Diamond Willow by Helen Frost is a beautiful story about a 12 year old girl, Willow, who lives in the fictional town of Old Fork, Alaska. Willow was named after the diamond willow which grows in northern climates. A diamond shape forms on the willow when a branch falls off, leaving a scar. Willow feels that she does not relate to her classmates but enjoys spending time with her dogs. She has a connection with them as they do with her, and she wants to mush the dogs to her Grandma and Grandpa’s house all by herself. Finally her parents agree to this, and Diamond sets off on her way. On the return, she has an accident and one of the dogs, Roxy, is badly hurt with an injury to her eyes which causes her to become blind. Willow’s parents decide that the best thing for the dog is to put her down. What they don’t realize is that Willow feels that Roxy is a true friend who understands her so she is willing to do anything to save her. Willow convinces her best friend, Kaylie, to hold Roxy in the sled while they mush to her grandparent’s house. She believes that she can talk her grandparents into keeping Roxy until she is healed. On the way, they follow the wrong trail and get lost in the snow overnight. Search parties are sent out, but they cannot locate the girls in the heavy snowfall. The girls spend the night in a make shift shelter under a spruce tree. In the daylight, Willow is able to see the correct trail, and they make it to her grandparent’s house. The adults are overjoyed to see that the girls are safe. Willow’s parents and grandparents decide that it is time to tell her about her twin sister, Diamond, who did not live past four days after birth. Throughout the story, the animals are the souls of past human lives. Willow has such a connection with Roxy because Roxy was Diamond in her human life.

Kaylie is a supporting character in this story with an important role to play. Without Kaylie, Willow would not have been able to take Roxy in the sled to her grandparent’s house to save her from euthanasia. This is a difficult choice for Kaylie to make since she is such a rule follower. What Willow is asking her to do goes against her beliefs. “Kaylie’s nervous. She has been grounded exactly once in her life, almost two years ago now, for something like seven hours, and she still talks about that. This might be the worst thing she’s ever done” (p. 44). But Kaylie puts aside her uneasiness to help out her best friend. On the way, Kaylie is still the cautious one by telling Willow to hurry since the snow is getting worse. Once they get lost, Kaylie stays true to character worried about Willow getting too cold. “You are starting to shiver, Kaylie says. You might be getting hypothermia. We need to warm up. Be sensible, Willow. Who made her the mother? But it’s true” (p. 49).
Kaylie is a typical twelve year old girl. She is still young enough to want to please adults by doing the right thing but at the same time, she is growing up. She is starting to like boys, and she has her eye on Richard. Kaylie is popular, and Willow envies her a bit. Willow is skinny and ordinary just like her name and doesn’t want to sparkle like a jewel. She doesn’t want to stick out but would rather blend in with the crowd and be unnoticed. Diamond would have been the outgoing one, more like Kaylie. “I dream of Diamond here beside me. We are both the age I am now. In the dream, we’re at school and we’re sitting at the same table. I’m thinking, *This must be a dream*, because all the sparkly kids who always sit together are asking if they can sit with us. They’re all coming up to us and saying *Diamond, Willow, can we sit here?* (Or are they saying *Diamond Willow?*) I’m quiet, like I always am, while Diamond is saying, *Sure, just save that place for Kaylie, and Good luck in the game tonight, and, Are you coming to our party tomorrow?*” (p. 104). Kaylie does face difficult decisions when choosing between Willow and Richard. When Richard was the one who found the girls, Kaylie has to make a choice between returning with Richard or continue holding Roxy in the sled to their destination. “Richard wants to take Kaylie home. *Don’t you know how worried people are?* If she does leave to go with him, what will I do without anyone to hold Roxy? It’s Kaylie’s choice, and I can’t stop her. She looks at Roxy and me. She asks, *Could you take Roxy the rest of the way alone?* I think so- I’m almost there. If they go back, they can tell Mom and Dad I’m okay. Kaylie will miss only half a day of school. *Sure, I say*” (p. 64). Although Kaylie made the choice to return with Richard, she made sure that Willow was able to continue by herself. If Willow would have asked her to stay, Kaylie would have probably stayed with her friend.

Kaylie is a true friend to Willow who will do anything for her including putting Willow’s needs before her own. Willow also realizes just how much she can push Kaylie. Willow wanted to have Kaylie all to herself at lunch the next day to tell her everything she had learned, but that would be putting Kaylie in the middle of having to choose between Willow and Richard. Willow moved over so that everyone could sit together, but if she hadn’t done that, who would Kaylie have chosen? More than likely she would have chosen to sit with Willow since she had already shown her love for her by knowingly disobeying rules to help out her best friend. Everyone should have a best friend like Kaylie. One who is willing to do anything for you, but at the same time have genuine compassion and concern.