

## *TIGHTWIRE*

Literature and Writing Curriculum

By Amy Kaufman Burk

### CHAPTER 1

#### “First Session”

Collier Z. Tratner, the patient, has his first meeting with his therapist, Caroline Black, a trainee in her rookie year of seeing patients. Collier is Caroline’s first patient in her internship at Oasis Psych Clinic, County Hospital, San Francisco, CA. Collier reveals to Caroline that he is fluent in French, Spanish, German and Italian, as well as English. He grew up with a single mother, as a child of the circus. The issue of child abuse is raised but not discussed. He explains that he has run away from the circus, and is now working as waitstaff at a restaurant, temporarily living at the YMCA. Collier’s favorite song is “Tight Rope,” by Leon Russell. During the session, Collier is volatile — charming, angry, funny, remote, sexual.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline Black: age 24, a rookie therapist, beginning her internship year of training to become a psychologist.

Collier Z. Tratner: age 21, Caroline’s first patient, ran away from the circus to find himself.

Collier’s mother: a clown, unicyclist, contortionist on the circus team of the Club Med Resort.

#### VOCABULARY

Setting

Protagonist(s)

Conflict (internal and external)

Character

Theme

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What does the reader learn about Collier?

What does Caroline’s style as a therapist reveal about her as a person?

What is the role of a first chapter in a novel?

From his first session, Collier sets up a situation with a clear sexual tension between him and Caroline. Since their relationship is professional, therapist and patient, sex is off limits. Why do you think Collier brings a sexual charge into the office, when a sexual relationship between them will never happen? The following essay explains why sex can never be a part of a productive therapy.

Therapy Never Includes Sex

Collier brings to his therapy an atmosphere brimming over with seduction and sex. Yet, in the context of psychotherapy, Caroline must hold a clear boundary. The point of therapy is for the patient to heal and live a full, healthy life to the best of his\* ability. Important parts of a healthy life are emotions, identity, friends, home, career and sex. *Tightwire* follows one year of Collier's therapy, as he works to sort out all of these parts of his life.

So how does therapy work? How can people change just by talking to a therapist? When a patient takes unresolved feelings about an important person in his past and superimposes those feelings on the therapist, it's called *transference*. For example, if a patient had a mother who was mean to him, then he might start feeling like his therapist is being mean. This gives the patient an opportunity to fully experience a problem from the past, in the safety of the office, and gain a new understanding.

To help the patient, the therapist needs to NOT become mean like the patient's mom. Instead, the therapist needs to show the patient how he brings his relationship with his mother to other relationships, and how this causes him to recreate this unhealthy relationship again and again.

The same is true for sex. Collier has many sexual issues that he needs to sort out in therapy. From his first session, he creates an atmosphere of sexual tension. Caroline understands that part of her job is to help Collier have healthier sexual relationships in his life. She knows that if she has any sexual contact with him, it would be like a doctor forcing a patient to have sex during a physical exam. This would be a personal, emotional, physical, legal and ethical violation — which could cause her to lose her license to practice, would ruin Collier's therapy, and would damage him emotionally.

As a reader, you can watch how Collier works in therapy to develop a healthy sex life. Caroline helps him gain a healthy understanding of his own behavior, and develop a new approach to his own sexuality. In order to do this, she will not have sex with him, no matter how seductive he becomes.

\*Because of the genders of the patient and therapist in *Tightwire*, I refer to the patient as "he", and the therapist as "she". However, any gender can apply to either role.

## CHAPTER 2

### "A Healthy Baby Girl"

Caroline is born. Her parents, Leah and Geoff, insist on a natural childbirth, going against the hospital's policy in 1958. Two nurses, Rose and Deborah, step in as midwives. Caroline is born in the hallway of the maternity ward, behind a heap of laundry. We find out that Leah attended Radcliffe College and UCLA medical school, where she was one of two women in her class, and graduated #3. Geoff attended Harvard College, where he played football.

#### CHARACTERS

Leah Black: new character, Caroline's mother.

Geoff Black: new character, Caroline's father.  
Nurse Deborah: new character.  
Nurse Rose: new character.  
Dr. van Heyst: new character.

## VOCABULARY

Background

Minor Character

Background

Plot

Structure of the novel; alternating chapters between key moments in Caroline's growing up and Collier's treatment.

Mood

Atmosphere

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Caroline won't remember the day she was born, but the personality traits that Leah and Geoff bring forward in this chapter will be important parts of Caroline's upbringing. If you look back on Caroline's first session with Collier, can you find places where Caroline might have integrated her parents' character traits into her own personality, and into her professional work as a therapist?

Do you think the personalities of your family members have influenced you? Why or why not?

How would you describe the tone of Collier's sessions with Caroline? (Caroline tries to hold steady in the face of Collier's mercurial moods.)

## CHAPTER 3

"Maurice"

Caroline sets up an appointment with her supervisor, Dr. Laura Stilwell. Along with Collier, Caroline has seen two other patients: Gigi, an adolescent whose best friend was killed in a drive by shooting – Dr. R., a female chemistry professor, who builds music stands as a hobby and is extremely intellectual. Collier tells Caroline about his circus act on the trapeze with Maurice. They begin to speak about Maurice and how confused Collier was (and still is) about the sexualized tone of the act.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Collier

Dr. Laura Stilwell: new character, Caroline's supervisor.

Maurice: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier, the novel's antagonist.

Gigi: new character, Caroline's patient, an adolescent girl from the projects, her best friend was shot in a drive by shooting and bled out in Gigi's arms. Gigi isn't speaking.

Dr. R.: new character, Caroline's patient, extremely intellectual.

Collier's mother: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier.

Gregory: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier.

Wanda: new character, on the Club Med circus team with Collier.

## VOCABULARY

Character Development

Major Character (vs. minor character)

Antagonist

Conflict

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

How would you describe Collier's background from the perspective of abuse? Caroline finds words to begin to address Collier's confusion about what happened to him, and the ambiguity about whether he was physically abused, emotionally abused, or both. Do you think Collier was abused as a child?

("Child Abuse" and "Sexual Abuse" are catch-all phrases, which cover a variety of circumstances. Many situations which clinicians would call "abusive" fall outside of the category of "legal abuse." This can lead to confusion in sorting out the resulting feelings, and in healing. If this chapter brings up something in the reader's past that feels confusing or abusive, please reach out to a therapist for the support you deserve.)

## CHAPTER 4

"Everyone Does It"

Leah and Geoff return from a 5-day vacation. Rose (one of Leah's labor nurses) and Ted (Rose's husband) have taken care of Caroline (age 2) and her brother Derrick (age 5) while their parents were away. When Leah and Geoff return, Caroline is speaking in full sentences. She has been throwing tantrums.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Derrick: new character, Caroline's older brother.

Leah

Geoff

Rose: one of Leah's labor nurses, a family friend.

Ted: Rose's husband, a high school English teacher.

## VOCABULARY

Structure of a novel (alternating chapters between Collier's therapy and Caroline's growing up)

Use of humor (including the chapter's title)  
Background  
Two Protagonists (Caroline and Collier)

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What is your opinion on the structure of the novel? Do you think the author made a good choice to structure her story in this way? Why or why not?

In some ways, Caroline is precocious; in other ways, is she very much her age. Describe both types of character traits in Caroline.

Even as a young child, Caroline begins to show qualities which will contribute to her being a gifted therapist. Can you pick out these qualities? (Her gift with words is the quality shown in this chapter.)

What do you think of the author's choice to write a novel with two protagonists?

#### CHAPTER 5

"Dr. Stilwell And Mandy"

Caroline has her first meeting with Dr. Stilwell, her supervisor. As Caroline's supervisor, Dr. Stilwell will be Caroline's teacher and guide through her first year as a therapist.

To Collier's intense surprise and discomfort, he cries in his session as he describes his relationship with Mandy, and his leaving her without saying goodbye.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Collier

Dr. Stilwell

Mandy: new character, Wanda's daughter, Collier's girlfriend. She and Collier grew up together on the circus team.

#### VOCABULATY

Character

Character Interaction (Dr. Stilwell and Caroline; Collier and Mandy)

Textual Evidence

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Have you ever had a great teacher? (This can be someone in a classroom, or in a completely different setting like an aunt who teaches you to cook, a sister who teaches you to throw a ball, or an uncle who teaches you swing dancing.) What qualities made your teacher great?

What are the qualities that make a great teacher? Do you think Dr. Stilwell has those qualities? Does Dr. Stilwell do a good job in her first meeting with Caroline? Why or why not?

Collier and Caroline are both extremely surprised when Collier cries in this session. What do you notice about the way Collier cries? What does this reveal about Collier? (People have different styles of crying. Each person has a relationship to their own tears.)

## CHAPTER 6 “Artistic Vision”

Caroline overhears her father (Geoff) when he loses his temper on the phone, speaking to a movie director. Caroline throws a tantrum.

CHARACTERS  
Caroline  
Geoff

VOCABULARY  
Character development: Caroline (intuition) and Geoff (anger)  
Character Interaction: Caroline and Geoff

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS  
This is the first of several chapters dealing with Caroline’s intuition. How does her intuition relate to her tantrums?

Caroline’s gift of intuition is also a burden. Can you think of another example of a gift that is also a burden?

## CHAPTER 7 “Hairballs And Hope”

Dr. Stilwell helps Caroline understand the power of hope, and the need to keep the office safe in a way that surprises Caroline (safe for Collier’s vomiting). Dr. R’s favorite movie is *The Wizard Of Oz*. Gigi is still not speaking in therapy, but is starting to connect with Caroline through playing the game Hangman.

Collier rents a basement apartment from a lesbian couple, Jeanne and Tracy. Jeanne and Tracy have two children, Heather (age 6) and Henry (age 9).

CHARACTERS  
Caroline

Collier

Dr. Stilwell

Jeanne and Tracy: new characters, Collier rents their basement apartment. They will become role-model-parents to Collier.

Heather and Henry: new characters, ages 6 and 9, Jeanne and Tracy's children.

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development

Theme (the importance of hope)

Humor (chapter's name)

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

As the book opens, Collier feels hopeless. How do you think *hope* paves the way for healthy change in a person's life? Do you think healthy change can lead to healing?

From the story so far, which qualities in Collier do you think will contribute to his hopelessness? Which qualities have the potential to help him heal?

#### CHAPTER 8

"Tea Party"

Leah tells Caroline important pieces of her family history. Caroline becomes overwhelmed when she senses her mother's emotions, and throws a tantrum. Leah doesn't understand the extent of her daughter's intuition.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Dr. R.

Gigi

Leah

#### VOCABULATY

Character development

Character Interaction: relationship between Caroline and Leah

Textual Evidence

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter is revealing not only about Caroline and Leah as individuals, but also about their relationship. What does this chapter reveal about their relationship?

When a child throws a tantrum, people generally react negatively. Do you find yourself reacting negatively to Caroline, or do you feel empathic when she throws a tantrum?

This chapter deals with the relationship between Caroline's tantrums and her intuition. Cite textual evidence to explain how her tantrums relate to her intuition. (She feels overwhelmed by her intuition, then she throws a tantrum).

## CHAPTER 9 "Lorna"

Caroline is learning the basics of becoming a therapist. Dr. Stilwell guides Caroline on how to use countertransference to help her patient. She tells Caroline that therapy takes place in the preconscious. Gigi has begun to speak in her therapy sessions.

Collier brings his sexual history into his treatment, both through his words, and through the transference. He talks about masturbating until he hurts himself.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Gigi

Lorna: new character, Collier will fall in love with Lorna as the story unfolds.

### VOCABULARY

Character: new character, Lorna

Character development – Collier, how he handles relationships

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What is your personal reaction to Lorna? Do you find her interesting? If she were a "real" person, would you want to get to know her?

What qualities draw Collier to Lorna? Why is he afraid to connect to her?

## CHAPTER 10 "Autograph"

Leah and Geoff meet with Terra, Caroline's kindergarten teacher. Terra is concerned that Caroline is too academic, not artistic enough. Terra asks for Geoff's autograph, which infuriates Leah.

### CHARACTERS

Leah



Geoff

Terra: new character, Caroline's kindergarten teacher (minor character; this is her only appearance in the novel).

Marsha: new character, Caroline's best friend.

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development

Character Interaction

Minor Character

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter is about Geoff and Leah as individuals, and about their relationship as a couple? What do you learn about them as individuals? (They are both narcissistic.) What do you learn about them as a couple?

In this chapter, if you were a friend of Caroline's parents, who would you feel more empathic towards in this situation – Leah, Geoff, both, neither?

Why does the author bring Terra into the story? What is Terra's role in this chapter? (She brings into the light aspects of Leah, of Geoff, and of their relationship.)

#### CHAPTER 11

##### "Hopeless Case"

Caroline tells Dr. Stilwell that she doesn't feel lost all the time in sessions anymore. Dr. R. talks about the misogyny she deals with in her chemistry department.

Collier called his mother who is furious at him for abandoning her. He described how he always loved to read, but his mother gave him no support for his intellect. Mandy eloped with one of the Club Med guests and is married.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Dr. R.

Collier

Lorna

Mandy

#### VOCABULARY

Background (Collier's mother)

Character Development (Caroline makes a mistake; Collier's mother)

Character Interaction (Collier and his mother.)

Structure of a Novel

Style of Writing

Conflict (within a character and between characters)

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Therapists are human and mistakes are a part of every treatment. Handling mistakes productively is important and in this session, Caroline misses a crucial moment. Can you find Caroline's mistake? How does she miss an opportunity to pick up on Collier's issues?

Chapters in *Tightwire* often end with an insight or a twist. Do you find the end of the chapters interesting or not? Does the ending of each chapter motivate you to read the next chapter? Why or why not?

How would you describe Collier's mother and her character? (Narcissistic)

#### CHAPTER 12

"Cinderella Needs Analysis"

Caroline goes to Marsha's birthday party and one of the mothers tells Caroline that she is overweight (she isn't). Caroline and Marsha are both growing up in film industry families, and neither wants to be an actor. At the party, they saw the animated movie *Cinderella*. Caroline tells Leah that the movie doesn't make sense because after her traumatic childhood, Cinderella doesn't need a prince to make her happy; she needs analysis.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Marsha

#### VOCABULARY

Tone

Background

Theme

Subplot

Character Development

Use of Humor

Chapter Title

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Think about Cinderella's story: the death of her mother, followed by the death of her father, followed by abuse and enslavement by a new family...and then catapulted into "Happily Ever After" by a pumpkin carriage and a glass slipper. Of course, with her background, Cinderella's happily-ever-after-ending is as realistic as a pumpkin's turning into a frilly,

sparkly carriage. Why do you think the “happily ever after” fairy tale approach to life doesn’t actually work?

What does Caroline’s reaction to *Cinderella* reveal about her character?

This chapter deals with tone (another parent telling Caroline she’s fat), subplot (growing up in the film industry) and theme (attitudes in the film industry). Pick one of these topics and cite textual evidence from this chapter.

### Chapter 13 “A Name Without An Identity”

Dr. Stilwell tells Caroline that she is earning a strong reputation in her training program. Caroline figured out the meaning of a series of drawings from a young child. Caroline becomes anxious, feeling like people have high expectations that she can’t meet. Dr. Stilwell suggests that she might want to pursue her own therapy, and Caroline is completely taken aback.

Collier is extremely upset that Mandy is married. Collier realizes that both he and Mandy needed a way out of the circus, and both of them leaped when an opportunity presented itself. He’s worried about her, and about himself. He describes himself as having a name without an identity.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Mandy

Bob: new character, Mandy’s husband.

#### VOCABULARY

Textual Evidence

Chapter: viewing each chapter as a separate entity, and as a part of a larger story.

Theme: the importance of a healthy and strong identity

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

The chapter’s title not only guides the reader in understanding this chapter, but also highlights a theme in the novel. Do you like the title of this chapter? Why or why not?

At this point, you have read approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the novel. Do you identify with any character in the story? Why or why not?

What does Caroline’s meeting with Dr. Stilwell reveal about Caroline? Cite evidence from the text.

This is the first time Collier refers to a previous session in his therapy. Until this point, he treats each session like a separate entity from every other session. Why do you think this is important? (Collier is developing a new sense of continuity in his own life. This is reflected in his therapy sessions, which are starting to fit together in his mind, helping him make sense of his own emotions.)

## CHAPTER 14 “Haircut”

Caroline gives her Barbie Doll a haircut so she’ll look “more real.” More information about Leah’s background and Geoff’s background is revealed. Leah realizes that Caroline remembers everything people say, word for word.

### CHARACTERS:

Caroline

Leah

Geoff

Millie Charlemagne: new character, actor (minor character).

### VOCABULARY

Minor Character

Character Development (Caroline likes things which are “more real”; Caroline is extremely perceptive about her parents, and she is beginning to have words to help her structure her own ideas.)

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter reveals Caroline’s character, Leah’s character, and their relationship. What is revealed in this chapter?

Regarding her doll, Caroline says, “She’ll look prettier when she’s more real.” What does this tell you about Caroline’s character? How do you imagine this attitude will influence Caroline as she grows up in a film industry family?

What are your thoughts on the way this chapter ends? (Children usually believe that their experience is everyone’s experience. Caroline is completely surprised by the idea that not everyone remembers conversations, verbatim, for years. This self-referenced approach to the world, assuming everyone is like you, is completely normal in child development.)

What is the purpose of a minor character? Use Millie Charlemagne as an example.

## CHAPTER 15 “Signature”

Caroline is impatient for Collier to have more insights, and Dr. Stilwell encourages her to slow down. Gigi is making progress in her therapy.

Collier gets back in touch with Lorna after cancelling their date. Lorna makes metal sculptures and plans to go to medical school.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Gigi  
Lorna

### VOCABULARY

Interpreting the Text: interpreting text as both symbolic and literal.  
Theme: identity

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

The word “signature” used literally and metaphorically in this chapter. Explain the literal and metaphorical meanings? (identity)

Think about a quality of yours that is important to your identity. What makes this quality important to you?

## CHAPTER 16 “Profiteroles”

Leah and Geoff give a dinner party, and one of their guests reveals confidential information about a patient. In reaction, Caroline begins to shake uncontrollably.

### CHARACTERS

Leah  
Geoff  
Caroline  
Dr. and Mrs. Koslucher: new characters, therapists who cross ethical lines revealing confidential information.  
Deborah and Steve: (Leah’s labor nurse and her husband)  
Rose and Ted (Leah’s labor nurse and her husband)  
Hadley Lindquist: new character, actor.  
Maia Pompelli: new character, actor.

## VOCABULARY

Background: shows how the film industry influences Caroline's values as she grows.

Character Interaction: shows how Caroline and Derrick bond.

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

The reader knows that Caroline will grow up to become a therapist. In this chapter, we meet a therapist who acts in an extremely unethical way. What does Dr. Koslucher say that is a breach of ethics? (Therapists should never discuss a patient by name, or give identifying information, because this violates confidentiality.)

Do you agree with how Leah and Geoff handled their dinner party? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 17

### "Tears For Zeus"

Collier attends a concert at a church with a discussion afterwards. He realizes he doesn't know his religious heritage, and calls his mother to ask (father Presbyterian, mother Protestant). He tells Caroline that his mother joined the circus at age sixteen after both of her parents died. Collier feels the emotional impact of knowing that his mother didn't cry when her parents died, but was inconsolable when Zeus (her dog) died when Collier was a child.

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about Collier's living in the moment, trying to detach himself from a sense of continuity, disconnected from his past and not thinking about his future.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

## VOCABULARY

Character development: Collier, Collier's mother

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter addresses an important relationship: Collier's relationship to his own tears. Do you think being able to cry is important? Why or why not?

What does Collier realize in this chapter about his past?

How would you describe Collier's mother and her character traits?

## CHAPTER 18 "Madeleine"

Caroline attends an entertainment industry party with her parents and brother, Derrick. Caroline and Derrick walk into a room with a group of adults having sex.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline, age 9

Derrick, age 12

Leah

Geoff

Dolly Bracker: new character, financing Geoff's project.

Beau: new character, Dolly's boyfriend.

Madeleine: new character, Dolly's daughter, age 11.

Matt: new character, Dolly's son, age 14.

Bronze: new character, Dolly's therapist.

### VOCABULARY

Character – Madeleine, Matt, Dolly, Bronze

Character development – Caroline

Character interaction – Caroline, Derrick, Madeleine

Textual Evidence

Minor Character (Madeleine will return in Chapter 46 "Spitfire With A Heart Of Gold".)

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Sexual trauma in childhood can take many forms. Do you think this chapter describes a type of sexual trauma or sexual abuse? Why or why not? What happens in this chapter that Caroline experiences as sexual trauma?

Although Madeleine is a minor character, she is extremely complex. How is she complex? Cite textual evidence. Compare Madeleine's character to Bronze's character (another minor character who is much more one-dimensional.)

## CHAPTER 19 "Halloween"

In supervision, Caroline discusses the different styles of speech in her patients. Dr. R. loses her temper with her colleagues.

Collier attends a school pageant with Jeanne and Tracy. He is upset by some of the costumes. Collier is developing a stronger relationship with Jeanne and Tracy.

## CHARACTERS

Collier  
Dr. Stilwell  
Jeanne  
Tracy

## VOCABULARY

Style of Speech (in dialogue)  
Style of Writing

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What is your favorite Halloween costume you've ever worn or someone else has ever worn? If you've never seen one you liked, design it in your mind and describe it.

What does the reader learn about Collier in this chapter? (He is angry when he comes across homophobia; he feels extremely vulnerable, but keeps it hidden.)

How would you describe the author's style of writing? Do you like her style? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 20

"It's All In The Notebooks"

Leah's mother (Caroline's Grandma Ruth) has died. Leah, Geoff, Caroline and Derrick are packing up her belongings. Caroline figures out that Leah's mother was dyslexic. The reader learns the story of Grandma Ruth and the Academy Awards, as well as more family history about Leah's parents (Ruth and Sam).

## CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Leah  
Geoff  
Derrick  
Grandma Ruth  
Grandpa Sam

## VOCABULARY

Background  
Character Development: Caroline's ability to understand other people.

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Have you ever figured out something about a person that nobody else realized?



What does Caroline figure out about her grandmother? What does the reader learn about Caroline's style of thinking? Why do you think Caroline is so drawn to reading about Sherlock Holmes (a fictional detective)?

## CHAPTER 21

### "Tomato Wedges And Barf"

Caroline talks to Dr. Stilwell about Collier's new ability to feel anger without becoming consumed by anger. Caroline realizes that Collier is a great teacher.

Collier babysits for Heather and Henry, who become ill with the stomach flu. For the first time, Collier can imagine being a father. Jeanne and Tracy are becoming role model parents for Collier.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Jeanne

Tracy

Heather

Henry

## VOCABULARY

Character Development: Jeanne and Tracy, Collier

Character interaction: Jeanne, Tracy, Collier, Heather, Henry

Humor: chapter title

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Have you met a same-sex couple with children? Are you comfortable with that family constellation? Why or why not?

Do you like the title of this chapter? Why or why not?

At the end of this chapter, Collier tells Caroline that he can imagine being a father. What happens in this chapter that serves as a catalyst for this change in Collier?

## CHAPTER 22

### "Empathy And Boundaries"

Caroline and her family are in Rome for the summer, on location with Geoff who is filming a movie. Caroline is extremely upset by the way other families at their hotel treat each other.

Caroline is startled when her mother tells her that feeling both empathy and boundaries, experienced simultaneously, are essential components of being a therapist. Caroline decides to become a psychologist when she grows up.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Guests at the hotel, including a boy who beats up his sister while their mother reads a magazine.

#### VOCABULARY

Character's Development: Caroline

Textual evidence

Themes: empathy and boundaries, and how they interact.

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Why is the idea of empathy and boundaries an emotional revelation for Caroline? (In this chapter, Caroline discovers an antidote to being overwhelmed by other people's feelings – combining firm boundaries with her capacity for empathy.)

Why does Caroline decide to become a psychologist?

Find textual evidence through the novel regarding Caroline's intuitive empathy and her developing the ability to incorporate boundaries. As she grows older, her empathy shows itself in different ways. (Look at Chapters 6, 8, 12, 14, 20, 22)

#### CHAPTER 23

"Jerry"

Caroline reports to Dr. Stilwell that Collier has been talking about fatherhood. Dr. Stilwell points out that Collier is discussing the issue, but not attaching emotions to his therapy sessions.

Collier meets Jerry, a gay man. They begin to have sexual contact, and Collier panics. Jerry is a role model for how to handle the situation, and they begin a platonic friendship. Collier is frantic and suicidal in his session with Caroline.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Jerry: new character, gay, will become Collier's first close male friend.

## VOCABULARY

Character  
Character Development  
Internal Conflict (Collier)  
Textual Evidence

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What makes Collier's sexual encounter with Jerry so frightening for Collier? What allows Collier and Jerry to establish the foundation for a healthy friendship? Cite textual evidence.

Do you think Caroline handles this session well? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 24

### "Special Dessert"

Caroline attends a musical theatre production and party with her parents and Derrick. Maia Pompelli, an actor, gives Caroline a piece of candy which turns out to be a laxative, and Caroline becomes quite ill.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Leah  
Geoff  
Derrick  
Maia Pompelli: an actor (first mentioned by Dr. Koslucher in Chapter 16 "Profiteroles")

## VOCABULARY

Irony

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter describes a situation that could be considered child abuse. What happens in this chapter that could be considered child abuse?

The reader learns how Leah and Geoff handle themselves in a crisis. How would you describe each of their reactions?

What is your opinion on the author's title for this chapter? (The title has an extremely different set of connotations from the actual content of the chapter. How is this an example of irony?)

## CHAPTER 25 "Attention 911"

Caroline describes to Dr. Stilwell the previous session, where Collier was suicidal. She is worried because her emotions broke the surface, and Collier accurately read her feelings.

Delano Hardy, who calls himself "Pierre," dislocates his own shoulder to become the center of attention at the restaurant where Collier works.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Mr. Anesta: new character, Collier's boss at the restaurant.

"Pierre" or Delano Hardy: new character, can dislocate his own shoulder, his only appearance in the book.

### VOCABULARY

Theme: healthy vs. unhealthy attention

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

"Wanting attention" can have several meanings. What is a healthy way to want attention? What is an unhealthy way of wanting attention?

In the course of the session, Collier's perspective changes on the idea of wanting attention. How does his perspective change?

## CHAPTER 26 "Waterfall Blossom Ranch"

Caroline, age 13, is at camp with a suicidal counselor. Caroline is targeted by her peers.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leslie Rockwell: new character, age 18, a camp counselor who attempts suicide.

Darian: new character, a camper who targets Leslie and Caroline.

### VOCABULARY

Character Development – Caroline

Theme: every gift is also a burden

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Think about one personality trait that you've had since you were a child. How did that same trait show itself when you were a child, an adolescent and an adult?

How is Caroline's level of intuition both a gift and a burden for her to carry at age 13? How does this relate to Caroline's tantrums in earlier chapters? How does this relate to Caroline's ability to effectively be a therapist as an adult?

## CHAPTER 27

### "Through The Looking Glass"

The holidays can be evocative, setting off a storm of emotion, and Gigi is having a difficult time. Dr. R. met a man who teaches kindergarten, her first serious boyfriend. Dr. Stilwell tells Caroline she is becoming a good therapist.

Collier begins his session by becoming furious at Caroline, and then calms down and works with her to understand his feelings. Collier spends his holiday with Lorna and her parents, and joins Jeanne and Tracy to help the kids decorate their tree. His mother continues to be enraged at him for pursuing his own life. Collier realizes that he is taller than Maurice.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Gigi

Dr. R.

Maurice

## VOCABULARY

Character interaction: Caroline and Collier

Character Development: Collier's view of Maurice changes.

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

How does Collier's perspective change regarding Maurice? Why is this important in Collier's character development?

## CHAPTER 28

### "The Living And The Dead"

Black Eagle/Jefferson Quincy Eagleton visits Geoff. The two men served together in the Marine Corps, World War II. Caroline intuitively understands her father's friend and the emotional issues he carries. She becomes overwhelmed.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Black Eagle/Jefferson Quincy Eagleton

Leah  
Geoff

## VOCABULARY

Character Interaction: Caroline and Black Eagle

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter deals with racism. Where is racism addressed in this chapter?

Throughout the novel, the author chose to leave the racial heritage of several characters unclear. In the United States, unless a character is specified as a different racial heritage, readers often assume the character is white. Can you find a character you assumed was white, but the author actually never identified their racial heritage?

The author made a choice to leave certain characters' racial heritages ambiguous. Why do you think the author might have made that choice?

## CHAPTER 29

"Dream"

Caroline is growing more confident as a therapist.

Collier has a recurring dream about the board game Monopoly.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

## VOCABULARY

Literary Device: Collier's dream

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Do you remember your dreams? Do you think dreams are meaningful? Why or why not?

How are Caroline and Collier alike? How are they different? What qualities contribute to their working together so effectively? Can you find evidence in this chapter to support your ideas?

## CHAPTER 30

### “The Immortal Oscar”

At the Academy Awards, Maia Pompelli (who gave Caroline the laxative, Chapter 24, “Special Dessert”) was nominated for an Oscar and lost. Geoff won an Oscar for cinematography. When Caroline finds out that Geoff voted for Maia, she throws Geoff’s Oscar through a window. Caroline is sent to see a therapist, Dr. Marvin Fein. Dr. Fein makes a series of mistakes in his meeting with Caroline.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline: age 14

Dr. Marvin Fein: new character, a therapist.

#### VOCABULARY

Humor

Minor Character

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What is the role of a minor character in a novel? Some characters in *Tightwire* appear only once. Pick one of those characters and talk about their role in the novel. Why did the author include these characters? Possible characters are Dr. van Heist (Chapter 2), mother who tells Caroline she’s fat (Chapter 12), Dr. Koslucher (Chapter 16), Bronze (Chapter 18), Grandma Ruth (Chapter 20), Black Eagle (Chapter 28), Dr. Fein (Chapter 30).

Did you find this chapter funny? Why or why not?

Can you track Dr. Fein’s mistakes, find the moments when he missed opportunities to form a therapeutic connection with Caroline? Why do you think she tells Dr. Fein she is “cured” when none of her emotional issues have been resolved?

## Chapter 31

### “Sex As A Weapon”

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell agree that something is brewing with Collier.

Collier uses sex and sexuality as a weapon in his session with Caroline. She has no idea how to handle the situation, and she makes several mistakes with Collier. She is certain that she has ruined both the treatment and her career.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

## VOCABULARY

Conflict

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Do you think Collier's treatment with Caroline will end because of her mistakes? Why or why not?

Can you find Caroline's mistakes in this session with Collier?

## CHAPTER 32

"Dale"

Caroline attends an entertainment industry party with her parents. She meets Dale, who will become a close friend. They are both surprised to form a strong bond in their first meeting.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Leah

Geoff

Dale: new character, will become Caroline's close friend.

Stash and Eve: new characters, entertainment industry.

Chet and Hillary: new characters, Caroline's godparents.

Skye Patterson: new character, a singer.

Misty Wade and Tray Mornell: new characters, actors, dancers.

Ned Brisman: new character, dancer.

## VOCABULARY

Character: Dale

Character Interaction: Caroline and Dale

Conflict: Caroline and her parents, Dale and his parents.

Theme: Caroline and Dale form a strong connection as they realize they are both fighting against the values of the film industry.

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Did you ever meet someone you expected to dislike, and instead you became great friends?

What qualities draw Caroline and Dale together?



## CHAPTER 33 “Perspective”

Caroline feels terrible about the previous session with Collier. She expects Dr. Stilwell to kick her out of her psych internship, and Collier to quit therapy. To her surprise, her supervisor is supportive and helpful. Collier, assuming Caroline is going to throw him out of therapy, returns to say goodbye and apologize. Instead, they work together and he continues his treatment.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

### VOCABULARY

Conflict Resolution

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What does Caroline do that earns Dr. Stilwell’s respect? (She is honest about her own mistakes).

Although Caroline made several mistakes during her last session with Collier, she also handled certain key components of the session extremely well. What did she do that allows Collier to return to his treatment? (She protects the sexual boundary, and ends the session when he can’t stop himself from being abusive.)

## CHAPTER 34 “Three Boyfriends”

(HISTORICAL POINT: This book takes place before cell phones, texting and email existed. Many people wrote long-hand letters, and sent them snail mail.)

Marsha and Caroline exchange letters. Caroline and Dale are in Massachusetts together, at a summer session at Andover Academy. Marsha is in West Virginia, doing research on lung damage in coal miners. All three have their first boyfriends.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Marsha  
Dale  
Jason: new character, Caroline’s first boyfriend.

### VOCABULARY

Character development

Theme: equality of straight relationships and LGBTQ+ relationships. Caroline, Marsha and Dale all have their first boyfriends, and the developmental milestone is equally important for them all.

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Caroline, Marsha and Dale form a strong, caring, supportive friendship group. Would you like to be a part of this friendship group? Why or why not?

What do you learn about Caroline, Dale and Marsha from their letters? Cite textual evidence.

#### CHAPTER 35

##### “Therapy Is Weird”

Dr. R. turns out to be extremely funny, and Gigi is discovering her own intellect while being a wonderfully sassy adolescent. Caroline complains to Dr. Stilwell that Collier’s style has become boring. They talk about how Collier frightened himself when he used sex as a weapon, and this is his reaction. Dr. Stilwell explains that Collier is most frightened that Caroline forgave him. Collier emerges from his need to be boring, and talks about his mother’s impossible expectations.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Dr. R.

Gigi

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development

Character Interaction

Theme: power of forgiveness

Writing Style

Textual evidence

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS A therapist’s job includes understanding the meaning of the patient’s entire presentation, even understanding boredom. A “real” therapy involves different stages, sometimes including periods of feeling stuck in one emotional place. In writing *Tightwire*, the author needed to convey the meaning of boredom for Collier without letting the story become boring. Do you think the style the author chose worked well? Why or why not?

Why do you think Collier is so frightened by Caroline's forgiveness?

## Chapter 36 "Two Firsts"

Caroline goes with Leah and Geoff to an entertainment industry New Year's Eve party. She becomes furious at Tray (a professional actor/dancer), and confronts him in front of all of the guests. She smokes pot for the first time with Dale, and they lose their virginity to each other.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dale  
Leah  
Geoff  
Tray  
Misty  
Skye  
Eve

### VOCABULARY

Character Development  
Character Interaction: the people at the party, Caroline and Dale  
Textual evidence  
Theme – values of the film industry, different kinds of healthy sex

What happens in this chapter that makes Caroline so angry?

What do you think of the sexual development in Caroline and Dale's relationship?

What are the "two firsts" that the chapter's name refers to? (Caroline smokes pot and has sex for the first time.)

Caroline is straight; Dale is gay. They love each other as friends. In this chapter, they have sex, and it's a caring and positive experience for them both. What makes this sexual experience healthy for both Caroline and Dale?

## CHAPTER 37 "Always Wild"

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell acknowledge that both Caroline and Collier love to learn.

Collier talks about his reckless, dangerous behavior at Club Med.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier  
Mandy  
Collier's mother

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development  
Character Interaction  
Background

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Have you ever looked at yourself in a new way that changed your perspective?

In this therapy session, Collier comes to several realizations about himself. What does Collier understand that he didn't understand before?

Why is it so important that Collier is able to feel fear in this session?

#### CHAPTER 38

"Brad"

Caroline is in college at Yale and meets Brad. She is surprised to find herself extremely drawn to him.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Brad: new character, will become Caroline's boyfriend and husband.  
Alyssa: new character, Caroline's college roommate.

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development  
Character Interaction

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What draws Caroline to Brad?

Do you like Brad? Do you think Brad and Caroline are a good match for each other?

CHAPTER 39  
"He Still Counts"

Caroline is excited to tell Dr. Stilwell that she figured out Collier's style of speech is uneven because it reflects his uneven emotional development.

Collier asks Caroline for his diagnosis, which turns out to have symbolic meaning.

CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

VOCABULARY

Character Development

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Although Collier's father was absent, Collier built a relationship with his father in his mind. Have you ever had someone who was absent, but still important in your life?

What does Collier realize about his relationship to his father?

CHAPTER 40  
"New And Different"

Caroline and Brad make love for the first time.

CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Brad

VOCABULARY

Theme: empowerment of healthy sex

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

As you get to know Brad, do you like him more or less? Why?

Why is sex with Brad such an important step forward for Caroline? How does this help her heal from her past?

## CHAPTER 41 “Maximal Impact”

Dr. Stilwell helps Caroline understand that she has become a role model for Collier.

Collier talks to Caroline about the importance of teachers in his life. Collier decides on a career. At first, he says he wants to be a therapist like Caroline. But as they talk it over, he realizes he wants to be a teacher.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

### VOCABULARY

Secondary Characters: teachers Collier meets at Club Med (Margery and John)

### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What does “maximal impact” refer to? Why is this important in Collier’s treatment?

Why are Margery and John important characters, even though they barely appear in the story?

Caroline makes a comment that changes Collier’s perspective and guides him to choose the right career. Can you find her comment in the text? (Caroline’s comment is about Collier’s mistakenly thinking that he has to choose *her* career, in order to have her support.)

## CHAPTER 42 “The Power Of Silence”

This is the second chapter with an exchange of letters between Caroline and Marsha. (The first letters are in Chapter 34, “Three Boyfriends”).

This chapter consists of two letters, one from Marsha to Caroline, and one from Caroline to Marsha. Marsha forms new friendships with women in college at MIT. Caroline takes charge of a hostile situation by using silence.

### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Marsha

### VOCABULARY

Letters as a literary device  
Character Development

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

How are Caroline and Marsha growing into adulthood as individuals and as friends? Describe their characters.

## CHAPTER 43

### “Repeating History”

Caroline is proud to report Collier’s emotional growth and development. Dr. Stilwell reminds her that progress is an ambivalent process.

Collier opens his session by announcing that he is returning to Club Med. It turns out Mandy’s husband is a serial child molester, and has been arrested. She has returned to Club Med and Collier, consumed with guilt, initially insists he has to return as well. As he and Caroline talk it over, he decides to stay in San Francisco and commit to his own pursuit of a healthy life. This chapter is a turning point in Collier’s therapy, and in his life. This is the chapter where he commits to a healthy life, on his own terms.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Mandy

## VOCABULARY

Conflict Resolution

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Do you think this is an important session? Why or why not?

Why is this chapter so important in Collier’s emotional development? How does Caroline handle his announcement in the beginning of the session? What makes Collier change his mind? Cite textual evidence.

## CHAPTER 44

### “Juaquin And A Hex”

This chapter is Caroline’s personal essay on her application to a doctoral program in clinical psychology.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

## VOCABULARY

Backstory

Writing Style

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

If you were on the admissions committee and you read Caroline's application essay, would you accept her into your psychology graduate school? Why or why not?

In *Tightwire*, the author uses different writing styles. For example, the chapters describing Collier's therapy are written in one style. The letters between Caroline and Marsha are another style (Chapters 34, 42). Her graduate school application essay is written in another style. Do you think including these different writing samples/styles of the characters adds to the story? Why or why not?

What important parts of Caroline's backstory are revealed in this chapter?

## CHAPTER 45

"Baseball"

Caroline and Dr. Stilwell talk about Caroline's anxiety. Dr. Stilwell suggests Caroline consider starting her own therapy. She asks Caroline to call her by her first name, Laura.

Collier goes with Jeanne, Tracy and Heather to watch Henry's baseball game. Jeanne and Tracy embarrass their children, and Collier feels he has lost his role model parents. He also sees the family talk through the problem and reach a healthy resolution. He invites Lorna to one of his baseball games, where she meets Jerry and AZ (Jerry's boyfriend).

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Lorna

Jerry

A.Z.: new character, Jerry's boyfriend.

## VOCABULARY

Conflict

Conflict Resolution

Character Development

Textual Evidence



## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This is the first time Jeanne and Tracy are presented to the reader as flawed. What are your thoughts on seeing Collier's role model parents as imperfect?

Seeing the family conflict and resolution leads to changes in how Collier views himself and others. Describe those changes. Cite textual evidence. (Reality vs. Idealization)

What is important about Collier's first baseball story? What changes in his relationship to Jeanne and Tracy?

What is important about Collier's second baseball story? What changes in his relationship to Lorna?

What happens with these baseball experiences that changes Collier's relationship to himself?

What is your opinion on the chapter's title? (This chapter is titled "Baseball," but it's really about Collier. The author is trying to communicate how even a pick-up baseball game can provide material to help Collier change his core emotional self.

## CHAPTER 46

### "Spitfire With A Heart Of Gold"

Caroline is in the same psych grad school program as Madeleine Bracker (introduced in Chapter 18, the entertainment industry party where her mother sends Caroline and Derrick into a room with adults having sex). When Caroline and Madeleine reconnect as adults, they immediately feel a strong bond. Caroline finds out that her suicidal camp counselor, Leslie Rockwell from Chapter 26, is beginning treatment with Madeleine.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Madeleine

## VOCABULARY

Character Development (Madeleine)

Foreshadowing: (Chapter 18, Matt's secret)

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Madeleine and her brother Matt were introduced in Chapter 18, and the author has now brought Madeleine back into the story. With the new information in this chapter, reread Chapter 18. Do the two chapters fit together as the plot progresses? Do parts of Chapter 18 make more sense to you now? (Think about Matt's reaction in the Monopoly game, when Derrick says he's discovered Matt's secret.)

Does Madeleine's character as an adult make sense given the chapter about her as a child (Chapter 18)?

What do you think of the author's choice to bring back Leslie Rockwell (Caroline's camp counselor from Chapter 26?)

#### CHAPTER 47 "I Think I'll Get There"

Dr. Stilwell points out that Collier is keeping something secret from Caroline.

Collier has been accepted into San Francisco State University, and will begin college in the fall. He is worried that Caroline will be angry that he kept his application process a secret from her.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

#### VOCABULARY

Theme

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

As *Tightwire* opens, Collier feels hopeless. As the book progresses, he discovers his capacity to heal. Can you find textual evidence? (Theme: hope)

One theme in *Tightwire* is secrets. In this chapter, Collier reveals a secret. What's his secret? Why is this a meaningful secret for Collier to reveal?

#### CHAPTER 48 "A Great Singer"

Caroline is visiting her parents, and runs into Skye Patterson (singer) in the market. Skye unexpectedly offers Caroline a helpful perspective on her parents and on the film industry.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Skye Patterson (singer)

## VOCABULARY

Character Development: (Skye Patterson)

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

What does the reader learn about Skye Patterson in this chapter?

What does Caroline learn from Skye that broadens her perspective?

## CHAPTER 49

“Surfboard And Passport”

Dr. Stilwell and Caroline talk about how therapy isn't about rewriting the past; it's about rewriting the future.

Collier runs into a couple he knew from Club Med. He talks about his childhood, and integrating the past into the present. Caroline realizes that she and Collier have a similar style of speech. For the first time, Collier talks about the positive parts of his background, along with the difficult parts.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Guests at Club Med

## VOCABULARY

Background

Character Development

Textual Evidence

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

This chapter is a turning point in Collier's emotional development. He is able to integrate “good” and “bad” feelings about his life in the circus. He is able to connect the child in him (“Coll”) to the adult in him (“Collier”).

What do “Coll” and “Collier” represent to Collier? How does he relate to these different parts of himself in a new way? Give textual evidence.

Do you have parts of yourself that “talk” to each other? (As Caroline shows Collier, this can be healthy!)

Why is it important for Collier to say goodbye to Club Med in a different way, acknowledging both the good and the bad?

## CHAPTER 50

### “Derrick’s Finest Creation”

Caroline and Brad visit Derrick and Zoe, who have just given birth to their first child. Caroline and Brad are getting married.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Brad

Derrick

Zoe

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

In this chapter, Caroline’s family welcomes two new people, Brad (Caroline’s college boyfriend, now her fiancé) and Carleton (Caroline’s newborn nephew). Has your family ever welcomed a new member?

## CHAPTER 51

### “Your Own Free Agent”

Caroline talks to Dr. Stilwell about how hard it is to trust therapists enough to pursue her own treatment.

Caroline is surprised to learn that Collier and Lorna haven’t had sex yet. Collier tells Caroline about being sexually assaulted by Maurice.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell

Collier

Maurice

Lorna

#### VOCABULARY

Background

Theme

Character Development

Textual evidence

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

Sexual assault can happen in many forms. People can feel many emotions including, violated, betrayed, contaminated, frightened...also guilty, confused, depressed, doubting the validity of their own experience. Sexual assault is a part of this novel, and the victim's healing is a central theme.

Now that you know Collier was sexually assaulted, do parts of the story make sense on a deeper level? Cite textual evidence.

## CHAPTER 52

### "The Tiny Victorian"

Brad and Caroline find a house to buy.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Brad

Mr. Nards: new character, real estate agent.

## VOCABULARY

Character Development

## DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

*Tightwire* has followed Caroline's journey from birth into adulthood. Did the author convey her growing up in a way that felt authentic? Why or why not?

Suppose you were a therapist, and Caroline walked into your office as your patient. Imagine that she described the experience in this chapter. If you were Caroline's therapist, what would you learn about her style of thinking and of processing feelings? (Think about how Caroline's way of approaching the world applies to all aspects of her life, not just to her work as a therapist. Her approach even applies to an off-kilter cabinet in a house.)

## CHAPTER 53

### "World Shifted"

Caroline understands that in the previous session, Collier didn't need to vomit; he needed to feel safe in case he vomited.

Collier tells Caroline that he and Lorna made love and her eyes stayed brown.

## CHARACTERS

Caroline

Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

#### VOCABULARY

Character Development

Theme: healthy sex can be empowering and healing.

Writing Style

Conflict Resolution

After trying out many versions of this chapter, the author chose to make this the shortest and simplest chapter in the entire novel. Do you think this choice was effective? Why or why not?

Why does Collier describe his sexual experience with Lorna as causing his world to shift? Why does he cry?

#### CHAPTER 54

“Patient Therapist”

Caroline and Madeleine have become friends. Caroline has received her masters degree, and will begin seeing her first patient (Collier). Caroline asks Madeleine to recommend a therapist.

#### CHARACTERS

Caroline

Madeleine

#### VOCABULARY

Theme: the value of a good psychotherapy (fighting the stigma).

#### DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

People have all sorts of ideas about therapy and therapists, and their ideas sometimes include a stigma. Even though she’s a therapist, Caroline herself is extremely anxious about being a patient. I hope this novel shows how helpful a “talking therapy” can be, and helps to diminish the stigma.

In your view, does psychotherapy include a stigma? Does mental illness include a stigma? Why or why not?

Did the novel influence your view of psychotherapy?

Why is Caroline so anxious about starting her own therapy? (Think about her experiences with therapists as she grew up.)

CHAPTER 55  
"A Window And A Skylight"

Dr. Stilwell welcomes Caroline into the field, and refers her first private case.

Collier and Caroline talk about how far he has come in his therapy, and that he will continue treatment in her private practice.

CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Dr. Stilwell  
Collier

VOCABULARY

Resolution  
Metaphor  
Simile

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

The title of this chapter is a metaphor. Caroline's new office has a window and a skylight, but these words symbolize much more. What do the words symbolize? (Letting in the light.)

Why is it so meaningful at the end of the chapter when Collier tells Caroline that she is hired?

CHAPTER 56  
"Another First Session".

Caroline begins her own therapy with a psychiatrist, Clay Gittleman.

CHARACTERS

Caroline  
Clay Gittleman: new character, Caroline's therapist.

VOCABULARY

Resolution

DISCUSSION/WRITING TOPICS

During my 20+ years as a therapist, before I began writing novels, I was always fascinated by first sessions. In the initial fifty minutes, patients make several choices, both conscious and unconscious – what to say, how to say it, in what order, tone of voice, facial expression, physical appearance, body language. Choose three meaningful moments in Caroline's first session with her new therapist. Why are these moments important?

Did you like *Tightwire*? Why or why not?

Now that you know Collier's story through his first year in therapy, go back to the first chapter. What can you now understand about that first session? (Think about his fear, his anger, his sexualizing his relationship with Caroline.)

#### ASSIGNMENTS AND QUESTIONS

- Keep a journal, written from Collier's perspective or Caroline's perspective.
- Design an alternative cover for *Tightwire*.
- Write the book's next chapter -- Collier's first session with Caroline in her new office.
- What was your favorite/least favorite part of *Tightwire*?
- If you could have lunch with any character in the book, who would you choose?
- Choose a theme from *Tightwire*. Write a poem about the theme.
- Write a blog post from a character's point of view.
- Take a chapter from *Tightwire* and rewrite it as a play. Perform your one act play for the class.
- Write a song about *Tightwire*. Perform your song for the class.
- Write a book review of *Tightwire*.
- Write a character analysis of either Caroline or Collier. Track their development as the story unfolds. How do they influence each other's growth?
- For a novel to work well, the writer needs to evoke feelings in the reader. Did *Tightwire* evoke feelings in you? What did you feel?
- Write a critique of *Tightwire*. Did parts of the story make you angry? Did you disagree with the messages conveyed? Did you dislike the author's style?
- Is there a passage or chapter in the novel that caught your attention? Analyze this portion of the book, in the larger context of the story. Why did you have such a strong reaction to this particular section?
- Analyze a quote or portion of dialogue. What is the significance of this section in the larger story? Why did you have a strong reaction to this quote?
- The author structured *Tightwire* with chapters alternating between Collier's therapy sessions with Caroline, and Caroline's growing up. A large proportion of the novel is comprised of dialogue. What is your opinion on the author's choice to structure her book in this way?