

# Cassidy

Cassidy finds herself at a critical juncture in her life, facing the aftermath of a journey that began with hope but quickly descended into disappointment. After leaving Paradise Springs, her once bright expectations of a new chapter in life fade as the reality of their situation sets in. At just fourteen, Cassidy is caught between adolescence and the looming adulthood that requires her to face challenges far too complex for her age. The sight of old photographs showing her mother at eighteen mirrors her own growth, creating an unsettling reflection of how similar they have become. Cassidy feels as though she is growing into someone she doesn't recognize, and the loss of their beloved RV, "Sadie Mae," only deepens this sense of identity crisis. The RV had been their sanctuary, their home on the road, but now it is nothing more than a heap of scrap, its parts sold off, marking the loss of yet another piece of their past.

Cassidy looks back on the life they once had with nostalgia, a life filled with adventure and possibility, which has now been replaced with instability and uncertainty. Her mother, once a vibrant force, has slipped into destructive habits, abandoning the freedom and connection they once had with nature in favor of reckless behavior fueled by self-medication. The excitement of exploring new places is replaced by a lifeless routine of RV parks, where the only constant is a sense of dislocation. As her mother embraces a philosophy called "Transcendent Living," Cassidy becomes more confused, unsure of whether this is just another way for her mother to avoid confronting the problems at hand. The erratic behavior leaves Cassidy isolated, struggling to navigate a world that feels increasingly out of control. What once was a bond built on shared experiences now seems frayed, and Cassidy's attempts to find her place in this chaotic new life are thwarted by the ever-growing distance between them.

The confusion in Cassidy's world deepens as she tries to piece together a sense of who she is and where she belongs. Her mother's fluctuating behavior—alternating between closeness and withdrawal—leaves Cassidy with a profound sense of emptiness. She longs for consistency, but it seems elusive, as if every connection she makes is tenuous at best. School becomes an afterthought, a distant memory of something once important but now replaced by the immediate need to survive emotionally. With no steady footing to cling to, Cassidy turns to books for escape, diving deep into fictional worlds where stability and order reign. But even books, comforting as they are, can't fill the void in her life. It's in her quest for meaning that she discovers the word "Desiderium," which perfectly captures her inner longing—a deep and painful yearning for something solid and real, something that gives her a sense of belonging.

This newfound awareness becomes a turning point for Cassidy, as she finally acknowledges the depth of her longing and begins to accept the reality of her situation. While she cannot change the past or the chaos her mother has created, she realizes that there is still hope for her future. Cassidy understands that to find peace, she must first come to terms with her past and her fractured relationship with her mother. The chapter concludes with Cassidy reflecting on the notion of home—not just a physical place, but an emotional one, and she wonders if she will ever find it. As she gazes out into the unknown, she feels a glimmer of hope that one day, she will no longer feel like a shadow in her own life but someone who has found their place in the world.