

The Bone People Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Kerewin Holmes is a reclusive painter who is trying to pick up the pieces of her life. Joe Gillayley is a widower who maintains a love hate relationship with his adoptive son and is searching for human companionship. Simon Gillayley is a mute seven-year-old who is lovable but notorious for his sudden outbursts of violence and theft. When the three first come together, their lives are blissful; spending their nights drinking and enjoying their friendship. As time goes on, Joe's violence towards Simon is revealed, prompting Kerewin to become more involved in the Gillayley family. Their lives are shattered one fateful evening when Joe's aggressive nature takes over and Simon is taken away from him forever. "The Bone People" is a twisting saga of broken families and the path toward individual redemption.

Kerewin Holmes is a painter who has lost her will to paint. She has isolated herself in a tower she had built on the edge of a beach in Southern New Zealand. One evening, she finds a young mute boy hiding in her home. When she tries to find someone to pick the boy up, the telephone operator informs her he is a known troublemaker. His father, Joe Gillayley seems to be extremely affectionate towards Simon, but when he finds out Simon has stolen an item of Kerewin's, he slaps him. This gets Kerewin's attention and she starts to become more involved in their lives. More abuse is heaped on the boy and Kerewin decides she must keep a more watchful eye on the Gillayley's. This leads to a vacation where Joe tries to hurt the boy, but is instead hurt by Kerewin, who has gotten angry over Joe constantly beating Simon.

Throughout all this time, Joe's feelings for Kerewin have blossomed from platonic to more romantic. Although Kerewin doesn't share this feeling, she still feels very affectionate toward the pair. After the vacation, various people mention Joe and Kerewin's relationship, causing Kerewin to take a step backward. Kerewin is frustrated at Simon for stealing her favorite knife. When she asks Simon to return it, he destroys Kerewin's prized possession. Afterwards, Simon goes downtown, smashing windows on the main street. Joe beats Simon so badly he suffers several injuries. Simon stabs Joe with a broken shard of glass. Joe is arrested and Simon is taken to the hospital, with Kerewin left to pick up the pieces of a broken house.

Joe is sentenced to three months imprisonment and Simon eventually recovers from his injuries. Kerewin's health begins deteriorating. In her guilt and sickness, she decides the tower must be destroyed so she dismantles as much as she can before setting off to be alone again. Joe is released and he goes to a secluded area, where he meets an old Maori man who tells Joe he has been picked to guard a secret in a cave by the beach and he is leaving all of his land to Joe. The old man dies shortly afterward, leaving Joe alone again.

As Simon recovers, he learns Joe no longer has custody of him. This makes him despondent and he becomes unresponsive to anyone that comes near him until he meets a doctor who promises Simon will be reunited with Kerewin. Unfortunately, the doctor cannot make good on his promises and Simon is sent to various orphanages,



and escapes from them frequently. He goes back home, only to find Joe and Kerewin are gone.

Kerewin declines any medical treatment for the tumor on her abdomen, but the condition worsens. She goes to a deserted hut to die, but she is revitalized by a mysterious person. When she wakes up refreshed, she heads off to another small town. While there she meets a man who claims he is a diver and she pays him to salvage the shipwrecked boat Simon arrived on. Armed with new information of his past, she goes to search for Simon.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1. "Portrait of a Sandal" Kerewin Holmes is a lonely hermit who lives in a lighthouse on the edge of a beach. On her way home one day, she comes across a child's broken sandal. While she is searching for a book in her library, she is shocked to see a small boy standing in her windowsill. At first she is harsh with him, wanting to know why he has broken into her home and finds that the boy is mute and that the sandal is his. She then finds a pendant which lists the boy's name and address. After lunch, Kerewin tries to have the operator call the number that is listed on the pendant, but the operator tells her no one is home. The operator also tells Kerewin Simon has a habit of wandering from home and stealing. Kerewin half-heartedly disregards this information and decides Simon can stay a while longer.

During the evening, Kerewin begins to communicate better with Simon. Simon falls asleep and Kerewin tells him he can sleep in her bed for the night. After she tucks him in, she goes downstairs and plays her prized guitar before falling asleep herself. In the morning, she begins teaching Simon how to play chess when a relative of Simon's shows up to take him home. After Simon leaves, Kerewin notices Simon has left his sandal but has stolen her black queen.

Chapter 2. "Feelers" A few days later, Kerewin receives a letter from Simon's father, Joe saying he would like to thank Kerewin in person for taking care of Simon. At first, Kerewin feels apprehensive about Joe and Simon coming over since she prefers being alone, but she invites the two to stay for dinner. Joe agrees, thinking this might be the opportunity to finally have a friend. Joe takes Simon upstairs to get washed up, but he is alarmed when one of Kerewin's golden rings falls out of Simon's pocket. When he goes to berate Simon, he speaks in Maori; which he does not realize Kerewin understands. Joe also slaps Simon on the leg for his actions causing Kerewin to reveal she speaks Maori.

In the morning, Kerewin goes outside and notices Simon in the garden. Simon hands her two packages and a note from Joe. The first one is a package of mutton birds and the second is a rosary made with semi-precious stones. Kerewin tries to explain to Simon it is too priceless a gift to give her and she can't keep it, but Simon begins to get upset and Kerewin decides to accept his present. After Simon goes to bed later that night, Joe tells Kerewin how he came to adopt Simon. Three years ago, there was a shipwreck nearby and Simon was the only survivor. Joe also found out Simon has the ability to talk and the other people on the boat were not his parents. Kerewin also learns the rosary was an item found on the female victim of the shipwreck and is Simon's prized possession. During their discussion about Simon's negative behavior, Kerewin suggests to Joe he take Simon on a vacation to the beach her family lives on, revealing they are estranged because of constant fighting.



Chapter 3. “Leaps in the Dark” Kerewin becomes so curious about Simon’s past she consults the local police and the library. In a book, Kerewin finds the same coat of arms on the rosary belonging to an Irish earl. A month after her research, she receives a letter from an Irish earl who wrote the rosary may have come from his grandson, but that the grandson has been disinherited and that Kerewin is not to write to him anymore about the matter. Later on, Joe is visiting Kerewin and sees one of her inventions. He points out that Simon likes to make little inventions, including a “music hutch” which Simon uses to listen to the waves. Joe also explains he tries to keep Simon from inventing anything as much as possible. Kerewin is confused with Joe’s reasons, but leaves the matter alone.

A few nights later, Joe calls Kerewin to see if she has seen Simon, but she says no. Joe then asks Kerewin out to the local pub for dinner and reluctantly Kerewin agrees. After dinner and being reassured by Joe that Simon is fine, Kerewin comes home to find Simon sleeping on the floor and notices his face is swollen and bruised. She tries to call a doctor for Simon but he tells her no, instead she calls Joe. He is nonchalant about what has happened to Simon which angers Kerewin. When Kerewin asks Simon who hurt him, Simon refuses to answer. Kerewin is beginning to suspect things are not quite what they seem in the Gillayley household, but holds her tongue about it.

When Joe arrives the next day, he barely speaks to Kerewin, and it is a week before he sees her again. Joe asks Kerewin to watch Simon for a few days while he goes out of town. When Joe comes back he takes Kerewin to the local pub where Joe runs into his cousin Luce who tells him Simon was sighted near a local pedophile’s house. When Joe gets home he severely beats Simon for going to the pedophile’s house. Afterward, Simon breaks into Kerewin’s house and gets into her liquor cabinet. When Kerewin comes home, she accidentally startles Simon and he vomits all over himself. She goes to get him undressed and she finds out the full extent of how badly Joe beats the boy. Instead of confronting Joe about his actions, she decides she will secretly watch over Simon and tells Joe she is going with them on their upcoming vacation.

Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the protagonist of the novel, Kerewin Holmes. She is a reclusive woman who values her privacy as well as her collection of items found within her self-built tower. Kerewin is an extremely intelligent woman and an artist, although it is unknown why she has lost the will to create art. The reader will note Kerewin loves to talk to herself and it may suggest she has been by herself for a long time. When she finds a sandal on the beach, she quickly dismisses it, thinking it belongs to a child who was wandering along the beach. She is shocked to find the owner of the sandal perched in a windowsill in her library. At first Kerewin wants to get rid of him quickly especially since she finds it so frustrating to try to communicate with him since he is mute. Her attitude changes when she finds out he has a large splinter in his foot and she attempts to fix it. Kerewin still finds the whole situation is a nuisance to her and she would like to get the boy out of her home as soon as possible. The reader finds Kerewin has little patience with anyone or anything that interrupts her solitude. The tag around the boy’s



neck says “Simon P. Gillayley” and it lists his contact information. Kerewin and the reader can guess since he is wearing this tag that Simon runs off frequently.

The reader’s curiosity about the child is engaged when Kerewin has the operator call Simon’s home. The operator is full of gossip for Kerewin about the boy, pointing out the boy steals from people, runs away frequently, and Kerewin should be careful around Simon. The reader can also see that Simon is extremely intelligent but has the tendency to be stubborn and defiant when he is uncomfortable. After Simon falls asleep, Kerewin puts him in bed and she sleeps downstairs in a sleeping bag, not really knowing what to make of the boy or the intrusion on her life. Piri Tanui, a distant cousin of Simon’s father, arrives the next day to pick Simon up from Kerewin’s home. The reader should note Piri never directly looks in Kerewin’s face; he constantly averts her eyes and smiles nervously. This gives the reader the impression there are secrets in the Gillayley household and Piri knows them all.

In Chapter 2, Kerewin gets a note from Joe, Simon’s father, wanting to stop by Kerewin’s home to thank her in person for watching Simon. Kerewin is reluctant to have visitors; she does not want her introverted lifestyle interrupted for any reason. When the Gillayley’s arrive, Kerewin changes her mind and invites them to stay for dinner. This is a pivotal moment in the novel, as this is the start of a doomed friendship. While washing up for dinner, Joe finds Simon has stolen one of Kerewin’s rings. The reader becomes aware Joe doesn’t want anything Simon does to ruin the evening because he wants Kerewin to like them both. The reader can see Joe is a lonely man and this evening is extremely important to Joe as this is the first friend he will have since the death of his wife and son. When Joe goes to yell at Simon, he does so in Maori. The reader then becomes aware of the fact when Joe wants to berate Simon, he does so in his native tongue. The problem is Kerewin understands Maori as well, which is revealed when Joe slaps Simon for his action. This is the reader’s first encounter with Joe’s aggression toward Simon for any sort of wrongdoing.

The reader learns how Joe came to be Simon’s guardian but will also be more curious about how Simon came to be washed up on a shore from a shipwrecked boat with no relatives to be found. The reader also is made aware of the fact there is no medical reason why Simon cannot speak. Joe informs Kerewin that although Joe and his late wife took him in, the adoption was never legally finalized. This will be important for the reader later in the story. The reader can sense the relationship between Joe and Simon is not one of a normal father and son. This is shown in the fact Joe allows Simon to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes, although Simon is only about 7 years old.

The next day, Kerewin goes out to the beach to do some fishing. Before she gets out of her yard, she notices Simon in her garden waiting for her. He has two gifts for her and a note from Joe, the first being a bunch of mutton birds for her to make lunch with, and the second a rosary inset with precious jewels. It upsets Simon that Kerewin won’t accept his gift of the rosary, which the reader understands is Simon’s way of letting Kerewin know she is a friend. When Kerewin asks Simon why he doesn’t go to school, the conversation is cut short as Simon cannot find the right words to express himself.



The reader should note Simon is quick to get frustrated when he cannot say what is on his mind and that could be the cause of his bad behavior.

In the evening, Kerewin goes to the Gillayley home for dinner. This gives the reader a view of the Gillayley home and a different impression of Joe than what is first given. The reader's first impression is Joe is an uneducated factory worker. While he is cooking for Kerewin, he shows he is more intelligent than what the reader first thought, as well as an excellent cook which is important to the reader as most of Joe and Kerewin's time together is spent with alcohol and food. He also shows the strains of single parenthood are starting to make him tired as he tells Kerewin some of the things Simon has done. It is here Kerewin offers her family beach as a quiet place to get away for a while. This is one of the few times Kerewin actually mentions her family to anyone, but she is unsure if she will actually go with Simon and Joe to the family beach because of all the painful memories the reader does not see.

In Chapter 3, the tone of the novel begins to turn darker. Simon's origins are so mysterious to Kerewin she goes to investigate through the local authorities and uses Simon's rosary to try to find out anything she can about Simon. Her search ends when she tracks down an Irish lord and his only reply is he had a grandson who had been disowned by the family. The reader is left curious as to what happened to this grandson as well as why Simon would have the rosary. The reader will also become interested in how Simon came to be with the people on the boat in the first place.

Sometime later, Joe calls Kerewin to come out to the bar and have dinner with him. Kerewin doesn't want to go, but agrees to go out when Joe tells her he wants her to meet some of his friends. Joe asks Kerewin if she had seen Simon, but she tells Joe she hasn't seen him and becomes concerned. The reader sees Kerewin's brief sense of concern, but it is quickly disregarded until Kerewin goes to the bar. This is one of the first instances where the reader sees Kerewin's anger at Joe and his nonchalance over his son's well-being. The reader notes Joe's friends obviously don't believe Joe's excuse for where Simon is. This shows Joe has told lies about Simon before and his friends know the truth about Joe and Simon.

In the meantime, Simon breaks into Kerewin's house and falls asleep until Kerewin gets home. When Kerewin finds him, she sees Simon's face is badly damaged, which infuriates her knowing there was only one person who could have done this to Simon. Kerewin calls Joe but instead of feeling concern that Simon is hurt, Joe berates Simon for being at Kerewin's. The reader is not sure why Joe is so upset with Simon, since the reader can assume it was Joe that hurt Simon in the first place. What the reader won't understand is the impatience Kerewin feels when she tries to ask Simon about what is going on. It is crucial the reader takes note of the fact when Joe picks Simon up he shows remorse to Simon, but ignores Kerewin. It may be assumed Joe feels ashamed of what he did and is aware of the fact that Kerewin is upset about Simon's injuries as they stay away from her for a week.

When Kerewin sees the Gillayleys again, Joe asks if Simon could spend a few nights with her since he is going out of town. The reader should be able to sense trouble



between Joe and Piri when Simon and Kerewin run into Piri. Piri alludes to the fact that Simon's injuries are not from running into a door, which the reader can perceive is the usual excuse given for Simon's bruises. It seems to the reader everyone in the Tanui family knows what is going on between Simon and Joe. When Joe comes to pick Simon up, Wherahiko and Marama Tanui are in the car with him. The Tanui's invite Kerewin to visit their home so they can talk to her about Joe and Simon. Joe is obviously unhappy about this invitation because he knows the Tanui's are planning to tell Kerewin Joe is abusing Simon and that he is a terrible father.

At the bar, Joe and Kerewin run into Luce Mihi, another Tanui relation. Although it is never actually mentioned, the reader can assume by Luce's demeanor and speech he is a homosexual. Luce tells Joe about one of the local people seeing Simon at the home of the local pedophile, Binny Daniels, which immediately infuriates Joe. Luce also insinuates that at one time Joe had a homosexual affair with someone, but this part of the conversation is cut short and the idea is not picked up in the conversation again.

When Joe returns home, he asks Simon where he was earlier in the day. Simon admits he had been to Binny Daniels but it was to borrow a dollar. Joe doesn't accept this excuse and beats Simon. The reader will feel helpless as Simon reminds Joe he promised not to hit Simon in the face anymore. The reader will also feel anger as Joe tries to convince himself beating Simon is for his own good and he shouldn't feel guilty for punishing Simon. There is constant turmoil in Joe's mind over whether to beat the boy or not, and usually the next morning, Joe feels the usual feelings of shame and guilt. The reader should be aware that this constant wave of love and abuse is taking a toll on Simon as well, as he thinks of himself as a "bad boy".

In the final part of Chapter 3, the whole situation comes to a turning point as the extent of Joe's abuse becomes clear to Kerewin. When she gets home, Kerewin finds that Simon has broken into her house and gotten drunk. She cleans him up, but is horrified at what she sees when she takes off Simon's shirt and finds out that Simon is being abused. She wonders whether or not she should confront Joe about his behavior. The reader senses Kerewin is torn between her anger and the thought of losing a good friend if she confronts him. By the time she has finished helping Simon into bed, she realizes the only thing she can do is to keep a silent watch over the boy. When a drunken Joe comes to pick Simon up, he disregards what Kerewin says to him about the incident. The only thing that catches Joe's attention is Kerewin telling him they should go on vacation soon. Joe secretly becomes happy at this thought as he goes to sleep and the reader can surmise Joe is starting to have deeper feelings for Kerewin than just those of friendship.

Vocabulary

anecdote, monotonously, macabre, intermittent, askew, protrusion, morosely, diffident, suppleness, boisterous, flippancy, gaiety, omnipresent, mundane, incongruous, luminous, regale



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4 “A Place to Sleep by Day” Joe, Simon, and Kerewin go to a set of beach cabins owned by Kerewin’s family. The next day, Joe tries to improve his mood and he and Kerewin go for a walk. At this point, Simon gets mad and hides in one of the bedrooms. When Simon goes outside, he is still angry and he rips up the note Joe had left for him. Kerewin tries to calm Joe down, saying he should just ignore Simon and he is just throwing a temper tantrum. She also lets Joe know she is aware of what happens when Joe lets his own temper get the better of him. Simon further antagonizes Joe by spitting at him and Joe grabs Simon. Kerewin gets in between them and tries to break up the argument, only to find herself fighting with Joe. After she realizes what she has done, she tries to help Joe get off the ground, but an intense pain in her abdomen causes her to go back to the cabin immediately.

After finding out Kerewin is alright, Joe agrees to not hit Simon anymore unless he gets approval from Kerewin first. Joe questions Kerewin on why she was able to beat him so easily in a fight. Kerewin’s reply is she spent a year in Japan studying martial arts, but left when she got bored with it. Kerewin remarks as she and Joe were fighting, she looked over at Simon and noticed Simon’s ear had been pierced. Joe tells her Simon has always had a hole in his ear, but is unsure of who put it there. He tells her Simon used to wear an earring all the time, but he took it out because the other children teased him about it. Kerewin tells Simon he shouldn’t worry about what the other kids think of him and he would look nice with the earring back in. To Kerewin’s surprise, when she wakes up the next morning, he has the earring back in his ear.

Chapter 5. “Spring Tide, Neap Tide, Ebb Tide, Flood” The trio head out on Kerewin’s boat to fish for the afternoon. When Simon catches his first fish, it tries to jump back in the water, but Simon grabs the fishing line catching his thumb on the large hook hanging out of the fish’s mouth. Kerewin gets Joe and Simon back to shore quickly, but instead of taking Simon to the hospital Joe decides to take the hook out of Simon’s hand himself. Kerewin informs Joe she can’t help him and she leaves. Later, Joe explains to Kerewin Simon has always been afraid of doctors but he has no clue as to why. Kerewin lets Joe know she could not help him take the hook out of Simon’s hand because she hates seeing anything or anyone in pain and she would not have been much help to Joe even if she had stayed to help him.

The next day, Joe goes to the grocery store and brings back a dart board. He tells Kerewin he is an excellent dart player because he spent two years in bed due to a “polio-like” disease and playing darts was one of the ways he kept busy. He then reminisces more about the past; including how he wanted to be a teacher and a priest but all of his past plans fell through. In the morning, Joe has come down with a cold, so Simon goes out to play on the beach by himself. Out in the distance he sees a dying bird flapping around. Pitying it, Simon bashes it in the head until it dies. As he is burying



the bird, Simon begins to let out a sound that resembles singing. Kerewin secretly watches and listens as this goes on, and when Simon is finished, Kerewin makes her presence known. In his own way, Simon explains what happened to the bird and how he tried to help it. Kerewin tells Simon how amazed and happy she is Simon has found a new way to express himself.

Chapter 6 “Ka Tata Te Po” Kerewin sits on the beach sadly playing her guitar. Joe asks Simon what is wrong and Simon tells Joe her brother stopped by to visit her. Simon explains the brother updated Kerewin on what was going on in the family and then asked if Kerewin was ever going to visit. Kerewin refused his invitation and the brother left. To make Kerewin feel better, Joe takes her to a local bar. Everyone has a good time as Simon and Joe entertain the other patrons of the bar and are saddened when Kerewin decides it is time to leave. The only person in the bar happy to see the trio go is a local man who makes a snide comment about them. Kerewin stops near the man and proves she is more than willing to fight with the man, but he backs down when he sees how quickly she moves her hand to kill a fly.

For the rest of their vacation, Kerewin reflects on her untold past. She spends most of her time cleaning the beach houses and making sure everything is secured as she packs her things. Simon spends the rest of the days gathering rocks and sea shells. He even finds plenty of items to take home which makes him extremely happy. Joe ponders asking Kerewin to marry him when they get back to their homes. He asks Simon what he thinks of this and Simon instantly loves the idea. With this idea now in Joe’s head, they finish their vacation and head home.

Analysis

In Chapter 4, the reader sees the trio more relaxed on vacation. As they are unpacking Joe thinks this may be a good time to atone for his past abuse toward Simon, as well as grow his romantic relationship with Kerewin. The reader feels Kerewin’s happiness as she returns to the place where she grew up. Although Kerewin is happy to be there, she also reminisces about some of the unhappier moments of her life, including the fact she had a disagreement with her family that ended with her leaving them. She ponders about the night everything happened between them, but no major details are given as to what occurred.

Later in the night, while Simon rests, Joe whispers to him he loves him. This is one of the times Joe feels truly remorseful by what he does to Simon, but he does not know why he beats Simon so frequently. When the pair goes to bed, Joe still wonders about Simon’s mentality as well as Joe’s own ability to raise the child successfully. This gives the reader further insight into Joe’s mind as he thinks about how much he hurts Simon and how he knows he must stop it. The reader can feel the inner turmoil going on in Joe’s mind as he wrestles with his own pain and guilt over treating Simon so badly. As he drifts off to sleep his thoughts then go to Kerewin and how he feels like they should be more than friends. Joe realizes one of the main problems with Kerewin is he doesn’t



understand what makes her unique and Kerewin doesn't reciprocate the feelings that Joe has.

This vacation means a lot to all three in the group. For Kerewin, it means a chance to reconnect with her lost past. For Joe, it is a time to make up with Simon. For Simon, it is a chance to get away from his normal life. The reader sees one of Simon's sudden mood swings when he refuses to go for a walk with Joe and Kerewin. Simon antagonizes Joe by coming out onto the beach and ripping up the note Joe has left for him. The reader will be confused by Simon's sudden outburst and left wondering not only what was really in the note, but why he started throwing things at Kerewin. This angers Joe and as he goes to grab the boy, Kerewin steps in to diffuse the situation. As she does, Joe goes to hit her and this is where the reader sees Kerewin's physical prowess as she beats Joe in a fight. Shortly after the fight is over, Kerewin falls to the ground in pain, although she was never hit. This is the first inclination there is something wrong with Kerewin's health although it is not discussed for the rest of the vacation.

Back in the cabin, Kerewin tells Joe of her time in Japan. The reader is surprised as this is the first time Kerewin talks of the time between becoming estranged from her family to when she built her tower. Kerewin admits she left Japan because she did not want to learn the spiritual aspect of aikido, she only wanted to learn the physical part and the rest bored her. She doesn't mention any of her other travels, which leaves the reader curious about this hidden time period in her life. She also mentions to Joe she noticed that Simon has a hole in his ear lobe. This is surprising both the reader and Kerewin who wonder who would have put an earring on Simon and why. Joe informs Kerewin that Simon used to wear it constantly but the other kids at school used to pick on him. This shows Simon has fragile feelings, which he does not display very often. Kerewin tells him he should put the earring back on and Simon shouldn't listen to what the other children say. In the morning, both the reader and Kerewin are surprised Simon has put his earring back in.

Chapter 5 comes in several parts with the first being when Simon finds two dead rabbits in a hole. He is instantly sorry he disturbed their hole, which shows the reader that he is intensely sensitive about death. In the evening, Joe and Kerewin talks about Simon's troubles and his mischievous nature. Kerewin suggests Simon has outbursts of theft and anger because he is trying to get someone to really pay attention to him and is working out his feelings. Later in the evening, he has a nightmare about the rabbits and how he is trying to tell Kerewin and Joe about them. The reader knows from previous talks between Joe and Kerewin that Simon has frequent nightmares, but this is the first one actually detailed for the reader.

In the morning, the trio goes fishing on an old boat of Kerewin's. It is the first time Simon has gone fishing, but his seasickness worries Kerewin. In the afternoon, they move on to another spot where Simon catches his first fish. The reader feels proud of Simon as he struggles to bring the large fish in and they also get caught up in the action of Joe and Kerewin trying to help him. Once they finally get it onto the boat, the fish tries to get out, but Kerewin is quick to try to catch it again. Simon is so eager to keep his fish he grabs the line as Kerewin pulls. The result is the fish is dead but Simon has managed to



get the large hook that was once in the fish's mouth in his thumb. Kerewin immediately takes Joe and Simon back to shore, but Joe refuses to take Simon to the hospital.

Although it is never fully explained, Joe tells Kerewin Simon is extremely afraid of doctors and Joe will have to take out the hook himself. The reader becomes curious about why Kerewin suddenly says that she cannot stay to watch or help Joe attend to Simon. Instead, she goes to the other beach house to clean all the fish that were caught. This hurts Joe's feelings and he thinks she does not like the Gillayleys as much as she says she does. As Simon sleeps, Kerewin reveals she is squeamish about seeing other people suffer and she would not have been any help to Joe. He understands this and forgives Kerewin, knowing she still cares for them.

The next day, Joe buys a dart board and shows Kerewin how skilled he is. He explains to Kerewin about his family and how his grandfather was always harsh with him. This on top of the fact his mother was mentally unstable and his father was dead may explain some of Joe's aggressiveness. Joe indicates he also had a strict Maori grandmother who demanded he lay in bed for almost two years straight due to an illness. During this illness he learned how to play darts and got better with both at the same time. Joe also explains when he was younger he wanted to be several different things, including a priest and a teacher. Joe's sadness is felt when he talks of his missed opportunities, but he says he gladly gave them up when he married his late wife Hana. This show of emotion and a glimpse into Joe's own past give the reader more of an insight into Joe's character and why he gets so easily frustrated with life.

The end of Chapter 5 leaves the reader with Simon's inability to see a living creature suffer. While he is walking on the beach, he sees a bird flapping around in the distance. When he gets closer, he sees it is severely injured, so Simon decides to put it out of its misery. Simon smashes the bird's head with a rock, but upon feeling guilty, he buries the creature. The reader senses his anguish at first killing the bird then as he is burying it. In his mourning over the bird, he begins to let out a sound that almost is like singing. This is the first time that Simon makes an intelligible sound, although he still cannot speak clearly. It makes the reader question what holds Simon back from speaking. All this time, Kerewin silently watches in the distance and when Simon is done, she walks over to him. She feels Simon's pain and does not chide him or question what he has done. Like the reader, she is amazed by the fact Simon can express himself in a new way.

Chapter 6 finds Joe with a cold and the end of their pleasant vacation. While Joe is asleep, Kerewin's brother comes to visit her. This upsets Kerewin, since the brother gives her updates on what has been going on in the family. He also asks if she would like to stop by the family home for a visit, which Kerewin quickly refuses. She is saddened by the fact she feels she cannot return to her family, although the actual details of the argument are never revealed. To cheer Kerewin up, Joe takes her to a local bar where they have a good time until a local man makes a rude remark about the three of them. Kerewin doesn't verbally challenge the man; instead she quickly kills a fly and flicks it at him to prove she would fight him if she had to. The man instantly backs off and the rest of the bar is amazed Kerewin is so quick. This doesn't improve her



mood, and neither Joe nor Simon can do anything to improve her mood as well, although she promises she will feel better in the morning.

As the vacation comes to an end, the trio finds themselves newly invigorated yet sad at the prospect of having to go back to their normal lives. As Kerewin reflects on the vacation and her past, she is once again saddened; but neither she nor the reader knows why. Joe questions whether or not he should ask Kerewin to marry him. The reader will be a bit baffled by this as Kerewin is shown not to have the same feelings for Joe; no matter how determined Joe is to have Kerewin love him. Joe decides that he will wait until they are back in their homes before asking her. As they are leaving, the reader will be unsure as to how Kerewin really feels about the vacation as her answer to Joe's question about whether they can come back is very ambiguous.

Vocabulary

plaintively, judicious, acrid, abeyance, abscess, obscured, implicit, addendum, reconciliation, proverbial, ribaldry, seminarian, vocation, gelatinous, gist, contagion, corroborating, dinghy



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7 “Mirrortalk” Joe comes over to Kerewin’s house, although Kerewin doesn’t want any company. He asks Kerewin what she wants out of life. Her reply is that she wants to make up with her family again and to regain her ability to paint. Joe tells her what he wants most of all is a decent family life which would include Kerewin. At this point, Kerewin shows Joe her paintings and tries to tell Joe without her ability to paint, she has no feelings about anything or anyone. Joe asks if he can keep the self-portrait Kerewin had made years earlier and Kerewin agrees, with the understanding Joe does not ask her to be anything other than a friend. He goes to kiss her and she immediately backs away, which prompts Joe to ask her if she has ever been hurt by love. She tells him she has never been hurt, but she also has never seen the need for any sort of romance or physical intimacy. Joe assures her he will never try to go any further than what Kerewin wants, but as he is leaving he tells himself he will wait for as long as he has to for her to change her mind.

Kerewin puts her self-portrait in a frame and takes it over to Joe’s house. When she gets there she finds Joe and Simon are having an argument. Kerewin inquires what the fight is about and Joe tells her Simon refuses to have his hair cut. As Kerewin tries to console Simon, his demeanor changes to the point where he cuts off a chunk of his own hair when Kerewin is finished talking to him. Joe goes to finish cutting Simon’s hair and when he is finished, he saves some so he can make a rope from which to hang one of Kerewin’s stones as a necklace. In the morning, she goes on a cleaning frenzy but is interrupted when Joe calls her wanting to come to the bar. Kerewin relents and heads to the bar because Joe says he has a gift for her.

While at the bar, Joe’s relations ask Kerewin all about the recent vacation to ensure Simon was not mistreated. While they were talking, one of Joe’s cousins brings up a possible romantic relationship between Kerewin and Joe, but Kerewin quickly dismisses the notion. Joe overhears this and thinks it is possibly Simon’s fault for her not wanting to be with them. Kerewin sings a raucous song about Simon, although it is just a song made in drunken good humor, Joe doesn’t find anything funny about it. When Kerewin is finished singing, she over hears Joe talking to the other men in the bar and telling them Kerewin isn’t in love with anything or anyone except for her paintings. This hurts Kerewin’s feelings but she dismisses her thoughts and goes to play darts with Joe. The ride home is silent, but when Kerewin gets to her tower, Joe gives her his present and says goodbye to her sarcastically and leaves to go pick up Simon.

Chapter 8. “Nightfall” Joe is in a bad mood the next morning and tells Simon not to go to Kerewin’s house for any reason. Simon heads to school where he gets a note from the teacher about possibly expelling Simon. At lunch time, Simon goes to Binny Daniels’ house to get money but finds him dead in the garden. Not knowing what to do, he goes to Kerewin’s house, and asks him about her favorite knife. She informs him she knows



that he probably stole it, but Simon keeps denying it. The more Kerewin asks, the angrier Simon gets, to the point where he reaches out to punch her. Kerewin strikes him back and he continues to try to hit her. After a few unsuccessful attempts, he moves over to her prized golden guitar and destroys it. Next he goes out to the main street of the town and smashes all of the windows. The cops come along and take him back to Joe's, where Joe questions the boy, but Simon refuses to answer. Joe calls Kerewin to get her advice on the matter, and Kerewin tells Simon she absolutely hates him and that if Joe wanted to beat him senseless, it didn't matter to her anymore. When Joe gets off the phone with Kerewin, he immediately goes to beat Simon. As Joe is punishing Simon, the boy pulls out a large shard of glass and to defend himself, he stabs Joe in the side.

Chapter 9. "Candles in the Wind" During the first week since the incident, she packs away all of her opal jewelry because it reminds her of Simon. The next week, she begins packing all of her belongings. During the third week, Joe returns to her, trying to salvage what he can of their friendship. He tells Kerewin he has learned of her decision to destroy the tower and offers to help in any way he can. Simon is still alive, but only barely, having suffered a lot of serious injuries. Kerewin tells Joe the courts will more than likely take custody of Simon away from him and she feels guilty for having berated Simon over the knife and her guitar and she was the cause of the whole incident.

During this time, unbeknownst to anyone else, Kerewin has developed a large knot on her stomach and her health is failing. In her grief over everything that has happened, she makes a statue with all of their faces on it. Joe awaits his trial and Joe mentions frequently how remorseful he is over the situation. Joe returns to his home long enough to get it sold before hearing his sentence. He gives Kerewin a bag of items that Simon stole from her in all the times he had been to visit her. The knife that Kerewin asked Simon to return was one of the items she found in the bag. Joe learns he will spend three months in prison for his actions. When Kerewin hears of this, she packs up a few of her belongings and a handful of dirt from her garden. She then lights torches and sets the statue in a pile of wood, walking away from it after it burns completely to the ground.

Analysis

Chapters 7 through 9 are crucial for the reader as they establish the climax of the novel and give the reader a look at what happened to change the lives of Simon, Kerewin, and Joe. Kerewin desperately wants some alone time after being with Joe and Simon for the last three weeks, but her quiet time is interrupted when Joe shows up at the tower. As they are discussing things, Joe asks her what she wants most out of life. Kerewin's response is she would like to get back together with her family and to paint again. This clues the reader in that Kerewin does not harbor any truly bad feelings for her family. Joe hears this and he tells Kerewin what he really wants out of life is for Kerewin to care more about him and Simon and eventually to be with them permanently. Kerewin is unsure what to say about this proposition, but Joe senses her embarrassment with this admission and he tells her he and Simon are willing to wait for her as long as it takes.



As Kerewin goes through some of her paintings, she comes across a self-portrait Joe wants. He offers to pay whatever price Kerewin wants for it and she makes the comment about giving her time to be alone and Joe agrees. Kerewin decides against this and gives the painting to him free of charge. Joe goes to kiss her, but she pulls back and the thought that Kerewin has no romantic feelings toward Joe are reiterated. This causes Kerewin to reveal she does not do anything associated with love, from kissing to sexual contact. She says she never felt the need for it, proving she prefers being alone. Joe agrees to keep the friendship the way it is, but in the back of his mind he thinks to himself he will just have to continue to wait for her.

A few days later, she takes the framed portrait over to Joe's house. When she walks in she sees a mess all over the house, remnants of a recent argument between Joe and Simon. She asks what the problem was and Joe explains Simon does not like to cut his hair, but also says his hair needs cutting. Kerewin talks to Simon about it, which shows she can calm Simon, and he reluctantly agrees to cut his hair after he cuts part of it off himself. It is unclear why Simon has a fear of having his hair cut, but it can be assumed it is something from his hidden past. Ironically, due to falling asleep near a lit candle, Kerewin has to cut off a lot of her hair in the morning.

The next day, she is in a terrible mood and would prefer to stay at home cleaning. When Joe calls her that evening, he cajoles her into going to the bar with him. He tells her he has a present for her. She goes to the bar against her better judgment and starts drinking with Joe's family who want to know all about her vacation with Joe. They insinuate there is a romantic relationship going on, which frustrates Kerewin. After becoming quite intoxicated, she gets on stage to sing a song she instantly made up about Simon. This angers and hurts Joe, causing him to feel that Kerewin never liked them in the first place. They leave the bar, barely talking to each other. As Kerewin gets out of the cab at her tower, Joe gives her the present he had waited to give her, but leaves in a foul mood.

Although Chapter 8 is only eight pages long, it has the most impact on the novel. Joe wakes up the next morning and he is still in a nasty disposition. He tells Simon not to go to Kerewin's house for any reason without explaining why, but the reader can surmise Joe is angry with Kerewin for her cold actions the night before. While at school, Simon gets a note from his teacher, which presumably tells Joe Simon is being expelled for his behavior. Instead of going straight home, he heads to Binny Daniels' house but he is shocked to find Binny dead in his garden. The reader questions how often Simon goes to Binny's house and why. Not knowing how to mentally process what he had just seen, Simon goes to Kerewin's even though he knows he shouldn't.

Kerewin is a bad of a mood as well and informs Simon he should not be there. She also tells Simon she knows he has stolen it, but if he returns it, she will forgive him and forget about her other things that were stolen. For some unknown reason, this ignites Simon's anger and he goes to strike Kerewin and she quickly defends herself. On finding there is no way to beat Kerewin in a physical fight, he unexpectedly destroys her favorite guitar. She kicks him out of the house which further incites Simon's rage. In a fury, Simon goes



downtown and destroys most of the windows in the shops along the main street. The police take Simon to his home and let Joe know complaints are being made about him.

In keeping with his agreement to inform Kerewin of any time he needs to punish the boy, Joe calls Kerewin to ask her what he should do. Kerewin is still extremely angry with Simon and when the boy gets on the phone, she unleashes her verbal wrath upon him. She tells Simon she hates him and she doesn't care if Simon is beat severely. This gives Joe the verbal permission to beat Simon, although the reader knows Kerewin does not expect Joe to be so savage with his punishment. Joe goes on a rampage, causing Simon serious physical damage, including a concussion, a broken jaw, and nose. In an instantaneous moment, Simon retaliates by stabbing Joe in the stomach. The chapter closes with Simon covered in blood and blacking out.

Chapter 9 shows the aftermath of the struggle between Simon and Joe. Joe is immediately arrested for assault while Simon is taken to the hospital for severe head trauma and broken bones. The reader instantly feels pity for both parties, as it is realized even if Simon lives he will be taken out of Joe's custody. Kerewin is racked with guilt as she is the one who gave Joe the permission to punish Simon. In her anguish, the lump in her stomach grows and she decides it is time to leave the Tower forever. As she is packing and destroying the top parts of her tower, Joe comes back to stay with her for a while. He is filled with remorse over what happened and he realizes that things will never be the same again. Kerewin agrees and informs Joe he is going to lose custody of Simon and she feels guilty over having instigated the whole situation. Kerewin remains silent about her illness, although the reader can see it is slowly consuming her.

Joe goes into town and sells his house ahead of his trial. It is understood he will most likely get prison time, which he does not mind as much as not being able to see Simon. He brings back a bag of items from his home and gives it to Kerewin. Inside are all the things Simon has stolen from her. Among those items is the knife that she had been asking Simon about. She quickly realizes pressuring Simon about it was a foolish thing to do and she regrets her actions. Kerewin creates a statue with their three faces on it together. This is perhaps to quell her feelings of guilt as well as to remember happier times with Joe and Simon. As they are awaiting Joe's trial, their evenings are no longer spent playing chess and mindless conversation. They either talk about what happened on the night of the fight or they barely talk at all.

Once everything has been packed away in boxes and sent to storage, Joe learns his fate. He has been sentenced to three months in prison for his attack on Simon. It is then that Kerewin decides it is time to finish destroying the Tower and leave the area forever. Most of her items are packed away, but she takes a few of her favorite books and only a handful of other items with her. These things are important to her as one of them is her book on spirituality. She feels she needs this as she is going into seclusion to die. As night falls, she puts the statue she had just made in a prominent spot into a pile of wood. This is possibly to show she is moving on with her life and she is releasing her feelings. She then takes a torch and ignites the Tower, staying to watch it burn mostly to



the ground. After the pile has finish burning, she heads off into the darkness, leaving behind her memories and her shame.

Vocabulary

reconciliation, cynical, euphemism, platonic, placid, ominous, opaque, entendre, talisman, retinue, impassive, judicious, benign, grievous, serrated, garrulous, luminous, extremity, innate, sanctuary



Chapters 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10 “The Kaumatua and the Broken Man” Joe is released from prison and he gets off of a bus in the middle of nowhere. When he gets to a ravine, he tries to jump it, but falls in instead and breaks his arm. Eventually a mystic man finds Joe and bandages him before inviting Joe to come home with him. Joe does and he learns that the man is named Tiaki Mira. After listening to Joe talk in his sleep, Tiaki learns that Joe was having a nightmare about his late wife. Tiaki educates Joe on the Maori concept of dreams, especially of the afterlife and says it is an omen that his wife’s final wishes for Joe have gone unfulfilled. Tiaki tells Joe he waited his whole life to see Joe. He goes on to explain his grandmother had left him instructions to guard a secret in one of the caves and that Joe has been picked to take care of the secret after Tiaki dies. Tiaki then informs Joe he will be the new guardian of this area. Once back at Tiaki’s home, Joe witnesses Tiaki change his will before dying of a heart attack.

After getting the estate details figured out, Joe begins his new life as the caretaker of the cave area. He adapts well at first, although his mind constantly drifts back to Kerewin and Simon. One day, an earthquake occurs and Joe immediately becomes worried about the cave. He goes out to check on it and finds the cave has been split open. Joe is at first distraught, thinking this is a bad omen. When he gets to exploring the area, he finds the area has been exposed and there is a glowing green stone within it. Thinking this was an omen to go back to Whangaroa, he packs up his things, but takes the green rock with him.

Chapter 11 “The Boy by His Own” Simon wakes up to find himself in the hospital with only some recollection of the events that put him there. He is briefly saddened by the fact that his hair is gone, but even more saddened at the fact he is alone. When Piri comes to visit, Simon is ecstatic to see Piri, and he starts asking all sorts of questions. Piri does his best to answer them as honestly as he can, but he himself gets frustrated when he realizes he cannot answer all of Simon’s questions. Piri knows custody of Simon has been taken away from Joe, but he does not want to hurt Simon’s feelings by telling him. Piri also wants to adopt Simon, but he knows the courts will not allow him to as he already has four children and is on a limited income. Piri never returns to Simon’s room; he sends his wife Lynn to visit the next time. Simon knows something isn’t right, but all of his questions go unanswered by the doctors.

A female doctor takes Simon aside and explains to him he never can go home to Joe again. This causes Simon to stop communicating with everyone around him and stop cooperating. The only person able to reason with him is Dr. Sinclair Fayden. He tells Simon he needs not act complacent about what is happening to him and the more he makes a fuss about things, the more the courts will see he is unhappy being anywhere else but with Joe. Dr. Fayden talks to Simon as if they were old friends, something



Simon appreciates and helps to get Simon communicating again. Dr. Fayden assures Simon he will do what he can to find Kerewin but that it may take some time.

A few months later, Simon has been transported to another orphanage after trying to run away from several others. The head priest of the facility calls in a man who often takes in difficult foster children and asks him if he could take Simon. After a lengthy discussion, the man agrees and the priest sends for Simon. It is a while later they discover Simon has run way yet again. Simon makes it all the way to Whangaroa this time, and first he stops by his old house. He knocks at the door thinking to surprise Joe, but is instead surprised when he learns that the house has been sold. Simon then goes to the Tower, thinking Joe and Kerewin are there together, but he is distraught when he learns neither of them is there. Simon finds the statue Kerewin created before she left the Tower and he perceives it to be a good omen indicating he will find his family again. The next thing he knows, he is grabbed by a pair of hands and dragged away.

Chapter 12 “The Woman at the Well Spring of Death” Kerewin’s health is deteriorating quickly, with the lump in her stomach getting larger, losing mass amounts of weight, and her hands becoming purple and misshapen. Kerewin refuses any medical treatment for it, constantly telling doctors she just needs medicine to sleep. She travels to an old family hut where she settles in thinking these will be the last days of her life. She hallucinates as she hears a strange voice talking to her and trying to help her. When she opens her eyes, all she can see is a silver face, but no body. The face gives her a cup with a strange liquid she instantly drinks. When Kerewin is finished, the voice tells her she should go back to painting and it was leaving. In the morning, Kerewin finds all of her ailments are gone and that she has the desire to paint again.

Kerewin finds new strength and purpose as she cleans out the hut and prepares to leave. She leaves the hut to go to the beach houses at Moerangi,. During this time, she encounters a diver named Finnegan she hires to salvage the boat Simon was found on. When she calls the police to get permission for this project, she is informed Simon had been spotted in the area recently and they will notify her if they see him again. Finnegan was able to salvage most of the boat and the police are aware of the situation and with this information, they can close the Gillayley case. At the end of the conversation, another detective gets on the phone telling her he has good news for her. In this, Kerewin decides although she thought of herself as lonely and dying before, now she has a reason to live.

Analysis

Chapter 10 deals with Joe and his life shortly after being released from prison. Although three months have gone by, he still feels guilt and sadness over losing Simon. The reader does not know where he is going and is unsure if Joe knows where he is going either. He sees a ravine which he tries to cross; instead he drops to the bottom of it breaking his arm. As he is waiting for help he builds a fire and continues thinking about all that he has lost. He feels like he cannot deal with what has happened and that he is at the end of his limits. The reader sees Joe is broken not only physically, but mentally



and emotionally as well. His mind wanders to when his beloved wife and son had died. This shows the reader his wife's death is mainly the cause of his downward spiral into what he has become. It is then also Joe realizes others have been in far worse situations and he should have been grateful for his adopted son and his best friend.

An elderly Maori man named Tiaki Mira comes to Joe at some point after Joe has fallen asleep. Tiaki invites Joe to come home with him. When they arrive at Tiaki's hut, it is revealed Joe is suffering from more than just a broken arm. At first Joe is wary of the help Tiaki offers him, perhaps out of mistrust he learned while in prison. During the night, Joe dreams of his late wife and son. The dream starts out pleasantly, but soon turns into a nightmare. This is the first time the reader has seen Joe truly afraid and incapable of handling his fear by himself. Tiaki overhears Joe talking in his sleep and tells him of the Maori ways of dreams and the afterlife. He tells Joe his wife left him with a final wish and she haunts him because he is not fulfilling that wish. Joe knows her last wish was that he love Simon like his own son, but it is now impossible because Simon has been taken away. In this, Joe feels even more like a failure. Tiaki then informs Joe he was instructed by his grandmother to guard a cave bearing an ancient secret. The reader will find this story incredulous as he continues and tells Joe it is now his mission in life to guard the cave. After Tiaki finishes his tale, the reader is surprised to see Joe believes the old man and asks that he go to see the cave.

Tiaki takes him out part way to the cave where the canoe is held. Almost as if it were fate, Tiaki's health diminishes rapidly and Joe walks the rest of the way to the cave by himself. As Tiaki and Joe prepare dinner, Tiaki suffers a heart attack. Tiaki changes his will so that Joe inherits all of the land before finally passing away. This fills Joe with even more grief as he is left alone yet again. Joe settles into his life as the new caretaker of the cave, during which time he still thinks of Kerewin and the last note she had left for him. In it she tells him that if she is alive at Christmas, she will meet him at the Tower and live with him. As he is contemplating this, an earthquake occurs. Afterwards, Joe decides to walk around the property to see if anything had been damaged and to check on the cave. He is appalled to find the cave entrance has been opened up, revealing a broken canoe. A shiny heavy stone lay inside it and Joe feels like it is beckoning him to take it. He sees it as a sign of a possible new life. At the end of the chapter, he has the stone in a bag as he hitchhikes back to Kerewin's Tower.

Simon's life while he is in the hospital and afterward is told in Chapter 11. It is here Simon learns Joe has lost custody of him and that Kerewin has gone missing. Simon chooses not to remember the night Joe put him in the hospital as what he remembers haunts him. Piri Tanui comes to visit Simon as he is visiting his mother Marama who is in the hospital as well. The reader can sense Piri's fury when he looks at the damage Joe has done to Simon. Simon is ecstatic to see someone familiar finally come to visit him, but is confused by Piri's ambiguous answers. Piri is hurt as Simon continuously asks of Joe's whereabouts and desire to see Joe. As Piri is leaving, he decides he cares too much for the boy to see him this way and that next time he will send his wife in to see Simon instead of himself.



Since Simon has seen Piri, he assumes he will be going back home to Joe. He is hoping things can get back to normal and so he questions all of the medical staff on when he will be allowed to return home. When he is told he will not be able to go back to Joe, Simon is inconsolable and shuts down mentally. For Simon, home is being with Joe and Kerewin and nothing else will satisfy him. The only person who could get through to him was Dr. Sinclair Fayden, who manages to get through to Simon by acting sympathetic to Simon's problems. The doctor answers all of Simon's questions honestly, which Simon appreciates, but he also tells Simon he will try his hardest to ensure he can go home with Kerewin. The doctor also states while he searches for Kerewin Simon must go to a local orphanage and he must seem like he is happy with the decision or else the courts will never let Simon leave. The reader can see the doctor truly wants to help Simon get reunited with Kerewin and he will do whatever it takes to make that happen. Unfortunately this doesn't happen and Simon is sent to many orphanages, each time running away in his desperation to see Joe and Kerewin again.

The last time Simon runs away, he walks back to Whangaroa hoping to find Kerewin and Joe. All of the months spent in the orphanages and foster homes have not changed his view that he belongs at home with them. When Simon arrives at his old house, he is shocked to learn someone else is living there and that Joe is nowhere to be found. He is hurt by the fact Joe left him with no information on how to find him, but Simon decides Joe must be living with Kerewin. Simon is dismayed as he sees the Tower is in pieces and that there is no one there to greet him. He feels no one cared about him enough to either come get him or to at least let him know where Joe and Kerewin are so he can find them. In the ashes of Kerewin's burn pile, Simon sees the statue she made shortly before leaving. Simon takes it as an omen that they will be together again, but unseen hands grab him and carry him off. It is never said who actually takes him, whether it is the police or the people from the orphanage.

Kerewin's journey is detailed in Chapter 12. In it, she travels aimlessly through the countryside as her medical condition worsens. The reader notes Kerewin does not really care about her medical condition and she actually wants death. Kerewin goes to doctors just to get sleeping medicines and disregards any medical advice given to her about her illness. Kerewin actually becomes rude with some of the doctors, letting them know she is ready to die no matter who it may hurt. She finally gets the doctor to realize she is committing a long and slow form of suicide and he offers her a place to stay while she waits for death. She politely refuses his kindness by saying it would be best for everyone if she just stayed by herself.

Kerewin finds herself at the hut her family used to own and she quickly settles in, thinking she will die there. While she is waiting for death, she begins thinking about how much she misses her family. As she lies in bed Kerewin hallucinates about them. Afterwards, she dreams she is dead, but a strange voice keeps talking to her. When Kerewin sees the voice, it has a silver face but no body. The head gives her a strange drink then informs her it is leaving and Kerewin does not owe it anything for its help. When the voice leaves, Kerewin is miraculously better, making the reader wonder about the identity of the mysterious voice and the contents of Kerewin's glass. The reader will be astonished to find she has found her ability to paint again as well. She also decides



to do whatever it takes to get Simon back. The next morning, feeling invigorated, she leaves the hut. She leaves the rosary as a memento of herself and with fresh spirit; she heads off to spend some time at the beach house in Moerangi.

The last part of the book is a journal entry made by Kerewin as she reviews the last year of her life. During this time, she meets a deep sea diver named Finnegan. This is a very fortuitous set of circumstances as Kerewin now has a diver to salvage the shipwrecked boat Joe found Simon on. Finnegan agrees to do it, thinking the challenge that will be prosperous for him. Finnegan now has bragging rights about a saving a ship noted as impossible to save. Kerewin, in asking the police for their permission to salvage the boat, learns Simon had been previously spotted in the area. The police assure her they will look for the boy and that he will probably try to continue searching for Kerewin in the area.

Finnegan calls her once the boat has been brought up from the ocean and he tells her the police are now interested in the boat. A local detective explains to Kerewin twenty pounds of heroin was found on the boat and the file on Simon's case will be closed. This leads the reader and Kerewin to wonder how Simon got mixed up with drug dealers, although nothing more is said about Simon's presence on the boat. At the end of the conversation, the detective tells Kerewin another detective is waiting to talk to her. Although it is not known what exactly is said by this detective, the reader can surmise through Kerewin's final entry in her journal and the elation she feels that Simon has been found and they may be reunited.

Vocabulary

litany, frugality, archaic, antiseptic, ornate, incongruities, amicable, reminiscent, pallid, superstitious, elation, consummate, apathetic, surreptitious, impervious, immaculate, oppressive



Characters

Kerewin Holmes

Kerewin is a self-exiled woman who had a quarrel with her family many years prior to the start of the story. She was a painter at one time, but according to her, she has lost the ability to paint. She lives in a self-built Tower, built from some of the proceeds of a large sum of cash won in a lottery. When she first encounters the Gillayleys, she is wary of them as she doesn't want to be bothered with the outside world. When Joe is sent to prison, she packs her belongings and destroys her Tower to wander again. During this time, she believes she is dying of a mysterious stomach illness and settles into an old hut to die. Miraculously, one day the pain is gone and she is able to move on with her life again.

Joe Gillayley

Joe is also known as Hohepa or Ngauku. He is a stout Maori man who is grieving the loss of his wife and infant son. He has an adopted son named Simon who he rescued from a mysterious shipwreck. When he permanently loses Simon after beating him nearly to death, Joe is sentenced to three months in prison for his behavior. He is in love with Kerewin, and although she does not feel the same way towards him, he is determined to wait for her to change her mind. His brutality towards Simon is thought to be the manifestation of his feelings of grief over his late wife and son and lost opportunities.

Simon P. Gillayley

Simon is also called Himi or Haimona, but his real name is unknown and when he is thinking he calls himself "Clare". Simon is the sole survivor of a mysterious shipwreck four years prior to the start of the novel. Although he can make some sounds, he is unable to speak fully. Simon is notorious for his bad behavior including fighting, theft, and vandalism. He is taken away from Joe when Joe savagely beats him nearly to death.

James Piripi Tanui

Also known as Piri, he picks the boy up from Kerewin's home the first time he breaks in. He also knows the secret about Joe and Simon, but promises his father not to say anything. He wants to adopt Simon, but is not allowed because he has little money and four children already.



Luce Mihi

Luce is another Tanui cousin who tells Joe that Simon was seen at the local pedophile's house.

Binny Daniels

Binny is the local alcoholic pedophile. Simon comes to visit him and get money, incurring Joe's anger. Simon finds Binny dead in his garden after falling on his glass of brandy.

Wheraihiko Tanui

Wheraihiko is the patriarch of the Tanui family. He wants to tell Kerewin of the abuse Joe heaps on Simon, but he decides to give Joe a chance to tell Kerewin of it himself.

Marama Tanui

Marama is Joe's great aunt. She knows of the abuse going on in the Gillayley home and tries to tell Kerewin about it when she comes to visit the Tanui home.

Tiaki Mira

Tiaki is an elderly Maori mystic man who tells Joe of the secret in the cave and that Joe will be the new guardian of it. He dies shortly after changing his will so Joe owns the whole area.

Dr. Sinclair Fayden

Fayden is the only doctor who can get through to Simon as the other hospital staff has quit trying to help him. He tells Simon he will try to reunite him with Kerewin, but is unable to do so.

Finnegan

Finnegan is a local diver who Kerewin hires to salvage the boat Simon was found on. He is mostly successful in his attempts, giving Kerewin new information about Simon.



Objects/Places

Sandal

Kerewin finds a sandal on the beach while walking home, but quickly disregards it as belonging to a child who was wandering around. She comes to find it belongs to Simon Gillayley when she discovers him hiding in her house.

Tower

The Tower is the home Kerewin built on the farthest part of the beach after she won the lottery. After Joe is taken to prison, she dismantles the Tower because she is filled with guilt over the fight between Joe and Simon.

Rosary

Simon gives Kerewin his prized possession, a rosary with semi-precious stones and ring with a phoenix coat of arms. Kerewin uses this to try to learn more about Simon's past, but learns it may have belonged to an old Irish family that does not want to know anything about the rosary or its current whereabouts.

Guitar

Kerewin's golden guitar is her prized possession, having been given to her by her mother. When Simon is pressured about the location of Kerewin's favorite knife, he destroys it which upsets Kerewin enough to tell Joe to that he has her permission to beat the child, causing the fight which gets Simon taken away from Joe.

Whangaroa

This is the small town where Joe, Kerewin, and Simon live. All three of them end up leaving it after Joe is sent to prison and Simon is sent to the hospital.

Moerangi

The beach area where Kerewin grew up, Moerangi is where Joe, Kerewin, and Simon spend their vacation. It is also where Kerewin goes after she recovers from her mysterious stomach illness.



Aikido

Aikido is the form of martial arts that Kerewin learns while she spends a year in Japan. She uses it to beat Joe after he attempts to beat Simon while on vacation.

Hair necklace

Joe has a necklace made with some of Simon's hair as a present for Kerewin. He also has a hook pendant attached to it with an inscription for Kerewin.

Seafire

This is Kerewin's favorite knife that she berates Simon about when he comes to her house after seeing Binny Daniels dead in his garden. It is returned to Kerewin after Simon is in the hospital along with other objects from her home

Statue

Before leaving the Tower, Kerewin builds a small statue bearing her face as well as Joe and Simon's mixed into one. When Simon comes to the tower to look for Kerewin, he finds the statue, the last thing he sees before an unknown person grabs him and carries him off.



Themes

Loneliness

Loneliness is a key theme to this novel as all three main characters experience it in their own way and are trying to find their way out of it. Kerewin's loneliness is mostly self-imposed, but her thoughts linger on her family. Joe's loneliness comes from his grief over losing his wife and son and from it comes some of his aggression towards Simon. It also causes him to reach out to Kerewin and fall in love with her. Due to his inability to actually speak, Simon feels lonely which comes out in the form of theft, fighting, and other bad behavior. Although each of their reasons for their loneliness are different, they struggle to cure their feelings together.

Family

The family element of the novel is crucial as it is a binding force for Joe, Kerewin, and Simon. Both Joe and Simon see Kerewin as a replacement mother and strive to keep her as a member of their family. Joe's behavior towards Simon causes terrible arguments between him and his own family. Simon has no blood family, and Kerewin tries unsuccessfully to find his family so he can have a sense of identity. As for Kerewin, a family argument many years ago causes her to part ways with her family. As the story goes on, she often thinks of her family and it is revealed she wants to be reunited with them.

Abuse

Probably the most important theme, the abuse of Simon goes on all throughout the novel. Kerewin turns a blind eye to a good deal of the violence until she sees the full extent of it when she goes to bathe Simon. Afterwards, she feels it is her duty to protect the boy, which she does while the trio is on vacation. Joe realizes he does abuse Simon but instead of stopping he only says he is sorry afterward. The climactic event of the novel focuses on a fight between Joe and Simon; showcasing the harsh brutality that Simon endures every day. During the altercation, Simon stabs Joe in the side, changing the whole course of the novel.

Separation

Separation is another key element in this novel. Ironically, feelings of separation are what bring Joe, Kerewin, and Simon together as friends. Joe's separation from his late wife and son manifests frequently in his abuse towards Simon. For Kerewin, the separation from her family causes her to withdraw from the world. Through her friendship with Joe and Simon she starts changing this attitude, but after Simon is taken away, she goes away again, this time to die. Simon is already separated from the rest of



the world because of his inability to speak although he can communicate in other methods. When he is taken away by the courts after Joe beats him for the last time, he further withdraws into his own mind, constantly running away from various foster homes in the hopes of reuniting with Joe and Kerewin.

Love

Love is shown in many different ways throughout the novel. Simon maintains a sweet and innocent love no matter what abuse is heaped on him. Joe's love for Simon floats between a normal father/son relationship to a sort of dark love where Joe uses his alleged love for the boy as an excuse to beat him. Kerewin's love is strictly platonic, showing that she is uncomfortable with any love in other forms.

Style

Point of View

“The Bone People” is told in both first and third person point of view. Many parts of each chapter are written in third person, but there are many times that it will unexpectedly switch to the story being told in first person. The reader must pay close attention as it is never clearly written when the voices change between characters as they relate their own thoughts and feelings about what occurs in each chapter. The final three chapters are the only exception to this. Chapter 10 relates the story of what happened to Joe after he is released from prison, Chapter 11 is of Simon in the hospital and covers almost six months after he is released, and Chapter 12 is of Kerewin after she leaves the Tower.

Setting

This novel takes place in the Southern Islands of New Zealand. As the book was published in 1984, it can be assumed the time of the novel was circa 1980 although no actual dates were used in the novel. Most of the novel occurs in the beach town of Whangaroa, however Kerewin, Joe and Simon go on vacation in nearby Moerangi.

Language and Meaning

The language in “The Bone People” is written as it would have been spoken, with explicit words throughout and broken dialect. The author writes in both Maori and conversational New Zealand speech, often making it difficult to understand. The author includes a section of translated Maori words and phrases that are scattered throughout the book at the end of the novel. Due to the explicit speech of some of the characters, this book is suggested for mature audiences only.

Structure

The novel is broken up into four main sections, each containing three chapters. Each section focuses on a main event in the novel. The first section entitled “Season of the Day Moon” deals with Kerewin and the Gillayleys beginning their friendship. It is also where Kerewin learns of Joe’s abuse of Simon. The second section named “The Sea Round” is dedicated solely to the vacation. The third section called “The Lightning Struck Tower” deals with the final assault on Simon and the consequences of Joe’s actions. In the final section named “Feldapart Sinews, Broken Bones”, each chapter tells of what each character is doing many months later and of their final attempts to reunite with each other. Most of the chapters are between thirty to fifty pages in length, with the exception of Chapter 8 which is only eight pages long.



Quotes

I am in limbo, there are no races, no prizes, no changes, no chances. There are merely degrees of endurance, and endurance never was my strong point. (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 28)

For the first time since they met, she feels alienated from Joe. All the while she ate and drank and talked smoothly, inconsequentially, the feeling that there was something very wrong between them grew and grew, until there was a wall up. (Chapter 3 paragraph Page 114)

Well there's them...and I think it was a mistake I brought them...but how can I send them away now? But my family is gone. I am alone. Why did I lose my temper that night and wound everybody with words and memories? (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 167)

What would it feel like, to want to be priest, to want to be teacher, to want to be husband and father of a family, and be thwarted in them all? How would it feel to have that macabre kind of childhood, blighted by insanity, beset with illness? And those veiled hints he dropped of violence done to him... no wonder he's sparse on knowledge of how to deal with children. (Chapter 5 paragraph Page 231)

A family can be the bane of one's existence. A family can also be most of the meaning of one's existence. I don't know whether my family is bane or meaning, but they have surely gone away and left a large hole in my heart. (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 242)

But it's a dream we've got, Himi and I, that you'll decide to throw your lot back in with humanity again. Specifically, us...we can wait a long time. We're masters of patience, both of us, and trained to disappointments. (Chapter 7 paragraph Page 263)

The blood pours from everywhere. He can feel it spilling from his mouth, his ears, his eyes, and his nose. The drone of flies gets louder. The world goes away. The night has come (Chapter 8 paragraph Page 309)

On the other hand, my cardinal virtue is hope. Forlorn hope, hope in extremity. Not Christian hope, but an innate rebellion against the inevitable dooms of suffering, death, and despair. A senseless hope... (Chapter 9 paragraph Page 330)

I have nothing to give Kerewin that she will have. I have nothing to give Himi, not even the shelter of my arms and heart. I know I exacerbated his reckless wounding of himself, but now I am not allowed to give him even shelter... (Chapter 10 paragraph Page 334)

It is Kerewin, it is Joe, turning round the third face, aiee it is me, and even though he is moaning aloud, somewhere in the cloudy anguish a thread voice says Together, all together, a message for you, and he clasps it to his chest as hard as he can, and will never let it go. (Chapter 11 paragraph Page 410)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Why did Kerewin build a tower in the middle of nowhere? Discuss why she thinks she has lost the ability to paint. How does Kerewin deal with being alone all of the time? Discuss her reasons for wanting solitude.

Topic 2

Why did Simon break into Kerewin's Tower? Why does Kerewin change her attitude toward the boy? Was the radio operator out of line for telling Kerewin about Simon? Would it change your opinion of Simon? Why does Piri avert Kerewin's eyes when he picks up Simon?

Topic 3

What are Kerewin's first thought about Joe? How do they differ from the real Joe? Why does Joe get mad at Simon? Should Kerewin have stepped in before Joe slapped Simon? How does Joe's attitude change after Kerewin speaks Maori? How does this new friendship alter their lives?

Topic 4

Why does Simon give Kerewin the rosary? Discuss where you think the rosary may have come from. How does Kerewin investigate the origins of the rosary and Simon's past? Should she have proceeded further after the letter from the Irish lord? Who were the people that Simon was with when the boat wrecked? Discuss Simon's life before the shipwreck.

Topic 5

Why are the Tanuis so interested in Kerewin? Discuss what they may know about Simon and Joe. Does Simon like or dislike them? Why was Joe so nonchalant when Simon was missing? Why did he go to Binny Daniels' house while Joe was away for a few days? What would you do if you saw the marks on Simon? What else should Kerewin have done?



Topic 6

Why did Kerewin pick Moerangi for a vacation? Discuss Joe's mood changes throughout vacation. When Kerewin beats Joe, was she protecting Simon or seeking revenge on Joe? Did Joe and Kerewin's relationship change afterwards? What was the rest of their vacation like?

Topic 7

What made Simon go to Binny Daniels? Why was he told to stay away from there? Why did Kerewin pressure Simon about her knife? How does he react to her questions? Discuss what happens after Simon leaves Kerewin's house. Should Kerewin have been so harsh with Simon on the phone? What happens to Simon and Joe after Joe gets off the phone?

Topic 7

Is it right Kerewin should feel guilty for her part in the fight between Simon and Joe? Why did she destroy her tower? Was her illness made worse by her feelings? Where does she go after she destroys the tower? Discuss her reasons for creating then burning the statue.

Topic 7

What does Joe do when he is released from prison? Discuss Tiaki Mira's reasons for finding Joe. What does Tiaki give to Joe and why? What does Joe decide to do with it?

Topic 7

Why can't Piri and his wife adopt Simon? Why do they stop visiting? Why does Simon stop cooperating with the hospital staff? Who gets Simon to communicate again? What makes Simon run away after he recovers? Discuss who finds Simon after he arrives at the Tower.

Topic 7

Why does Kerewin not get medical help for her condition? Discuss why she goes into seclusion to die. What makes her decide she wants to live again? Discuss why she salvage Simon's shipwrecked boat. What is found on the boat? How does this help Kerewin? Discuss whether or not she gets Simon back in the end.