

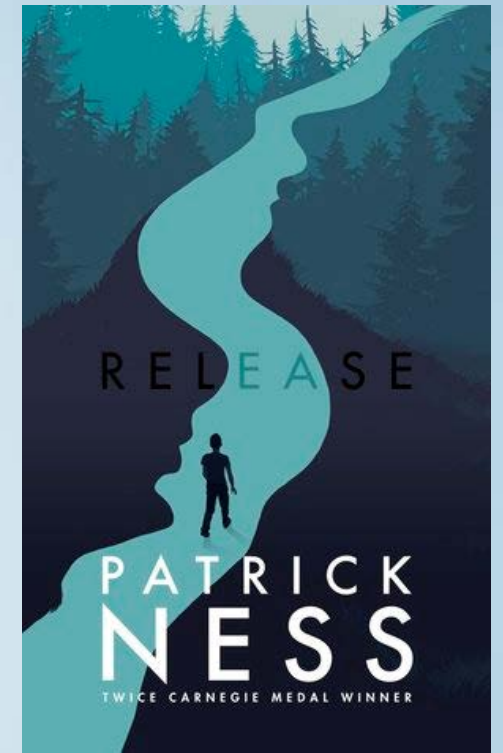


# 'RELEASE'

## by Patrick Ness

Read by:

*Ella Anderson & Mrs. Valentino*



# Introduction



## Context:

- Patrick Ness has won every ,major prize in children’s fiction.
- He is known for taking the themes of ‘coming of age’ and feeling at ease in your own skin in his novels and interweaving them with supernatural elements.
- In ‘Release’ he adopts elements and ideas from two other novels:
  - ‘Mrs Dalloway’ (1925) by Virginia Woolf
  - ‘Forever’ (1975) by Judy Blume
    - *More of both later!*



## Genre

- Essentially, 'Release' combines the genres of 'Bildungsroman' and 'Magic Realism'
- 'Bildungsroman' is a genre
  - focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood in which character change – both morally and psychologically - is extremely important.
- 'Magic Realism' is, in a nut-shell
  - Real-world setting + fantastical elements.
  - In visual terms, think of it as a photo that's blurred around the edges to give it an ethereal, almost otherworldly quality. It has the *feel* of magic—that anything is possible.
  - Magical realism focuses on ordinary people going about the humdrum activities of daily life. Everything is normal—except for one or two elements that go beyond the realm of possibility, whether it be magic or fate or a physical connection with the earth and the creatures that inhabit it, but always in a way that celebrates the mundane.

# What is 'Release' about?

This is what the 'blurb' tells us:

- Adam Thorn doesn't know it yet, but today will change his life.
- Between his religious family, a deeply unpleasant ultimatum from his boss, and his own unrequited love for his sort-of ex, Enzo, it seems as though Adam's life is falling apart. At least he has two people to keep him sane: his new boyfriend and his best friend, Angela.
- But all day long, old memories and new heartaches come crashing together, throwing Adam's life into chaos. The bindings of his world are coming untied one by one; yet in spite of everything he has to let go, he may also find freedom in the release.

# What do Ella and Mrs. V think the book is about?

- Ella:
  - “It’s about knowing the importance of letting go to prevent you from getting hurt in the future. This could be in an emotional sense as the main character doesn’t know how to get over his former lover. Teaching us a lesson, young and old alike.”
- Mrs Valentino:
  - “It’s about friendship, love and families; the meaning of life; knowing yourself; courage; about magic and what binds us all together as humans. Most of all, it’s about finding out what love is for you: and that’s something that is important for *all* of us, teenagers *and* adults.”

# Who are the main characters?

- ADAM THORN (17-18 years old)
- MARTIN THORN (Adam's older brother, about 20)
- LYDIA THORN (mother of Adam and Martin)
- BRIAN THORN (father, an evangelical preacher at 'The House Upon the Rock')
- ANGELA DARLINGTON (Korean by birth, adopted, Adam's best friend)
- ENZO (Lorenzo Emiliano Garcia, Spanish, boyfriend of Adam)
- LINUS BERTULIS (boyfriend of Adam)
- KATHERINE VAN LEUWEN (a murdered girl)
- THE QUEEN
- THE FAUN

# Other characters:

- MR. & MRS. DARLINGTON (mother - Dutch; father – American)
- WADE GILLINGS (Adam's supervisor at work)
- RENEE & KAREN (Adam's co-workers)
- TONY (the murderer of Katherine)

# The TITLE

- What did you imagine the novel might be about from the title?
- Ella:
  - The word release made me think of a character or event reaching closure as they may release a burden or emotion. Upon reading you hope that the main character does get a release from his personal problems and tragic home atmosphere.
- Mrs. Valentino:
  - First I thought of “Freedom”; then I thought, “If something can be released, the suggestion is that it has been imprisoned previously”; then I thought of different types of ‘release’ – mainly emotional and physical.



# Structure

- The novel is divided up into eight sections:
  - 1 – The Yoke (Adam's home and family life / the murder of Katherine);
  - 2 – Run (Enzo / evangelism / the Queen and the Faun / Marty and Felice);
  - 3 – Evil International Mega-Conglomerate (Adam's workplace / Katie's spirit)
  - 4 – Because, Pizzas (Adam and Angela's friendship / the Queen and the Faun's relationship)
  - 5 – Linus at 2 O'Clock (relationship between Adam and Linus / the Queen, the Faun and Katie);
  - 6 – The House Upon the Rock (Adam and his father's relationship / Queen Katie and the faun)
  - 7 – The Get-Together (the boundaries between reality and magic break down)
  - 8 – Release ('release' is experienced)

- Within each section, there are two parallel worlds evident – that of the humans and that of the non-humans (these are linked in several ways, as in magical realism genre)
- Both worlds are written in the third person narrative (perhaps to create a sense of omnipresence, as though one ‘presence’ is witnessing the events in both worlds)
- Both worlds switch between the past and the present (again, creating a link between the real and the non-real)
- The human world narrative is written in normal typeface; the non-human narrative is written in italicised typeface

# 1 - THE YOKE



- The novel starts with the important image of a rose and blood:
  - Adam breaks his skin with a rose thorn and sees, **'fast as a gasped breath, of trees and green, of water and words, of a figure that follows in the darkness, of mistakes made, of loss, of grief –'**
  - Which also heralds the introduction of the spirit of Katherine – ***'the smell of blood, of roses ... surrounded by thorns'***
  - It is as though the two worlds of magical realism start to be joined at this moment in time ... we won't give the spoiler away yet!
- 'The Yoke' is a reference to the Bible, denoting Brian Thorn's control over his sons – The Thorns have never spoken about / accepted Adam's sexuality
  - **'His father was an evangelical minister, after all. With Adam as a son. Particular denials of reality were going to be a necessity for anyone in that house.'**

## 2 - Run

- “Why do you have to call yourself anything? Because, if you don’t, freedom. Because, self-actualization. Because, fluidity and not calcifying it into what that label will make you.” (Angela)
- ‘... there was always a wound, it seemed, keeping freshly opened by a family who also kept saying they loved him.’ (Adam following Marty’s admission to him that he has got a girl he hardly knows – Felice – pregnant.)
- ‘... seven feet tall, furred to his haunches, horned of head, bare of chest, naked as a wild creature, his priapic goat smell cleaning the man’s nostrils as effectively as any menthol ...’ (Adam’s first blurred awareness of the faun)

# 3 – Evil International Mega-Conglomerate

- This is a warehouse where Adam works all the hours that he can, as the Thorns struggle for money
- Wade Gillings is the stockroom manager (who sexually harasses Adam, as he is homosexual, too, and recognises that Adam is as well); Karen and Renee also know that Adam is homosexual, but do not treat him dependent on his sexuality and they are disgusted with Wade's behaviour (presenting this contrast helps the reader see Ness' message that one's sexuality is not / should not be the issue here)
- The reader is presented with different ideas about what LOVE is in this section:
  - Wade has no conception of Love – to him, it is replaced by sexual activity
  - Angela says to Adam, **"If you ever fall, I'm here to catch you."**
  - As Tony Killed Katherine, he told her, **"I loved you," he wept, as he killed her, strangled her, then put bricks in her pockets** and threw her body into the lake.
  - Adam feels, **"...that corruption at his heart, that little piece of unfixable brokenness."**
  - the Faun is dedicated to the Queen: they are part of the ***"urid and preposterous rumours of a forest cult and sightings of half-naked men in the furs of who knew what animals"***

- So, is love

- Physical?
- Unconditional, no matter what?
- A saviour?
- Possession?
- Perfection?
- Devotion, transcending time?



- Ness frequently describes his characters as being “lost” at various points in their lives. Perhaps, by this, he means that they have not yet found the answer to this fundamental question. Indeed, some of them do not seem to know where to turn next to find their answer.
- This takes us back to the image of the rose in the first section: as a symbol of both love and pain, to whom should Adam give the rose?

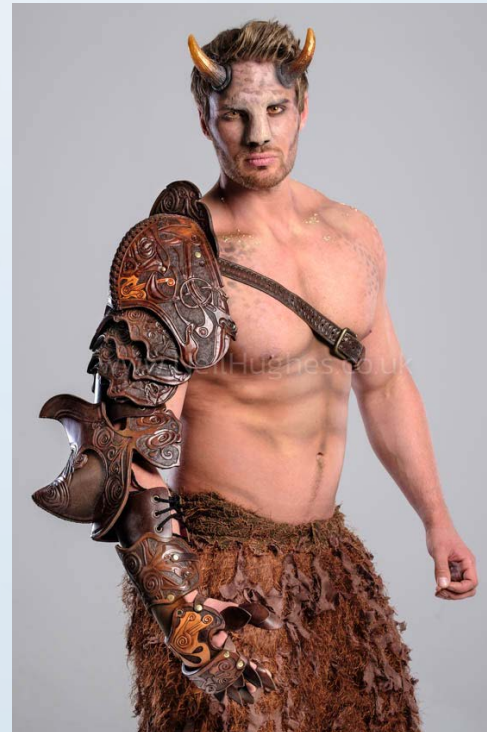
# 4 – Because, Pizzas

- Angela's wise mother:
  - “Never pass up the chance to be kissing someone. It's the worst kind of regret.”
    - This is not a sexual statement. It is a statement about connection.
- Friendship between Adam and Angela
  - ‘They'd just had life together. First kisses, last kisses, virginities lost, drinks tried, movies watched, classes shared, heartaches exchanged, world theories pontificated, gossip spread, uncontrollable laughter at nothing ...’
  - Here, Ness seems to be encapsulating what he sees as the perfect, average, extraordinary platonic love between two friends.
  - Although this novel has been criticised by some for its descriptions of sexual activity, these parts of the novel are not at all offensive:
    - They are gentle, not at all salacious, often tinged with humour – “**anthropological excursions**” – which genuinely reflect curious teenager discussions.

- We find out more about the Queen and the Faun:

- Katherine (Katie – the murdered girl) is using the Queen to revisit her past life with Victor and Tony (her two boyfriends)
- Katie and the Queen are combining to become one
- The Faun can smell emotions
- He protects the Queen by being able to wipe humans' minds of the memories she has brought to them
- If he is separated from his Queen, they will both die

In these parallel narratives, Ness is exploring ideas of love, loss





# 5 – Linus at 2 O’Clock

- We learn more of Adam’s background:
  - When a younger Linus had taken a boy, rather than a girl, as his date to the Junior Prom, Adam’s father reflects to Adam: **“I would sit outside that dance in sackcloth and cover myself in manure if that were my child.”**
  - Now that Adam is Linus’ lover, Adam’s view of their sexual relationship is that **‘Like Linus was enlisting Adam in the funnest, funniest thing two people can do together.’**
  - Linus says to Adam, **“Doesn’t this feel like out own little world? Our own place, just the two of us, separate not only from other people, but from existence altogether?”**
  - In confiding in Adam her experiences of sexual activity, Angela says: **“... I just looked at it as a kind of obstacle course. You jump over some parts, you duck under others, then you climb the rope at the end and everyone gets a Diet Coke.”**
  - Adam – **‘There was so much more to it than just the body.’**
- Sex as part of love:
  - In presenting these varied thoughts on physical relationships, Ness seems to be using the preacher’s homophobic, prejudiced views as a foil to enable the reader to appreciate the tolerance, humour, intimacy and love reflected by the views of Adam, Angela and Linus.

- Also in the parallel narrative of this section:
  - Katie's spirit and the Queen have already become entwined
  - Now, Queen Katie and the faun visit the home of Sarah, a friend of Katie's, who has been taking drugs and is close to dying
  - Queen Katie takes Sarah's hand and Sarah sees her – they become ***'this new third being their combination has created.'***
- The faun, as a non-human, magical realism character, can see what is ahead
  - He knew it could be ***"... his last day in existence."***
- Adam, as a human character of the real world,, is not so sure:
  - ***'Everything was always so clear in books and movies. Everyone always knew their reasons. But real life was such a mess.'***

# 6 – The House Upon the Rock

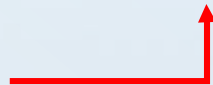
- This is a key section of the novel.
- There are three main strands:
  - A) the relationship between Adam and his father
  - B) Queen Katie's judgement
  - C) the boundaries between the real and the non-real worlds break down further

- A) Adam and his father:
  - The hypocrisy and un-spiritual nature of the evangelical church is presented through the image of the baptism 'pool'
    - It is a '**Jacuzzi**' which has to be frequently cleaned – Adam has found dead mice and '**an open diaphragm box**' amongst other debris
    - Adam was baptised there, aged 8, and wavered from then on in his belief till he was 13, when he reaffirmed his commitment to God, before rejecting this belief totally two years later
  - Adam's father:
    - "**The young are always glib. And look what happens.**"
    - "**I wish we could be honest with each other. I wish that for all of us ... I wish it for you and me. It hurts my heart that you're afraid.**" (to Adam)
    - Wanting to believe that his father is offering him love and understanding – '**If protectiveness was love, his dad was an avalanche of it**' - , Adam reveals that Wade "**made a sexual advance**" on him
    - Brian's response is to tell his son that he, Lydia and Marty had known about the porn on Adam's laptop, the "**infatuation**" with Enzo and that they "**Pray for your healing**" ... "**I rebuke this sin in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**" ... "**You have no idea how much I work to love you.**"
    - This is a major realisation for Adam. He tells his father that earlier this day "**I was getting comfort in the bed of my boyfriend**" then '**Drove off to find his family.**'
    - Adam is discovering what 'family' love is: and it is not that of the 'family' of the church, nor his immediate, genetic 'family'.

- B) Queen Katie's Judgement:

- Queen Katie and the faun return to the cabin by the lake where Katherine was murdered
- The faun is worried by this connection to the real world, as, *'... for a creature who depended on myth, too much fact could prove quite fatal.'*
- A policeman guarding the scene of the crime sees the non-real figures as *'... a dead woman in a drowned dress, then a seven-foot faun following.'*
- This happens because this is the policeman who pulled Katherine from the lake and tried to revive her. Also, he arrested Tony for the murder.
- Queen Katie and the faun then proceed to the prison where Tony is being held. The faun makes the door fly off its hinges and, as the guards approach, the faun collapses them on the floor and then wipes their memories.
- The prisoners they pass *'... stare at her firmly, unwaveringly, and within them she recognises the spark that drives some of these creatures. The one that compels them to consume too much, gorge themselves to the points of actual physical harm and beyond, the greed and gluttony that would rot their very skin if they could manage it.'*
- *'She reaches the man's cell. She turns to him. The Queen and the girl Katie, turn to him, and they are now so interleaved that neither is entirely sure which one of them speaks. "Hello, Tony," they say. "My murderer."*

Climax  
of the  
narrative



- C) the boundaries between the real and the non-real worlds break down further
  - “I saw the craziest thing today. A man dressed up as a goat ... like someone had glued actual hair all over him.” (Adam’s father)
  - “*There are greater powers at work.*” (the Queen)
  - “I love you more than probably any other person on this planet. Including myself.” (Angela to Adam)
  - The Queen *‘is the keystone between the worlds. Should she die ... the universe [will unravel]’*
  - *‘There are ancient agreements with this world, agreements made before memory with the people who were first in this place, people who gave the faun and his Queen different shapes in their dreams and prayers, shapes that changed as the people did, shapes that become even more elastic until he often doesn’t know what physical form he will take when he steps out of the lake until he has done so.’*

Key  
passage!



The quotation above is really, REALLY important in linking the real world with the non-real. It is reminiscent of Wordsworth in ‘The Prelude’, when he states that Nature has a “**plastic**” power and sees/feels a pantheistic presence in the mountains, rocks and lakes of the Lake District.

# 7 – The Get-Together

- This section develops Adam's self-actualisation:
  - With Angela:
    - Adam – **“Don't go anywhere?”**
    - Angela – **“Not even when I'm across a continent and an ocean.”**
    - Adam – **“Not even then.”**
    - Angela – **“Not even until the end of the world.”**
  
    - Angela – **“They're your parents. They're meant to love you *because*. Never *in spite*.”**
    - Angela – **“You choose your family, you know.”**
  
    - Adam attempts to give the rose (remember – from section 1?) to Angela, but she rejects it:
      - Adam – **“I can't help missing you.”**
      - Angela – **“That's different. I'm supernatural.”**

- With Enzo:
  - Adam is finally 'released' from any remaining pangs of 'love' he thought he might have for Enzo due to two key moments –
    - Natasha (Enzo's girlfriend) turns up and they kiss in front of Adam
    - Enzo offered to pay Adam \$150 for the pizzas he has brought to the farewell party (the food actually cost \$300) and Adam feels '**... his heart broken in a different way. A way that felt suddenly, terrifyingly free.**'
    - Adam is learning more about himself, his feelings, love, letting go and being free to move on.
- With Linus:
  - **"I want to take you back to the party, Linus ... I want to kiss you in front of everyone there. I want everyone to know." "I want to love you ... if you'll let me."**
    - Adam feels he is with his 'true' family, where he is accepted unconditionally and loved 'because' not 'in spite'.
    - But Linus refuses the rose.
    - Adam '**put a thorn back to the wound again, idly pricking himself once more, just wanting to feel the pain for a second -'**

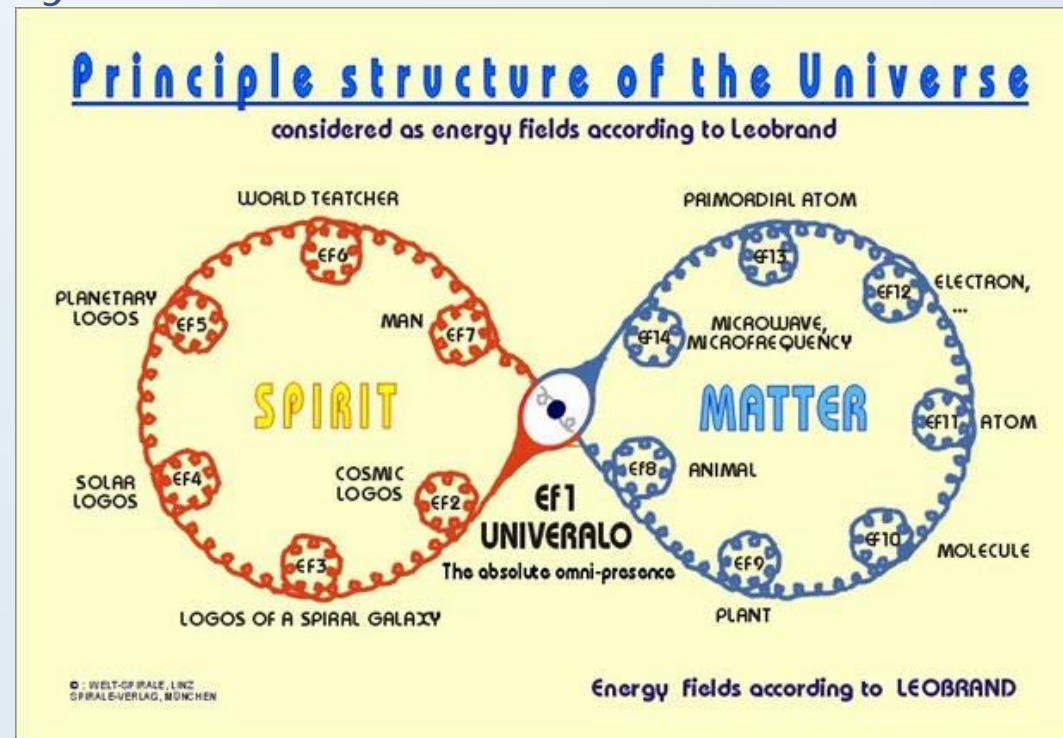


- This section also develops the real-world narrative of Katherine van Leuwen and the non-real narrative of Queen Katie:
  - When Tony sees Queen Katie in prison, he asks, *'Have the worlds already begun to erupt over their borders?'*
  - When Queen Katie touches Tony's elbow, it burns, *'And there. The power of a word. The power of one word. That's where it all changes.'*
  - Queen Katie tells Tony that she was alive when he thought she was dead. But Tony reminds her that they are both responsible, as they were both *"too high, too far gone"* on drugs. At this, Queen Katie *'removes his head from his body'* in one fell swoop.
  - The faun reunites Tony's head with his body and the Queen tells the faun, *"I am lost."*
  - They know that there is the danger of *'a world ending, ending, ending –'* on *'this eternal, pivotal day'*, that *"The binds of the world are coming loose ... We have till the sun sets. That's all the time given to a spirit to wander ... She will die, and if you die with her ... time will finish ..."* (the faun to the Queen).
  - The Queen replies, *"Let us return to our home ... Let us greet the end there."*

# 8 - Release

- This section takes place at the lake. The two narratives are fully intertwined:
  - Adam 'started walking back down the pier to get his friends some water. "Hey," Angela called after him. "You coming back?" He turned to them and smiled. "Always," he said. "until the end of the world."
  - Simultaneously, the faun leads the Queen to the water: *"This is where I shall die now."*
  - But the faun notices *'A human creature, man-sized ... but not perhaps all the way to being a man just yet ...'*
  - *'... the spirit herself reaches out and asks of the boy, simply, "How do I let go?"'*
  - Adam takes a breath and tells her, *"Today was a day I had to let go of a lot of stuff. Like everything that was tying me down suddenly got untied."*
  - *"How do I let go?"*
  - *"I don't know," the boy says, "but I think this is for you." He holds out the rose. And the spirit steps away from the Queen to take it. It is, in the end, that simple.*

- Perhaps Ness' message here is 'simply' to accept ourselves for what we are individually.
- If love is offered and it feels right to take it, then do so. Because that will bring our 'release'.
- But if it doesn't feel right, then don't be afraid to reject it and wait until what is right for you to come along. Because it will. Always. Even if you have to wait until the end of the world.



# Okay, so back to 'Mrs. Dalloway' and 'Forever' ...

- Maybe you can now see the links which Ness makes ...
- '*Mrs. Dalloway*' [1925] (by Virginia Woolf) is a unique novel in that it takes place in a single day — a Wednesday in mid-June 1923. The novel interweaves two seemingly unconnected storylines during this day.
- At the beginning, Clarissa Dalloway, fiftyish, is preparing for a party she will host that evening. She begins her day running an errand to purchase the flowers for the party.
- Throughout the morning, Clarissa reflects on her past, including her decision to marry Richard Dalloway thirty years earlier, rather than her more fiery suitor Peter Walsh.
- Meanwhile, the second storyline begins with Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked war veteran, out on the street with his wife, Lucrezia.
- Septimus struggles with the aftereffects of the war, hearing voices and feeling that life has little meaning. A car backfiring paralyzes him, and he reflects on his life.
- Septimus lost his good friend and commanding officer Evans in the war and continues to carry on conversations with this lost friend.
- Clarissa has returned home and begins to remember a special friendship she shared in her youth with Sally Seton, a vivacious, slightly scandalous young woman. The two shared a special bond, bordering on a crush, and Clarissa remembers a kiss they shared.

- Clarissa begins mending her green silk dress for the evening when she receives an unexpected visit from Peter Walsh, her former suitor.
- Peter had once told Clarissa disparagingly that one day she would become "the perfect hostess," and it becomes more and more clear that his prediction was accurate.
- Clarissa and Peter talk to each other easily about the present, but both are thinking of their past and the decisions they made to get them to the place they are now. Clarissa's 17-year-old daughter Elizabeth enters and Peter ends his visit.
- Peter goes to a park where Septimus and Lucezia are also walking.
- The couple get into a heated discussion about suicide, and Peter sees them as a young and in love couple quarreling. He doesn't realize the depth of their emotions or how unsteady Septimus is.
- Lucezia has made an appointment for Septimus to see a specialist, Sir William Bradshaw, who dismisses the complexity of Septimus's madness and suggests a rest in an asylum to get more perspective.
- Meanwhile, Richard Dalloway has been to lunch with Lady Bruton.
- Clarissa was somewhat miffed that Lady Bruton invited only Richard and not her, and sees it as a remark on Clarissa's validity.
- Richard has realized during this lunch that he wants to come home and tell Clarissa that he loves her. Unfortunately, he never finds the words, as he has gone so many years without saying them.

- Clarissa goes to see Elizabeth, who is studying with her tutor, Doris Kilman.
- Clarissa despises Doris, who she sees as a monster with "hooves" taking her daughter from her. Doris also despises Clarissa, largely for her bourgeois ways and financial means.
- Septimus and Lecrezia go to their apartment to wait for the attendants who will take him to the asylum.
- When they arrive, Septimus decides to escape from them, and not wanting to leave life but not wanting to meet the attendants, he jumps out the window to his death.
- Clarissa's party is underway, with several ghosts from her past – including Peter Walsh and Sally Seton – in attendance.
- Richard has still been unable to tell her that he loves her.
- Very late into the party, Sir William and Lady Bradshaw arrive, very apologetic for their tardiness. Lady Bradshaw explains that they were delayed as one of Sir William's patients (Septimus) had committed suicide that day.
- The party ends with Clarissa surprisingly disappointed at the success of her party.

- '*Forever*', [1975] (by Judy Blume), is a universal tale of first love, adolescence, and the struggle towards self-discovery. The main character, Katherine Danziger, comes from a loving, supportive family.
- Her parents and grandparents are open about everything from love, sex, and relationships to life experiences and mistakes. They want her to know about life in order to be able to make sensible, informed decisions.
- Throughout the novel, Katherine's parents help to guide her through the journey to self-discovery and offer her the advice and information that she needs to make wise decisions.
- As Katherine goes through the normal adolescent journey toward self-discovery, she meets Michael Wagner, who becomes her first love and ushers her into the world of romance and intimacy.
- Michael and Katherine throw themselves into the excitement and romance of their relationship and it is this relationship that builds up Katherine's confidence and begins her preparation for adulthood.
- Through her relationship with Michael, Katherine slowly learns to take command of her own life. She learns to take control of her destiny, make decisions for herself, and accept the consequences for her actions and decisions.

- When she first meets Michael, Katherine has no definite plans for her life or understanding of her own identity.
- In the middle of her senior year in high school, Katherine goes to a friend's New Year's Eve Party and is immediately attracted to Michael Wagner just as he is immediately attracted to her.
- The next day he returns to the friend's house under the pretense of collecting his records and asks Katherine to spend some time with him. It is not long before they are spending their every available moment with each other. Michael has been sexually active while Katherine has not and as their relationship progresses Katherine is continually having to set boundaries around their physical intimacy. Katherine also discovers that the first time Michael had sex, he got a venereal disease.
- While Michael is not pushy or demanding, he makes it obvious that he wants a physically intimate relationship and Katherine feels pressured.



- Katherine and her friend Erica debate the nature of sex.
- Erica argues that sex is simply a physical act and not a romantic one, while Katherine sees sex as an emotionally loaded action that can result in greater intimacy between the participants.
- Katherine's mother and grandmother both provide her with literature and information that helps her realize the seriousness of sex and allows her to make an informed decision.
- But Katherine and Michael's relationship is not just about sexual intimacy. Through her relationship with Michael, Katherine works towards self-discovery. At the beginning of the novel she had no ambitions or goals in life. She planned to go to whatever college accepted her.
- During her relationship with Michael, she begins building her life around him and making plans for the future around his dreams and plans. She adopts his interests and throws herself completely into his life.
- Katherine's parents are understandably concerned by this development, but Katherine is very defensive. Eventually, as Katherine begins to realize how much her parents care for her she slowly begins to see that they have a point.
- Towards the end of the novel, Katherine and Michael are separated by summer jobs in different states and Katherine realizes that in fact, her parents were right. She finds out that she is too young to plan on spending the rest of her life with someone and she slowly comes to realize that there is a balance between thinking that the future will take care of itself and having every detail of the future planned.
- She realizes that she has to take control of her own life and make decisions based on her own dreams. With the death of her grandfather, Katherine comes to understand that life must be lived fully and that she has her whole life ahead of her to have a serious relationship.
- Ultimately, Katherine realizes that she is simply too young for a forever relationship and that her relationship with Michael is just a stepping-stone in her life journey. However, she knows that she will always cherish her time with Michael, which helped her to embrace and discover her identity as a young woman.