

Everything We Keep Study Guide

Everything We Keep by Kerry Lonsdale

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide specifically refers to the 2016 Lake Union Publishing paperback edition of *Everything We Keep* by Kerry Lonsdale.

Everything We Keep is a suspense novel by Kerry Lonsdale in which twenty-something Aimee Tierney believes her fiancée, James, who is believed dead, may still be alive. When the novel begins, Aimee attends her would-be husband's funeral on the very same day they were meant to be married. Aimee is devastated, but her parents and her good friends, Kristen and Nadia, rally around her. James's disreputable and shady cousin, Phil, in addition to James's older brother, Thomas, also state their support for Aimee. At the funeral, a strange woman introducing herself as a psychic named Lacy speaks with Aimee, telling her James is still alive. Aimee is stunned and wants to believe this, but cannot. At home, she discovers that eight boxes of James's paintings are missing.

Two days after the funeral, Aimee returns to work as sous chef at the family restaurant. Her parents reveal they are selling the place, and believe Aimee has a second chance at life without James. They explain that Aimee can now be independent and can be her own person without him. This causes Aimee to reflect on knowing James since childhood, falling in love with him through high school, and planning to marry him after college. Aimee falls into a depression for several months, ultimately deciding to lease an old coffee shop in order to open her own. Her family and friends do all they can to support her. Meanwhile, Aimee meets a photographer named Ian Collins, but she resists his romantic advances because she believes James is still alive.

When her coffee shop opens, Lacy leaves behind a postcard to Puerto Escondido, Mexico, bearing an image of one of James's missing paintings and promoting a gallery there. Aimee hires a private investigator to look into things, but he finds nothing. Two years pass. Aimee suddenly receives a package containing one of James's missing paintings, and a note from Lacy saying that James is safe now, and Aimee must come and see him. Aimee travels to Mexico with Ian for the truth. While there, Ian continues his romantic advances on Aimee, who finds herself falling in love with Ian and trying to push him away because she wants to find James. Aimee is stunned to find James at the gallery listed on the postcard, only to discover James has dissociative identity disorder, meaning he does not remember who he was. Now, he believes he is a man named Carlos.

Aimee comes to learn through Imelda, the woman looking after James, and later, through Thomas, that James originally went down to Mexico before the wedding to confront Phil over criminal business activity with drug cartels, and which threatened the family company. James did not know Thomas was already cooperating with the DEA to get rid of Phil, and this led to James nearly being killed by Phil and the cartels, the result of which was James's identity disorder. Thomas arranged for Imelda to look out for James, arranged for James to be Carlos and have a gallery, paid off the private investigator hired by Aimee, and ensured that James could not be found by Phil or the



cartels. Imelda reveals she hired Lacy to get in touch with someone who knew James from before, while Thomas reveals he paid off the building owner of Aimee's coffee shop so Aimee could restart her life.

When talking to James as Carlos, Aimee discovers Carlos has had the life he has always wanted as James. She learns Carlos was even briefly married, until his wife died of a brain aneurysm. She learns that Carlos even has a son. She realizes she cannot force Carlos away from the life he has known, and decides to simply let things be. She is heartbroken by losing James, but finally commits to Ian. Ian reveals his reasons for accompanying Aimee to Mexico were not just to help her out of love, but to find Lacy, for Lacy was the psychic who found him when he went missing as a child, and he now hopes Lacy can help find his own mother, who has been missing for years due to identity disorder. In the epilogue of the novel, five years later, Carlos's identity disorder suddenly goes into remission, and he finds a note from himself, telling himself he is James but has been living as a man named Carlos.



Part One, Chapters 1 – 6

Summary

Part One: Gem City of the Foothills, Los Gatos, California

Chapter 1 – It is July. Instead of getting married as planned, 26-year-old Aimee Tierney must contend with her fiancé, 29-year-old James's funeral. Aimee is devastated. The funeral cannot be open-casket, as James's body, found underwater, was too decomposed by then. Among those in attendance are Aimee's parents, Mom (Cathy) and Dad (Hugh), James's mother, Claire Donato, James's brother, Thomas, and James's cousin, Phil. Aimee explains she is not attending the reception, but only the burial. Thomas hands Aimee a check for \$227,000, noting that James's will was to be updated when he was married.

A short time later, a woman named Lacy tells Aimee she wonders what is in the casket, because James is alive. Aimee is stunned and bursts into tears. Her friends Kristen and Nadia, who would have otherwise been bridesmaids, come to her side as Lacy hands Aimee a card and leaves. The card reveals Lacy is a psychic. Kristen is the wife of Nick, the best friend of James. After the burial, Kristen and Nadia go back to the house Aimee shared with James. Aimee reflects on how James worked for his family company, Donato Enterprises, but was also an artist. That night, Aimee has a dream that Lacy brings James back from the dead.

Chapter 2 – Two days after James's funeral, Aimee returns to work as sous chef at her parents' pub, The Old Irish Goat. Dad is stunned to see her at work. He and Mom urge her to go home and to take as long as she needs, because there will be some changes. They explain they have sold the restaurant because of their debt. Aimee is stunned because she had always planned to purchase the place, but her parents explain they did not want to saddle her with such debt. They explain they would have had to file for bankruptcy had they not sold. They explain the new shopping center and two franchise restaurants have destroyed their business.

Aimee's parents want her to figure out who she is now on her own, because she has been with James since the age of eight. This causes Aimee to reflect on meeting James as a child when he and his family moved to Los Gatos from New York, and Nick and Kristen introduced him to Aimee. She remembers how James put two neighborhood bullies, Robbie and Frankie, in their place when defending Aimee.

Chapter 3 – Kristen and Nadia are waiting for Aimee when she returns home from the pub to keep her company. Aimee then goes to the cemetery to visit James's grave. She reflects on how James insisted on going to Mexico rather than Thomas. She then goes to visit Claire, and learns Phil is living with him. She is uncomfortable with how close Claire and Phil seem, and is uncomfortable as she knows Phil is checking her out.



Claire gives Aimee a list of James's wedding guests, expecting Aimee to fill them all in on what has happened.

Back home, Kristen and Nadia have gone food shopping for Aimee, and are waiting to comfort her and be there for her should she need it. Aimee explains she needs to figure out what next to do next with her life. Aimee considers her own restaurant. She becomes upset when she learns a new gallery is to go in the same place where James planned to put a gallery, and that Nadia has been hired to design it. Kristen asks Aimee when she cleaned her garage, but Aimee does not know what she is talking about. She discovers that all of James's eight boxes, filled with his paintings, are missing. Aimee decides she will call Thomas in the morning to see what happened to them, figuring James must have decided to store them somewhere else.

Chapter 4 – It is now October. Aimee's days blur together as she does her best to keep busy and to avoid simple things in life, like dishes and answering mail. She has been baking treats for the neighborhood to keep busy, and speaks about Lacy. Kristen then gives Aimee a card for Grace Peterson, who has a PhD in clinical psychology and grief counseling. Aimee is later surprised when Lacy appears at her home. Lacy explains she is returning Aimee's lost Gucci purse. Aimee is worried Lacy is a con, and says she should leave. Lacy says nothing more and leaves.

Chapter 5 – Aimee goes to eat at Joe's Coffee House, where she and James always used to eat on Sundays. When she arrives, she is stunned to learn it is closed and the building is for lease. Aimee goes to see the gallery Nadia has created for photographer Wendy V. Yee. Aimee finds it beautiful. She meets Wendy and a fellow photographer in his thirties named Ian Collins that Aimee finds cute. Ian invites Aimee out for pizza for lunch, to which Aimee hesitantly agrees. Things go well at lunch, with Ian encouraging Aimee to take over Joe's. Ian reminds Aimee about the gallery opening on Thursday night, and encourages her to come. Ian pays for lunch while Aimee agrees to come on Thursday.

Chapter 6 – On the phone with Nadia, Nadia encourages Aimee toward seeing how things go with Ian. Aimee says she is not ready. Nadia reminds Aimee she has her whole life ahead of her, but she will not push Aimee. Aimee then has the feeling she should call Thomas, almost hearing James's voice in her head. It was Thomas who went to Cancun to retrieve James's body, and Aimee is thinking about Lacy's assertion that James is not dead. Aimee calls Thomas to ask about this, but loses her nerve at the last moment. She then calls Dad to reveal she now has plans on his voicemail, but does not say she intends to buy Joe's and rename it Aimee's Café.

Aimee meets with Brenda Wakely, the leasing agent, the next morning, who shows Aimee around Joe's. She decides she will call the owner of the building, Joseph Russo, who has known her parents for years. Aimee next moves to get her finances in order, and she applies for a business license. On Thursday, Nadia comes over to help Aimee get ready for the gallery opening, making sure she looks good. Brenda then calls, saying she cannot pass on Aimee's application to Joe because of Aimee's bad credit,



unless she has a cosigner. Aimee tries to explain what has happened in recent months, but does not have the chance.

Analysis

When Kerry Lonsdale's novel *Everything We Keep* begins, Aimee's life is exactly the opposite of what she intended and planned. Instead of getting married on a particular date, she is attending her would-be husband's funeral. There is great symbolic irony in the idea here that, rather than beginning a life together in love, Aimee is contending with the death of her dearest love in heartbreak due to his death. Aimee's utter devastation at his death underscores not only how much she misses him, but how much she loves him. It is first through Aimee that Lonsdale unveils a critically important theme which will continue consistently through the rest of the novel: love must always be pursued. Even in his death, Aimee's love for James is pursued as she struggles to stay busy while falling into depression, reliving her memories with James all the while. Lacy's assertion that James is alive startles, but heartens Aimee by giving her hope that perhaps her great love with James is not finished after all.

When Aimee meets Lacy, Lacy originally contends that she is a friend. Aimee does not recognize her but realizes Lacy claims to be a psychic, based on Lacy's card. As such, Lacy is not who she first appears to be, and the idea that people are not who they first appear to be is an important theme that will become central to the plot of the novel in coming chapters. Aimee herself begins to realize she is not the person she previously believed herself to be, but the person her parents believed her to be – that she can be independent of James.

The reader should note the very honest, but very difficult, conversation Mom and Dad have with Aimee when they not only tell her they will be selling the Old Irish Goat, but that Aimee now has a new chance at life without James. Aimee's losing James allows her to find herself, as the reader will come to see. At the same time, she already begins to feel herself being attracted to Ian, but she resists his romantic advances not only because it is too soon, but because she harbors the hope that James might still be alive. In keeping with the thematic argument that love must always be pursued, Aimee first needs to figure out what is going on with James – whether he is alive or truly dead.

Had Aimee married James, she would have also been marrying into his family. The reader is already gaining hints that things with James's family are not only not what they appear to be at first – an upstanding, wealthy family with a family-owned and operated business – but that James's family problems would have also become Aimee's family problems. (Consider, for example, the unnervingly close relationship between Claire and her nephew.) Marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage, Lonsdale contends – and this thematic argument will itself become immensely critical by the end of the novel. At the same time, none of this matters to Aimee because she would have done anything for James. Now without James, Aimee is devastated – and surprised to learn that eight boxes full of his paintings have suddenly disappeared from the garage.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Aimee hang on so desperately to Lacy's contention that James is still alive? Why is it so difficult for Aimee to accept the idea that James is dead?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Aimee resist Ian's romantic advances? Do you believe these are appropriate reasons to resist romance? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Aimee's parents believe that, without James, Aimee will have a chance at an independent life? How does Aimee react to their contention? Why?

Vocabulary

quivered, bookending, reverberated, wailed, stifling, peruse, niche, pretentious



Part One, Chapters 7 – 12

Summary

Chapter 7 – Aimee and Nadia head to the gallery opening. Nadia encourages Aimee to have fun. The place is packed. Wendy is happy to see Aimee and Nadia. Wendy brings Nadia away to speak to someone about design, while Ian and Aimee talk. They are happy to see one another, but Ian is taken away to address the crowds as it is his work that is the main attraction for the evening. Later, Ian heads out with Aimee to celebrate her birthday with coffee and dessert at La Petite Maison. The outing goes well, even though Ian explains he will be leaving for ten days on a photography trip. He tells Aimee he hopes to see her when he returns.

Chapter 8 – Aimee recalls the many conversations she and James had about getting married, and remembers how James did not like Phil because Phil was not nice. She remembers giving James a present of paint when his own parents would not buy him any. When James's mother would not allow him to accept the gift, Aimee kept it so that James would be able to use them whenever he was with her at Phil's suggestion. Aimee also remembers Phil apologizing for Claire's meanness about the paints, saying Claire is the only mother-like figure he has, and that his own father is never around because he is always working. Aimee remembers that, as the years passed, she grew closer with James while James's artistic skills grew better.

Chapter 9 – In the present, Kristen and Nadia are excited to learn that Aimee is determined to open a restaurant. Kristen and Nadia want to help however they can. In the meantime, they celebrate Aimee's 27th birthday. Nadia is glad to know things went so well between Ian and Aimee, and tells Aimee she will get Ian's number from Wendy for her. It is then that Aimee sees Lacy in the club they go to. She and Lacy go into the restroom where Aimee challenges Lacy to prove James is not dead. Aimee suddenly has visions of James in the water, bullets slicing past him, and then not remembering who he is.

Aimee shakes her head and thinks she is drunk. Aimee then suddenly comes to, having passed out in the restroom. Kristen and Nadia reassure a concerned group of girls who have gathered around that it is Aimee's birthday, and that she has had too much to drink or that perhaps she has had an allergic reaction to MSG in Chinese food eaten earlier. Nadia brings Aimee home and decides to spend the night with her.

Chapter 10 – The next morning, Aimee believes Lacy must have been an hallucination. She tries to refocus on planning for Aimee's Café. Suddenly, Ian arrives at the house, apologizing for the hour but asking for Aimee's number. Aimee gives him her number. Later, she prepares to call Thomas to ask him to cosign, but is surprised when Joe Russo arrives at her door.



Joe asks about the business Aimee wants to run. She explains she primarily wants her place to be a specialty coffee shop. Joe reveals he lost his wife five years ago, and could never pick up the pieces. He says he knows Aimee is trying to pick up the pieces. He then offers her the building at a five-year lease. Joe says that Aimee has people looking out for her, and that the deal over leasing the building is between him and her. Aimee agrees, and shakes his hand.

Chapter 11 – Dad, Nadia, and Kristen accompany Aimee to Joe’s shop. They realize the place will need a lot of work. Aimee explains the place will be called Aimee’s: Slow-Brewed Coffees & Gourmet Eatery. Kristen, Nadia, and Dad agree to help however they can. It is believed Aimee will be able to open within a year. Ian visits later on, back from his photography trip. Ian is excited to learn that Aimee is moving forward, and offers to help. As they get to talking, Aimee explains about losing James while Ian holds her hands. She gently turns down Ian’s romantic advances, saying she is not yet ready and that she needs to be independent for a while. She promises to tell Ian when she is ready.

Chapter 12 – Aimee recalls how it was in high school that she fell in love with James. She remembers how the first time he took her in his arms was to show her he was taking dance lessons, which in turn led to their first kiss. She remembers James having to leave after that, because Phil was coming to visit, and James being unhappy about this. She also remembers learning from Phil about how hard James’s father, Edgar, could be on James and Thomas. She remembers Phil explaining that Edgar took over Donato Enterprises when Phil’s own father got sick, and that Phil was due to inherit the company upon graduation from college. She also remembers Phil telling her he would date her if things did not work out with James, but being unable to think of anything else but kissing James.

Analysis

Although Aimee continues to resist Ian’s romantic advances, she does not completely count them out, either. Her willingness to give him her number, as well as to be in touch with him, are proof that though she still loves James, she cannot remain lost in the past. Aimee’s own decision to move ahead with her plans for a coffee shop underscore the point her parents made about being independent of James and the past, and in so doing, continues to evince the thematic idea that losing James mean Aimee is able to find herself. Indeed, one of Aimee’s newest reasons for resisting Ian’s romantic advances is that she does need to be single for a while, and that she needs to be independent for a while. In other words, she has to find herself – and she hopes it will be through building a business in leasing what used to be Joe’s shop.

However, Aimee continues to resist Ian’s romantic advances also for the reason that she holds out hope James is still alive. The reader should note that as Aimee looks forward to her future – one that will hopefully include James – as she begins to look back at her past with James. Entire chapters are to be devoted through the rest of the novel to Aimee’s remembering the past with James. She cannot let the past go, and



cannot let James go. This is the strength of her love for James. It is stronger than anything else in her life, and expounds perfectly upon the thematic idea that true love must always be pursued.

This is understandable especially when seen in context of the scene where Aimee has visions of James's near-death experience. The reader should note that these visions are never totally explained, except perhaps by the belief in psychics, or a connection so strong between Aimee and James that she is actually seeing what he experienced because of this shared love. Aimee, as the reader notes, at first tries to dismiss the visions as nothing more than an alcohol-induced hallucination, but she cannot shake the hauntingly real images she has seen.

No one – not even James – is who they appear to be at first, Lonsdale continues to contend in this section of the novel. This is to be seen in conjunction with the theme that marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage as well. It is discovered through Aimee's reflections on the past that James and Thomas were given high expectations by their parents, and that their parents could be incredibly hard on them. At the same time, it is discovered that Donato Enterprises was intended to go to Phil's control and ownership when Phil became old enough, but it is clear from the start of the novel that Phil, even years later after the memories Aimee recalls, does not control the family company. Why this is so is not yet revealed.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Aimee continue to resist Ian's romantic advances? What new reason does she add to the fold? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What visions does Aimee have while in the bathroom? Why is she so shaken by these visions? How does she attempt to explain them? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Aimee decide to open a business? Why does she specifically choose to do coffee and gourmet foods?

Vocabulary

litigation, turbulent, cursory, agreement, midstride, interjected, incoherent, turgid



Part One, Chapter 13 – Part Two, Chapter 18

Summary

Chapter 13 – One year after James's death, Aimee's shop is preparing to open for business. Aimee considers that she never thought she would be a single independent business owner - or be without James. She is proud of herself. Despite all this, she continues to wonder if James is still alive, and decides she must find a way to find out for sure without her parents knowing.

Meanwhile, Ian, who knows how to handle coffee, signs on to help train employees when Aimee's only experienced barista suddenly quits to move to London. He even takes on regular work at Aimee's in between photography expeditions, and arranges with Aimee to have some of his work displayed there. He also gifts Aimee with her favorite photo of his, Belize Sunrise. Aimee must resist her desire to give in to James romantically, telling him she likes him but cannot act on it because she believes James may still be alive. She explains to Ian about Lacy's warnings, the bathroom visions, James's missing paintings, and the unseen body of James lead her to believe James is still alive. Instead of making fun of Aimee, Ian explains his own father hired a psychic to help find him when he was lost as a kid. Ian says he can understand how much Aimee loved James, but says he hopes she is not using the psychic as an excuse not to fall for him, because he has already fallen for her.

Chapter 14 – Aimee's place does a soft launch. Her parents are first to arrive. The soft launch goes well, and Aimee can hear James's voice telling her she did it. Mom and Dad congratulate Aimee. When Thomas arrives, Aimee questions him about James's paintings. Thomas has no idea what has happened to them, but knows it could not have been his mom who took them because she was never interested in James's artwork. Aimee begins to feel Thomas out about James, but Thomas says that James is definitely gone and buried.

Thomas says he is glad Joe gave her a second chance, which causes Aimee to wonder how Thomas knew about Joe's reconsidering. It is then that Thomas's face hardens when he looks past Aimee, but when Aimee looks, all she sees is people in line. Thomas explains he is fine, but that he merely thought he recognized someone. He leaves quickly. Aimee then receives a mysterious postcard through a waitress left by a customer, promoting an art gallery in Mexico, El studio del pintor, featuring an image of one of James's missing paintings. Aimee is stunned.

Aimee looks around the shop and is again proud of herself, causing her to remember telling James's father about her future plans when she was younger, during which time Phil confronted Edgar over the killing of the Costas deal. Aimee recalls Edgar saying he killed the deal over Costas illegally obtaining wood for their furniture. She remembers



how Phil angrily outed James's secret painting dates at Aimee's house in revenge for accusing Edgar of wanting Thomas to take over the company, after which Edgar told Phil to get out. Aimee also recalls Edgar not really caring that James secretly painted, but explaining that it was Claire who insisted her boys only do things with their lives that would help them in some way with the family company. Aimee then remembers going to have sex with James in their secret spot, a beautiful meadow, while suspecting that Phil had followed them.

Chapter 15 – Looking through photos of the soft opening, Aimee finds Lacy in one of the pictures holding the postcard. Researching online, Aimee discovers nothing has changed about the hotel, Casa del sol, a card from which she has found in her wallet; while she learns the gallery, in Puerto Escondido, has been opened within the last two years. Aimee wonders why Lacy is urging her to such a place since James had gone to Cancun, checked into a hotel in Playa del Carmen, and had fished off of Cozumel. She is confused because Thomas claimed to have retrieved Thomas's body from the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, not Oaxaca.

Aimee fills Kristen in on everything, and asks to speak to Nick about what she is thinking. Kristen agrees, so Aimee fills in Nick on what she knows. Nick thinks it is possible the painting on the postcard could have been purchased through an unknown source, and that Lacy could be a hired informant or a hired form of bait. He thinks she could also be a con artist. Nick believes James is dead. Nick puts Aimee in touch with Ray Miles, a shady private investigator who is very good at his business. Ray agrees to take the case.

Another year passes. As it does, Aimee notices how thin and sick Thomas looks, for Donato Enterprises had been a wreck when he assumed control. Aimee considers that, if James is alive somewhere, it means something bigger than her has been going around that she had been too naïve to notice.

Chapter 16 – It is now November and Aimee is 28. Ray has finished his investigation and confirmed that James did fly to Cancun, check into his hotel in Playa del Carmen, and went fishing during which he fell overboard. He has confirmed the news stories about the incident are all legitimate. Aimee also learns the painting on the postcard has been claimed by the gallery owner himself, saying his style is his own and any similarities are coincidental. Aimee is deeply upset. Kristen hopes this will bring closure for her.

That night, a package arrives for Aimee from Oaxaca without a return address. It is one of James's paintings, signed with his initials. A note is enclosed from Lacy, saying this is the proof, that James is safe, that he must now learn the truth, and that Aimee must come to Oaxaca. The note also reveals that Lacy has only ever become involved because she has been asked to.

Aimee is stunned, because Ray's e-mail that he does not believe there is any solid evidence James is still alive, and that he recommends calling off the search. Aimee, in tears, then calls Kristen to tell her what has happened. Aimee books a hotel room in



Puerto Escondido. Nadia arrives later that night to try to talk Aimee out of going. Aimee will not be deterred. Nadia tells Aimee she needs to let James and the past go, but Aimee cannot. Nadia believes Aimee is being manipulated by Lacy. Nadia says Aimee cannot go alone, then calls for Ian, who has volunteered to go along on the trip.

Part Two: The Emerald Coast, Puerto Escondido, Mexico

Chapter 17 – Aimee checks into the beachfront Playa del sol Hotel in Puerto Escondido. She awaits Ian’s arrival, who is on a later flight. Aimee wants to find James, but she also fears finding him because she does not know what to expect. She also now has had an entirely different life without him, and she does not know if she can take him back after everything that has happened. Aimee, with the help of Imelda Rodriguez who works at the desk, is able to track down El estudio del pintor, owned by J. Carlos Dominguez.

Ian arrives moments later. Aimee reveals what she has learned. Aimee reveals that James preferred to work in acrylics, that he created a special blue called Les bleus de mon bebe (My Baby’s Blues) to match Aimee’s eyes, that he loved working in that color, and that he always signed his name in all his paintings. When Aimee shows Ian the picture of Lacy, he reveals her name is actually Elaine “Laney” Saunders, the psychic profiler his dad hired years ago.

Chapter 18 – Aimee and Ian walk to El estudio del pintor. Aimee is frustrated that Ian keeps stopping to take pictures, but chastises herself because Ian has gone out of his way to help her. When they arrive at the gallery, they discover it is closed for the moment. Ian checks with the next-door real estate agent, Celine, and finds out Carlos has a habit of closing early, especially when training for a marathon. Aimee calls Kristen to fill her in on what has happened so far. Suddenly, a man comes running along and says hello to Aimee, saying it looks as if Aimee has seen a ghost. Aimee is stunned. It is James. The man introduces himself as Carlos.

Analysis

Love must always be pursued. That much is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt in this section of the novel. Aimee’s opening of – and the success of – her coffee shop demonstrates that she has become the truly independent person that her parents wanted her to be. Yet, the opening of a new phase of her life through the opening of the coffee shop also brings up the past. Lacy reappears with a postcard – and the reader should carefully note the postcard, with a Mexican mailing address – bearing an image of one of James’s paintings. Aimee is stunned and confused, but ever hopeful that James is still alive. As a result, she is determined to pursue her love for James by pursuing James to the ends of the Earth if needed, including down in Mexico. She asks Ian this much – what he would do to find someone he loved who was missing – and Ian says he would go to all corners of the Earth to find that person.

Ian himself is in love with Aimee. It is among the two major reasons why he decides to go to Mexico with her. He does not want her to face such a serious and potentially



traumatic experience alone. His love for her is clear through his willingness to see things through with her. Yet, at the same time, Ian's determination to go to Mexico with Aimee brings to light the thematic argument that sometimes, the greatest act of love is to let the one you love go. Ian realizes that it is very possible James could be found, and his love for Aimee will ultimately be rejected. However, he would rather have his own love go unrequited and see Aimee happy, than see Aimee miserable but returning his love.

Ian's selflessness is, however, not all there is to him, as in keeping with the argument that not everyone is as they first appear. As the reader discovers, Aimee finds James just where she believes she will find him in Mexico. But James is not as he first appears. He insists his name is Carlos. Aimee is stunned to have found James, and she is horrified that James is calling himself Carlos. Tragically, in this instance, it is clear that while Aimee has found herself and found James, James has somehow lost himself – or seems to have. As the reader will note, Aimee has both desperately wanted to, and feared, finding James. Thomas, and all the others who believed James to be dead, are thus proven to be wrong. The reader should note carefully the concern Thomas exhibits while at Aimee's coffee shop, in which he says he thinks he has noticed someone he knows, while the package that arrives for Amy bearing one of James's paintings is in direct conflict with Ray's revelation that he could not find anything about James.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Aimee so impressed, and so proud of herself, for opening her own coffee shop? How does she consider this in lieu of the idea of her being an independent person?

Discussion Question 2

What evidence finally convinces Aimee to go to Mexico? Why does she ignore the results of the private investigation to do so?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ian go to Mexico with Aimee – especially when he loves her, and knows Aimee could very well find James?

Vocabulary

ethereal, askance, acquiesced, lucrative, vehemently, gaunt, ludicrous, boisterous



Part Two, Chapters 19 – 25

Summary

Chapter 19 – James looks at Aimee as if he has never seen her before. Aimee is shocked and stunned. She begins to have a panic attack, which James helps her through. James insists his name is Carlos, and that Aimee must have him confused with someone else. Aimee leaves James behind to find Ian and tell him what has happened. She says the only difference between the James she knew and the James she saw is a little scarring in the face. Aimee considers that James might have amnesia, or no memory at all because he acted like a completely different person.

Chapter 20 – Aimee watches the man calling himself Carlos through the window of the gallery as he works inside before the opening, and notes how his movements are exactly like James's. Aimee heads into the gallery before it opens to speak with Carlos, saying he looks so much like James. She questions him, mentally urging him all the time to recognize her. Aimee shows him a picture of James, and even Carlos remarks they look similar. Aimee wants more time with Carlos, so she agrees to take a basic painting class with him so long as she has lunch with him afterwards. Aimee then meets up with Ian to reveal what has happened over lunch at the hotel. The waitress notices a photo Ian has out of Lacy, which she says is Lucy, one of Imelda's friends. Ian tells Aimee to follow her gut.

Chapter 21 – While Ian seeks out Imelda for information about Lacy/Lucy/Laney, Aimee goes to the beach. She calls Kristen to update her on everything that has happened. Kristen is stunned. When Ian meets up with Aimee, she thinks about how much she wants Ian – but wonders why she would be thinking this way when she is so close to James.

Aimee and Carlos get together for lunch. Carlos reveals he has had serious surgery on his face following an accident two years before. Ian joins the lunch, and introduces himself. Carlos reveals his full name to be Jaime Carlos Dominguez, which calls to mind James Charles Donato. Carlos excuses himself, and reminds Aimee of their painting class the following morning at ten.

Chapter 22 – Aimee and Ian go out on a dinner date. Ian urges her to forget about why they have come to Mexico, and to focus on each other for dinner. Aimee asks Ian why he has come. Ian explains that because of losing his mother, he has vowed never to lose someone who means so much to him again. Ian explains he cares a lot about Aimee, more than she knows. Aimee and Ian dance, during which time they kiss. Aimee is confused, wanting Ian and wanting James. Ian tells Aimee he loves her and wants her, but Aimee pushes away. Later, she realizes she loves Ian and goes to him, initiating sex. The next morning, Aimee feels horrible, as if she has betrayed James. She cries and leaves the room, leaving a confused Ian behind.



Chapter 23 – Aimee arrives at Studio del pintor. Aimee feels very guilty about the night before. Pia, a pretty young woman working at the front of the gallery, welcomes Aimee when she enters, saying Carlos has been talking about her all morning so Aimee must mean something to him. Pia says she is happy for Carlos because he has been so sad before Aimee. Aimee goes into the studio of the gallery, and behind a table, finds all of James's missing paintings. Aimee discovers numerous other paintings of a woman, each slightly different, but each with some of Aimee's features. Aimee confronts Carlos over this, but Carlos says the woman in the pictures is someone he dreams about routinely. Aimee identifies herself as the woman, and begins telling Carlos about who he is and his life. Carlos says his life is in Mexico, and identifies Imelda as his sister. Aimee persists, but Carlos tells her she needs to leave.

Chapter 24 – Aimee returns to the hotel thinking she has ruined things with both Carlos and Ian. Ian confronts Aimee, who says last night should never have happened. Ian believes it should have. Aimee reveals that she has found James's missing paintings. Ian then explains to Aimee that his mother had DID, or dissociative identity disorder, and that her two personalities were the loving Sarah and the scary Jackie. Sarah had no memory of Jackie. Ian explains his mother is the reason why his photography is never of people. He also explains that a specialist believed Sarah had been abused as a child, thus causing her DID. Ian reveals he wants to find Lacy, so that Lacy can help find his mother. Ian explains that recovery is not always possible, but that it can happen. He warns Aimee that James may never get his memories back. Ian then reveals his meeting with Imelda was cut short because Carlos is meeting with her, now.

Aimee rushes to find Imelda, but Ian cautions her to wait and process. Aimee agrees, realizing that James's trauma must have been psychological, and that someone must have fed him the identity of Jaime Carlos Dominguez given the identical initials to James Charles Donato. Aimee wonders if Imelda had anything to do with this. Aimee believes that James's travel records must have been falsified to confuse Ray. Aimee decides it is time to track down Imelda, but when she does, she sees her crying beside Carlos. As Aimee is about to confront them, Ian stops her, telling her that Imelda has told Carlos everything. Aimee cannot be stopped, and begins shouting at Imelda, demanding to know what has been done to Carlos. Imelda tells Aimee she has been expecting her for a long time as Carlos leaves.

Chapter 25 – Imelda brings Aimee to the beach. Imelda explains the night she found James, he was wandering along the beach, dazed, confused, and bloody. Imelda believes the strong current pushed him against some rocks, causing his injuries. Imelda does not know what exactly happened to James, but does explain she inherited the hotel from her husband, and that the hotel was in financial danger. She explains she took James to a hospital, but an American relation – whom Aimee believes to be Thomas – arrived to offer Imelda a check to keep quiet about the entire incident. Imelda explains that part of her deal with the American was not to ask questions, but that she did learn James's life was in danger. She explains she was to watch over him and keep him safe as another part of the deal.



Imelda explains that while James recovered, Thomas arranged a new life for him. Meanwhile, the checks from Thomas kept coming in. Imelda says she is a Christian woman and has greatly sinned, and must atone. She says Aimee can stay at the hotel, free of charge, as long as she wants. She also says, as part of her atonement, she went to Lacy to find someone who knew James from before.

Later, Aimee calls Kristen to tell her everything – including how she slept with Ian. Kristen tells Aimee to prepare for the worst, that James's memory may never come back, and that Aimee should embrace Ian. Aimee knows Ian needs her - but knows James needs her more. James, as Carlos, then shows up at Aimee's hotel door.

Analysis

The thematic argument that love must always be pursued is further vindicated in this section of the novel. While at first Aimee almost believes Carlos may not be James, subsequent evidence – including everything from Carlos's dreams about a woman who Aimee reveals to be herself, as well as the paintings Carlos has made of that woman, let alone the man's initials, style of painting, and mannerisms – convince Aimee beyond a shadow of a doubt that Carlos is James. Aimee, acting on true love and the clues proffered by Lacy, has managed to find the love of her life. However, Aimee's fear of finding James is also confirmed by the idea that James has DID – and so truly does not remember that he is James. Although James may appear to be James at first, it is clear that he is not the same person anymore. He is still James, true enough – but he is James turned into Carlos. Aimee feels herself falling in love with Ian, and even sleeps with him –but she believes this to be a mistake afterwards because she has still not gotten to the bottom of things with James.

It is through Imelda that Aimee comes to learn about how James came to be Carlos, and how Thomas arranged to put James into hiding. Imelda's revelations raise just as many questions as they answer. Imelda is among those who does not appear as she first appears to be. She is not merely the girl at the desk, but a young widow in desperate financial straits who happened to be in the right place at the right time not only to save Thomas, but to become part of the deal to shelter him. Why Thomas should choose to hide, rather than bring James home becomes one of the predominant mysteries Aimee must now seek an answer to – and this is further proof that marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage.

The courage and bravery Aimee demonstrates through her seeking out of James is not only evidence of her personal growth, but her love and independence as well. In the past, Aimee's life consisted of doing everything James wanted – not because he was domineering or demanding, but because she simply loved him. In the present, Aimee's courage and bravery speak to her independence, and speak to the fact that losing James has allowed Aimee to find herself. Now, Aimee has found James, and the issue becomes helping James to find himself. James's future is wholly dependent upon Aimee at this point, especially now that Carlos has had the truth revealed to him by Imelda. It



was Imelda, it is discovered, who hired Lacy to come and find Aimee as a matter of penance.

Discussion Question 1

What convinces Aimee that Carlos is actually James? What finally convinces Carlos that he has not always been Carlos? What does Aimee hope this will lead to? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ian believe that James has dissociative identity disorder? Does this give Aimee hope or heartache? Why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Imelda factor into the events that led to James's becoming Carlos? Why did she become involved in the first place? What is Aimee's reaction to Imelda's involvement? Why?

Vocabulary

fluttering, eons, serene, bewildered, fugue, ascertain, pacify, enigma

Part Two, Chapters 26 – Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 26 – Aimee tells Carlos to trust her. Carlos asks her to dinner. Carlos and Aimee talk about everything but themselves as they walk to dinner, at which point Carlos says everything is simply overwhelming. Carlos talks about his life in Porto Escondido, about having to recover after the accident. Aimee urges him to dance with her, but Carlos says he does not dance anymore. It is then that Aimee sees him as Carlos, and not James.

Chapter 27 – Carlos and Aimee head to the gallery to pick up his Jeep Wrangler. Aimee asks Carlos to bring her to his home, not far away. Carlos agrees. Aimee is amazed to discover he lives on the beach. Carlos says he could not imagine living anywhere else. He asks about his life as James, and about Aimee. She shows him their engagement ring. Carlos says that all he can feel is anger about what has been done to him. He says he is not sure he wants to remember the past, or he will lose everything he loves. Aimee is stunned by this. She is also stunned to learn that Carlos has adopted a five year-old son named Julian, and an infant named Marcus whose mother Raquel died of a brain aneurysm. Carlos explains he was married to Raquel for a very short time. He reveals his kids are away for the weekend. Carlos tells Aimee that James is dead, and she must accept this. Aimee then tells Carlos their story as Aimee and James.

Chapter 28 – Carlos holds Aimee's hands as she tells him their story, including how James proposed to her in their meadow. She recounts how James ran back to the car, during which time Phil came after her, attempted to rape her in revenge for losing the family company, and was thrown back and knocked out by James. She recalls how she and James then had to return to share the news with their parents, while keeping what happened between them and Phil to themselves. Aimee recounts being unnerved by the experience of Phil, but thrilled to be engaged to James.

Aimee remembers how Thomas returned home next, full of congratulations for her and James, only later to overhear a conversation between James and Thomas in which both realized Phil had to be dealt with. She remembers James telling Thomas he is tired of Phil's illegal dealings and use of dirty money, and says if Phil is not cut out at once, he will quit. She then remembers Edgar complimenting her and her parents as being good people, and being welcome additions to the family.

Chapter 29 – Looking at Carlos, Aimee realizes now that they should have told their families about Phil. Aimee realizes that, since James's disappearance, she has become a stronger, more confident person. Aimee realizes that Carlos now is living the life he had always dreamed of as James, where he could paint, have his own family, and a peaceful life.



Back at the hotel, Aimee finds Thomas waiting for her in the bar. Aimee reveals what happened the day of the engagement. Thomas says he never knew, and that Phil will never bother her again. Thomas reveals he was protecting James from Phil, who had been using Mexican drug cartel money in business dealings. Thomas reveals he and his father were cooperating with the DEA to do away with Phil. Thomas reveals James's decision to go to Mexico was to confront Phil because James grew impatient with waiting for Thomas to handle things. He explains James did not know about the DEA's involvement.

Thomas then reveals that James had been trying to protect Aimee from everything all along. He also reveals that it was Phil who probably tried to kill James, and that James had to stay "dead" so Phil would not deviate from his illegal activities to find James and kill him otherwise. Thomas explains James was only supposed to be in hiding a few months at most, but the DEA took longer than expected, and by then, James was thoroughly living as Carlos. Thomas explains Ray, the PI, figured out everything and had to be paid off. He also explains that it was he who paid Joe to allow Aimee to rent the café building. Thomas then reveals then that James went to Cancun to mislead everyone about confronting Phil, who was elsewhere; and that James's casket was full of sandbags.

Chapter 30 – Back at the hotel, Aimee reveals to Ian what has happened, and reveals she has given back her ring to Carlos. Ian reveals Imelda has promised to help him find Lacy. Back home, Aimee explains everything that has happened to Nadia and Kristen. Ian, hurt by the events in Mexico, does not speak to Aimee for weeks. Nick wants to visit James, but Aimee tells Nick that James would not know him. When Ian returns, he reveals he did not find Lacy, but is not giving up. Aimee then confesses her love for Ian, and they kiss.

Epilogue – Five years pass. Carlos dreams of having to protect his fiancée from his brother, and having to leave a boat while being shot at, only to be washed ashore into large rocks. When Carlos awakens from his nightmare, he cannot recognize anything around him. Looking through his things, he discovers a note written to himself in which he tells himself he is Jaime Carlos Dominguez, once known as James Charles Donato.

Analysis

At last, Aimee comes to the full truth of what led to James's near-death and fake funeral. She learns that James – ever the honest and moral man – sought to confront the drug cartel-associating Phil, but nearly got himself killed in the process. To protect James, Thomas ensured that James could not be found until things were safe – but by then, James was thoroughly ensconced in his new life as Carlos, thanks to the DID. As Aimee learns fully here, marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage. Aimee herself recognizes that she will never have to deal with the family baggage again, yet she also realizes that her ultimate life apart from James means she has become a far more independent person than she would have otherwise been – independent not only in terms of her own character, but independent of family drama.



Still, Aimee is glad she has pursued James to Mexico. She now has the full truth, and realizes how important it is that love itself must always be pursued. Aimee understands that by losing James, she has been able to find herself, but also has a semblance of closure with James. She will always wonder about James, and how James is doing in his life as Carlos, but she cannot allow her life to be held back by the past any longer. She has to move on with her own life. In a sense, Aimee has attended James's funeral by traveling to Mexico.

Thomas recognizes early on that letting James go so that he can live his own life as Carlos, free and peaceful, is a sacrifice he must make. Familial love means letting go sometimes. Aimee learns the same. She comes to believe that Carlos will be forever happy in the life he has now – a life he always wanted when he was James, but could never have. Aimee lets him go out of love, wanting to see him happy. By letting Carlos go, Aimee knows she can move on in her own life. As such, she commits to Ian – and by the time of the epilogue, is presumably married to him. However, the epilogue reveals a twist in the story: it appears as if Carlos is having a remission from DID, and his discovery of the note will change his life in unknown ways – and, perhaps, Aimee's as well.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Aimee decide to leave Carlos alone and allow Carlos to live his life rather than forcing him to return to his previous life as James?

Discussion Question 2

If you were in Aimee's position, would you attempt to continue to help James recover his identity or allow him to live on as Carlos? Why?

Discussion Question 3

If you were in James's position, would you want to know the truth about your created identity and your situation? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

tautness, vile, prone, surname, extrapolated, appalled, ballistic



Characters

Aimee

Aimee Tierney is the 27-year-old narrator and principal protagonist of the novel *Everything We Keep* by Kerry Lonsdale who believes her fiancé, James, has been killed on a trip to Mexico. Passive, quiet, and dependent on James, Aimee is devastated, but her Mom, Dad, and friends Kristen and Nadia, rally to her side. They all urge her to mourn but to move on with her life. Aimee decides to do so by opening a coffee shop.

At the same time, however, Aimee begins receiving clues and visions revealing James to be alive and living in Mexico. At the same time, Aimee meets and begins to fall for a photographer named Ian. Aimee resists romance with Ian until she can learn the truth about James. Aimee travels with Ian to Mexico to find James, and discovers him living as Carlos due to a mix of family drama and DID. Aimee decides to let James go, because he has thoroughly invested himself in his life as Carlos, and because she loves him and wants him to be happy. Aimee moves on with her own life at that point by committing romantically to Ian.

James

James Charles Donato is the fiancée of Aimee, and is presumed dead through much of the novel. James is utterly in love with Aimee and looks forward to a long life with her. James is also the brother of Thomas, and the cousin of Phil, all of whom work in the family business. When James discovers Phil is dealing with Mexican drug cartels, James – unaware Thomas and the company are already cooperating with the DEA – goes down to Mexico to confront Phil, and is nearly killed. James, for unknown reasons, develops DID during his escape, and forgets who he is. He begins to live as Carlos, and remains Carlos until five years after the main events of the novel end – and he appears to be undergoing a remission.

Carlos

Jaime Carlos Dominguez, who goes by the name Carlos but is actually James, believes himself to be a longtime resident of Mexico whose sister is Imelda, and who has long owned and operated an art gallery. Carlos knows he has a memory problem, but believes it stems from an accident on the water. A widower, Carlos has a step-son and a biological son he raises while he paints and runs a local art gallery. Carlos is stunned by the truth about his identity given to him by Imelda and Aimee, but reveals he is happy in his life in Mexico. Carlos cannot remember anything concrete from his life before apart from nightmares featuring an unknown woman, and so he does not leave Mexico with Aimee. However, five years later, Carlos's DID goes into remission, and he wakes up without knowledge of himself as Carlos.



Lacy

Lacy Saunders, also known as Laney and Lucy, is a psychic who was instrumental in locating Ian as a child when he went missing. In the present, Lacy, as the request of Imelda, gets in touch with Aimee to let her know that James is still alive. Over the course of two years, Lacy provides clues to Aimee to this effect, until James is finally safe. It is then that Lacy directly writes to Aimee, providing one of James's paintings, to let her know she must come see James.

Ian

Ian Collins is a photographer in his thirties who becomes romantically interested in Aimee, ultimately falling in love with her. Out of love for Aimee, Ian travels with her to find out the truth about James, even if it means he and Aimee can never be together. Ian also travels to Mexico with Aimee in the hopes of finding Lacy, for Lacy was instrumental in finding him when he went missing as a child. He now hopes Lacy will be able to help him find his mother, who suffers from DID and has been missing for years. Ian helps Aimee to deal with the loss of James and the situation with Carlos, and he and Aimee become romantically involved by the end of the novel.

Kristen

Kristen Garner is one of Aimee's best friends, and is married to Nick Garner, a best friend of James's. Kristen is kind, supportive, and unfailingly loyal to Aimee through James's funeral, the opening of Aimee's coffee shop, and Aimee's decision to go to Mexico. Aimee routinely calls Kristen to keep her apprised of progress in Mexico.

Nadia

Nadia is one of Aimee's best friends. She is unfailingly loyal, kind, and supportive of Aimee through the funeral of James, the opening of Aimee's coffee shop, and Aimee's decision to go to Mexico. It is Nadia who helps introduce Aimee to Ian, and helps encourage Aimee to pursue a romantic relationship with Ian.

Ray

Ray Miles is a private investigator who often does work for Nick Garner's law firm. Aimee hires Ray to look into the idea that James could still be alive. After an extensive investigation, Ray says no such information can be found. It is later revealed that Thomas paid Ray off in order to protect James from being found out.



Imelda

Imelda Rodriguez is the owner of Playa del sol in Puerto Escondido, having inherited the hotel and resort from her husband after his death. In heavy debt, Imelda was at the right place in the right time to assist James upon his washing ashore. She later accepted money from Thomas to keep quiet and help protect James. This money she used for her financially struggling hotel. Eventually, in penance as a Christian, Imelda seeks out Lacy to let Aimee know the truth.

Phil

Phil Donato is the underhanded and cruel cousin of James and Thomas. The heir apparent to Donato Enterprises, Phil is passed over due to his handling of dirty money from Mexican drug cartels, and his illegal and immoral dealings. James already hates Phil for attempting to rape Aimee the very night he and Aimee get engaged. When James confronts Phil over his dealings in Mexico, it is believed that Phil tries to have James killed, or attempts to kill James himself.

Claire

Claire Donato is the wife of Edgar, the wife of Thomas and James, and the aunt of Phil. Cruel and highly expectant of her sons and husband, Claire has a disturbingly close relationship with Phil, and is believed to have had an affair with Phil's father as well. It is Claire who refuses to let Thomas and James do anything with their lives that will not serve the family company, and it is Claire whose maiden name is Donato, forcing Edgar to take her maiden name to benefit his dealings with the company.



Symbols and Symbolism

Lacy's business card

Lacy's business card symbolizes the buried truth. Lacy hands Aimee a business card during James's funeral, telling Aimee that James is not dead. The card reveals Lacy to be a psychic. Aimee does not know how to respond to this, but keeps the card and gets in touch with Lacy some time later in order to learn more about the idea that James might actually still be alive – a truth buried by Thomas.

\$227,000 check

A check for \$227,000 symbolizes the duplicity of Thomas, and the desire to keep Aimee distracted from the truth. The check is given to Aimee at James's funeral by Thomas in the hopes she will focus on using the money for her next stage in life rather than pursuing the truth about James. The money comes from James's life insurance policy, to which Aimee was set to become a beneficiary upon marriage.

James's missing paintings

Eight missing boxes of James's paintings symbolize deception and safety. Aimee discovers the boxes of paintings missing after James's funeral, and learns later from Thomas that Thomas arranged to have the paintings sent to Mexico to reinforce the cover that James is Carlos, an amnesiac American-Mexican painter. The missing paintings show up in Carlos's studio when Aimee visits, and help her realize Carlos is James.

Paints

Aimee purchases paints for James, symbolizing both her love for James, and James's desire for a different life. Aimee's purchasing of paints allows him to work at her house when James's own mother will not allow him to paint. James becomes an amazing artist, and it is because of James's talents with paint that Aimee is later able to find him.

Studio del pintor postcard

A postcard for Studio del pintor symbolizes that James is still alive. The postcard bears an image of one of James's missing paintings, and advertises a gallery in Mexico. The postcard is given to Aimee by Lacy through a waitress, and reinforces Aimee's determination to go to Mexico.



Package from Oaxaca

A package from Oaxaca, Mexico, demonstrates to Aimee that James is still alive. The package contains both one of James's actual missing paintings, and a note from Lacy saying Aimee must come to Mexico to get James because James is safe now, and needs to know the truth. Aimee is fully convinced by the package that James is alive, so she travels to Mexico.

Checks for Imelda

Checks for Imelda symbolize desperation. Imelda is paid off by Thomas to watch out for, and to protect James. The checks are desperately needed by Imelda to financially support her heavily indebted hotel and resort. The checks are desperately written by Thomas to pay for the protection James, and to give him cover through Imelda.

Engagement ring

An engagement ring symbolizes both hope and loss. The night Aimee and James get engaged, James gives her a beautiful engagement ring, demonstrating not only his love for her but their shared hope for the future. Aimee wears the ring for two years in hopes James is still alive. When she finds out that James is now Carlos, she gives the engagement ring back to him, demonstrating everything she has lost.

Nightmares

Nightmares symbolize the truth of Carlos's past, things that his conscious mind cannot remember. Carlos has nightmares about being shot at in the water, about having to protect his fiancée, and about a mysterious woman. Carlos's unconscious mind recalls the things his DID-plagued conscious mind cannot. Carlos has such a nightmare when his DID suddenly goes into remission.

Carlos's note to himself

Carlos's note to himself symbolizes truth. Carlos, upon entering remission from DID, discovers a note written to himself which reveals himself to be James, though he has been living as Carlos. The note gives Carlos some bearing, but what will become of Carlos because of the note is not known.



Settings

Los Gatos

Los Gatos, California, is the setting for the first half of the novel. While little is said directly about Los Gatos, it is clear that it is an upper-middle to lower-upper class area, for Aimee's family owns and operates a restaurant (that later goes into debt) while James and his family, owners of a multimillion dollar company, move into the same area. Los Gatos appears to be primarily rural-suburban, for Aimee and James live close enough to walk to one another's houses, but also live close enough to the country to be able to go hang out, make love in, and get engaged in, a meadow.

The meadow

The meadow, located not far from Los Gatos out in the countryside, is the favorite spot of Aimee and James. It is in the meadow that they spend much time, and often have sex. The meadow affords them beautiful views and peace, but no privacy. The night James proposes to Aimee, Phil attacks them and tries to rape Aimee, but James pummels Phil instead. The meadow is never the same place again for Aimee.

Aimee's coffee shop

Aimee's coffee shop, officially Aimee's: Slow-Brewed Coffees & Gourmet Eatery, is symbolic of Aimee's independence in life after James as well as beginnings. Alone, Aimee has built a business up from scratch, which becomes a hit locally. The coffee shop signals a new phase in Aimee's life, both in terms of now being a business owner (something she never before thought possible) and Lacy's arrival with a postcard bearing an image of one of James's paintings, signaling a new phase in Aimee's search for James.

Puerto Escondido

Puerto Escondido is a resort village on the Emerald Coast of Mexico, and symbolizes new beginnings and endings in the novel. Heavily frequented by tourists, Puerto Escondido is where James is hidden away by Thomas and Imelda, and is where Aimee travels with Ian to find James. Puerto Escondido is where James now lives as Carlos and owns the art gallery and studio, Studio del pintor. Aimee recognizes that Carlos is very happy with his life in Puerto Escondido, and will not give it up for anything, so she must let the past go, accept the end of things, and begin anew with Ian and begin anew without James.



Studio del pintor

Studio del pintor is an art gallery owned and operated by Carlos. It features his artwork and the artwork of many locals. Studio del pintor is visited several times by Aimee through the second half of the novel in her attempts to determine for sure that Carlos is James, and to help Carlos see who he truly is. When Aimee discovers James's missing paintings in the studio, as well as paintings of Carlos's dream woman who has Aimee's eyes, Aimee is fully convinced.



Themes and Motifs

Love must always be pursued

Love must always be pursued, argues Kerry Lonsdale in *Everything We Keep*. Love is an important and essential part of life, and when true love is found, it must be valued. This is certainly the case for both Aimee and Ian in the novel.

Aimee grows up alongside James. Each year she grows closer to him, and in high school, outright falls in love with him. They spend all the time together that they can, and plan on getting married after college and raising a family. James is willing to pursue love to whatever extent it must be pursued, traveling to Mexico to confront the corrupt Phil in order to protect not only his family, but his future wife.

When James is presumed dead, Aimee is devastated. It takes her two years to fully get her life back on track, but all the while, she hears rumors that James is not dead through Lacy. When Aimee receives one of his missing paintings, she has had enough and pursues her love of James all the way to Mexico to discover the truth. There, she finds James alive but changed.

Ian decides to accompany Aimee to Mexico, not only so she will not have to deal with whatever happens alone, but because he loves her. Ian's love of Aimee is something that matter so much to him, he is willing to pursue it no matter the cost. When Aimee returns from Mexico without James, Ian and Aimee pursue love with one another.

No one is who they appear to be at first

No one is who they appear to be at first, argues Kerry Lonsdale in *Everything We Keep*. First appearances are not always necessarily deceiving, but also do not always tell the full story about a person. Only getting to know someone makes this possible.

When Aimee first meets James, she finds him to be confident and outgoing. She later learns that this is a façade, as James must deal with overbearing parents with high expectations, who take the stress in their own lives out on him. The same is true for James. Phil, who at first seems to be a nice guy, later turns out to be pushy and angry. It is only revealed much later that Phil is a would-be rapist, and has been shuffling dirty money for Mexican drug cartels while engaging in other illegal and immoral business dealings.

Aimee also learns that Lacy is not exactly who she first appears to be. She did not psychically envision James still being alive, but was paid by Imelda to contact Aimee. Likewise, Imelda is not some horrible person, but someone who helped save James and helped to protect him in exchange for money to save her hotel and resort. Likewise, the James that Aimee finds in Mexico is no longer the James that went missing. Instead, he is now Carlos.



When Aimee meets Ian, she has no idea that Ian has had a difficult family past – including with his mother, who like James has DID. Ian comes to Mexico with Aimee on the appearance that he loves her and does not want her to face anything alone, but in reality also wants to find Lacy to help him find his mother. James, now Carlos, and by all appearances solidly Carlos, finally has a remission of his DID five years later – and so cannot even determine who he is based on his own appearance.

Marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage

Marrying into a family means marrying into their baggage, argues Kerry Lonsdale in *Everything We Keep*. Allowing people into one's life, or becoming a part of someone else's life, necessarily means bringing in the good and bad parts of their lives. This is something Aimee is not expecting, but something James is trying to avoid.

Aimee learns early on that James's family is very messed up. Possible affairs between family members, an unnervingly close relationship between Claire and her nephew, Phil, the high expectations of Thomas and James, and the emotional abuse suffered by Thomas and James, are all things Aimee now stands to become fully aware of. At the same time, James does not want Aimee to have to deal with these things.

If the family situation was not bad enough for James, the business situation is even worse. Phil, poised to take over the company, has been denied leadership for the reason of his illegal and immoral deals. This, taken together with his involvement with the Mexican drug cartels, only makes things worse. Scandal is very possible. James, seeking to protect Aimee, travels to Mexico to confront Phil, but is entirely unsuccessful in his efforts.

All this knowledge deeply weighs upon Aimee when she decides to let James live as Carlos. She does romantically commit to Ian, however, meaning that Ian must now inherit all of Aimee's emotional baggage that comes from her two years' worth of traumatic experiences and unsavory knowledge of the Donato family. Likewise, Aimee will come to inherit Ian's own traumatic past, including his currently missing mother.

Aimee's losing James allows her to find herself

Aimee's losing James allows her to find herself, argues Kerry Lonsdale in *Everything We Keep*. Aimee's belief that James is dead leads her to a journey of self-discovery, which in turn makes her a more courageous and independent person. Aimee's finding of herself also helps her to let James go in the end.

When James dies, Aimee is devastated. Her whole life has revolved around, and been planned around him. Aimee has never done anything without James, is totally dependent on him, and always defers to him – not because James is demanding or controlling, but because Aimee is utterly in love with him. When James dies, Aimee's



parents tell her that she now has a chance to live her life independently of James, and to become her own person.

Aimee decides she will open her own coffee shop. While she is helped along the way by her parents and her friends, the majority of what she does is hers. She feels proud of herself when the shop opens and is a hit, realizing she can make it on her own and that she can be proud of herself for a reason. Life is possible without James. She has done a very brave thing to open a shop on her own, and move on with her life.

This courage and independence bring her to Mexico alone, arriving before Ian and deciding to go to Mexico before waiting for anyone else to come along in the first place. Most of Aimee's attempts to find or reestablish contact with James are done alone. Her love for James, and her ability to survive without him, are what lead her to finally being able to walk away from James in the end.

Sometimes the greatest act of love is to let the one you love go

Sometimes the greatest act of love is to let the one you love go, argues Kerry Lonsdale in *Everything We Keep*. Love is an immensely powerful thing that can help inspire people to do incredible things. The greatest thing, however, is sacrificing one's own happiness for another's out of love.

When James learns that Phil is up to no good with the family company, and that things are not moving fast enough in dealing with him, James is willing to risk everything to confront Phil himself. James, set to be married, sacrifices the happiness surrounding his wedding in order to handle Phil so that Aimee will always be safe. James's sacrifice, however, leads to his near-death experience, and his development of DID.

Aimee travels to Mexico two years later to find James. There, she finds James thoroughly involved in his life as Carlos. She realizes how happy Carlos is, and how he is living the life James always wanted to live. Out of love for James, and in sacrifice of her own happiness, Aimee refuses to bother Carlos any longer, and will not force him to return to America with her. The hardest part of Aimee's love for James is letting go.

Ian, on the other hand, has risked his own chances at love with Aimee by traveling with her to Mexico to see what is going on with James. Ian knows he risks everything should things work out between Aimee and James, but this is a risk he is willing to take. His love would rather have him see Aimee happy with James while Ian himself is miserable, than see Ian himself happy with Aimee while Aimee herself is miserable.

Styles

Point of View

Kerry Lonsdale tells her novel *Everything We Keep* in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Aimee. This is done because the novel comprises Aimee's story of losing, finding, and losing James, while finding, losing, and finding love again. The first-person narrative mode creates an intimate relationship between Aimee and the reader, as the reader becomes the sole individual privileged with Aimee's innermost thoughts and feelings. This is critical given the immense emotional complexity of the situation, in which Aimee believes that James is dead, only later to hope against hope he is alive. This also allows the reader to understand not only Aimee's frame of mind, but the process of her thoughts and logic as she comes to accept that James is alive. At the same time, the limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative – Aimee does not know everything all at once, and only chapter by chapter does new information become available – is in keeping with the novel's identity as suspense. Additionally, the novel contains chapters where Aimee remembers the events of the past, reflecting on them from the present time, in which more information is presented relating to the situation with James.

Language and Meaning

Kerry Lonsdale tells her novel *Everything We Keep* in language that is simple, sad, and straightforward. The simple and straightforward language is a hallmark of the causal language of mainstream young people in the 2010s when the novel takes place, thus helping to fix the setting and creating an air of authenticity in the novel. The sadness in the language, found consistently throughout the novel, comes by way of Aimee's devastation over James's death, and her sad but realistic approach to her fledgling hope that James might still be alive. The simplicity and sadness of the language make Aimee's narration poignant, as profound emotions are conveyed with very simple sentences. Consider in Chapter 1 where Aimee addresses the emotional complexity of the situation at large in a handful of words without flair or flourish: "On our wedding day, my fiancé, James, arrived at the church in a casket" (1). Or consider the sad and reflective language of Chapter 2, where Aimee describes what life should have been: "We'd grown up together and made a promise to grow old together. I couldn't imagine wanting anything else than the life we'd planned together" (26). Or lastly, consider the dramatic poignancy and trepidation Aimee has on the search for James, where she explains that "While I wanted to find James, I feared I would find him" (167).

Structure

Kerry Lonsdale divides her novel *Everything We Keep* into two major parts, each subdivided into numbered chapters. The first part of the novel, Part One, takes place in



California. It deals with everything from James's death to Aimee's search to discover whether James could still be alive. Part Two deals with Aimee's time in Mexico looking for James, finding him, and dealing with the repercussions of the truth. Each part deals with a phase of Aimee's life, and becomes representative of that phase. Part One is Aimee's attempt to determine whether or not James is dead, and what her life could be like without him, whereas Part Two is Aimee's attempt to figure out what to do now that she knows James is alive, and what her life must be without him. Each chapter within each part deals with a specific set of events, situations, or circumstances relating to the overall plot of the part. While most of the chapters are arranged chronologically, a handful of chapters delve entirely into the past, with Aimee reflecting on the past from the present.



Quotes

On our wedding day, my fiancé, James, arrived at the church in a casket.
-- Aimee (Chapter 1)

Importance: As the novel begins, Aimee quickly and succinctly lays down the foundation for the rest of the novel. Expecting to be married to James, she must instead deal with his funeral. She is absolutely devastated. However, she is even more stunned by the revelation that Lacy makes to her.

Alive. James is alive.
-- Lacy (Chapter 1)

Importance: An unknown woman claiming to be Aimee's friend introduces herself as Lucy, and tells Aimee that James is still alive. Aimee is stunned. Lacy hands Aimee a card which reveals her to be a psychic. Aimee is confused, but as time passes, comes to suspect more and more that James may still be alive.

We'd grown up together and made a promise to grow old together. I couldn't imagine wanting anything else than the life we'd planned together.
-- Aimee (Chapter 2)

Importance: After Aimee learns that her parents plan to sell the family restaurant and encourage her to be her own person apart from James, Aimee cannot help but remember her life with James. She has known him since she was eight, and has always wanted to be with him. Because they were childhood sweethearts that grew into adult lovers, Aimee reveals just how much her planned life with James meant. There was never any other way to live for her.

My house was a mess. My life was a disaster. I was a wreck. Until the day I woke up.
-- Aimee (Chapter 4)

Importance: Aimee explains that her life has practically fallen apart without James. In so much pain, she does her best to keep busy and to avoid simple daily things, such as doing dishes and opening mail. She decides in October it is time to get her life in order, and decides to open her own restaurant just before she meets Ian.

Still, those images of him on the brink of death, almost drowning, haunted me.
-- Aimee (Chapter 10)

Importance: At a club with Kristen and Nadia, Aimee goes into the restroom after she believes she has seen Lacy. In the restroom, Aimee has a vision of James in the water being shot at, after which James emerges on the shore and cannot remember who he is. Aimee is deeply troubled by these visions, and struggles to determine whether she has hallucinated everything or not.



Looking back, I never imagined coming this far or accomplishing so much. I never fathomed the life of a single, independent business owner would be my life. Then again, I'd never imagined a life without James.

-- Aimee (Chapter 13)

Importance: When Aimee's coffee shop finally opens, she is very proud of herself. Her life has taken a direction she never would have thought possible otherwise. Until now, she believed her life could only ever work with James. Now she knows she can survive without him. She has picked up the pieces of her life and done something amazing with them.

If you learned someone you'd lost was still alive, but you had no idea where they were, what would you do?

-- Aimee (Chapter 13)

Importance: Aimee resists any romantic possibilities with Ian because she believes James is still alive. She explains as much to him, asking what he would do to find someone he thought he had lost. James says he would search every corner of the Earth. Aimee then explains to him why she doubts James is dead.

It was my birthright. Mine!

-- Phil (Chapter 14)

Importance: Aimee remembers the past as the novel unfolds, including how James's father ensured the Donato company would be morally and ethically sound, while Phil only wanted to make quick money. She remembers how Phil accused Edgar of grooming Thomas to take over the company instead of him, which enraged him. Aimee also recalls how Phil declared the company was his birthright before storming out.

Here's your proof. The danger has finally passed and James is safe. I've been asked to seek you out. It's time he learned the truth. Come to Oaxaca.

-- Lacy (Chapter 16)

Importance: Aimee receives this note from Lacy after she believes Ray Miles's private investigation into James's disappearance has been closed. The note accompanies an actual painting of James's. The note urges Aimee to come to Oaxaca so that James may learn the truth, and reveals that Lacy herself has been asked to seek Aimee out, revealing why Lacy ever became involved at all.

While I wanted to find James, I feared I would find him.

-- Aimee (Chapter 17)

Importance: When Aimee arrives in Mexico to find James, she explains she not only wants to find him, but fears finding him. She does not know what to expect, and has had an entirely different life without him in it. Aimee does not even know if she can take James back should she find him, after everything that has happened. As it turns out, Aimee does run into James, who insists his name is Carlos.



What happened to you, James?
-- Aimee (Chapter 24)

Importance: When Aimee discovers that Carlos is actually James, she learns from Ian that, like Ian's mother, James must have DID. However, what causes James's DID is unknown, and Aimee suspects that someone fed him the identity of Carlos for Carlos's initials – JCD – to be the same as James's –JCD. Aimee must now find out what happened.

I AM YOU.
-- James/Carlos (Epilogue)

Importance: Five years after the novel ends, Carlos awakens from a nightmare in which he is trying to protect his fiancée, has been shot at, and has been washed up onshore. Carlos realizes he can recognize nothing around him upon waking up. He is terrified. He finds a note written to himself in which he reminds himself he is Carlos, but also known as James.