

# **The Echo Maker Study Guide**

## **The Echo Maker by Richard Powers**

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## Plot Summary

In the wee hours of February 20, 2002, a 27-year-old man named Mark Schluter has a near fatal crash in his truck on a desolate stretch of highway near Kearney, Nebraska. Mark is taken to Good Samaritan Hospital and his older sister and only remaining relative, Karin Schluter, leaves her job to be with him during his recovery. When Mark comes to from a temporarily induced coma due to brain injury, he thinks that Karin is an imposter due to Capgras Syndrome in which a person does not recognize blood relatives after a head injury. Karin sees a mysterious note that was left in his hospital room supposedly from the person who rescued Mark the night of the accident but no one can be identified as the source. Frustrated by Mark's refusal to recognize her, Karin writes to noted neurologist, Gerald Weber, to enlist his help. Karin had always taken care of Mark due to lack of appropriate attention from their religious fanatic mother and lazy father so she leaves her job and home in Sioux City to take care of Mark during his recovery.

Mark slowly heals and is eventually moved to a rehab center where he takes a shine to a nursing assistant named Barbara Gillespie who dedicates time to Mark even after he returns home. Karin, who had been staying in Mark's mobile home, moves in with an old boyfriend named Daniel Riegel, a mild mannered man who is a devotee of protecting the environment for the cranes that return to the area every spring. Mark's paranoia extends to his friends now and he believes that he is being spied on and perhaps his accident was not an accident at all but a means of getting rid of him for some reason. Dr. Weber visits from New York, examines Mark and recommends therapy before quickly returning home. Dr. Weber is having issues of his own with his marriage and the fallout from critics who are not kind to his latest book.

Mark becomes obsessed with finding the author of the note for a clue to what caused his accident and even contacts a television crime show who broadcasts his story. Daniel enlists Karin to work at the crane nature preserve at the same time that she takes up with a former boyfriend, Robert Karsh, who is a town leader and particularly active in growth and expansion enterprises. Karin obsesses over Mark's compromised mental state and writes Dr. Weber, requesting that he return to help Mark. Dr. Weber meets Barbara at Mark's house one day and he is smitten by her, even telling his wife about her when he returns home. Robert Karsh's expansion group wins out over Daniel Riegel's preservationists and Daniel soon surmises that Karin was at the hub of sharing proprietary information about the nature preserve with Karsh so that he has an advantage over how the county land will be used.

Karin entreats Dr. Weber to return one more time to help Mark and this time Dr. Weber has a tryst with Barbara. It is finally Daniel who recognizes Barbara as a news broadcaster who has been posing as a nurse's aide for months to help Mark. It is revealed that Barbara was burned out in her work, went to Nebraska to do a simple story about the cranes and got caught up in the battle between the preservationists and the expansionists. Barbara is finally able to tell Mark that it was she who was out on the

desolate road the night of his crash and she had gone to the hospital immediately to see about his condition and it was Mark himself who wrote the mysterious note.



# Cranes keep landing as night falls - Rises up in flooded fields

## Summary

It is February 20, 2002, near the Platte River in Kearney, Nebraska, and nearly half a million sandhill cranes begin their descent on this area just as they do every year at this time. They come from New Mexico, Texas and Mexico to stay for a few weeks before moving on to Alaska and Canada. The cranes have been following this pattern for centuries and it is part of their internal knowing. The birds begin to settle for the night when the sound of screeching tires and brakes interrupts their repose as a truck flips into the air and drills into a nearby field.

In 'Her brother needed her', Karin Schluter is driving to Kearney, Nebraska, from her home in Sioux City, South Dakota, because her brother, Mark, has been badly injured in a truck accident on Northline Road. Karin drives in a numb state trying to understand how her expert driver brother could have met with such a fate. The doctor at Good Samaritan Hospital tell Karin that Mark is lucky to be alive, that he had to be cut from his truck which was found upside down with Mark dangling inside, freezing and bleeding to death. Fortunately, an anonymous call alerted authorities to Mark's location. Mark is agitated when he sees Karin who is asked to wait in the trauma waiting room. Karin calls her boss at the computer company where she works in customer service and he gives her 3 days off to tend to her brother.

When Karin was allowed back into Mark's room he was in an induced coma due to pressure on his brain. Karin answers questions for hospital and police personnel. Mark has more procedures, a tracheotomy and a bolt in his skull. The nurses agree to let Karin see Mark one more time if she promises to go home to rest afterward. Mark is unresponsive when Karin enters his room and she sees a note on the bed stand with scrawled writing which reads: I am No One; but Tonight on North Line Road; GOD led me to you; so You could Live; and bring back someone else. No one knows who has delivered the note.

In 'A flock of birds, each one burning', the author briefly shares the sight and sounds of Mark's accident from the perspective of the cranes. They are in and out of the water when they sense a flash of white, a face with a soundless scream, and then pure terror flipping and falling before everything turns to water again.

In 'She checked into one of those crane-tourist places off the interstate', Karin stays the night at a hotel close to the hospital. On her second night, Karin drives the half hour to Mark's modular Homestar home in Farview. Mark had been so proud of his home, the down payment made with money he received after their father died. Mark works as a repair technician at a local meat packing plant, a job he started just after buying his home. Karin is not surprised to find the interior messy and in need of cleaning and



decorated as a young man would like, complete with posters of scantily clad girls. Karin is content with her life in Sioux City now after many years of bad relationships, jobs and apartments. Karin calls her boss again and negotiates a week away from work and then cleans Mark's house.

The next day Karin asks people in the trauma unit about the note in Mark's room but no one knows anything about who wrote it. Mark is eventually moved out of the trauma unit to a room where Karin can sit with him and talk even though he is still unresponsive. Mark's doctor, Dr. Hayes, tells Karin that parts of Mark's brain are showing signs of healing and she sets out to learn all she can about brain injury so that she is ready to get more information from Dr. Hayes as time goes on.

In 'Rises up in flooded fields', the author shares the events related to Mark's accident and first days in the hospital from the perspective of Mark's brain. It is clear that Mark is thinking as things happen to him and he cannot form full sentences, just thoughts.

## Analysis

The author begins the book with beautiful, lyrical language when describing how the sandhill cranes return to this section of the Platte River at the same time each year. "A neck stretches long; legs drape behind. Wings curl forward, the length of a man. Spread like fingers, primaries tip the bird into the wind's plane. The blood-red head bows and the wings sweep together, a cloaked priest giving benediction. Tail cups and belly buckles, surprised by the upsurge of ground. Legs kick out, their backward knees flapping like broken landing gear. Another bird plummets and stumbles forward, fighting for a spot in the packed staging ground along those few miles of water still clear and wide enough to pass as safe." Comparing the bird's primary feathers to fingers and the head and wing formation to a cloaked priest are similes that provide distinct imagery.

Establishing the metaphor of the birds is important because the author uses them throughout the story to highlight and symbolize the human interactions that are going on in the story. The author also uses the innate senses of the birds to show that people also follow internal patterns in their lives. In essence, people retain some of the same primordial instincts as the ancient instincts of the bird. In humans, the instincts exhibit in elements such as protection, security and love, which are homing mechanisms just as the birds have their own homing instincts for their return to the Platte River area each year.

The author also introduces an important element to the mystery of the story--the note left in Mark's hospital room. Not only is the message cryptic, but the handwriting is a ragged scrawl, lending to its mysterious quality. Plus, the trauma center nurses can prove that no one else but Karin had been given access to Mark's room. Establishing this mystery early in the story will push the story line forward throughout the book.

The author shares the events of Mark's accident and first days in the hospital from an interesting perspective--Mark's brain. There are no full sentences developed, just



thoughts and base feelings. It is almost as if Mark's brain is a separate character because it seems to have a life all its own. This sets up well for the ensuing work to come with Dr. Weber and the importance of different aspects of the brain especially related to healing.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Name some of the mystical elements surrounding the date and events of Mark's accident.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why would the author provide a view of Mark's accident from the cranes' perspective?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What are your original thoughts about the note and who could have written it?

## **Vocabulary**

upsurge, indigo, saurian, rouse, deranged, platte, gouged, hostel, meager, clone, gimmick, aptitude, zeal, propaganda, neurologist, reptilian, slack, tracheotomy, wheedled, rogues, varietal, binge, flayed, serotonin, desolation, metropole, underhand





# Two weeks in, Mark sat up and moaned - The health professionals descended on him

## Summary

One day after being hospitalized for 2 weeks, Mark suddenly awakens with a start that scares Karin who is constantly at his bedside. For days Mark fights against his restrictions and begins to make guttural sounds which are painful for Karin to hear. Karin feels that Mark is begging her for something she cannot understand. One day, Mark's movements are exaggerated to the point that they scare Karin but an orderly sees it as Mark wanting to hug Karin.

Karin briefly returns to Sioux City where she has lost her job due to being gone to care for Mark. Karin takes care of a few things at her condo and then packs more clothes to take back with her to Kearney. Karin recalls Mark as a boy and how she had so much care of him due to delinquent parents. Karin helped Mark survive school and eventually finished her sociology degree at the local university before moving to Chicago where she got a job as a receptionist at a big accounting firm. From Chicago, Karin moved to Los Angeles for yet another job and each time she encouraged Mark to come be with her but he declined. Karin vows that when Mark is healed, they will move away together.

Karin reads the cryptic note every day hoping for some clue to its author and thinking that surely the person who wrote it will show up at the hospital one day now that Mark is improving. Two of Mark's best friends from the meat processing plant, Tommy Rupp and Duane Cain, finally visit Mark in the hospital and Karin resists the impulse to ask where they have been all this time. Karin feels that Tommy and Duane must know what happened on the night of Mark's accident but she does not want to discuss it in front of Mark so she leaves the hospital to take a walk around town. When Karin returns to the hospital hours later, Tommy and Duane are still there playing a crude game of catch with Mark with a wadded up ball of paper. Karin's immediate irritation turns to joy when she hears Mark trying to laugh again. Before Tommy and Duane leave, Karin asks them if they know anything about the note but they do not.

In 'The police questioned her again', the police question Karin a second time in a hospital conference room trying to determine if she knows anything about Mark's activities on the night of his accident or whether he was stressed out or possibly depressed. Karin cannot fathom the thought of Mark possibly trying to kill himself and tells the officers that Mark was always a very careful driver. The officers reveal that Mark had been at a bar that night and that skid marks show that he had been traveling 80 miles per hour on an icy road. They also tell her that there were 3 sets of tire tracks at the site of the accident. Apparently, someone had lost control right in front of Mark and he could not slam on his brakes because there was also someone behind him. The



officers told Karin that the accident had been phoned in by an anonymous male caller from a pay phone at a Mobil station right off the interstate in Kearney.

In 'A rising comes that isn't always death', Mark tries to recall events from the night of his accident and gets mostly words such as "Goat head, Goat head." Mostly Mark lies still in his bed and tries to remember.

In 'The health professionals descended on him', Karin gets in the way of the physical therapists trying to help Mark because she is interested in every detail of his care and recovery. When Mark is finally able to stand, Karin walks him around the hospital floor day after day, relieved because she thought he might never have walked again. When the tracheotomy tubes are removed, Mark makes guttural sounds as if he is trying to talk. Karin starts to read to Mark every day and it seems to calm him. Sometimes Mark tries to say words Karin reads and Dr. Hayes, Mark's neurologist, says it is echolalia, merely repeating what Mark has heard but Karin is convinced that Mark is trying to communicate.

One day, a young woman named Bonnie Travis came to see Mark and Karin is happy to see her. Bonnie and Mark have dated but not seriously. Bonnie tells them about her new job as a docent for the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument where she dresses up like a pioneer woman to provide information to tourists. While Bonnie visits with Mark, Karin leaves the hospital to buy a pack of cigarettes and she smokes half of one before returning to the hospital.

## Analysis

Karin is 4 years older than Mark and had always taken care of him and looked out for him. Karin and Mark's parents were not attentive, off in their world of religious zeal, and not really engaged with their kids. Karin always felt like she needed to be watchful of Mark throughout all his youthful antics and that need to hover over him continues. Now that Mark is so seriously injured, Karin is both frightened and hopeful and thinks that this might be an opportunity to help create a new Mark free from the bad habits and relationships that he has acquired as an adult. True to her past, Karin has kicked into caring mode for Mark, only now Karin is losing things in her own life such as her job and condo in order to dedicate herself to her brother's recovery. Karin loves Mark but wonders how much more she will have to give up for him.

The author continues to establish the theme of returning home. He started the theme with the cranes' return to Kearney every year at the same time and now he shows the same pattern in Karin. Karin had left Kearney several times to take different jobs but there was always something, usually family related, that brought her back. This time it is Mark's accident that has brought Karin home and she tries not to resent the toll it is taking on her life but returning home is a pattern that Karin seems destined to follow, just as the cranes on the Platte River.



Karin does not appreciate Mark's friends, Duane and Tommy, and resents the fact that it took them so long to come visit Mark in the hospital. Karin thinks they are a bad influence on Mark and would like to get Mark away from them. Their visit at the hospital is not a pleasant one for Karin so she leaves for awhile but she is torn by what she thinks is their bad influence on Mark and his positive responses to them.

The author provides some foreshadowing when he writes about Mark saying "Goat head, Goat head." Later in the book, this will be clarified and it will show that Mark's recall about the accident is clearer than anyone thought.

The second time the police question Karin, it occurs to her that they think he might have been trying to commit suicide, a thought which both shocks and saddens Karin. Karin and Mark's parents had not been mentally healthy and Karin is afraid that Mark may have had some deep psychological issues she did not know about and she does not know how she will bring him back from that.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Karin give up everything in her life to take care of Mark now? What pattern does this reinforce in her life?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why would Karin be especially sensitive to the fact that Mark may have tried to kill himself in the accident?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why would Karin consider Bonnie inane but necessary when Bonnie shows up at the hospital to see Mark?

## **Vocabulary**

velocity, indeterminate, talisman, untethering, hemlock, barrage, cagey, watershed, Kokopelli, inanity, docile, snagged, surge, nostalgia, self-abasement, dexterous, unrepentant, aconite, fixation, contemptible, lean-to



# First he's nowhere, then he's not - She went to Daniel, after the hospital calamity

## Summary

Mark begins to come back to himself through feelings more than thoughts and he feels sometimes like a whale with each breath being an earthquake. Storms rage inside him and the monster inside slowly comes to the realization that he is a man with body parts that he inventories all the time. Finally words and notions come and he realizes that he is mending.

In 'Some days his rage was so bad that even lying still infuriated him', Mark's therapists have asked Karin to leave because she is in the way so she stays at Mark's house to fill the time. Karin spends her days drinking wine and watching old movies on TV and even dials the old phone number of Robert Karsh, a high school boyfriend, but she does not let it ring through. When March arrives, Karin takes Mark outside for walks on the hospital grounds. Mark's attempts to speak come out in bursts of profanity sometimes but Karin realizes that this is the healing, not her brother. One night Karin calls Robert Karsh's number and hangs up after a little girl answers. Karin then calls a man named Daniel Riegel, a former friend of Mark's who is very happy to hear from her. Daniel and Mark had been great friends until their sophomore year in high school and they never communicated again. Karin and Mark had connected for awhile and he always welcomes her back when she returns home from her adventures. Daniel works for the Buffalo County Crane Refuge whose mission is to save the environment for the cranes which return to the Platte River region every year. Karin tells Daniel that it would be nice to meet and talk someday and he agrees.

In 'Echo caca. Cocky locky. Caca lala', Mark continues to experience life locked in a mind and body that are still seriously injured. Nonsense words and random thoughts spill out in his mind as he attempts to balance what is going on in his head with his surroundings.

In 'She kept reading to Mark: all she could do', Karin continues to read to Mark every day and Tommy and Duane visit again, this time with foam footballs and other toys and Mark shows more improvement with them than he has in hours with the therapists. Bonnie also visits and brings fun gifts as well as a disc player with CDs which Mark enjoys. Karin is grateful for Bonnie's visits because she is always optimistic. One day Daniel stops by for a visit but Mark gets to upset that Karin asks Daniel to leave.

In 'She went to Daniel, after the hospital calamity', Karin goes to see Daniel and is amazed at how warm and calm he is and how he no longer seems so much younger than she, in fact he seems older and more mature somehow. Karin is grateful that



Daniel will spend time with her both because of their prior relationship but also because he knows Mark and can intuit what would be good for him. Karin wonders why Daniel would still want to spend time with her but is grateful for his generous, calm spirit. One day during a walk Daniel shares his concerns that the Platte River is being used up and diverted to three states, a fact which will dramatically impact the cranes. Daniel's hope is that people will recognize the plight of the birds and do the right thing by ending any further erosion of the waterways. For a moment Karin sympathizes with Daniel's passions and they kiss, returning to Daniel's house to make love.

One day Karin is walking Mark around the hospital floor when he utters his first sentence, "There are magnetism waves in my skull." By the next evening, Mark is conversing again. Karin is thrilled but caught off guard when he declares that Karin is not his sister. Karin tries to tease Mark out of it but he insists that Karin is not his sister. Days later Mark still denies Karin, saying that she is an actress who looks like his sister. Dr. Hayes tells Karin that Mark is experiencing Capgras Syndrome in which a person does not recognize close relatives. The impaired person recognizes a loved one's face but is missing any emotional recognition or attachment due to brain injury. Dr. Hayes states that Capgras can improve but Mark just needs time.

Karin feels that Mark does not have any syndrome but is just still suffering from the impact of the accident. Karin tries to reinforce positive memories but has to pretend not to know too much about Mark or it upsets him. One day Mark asks Karin to please check on his dog and to ask his sister to come see him but Karin does not reply. When Mark learns that he is being released from the hospital to go to a rehab center, he again asks Karin to find his sister and let her know where he will be. Mark cannot understand why he has not heard from his sister because she always used to take such good care of him. Mark senses Karin's distress and tries to placate her by thanking her for helping him. One day Karin shows Mark the cryptic note and he declares that he needs to find whoever wrote it because that person will know what really happened to Mark on the night of the accident.

## Analysis

The author writes what is going on in Mark's mind as he is trying to recover from his accident and the style mimics his brain pattern, in glimpses of images and incomplete thoughts. This can be shown in this example: "Miles of air above press down so hard the whale can't breathe. Can't lift his own lungs. Dying in dried ocean, smothered underneath the thing it now must inhale. Largest living thing, almost God, stretched out flat, muscles beaten. Only his heart, as big as the courthouse, keeps pounding." Mark imagines his body to be an immovable whale burdened even by breathing, with the only vital part of him, his heart, still beating. The author tries to impart to the reader what Mark must be feeling trapped in a body that no longer feels like his own. Mark's attempts to speak and process thoughts come out mangled and sometimes profane but at least he is trying. The only thing Mark knows for sure is that his heart continues to beat and somehow, right now, that is enough.



Karin toys with contacting her former boyfriend, Robert Karsh, but cannot bring herself to do it completely. Robert would be thrilling to have around again but right now Karin needs some calm so she calls another former boyfriend, Daniel Riegel, instead. Like an animal, Karin knows instinctively that Robert is not who she needs right now, preferring to contact Daniel who will help her--and maybe Mark--heal again. Daniel is soothing to Karin's frantic mental state right now and she is amazed that he is so generous to talk to her after what must have been an unpleasant break up before she moved to Chicago. Daniel is someone who values the past and the rituals of nature so he is not surprised to find Karin has returned, just like the cranes that return to Kearney each year. Daniel embodies refuge as he fights to save the wetlands for the cranes as well as rising to the occasion to save Karin in her angst about Mark and the state of her life since Mark's accident.

The author establishes the theme of forgiveness when Daniel accepts Karin back into his life after she had hurt him a few years before. Daniel is very attuned to nature and works on the premise that people are really animals at the core and sometimes behave on instinct instead of rational thought. Daniel allows Karin's inner animal to surface and he tries to care for her wounded self instead of rejecting her in her state of vulnerability.

The author compares Karin to a crane in the story, not only in her repeated return trips to Kearney but also in her physicality. For example, when Daniel and Karin make love, he writes "She rolled him over and rose, one of his feathered, gray priestesses, neck extended. Another endangered species, in need of conserving. She straightened herself above him, displaying." The author gives Karin the physical characteristics of an elegant crane and it is easy to see why Daniel is so attracted to her once more--she is in danger and in need of his rescue.

Mark is now speaking and Karin is both pleased and horrified in that he does not recognize her as his sister. The doctor explains it as Capgras Syndrome but does not offer any real hope for recovery. Karin still tries to care for Mark during the day but at night, she is filled with angst because she has given up everything to care for her brother who now claims that he does not even know her. Even more unsettling, Karin wonders if Mark is mentally ill and will not recover which will lead to a lifetime of care and dependency.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Karin ultimately call Daniel when her first impulse was to call Robert?

## Discussion Question 2

Explain Daniel's personality traits that make him perfect for the preservation work he does.



## Discussion Question 3

Does the author do a good job at explaining how Mark views his world trapped in a body and mind that are seriously compromised? Is the imagery used appropriate for what you might imagine Mark's experiences to be?

## Vocabulary

placid, derelict, faux, mortified, crestfallen, exorcisms, mammalian, goatee, decode, obscene, encroaching, phoebe, grebes, hallucinations, nuzzled, priestesses, slack, steeplechase, oracle, Capgras, cognition, spontaneous, chaos, spectral, recession, whatnot, jihad, infiltrated, bassinets, grasp, plausible, mystical, reproached, begrudge, contrite, zeal, phantasm, latent, careened, ambiguous, paranoia, proclivities, syllogism, bureaucracy, confidante, commiserate, incredulity



# They ask Mark Schluter who he thinks he's supposed to be - Karin dragged Daniel out to North Line Road

## Summary

Mark is suspicious of the doctors who ask him question about who he is and thinks that their time would be better spent trying to figure out the woman posing as his sister. Duane and Tommy visit and Mark asks Tommy if he knows anything about the woman posing as Mark's sister. Mark feels that everyone is hiding something from him because his beloved truck has been destroyed and his sister is missing. Mark is suspicious of everyone now, even Bonnie whom he tolerates because at least because she is sexy.

In 'Weeks passed that Karin couldn't account for', Mark is moved to a rehab center called Dedham Glen where Mark becomes infatuated with a nurse's aide named Barbara Gillespie. Karin is also taken in by Barbara's confident, reassuring manner and grows to rely on her during Mark's recovery. Karin tries to understand and emulate Barbara's quiet grace and is thrilled that Mark relates to Barbara after so much time spent mistrusting other people. Karin also thinks that in spite of her self assured demeanor, Barbara seems sad at heart. Karin tells Daniel that maybe fate brought Barbara into Mark's life to help him create a better one for himself. Daniel is not so sure about fate but Karin needs something to hang on to in the hopes that Mark will get better.

The last of the cranes leave for the season and other birds take their place and Karin goes birding with Daniel who can identify all of them. Being outside and away from the hospital is a welcome relief for Karin but she also feels guilty for leaving Mark by himself. Karin is finally becoming more like her old self and she thanks Daniel for being such a great source of support. One day Daniel shows Karin a box he has been keeping that holds all the trinkets she had ever given him such as ticket stubs, post cards and sketches.

Mark continues to deny that Karin is his sister yet he is angry with her if she does not show up some days and tells Karin that his sister would not let him rot away in rehab. Karin thinks about what it really means to be related to someone and recalls the time that their father took them on a long road trip to see his estranged brother, Luther Schluter. The visit was odd, filled with obscure stories from Luther's past but Karin now realizes that Luther was dying and the trip was an opportunity for her father to say goodbye.

In Jack is that person's father, but that person isn't Jack's son, Mark continues to suffer through sessions with cognitive therapists and visits from Duane and Tommy, all the while not trusting the person who still thinks she is his sister. The only person Mark





trusts is Barbara but he thinks she might also work for the enemy and has been planted here to keep an eye on him. One day Barbara takes Mark for a walk and Karin arrives in her car and Mark is elated but quickly realizes that she is the Karin imposter who has brought an imposter collie dog with her. Both Karin and the dog try to get close to Mark but he rejects them, saying that that dog is not his beloved Blackie any more than that woman is his sister. Karin leaves and takes the dog with her and Mark later feels bad about the way he behaved.

In Karen dragged Daniel out the the North Line Road, Karin takes Daniel to the site of Mark's accident on North Line Road to try to understand what happened that night. Daniel is able to discern some westbound burn marks that swerve into the eastbound lane and Karin spots a second set of skid marks 100 feet in front of the first. Karin surmises that Mark tried to get out of the way of an oncoming vehicle but turned too sharply and ended up in a ditch upside down. Daniel is then able to see faint tire tracks in the sandy ground nearby and Karin is outraged at the thought that someone could have left the critically injured Mark out here in his truck. Karin thinks that the police might be right, that there were some kind of games going on out on the deserted stretch of highway that night.

It is now 2 months after Mark's accident and he seems normal to anyone who had not known him before but Karin is still unnerved by his bouts of paranoia and outbursts. Mark tells Karin that she cannot be his sister because his sister would have come by now to have him released from the rehab center. Karin loses her temper and wants Mark to come to his senses but it is not that easy. Mark's insurance coverage is almost exhausted and Karin is tapping into her meager savings in order to live. Daniel tells Karin not to worry about money and he takes care of all their household expenses but she is uneasy about that so he offers her a job at the Refuge doing office and fundraising work.

By May, Karin has reached her tipping point about Mark's care and wonders if she should move Mark to a different facility where the doctors might do surgery or prescribe drugs to help Mark's progress. Daniel brings Karin some books written by a cognitive neurologist from New York, Gerald Weber, and for the first time since Mark's accident, Karin feels some sense of optimism. Karin writes a letter to Dr. Weber in the hopes that he will be intrigued by Mark's Capgras Syndrome and agree to assist in Mark's treatment.

## Analysis

Karin is on the verge of a breakdown due to Mark's ongoing behavior and treating her as if she is an imposter and not his sister. Karin cannot get past the fact that she has completely rearranged her life for Mark who denies who she is. Karin is caught up in repeating life patterns of caretaking when it comes to Mark and she finds it outrageous that he asks her to find his real sister who has always cared for him. Daniel is Karin's refuge from the madness in all ways--he provides for her and even offers her a job. Daniel is also the calm, steady force in Karin's life and she admits that he is too good



for her. Something about Daniel, though, likes to rescue and he provides a safe place for Karin during this tumultuous time. Barbara is another steadying factor for Karin and Karin wishes she could emulate Barbara's sense of grace and calm.

Again the author compares Karin to the cranes which have now left for another year. Karin is restless and longs to leave to get her life back but she is bound by ties that keep her in Kearney. Daniel will be her refuge for awhile just as he hopes to maintain the refuge for the cranes and their annual return.

The author provides a flashback about the Schluters' road trip to visit their Uncle Luther to show how odd their family was. Their father drove hundreds of miles with no breaks or conversation and the visit was strained, the only conversations being wild stories told by Uncle Luther. It is only later that Karin realizes that the trip was an opportunity for her father to say goodbye to his brother who died 4 months after their visit. The author wants the reader to understand the extremes of mental health and perhaps plant the seed that Mark may be suffering from a mental illness and not brain injury after all.

The author also begins to establish the theme of memory when Karin tells the story of the trip to visit Uncle Luther. It is important to understand some of the things that occurred in their childhood to know why Karin and Mark behave the way they do today. There is no real escape from the past; the events have occurred and the impact has been made. The only thing to do is to try to understand and not repeat any offenses. Karin also tries to escape from the past in Daniel and her hopes of his helping her move forward but he brings her up short when he produces the box of items she had given him in the past. Karin is both touched and surprised that he has kept the items for so many years and she has still not escaped a past which she would like to forget.

True to form, Daniel is Karin's lifeline during this time and he gives her books written by neurologist, Dr. Gerald Weber. For the first time since Mark's accident, Karin feels hopeful and writes to Dr. Weber asking for help. This shows Karin's persistence and unwillingness to give up in a situation that many would consider impossible to overcome. Karin has always watched out for Mark and this situation is different only in the severity and the toll it is taking on everyone involved.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is the reason for Karin showing up in the car at the rehab center with Blackie in tow?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does the author insert the story about the visit to see Uncle Luther? What is the significance of the visit for the family?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Karin become even more dependent on Daniel just at the time that the cranes leave for another year?

## Vocabulary

evanescent, skeins, muskegs, merge, tundra, neurological, disorienting, narcoleptic, archaic, gratuitous, copasetic, avuncular, confabulation, ethnography, illicit, kin, vocation, dismayed, skeptical, exonerated, ratification, temporal, akinetopsia, cubist



# Faster than they gathered - He stayed at a motel just off the interstate

## Summary

The cranes have left and are following paths they know by instinct that will take them thousands of miles further, finally reaching their home nesting place where they engage in ancient rituals. A pair of cranes that witnessed Mark's accident are now roosting in Alaska, tending to new colts that have hatched. One of the colts starves to death due to his brother's ravenous appetite. This young bird will make the annual trip with the flock in autumn back to warmer climates.

Dr. Weber recalls a lunch meeting with his publisher in May of 2002 to discuss Dr. Weber's next book in which he wants to address memory. His publisher thinks in terms of what is marketable but Dr. Weber wants something of more substance. Dr. Weber returns to his home in Stony Brook where he lives with his wife, Sylvie, a social worker who runs an organization called Wayfinders. When Dr. Weber sits down to check his email, he sees the note written by Karin Schluter telling him about her brother who has Capgras Syndrome. Dr. Weber shares Karin's note with Sylvie and Sylvie agrees that Dr. Weber should see Mark.

In 'He called them all by fictional names', the reader learns that Dr. Weber always made up new names for people he wrote about in his books. In one particular story in his book, he calls the woman Sarah but it could have been any name, the name is insignificant.

In 'He stayed at a motel just off the interstate', Dr. Weber is temporarily unnerved by how flat Nebraska looks but he returns to normal after entering the cookie cutter interior of his hotel room. Dr. Weber meets with Karin in the lobby of the hotel and she shares documents related to Mark's case. Karin tells Dr. Weber that the doctors let her see Mark briefly on the night of his accident and he recognized her but everything changed after his intracranial pressure shot up. Dr. Weber wants to retract from Karin's frantic appeals but he is intrigued by the case so he continues and agrees to see Mark.

Karin is embarrassed by Mark's wardrobe and flippant behavior toward Dr. Weber when they arrive at the rehab center. When Karin leaves the room, Mark tells Dr. Weber that she is not his sister because this woman is wound too tight whereas his sister is easygoing and fun to be around. Mark tells Dr. Weber that Tommy is not what he used to be and that somebody has swapped out his dog for an impostor. Mark admits that Karin knows things that only his sister would know but believes that she could have been trained to learn these things. Mark even theorizes that his real sister and Tommy ran off with his truck and somebody got stand ins to take their places. Dr. Weber conducts a few simple tests on Mark who soon gives up in frustration. When Barbara appears in the room, Dr. Weber feels as if he has seen her somewhere before and she



seems to have recognized him too. Barbara soon leaves and Mark asks Karin to leave too so he can ask Dr. Weber to get in touch with his sister.

Karin later tells Dr. Weber that it is getting harder to hear about how Mark idolizes the woman he thinks is his real sister and how she is falling short of his expectations. Dr. Weber tries to reassure Karin that Mark has made a lot of progress and will continue to do so. Back in his hotel room, Dr. Weber calls Sylvie to tell her about his day and to remind her to update her passport for their trip to Italy in three months.

## Analysis

The author uses local color throughout the story especially in the form of fables. In 'Faster than they gathered', he writes "Once, long ago, as the cranes massed for their autumn departure, they passed above an Aleut girl standing alone in a meadow. The birds flew down on her, beat their wings together, and lifted the girl upward in a great turning cloud, hiding her, trumpeting to drown out her calls. The girl rose on that twisting shaft of air and disappeared into the southward flock. So cranes still circle and call when they leave each autumn, reliving that capture of that humans' daughter." Native cultures are very tuned into nature and stories which provide reasons for things that cannot be explained. The author is providing a glimpse into a cultural fable that has been passed down through the generations just as the cranes continue their instinctive patterns of homing and nesting. The use of local color provides a diversion from the actual story line but also points out the need for people to have explanations for everything, whether it is the sound that cranes make when taking off in autumn or why your brother does not recognize you in Karin's case.

The author further establishes the theme of memory with Dr. Weber's declaration that he would like that to be the subject of his next book. Dr. Weber has studied many aspects of cognitive neurology but is most intrigued with memory and the human capacity for it. Mark would be the perfect subject on a study of memory because he is at a place where he has none regarding his accident and it would be interesting for Dr. Weber to follow along in Mark's recovery to see how, or if, memory can return intact.

Dr. Weber is caught in a bit of a dilemma because he has sworn off assisting in individual cases, having heard too many traumatic situations, yet he is fascinated by Mark's probable Capgras Syndrome and he steps outside his boundaries to learn what he can. Dr. Weber is also way too familiar with the hopes that the relatives of brain injured people have placed in him over the years. Dr. Weber is uncomfortable with Karin's eagerness for him to treat Mark when all Dr. Weber really wants to do is make some observations and return home, satisfied that he has encountered Capgras firsthand.

The author uses foreshadowing in the situation where Dr. Weber meets Barbara in Mark's room at the rehab center. They silently register recognition for each other and the revelation of their knowing will become important as the story extends.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Dr. Weber agree to see Mark even though he is weary of hearing patient stories from so many years of scientific research?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you think will happen to Karin if Dr. Weber cannot help Mark?

## Discussion Question 3

Why has Dr. Weber always fictionalized the names of patients in his books? Is it more than privacy issues?

## Vocabulary

estrangement, tawny, primed, aphasia, pendulum, mortified, contemplative, conspiracy, obnoxious, disgust, sheepish, twinge, distinguished, interlopers, aflame, impaired, absurd, subtle, bewildered, notorious, prose, cowering, sediment, ectomorph, commemorating, acetylene, inappropriate, intracranial, indigence, discrete, fusiform, hypothesis, ratification, vectors, truce, galvanic, parlance, mundane, bedrock, ludicrous, gaga, verbatim, goon, flailed, calibrate, ducats



# Years ago, in Stony Brook - He woke fitfully

## Summary

A case in one of Dr. Weber's books included a man named Neil who suffered a stroke and could no longer register or see anything on his left side. He did not shave the left side of his face and could not see the sunroom on the left side of his house. From Neil's experience, Dr. Weber gleaned two things: what people take as absolute space is actually a chain of perceptual processing; and even a brain that thought it was measuring and inhabiting space might already have lost half a world.

In 'Weber woke early, from rough sleep', Dr. Weber prepares for his day with breakfast at the hotel while he browses some tourist brochures on the local area. Dr. Weber heads to Good Samaritan to meet with Dr. Hayes who gives Dr. Weber some background on Mark's case. Dr. Hayes thinks that Mark is lucky to be alive given the extent of his injuries. Dr. Hayes shares Mark's medical file complete with brain scans that show a possible disconnection between the amygdala and intertemporal cortex which would disrupt any recognition patterns for Mark. Dr. Weber is not completely sold on the idea and thinks that the Capgras might be caused by large-scale psychodynamic responses to trauma; that delusion can be employed to make sense of a deeply disturbing development. The meeting grows tense as the two doctors stand their ground in differing opinions on what has happened to Mark. Dr. Weber tells Dr. Hayes that he would like to conduct a few more tests on Mark and agrees to meet with Dr. Hayes again before leaving town.

Dr. Weber meets Karin for lunch and she provides him with some background on Mark's life. Karin also gives Dr. Weber some family photos in the hopes that Mark will be able to identify people or have some kind of connection. Karin tells Dr. Weber about their childhood, especially about their father who could never provide properly for the family and her mother who became a religious zealot. Karin also produces a photo of Barbara because Mark adores her and the image will be a positive one for any testing the doctor does with Mark.

Dr. Weber meets with Mark alone at the rehab center to conduct some tests. Mark does really well at recognizing faces and facial shapes but has a hard time putting any emotions or expressions with them. Dr. Weber also does a galvanic skin test on Mark which shows that Mark reacts positively to pictures of his friends and Barbara but has no reaction when shown pictures of Karin and his parents. Then it occurs to Mark that Dr. Weber must have received the pictures from Karin which proves that actors were used in the photos of his family. Before Dr. Weber leaves, he tells Mark about Capgras Syndrome and Mark is upset because Dr. Hayes has already talked to Mark about that and Mark had hoped for more from Dr. Weber.



In 'He'd seen true face blindness', Dr. Weber's books include cases of people who lost their ability to recognize and identify faces. Dr. Weber determines that Mark is just the opposite, he sees differences in faces that just don't exist.

In 'The third morning', Dr. Weber goes to the rehab center and finds Mark, Duane and Tommy playing video games. Karin arrives and erupts in anger when she realizes that the game is about cars and wrecks and she does not think this is mentally healthy for Mark. Karin insists that Tommy and Duane know more about Mark's accident than they have said because Karin has seen the accident site and the three sets of tire skid marks. After Tommy and Duane leave, Dr. Weber privately tells Karin that he would like to try an experiment in which Karin calls Mark on the phone, where no facial recognition is involved, and she agrees.

Dr. Weber works with Mark on more tests and determines that he has suffered little cognitive impairment, his emotional maturity is below average, he is slightly depressed yet shows no signs of paranoia which many studies link to Capgras Syndrome. Later that afternoon, Dr. Weber asks Barbara if they have met before because she seems so familiar but she denies it. Dr. Weber had told Karin to call Mark's room at 3:00 and he listens as Mark talks to her, relieved that his sister has contacted him at last. Mark is elated and demands that Karin come to the rehab center right away but when Karin arrives Mark sees the impostor Karin and both siblings begin to cry.

In 'Weber had worked with several patients', Dr. Weber had worked with people who could not recognize their own body parts, often as a result of a stroke. Logic and reason were still intact for these people, it was just the feeling that was missing. That night, lying in his bed at the hotel, Dr. Weber itemized his own body parts again and again.

In 'He woke fitfully', Dr. Weber awakens from a dream in which his work has gone terribly wrong and he has a feeling of dread that something happened back in New York that he needed to fix. It takes Dr. Weber most of the night to figure out that the terrible feeling he has is shame. Giving up on going back to sleep, Dr. Weber dresses and heads outside for a walk until he finds a diner that is open at this early hour. Dr. Weber wants to call Sylvie to see if she is all right but it is still too early to call. The waitress recognizes Dr. Weber as the doctor who has come to help Mark and explains that it's a small town and everybody knows everything. Dr. Weber calls his editor who tells him that his latest book, *The Country of Surprise*, is getting mostly good reviews so far.

Dr. Weber returns to Good Samaritan to see Dr. Hayes before he leaves town and Dr. Hayes appreciates what Dr. Weber has learned and is interested in his ideas on how to treat Mark. Dr. Weber recommends intensive cognitive behavioral therapy and Dr. Hayes reluctantly agrees. Dr. Weber proceeds to the rehab center to say goodbye to Mark and Karin, neither of whom wants him to leave. Dr. Weber then finds Barbara and asks for her help in some cognitive behavioral therapy for Mark and she agrees. Karin catches up with Dr. Weber one more time and wants to know if her presence is hindering Mark's recovery and he tells her that it is not and she promised to keep in touch with him.





## Analysis

This section of the book is about Dr. Weber and is told both from a narrative point of view and from flashbacks. The cases that Dr. Weber recalls are all background for him as he wades through Mark's case. The case about the man named Neil who lost all sight and perspective of anything on the left of his vision leads Dr. Weber to think that the interruption in Neil's brain could be similar to what is happening with Mark. There is an interruption that impedes vision and perception which could account for the lack of recognition and even some memory issues. In other situations, Dr. Weber knows of people who cannot identify faces, but Mark is the opposite of that--he sees differences in faces that are not there. In a way, Mark is seeing the negative view of a photograph, the reverse of what most people perceive to be the accurate image. Dr. Weber's experience also haunts him in that he begins to experience some troubling perceptions related to body parts. Some people who have brain injuries or strokes have to constantly take inventory of their body parts because they have lost the ability to feel them. They know logically that their bodies are intact but they cannot feel them properly. Dr. Weber experiences a mild version of this after his experiences in Nebraska. It is possible that Dr. Weber has witnessed so many traumas and people who are brain injured that he has lost his feelings toward them. His experience of itemizing his own body parts again and again one night could mean that he is still functioning logically but he has lost the feeling that should be associated with it.

Dr. Weber is not comfortable being in Nebraska because it is so flat and barren as opposed to where he lives on Long Island. He is still a scientist at the core which has propelled him to meet with Mark and Karin but he is there only for clinical reasons, he has no real feelings about the situation. Karin's longing for some revelation from him seems to irritate him because he wants only the facts for his notes, not the emotional involvement. This will come to be a major point of distress for Dr. Weber as the story extends and he wonders about his integrity in using damaged people only for their clinical value and not for valuing them as people who badly needed help.

The author uses foreshadowing in Dr. Weber's marked interest in Barbara. He senses that there is more to Barbara's story than she is revealing and that he has seen her somewhere before. As the story extends, these two points will be addressed and clarified.

### Discussion Question 1

Why was Dr. Weber's phone experiment with Karin both a success and a failure?

### Discussion Question 2

Given their childhood history, why is it so important to Karin and Mark that they be able to connect with each other during this traumatic time?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Dr. Weber tell Karin what he thinks she wants to hear about Mark instead of telling her what he thinks is the truth about the situation?

## Vocabulary

agnosia, baffling, fusiform, vigilance, spatial, compensatory, laborious, delusional, sinuous, colleague, deficit, defamation, reflex, tracheotomy, paranoid, glee, exacerbated, aberrations, diagnostics, radiant, ethics, therapeutic, indictments, conscience, onset, arpeggios, tableau, hybrid, longitudinal, crepes, bulbous, quell, disperse, provisional, portentous, masochist, intact, quarantined, collaborative, deficit



# When animals and humans still shared the same language - They took Mark home: no other place to take him

## Summary

The author tells more Native American fables about cranes, one in particular is about an Anishinaabe clan who called themselves the Cranes, or Echo Makers. The Cranes were leaders with voices that called all people together. The Crow and Cheyenne tribes even carved the leg bones of cranes into hollow flutes in an act of echoing the echo maker.

In 'Something was wrong, the moment Karin called', Karin feels the lingering effects of a disappointing visit from Dr. Weber who simply ran a few tests, prescribed some therapy for Mark, and left town with some more input for a book. A few weeks later, Barbara tells Karin and Mark that Dr. Weber is going to be on a TV show talking about his new book the next day. The three are surprised when they see Dr. Weber who looks nothing like the man who visited with them with his hair slicked back and his beard teased out. Dr. Weber is visibly unnerved when someone in the television audience asks about violating the privacy of his subjects and Karin, Mark and Barbara are upset at the whole experience.

In 'The night Weber flew back east from the empty plains', he physically devours Sylvie after she drags him to a fundraiser for Wayfinders. Their sex life had grown into something casual and familiar and her husband's energetic enthusiasm both surprises and delights her.

Dr. Weber's book, 'The Country of Surprise', has launched successfully but he feels it will be his last one written for the general public. Dr. Weber hates that he has to do promotion for the book but is pleased that researchers have found motivation in the content. It occurs to Dr. Weber that he had traveled to Nebraska to study Mark to prove to himself that in spite of the physical elements of Capgras syndrome, it still manifested in psychodynamic processes such as individual responses, personal history and wish fulfillment.

In 'They took Mark home: no other place to take him', Dr. Hayes releases Mark from Dedham Glen so Karin has to move out of Mark's Homestar so he can go home. She had been living there for months and has nowhere else to go until Daniel asks if she wants to move in with him which she does. Karin restores Mark's home to its previous man cave appearance and Barbara offers to check up on Mark to make sure he adjusts properly. Upon his release, Mark refuses to get in Karin's car because he believes she has been sent to harm him so Bonnie drives him home. When Karin catches up to them at Mark's house, Mark is distraught because he thinks his house has been replaced by a facsimile. Karin and Bonnie try to console Mark but he is adamant that this place is



not his house. Mark knows that there is only one way to determine if the house is a fake and that is to find his stash of drugs under the kitchen sink because the authorities would not duplicate that. When Mark does not find the drugs which Karin had long ago flushed away, he is firmly convinced that this house is merely a duplicate of his original home.

Mark wants Karin to tell him whether or not he is in danger so they walk outside so he can see there is nothing or no one suspicious around. When they return to the house, Blackie has broken away and jumps all over Mark who feels sorry for the dog because she does not know she is not really Blackie. Mark decides to call her Blackie Two.

## Analysis

The significance of the book's title is alluded to in the fables of the Native American tribes as the author states, "All the humans revered Crane, the great orator. Where cranes gathered, their speech carried miles. The Aztecs called themselves the Crane People. One of the Anishinaabe clans was named the Cranes - Ajijak or Businassee - the Echo Makers." The cranes symbolize truth and authenticity and their ability to call out what they see around them. Their instincts come from ancient patterns and their powers of observation are acute, thus making them harbingers of truth. The cranes are in stark contrast to the humans in the book who all have secrets and shadow sides.

The author uses language to create and maintain authenticity with the characters based on their occupations and geographic locations. The most obvious example is the dialogue between Dr. Weber and his wife, Sylvie. They are intellectuals with scientific educations and their speech reflects that even during intimate moments at home. For example, when referring to marital sex, they call it "the relentlessness of marriage." "Their old euphemism, picked up from a classic family saga they'd read out loud to each other, back in grad school. Later, after Jess, they amused each other by calling it sexuality. Mock clinical. Foreplay: Are you at all disposed toward sexuality? And afterward: Some top-drawer sexuality, that. Neuropsychology--the home version." This may sound stilted and clinical to most people, but it is a language developed between the two of them that belies their comfort level.

## Discussion Question 1

Why did Native Americans call cranes echo makers?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Karin so disappointed with Dr. Weber after his visit to Kearney?



## Discussion Question 3

Why is Mark so distraught when he is finally able to go home after being in the hospital and rehab center for so long?

## Vocabulary

guises, recount, petroglyphs, pygmy, cognitive, florid, combative, cadence, nuances, obscure, assess, vigor, protocols, restive, pummeled, philanthropists, euphemism, vestigial, inanimate, onslaught, sublimation, complicit, ambiguous



# They're after Mark Schluter's ass - Weber's life began veering in late July

## Summary

Mark believes there is a conspiracy behind what has happened to him and he needs a witness but nobody was there at the time of the accident. Mark also believes that the surgeons removed his memory of what happened that night. The only piece of evidence available is the note. Mark determines to take things easy but decides that he needs to visit all the churches in the area to show the note in the hopes that a good person will come forward with information. Bonnie takes Mark to churches every Sunday but no one seems to know anything about the note. Mark is still obsessed though because whoever wrote that note is the only person who knows why Mark is still alive and he would like to know why.

In 'Karin wrote Gerald Weber', Karin sends another note to Dr. Weber telling him that Mark is getting worse, that he is obsessing about the note, doubling places along with people, and has rejected his home because it is a duplicate that someone has created. Karin cites information from Dr. Weber's new book about reduplicative paramnesia in which people see details that they never saw before injury. Is it possible that Mark has this? Dr. Weber's secretary replied telling Karin that Dr. Weber is traveling for the next three months but she would make sure he got Karin's email. Karin feels that the response is a blow-off but Daniel tries to get her to understand how demanding Dr. Weber's book tour must be.

Karin makes an appointment to see Dr. Hayes to discuss Mark's worsening condition. Dr. Hayes recommends that Mark get started with the cognitive behavioral therapy but Karin can't help but wonder if there isn't something more direct that could be implemented to help her brother.

In 'She reached a truce with Rupp and Cain', Karin makes arrangements with Tommy and Duane for help with watching Mark in the evenings. It is awkward for Karin to talk to Tommy because they had had sex once several years ago and she feels that he would like to resume but she is not interested. Tommy is in the National Guard and had convinced Mark to join a few years ago despite Karin's protests. Tommy is ready to go to war to fight after the September 11 attacks and the recruiters have given Mark a temporary reprieve due to his medical condition.

On Independence Day, Karin joins Bonnie, Tommy and Duane at Mark's for a holiday cookout and Mark dedicates the day to his sister wherever she may be because this holiday has always been her favorite. Mark thinks Karin must either be abroad or in prison or he would have heard from her by now.



In 'Weber's life began veering in late July', Dr. Weber's daughter, Jess, calls from California to wish him a happy birthday. Jess is pleased that her father is using his cell phone even though he hates it. Dr. Weber tries to ask about Jess' lesbian partner but cannot remember her name. Jess mentions that she has seen a review of her father's latest book so after their phone call he bikes to the library to read any reviews he can find. The review Jess had mentioned is not flattering, describing Dr. Weber of creating slightly cartoonish tales of brain injured patients and accusing him of sideshow exploitation and privacy violations. As angry as Dr. Weber is at the review, there is a part of him that wonders if it might all be true.

Dr. Weber and his wife go to Italy for a vacation but he is so distracted by the book review and the potential damage to his reputation that he has a hard time enjoying himself and frustrates Sylvie with his pouting. In August, Dr. Weber flies to Sydney to speak at an international conference but a combination of jet lag and professional anxiety renders him almost unable to perform. The next day he is stilted and shaky during a radio interview and he calls his editor to let him know in the event of any public relations fallout.

## Analysis

The note seems to have an almost spiritual aspect to it and Mark determines that it is possible that whoever wrote it might be a church goer so he enlists Bonnie's help to make the rounds of local churches to see if anyone will come forward to claim it. It is ironic that Mark would turn to the religious aspect because of the negative impact that his mother's religious fanaticism had on his life. But it is not uncommon for people to seek out spiritual answers when going through trying times in their lives and Mark is no different. The topic of religion and God also comes up frequently in conversations between Dr. Weber and his wife. They call God the "Tour Director" and place their trust in Him to help make decisions and provide safe travels.

Karin is relentless in her focus to find more help for Mark and she contacts both Dr. Weber and Dr. Hayes again to talk about any more options. Karin epitomizes the theme of forgiveness in the book because she could have easily given up on Mark when he does not recognize her and is rude to her but she forgives his behavior because he is not well. Karin wants what is best for Mark and is willing to suffer through hurts and indignities until she is satisfied that there is a solution for him.

Dr. Weber's fixation with the negative review of his book has almost taken over his life. Not only is he insulted that people would think negative things about him, he is also concerned for his professional reputation and the fear that he may be getting too old to do this kind of work. What really stings Dr. Weber, though, is the thought that perhaps the critics are right about him. Maybe he has used injured people to further his professional gain and has violated their privacy. This internal angst will continue to plague Dr. Weber until later in the book when he has the chance to talk to someone who has experienced something similar.



## Discussion Question 1

Why is it ironic that Independence Day is Karin's favorite holiday?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Dr. Weber especially bothered by the bad review of his latest book?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Dr. Weber's dislike of his cell phone?

## Vocabulary

damnation, denomination, territorial, standstill, pronouncements, lobes, distinct, melioration, delusions, transgression, leverage, prospective, ominously, autodidact, mediocre, fain, amassed, fanatical, waiver, salacious, affirmative, plaintive, aerie, obligatory, synopses, astronomical, pagan, bucktoothed, ecosystem, evaluative, irrefutable, ideological, exploitative, brackish, corroboration, anecdotal, anhedonia, nonplussed, synesthesia, dyscalculia, cavernous, preening, synapses, molten





# How much had Mark changed? - Back at last in his corner of the globe

## Summary

Karin is constantly trying to take note of Mark's improvement and she thinks he is much slower than before and much more forgetful, but he does seem to be funnier. Karin cannot deny that Mark is more childlike now and his temper seems worse than before. Karin also admits to herself that the Capgras is changing her too in that she has had to adapt herself and her image of herself to the way Mark sees her now. One day Mark wants Karin to take him to a dealership so he can buy a new truck but Karin refuses and Mark flies into a rage. Mark also talks about his need to return to work because he can't live off of disability forever.

Mark begins Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Dr. Tower and Barbara stops in to see him three times a week. Barbara takes Mark grocery shopping and plays video games with him and he loves their time together. Barbara even got Mark interested in reading again and he finishes *My Antonia* in spite of not understanding all of it. One evening Karin thanks Barbara for all her help and Barbara deflects, saying it is all for her own benefit.

One night after dinner at a restaurant, Mark demands that Karin take him to see the site of his accident so he can look at the clues. Karin tells him that nature has taken over and any clues have been washed away or overgrown but Mark persists and she agrees to take him the next day when it is light outside. Mark reluctantly understands and demands that Karin stay the night at his house so he can keep an eye on her and know that she has not left to tamper with any clues while he is asleep. At Mark's house, Mark overhears Karin talking on the phone and launches into a fit of rage when Karin reveals that she has been talking to Daniel Riegel. Karin tells Mark that she has been seeing Daniel and Mark does not see him as any threat but does not understand why Daniel would spend time with Karin when Daniel had dated Mark's sister a few years ago.

The next morning Karin takes Daniel to North Line Road to see the site of his accident. Mark recalls that he, Tommy and Duane had been at the Bullet bar with some other friends that night but does not even remember getting into his truck that night. All he recalls is being in the hospital. A car slows down to see if Karin and Mark need help and the car reminds Mark that there had been somebody else in the truck with him that night and he remembers talking with that person. Karin tells him that no one else had been found and Mark is angry that she does not listen to him. In frustration Mark throws the note into the wind and Karin scrambles to retrieve it. Mark is transfixed looking at the highway and tells Karin that there had been something white and ghostlike floating up in the air and then vanished. Mark thinks there was some kind of guiding spirit in the road and he tried to kill it.



In 'So the notewriter's not a churchgoer', Mark has to have the note laminated because he continues to show it to people and it is very worn. Mark and Bonnie go door to door and still find no one who knows anything about the note. One day it occurs to Mark that his accident occurred at the beginning of crane season and he wonders if Daniel Riegel has anything to do with it. Mark thinks that Daniel is following him plus Mark's fake sister is sleeping with Daniel, all too much to be consequential in his mind. Mark needs to clear his head so he walks to his favorite spot by the river, all the while the birds are chattering goat-head, goat-head, goat-head. Then it comes to Mark: Go ahead. He or the person in the truck with him on the night of the accident was saying go ahead. Mark runs back to his house and tells Karin to ask Daniel if the words "go ahead" mean anything to him.

In 'For a moment', Weber couldn't find his left arm or shoulder, Dr. Weber wakes up dazed in yet another hotel room on his book tour. The burden of public humiliation about his book and the people whose trust he may have violated weigh heavy on him and he cannot get comfortable in his own skin no matter where he is in the world.

In 'She found a description online', at Mark's house, Karin has discovered information on something called Fregoli Syndrome which, like Capgras Syndrome, involves disruption of the ability to identify faces. Karin is excited that this may be information that could help Mark and she is excited to tell Daniel but he cautions her and thinks they need to take Mark back to Good Samaritan for treatment. Karin says that maybe she should leave because Mark, after all, does not recognize her as his sister so technically he would not feel abandoned by Karin's departure. Daniel does not give credence to Karin's statement and changes the subject to the Crane Refuge which is in a lot of stress right now. For years, the Platte River had been protected from too many people accessing it and leaving it too low to sustain wildlife. But now the demands for the water are stretching the limits of the rules plus a new consortium of builders is getting new large scale building rights when the development council had promised that there would be none. Karen knows that Robert Karsh is behind the building schemes but she denies it when Daniel questions her. Daniel wants Karin to come to work for the Refuge because they need someone like her who is a fighter but also has good communication skills. The Refuge is trying to raise enough funds to buy land by the river and thereby block any other acquisitions.

In 'Back at last in his corner of the globe', Dr. Weber returns from his world travels and Sylvie tries to take his mind off his book reviews by discussing major news topics but Dr. Weber is obsessed with the book, even repeatedly checking his sales ratings on Amazon and getting distracted by reader reviews which covered the gamut. Dr. Weber muses that he is all used up and that this job now is to figure out what to do with the next 20 years of his life. When the 1-year anniversary of September 11 arrived, Dr. Weber tries to get his personal angst in perspective measured against the overwhelming grief of families and a nation. Dr. Weber receives another email from Karin, this one telling him that Mark thinks people are following him and that the entire town of Farview has been replaced in order to deceive him. Dr. Weber is torn about how to respond to Karin; would it be worse to just drop the case or to risk being called an



opportunist again? Dr. Weber decides that he will go back to Nebraska to authentically help Mark the best he can and he tells his wife that Tour Director wants him to go.

## Analysis

Karin has reached a tipping point in her relationship with Mark. She has taken stock of his progress and he seems to be regressing instead of getting better and the gravity of what that means sinks in all at once. "It wrecked her: he'd be dependent on her forever. And still she would fail him, as she had failed to protect her parents from their own worst instincts. Her ministrations were making Mark even worse. She needed him to be a way he would never be again, a way she was no longer sure that he had ever been. She hadn't the strength to cope with his crushing new innocence. She lowered herself into a folding chair. The arc of her own life no longer led anywhere. The years ahead collapsed, burying her under their dead weight. Then the graze of fingertips on her forearm took her out of herself." What started out to be a few weeks away from her life in Sioux City has turned into a lifetime commitment of taking care of someone who not only does not recognize her but also does not treat her very well.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when Karin thanks Barbara for all her help with Mark. Barbara brushes it off and does not want to take the gratitude, saying that it is all for herself. The meaning of this will become clear at the end of the story when more is revealed about why Barbara is in Kearney and why Mark is of particular interest to her. There is also foreshadowing in Mark's hearing the birds say goat-head, goat-head, goat-head. Eventually it comes to him that someone was in the truck with him on the night of the accident and said go ahead, but the birds helped Mark get to that understanding. This will become clear as the story extends. What is also interesting to note about Mark's realization is that it was birds that helped give him clarity. Just like the cranes call out the truth of what they see from their vantage point, the birds in the woods do the same for Mark so he can move closer to the truth of what happened to him on the night of his accident.

The theme of nature continues to exhibit in the story. When Karin tries to get Mark to calm down, she wants to take him down to the river to relax. Even Barbara knows that nature has healing properties and she takes Mark on walks to help him. When Mark wants Karin to take him to the site of his accident, Karin knows that nature has taken its course with the road and the surrounding vegetation and tells him, "There's nothing left to see. It's all been washed away or grown over." He sat up, excited. "You agree with me, then? Somebody's altering every clue I might have to crack this thing?" This thing. His life. "Nature, Mark." Overgrowing all that has ever happened. "Put your seat belt back on. Let's go." Nature has a way of healing if given enough time and the author wants the reader to know that the cycles of nature are important to people too but most do not notice the effects of natural events going on all around them. Nature is also important to Daniel and the Crane Refuge.

The erosion of the water is critical to the crane population which returns every year and the encroachment of the surrounding areas by the big builders is a classic example of



man vs. nature. Daniel represents nature and the preservation of instincts and life that are inherent in the birds and animals of the area while Robert Karsh represents men who are bent on progress--or at least what they call progress--at any cost. This is an ongoing theme in life and it will be interesting to see how it plays out in this story. The author is leading up to the climax of the story which will be revealed to involve the showdown between the Crane Refuge and the local building consortium.

In an act of hopeful redemption, Dr. Weber decides to return to Nebraska to help Mark. The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is not working and Mark is suffering from grander delusions. Perhaps if Dr. Weber approaches Mark's case with genuine authenticity and no other reason, he will be able to come out from under the cloud of despair and self-hate he has been experiencing since the negative reviews about his book have surfaced. When he says that he thinks Tour Director (God) wants him to go, it may be Dr. Weber's way of saying a confession and asking for forgiveness for his perceived lack of integrity and encroachment into people's lives for his own advancement.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is the significance of Mark's thinking that he saw something white and ghostlike in front of him on the night of the accident? Was it something ghostly? Spiritual?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What clues does Mark get from nature that are helping him along his healing journey?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the concept of man vs. nature as it relates to the Crane Refuge.

## **Vocabulary**

badgering, precedent, foundlings, eerily, farce, reconciled, rapt, diligence, curtailment, supplications, supplications, apoplectic, covert, conspiratorial, wainscoting, buoyant, maelstrom, depleted, solicitous, reconnoitering, hillock, peculiar, irrelevant, tentatively, synchrony, distort, quadriplegics, phantom, alpha, scythe, encroachment, consortium, mirage, backlash, empiricism, dinghy, ludicrous, mythic



# They find their way back down from the arctic - Karin went to Karsh for advice

## Summary

A family of three cranes is flying south in its annual course and roosts in Colorado in October when the father is hit by gunshot. The other cranes in the group cry and scatter as the fledgling baby seeks his mother. For two days the flock of cranes circles and hollers waiting for the dead crane to appear but he does not. When the mother and baby reach the Platte River with the rest of the flock, yards from where Mark's accident occurred, the mother again looks for her mate but he is not here. The mother crane grows jittery recalling that something bad happened in this place last year. The baby senses his mother's distress and launches into a type of dance but there is no joy.

In 'He quits the so-called cognitive therapy', Mark tires of his sessions with Dr. Tower because he does not feel as if they are doing him any good. Mark still needs to get to the facts about his accident so one day he tells Tommy and Duane that there had been someone else with him in his truck who walked away from the accident. Tommy and Duane are incredulous because Mark's truck was demolished and there was no way anybody walked away from such an accident. Mark thinks that perhaps he picked up a hitchhiker and does not remember. Mark also feels that something happened to him on the operating table that erases his memory. Then his sister and his home were swapped out and now people are following him. Mark tells Duane and Tommy that they weren't swapped out because they don't know anything. Mark thinks that the government is trying to replace the whole town and thinks that is what the hitchhiker must have been alluding to when they played a warmer/colder word game. Mark also feels that his accident occurred at the time that the cranes were roosting so that people would be diverted by them. According to Mark, Daniel Riegel has been following him around for weeks and has gotten involved with the fake Karin. Daniel works for the Crane Refuge but in Mark's mind that is a government organization and capable of sinister activities. Then Mark suggests that the hitchhiker he had picked up was a terrorist scoping out iconic American sites.

On the way home, a deer heads straight into the path of Tommy's truck and he maneuvers to miss hitting it; both the boys and the deer are surprised that no one was hurt. Duane opens the glove compartment and pulls out a walkie-talkie, something Mark has seen before. Tommy demands that Duane put it back but Mark suddenly realizes that he had been talking to Tommy and Duane on one of these things on the night of his accident. Now Mark realizes that Tommy and Duane are in on the government plot too. Mark demands to be let out of the truck so he can walk the rest of the way home.

In 'They didn't touch each other', Mark tells Karin that he is quitting therapy and Karin frantically tries to convince him to stay. Karin goes to the rehab center to see Barbara who tells Karin that Karin could force the therapy issue with Mark because Karin is his



legal guardian. Later that night, Karin is sitting with her suitcases outside Daniel's house when he comes home from work. Karin tells Daniel that she cannot live this life anymore, that everything she tries to do for Mark just ends up hurting him. Plus Karin is broke and exhausted and cannot rely on Daniel's kindness any longer. Karin breaks down in tears and after talking, Daniel leads her back into the house.

The next day Karin heads downtown in order to catch Robert Karsh as he left his office to go to lunch. Robert is happy to see her and they sit on a bench to catch up and he tells her that he is heavily involved in expansion for the city. Karin probed, trying to find out if Robert was involved with any building plans out near the river and Robert tells her that that is top secret information. Robert tells Karin that the project is big and he has always wanted to do at least one thing that would make her proud of him. Karin is so touched that she cries and they make tentative plans to get together again. Karin does not tell Daniel about her talking with Robert but does tell him that she is ready to take the fundraising job at the Refuge and she is energized by the thought of being able to help somewhere that would do some good. The following Tuesday, Karin met Robert again.

In 'Four months on, and the place', Dr. Weber has returned to Nebraska to help Mark. Dr. Weber arrives at Mark's home and Mark is excited to see him, bringing the doctor up to speed on what he has learned since they last talked. Mark tells Dr. Weber that he and Barbara are the only ones that Mark trusts anymore. Mark tells Dr. Weber that there must be a secret biological project so big that only the government could back it and it has something to do with the cranes which is why Daniel is involved. Mark even tells Dr. Weber that it is possible that the real Mark had been run over on the highway that night and that he is actually an impostor too. Dr. Weber offers Mark a trip to New York for some testing but Mark declines. Mark tells Dr. Weber that he is worried that his sister has not shown up since his accident.

The next day, Mark takes Dr. Weber fishing so they can talk without fear of being overheard. Mark does not understand why he has become the center of some conspiracy when he does not know anything. A thunderstorm erupts and Mark and Dr. Weber run for the car. Later that evening, Dr. Weber reaches out to some of his colleagues to tell them about Mark to see if he can rally any help but none seem interested in the case. Dr. Weber works late into the night searching the Internet and finds a Capgras Syndrome patient who was helped with a medication called olanzapine. Dr. Weber recalls that Karin had begged him to put Mark on some medication but he had not wanted Capgras to be treatable merely by a new drug.

The next day Karin and Daniel meet Dr. Weber at his hotel and he tells them about his time with Mark and that he recommends that Mark be put on olanzapine which is an antipsychotic drug which will hopefully leave Mark more lucid and less agitated and confused. Daniel pushes back on Dr. Weber's suggestion because of unknown side effects and dependency issues but Karin wants to consider it. Dr. Weber heads to Mark's house and is pleased to find that Barbara is there but wonders about the purpose of her visit since Mark is no longer her patient. Dr. Weber and Barbara go to dinner that evening and discuss Mark's case. Dr. Weber is surprised by Barbara's



medical knowledge and tries to learn more about her past but she is evasive. Barbara offers to show Dr. Weber the Silver Bullet, the bar where Mark had been just prior to his accident. As they sip their drinks, Dr. Weber surmises that Barbara has a story that she is not telling, that she is in this current work situation which is way below her skill set. Dr. Weber reveals to Barbara that he thinks his own work is suspect and the critics are right about him. Barbara drags Dr. Weber to the dance floor and he is very uncomfortable so they leave the bar.

In 'Karin went to Karsh for advice', Karin has breakfast with Robert to get his perspective on medication for Mark and he thinks it would not be a bad idea, which is in stark contrast to Daniel's opinion. Robert is incredulous that Karin is working for the Refuge and questions her about what she does there but Karin does not divulge much, very aware of the conflict of interest. Later that evening, Dr. Weber called Karin to tell her that he will be sending his full write up about Mark to Dr. Hayes. Karin is again disappointed that Dr. Weber is leaving her unsettled and says goodbye for good.

## Analysis

Once again, the author uses the cranes as reflections of the truth. The instance of the father being killed wreaks havoc with the migration and roosting patterns of the mate and baby as well as on the entire flock. This violence is a metaphor for Mark's accident, something that cannot be explained just as the crane's death cannot be explained. The remaining cranes mark the trauma into their brains and will remember it again and again each time they return to this place. The author continues to weave the theme of memory into the story and even though Mark's memory is thwarted at the moment, the cranes are acutely aware of the trauma and it is locked into their memories forever.

Mark's delusions are getting increasingly worse and no one can reason him out of them. Memory continues to be an important theme but in this case it is what Mark cannot remember and the distress it causes him. He cannot understand why he would be singled out to be the victim of a conspiracy because he does not know anything and feels that his memory of what was has been obliterated by those in charge of the conspiracy. Soon, though, Mark will begin to rely more on his instincts just as the cranes do, and memory will not have to be forced but will come more naturally. Nature is still important in the story. Whenever anyone wants to calm Mark, they walk with him through his neighborhood or down to the river. Mark himself knows the healing properties of nature and he takes Dr. Weber fishing so they can communicate free from the conspirators that he feels are all around his house. Even Dr. Weber is influenced by nature when he returns to Nebraska. On his first trip to Kearney, he was almost repulsed by the flat sameness of the area but now he views it as more peaceful and a place that engenders thought and deeper exploration of concepts.

Mark is not the only one suffering from an identity crisis; Karin has all but evaporated in who she thought she used to be. Karin is essentially invisible to Mark as a real person who loves him and he continues to dole out insults and slights. She has given up everything for him, even almost forced to live with Daniel because she has nowhere



else to go. Daniel's asceticism has also drained all the life from her. A person can live with emotional and spiritual deprivation for only so long before breaking and this is exactly where Karin is. She wants to leave Daniel's house but she is still vulnerable so she takes the low-paying job at the Refuge to at least have something to do where she feels she can contribute her talents to something worthwhile. Daniel's boring life makes Karin reach out to Robert but she is playing a dangerous game by seeing both men at the same time which will soon become evident.

The incident of the deer on the highway is a metaphor for Mark's escape on the night of his accident. Tommy is able to maneuver the truck to avoid hitting the deer and no one is injured, something that surprised all of them. The deer represents Mark who also escaped with his life and it becomes evident to all the boys how precarious their situation really was and how Mark is still suffering the shock from his own accident. The near accident provides an opportunity for truth too because the walkie-talkies are revealed, something that Tommy and Duane had tried to keep secret from Mark. Tommy and Duane clearly know more about Mark's accident than they have let on and now Mark can no longer trust his best friends, his comfort circle is narrowing. There are more secrets to come about the accident and they will be revealed in almost as abrupt a manner.

The author uses foreshadowing in Robert's questioning of Karin's job responsibilities at the Refuge. He has more than a passing interest in what is going on at the Refuge and that will soon be revealed to Karin's disadvantage.

## Discussion Question 1

Why has Dr. Weber agreed to return to Nebraska one more time to help Mark?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the deer running in front of Tommy's truck on the highway and his skill at avoiding hitting it?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Robert and Daniel and what they mean in Karin's life.

## Vocabulary

fledgling, ecstasy, assessment, vice versa, wreak, havoc, hibachi, surveillance, godforsaken, sanctuary, quivering, self-effacing, morels, acquiescence, illicit, sparse, crystalline, euthanized, anorectic, flinch, sadistic, prognosis, atone, ecoterrorism, awn, benediction, contemptible, drumlins, copses, ventral, dorsal, iatrogenic, russet, vested, delusional, ingrate, shiftless, obscure, oblivious, placid, zeal, fatalistic, brash, bilateral,





lethargy, postural, hypotension, vain, corbels, behaviorist, chide, serotonin, ramshackle, crass, antiphony, narcissism, flagellation, psychoactive, truffle, mezzo, contrition, composure



# She all but threw it in his face - The TV show airs

## Summary

Dr. Weber stings from Karin's implications that he has no idea about her anguish about her brother and that he has really done nothing to help. Dr. Weber rationalizes that he has provided tens of thousands of dollars of care for free and he even came to Nebraska saving Karin the time and expense of dragging Mark around the country to specialists who could not help her. Dr. Weber could not tell Karin the real reason he is leaving Nebraska again so suddenly--he is in love with Barbara. Before he goes, Dr. Weber calls Dr. Hayes to tell him his recommendation of putting Mark on medication to which Dr. Hayes responds that that had been his recommendation months ago.

In 'Mark's not good for squat these days', the National Guard is after Mark because he had signed up awhile ago. Karin argues Mark's disability case with the officials and he is eventually released from any obligations. Karin lets it slip in conversation that Mark's disability checks from the slaughterhouse will stop at the anniversary of his accident so he calls the plant and is told that he needs a new battery of tests before they can re-hire him. Mark knows that his time is running out to find out what happened to him so he calls the Crime Solvers TV program to get them to do a story about him and the note. The show sends its star reporter and a cameraman to Mark's house and Mark tells all that he knows about his story. They then proceed to North Line Road to shoot some footage of the scene of the accident.

In 'Another prairie winter', Karin calls Barbara to ask advice on whether she should put Mark on the medication but Barbara refuses to give an opinion and Karin hangs up in anger. Karin continues to work at the Refuge and has begun seeing Robert more regularly, mostly parked on back roads in her car to talk. Robert thinks that Karin should start Mark on the meds just to see what happens because it could be positive. Robert tries to get Karin to talk about what is going on at the Refuge but she does not. Robert tells Karin that she will be proud of him once all the development consortium activity becomes public news and she is intrigued.

Karin attends the Development Council public hearing with Daniel and she averts her eyes when she sees Robert in the hall. Karin is rattled to see Barbara sitting in the crowd and points her out to Daniel. Robert's consortium presents its plans to build what Karin interprets as a sprawling tourist village for crane peepers. Daniel passionately pleads the case for the Refuge in maintaining the Platte River area just as it is to save the birds. Robert contends that the consortium's project is not in a roosting area and that the visitors will come regardless so it makes sense to offer them amenities and build revenue for the area. As the debate continues, Karin secretly supports both sides. No resolution comes from the meeting and Karin makes the mistake of telling Daniel that it does not seem as bad as she had thought; at least the consortium is not



proposing some sort of factory outlet mall and their recommendation is focused on the birds. Daniel erupts in anger at Karin and then apologizes just as Barbara comes up to them to say hello. Barbara wonders what the consortium plans to do with their project during the five sixths of the year when there are no birds around. Daniel is embarrassed that he had not asked the question in the meeting. Daniel cannot sleep that night out of frustration for not being able to push back effectively on the consortium and at one point tells Karin that he has heard Barbara's voice somewhere before.

In 'Winter on Long Island', Dr. Weber tells Sylvie why he had returned so early from Nebraska--that he had been attracted to Barbara Gillespie. Sylvie cries and wants to know why Dr. Weber is telling her this and he tells her that he cannot let it mean anything so he wants it in the open. Dr. Weber tells Sylvie that he thinks he is attracted to Barbara because she reminds him of himself.

The Webers' daughter, Jess, comes home to Long Island for Christmas with her partner, Shawna, and both Dr. Weber and Sylvie sink into depression after they leave. Dr. Weber still bemoans the lackluster sales performance of his latest book and Sylvie has reached her limit and begs him to forget about what the public says about him and start living his life again.

In 'The TV show airs', the Crime Solvers episode about Mark's accident airs on TV and he is mostly pleased with it. There is a \$500 reward offered so Mark feels sure that someone will step forward with some important information which will help him. Karin had not known about the show and is curious why Mark had not told her about it. Mark has a new plan to test Karin in which he takes her to the abandoned farm where their father had once tried to run. The farmhouse is abandoned and boarded up. Karin recalls things about living there with their parents that startle Mark and he starts to waver on whether she could be his real sister and starts to cry like a baby.

## Analysis

In spite of his hope to redeem himself where Mark is concerned, Dr. Weber has still fallen short of both his expectations and those of Karin. He had come to Nebraska this time with an open heart and no ulterior motives but is caught up short when he is smitten by Barbara Gillespie. Because he cannot tell Karin about these new feelings, he leaves her feeling unfulfilled and with no real solution for her brother. Dr. Weber had hoped to achieve forgiveness, an important theme in the book, but he has ended up disappointing Karin once again, and, in turn, disappointing himself. Later when Dr. Weber tells his wife about his infatuation with Barbara, she wonders if her husband is just going through a mid life crisis. Dr. Weber is nearing 60 years old and he does not have the public recognition he once had and the students at the university are interested in concepts that seem to elude him. It would not be out of the realm of possibility to assume that Dr. Weber is suffering from feelings of inadequacy and being too old to keep up anymore. His wife understands this but she has a hard time with his maudlin behavior which is now degenerating into self pity. He is not the man he used to



be and she wishes that he could get things in perspective and appreciate the things he has in his life instead of bemoaning what he thinks he has lost.

For all of his troubles and issues, Mark has been very inventive in trying to find some information that will help him understand what has happened to him. His latest venture of calling the Crime Solvers TV program is very creative and resourceful, leading the reader to believe that perhaps he is not as compromised as other people may think. Mark's only issue with the program is that they used dramatic license in some of the videography but he hopes that this will produce some substantial input. It is also interesting to note that he initiated the TV show on his own without Karin's knowledge so he is becoming more comfortable with his independence again.

Karin is having a difficult time--it is a bleak winter, her brother still does not recognize her and she has no real purpose to her life. The work at the Refuge meets some of her need for fulfillment but Daniel is not stimulating enough for her so she continues to see Robert who is more vital and commanding. Karin is playing with fire by being involved with both men, both personally and professionally, but it seems that she needs both Robert's creative energy and Daniel's calm reassurance. This will soon come to a critical point where Karin's duplicity will be revealed and she will lose more than she thinks.

Mark attempts to test Karin by going to their old farmhouse to see what she recalls about living there. When she not only answers his questions accurately, but offers information that only the two of them would know, Mark is shocked. He is not at the point of calling her his real sister yet but he cries tears of frustration leading the reader to think that he wants to believe her and this is a positive sign that he has any interest in proving her identity.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is a mid-life crisis and what signs does Dr. Weber exhibit that could mean he is going through one?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do you think Robert tries to pry information from Karin about her work at the Refuge?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Karin risk her relationship with Daniel by seeing Robert again?



## Vocabulary

opportunist, opaque, entitlement, asymbolia, stoic, optimal, anhydrous, pathetic, subterranean, fidelity, exasperated, pretentious, wannabe, contestable, paternity, sultry, mortified, contrite, geriatric, meandering, haggling, frenzied, spew, decimated, postmortem, endorphins, dank, hypothetical, retrospect, estrangement, crouch, commodity, pretense, neurons, empathy, synergistic, nuanced, anarchist, disembodied, nattering, florid, inadvertently, restive, accreting, parsimonious, ad hoc, cyan, effaced, eugenics, certifiable



# They stood alone together - It had to be the hospital, again

## Summary

Karin and Mark continue to reminisce at the abandoned farm and he tells her that Daniel had approached him sexually when they were in high school which is what ended their friendship. Karin is incredulous at this statement but Mark remains firm. Mark is interested in Karin's work and she tells him about being at the Refuge and how hard Daniel works to keep it going. Mark does not want to hear anymore about Daniel because he feels that Daniel is at the heart of all his problems. Karin points out to Mark where the consortium wants to build its project and Mark is astonished to see that it is near the site of his accident. At last Mark admits why he had asked Karin to come to the farm with him: to thank her for standing by him when he was injured and recovering. Mark also wants to know if Karin thinks that Mark could have been trying to commit suicide in his truck accident, that perhaps the whitish shape he saw in the road was some person or spiritual being sent to stop him. Karin denies that this is what happened but Mark is not sure.

On the way home Karin tells Mark about the olanzapine that might help him get his life together again but he does not focus on it. Karin says she will make an appointment with Dr. Hayes. Mark then asks Karin that if his sister ever shows up, if Karin can still care for him a little bit.

In 'The self presents itself', Dr. Weber mulls over the elements of neuroscience and all that is required in the brain to have thought and memory. He recalls expressions and faces his little daughter made at various ages just by mimicking his own expressions and he marvels at the processes that must be in place for that to happen.

In Christmas came and went, Mark has received no leads from the Crime Solvers episode and tells Karin that he has a pretty good idea about what happened to him on the night of his accident, that any ambitious building project would mean transforming the local inhabitants. Karin does not understand and he tells her to think about it. On New Year's Day, Tommy shows up at Mark's house but Mark won't let him in. Tommy yells through the door that he has been called up to go to war and he will see Mark when he gets back.

On Groundhog's Day, Daniel calls Mark, the first time they have talked in 15 years. Karin had told Daniel about Mark's disclosure about his approaching Mark sexually when they were in school and Daniel stumbles as he tries to apologize for what happened and any miscommunication that might have taken place. Mark accuses Daniel of sleeping with Karin because she reminds Daniel of Mark's sister. Eventually the conversation turns to Daniel's job at the Refuge and Mark tells him that he has seen surveyors out around his house and Daniel figures the consortium must be running an



environmental impact survey. Mark feels sure that they want his property and Daniel would like to talk to him about that so he goes to Mark's house. Mark shows Daniel the note but Daniel says that he does not know what it means. As Mark and Daniel talk, Barbara shows up. Mark is surprised that Barbara knows Daniel who leaves pretty quickly and later remembers how he had first heard about Barbara Gillespie.

In the middle of February, the birds came back, Dr. Weber and his wife see a news feature on TV about the cranes at the Platte River but he says nothing as his wife questions him about it.

Mark begins taking the medication and four days later calls Karin in the middle of the night to tell her that he now knows that he had died on the operating table the night of his accident but none of the doctors noticed. Now Mark does not know how to finish the job. Daniel tells Karin that Mark could be having side effects from the medication and Karin determines to get him in to see Dr. Hayes. Then Karin remembers that it is the one-year anniversary of Mark's accident. She cannot sleep and goes to the bathroom to take something. When she has been in the bathroom for too long, Daniel enters and she glares at him, declaring that Daniel still loves Mark and he is only with her because she is Mark's sister.

Mark needs some observation until he adjusts to the medication so Karin asks Barbara who agrees to help. Karin also enlists the help of Bonnie who agrees to spend the nights at Mark's house. One evening, Mark assembles both Karin and Bonnie to watch an episode of Crime Solvers because there has apparently been a break in Mark's case. A police officer states that the tire tracks left at the scene of the accident have been traced to tires belonging to Duane Cain who had been brought in for questioning. Karin flies into a rage, driving to the police station but Duane has already been released so she speeds over to Duane's apartment where she tries to punch him. Duane then tells Karin what happened on the night of Mark's accident. Tommy and Duane had been driving in Tommy's truck and Mark was in his own truck, all of them talking on the walkie-talkies. Mark's signal apparently went dead and they lost communication with him so they sped up trying to find him. When they did locate Mark, his truck was upside down in the ditch and he was unconscious. Tommy hit his breaks, causing the skid marks in front of Mark's truck. Tommy and Duane then sped into town to report the accident. Duane says that they reported the accident anonymously because the cops always go after types like him and Tommy and, besides, they had no other facts to report. Karin then remembers the tracks from a third car and Duane says that they noticed a white car with out-of-state plates that had been going the opposite direction before they reached Mark's truck. Karin tries to explain everything to Daniel when she gets home but nothing seems to add up. The next morning Bonnie calls Karin because Mark is having some kind of seizure.

In 'It had to be the hospital, again', Mark is back in the hospital because he had tried to kill himself by taking too much olanzapine. When Mark comes out of his coma, he demands to talk to Dr. Weber who is hesitant to return to Nebraska but realizes he must go because of a responsibility. Sylvie is not happy that he has chosen to go back to Nebraska but he feels compelled to do it. Karin, too, feels guilty about what Mark has



done and he refuses to speak to her. Karin buries herself in work at the Refuge. The Development Council grants the consortium the right to purchase water shares, a decision which crushes Daniel. The Refuge decides that what the consortium is doing may not be so bad after all but Daniel cannot agree so he quits his job. Karin tells Daniel what she knows about the next phases of the consortium's plans to include a living prairie museum and waterpark. Daniel finally realizes that Karin has learned all this by being with Robert and he is doubly betrayed. But the worst part is that Karin had played up to Barbara, who is the consortium's researcher. Daniel tells Karin that Barbara had called him 14 months ago, pretending to be working on some news story, and quizzed Daniel about what the Refuge was doing. Karin feels sick about what has happened and leaves Daniel's house.

Dr. Weber has returned to Nebraska and visits Mark in the hospital. Mark tells Dr. Weber that they are going to do electro shock therapy on him and asks the doctor if it is possible to transplant animal parts into a human brain. Karin meets with Robert and he still wants her in spite of the fact that she had told Daniel everything he had told her about the consortium's plans. Karin takes Dr. Weber out to see the cranes because he should not miss the opportunity to see such a spectacle. Karin intuits that Dr. Weber has really come back to Nebraska to see Barbara and tells him that Barbara had called Daniel over a year ago and Daniel thinks she was spying for the consortium.

The next morning, Dr. Weber goes to Barbara's house and he takes her out to see the cranes and they then spend the day together. Jess calls her father to say that her mother had told her about what Dr. Weber is doing by going back to Nebraska and she screams at him to grow up. Dr. Weber then quizzes Barbara about what she is really doing in Kearney and she reveals that she had been a producer for a cable television network in New York when she had a breakdown from all the stress. She was then sent to Nebraska to cover the cranes story but she realized the story about the water crisis would not change no matter what she did so she quit and became a nurse's aide.

In a flashback, Barbara recalls driving on North Line Road on that February night, stressed out from work and the antidepressants have not kicked in yet. Barbara pulls over to the side of the road to steady herself. Barbara then recalls going to the hospital to see Mark after his accident, having been let in because the nurses think she is his sister. Barbara tells Mark that she had been in the road that night and he swerved to keep from hitting her. Mark asks if she is the one who had written the note and she says no. Hours after this visit, Barbara again went to Mark's room and he tries to talk but the coma is taking him down but not before he writes the note. Barbara left the note on the bedside table and vanished. Back in the present, Mark is incredulous that Barbara could have known what happened on the night of the accident and never said anything.

## Analysis

Karin and Mark may have reached a turning point in their relationship in that Mark may be realizing that she is, after all, his sister. Karin has not only been able to answer Mark's questions about their life at the farm but has also initiated some memories that





only he and his real sister could have known. In a way, this plays into the theme of coming home. They have returned to the home where they spent their childhood together and now, after much angst and separation, they are returning home to each other and it is a nice feeling for both of them. Karin is not so happy to learn how Mark's friendship with Daniel ended and she will later speculate that the only reason Daniel is so good to her in spite of everything is that by being close to her, he can remain close to Mark. This supports the theme of betrayal in the story because Karin thought that Daniel was interested in her as a person and to learn otherwise is devastating. The author also uses foreshadowing in Mark's questioning of whether he had tried to commit suicide on the night of his accident. This will become real as the story extends and Mark does try to kill himself by taking too much of his olanzapine.

Throughout the story, Barbara's true identity has been in question. People like Daniel and Dr. Weber do not understand why such a confident, articulate woman is working as a nurse's aide. Both of the men also seem to recall hearing her voice or seeing her somewhere before. Eventually Daniel remembers her voice from a call she made to him prior to Mark's accident asking questions about the Refuge for a news story. Dr. Weber also remembers seeing Barbara on a cable program in New York. Both of these recollections lead to Barbara's revelation about her real purpose for being in Kearney. She has misled everyone into thinking she is simply a nurse's aide when clearly she is more than that. This supports the theme of betrayal in that she built up trust and friendship with Karin and Mark but her motives were not true. Under different circumstances, she would never have befriended them, but her guilt at causing Mark's accident has pushed her into a disingenuous situation. In a similar vein of betrayal, it is revealed that Duane and Tommy were on the road on the night of Mark's accident and even reported it to the authorities but never said anything to Mark about what they saw. They both know that Mark has been suffering severe angst about finding out what really happened to him that night but neither one spoke up, an action which would have saved their friend a significant amount of anguish.

There is also betrayal in Karin's relationships with Daniel and Robert. Karin has shared her knowledge of the Refuge's plans with Robert which jeopardizes both the Refuge and her relationship with Daniel. Dr. Weber is also betraying his wife by making yet another trip to Nebraska. She knows he is really going to see Barbara under the pretense that Mark's condition has worsened and he needs him.

The author ties up some loose ends related to the flash of white that Mark saw in front of him on the night of the accident. Duane and Tommy had also seen a white car driving by them on the road that night. As it turns out the flash of white was Barbara who had been on the highway and he swerved to miss her. All this time, Mark thought the flash of white could have been something spiritual, or possibly his guardian. In an ironic twist, Barbara does become his guardian of sorts when she cares for him in the hospital. Barbara, whom Mark idolizes is the cause of his pain and he is the reason she is still alive. In another twist of irony, it was Barbara who was probably trying to kill herself out on that dark highway that night but it is Mark who wonders if that is what he had tried to do to himself.



## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Dr. Weber taking Barbara to see the cranes during the morning hours?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Duane and Tommy never said anything to Mark about what their knowledge of the accident?

## Discussion Question 3

Why was it important to Barbara to become a nurse's aide at the hospital?

## Vocabulary

cistern, godsend, fervor, consciousness, verge, muffled, frenzied, embodied, blindsided, intuitive, phenomena, receptor, cannibalizing, obscure, flimsy, disclosure, wavered, bafflement, faltering, skeptical, paranoid, perpetuity, incoherence, bewildered, deranged, crestfallen, per se, evasive, appalled, spectral, dystonic, intubation, grim, phantom, deficient, futility, solvent, demoralizes, residual, coriander, elaborate, pungent, recrimination, devious, transcendence, ingestibles, fabricated, vivid, bastardized, distraught, novitiates, crestfallen, garish, brusque, lure, omnipotent, renegade, elegies, oxytocin, replica, insouciance, collaborative, contradict



# What does a bird remember?

## Summary

A crane colt has had the migration path imprinted on its brain so it will know to return again and again and to bring its offspring to learn the same patterns. Even after men are long gone from the earth, the birds will remain and they will find water.

## Analysis

The author wants the reader to know that birds have innate memories for the things that are critical to their survival such as migration paths and waterways. Long after men are gone from the planet, there will still be birds and they will use the instinctive memories that generations before them have used to survive and continue to find new life. In some ways, birds are smarter than men because they rely on instinct and memory and not on betrayals, deceit and manipulation which are the habits of men.

## Discussion Question 1

What is imprinted on the brains of cranes and why is it important to survival?

## Discussion Question 2

What do the cranes, and all other birds, need to find in order to survive?

## Discussion Question 3

In what ways are birds smarter than men?

## Vocabulary

corpuscular, parched, extinction, offspring, plovers



# When Karin Schluter enters her brother's room

## Summary

Karin goes to Mark's hospital room and he recognizes her as his sister. They embrace and he holds her face in his hands to study her. Mark has been reading a book called Sand County Almanac which Daniel has given to him. Mark tells Karin that Daniel is moving to Alaska to be with the cranes all summer long. Karin tells Mark that she is not going with Daniel, that she is staying to work at the Refuge. Mark breaks down in tears when he tells Karin that it had been Barbara out on the highway and she was the cause of his accident but never told him until the other day. Barbara had also told Mark that she is washed up, finished, and he asks Karin to hire her at the Refuge but that makes Karin angry. Mark has decided to stay put in Farview and Karin begins to cry, the weight of so many months of anguish suddenly lifted.

## Analysis

The author brings Karin and Mark full circle as Mark now recognizes Karin as his sister. After all the betrayals and deceit, they are happy that they have found each other again and they will always be a unit. The theme of returning home is important because that is essentially what has happened to Mark after being gone mentally and emotionally for a year. Karin has also returned home in that she has her brother back and their lives can begin again. Just as the cranes instinctively know to return to Kearney each year, Karin and Mark's instincts are intact once more and their lives will be back on track despite whatever else happens.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Karin angry when Mark asks her to hire Barbara at the refuge?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Karin decide to continue working at the Refuge even though Daniel has left?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Mark can forgive Barbara for her betrayal over the past year?

## Vocabulary

longstanding, gradual, intriguing, appalled, habituated, fraudulence, delusion, retrieve



# There is an animal perpendicular to all others

## Summary

Dr. Weber navigates the Lincoln airport, all the news stations blaring stories about the war in Iraq. In the Chicago airport, more of the same. Finally airborne on his way to New York, Dr. Weber is conscious of the forms of life surrounding him, insects in the plane's wiring, fungus in the cabin's lining and seeds in the cargo hold. Dr. Weber recalls saying goodbye to Mark in his hospital room, and he gives the doctor a copy of *My Antonia* to read on the plane. Mark tells Dr. Weber that he cannot understand what he is supposed to do with the fact that he was Barbara's savior. Mark says that the Refuge could use Barbara's help but Karin won't ask her and Mark can't after their last encounter which was ugly. Dr. Weber tells Mark that he could try reaching out. Dr. Weber flips through the pages of *My Antonia* and swears he can smell the prairie on the pages. When he disembarks in New York, Dr. Weber hopes to see his wife waiting for him at the baggage claim.

## Analysis

The theme of returning home is present even until the end of the book. Dr. Weber has had a year of twists and turns, both professionally and personally, and he is ready to come home to his wife and continue their life together. He has returned home and his only hope now is that Sylvie will be willing to take him back in spite of the hurts and uncertainties he has caused. Dr. Weber is critically aware of all forms of life around him and if he is lucky his wife will be waiting for him, her memory and instincts for him just as intact as those of the cranes who return to Kearney each year. Life does, indeed, go on.

## Discussion Question 1

What is happening in the world that is so prevalent on the news channels in all the airports?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the book, *My Antonia*, that Mark gives to Dr. Weber?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Mark think he can do to be Barbara's savior?



## Vocabulary

instinct, synthesized, meandering, speculation, transfixed, animate, exploitation, archaea, reclamation, teeming, cognitive, prolong, omnipotent, predetermined, intricate, blunders, disembark, imposters



# Characters

## Karin Schluter

Karin Schluter is a 30-year-old woman who grew up in Kearney, Nebraska. Karin and her brother, Mark, grew up in a dysfunctional household with a less than ambitious father and a mother whose religious zeal superseded any mothering. Because of their upbringing, Karin always felt responsible for Mark who is four years younger than she is. Karin watched out for Mark and he grew to rely on her. It is no surprise then that when Mark is seriously injured in a car accident that Karin leaves her job and home in Sioux City to return to Kearney to care for him during his recovery.

Mark's rehabilitation is not normal, however, due to the onset of Capgras Syndrome, which leads him to believe that Karin is a double sent to spy on him. Karin perseveres doing everything she can for Mark's recovery, even appealing to a world-renowned neurologist to intercede in Mark's psychological care. Karin feels the full weight of Mark's recovery on her shoulders and eventually realizes that Capgras has taken her as well because she no longer recognizes the life that she had set in place for herself. Karin had only recently settled down in Sioux City with a good job as a customer service rep at a computer company after a history of service jobs and moves to cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles. Always looking for something better, Karin had always tried to get Mark to join her in order to save him from the desolation of Nebraska but Mark stays in Kearney.

Karin's exhaustion from her life leads her to the calm but rigid former boyfriend, Daniel, as well as a former boyfriend, Robert, who supplies a need for creative energy in her life. When Karin's job at caring for Mark leaves her unsatisfied in her usual role, she takes a low-paying job at the Crane Refuge to do something valuable. Karin is good hearted, persistent, loving, and generous and these qualities make the lives of those around her better even though she struggles to receive much in return.

## Mark Schluter

Mark Schluter is a 27-year-old man who is critically injured in a truck accident on a dark highway on February 20, 2002. Mark has to be extracted from his vehicle which is found upside down in a ditch. A few skid marks are found indicating other cars were involved but Mark can remember nothing. When Mark wakes up in the hospital, he can identify everyone but his sister, Karin, as the result of Capgras Syndrome which renders the faces of close relatives unidentifiable after severe brain injury.

Mark tries to determine what has happened to him as he recovers but no one can tell him any facts and no one knows who left the mysterious note on his bedside table. Mark begins to think that he is the victim of a government conspiracy and he trusts very few people, most of all Karin. Eventually Mark thinks that perhaps he had tried to kill himself





in his truck accident and that he should not be alive today. Mark had always been close to his sister and he cannot understand why she has not come to see him and he is worried that something may have happened to her too. Mark is a good person at heart, even though he is a bit immature for his age but he had always been watched over by his sister and is used to people taking care of him. By the end of the story Mark's memory returns and he reunites with Karin and deals with the betrayal of false friends.

## **Daniel Riegel**

Daniel Riegel is an old boyfriend of Karin's with whom she reunites when she returns to Kearney during Mark's recovery. Daniel is patient, kind and forgiving and very generous to Karin when she is in need of a place to stay. Daniel had been a friend of Mark's but they have been estranged since high school. Daniel is a naturalist devoted to preserving the Platte River environment for the cranes which return every year. Daniel has very high ideals and lives by them, making him very focused in his life choices. Mark reveals toward the end of the story that Daniel had come on to him during high school but it was more than a sexual overture, Daniel truly loved Mark. This was the point at which Mark ended their friendship. When the Consortium wins their bid to build a crane family attraction, Daniel feels as if he had done all he can do at the Refuge and decides to move to Alaska to do conservation work there.

## **Dr. Gerald Weber**

Dr. Gerald Weber is a cognitive neurologist who has written several books on the topic of the brain and consciousness. While Dr. Weber studies Mark's case, his own personal life seems to fall apart as the reviews for his latest book do not meet the level of accolades to which he has become accustomed. Dr. Weber's critics claim that he has profited from the despair and unfortunate circumstances of brain injury patients. Dr. Weber's wife thinks his ennui may be part of a midlife crisis which is reinforced when he returns to Nebraska because he thinks he is in love with Barbara Gillespie, a woman he does not really even know. In the end, though, Dr. Weber returns home to his work and his wife with positive hopes for the future.

## **Joan Schluter**

Joan Schluter was Karin and Mark's mother. She was a religious zealot and not a very supportive parent. Karin recalls her mother calling her when Karin had a receptionist job in Chicago just to hear what she sounded like. Overall, Joan was not happy to be a mother and always made Karin feel like she was a burden and someone who always made bad choices.



## Mr. Thurman

Mr. Thurman was Mark's imaginary friend when Mark was a boy. Mr. Thurman accompanied Mark to school and even went on the horrific road trip to visit Cappy's dying brother. Karin tries to talk to Mark about Mr. Thurman during Mark's recovery in an attempt to jog Mark's memory and prove that Karin really is his sister.

## Barbara Gillespie

Barbara is a nurse's aide involved in Mark's care at the rehab center. Barbara is competent in all areas and both Mark and Karin grow to rely on her. At the end of the book it is revealed that it had been Barbara who had been on the road on the night of Mark's accident. Mark had swerved to avoid hitting her and ended up crashing in the ditch. Barbara had been a TV producer who was suffering from burnout and came to Nebraska to do a story about the cranes. After the accident, Barbara had gone to the hospital to see about Mark and he recognized her from being on the road earlier and she begs for forgiveness for causing his accident. Mark is unable to speak but writes the note to Barbara who leaves it on Mark's bedside table as he slips into a coma.

## Cappy Schluter

Cappy Schluter was Karin and Mark's father. He was not a very ambitious man and had a hard time supporting his family financially and emotionally. Karin and Mark have no real positive memories of their father, just deprivation and punishment. The one memory that Karin recalls as part of the story is a road trip to visit Cappy's dying brother. Cappy made it clear that the trip was not for pleasure and he drove relentlessly, not even stopping for bathroom breaks for the rest of the family.

## Tommy Rupp

Tommy Rupp is Mark's good friend. Together with Duane Cain, they call themselves the Three Muskraters. Tommy is the most intelligent and ambitious of the three. It is Tommy who got Mark his job at the slaughterhouse. Karin once had sex with Tommy many years ago and Tommy always insinuates that he would like an encore. Tommy belongs to the National Guard to earn extra money on the weekends and is sent to the war in Iraq after the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001.

## Duane Cain

Duane Cain is Mark's good friend. Together with Tommy Rupp, they call themselves the Three Muskraters. Duane has a criminal history beginning with an insurance fraud

scheme in high school. Duane is not especially bright but is good-natured and willing to go on adventures and play Internet games for hours on end.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The note

The note is left by someone in Mark's hospital room after his accident. The note says: I am No One; but Tonight on North Line Road; GOD led me to you; so You could Live; and bring back someone else. All through the book, Mark works to find the originator of the note thinking it will lead him to some explanation of his accident. At the end of the book, Barbara Gillespie tells Mark that she was the cause of his accident and he wrote the note when he was not able to speak. Barbara left the note on Mark's bedside table when Mark slipped into a coma.

## Cranes

The sandhill cranes come back to Kearney, Nebraska for about 6 weeks each year at the end of winter. Each year about half a million of the cranes stop on the Platte River on their migration back north. The sections of the book begin with a passage dedicated to the history and patterns of the cranes. The imagery of the cranes extends throughout the book in many instances. The birds symbolize truth because they see what humans cannot, not only today for hundreds of years. The cranes know the patterns and secrets of humans because they have witnessed them for so many years. The title of the book stems from a passage about ancient myth and lore in which cranes could communicate with men. "When animals and people all spoke the same language, crane calls said exactly what they meant." The author states that a few of the cranes actually saw Mark's accident that night but for the most part the cranes serve as symbolism for innocence, patterns, and truth in all of nature.

## The Homestar

The Homestar is Mark's mobile home which he was so proud to purchase a couple years before his accident. After Mark returns home from his accident, he believes that the Homestar has been replaced with a duplicate as part of the conspiracy that has been perpetrated upon him.

## Dodge Ram Truck

Mark Schluter's Dodge Ram truck is the one he was driving the night of the accident and has been totaled as a result.



## Great Platte River Road Archway Monument

Bonnie Travis works as a docent for the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument which straddles the interstate in Kearney. The monument is a historical center featuring the history of Nebraska.

## The Country of Surprise

The Country of Surprise is Dr. Weber's latest book. Unfortunately, the book does not receive the accolades of the doctor's previous work which causes him much distress. Dr. Weber ruminates about different cases covered in the book and he begins to wonder if his critics are right in that he has profited from the misfortunes of those who are brain injured and the sources of his studies.

## Walkie-Talkies

Mark, Duane and Tommy were using walkie-talkies while driving around on the night of Mark's accident. When Mark can only remember the words "Goat head" from that night, he is actually recalling their communication on the devices when they were actually saying "Go ahead."

## Olanzapine

Olanzapine is the anti psychotic drug that Mark takes to help his mental condition. Karin is hesitant to put Mark on the medication because of the extreme side effects but does so eventually because of hope for some recovery. Unfortunately, Mark does try to commit suicide when he overdoses on the drug.

## Karen's car

Mark does not want to ride with Karin in her car because he thinks she intends to wreck and kill him in it.

## Internet

Mark, Tommy and Duane spend lots of time playing games on the Internet.

## The farmhouse

When Karin and Mark visit the farmhouse where they grew up together, they are able to connect emotionally for the first time in a long time. Mark is finally able to visualize Karin

in this place and is almost convinced that she is actually his sister because she knows things about living at the farm that no one other than Karin would know.



# Settings

## Kearney, Nebraska

Kearney, Nebraska is the city in which the story takes place.

## Good Samaritan Hospital

Good Samaritan Hospital is where Mark is taken for treatment after his accident and where he stays for several weeks.

## Dedham Glen

Dedham Glen is the rehab center where Mark is taken for further recovery when he leaves the hospital.

## Sioux City

Sioux City is where Karin is living and working when she learns about Mark's accident. She soon leaves because she cannot keep her job which results in the sale of her condo.

## North Line Road

North Line Road is the site of Mark's accident in February 2002.

## Stony Brook

Stony Brook is the Long Island town where Gerald and Sylvie Weber live and work.



# Themes and Motifs

## Returning home

The theme of returning home is an important one which extends through the story. The most obvious instance of returning home are the cranes who migrate back to the Platte River each winter. Driven by instinct and ancient memory, the cranes take the same route every year, returning again and again to the water that they need. Another obvious example of returning home is Karin's return to Kearney to care for Mark after his accident. Karin had roamed for years trying out different cities and jobs, but she always gets pulled back home. Unfortunately, Karin had just settled into a condo and was doing well at a job in Sioux City when Mark's accident occurred and she gives up everything to return home to care for him.

Later in the story, after much anguish caused by the Capgras Syndrome, Karin and Mark return home to the dilapidated farmhouse where they grew up. It is at this time that Mark realizes that Karin is probably his real sister and they both experience a mild feeling of reunion. By the end of the story when Mark is more fully recovered, he finally recognizes Karin and validates her as his sister. This is a coming home experience for both of them who have been separated from each other mentally and emotionally for the past year as Mark struggled with his physical and mental injuries.

And, finally, Dr. Weber returns home at the end of the story with the hopes that Sylvie will welcome him back. Their marriage has suffered indignities over the past year due to his failing self esteem and interest in another woman but in the end, he is hopeful that they can use their instincts and memory to find each other again just as the cranes find their way back to the Platte River each year.

## Refuge

The theme of refuge is an important one in the book. The clear example of refuge is the Crane Refuge where Daniel and Karin work to save the waterways for the cranes which return to the Platte River area each year. Water is essential to the birds' survival and Daniel works tirelessly to help ensure that it will be preserved in spite of expansion efforts. Daniel also provides refuge for Karin who is like the cranes in a way in that she repeatedly return to Kearney in spite of her wishes to leave for a better, or different, life. Karin, in turn, serves as a refuge for Mark. All her life, Karin has watched out for Mark and now that he has been seriously injured, he needs care and she is loyal in spite of his not recognizing her and even being mean to her at times.

Barbara, too, is like the cranes looking for refuge when she lands in Kearney. She has suffered burnout at her high pressure job in New York and is working on the crane story for a human interest piece. She is weary and exhausted and finds a place to rest for awhile in Kearney. After her guilty secrets are revealed, it will be up to Karin once again





to provide refuge to Barbara, who is still wounded, by maybe offering her a job at the Refuge. It is not known what Karin will do but it has been her nature to provide respite for people so she will probably end her feud with Barbara and give her refuge as well.

In an odd way, Dr. Weber's wife is a refuge for him. She has been the constant in his life throughout his cognitive studies work and while writing his books. When Dr. Weber's book does not receive the accolades he normally receives from his work, he pouts and slides into depression. His wife tries to reason him out of his moods and does everything she knows to bring him back to himself. Even after Dr. Weber tells his wife that he is in love with Barbara Gillespie, a woman he barely knows, his wife takes him back when he returns home contrite and willing to commit to her once again.

## Memory

The theme of memory is an important one in the book. Just as the cranes remember their migratory patterns each year, Karin, too, returns to Kearney through emotional ties and memories that pull at her. Now she returns to care for Mark and gives up everything in her life in order to care for him. Memory as it relates to family is extremely powerful and Karin is a great example of not being able to shirk responsibilities just for convenience. The patterns and memories of her childhood propel Karin to provide better circumstances for herself and for Mark and those instinctively drive her.

Memory can also be nostalgic such as in the example of Daniel's keeping all the items and memorabilia that Karin had given him when they dated before. Memories do not only live in the mind but also in physical representations that prompt deep-seated emotions.

Dr. Weber brings the theme of memory full circle in that it is the topic of his latest book. His studies on the topic show various examples but primarily provide evidence on the power of memory both in humans and animals.

It is ironic that the cranes which have witnessed Mark's accident have memory of the incident while he struggles to recall even the slightest moments of that night. Not only do the cranes see the accident, it will be locked into their primal memories forever as they return again and again to this place. Finally, happily, Mark is able to begin remembering the accident and the other elements of his life including his sister, Karin. Mark is proof that without memory, humans are not fully whole because it is the sum of all experiences and emotions which complete the person. Mark's sense of well being returns slowly with his memory and the cranes will undoubtedly be aware of this transformation.

## Nature

Nature is an important theme in the book. Obviously the migration of the cranes is a huge natural event each year and men even do battle over how to use the waterways that are critical to their existence. The theme of man vs. nature is a popular one in



literature and that exhibits to a degree in this story as Daniel works selflessly to protect the Crane Refuge while others in town such as Robert Karsh would not hesitate to compromise the waterways in favor of financial growth and expansion for the area.

Nature as a healer is important in the story too. Eventually nature's patterns will take care of hurt and pain and wipe away any of its evidence. For example, Karin states, "There's nothing left to see. It's all been washed away or grown over." He sat up, excited. "You agree with me, then? Somebody's altering every clue I might have to crack this thing?" This thing. His life. "Nature, Mark." Overgrowing all that has ever happened. "Put your seat belt back on. Let's go." Mark wants desperately to find out why his accident happened but nature and time are erasing all evidence and pushing the experience to the background. In the end, nature wins, good or bad.

Dr. Weber is also very aware of nature, especially as it relates to memory. The memory of the cranes is consistent and authentic, whereas human beings tend to complicate memory either naturally or due to injury.

The geography of the Kearney, Nebraska area near the Platte River is flat plains country. People settling in the area had to rely on nature and on each other to survive because of the desolation and sparsely populated area. People live off the land by farming, ranching and fishing so nature is a big part of everyday life in Kearney. It is natural that Karin and Mark have memories of growing up on a farm and Mark and his friends still hunt and fish as forms of recreation. Nature can be bountiful with crops and the beauty of elements such as the return of the cranes each year but it can also be cruel in the weather and the lack of cultural stimulation available to the residents nearby. Nature is truly a force to be reckoned with regularly in this isolated area and the characters either adapt to it or leave for more abundant environments.

## Betrayal

The theme of betrayal is an important one in the book. The first obvious betrayal is when Karin is living with Daniel and working with him at the Refuge yet she begins to see Robert on the side and eventually provides some confidential information that will help Robert and the expansion consortium. Karin betrays Daniel both personally and professionally. Ultimately, she realizes the wrong of what she has done and she leaves Daniel's home because she can no longer take advantage of his kindness.

Barbara also betrays a personal trust in her relationship with Mark. All through the story, Barbara had positioned herself as a friend to both Mark and Karin, willing to do whatever they needed from her. But at the end of the story when Barbara reveals that she had been the one who had caused Mark's accident and had never told him, Mark feels incredibly betrayed. Mark had idolized Barbara and now he finds out that she is the one responsible for his injuries. Probably if Barbara had come clean with Mark immediately about her role in his accident, he would have been willing to understand and forgive but now he just feels another betrayal in his mind which is already cluttered with conspiracy theories with him as the target.



Another obvious example of betrayal in the book is Dr. Weber's dalliance with Barbara. Dr. Weber tells his wife about his attraction to Barbara, thinking that if he is up front about it, it will exonerate him but his wife is still hurt and humiliated by the situation. His wife probably tells herself that the attraction is probably part of a mid life crisis but she has stood by him throughout his woes about his faltering writing career and failing professional position and she deserves more loyalty from him.



# Styles

## Point of View

The story is told both from the first and third person narrative points of view. This means that the author tells the story directly from the perspectives of the main characters as well as in narrative that explains what the characters are thinking. For example, the narrator uses the pronouns she, he, they, etc. throughout because the story is being told from a third party point of view. However, the dialogue between characters is told from the first person perspective with the pronouns I, we, us, etc. With the third person narrative point of view, the reader does not have access to the thoughts and feelings of the characters, only their activities and dialogue are stated. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is revealed through narration which is third person as opposed

As the characters go from present day to flashbacks in the story, the third person point of view is maintained. The reader will learn what the characters are thinking as it relates to their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

## Language and Meaning

The author uses lyrical statements throughout the book, especially when talking about the cranes. For example, he writes, "Twilight comes early, as it will for a few more weeks. The sky, ice blue through the encroaching willows and cottonwoods, flares up, a brief rose, before collapsing to indigo. Late February on the Platte, and the night's chill haze hangs over this river, frosting the stubble from last fall that still fills the bordering fields. The nervous birds, tall as children, crowd together wing by wing on this stretch of river, one that they've learned to find by memory."

There is also much scientific language in the book due to Dr. Weber's and Dr. Hayes' professions. The author writes, "'If that's what we're looking at,' Hayes said, 'it would fit the prevailing understanding. Both the amygdala and the intertemporal cortex intact, but a possible interruption of connection between them.'"

The language of the characters is relevant and Mark is the most colorful in his language which shows his personality. The author writes, "'Save the birds? Save the river? What about saving me? Where the hell is Shrinky? There's so much shit I have to ask him. The man bailed out of here so fast, you'd think I had tried to queer him.'"

## Structure

The author begins each section with a passage or a poem related to nature and then the first chapter of those sections relates to the cranes and their migration and memories. Further, the structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character,



milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. The Echo Maker takes the structure of an idea form. These types of novels tend to show the seeking and discovering of new information and thoughts through the eyes of characters who are positioned to make the discoveries. Typically an idea story, such as a mystery, begins with a question and is completed when that question is answered. At its basic level, The Echo Maker is a mystery which begins with Mark's accident and the discovery of the mysterious note and ends when Barbara reveals her role in Mark's accident and the story is complete.



## Quotes

Would you look at that," the orderly said. "He's trying to hug you!

-- A hospital orderly (Two weeks in, Mark sat up and groaned paragraph 13)

**Importance:** Karin has been at Mark's bedside for two solid weeks and his communications, as expected are very limited. But one day, after Karin talks to Mark about some things from their childhood, Mark is overwhelmed and starts to make wild movements. Karin is frightened thinking that Mark is out of control when really he is trying to hug her, a gesture that she thought might never come again.

G-G-G-go goo god damn. Damn it to hell. God shit piss bitch. Suck a flaming cunt up your ass.

-- Mark (Some days his rage was so bad that even lying still infuriated him. paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Mark's frustrations at being unable to speak correctly exhibit in outbursts of profane language. This is shocking but also shows that Mark knows he is not doing what he could be which will motivate him to keep trying.

Nobody's ever who they were. We just have to watch and listen. See where he's going. Meet him there.

-- Daniel (She went to Daniel, after the hospital calamity paragraph 39)

**Importance:** Karin is concerned that Mark is never going to be the same and Daniel tries to reassure her that although Mark may be changed, that is something that everyone does all the time anyway. The best they can do for Mark is to stand by him and be what he needs when he emerges from his crisis.

Can you at least find out how my dog is doing?" She promised to. "And for God's sake, would you please get my sister here, already? She probably hasn't even heard.

-- Mark (She went to Daniel, after the hospital calamity paragraph 78)

**Importance:** Karin is shocked when she realizes that Mark does not recognize her as his sister, something that Dr. Hayes calls Capgras Syndrome. Karin is devastated because she has given up everything in her life to be with him at the hospital during his recovery and he does not even know who she is.

You think this might be his... path? This woman has arrived to save him from himself?

-- Daniel (Weeks passed that Karin couldn't account for. paragraph 23)

**Importance:** It is ironic that Daniel wonders if Barbara has been put on Mark's path to save him when it is revealed later in the book that Barbara had indeed been on Mark's path but not in the way Daniel and Karin think now.

Oh, Daniel. I don't get you. Why are you so good? What's in it for you?

-- Karin (They took Mark home: no other place to take him paragraph 8)



**Importance:** Karin has had a difficult childhood in which her parents could not be trusted to be much of a support system so she has taken Mark under her wing all her life. It is unusual for Karin to be on the receiving end of any kindness so she wonders why Daniel has such a generous spirit toward her.

The man's ducking me," she told Daniel. "He's taken what he wants, and now he's blowing us off.

-- Karin (Karin wrote Gerald Weber paragraph 7)

**Importance:** When Mark's condition seems to get worse, Karin writes to Dr. Weber again and she receives an evasive reply. Karin feels that Dr. Weber has used Mark for information for a book and is not interested in Mark as a person. This coincides with the reviews that Dr. Weber is receiving about his latest book and the underlying feelings he has about himself.

Nature, Mark." Overgrowing all that has ever happened. "Put your seat belt back on. Let's go.

-- Karin (How much has Mark changed? paragraph 118)

**Importance:** Mark wants to see the site of his accident and Karin tells him that everything has been washed away or overgrown by now. Nature moves on in its own patterns and ultimately covers up things that are too unpleasant to see.

I'm telling you, greed has run amok. The Development Council, whoring itself for this new consortium of builders. They promised there wouldn't be any new building. That's what we'd fought for and won. A freeze on large-scale development for ten years. They're selling us out, like we're the new Pawnee.

-- Daniel (She found a description online, at Mark's house paragraph 54)

**Importance:** Daniel knows that the Crane Refuge is in trouble and his inherently authentic nature has a hard time understanding how people can go back on agreements they had made and also can't comprehend why the cranes are not critically important to everyone in the area. His outrage comes out at dinner with Karin and she begins to understand the passion which drives him.

I think Tour Director wants me to do this.

-- Dr. Weber (Back at last in his corner of the globe paragraph 39)

**Importance:** When Dr. Weber says that he thinks Tour Director (God) wants him to go back to Nebraska to help Mark, it may be his way of saying a confession and asking for forgiveness for his perceived lack of integrity and encroachment into people's lives for his own advancement.

Daniel, I'm breaking. I can't do this anymore. For every little thing I do to help, I hurt him in three other ways. The sight of me makes him worse. He wants me gone. I'm sick and broke and in your way, light-headed and I haven't slept well in six weeks. He makes me



think I'm invisible, a virus, a nothing. I'm falling apart, Danny. I'm floating and buzzing. Like little spiders on my skin, all the time. I'm a mess. I'm disgusting. You just don't, can't, you have absolutely no...

-- Karin (They didn't touch each other paragraph 27)

**Importance:** Capgras has claimed a victim in Karin too because she has suffered from Mark's not recognizing her. She has poured all she has into caring for him and it has drained her. She used to be Mark's support system but this illness has taken its toll on her and she no longer knows what her role is in life. Karin has reached a tipping point and needs to make some changes going forward in order to survive intact.

Why are you doing this? Am I another case? What do you want from me? You smug, self-righteous, self-protecting little...

-- Barbara (It had to be the hospital, again paragraph 294)

**Importance:** Dr. Weber has figured out Barbara's story and he wants her to come clean with the people she has deceived, especially Mark, and she is angry that he is going to hold her accountable.