

The Child in Time Study Guide

The Child in Time by Ian McEwan

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Plot Summary

Stephen Lewis wakes on a Saturday morning and plans to take his three-year-old daughter Kate to the market for their morning's shopping. He leaves his wife Julie asleep in bed. At the market, Stephen takes Kate from the shopping cart and begins unloading the groceries to check out. When Stephen turns to check on Kate, she is not here. Thinking she has stepped back from the cart, he pushes it out of the way and searches for her, but cannot find her. A search of the street is unfruitful as is a search of the store's loading dock. Other shoppers get involved and the police arrive, but Kate is not found. Stephen then has to go home alone to tell Julie the news.

Over the coming weeks, Stephen spends all his time searching for Kate. He compiles lists of people who have a child who died, thinking that they might have taken Kate as a replacement child. Meanwhile Julie sits in the apartment, stirring only occasionally. One day Stephen comes home to find that Julie has cleared out Kate's room, bagging up all the items. Julie then goes away for a time and Stephen is taken in by a friend. It is soon obvious that Julie and Stephen together as a couple is only a statement of the fact that Kate is missing and Julie moves out. The two seem unable to face their loss together and this will prove to be their downfall.

Meanwhile, Stephen participates in a government committee charged with creating a handbook on child care only to discover that his friend, Charles Darke, has already written the book that is to be released as the culmination of the committee's work. Stephen is a writer of children's books, though he admits that he started on this career by accident. He had intended to write a story about a group of hippies on a journey and starts by writing about one of the characters spending a childhood summer with cousins. Stephen is eventually convinced by publisher Charles Darke to allow the book to be published as a children's book. Charles moves his life to the political realm but later moves to the country with his wife where he reverts to a child-like existence for a period of time before committing suicide.

After Charles' suicide, Stephen hears from Julie who summons him after months of absence. Stephen arrives to find Julie in labor with a child conceived during a sexual encounter. They finally talk about Kate and cry over her disappearance. Julie gives birth and they prepare to take their love and their new family into the future.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Stephen Lewis is walking on the street when he encounters a young girl, a beggar, wearing a "faded yellow frock." Though he tends to give only minimal donations to the beggars he encounters, he gives the girl more and she is not thankful but derisive of his donation, calling him a "rich creep" as she walks away. Stephen continues on his journey and is soon enmeshed in a meeting of the Official Commission on Child Care's Subcommittee on Reading and Writing. The meetings are held at Whitehall and Stephen, as a noted writer of children's literature, seems expected to participate in at least some of the discussions. The meetings are overseen by Lord Parmenter who is always the last to arrive, requires the board members be punctual and opens each meeting by outlining what the committee is expected to accomplish during that meeting. Stephen's mind often wanders and he sometimes thinks about his life as it was prior to the disappearance of his three-year-old daughter, Kate. He recalls the day he had been in London, outside a supermarket, holding Kate's hand. She had worn a red woolen scarf and carried a stuffed donkey that was well-worn. That particular memory comes from a Saturday and there had been lots of people. Stephen pulls himself back from that memory only briefly before allowing his mind to recreate the events of that particular Saturday.

Stephen decides to go to the supermarket while his wife, Julie, sleeps in. Stephen dresses Kate and takes tea in to Julie. Stephen is briefly aroused by the sight of his wife, still in bed, and considers putting off the trip to the supermarket. He thinks that Kate would probably accept being put in front of the television and that Stephen could slip back into bed with Julie, but Stephen eventually discards the idea, planning to slip back into bed with Julie later in the day. At the market, Stephen picks up items they need at home and notes that he is among a class of fathers from the more affluent of the shoppers who are "doing their bit" by helping out with the marketing. Stephen says that looking back on that day from the vantage of hours, weeks, months and even years later, he continues to relive the errands in the hope that he would remember the person who had probably been following them while he had been shopping—the person who eventually kidnaps Kate—but he cannot remember. When it is time to check out, Stephen chooses a cashier he knows to be fast with her task. He takes Kate from her seat in the cart and notes that she is cranky, a sure sign she will be ready for a nap when they get home and that he will be able to go back to bed with Julie. He begins unloading the cart and turns to realize that Kate is gone. He is not alarmed, believing that she has simply stepped out of his line of vision and he calmly moves to the rear of the cart to look for her. When he cannot find her, he begins to panic, fearing that she might have gone outside and would be in danger from the traffic. He rushes out but does not see her and is relieved, believing that he will find her still inside. He notes that he had been looking only for Kate and had not considered the possibility that he might need to search adults for some sign of his daughter.



Inside, Stephen becomes more upset and the other shoppers help with the search. The store managers guess that she might have wandered onto the docks and they search there. Stephen says that he knows if they find her there, she will be dead, but they do not find her. The police are called and Stephen is questioned at some length as the police begin to search. When Stephen is offered a ride home, he declines and chooses to walk. He realizes that his purchases have been bagged up for him though he did not pay. He calls it "compensation" for his loss. He arrives at home and wakes Julie to share the news. Julie is a violinist, teaches at Guildhall, and Stephen admits that he has built his entire life with a central dependence on intimacy with her.

Stephen's thought moves from that day to the committee business at hand to listen to another writer of children's books say that any written language is naturally difficult and that overcoming this difficult challenge gives children an important sense of accomplishment. Stephen then drifts back in time to the months after Kate's death. While Julie simply sits in a chair in the apartment for days on end, Stephen is busily searching. He is convinced that if he looks long enough and is diligent enough in his search, he will find Kate. One of his theories is that Kate has been taken from him to replace a child who died. Toward that end, he does research, compiles a list of parents who have lost a child, and watches the homes of everyone on the list for signs of Kate. One day he returns home to find Kate's possessions bagged up and her room cleared of her toys and clothes. Stephen is angry and believes that Julie is simply being self-destructive, but finds himself unable to confront her. Stephen finds that he and Julie cannot discuss their loss and they each search for ways to deal with it individually. One day Stephen returns from his day of searching to find a note from Julie indicating that she has gone to the Chilterns.

Chapter 1 Analysis

At the market, Stephen notes that there are two distinct groups of shoppers—those who own the recently-renovated Victorian terrace houses and those who live in the public housing. He says the two groups shop differently, with the first group buying fresh fruits and vegetables, coffee beans, brown bread and wine and the second buying canned or frozen vegetables, beer and cigarettes. These differences make an impression on Stephen, as do the aspects of the lives of the beggars. It is noted that the beggars have to carry a badge, an apparent attempt by the government to hold the number of beggars to a defined group. Stephen obviously feels some responsibility for these poor but he seeks a personal objective, some individual to help, though he notes that he is expected by the government to help the entire class through any random individual.

Stephen and Julie each have their own ways of dealing with their loss, but both feel unable to share their methods, their hurt or even their anger. The interesting thing is that Stephen expresses some guilt over the situation but seems to get past it and does not spend as much time in self-recriminations as might be expected. The method of working through the hurt of the loss is different for Stephen than for Julie, who apparently comes to a point where she has to give up in order to let herself begin the healing process. This is when Julie packs up all of Kate's possessions. Stephen comes to believe that



Julie is wallowing in self-pity and that she should be stronger in the face of this loss. Their lack of communication is noteworthy but is likely the only reason that they are later able to come back together as a couple with a new family.

The government committee of which Stephen is a part seems to be a very minor secondary plot to the story but is actually significant on several levels. For example, it will eventually be discovered that the committee is nothing more than a front to give an official and unbiased face to a report that has actually already been written. Charles Darke will eventually be revealed as the author of that report and Charles himself battles with the lines between childhood and adulthood, seeking to hold to the best of both without giving up anything of either. It is also interesting that Stephen himself holds onto this project as a lifeline to keep himself grounded during the months after Kate's death, a time when he might otherwise have given in to despair.



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Stephen recounts the fact that his wealth and fame as a writer of children's books was the result of a "clerical error" at Gott's publishing house. Stephen had been intent on writing and intended to create a book about a group of hippies who are stabbed to death in their sleeping bags, a nice girl who is sentenced to jail time in Turkey and "mystic pretentiousness, drug-enhanced sex, amoebic dysentery." To get his novel off to its proper start, Stephen creates a background for one of his characters, a young man who spends an idyllic summer with two young female cousins. Stephen's novel was to have been called "Hashish," but when he is caught up in the story of that summer when the young man is eleven—based loosely on the summer of Stephen's eleventh year—he gives in to the demands of the story and writes "Lemonade" instead. He notes that the "crazed sex" of "Hashish" is replaced by youngsters holding hands in "Lemonade."

Stephen submits the book to the publishing house of Gott's, intending that it be published as adult fiction. Instead, it is given to the children's book editor who picks up on the promise of Stephen as a children's writer and proposes that they publish the book in the children's genre. Stephen is opposed to the idea but does agree to meet the publisher, Charles Darke, whom Stephen only briefly encountered on a previous visit to Gott's. During this meeting, Charles works to convince Stephen of the necessity of publishing as a children's book, saying that the book is for children but with the vision of an adult looking back. Stephen continues to object, but somewhere along the way is convinced, possibly with the advance check and the "tasteful, limpid watercolor" illustrations done by Turner Malbert. He notes that there are some who say children should not read it because the message is too serious for children to deal with.

Stephen's life after the disappearance of Kate takes on a lack of structure that is somewhat combated by his serving on the subcommittee. One day he receives news that Charles, who by now is living the very visible life as a political figure, has resigned. Two days later, Charles' wife, Thelma, invites Stephen to visit them in their house on Eaton Square. Stephen accepts and reviews Charles' move into politics. His choice of parties was made over coffee with friends. He had put himself out for various causes, going so far as to make a skydive for a charity, and his career into politics advanced quickly. Back in the present, Stephen is greeted by Thelma who says Charles resigned so that they could move to the country. She hints at plans for their lives there but does not elaborate, though she and Charles invite Stephen to visit. Stephen recalls that it was Thelma who arrived at Stephen's apartment the day after Julie left for the Chilterns, taking Stephen in hand and forcibly taking him back to her house where he stayed for weeks. Stephen's only objection had been his worry that Kate might come home and Thelma had left her address stuck to the door to pacify this concern. Stephen has a vague memory of riding on a bicycle behind his father. The landscape indicates that they are near the sea but Stephen cannot remember the place but never finds the right time to ask his parents about the bicycles. He notes that there will come a time when it



is too late to ask and resolves to find out things about his parents in order that their lives are never forgotten.

In chapter three, Stephen sets out in mid-June to visit Julie. Stephen travels by rail and begins walking to Julie's instructions upon his arrival at the station. He remembers her return from the Chilterns. Stephen had left the Darke's house and arrived at the apartment he and Julie shared about the same time she had arrived. They had remained together only briefly, both realizing that every moment together is a testament to Kate's absence. Julie had then moved out into a place of her own. As Stephen follows Kate's instructions, he comes to a pub called "The Bell." He is drawn to the window and looks inside where he notes that there is a young couple and he is suddenly certain these are his parents. He does not remain long but continues on his way, though the encounter affects him as he reaches Julie's house.

There, Stephen and Julie have sex but find that their conversation afterwards is strained and Kate is again between them. Stephen spends the coming months alternately berating himself for allowing the sex to occur because it undid "what he saw as careful progress in separation" or that it had occurred too soon so that both were not yet prepared for it. He waits, hoping that Julie will contact him again but willing to allow her time alone if that is what she chooses.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Stephen's relationship with Thelma is interesting in that she seems to seek the pretense of something deeper than is actually there. In fact, Thelma will call on Stephen when Charles commits suicide, a fact that is never explained. Stephen notes that Thelma pretends that she is closer to Stephen than she is to Charles, though Stephen admits that it is sometimes embarrassing. It seems that Thelma, in dealing with Charles' manic depression, is seeking an ally of sorts and Stephen is as near as she can come to having that. What is more interesting is that Thelma seems to want only the appearance of that close relationship because as Charles falls deeper into madness, she gives Stephen only one glimpse into the situation but never really calls on him for help.

Julie and Stephen go their separate ways to try to find solace following Kate's disappearance. Stephen notes that he believes Julie to be weak in her passive reaction though he will later wonder if she had not been the stronger of them. It is also noted that Stephen falls into a pit of despair of his own, and that it only seems delayed when compared to Julie's reaction.

Stephen discusses at some length his ideas on men and women with regard to their places in life and their abilities—or willingness—to change places. Stephen says that men almost always believe they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. He cites this as the reason men are so dogged with determination, even in something as futile as standing in the trenches waiting to be killed. Men, according to Stephen, seldom stop to think that they might just as well be somewhere else, doing something else. He says that women, on the other hand, are constantly considering what they might be or might



have been. He says that women are torn because of this, wishing to be the best at motherhood though it means careers suffer, and the best at their careers though some other aspect of life is bound to suffer.

The encounter at the pub called The Bell is interesting and will be further explained later in the story. At this time, the reader gains only the information revealed by Stephen's perspective. However, he will later talk again with his mother about the bicycles and this particular place. She will reveal that this is where she had told Stephen's father that she was pregnant and where she had been torn by indecision, initially considering that she would have an abortion in an effort to distance herself from her boyfriend and would simply move on with her life. She tells Stephen that even as she was making this decision, she had seen a child at the window and had felt certain this was her own child looking in at her. It is this vision that prompts her decision to keep the baby. This seems to be the incident that prompts the title of the story, though the reader may be expecting that the title has something to do with Kate's disappearance. In fact, Stephen's appearance at the window seems to have prompted his mother's decision not to have an abortion, meaning that Stephen is destined to be born and to live his life.



Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Stephen recalls his life as a child. They had moved several times because his father is in the military. He recalls a scene in which his mother had—impossibly—insisted that they have a nap in the middle of the day. He had become enamored with the idea that he could control sleep and so might be able to control other aspects of his life as well. There had been instances of anger, raised voices and thrown dishes, though Stephen feels some of these may have been his dreams rather than his reality. During their time in Africa, Stephen is happily absorbed in school, friends and time on the beach. He is later sent to boarding school and realizes that most of his life will be spent away from home from this point on.

Stephen rouses himself from these childhood memories to focus on a young man addressing the subcommittee. The man's appearance is strange in that his arms seem unnecessarily long. He argues that having a child learn to read so early in life creates a degree of discord in the life of a child from which the child never recovers. His argument seems based on the fact that the child would be better often learning written language several years later, "when their brains and minds undergo the important surge of growth" that enables the child to separate "self from the world." Stephen is called on to respond and he says that it would be wonderful if everyone had the opportunity to be "whole" in the way described by this man, but says that it is impossible to predict how to make that happen. He goes on to say that there are some similarities to writing and music, and that depriving a child of the written word is depriving that child of the power that comes from being able to read.

During this meeting, there is an interruption with several men coming into the cramped room, looking around and taking up positions near the window before the Prime Minister appears. The Prime Minister's presence puts an end to the discussion as everyone is introduced. When Stephen's name is mentioned, the Prime Minister seems to know who he is. He leaves after only a few minutes, ostensibly checking on the progress of the group. Stephen is then summoned into the hallway where the Prime Minister asks if he has heard from Charles Darke lately. Stephen notes that it is instinct to want to share all information in the face of this important man's questions, but he does not.

Stephen later visits his parents. He notes that they live in a development of the 1930s and that he sees no children outside playing in the neighborhood as he arrives. At one point in the conversation, Stephen's father says that Stephen needs to get back to work at his writing. He says that Julie and Kate are gone and will not return, though to say this aloud is a violation of an unspoken rule never to talk of the subject. Stephen notes that his parents have aged, but that there is a look of desperation that he attributes to Kate's disappearance. However, his parents have not talked about their sorrow and Stephen's notice of their physical changes are his only sign that they have been impacted by the loss. During this visit, Stephen tells his mother about his memory of the



bike ride near the sea. His mother says that she recalls the time he is speaking of, that they had been on bicycles they had purchased new and that they had stayed at a bed and breakfast. His father says it did not happen and when Stephen leaves to go home, his parents watch from their front door.

In chapter five, Stephen is driving toward the Darke's country home, relishing the time behind the wheel, when a truck in front of him skids and crashes. Time slows to a crawl for Stephen and he feels that he has plenty of time to decide what to do to avoid crashing directly into the truck. He steers to the side and hits the gas so that he slips in a narrow opening to the side of the wreck and into the ditch. The car is scraped and the mirror and door handle torn off, but Stephen realizes he is lucky to be alive. After he has celebrated his good fortune for a few minutes, he rushes to the truck to find the driver pinned inside. The driver tells Stephen that he is not going to survive and asks Stephen to take down a couple of notes for loved ones. Stephen agrees and takes down the first two, one to the man's wife and another to a friend whom the man owes money to. When the man, who Stephen has learned is named Joseph McGuire, begins dictating a note to yet another person, Stephen stops him and goes to the car in search of a jack. Finding one, he begins the task of jacking the truck up so that he can pull the man free. When the man is out of the wreckage, they discover that the man is not seriously injured at all. They continue on their journey with the man citing his good fortune—he will be able to use the insurance money from the crashed truck to buy two and expand his business. Stephen drops Joe off at a police station and goes on to the Darke house.

Stephen finds that Thelma is at the house alone. He asks about progress on her book and asks where Charles is. Stephen tells her of his conversation with the Prime Minister and Thelma mentions that she had expected it, saying that there was political interest between the Prime Minister and Charles and that there was a "touch of fondness and desire." Stephen asks if Charles is doing alright in this new lifestyle in the country and Thelma says she will allow Stephen to judge for himself. She gives him directions to a wooded area where Charles will be waiting for him. Stephen arrives there to find Charles at the base of a large tree where there is a tree house. Charles is in shorts and acts every bit the overgrown schoolboy. Stephen is afraid to go up in the tree house but does so at Charles' urging and discovers that Charles has created the tree house to be his own, complete with a bird recognition guide and a copy of "Lemonade." He has a slingshot and demonstrates his shooting ability from this height.

Stephen returns to the house where he and Thelma talk briefly about Charles and his "regression." Thelma seems relieved that there is someone else in on the secret and it now seems obvious that the decision to move to the country was an effort to keep this from being general knowledge. Charles retires while Stephen is taking a bath and Charles is already gone to the woods the following day when Stephen wakes. Stephen decides that he cannot face Charles again and leaves without saying good-bye. As Stephen is leaving, Thelma says that Charles is "completely mad" and Stephen points out that Thelma is "all alone" in the situation.



Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

There is a convoluted set of memories presented by Stephen that may be recollections and may be the product of his imagination. Stephen describes raised voices between his parents, times when his father loudly called him "mama's boy," and other times when his father held him, obviously making fun of him for being "mama's boy." These events could be the creation of Stephen who feels the distance created between his parents because of his birth. Stephen's mother will later describe to him the fact that she had almost decided to have an abortion. It seems that his father had not wanted a child and had not been eager to accept the responsibility, though he does step up and do so. This may have created in Stephen's mother a desire to keep Stephen somewhat separated from his father, probably with the intention of protecting him from this information. An interesting twist on this theory is that it is Stephen's mother who tells him about her initial elation at the thought of being pregnant, then her fleeting decision to have an abortion. Stephen's father seems to want to forget this incident as evidenced by his argument that he had never owned a bicycle and had not gone riding near the sea. The significance is left to the reader to decide.

The Prime Minister's interest in Charles seems to be purely a professional interest. He points out the sheer number of people who travel with him on any given errand and says that any information that comes his way has been "watered down" with regard to personal details. He seems to want only to know that Charles is alright though he tells Stephen that he had had "high hopes" for Charles' political career. In fact, the Prime Minister will later reveal a more personal interest in Charles though it seems possible that it did not culminate in a sexual relationship.

Stephen notes that it seems as if Charles had done a great deal of research to discover exactly what a pre-adolescent boy would have in his tree house and in his pockets. Stephen is uncomfortable with the fact that Charles appears completely mad and it seems that Thelma is expecting a lot of him in not revealing Charles' mental state and still expecting that Stephen will simply step in and know what to do. Stephen does not know how to handle the situation and opts to skip any meetings with Charles altogether. Stephen will later admit that he had hoped that he would have the opportunity to reunite with Charles after Charles had gotten past whatever was making him act like a child. Stephen notes that if he had seen a great deal of Charles in this condition, their friendship would have been ruined. In truth, he seems not to know how to react and simply wants to avoid spending time with Charles.

Stephen says that he had always liked to have the Darkes as friends because they are "rooted." He has always known what to expect from them and that they will always act in the way Stephen expects. It seems that this deviation from the normal is another reason Stephen does not want to remain with them. Stephen will later learn that his leaving without saying good-bye to Charles apparently has a great impact on Charles.



Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

In chapter six, the "Authorized Child-Care Handbook," which is supposedly the work of the government committee of which Stephen is a part, notes that it is perfectly acceptable to bribe a child into good behavior. The excerpt notes that society is successful because people know that there are rewards to good behavior and hard work, and that there no reason that a child should not hold rewards as a reason for good behavior.

As time passes, Stephen begins to think about Kate's upcoming birthday. While he thinks it to be a foolish exercise, he eventually buys a roll of wrapping paper. He goes through the toy aisle, planning only to look at what he would buy if he were truly shopping for Kate's birthday, but sees items that he wants to buy for her and gives into the temptation. He is soon on a themed mission to buy all kinds of magic items, such as disappearing ink, a witch's hat and stuffed black cat, capsules that expand into flowers when left to soak in water, and eventually a set of walkie-talkies. The cost is much more than was justified by his original plan to honor the day of Kate's birth and acknowledge that she has probably been led to believe some fabricated story of her birth. At home, he begins the wrapping process and soon realizes that the project has moved well off-course. He had intended to have the gifts be his way of saying that he had bought the birthday presents and that it was now up to someone else to bring his daughter home. Over the course of the afternoon, he remains immobile for awhile, then is drawn back to the present and turns on the television while reaching for the liquor which is never far from his grasp.

Over the coming days, he is telephoned by friends who want to meet him for dinner or just to check in on him. He lies, saying that he is working on a book and, "friendly but firm," says that he cannot leave the project. He wishes that it was true and that he did have a book to work on, but continues to spend his time watching television and drinking. One day he is contacted by the assistant secretary to the Prime Minister. As it is explained to Stephen, the Prime Minister wants to issue an invitation for Stephen to join him for lunch. Stephen learns through the conversation that he has not officially been invited, but that it would be embarrassing for the Prime Minister to issue an invitation that is turned down, so the purpose of the call is to find out whether Stephen would accept, if the invitation were to be issued. Stephen is reluctant but curiosity wins out and he says that he would accept.

The subcommittee does not meet over the summer months and Stephen is relieved when October arrives and the meetings resume. Stephen continues to work through his feelings, especially with regard to his separation from Julie. He comes to several conclusions, including that Julie was simply too weak to deal with the situation with him and that is why she left. He also considers that Julie might have been tired of their relationship and already looking for a way to escape when Kate disappeared. Stephen



wonders if perhaps Julie might not have had the courage to leave when it was only her own desires that made her want to, but had grabbed onto Kate's disappearance as a way to justify leaving.

In December, only a short time before Christmas, Stephen prepares to be picked up for his ride to visit with the Prime Minister. He purposely chooses old clothes that are worn and stained. A chauffeur arrives and Stephen comments on the ragged appearance of the car that was sent to pick him up. The man goes through a description of how a person gets preferential treatment on this job—taking an important political figure for a rendezvous with a prostitute—apparently indicating that he has done something undesirable to be landed with the ragged car picking up this man dressed in threadbare clothing.

Stephen seats himself in front and when they are stopped momentarily in traffic, he notes children playing on a playground. The girls jumping rope catch his attention and he sees a girl who has a resemblance to Kate. He is immediately convinced that he has seen his daughter who has aged more than two years away from him. He demands the chauffeur pull over and when the man refuses, Stephen grabs the steering wheel and causes the car to sideswipe parked cars so that the chauffeur comes to a halt. Stephen jumps out and races back to the school. There he wanders through classrooms until he finds the girl. A teacher approaches him and he quietly tells the story of his daughter who was kidnapped and his belief that this is his daughter. The teacher takes Stephen and the girl to the headmaster who asks Stephen for an explanation. Already calculating that the girl will be upset when she learns the truth of her identity, Stephen asks that she wait outside. He tells his story to the headmaster who says he has know the girl, Ruth Lyle, since she very small and that she has been enrolled in this school since she was four. The girl is now nine and a half, meaning she cannot possibly be Kate.

As Stephen learns the truth about the little girl, he is already noting some discrepancies. The girl's nose—seen in profile now—is not like Kate's at all. The headmaster tells Stephen that he is mistaken about the girl though he briefly suggests that Stephen might be a journalist "trying to make trouble for the school again," though he does not elaborate. Before Stephen leaves, Ruth is warned to call a teacher if Stephen approaches her again.

Following the incident, Stephen admits to feeling purged and says that he had been "mad" prior to the meeting with the girl who both resembled Kate and looked nothing like her. It is only now that Stephen realizes Kate would no longer be that innocent three-year-old she had been on the day she was kidnapped. He also realizes that Kate would have been changed by her life after she was taken from Stephen and that he has no way of judging what those changes might be.

Stephen misses his lunch with the Prime Minister and the assistant calls him, noting displeasure that he had not appeared at the meeting. Despite the man's obvious contempt for the situation, he tells Stephen that there is to be another invitation issued. Stephen says that he cannot accept another. The secretary is taken aback and asks why not. Stephen apparently tries to be diplomatic and says that he is busy with a



project. The man says that even a busy person has to take time out for lunch, which prompts Stephen to drop all pretense of diplomacy. He says that he does not agree with the Prime Minister's policies and believes the man is "a disgrace." Asked why he had agreed to come to the first meeting, Stephen says that he had been "depressed" but was now past that. The secretary then incredibly tells Stephen that the Prime Minister insists on the meeting and that Stephen will not be allowed to refuse. Stephen says that the only option available is for the Prime Minister to come for a visit. A few minutes later, the phone rings again and the assistant, now obviously annoyed and snippy, says that he has lost Stephen's address.

In chapter seven, the subcommittee are nearing agreements on the various aspects of the report they are to turn in. Stephen begins learning a new language and playing tennis on a regular basis. His mother falls ill. One day there is a knock on the door and Stephen finds Harold Morely, who reminds Stephen that he's "from the committee." Morely gives Stephen a copy of a book which is to be released as the official child care handbook of the government. The significance is that the committees have not yet compiled all the information but the government has already decided what is to be released. This is a scenario that had been presented by Stephen's father though Stephen had not really given the idea credit until now. Morely explains that there had been a break-in and that he had taken the book himself and listed it among the stolen pieces of property. Morely says the government had known that there was no way to have a panel of experts and celebrities compile the "correct" book, and so the committees were merely a front to lend credence to the contents of the book. Morely leaves the book with Stephen who plans to "leak" the information to the press, carefully keeping Morely's name out of the story.

One day Stephen goes to visit his parents, planning to spend some time with his mother while his father goes to visit Stephen's aunt. Stephen chooses it as the perfect time to question his mother about the bicycle ride from his distant memory. His mother, Claire Temperly, tells about her youth and the fact that some felt she would probably never marry. Claire falls in love with Stephen's father and turns up pregnant. When she tells Stephen's father, his reaction is unenthusiastic. Claire says that she realizes he does not want the child and is not going to marry her, so she sits with him in a small pub and waits, knowing that she is going to have to go for an abortion. Claire's plans become concrete—that she will insist he pay and that she will never see him again. She tells Stephen that the child within her had not been real to her up to that moment. It is then that Claire looks up and sees a child at the window. She becomes convinced that this is her child looking at her, then the boy disappears but she has determined that she will not have an abortion after all. Moreover, she says that she was now determined that she would have this man as her husband.

Claire later goes to bed and Stephen waits for his father to return home. He notes that Mr. Lewis seems very tired after his trip. Stephen tries to begin a conversation, saying that Mr. Lewis had been right in his earlier statement that the work of the committee toward compiling a book would not be used, but Mr. Lewis soon goes up to bed. Stephen leaves while his parents are asleep.



Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

Stephen notes that his wavering emotions with regard to Julie and their separation makes him angry, but it seems that the anger is mostly because he is unable to share it with Julie. When Stephen considers that perhaps Julie is simply weak—too weak to stay and work through the ordeal as a couple—he also considers that she believes herself to be strong. Stephen then wants to tell Julie that he has come to the realization that she is weak so that she does not continue to walk around acting as if she were strong. This weighs on Stephen but it seems that this time apart is the only way Stephen and Julie might get back together. If they were together while Stephen is working through this anger, he would likely have shared his insights with Julie, prompting hurt feelings and eliminating any chance the two might have to reunite.

An interesting aspect of Stephen's thought process after Julie leaves is that he seems eventually to change his focus from the fact that Kate has been stolen from him to the fact that Julie left him. While Kate's disappearance seems to weigh on him only at certain times, Julie's leaving seems to be on his mind constantly. This could be because Stephen cannot stand to focus on Kate's disappearance any longer nor speculate as to her fate. It could also be that he feels Kate has no choice in whether to return to be part of his life whereas, at least in his mind, Julie does.



Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

The story of the child-care handbook which was "secretly commissioned by the Prime Minister's office" appears in the only newspaper not in favor of the government's policies and operations. The story is not overly specific, talks of "unnamed sources" and rumors. However, a photocopied copy of the book is soon put into the hands of the government's opposition and the next newspaper articles mention "a disgusting charade" and the story is picked up by other newspapers. The government counters by having thousands of copies of the book printed and turning them over to a number of people, including journalists. The reviews range from "favorable to ecstatic." The general consensus is that the book should become the law of child-rearing and be made available immediately. There is little interest in the fact that the government has a commission in place charged with the responsibility of creating this very document. Instead, the newspapers say the person to be blamed for this scandal is the person who leaked the document in the first place.

It is in this situation that Thelma calls Stephen. She says that she needs him immediately and asks that he come. Stephen says that he will catch the next available train and prepares to lock up his apartment and leave. Before he can get out the door, men arrive with telephones, equipment and the Prime Minister. Stephen is asked to sign a document that is a sort of a confidentiality clause. Stephen is told that if he does not sign, the Prime Minister will simply go away without talking to him. Stephen is then taken to his study where the Prime Minister is already waiting.

The Prime Minister says that he believes he is in a position where he needs to trust Stephen but warns that if Stephen tries to report any part of their conversation to the press, he will find that he is not believed. He does not elaborate. The Prime Minister says that he helped Charles start his political career and that he has "formed an attraction" to Charles. The Prime Minister says that he has had Charles followed and says that he knows Charles frequented a house of prostitution that catered to some specific sexual fantasies that involved dressing up. The Prime Minister asks if Stephen has seen Charles since their last conversation and asks if Charles had mentioned the Prime Minister. Stephen says he did not and the meeting comes to a close.

Stephen leaves for the Darke's house and in the train station he sees the girl he had seen earlier in the year. Then she had been wearing a yellow outfit but now her clothes are much more ragged and she is lying on the train platform. Stephen, with the same impulsive gesture that had prompted him to give the girl more money than he typically gave beggars, decides to give the girl his coat. He knows that he is going to get on the warm train and that the girl needs the coat. When Stephen leans over the girl to cover her with his coat, he realizes that she is dead. He wavers, but knows if he reports it he will be caught up with the police. He decides to go on to the Darke's house. Stephen arrives in a cab. It is snowing and the ride takes a long time. When he arrives at the



house, he finds that Thelma is in the house alone. She tells him that Charles is in the woods and Stephen figures out that Charles has died there. He asks if Charles fell from his tree house, but Thelma says it appears he just sat down in the cold and died. Stephen picks Charles up over his shoulder and carries him to their house where he puts the body down in an outer room.

Thelma says that Charles had been torn in his life and his desires. She says that he had wanted desperately to live the life of an idyllic childhood but that he had also wanted the power and prestige of a successful political life. She says that she had just told Charles that they would return to the city. She says that she believes he could have been equally as unhappy in the political life as living in the country. The conversation then turns to the book Charles had written—the handbook on child care. Stephen says that it seems strange that Charles had been so harsh with his child-rearing advice when he was obviously craving the opportunity to live his life as a child. Just then, Julie calls, asking for Stephen.

After Julie calls, Stephen arranges to borrow Thelma's car to get to the train station and catches a train. When he gets off the train, he cannot find a taxi. He is finally picked up by an off-duty taxi driver headed home. Stephen asks the man for a ride on to Kent but the man refuses. Stephen offers more money and finally asks the driver if he would take him for "two and a half thousand." The man stops the taxi and says he would want to see the money first. Stephen laughs, saying he doesn't have that much but had wanted to see if the taxi driver "had a price." Stephen manages to get a ride on a train that passes near Julie's house though the train is only running for maintenance. As the train engineer tells Stephen that he will take him, he asks if Stephen is "on the run." Stephen says that he got "an urgent summons" from his wife and explains that he has not seen her since June. The engineer seems to quickly add up how long that has been, laughs and agrees to drop Stephen near his destination.

As Stephen begins the walk toward Julie's house, he has what he terms "a premonition" based on the knowing look given to him by the engineer and by Thelma. He gives "a whoop of recognition" as he runs the rest of the way to Julie's cottage. Stephen finds Julie in bed. Julie has no phone in her cottage and tells Stephen that she believes she had had a contraction soon after talking to him. He briefly describes his arrival by train to answer Julie's question, but then asks why she had not told him that she was expecting a baby. Julie says that after his visit with her in the summer, she had initially felt cheated because she had come here to be alone in order to "make myself stronger." She says that she had considered an abortion but could not face the heartbreak of the loss. Julie says she eventually came to realize that this was fate and cites the fact that they had had trouble conceiving Kate. Julie says that as she came to accept the loss of Kate she also came to accept the comfort of this baby.

The contractions continue to advance and Stephen goes to telephone the midwife. He is assured by the person who answers the phone that the midwife will be there soon. A short time later, Julie says that she does not believe that the baby is going to wait for the midwife's arrival. She urges Stephen to look and when he raises the sheets he finds the baby's head already emerged. He clears the child's face of mucus while waiting for the



next contraction and catches the baby during the next contraction. The child begins to cry and Stephen moves the baby onto Julie's stomach. Then he gets into bed with the baby cuddled between them. They are still there when the midwife arrives. Just before she reaches the room, Julie reaches under the covers to check the sex of the child.

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

When Stephen and Thelma return to the house after retrieving Charles' body, the talk turns to Charles' reasoning. Thelma says that Charles had been upset on the day Stephen left without saying good-bye to him, but says that she believes Charles would have taken the same action anyway. Thelma says that Charles had not really wanted Stephen's approval, but that he had wanted Stephen "not to mind." Stephen now honestly admits to Thelma that Charles' actions had made him uncomfortable. Thelma also addresses the sexual insinuations made by the Prime Minister. She tells Stephen that Charles had sought out prostitutes who were willing to play out fantasies about being a school boy. By Thelma's comments regarding the conversation she had had with Charles in which she had decided they would return to London, it seems likely that Thelma had dealt with Charles' idiosyncrasies, but that in truth she believed that it was all an act that Charles could turn off at will. The conversation about Charles' life seems to indicate that both Stephen and Thelma thought that he had acted like a spoiled child who wanted what he could not have.

Julie talks to Stephen about her reasons for moving away and remaining alone more honestly and rationally after this passage of time—more than two years—than she could possibly have done right after Kate's disappearance. As they talk, Julie says that Kate had been a beautiful daughter and Julie and Stephen begin to cry together. It is noted that this is the first time they have cried together over Kate's disappearance. It seems to have a healing effect that had previously been missing from their lives.

It seems likely that this child will provide the healing needed for Julie and Stephen though it also seems there are some problems they have not yet addressed that may someday come back to haunt them. As is the case with most stories that simply end with an epiphany, it seems that they will live the rest of their lives in fear that Stephen might again turn his back for the few seconds it takes someone to snatch their child, and that Julie might hold this against him. It could be that Julie and Stephen, as intelligent, reasoning adults, may simply realize that Kate's kidnapping was the fault of the kidnapper rather than because of anything Stephen did.



Characters

Stephen Lewis

A writer of children's books, Stephen sits on a government subcommittee aimed at creating a handbook to be released as the official government stand on child care. Stephen is a dedicated father and husband and he takes Kate to the market on the day she is kidnapped. Stephen feels the guilt of having been in charge of Kate when she is taken and spends all his time in the coming months in search of her. Stephen's role in the government subcommittee is a stabilizing part of his life when he is trying to get on with his life after Kate's disappearance. As Stephen battles to find a way to live with the loss of Kate, he watches as one of his best friends falls into the depths of madness, torn between his desire to live a successful life as an adult and the idyllic life of a child. Stephen does not realize this aspect of his friend's life until much later. Stephen loses touch with his wife Julie for a period of time but reunites with her just as Julie is giving birth to their second child more than two years after Kate's disappearance.

Julie Lewis

Wife of Stephen, Julie is a violinist and seems happy and successful in both her professional and personal life on the morning she remains in bed after Kate disappears. She seems sometimes to blame Stephen for Kate's kidnapping though she apparently does not say the words. While Stephen spends all his time searching for Kate after her disappearance, Julie draws inward and has no interest in anything. She remains in a particular chair in her house for days on end, finally making something of an escape into the country, leaving Stephen behind. Julie lives there alone for the months following and later tells Stephen that she had sought solitude to come to terms with the situation. As the story comes to a close, Julie calls Stephen with the news that she is in labor, having conceived during a visit with Stephen months earlier. Julie tells Stephen that she had initially regretted the pregnancy but that it had come to be her salvation so she is pleased with the situation. Julie gives birth to a child with only Stephen present.

Kate Lewis

Daughter of Julie and Stephen Lewis, Kate is just three when she is taken from Stephen while he stands in line at the market. Kate's fate is never revealed though Stephen cannot stop looking for her.

Charles Darke

An official at Gott's publishing house, Charles is charged with convincing Stephen to allow the publishing of his first book, "Lemonade," as a children's book. Charles and Stephen become good friends as Charles launches a political career and it is Charles



who eventually writes the book that is adopted as the government's official stand on child care. Charles retires from public life though he is always dissatisfied by his child-like idyll. He seems to choose to die, taking off his winter clothing and simply sitting down in the cold.

Thelma Darke

Charles' wife, she is a teacher and turns to writing when Charles wants to retire from public life. Thelma finds Charles dead in the woods and calls on Stephen to help move the body into the house. Thelma explains that Charles had been torn between his desires for a political life and his desire to live the idyllic life of a child.

Ruth Lyle

The little girl Stephen sees playing on a school playground and whom he believes to be Kate.

The Homeless Girl in Yellow

The girl Stephen sees begging as the story opens. Stephen gives the girl money, more than he would normally have given to a beggar, and later prepares to give her his coat though he discovers that she is dead.

Lord Parmenter

The chairman of the committee related to childhood development on which Stephen sits. Lord Parmeter is rigid in his beliefs regarding public etiquette, requires that those who sit on the board be completely punctual and always outlines the work to be done by the committee on any particular meeting date.

The Prime Minister

The official who seeks out Stephen on several occasions with the hope of using him to have a private conversation with Charles Darke. It is eventually revealed that the Prime Minister has had Charles followed for years, and that the reports on Charles' activities are the reason he knows Stephen is friends with Charles.

Claire Temperly Lewis

Stephen's mother, Claire reveals to Stephen that she had been pregnant with him prior to marriage and that she had been considering an abortion until the moment she had seen a child standing in the window of a pub. Claire says that she had been convinced

that this child was her child, and from that moment she was fully determined to have her child and to marry the child's father.



Objects/Places

Lemonade

The name of the children's book written by Stephen that catapults him into his career as a writer.

The Official Commission on Child Care

The board formed to write a handbook on child care that is to be the government's official stand.

The Subcommittee on Reading and Writing

The committee charged with writing part of the government's official book on child care. Stephen sits on this committee.

Whitehall

Where Stephen attends the subcommittee meetings.

Guildhall

Where Julie teaches.

The Supermarket

Where Kate is kidnapped

Chilterns

Where Julie tells Stephen she is going after Kate's disappearance.

Gott's

The publishing house that takes Stephen's first book.



Eaton Square

Where Thelma and Charles live while in London.

The Bell

The name of the pub where Stephen has a vision of his parents as his mother makes the decision to keep the child she is carrying.



Themes

Survival

Stephen and Julie, as the main characters of this story, are never in physical danger but their survival is nonetheless a major theme of this story. Each is forced to find a way to go on with life after their three-year-old daughter is kidnapped. Though it is not recognized initially as part of the survival process, both set out to heal in their own ways. Julie pulls inward and spends time alone in their apartment, seldom stirring and apparently focusing on the thought process that will eventually be her salvation. Stephen is spurred into action, believing that if he works hard enough, he can find Julie. Stephen seldom stops to do more than catch a few hours sleep at night and grab something fast to eat. Each goes through some additional stages before reaching a point where they can live with their grief and the loss of their daughter. In Julie's case, she puts physical distance between herself and her family and friends. This distance becomes her shield and Stephen respects it though he does not seem to understand it.

In Stephen's case, he soon falls into a routine of drinking and watching television, though he also comes to distance himself from almost everything with the exception of his work on the subcommittee charged with creating an official childcare handbook. In the case of Stephen's parents, the loss of their only grandchild apparently weighs heavily on them, as evidenced by their physical aging. However, they keep their grief to themselves and this seems to be their way of surviving the grief of the loss.

Love

Stephen's love for Julie and Kate are at the heart of the story and Stephen spends a great deal of time and energy trying to find a way to go on with his life without their support. Stephen's love for Julie seems to take a back seat to the loss of Kate for a brief period of time though he later admits to having to learn to live without the comfort of Julie's love, specifically the physical side of their love. The fact that Julie and Stephen have a sexual encounter when they are both trying to find their way through the grief of loss is a testament to how important this physical love is to both of them. Another example of the importance of this love is seen when Julie calls on Stephen to be present for the birth of their child. Though they have no contact over the course of Julie's pregnancy, there seems to be no doubt that Julie wants Stephen with her when the time comes for her to give birth. Another example of this theme is seen in Stephen's parents. Though they seem to have grown into a mature, stable love for each other later in life, they obviously love Stephen. Stephen's mother says that she almost chose to have an abortion but the vision of a child at a window made her understand that she fully loved this baby she was carrying and that she would not give up the family necessary to support that love. Stephen's father seems to have been reluctant at first but comes to love Stephen deeply. While Stephen and his parents apparently never talk



about the loss of Kate, the fact that his parents age dramatically after her kidnapping is a testament of their love for their granddaughter.

The Ideal Childhood

The ideal childhood remains at the heart of the story though Kate's own is interrupted. Prior to being kidnapped, Kate's life was something of the ideal. Her father is the famous writer of children's books and her mother is a musician and teacher. Though little is known of Kate's life, the few facts presented along with the grief caused by her disappearance indicate that she was a beloved child. Some details of Stephen's life as a child are also presented, including a period when he had been exceptionally happy, balanced against the rest of his childhood which included a series of moves and being sent to boarding school. Though he does not describe an ideal childhood, there is a longing for the ideal of childhood as evidenced by his first children's book, "Lemonade." Stephen had begun writing this book as a sex-crazed, drug-filled trip by a group of hippies but finds he cannot escape the need to tell the story of an eleven-year-old boy who spends an idyllic summer with a couple of cousins. The fact that Stephen tells the story from the vantage point of years later makes it evident that he believes in the ideal childhood, though he seems to have had only brief moments of this ideal. Finally, Charles takes this desire for an ideal childhood to the extreme. He retreats from his career and even from reality to build himself a tree house and to play at all the things a pre-adolescent boy would find to entertain himself. Charles seems to realize that this ideal childhood is unattainable, even with the advantage of being an adult planning it, and ends his life rather than face that reality.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from the limited view of the main character Stephen Lewis. Stephen is a children's writer and the father of Kate, who is kidnapped as a three-year-old. This perspective means the reader is very limited in the understanding of anything that does not occur in the direct sight of Stephen. The author counters this by relating things that Stephen learns through conversations. For example, Stephen learns what happened to Charles through the conversations with Thelma. In another instance, Stephen has to guess what Julie is thinking after the disappearance of Kate. The lack of communication means that Stephen's guesses are all he has to go on and he adjusts those to include the fact that Julie is too weak to handle the situation. This lack of communication between the two leaves the reader in the dark as to Julie's thoughts as much as Stephen. This is resolved as the story comes to a conclusion. The conclusion itself is an epiphany that simply brings the story to a close with only some conversation between Julie and Stephen and the birth of their child. This ending may leave the reader hanging on some points and some may believe that nothing has actually been resolved. One very limiting point of this perspective is that the reader never learns Kate's fate because Stephen never discovers what happens to her.

Setting

The story is set in the UK with various settings in several cities, including London. The settings are described in great detail and these descriptions serve to make the settings more real. For example, Charles and Thelma move to a rural location and the house is described fully when Stephen goes there to visit. At his arrival, Stephen describes the overgrown foliage, to a lesser degree the house, and then describes in great detail the tree house and the wooded area where Charles spends so much time. The tree house is located in a beech tree with nails providing foot and hand holds along the base until the limbs provide a natural way to climb. Another of the settings is the pub called The Bell. This is where Stephen has the vision of his parents discussing the turn their lives have taken. Stephen's description of the place is supplemented by his mother's description. Other important settings included in this story are the supermarket where Kate is taken while she and Stephen are shopping and the apartment Julie, Stephen and Kate share. Yet another specific setting is the office where the subcommittee meets to discuss child care. It is noted that the room is typical of classrooms where a young boy's attention might stray to outdoors.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in straightforward language though the fact that the story is not written in chronological order is somewhat confusing. The language is typical of modern



British English and there are a few words that may be unfamiliar to readers not acquainted with British English. For example, Stephen has a near-death experience when the truck in front of him has an accident. This truck is described as a "lorry." These words are presented only occasionally and the meanings of most are evident from the context. The overall tone is one of hope, which is interesting considering that the story occurs because of the kidnapping of a three-year-old girl who is never found. The story revolves around the efforts of the girl's parents to find a way to live with the loss and Stephen seems never to lose sight of the fact that this is what he has to do. Though there are points of despair, Stephen continues to work at getting past the loss. Another aspect of the tone is the creation of the book that is to be released as the government's official stand on child care. The book and Stephen's work as a member of one of the subcommittees becomes important to the story line. The fact that the government is not truthful about the status of this book is one aspect which imparts a tone of hopelessness in the story because it exemplifies a sense of distrust of government officials and the government's willingness to lie. Finally, the fact that Charles reverts to a life of childhood dreams is an example of despair, with Charles eventually giving in to this despair.

Structure

The book is divided into nine chapters. The length of the chapters ranges from more than twenty to more than thirty pages. The final chapter is the shortest at twenty pages. The chapters have no titles but are merely numbered. A single numeral begins the chapters. It seems reasonable that there would not be a title to the chapters because of the lack of chronological order. The story opens with Stephen seated in a room with other members of the subcommittee on which he serves. A few pages later, the story flashes back to Stephen's memories of the day he took his three-year-old daughter Kate to the market where she was kidnapped. The main storyline of the book seems to be Stephen's attempts to recover from this tragic loss, beginning some two years after the fact, but the story is intermittently interrupted for memories of his life immediately after Kate's disappearance. This divergence from a traditional chronological order is somewhat confusing but the reader who carefully considers the settings and the clues will have no problem following the story.

Quotes

"Later, in the sorry months and years, Stephen was to make efforts to reenter this moment, to burrow his way back through the folds of events, crawl between the covers, and reverse his decision. But time—not necessarily as it is, for who know that, but as thought has constituted it—monomaniacally forbids second chances." Chapter 1, p. 10.

"He had been back a thousand times, seen his own hand, a shelf, the good accumulate, heard Kate chattering on, and tries to move his eyes, lift them against the weight of time, to find the shrouded figure at the periphery of vision, the one who was always on the side and slightly behind, who, filled with a strange desire, was calculating odds, or simply waiting." Chapter 1, p. 12.

"The idea that the more educated the population was, the more readily its problems could be solved had quietly faced away. It belonged with the demise of a more general principle, that on the whole life would be better for more and more people and that it was the responsibility of government to stage-manage this drama of realized potential, widening possibility." Chapter 2, p. 26.

"As always, they stayed out on the front path waving at their son as he receded into the sodium dusk, waving, resting their hands, then waving again as they had on the desert airstrip, till a slight bend in the street lost him to their view. It was as if they wanted to see for themselves that he was not going to change his mind, turn around, and come back home." Chapter 4, p. 104.

"At the end of a day in which he had come close to smashing a car, seeing a man crushed to death, being set upon by beggars and falling out of a tree, Stephen felt in need of a hot bath." Chapter 5, p. 132.

"Incentives, after all, form the basis of our economic structure and necessarily shape our morality; there is no reason on earth why a well-behaved child should not have an ulterior motive." Chapter 6, p. 142.

"From where he stood he could see her nose in profile and that was way off, a gross inaccuracy. She was going from him, she was letting him down." Chapter 6, p. 178.

"They couldn't leave it to the great and good, experts and celebrities gathered for public consumption to come up with exactly the right book. The grown-ups know best." Chapter 7, p. 191.

"Thinking about it over the years, I realize it was probably the landlord's boy, or some kid off one of the local farms. But as far as I was concerned then, I was convinced, I just knew that I was looking at my own child." Chapter 7, p. 207.

"Initially it was not the weight of the body that oppressed him so much as the chill it communicated through its bulk to the bones of his shoulder and down his back. It drew the heat from him greedily, as if they might soon change places and the corpse, warmed to life, would carry Stephen's cold body to the cottage." Chapter 8, p. 235.

"He wanted the security of childhood, the powerlessness, the obedience, and also the freedom that goes with it, freedom from money, decisions, plans, demands." Chapter 8, p. 238.

"'A girl or a boy?' And it was in acknowledgment of the world they were about to rejoin, and into which they hoped to take their love, that she reached down under the covers and felt." Chapter 9, p. 263.

Topics for Discussion

Who is Stephen Lewis? Julie Lewis? Kate Lewis? What is the relationship between the three? What is the fate of the three?

What do you consider to be the main plot of this story? Why? List at least one secondary plot.

What is "The Bell?" What is Stephen's perspective on the events he sees inside The Bell? What is Claire Lewis's perspective on the events in The Bell? How can this event be explained?

Describe the impact Kate's disappearance has on Stephen, on Julie, and on Stephen's parents. How are their reactions typical of a family in this situation? How are they atypical?

As the story comes to a close, Julie gives birth. Is there any significance to the fact that Stephen is present for the birth? Is there any significance to the fact that Stephen and Julie are alone for the birth? Predict what impact this child will have on the lives of Stephen, Julie and Stephen's parents.

How does Stephen come to be a children's writer? Was this his intention? Is there significance in the names of the book he intended to write as opposed to the book he does write?

What is Stephen's opinion about the beggars of the city? What could the beggars symbolize? What is Stephen's opinion of the government and, more specifically, the Prime Minister?

Who is Charles Darke? Thelma Darke? How does Stephen come to know them? What prompts Charles' decision to change careers? What prompts him to leave his political career? What is the fate of Charles and Thelma after this decision? Do you believe Charles was in control of himself and his emotions after moving to the country? Support your answer.