

## **Angels Don't Get Tattoos....A Summary**

Kennedy Winger is a savvy 16-year-old with end-stage cancer, a leg amputation, and a lily tattoo. Driven by her gritty independence, she expects to die peacefully in her family's small home in a burly, well-worn Madison, Wisconsin neighborhood. Instead, K collides with family, friends, societal isolation, her aching heart, and a brutal secret from her past.

Sometimes prickly, but always with a smart sense of humor, K feels like the caged lion cub at the zoo and declares cancer isn't the teddy-bear-angel society sells. She invents a way to help her younger brother and is tempted to restart cancer treatment. Her pet dog, Beatles music, the hospice nurse, and the clumsy love of family, three best friends, and a neighbor kid carry K through dying and death. But K's story doesn't end on the last page.

All is not harmony at the Wingers. K discovers her dad, Drake, her mom, Emmy, and Jackson, her neighbor friend all excel at keeping secrets. She no longer worries about her bald head but K must decide if and how to tell her own secret—one that pushes her to drill Jackson about bullying and one she's told only to her best friend Jasmine.

As the secrets unfold, K's last weeks drag raw and complicated. Days plummet from the B range to low C's and D's. There are hallucinations, an iPad fund-raiser, an undercover funeral home visit, and a deal with a university basketball coach to help her brother Linc go on living. K forges and mails an obituary—not her own but one she wrote to torture its recipient. A Chicago family weekend reveals growing street-smarts but yet another secret. During a late-night prowling through her high school, K scatters her farewell and uncovers the flipside of a detested teacher. Struggling to breathe, K visits the zoo with Corey once he builds the courage to stumble out an invitation.

Reading and writing empower K. At the end, she writes some final notes and begs us, “*please read between the lines.*” From an honored spot on K’s bed, her dog Madge watches everything and describes K’s last day.

This novel is real and it is unique. It is filled with anger, revenge, sadness, shame, fear, and love. It draws on the author’s personal experiences and her work as a registered nurse, and it differs from similar books that emphasize romance. *Angels Don’t Get Tattoos* hears the voice of people often living invisibly on the ragged edges of the middle-class. It is about K’s past and her intricate relationships with friends and family at the end of her life.

This is a novel for teenagers and for people who care about teenagers.