

If I Stay



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GAYLE FORMAN

Gayle Forman was born in Los Angeles, and worked as a journalist before she began writing novels. She has written for magazines such as *Seventeen*, *Details*, *Jane*, and *Glamour*. Forman enjoys traveling, and before going to college she took three years off in order to travel. She and her husband, Nick, also spent a year traveling the world, going everywhere from Tonga to Kazakhstan, a journey that Forman wrote about in her memoir *You Can't Get There From Here: A Year on the Fringes of a Shrinking World*. Forman, Nick, and her daughter currently reside in Brooklyn, New York City. She is the author of eight books, including the sequel to *If I Stay*, called *Where She Went*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Gayle Forman published *Where She Went*, a sequel to *If I Stay*, released on April 5, 2011. She has written several other books in the same genre of young-adult fiction, such as *I Was Here*, *Just One Day*, *Just One Year*, and *Just One Night*. Novels by other writers that share some similarities to *If I Stay*, in their focus on a young female protagonist trying to manage the intersection of everyday life and illness or terrible traumatic experiences, are *A Fault in Our Stars* by John Green and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *If I Stay*
- **When Written:** Late 2000s
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2009
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult Fiction
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction
- **Setting:** Oregon, United States
- **Climax:** Adam plays Yo-Yo Ma for Mia, and Mia decides to live.
- **Antagonist:** There is no major antagonist in the text, besides the older head nurse who, strictly following the rules of the hospital, denies Adam and Kim entry into the ICU because they are not Mia's relatives.
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Movie. In August 2014, a film version of *If I Stay* was released in theaters, directed by R.J. Cutler and starring Chloë Grace

Moretz as Mia. The film grossed \$78.9 million worldwide.

Shooting Star. _Gayle Forman's husband once played in a band called The Redmond Shooting Stars, which is where Shooting Star, the name of Adam's band, is taken from.



PLOT SUMMARY

Seventeen-year-old Mia Hall lives in a small town in Oregon with her Mom (Kat), Dad (Denny), and eight-year-old brother, Teddy. On one snowy morning, school is cancelled, leaving Mia and Teddy, as well as their father, an English teacher, with the day off. Mia's Mom decides to take the day off from her job at a travel agency in order to spend the day with the rest of her family. They eat breakfast, and Mia's Mom jokes that she's surprised Mia isn't spending the day practicing the **cello**. Mia is a talented cellist, and has recently auditioned for The Juilliard School in New York City, where she hopes to study the following year, after she graduates from high school. Everyone piles into the family car, and they start to drive. They plan to visit Willow and Henry, family friends who have a baby daughter, and to have dinner with Dad's parents, Gran and Gramps, who live nearby.

Mia falls asleep while her parents drive, and suddenly wakes up to find the car "eviscerated." The car has been totaled by a pickup truck, due to the snow on the roads, which is unusual for their part of Oregon. Mia finds her mother and father dead from the accident, and sees her own body, unconscious, still in the vehicle. She realizes she is having a kind of out-of-body experience: she cannot feel any pain, and appears to be able to move around as she pleases, though no one can see her. An ambulance soon arrives. Mia's parents are declared dead on arrival, and she is taken to a nearby hospital, where she is then airlifted to a hospital in Portland.

In Portland, Mia undergoes an operation to treat her extensive injuries. After the surgery, she is brought to the intensive care unit, where her body is stable, though in a coma. Though her grandparents are allowed to visit her, the head nurse does not allow Adam, her boyfriend, and Kim, her best friend, to visit because they are not relatives. Adam, who is a guitarist in a popular local rock band called Shooting Star, concocts a scheme to have Brooke Vega, the lead singer of an even more famous local band called Bikini, play an impromptu concert in the hospital to distract the nurses while Adam and Kim sneak into the ICU to see Mia. While the scheme doesn't work, the family's friend Willow, who is a nurse at another hospital, is able to use her connections to let Adam and Kim in to see Mia.

As Mia cannot speak to anyone to ask about Teddy, she had

assumed that Willow had previously been busy taking care of Teddy back in their local hospital. When she sees Willow in Portland, however, she deduces that Teddy is no longer alive. This realization causes Mia's physical body to go into cardiac arrest, and she is rushed into surgery again to fix a perforation in her abdomen.

Mia is brought back into the ICU after surgery, stable though still in a coma. Nurse Ramirez, a young nurse in the hospital, tells Mia's grandparents that Mia is "running the show," meaning that it is up to her whether or not she will emerge from the coma. Mia realizes that her emotions and decisions in her out-of-body experience directly connect to her physical body, and that it is up to her to decide whether she will live or die. If she chooses to live, she will have to cope with the grief of the loss of her parents, while if she decides to die and join her immediate family in death, she will forfeit her entire future with the cello, as well as her love of Gran, Gramps, Kim, and Adam.

Mia weighs the pros and cons of living and dying through a series of flashbacks, in which she recalls memorable moments with her family, such as Teddy's birth, for which she was present, and the trajectory of her relationship with Adam. Though Mia and Adam love each other, they had recently experienced tension in their relationship: Adam, who is one year older than Mia, is still living in their Oregon town because his band, Shooting Star, has quickly been gaining popularity and he has the potential to succeed as a musician. Should Mia be accepted to Juilliard, and Adam choose to remain in Oregon, an entire country will separate them. Mia is unsure if their relationship will survive the distance.

Mia makes it through the night. Exhausted, she feels as if she is ready to go to sleep, which will likely lead to her death. Adam comes to see Mia, puts headphones on her ears, and plays her the cello music of Yo-Yo Ma. The music brings up emotions and memories for Mia, both from the past and the future. She summons the strength to decide to stay, and squeezes Adam's hand, indicating that she has woken up from her coma, and has decided to live.

love of **classical music**. She often feels out of place in her family, though, due to her commitment to classical music rather than rock.

Adam Wilde – Adam is Mia's boyfriend. He is one year older than Mia, and graduated from their high school the year prior. He continues to live in Mia's town due to his role as guitarist in the local band Shooting Star, which is quickly gaining popularity. Adam is confident and more outgoing than Mia is, which initially led Mia to feel that he was teasing her when he first expressed interest in her. However, Adam won Mia over by taking her to a Yo-Yo Ma concert on their first date. Though Mia often feels out of place at Adam's **punk rock** concerts, Adam soon proves that he doesn't care that she isn't engaged in the same kind of music that he is, and he loves her for who she is as a person, someone with her own unique tastes.

Kim Schein – Kim is Mia's best friend. When they first met in middle school, Mia and Kim hated each other, mostly because teachers and other students assumed the two girls were already friends due to their similar looks and quiet demeanors. Continually being lumped together in the classroom led to name-calling via passed notes, and finally a fight on the playground in the sixth grade. After physically exchanging blows, however, the girls are quickly able to laugh about their feud, and finally become fast friends. Kim's mother, though well meaning, is overbearing, and makes her wear certain clothing and imposes strict curfews on her daughter. Kim is Jewish, and attends Jewish camp each summer in New Jersey. Kim is an aspiring photographer, and wants to work for *National Geographic* one day, just like her uncle does. Mia admires Kim for her personal strength and resilience, though is upset that Kim and Adam don't become fast friends when Mia and Adam begin dating.

Kat Hall (Mom) – Kat is Mia's Mom. Kat is strong, sassy, and fiercely protective of her family. She met Mia's father in her early twenties, when they were both fans and members of the **punk rock** scene of the Northwest. She currently works for a travel agency. Though always a rocker chick at heart, she respects and supports Mia's love of the **cello**.

Denny Hall (Dad) – Denny is Mia's Dad. He and Mia's Mom married when they were twenty-three, and had Mia soon after. Teddy was born ten years later. Denny is a middle-school English teacher—though he played guitar and wrote songs for a popular local band for many years, he quit when Teddy was born in order to spend more time with his family. Though Denny's friend Henry becomes angry with him for leaving the band, he maintains that his family will always come first, and that he was making an obvious choice, not a sacrifice. Once Dad and Mom recognize that Mia has a true gift with the **cello**, he works to support her passion, and finds her a teacher to study with, his friend Professor Christie.

Teddy Hall – Teddy is Mia's eight-year-old younger brother.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mia Hall – Mia Hall is the seventeen-year-old protagonist of *If I Stay*, and the novel is told from her point of view. A passionate and talented **cello** player from Oregon, Mia is likely Juilliard-bound after she graduates from high school. She is close with her Mom, Dad, and eight-year-old brother Teddy, as well as with her Gran and Gramps, her father's parents who live nearby. Quiet but driven, Mia spends most of her time with her family, her boyfriend, Adam, and best friend, Kim. Music is very important to Mia, as her parents were members of the **punk rock** scene in their younger days, and she grew to have a deep

Mia was present at his birth, and she was the first person he ever laid eyes on. Mia's Mom jokes that Teddy "imprinted" on Mia, since Mia has a mother-like connection and influence over Teddy. Teddy loves eight-year-old things such as SpongeBob and banging on drum sets. His birth is the reason Dad quits his band and devotes more time to the family. While he survives the initial impact of the car crash, he later dies in the hospital.

Gran – Gran is Dad's mother. She and Mia's grandfather, Gramps, live near Mia's family, and are very involved in their lives. Gran is a perpetually positive person who loves to garden and believes that deceased family members become **angels** that are reincarnated into birds, sent to watch over her and her family. Mia is inspired by Gran's past—as a young girl from Massachusetts, Gran decided to begin a new life in the Northwest and moved alone to Oregon, where she met Mia's grandfather. Gran loves that her son and his family are so involved in music, and also works to support Mia's talent and passion for the **cello**.

Gramps – Gramps is Dad's father. He is a man of few words, but supports and loves his son's family and their involvement in music. He is sad when Mia's Dad leaves his band, because Gramps loved listening to the music Dad played and the lyrics that he wrote, which Gramps found to be like poetry. Gramps also supports Mia's passion for the **cello**, and escorts her to San Francisco for a weekend for her Juilliard audition. While Mia is in a coma, he is the only person to privately let her know that he will understand her decision if she decides to leave.

Nurse Ramirez – Nurse Ramirez is a young nurse who cares for Mia in the Portland hospital. She is sympathetic to Adam and Kim's wishes to see Mia, and covertly helps them when they try to use diversion tactics to get into the ICU, against the rules of the older head nurse. She tells Gran and Gramps that Mia is "running the show"—that Mia is the one who can decide whether or not she will emerge from her coma.

Henry – Henry is one of Dad's former band mates, and his best friend. Henry used to be a "drunk playboy," but when he began dating Willow, a nurse, he changed his ways. While he is angry when Dad leaves the band, he apologizes months later when his own baby daughter is born, and tells Dad that he finally understands what it means to put one's family first.

Willow – Willow is a family friend of the Halls who is married to Henry, and together they have a baby daughter. Willow is a nurse at a hospital in the Oregon town where she and the Halls live. Willow takes care of Teddy until he passes away. Willow becomes an advocate for Adam and Kim in the Portland hospital where Mia is airlifted for treatment after the accident. She speaks with the head nurse to make sure that they are able to visit Mia, despite the fact that they are not technically family members. Like Mom, Willow is fiercely protective of her family, and she transfers this affection to Mia when Mia's own family is gone.

Mrs. Schein – Mrs. Schein is Kim's mother. Though well-intentioned, she is often overbearing, and imposes strict restrictions on what Kim can wear and do. She initially doesn't let Kim visit Mia's house, due to the fact that the two girls physically fought, but she is eventually won over by the kindness of Mia's family. Mrs. Schein is inconsolable and distraught when she learns of the car accident.

Professor Christie – Professor Christie is Mia's cello teacher. She is a professor of music at a local college, and a friend of Mia's Dad. Though she is skeptical of young Mia's abilities at first, after listening to her practice the **cello**, she agrees to take over her studies and find her other students to play with. Professor Christie encourages and coaches Mia to apply to Juilliard, and believes she has a real chance to become a professional musician.

Brooke Vega – Brooke Vega is the lead singer of a locally famous band called Bikini, which Shooting Star was planning to open for on the day of the accident. At Adam's request, Brooke and her band come to the hospital to stage an impromptu show as a form of distraction while Adam and Kim attempt to get into Mia's hospital room to see her. Though the distraction doesn't work too well, it is a testament to how much Adam and his band care about Mia that they were able to convince a rock star to risk getting arrested on her behalf.

Mr. Dunlap – The man who was driving the car that hit Mia's family's car. Mr. Dunlap survived the accident – which truly was an accident as he swerved because of snow on the road – but Mia shows her empathy by compassionately wondering what it is like for Mr. Dunlap to have been the cause of an accident that took the lives of a family.

Great Aunt Glo – Mia's great aunt, and the sister of Gran. Great Aunt Glo died some years before the accident, and requested that her ashes be scattered in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. While Mia is in a coma, Gran goes on a walk and sees a crossbill, a rare bird in that part of Oregon. Gran believes that the bird is a reincarnation of Glo that has returned to show support for Mia.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Peter Hellman – A friend of Mia's at the summer conservatory camp she attends in British Columbia. While still young, he dies of lymphoma.

Simon – A friend of Mia's at the summer conservatory camp she attends in British Columbia. He also plays cello, and they practice and "duel" together in friendly competition.

Kerry Gifford – A young man, active in the punk music scene in Mia's town, who died of a freak brain aneurysm while operating the sound board at a concert.



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.



SACRIFICE AND CHOICE

If I Stay is a novel that explores the kinds of sacrifices that inevitably accompany choices. As a teenager, Mia is at the crossroads of many major

life decisions. For example, as a talented cellist, Mia has to decide whether to pursue her study of the instrument at Juilliard in New York City, or whether she will remain with her boyfriend, Adam, in the Pacific Northwest. Other characters have important choices to make as well, like Mia's Dad, who quits the band he has been part of for years in order to pursue a degree in teaching and better provide for his growing family. The consequence of this decision is that his friend Harry, whom he has played with in the band for years, becomes very angry at what he perceives to be disloyalty. However, Harry comes to understand Mia's father's decision when he himself becomes a father. The novel thus suggests that as we grow and take on more responsibilities, it becomes necessary to make choices not just for ourselves, but also for the welfare of the people around us.

Of course, in the wake of a car accident that kills her parents and brother and puts Mia in a coma, the major decision facing Mia is whether she will remain in the land of the living—with her grandparents Gran and Gramps, her best friend Kim, her boyfriend Adam, and her future with classical cello—or if she will move on to death to join her Mom, Dad, and brother Teddy. If Mia continues to live, she will get to live out the hopes and dreams her parents had for her, but will have to cope with the pain of her loss. If she goes on to die, losing Mia and her entire immediate family will further devastate those close to her. This central, fundamental choice that Mia must make gives the novel much of its drama. Yet with all of the different sorts of choices faced by so many different characters in the novel, the profound choice Mia faces here *also* serves as a metaphor for the fact that in life, one will always have to make decisions that result in difficult consequences, and those choices inevitably result in also making sacrifices. While two choices in life may seem equally appealing, pursuing both options is often impossible, and there are consequences involved in what is lost—and gained—when choosing one path over another. It is therefore a part of life and growing up that we must cope with the consequences of the decisions we make, and the sacrifice of what we choose to leave behind.



MUSIC AND HARMONY

The characters in *If I Stay* are connected by a deep love and respect for music. While a profound emotional response to music brings characters together, differences in taste and lifestyle also push them apart. Respecting the musical choices and tastes of characters in the novel therefore becomes a metaphor for accepting others for who they are, and also for accepting one's own unique talents and tastes. This idea manifests in a motif of harmony in the novel, which comes to represent the blending of not just different notes and genres of music, but also the perfect mixing of different personality types and tastes.

Mia's Mom and Dad, as well as her boyfriend Adam, are all lovers of rock music—as the novel is set in the punk and alternative scenes of the Pacific Northwest. Rock music is what brought together Mia's parents, and it is what Adam loves and hopes to pursue as a career. However, Mia is a lover of classical music, a genre which is often associated with people who are quieter and more traditional, and she often feels out of place among her parents and Adam, who bond over their mutual interests and styles, to the extent that Mia often wonders if she is adopted. Yet Mia makes a concerted effort to understand the music her parents and Adam love, and her loved ones, in turn, attempt to understand her love of the cello and classical music. These efforts to reconcile and connect come to a climax when she plays the cello along with her Dad and Adam, who play the guitar. Together the three of them create a new kind of harmony, one of both people and music: classical music blends with rock, as do the personalities of people who prefer one genre to the other.

Mia is an exceptionally talented cellist, and hopes to study it at Juilliard in New York City. She is drawn to the cello because she finds it “humanlike” when she first sees one in school as a child. Her love of the cello is also symbolic of her profound appreciation for the small but close circle of people in her life. While some musicians play multiple instruments, she is drawn to and focuses all her energy on just one—just as she is very close to her immediate family, and socializes almost exclusively with Kim and Adam. Conversely, the people in her life who love rock music tend to have multiple pursuits within music, such as writing songs as well as playing them on the guitar, and they participate in a band rather than playing solo. By attempting to understand the appeal of rock music and playing in a band (an orchestra or quartet, in the case of the cello), Mia begins to open herself up, emotionally and musically. The cello is a symbol of the “family” Mia will have to return to if she decides to stay. The cello is what will bring her to New York to study at Juilliard, but it is also what will continue to separate her from Adam. Ultimately, as Mia faces her choice of whether to follow her parents into death or stay behind and live, it is Adam playing cello music for Mia that prompts her to decide to stay. This is a metaphor for the deep understanding in the musical tastes of

the other that bonds the two teenagers and is the basis for their love. When Adam and the cello are finally combined, Mia is reminded of what she will lose if she dies, and she is convinced to remain and cope with the loss of her parents.



LOVE, FAMILY, AND RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of love and family is a driving force in *If I Stay*, as many of the choices and sacrifices made within the novel are done for the sake of loved ones. However, love can also complicate these decisions, and can sometimes be the very thing that must be sacrificed. Thus, characters in the novel must balance making decisions for the sake of love, while also understanding and learning when they must let love go. They subsequently learn how to cope with the loss of someone or something they love.

If Mia chooses to stay, she will live on with Adam, Kim, Gran and Gramps, as well as her musical future. However, she will also have to cope with the loss of Mom, Dad, and Teddy for the rest of her life. Similarly, if she pursues the cello at Juilliard, she will be separated from Adam by distance, which will possibly cause the end of their relationship. In choosing to continue her own life, Mia makes the sacrifice of losing her parents and also sacrifices the peace that would come with her death. She must gain the strength to make one decision and cope with the other difficult choices that inevitably arise as a repercussion. These reverberating decisions, she realizes, are one of the complexities of life.

Mia's grandfather, Gramps, her father's father, whispers to a comatose Mia that while he wants her to live, he will accept and understand if she wants to give up fighting. Gramps is the only character who expresses this kind of understanding to Mia (Adam, Kim, and other loved ones want her to keep fighting). While Adam and Kim want their friend to stay alive, Gramps acknowledges that living in a world without her family would be very painful for Mia. Mia, in her coma, wishes that he could be a kind of "death proxy," and make the decision for her. Yet, of course, Mia is the only person that can make this choice for herself, signifying the fact that as one grows up and gains more responsibility, parents and grandparents can no longer make all the tough decisions on behalf of their children. A strong bond of love and understanding, however, means family members and loved ones will support each other on whatever path they choose.

In Mia's flashbacks, we see that Mia is distraught when she realizes that her best friend Kim and boyfriend Adam do not become fast friends when Adam and Mia begin dating. However, Kim and Adam are unperturbed by the fact that they do not immediately bond over their mutual love of Mia. The non-relationship between Kim and Adam is symbolic of the discrete parts of life that don't always have to connect to still make a person whole. These separate parts of her life do come together when Mia's loved ones attempt to convince her to

stay, however—Adam and Kim bond as they cope with Mia's coma. It is then that Mia realizes how the separate parts of her life, regardless of their lack of intersection, make her life whole. A family, the novel suggests, like a rock band or classical orchestra, functions best when each distinct part serves to support the group, while remaining true to its individuality. It is harmony, not homogeneity, that creates the perfect blend. Thus, *If I Stay* argues that a fulfilling life is inherently composed of complex relationships and the different kinds of love they require.



LIFE AND DEATH

At its core, *If I Stay* is predicated on one decision: whether, after the car accident that kills her parents and brother and puts her in a coma, Mia decides to stay alive, or whether she decides to die. She is able to make this decision while in an out-of-body experience, in which she can see everything that is happening around her regarding her care in the hospital, but cannot interact with anyone or anything. It is in this state that she reflects on her past life experiences, and how they have influenced her as a person and brought her to this moment.

Mia vacillates between wanting to stay behind, and wanting to move on into death along with her Mom, Dad, and brother Teddy. Leaving the world of the living would mean that she would be with her parents, and would not have to live with the grief of their deaths. It would also mean that she would not have to face the inevitable tough decisions of life, such as whether or not to pursue cello in New York City, away from her boyfriend Adam. However, if she stays alive, she will be able to continue to cherish the memories she shared with her family, and these experiences will forever shape her future.

Ultimately, Mia makes the decision to stay behind, and to come to terms with the sacrifices and rewards of continuing to live and be the sole survivor of the car crash. Mia's choice is a metaphor for the fact that making difficult decisions is a part of life and a part of having agency over one's own life. Conversely, part of taking agency and making these tough decisions is understanding when it is time to make the choice to let something go. While Mia is tragically forced to make a life-or-death decision at a younger age than most, her choice is a response to the universal question everyone must face at some point: how to experience the joys in life, while coping with the sorrows that inevitably accompany them, and how to carry the memories of what has been lost along the way while continuing to move forward.



SYMBOLS

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



THE CELLO

Mia is a talented cellist who plans to pursue a career in **classical cello music**. She fell in love with the instrument as a child, initially due to its “humanlike” shape, and has played it ever since. While her parents are punk rockers at heart, Mia has always felt an affinity to classical music. In the novel, the cello is a symbol of what makes Mia unique, and also what makes her feel different from her parents and from Adam, who plays guitar in a rock band. The cello is what may bring her to New York City to study at Juilliard, but it will also be what will take her away from Oregon, and thus from Adam, whose band is based there. Mia also learns, however, that her cello can also be used to create harmony in her life, rather than dissonance. This is especially apparent in a symbolic scene where Mia plays her cello alongside her Dad and Adam on their guitars, and together they create a unique and “pretty amazing” sound. The power of the cello as a symbol is also illustrated in the book’s final scene—when Adam puts the headphones on Mia, it is ultimately both the music of Yo-Yo Ma and cello music’s overall meaningfulness to Mia that gives her the strength to decide to stay.



PUNK ROCK AND CLASSICAL MUSIC

Mia’s Mom and Dad met in their early twenties, when Dad was in a punk rock band. Unlike her parents, however, Mia’s love of the **cello** led her to classical music, her preferred genre. Classical music is what makes Mia feel unique, but it is also what makes her feel different, even within her own family. Her family is surprised by Mia’s affinity for the cello when she is young, but they soon come to realize that she has immense talent, and they support her music studies even if they can’t understand her choice of genre. Like Mom and Dad, Adam is also in a rock band, and Mia often feels out of place at his concerts and with his band mates, especially because she is quieter and more introverted than his loud, outgoing fans. For Halloween, Mia dresses up like Adam’s punk friends do—essentially crossing over from her world of classical music to the world of punk music—and feels more accepted by Adam’s community. However, Adam tells Mia that while he appreciates the effort, he likes her just the way she is. Mia ultimately comes to realize that it is a love for music, no matter the genre, that connects her to her family and to Adam.



ANGELS

Mia’s grandmother, Gran, believes that deceased family members become angels and are reincarnated in the form of birds, which then “visit” in order to watch over the family. For example, on the day of the car accident, Gran says that she saw a crossbill, a bird that is not common in their part of Oregon. She believes that the bird is a

reincarnation of her sister Glo, visiting to watch over Mia and support the family through the tragedy of the accident. Mia recalls that all her life, whenever she heard an anecdote from the past, she had an overwhelming feeling of déjà vu, as if she had been physically present at the event. Neither of these ideas of angels or reincarnation are given any specific religious framework in the book, but they do contribute to the novel’s theme of the spectrum of life and death, as Mia, in a kind of state of purgatory, is deciding whether she will remain alive or follow her family into death.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *If I Stay* published in 2010.

7:09 AM Quotes

☝ Just like with Shooting Star’s meteoric rise, my admission to Juilliard—if it happens—will create certain complications, or, more accurately, would compound the complications that have already cropped up in the last few months.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Adam Wilde

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

On the morning of a snow day off from school, Mia’s Dad points out a photo of Adam, Mia’s boyfriend, in the newspaper. Adam is part of a local band, Shooting Star, that is quickly gaining popularity in the area. In this quote, seeing Adam and his success reminds Mia of some upcoming changes and choices in her life: if she is accepted to the prestigious Juilliard School in New York City, in order to pursue classical cello, she and Adam will have to decide whether to stay together or whether to break up due to the distance. Since Adam’s entire band and fan base is in the Pacific Northwest, there is no chance of him joining her in New York City. Although the admissions decision has not yet arrived, the prospect of a change has already caused strain on Adam and Mia’s relationship in the last few months. Though the cello is one of the most important things in her life, so is her relationship with Adam. Throughout the novel, Mia is frequently concerned about having to choose the cello over Adam, or the other way around, and often grapples with the pros and cons of moving to NYC, or remaining in Oregon with her family and Adam.

☝ I know it's silly but I have always wondered if Dad is disappointed that I didn't become a rock chick. I'd meant to. Then, in third grade, I'd wandered over to the cello in music class—it looked almost human to me. It looked like if you played it, it would tell you secrets, so I started playing. It's been almost ten years now and I haven't stopped.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Denny Hall (Dad)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Hearing Teddy banging on his drums upstairs, Mia thinks about her family's relationship to music. Though her parents met through the punk rock music scene of the Pacific Northwest in their twenties, Mia has always been drawn to classical music. In this quote, she describes how she was drawn to the mysterious shape of the cello in the third grade, and has never looked back since. Even though Mia is very close to her family, she often wonders how she, a dark-haired classical music lover, ended up in a family of fair-haired punk rockers. A quiet, intense musician, she occasionally feels out of place among her outgoing family members. Here, she implies that her father may be prouder of Teddy's musical skills if he uses them for rock rather than classical music, like she does. She loves her family, and they are all musically talented, but Mia still feels somewhat out of place and different.

☝ I'd actually rather go off with my family. This is another thing you don't advertise about yourself, but Adam gets that, too.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Adam Wilde

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

When the Hall family wakes up to discover a light snowfall—enough to close school for the day—they quickly decide to spend the day together. They decide to visit family friends Willow and Henry, who have a new baby girl, followed by a trip to the bookstore and dinner with their grandparents. In this quote, Mia acknowledges that she will

always choose to spend time with her family over anything else. She also acknowledges that as a senior in high school, most other kids her age would pick friends over family. Mia recognizes that she might be making an "uncool" choice, but she seems confident enough to make that choice easily—and Adam, her idealized boyfriend, supports and understands her.

8:17 AM Quotes

☝ As usual, there is a battle for stereo dominance. Mom wants NPR. Dad wants Frank Sinatra. Teddy wants SpongeBob SquarePants. I want the classical-music station, but recognizing that I'm the only classical fan in the family, I am willing to compromise with Shooting Star.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Teddy Hall, Denny Hall (Dad), Kat Hall (Mom)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

With a free day off from school and work due to the snow, Mia's family decides to visit family friends Willow and Henry. In the car, they debate over what music to listen to during the drive. While everyone in the family loves music, they often dispute over what kinds of music to listen to, as represented in this quote—one of many instances of choice in terms of music, and compromise in terms of harmony. As shown in this example, the family members are close enough that they are always willing to compromise. In this quote, the compromise is Shooting Star, the local band that Mia's boyfriend Adam plays in. This instance is representative of the harmony that the family maintains in nearly every situation, despite their varying preferences.

9:23 AM Quotes

☝ Am I dead? I actually have to ask myself this.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

When a truck collides with the family car due to ice on the road, Mia's parents die upon impact, and Teddy is mortally wounded. Mia, critically injured but still alive, has an out-of-body, quasi-religious experience for the majority of the novel. In this quote, Mia is able to see the crash and her physical, injured body in the car as external from what she perceives to be the body that she uses to presently move and think. She is invisible to everyone else. Seeing the trauma the crash caused to her body, she is unsure if this out-of-body experience is what happens to someone when they die. However, she cannot see the deceased members of her family, and realizes she must be existing in some kind of limbo between life and death. It's never made clear just why Mia is chosen for this state of limbo, but it is the conceit that drives the rest of the book.

☞ Sometimes I did feel like I came from a different tribe. I was not like my outgoing, ironic dad or my tough-chick mom. And as if to seal the deal, instead of learning to play electric guitar, I'd gone and chosen the cello.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

When she was eight years old, Mia fell in love with the cello: she was drawn to the human-like shape of the instrument, and felt passionate about the music she could make in tandem with its strings. At first, her parents were incredulous about such a small girl playing a rather large instrument, particularly one that was so different from the punk rock music that they loved and listened to. However, their love of Mia meant that they were willing to put aside musical preferences to support their daughter in her interests. Though Mia never doubted that her parents were proud of her, she always felt slightly out of place among the punk, outgoing personalities of her Mom and Dad. To her, her parents' punk-rock lifestyle and her classical pursuits seemed to mean that she was inherently "uncool," despite the family she was born into. Yet, this discomfort is not enough to dissuade her from pursuing the kind of music that she loves. Once again, this quote is an example of how

Mia finds herself making choices and separating herself from others, but also compromising and finding harmony with her family and friends.

☞ I was still scared, but it was somehow comforting to think that maybe stage fright was a trait I'd inherited from Dad; I wasn't just some foundling, after all.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Denny Hall (Dad)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Mia thinks back to her first cello recital many years ago. Scared of performing on stage, her father comforted Mia by telling her that when he performed in his own band, he, too, had crippling stage fright. Knowing that she and Dad share this trait comforts Mia, who has long been concerned about how her musical tastes, personality, and appearance differ from her parents'. While they are fair-haired and like punk music, Mia is dark-haired and prefers to play the cello. She finds enough comfort in having this shared fear with her father to have the courage to perform in the recital. This quote is representative of the fact that even though Mia is sometimes concerned with how different she is from her immediate family members, they support her in whatever she pursues.

10:12 AM Quotes

☞ "I'm obsessed with music and even I don't get transported like you do."

Related Characters: Adam Wilde (speaker), Mia Hall

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

When Adam first expresses interest in Mia, she thinks that he is perhaps making fun of her. Adam is a year older and considered popular at their high school, while Mia is known as a quiet and intense student. After watching her practice for days, Adam approaches Mia and expresses his admiration for the intensity with which she practices her cello. He tells her that he, too, enjoys music—he plays guitar

in a rock band—but in this quote, he tells her that he has awe for the way in which music seems to "transport" her. Adam and Mia's mutual love for music, and their admiration for the other person's passion for music, becomes a foundation of their relationship to come. However, the differences in their musical interests—Mia's passion for classical cello, Adam's aspirations for his punk rock band—occasionally become a source of tension in the relationship.

☞ A small part of me felt like even applying was some kind of betrayal. Juilliard was in New York. Adam was here.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Adam Wilde

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

When it comes time to apply for college, Mia feels very torn between staying in Oregon with Adam and her family, and pursuing her dreams of playing the cello professionally in New York City. As a very talented cellist, she knows deep down that there is a chance that she could be accepted to the prestigious Juilliard School, all the way across the country. If her application were to prove successful, she would find it very difficult to choose between following her dreams and continuing to stay in Oregon with those she loves. Adam, also a musician, plays in a popular local band called Shooting Star. As their fan base is on the rise in the Pacific Northwest, there is no possibility of Adam following Mia to New York. Mia feels that in even just applying to Juilliard and entertaining the idea of moving away from home, she is "betraying" her relationship with Adam. She therefore keeps her application a secret from Adam until she finds out that her preliminary audio tape has earned her an audition in San Francisco.

☞ When we got back home, Gramps dropped me off and enveloped me in a hug. Normally, he was a handshaker, maybe a back-patter on really special occasions. His hug was strong and tight, and I knew it was his way of telling me that he'd had a wonderful time. "Me, too, Gramps," I whispered.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Gramps

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

When Mia is invited to audition for the Juilliard admissions panel in San Francisco, Gran initially plans to take Mia on the trip. However, she falls ill, and Gramps volunteers to take Mia instead. The two make a weekend of San Francisco, and enjoy exploring shops and restaurants together. Though Mia is very nervous for her audition, it goes very well. Unlike Gran, Gramps is quiet, and doesn't always express his love and appreciation verbally. In this quote, Gramps tells Mia that he had a wonderful weekend spending time with her not with words, but with a strong hug. Mia knows that he is telling her he loves her and is proud of her in his own way, and that is why she responds with, "Me, too, Gramps." This instance is representative of the love and support that Mia receives not only from her immediate family, but from her grandparents as well. Mia's closeness with her grandparents is one of the reasons that her decision between staying and leaving is made more difficult.

☞ I didn't mind. I was excited about a baby. And I knew that Carnegie Hall wasn't going anywhere. I'd get there someday.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Teddy Hall

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

When Mia's mother finds out that she is pregnant with Teddy, the family cancels an impending trip to New York City. Mia's parents have always been very open about the fact that neither Mia nor Teddy were planned pregnancies, a hallmark of their easygoing and spontaneous attitudes. This quote is representative of how important Teddy has always been in Mia's life, even before she was born. Though she was very excited to visit Carnegie Hall (a famous concert hall, and thus a dream for the ambitious, cello-playing Mia) and see New York City for the first time, her excitement and understanding about missing the trip due to the prospect of having a sibling trumped any feelings of disappointment. Despite her love of the cello, Mia's deep love of family has always come first.

“Mia, Mia, Mia,” he said, stroking the tendrils of my hair that had escaped from the wig. “This is the you I like. You definitely dressed sexier and are, you know, blond, and that’s different. But the you who you are tonight is the same you I was in love with yesterday, the same you I’ll be in love with tomorrow. I love that you’re fragile and tough, quiet and kick-ass. Hell, you’re one of the punkest girls I know, no matter who you listen to or what you wear.”

Related Characters: Adam Wilde (speaker), Mia Hall

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

When Adam's band plays a show at a popular local venue on Halloween, Mia decides to go all out with her costume. With Mom's help, she dresses up as a sexy punk rock chick. As she's always felt out of place at Shooting Star's crazy concerts, Mia hopes that Adam will be impressed with her attempt to fit in with the other punk rockers. When he sees her after the show, he is shocked at her appearance, but in this quote, he tells her that he loves her for who she usually is, not for who she dresses up as. Though Mia is often worried that she's not "cool" enough for Adam, who is older and in a rock band, Adam explains that he loves her for her quiet intensity, which makes her one of the "punkest" girls he knows, despite her tamer wardrobe and musical choices. It is Adam and Mia's mutual respect and acceptance of each other allows their relationship to thrive, despite the differences in their musical tastes.

7:13 PM Quotes

“Look, I accept Adam because you love him. And I assume he accepts me because you love me. If it makes you feel any better, your love binds us. And that’s enough. Me and him don’t have to love each other.”

Related Characters: Kim Schein (speaker), Adam Wilde, Mia Hall

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

When Mia and Adam first began to date, Mia assumed that as two of the most important people in her life, Kim and Adam would become fast friends. However, after several encounters, it becomes clear that the two teenagers just

don't get along very well. This makes Mia very upset. In this quote, Kim explains that Mia shouldn't be upset about Adam not becoming her best friend as well, because they will always be bound, to an extent, by their mutual love for Mia. The fact that Kim and Adam don't hit it off upsets Mia because she comes from a family that, for the most part, exists in total harmony—she is not used to the people in her life not thoroughly enjoying each other's presence. Kim and Adam's mutual respect but lack of fondness for each other is a rude awakening for Mia that sometimes, two people that she loves will not always love each other.

And that’s how I know. Teddy. He’s gone, too.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Teddy Hall

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Though Mia is happy to see Willow stick up for Adam and Kim, she is struck by the realization that Willow's presence in the hospital means that she no longer needs to be at the hospital where she works as a nurse. Mia had been certain that Willow was there taking care of Teddy. If she no longer needs to be at the hospital, Mia realizes, this means that Teddy has died. While Mia could tell that her parents had died upon the impact of the crash, she held onto the hope that Teddy would survive. Now, Mia knows that her entire immediate family has died in the crash—knowledge that will make her decision whether to stay or to leave very difficult. If she were to remain alive, she would have to deal with the grief of losing her entire family. If she were to leave, she would sacrifice her entire future with the cello, Adam, Kim, and her grandparents, but could at least be on the "other side" with Teddy, Mom, and Dad. As Teddy's older sister, she has always been very protective of him, and so she is distraught by the prospect of him scared and dying alone. She hopes that wherever he is, he is being comforted by Mom, Dad, and other relatives that have passed away.

When Teddy slid out, he was head up, facing the ceiling, so that the first thing he saw was me.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Teddy Hall

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

In a flashback, Mia recalls the day that Teddy is born. Mia accompanies her mother to the birthing clinic and is present in the room at the moment Mom gives birth. In this quote, Mia remembers that when Teddy first opened his eyes, she was the one he was looking at. Ever since then, she and Teddy have been exceptionally close, to the point that her parents joked that he "imprinted" on her. This memory makes the trauma of Teddy's passing even harder on Mia, as she was always very protective of her younger brother. Teddy's death also makes Mia's decision to stay or leave even more difficult: If she were to decide to stay, she would have to go through life without the support of her immediate family.

☝ "In my ideal scenario, my bighearted pushover husband and I die quickly and simultaneously when we're ninety-two years old...Mia plays at our funeral. If, that is, we can tear her away from the New York Philharmonic."

Related Characters: Kat Hall (Mom) (speaker), Mia Hall, Denny Hall (Dad)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

In the car on the way home from a funeral, Mia's family begins to discuss what kind of funerals they hope to have one day. In this quote, Mom notes that she hopes to die at the same time as Dad, and to have Mia play for the funeral. This quote is one of morbid foreshadowing to the crash that is to happen years later: Mom and Dad do die at the same time, and if Mia decides to stay, there is a possibility that she would play at the funeral. This particular memory highlights the often dark irony of life—Mom will perhaps get her wish for her funeral, though several decades prior to when she hoped she would die. Mia recalls this conversation as she weighs the pros and cons of staying or leaving, because it represents how fleeting life can be—someone as vivacious as Mom can be here one moment, and gone in the blink of an eye.

☝ Dad was wrong. It's true you might not get to control your funeral, but sometimes you *do* get to choose your death.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Denny Hall (Dad)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

While in the car on the way back from a family friend's funeral, Mom is furious about the sentimental and religious nature of the service. She believes that the friend, who was an atheist, would have been very upset at the funeral his family set up for him. Dad gently counters Mom and points out that no one gets to choose how their funeral goes, since it only happens after they are gone. In this quote, Mia recalls Dad's words in the course of her decision whether to stay or to leave the world of the living. Once she realizes the terms of her coma—it is her choice whether she will join her parents in death, or to wake up and continue living—she thinks about the humorous, if morbid, conversation in which she and her family discussed their funerals. For all their talk of death, Mia never thought that she would have any say about when or how she would die. In remembering an instance when she realized her father was wrong about the terms of life and death, Mia further realizes how this choice is entirely her decision—a moment of growth, and separation, from the world in which she relied on the advice of her parents.

2:48 AM Quotes

☝ Sleep without dreams. I've heard people talk about the sleep of the dead. Is that what death would feel like? The nicest, warmest, heaviest never-ending nap? If that's what it's like, I wouldn't mind. If that's what dying is like, I wouldn't mind at all.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

As the hours in which she is in a coma wear on, Mia, even in her out-of-body state, begins to become very tired. She longs to fall asleep, but does not succumb to her fatigue because she has not yet decided whether to stay or to leave. In this quote, she wonders if dying would be like one very long nap, albeit one without dreams. Here, she longs for a sleep without any memories of her life—good or bad—in order to forget the trauma of the day, and to not miss the

good times she enjoyed with her now-deceased family members. In this instance, the weariness that she feels from the events of the day and the emotional stress of her impending decision make her want to give up and give in to the never-ending sleep of death. However, while she has heard people speak of death as a long sleep, she cannot be sure, thus revealing her current preference for leaving, though with reservations.

☞ “It’s okay,” he tells me. “If you want to go. Everyone wants you to stay. I want you to stay more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life...But that’s what I want and I could see why it might not be what you want. So I just wanted to tell you that I understand if you go. It’s okay if you have to leave us. It’s okay if you want to stop fighting.”

Related Characters: Gramps (speaker), Mia Hall

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

Gramps goes to visit Mia in her hospital bed, this time without Gran. Mia, via her out-of-body experience, can see and hear what Gramps is saying to her comatose body. In this quote, he tells her that he would understand if she made the decision to leave the world of the living, rather than stay. Gramps saying this to Mia is significant because thus far in the hospital, people have been urging Mia to stay alive without acknowledging the pain of loss that she will have to deal with for the rest of her life. This quote is also significant because Gramps, though supportive and loving, is not a man of many words—but when he does speak, such as now, he says exactly what Mia needs to hear. While Gramps' understanding is enormously comforting, it also makes Mia's decision to leave even harder—how could she leave Gramps and Gran behind? Ultimately, when Mia does choose to stay, one major factor in her decision is the knowledge that she will still have a family to support her through the grief of losing Mom, Dad, and Teddy.

☞ “I’d played that part of my life out. It was time. I didn’t even think twice about it, in spite of what Gramps or Henry might think. Sometimes you make choices in life and sometimes choices make you. Does that make any sense?”

Related Characters: Denny Hall (Dad) (speaker), Gramps,

Henry

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

When Teddy is born, Dad makes the decision to leave the rock band that he has played in for many years. This makes his best friend who is also in the band, Henry, very angry with him. It also makes Gramps, who loved listening to Dad's music, very sad as well. In this quote, Dad responds to Mia's question as to why he made this decision. Dad explains to Mia that for him, it wasn't even a decision—it was simply time for him to move on with his life, and focus on his family and being a good father to Mia and Teddy. In the course of making her decision whether to stay or to leave, Mia recalls this conversation because of Dad's quip that "sometimes you make choices in life and sometimes choices make you." Here he means that sometimes in life, we don't have a choice in what happens, and it is up to us to make the most of a bad situation so one situation doesn't change us completely. When Mia decides to stay, it is ultimately because of an outpouring of love that has shown her that she must go on living in order to keep the memories of her family alive, and to see where the future takes her.

☞ Something had happened to my playing in that audition; I had broken through some invisible barrier and could finally play the pieces like I heard them being played in my head, and the result had been something transcendent: the mental and physical, the technical and emotional sides of my abilities all finally blending.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mia recalls her audition for Julliard in San Francisco. Though she was very nervous in anticipation for it, it went extremely well. As a passionate cellist, Mia seeks not just for technical perfection, but to connect with music emotionally as well. At the present moment in the novel, Mia is still unsure as to whether she has been accepted to the prestigious music school, but the prospect of continuing to play the cello is one of the major reasons why she ultimately decides to stay. For Mia, music is a way of

transporting herself to another world, and also a way of connecting with those around her who love music, too—such as Mom, Dad, and Adam. By staying alive and pursuing her love of the cello, a passion that the people around her always supported, she is continuing to honor the memory of the family that encouraged her in all of her endeavors.

“...I do know that if you want to stay and be with him, I’d support that, though maybe I’m only saying that because I don’t think you’d be able to turn down Juilliard. But I’d understand if you chose love, Adam love, over music love. Either way you win. And either way you lose. What can I tell you? Love’s a bitch.”

Related Characters: Kat Hall (Mom) (speaker), Adam Wilde, Mia Hall

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mia and Mom discuss the difficult choice that Mia has coming up: whether to move to NYC to pursue the cello (if she is accepted to Juilliard) or to stay in Oregon and attend a state school closer to Adam. This quote is significant because it parallels the extremely difficult choice that Mia must imminently make: whether to stay alive, or to join her parents and brother in death. Like with the choice between "Adam love" and "music love," each option has significant pros and cons. Mia recalls this quote because of the unconditional support that Mom always gave to her. Regardless of what she chooses, Mia knows that she has an immense amount of love waiting for her on the side of life or on the side of death. With either option she wins, and with either option she loses. The decision between life and death, like love, is a "bitch."

So I played. And even though you wouldn’t think it, the cello didn’t sound half bad with all those guitars. In fact, it sounded pretty amazing.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker), Denny Hall (Dad), Adam Wilde

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Mia recalls an impromptu party that her family threw one Labor Day. Neighbors and friends come over, and they enjoy barbecue and watermelon together. Later in the evening, Dad and Adam begin to jam on their guitars together. They implore Mia to join them, and begrudgingly, she agrees. Though she is concerned at first that the different instruments won’t sound good together, she is surprised to realize how great the two string instruments sound in harmony. This incident is a metaphor for Mia’s relationship to both her parents and Adam in terms of musical taste. Though Adam, Mom, and Dad are all big fans of punk rock music, Mia prefers classical music above anything else, though she does enjoy Adam’s band, Shooting Star. This difference often makes her nervous that there is something inherently incompatible about her and Adam as a couple, or as a child to her parents in the context of the family dynamic. However, the people around her are always supportive of her passion for the cello, and in instances such as this one, she is reminded of how differences between people—or instruments—can give rise to incredibly beautiful and rich experiences, relationships, and musical jam sessions.

7:16 AM Quotes

“I can lose you like that if I don’t lose you today. I’ll let you go. If you stay.”

Related Characters: Adam Wilde (speaker), Mia Hall

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

Adam, who has been crying, comes into Mia’s hospital room and collapses next to her bed. Worried that she is about to die, he tells her comatose body that he loves her and that if she survives, he is willing to quit Shooting Star and move to New York with her. In this quote, he also tells Mia that if she survives and decides to leave him when she moves to New York, he will understand her decision. As all of Adam’s musical dreams remain in Oregon, this is a huge declaration of love—Adam is willing to give up the band he loves in order to be with the girl that he loves. However, his selflessness also shows in this speech, as he says that as long as Mia is alive, he will also understand if she wants to end the

relationship to focus on the cello in New York. It is in this moment that Adam's true devotion to Mia is revealed: as long as she is alive and well, he will be happy, regardless of whether they continue to be in a relationship or not. It is this declaration of sacrifice and selflessness that ultimately convinces Mia to stay.

Yo-Yo Ma continues to play, and it's like the piano and cello are being poured into my body, the same way that the IV and blood transfusions are. And the memories of my life as it was, and the flashes of it as it might be, are coming so fast and furious. I feel like I can no longer keep up with them but they keep coming and everything is colliding, until I cannot take it anymore. Until I cannot be like this one second longer.

Related Characters: Mia Hall (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 232

Explanation and Analysis

In a last-ditch effort to rouse Mia out of her coma, Adam puts headphones over Mia's ears. He presses "play" on an iPod, and the music of Yo-Yo Ma (whom they saw in concert for their first date) floods her ears. Despite all of the reminiscing and flashbacks that Mia has thought of during the last few hours since the accident, it is this music that triggers the most emotion. It is this overwhelming feeling of how much she loves music, and how much she loved making and feeling this music with the people around her, that brings Mia to the place where she knows without a doubt that she cannot leave. She knows that to honor the memories of her family, it is her duty to remain alive—this way, she can continue to make music and keep that love alive. Though Teddy, Mom, and Dad are gone, music, combined with the love of the friends and family members who remain alive, will transport her to a place of comfort, even in the face of grief.



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.

7:09 AM

One winter morning, seventeen-year-old Mia wakes up to find snow covering the front lawn of her family's Oregon home. When it is declared over the radio that school is closed, Mia's Mom, a travel agent, decides to stay home with Mia's Dad, a middle school English teacher, and Mia's eight-year-old brother, Teddy.

As the family eats breakfast together, Mia's Dad points out a photo of Mia's boyfriend, Adam, in the newspaper. Adam is a member of a local up-and-coming band, Shooting Star, which opened the night before in Seattle for a well-known indie rock band called Bikini. Adam's band is scheduled to play at a venue in Portland that night, which Mia plans to go to, though she notes that she may have to rehearse with a pianist and her **cello** teacher, Professor Christie, instead. Mia is a talented cellist, and recently auditioned for a spot at Juilliard. While she believes the audition went well and hopes to attend, she admits that moving to New York to study would create "complications" in her relationship with Adam, as they would each be on opposite coasts pursuing their different music careers.

When Mia's Mom asks if she would like more coffee, Mia mentions that she is considering going back to bed, since her **cello** is at school and she can't practice. Mom is incredulous that Mia would go a whole day without practicing, a comment which prompts Mia to recall that Mom, a former rocker-chick, took time to warm up to Mia's love of **classical music** and Mia's "marathon" practice sessions. Then a crash sounds—it's Teddy playing on Dad's old drum set, which makes Mia wonder if her mother and father, who used to play in a local band, ever feel disappointed that she didn't follow in their **punk-rock** shoes, and if they're happy to see that Teddy may be heading in that direction. While Mia once intended to become a punk-rocker like her parents, she fell in love with the cello in music class at around Teddy's age, and has been playing it ever since.

We are introduced to the main character, Mia, whose family is clearly very close and likes to spend time with each other, as demonstrated by their collective eagerness to spend the snow day together. Forman emphasizes how happy the family is to make the ensuing disaster feel more tragic.



Though Mia and Adam are both dedicated musicians, the difference in their projected paths causes tension in their relationship. While Mia is excited at the prospect of pursuing her study of the cello at Juilliard in New York, the rising popularity of Adam's band in the Northwest means that he will remain in Oregon. Mia is proud of Adam's success, but worried as to how the distance will affect their relationship. Music will be a very important motif in the book, as Mia, her family, and Adam understand many things (like personal relationships) in musical terms.



Mia is the only classical musician in a family of rockers. Her father used to be in a punk-rock band, her mother frequented the scene in their Oregon town, and even Teddy seems to lean towards rock music, as shown by his crashing on the drums. Mia often feels out of place, especially when her parents point out her intense, solitary focus on classical music (such as with her "marathon" practice sessions) instead of playing with a band or friends.



Mia's Dad suggests that the family take a drive to visit Willow and Henry, married friends of the family who used to be musicians in the same **punk-rock** scene as Mom and Dad. Though Mia knows that Adam is busy with his touring band, and that her best friend, Kim, is occupied by her work for the yearbook, she admits that she would always rather spend the day with her family anyway. Mia initially thought that Adam, an effortlessly cool and older musician, was making fun of her when he expressed interest in her. However, the teenagers bonded over their mutual collections of dusty old records and love of music. After Teddy is done banging on the drums, the family finishes their breakfast before heading out for their day off.

While Mia likes to spend time with Kim and Adam, the whole family always enjoys spending time together. As with many of her other characteristics (like her love of classical music), Mia wonders if this makes her “dorky”—but her love of her family and of the cello are what make her who she is, and these are some of the very reasons that Adam falls in love with her. Mia lives a rather idealized life, and Adam is basically the perfect boyfriend.



8:17 AM

The family piles into their old Buick, and Mia's Dad begins to drive them to Willow and Henry's house. Though Dad used to be notorious for riding his bike everywhere and not even having a driver's license, Mia's Mom insisted he learn to drive when she became pregnant with Teddy. With two kids to take care of, he also went back to school to earn his teaching certificate, and gave up his rocker style to now wear what Mia describes as 50's *Father Knows Best*, complete with bowties, wingtip shoes, and a pipe.

Though Mia's Dad is a punk-rocker at heart, he put aside his exciting—but less predictable—lifestyle as a musician in order to better provide for his family. This is one example of the difficult choices and sacrifices necessary in life—foreshadowing the important choice Mia will face later.



As usual, the family debates as to what to put on the radio: Mom wants NPR, Dad wants Frank Sinatra, Teddy wants Spongebob SquarePants, and Mia wants to listen to classical music. To compromise, Teddy is allowed to use the Discman with earphones, and Mia and her parents listen to the news until it's over, when Mia turns it to the classical music station, which is playing Beethoven's **Cello** Sonata no. 3. Happy and content to have the day off with her family, she closes her eyes and imagines herself practicing the piece on her own cello.

Though each member of the family has different tastes, music is what bonds Mia, Mom, Dad, and Teddy together. They are used to each person wanting to listen to something different, and so they already have a system in place to respect everyone's wishes. When it is Mia's turn to listen to classical music, she finds herself perfectly content in a car with her family, listening to what she loves.



Mia suddenly wakes up to find the family car “eviscerated,” even as the radio somehow continues to play the sonata. The car has been totaled by a pickup truck that ran straight into its passenger side. Mia climbs out of the car and finds herself without a scrape. She looks around for her family, and finds her father, bloody and dead, on the pavement. She finds her mother dead as well, completely white with blue lips and red eyes. She sees a hand in the car, and, believing it's Teddy, goes to pull him out. Then she notices a silver bracelet, however and realizes it's actually her own body, bloody and mangled in the wreckage.

Mia does not narrate the actual accident itself, but rather attempts to piece together what has happened in the wake of the crash. Forman uses this narrative strategy to make the disaster seem all the more sudden and jarring, especially when contrasted with the idyllic scene that directly preceded it. Mia slowly realizes the gravity of what has happened as she discovers the bodies of her Mom and Dad.



Mia pinches herself while looking at her body in the car, but feels nothing. She attempts to wake herself up from what she hopes is a nightmare. To calm herself down, she focuses on the music and plays what Adam calls her “air **cello**,” practicing the notes without her instrument. When the music dies away, she hears the sirens of an ambulance.

Mia experiences true shock when she sees her physical body still in the wreckage of the car, and realizes she is having some kind of out-of-body experience. She turns to thoughts of the cello and Adam to calm herself down in the midst of this sudden trauma.



9:23 AM

Mia, in a panic, asks herself whether or not she is dead, and thinks she must be in a kind of purgatory—waiting before being sent on to the next stage of death. When the paramedics arrive, Mia overhears a senior firefighter explain to a junior officer that Mom was most likely hit first, and died instantly. Paramedics work frantically on Mia’s body, ripping her clothing open and leaving her body exposed. Mia, watching, feels embarrassed.

We aren’t given much explanation for Mia’s very specific out-of-body, near death experience, but she at least starts to discover the “rules” of her situation as the book progresses. Without agency over her own physical body, Mia feels embarrassed by being exposed by the paramedics.



Cars stop along the side of the road to view the damage. Some people get out of their cars, and one woman throws up at the sight of the carnage, while others pray. Mia is convinced she’s dead because, given her injuries, she should be in agony. But she feels absolutely nothing while she watches herself being worked on. The medics load her into an ambulance, saying that they will drive her to a nearby hospital, where she will then be airlifted to another hospital.

Seeing other people’s reactions to her own injuries makes Mia believe she is dead, especially as she herself feels no pain. In a way, feeling the physical pain of her injuries would help her to validate and cope with the emotional pain of losing her parents.



In the first flashback of the novel, Mia remembers herself at age ten, when she first fell in love with the **cello**. Her parents laughed at the idea of such a tiny girl playing such a large instrument, a reaction that has stung her for years, despite her parents’ subsequent apologies. Mia notes that she often feels out of place as a dark-haired **classical music** lover in a family of fair-haired **punk rockers**, and has sometimes wondered whether she was switched at birth.

In the face of the loss of her parents and her own potential death, Mia (whether willingly or not) turns to flashbacks to recall key moments in her life. Despite her parents’ punk-rock past, she fell in love with the cello and classical music of her own accord, a passion that sometimes makes her feel out of place in her family.



Despite their initial incredulousness, Mia’s parents supported her musical talents, and ensured that she was always able to study the **cello** privately with college students. When she surpassed the abilities of the college students at around age fourteen, Mia’s studies were taken over by Professor Christie, a friend of Mia’s Dad who was surprised by the level of Mia’s talent, given her age.

Mia’s parents support her decision to study the cello, and Mia’s Dad uses his music connections in the area to find Mia a cello teacher. Music is an integral part of the family dynamic.



Mia recalls her first recital, years before she ever worked with Professor Christie, when she was around age eight. Terrified of the thought of playing onstage, Mia runs away before her performance. Dad finds her and tells her that he, too, used to get terrible stage fright before performing as a drummer for his rock band. This admission makes Mia feel less out of place in her family, as she reasons that she perhaps inherited stage fright from her father. He tells her there's no cure for stage fright, but that you need to just "hang in there." Mia plays the recital without a hitch. Afterwards, her parents present her with a new **cello** of her own.

Mia's first cello recital is formative for a number of reasons. Firstly, Mia feels closer with her father after discovering they both suffer from stage fright. Secondly, it is the first time she successfully performs in front of an audience, and thirdly, her parents present her with her own cello after the performance. This shows that they definitely support her classical music studies—even if they can't relate to them.



10:12 AM

When Mia's ambulance arrives at the hospital, doctors frantically work her on to keep her stable enough for the flight to another hospital. One doctor notes that while her parents were "DOA" (dead on arrival) at the scene of the accident, a boy, approximately seven years old, is in another ambulance on its way. Mia is relieved to hear that Teddy is still alive. She sees Willow, who works as a nurse at the hospital, and wonder if she knows what has happened to her family.

Though Mia is able to witness what happens in the wake of the accident firsthand due to her out-of-body experience, being invisible means she cannot ask what has become of Teddy. Mia feels relieved when she sees Willow, a family friend who is a nurse, and knows that Willow will ensure Teddy is taken care of.



While on the helicopter, Mia recalls how her best friend Kim, an aspiring photographer, once accompanied her uncle on a helicopter trip to photograph Mount St. Helens. Kim disliked the nausea the helicopter induced, and joked that she hoped Mia never had to ride one. Mia thinks to herself that she would like to tell Kim that "sometimes you don't have a choice in the matter." As the helicopter speeds through the air, Mia realizes she's probably not dead yet, since her mother and father haven't come for her. She wonders if her Gran and Gramps—who were expecting the family for dinner—or Kim knows what has happened. As the helicopter passes Mount Hood, Mia realizes she and the medic team are bound for Portland, where Adam is scheduled to play guitar in a gig that night. She wonders what he will think when she doesn't arrive at their set meeting point later that day.

Mia's recollection of what Kim's words about the helicopter prompts Mia to think about all the things she may never do, and all the people she may never speak to again. Mia continues to ponder the terms of her out-of-body experience, and assumes that if she is not with her parents, she must still be alive. She wonders how her grandparents, Kim, and Adam will each respond to the events of the day. The accident has thrown everything into turmoil.



In a flashback, Mia recalls being asked by Adam if she has "ever heard of this Yo-Yo Ma dude" (Yo-Yo Ma is a famous cellist) in the spring of her sophomore year and his junior year. Though Mia was initially baffled by the attention Adam paid to her, and thought he was teasing her for not being cool, over several months of chatting she realized he was genuinely interested in her attentiveness to the **cello**. While Adam is effortlessly cool, Mia's introversion means that she is well-liked, but not overly popular at school.

Mia, who has always been rather shy and introverted, is concerned that Adam is making fun of her when he first expresses interest in getting to know her and her love of the cello. Over time, however, Mia accepts that Adam is being genuine in his interest, and the two bond over their mutual love of music.



One day Adam mentions that he has two extra tickets to a Yo-Yo Ma concert in Portland that Friday, and Mia agrees to go with him, unsure if it is a date. When Adam holds her hand during the concert, she realizes that he has feelings for her, and that he has a similar reverence for music of all kinds. After the concert, Adam admits that he saved up two weeks worth of pizza delivery tips to buy the tickets. Mia and Adam kiss, sparking the beginning of their relationship.

Since Mia has always felt out of place as a classical musician in a family of rockers, Adam's grand gesture to buy her Yo-Yo Ma tickets makes their first date extra special. For the first time, Mia feels as if someone understands what the music means to her.



12:19 PM

When Mia arrives at the Portland hospital, she is rushed into surgery to be treated for a host of injuries, such as a collapsed lung, contusions on her brain, broken ribs, and leg and facial abrasions. In the operating room, the doctors debate on what kind of music to play. Mia silently roots for **classical**, which they ultimately decide upon, though she is not too pleased with their selection of "Ride of the Valkyries." Mia watches as the doctors and nurses pull and tug at her bloody body. The operation goes on for a long time, and the CD is switched to jazz, a genre that reminds Mia of her Dad, who once declared jazz as "punk for old people."

Though Mia is watching her own body being cut and sewed and tugged, she feels no physical pain, causing her to feel detached from the operation at hand. This allows her mind to wander enough to have an opinion on what kind of music the surgeons are playing. As always, she roots for classical music, and can't help but think of what her Dad would have said about the jazz. This underscores her Dad's influence on her life and her love of music.



As the operation wears on, Mia wonders what the limitations of her state are. She attempts to walk through a wall, and is unsuccessful. She follows a nurse out of the operating room, and discovers her grandparents (her father's parents) in a waiting area. Her grandmother, Gran, is chatting away, a hallmark of her anxiety, while her grandfather, Gramps, expresses his grief in silence. Gran believes in **angels**, and often says that birds she sees are deceased relatives who have come for a visit. Mia finds it difficult to look at Gramps, who bears a striking resemblance to Dad and Teddy.

Seeing her grandparents is both a comfort and a source of pain for Mia, as they remind her of the other family she has lost. Her grandmother's belief in angels brings up a vague kind of spirituality, but there are no concrete religious ideas in the novel, or really anything to explain the nature of Mia's out-of-body experience.



In a flashback, Mia recalls that it was Gran's idea that she audition for Juilliard. An independent woman from a young age, Gran moved of her own volition from Massachusetts to Oregon when she was twenty-two. On one visit to Gran's relatives in the East, Mia gives an impromptu concert with her **cello**, and someone brings up the idea that she is Juilliard-worthy. Gran speaks to Professor Christie about Mia auditioning, and Mia eventually sends in an application, subsequently receiving an invitation to audition. Though she is excited, Mia feels nervous that Adam will be upset, since he plans on remaining in Oregon to pursue the success of his band.

Though Mia is hesitant to become truly excited about Juilliard because it will mean distance from Adam, Gran's own past is one of the factors inspiring her to summon the courage to move to New York to follow her dreams. Looking in on Mia's life from the outside, it seems clear that Mia should choose to pursue music in New York—but she is the one in the throes of young love, and it is ultimately her decision to make.



Gran had planned to take Mia to her Juilliard audition in San Francisco herself, but she sprained her ankle at the last moment, and Gramps stepped in to escort Mia. After a grueling audition that requires her to play five pieces, Mia and Gramps spend the weekend together in the city, shopping and dining. At the end of the trip, Gramps hugs Mia tightly, rather than giving her his usual handshake or back pat. She translates this as him telling her, in his own way, that he had a good time on their trip.

While Mia's love of the cello and of classical music were always aspects of her personality that made her feel distant from her family, here they allow Mia to feel closer to Gramps and more secure in her future ability to study the cello.



3:47 PM

Mia is moved from the recovery room and into the intensive-care unit. She is plugged into multiple machines to keep her alive, and nurses check on her in a constant rotation. A social worker tells Gran and Gramps that Mia is in “grave condition,” and that she is in a coma in the wake of her surgery. The social worker notes that it can be helpful for comatose patients to hear their loved ones talk to them. Though Gran mentions the names of many relatives who are en route to see Mia, Mia notes Adam’s absence, and hopes he is on his way.

Even though Mia is able to move around the hospital unseen, she receives updates about her physical health at the same rate as her relatives, as she is unable to talk to anyone to ask. While she is glad to see her relatives assembled in her time of need, she worries the most about Adam's reaction to the tragedy.



In a flashback, Mia recalls that she and Adam did not transition from friends to boyfriend and girlfriend as smoothly as she had hoped. Though they shared a love of music, they came from opposite ends of the social spectrum at high school, and often found that their conversations were strained. Mia feels uncomfortable when she attends Adam’s band’s shows, where he is the center of attention, surrounded by members of the **punk** scene. However, she loves to watch Adam play the guitar, even if she feels out of place at the venues.

While Mia and Adam bonded over their mutual love of music, Adam's punk rock shows are very different from Mia's classical music concerts. She worries that she is not cool enough, or does not have the right outgoing temperament, to fit in at Adam's shows. As she fails to become more comfortable in his music scene, she becomes concerned that they may be too different to sustain their relationship.



Mia notes that had it not been for Adam’s warm relationship with her family, their romance may not have developed to the extent that it did. Adam was able to bond over **punk music** with Mia’s Mom and Dad, and he even plays basketball with her Dad as well. One night in Mia’s bedroom after dinner, Adam invites Mia to “play” him like she would a **cello**, and then he “plays” Mia like a guitar, resulting in their first sexual experience together.

Mia's house becomes a common ground where Mia and Adam can be themselves without the pressures of their respective social scenes. Adam and Mia share their first sexual experience together in Mia's bedroom, and they both experience it in the way they do almost everything, it seems—in musical terms.



4:39 PM

Many of Mia's relatives, as well as her best friend Kim and Kim's mother Mrs. Schein, arrive at the hospital waiting area to await news of Mia's condition. While Mrs. Schein, notoriously emotional, is distraught, Kim stays calm and collected in the face of the tragedy. Mia recalls Shabbat dinners that she has attended with the Schein family, and how Kim's Jewish faith has influenced her life. Kim's parents expect her to date a Jewish boy, and sent her to Jewish sleep-away camp every summer. Kim leaves her sobbing mother to take a walk, and Mia follows her. Kim finds her way to the hospital's chapel, where she prays for Mia in Hebrew.

In a flashback, Mia remembers how she and Kim hated each other when they first met in middle school. Because they are quiet, dark-haired, and serious about art (photography in Kim's case, and the **cello** in Mia's), students and teachers implicitly paired the two girls together. Most likely because of these assumptions, Kim and Mia quickly developed a strong dislike for one another. Their middle-school hatred of each other reached a tipping point when they ended up in a schoolyard fistfight. However, after teachers break them apart, the two girls look at each other and laugh, despite their bruises and scrapes. This marks the beginning of their close friendship.

After the fight between Mia and Kim, Mrs. Schein, Kim's overprotective mother, would not allow Kim to visit Mia's house. However, after finally coming to Mia's house for dinner with Mia's family, Mrs. Schein consents to allowing Kim to spend time with Mia at her house. Though students and teachers soon revert to assuming the two girls are "quiet, good-girl twins," Kim and Mia don't mind, and welcome being linked to one another.

4:47 PM

In a flashback, Mia remembers being snuck into a casino by her Mom and then watching her Mom gamble at a blackjack table. Due to the controlled ambience of the casino, she felt as if only fifteen minutes had passed, though it had actually been an hour. Mia relates her experience in the casino to the intensive care unit (ICU), where it's also difficult to tell what time of day it is. Mia is hooked up to countless machines that monitor her vital signs, and is attended to by numerous doctors and nurses. Upon leaving for the day, one nurse tells a comatose Mia that she would like to see her tomorrow, which the narrating, out-of-body Mia realizes means that the nurse hopes Mia will still be alive the following day.

Kim's strength in the face of Mrs. Schein's hysterics reminds Mia of how grateful she is to have Kim's resilience and willpower in her life. Along with her grandparents, Adam, and her immediate family, Kim has been one of the most influential and important people in Mia's life so far—a crucial part of her small but intimate circle of relationships.



The beginning of Mia and Kim's friendship is a metaphor for many things in Mia's life. Situations that start out badly or uncomfortably—such as her relationship with Kim or Adam, and her family's attitude towards her love of the cello—eventually grow into strong bonds in the wake of adversity.



Despite a rocky start to their friendship, Mia and Kim form a strong bond that develops over the years. Their peers' view that the two girls are "goody two-shoes" does not change much, but it seems that the girls don't mind—they are happy with each other's company, and don't care what others think.



While this moment makes Mia think of the casino because of its feeling of timelessness—similar to the ICU—she may also remember the casino for its air of gambling and chance. Much like the odds in a slot machine, the fragility of life and death feels something like a game of chance in the unpredictable atmosphere of the intensive care unit. This feeling of precariousness is underscored by the nurse who tells Mia she would like to see her alive in the morning.



A social worker acts as the link between Mia's fluctuating condition and her waiting family members. She informs Mia's relatives that while she is still comatose, it appears that she may be able to soon breathe on her own. Unfortunately, it won't be known whether or not she suffered brain damage until she wakes up. The social worker invites Gran and Gramps to come visit Mia in her hospital room.

The social worker's job is to keep Mia's family informed and up to date about Mia's condition, but she also serves as a barometer for Mia to know the state of her own physical body. Mia's out-of-body experience may be related to her physical body's comatose state.



Though Mia knows Gran and Gramps to be tough people, both of them pause when they see the extent of Mia's injuries. The social worker notes that while she's unsure if Mia can hear her grandparents if they speak to her, it is possible that their voices may be soothing to their comatose granddaughter. However, a new nurse, Nurse Ramirez, enters the room and assures Gran and Gramps that "Mia is running the show," and that it is up to her when she will wake up. Being spoken to, she insists, will help convince Mia to stay alive.

Gran and Gramps know that Mia's injuries are life-threatening, but they don't quite comprehend in what grave danger she is until they see her in person. When Nurse Ramirez tells Gran and Gramps that Mia is "running the show," Mia realizes that while in her current state, one between life and death, she may have the power to decide whether to stay living or to join her family in death.



In a flashback, Mia recalls that while neither she nor her brother, Teddy, were planned pregnancies, her parents never referred to their children as "accidents" or "mistakes." Both of her parents were involved in the **punk-music** scene, and married young. Mia was conceived the night of one of Mia's parent's friend's weddings. However, Mia's parents had difficulty conceiving for a second time, and had given up trying fertility treatments when Mia's Mom discovered she was pregnant with Teddy. The family had to call off a trip to New York City due to the pregnancy, though Mia didn't mind since she knew "Carnegie Hall wasn't going anywhere," and that she would get there on her own someday.

Though Mia's Mom and Dad have never been traditional parents, they have always put Mia and Teddy before the excitement of the music they loved in their younger days. Even though Mia is excited about visiting New York and Carnegie Hall for the first time, like her parents, she has no problem dropping everything to do what is best for the new baby's arrival. Above all, the members of Mia's family put each other above their personal preferences.



5:40 PM

After visiting Mia in the ICU, Gran and Gramps discuss whether it is true that Mia will be the one to decide whether she lives or dies. Gramps worries that Mia will want to join her parents in death, a notion that Gran hurriedly dismisses. It is this conversation that makes Mia realize that she is the only one who can decide whether she stays alive and joins Adam, Kim, and her grandparents, or whether she passes on to death to join her immediate family. This realization terrifies Mia "more than anything else that has happened today."

Though Mia is able to move about of her own accord, unseen and undetected, in the wake of the accident, everything that has happened has been largely out of her control. She is "terrified" by the idea of making such a permanent decision, especially since she has no one to converse with about the pros and cons of living or dying.



In a flashback, Mia remembers Adam showing her a Mozart Halloween costume he spent \$100 putting together. At the mention of Halloween, Teddy runs out to show the couple his red-pajama devil costume, which Mia and Adam assure him is terrifying. Mia notes that she hasn't put much thought into Halloween yet, and Adam reminds her that he has a Shooting Star show that night. Mia grows uncomfortable at the thought of attending another one of Adam's shows, where she feels out of place in the **punk** scene. When Adam leaves Mia's house, Mia is left wondering yet again why Adam is interested in her of all people, since they come from such different social scenes.

Mia decides to follow Mom's advice of "Fake it til' you make it," and dress up as a rocker chick for Shooting Star's Halloween show. Mom takes Mia shopping and digs out her clothes from when she was Mia's age to create a **punk** ensemble. When Mia dons a blond wig, she notes that for the first time, she feels like she looks like the rest of her immediate family. At the concert, Mia blends right in, and is able to let go of her insecurities enough to enjoy herself among Adam's friends and fans.

After the show, Mia asks Adam if he prefers her **punk-rock** persona to her quiet **classical music** personality. Adam replies that while he appreciates her attempting to fit in with his friends, he likes her the way she is, saying that she is "one of the punkest girls" he knows, no matter what she wears. Mia looks back on this moment whenever she doubts Adam's feelings towards her, and feels lucky, not insecure.

7:13 PM

Much to Mia's relief, Adam finally arrives at the hospital, accompanied by members of Shooting Star. From the windowsill in the ICU, Mia sees Kim follow Adam into the hospital, and realizes her friend went to find Adam at the concert venue to personally give him the news and escort him to the hospital. Though Mia is happy Adam has arrived, she is nervous to see how he will react to her injuries.

Mia notices the late hour, and realizes that Shooting Star will probably not be playing their concert to open for Bikini, a popular local indie band, in order to accompany Adam to the hospital. Mia recalls another time one of the band members was too distraught to play due to a breakup, and though another drummer offered to take her spot, the band refused and cancelled their tour rather than go on without their band mate.

Mia is touched by the fact that Adam decides to dress as one her favorite classical musicians for Halloween, and feels guilty that she still has not figured out how to feel comfortable at his punk rock concerts. Still insecure in their relationship, Mia sees her inability to embrace punk-rock as wholeheartedly as Adam has embraced classical music as a shortcoming on her part.



Mia finally is able to step into the world of Adam's music scene through the comforting detachment of a Halloween costume—just as Adam did in dressing up like Mozart. Looking the part helps to give Mia confidence, and she enjoys herself at one of Adam's concerts for the first time since they began dating.



While Adam appreciates Mia's efforts to fit in with his friends, he loves her for who she is, not for who she could be with more of a rocker sensibility. This marks a turning point in their relationship. Mia no longer feels like she is lacking something compared to Adam's punk-rock friends.



Mia is both excited and scared at the prospect of seeing Adam. He is her number one comfort, outside of her immediate family, and she knows that seeing him will make her choice whether to stay or to leave much harder than it already is.



Adam and his band had been in Portland to open for a popular indie band, Bikini. It is a show of solidarity that they cancel the gig to support Adam, and thus Mia as well. Despite their wild punk personas, Adam and his band still put each other first, no matter what the cost.



Unfortunately, when Adam and Kim reach the ICU to see Mia, they are denied entry to see her because they are not “immediate family.” While Mia knows the nurse is not trying to be cruel (as Mia no longer has an immediate family), Adam and Kim are outraged and attempt to reason with the nurse, who will not budge. Kim bears Adam’s weight, with his arms around her shoulders, as they are turned away from seeing Mia.

In a flashback, Mia remembers how she and Kim developed a theory that everything in the world can be divided into two groups, such as people who like pop music and people who like **classical music**, or girls who have boyfriends in high school, and girls who don’t. As Mia and Kim both assumed they belonged in the latter category, and that they would have to wait for college for romance, it came as a surprise to both of them when Adam and Mia began dating. When Mia broke the news to Kim, she already knew, thanks to the gossip circulating their high school. Kim told Mia that she supported the relationship, as long as their friendship remains intact.

Though Adam fits right in with Mia’s family once they begin dating, Mia is upset when he and Kim do not become fast friends. Mia accuses him of being a “snob,” and Adam points out that he’s dating Mia, not Kim. Kim, too, is unfazed that she and Adam don’t click as friends, and tells Mia that it’s okay to have discrete parts of your life that don’t blend perfectly. Though Adam and Kim would always be bound through their love of Mia, that didn’t mean they would be bound to each other. Their distance continues to make Mia upset until the moment she sees them walk away from the ICU together. She finally realizes that they have come together to support one another in the face of the tragedy.

8:12 PM

Mia comes to understand the terms of her out-of-body condition, in that she can press elevator buttons, sit in rooms, and open doors, but no one seems to notice that she is there. She goes to the waiting area where her family continues to wait for news of her condition, and overhears two of her aunts discussing someone with cuts and bruises. She hopes they are talking about Teddy, meaning he is still alive, but she soon discovers they’re talking about the driver of the truck that hit her family’s car, a man named Mr. Dunlap. The aunts note that the police believe he swerved due to the snow, and that “lopsided” outcomes in terms of damage in car crashes are common. While it is true that Mr. Dunlap is physically “fine,” Mia wonders how much his life has changed after this morning, when his truck took the lives of (almost) an entire family.

Adam and Kim have always been separate parts of Mia’s life, but the two teenagers come together to show support in the face of the day’s events. While Adam has always been calm and cool, Mia is struck by the metaphorical image of Kim bearing Adam’s weight, showing that her friend is much stronger than she knew.



Neither Mia nor Kim considered themselves popular in school, and therefore never expected to be the kinds of girls that teenage boys are interested in. When Adam and Mia begin dating, Mia is worried that Kim will see her new relationship as a threat to their friendship. Kim is apparently secure enough in their friendship, however, to not be concerned about the addition of a new person into Mia’s life. This is one those life choices that doesn’t involve sacrificing something beloved.



Kim and Adam’s incompatibility teaches Mia that it is possible to have distinct parts of one’s life that don’t always agree or go together (such as her love of the cello in a family of rockers). When Kim lets Adam lean on her shoulder, Mia realizes that the separate parts of her life will come together in the precise moments that they need to.



Even in the wake of her parents’ death, Mia cannot help but feel compassion for the driver who caused the accident. This is evidence for her extreme empathy and ability to feel for others instead of automatically blaming them. Her aunts’ assessment of the situation is kept relative to the other, more serious outcomes of the car accident. Despite her ability to move around unseen, Mia still does not know Teddy’s condition or fate.



Mia searches the hospital to find Adam and Kim again, and discovers them looking for nurse or janitor's uniforms in an attempt to break into the ICU to see Mia. Though Kim suggests Adam go to Mia's grandparents and see if they could have him authorized to see Mia, Adam replies that he can't bear to face them in the wake of the tragedy, and that this is something he must do himself. As Mia already knows but cannot tell them, the closet they are fumbling in is a broom closet and doesn't contain any uniforms. Once Kim and Adam realize this, they know they must come up with a better plan. Adam finally does, declaring it is "time to activate the Bat Signal."

In a flashback, Mia remembers that when she began to play the **cello**, she noticed how different it was from the band her Dad played in. While he was always playing with other people, she could only practice solo in her room. Mia then decided to quit, due to this loneliness, in the spring of eighth grade. Kim notices this, however, and prompts Mia to apply to a summer conservatory camp in British Columbia. The prospect of playing with other students re-sparks Mia's interest in the cello, and she is accepted to the camp.

When she arrives at the camp on Vancouver Island three months later, Mia is miserable at first, since she doesn't know anyone. However, she soon makes friends with Peter, a trombonist, and Simon, a fellow cellist. Simon asks Mia if she will be trying out for the concerto competition, which Peter explains is a competition for one student to play a solo during the camp's end-of-summer symphony. Simon notes that people have been talking about Mia's audition tape, since it was apparently very good. He assumes Mia will be gunning to win the concerto competition, but privately, Mia knows she has very little experience playing the **cello** with other musicians.

Mia is kept busy all day at camp playing music in the context of an orchestra, a much different experience than playing solo in her bedroom. She also begins to play duets (and **cello** "duels") with Simon in the hours after dinner. They engage in friendly competition, and though neither of them wins the concerto competition that year, Mia notes that four years later she would win the competition.

Mia is heartened, and somewhat amused, by Adam's determination to see Mia on his own terms. This is the first time Adam and Kim have ever worked together, bonded by their mutual love for Mia. Most of the non-flashback action of the book, in fact, involves Mia looking on, heartened, as her friends and family show their devotion to her but also how that devotion does bind them together as friends.



Mia is somewhat of a natural loner, something both reflected and reinforced by her interest in the cello. Kim, who is more outgoing than Mia, takes it upon herself to ensure that Mia continues to pursue her passion while also strengthening her interpersonal relationships.



Camp is the first time Mia has ever met other students her age interested in classical music. It is also the first time her abilities as a musician have been seen as something to be jealous of, and the first time they have ever been challenged.



Playing music with students who possess equal or greater musical talent teaches Mia how to hone her skills, while being away from home for the first time ever teaches her how to adapt to a new environment. Ultimately, camp helps reinforce Mia's dream to play the cello professionally.



9:06 PM

Mia then hears a raspy, familiar voice, and realizes it belongs to Brooke Vega, the lead singer of Bikini, the popular indie band that Shooting Star was supposed to open for in Portland. Adam's plan is to have Brooke make enough of a ruckus in the ICU to distract the nurses, while he and Kim run to see Mia. Brooke begins an impromptu concert in the hallway outside the ICU, distracting a few of the nurses. Adam makes a break for it, followed by Kim. Nurse Ramirez, the nurse who told Mia's grandparents that Mia was "running the show," tips them off as to which room is Mia's. Though they enter Mia's room for a moment, they are quickly escorted out by security.

As Kim and Adam are being led away by security, they run into Willow, who has come from the hospital where she works to the hospital where Mia is being treated. As a nurse, she is able to convince the guards to let Adam and Kim go. Willow says she can talk to Mia's grandparents about arranging for Adam to be able to see Mia.

Mia recalls that when Willow began to date Henry, her Dad's band-mate, Henry was a "total drunk playboy," but that Willow whipped him into shape, and they now have a daughter. Mia believes in Willow's ability to fix any tough situation, but it hits her that if Willow is here in Portland, it means that she's not back at the local hospital near the accident with Teddy (where Mia believed her to be). It also occurs to her that no one in the hospital is discussing Teddy's condition, or splitting their time between two hospitals. Mia then realizes that Teddy, too, has died.

In a flashback, Mia remembers how on the day her Mom's water broke with Teddy, she still insisted going holiday shopping at the mall as planned. Several hours later, Mia accompanies her mother to the birthing center, and watches her mother give birth to Teddy. When, after the birth, Henry comes to bring food to the new family of four, he tells Mia the story of her own birth, when her father allegedly "cried like a baby." When Teddy is born, the first person he sees is Mia, and she cuts his umbilical cord. Later, Mia's Mom jokes that Teddy "imprinted" on Mia, because they have a special bond, and she is often the only one who can make him feel better.

Adam's involvement in Shooting Star is one of the main tensions in their relationship—both because the punk-rock scene is foreign to Mia and because its Northwestern location may end up causing a rift in physical distance between them—but the fact that the entire band came (along with a famous singer) to help Adam see Mia is incredibly moving to her. Though the whole event is somewhat of a disaster, it is a brave show of Adam and Kim's love for Mia.



When the head nurse tells Kim and Adam that only Mia's "immediate family" is allowed to see her, it becomes clear that she does not truly understand the situation. Willow uses her connections as a nurse in a nearby hospital to advocate for Adam and Kim.



Though Mia is initially delighted to see Willow helping her friends, she is also horrified to realize that Willow's presence here means that Teddy has died. We wonder if Teddy, too, had an out-of-body experience like Mia, and if he then decided to join his parents in death.



Mia and Teddy have a strong bond, one that extends beyond the usual bickering relationship between a brother and sister. Mia's presence at Teddy's birth is representative of the responsibility she holds in the family, and is also the reason why Mia feels so powerless when realizes that Teddy has died—even though he did not die immediately in the accident, she was unable to comfort him in his final moments, as she was able to in his first moments.



10:40 PM

Mia runs through the hospital, distraught after realizing Teddy has died. She then goes back to the ICU, enraged and upset. Her physical body goes into code blue (an emergency situation of cardiac or respiratory arrest), and doctors rush in to figure out what is going wrong. An ultrasound reveals that Mia's abdomen is filled with fluid, and she is quickly intubated and rushed to surgery. Mia realizes that there is a connection between her physical body and the Mia that is able to wander the hospital unseen. Still in shock by the events of the day, she wonders if it would be easier to pass away with her family than it would be to stay alive.

Mia recalls other people in her life who have died, such as her Great-Aunt Glo, who requested to have her ashes scattered in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and her friend Peter Hellman from camp, who died of lymphoma. A friend of the family from the **punk music** scene, Kerry Gifford, died of a freak brain aneurysm while operating the soundboard for a band in Portland. Since Kerry was young and well-liked, Mia's town was distraught by his sudden death.

When Kerry dies, Mia, her family, Adam, Willow, and Henry drive several hours to Kerry's hometown to attend his funeral. Although he was known for being a committed atheist, Kerry's family arranges a funeral that is very religious. This outrages Mia's Mom, who wishes Kerry's family had celebrated his life in the way he lived it. Mom is particularly angry that the family ended the funeral service with a rendition of "Wind Beneath My Wings." Dad reasons that it was his family's way of coping with their son's death, and that funerals are a lot like dying—at the end of the day, despite all of your planning, it is out of your control. On the drive home, Mia's family, Willow, and Henry all discuss the songs they would like to have played at *their* funerals. Mia chooses Mozart's "Requiem." Mia's Mom says she would want Mia to play the **cello** at her and Mia's Dad's funeral, as if certain they would die together.

Mia muses that to some extent, her Dad was wrong—in Mia's scenario, she does seem to be able to control whether she lives or dies. And her Mom was right—she and Dad did die at the same time. However, Mia is not sure if she will live to play at their funeral. She takes a kind of comfort in the idea that she and her whole family could die the same way, together.

Teddy's death becomes a major factor in Mia's decision as to whether to stay or to join her family in death. Should she stay, she will now have to live her life completely without any members of her immediate family. Her emergency surgery makes her realize that should she choose to leave and die, her emotional choices will translate into true bodily harm in order to make her decision a reality.



By recalling how she felt about the deaths of other people she has known, Mia implicitly wonders how she will be remembered by her friends and family if she decides to die along with her parents and Teddy.



This scene of Mia's family members deciding what songs they would like during their funerals—while all driving together in a car—is poignant foreshadowing for the tragedy that will unfold years later. While her mother may have been serious when she said she wanted to die along with her husband, she surely did not want her children to die along with them, as noted by her wish that Mia would play the cello at her funeral. If Mia decides to keep living, it will be up to her to carry on the memory of her family, but if she chooses to die, there will be some comfort in having left the world of the living along with those she loved the most.



While she knows that her mother would want her to keep living, Mia is tempted by the concept of dying in the same way as the rest of her family. In a way, this would allow her to exert agency over the tragedy. Mia recognizes that her ability to decide whether to live or to die is an incredibly precious choice—and yet as readers we are also encouraged to use Mia's fantastical situation to examine our own choices that we make every day. All of our lives are precarious, and every choice we make affects them..



2:48 AM

After several hours in surgery, Mia's body is returned to the ICU in stable condition. Willow convinces the nurses to let Mia's grandparents visit her. While Gran is as chatty as ever and tells Mia all of the family news, Gramps looks exhausted from the day's events. Gran reports that she saw a crossbill on her walk, a bird that is unusual in their part of Oregon. Gran believes that the bird is a reincarnation of her sister Glo, returned to show support for Mia.

As Mia listens to Gran drone on, she thinks about how nice it would be to fall asleep to the sound of her voice. Death, she thinks, might be like one, long, satisfying nap. She pulls herself back to the present in a panic, worried that if she meditates on the thought of sleep as death, then she may actually die, according to the ambiguous rules of this out-of-body experience. Mia wonders if all dying people have these kinds of choices, and if her parents perhaps had a choice, too. She hopes that all of the angels Gran believes in were too busy comforting Teddy as he slipped away to worry about Mia, which is why she is left alone with the choice to stay or to go. Mia wishes someone else could decide for her—a "death proxy" who could choose whether she should remain alive or move on to join her family in death.

Eventually Gran and Willow leave the ICU, leaving Mia with Gramps, who cries over Mia's body. He speaks to her body, telling her that while he wants her to stay more than anything, he will understand if she chooses to go. He is the first person to tell Mia that he understands the tragedy she has been through that day—he understands staying will come with its own challenges, and that to some extent, leaving is the easier option.

In a flashback, Mia recalls that prior to Teddy's birth, Dad's band was fairly popular in college towns across the Northwest, and, oddly, Japan. However, once Mom announces she is pregnant for a second time, Dad begins to make changes to his life, such as finally learning how to drive a car (rather than bicycling everywhere) and exchanging his **punk-rock** wardrobe with a vintage buttoned-up style from the 1950s. He goes back to school and earns his license to teach English.

When Teddy is a few months old, Dad announces he is leaving the band, even though Mom says she's okay with him continuing to play shows. Henry becomes livid with Dad, and doesn't speak to him for months. Henry only apologizes for his behavior years later, when he has a daughter of his own, and can finally understand why Dad had to prioritize his family at all costs.

Gran's pleasant demeanor, especially given the events of the day, may be due to the fact that she is optimistic about life after death. By pointing out that she believes her reincarnated sister Glo actually "visited" in order to support Mia, she is implicitly noting that Mia's parents and Teddy may often return to her as reincarnations or angels.



Despite being surrounded by her loved ones, Mia feels entirely alone in her decision as to whether she join her family in death or keep living. Though Gran speaks of angels, no outside entity of any sort has come directly to Mia to speak with her, which makes her doubt their existence. On the other hand, she has no idea how to characterize the state of mind or being she is currently in, as she is separated from her physical body. With so many pros and cons to living and dying, she almost wishes she didn't have a choice in the matter at all, like her parents and Teddy. It's easier when something is just lost—not sacrificed.



In a family of extroverts, Mia and Gramps have always had a special connection based on their quiet, thoughtful dispositions. Mia is touched by the fact that he will understand if she leaves. In a way, telling Mia this makes her decision harder—by leaving the world of the living, she will also be leaving someone who understands her very well.



Mia's father's choices in the wake of Teddy's birth show his commitment to his family, rather than to the pursuits of his youth. Even though he has a profound love of music, his love for his family always came first. This is another difficult choice, a reminder to Mia that she's not alone in having to make sacrifices.



Henry's apology to Mia's Dad shows that, with some things in life, you have to experience an event for yourself to truly understand what another person is going through. Henry can only understand Dad's decision once he himself knows what it is like to want to care for a family.



Meanwhile, Gramps is upset at Dad's transformation into a more parental figure for reasons Mia can't figure out. Gramps finally explains that he misses the music Dad used to write, as he finds his lyrics to be like poetry. Mia didn't know her father wrote the lyrics to the songs he played, since he was not the singer of the band. She returns to his band's albums to listen more closely to the lyrics, and enjoys one song, "Waiting for Vengeance," in particular. Mia absentmindedly sings it to baby Teddy, which delights her father. Mia asks her father if he is sad that he's not in the band anymore, and he replies that he doesn't feel like he gave anything up. Though everyone around him wanted to bargain, he felt as if it was an either-or choice to quit the band and be a better father. "Sometimes," he tells Mia, "you make choices in life and sometimes choices make you."

Mia recalls "Waiting for Vengeance" due to its themes on the nature of making choices. While Mom, Dad, and Teddy were not able to decide as to how they would die, Dad was able to exert agency in his life when he quit the band in order to better provide for Mia, Mom, and Teddy. Now Mia now has a similar kind of agency in a decision, but a much more consequential one. While Dad didn't feel that leaving the band was that difficult of a sacrifice, Mia must decide if continuing to live her life is worth the pain that the loss of her family will always cause.



4:57 AM

Mia mulls over the lyrics her father wrote years ago, meditating in particular on the lyric "I'm not choosing. But I'm running out of fight." She struggles with the decision she is facing—while she knows her Mom would be "livid" if she decides to follow her family in death, Mia wonders if her Dad, like Gramps, would understand if she gave up "the fight." She sings "Waiting for Vengeance" to herself, searching for an answer in the lyrics.

Mia must decide whether to follow what her Mom would want for her, or whether the loss of her family's presence would be too much to bear as she moves forward in life. Unsure of how her father would weigh in on her decision, Mia looks to his song lyrics to speculate.



Meanwhile, Willow convinces the head nurse to allow Adam to visit Mia. Fatigued from the surgery, Mia (the out-of-body Mia) is unable to leave the room, despite her nervousness at seeing Adam. She curls up into a ball onto a chair, and listens to Adam talk to Nurse Ramirez. Adam regrets the stunt he pulled earlier in a vain attempt to see Mia, but the nurse tells him he was being romantic. She also tells Adam that while it's true Mia's heart stopped on the operating room table, the surgeons were able to successfully fix a perforation in her bowel. While Adam is convinced it was the stress of the situation he created that caused Mia to almost die, the nurse reassures him that Mia is fine now.

As time wears on, Mia's physical body seems to become more linked to her out-of-body self. This makes her impending decision all the more real. While the surgeons were able to fix the perforation, she knows that "giving up the fight," or not making the conscious decision to remain alive, will mean that she will soon die. Adam's presence complicates that option, as he is one of the reasons she would want to stay.



Nurse Ramirez leaves Adam and Mia alone in the room. While Adam is initially in shock when he sees the state Mia is in, he quickly relaxes and takes her hands. He notes that they are cold as usual, and begins to blow on them as if to warm her up. Mia recalls that this is something he often does, even in public and in front of her parents, and is a display of affection that makes her want to reach out and touch him. He drops Mia's hand and begins to say "Please," over and over again, and begs her not to make him "write a song."

Even though Mia had felt tension between her and Adam prior to the accident, Adam's reflexive displays of affection remind her why they fell in love in the first place. Adam begs Mia not to make him "write a song," because he only writes songs about things that upset him. Once again, Adam (like Mia) perceives things in musical terms.



In a flashback, Mia recalls that before Adam, she never expected to fall in love. She and Kim always assumed they would be the “kind of girls” who had boyfriends in college, but not in high school. When Mia fell in love with Adam, however, it felt just right, despite the fact that they often fought, such as over the fact that Adam never wrote any songs about Mia. He tells her that she would have to cheat on him to get a song written about her, which they both knew would never happen.

However, Mia recalls fighting with Adam more than ever that past fall, usually due to the tension of where Mia would end up after high school graduation. Adam is a year older than Mia, and has planned to remain in Oregon for a few more years in order to pursue success with his band. While he still lives nearby with his band, he is often out touring or playing gigs. She initially withheld from him the fact that she was auditioning for Juilliard, afraid of the conversation they would have to have if she decided to attend.

After Mia aces the Juilliard audition, she first tells Adam she just did “okay,” then changes her mind and tells him she played better than ever. When Adam announces they need to celebrate, they have a difficult time finding a mutual night to have dinner due to their busy music schedules. He notes to Mia, “Things are getting complicated, aren’t they?” She agrees, citing their busy schedules, but he replies that that’s not what he meant.

Mia and Adam try to diffuse the tension by joking about Mia going to a local college to study **cello**, and about Adam’s band moving to New York. However, they both know that neither option is truly feasible. They both avoid making future plans with each other, out of mutual fear that they may not be together for much longer. At a New Year’s Eve party several weeks prior to the accident, Adam and Mia promise each other that they will be together on the next New Year’s Eve. Mia does not return home that night, which does not faze her family.

But Mom recognizes that Mia seems upset. They discuss Mia’s worry about the future of her relationship with Adam. Mom admits that while she believes Adam and Mia are truly in love, relationships can be tough despite the love between two people. She agrees to support Mia through whatever she decides to do, whether she chooses to stay in Oregon to be with Adam, or whether she chooses to move to New York City to study at Juilliard.

From Mia’s perspective, her relationship with Adam has prevailed despite obstacles like their differing social situations. Because their love for each other is intrinsically linked to their love of music, Mia is upset that Adam never wrote a song for her. They both assume, however, that neither of them would ever cheat on the other.



Mia and Adam’s relationship seems perfect and devoid of fights, until their potential separation becomes all the more real when Mia aces her audition for Juilliard, and Shooting Star begins to go on tours. Mia doesn’t tell Adam about her audition at first, because that would make her potential future decision all the more real.



Adam and Mia both sense that there is tension in their relationship, but abstain from speaking about it out loud for the same reason that Mia initially doesn’t confess that her audition went well—if either of them vocalizes the issue, then it makes it seem that much more real.



For both Mia and Adam, their first love is music. Though Mia and Adam joke about Shooting Star moving to New York or Mia studying the cello in Oregon, they both know that Adam would never leave his band, and Mia wouldn’t give up Juilliard. Being physically together next New Years would thus mean that one of their dreams has failed—or that they attempt a long-distance relationship. The New Year’s promise also relates to Mia’s current decision—if she decides to die, she’ll be breaking her promise to Adam.



Mom’s commitment to supporting Mia, no matter what her ultimate decision, can be directly applied to Mia’s current situation. Even though Mia knows Mom would want her to fight on and keep living, she knows that at the end of the day, Mom will understand and accept her decisions, since she respects Mia’s sense of responsibility and morality.



In another flashback, Mia recalls the last time she and Adam discussed the future of their relationship, on Adam's futon in the "House of Rock" he lives in. Mia notes that even though her Juilliard audition went well, it's possible that she will not be accepted, and that she will attend school in Oregon, allowing them to stay together. Adam replies that if the alternative occurs, and Mia is accepted to Juilliard, he knows that the choice (for her to go to New York, and for them to be apart) has already been made. Adam knows he could never keep Mia from Juilliard, and Mia notes that Adam's already been off on his own Juilliard-like adventure, in the form of his band's rising popularity and exposure. Still, they express their mutual love for each other, despite what the future may bring.

Regardless of what the future may bring for Adam and Mia, they both know that they must support each other on their paths to fulfilling their dreams of becoming musicians. It is a true testament to their feelings for each other that neither expects the other to give up pursuing their passion in order to save the relationship. Both Mia's potential for a future relationship with Adam and her possible future of studying at Juilliard are major factors when she considers the pros of staying alive.



5:42 AM

Adam leaves Mia's hospital room abruptly, telling Nurse Ramirez that he has forgotten something and will return shortly. Willow has taken charge of Mia's care, and convinces the head nurse to allow visits by all of Mia's family members. Kim sits next to Mia and tells her about the craziness that has been occurring in the hospital, which Mia has actually been witness to due to her out-of-body experience. Kim's chatty demeanor calms Mia, just like Gran's talking had soothed her the day before.

Kim's strength throughout the whole ordeal has continually surprised and comforted Mia. Like Gran, Kim is one of the people Mia would most miss if she died. On the other hand, Mia knows that besides her grandfather, Kim is one of the people who would most understand her decision if she chose to leave. Mia has faith in Kim's resilience to move on after her death.



Mia wonders what death would feel like—whether it will be a whole lot of nothingness, or whether she would be able to remember things that happened to her when she was alive. She recalls moments in her life when she had an overpowering sense of déjà vu, such as when her Mom or Dad told her a story from their childhoods and she felt as if she had lived the event that they were talking about. Mia wonders if perhaps she was present at these events, like the angels that Gran believes in. She knows that if she decides to go, she will want to retain all the loving memories she has of her family and Kim. Remembering Adam, however, would be too painful.

Mia's grandmother's belief in angels and Mia's lifelong sense of déjà vu show that she has grown up with a strong sense of the supernatural. Her mature sense of responsibility and old soul, then, may be the product of the fact that she has "lived" before, like the angel reincarnation that Gran believes in. The thought of this comforts Mia, as it means that if she chooses to leave, she is not "gone forever," and if she chooses to stay, it means her family isn't either.



Kim ends her story to Mia about Brooke Vega's distraction and the security guard by noting, "going to jail would be easy compared to losing you." Though Mia knows Kim's comment is meant to urge her to stay alive, in a way, Mia construes it as a sign that Kim will eventually get over the grief of losing her best friend. Mia knows that while it will hurt in the short term, Kim will go on to live a full life, and will become a stronger person for surviving the loss of Mia. Mia knows that this thought makes her hypocritical, however—if she expects Kim to survive the loss of Mia, she wonders if she should stay alive and soldier on in the face of her own personal tragedy. But she's not sure she's tough enough to cope with the loss of her whole family.

Kim's strength adds to both the pros and cons of Mia's decision about staying: she knows Kim will help shoulder the burden of Mia losing her whole family, but also that Kim will go on to live a vibrant life even without Mia's presence. Should she decide to go, Mia hopes to live vicariously through Kim and her future successes. While she admires the resilience and strength that Kim shows in the face of tragedy, Mia is not sure she has the same ability to move on, even with the promise of having Kim by her side to help see her through.



As Kim describes being saved from jail by Willow, Mia imagines Kim and Willow becoming close friends, and meeting every so often to remember Mia and her family. Kim lists all the family members and friends who have come to keep vigil at the hospital, and notes that even more are on the way. She takes care to note that even though Mia has lost her immediate family, the twenty-plus people that have come to see her still count as Mia's family, regardless of whether or not they are actually related to her. "You still have a family," she whispers to Mia.

In a flashback, Mia recalls an impromptu Labor Day party hosted by her family, attended by about twenty of the family's friends. They enjoy food on the grill, cold watermelon, and wild blackberry pies. Mia feels especially happy when Dad, Henry, and Adam jam on their guitars and sing. They invite her to join on her **cello**. She protests at first, saying the musical styles of the instruments don't go together, but eventually gives in to the pleading. After a few moments of playing along with the guitars, she realizes that the cello actually sounds "pretty amazing" alongside the other stringed instruments.

7:16 AM

It's finally morning, and doctors are evaluating Mia's body. Mia is tired, and hopes it will all be over soon. Kim has left, and the parade of people visiting her has ended. Mia feels ready to give into death, but wants to wait to see Adam one last time.

Adam soon comes and collapses into a chair next to Mia's bed. He has clearly been crying, which Mia has only seen him do in moments of extreme sorrow. He asks her to stay, telling her that he loves her and is prepared to stay by her side as she copes with the loss of her parents, even if that means he must move to New York. However, he also says that if she no longer wants to be with him when she moves to New York, he will respect her wishes and let her go.

The lengths that Mia and Adam, as well as the other twenty-odd relatives, will go to support Mia through this difficult time is a testament to the support system she will have should she decide to stay. While they will never truly replace her parents and brother, Mia is comforted by this network of friends and family, and also by the fact that they can all support each other as they mourn Mom, Dad, and Teddy.



Jamming on the cello with her father and Adam on the guitars teaches Mia about the harmony that can exist even in seemingly disparate things. Classical cello and rock guitar don't seem to go together at first, but a little effort and patience can prove that together they are better (or at least no worse) than they were alone. Should Mia stay, she and Adam may be able to make their relationship work, no matter the distance between them. Again Mia sees things through a musical lens, applying this instance of musical harmony to her personal relationships.



The relationship between Mia and her body appears to go two ways: her mental anguish can cause her body to become ill, and physical weakness can make her out-of-body self feel emotionally drained.



In this speech, Adam states that he is willing to give up Shooting Star in order to move to New York with Mia. For both Mia and Adam, their love of music always came before their love of each other—until this moment. Adam is willing to give up everything he's worked towards if it means he can have Mia by his side. This echoes Dad's decision of years ago, to give up his band to take care of his family.



Adam puts headphones around Mia's ears, and plays Yo-Yo Ma's *Andante con moto e poco rubato*. Mia is hit with a rush of memories from her life, both from the past and in the future, such as holding Teddy in her lap, and visiting three graves on a hill, next to a river. As the music continues to play in her ears, she feels like she can no longer keep up with the memories, until there is a blinding flash and an instant of pain. It is then that she understands how "agonizing" it will be for her to remain alive. Suddenly Mia is reunited with her body, as she can feel Adam holding her hand, and she knows she is in the hospital bed.

Mia concentrates on the feeling of Adam's hand in hers. She summons all the love she knows she will receive even as she must cope with the pain of moving forward in her life. She pictures Teddy, Mom and Dad, and her **cello**, and squeezes Adam's hand. Adam's grip on her hand tightens, and he gasps—the first time that day that Mia feels like she has truly heard him. "Mia?" he asks.

Though Mia feels "agony" when her mind reunites with her body, it is still a tolerable kind of pain, one that has an end. This seems to represent the grieving process Mia will have to go through in order to cope with the loss of her parents and Teddy. Though it will be difficult at first, she has the resources and support system to get through it, as well as the knowledge that the pain will, eventually, get better. Like everything else in Mia's life, the music (and Adam by her side) is what will hold her together until she is strong.



Mia ultimately decides to stay alive. The power of the music and Adam's love for her give her the strength to begin a new life without her parents. She will keep her parents and Teddy alive through not only her grief but also her memories and her future music, and it seems that she will have no difficulty finding a new kind of family in her remaining loved ones.





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