, play unique games like Phonetic Scrabble, and importantly, don't keep secrets from each other. Because of this, it's extremely uncomfortable for Maddy when Olly moves in next door and she finds herself attracted to him. This is the first time that Maddy has felt attraction for a real person, but it's also the first time she's ever kept a secret from Mom.

Maddy's discomfort, and later, Mom's reaction when Maddy begins to pull away from her to instant message Olly or think about him by herself, begins to suggest that there's more to their relationship than just innocent closeness. Maddy has an unusual amount of discomfort and anxiety about having a crush—an entirely normal thing for an 18-year-old to experience—and Mom is similarly anxious that Maddy seems different. These reactions begin to suggest that what Maddy believes is a family culture of genuine truth and openness is actually one in which members are required to sacrifice their privacy or suffer consequences. Importantly, the consequences Maddy eventually experiences for her “transgression” don't actually encourage her to be any more truthful with Mom—instead, she becomes even less truthful and embarks on a trip to Hawaii without telling Mom where she's going.

Though Maddy congratulates herself for much of her relationship with Olly for never lying to him, she does have to lie in order to convince him to go to Hawaii with her. To assure him that she's going to be safe in the outside world, Maddy tells him that she bought pills from Canada that will delay any possible reaction to her SCID triggers. Importantly, Maddy can tell that Olly doesn't really believe her, and yet he chooses to trust her and accompany her to Hawaii anyway. When taken in conjunction with Maddy's choice to lie to her mom about going to Hawaii in the first place, this begins to suggest that to some degree, lying is a normal part of growing up and developing a sense of independence and agency. Further, Olly essentially ignoring Maddy's lie and choosing to go with her anyway allows him and Maddy to build intimacy and develop their relationship in a way that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise. This, again, leaves open the possibility that Maddy's lie was, in the long run, a positive thing for their relationship and her development.

Most importantly for Maddy, lying to Mom about Hawaii leads to her discovery that Mom lied about Maddy's diagnosis: Maddy doesn't have, and never had, SCID. Maddy only learns this because her illness and hospitalization in Hawaii is the first time since infancy that a doctor other than her mom has seen her. Maddy is understandably angry when she discovers that Mom lied to her. Because of the lie, Maddy was denied a real childhood, friends, and school experience in favor of a sanitized existence in which Mom controlled nearly everything Maddy did, experienced, ate, and saw. It's possible, then, to see

Maddy's lie about Hawaii as one that is hurtful in the short term but that allows Maddy to grow as an individual and leads her to discover vital information about herself. In contrast, Mom's lie about Maddy's diagnosis is one that actively harms Maddy and deprives her of everything life has to offer, both positive and negative. Through this, *Everything, Everything* makes the case that teens lying—to their parents and to each other—is a normal part of development that can lead to new information, experiences, and growth, even if the lie causes discomfort, fear, and anger in the moment. When adults lie to their children, however—especially when they do so to control their children's bodies and lives—lying becomes an unforgivable and sinister offense.



FAMILY, ABUSE, AND BRAVERY

In many ways, *Everything, Everything* is an exploration of family dynamics—and in particular, the many different ways in which family structures can be dysfunctional and abusive, both verbally and physically. By showing how both Maddy and Olly begin to break free of their respective abusive family structures (and in Maddy's case, discover that her relationship with Mom is actually manipulative and controlling, not innocently close), *Everything, Everything* suggests that choosing to make the change to free oneself from situations like these is overwhelmingly positive yet also incredibly difficult, and requires immense bravery.

Maddy's family situation is one formed by trauma and grief. Her dad was the love of Mom's life, but Maddy's dad and her older brother died tragically in a car accident when Maddy was only a few months old. Around the same time they died, Mom supposedly received Maddy's SCID diagnosis, and with the settlement money from the accident, outfitted their home with an airlock and an air purifying system and hired Carla to help care for baby Maddy. Despite the ethical questions that arise given that the book eventually reveals that Mom fabricated Maddy's diagnosis, the two nevertheless share a close and loving relationship. They're all the other has, given that Maddy can't leave the house and that while Mom works outside the home, she still appears to not have much of a social life outside of spending time with Maddy. The image created by Maddy's descriptions of her home life and of her relationship with Mom suggest that neither she nor the reader should expect anything to change without a major outside force, which comes in the form of Olly moving in next door. As Maddy and Olly grow closer and spend more time communicating over instant messenger, Maddy naturally develops a crush and begins distancing herself from Mom. Again, this shift is normal for any teen to undergo—even if Maddy isn't, as far as she's concerned, a normal teenager. Mom's anger, sense of betrayal, and anxiety surrounding Maddy's changes, however, reflects something seriously amiss in their family dynamic: the belief that nothing about it should ever change, even as Maddy grows up and

enters a new stage of her life. In this sense, Mom resists a change that the novel suggests is inevitable: children will, at some point, seek to distance themselves from their parents and seek relationships, both platonic and romantic, with other people.

Through her friendship with Olly and her observations of Olly's family out her window, Maddy gets an intimate look at his family, which is dysfunctional in a different way. Olly's family members, most notably Olly's mom and dad, resist change, just like Maddy's mom does. But in Olly's parents' relationship, which is abusive, not changing anything has dangerous and scary consequences. Maddy both listens to Olly talk about and bears witness to Olly's dad hit Olly and Olly's mom, to the point that Maddy begins keeping a tally of the visible bruises on his mom. Olly explains that while his dad has always been angry, he only became physically abusive (to his knowledge) about a decade ago. Following the first instance of physical violence, he promised to reform, but he continues to verbally abuse everyone in the family on a daily basis and physically abuse his wife semi-regularly. In the course of sharing this history with Maddy, Olly notes that he's talked to his mom at several points about leaving his dad, but his mom continues to insist that she believes Olly's dad will change—something that his actions suggest won't happen. Through the dynamics of Olly's family, the novel shows how abusers like Olly's dad rely on family members' fear of making a change, like leaving, so that they can continue to abuse their victims. While it's important to keep in mind that leaving an abusive situation like this can be extremely dangerous for victims—and the novel never condemns Olly's mom for staying—remaining in an abusive situation is still a surefire way to guarantee that the abuse will continue unchecked.

Ultimately, both Maddy and Olly's mom are eventually able to stand up to those who control them and make necessary changes to improve their lives. Maddy does so by discovering her fraudulent SCID diagnosis, which Mom fabricated as a product of her own trauma, grief, and overprotectiveness. Olly's mom does so by covertly moving herself, Olly, and Olly's sister, Kara to New York while Olly's dad is at work one day. Both choices require intense bravery. Up to this point Maddy has never been in a situation where she had any reason to question Mom's honesty, making calling her out and seeking testing to confirm her suspicious an exercise in courage at home—in addition to the fact that for testing, Maddy has to navigate the outside world for only the second time in her life. For Olly's mom, leaving her husband requires immense bravery and a willingness to put herself and her children in potential danger if her husband were to discover her plan beforehand.

In both cases, however, *Everything, Everything* suggests that the changes that Olly and Maddy's families undergo as a result of these acts of bravery are necessary, important, and positive. Maddy discovers that she does indeed have a future out in the

world ahead of her, while Olly, Kara, and Olly's mom are finally in a situation where they don't have to fear for their safety. Through this, the novel makes the case that change within families, especially when it's either a normal part of children growing and changing or to free oneself from abuse, isn't a bad thing by any means. It may be difficult for those in the thick of it, but Maddy's sense of freedom and Olly's clear happiness once he's away from his dad are testaments to the power of making these changes.



THE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

At the beginning of the novel, Maddy has no experience with the outside world; she hasn't left her house since she was an infant. Because of her illness, Maddy's "experiences" with the outside world are ones she gains vicariously through movies, the internet, and her beloved books. While Maddy initially believes that this kind of experience is all she'll ever be able to safely have, her budding romance with Olly leads her to question whether her life and health are actually more important than what she might gain by experiencing the outside world firsthand. Through Maddy's trip to Hawaii and her later discovery that her SCID diagnosis is illegitimate, *Everything, Everything* insists forcefully that gaining experience is worth the risk to one's innocence and safety—and at times, denying a person experiences actually does more harm than anything else.

When the reader first meets Maddy, it's clear that she has worked hard to come to terms with all the things she'll never be able to experience in real life. Instead of dwelling on this, Maddy turns to books and very consciously enjoys them in the same way she might otherwise enjoy these experiences firsthand. Because of this, Maddy is able to vicariously experience life "Outside" and uses her imagination to enjoy everything from kissing to the **ocean** and having real friends. This doesn't mean, however, that Maddy has never wanted to see what life is like Outside: in a diary entry from when she was eight years old, she wrote about a family with children around the same age who moved in next door. Seeing them made Maddy desperately want to go outside and play with them, something she was never able to do. This was a major formative experience for Maddy, as it impressed upon her that wanting to experience life Outside would never bring her anything but heartache. Vicarious experiences through books and movies, meanwhile, allow her to safely engage with the outside world both emotionally and physically.

Maddy's world begins to open up when Olly and his family move in next door, in the same house where the children lived when Maddy was eight. Maddy is immediately curious about Olly, but she also proceeds with caution as they begin emailing, instant messaging, and getting to know each other—her last experience taught her that there's no way getting close to Olly will ever end well. Despite these reservations, Maddy soon

discovers that everything Olly can tell her about, as well as Olly himself, is intoxicating. He can tell her, for instance, what it's like to swim in the ocean, and once the school year starts, he makes a point to send her pictures and messages detailing exactly what his school day is like. This, combined with the experience of having a real, live boy whom she's attracted to visit her regularly, forces Maddy to question whether it's really in her best interest to actively deny herself even the desire for real experiences. After Maddy and Olly kiss for the first time, Mom eventually finds out what's been going on. She fires Carla and bans Maddy from communicating with Olly. At this point, Maddy begins to truly take Carla's advice—that love is worth the risk and potential pain—to heart. She comes to the conclusion that her life isn't worth living if she doesn't get to experience at least some of what the world has to offer before she dies, which leads her to secretly apply for a credit card and purchase plane tickets for her and Olly to visit Hawaii.

Being in Hawaii is a transformative experience for Maddy, and for the most part, it helps her come to a better understanding of herself and of the world around her. She and Olly snorkel, jump off cliffs, and have sex—all things that make Maddy feel more whole, human, and alive. With this, the novel suggests that experiences like these are what make life work living. Disaster strikes after only a day on the trip, however, when Maddy becomes deathly ill. For the few months that it takes her to recover, Maddy cuts things off with Olly and tells herself that she doesn't regret what she did—but it's not worth it to try again. However, things begin to change when two months later, the doctor who treated Maddy in Maui writes and shares that from what she could tell, Maddy doesn't actually have SCID. Instead, she allows that while Maddy did experience a serious heart problem, what happened to her is something that could've happened to anyone. This leads Maddy to discover that Mom fabricated Maddy's SCID diagnosis after the tragic deaths of Maddy's dad and brother.

Through this, and Maddy's appointments with specialists in the weeks after the discovery, the novel reveals the true and very basic value of life experiences and the consequences of attempting to protect someone the way Maddy's mom tries to protect Maddy. Because Maddy has spent her entire life in a sanitary environment, her immune system is like that of an infant—she doesn't have the ability to fight off the sorts of viruses and bacteria that healthy people's immune systems learn to guard against as children. In this way, Mom actually made Maddy *less* safe and *less* prepared to handle everything the outside world has to offer, even if her intentions were good. With this, *Everything, Everything* insists that while books and movies may teach valuable lessons, those lessons are no substitute for real experiences. People's emotional development, growth, and overall health depend on experiencing the world firsthand, whether that means simply stepping outside or traveling hundreds of miles.



SYMBOLS

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



THE ASTRONAUT

The astronaut, a tiny figure that Maddy hides in every architectural model she creates, is a symbol for Maddy herself, and specifically how limited her interactions with the rest of the world are at the beginning of the novel. This is best encapsulated when her architecture tutor, Mr. Waterman, finds the astronaut in a model restaurant and asks how the astronaut is supposed to eat through his helmet—and Maddy had never considered that the astronaut could, or might want to, actually eat the food. Maddy, as a person with SCID, must engage with the world around her through books and movies and from the safety of her sanitized house. This allows her to see life on the outside without actually interacting with it, much as the astronaut can look at his model food and the rest of the model but cannot actually experience any of it through his space suit.



THE OCEAN

As Maddy begins to experience more curiosity about the world outside her sanitized home, the ocean functions as a representation of life outside in the real world. For Maddy, asking Olly about what it's like to swim in the ocean is the easiest way for her to begin asking questions about the world outside and what it's like to inhabit it. Maddy feels her own life open up as later, in Hawaii, she swims in the ocean and even jumps into it off of cliffs. Further, in much the same way as life isn't all good and fun, the ocean isn't simply a thing of wonder. Olly cautions Maddy to be wary and respectful of the ocean, as, like life itself, it may be inarguably beautiful and compelling—but it can also be deadly and dangerous.



THE COLOR WHITE

White symbolizes the pure, sanitized, and controlled environment in which Maddy lives at the beginning of the novel, as well as her lack of individuality. Everything in her home is white, from the walls and the furniture to Maddy's T-shirts and shoes. While Maddy doesn't take issue with the **color** palette at first, it does read as a symbolic encapsulation of Mom's attempts to control Maddy's environment down to the smallest thing and essentially whitewash it of all the colorful emotions and experience that Maddy could potentially experience in the outside world. In doing so, she deprives Maddy of any sense of individuality, or indeed any sense that she exists separately from the house or from her mom.



COLORS (PINK, YELLOW, ORANGE)

While **white** symbolizes purity and cleanliness, other colors symbolize Maddy's growing curiosity about the world and her budding individual identity. This begins when, after her first meeting with Olly, she decides that she needs more than just white shirts and so purchases a T-shirt in every color. At this point, Maddy wants to be able to experiment with both her body and how she presents herself to the world, something she can achieve by choosing to wear bright colors. This relationship between color and Maddy's burgeoning identity becomes most apparent in Hawaii when Maddy wears a hot pink bikini for the first time. While the bikini by design impresses upon Maddy that her body is that of an adult woman, not the repressed teen she was at home, the pink color makes her look flushed, healthy, and beautiful—all things she longs to be as she begins to engage with the wider world around her. Finally, following the revelation that she doesn't actually have SCID, Maddy paints her white bedroom bright yellow, thereby symbolically separating herself from the identity that Mom thrust upon her through both her fake diagnosis and the color of the house and furnishings. In this way, bright colors represent Maddy's individuality as she comes to terms with her own self-expression, sexuality, and identity outside of Mom's control.

and so she cannot leave the sanitized environment of her house. Maddy and Mom's realization that this will be Maddy's life forever illustrates just how incomplete Maddy's life is as a result of her diagnosis, and how her illness means that she's essentially trapped in time. Although Maddy does things through the novel which signal her maturity—developing a relationship with a boy, getting a credit card, making significant decisions without Mom's permission—in many ways Maddy remains effectively a teenager. This is mostly because she must continue to rely on Mom and Carla to care for her, which means that by default, Maddy can never experience life as an independent adult. It's this lack of independence, the novel suggest, that truly marks Maddy as not an adult despite being 18.

16. Astronaut Ice Cream Quotes

☝☝ “Madeline,” He says happily, clapping his hands together. He's my favorite of all my tutors. He never looks at me pityingly and he loves architecture like I love architecture. If I were going to be something when I grew up, an architect is what I would be.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier, Mr. Waterman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Waterman arrives for an in-person architecture lesson with Maddy, and Maddy introduces him to the reader. The way that Maddy talks about her future here: she references her career path *if* she were going to be something when she grows up, not *when*. Through this word choice, she implies through that even if she receives all the possible education in architecture, she's still never going to be able to go on and actually be an architect because of her illness. While architecture is a field that relies on hands-on experiences through model building and such, it's also one that requires field visits, meetings with prospective employers, and working in teams of people—all things that, as a person confined to her house, Maddy will not be able to safely experience. In this sense, the novel illustrates how Maddy's illness and the way it deprives her of the possibility of real experiences also dictates the course of her life—it will effectively keep her in a dependent, teenager-esque state even into adulthood.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ember edition of *Everything, Everything* published in 2015.

3. Brthdae Uish Quotes

☝☝ This year is a little harder than the previous. Maybe it's because I'm eighteen now. Technically, I'm an adult. I should be leaving home, going off to college. My mom should be dreading empty-nest syndrome. But because of SCID, I'm not going anywhere.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

On her 18th birthday, Maddy shares with the reader why this birthday is difficult for both her and for Mom: even though Maddy is becoming a legal adult, nothing is going to change thanks to her SCID diagnosis. This rare autoimmune disease renders Maddy extremely susceptible to infections,

“There he is!” Mr. Waterman exclaims. He clucks at the scene for a few moments and then turns to me. His merry eyes are a little less merry than usual. “It’s just wonderful, my dear. But how will he eat all that scrumptious food with his helmet on?”

I look back at my astronaut. It’d never occurred to me that he’d want to eat the food.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier, Mr. Waterman (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

During Maddy and Mr. Waterman’s critique session of her outdoor shopping center, Mr. Waterman takes issue with how Maddy arranged the model astronaut that she hides in every model—by giving him food but leaving his helmet on, the astronaut isn’t able to enjoy any of the world Maddy has given him. In this sense, the astronaut comes to represent Maddy herself. Like Maddy, the astronaut exists in his own, presumably sanitary bubble and cannot break free of his suit to experience the world around him in a meaningful way. Like Maddy, he can only ever look at the food in front of him and admire it for its visual qualities; he can’t consume it because of his helmet, and she can’t experience the world because of her illness.

That it never occurred to Maddy that the astronaut would want to eat the food speaks to the way in which she, at this point, has built a life for herself in which she doesn’t think of all the things she’s missing, like outdoor shopping centers or even food not prepared by Mom. The outside world is, for her, something to look at and admire from the safety of her room, not something to experience.

21. Future Perfect; Olly Quotes

“Actually, mine’s not blank at all, but I really can’t tell him how beautiful his eyes are. They’re Atlantic Ocean blue, just like he’d said. It’s strange because of course I’d known that. But the difference between knowing it and seeing them in person is the difference between dreaming of flying and flight.”

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Olly

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

During Maddy and Olly’s first meeting, Maddy finds herself entranced by Olly’s eyes and comes face to face with the reality of how closed-off her life has been up to this point. While Maddy has read a lot about romance, seeing Olly—the first boy she’s ever been attracted to—in front of her forces her to recognize that hearing about a person’s blue eyes isn’t the same as seeing those same eyes in person, just like “dreaming of flight” is entirely different from actually flying. This experience begins to show Maddy that real experiences, rather than vicarious ones, are the only truly effective and fulfilling way to experience the world. Making such a specific note about the color of Olly’s eyes also allows Maddy to find meaning and interest in the real world, which is colorful and full of variety as opposed to the controlled, all-white environment in which she is forced to live.

“I’ve seen pictures and videos, but what’s it like to actually be in the water? Is it like taking a bath in a giant tub?”

“Sort of,” he says slowly, considering. “No, I take it back. Taking a bath is relaxing. Being in the ocean is scary. It’s wet and cold and salty and deadly.”

That’s not what I was expecting. “You hate the ocean?”

He’s grinning now, warming to his topic. “I don’t hate it. I respect it.” He holds up a single finger. “Respect. It’s Mother Nature at her finest—awesome, beautiful, impersonal, murderous. Think about it: All that water and you could still die of thirst. And the whole point of waves is to suck your feet from under you so that you drown faster. The ocean will swallow you whole and burp you out and not notice you were even there.”

Related Characters: Olly, Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

When Olly offers to describe the ocean for Maddy, he makes it clear that while the ocean may be beautiful, it isn't something to trifle with. Because Maddy has grown up so sheltered and is beginning to experience more curiosity about the wonders the outside world has to offer, it's unthinkable to her that something that intrigues her so is actually dangerous and should be treated with respect and caution. Olly, because of his difficult upbringing in the real world, recognizes already that life, like the ocean, isn't just delightful and fun—life also brings with it its fair share of hard times and dangerous spots, just like the ocean does. In this way, this conversation introduces Maddy to the idea that while it's certainly normal for her to want to know more about the real world, it's also important for her to recognize that the real world brings dangers with it that she hasn't yet considered—and yet, this doesn't mean that the real world isn't worth experiencing.

28. Mirror, Mirror Quotes

☝ I wish again that I could talk to my mom about this. I want to ask her why I get breathless when I think of him. I want to share my giddiness with her. I want to tell her all the funny things Olly says. I want to tell her how I can't make myself stop thinking about him even though I try. I want to ask her if this is the way she felt about Dad at the beginning.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Maddy's Dad, Olly, Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

As Maddy and Olly's relationship progresses, Maddy becomes increasingly anxious about the fact that she can't tell Mom about Olly. At this point, it's important to focus on the fact that Maddy doesn't truly *want* to hide these things from Mom—she desperately wants to share these new experiences with her. If she weren't so concerned about Mom shutting down her visits with Olly, she'd trust Mom to take her interest in Olly seriously and answer her questions about what it's like to be in love. This speaks to the depth and strength of Maddy and Mom's relationship.

However, it's also important to keep in mind that Maddy knows she can't trust Mom with this secret exactly because if Mom were to know that Maddy is seeing Olly, Mom would stop the visits immediately. Olly, in this sense, is what's separating Maddy and Mom from each other. This isn't an abnormal situation—teens and young people naturally seek

relationships with people other than their parents, no matter how strong their relationships with their family might be. Maddy's unwillingness to tell Mom the truth, then, suggests that there's more to this than just closeness, given that Maddy recognizes that despite their closeness, Mom still holds an outsize amount of control over Maddy's life and will undoubtedly use it if given the opportunity or the reason to do so.

30. Madeline's Dictionary; Secrets Quotes

☝ It feels strange not to talk to my mom about something, someone, who's becoming so important to me. My mom and I are drifting apart, but not because we're spending less time together. And not because Olly's replacing her. We're drifting apart because for the first time in my life, I have a secret to keep.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Olly, Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

As Maddy continues to mull over her changing relationship with Mom, she recognizes that their bond is changing because Maddy is keeping her relationship with Olly a secret. Again, an 18-year-old having a crush or a relationship—and in many cases, keeping that secret from a parent—isn't necessarily something that's abnormal or questionable for a teen to do. Maddy's discomfort with keeping a secret, however, makes it very clear that secrets aren't appropriate in her family, no matter how benign, normal, or understandable that secret might be. To take this a step further, this begins to suggest that Mom isn't necessarily sold on Maddy having much in the way of privacy, at least not when giving Maddy privacy doesn't suit Mom. This begins to open things up for Mom to invade Maddy's privacy in the future when Maddy continues to keep secrets despite Mom's fear and displeasure.

33. Chaos Theory; Olly's Formula Quotes

☝ Olly watched the color fade in the glass and remembered the day his dad got fired and how he'd been too afraid to comfort him. What if he had—would things be different now? What if?

He remembered how his dad had said that one thing doesn't always lead to another.

Related Characters: Olly's Dad, Olly

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

In a third-person account, Olly recounts his memories of his dad first becoming violent and drinking during the day. On the first day that Olly's dad hits his mom, Olly remembers that he didn't comfort his dad when his dad was fired a few months earlier. Olly finds himself caught between two different thought processes here. One is the possibility that it was in his power to change the course of his dad's violence by showing him compassion, and the other is the recognition that in reality, nothing he did, didn't do, or could've done would've made any difference. For the reader, it's important to keep in mind that Olly's suspicion that he could've done something is a suspicion that many people who are the victims of abuse experience, and it's a thought process that helps keep abusers in control of their victims. In this sense, it's possible to see that even if Olly's dad isn't entirely aware of Olly's thought process at this point, he absolutely goes on to prey on the fact that Olly feels responsible so that he can continue to abuse his family and make them feel as though they could fix it if only they tried a little harder—something that, in reality, they'll never be able to do.

34. A Tale of Two Maddys; Freedom Card Quotes

☝ Before, I was worried about keeping secrets from her. Now, I'm worried about not being able to have any secrets at all. I know she's not upset that I bought new clothes. She's upset that I didn't ask her opinion and bought them in colors that she didn't expect. She's upset with the change she didn't see coming. I resent and understand it at the same time.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Olly, Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Maddy continues to see Olly and realizes that if Mom were

to discover her relationship with Olly, Mom would put a stop to it, something that would mean that Maddy was unable to keep secrets at all. First, though Maddy characterizes her choice to buy shirts in new colors as a change that Mom didn't see coming, it's worth keeping in mind that this is something perfectly normal that Mom should've expected. Maddy is growing up and becoming her own person, no matter how Mom might feel about it or how much she might want Maddy to stay a teenager forever. That Maddy realizes that Mom doesn't see this as a normal change speaks to how distorted Maddy's sense of what's normal really is. This, in turn, influences Maddy's sudden realization that she'd like to keep a secret from her mom, not in the sense that she's actively trying to aggravate her mom, but in the sense that she's a young adult and is fully entitled to her secrets. Because of this shift in Maddy's thoughts, this moment becomes one in which Maddy begins to shift from dependent child to independent adult, if only in her thought process.

44. Schedule Change; More Than This Quotes

☝ "Can I have my Internet privileges back?" I have to try. She shakes her head. "Ask me for something else, honey." "Please, Mom." "It's better this way. I don't want you to have a broken heart." "Love can't kill me," I say, parroting Carla's words. "That's not true," she says. "Whoever told you that?"

Related Characters: Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Carla, Olly

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

When Maddy finally agrees to speak with Mom about Olly, Maddy attempts to get her internet privileges back and repeats that love can't kill her. Generally speaking, Carla is right—while love may be painful at times, it's usually not deadly. It's telling, then, that Mom insists that love actually is deadly. This is, of course, due to Mom's own experience: love is what tore her world apart and severely damaged her ability to move through the world normally. Losing the love of her husband and son when they died is what caused Mom to fabricate Maddy's SCID diagnosis in the first place. That diagnosis, meanwhile, allows Mom to protect Maddy from ever experiencing the kind of loss she did, something that

Mom believes is the best course of action.

Further, it's also true that if Maddy were to fall in love, Mom would experience another loss of sorts as Maddy shifts her focus from her mother to her partner, something that happens all the time as children grow up and begin relationships with other people. In this sense, it's essential that Mom keep Maddy focused entirely on her, as doing so is the only way for Mom to ensure that she has Maddy all to herself for the foreseeable future.

49. Later, 9:08 P.M.; Madam, I'm Adam Quotes

☝☝ How am I supposed to go back to my old life, my days stretching out before me with unending and brutal sameness? How am I supposed to go back to being The Girl Who Reads? Not that I begrudge my life in books. All I know about the world I've learned from them. But a description of a tree is not a tree, and a thousand paper kisses will never equal the feel of Olly's lips against mine.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Olly

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 162-63

Explanation and Analysis

After Mom bans Maddy from having any contact with Olly, Maddy again must face the realization that thinking about life and about love from the safety of her house isn't the same as experiencing the real world. When Maddy allows that books have taught her many things, she makes it clear that the books and movies she relies on to connect with the world do teach valuable lessons. However, those lessons aren't at all equivalent to what Maddy might learn through experience, whether that be about kissing as in this case or about any number of things, from what the ocean is like to how to navigate one's world. This moment, then, is one that begins to push Maddy more forcefully toward choosing to purchase the tickets to Hawaii and put herself out in the world, as she starts to recognize that there's no good substitute for actually existing in the world and experiencing it firsthand.

52. Half Life Quotes

☝☝ Ever since Olly came into my life there've been two Maddys: the one who lives through books and doesn't want to die, and the one who *lives* and suspects that death will be a small price to pay for it. The first Maddy is surprised at the direction of her thoughts. The second Maddy, the one from the Hawaii photograph? She's like a god—impervious to cold, famine, disease, natural and man-made disasters. She's impervious to heartbreak.

The second Maddy knows that this pale half life is not really living.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Maddy makes her decision to purchase tickets to Hawaii, she realizes that there are two competing versions of herself, and one understands that it's necessary to actually go out and experience the world firsthand. This shift represents both Maddy's burgeoning maturity, as well as her recognition that the safe world that Mom created for her won't actually give her a meaningful life.

When Maddy looks at the photograph she mentions here, which is of her family in Hawaii a month before her dad and brother died (when Maddy was six months old), she sees that she's full of potential. Six-month-old Maddy doesn't yet know she's sick, so she truly has her whole life ahead of her and in Maddy's mind, can do anything. In this instance then, Maddy comes to recognize that potential in her 18-year-old self as well, which is what gives her the final push to go out and see the world—something that allows her to live her life, even if she believes that it will be short.

55. Other Worlds; Aloha Means Hello and Good-Bye, Part Two Quotes

☝☝ He's much too smart to fall for this, but he wants it to be true. He wants it to be true more than he wants the truth. The smile that breaks across his face is cautious, but so beautiful that I can't look away. I would lie to him again for that smile.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Olly

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

After sneaking out, Maddy convinces Olly to go to Hawaii with her by telling him that she bought pills from Canada that will keep her reactions at bay and keep her safe for a few days in the real world. When Olly chooses to essentially ignore what he at least suspects is a lie and go with Maddy, it shows that he understands that it's important to experience the world firsthand, as Maddy wants to do here. Though this is an even bigger leap for Maddy, as this is her first time outside in the real world, this is also a leap for Olly in that it's one of the few times that he gets to move through the world without worrying about his parents and sister. Choosing to accept Maddy's lie and go with her allows them to experiment with forming their own chosen family of sorts, especially since they allow people in Hawaii to think that they're newlyweds. In this way, though this trip comes about because of a number of lies, it also allows them to form a healthier family of sorts on their own, as they spend time with each other and deepen their relationship.

many more reasons. This gives Maddy a lot to think about, as it introduces her to the idea that experiencing regret, sadness, and other negative emotions—and in particular, hurting the people she loves, like Mom—are all normal and expected parts of life. With this, the novel makes it very clear that even if experiencing things firsthand is superior to experiencing them vicariously through books or movies, that firsthand experience naturally brings consequences with it.

The attention Maddy pays to color as she thinks about Mom dealing with her possible death again establishes color and its absence as symbols for Maddy's development. The white room is representative of Maddy's childhood and her sanitized life, a life that in almost all ways is inseparable from Mom's. Importantly, however, even as Maddy imagines her death, she still brings color into it when she mentions the green field. Even if she dies, Maddy recognizes that she's going to achieve some sense of identity and uniqueness separate from her mom if she does so, which again strengthens Maddy's resolve to see the world before she leaves it.

57. Infected Quotes

☝☝ “Of course I regret it. A lot of bad things happened on that trip. And when my mother and father died, I couldn't go back for the funerals. Rosa doesn't know anything about where she's from.” She sighs. “You're not living if you're not regretting.”

What am I going to regret? My mind cycles through visions: my mom alone in my white room wondering where everyone she's ever loved went. My mom alone in a green field staring down at my grave and my dad's grave and my brother's grave. My mom dying all alone in that house.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier, Carla (speaker), Maddy's Brother, Maddy's Dad, Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Rosa

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

On their way to the airport, Maddy and Olly stop at Carla's apartment, and Carla shares words of wisdom with Maddy regarding what living entails. She tells Maddy about her choice to leave Mexico—and says that while she regrets leaving for a lot of reasons, she also thinks it's worth it for

60. Here Now; Madeline's Dictionary Quotes

☝☝ “Be careful,” Olly calls out from somewhere behind me.

I'm not sure what that means in this context. Be careful because I may drown? Be careful because I may get sick? Be careful because once you become a part of the world it becomes a part of you, too?

Because there's no denying it now. I'm in the world.

And, too, the world is in me.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier, Olly (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

Maddy runs into the ocean in Hawaii the first chance she gets, despite Olly's warnings. Up until this point, Maddy's only experience of the ocean has been through books and Olly's descriptions of it to her. Running headlong into the ocean, then, is symbolic of Maddy running headlong into life itself by booking this trip to begin with—something that she did without much thought as to what could go wrong or how she might protect herself, just as she runs into the

water with little thought for what might be lurking there. However, Maddy still understands that being a part of the world is much like standing in the ocean in that it makes her feel seen, heard, and connected to the outside world for the first time in her life. Her reaction suggests that this sense of belonging is worth any risk she might be taking, either in terms of life or in terms of running into the water.

62. Remembrance of Things Present Quotes

☝☝ By eighteen years old, other teenagers have separated from their parents. They leave home, have separate lives, make separate memories. But not me. My mom and I have shared the same closed space and breathed the same filtered air for so long that it's strange being here without her. It's strange making memories that don't include her.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Olly

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

In the souvenir shop, Maddy wonders what to get Mom and considers that she's never been able to make memories separately from Mom, thanks to Maddy's illness. Being able to think about this so clearly shows that even if Maddy previously struggled to articulate it, she is aware that it's normal for teenagers to distance themselves from their parents and begin their own lives as independent adults. This again begins to indicate that Maddy's childhood experiences of being so close to her mom, though she believes them to have been necessary for her health, aren't necessarily normal or healthy. In fact, given that Maddy's SCID diagnosis is eventually revealed to be fake, that closeness is instead the product of an unhealthily overbearing and overprotective parent. Maddy feels so strange about experiencing things separately from her mom because she's never been a situation to practice doing this before. This adds even more to the sense that Maddy is a teenager stuck in time, as the independence she has had up to this point is that which is often afforded to much younger children, not newly legal adults.

65. Zach Quotes

☝☝ “Maybe growing up means disappointing the people we love.”

Related Characters: Zach (speaker), Olly, Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Madeline “Maddy” Whittier

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

While Olly is in the restroom, Zach ascertains that Maddy lied about the pills that supposedly stave off her symptoms. She and Zach discuss the possibility that disappointing others is an intrinsic part of growing up. This possibility is something the novel strongly implies is correct, as coming of age for both Olly and Maddy entails disappointing people. For Zach, too, if and when he chooses to come out to his parents as gay and share his dreams of becoming a rock star, he's also going to disappoint them. The idea that disappointment is part of growing up makes it clear that while growing up is necessary and is generally a positive thing, this doesn't mean that it's not difficult for everyone involved—not least for the adults who raised the child doing the disappointing. This also suggests that it's normal for adults to have expectations for their children that their children will, in all likelihood, not be able to meet or not want to meet. In both cases, however, the novel suggests that doing away with these expectations allows children to develop their own identities and a sense of independence, and in doing so, become the functional adults that they must in order to go on to live healthy, meaningful lives.

69. This Time Quotes

☝☝ “You should leave them,” I say. “It's not safe for you there.” I say it because he doesn't know it. He's trapped by the same memory of love, of better times, that his mother is, and it isn't enough.

Related Characters: Madeline “Maddy” Whittier (speaker), Olly's Dad, Olly's Mom, Olly

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 231-32

Explanation and Analysis

As Maddy and Olly sit on the beach at night, Maddy tells Olly that he should leave his parents' home, which is unsafe for everyone because of Olly's abusive dad. Maddy recognizes that just as Olly's parents have expectations for Olly that he can't meet, Olly too has expectations that his parents aren't capable of meeting—such as creating a

healthy and safe environment for their children. This also illuminates one of the reasons that the abuse has gone on so long in Olly's house, as both Olly and his mom live with the hope that they'll be able to do something to appease Olly's dad and return things to the way they used to be before he became violent. However much the novel suggests this is a normal desire, it also makes it very clear that it's misguided and will never come to pass. Abusers like Olly's dad can't be stopped by returning things to the way they used to be; the only way out is to physically escape, as Maddy suggests.

72. Readmitted Quotes

☝☝ "How could you do this to yourself? You could've died," she whispers.

She steps closer, hugs a clipboard to her chest. "How could you do this to me? After everything?"

Related Characters: Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier (speaker), Madeline "Maddy" Whittier

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

Once Maddy returns home to recover under Mom's care, Mom asks why Maddy went to Hawaii behind her back, which resulted in Maddy getting seriously ill. In framing Maddy's actions as hurtful both to herself and to Mom, Mom challenges Maddy's newfound ability to make decisions for herself. Especially when Mom asks why Maddy did this to *her*, it suggests that Mom doesn't necessarily view Maddy as in control of her own life. Rather, Maddy's existence and continued health is for Mom's benefit, possibly more than Maddy's benefit. In this way, the novel again exposes the unhealthy dynamic at work in Maddy's house and makes it clear that as long as Maddy remains under Mom's roof and in her sanitary environment, it's impossible for her to live for herself or experience anything the outside world has to offer.

77. Reunion Quotes

☝☝ I wish I could undo the last few months of knowing him. I would stay in my room. I would hear the truck beeping next door and I would remain on my white couch in my white room reading my brand-new books. I would remember my past and then I would remember not to repeat it.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Olly

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

When Olly, his mom, and Kara move out, Maddy refuses to acknowledge him and instead, thinks of how she'd do things differently, knowing what she knows now. Though this is extremely painful for her, it is important to note that Maddy understands that she learned a lot from her relationship with Olly. She learned that love can be painful, and that there are costs to living out in the world as she did in Hawaii. These are all important lessons that ultimately propel Maddy toward adulthood over the next month and until the end of the novel. It's important to keep in mind that while Maddy doesn't say as much, the primary reason that she wants things to go back to the way things are is because of how much she trusts Mom. She believes, at this point, that Mom was right to try to forbid her from spending time with Olly, and she trusts that Mom has her best interests at heart in terms of Maddy's health and her heart.

78. Neighborhood Watch #3; Five Syllables; His Last Letter is Haiku Quotes

☝☝ He's not sure which conversation with his mom finally convinced her. It could've been because he told her he couldn't be part of the family anymore if she stayed. Sometimes you have to leave the people who love you the most, he said. Or, he says, it could've been when he finally told her about me and about how sick I am and how I was willing to do anything just to live. He says that she thinks I'm brave.

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Zach, Olly's Dad, Olly's Mom, Olly

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Following Olly and his family moving away, Maddy finally goes through the emails Olly sent her and reads about why his mom finally agreed to leave Olly's dad. The possible reasons that Olly gives show that what Olly's mom did

required intense bravery, especially since Olly put things in terms of Maddy's desire to experience the world outside. For Maddy, she wasn't able to truly live until she extricated herself from Mom's control. And for Olly's mom, she too is unable able to live freely and safely until she's able to escape her abusive husband and find a place where she can exist independently. Olly's threat, meanwhile, also illustrates the kind of bravery required in order to make these changes, which the novel suggests are absolutely necessary. In essence, Olly was willing and able to make the decision that his friend Zach is unwilling to do by refusing to play along as long as things don't change.

80. Protection Quotes

☝☝ "Mom, it's OK," I say. "I didn't really believe it anyway." I don't think she hears me. "I had to protect you," she says. "I know, Mom." I don't really want to talk about this anymore. I move back into her arms. "I had to protect you," she says into my hair. And it's that last "I had to protect you" that makes a part of me go quiet. [...]

I try to pull away, to see her face, but she holds on tight.

Related Characters: Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier, Madeline "Maddy" Whittier (speaker), Dr. Melissa Francis

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

Mom behaves strangely when Maddy shows her Dr. Francis's email and test results, which suggest that Maddy doesn't have SCID, and instead experienced a heart problem in Hawaii. Mom's reaction shows that while she did fabricate Maddy's diagnosis—a morally reprehensible thing that deprived Maddy of a childhood and a life in the world—she did so because she honestly believed that it was better to grow up as Maddy did, protected and safe from anything, than to exist in the world with all its dangers and the possibility of heartbreak. Despite these good intentions, however, the novel also never lets Mom off the hook, instead suggesting that a parent lying to their child like this is something that Maddy has every right to never forgive

her mom for. While others, like Carla, encourage Maddy to forgive Mom and understand that this happened in part because Mom is unwell, the novel also suggests that Maddy's reaction is normal and understandable given all that she's missed as a result of Mom's lie.

84. Fairy Tales; The Void; Beginnings and Ends Quotes

☝☝ "Because of the circumstances of your upbringing, we're not sure about the state of your immune system."

"What does that mean?"

"We think it's possible that it's underdeveloped, like an infant's."

"An infant?"

"Your immune system hasn't been exposed to a lifetime of common viruses and bacterial infections. It hasn't had time to get experience with fighting these infections. It hasn't had time to get strong."

Related Characters: Madeline "Maddy" Whittier, Dr. Chase (speaker), Mom/Dr. Pauline Whittier

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

During Maddy's appointment with Dr. Chase, a SCID specialist, in which she learns that she indeed doesn't have SCID, she also learns the true consequences of growing up in a protected environment: her immune system is unprepared to handle the outside world. This makes it clear that while Mom may have good intentions in keeping Maddy inside and safe, in practice, she ironically made Maddy's life *less* safe by denying her the opportunities to develop a healthy immune system capable of keeping her safe and well in the outside world. Experience, in this case, doesn't have to mean traveling to Hawaii or even kissing boys. The novel shows here that experiences that might seem mundane—such as existing in the world, being allowed outside, and being in contact with other people—are, from a health standpoint, almost more important than the exciting and adventurous experiences that Maddy so prizes. Without these smaller, less showy experiences, she won't be healthy enough to engage in the bigger ones.



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.

1. THE WHITE ROOM

Maddy assures the reader that no matter how many books they've read, she's read more. Her bedroom is entirely **white** except for the spines of brand-new books, which are the only **color**. The books come decontaminated from "Outside," and Maddy would like to see the machine that decontaminates and seals them in plastic wrap. When Maddy receives a new book, the first thing she does is write her full name in it. She's not sure why she does this, as Mom never reads and Carla, her nurse, spends her time watching Maddy breathe. No one visits either. Regardless, Maddy then goes on to create a list of rewards for someone who finds her book. These range from the fanciful (picnics and snorkeling with Maddy) to the mundane (a walk or a conversation with Maddy).

The way that Maddy treats her books reveals that even though she goes on to insist to the reader that she's happy, she does long for more in her life. In particular, spending her time coming up with so many rewards for finding a lost book suggests that she craves companionship and contact with people who aren't Mom or Carla, while the presence of the mundane rewards in particular do indicate that Maddy is lonely and yearns for connection, pure and simple.



2. SCID ROW; DAILY HEALTH LOG

Maddy explains that her disease is both rare and famous. She has Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID), but many know it as "bubble baby disease." It basically means that she's allergic to everything. Her triggers are unknown and Maddy already almost died as an infant. She hasn't left her house in 17 years. Maddy shares her daily health log with the reader: her mom, Dr. Whittier, records Maddy's breaths per minute, the room temperature, and the air filter status.

Given Maddy's health issues, it's unsafe for her to experience anything of the outside world. This begins to explain why she treasures her books so much, and why they are the only color in her room. Color throughout the novel represents Maddy's burgeoning individual identity, and at this point, books are the only means by which Maddy can explore as an individual.



3. BRTHDAE UISH

As Mom takes Maddy's blood pressure, she asks what Maddy wants to do after dinner. She doesn't mention Phonetic Scrabble, Mom's favorite game, but Maddy insists that they play it. Maddy explains that it's her birthday, which means that Mom gave Carla the day off so Mom can spend the whole day with Maddy. Mom listens to Maddy's heart and when Maddy notices a concerned look on Mom's face, she kisses her forehead quickly. Maddy declares that she'll win Phonetic Scrabble, even though she knows she won't.

From this exchange, it's clear that Mom and Maddy are extremely close and have come up with their own ways to pass the time since Maddy is so secluded. In particular, it's significant that Maddy notices Mom's concern and kisses her to make her feel better. This suggests that Maddy has learned to reflect and reciprocate the kind of care that Mom shows her, and she knows how to read others' emotions well.



Maddy and Mom bake Maddy's traditional birthday cake, vanilla sponge with vanilla cream frosting. Maddy frosts it and then draws 18 **white** daisies and white curtains around the sides. Mom declares that the cake is perfect like Maddy, and Maddy explains that her birthday always makes Mom weepy and joyful. It's the one day per year that they're both very aware that Maddy is sick and won't be cured. Maddy thinks of how, as she gets older, it gets easier to ignore that she'll never learn to drive or go to prom. This year is harder, though, since Maddy is turning 18 and is technically a legal adult. SCID means that she's not going to go to college.

Later, Maddy blows out the candle on her cake. When Mom asks, Maddy says she wished for world peace—that's more likely to come true than finding a cure for SCID. They begin a game of Phonetic Scrabble and Maddy loses spectacularly. Later, they watch their favorite movie, *Young Frankenstein*. They laugh at the same jokes they always do and Maddy reasons that it wasn't a horrible birthday.

4. STAYS THE SAME; LIFE IS SHORT

Maddy is reading on her **white** couch when Carla arrives the next morning and wishes her happy birthday in Spanish. Carla knows exactly how Maddy and Mom celebrated, and declares that it's sweet how close Mom and Maddy are. She notes that Rosa, her 17-year-old daughter, will barely talk to her. Maddy thinks that she can't imagine being like that with Mom. As Carla moves to take Maddy's blood pressure, she asks why Maddy is reading *Flowers for Algernon* again—it always makes her cry. Maddy says that she's certain that one day she won't cry when she reads it, and hopes that maybe things will change someday. Maddy tells the reader that *Flowers for Algernon* is about a mouse named Algernon, who dies.

5. ALIEN INVASION, PART 2; MADELINE'S DIARY

As Maddy reads, she hears a rumble outside. She immediately thinks of a spaceship, but when she hears beeping, she tries to tell herself that it's just a truck that's lost. However, the engine cuts off and after a minute, Maddy hears a woman say that they've made it to their new home. Carla stares at Maddy and Maddy thinks it's happening again. She includes a diary entry from a decade ago. She wrote then that the family in the house next door moved away, though the little boy resisted. Maddy had a dream that aliens kidnapped the family along with Mom and Carla, but they didn't take Maddy because they only wanted healthy people. She writes that she didn't tell Mom the dream. She told Carla, who hugged Maddy.

Even though Mom and Maddy are going through the motions of celebrating Maddy's birthday, Maddy implies that her birthday doesn't mean much for either of them except that Maddy is still alive to celebrate it. With this, the novel begins to suggest that traditional coming of age milestones, like turning 18, are relatively meaningless for Maddy. While she may now have the right to exist as an adult in society, that right is relatively meaningless if Maddy cannot exercise it.



These descriptions give the impression that Maddy and Mom's relationship functions like a well-oiled machine. It doesn't change and it's comfortable and predictable. This sets the stage for major changes throughout the rest of the novel, as their relationship cannot stay this way forever as Maddy gets older.



While Maddy may be aghast that Carla and Rosa aren't on the best of terms right now, their relationship also reflects the fact that Rosa has the ability to move away from her mother and begin to develop her own identity, something that, in this case, comes with some strife and struggle. Maddy's inability to imagine what this is like speaks to her belief that nothing will ever change in her relationship with Mom—and suggests that Maddy's identity is wrapped up entirely in her relationship with her mom.



It's telling here that Maddy didn't feel comfortable telling Mom about her dream and told Carla instead. This begins to imply that even though Maddy insists that she and Mom are very close and there's nothing amiss about their relationship, she does, on some level, feel the need to keep things from Mom and do whatever she can to keep Mom from worrying. Carla, on the other hand, emerges as the adult figure in Maddy's life who's safe to be honest and vulnerable around, positioning Carla as a much better mentor for Maddy as Maddy begins to come of age.



6. THE WELCOME COMMITTEE; MY WHITE BALLOON

Maddy assures Carla that this won't be like last time and sweeps the curtains aside. The California sun is blinding at first, but then Maddy sees an older woman, an older man, a girl a little younger than she is, and finally, a tall, lean boy. He wears all black and moves with a graceful, gliding gait. The boy studies the house and then runs up the wall before dangling from a windowsill. The boy's mom praises him, but the father growls at him to stop doing that. Maddy feels breathless. The boy stands and meets Maddy's eyes. He smiles at Maddy, but she's so flustered she can only frown. That night, Maddy dreams that the house breathes with her. She fears that her breath will make her life explode.

Maddy's dream about breathing with the house situates her as being unhealthily connected to the house and everything it stands for—namely, Mom and their close relationship. When Maddy fears that her breath will explode her life, it suggests that she fears making any changes that might distance her from her house and the identity she assumes while she's in it. Though changing and being independent are normal parts of growing up, Maddy's unpleasant dream suggests that this is something unusually anxiety-inducing for her.



7. NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Maddy lists Olly's mom's schedule. She spends her morning on the porch, kisses Olly's dad goodbye, gardens and discards cigarette butts, and in the evenings, begs Kara and Olly to do their chores before Olly's dad gets home. Kara, meanwhile, smokes cigarettes in the garden and spends her days on the phone before beginning her chores minutes before her dad gets home. Olly's dad goes to work during the day and yells at his family for about three hours after his third drink of the evening. Olly's schedule is unpredictable.

The observations Maddy makes about Olly's family paint a picture of abuse and fear. Kara's smoking habit, if not a direct reaction to her dad's abusive behavior, is at least not something her family is supportive of, given the way her mom spends her day cleaning the butts up out of the yard—presumably so Olly's dad doesn't see them.



8. I SPY

Maddy says that Olly's mom and Kara call the boy Olly, but Olly's dad calls him Oliver. Olly's bedroom is almost directly across from Maddy's, and he seldom closes the blinds. He sometimes sleeps until noon, and other days he's already gone when Maddy starts watching. Olly also spends time on the roof, but Maddy can't figure out what he's doing there. The only decoration in his room is a movie poster for *Jump London*, which is about parkour, or street gymnastics. Maddy becomes increasingly curious the more she watches.

That Olly's dad calls him by his full name suggests that his dad has expectations for him that Olly's mom and Kara don't share, which certainly contributes to the abuse Olly suffers at home. The fact that Olly's only poster is about parkour, when Olly's dad so clearly dislikes parkour, implies that Olly is already striking out and figuring out who he is despite his dad's wishes.



9. MENTEUSE

Maddy sits down for Friday night dinner, which is a weekly special occasion in her house with French food. It's so special that even Carla eats with Maddy and Mom. Mom always makes cassoulet, a French stew and Maddy's dad's favorite food, but because of Maddy's allergies, it only has white beans and broth in it. As Mom serves, she asks if Maddy is doing okay—she's late on her architecture assignment for Mr. Waterman. Mom asks if Maddy wants a new tutor. This surprises Maddy, as she didn't know Mom was even paying attention. Maddy insists that she lost track of time, but Mom asks if this is about the new neighbors. Maddy has never lied to Mom before, but she thinks she has to. She tells Mom she's too engrossed in a book.

A few minutes later, when Maddy isn't eating as quickly as usual, Mom worriedly feels her forehead. The doorbell rings, an unusual occurrence. Mom goes to get it and instructs Maddy and Carla to stay put. Maddy, however, assures Carla that Mom won't let anyone pass the air lock—a sealed room around the front door, so hazards don't get into the house—and Carla relents. Olly tells Mom that Olly's mom sent a Bundt cake, but it's guaranteed to be inedible. Mom apologizes, but says she can't accept it. Olly asks if Maddy is around, which shocks Maddy. Mom closes the door on Olly and steps through the airlock, looking pained. She apologizes and Maddy thinks of how hard it must be for Mom to be locked up with her ill daughter. After dinner, Maddy goes to her room to think about what Bundt cake tastes like.

10. PIÈCE DE REJECTION

Maddy heads for her window and watches Olly's dad grab the Bundt cake from Kara and throw it at Olly. Olly dodges and the cake lands unharmed, but the plate shatters. Olly's dad shouts for Olly to clean it up and slams into the house. Maddy watches Olly take his time sweeping it up and take the Bundt up to the roof. When she sees Olly in his room, Maddy decides she's done hiding. She turns on her light and steps to her window. Olly is at his window, too, but he doesn't smile. He just pulls the blinds closed.

The revelation that Mom is keeping tabs on Maddy's progress in school flags for Maddy and the reader that Mom is probably keeping an eye on more than just Maddy's schooling. It's important to note that for Maddy, realizing that Mom is watching her like this doesn't make her want to be truthful—in fact, it does the opposite and brings about Maddy's first lie. Maddy's desire to not share her crush with Mom is entirely understandable, and it suggests that Maddy is already beginning to move away from Mom and their close relationship.



Again, though Mom seems genuinely sorry that Maddy doesn't get to experience friends, neighbors, and the outside world, it's also a mark of Maddy's compassion that she dwells on what Mom gave up to care for her. Even though compassion is a good thing, however, it's worth keeping in mind that Maddy's is tinged with guilt—seems to feel worse for Mom's situation than she does about her own even though she's the one with a life-threatening illness. This begins to expose the possibility that Maddy and Mom's dynamic isn't as innocent as it might seem—Mom may have, purposefully or not, trained Maddy to think about Mom instead of herself.



Seeing that Olly's dad's abuse includes his children continues to show that Olly doesn't live in a safe environment. In a sense, Olly lives in the exact opposite environment as Maddy does: while her home is, in theory, the safest place she can be, Olly's home is dangerous and violent. Maddy's choice to reveal herself suggests that she's becoming more comfortable engaging with the outside world.



11. SURVIVAL; LIFE IS SHORT

A week later, Carla asks how long Maddy is going to mope. Maddy denies that she's moping, but she is—Olly's rejection made her feel like a kid and reminded her why she stopped paying attention to the outside world. Now, however, it's hard to get back to her routine when she's begun to notice the birds, the wind, and the sunlight again. Carla points out that Maddy has been reading the same five pages of [Lord of the Flies](#) for days, but Maddy insists that it's a terrible book about awful boys. Finally, Maddy admits that she just wants the new neighbors to go away, as it was easier to be sick before they moved in.

Firmly, Carla says that Maddy is going to be fine. She was sure when she started caring for Maddy that Maddy would get depressed living like this, but Maddy has done a fantastic job of keeping herself happy and occupied. Carla continues that Rosa could learn from Maddy—she has everything Carla can give, but thinks she has nothing. Maddy tells the reader that a concise summary of [Lord of the Flies](#) would simply be that boys are savages.

Maddy's explanation makes it very clear that she's done everything in her power to come to terms with her situation, and that entails simply going through life as though the outside world doesn't exist. Reading is, in this sense, the only way that Maddy is able to connect with the outside world in a meaningful way, given that books seem to give her a pleasant outlet in a way that looking out the window doesn't right now.



Though the novel overwhelmingly comes down on the side of insisting that firsthand experience is superior to vicarious experiences in almost all ways, what Carla says about Rosa insists that there's still something to be said for growing up as Maddy has: accepting what one has is, in a sense, the key to happiness.



12. FIRST CONTACT

Two nights later, Maddy is feeling better as she reaches the end of [Lord of the Flies](#). She ignores the first ping at her window, but gets up when she hears more objects hit it. Olly's window is open, the lights are off, and the Bundt sits on his windowsill wearing googly eyes. The cake trembles and falls to the ground. Maddy gasps at the suicidal cake and a spotlight illuminates it on the ground, miraculously still intact. Maddy catches sight of Olly's gloved hand, but he doesn't show himself.

The following drama with the Bundt cake functions to pique Maddy's interest in Olly and in the outside world. In doing so, it begins to plant the seed that Maddy is actually missing out on fun, meaningful, and entertaining things by remaining in her house all the time.



13. NIGHT TWO; NIGHT FOUR; NIGHT FIVE; NIGHT SIX; NIGHT SEVEN

The next night, Maddy ignores the pings at the window. By the fourth night, however, her curiosity gets the better of her. She peeks outside to see the Bundt on Olly's windowsill, covered in bandages. The next night, the Bundt sits on a table with a martini, cigarettes, and a pill bottle labeled with a skull and crossbones. Maddy wonders if it's going to commit suicide again. The following night, the Bundt is arranged as though it's in the hospital receiving IV fluids. In a white jacket, Olly listens to the Bundt's heart and shakes his head solemnly at Maddy. Maddy doesn't want to look the next night, but she does. She sees Olly, dressed as a priest, performing the Bundt's last rites. Maddy laughs and Olly writes his email address and an apology on his window.

Olly's performance shows Maddy that it's okay for her to feel curious about him and want to get to know him, as he clearly reciprocates and wants to engage with Maddy in some way. This is a major coming-of-age moment for Maddy, as this is the first time in her life that she's had a relationship with someone other than Mom and Carla—even if it is happening through protective glass. This becomes the first step as Maddy starts to move away from Mom and figure out who she is in the presence of other people.



14. FIRST CONTACT, PART TWO

In an email, Maddy introduces herself, says that Olly has nothing to apologize for, and asks what the Bundt is made of. Olly declares that Maddy is a terrible spy if she doesn't already know his name. He suggests that the cake is made of rocks. In response, Maddy sends a joke recipe for a Bundt cake made of cement, sawdust, and paint thinner. She insists she's not a spy.

Choosing to email Olly is another major step for Maddy, as this is the first time she's ever spoken with someone her own age. As they talk, Maddy gets to start to figure out who she wants to be without the influence of Mom or Carla.



15. FIRST CONTACT, PART THREE

On Wednesday evening, Olly sees that Maddy is online on an instant messaging system. He messages her, complimenting her Bundt cake recipe and asking what Maddy's middle initial stands for. Maddy replies that it's for Furukawa; Mom is Japanese American and Maddy's dad was African American. Olly declares that they're going to be friends. On Thursday, Maddy peppers Olly with questions about where he's from, his all-black clothing, and his tattoo. He admits that he's from the East Coast and shaved his head, which is why he wears a hat.

Keep in mind that for Maddy, everything that Olly tells her about himself is going to be very new and different, given her upbringing. In this sense, it's important to remember that this type of human connection is entirely new for Maddy, while it's likely not so new for Olly. Maddy's ability to communicate effectively with Olly does suggest that her books have done a reasonable job of preparing her to talk to others like this.



On Friday, Olly asks Maddy if she's grounded. All evidence points to that: she logged off in a hurry last night and never leaves the house. Maddy says that she's not grounded, but she can't leave the house. Olly asks if she's a mysterious ghost and then suggests that she might be a fairytale princess. They discuss the issues they have with Cinderella and Rapunzel's stories, but Maddy insists she's not a princess and doesn't need to be rescued. She asks if Olly thinks she's pretty, and Olly says she is.

Maddy's unwillingness to tell Olly the truth about her condition right away, as well as her insistence that she doesn't need rescuing, all read as elements of what little independence Maddy has right now. Even though she's undeniably dependent on Mom in many ways, she's unwilling to play into the idea that she should be dependent on anyone else at this point.



The next night, Olly asks Maddy why she doesn't log on until after 8. Maddy explains that she's not alone until then, but refuses to say more. On Sunday night, Olly suggests a game in which Maddy has to list five favorite things, like books or vices. Maddy says that [The Little Prince](#) is her favorite book, but she doesn't have any vices. Olly gives his answers to the same list and says his favorite vice is stealing silverware and that [Lord of the Flies](#) is his favorite book. Maddy insists they can't be friends because of this, but Olly maintains that [Lord of the Flies](#) tells truths about human nature. On Monday, Olly asks if Maddy is grounded because she's pregnant.

Because Olly has grown up in the outside world, it's possible that he's seen more of the kind of human nature explored in [Lord of the Flies](#) than Maddy has. This begins to suggest that because Maddy never has the opportunity to leave the house and explore the world herself, her books can only do so much as she never has the opportunity to apply the things she learns from them to real-world situations.



On Tuesday, Maddy asks Olly if he's okay and why Olly's dad was so angry. Olly insists that this is his secret. The next night, neither of them can sleep, so they message each other at 3:30 a.m. They list more favorites and Olly grouches that every girl loves Mr. Darcy from [Pride and Prejudice](#), even Kara. They share their eye colors and then their favorite forms of poetry. Olly offends Maddy by saying he loves limericks, which Maddy insists makes him a heathen. She loves haikus, which Olly declares are just less fun limericks.

The next day, they discuss Olly's love of math, which Maddy finds surprising given Olly's athleticism. He explains that he used to be a mathlete, but Olly's dad made him quit to play football and be more manly. He says that now, he's bigger, older, and harder to bully. On Friday, Maddy asks if Olly's mom is okay, since she saw what happened earlier. Olly says she is, but this isn't the first or the last time his dad has lashed out. At Olly's request, Maddy tells him a bad joke to take his mind off of things. Over the weekend, Maddy admits that she's homeschooled and finally shares that she's too sick to leave the house. Olly points out that most national spelling bee finalists are homeschooled and then asks Maddy to come to the window so they can see each other.

16. ASTRONAUT ICE CREAM

Maddy is putting her finishing touches on her model for architecture class. She designed an outdoor shopping/dining center in her favorite style, which is art deco. Carla calls that Mr. Waterman, Maddy's tutor, is here. This is only the third time Maddy has met him, and Maddy suspects that Mom let him come this time because she still feels bad about turning Kara and Olly away. It's a pain to come see Maddy, since visitors have to undergo a physical exam and be decontaminated for an hour.

Mr. Waterman bustles in and happily greets Maddy. He never looks at Maddy with pity and loves architecture, which makes Maddy love him. She thinks that she'd be an architect if she were going to be anything when she grows up. Mr. Waterman inspects her model and praises her handiwork. He looks for her **astronaut**, which she hides in every model she makes. The astronaut is sitting in a diner surrounded by food, and Mr. Waterman asks how the astronaut will eat any of it through his helmet. Maddy hadn't considered that the astronaut would eat anything.

Though sharing the truth of the abuse with Maddy is Olly's choice, choosing not to be open with her also means that Olly doesn't get any outside perspectives on his situation—perspectives that might, in an ideal world, help him find the motivation or assistance to get out of the abusive situation in the first place.



This passage confirms that Olly's dad holds unreasonable expectations for his son, which likely contributes at least in part to why he abuses Olly. Letting Maddy in on what goes on in his home, meanwhile, helps Olly connect with Maddy and also helps him truly realize that what's happening at home isn't okay. His acceptance that Maddy is sick and homeschooled, meanwhile, shows that Olly is just as compassionate as Maddy is, and doesn't see her illness as a barrier to them having a relationship.



Designing this shopping center is another way for Maddy to experience the outside world from the comfort and safety of her own home. However, it's worth considering that because Maddy has never been in a shopping center like this, her design probably has a number of issues that simply aren't visible to her—another consequence of never experiencing the outside world.



The astronaut is a symbol for Maddy and how she moves through the world. Like the astronaut, Maddy doesn't consider that she might ever be able to eat food from the outside or experience the world through anything but her sanitized home or through her books. Mr. Waterman's comment suggests that this kind of oversight is something that comes with Maddy's illness and means that she'll have a far more difficult time than others being an architect as an adult.



17. EVERYTHING'S A RISK

Carla smiles knowingly at Maddy and sings “Take a Chance on Me” by ABBA under her breath. As Maddy tries to eat lunch (she’s never hungry anymore), she tabs to her email while Carla isn’t looking. She has 13 emails from Olly. Maddy catches Carla’s eye, insists she’s not looking at anything, and then lies that she’s watching a cat video. This is a mistake; Carla loves cat videos and starts to come over. Maddy says that this is a bad video—the cat dies. Carla stares at Maddy in shock and then begins to laugh. She laughs that Maddy is awful at keeping secrets, says that she always knows when teen girls are up to no good, and asks why Maddy didn’t tell her that she has a crush on Olly. Maddy says that she didn’t want Carla to worry about her getting sad, and insists that she won’t.

Though Maddy does try to keep her crush a secret from Carla at first, it’s telling that she does eventually feel comfortable sharing with Carla that she likes Olly. This again shows that Carla has put herself in a position where she’s a much safer adult for Maddy to talk to. This does suggest that Carla is doing something right here, while Mom is missing out on a crucial part of connecting with her daughter by making Maddy feel as though she has to lie to Mom about Olly.



18. FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER; TWO HOURS LATER; TEN MINUTES AFTER THAT

Fifteen minutes later, Maddy suggests that Olly could come for a visit. Carla insists that all teens try to get as much as possible, and refuses with a laugh. Maddy tries to convince Carla that Olly could get decontaminated, but Carla insists that Maddy is crazy.

Even asking that Olly visit is a huge step for Maddy, as it shows that she’s somewhat willing to let herself want things from the outside world now that she’s seen how fun connecting with Olly can be.



19. LATER STILL

Maddy begs Carla again to let Olly visit, but Carla says flatly that they can’t always get what they want. Maddy knows this is something she must say to Rosa all the time. As Carla leaves for the day, she says she hates telling Maddy no. Hurriedly, Maddy says that Olly could get decontaminated and sit far away from her for 15 minutes. Carla points out that Mom won’t allow it, but Maddy says they don’t have to tell her. Disappointed, Carla asks if it’s really so easy for girls to lie to their mothers.

Carla likely recognizes that Maddy doesn’t feel comfortable letting Mom in on this—and that wanting to keep this quiet is a normal part of Maddy’s development. The point here isn’t necessarily that Maddy is lying to Mom; it’s that she’s at a point where gaining experience feels more important than remaining truthful with someone who won’t be thrilled with a perfectly normal thing that Maddy wants to do.



20. TO THOSE WHO WAIT

Two days later, Carla sternly tells Maddy that she can’t touch Olly. Maddy asks if Olly is really already here and decontaminated, and Carla replies that he’s in the sunroom. Maddy fidgets and Carla tells Maddy to fix herself up. Maddy asks why Carla changed her mind. When Carla says that Maddy deserves something, Maddy realizes that this is how Rosa gets what she wants. Maddy rushes to the mirror. She likes to think that she looks like an equal split of Mom and Maddy’s dad, with warm brown skin and big wavy hair. She experiments with smiling and asks Carla if she’s sure this will be okay. Carla says that everything, including doing nothing, is a risk. Maddy studies her familiar **white** room and thinks that Olly is the exact opposite of this space—and a huge risk.

Carla again seems to recognize that Maddy is at a place in her development where she’s increasingly curious about experiencing everything the world has to offer—and that having a crush on a boy isn’t abnormal or bad at all. When Maddy situates Olly as being the exact opposite of her white room, it suggests that she’s starting to see that her identity is entangled in the house itself, and that she sees herself as similarly alienated from the outside world. Anything that’s not already in the house is a threat to this old identity.



21. FUTURE PERFECT; OLLY

Maddy sends Olly an email just before they meet, saying that their meeting will have been perfect. She describes the sunroom. It's almost all glass and is decorated like a tropical rainforest, with fake tropical plants, a stream, and aged **white** wicker furniture. Some days it makes Maddy feel like she's Outside, but other days it feels like being in a fishbowl. When Maddy enters, Olly is halfway up the rocky wall and grabs at a banana leaf. They both say that it's not real at the same time. Maddy asks if Olly is going to stay there and invites him to come down. He does and stands still. Maddy thinks he's trying to not spook her.

Olly invites Maddy to actually enter the room. Maddy feels like she knows him after all their messaging, but having him in front of her feels different. He's tall and she thinks his skin would be warm to the touch. Maddy blurts that Olly is different than she expected, and Olly insists that this is true—he's sexier. They joke with each other about Olly's muscles and Maddy's freckles, but then an awkward silence falls. Maddy thinks that Olly's eyes are the exact **blue** color he said they were, but seeing them in person is an entirely different experience.

They discuss the room's furnishings, and then Olly asks how long Maddy has been sick and what would happen if she went outside. Maddy says she's been sick her whole life and jokes that she'd explode. She explains that she can't not joke about it, and she tries to not want things she can't have. Olly asks where Maddy wants to go most. Maddy first says outer space, but then says she wants to see the **ocean**. Olly offers to describe the ocean, so Maddy asks if being in it is like being in a giant bathtub. Olly says it isn't: the ocean is scary, cold, and deadly. He says he doesn't hate it, but it's simultaneously beautiful and murderous. There's nothing to drink and if the waves suck a person in, the ocean doesn't care.

They laugh for a bit and Maddy asks Olly to do one of his tricks. He starts to say that they'll need to go outside, but then apologizes. Harshly, Maddy tells him that he can't feel sorry for her. Olly effortlessly falls into a handstand, closes his eyes, and lifts one arm. Maddy studies his exposed stomach and tells him he can stop. He does a backflip, sits down, and asks Maddy why she wants to go to outer space. She says she wants to see the world, but Carla enters and shrewdly asks if they touched. Olly stares at Maddy, making her blush, and assures Carla they didn't touch. Maddy is sure that she'll spontaneously combust.

Even though the description of the sunroom paints a picture of a beautiful and relaxing room, it nevertheless still isn't real and cannot provide the kind of joy or relaxation that an actual tropical rainforest might be able to. This again shows how contrived Maddy's home is, and how ineffective it is at actually making her feel as though she can have genuine experiences from the safety of inside.



Maddy's observation about Olly's blue eyes is a defining moment for her, as she begins to understand that reading about something, either over instant messenger or in books, is in no way a substitute for experiencing the real thing. Reading about eligible bachelors in books is also not the same as having Olly in front of her, which is why she's thinking about how warm his skin might be—nothing in a book can prepare her for what it might actually feel like to touch him.



Olly's description of the ocean does much the same thing as Maddy's observations of Olly's eyes, in that it shows her that her photos and videos of the ocean cannot accurately help her understand what the ocean is like. Her interest in the ocean comes to represent a much broader interest in life in general, while Olly's insistence that people must respect the ocean indicates that life isn't just wondrous and beautiful. Rather, life also has the ability to destroy a person.



For Maddy, seeing the world from outer space is the only way she thinks she'll be able to make up for all the things she's missed over the last 18 years. This, however, also shows that what Maddy thought she wanted to see was the land itself, while her attraction to Olly suggests that she's actually just as interested, if not more interested, in gaining experience by getting close to the people who inhabit the outside world.



22. DIAGNOSIS

Maddy creates a fake webdoc.com entry for a disease she calls Hysterical Abdominal Rhopalocera, or having monarch butterflies in one's stomach. It affects at least one teen girl every 30 seconds and symptoms include nausea, light-headedness, elevated heart rate, and the inability to focus. It's triggered by contact with a romantic interest, though acute sufferers can experience episodes just by thinking about their crush.

Imagining this new disease is a safe way for Maddy to try to make sense of the new feelings she's experiencing after seeing Olly. In this sense, it reflects her still sheltered life while showing that she's having to come up with new ways of understanding what she's experiencing.



23. PERSPECTIVES

Maddy firmly believes that she's sick the next morning, but Carla checks her vital signs and insists that Maddy is just lovesick. Maddy insists she can't be in love, since there's no point. Carla says in a serious tone that love isn't pointless: just because Maddy can't experience *everything* doesn't mean that she shouldn't experience *anything*, and doomed love is a normal part of being alive. For most of the morning, Maddy is too distracted to do anything. By afternoon, Maddy decides that Carla is right, but she's just "in like," not "in love." She sees Olly everywhere and also pictures herself floating above the earth, where walls don't obscure her view. For the first time in a long time, Maddy wants more.

Carla's insistence that love and loss are a part of life go against everything Maddy has grown up knowing. Growing up so sheltered means that she's never had to reckon with crushes that didn't pan out, as many teens do before they're her age. Further, in terms of Maddy's health, Carla also has a point—being in love or experiencing heartache aren't going to kill Maddy, like going into the outside world might.



24. WONDERLAND; LIFE IS SHORT

Wanting more scares Maddy, so she sends Olly an email saying that she's busy and needs to get some sleep over the weekend. She unplugs her computer and hides it. Maddy spends Saturday on calculus, which she hates and isn't good at. When Carla asks, Maddy refuses to say anything about Olly. By Sunday, Maddy feels that her inbox must be overflowing with emails from Olly. She reads *Alice in Wonderland* on her **white** couch and feels like she's trying to not get lost, just like Alice. Maddy thinks of how badly she wanted to go outside and play with kids when she was eight. She knows now that wanting just leads to more wanting, so she doesn't check her email. Maddy's review of *Alice in Wonderland* is that the Queen of Hearts is someone to watch out for.

Maddy's fear is entirely understandable, given that the last time she expressed interest in leaving the house and seeing the world, all she got was heartache. This makes it clear that even if heartache isn't something that's going to kill Maddy in the literal sense, it's still something uncomfortable that, given her comfortable upbringing, she feels compelled to do everything in her power to avoid. Conceptualizing falling in love with Olly as getting lost makes it very clear that Maddy is out of her element, even if she's read books about romance before.



25. MAKES YOU STRONGER

On Monday, Maddy has no emails from Olly in her inbox. She insists it doesn't bother her, but she refreshes her email multiple times per second as Carla walks in. Carla asks if Maddy found another dead cat video, but Maddy admits that Olly didn't email her all weekend. Carla looks nonplussed and asks if Maddy emailed him. As Carla takes Maddy's vitals, Maddy explains that she asked Olly to not write and asks Carla how ridiculous she's being. Maddy insists that she likes Olly too much, but Carla suggests that it's silly for Maddy to lose a friend over a "little bit of heartache." Maddy thinks that in all she's read about heartache, it's never just little. Carla assures Maddy that this will pass, and that Olly is too cute to ignore. She insists that love won't kill Maddy.

The differences in how Carla talks about heartache and how Maddy conceptualizes future heartache speak to the generational and experiential differences between the two. Carla likely recognizes that any heartache Maddy might experience will pass, while Maddy is inexperienced and only has her books to go off. While Maddy doesn't go into great detail about the contents of her library, her views on the matter imply that she doesn't have literary models for recovering from heartache successfully.



26. NO YES MAYBE

That night, Maddy gets on instant messenger and apologizes for her email. She asks if Olly is upset with her and explains that she sent it because she got scared. She accuses Olly of not writing, but Olly points out that she asked him not to write. They discuss why they love books and math. Maddy insists that it's possible to find the meaning of life through books, but Olly suggests that life is meaningless. Maddy proposes the solution to their problem: just being friends. Olly agrees, but says that Maddy can't check out his muscles or eyes, and they joke that he can't check out Maddy's hair and freckles.

Maddy and Olly's decision to just be friends mirrors, in many ways, Maddy's sanitized existence: while she knows there's more out there (and while it's clear to Maddy, Olly, and the reader that Maddy and Olly are attracted to each other), she nevertheless feels as though it's safer to pretend that the outside world doesn't exist.



27. TIME

Carla makes Maddy and Olly wait a week before seeing each other so that they can make sure he won't activate any of Maddy's triggers. The week seems to drag on forever. Maddy devises techniques to pass the time, such as measuring shadows, watching glue dry, and rearranging her books.

That Carla is willing to let Olly visit again shows that Carla understands how important it is for Maddy's development to have the opportunity to interact with someone like Olly, unsupervised and on her own terms.



28. MIRROR, MIRROR

At the end of the week, Maddy tries to not be too giddy. Carla watches Maddy try to choose what to wear, which isn't something Maddy has ever thought about much. She only owns **white** tee shirts, white Keds, and **blue** jeans in various styles. After dressing, she wonders if white is her best color and decides to buy a T-shirt in every color to see what her best color really is. Maddy asks if Mom already left and changes her shirt for something to do. She wishes she could talk to Mom about this. She'd ask why she gets breathless and if this is how Mom felt about Maddy's dad at the beginning. She tries to tell herself that all of this will be okay and that it's not bad to lie to Mom like this. She tells herself that love can't kill her.

The white shoes and T-shirts parallel the white house, and similarly connote sanitization and a lack of individual expression. In terms of her identity, Maddy is very wrapped up in the house and all it stands for (that is, her illness and her relationship with Mom). Wanting to buy clothes in other colors shows that Maddy wants to experiment with her identity and how she portrays herself to the world, something that by necessity means that she's going to begin to separate from Mom.



29. FORECAST

Maddy finds Olly on the wall again and sits on the couch. He comments on her choice to wear shoes and when Maddy says she has nine pairs of the same shoes, he insists she has no right to complain about his clothing choices. The air filters come on and when Olly asks, Maddy explains how it works and says that the settlement paid for it. She quickly adds that a trucker killed Maddy's dad and brother in a car accident, and settled with Mom. Maddy says she doesn't remember them and struggles with how to miss them. Olly asks if Maddy ever wonders what things would be like if she could change one thing, something Maddy has been thinking a lot about recently.

Olly suggests that people aren't really unique; instead, they're made up of outputs and inputs, like a formula. He says that he thinks that if he can pin down one or two important inputs, he can figure a person out. Maddy asks how he'll figure out which input to change. Olly says that it'd be easy to make things worse, but he suggests that if he *could* figure it out, he could fix things before they got messed up. He seems frustrated and embarrassed and says that chaos theory states that it's impossible to do this. Maddy says she already knew that—she learned that people are unpredictable from books. They laugh and Maddy focuses on Olly's dimple, which she's not supposed to do. She knows she's going to fall in love with him.

Learning Maddy's family history shows that Maddy's present is one informed by family trauma in the past. Both Maddy and Mom must live with the ghosts of Maddy's dad and brother, as the safety precautions in the house are a constant reminder that loss could easily happen again due to Maddy's fragile health. That Olly's closet is similarly limited to Maddy's suggests that, like her, he's extremely caught up in his current situation and doesn't have the time or energy to experiment with who he might be outside of this situation.



That Olly spends so much time thinking about how he could change things suggests that he also lives with possible regrets and trauma in his past. His desire to change the past, however, suggests that he's ignoring the person he might become in the future by learning simply to deal with what happened to him. When both Olly and Maddy can come to similar conclusions about unpredictability from books and math, it shows that they can both come up with effective ways of coping with life in a theoretical way when their literal realities are too complex to make sense of.



30. MADELINE'S DICTIONARY; SECRETS

Maddy defines *obsession* as acute and justifiable interest in someone or something that's very interesting. She explains that spending all night instant messaging Olly is catching up with her. She's fallen asleep during two movie nights, which makes Mom worry—Maddy is more likely to get sick if she doesn't get enough sleep. Maddy talks with Olly until two a.m. instead of three a.m. that night. She thinks that it's odd to not talk to Mom about Olly and notices that she and Mom are drifting apart. This isn't because Olly is replacing Mom, it's just because Maddy is keeping a secret for the first time.

When Maddy identifies that she and Mom are growing apart because she's keeping a secret, it makes it very clear that Mom doesn't support Maddy having privacy about things like this. This suggests that if the truth does come out, it won't go over well—Maddy is probably correct that if she were to share anything about Olly with Mom, Mom would be hurt and upset that Maddy has a life outside of their relationship. This, again, signals an unhealthy dynamic to Mom and Maddy's relationship—even if Maddy can't see this herself.



31. THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING; NUMEROLOGY

Maddy places an order for new tee shirts and shoes. She buys six shirts, each in a different **color**, and a pair of blue shoes. Maddy makes a list of various measurements: it took Olly's dad eight minutes to start yelling last night. He made four complaints about the overcooked roast, and Olly's mom apologized six times. He called Kara a "goddamn freak" for wearing black nail polish twice, and it took Olly's mom three minutes to take the nail polish off. Olly's dad accused someone of drinking his whiskey five times and reminded everyone that he's the smartest person and the only moneymaker in the house several times. Later, it takes Maddy five jokes to make Olly feel better over instant messenger. She sees four cigarettes in the garden this morning and though she can't see any bruises on Olly's mom, she's not sure how many she *can't* see.

Again, purchasing shirts and shoes in bright colors is a way for Maddy to start to discover who she is when she's not wearing white and when she's not part of the house mentally. Keeping tabs on Olly's family again allows Maddy to understand the kind of abusive situation that Olly comes from. Her comment about the bruises on Olly's mom that she can't see suggests that the abuse is probably worse than a bystander can pick up on, while also suggesting that some of those bruises might not be physical—Olly's mom could have emotional bruises as well that make it even harder for her to leave.



32. OLLY SAYS

Olly isn't on the wall the next day. Both he and Maddy sound sleep-deprived and Olly admits that he wishes he could disappear and leave his parents. Maddy wants to comfort him, but she thinks that words aren't enough. This is why people touch. Olly asks why it feels like he's always known Maddy. Maddy feels the same way. Olly says the world can change in a moment, that no one but possibly Maddy is innocent, and that Olly's dad hasn't always been this way.

The realization that touch is an important part of the human experience shows that as Maddy and Olly grow closer, Maddy is learning that her life inside is unfulfilling and doesn't offer her a full range of experiences. Wanting to comfort Olly, meanwhile, also speaks to how close they're becoming as a result of Olly being truthful about what's going on at home.



33. CHAOS THEORY; OLLY'S FORMULA

Olly is 10 years old. He sits with his dad at the breakfast bar in their New York City penthouse apartment. His dad makes hot chocolate from scratch and tops Olly's mug with a dollop of homemade whipped cream. Olly tries to figure out what kind of mood his dad is in, as his moods have been worse than normal. His dad says that the world isn't deterministic. Olly loves when his dad talks to him like he's a grown-up, even though he's not sure what his dad means. This has been happening a lot since his dad was suspended from work. Olly's dad says this means that one thing doesn't always lead to another, and that a person can do everything right and still end up in a horrible place. He curses as he says this.

Notice how tuned-in Olly is to his dad's moods and what his dad says. In many ways, this mirrors how attentive Maddy is to her mom's moods—and because of this, it adds more evidence to the possibility that Maddy's mom isn't as benign or supportive of a force as Maddy thinks she is. However, also note that Olly seems to trust his dad to talk to him like an adult, and that he enjoys the attention. This suggests that at least at one point, Olly idolized his dad and wanted to please him, much like Maddy wants to please Mom.



A few weeks before, Olly's mom explained to Olly and Kara that Olly's dad would be home for a while. Olly heard his parents talking about fraud and an investigation, but he isn't sure what any of it means. He does feel as though it means that his dad loves him, Kara, and Olly's mom less. Olly tries to become more loveable to compensate. The phone rings and Olly's dad answers it. At first, he uses his angry-relaxed voice, but he becomes purely angry and asks if they're really firing him. Olly feels angry on his dad's behalf and climbs down from his stool. His dad says that nobody will touch him after this. Olly wants to comfort his dad, but he's too afraid.

Olly's dad doesn't get violently drunk until a few months later. He spends his day yelling at financial news shows on television and in the afternoon, mixes vodka, whiskey, and gin in a tall glass. Olly watches his dad stir and remembers the day his dad got fired. He wonders if things would be different if he'd comforted his dad. Olly remembers his dad saying that one thing doesn't always lead to another, and thinks that no matter how much he wants to fix things, he can't. In a notebook, Maddy comes up with an equation of variables that might give Olly his answer.

34. A TALE OF TWO MADDYS; FREEDOM CARD

As Maddy watches *Mission: Impossible*, Carla says that Mom wants to know if Carla has noticed anything different about Maddy. Maddy ignores Carla and then flippantly asks if she has noticed anything. Carla pauses the movie and says that it was a mistake to let Maddy see Olly. She asks if Maddy canceled a movie night with Mom. Maddy thinks that her mom looked extremely hurt and disappointed, but she didn't want to wait until nine p.m. to talk to Olly. Carla says that Mom also thinks that Maddy is distracted and she's concerned that Maddy bought a lot of clothes. Maddy asks if Mom suspects, but Carla says this isn't the point—Mom is lonely. Carla forbids Maddy from seeing Olly again and says that once Olly goes back to school, he'll find a girlfriend.

Carla gets up to leave and Maddy asks if love really won't kill her. Carla says it won't, but it might kill Mom. She relents and agrees to let Maddy see Olly again. Maddy spends the next day alone. She can't decide if she's angry with Carla and she's suddenly worried that Mom might not want her to have any secrets. She knows that Mom isn't upset about the new clothes; rather, Mom is upset that Maddy didn't consult her and bought clothes that she didn't expect. Maddy does know that Mom isn't wrong, but she also thinks that it's normal to grow apart as she grows up. Regardless, Maddy still feels guilty since Mom has devoted her entire life to keeping her safe. Later, Maddy receives an email approving her application for a credit card.

The aside that Olly is trying to be more loveable to compensate for his dad's inattention illustrates another effect of abuse like this: Olly likely feels responsible at least in some sense for his dad's bad moods, if only because in his mind, he's not being loveable enough to keep his dad happy. Olly's inability to understand what's going on shows that it's not necessary to have the experience or the maturity to comprehend what's going on—Olly can still understand that this means something bad for him and his family.



Olly's musing about whether things would be different had he comforted his dad shows again that he thinks that this is, at least in part, his fault—even if his dad's discussion of determinism would also tell Olly that it's not his fault, since one thing (comforting his dad) doesn't always lead to another (a safe and happy parent).



Even if it appears that Carla is on Mom's side here, it's also worth keeping in mind that if Mom catches onto what's happening, she'd certainly put a stop to it. In this sense, Carla is trying to do Maddy a favor by impressing upon her that if she wants to keep secretly seeing Olly, she needs to make it look to Mom as though there's nothing amiss. While possibly kind in some sense, this also suggests that Carla doesn't believe Maddy will ever be able to break free from Mom, a reality that holds sinister implications for Maddy's adult life.



It's pretty clear that Mom indeed doesn't want Maddy to have secrets or change as she grows up, given her sense of betrayal that Maddy bought clothes without asking and that Maddy seemingly wants to spend more time alone. It's likely that Maddy knows that growing apart from a parent is normal in part because of what she's learned from books, which shows that there are meaningful things to learn from reading. But again, learning something from books isn't the same as experiencing it firsthand.



35. UPSIDE DOWN; SKIN

Maddy tries to convince Olly to teach her how to do a handstand. He stalks around and grumbles that she's not strong enough, but eventually relents. He instructs her to squat, shows her how to arrange her arms and hands, and tells her to shift forward. Maddy goes too far and somersaults, which makes Olly laugh. Olly demonstrates again, and for the next hour, Maddy tries and fails again and again. Finally, Olly tells Maddy to close her eyes and imagine she's in outer space. She tips forward and realizes she did it. Olly applauds her and then agrees to let her try again. Maddy wobbles and Olly steps forward to grab her ankles and steady her. This makes her feel like she's never been touched before.

Olly lets Maddy down and they remain standing close to each other. Maddy can't talk as Olly reaches out and grabs her finger. She puts her hand in his. Olly begins to tell her about how he sees her. Her freckles are beautiful, the way she chews her lips is adorable, and her hair looks like a cloud. He asks what Maddy sees, but she can't speak. They hold hands until they hear Carla coming. Maddy feels as though she's being "unmade." She tells the reader that the upper layers of a person's skin changes completely every two weeks. In two weeks, the skin of her hand won't remember Olly, but her brain will remember forever.

36. FRIENDSHIP

Around 8:00 that evening, Maddy logs onto the instant messenger and tells Olly that she told Mom she has lots of homework. She says that she's not sick, but she admits that she's a little worried. Olly apologizes for touching her, but Maddy insists that she wouldn't trade the touch for anything. She says she feels brand new, and Olly wonders what a kiss might do. Maddy points out that friends don't kiss, but Olly insists that they can if they're really good friends.

37. RESEARCH; KISSING PRIMERS 1, 2, 3

Maddy thinks of nothing but kissing. She's read about it and seen it in movies, but she's never thought about actually kissing someone. Because of her nerves, she insists that she and Olly should wait a few days before they see each other again. Maddy knows she should tell Carla about touching Olly, but she's afraid that Carla won't let Olly visit. She thinks that Olly is the only person she's never lied to. Two days after the touch, Maddy feels fine. She devises a pre-kiss checklist, which includes lip balm and practicing kissing on her hand, a pillow, and a gourd. She lists things that will create the proper atmosphere such as rain or a boom box. Then she lists the six steps of kissing.

To Maddy's credit, she hasn't been touched before in the way she's thinking of—she's only ever been touched by Mom and Carla, both of whom are touching Maddy to care for her, not because they're attracted to her like Olly is. That Maddy isn't really picking up on this again speaks to how sheltered she is, as it doesn't seem to have occurred to her that the experience of touching a person changes dramatically depending on one's relationship to them.



Choosing to hold hands with Olly represents a drastic step toward independence for Maddy, which is one of the reasons she suggests that she's being "unmade" here. In this sense, she's entering a phase in which she begins to break down her old identity as Mom's daughter and a sick teen, and begins to add other elements as she sees fit. All of this will ultimately propel her toward a more fully-formed adult identity.



Maddy's insistence that she wouldn't trade holding hands, even though she's afraid she might be ill, suggests that going forward, Maddy is gradually coming to the conclusion that meaningful experiences like these are worth the risk to her health. She's already learning that they open her world up to new possibilities, and that what she can experience firsthand is far more fulfilling than reading about it.



Just as with her webdoc.com article, Maddy's kissing primers and checklists are a way for her to try and make sense of her emotions and the desirable yet terrifying event in front of her. Again, this makes the case that these are perfectly effective ways for someone to deal with discomfort and uncertainty, but all the kissing primers in the world are still no substitute for actually kissing Olly and seeing what it's like to do so.



38. LIFE AND DEATH

Olly is on the couch when Maddy comes into the sunroom the next day. She feels compelled to be close to him, but she's uncertain. He compliments her **orange** shirt and asks if he should move. In response, Maddy sits down about a foot away from him. She takes his hand and they scoot in close to each other. Maddy feels her whole body light up and wonders how normal people keep from touching each other all the time. Olly pulls on Maddy's hand and kisses her gently. Maddy thinks he tastes like caramel and sunshine, though she's never tasted either. When they pull apart, she asks if it's always like this. He says it's never like this, and everything changes instantly.

That the kiss feels different for Olly, too, offers hope that as he and Maddy grow closer to each other, Olly will begin to look at the healthy relationship he has with Maddy and think critically about his parents' wildly unhealthy marriage. Note, too, that though Carla insists Maddy and Olly don't touch, she also doesn't supervise them and enforce the rule. This suggests that she knows full well that they're going to touch anyway, but feels it's a reasonable and expected risk for Maddy to take.



39. HONESTLY

That evening, Maddy tells Olly that she canceled movie night with Mom. Carla will be upset. Olly says that he's messing up Maddy's life and that they did a crazy thing, but Maddy tells him he's not doing anything wrong. He says he wants to protect her, but Maddy says she doesn't need protection. They both admit that they're not sorry they kissed.

The insistence that Maddy doesn't need Olly to protect her again speaks to Maddy's growing independence, as she's figuring out how to conduct herself around others. Not having someone close to her care for her is likely a new experience for her, and the risk only adds to the attraction.



40. OWTSYD

Maddy feels like the universe and her subconscious are conspiring against her: she and Mom are playing Phonetic Scrabble and Maddy is winning for the first time ever by playing words that sound like "outside," "freedom," and "secrets." Mom studies Maddy's face and Maddy feels guilty and selfish. She wants to be with Olly and feels herself becoming someone new whenever she's around him. Mom asks Maddy what's going on but before Maddy can lie, they hear a scream, yelling, and a slam from outside. When they hear someone scream "stop," they run to the window. Olly, Olly's mom, and Olly's dad are outside. Olly's dad drinks and tells Olly's mom to take the glass, but Olly won't let her. As Olly's mom steps forward, Olly's dad grabs at her.

That this abuse is taking place outside, not just behind closed doors, speaks to how confident Olly's dad feels that nobody is going to step in and stop things. He's secure in the knowledge that his family members can't stop him, and the neighbors won't step in either. This is one of the main reasons why he can continue to behave this way: even Olly standing up to his dad won't enough to show him that this kind of behavior won't be tolerated.



Olly separates his parents and tries to draw Olly's dad's attention away from Olly's mom. It works, and as Olly's dad punches at Olly, he falls off the steps and lands in a sprawl. Everyone waits for him to move and Olly's mom moves down to her husband. Olly's dad grabs his wife's hand and hauls himself up. As Olly rushes in to separate them again, his dad punches him twice in the stomach. Maddy and Olly's mom scream, and before Maddy knows what she's doing, she races outside and screams at Olly's dad to stop. It startles him enough to make him go inside. Olly looks pained, but as Mom grabs Maddy's arm, he fearfully tells her to go back inside.

That Maddy screaming at Olly's dad makes him stop shows that if someone else in the neighborhood were willing to intervene, things may improve at Olly's house—or at least, the abuse would stop taking place on the front lawn. Maddy's relationship with Olly is, at this point, strong enough to overpower any sense she has for her own safety, hence why she's able to leave the house without thinking to rush to Olly's defense. In this sense, Olly is truly helping Maddy to separate from the house and her mother's control.



Inside, Maddy insists that she's fine and dodges Mom's question of why she'd go outside to help a stranger. Mom realizes that Olly *isn't* a stranger as Maddy starts to shake, aware of what she did. Mom makes her shower and throws out her clothes. Maddy apologizes, but Mom asks how she could do this. Maddy isn't sure if she's talking about the lying or going outside, but she can't answer either way. Maddy goes upstairs and doesn't see Olly outside. She thinks that she doesn't remember what it was like to be outside, but she remembers the sight of Olly in pain and him telling her to go back.

Mom's controlling behavior looks less sinister here exactly because Maddy legitimately put herself in danger by going outside. In this sense, it seems that the more Maddy branches out and take risks, the more Mom will try to maintain her grip on Maddy. Maddy's focus on her memories of Olly outside show that she has truly shifted her thinking, and now she recognizes that life outside isn't just the inanimate world—it's the people in it that make it worth experiencing.



41. THE THIRD MADDY

Maddy is almost asleep when Mom opens her bedroom door and sits on Maddy's bed. Maddy pretends to be asleep. As Mom leans over to kiss Maddy's forehead, Maddy rolls away. Maddy isn't sure why she's being so cruel as she listens to Mom leave. Maddy sees a black rubber band on her nightstand and knows that Mom knows about Olly.

Though Maddy can certainly classify her behavior as cruel, it's also understandable that she's upset that Mom discovered her secret. She knows that Mom won't allow her to keep seeing Olly, and their close relationship doesn't mean Maddy can't be mad at her mom for taking him away from her.



42. LIFE IS A GIFT; MADELINE'S DICTIONARY

Maddy wakes up to yelling in her house. Mom berates Carla for letting a stranger into the house and refuses to let Maddy defend Carla. Mom fires Carla, and Maddy sobs as Carla packs her things. She gives Carla her copy of [Flowers for Algernon](#), and Carla tells Maddy to be brave. She reminds Maddy that life is a gift and that she should live it. Mom sees Carla out the door. Maddy defines *asymptote* as a wish that continually gets closer, but never comes true.

Carla's parting words to Maddy are a tacit endorsement of Maddy continuing to figure out who she is separate from Mom and her identity as a sick person—in other words, Carla suggests that Maddy should continue seeing Olly. In doing this, she again reads as an adult who's aware that teens naturally move away from their parents and toward their peers as they grow.



43. MIRROR IMAGE

Back in her room, Maddy pulls the curtains aside. Olly is at his window and when he notices Maddy, he looks afraid. He mimes typing, but Maddy shakes her head. Olly comes back with a marker and writes on his window, asking if Maddy is okay and grounded from the internet. He writes an apology, but Maddy shakes her head to convey that it's not his fault—this is just life.

Remember that Maddy has no reason to believe that seriously engaging with the outside world will end well, hence her insistence that this outcome is just the way things are. This also suggests that she still sees herself as subject to her mom's rule, and doesn't yet feel comfortable advocating for herself even though she's a legal adult.



44. SCHEDULE CHANGE; MORE THAN THIS

Maddy shows the reader her weekly calendar. Mom held interviews for a new nurse, and Nurse Janet is scheduled to start on Monday. One night, after a game of Honor Pictionary, Mom gathers their drawings. Their laughter is forced, but Mom says she's had a good time with Maddy. Maddy says nothing, but thinks that spending time with Mom is the only good thing that's happened. Mom says that she hired a nurse and asks Maddy if she understands why she's doing what she's doing, which includes taking away the internet and canceling Maddy's in-person lesson with Mr. Waterman. Maddy admits that she misses Carla, but Mom says she'd be a bad mom if she let Carla stay.

When Maddy says that Carla was her friend, Mom angrily spits that it was Carla's responsibility to keep Maddy safe, not introduce her to teenage boys or give Maddy false hope. It hits Maddy that Carla's gone, and she'll never see Olly or kiss him again. Mom asks Maddy to tell her about Olly. Maddy tells her everything and Mom says he sounds wonderful. Maddy asks for her internet privileges back, but Mom refuses—she doesn't want Maddy's heart to break. Thinking of Carla, Maddy notes that love can't kill her. Mom says that's not true and asks where Maddy heard that.

Maddy's aside that it's been good to spend time with Mom can be interpreted as Maddy's optimism and her genuine love of her mom, but it also suggests that Maddy doesn't see what Mom did in terms of banning Olly as especially bad or surprising. This shows that Maddy still doesn't legitimately believe that she has a life as an independent adult in front of her. Instead, she still feels as though she has to play by Mom's rules and receive care from her for the rest of her life.



Mom's insistence that Carla was wrong about love not being deadly suggests that in her mind, love is deadly. This likely came from losing her husband and son and suggests that she's still not entirely over the accident—and that she's possibly trying to protect Maddy from experiencing any similar heartbreak, even though Carla proposes that heartbreak is a normal and expected part of growing up.



45. NURSE EVIL

Maddy describes her new nurse as “an unsmiling despot with a nursing degree” named Janet Pritchert. She insists on being called Nurse Janet, and Maddy fixates on the fact that she's not Carla. By the afternoon Maddy decides to adjust her attitude, but then she finds a sticky note on her laptop. It has animals in nurse's hats on it and says that rules aren't meant to be broken, but Maddy can use the internet until three p.m. Maddy is certain that this is because Olly is in school now and doesn't get home until after three. Seeing that it's 2:30, Maddy feels offended that Nurse Janet assumed that she'd break the rules and decides to not improve her attitude after all.

The next day, Nurse Janet's sticky note reads that moping is unhealthy and says that she expects three smiles every day. Maddy and Olly settle into a new rhythm of instant messaging sporadically until three p.m., and after dinner, Olly and Maddy stare at each other through their windows. Mom refuses to budge on her position, and Nurse Janet leaves another note saying that life is a gift and shouldn't be wasted. Maddy remembers that Carla said the same thing. She wonders if she's wasting her life.

The cutesy animals on the sticky notes, combined with Nurse Janet's manner of treating Maddy, suggests that she's treating Maddy much more like a small child in need of firm rules and regulations than like a young adult who should be allowed some freedoms and opinions. That Mom hired Maddy reflects Mom's similar line of thinking, as keeping Maddy grounded like this ensures that Maddy will effectively remain a dependent teen forever.



When Nurse Janet gives Maddy the exact same advice that Carla did, it introduces Maddy to the idea that she can interpret what that means however she'd like. While Nurse Janet likely intends Maddy to take it as another request to smile and get over it, Maddy can choose to take it like Carla intended and can vow to actually live her life.



46. NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH #2

In the mornings, Olly writes “good morning” on his window, waits for Kara to finish smoking, and leaves for school. He gets home in the afternoons, writes that he’s home, and at night, writes questions for Maddy. Maddy waits for Olly in the morning joyfully, but despairs once he goes to school. She ignores Nurse Janet and does schoolwork during the day, and then waits for Olly to get home. She hangs out with Mom in the evenings, mimes answers to Olly’s questions, and despairs once more after he goes to bed.

Especially after holding Olly’s hand and kissing him, this kind of a relationship certainly feels less fulfilling to Maddy. This, too, begins to show her that it’s impossible to go back to the way things were before Olly moved in, and that it’s also unfulfilling to conduct a relationship like this. Instead, she should turn her attention to figuring out a way to see Olly in person again.



47. HIGHER EDUCATION

Olly messages Maddy when he can between classes. For his first week at school, he sends Maddy pictures of everything from his locker and the librarian to his math homework. Maddy wallows and settles into a grudging routine with Nurse Janet. She finds that she’s jealous of Olly’s life, even though he insists that high school isn’t a utopia. Things get difficult by the third week. Maddy misses him and who she is with him. One day, Maddy watches Olly get home from school. A girl gets out of the car, puts her hand on Olly’s shoulder, and smiles. Maddy is shocked and thinks of Mom—Mom knew this would happen. Maddy wants to size up this girl, but she knows it’s not really a competition if she can’t leave the house. Olly frowns at Maddy’s window, but Maddy pretends to not see.

Because Maddy doesn’t have any experience actually attending high school, it naturally feels like a utopia for her, especially since she loves reading and learning so much. When Olly comes home with this girl, Maddy is forced to reckon with the fact that her illness does indeed mean that she can’t truly engage with Olly in the world, no matter how much they message each other online or mime at each other through their windows. Her inability to experience things means it’s less likely that Olly will choose to be with her long-term, since that would require him to sacrifice important life experiences as well.



48. ALOHA MEANS HELLO AND GOOD-BYE, PART ONE

Maddy cancels another mother-daughter night, so Mom stops by her room. Maddy explains that she’s feeling mentally out of sorts as Mom feels her forehead. Mom says that she was a teenager once and found it very painful. Maddy is incensed that Mom thinks that she’s just lonely and angsty, so she snaps that she’s alone, not lonely. Mom flinches and asks if Maddy wants her to go, which makes Maddy feel bad for getting upset. Mom pulls out a framed photograph of herself, baby Maddy, Maddy’s dad, and Maddy’s brother. Mom is wearing a red strapless sundress, and to Maddy, looks like she belongs in an alternate universe. She’s never seen a photo of herself Outside before. Mom explains that it was taken in Maui, a month before the accident. Mom and Maddy say they love each other, and later, Maddy studies her baby face in the photo.

Maddy’s anger here is perfectly legitimate—she is utterly alone, not merely experiencing normal feelings of loneliness or angst. Her illness means that she doesn’t have any contact with other people, including Olly, that would make her feel less alone and would give her a more sympathetic outlet for her frustrations. The photograph introduces Maddy to the idea that once, she was a supposedly healthy baby with a future ahead of her. This photograph essentially allows Maddy to understand that her life could’ve taken a very different path, as it shows her how things were before everything changed dramatically.



49. LATER, 9:08 P.M.; MADAM, I'M ADAM

Olly is ready when Maddy gets to her window. He writes “lab partner,” and Maddy mimes that she’s not jealous. Maddy tells the reader that sometimes, she reads her favorite books from back to front. When she does this, characters come back to life, lose their way, and lovers turn into strangers. She thinks that if her life were a book, it would read the same forward and backward—until Olly came on the scene. Now, Maddy thinks that her life doesn’t make sense. She’s not sure how to go back to the way things were, when her books were enough. Everything she knows came from books, but she also knows that kisses in books will never be the same as kissing Olly.

Seeing Olly with the other girl makes it abundantly clear to Maddy that if she’s not able to experience anything out in the real world, she’s not truly living—being shut up inside but being alive isn’t the same as experiencing all the world has to offer, both good and bad. This is why she mentions that her books are no longer good enough. Though she doesn’t discount that her books taught her a lot about the world, next to Olly, they don’t come close to making her feel real and alive.



50. THE GLASS WALL

A week later, Maddy startles awake at three a.m. She can see that all the lights are on at Olly’s house and hears a door slam. Olly stumbles onto the porch like someone pushed him, and Maddy wants to comfort him. Olly waits until Olly’s mom joins him outside. She tries to touch him, but he jerks away. She goes back inside and as soon as he’s alone, Olly begins to cry. He looks at Maddy’s window and Maddy waves, but she realizes he can’t see her since her light is off. She runs to turn it on, but he’s gone when she gets back to the window. She feels like she’s never wanted to get out of her skin more.

Witnessing Olly crying impresses upon Maddy that in many ways, Olly is also quite lonely. He’s not fully able to trust his mom, since she won’t leave his dad and puts them all in danger because of this. He certainly can’t trust his dad, and it’s unclear how close Olly and Kara are given Maddy’s limited view of the family. Seeing this shows Maddy that she and Olly are more alike than she thought and propels her to her next, drastic choice.



51. THE HIDDEN WORLD

Maddy says that sometimes, the world reveals itself. She sits alone in the sunroom one late afternoon and watches the light come through the window. She sees bright **white** dust drift in the light and thinks that there are entire worlds that exist, just out of reach and notice.

For Maddy, those worlds that exist just out of reach are a way for her to think about the world outside the sunroom. Just as she can’t see the possible worlds in the dust, as things stand, she also can’t see the worlds outside her house.



52. HALF LIFE

Maddy thinks that strangely, she’s decided she’s willing to die. The sight of Olly crying won’t leave her alone, so she spends her time poring over the photo of herself as a baby. She thinks that since meeting Olly, there have been two Maddys. One lives in books and doesn’t want to die; the other truly lives and doesn’t think death is a bad price for living. Maddy thinks that the baby Maddy in the Hawaii photo is like a god—she’s not sick, has life ahead of her, and is impervious to heartbreak and disaster. The second Maddy knows that her half-life isn’t truly living.

Seeing the abuse that Olly suffers impresses upon Maddy the importance of seeking happiness and connection with him and with others, hence her choice to believe that it’s worth potentially dying to see and experience more of the world around her. The photograph of baby Maddy helps teenage Maddy see that she can embody that person if she chooses to.



53. GOOD-BYE

In a letter to Mom, Maddy says that she loves her, and that Mom is kind and selfless—but that Mom won't understand what Maddy is going to say and do. She writes that she's only alive thanks to Mom, but it's not enough. She insists that she's not really doing this because of Olly, but Olly did introduce her to a new part of herself that won't be quiet. Maddy asks if Mom remembers how sad she was when they read [The Little Prince](#) for the first time and he died in the end to get back to his rose. Now, she understands it. He wasn't *choosing* to die—he *wasn't alive* without the rose. She asks Mom to forgive her.

The comment that being alive isn't enough shows Maddy's newfound recognition that living in her controlled, sanitized environment isn't the same as taking risks and seeing everything that the world has to offer. She understands that the life she leads in her imagination and in books is no substitute for experiencing things firsthand, and her choice to break free from Mom and gain these experiences shows that Maddy is growing and coming of age.



54. THE FIVE SENSES

Maddy hopes that the beeping of the alarm keypad isn't loud enough to wake Mom. The door unseals, and Outside, the world is so quiet it seems to roar. The door handle is cool and smooth. Since it's so early in the morning, Maddy can't see much more than silhouettes of trees and gates. She smells the flowers in Olly's garden and throws pebbles at his window. He comes down and Maddy kisses him. He tastes like Maddy remembers.

Keep in mind that Maddy has only been outside the one time—and that time, she wasn't paying attention to how things felt or sounded. Now, she can actually pay attention to her neighborhood and can come to a better understanding of what it's like, how it functions, and where she fits into it.



55. OTHER WORLDS; ALOHA MEANS HELLO AND GOOD-BYE, PART TWO

Olly pulls away and asks Maddy if everything is okay. She bravely says she's running away and takes a deep breath. The air is moist and heavy, unlike anything she's ever breathed. She feels like she swallowed a stone, so Olly tries to take her back to her house and asks if he needs to carry her. Maddy stops him, repeats that she's running away, and asks for help—she knows nothing about the world. She asks him to take her to the roof so she can explain, and he grudgingly leads her to a ladder. On the roof, Maddy looks around and sees a small table with a lamp and crumpled papers. She wonders if he writes poetry, but he turns the lamp on, and she sees that they're fast-food wrappers. There are tools and something covered in a tarp next to the desk.

Though Olly's concern annoys Maddy, it's important to note that his desire to care for her shows that he's not just thinking about himself. Instead, he understands the importance of thinking about others' comfort and safety, which is a mark of maturity and shows that in this sense, Olly is possibly more mature than Maddy is. Her realization that his desk is covered in fast food wrappers suggests that not everything she learns in the real world is going to be particularly delightful or enlightening.



Maddy says that she has experimental pills from Canada that will give her a few days outside. Olly curses but looks less obstinate. Maddy knows he's too smart to fall for this lie, but he wants it to be true, so he smiles at her cautiously. When she asks, he pulls the tarp aside to reveal a large model of the universe. He says it's called an orrery and Maddy says it's beautiful. She begs for his help and Olly asks where she wants to go. Maddy reveals two tickets to Hawaii.

When Olly essentially chooses to ignore Maddy's lie, it allows both of them to move forward and strengthen their relationship. In this sense, the lie doesn't seem like such a bad thing in the long run, even though it still raises a variety of ethical questions. However, the novel overwhelmingly suggests that this possible price is outweighed by what both of them learn on their trip.



56. HAPPY ALREADY

They sit in Olly's car, but he doesn't turn the key. He insists they can't really go to Hawaii and asks when Maddy did this. She points out that she already bought tickets and booked them a hotel with her recently opened credit card. Olly asks what he'll do if something happens to Maddy. Maddy insists that she'll be fine with the pills. When Olly points out that there's a lot to see in southern California, Maddy says there's no humuhumunukunukuapuaa, the state fish of Hawaii. This makes him smile and he agrees to go.

Olly's mood improves as they drive away from his house, especially since an old friend of his named Zach lives in Maui. Since they have a few hours before their flight, Maddy asks to make a detour. Being in the car is scary for Maddy and she can't make her eyes focus on the passing landscape. She sometimes gets a glimpse of other people in cars, but isn't sure if she should acknowledge them. They exit the highway and enter Koreatown. Maddy marvels that all the people are real, not architectural models. When they stop in front of an apartment complex, Olly tells Maddy that nothing can happen to her. She thanks him and thinks that she was happy before she met him—but now, she's alive.

That Maddy can easily rattle off the traditional Hawaiian name of the fish is a signal that she's still immersed in her vicarious, safe experiences of the world—it reflects her theoretical education, in other words. Her credit card signals her maturity and independence, as it is a card she opened without Mom's help or knowledge—and it allows her to function as an adult.



For both Maddy and Olly, choosing to leave their families, even for just these two days, is an act of intense bravery. Maddy knows that she's going to upset Mom and make her worry—let alone that she might die and cause Mom even more grief—while Olly knows that without him there, his mom and Kara are in even more danger. However, choosing to go together allows them to experience a healthier relationship with each other, rather than remaining mired in their respective unhealthy family situations.



57. INFECTED

Carla screams, pulls Maddy into a crushing hug, and asks if she's a ghost. Maddy apologizes for making Carla lose her job, but Carla insists that she's fine and just misses Maddy. Carla greets Olly too, and invites them inside. She fixes Maddy with a nurse's stare and asks Maddy how she's feeling. Olly mentions the pills and Maddy admits that Mom doesn't know about them. Carla looks at Maddy in a way that conveys she doesn't believe any of it, but Maddy silently begs her to not expose her lie. Carla doesn't, and starts making breakfast. Maddy looks around the bright living room, worried that Olly will be able to sense her lies. When she comes across a framed photo of Carla and baby Rosa, Maddy feels she'll never be able to repay Carla for what she's done.

Maddy's sense that she'll never be able to repay Carla shows again that in important ways, Carla functioned as more of a parent to Maddy than Mom did in that she gave Maddy a safe person to confide in, trust, and test boundaries as needed. This is exactly why Maddy feels comfortable visiting Carla before heading out, as she trusts that Carla is going to allow her to make these choices for herself, like any other 18-year-old.



Carla makes chilaquiles, but Maddy is too nervous to eat much. Olly asks if Carla thinks the pills are working. Carla says it's possible, but it's also possible that the pills are merely delaying Maddy's sickness—or that Maddy just hasn't encountered a trigger yet. Olly remains optimistic. Maddy follows Carla into the kitchen. Carla says she understands what Maddy is doing. She says that she left Mexico with nothing and didn't think she'd survive, but she'd decided that she was going to control her life. Carla admits that she's never felt freer than the night she left her house, but she does regret things. She wasn't able to go home for her parents' funerals, and Rosa knows nothing of Mexico. However, she suggests that regretting is part of living. Maddy thinks of Mom all alone and then pushes the thoughts away.

It's important to keep Carla's advice that regretting is part of living in mind going forward, as it should suggest to Maddy that there's guaranteed to be something about these choices she's making that she'll regret—but that doesn't mean Maddy shouldn't still go to Hawaii. In essence, it encourages Maddy to take responsibility for her choices and forces her to understand that she can't please everyone as she grows and comes of age. Someone will always take offense to her choices, but if those choices seem right for Maddy, she should still make them anyway.



58. TTYL; FIRST-TIME FLYER FAQ

Olly sends Kara a text saying he'll be home in two days. In a mock Q&A, Maddy answers questions about flying, such as how to relieve earaches (gum and kissing), which seat is the best (the window), and how often the air refreshes in the cabin (every 20 minutes). She address how airline blanket can cover two people, how it's amazing that humans were able to invent both airplanes and bombs, and how turbulence is a fact of life.

Being in an airplane doesn't just introduce Maddy to the intricacies of air travel—it introduces her to all the innovations that humans have been able to achieve over the course of history. It also puts immense phenomena, like the bombs and violent destruction, into perspective.



59. THE CAROUSEL; MADELINE'S DICTIONARY

As he sits on a stationary baggage carousel, Olly announces that baggage carousels are a perfect metaphor for life. He says that when people are born, they become luggage and go around on the carousel. Some people are damaged by other luggage, some people get lost, and those that get picked up live boring lives in closets. Olly has been to Hawaii before and remembers Olly's dad saying the airport could spend more on first impressions, but Maddy thinks that it's not a bad sight. Maddy asks where Olly's family members fall in his baggage carousel theory. He says Olly's mom is damaged, he and Kara are lost, and his dad is the carousel. At this, Maddy tells Olly that his dad doesn't get to have everything.

Olly's insistence that his dad is the baggage carousel itself shows how little power he has in his family and indeed, over his life as a whole. He sees that his dad has an outsize amount of power to dictate the course of Olly's life, whether that's intimidating Olly nightly or forcing him to quit the mathletes. When Maddy insists that Olly shouldn't give his dad so much credit, she encourages him to understand that he actually does have the power to change things—for instance, he could leave.



Embarrassed, Olly turns away and announces that Maddy needs a lei. He talks a greeter into giving him one for free and then puts it over Maddy's head. Maddy thanks Olly in Hawaiian. He teases her about reading her entire guidebook, and Maddy says she'd adore her suitcase and everything it stood for if she had one. She realizes that Olly doesn't buy into her optimism, but it's intoxicating for him anyway. He makes her promise not to die. For the reader, Maddy defines *promise* as a lie that she wants to keep.

Through Maddy, Olly is able to see the world through new eyes. Her optimism far surpasses his own exactly because she hasn't had as much experience in the real world, but this doesn't mean that her optimism doesn't still have an effect on him as he sees how happy and fulfilled she is by this experience of traveling with him.



60. HERE NOW; MADELINE'S DICTIONARY

As Maddy and Olly ride toward their hotel, the car turns and suddenly, Maddy can see the **ocean**. She declares that she can't believe that she's been missing the entire world and Olly asks the driver if they can stop. The driver pulls over at a park and Maddy bolts out of the car for the water. She takes off her shoes in the sand and wades into the waves up to her knees. Olly calls for her to be careful, but Maddy isn't sure what he means—if he doesn't want her to drown, if he's cautioning her to not get sick, or if he's cautioning her to understand that it's impossible to separate oneself from the world. Maddy feels like now, she's a part of the world and it's a part of her. Maddy defines *ocean* as a part of herself she never knew, but suspected was there.

When Maddy wades into the ocean, she confirms that the ocean itself is a symbol of all of life, and indeed of the world. Now that she's standing in it, she cannot go back to the way things used to be—she now understands what it's like to truly live in the world, which means that her photos, videos, and books that portray the ocean will no longer be enough to satisfy her. Thinking through Olly's calls to be careful shows that this is also giving Maddy new perspective, as she's able to recognize that it's silly to caution her about the ocean when Maddy might die of something else instantly.



61. REWARD IF FOUND

Their hotel is right on the beach, and greeters give Olly and Maddy each a lei. At the check-in counter, the woman welcomes them as Mr. and Mrs. Whittier and tells them to enjoy their honeymoon with a wink. Olly grins wildly. In their room, Maddy looks around and realizes there's no bed. Olly reaches for what Maddy thought was an enormous closet and pulls down a Murphy bed, which surprises Maddy. He notes that there's only one bed and stares at her in a way that makes her blush. To cover up the awkward silence, Olly fishes in Maddy's backpack for her guidebook, but pulls out *The Little Prince* instead. He notes that when he read it as a sophomore, he didn't understand it. Maddy suggests he try again, as the meaning changes every time.

When Maddy asserts that the meaning of [The Little Prince](#) changes over time, it shows that she does recognize that as people mature, they naturally change and think of things differently—an unexpected viewpoint, given how frozen in time Maddy seems in many other ways. Saying it now, however, suggests that Maddy is becoming more aware of the ways in which she's changing, especially as she stares down a night in shared bed with Olly.



Olly takes the book to the bed, ascertains that Maddy has read it more than 20 times, and opens it to where Maddy wrote possible rewards for someone who finds the book. She offers a visit with her to a used bookstore and snorkeling with her to find the Hawaiian state fish. Olly asks when Maddy wrote this, but as Maddy starts to climb onto the bed, she experiences vertigo and her heart squeezes painfully. Olly is concerned, but Maddy realizes she's just very hungry—she's barely eaten in 24 hours. Olly laughs and Maddy laughs with him. She ignores her heart squeezing again.

Because of the way that Maddy grew up, she's had lots of time to imagine doing something like this, hence the more fantastical options in her list of rewards for finding her book. This suggests that Maddy's trip is really one that she's wanted to take for a long time, even if she wasn't entirely aware that's what she wanted. This positions this trip as something somewhat inevitable in terms of Maddy's coming of age process.



62. REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PRESENT

Maddy feels better after eating. Olly insists they need beach gear and souvenirs, so they stop at a souvenir shop. Maddy tries unsuccessfully to find their names on monogrammed surfboard key chains and picks out a calendar of shirtless surfers for Carla. Olly shares what he got for Kara and for Olly's mom, and Maddy says she's going to get herself macadamia nuts and a dress. Olly asks what she's going to get for Mom. This stumps Maddy, as she thinks that nothing will be good enough for the woman who gave up her world to care for her. Maddy wanders away, thinking that most teens separate from their parents by age 18. She and Mom, however, have shared space for 18 years and it's odd to make memories without her. Maddy wonders what Mom will do if she doesn't make it home and chooses to send a postcard.

The way that Maddy conceptualizes what Mom has done for her shows again that Maddy doesn't really see anything wrong or amiss with their relationship, even as she understands that their dynamic isn't tenable if Maddy wishes to become an independent adult. Sending Mom a postcard allows Maddy to impress upon Mom that Maddy is doing this because she wants to see what the world has to offer and wants Mom to see that she's having a good time doing so. It invites Mom into Maddy's experience and thought process.



63. THE SWIMSUIT; GUIDE TO HAWAIIAN REEF FISH

Maddy allows that she should've tried on the swimsuit before she bought it as she studies her reflection in the mirror. The suit is a bright **pink** one-piece. The color makes her look flushed. Maddy confirms that her behind is covered and wonders how she's supposed to be in public wearing so little. Olly knocks and asks if she's snorkeling. Maddy pulls open the bathroom door quickly and Olly slowly looks her up and down. Maddy feels naked and tries to slow her heart, thinking that Olly looks like he's starving. They agree that the swimsuit is small. Maddy includes drawings of several reef fish, including herself and Olly.

Though the bikini does, by design, make it clear to Maddy that she's an adult woman with an adult's body, the flushed look that the pink color gives her shows clearly that Maddy is coming into her own identity. Just as the color seems to be rubbing off on her, her newfound self-expression is similarly "coloring" her into a new version of herself, separate from the sanitized, all-white existence she's led thus far. Even though the novel doesn't go into much depth in this regard, this does suggest that part of Maddy's coming of age will entail coming to terms with her adult body and how it comes across to others in the real world—which she can, to a degree, control by wearing a revealing suit or by choosing to wear particular colors.



64. JUMP; CLIFF DIVING: A GUIDE

Maddy surprises Olly by wading into the **ocean** right away. She and Olly swim around the reef. They find the humuhumunukunukuapuaa right away, and Maddy marvels at the vibrant **colors** of the reef. Olly takes Maddy's hand and further out, they see stingrays and sea turtles. Finally, Olly tugs Maddy back to shore. She knows he's watching her surreptitiously, but she's watching him the same way. She shivers, which Olly takes as her being cold, so he wraps his towel around her. Maddy senses that Olly is holding himself back as he steps away, but she's not sure he wants him to.

The reef's bright colors suggests that Maddy will discover her adult identity in the outside world, not in the contained white environment of her house with Mom. Meanwhile, her sexual interest in Olly (and the fact that he returns the interest) makes it clear that she's moving away from Mom and the protected world Mom created for her as she continues to mull over how intimate she wants to be with him.



Olly suggests they jump off a cliff and leads her to the edge. Olly goes first and waves to Maddy. Jumping off a cliff seems like it should be scary, but Maddy thinks that considering what else her future might hold, it's not so scary. Maddy shares a page from her guidebook about cliff diving, but the text describes Maddy's experience. She screams, but it's silent underwater. It feels like being on another planet and then, like she's a tiny creature in a huge world.

The experience of diving into the ocean like this again mirrors Maddy's experience of entering the real world. Purchasing tickets to Hawaii is, in many ways, not that different from jumping off a cliff into the ocean. Both actions represent a desire to be a part of the world, and to fulfill that desire in a drastic way.



65. ZACH

Olly calls Zach and Zach shows up a half-hour later. Zach immediately begins playing air guitar and singing. His dreadlocks keep time with the music. He tells Olly to call him Zachariah, as he's going to become a rock god. Olly refuses. They head out for lunch and Olly asks if Zach has told his parents about wanting to be a musician or about being gay. Zach hasn't shared either thing with his parents and tells Maddy that his parents believe only in family as defined by a man, a woman, and two kids; education, as in a four-year college; and hard work, which means no art or music. Maddy suggests that Zach's parents must at least suspect he wants to be a rock star given his hair, but he explains they think it's a phase.

Just like Maddy and Olly, Zach also suffers because of his parents' unfair and misguided expectations of him. By showing three teens who are going through three very different experiences that nonetheless share this quality, the novel makes the case that breaking free from a parent's expectations like all three are doing is a natural and expected part of coming of age—and given the way their parents react to their children, it suggests, too, that this is difficult for everyone involved.



Olly asks Zach to borrow his phone and they briefly discuss that Olly's dad is still controlling and awful. Zach asks Maddy what's wrong with her parents. Maddy can't come up with anything wrong with Mom, except that she's probably dying from worry. Maddy says that Mom always puts her first, which surprises both boys. Olly hands Maddy the phone, says she has to tell Mom she's okay, and leaves for the restroom. Maddy reads emails from Mom to Olly, sent from Maddy's email address, asking where they are and finally saying that Mom is on her way. Maddy feels guilty, resentful, and panicked. She wants to tell Mom she's fine, but she also hates that Mom read her private emails.

Maddy's inability to come up with any fault on Mom's part speaks to the degree to which she trusts Mom to be there for her and have her best interests at heart. Though this is still clearly true, Maddy's displeasure at discovering that Mom read her emails also suggests that Maddy shouldn't really trust Mom so unthinkingly, given that Mom was willing to invade her privacy to figure out where Maddy is and then decide to (in Maddy's understanding) spoil the trip by crashing it.



Zach asks Maddy if she's okay and clarifies that he's asking about her illness. Truthfully, Maddy says she's fine. She quickly sends Mom an email asking her not to come, saying she's fine, and insisting that it's her life. Zach asks if Maddy really bought pills and Maddy is too shaken to effectively lie. Zach seems to understand immediately, but says he won't tell Olly—he knows what it's like to lie. Maddy asks what'll happen if he tells his parents the truth, and he says that they'd make him choose. He wouldn't choose them. Zach suggests that growing up means disappointing the people they love. Olly returns and Maddy tells him, honestly, that she feels great.

In general, the novel makes it clear that Zach is right: it's normal for teens to disappoint the adults in their lives as they grow up and figure out who they are. This still doesn't mean that the process is easy, however, as made clear by Zach's aside that for the time being at least, it's easier to remain closeted and quiet about his dreams than it'd be to take pride in his identity and actively pursue his dreams of being a rock star.



66. THE MURPHY BED

Olly and Maddy get back to their hotel in the late afternoon. Olly somersaults onto the bed and declares that he sleeps on the left side. Maddy asks if he's nervous, but he says too quickly that he isn't. Maddy listens to the sounds outside and thinks that a few days ago, she would've been happy with one day outside. Now, she wants more. Olly admits that he *is* nervous. He's never felt this way about anyone before and insists that even though Maddy hasn't either, this is her first time for everything. Maddy doesn't think this should matter, but she realizes that he's just afraid. He explains that he knows he's been in love before, but being in love with Maddy is better. They curl up, say they love each other, and fall asleep.

Even if Olly does lie about being nervous about the prospect of sex at first, it's important to focus on the fact that he ultimately does tell the truth and open up to Maddy. Being truthful about their feelings about the possible next step in their relationship allows them to develop intimacy and deepen their trust in each other, both of which will be important if they do decide to have sex and if they try to continue their relationship after returning home from Hawaii.



67. ALL THE WORDS

Maddy wakes up slowly and realizes they now only have 20 minutes to make it to the beach to watch the sunset. She shakes Olly awake and slips into her new **red** dress, thinking she looks like the picture of health. Maddy finds Olly sitting out on the balcony railing. He smiles at her and calls for her. They kiss and Maddy says yes—the sunset will wait; she wants to have sex. Sensing her nervousness, Olly says they don't have to and mutters that he needs to buy condoms. Maddy says she bought some earlier. They undress, kiss, and have sex. Maddy feels like she knows all the secrets of the universe.

Again, choosing to have sex allows Maddy to experience something that she never would've gotten to had she not left her house and fallen in love with Olly. When she suggests that sex makes her feel like she understands the secrets of the universe, it makes it clear that experiences like these help people figure out how they fit into the world and can be overwhelmingly positive in this regard.



68. MADELINE'S DICTIONARY; THE OBSERVABLE WORLD

Maddy defines *infinite* as a state of not knowing where one body ends, and another begins. She tells the reader that per the Big Bang theory, the universe came into existence in a single moment. In the beginning, she suggests, there was nothing—then suddenly, there was everything.

Being intimate with Olly makes Maddy feel as though her life is just beginning—and in many ways, it is. She now understands what it's like to love and be intimate, and she can see that there's a world in front of her she didn't know existed.



69. THIS TIME

Olly and Maddy kiss until Olly's stomach growls. Maddy suggests they get something to eat and pulls the blankets up to her chest. Olly walks around naked, grinning. Maddy feels like everything is different, but exactly the same. They're both the same people, but Maddy also feels known. They go to a restaurant right by the ocean. As they eat, they sit close to each other and don't stop touching and kissing. Maddy wonders why they keep laughing and wonders if it's because the world seems extraordinary. When they're finished, they head for the beach and sit in a secluded spot.

Maddy's sense of feeling known speaks to how close she feels to Olly now, and how much she trusts him. This suggests that their sexual experience has allowed them to deepen their intimacy and trust each other even more with their bodies and their emotions, something that will show them what it's like to be in a positive, healthy relationship.



Sitting on the beach, Olly tells Maddy that Olly's dad apologized and cried after he hit Olly's mom the first time. He says that Kara knew their dad was lying, but Olly and his mom believed he'd change. Olly's mom encouraged Olly and Kara to forgive their dad. Olly says that his dad wasn't violent for a year after this, but that he continued to drink and yell at all of them. Maddy asks why Olly's mom doesn't leave. Olly says he thinks that if his dad was violent more often, his mom would leave. As it is, his mom doesn't think it's that bad—and she always believes that Olly's dad is sorry.

Maddy reaches for Olly, but he pulls away. He says that Olly's mom won't talk about it anymore, but she used to say that Olly would understand once he was in his own relationships. She also says that love makes people crazy. Maddy asks if Olly believes this. Olly sidesteps, but says that he does believe it—he's in Hawaii, even though he feels guilty for leaving his mom and Kara alone with Olly's dad. Maddy says that she believes love makes people crazy, since she wouldn't have left her house if not for Olly. Maddy tells Olly that he should leave home, since it isn't safe. She realizes that Olly doesn't understand this—like his mom, he's trapped by memories of better times. She and Olly sit and watch the **ocean**.

Given how Olly talks about his parents, it's possible that he doesn't trust his mom to care for him anymore—and given that Maddy has most often seem him defending her, it's possible that their respective roles have shifted in the last few years. This suggests that Olly has had to grow up much too fast and take on extremely adult concerns, all without the adult guidance to figure out how to most effectively handle the situation.



Olly's mom's insistence that Olly would understand once he was in a relationship of his own suggests that in Olly's mom's mind, all relationships are somewhat dysfunctional or abusive—something that Maddy and Olly's healthy and positive relationship shows clearly isn't true. This shows how even when a person is able to exist in the world, as Olly's mom does, it's still possible for them to hold a view of what the world is like that's just as narrow and misguided as some of Maddy's views are.



70. SPIRAL; THE END

In a spiral pattern, Maddy recounts her dream of running away from home with the boy she loves. She sees the **ocean** and falls asleep in a noisy room with him. In her dream, she dreams the same dream. Maddy wakes up slowly and feels as though she's on fire. The sheets are sweaty, and she shivers. Everything hurts, but her head hurts the most. She can't sit up and thinks she's dying. As soon as she thinks Olly's name, he wakes up and turns on the lamp. He looks terrified as he calls an ambulance. Maddy isn't sure if he's talking about her but wants him to stop crying—he's going to be fine. She hears him say something about Mom and she hopes that Mom is coming. Maddy's heart stops and starts again.

Again, notice that Maddy isn't necessarily thinking about herself—she wants Olly to stop crying because he's going to be fine, which suggests that she's been conditioned to believe that she doesn't need to think about her own thoughts and emotions as much those of people around her. Though this happens while Maddy is seriously ill, it does reflect that she's been brought up to think this way and this is part of the reason why she hasn't, until now, tried to break free and think of herself.



71. RELEASED, PART ONE; RESURRECTED

Maddy shares her discharge form with the reader. Her doctor is Dr. Melissa Francis, and she was unable to diagnose what was wrong with Maddy's heart. She performed an echocardiogram. The form reads that Dr. Francis discharged Maddy, though she didn't want to. Maddy doesn't remember much, but recalls being in the ambulance, receiving adrenaline shots, and the hospital. She remembers the smell of the airport, Mom crying, and Olly's look of sadness, relief, and love. Maddy knows she's going home and will be trapped there forever. She's alive, but she doesn't want to be.

When Maddy insists that she doesn't want to be alive, it indicates that her experiences in the real world, though dangerous, have showed her that her life in Mom's house isn't as meaningful or positive as she had previously trained herself to believe. Rather, staying there means that she might not get to see Olly again, and it definitely means that she's never going to be able to see the world again. It will, in short, return her to a dependent state.



72. READMITTED

Mom transforms Maddy's bedroom into a hospital room. She's there every time Maddy wakes up and Maddy often can't quite hear her. Maddy wakes up and sees that Mom is about to put her back to sleep. She sits up quickly, asks Mom not to, and asks if she's okay. Mom's voice trembles and breaks, but she says that Maddy will be okay. Mom looks frightened and drawn. In a whisper, she asks how Maddy could've put herself in such danger. She asks how Maddy could've done this to her after everything. Maddy feels like her guilt is an **ocean** drowning her.

Maddy lies in bed and thinks of what she regrets—everything. She thinks that she can't live her life in this bubble now that she knows what she's missing and fixates on Mom's desperate look. Maddy reasons that loving someone like Mom loves her must be terrible. She reasons that love is a terrible thing and she doesn't want anything to do with it.

Though it's understandable that Mom is hurt by what Maddy did, it's also telling that she asks Maddy why she did this in a way that suggests she believes Maddy went to Hawaii to purposefully betray her, rather than because Maddy wanted to go. This reveals that Mom takes anything Maddy does for herself very personally, which explains some of why Maddy's personality was so tied up in her relationship with Mom earlier in the novel.



Remember that Carla suggested that regret is part of living, which means that per Carla's understanding, Maddy is only now truly living. In this sense, life isn't all snorkeling happily in Hawaii—life is also experiencing pain and disappointing loved ones.



73. RELEASED, PART TWO

One evening, Maddy logs onto the instant messenger. Olly is worried, says that Mom won't let him visit, and tells Maddy that she doesn't have to thank him for saving her life. Later, he writes that he's glad they can chat again, and that maybe Mom will let him visit, but Maddy doesn't respond. He suggests that visiting would be better than nothing. A few hours later, Maddy says it isn't—they can't go back to no kissing and no future. Olly asks about the pills. Maddy admits that she lied. When Olly points out that it would've been his fault if Maddy died, Maddy writes that she's not Olly's responsibility. Another hour later, Maddy writes that she wanted everything, but that she can't do this anymore. She says that Mom is right, and that life was better before. She logs off.

Even if Maddy is very upset by what happened, it's worth keeping in mind that she's only able to insist that Mom was right because she had the experience of getting out and seeing firsthand all the horrible things that can happen to a person out in the world. With this, even though Maddy comes to Mom's preferred conclusion, it's essential to recognize that Maddy only gets to this point because she disobeyed and experienced things firsthand, rather than taking Mom's word for it.



74. LIFE IS SHORT; GEOGRAPHY; MAP OF DESPAIR

Maddy gives a review with spoilers for Ralph Ellison's [Invisible Man](#). She says that a person doesn't exist if nobody can see them. Maddy wakes from a dream in which she's in a field of poppies. Multiple iterations of Olly march toward her, wearing gas masks, bearing handcuffs, and crushing the poppies. Maddy spends her day trying not to think of Olly. It makes her think of how connected she was to the world a few days ago and how much hope she had. She vows to let Olly go and thinks she learned her lesson: love is deadly, and she'd rather be alive. Maddy feels like her heart has changed. She includes a heart-shaped map of her land of broken dreams.

Again, Maddy is only able to come to these conclusions about the uselessness of love and of life on the outside because she experienced it firsthand. However, it's also worth considering that Maddy is mired in grief right now, which is certainly influencing her dark outlook on life and the value of trying to love. This makes it clear that Maddy's assessments could easily change with time or with new experiences—if she allows herself to have any.



75. LIFE IS SHORT; SELECT ALL, DELETE

Maddy reviews [The Stranger](#) by Albert Camus, [Waiting for Godot](#) by Samuel Beckett, and [Nausea](#) by Jean-Paul Sartre. She says that these works reveal that everything is nothing. Maddy selects every email from Olly in her inbox and deletes them.

Deleting all of Olly's emails is an attempt to turn their relationship into nothing, too. This makes losing contact with Olly easier to deal with and less painful for now, and Maddy's newfound interest in nihilist literature suggests that despite her meaningful experiences in Hawaii, she's now reverted to a pessimistic and apathetic worldview in order to cope with her pain.



76. PRETENDING

Maddy's heart is the only thing that hurts, so she tries not to use it. She reads existential and nihilist books, doesn't think about Olly, and resumes her classes after four weeks. Mom hovers worriedly and seems to want things to go back to the way they were before. Maddy doesn't want to do mother-daughter nights, as she doesn't enjoy much of anything, but she pretends when she sees Mom getting thinner and thinner. Olly's emails eventually stop. One night, Mom says she's asked Carla to come back. She explains that she trusts Maddy, since Maddy learned her lesson the hard way.

The assertion that Mom wants things to go back to the way they were before suggests that in important ways, things will never be the same. Maddy has now made memories that don't include Mom and experienced things entirely alone, which in a healthy relationship, wouldn't be a problem. This again implies that Maddy and Mom's relationship isn't entirely healthy.



77. REUNION

Carla bustles in like nothing changed the next day. She pulls Maddy into a hug and says it's all her fault. Maddy dissolves into tears for an hour. When she's done crying, Carla asks about Mom. Maddy says that Mom doesn't hate her, and Carla insists that mothers don't know how to hate their children. Maddy says that she's a terrible daughter. When Carla asks about Olly, Maddy refuses to say, thinking that if she can hold onto her pain, her heart will never heal and tempt her to use it again.

Once again, when Maddy feels comfortable sharing things with Carla and cries in front of her, it reflects the fact that Carla has made herself an available, trustworthy, and kind mentor to Maddy—and so she gets a more unfiltered view of what Maddy is going through. Mom, because she expects something very particular, doesn't see as much of Maddy's internal struggle.



Things settle back into a routine until one day, Maddy hears a rumble and a beeping. At the window, Carla says that a moving truck has pulled in next door. The two men talk to Olly's mom, but Olly's dad isn't around. Maddy joins Carla at the window and watches Olly, Kara, and their mom frantically carry out boxes. Olly hugs his mom often and Kara smokes openly. Olly realizes that Maddy is watching him and looks up. Maddy feels like the moment their eyes meet is different than the first time. Then, everything felt possible and she knew she'd love him. Now, she knows she loves him and won't stop. He waves, but Maddy turns away. She thinks that if she could undo the last few months, she'd hear him moving in and stay on her **white** couch with her books.

Though seeing Olly and his mother and sister leave is painful for Maddy, it's worth commending Olly's mom for making the choice to escape. This could've been a very dangerous situation had Olly's dad realized what was going on or just decided to come home early, which makes it clear that making changes like this require intense bravery and a willingness to risk one's health and safety in the hope that doing so will lead to a better situation in the future.



78. NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH #3; FIVE SYLLABLES; HIS LAST LETTER IS HAIKU

Olly's dad leaves for work around nine a.m. and gets home late in the evening, looking as though he's already drunk. He spends the rest of his night drinking on the porch, falls asleep, and eventually stumbles inside. Maddy has no idea what Olly's mom, Olly, and Kara are doing. Just after Christmas, Olly's dad moves away too. Maddy hopes he's not going where Olly, Kara, and their mom went. She studies the house and wonders how it can look exactly the same with nobody in it.

A few days later, Maddy goes through the emails from Olly that she put in her trash folder. He sent her a few limericks that make her laugh until she cries. In other emails, he writes about talking to Olly's mom about getting help for herself and for Kara. His mom might have decided to leave when Olly said he couldn't be a part of the family if she stayed, but she might've made the decision when Olly told her about Maddy and how Maddy was willing to do anything to live. Olly says his mom thinks that Maddy is brave. In a haiku, Olly writes that he loves Maddy.

The house has changed in Maddy's mind since the boy she loved used to live there and introduced her to some of what's possible in the outside world. For her, the house's meaning has changed entirely—proof again that she cannot just go back to the way things were, as even the familiar and reliable parts of her neighborhood seem different now.



Though Maddy doesn't give her thoughts on the matter, it's possible that hearing from Olly that his mom thinks Maddy is brave will help Maddy put a better spin on what happened to her in Hawaii. Choosing to separate forcefully from Mom and go was a brave thing, even if she regrets it for now. It introduced her to who she could be out in the world, while also allowing her to build intimacy with someone other than Mom.



79. HERE AND NOW; FOR MY EYES ONLY

Maddy thinks that according to Olly's math, it's impossible to predict the future—but she thinks it's also impossible to predict the past. What happens in the present changes the future and the past. Dr. Francis sends Maddy an email with “for your eyes only” in the subject line. She explains that she cared for Maddy in Hawaii and says she's writing because she doesn't believe Maddy has SCID. Dr. Francis suggests that Maddy get another doctor to verify the attached test results, as physicians—like Mom—should never practice on their families. She believes that in Hawaii, Maddy experienced a myocarditis episode triggered by a virus. She suggests that given Maddy's upbringing, Maddy's immune system is likely very fragile.

Myocarditis is, broadly speaking, heart swelling that causes cardiac arrest—and it's a relatively common affliction in young people, even those who are otherwise perfectly healthy. Dr. Francis's assertion that it's unethical for doctors to practice on their family members introduces Maddy to the possibility that her mom has done something unethical by not seeking other opinions or assistance with managing Maddy's condition at the very least, as there's no indication that Maddy has ever seen another doctor.



80. PROTECTION

Maddy reads the email from Dr. Francis six times and struggles to take it in. She studies the lab results and sees that all her numbers are average, so she reasons there must've been a mistake. Even though she's sure Dr. Francis isn't right, Maddy still prints the email and test results and then spends an hour Googling the tests. She knows it's a mistake, but she still takes the printout down to Mom. Maddy finds Mom in her bedroom, and Mom's face lights up. She asks if Maddy came for a sleepover. Maddy doesn't answer and instead, says that Dr. Francis thinks she's not sick. Mom seems not to hear Maddy.

Remember that Maddy trusts her mom to always have her best interests at heart, hence her unwillingness to really entertain that Dr. Francis's assessment is correct. Her willingness to do the research and ask Mom about it, however, speaks to the crossroads where Maddy finds herself in terms of identity. She wants to believe that Mom is still going to care for her, but she also knows now what it's like to be independent and wants to know if that's possible for her.



Maddy repeats herself. Mom sits down, invites Maddy to sit next to her, and softly says that it's not true. Maddy feels safe in Mom's arms and says she knew it was a mistake, so she didn't get her hopes up. Tears in her eyes, Mom says that SCID is rare and complicated, and she reminds Maddy that Maddy saw firsthand when she almost died in the emergency room. She frowns and says that Dr. Francis doesn't know Maddy's whole history. Maddy can tell that Mom is more upset by this than she is, so she assures Mom again she didn't believe it. Maddy leans into Mom again and Mom says twice that she had to protect Maddy. Hearing uncertainty in Mom's voice, Maddy pulls away and goes quiet. Mom invites Maddy to stay, insisting she'll feel better if Maddy stays, but Maddy suspects that *she* won't feel better.

Pay attention to the way that Mom interacts with Maddy physically during this exchange, pulling her close and not letting her go. Even more than what she says, her physical reaction to Maddy's desire for distance suggests that Mom doesn't want to let go or allow Maddy to ask questions that contradict Mom's preferred worldview. Hearing the uncertainty in Mom's voice also reminds Maddy that Mom is never uncertain about Maddy's condition—so maybe this uncertainty actually means something.



81. MADELINE'S DICTIONARY; IDENTITY

Maddy defines *suspicion* as the truth that she doesn't, can't, and won't believe. The next morning, she thrusts the email at Carla as soon as Carla arrives. Carla studies the test results, and rather than dismiss them, she asks if Maddy showed them to Mom. Maddy whispers that Mom insisted it was a mistake. After a minute, Carla says they need to find out the truth. Maddy is shocked and feels like they already know the truth—she's sick and can't leave her house. That's who she is. Maddy asks Carla if she's hiding something and with coaxing, Carla admits that she sometimes suspects that Mom never fully recovered from what happened to Maddy's dad and brother. The walls close in on Maddy and she dry heaves into the sink. Maddy says she needs to know the truth and refuses Carla's attempts to comfort her.

Carla's reaction again shows that she believes her job isn't just to make sure Maddy doesn't die—it's to make sure that Maddy has a confidante and someone to help her figure out who she is in the real world, whether that means introducing her to Olly or helping her get testing for SCID. Carla also models for Maddy how to deal with information like this by insisting that they don't really know anything and setting out logical next steps. In this way, she's preparing Maddy for adulthood and showing her how to deal with surprises like this.



82. PROOF OF LIFE

Maddy knows that she just needs to fall asleep, but she thinks again and again of Carla saying that Mom is unwell. It's one a.m. Carla will return in seven hours, and they're going to draw blood and send it to a SCID specialist. Maddy decides she can't wait and slips into Mom's office. It doesn't look like the office of a mentally unstable person. With shaking hands, Maddy begins to go through the filing cabinet. Mom keeps meticulous records, so it takes Maddy an hour to get through a few files of tax documents, warranties, and movie ticket stubs. In the back of the cabinet she finds a folder labeled with her name. It contains prenatal appointment records, Maddy's birth certificate, and sick-visit reports for a variety of infections, allergies, and rashes.

Maddy's aside that Mom's office doesn't look like it belongs to someone mentally unwell shows again that what she's seen of mental illness in books and movies hasn't prepared her for the fact that oftentimes, mental illness is invisible, even to those close to the sick person. The state of Mom's office, in other words, doesn't necessarily say anything about her relative wellness.



Maddy finds a record of being hospitalized at six months old, a month after Maddy's dad and brother died, for something called Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). After that, the records change. She finds a printout on RSV on which Mom circled that it's more severe in people with compromised immune systems, and she finds the first photocopied page of an article on SCID. There are records of visits to an allergist and three different immunologists, all of whom found nothing wrong. Maddy digs for another paper or folder with her SCID diagnosis. She scatters folders on the floor and pulls books off of the shelf, but she finds nothing. Maddy discovers that her name is Mom's computer password and goes through her files and browsing history. She finds nothing.

Maddy can't believe it. She feels as though her illness was invented and wonders if Mom has more records in her bedroom. Just as she turns to leave, Mom enters the office, relieved to find Maddy. Maddy loudly asks if she's actually sick with SCID. She shares that Carla suspects Mom is unwell and demands to see the records of a diagnosis. Mom takes the folder when Maddy shoves it at her and insists the results are in there. Mom looks through the files for a while and then asks Maddy if she took the results. Maddy can hear confusion and fear in Mom's voice and knows for sure that she doesn't have SCID.

83. OUTSIDE

Maddy runs out the front door and vomits. She cries and laughs and thinks that she's never been sick. She feels like she's struggling in an **ocean** as Mom comes outside and fearfully tells Maddy to go back inside because she's sick and something could happen. Maddy jerks away from Mom's outstretched arm, but Mom continues to plead with her. She says she can't lose Maddy after losing Maddy's dad and brother. When she bursts into tears, Maddy thinks that Carla was right. Mom sobs that Maddy got so sick after they died, and she couldn't believe it was just an allergy. She says needed to protect Maddy, since anything can happen out in the world. Maddy knows she should feel compassion, but instead, she angrily screams that she's not sick and that this is Mom's fault. Mom begs Maddy to stay with her, since Maddy is all she has.

Notice that while the novel condemned Mom's invasion of Maddy's privacy when Mom went through Maddy's emails, the same doesn't hold true when Maddy goes searching for her own medical history. This suggests that a person's medical history is something that belongs to them and shouldn't be controlled by someone else—even if the person controlling that history is a parent. As Maddy begins to dive into her history and look for the truth, she also begins to take control of her health, and in doing so, comes of age in an important way.



Mom's insistence that the results are in there could be an indicator of serious mental illness, as it could suggest that she physically sees something that isn't there. But for the purpose of Maddy's story, it only confirms for her that Mom has been lying to her for years about who she is and what's wrong with her. This seriously damages Maddy's trust in her mom, as Maddy recognizes that Mom deprived her of everything a normal child would experience—all because Mom is unwell.



The revelation that Maddy isn't sick is both a blessing and a curse, as it means that Maddy has a future outside—she can, for instance, go on and be an architect—but it also means that Mom has been lying to her for her entire life. Mom's responses reveal that she desperately wanted to protect Maddy from everything bad that she experienced, both physical and emotional, after Maddy's birth and the death of Maddy's dad and brother. That Maddy can't bring herself to feel compassion may read as harsh, but it also suggests that now, Maddy has truly broken away from Mom and has become her own person.



84. FAIRY TALES; THE VOID; BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

Maddy begins a fairy tale by saying that once upon a time, there was a girl whose life was a lie. She says that the universe can blink into existence and then disappear again in an instant. Over the next four days, Maddy does homework and doesn't read. Mom walks around and seems to understand that she should be sorry for something, but she doesn't know what. Maddy refuses to talk to her. On the fourth morning, Carla and Maddy have an appointment to see Dr. Chase, a SCID specialist. Maddy asks Carla to stay in the waiting room. Dr. Chase seems nervous and sympathetic as he tells Maddy that she isn't sick—she shows no signs of SCID, and as a doctor, Mom should've known that.

Maddy feels the room melt away and then returns to the conversation. She asks why she got sick in Hawaii. Dr. Chase says that healthy people get sick all the time, and he agrees with Dr. Francis that Maddy experienced an episode of myocarditis. He asks if she experienced any chest pain or shortness of breath, and Maddy remembers ignoring pain in her heart. Dr. Chase says that given Maddy's upbringing, there's no way to know what her immune system is like, but it's probably underdeveloped. It hasn't experienced a lifetime of practicing fighting infections. He's never encountered someone like Maddy, but this might mean that she'll get sick more often or get more severely sick. They schedule weekly visits and Dr. Chase cautions Maddy to take things slowly—the world isn't going anywhere.

Asking Carla to stay in the waiting room shows that Maddy has truly made the leap from child to adult, especially in terms of her healthcare—she doesn't need an adult with her to interpret what the doctor says or to lead the appointment for her. Maddy's willingness to trust Dr. Chase, meanwhile, shows that Mom hasn't damaged Maddy's ability to trust other health professionals too badly, as she does take his assessment of her condition seriously.



Here, Dr. Chase reveals the true cost of Mom's attempts to protect Maddy: Maddy's immune system is unable to protect her in the world exactly because Mom tried to keep Maddy from experiencing anything that might make her ill. In this way, Mom made Maddy less safe and gave her absolutely no way to protect herself, as this kind of immunity can't arise overnight—it's something that Maddy is going to have to carefully cultivate in the months and years to come.



85. AFTER THE DEATH OF; ONE WEEK A.D.

Maddy spends the next few days looking for anything that might explain what happened to her and to Mom. She wants to see how and why Mom went mad, but Mom is in no state to tell her. Maddy wonders if she'd even understand the grief and fear that caused Mom to take away Maddy's life. Dr. Chase suggests that Mom seek counseling and cautions Maddy that Mom might never be able to talk to her about it. Carla, meanwhile, tries to convince Maddy to stay with Mom, both for Maddy's physical health and Mom's mental health. Maddy considers emailing Olly, but she's not sure what to say. Carla manages to convince Maddy to stay, but Maddy thinks the person she was before she found out the truth is dead. A week later, Maddy installs a lock on her bedroom door.

Installing a lock on the door is another way for Maddy to assert her independence from her mom, while her willingness to listen to Carla shows again that Carla is the adult in Maddy's life whom she trusts the most to give her sound, thought-out advice. The sense that Maddy is a new person yet again speaks to the power of learning new information about oneself and loved ones. In this sense, the discovery of the phony SCID diagnosis functions much the same way as having sex did, as it shows Maddy what else is possible in the world.



86. TWO WEEKS A.D.; THREE WEEKS A.D.; FOUR WEEKS A.D.

Maddy drafts four different emails to Olly sharing the news and saying she misses him, but she doesn't send them. Mom tries to enter Maddy's room, but the door is locked and Maddy won't open it. Maddy drafts more emails to Olly, and Dr. Chase continues to urge Maddy to be cautious. Four weeks after discovering she's not sick, Maddy paints each wall in her room a different **color**. One is yellow, one is blue, one is lavender, and the final one is black chalkboard paint. Maddy ignores Mom's knocks on her door.

Painting the walls in her room allows Maddy to assert her newfound identity and make it clear that she lives in the house separately from Mom. She's also able to do this by ignoring Mom's knocks, something that Maddy hadn't previously felt able to do. Through this, the novel doesn't ignore that Maddy is angry, but it still makes the case that she's independent and taking control of her life.



87. FIVE WEEKS A.D.; SIX WEEKS A.D.

Five weeks after discovering she's not sick, Maddy orders real plants for the sunroom, opens the doors and turns off the air filter, and buys goldfish. She names them all Olly. Six weeks after, Dr. Chase tells Maddy it's too soon to enroll in high school, but Maddy and Carla persuade him to let some of Maddy's tutors visit in person.

Maddy's continued efforts to personalize her home and introduce new elements into it reflect her burgeoning individuality and her desire to be a part of the outside world, even if it's still somewhat unsafe for her to experience it as fully as she'd like to.



88. MADELINE'S MOM

In a transcript from Mom's session with a psychiatrist, the psychiatrist notes that Mom is able to recount what happened the night that Maddy's dad and brother died—but she still speaks about it in the present tense. The psychiatrist includes the transcript of what Mom said about receiving the news. Mom talks about how police officers touch their weapons when they're nervous. The officers didn't seem to want to share the bad news. When the officer finally told her what happened, Mom found herself with Maddy, who was sick again. Mom wanted everything to stop. She wanted Maddy to stop crying, and she wanted to never see the hospital or death again.

That Mom speaks about this trauma in the present tense suggests that she hasn't been able to move on from the grief and trauma of losing her husband and son. Seeking help, however, offers hope that Mom will be able to recover and possibly even repair her relationship with Maddy. In the future, it's clear they would need to form a relationship as two independent adults, not as a parent caring for a child who, by many accounts, no longer needs that intense level of care.



89. FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON

A week later, Maddy hugs Mr. Waterman as he leaves and then sits outside with Carla. Maddy knows what's coming and asks Carla to not leave her. Carla says she'll stay if Maddy needs her, but Maddy *doesn't* need her—at least not like before. Maddy sobs for a while and then asks Carla what she'll do. Carla says she might go back to work at a hospital and has already told Mom she's leaving. Mom thanked her for caring for Maddy, which makes Maddy scowl. Carla encourages Maddy to forgive Mom, since she's sick. Maddy insists that Mom took her whole life away, but Carla insists that Maddy has lots of life left. As Carla packs her things, Maddy asks if she read [Flowers for Algernon](#). Carla says she didn't like it, but confesses it made her cry.

When Carla says that Maddy doesn't need her anymore, it effectively turns this moment into one in which Maddy is able to separate from a caregiver more on her terms. In important ways, Carla has been a more significant presence in Maddy's life than Mom has been, given that Carla has been the one to encourage Maddy to develop her individuality and take risks. This suggests that even going forward, Maddy and Carla will be able to maintain a relationship—but again, as two equal adults.



90. THE GIFT

Another week later, Mom knocks on Maddy's door. Maddy ignores her. She feels resentful as Mom knocks again, as she doesn't feel that Mom understands her crime. Maddy finally flings open the door and says it's not a good time. This clearly hurts Mom, but Maddy finds that she's *always* angry and wants to hurt Mom. In a small voice, Mom says she got Maddy something. Maddy wants to make the conversation end, so she takes the gift and asks if Mom thinks gifts will help. Mom turns away, but says she still loves Maddy and knows Maddy loves her. She implores Maddy to forgive her and not waste her life.

Even though Maddy has every right to be extremely angry with Mom, Mom also has a point: Maddy wallowing in her anger and her sense of betrayal is no way to live, just as Mom wallowing in her grief over losing her family was no way to live and even led to effectively imprisoning her daughter to deal with the negative emotions. In this sense, both Mom and Maddy have wasted their lives on negative emotions. Now, they have the opportunity to experience better, happier things that will allow them to develop and improve.



91. THE END IS THE BEGINNING IS THE END; FUTURE PERFECT #2

The gift is a phone, open to the weather app and showing a weekly forecast of sun. Maddy runs outside and without thinking, climbs onto the roof of Olly's house. She admires the orrery and marvels that when she was up here five months ago, she was a very different person. Maddy remembers that as a kid, she loved imagining different versions of herself, such as an outdoorsy girl or a skydiving daredevil. Imagining was fun since Maddy already knew who she was. Now, Maddy's not sure who she's supposed to be.

At this point, Maddy finds herself at a place where many teens end up: she has to figure out who she is, when the person she thought she was proves to be untenable in the long run. Now there are consequences for trying things, and given her conversations with Olly, Maddy understands that one choice could change everything dramatically.



Maddy tries to figure out the moment when everything changed. She wonders if it was when Maddy's dad and brother died, or if it was when her parents were born. She wonders which moment she'd choose to change and if changing that moment would give her the right results. She wonders if she'd still be Maddy, in this house, who fell in love with Olly. Maddy thinks that if she could find the moment, she could fix Mom and understand where she is now. Maddy composes an email to Olly saying that by the time he reads it, he will have forgiven her.

Though thinking about what she might change may or may not be a healthy and meaningful endeavor, it's also important to keep in mind that Maddy is only able to engage in this thought exercise because she's had the experiences in the real world that provided her with perspective and a new view of her life.



92. TAKEOFF; FORGIVENESS

Maddy shares a picture of her boarding pass from Los Angeles to New York City. In the air, she stares out the window at neatly delineated farmland, but she knows that in reality, the world isn't as ordered as it looks. Dr. Chase isn't thrilled with Maddy's choice to fly, but fortunately Mom didn't try to stop Maddy. Maddy tries to put herself in Mom's shoes and figure out how they got here, but she keeps coming back to the fact that love—and losing love—makes people crazy. She knows that Mom loved Maddy's dad, loved Maddy's brother, and still loves Maddy. Maddy can almost understand that Mom felt she had nothing when she lost her husband and son. Mom asked when Maddy would come home again. Maddy admitted that she's not sure this is home anymore, which made Mom cry. Maddy reads [The Little Prince](#) and the meaning changes again.

Though certainly heartbreaking for Maddy's mom to hear, Maddy's suggestion that this isn't home anymore reflects where Maddy is in her development—she's a young woman setting out into the world to live her life; she's no longer Mom's dependent daughter who must call this house home for her own health and safety. That Maddy is starting to understand how Mom feels and may have felt suggests that they may be able to repair their relationship and hopefully, go on to build one that's fulfilling for both of them—and one in which they can both be adults and trust each other.



93. LIFE IS SHORT; THIS LIFE

Maddy's spoiler review of [The Little Prince](#) is that love is worth everything. She lands in New York. She only told Olly that there's a gift waiting for him at a used bookstore near his house and spent the flight imagining their kiss-filled reunion. Maddy gets out of the cab and enters the bookstore. It's dim and smells old. She takes the 15 minutes before Olly is due to gawk at the books. When it's almost time, Maddy's stomach fills with butterflies and she hides. Olly appears a few minutes later. He is, for once, not wearing all black—his tee shirt is **gray**. Maddy begins to panic at seeing him so different, but she reasons that she's not the same anymore either.

That Olly is wearing a gray T-shirt suggests that when not living under his dad's thumb, he's becoming a happier person and is experimenting with who he'd like to be going forward. Maddy's ability to accept that Olly has changed shows that she's beginning to realize that experiences influence everyone in different ways, but this doesn't mean that another person's experience needs to be threatening to her.



Olly pulls out his phone to check Maddy's directions, which are that he'll know the gift when he sees it in the S-U aisle. He finds Maddy's book set in front of the others and stares at it. Maddy thinks that she knows now that there's not just one moment that brought her here—there are many moments, and a person's life can change in many different ways depending on their choices. There are many different versions of her life. In some she's sick; in others she died in Hawaii; and in some, Maddy's dad and brother are alive. In this version, however, Olly is in her life. As Olly picks up the book, Maddy walks toward him. Olly smiles.

Maddy's choice to accept that no matter what might have happened, this is the life she has shows that she now understands that she has the power to, in many ways, make her life what she wants it. She's a young adult with a credit card and a boy who loves her, and now that she's separated from Mom, she's able to give herself experiences that will bring her and Olly closer as they move further toward independence.





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