

Flight Behavior: A Novel Study Guide

Flight Behavior: A Novel by Barbara Kingsolver

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Plot Summary

Dellarobia Turnbow was born and raised in Feathertown, Tennessee in the southern Appalachian Mountains, and feels trapped in her rural, mommy life and shotgun marriage. One November day she finally feels ready to throw it all away for an affair with a young telephone repairman. Yet as she climbs the mountain on the back part of the family farm to meet her potential lover, she sees an epic vision of orange covering the trees and flying into the sky across a valley on another ridge. Without her glasses she can't see what it is, but her religious upbringing makes her think it is a sign that she is making a bad decision and she returns home to her husband Cub and young children, Preston and Cordelia.

Dellarobia and Cub share their property with Cub's parents, Hester and Bear. Because of the collapsed economy and terrible weather that ruined the year's hay crop, the farm is failing under an equipment loan. Bear signs a contract with a logging company to clear-cut the mountain where Dellarobia saw the flame-colored phenomenon. Feeling guilty about why she was up there to witness it, Dellarobia circuitously urges Cub and his father to check out the mountain before they strip it in case there is something more valuable than trees up there. The family takes a look and discovers that the trees and mountain are covered in monarch butterflies. In church the following Sunday, Cub testifies to Pastor Bobby Ogle and the congregation that Dellarobia had a "vision" that led them to discover the butterflies.

The small community is divided on whether the butterflies are some kind of gift from God, but Bear is determined to log anyway, desperate for the money so the Turnbows won't lose their entire farm. News of the butterflies slowly spreads, and Dellarobia is unexpectedly visited by an immigrant family from a small town in Mexico where the monarchs used to spend their winters before a recent flood and mudslide that destroyed the entire community. Dellarobia is visited by reporters who want to hear her "miraculous" story, but also by a scientist named Ovid Byron, who has studied the migratory patterns of monarchs for the length of his career, and sees their inexplicable roosting in Tennessee, miles away from their usual routine, as an ominous sign of climate change. The differences in ecology and temperature between Mexico and Tennessee could lead to the death of the monarchs before winter is over, and thus their virtual extinction. Ovid sets up a full lab with assistants to study the butterflies in the Turnbows' barn, but often finds the local narrow-mindedness about science and global warming to be mind-boggling.

After a national news report erroneously claims Dellarobia was saved from suicide by her vision of the butterflies, Dellarobia finds herself becoming uncomfortably famous and wishes to have her privacy back, though she grows closer and more attracted to Ovid as she begins working with him on collecting data for his experiments. Though Hester and Dellarobia don't ordinarily have the best relationship, Hester implores Dellarobia to urge Cub to stand up to Bear about the logging. Hester's deep-rooted faith guides her to continue in the idea that the butterflies came to their property straight from God himself. As Ovid persuades Dellarobia about the reality of climate change, and the



risks of flooding and mudslides that logging would bring to their property, Dellarobia readily agrees with her mother-in-law, but Cub is harder to convince about global warming's dangers, particularly to farmers.

The more attracted she becomes to Ovid, the more Dellarobia realizes her marriage to Cub, born of an unplanned high school pregnancy that ended in a miscarriage, is little more than fear of change and newness. Hester reveals she remained distant from Dellarobia because she always assumed she would leave, too smart and ambitious for her son. Though Ovid's wife Juliet arrives and Dellarobia is forced to admit her self-delusion that she could have a future with the scientist, her conviction that her marriage is wrong for both her and Cub remains strong, and she tells him they must separate. With the help of Pastor Bobby and Dellarobia, Hester and Cub convince Bear to grudgingly break his contract with the logging company.

The butterflies come through a strange, mild winter and begin to make movements toward living in their usual (though new) migratory schedule. But after a week of spring-like weather a sudden and deep snowstorm makes Ovid and Dellarobia certain the monarch population is lost. Yet as the world thaws again, Dellarobia witnesses some fraction of the butterflies resuming their flight patterns. The world may be completely different as Dellarobia plans to move off the farm with her children and return to college, but it is more than possible that both she and the butterflies will survive.



Chapter 1: The Measure of a Man

Chapter 1: The Measure of a Man Summary

At 27, Dellarobia Turnbow has already been married for ten years, has two kids, and a desperate desire for something new and exciting in her life. She and Cub Turnbow married at 17 when she got pregnant, but the resulting baby boy was born too early to survive; yet it was enough to trap her in a dull marriage to a farmer in a small town where everyone knows everyone else's business. The Turnbows now have two children, Preston, age five, and Cordelia, age one. Dellarobia's parents are dead; her in-laws live only a half-mile away on the same property as Dellarobia and Cub.

As the novel starts on a gray November day, Dellarobia has just dropped off her children with her mother-in-law Hester so that she can consummate her flirtation with a twenty-two year-old telephone repairman named Jimmy. She knows the scandal it will cause if anyone in her small community finds out, and she does not care. She plans to meet Jimmy at a small shack at the top of the ridge along which her property lies, used by her husband and father-in-law while hunting turkeys. As she makes the steep climb to the shack, dressed in second-hand maroon calfskin boots, a suede jacket, and a chenille scarf, she wavers between giddiness and doubt that a boy who still lives with his mother in a mobile home is worth risking the comfort and safety of her life.

Yet she is filled with an all-consuming desire and continues the muddy upward slog, until she begins to notice strange fungus type things hanging from the trees above her. In a fit of vanity she left her glasses at home and she can't see what they are, but they make her nervous. She comes to an overlook with a view of another tree-covered mountainside opposite, and realizes the trees there are also covered with the brown clumps. As she looks, the sun comes out from behind the clouds and suddenly the mountainside erupts as if on fire, the trees gleaming bright and orange. Something spirals out of them like sparks, flying in funnels into the sky. Dellarobia knows it's not an actual fire, but it fills her with a sense of fear and self-awareness. She takes it as a sign that she has been foolish in her longing, chasing an impossible dream, and she puts Jimmy out of her mind as she heads to pick up her children from her less than attentive mother-in-law. She feels like everything has changed somehow and even though she has thus far had little relationship with God, she can't help but feel what she just experienced means something deep and significant.

Chapter 1: The Measure of a Man Analysis

Dellarobia seems to have an ambivalent relationship toward religion. She uses the name of Jesus as an interjection, claiming, "she and Jesus weren't that close" and that passages from the Bible stuck in her brain "no longer carried honest weight, if they ever had" (Page 21). Yet religion and the Bible seem pervasive in her life, a constant point of reference. Upon seeing the fiery-looking mountain she immediately thinks of Moses and



the burning bush, the prophet Ezekiel, and the "lake of fire" in the Book of Revelations. She has internalized religion without internalizing faith. Furthermore, she has mostly internalized the negative, punishing aspects of religion. Revelations' lake of fire is hell, a punishment for sinners. She cannot help but think of her tryst with Jimmy in terms of a "road to damnation;" and, being on a "mission of sin;" and even Lot's wife, a woman mortally punished for her disobedience, pops into her head. Religion equates to punishment and disappointment in Dellarobia's mind, right down to her name: her mother thought she was giving her daughter a Biblical name but Dellarobia later discovered it was merely a nature craft project. Somehow Dellarobia doesn't think she deserves such an elevated name anyway.

There is something ironic, however, in the lake of fire/End of Days vision acting as a moment of salvation for Dellarobia. The vision that so closely resembles fire on the mountain terrifies Dellarobia, yet gives her clarity: "This was not just another fake thing in her life's cheap chain of events...Here that ended. Unearthly beauty had appeared to her, a vision of glory to stop her in the road. For her alone these orange boughs lifted, these long shadows became a brightness rising...It had to mean something. She could save herself" (Page 24). Despite the fear that a burning lake of fire should elicit, Dellarobia uses it to catapult herself into doing the right thing. The "End of Days" is a new beginning for her.

The colors red and orange have symbolic significance, and the two are tied together almost synonymously by Dellarobia herself: her hair is bright orange, making her a "redhead." In keeping with the sinful context, red has a negative meaning for her. She labels her teenage lipstick choices "Immoral Coral" and "Come-to-Bed Red;" she is wearing maroon boots and a red scarf as she moves toward adultery. Through this color repetition, readers see Dellarobia associates red with sexual promiscuity, similar to the scarlet "A" in Hawthorne's nineteenth century novel, though Dellarobia lives more than a century and a half later in the modern world. Red is tantamount to sin, and she, a redhead, is a sinner. Even roses, often associated with the color red, have only unpleasant connotations for Dellarobia, reminding her of her parents' funerals.

Like the color red, there are many references to weather and its effect on the natural world in this chapter: it is unseasonably warm for November, and there has been far too much rain in Dellarobia's community for months, causing the rotting and destruction of many farmers' crops. Water, a staple of life itself and a necessity to farming, has ironically turned disastrous due to vast quantity. The amount of time Kingsolver spends describing these anomalies marks them as significant, and readers should note foreshadowing for more strange weather in the future.



Chapter 2: Family Territory

Chapter 2: Family Territory Summary

A few weeks later, Dellarobia and Cub are at his parents' (Hester and Bear) to assist with the semi-annual shearing of the farm's sheep with the added aid of their neighbors the Norwoods and Valia and Crystal Estep. Dellarobia, still wanting the "lake of fire" she saw to mean something important, has no patience for the self-righteousness and pettiness of those around her. She challenges Hester's smug Bible-quoting and assurance that God favors the Turnbows (the rain has finally stopped just in time for the shearing) while their neighbors, the Cooks, lost their crop because of the summer's incessant rain. She is horrified by the way Crystal, an unmarried high school dropout, allows her two sons, Jazon and Mical, to run riot. The women gossip about a growing feud between Crystal and her friend Brenda, who wants Crystal to pay her medical bills after Crystal's sons slammed Brenda's hand in a car door.

When Preston ruins a fleece by playing with it, Hester relegates Dellarobia to the house to baby-sit the four children. Dellarobia rests on the sofa with Cordelia and fields a phone call from her best friend, Dovey, a butcher at the local grocery store. Dovey questions Dellarobia on her sudden dropped obsession with Jimmy, but Dellarobia can't explain her rearranged priorities. With the shearing done, Dellarobia wanders back to the barn, knowing her in-laws ordered her passive husband to stay behind and clean up. Her irritation with his lack of initiative is compounded by the shock of learning Hester and Bear are facing foreclosure on an equipment loan Bear took out to expand his machinery repair shop. When the economy collapsed he lost a lot of work, and the summer's poor weather has reduced their hay crop and income. The entire family shares the farm, so Bear's financial woes affect everyone, and Dellarobia and Cub are already a payment behind on their mortgage as well. In order to generate cash, Bear intends to sign a contract with a logging company to clear-cut their mountainside forests. Bear didn't tell Cub directly, he only overheard his father speaking about it with Peanut Norwood, who intends to contract out his timber as well. Despite their shared financial fortunes, Bear does not include Cub in family decisions.

It suddenly occurs to Dellarobia that logging the mountain will destroy her fiery phenomenon. She can't tell Cub she recently walked along the land without raising suspicion, but she urges him to comb the property and make sure there isn't anything valuable they might not want the logging company to have up there. Cub is skeptical, but Dellarobia pushes and a few weeks later, Cub, Bear, and Peanut Norwood go explore the property they haven't visited for many years;; they can only go after Cub fixes his broken all-terrain vehicle, too lazy to walk up the mountain. They return in shock, and take Hester and Dellarobia back out to the same overlook she had stood on so recently. The mountains are covered with what she can now discern, with her glasses, are butterflies, surrounding them and floating above them, orange and bright as fire.



Dellarobia is uncomfortable when Cub suspects she knew the butterflies existed, fearing some clue will give away her near-miss of a romantic tryst. Bear wants to retrieve some old pesticide and kill them, but surprisingly, Cub stands up to him, announcing the butterflies are a "miracle" that Dellarobia foretold in a "vision." He wants to stall the loggers until the butterflies have cleared out of their own volition. Cub sees God's will in the butterflies, and credits Dellarobia with the thought. Dellarobia, who doesn't remember ever mentioning God, is uneasy receiving a prominent place in a family decision, a position she's never held before. Yet she finds herself overwhelmed by the beauty of the swirling mass of butterflies and even Hester believes her daughter-in-law is "receiving grace" (Page 88).

Chapter 2: Family Territory Analysis

The novel takes place in the very recent past - since the economic collapse of 2008, and the farm community around Feathertown is suffering from it. This timeframe sets the narrative firmly in the world of contemporary readers, which potentially adds a sense of urgency, familiarity, and believability to the novel.

The Turnbows' neighbors, the Cooks, also farmers, lost everything in the current year's unexpectedly bad weather and their young son was diagnosed with cancer, yet Hester shows little in the way of a neighborly attitude toward them; they have only lived in the community for five years, unlike the many families who have lived around Feathertown for multiple generations. This attitude hints at Hester's extreme distrust and disdain for outsiders, and a general narrow-mindedness toward the world outside of Feathertown. In a community that is far from wealthy (even the Turnbows face foreclosure), Hester still constructs a social hierarchy based on longevity and familiarity.

Readers will continue to note Dellarobia's ambivalent relationship with religion. She is disgusted at the way Hester can twist "God's will" to fit her own needs and thinking. Though she attends church with the family, Dellarobia has little by way of a spiritual experience there, instead seeing it "as a complicated pyramid scheme of moral debt and credit resting ultimately on the shoulders of the Lord, but rife with middle managers" (Page 33). Though she has a hypercritical view of religion, readers will still find her thoughts weighted down with religious metaphors. She describes her sudden argumentativeness toward Hester's hypocrisy as "coming into her mouth and leaping out like frogs" (Page 35) - as if Dellarobia considers herself a plague, another negative self-association. Perhaps the only thing truly sacred to Dellarobia is the intimacy between people, when she compares Cub's pleasure at their first sexual experiences together to "religious awe" (Page 61).

The Turnbows raise sheep, an animal that has significant Biblical connotations. The local pastor references Jesus as a shepherd, "looking down on his flock from on high, and it seemed apt: an all-knowing creator probably would find humans to be exactly the same kind of ignorant little dumb-heads as these sheep" (Page 64). In a community heavily involved in the life of their church, sheep are a perfect metaphor for the easily-swayed, groupthink of a small, enclosed population, most of whom have never even left



the state of Tennessee (as epitomized by Hester's un-neighborly attitude, discussed earlier).

Before she remembers the orange miracle she saw on the mountain, Dellarobia's first reaction to the prospect of logging is negative. Besides making their property aesthetically unappealing, Dellarobia intuits one of the book's main themes: the adverse effect man can have when enacting his will on nature. She deduces from a similar logging site that she has witnessed that cutting down the trees can lead to dangerous mudslides, that could destroy their house. Chapter 2 again places a great deal of emphasis on the unusual weather conditions of an Appalachian November: "The world of sensible seasons had come undone" (Page 76). There is clearly a connection between the strange climate conditions and how people treat the land - an ominous premonition of the future.

Just as Dellarobia's initial reaction to the butterflies is to seek a meaning and significance in them, her feelings are mirrored, surprisingly by Hester and Cub, who claims, "There is a reason for everything" (Page 85). Hester immediately sees the hand of God in the butterflies. Just as Dellarobia, without her glasses, could not immediately even recognize that they were butterflies, their meaning and reason for covering the mountain is not immediately clear. Keen readers will note how the novel highlights the frequent discrepancy between the existence of a single truth that is widely interpreted in a personal way.



Chapter 3: Congregational Space

Chapter 3: Congregational Space Summary

The following Sunday the entire Turnbow family attends Mountain Fellowship, a Christian church founded by a local pastor named Bobby Ogle. Bobby, who as a baby was adopted like Moses, graduated from Dellarobia's high school a few years before she did. A month has passed since Dellarobia nearly committed adultery. Dellarobia is not particularly interested in church in and of itself, but welcomes the opportunity to drop her children in Sunday School and socialize with adults. The Mountain Fellowship Church contains spaces for every type of worshiper, and Dellarobia prefers to watch the service on a video monitor from the Café in Christ, where she usually relishes eating a blueberry muffin. On this particular Sunday Crystal Estep and her ex-friend Brenda (she of the broken fingers), whose family runs the Sunday School, are publicly airing their feud in the café. Having no interest in the drama, Dellarobia forgoes her muffin and joins Cub and Hester in the main sanctuary.

Pastor Ogle's sermon strikes a little too close to home for Dellarobia, as he gently urges his flock to harness their disobedient thoughts, of which she has had far too many, and replace them with good, graceful thoughts. The congregation begins to testify loudly with both their negative thoughts and the positive replacements. Dellarobia remembers why she likes to observe services from the distant café, yet she finds herself drawn into the gratitude people show for the simplest things. However, she is uncomfortable when Cub rises to describe butterflies. Pastor Ogle genuinely sees the miraculous in it, but the congregants seem skeptical, so Cub proclaims that Dellarobia had a "vision" of the butterflies and he believes the Lord is working directly in their lives. Hester grudgingly corroborates the story. Cub mortifies Dellarobia by pulling her toward the altar. She is sure no one believes she deserves such grace, yet Pastor Ogle invites her to make a covenant with the congregation, and Dellarobia reluctantly agrees. Throughout this, a screaming match has escalated right outside the sanctuary, and suddenly Brenda and her family burst into the space, announcing they are leaving and returning the congregation's children to their parents. The kids swarm to Dellarobia, and Pastor Ogle takes this as a sign that they can see her grace. Despite Hester's grinding teeth, Dellarobia is suddenly a new "beacon" in the family.

Chapter 3: Congregational Space Analysis

Readers learn in Chapter 3 why Dellarobia's faith has faltered: the early death of both her parents, before she was out of high school, destroyed her belief in the power of prayer. But her thought patterns reveal her guilt at turning her back on real religion: in the church a "disappointed-looking Jesus eyed her from the wall" and she thinks of herself as "a redheaded sinner," the two words being somehow synonymous in her mind (Page 90). She views Jesus as a person with whom she has no chemistry, the basis for any good relationship. Dellarobia is set apart from her family and the



congregation around her by an intense need to question things, and to view the Bible more in terms of its literary properties than its value as a truthful record: "the first rule of believable was to get your story straight" (Page 94). Yet she feels jealous of those who believe simply, without questioning. Her feelings toward religion are contradictory and complex. Her relationship with Cub is also complex: despite her near adultery, she does not hate him or resent him. She recognizes him as a kind and gentle man, and constantly berates herself for not being better to him. In some ways it mirrors her relationship with Jesus himself: she wants to do better for these men but continues to falter, feeling as if she has disappointed them despite their unconditional love, and she loathes herself because of it.

Dellarobia and Dovey grew up at the same time in the same community, yet they have two very different views of religion as well. Dovey, raised Catholic, has given up the practice of her faith. The most time she spends on religion is texting Dellarobia corny adages she reads on church marquees. The narrative voice never delves inside Dovey's inner thoughts, but she is presented as having little residual guilt for not adhering to the doctrine with which she was raised, unlike Dellarobia.

One's place in the church community is the epitome of social status to Hester, who is involved in many aspects of Mountain Fellowship. For Dellarobia to receive so much attention when she regularly floats along the periphery of the church, witnessing the sermons with a cup of coffee in her hand and the distance of a video monitor between her and any kind of enlightenment, chafes on Hester, whose sense of hierarchy is shaken. For once she and Dellarobia are in an ironic kind of agreement: neither believes Dellarobia "deserves" a miracle.

Despite the contemporary timeline, Dellarobia lives in a world still backward about the place of women. At church they are unwelcome in the room earmarked for "Men's Fellowship." Hester has a little rhyming proverb about the unmarriageability of women who wear glasses. Dellarobia's sense of desperation and desire to escape is not contingent simply on the unsuitability of her partner; she lives in a community that as a whole does not respect the contribution of women beyond the sphere of the home. Women aren't meant to think but simply to obey their husbands.

Kingsolver uses well-phrased metaphors to tie together the major refrains of the novel: "The congregational atmosphere shifted like weather." (Page 95-96) and after Chapter 2's focus on the Turnbows' sheep, Mountain Fellowship's congregation is referred to as Pastor Bobby's "flock," while he himself is compared to the sheep dogs who assist Bear in wrangling that flock: "He nudged the question again and again, the way Roy and Charlie herded the sheep, gently prodding a wildly disjointed group toward a collective decision to move in a new direction" (Page 107-108). Readers should note the use of language and how it intertwines concepts of religion and nature, creating a view of God and the world that is different from either Dellarobia or Hester's version. Keen readers will note that each chapter title encompasses a slightly larger group of people, mirroring the spread of the news of the butterflies.



Chapter 4: Talk of a Town

Chapter 4: Talk of a Town Summary

On December 1st, Dellarobia sits in Hester's kitchen with Valia and Crystal Estep, helping to prep skeins of yarn to re-dye for a spring sale. Hester's home is more oppressive than usual, since Hester has taken custody of the butterflies, commandeering tours of churchgoers curious to see them. Dellarobia is resentful, and mildly irritated with all the attention: a local newspaper reporter wanted to talk to Hester and Dellarobia about her "vision." Cub refuses to charge the tourists because of the "Lord's hand" in the miracle, but Dellarobia insists to Hester, who blames Dellarobia for the loss of income, that she never mentioned God in relation to the butterflies. Frustrated, she leaves to pick up Preston from the bus stop, and Crystal insists on joining her. As they wait in the rain for the bus, Crystal requests Dellarobia's spelling and grammar assistance with a "Dear Abby" letter she is writing regarding Brenda's broken hand. She wants to present her side of the story, having heard Brenda's family is sending Abby theirs. She tells Dellarobia that some people at church resent her for the miracle she received without putting in any groundwork as a good Christian, while others are prepared to believe she is a saint. Even Preston's bus driver stares Dellarobia down as the "woman who had the vision." Preston begs Dellarobia to see the butterflies, and she barter with Crystal to read the letter in exchange for an hour's babysitting. Leaving Cordelia with her, Dellarobia and Preston set off in the ATV. When they arrive at the mountaintop, Preston is gleeful at the orange butterflies that float above them. She points out the way they hang off the trees in grape-like bunches, and though impressed at his inquisitiveness about where they came from and what they eat, she is embarrassed at how little she knows.

They return to the house where Crystal tells Dellarobia that a family of "foreigners" has been standing outside for fifteen minutes. When Dellarobia opens the door, Preston recognizes the young daughter, Josefina, a friend from his class. Dellarobia invites the family in and Josefina speaks for her parents, translating from their native Spanish. She explains that they would like to see the butterflies, which are monarchs, because they believe they come from their native Mexican town of Michoacán. Her father and mother worked with the thousands of tourists who came to see them each winter when the butterflies settled in the village. But Josefina explains that the previous February, a flood destroyed Michoacán's home and people. The butterflies abandoned Mexico and Josefina and her parents immigrated to America; her parents now work on the nearby tobacco farms with her uncle and cousins. Dellarobia is appalled by her own sheltered life and promises the Delgados they can come back and see the butterflies anytime.



Chapter 4: Talk of a Town Analysis

Hester calls the butterflies "King Billies," a name passed down from her mother that has lost its origin. One piece of the puzzle fits when Josefina claims the butterflies are monarchs - accounting for the regality embedded in the slang name.

The newspaper article written about Dellarobia highlights the subjective interpretation of reality, alluded to when Kingsolver writes, "The reporter only wanted to discuss Dellarobia. Not actual Dellarobia, but the one who'd had a vision, who could see the future" (Page 119). When Dellarobia blames Cub for the insertion of God into the story, no one listens to her. Readers should watch for this theme of people only listening for what they want to hear, constructing stories about both themselves and others to shore up ideas they already have. Dellarobia may dislike how people are portraying her, but she must also grapple with her concept of herself. Just as her construct of herself once deflated when she learned her name did not have the lofty, Biblical roots she believed (even something as superficial and uncontrollable as a name has a significance and bearing on her inner person), she must now take a hard look at herself as a "smarty pants," a pejorative she would find positive. Dellarobia has always prided herself on being good at school, smarter than the average Feathertown resident. Her hubris takes a tumble when she can't answer Preston's questions about the basic science of insects.

Dellarobia hears thunder on December 1, indicating the continuing unseasonably warm nature of the weather. Thunder has ominous connotations, and readers can assume this strange weather does not bode well. The thunder is also a foreboding signal of Dellarobia's other hubris: she continues to misinterpret the significance of the butterflies, wondering, "what if this winter was meant to be her one chance at something huge" (Page 120). She views the monarchs as a symbol for her alone, while the church and now the entire town are pressing to give it a communal significance. The true reality of the meaning of the butterflies' presence has yet to be revealed.

In Hester's social hierarchy, even Catholics, another branch of Christianity, belong on a lower rung of the ladder. The narrow-minded nature of the community finds expression in Crystal as well, who refuses to open Dellarobia's door to "foreigners." Hester, having led a multitude of free tours to view the butterflies, tries to charge the Spanish-speaking Delgados. Even though Dellarobia considers herself "open-minded" compared to these women, she must still admit to herself that she is fairly ignorant, knowing nothing about the hardship and cost of leaving one's country because there are no opportunities left to survive.

Hester, usually domineering and confident, is unusually nervous about the upcoming visit of Pastor Bobby to the house. Her anxiety is significant enough for Dellarobia to notice and point out. Readers should take this key from Dellarobia and take special note of Hester's relationship with the pastor. There are also early signs of an impending struggle over the issue of logging: Bear wants to go through with the contract because they need the money, but Hester's belief in God's hand urges her to defend the butterflies and urge him to grant the land a reprieve for a time.



Readers get another hint at the local attitude toward women when Crystal tweaks the truth in her letter to "Dear Abby," claiming to have a husband because "I just don't think Abby would give me a fair hearing if she knew my kids were illegitimate" (Page 138). In this world, being single or a single mother still carries a burden of shame, and Crystal feels the need to negate that to win over Abby to her cause, even if it means lying. In another way, Crystal and Brenda's involvement of "Dear Abby" in their personal drama underscores a need to connect their individual lives with something bigger, a desire to make their strange tale universal by seeking the advice of a nationally syndicated columnist. This attempt to grow their notoriety mirrors the slowly building concentric circles of community that are learning about the butterflies and developing opinions about their presence. Dellarobia is already getting a sense of this because of the Delgados and their tale of environmental sorrow in Mexico. There is a hint here that Dellarobia's personal discovery has much bigger implications: "This thing on the mountain was a gift. To herself in particular, she'd dared to imagine. Not once had she considered it might have been stolen from someone else" (Page 157). Her own worldview is so internalized she has never stopped to consider the lives of anyone outside her community. Readers should take note of other instances where personal stories intertwine with bigger, perhaps global, issues.



Chapter 5: National Proportions

Chapter 5: National Proportions Summary

A man named Ovid Byron appears one morning as Dellarobia puts Preston on the bus for school. A friend sent him the Cleary Courier article about the butterflies and he has flown from New Mexico to see for himself. Ovid is tall, dark, and handsome, with a slightly foreign accent, and Dellarobia, showing him the road up onto the mountain, can't stop herself from inviting him for dinner later that day.

After a brief call to Dovey to review the strange encounter with this attractive stranger, Dellarobia spends the day cleaning and preparing for their out-of-town guest, preparing an inoffensive macaroni and tuna casserole. Cub is unenthusiastic about having a stranger in the house after a full day of laying gravel, his side job, but Dellarobia quotes the Bible to guilt him into acceptance. She is shocked that Ovid has spent the entire day on the mountain, wondering what he could be doing for so long. When he finally arrives for dinner, she and Preston, full of Wikipedia research, relay all the facts they know about monarch butterflies as if they are experts: how they lay their eggs on poisonous milkweed so their baby caterpillars will eat it and become poisonous to predators; that the butterflies spend their winters on one mountain in Mexico; that they can fly greater distances than almost any insect. Ovid turns the tables, asking Preston for hypotheses on why the butterflies would gather en masse, and why they go south every year. He suggests that south is actually their native space and they visit the north in the warm months.

Dellarobia becomes more and more embarrassed as she realizes Ovid is an actual scientist to whom she has been quoting Internet facts. Ovid confirms he studied at Harvard and teaches at Devary University, having published multiple books and articles on the monarch. He would like to ascertain why the monarchs have gathered in the southern Appalachian Mountains rather than their normal congregation in Mexico. He apologizes to Dellarobia for feigning ignorance, claiming he learns best by listening to others.

Chapter 5: National Proportions Analysis

Dellarobia's depth of Biblical knowledge can be useful to her, and she wields it like a weapon; she quotes Bible verses to make Cub submit to having a guest, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Page 176). Just like Hester, she can twist the concept of faith to suit her personal needs.

Keen readers will keep an eye on the reference and meaning of colors throughout the novel, predominantly reds and oranges. Ovid arrives in an orange VW Beetle, which matches Dellarobia's hair, which mirrors the University of Tennessee's main color.



Dellarobia's original vision of a lake of fire still colors the red/orange family with a hue of the dangerous and foreboding.

The power of words and their associations to alter reality once again manifests in Dellarobia's life when Ovid Byron tells her Della Robia is the name of a famous Italian Renaissance sculptor. Depleted by the homespun, crafty nature of her name, Dellarobia's ego inflates again to have such a prestigious reference for her name: "And the idea of being named for an artist. A person could be reborn on the strength of that" (Page 164). It does not matter that the allusion is incidental rather than intentional. Her mother may have never heard of the sculptor, but Dellarobia can reconstruct her sense of self with a connotation of refinement, beauty, and intellectual fervor. On the other hand, Ovid unintentionally forces her to review another concept of herself, just as Preston did in Chapter 3. Her Wikipedia research on monarchs has sated her curiosity and made her feel knowledgeable: she is smart again. But Ovid gently demonstrates how little she has scratched the surface, how much more she needs to open her mind to the world around her.

Ovid arriving from New Mexico means the story of the butterflies is taking on national proportions, the next concentric circle to envelope Dellarobia's life, whether she likes it or not. She is irritated when Cub mentions the farm has belonged to his family for a century, as if this creates a connection to the reason and intention of the butterflies in descending on the Turnbows. She cannot quite see how similarly she herself has viewed the monarchs, as a personal gift in her life, a signpost to guide her behavior. Ovid's scientific perspective and desire to find an objective reason for the aberration in the butterflies' normal migration pattern forces her to recognize the butterflies might not be "about her." Reality is being reconstructed around her without her input.

As Dovey celebrates the prospect of a black man (more importantly, a handsome stranger) at Dellarobia's dinner table, she compares it to *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, a film made in 1967 about interracial marriage. That this is Dovey's reference point underscores how sheltered their community is, how much of an anomaly anyone of an ethnic or racial minority is. This may explain why such "outsiders" inspire fear in people like Hester and Crystal; they simply have no experience with them.



Chapter 6: Span of a Continent

Chapter 6: Span of a Continent Summary

Two weeks after Dr. Byron first arrives at the Turnbow farm, he is living in a camper trailer next to the barn while doing his field research, at Cub's insistence. Ovid has also recruited three of his graduate students to assist, Pete, Mako, and Bonnie, who spend hours on the mountain studying the butterflies. Dellarobia isn't entirely comfortable around these educated people but she joins them in the camper for penny poker and sees ways the students, all near her own age, are both worldlier yet somehow younger than she herself is.

The farm floods under an unseasonable deluge of rain, killing and stunning the butterflies, and leaving Hester's soon-to-be birthing ewes nowhere to graze. Dellarobia can barely get to her porch for a cigarette. She is stunned when Hester arrives unannounced, since her in-laws never venture to her and Cub's corner of the property. Tensions continue to rise in the family: another newspaper article was written about the butterflies, and Hester is charging for tours. Neither she nor Bear had favored Ovid's presence on the property, but Hester suddenly and shockingly starts to cry, unable to discern God's intention in the butterflies. Bear and neighbor Peanut Norwood are determined to fulfill the logging contract and get paid. Hester isn't so sure that is the right thing, as "The Lord says attend to His glory. You [Dellarobia] were the first one of us to pay attention" (Page 205). She knows Cub wants to stand up to his father, and she asks Dellarobia to stand with him.

When the rains finally pass, Dellarobia ventures up the mountain with the scientists, having earned an invitation after doing their laundry. The ground is littered with the bodies of seemingly dead monarchs, and Bonnie and Mako invite her to help them count the butterflies in small sample ground squares; they will compare the numbers to previous counts of the same areas to ascertain how the butterflies were affected by the rain. They teach her how to tell male from female, and she soon discovers that the butterflies are not all dead - the students explain they are in a kind of hibernation until the temperature reaches fifty-five degrees. Dellarobia finds a monarch with a small white sticker on its wing, tagged at a previous research site.

Over lunch, Ovid explains his research a little more, trying to get to the root of how the butterflies, with a life span of six weeks, act out the same migratory patterns each year across generations, and also how climate change seems to be pushing their migration further north as well as forcing the butterflies to leave Mexico earlier each year. Fire ants and farm chemicals threaten the survival of caterpillars and their milkweed supply in Texas. While Dellarobia wants to chalk up the butterflies' presence on her mountain as a gift to a poor, drab community, the scientists know the anomaly might have a meaning, which is negative in much larger ways.



The scientists are just as curious about Dellarobia's life as she is about theirs: they are awed that she can replace a zipper in a coat, that her church has 300 members, and at how Hester organizes and collects money for her tours. They will leave for the upcoming Christmas holiday, and only Ovid is certain to come back, as the others return to class and running his campus lab. Dellarobia considers inviting them all in for a small Christmas celebration before they leave, but she is too embarrassed by the shabbiness of her home to articulate her invitation.

Chapter 6: Span of a Continent Analysis

The weather continues to be unseasonably warm and rainy. The flooding immediately brings Dellarobia and readers to allusions of Noah and the ark: "The times seemed biblical" (Page 191). The rain is literally trapping the community into their houses, and killing the butterflies; rain, usually considered a positive, life-giving element has taken on an evil, destructive nature. There is an impending sense of doom that readers should key into, though the pace of the novel, with long, slow descriptions of the natural world may distance readers from any sense of urgency.

Dellarobia's interaction with Ovid and his assistants introduces a social and class hierarchy into the narrative very different from the one Hester uses to order her small world. Dellarobia is painfully aware of the students' expensive clothing, their distaste for country music, as well as the diminished societal place of a smoker in the contemporary world. Once again, though she may have always felt "better" or "more" than most members of her community, she is beginning to view herself as a big fish in a small pond; the pond has grown, however, and she sees herself as infinitely small, and at root it is because she is poor and has not had the same kind of access to education and money that these outsiders have had. Dellarobia's wariness regarding climate change also underscores a divisive issue split cleanly along the class divide between upper and lower.

Hester's biggest concern is whether Ovid is a Christian. She refuses to be embarrassed by differences in education and wealth, scoffing at the scientific observance of butterflies. Dellarobia retorts that all they do is watch sheep on the farm. Hester is determined to categorize an "us" and a "them," failing to acknowledge any common ground. Her lifestyle is more valid because sheep provide food and clothing. Even as Dellarobia believes "Educated people had powers" (Page 194), the rest of the Turnbows show a decided disdain for education. Despite that, Hester feels a moral obligation to the butterflies as a gift from God; her reasoning for opposing the logging is different from Dellarobia's (who fears the consequences both for the land itself as well as the butterflies from an ecological standpoint), but the women arrive at the same conclusion about preserving the monarchs.

As she surveys the changes to her life since she went up the mountain to abandon her marriage, Dellarobia is dazed, unable to grasp everything "that had arrived out of her initial recklessness" (Page 192-193). With the introduction of the scientists to the narrative, this attempt to view things as "cause and effect" (climbing a mountain to



commit adultery has resulted in a camper of academics in her backyard) apes the values of science without the objectivity: Dellarobia is still putting herself at the center of this universe, as if she somehow had some control over bringing the butterflies to Feathertown. Yet there are hints that Dellarobia understands how reality may simply be a matter of perspective, and hers may or not be right. For example, when Cordelia plays with a toy rotary phone, she uses it for anything except talking. At only a year old, she has only ever seen her mother use a cell phone to communicate across space. A rotary phone does not exist in her reality as it did when Dellarobia was a child: "She'd seen something so plainly in this toy that was fully invisible to her child, two realities existing side by side" (Page 208). Once again, readers note the importance of context in constructing reality, and the necessity of viewing the world through the eyes of someone else in order to understand their version of reality. The phone also acts as a useful metaphor for the difficulty of communicating when there is an "us versus them" mentality, as well as a veiled reference to evolution, a concept most Feathertown residents would oppose.

Finally, there is the introduction in this chapter of a paradox: the butterflies are beautiful, a source of serenity and joy, yet they portend dangerous insight into global ecological health. This good thing is actually bad. This theme will haunt Dellarobia as she battles to reorder reality.



Chapter 7: Global Exchange

Chapter 7: Global Exchange Summary

The ceaseless rain and flooding lead to extra work for Cub pouring gravel, meaning the family will stay afloat on their house payments and offer help for Bear's equipment loan. The logging has been pushed back a month for the timber to dry out. Dellarobia has barely seen Cub due to his work schedule and doesn't know if he has requested ornaments from Hester for their still bare Christmas tree. She is disgusted by the quality of Christmas decorations made in China. The couple attempts a shopping trip for the rapidly approaching holiday, but ends up bickering over the cheap offerings of the local dollar store, both wanting to provide a better Christmas for Preston and Cordelia than they can afford. Dellarobia struggles to find something related to Preston's burgeoning interest in nature and science, while Cub scoffs at the idea of his son turning out to be brainy rather than athletic. Dellarobia is particularly frustrated that she cannot get Preston what his teacher tipped her off he really wants for Christmas: a fancy digital watch like the biology assistant Mako has.

They argue about the logging; Cub still fears rebelling against his father, and Dellarobia hasn't told him Hester's anti-logging position, hoping Cub will decide what he wants without kowtowing to the demands of either parent. Their mutual bad mood simmers over the poorly made but pricey merchandise the dollar store provides, trying not to make a scene in front of the other customers and staff who are quick to jump at an opportunity for gossip. But Dellarobia can't help but let some of her vitriol towards Cub spill. Cub tries to for the honor of keeping a contract, but Dellarobia knows he simply doesn't want to go out on a limb without Hester or Pastor Bobby as back-up (but Hester has only voiced her true opinion briefly and quietly to Dellarobia, and Bobby's sermons are ambiguous, using the Bible to justify respecting God's earth while praying for prosperity among his economically stifled congregation).

When Cub seems genuinely torn about the logging, Dellarobia tries to give him the facts of potential flooding and mudslides that have happened both locally and in Mexico, keeping the scientists out of her argument as much as possible because Cub distrusts intellectuals. She is afraid to even tell Ovid about the Mexican mudslide, worried that by connecting the butterflies to specific sorrow will somehow bring the same crisis to their farm. She instead ties the scientists' discoveries to a religious metaphor, giving Cub a sense that the butterflies are a harbinger of a global "End of Days." Cub, who has enough personal problems without worrying about the world, including an inability to afford a "real" Christmas for their children, tunes out of the argument until Dellarobia finally tells him Hester does not want to clear-cut the mountain either. Feeling exhausted and defeated, Dellarobia has a moment of grace when she stumbles upon the perfect gift for Preston: a well-made, anatomically accurate male monarch-shaped potholder.

Convinced by a curious Dovey to invite the academic team to the house for a Christmas party, Dellarobia worries what they will think of her shabby existence, and what her



family will say about throwing a party without "permission." But between trays of Christmas cookies and Dovey's easy flirting and dancing, the vibe in Dellarobia's house is relaxed and enjoyable. They decorate the tree by folding dollar bills scavenged from the depths of the house into fans and taping coins to bent paperclips. The dance party is in full swing when Cub gets home and wonders about the values Dellarobia is teaching their children with this "money tree."

Chapter 7: Global Exchange Analysis

As the novel reaches its zenith at the "global" level, readers will note the intersection of another global issue with Dellarobia's personal life: her father and mother, skilled laborers who were once considered craftsmen or artisans, lost business as products began to be mass-produced in factories on continents far away. To add insult to injury, now the only things Dellarobia and Cub can afford to buy their children are such poorly made, unappealing items in generic consumerist hubs like the dollar store. Globalization has had a direct impact on her life, and not in a positive way. Furthermore this negativity has made her as narrow-minded as Hester in certain ways: "Her mother used to spit that one out like a curse: slave-children-in-China. Dellarobia was startled by the words she'd channeled...She used to picture them [Chinese orphans] in poorly made caps and jackets, resentful of happy homes everywhere, undercutting her father's handmade furniture business and her mother's work as a seamstress" (Page 243-244). Perhaps Kingsolver here attempts to highlight the roots of xenophobia. The attitude might be intolerant and uncompassionate, but it can stem from a genuine claim of being wronged, and the idea is passed down from generation to generation with little opportunity to be taken out and reconsidered.

Because of the time she has spent with the academics, Dellarobia has begun considering her world from an outsiders' perspective: "It had altered her sense of things, even in this familiar store where she was examining her purchases with some new regard" (Page 250). Here readers note the emphasis on perspective. Reality is not simply one thing, the same for all individuals. Unexamined subjectivity can chokehold one's vision of reality creating rigidity that will not allow for anyone else's point of view. There is a warning in the text about the danger of entrenching oneself in one's beliefs, further underscored by Dellarobia's thoughts on the greater culture clash throughout the country: "It was the same on all sides, the yuppies watched smart-mouthed comedians who mocked people living in double-wides who listened to country music... They would never come see what Tennessee was like, any more than she would get a degree in science and figure out the climate things Dr. Byron described" (Page 256). There is a sense of hopelessness that common ground cannot be discovered, and people are too lazy to look beyond their own personal and reassuring view of reality.

This point is further illustrated by Dellarobia's subconscious view of herself. She berates herself for spending so much time with the science team, for "attempting to hang out with a higher-class crowd, getting above her station" (Page 248). Dellarobia has internalized a view of herself as undeserving, lower class, and incapable of social movement. The view is reinforced by Cub's disparaging remarks toward intelligence, a



trait Dellarobia has long prided herself on. The world she lives in literally distrusts smart people. Dellarobia's sense of herself has been ingrained in her by her family and her community, but they don't represent the only (or even an accurate) version of what is possible and what is real.

Religion is beginning to act as a badge of honor, to distinguish between the quickly emerging "us" and "them." It is a symbol of the deteriorating state of their marriage that Cub and Dellarobia use it as a weapon against each other, engaging in a competition about who is more spiritual: Cub accuses Dellarobia of never having truly felt God's spirit move inside her, while Dellarobia rebukes him for skipping church services in order to make money. This fundamental glue that should hold them together has become a wedge that is driving them apart, particularly as Dellarobia finds herself more and more aligned mentally with the rational thought of the scientists. The divide widens when Dellarobia, fed up with Cub's inertia regarding the family's Christmas ornaments, decorates their tree with cash, making it a literal "money tree." Dellarobia is smart enough to see the irony of it, both in relation to logging as well as to the consumer-driven obsession of the holiday, while Cub finds it almost immoral, a desecration of the meaning of Christmas - despite the fact that he is concerned about how little he has to spend on presents for his children.

Twice in this chapter a character references Noah's Ark because of the incessant rain. Besides thematically tying religion and the weather together as readers will have noted earlier, there may be some foreshadowing as to events impending within the novel itself - a tying of the ancient past to the near future.

Finally, on page 258, Dellarobia once again sums up for herself Hester's sudden spate of strange behavior, twice involving Pastor Bobby, and twice involving the butterflies and their potential significance. From the constant reinforcement of Hester's out-of-character behavior, readers can assume Hester will, in the spirit of Christian mores, make some kind of big confession before the novel is over.



Chapter 8: Circumference of the Earth

Chapter 8: Circumference of the Earth Summary

Christmas goes off better than expected when Mako gives Dellarobia his watch for Preston, who thinks it is from Santa Claus; he further believes he has scientifically proven Santa exists by only telling Santa telepathically that he wanted a watch. Dellarobia doesn't have the heart to tell him the truth. Preston is also enthralled by the endangered species calendar Ovid Byron gave him. On New Year's Day, Dellarobia and Dovey curl and straighten each other's hair at Dellarobia's house, and chat as they have throughout their twenty-year friendship, a joined forced that even Cub finds intimidating when he ventures to tell them he's going to help Hester "drench" the ewes (give them a de-worming medicine.) Dellarobia fills Dovey in on the imminent return plans of Ovid and Pete, who plan to drive a van of equipment from New Mexico so Ovid can set up a lab in the barn. Dellarobia is almost embarrassed by her excitement for Ovid's return and her interest in his work with the monarchs. The women wonder if he is married. Dellarobia discloses that Ovid will be looking for volunteers and paid assistants when he returns, and Dovey urges her to apply for a paid job, reminding her she is the type of person who "go[es] for things" (Page 293), even if Cub has already forbidden it because of their children and the nosey opinions of their neighbors.

Dellarobia turns melancholy as she realizes it is the day her first child was born prematurely, an event Dovey missed because their friendship had briefly soured around her marriage. Though the baby died before it was even named, Dellarobia still feels the pain of his loss. Dovey comforts her, but wonders why Dellarobia stayed in her shot-gun marriage once it was no longer a moral necessity. Dellarobia reminds Dovey that Dellarobia's parents were already dead, and she had no family or life to return to if her marriage failed. Preston appears at the door and chides Dellarobia for smoking, and though she puts out her cigarette, she knows she won't quit despite her promises. Dovey absently calls her "peach," and Dellarobia wonders where she pulled the nickname from. Dovey claims a flirty young customer at the meat counter calls her that, and Dellarobia realizes it is her telephone repairman, who also called her that. Though she cut it off before anything happened with him, Dellarobia is still disgusted and hurt. She spirals into self-loathing, recalling all the flirtations she has had behind loyal Cub's back, and wonders why she is so often tempted to stray from an essentially good man.

The next day at lunchtime, Dellarobia is surprised by a reporter and cameraman at her door, Tina Ultner and Ron Rains, wanting to shoot an interview with her immediately. Dellarobia tries to beg off because of her messy house and needy children, but Tina charms her into agreeing, so they ride to the top of the mountain to use the butterflies as a backdrop, kids in tow. Nervous, Dellarobia stumbles over her words. As she attempts to describe her first time seeing the butterflies without revealing the adulterous circumstances, she claims, "My life, I guess. I couldn't live it anymore. I wanted out. So I came up here by myself, ready to throw everything away. And I saw this. This stopped



me." (Page 323). Realizing how personal she's gotten, she asks Tina to keep what's she's said off the record.

But later that night, Dovey calls screaming that Dellarobia is on CNN and Tina Ultner is claiming Dellarobia was planning to kill herself when the butterflies saved her. As Dellarobia struggles to find the TV remote, Dovey narrates the news piece's assertion that Dellarobia is the only Turnbow fighting for the butterflies, while their neighbor Mr. Cook claims the Turnbows plan to log the mountain with no regard for the butterflies' habitat. Snippets of the news piece re-air on national and local news for days and Dellarobia is bombarded with attention from the community and reporters. She tries to deflect the notice to Hester and Bear so they can present their side of the story, but the "Battle of the Butterflies" only shows the pro side, airing the footage of Dellarobia, Mr. Cook, and even Pastor Bobby Ogle, as well as local officials who hope to cash in on the tourism opportunities. As Dellarobia watches the news, she realizes the anti-butterfly contingent is represented by redneck and hoodlum stereotypes, people easily made fun of by an educated, liberal-minded media and audience. Dovey shows Dellarobia the complete interview with the implication of suicide via the internet, and Dellarobia worries about her family seeing it. Dovey also shows a Photoshopped image of Dellarobia standing on the wings of a monarch butterfly, in which her posture and demeanor are identical to the famous "Birth of Venus" painting, right down to her light colored sweater making her appear nude. Dellarobia is overwhelmed as she realizes everyone with internet access suddenly has access to her life.

Chapter 8: Circumference of the Earth Analysis

Flight Behavior is divided into fourteen chapters, seven moving outward from the individual to the world and then retreating back from the globe to the individual; thus Chapter 8 continues Chapter 7's emphasis on the global, and more importantly how the global affects the individual. Once again Dellarobia's personal life is entwined with a global phenomenon, and this time it is the media and Internet. Anyone with even a modicum of notoriety suddenly becomes fair game in the eyes of the public, and Dellarobia is shocked to see her reality reconstructed by outsiders, creating a narrative in which she is suicidal; because there is video footage of her using certain words taken out of context, she has no hope of fighting this other version of herself.

Preston's experiment with the watch is a perfect metaphor for the tension of the entire novel: he wants to believe Santa exists, but he wants proof (in this he mimics his mother, who has trouble believing things she cannot see). So Preston uses the methods of science to "prove" his faith is founded. He is still too young to understand people generally treat these issues as polar opposites, not to be mingled. He has yet to take a side in the battle of "us" versus "them."

Dellarobia and Dovey have a discussion about hell, and its diminishing use in the Christian church as a deterrent for bad behavior. Dellarobia even decides she does not believe in hell, having "no heart for a system that would punish Dovey and reward the likes of herself, solely on the basis of attendance" (Page 286). There are two levels of



irony to this conversation; first, throughout the novel Dellarobia has a constant awareness of herself as a sinner, as well as a sense of guilt, so though she may not believe in hell, she clearly still has a concept of herself as a person who deserves and expects punishment. Second, the novel is peppered with hellish imagery, from the "lake of fire," to the constant flooding. There is a suggestion here that hell may no longer exist in the afterlife, but because of climate change, it is coming home to roost on earth.

Dellarobia's mindset is still somewhat ordered by religion: she still uses Moses as a reference point for Pastor Bobby's status as an adoptee, and she describes having one thought as "habitually as a prayer" (Prayer 288). But readers will note these Biblical and religious allusions are starting to ebb from the constancy of Dellarobia's thoughts. Her frame of reference is starting to shift with her initiation into the world of science, evident in her enthusiastic questioning of the butterflies' migratory patterns. She struggles with the idea that studying butterflies is "trivial" compared to putting food on people's tables or offering a protective service, yet her deep-rooted fascination cannot be dampened.



Chapters 9: Continental Ecosystem

Chapters 9: Continental Ecosystem Summary

As January progresses, Ovid and Pete have returned and set up the lab. Ovid interviews Dellarobia for a job assisting with their research. She is amazed and almost appalled at the amount of money Ovid's university and the government are able to lavish on the lab, putting luxuries she could never afford in her barn, like a stand-alone freezer. Ovid has leased the barn from Hester and Bear, which gives them some financial security as they decide how to handle the logging, and Ovid expects the butterflies, if they follow seasonal patterns, to leave their wintering spot by March anyway.

Dellarobia answers Ovid's questions with a mixture of shame, defensiveness, and a strange pride that she knows something that he doesn't: that people in her part of the world grow up with sports coaches as math and science teachers and have no aspiration beyond the local farm life they grew up in. While Dellarobia herself hoped to go to college before her unexpected pregnancy, her math ACT score would have inhibited her no matter how well she did on the English section. Ovid can't fathom the failure of the public education system, but Pete, who has little faith in people in general, is less surprised. He cynically thinks reporters only speak to Dellarobia because they don't want to face the facts about climate change from scientists; they'd rather believe the butterflies' presence is a strange and beautiful miracle.

Dellarobia warns Ovid that his potential volunteer pool will be filled with unskilled or apathetic labor, and Ovid's obvious anxiety deepens. Dellarobia has found him more impatient and distant since his return after the holiday. But he explains his growing panic: monarch butterflies usually winter in tropical climates, and will freeze to death when the thermometer hits the mid-twenties. The butterflies on the mountain, which represent most of the population of the North American continent since none are being found in Mexico at all in the current winter, will die from a typical Tennessee winter, making them near extinct. Ovid only has a few weeks to study them and develop hypotheses on why they might have strayed from their migratory path. He is sure climate change is behind the aberration in the eons' old pattern and he wants to understand how.

Determined to help Ovid in his life's work as best she can, Dellarobia hires Lupe Delgado, mother of Preston's classmate Josefina who immigrated to the area after the Mexican mudslides, to babysit the children while she works in the lab. A week into the new routine, Dellarobia is surprised to discover protestors on her lawn, local community college students demanding the butterflies be saved from the logging. Dellarobia sends them to Bear and Hester's house, and they apologetically scoot off her property. She realizes their passion might be useful if harnessed to work as volunteers.



In the lab, Ovid sets her tasks to help determine if the butterflies are in "diapause," their typical wintering physical state, and whether they are infected with a certain parasite that might be a corollary though not causal aspect of the butterflies' mis-migration; they might be affecting the butterflies' ability for long flights, and they may be more prevalent due to rising temperatures in Mexico. Dellarobia's work schedule prevents her from keeping up with her housework or church. She is shocked how much her world has changed in two months, and though she is satisfied to help, she knows the temperature is dropping. Her study of major narrative themes in high school English leads her to believe that in this story of Man versus Nature, Nature is bound to win.

Chapters 9: Continental Ecosystem Analysis

The illusion of nudity in the Photoshopped "Butterfly Venus" image that is circulating the internet acts as an apt metaphor for how Dellarobia feels now that her personal life is on display for the world: exposed and vulnerable, open to ridicule and criticism.

Chapter 9 focuses thematically on the different ways of perceiving and describing reality, based on the personal factors of one's personality and environment, and particularly split along the lines of the ideological divide between conservative and liberal. There are many examples of this: Cub's attempt to refuse Dellarobia the opportunity to apply for a job as Ovid's assistant underscores the role of women in the world where Dellarobia lives: "My family is just, I guess, typical. They feel like a wife working outside the home is a reflection on the husband" (Page 333). In local high school science classes, the teacher allows boys to shoot hoops while girls sit by quietly, raising no protest at their lack of education. In Dellarobia's burgeoning understanding of the world outside her community, this is an "us" versus "them" issue, deeply entrenched between the sides of conservatives and liberals, as is evident by Ovid's reaction to her comment. Ovid likely acts as a surrogate for most modern readers. Thematically, the novel stresses the necessity of each side overcoming their own certainty in the "rightness" of their reality, but some readers might have difficulty in trying to see this side of the coin.

Similarly, the estrangement between economic groups is highlighted by the cost of equipping the lab, at which Ovid doesn't break a sweat, while Dellarobia is amazed by the ease with which things appear on her property that she could never have afforded herself. Ovid's enclosed view of reality - a world where education is respected and sought, and is easy to come by due to a regular cash flow, and his shock that the entire world doesn't share this outlook - places him firmly on a spectrum of stereotypes familiar to most modern Americans: an "East Coast bleeding heart liberal" despite his home in New Mexico. The way the novel reinforces the "us" versus "them" mentality of conservative and liberal ideology along class lines may lead readers to question how useful it is for Kingsolver to so closely mimic the well-worn political archetypes. Does Dellarobia's belief that "people had worries or they had tons of money, not both" (Page 340), further add to the gulf of misunderstanding between the two groups, or is it merely a version of reality she needs to get over?



When reckoning with possible imminent extinction of the butterflies, Dellarobia "despised this account, the butterflies led astray. She'd preferred the version of the story in which her mountain attracted its visitors through benevolence, not some hidden treachery" (Page 351). This statement crystallizes what is at stake in the battle for reality: a beautiful but empty dream versus difficult facts (that can perhaps be changed if they are faced and dealt with).

As Dellarobia is forced to confront climate change, an idea she has been taught to reject out of hand as a liberal (read: upper class, "them") illusion, she reverts to what she knows: the Bible. Chapter 9 is peppered with Biblical and religious references; humorously, she covets her "neighbor's" stand-alone freezer, an allusion to the commandments; she compares math to an "alien religion." In grappling with the loss of the entire monarch population she can only think of Job, who lost his whole family in one catastrophe, and considers it the monarch's "End of Days." Dellarobia is not quite ready to fully change her conception of reality and accept climate change, so instead she clings to the reality she knows. Yet a key to acceptance lies in finding common ground with the other version of reality, something both sides can agree upon. She recognizes in Ovid's potential loss of his life's work and passion the loss of her own child over a decade ago; it makes it easier to understand what's at stake by focusing on this mutual grief. Dellarobia's personal life is intertwined with a more epic struggle for survival.



Chapter 10: Natural State

Chapter 10: Natural State Summary

As January progresses, Dellarobia records the high and low temperature each day, as she and Ovid worry about the thermometer's consistent descent. One particularly frostbitten Saturday as she waits for Cub to muster himself to do chores, Dellarobia goes to check the thermometer out of habit, and accidentally catches a glimpse of Ovid naked in his camper. Mortified, she quickly turns away, hoping he didn't see her as well, but she cannot keep her thoughts away from her burgeoning attraction to him physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Though she had hoped the butterflies represented a fresh start from her old habits, she still finds herself tempted by this other man in her fantasy life. Returning to the house, she is sure Cub will see her guiltiness, but he barely registers her and they head out together to repair gaps in their fence line, preparing for Hester's pregnant ewes which can no longer graze in their current sodden field. Dellarobia is surprised by Hester's change of heart, since she had previously implied Dellarobia and Cub couldn't handle overseeing birth of the lambs. Dellarobia is sure with the assistance of a veterinary manual and the budding scientist Preston, she can accomplish it successfully.

Cub and Dellarobia work well together fixing the fence. Cub mentions Peanut Norwood is trying to lure the butterflies onto his property in order to get a slice of the tourist income. Dellarobia tries to explain that the butterflies will most likely die before spring, and then there will be no replacement flock the following year. Cub and the town leadership simply can't stop planning nature to suit their needs. For once, Cub listens with interest as Dellarobia patiently breaks down the global significance of the butterflies' unusual migration pattern. While Cub absorbs and accepts her reasoning for the most part, he seems to draw the line at global warming, reverting to an argument of God's will for the weather. As they head back to the house, Cub abruptly announces Crystal Estep has been stopping at the house regularly to ask for more of Dellarobia's help with the "Dear Abby" letter, but in reality she flirts with Cub. Cub vows he would never cheat on Dellarobia, and she believes him, but she is blindsided by the thought that while she has been contemplating adultery against the steadfast Cub, he is considered a good catch by other women.

On Monday, Dellarobia joins Ovid and Pete on the mountain in order to assess the damage of the cold snap. She is nervous about seeing Ovid for the first time since she saw him naked. She is also amazed by some of the volunteers who are helping collect data: two young men from California living in tents, and Vern Zakas and some others from the local community college who had protested the logging. The team continues to collect numbers of dead butterflies from the ground, along with setting up an elaborate system of thermometers in the trees to track temperature at different heights. They collect butterflies in pillowcases to warm up back at the house, to see how many are truly dead; some of the "dead" might revive if thrown into the air, forcing them to fly or



sink. Dellarobia cannot gauge how bad the damage is; Pete only claims the situation could be worse.

Ovid unexpectedly joins her for her lunch break, and his body language indicates he neither knows nor cares about her inadvertent spying. He explains to her in much more detail exactly how global warming works, and the irreparable damage already done to the earth as the global temperature rises, damage that will play out for years even if there is a global shift in ecological policies. Dellarobia makes feeble arguments about historical cycles, but truly, she simply cannot fathom the scale of the destruction; she claims, "I'm not saying I don't believe you, I'm saying I can't" (Page 439). She thinks most people have too many day-to-day problems to worry about such an overwhelming crisis, and they simply can't imagine something they have never seen before.

Chapter 10: Natural State Analysis

In Chapter 9, Dellarobia reverted to her religious roots to shut out the depth of consequences of global warming. In Chapter 10, she similarly starts to slide back into her insatiable desire for other men, namely Ovid, and this likewise reinforces her personal preoccupation with the punishing nature of religion. She feels an incredible sense of guilt just for accidentally seeing Ovid naked, an act she calls "biblical," and again she alludes to the disobedience of Lot's wife. Her dependence on religious metaphors continue as a way for constructing the version of reality that Ovid continues to pressure her to see, with more suggestions of the End of Days and its lake of fire. There is an irony in the beauty she first saw on the mountain being a harbinger of doom; a symbol of the "End of Days," it literally could be a forecast for the destruction of the monarch species. The hell she and Dovey had thought humanity had evolved beyond has been reborn to torment people in this life instead of the next. Yet since the loss of her parents, when God failed her, Dellarobia has had trouble believing what she can't see; without some form of concrete map from A to B, Dellarobia still tries to deny climate change's power. Her ambivalence catches her: she doesn't think she believes, and she doesn't think she particularly wants to.

Once again, readers will note the mention of Hester's anxiety in the presence of Pastor Bobby, reinforcing a sense of connection or spiritual discovery that Hester is bound to confess before the novel is done. Readers will also note Cub's personal construction of reality in this chapter: he believes God sent the butterflies to save Feathertown by giving them tourist dollars, believing it is the community's "turn" to have some good fortune, a narrative of nature "centered around what they want. They need things to be a certain way, financially, so they think nature will organize itself around what suits them" (Page 398). Dellarobia creates an environmental metaphor for this phenomenon of personal narrative, comparing these limited visions to people's views in summer, when the world is hidden behind tree leaves, and anything not seen can be denied. She is frustrated by Cub's refusal to face facts, yet she behaves similarly, requesting physical evidence of global warming from Ovid. People tend to shift facts in order to make a "better story."



Some ground is covered in the battle between "us" versus "them," as Dellarobia and Cub assimilate new information into their worldview. Hester's house-preening before Pastor Bobby visits stirs recognition in Dellarobia, who has often felt ashamed to invite the well-to-do scientists into her own home. She and Hester, who have never gotten along, suddenly have something in common. Her relationship with Pete also grows; he initially sees her as a representative of all those people who prefer a nice story to facts, and she willingly accepts that she is not his equal. The longer they work together, the more they both appreciate the talents Dellarobia brings to the lab, especially when faced with another "them," the more temporary and transient volunteers. Similarly, Cub identifies the parallels between farming and science, with their focus on measuring and analyzing data. These are mere baby steps on the path to reconstructing reality, but they perhaps indicate more progress as the novel progresses.

Within the space of a page, there are two uses of the word free: in regards to her public domain across the internet, where anyone has access to both her and the butterflies because "free was free." She also worries over her growing feelings for Ovid, having hoped to use the revelation of the monarchs on the mountain as a chance to turn over a new leaf and break her old habits. Her new lust-driven obsession makes her feel trapped inside her past, when "She'd thought she could be free" (Page 393-94). There is an interesting notion of agency at work here, raising questions of how much control either Dellarobia or the monarchs have over their destiny. The monarchs are genetically encoded to behave a certain way; if they can't change, they may die, but also, if they do change they may still die, because the world will no longer be welcoming to them. Dellarobia wonders if she is trapped in the same genetic mess. She has always acted in a certain way - which makes her "Dellarobia." Is it possible for her to behave any differently and still be herself? Or, is it possible to change, period?

When Dellarobia and Preston read up on the strange practice of swinging a non-breathing lamb in order to shock some life into it, readers can assume this foreshadows the need for such behavior, despite Dellarobia's protests that they will never have to do it. There is a similar sense of foreshadowing around the discussion of giving the monarchs a last ditch effort to sink or fly by flinging them out into space. The monarchs act as a metaphor for Dellarobia throughout the novel; they are on similar journeys to re-evaluate the narrow path they have always traveled and to adapt to a strange and new world in order to survive. Like them, Dellarobia will either sink and stagnate in her unsatisfying, meaningless life, or she will find a way to fly.



Chapter 11: Community Dynamics

Chapter 11: Community Dynamics Summary

On Groundhog's Day, Dellarobia contemplates if the butterflies can survive for six more weeks of winter. She also wonders what will happen to her life once the science team leaves and she returns to the role of a rural housewife, devoid of scope and meaning, where even a trip to the neighboring town of Cleary seems too far to manage. Dovey picks up Dellarobia and the kids in her convertible to shop at a massive new secondhand store, where Dellarobia is shocked by the quality of the items for sale compared to the cheap goods at the dollar store, and for lower prices. As the women peruse the merchandise, Dovey gently teases Dellarobia for information about Ovid Byron, sensing Dellarobia's crush, but Dellarobia can't bring herself to even discuss it, since her feelings for him are born from more than convenience and boredom. In particular she doesn't want to talk about Ovid's wife Juliet, of whom he rarely speaks.

Instead she tells Dovey about a group of ladies called Womyn Knit the Earth, who are camping on the property and knitting monarch butterflies from the reused fabric of old sweaters in an effort to raise awareness for climate change. In return, Dovey tells Dellarobia about a website where people discuss the local news; on it a man volunteered to save the butterflies by driving them to a Florida nature park in his eighteen-wheeler truck. While intrigued by this possibility, Dellarobia wonders what gossip the website spews about herself. Preston gets excited about a set of encyclopedias he finds, outdated but full of information about animals. Dellarobia doesn't think they can afford the whole set at a dollar a book, but she doesn't think the store will break up the set so they can buy just a few. When Preston hypothesizes that if the books are considered one thing then the set should be one dollar, Dellarobia urges him to make his argument to the sales staff. Nervous but determined, he comes out victorious.

February is foggy and warmer than usual, buying the monarchs time. Dellarobia spends her working hours tracking the movement patterns of the butterflies, worrying that the warmth might be just as bad as the cold if they deplete their fat stores by flying around in the heat with no available food source nearby. She watches tourists trickle across her property, as well as a man, Leighton Akins, who loiters around encouraging tourists to sign a pledge. During a sudden rainfall, she and Ovid Byron huddle under a makeshift tent, and she tells him about the man who offered to drive the butterflies to Florida. Ovid's reaction surprises her: they cannot save the monarchs by imposing their will upon the insects without completely destroying the monarchs' inherent group dynamics. Nor does Ovid think anyone, even a scientist, has the right to play such a *deus-ex-machina* roll for the butterflies. While on one hand she recognizes his love for the butterflies and his desire to stay with them even to the moment of extinction, on the other hand she cannot fathom his desire to simply observe rather than try to protect and help the butterflies.



They discuss the modern unpopularity of science along strict socioeconomic lines. Ovid can't understand farmers' apathy toward climate change, a phenomenon that would directly affect their livelihood more than most, but Dellarobia asserts that people don't actually choose how to interpret information, they are simply told how to think based on their class status. She reiterates that her family works incredibly hard simply to survive and perhaps their need to keep themselves sheltered and fed will excuse them from worrying about global warming. She claims people on both sides make assumptions about the other and educated liberals like him tend to assume the least or worst about people like her and her family. Their conversation ends at an impasse as the rain stops, neither really seeing the side of the other, and Dellarobia returns to her outpost to track the flight of the butterflies.

She asks Leighton Akins about his pledge and he explains he wants people to actively reduce their carbon footprint, derisively telling her "you people" need to participate to reduce climate change. Yet as he reads the pledge to her, she points out how little of it applies to her: she has never been on a plane, she already shops secondhand because she can't afford anything (thus also can't afford buying new, environmentally friendly products), and she won't cut back on red meat because her family eats too many processed carbs already. Akins gets more and more flustered as he realizes how different her life is from his or from what he thought it was.

Chapter 11: Community Dynamics Analysis

Dellarobia's immersion with the scientists has her calling into question many of the narratives in the world around her: Groundhog's Day, like the media interpretation of the monarchs, is simply a nice story to help people get through the final slog of winter. There is no cause-and-effect or correlation between a groundhog, his shadow, and winter. She can recognize objectively the utter shift in the narrative of the word "smart" - it has become a bad reality, with only pejorative connotations, like "smarty pants" and "Don't get smart with me" (Page 462), at least within her community. But Dellarobia still has a hard time being objective when the narrative hits closer to home, as it does when she ignores that her children are outgrowing their clothes: "Everyone in their little house was going along with the story they could afford: that no one would grow, nothing would change" (Page 455). She still picks and chooses her reality, just like Hester, who thinks the mild winter is a gift directly from God to protect the butterflies.

Chapter 11 underscores more of the complicated message about women in Dellarobia's society. Local gossip has Dellarobia somehow using her sexuality in order to get the job working for Ovid. Dellarobia defends herself by falling back on her first invitation to Ovid for dinner, motivated by good Christian hospitality, the same argument about taking care of disguised angels that she made to Cub. Yet this defense is disingenuous; Dellarobia invited Ovid in on an impulse of physical attraction and seeming emotional attraction. Though Dellarobia has never actually cheated on Cub with anyone, let alone Ovid Byron, town gossip cuts close to the bone of truth regarding Dellarobia's motivations. Kingsolver may intend Dellarobia's struggle with lust as a metaphor for her greater restlessness in her intellectually stagnant life, but Dellarobia's not entirely unfair



reputation as the "Tennessee temptress" unfortunately links her all the way back to Eve and the apple.

Dellarobia's religious upbringing has also warped her perspective on the fragility of human nature. She says, "I keep thinking if I go to church I'll learn to be sweet. Bobby Ogle is so good. And Cub is sweet. My kids are, basically. So what's my problem?" (Page 471). Dellarobia conflates "sweet" and "good," as if niceness, or more importantly, passivity, were actually a barometer of moral character. The greater implication is that because Dellarobia is flawed, she must be bad. Because she is impatient and restless and desperate, she equates these qualities with moral failings, rather than simply the lot of humans who strive for "perfection" but can never achieve it. Dellarobia's constant feeling of self-loathing because of her inability to incorporate the lessons of church into her daily life highlights an issue particularly resonant to modern women who frequently feel an added pressure to be "good" in order to deserve happiness.

When Ovid says, "An animal is the sum of its behaviors. Its community dynamics. Not just the physical body" (Page 491), he is referring to the monarchs, but the statement is easily a metaphor for humanity. An individual's perception of him or herself, the narrative people share about who they are does not matter in the face of their actions, which may or may not shore up that subjective reality. How humans interact and react collectively to a crisis like climate change (with discernible results: it will either be slowed down or sped up) will say more about humanity in the long run than all the didactic debates and individual feelings on the subject.

The last section of the chapter illustrates the shortcomings of the liberal, well-to-do agenda that has courted Dellarobia throughout the novel. Ovid's paradoxical detachment from the subject he is so passionate about - his disinterest in saving the monarchs - demonstrates the limitations of science. As the "us" to its "them" would argue, science has no motivation in moral grounding; right and wrong don't matter, and this attitude can be dangerous as well as off-putting. Dellarobia's interaction with Leighton Akins, the carbon footprint pledge pusher, gives an even more heavy-handed reckoning of the blind eye the so-called "blue staters" turn to the true issues of poverty experienced by their "red state" compatriots. Leighton assumes everyone has access to the same opportunities that he does, and the need to use those privileges responsibly. He is a metaphorical indictment of the entitlement beliefs of liberals and their tendency, just like conservatives, to "shut out the other side. It cuts both ways" (Page 501).



Chapter 12: Kinship Systems

Chapter 12: Kinship Systems Summary

As February draws to an end, Dellarobia volunteers to help Hester vaccinate the pregnant ewes now living on her (Dellarobia's) part of the property, hoping to glean what to expect during the birthing process. The usual tension between the women seems to have thawed, and Dellarobia is glad Hester has trusted her with this responsibility. She is impressed by her mother-in-law's extreme veterinary knowledge and take-charge attitude. From all her recent work experiences, Dellarobia recognizes that she likes responsibility more than she realized.

The previous week has been awash in unending rains, but Dellarobia and Hester take advantage of a respite from the precipitation to seek out some mountain-dwelling, winter-blooming flowers Hester knows about in hopes of locating a nectar source for the monarchs. After chatting briefly with two of the Womyn Knit the Earth campers who explain to Hester their intention, Dellarobia takes advantage of Hester's unusual affability to wonder what they will do when the butterflies inevitably go away. She is surprised to learn Hester and Cub are having a prayer meeting with Pastor Bobby to make the final decision about logging. Dellarobia takes the opportunity to explain in basic terms why the monarchs are on their property and what it means in terms of the global climate, and Hester is not as immune to the suggestion as Cub was. They take a break so Hester can smoke, and Hester is unsurprised that Dellarobia quit cigarettes. They discuss Cub, each wondering why the other treats him like a child, but Hester floors Dellarobia by claiming she has always believed Dellarobia, who is smarter and more ambitious than Cub, would eventually take the children and leave him, an implicit explanation of why she has been cold toward her grandchildren. After this revelation, the women are at a loss for words so they continue their search for the flowers Hester calls "harbingers." Dellarobia is thrilled to find some. Before she can dig them up to take to the lab for feeding experiments, a handful of butterflies appear, having found their own way to the food source.

A few days later, Preston's kindergarten class visits the butterfly lab and mountain's roost site, an idea of Dellarobia's to get the young kids excited about science. She enjoys watching her son interact with his classmates, spreading his inquisitiveness like joy among them. She watches proudly as Ovid explains the basic science to them, using his gentle and honest tone to elicit interest from the youngsters. Left in charge on the mountain, Dellarobia gives them more information about caterpillars turning to butterflies and monarchs' mind-boggling migration patterns. Unbeknownst to her, Ovid has been listening. They are mutually impressed with how they relate the information to the children to generate their excitement. They even get in a small lesson about global warming. Dellarobia notices Josefina, Preston's Mexican friend who came to the house to see the butterflies, alone at lunchtime and sits with her. Josefina tells her that in Mexico, people believe the butterflies are the souls of babies who have died.



Later, Dellarobia awaits the arrival of Dovey and the kids to have dinner. She is surprised instead when Tina Ultner reappears on her doorstep for a follow-up/resolution piece about the butterflies, which had been a popular story with her news program's audience. Displeased with the results of the first interview, Dellarobia tries to evade the second, but when she cannot put off Tina, she takes her instead to interview Ovid in the barn-lab. Tina is immediately displeased that they can't return to the splendor of the mountain, and gets further frustrated when Ovid meets her cheery line of questions about the "beautiful phenomena" of the butterflies with facts about the ominous sign they represent. Tina tries to steer him off global warming, afraid the topic will "lose" the audience, but eventually asks him questions about the "contentious" topic. Her pleasant skepticism drives Ovid over the edge and he rants at her about the responsibility of the media to report facts, to educate people on the truth, and to make people care about a topic that will so drastically and certainly affect their futures. When he accuses her of colluding with advertisers to keep the general public placated, she ends the interview and leaves. Ovid laments his lost temper and lost opportunity to educate the public, but Dellarobia is merely sad no one else witnessed his eloquent rage. But Dovey, standing at the back of the barn, has recorded the entire interview on her phone and immediately uploads it to YouTube.

Chapter 12: Kinship Systems Analysis

Earlier in the novel, Dovey claims Dellarobia is the type of person who decides what she wants and gets it or does it. In Chapter 12, Hester presents a similar picture of Dellarobia, saying, "That's just you. You make up your mind on something, and it's done" (Page 532). This is an interesting reversal in personal constructs of realities: Dovey and Hester have a view of Dellarobia she does not hold of herself (when she promises Preston she will quit smoking earlier in novel, she can't even pretend to herself she is not lying.) Coupled with Dellarobia's sudden understanding that Hester remained aloof to her grandchildren because she was afraid she would lose them, this chapter illustrates the pervasiveness of constructing a reality to suit one's personal narrative. It also underscores the usefulness of direct communication between people of differing ideas in order to better understand their position.

As Hester teaches Dellarobia about the sheep, she says, "It's no good to complain about your flock...A flock is nothing but the put-together of all your past choices" (Page 519). Here the flock makes a good metaphor for Dellarobia's life, an amalgam of her own choices. She chose to get married then she chose to stick with it when there was no longer a reason. She chose to have children with Cub later on even though she didn't really love him. She chose not to fight to find a way to get an education, something she claims was important to her. Readers should watch to see if Dellarobia herself comes to realize this fully before the end of the novel, or if she stays trapped in her feelings of desperation and meaninglessness.

In the awareness of the accordion nature of her world since the butterflies arrived, stretching out to encompass the globe and now compressing back in as interest in the butterflies wanes (itself a metaphor for the difficulty in combating climate change,



because the short attention spans of modern life are not conducive to sustaining a long-term fight), Dellarobia says, "From that day on, week by week, the size of her life had doubled out. The question was how to refold all that back into one package, size zero" (Page 530). This is a clear nod to the greater narrative structure and titling of the chapters.

Dellarobia's ambivalent relationship with God has not necessarily changed, but it is key to note that she wants to believe in something. The scientific data surrounding the monarchs, their migration and perfect evolution into a survival pattern across millennia fascinates Dellarobia, and makes a sort of sense to her. Yet she still wants to know "why" - why the monarchs chose her mountain at this point in her life. The science is not enough, as it seems to be for Ovid. She still wants to assign meaning to the butterflies. Though she may not have a strong spiritual life, it is telling that she still seeks the significance of faith in something bigger, some greater purpose.

Keen readers will note the resonance of Josefina's revelatory metaphor equating monarchs to the souls of dead children. Dellarobia will immediately associate the butterflies with the life of her own lost child.



Chapter 13: Mating Strategies

Chapter 13: Mating Strategies Summary

Waiting for the school bus one day at the beginning of March, Dellarobia and Preston smell spring in the air, and Preston is determined to be present when the lambs are born at the end of the month. Dellarobia teases her son with hints at a big surprise for his upcoming birthday. Preston spots two monarchs in the road, doing a strange vertical kind of dance, which looks almost like fighting before they realize the butterflies are mating. Dellarobia recognizes this as a good sign that the monarchs might be coming out of diapause; maybe they will survive.

Ovid is away for the day, so Dellarobia is off from work; she wonders where he went and if it has anything to do with Dovey's video of him going viral. She dislikes his absence and her lack of purpose without her job. She decides to join Cub in running errands for Hester, taking donations to a church charity in town. She donates some of her own kids' clothes, the first time she has ever felt financially solvent enough not to trade them at the secondhand store.

Dellarobia and Cub find themselves with time to kill while they await assistance in unloading a heavy wardrobe. Dellarobia decides to treat them to a local fast food place called Dairy Prince. As they sit in the car eating, Dellarobia broaches the heavy subject of their marriage: the child they lost who drove them to the altar in the first place, and why they stayed together without that baby as their glue. Cub resists talking about it, offended by her implication that they would not have eventually gotten married in any case. But Dellarobia gently pushes the truth forward: without the pregnancy their lives would have taken different courses after high school. They are both good people but people who are not able to give the other what they need, and even if they love each other, there is a lack of mutual respect. Cub, simple and loyal to a fault, is devastated by Dellarobia's words, blaming the butterflies for a "difference" in her attitude and behavior and wishing the monarchs had never appeared. She tries to explain how long she has had these feelings, but Cub misinterprets her, thinking she refers to the fictional suicide attempt created by the news, which Hester saw and told him about. She denies the suicide attempt but tries to explain how the monarchs led her to avoid making a mistake that would ruin her life. She wanted instead to return to that life to face honestly why she wanted to ruin it in the first place. Cub accuses her of being in love with Ovid, but Dellarobia can only claim that rather than continuing to complain about making mistakes in the past, she simply wants to avoid continuing making them in the future.

Despite the painful conversation, Cub easily falls asleep that night while Dellarobia lies awake worrying. Having spoken her piece, she is determined to stay in her marriage if Cub does not make the first move to end it. Yet she feels a pang of disappointment when Ovid is not back the next morning, worrying he is angry at her over the Tina Ultner incident. Dellarobia's disappointment only intensifies when he returns later in the morning, with his wife Juliet in tow. Shocked but ever polite, she invites them to dinner.



Despite Ovid's earlier complaints that Juliet is not much of a cook, Dellarobia sees that she is an equal to her husband in every way: she has a PhD in folklore, studying cultures that have used the monarch as a meaningful symbol in their own simple decorations. Watching how animated and complete Ovid is with Juliet, Dellarobia realizes how much she has deluded herself in her feelings for him - how little she actually knows him - and further how unbalanced and sad her own marriage has been: "Not the precarious risk she'd balanced for years against forbidden fruits, something easily lost in a brittle moment by flying away or jumping a train to ride off on someone else's steam. She was not about to lose it. She'd never had it" (Page 616-617).

The next day, Dellarobia attends church with Cub, Hester, and Bear prior to their private prayer meeting with Pastor Bobby. Dellarobia listens to Bobby's sermon looking for clues about his mindset, wondering if his lecture on God being present in all creation and the arrogance of destroying that creation for personal gain is aimed directly at Bear or credit card debt. After stopping to check on the kids in Sunday School, Dellarobia walks into Bobby's office to find Cub standing up to his father, actively reasoning with him about the risks of logging. Bobby looks over the paperwork and assures Bear that he can get out of the logging contract honorably, and warns him about the sins of greed and pride. Bear is browbeaten into tentatively agreeing, and Hester looks at Bobby with pride and gratitude, despite the fact that Cub took a risk by voicing his opinion against his father.

Bear and Cub go to look at a potential equipment purchase, so Dellarobia drives Hester home. She broaches the subject of her alleged suicide attempt with Hester, assuring her that what she saw on the news was an edited piece of untruth. Yet Hester somehow does not believe her, maintaining that Dellarobia was obviously unhappy enough to have such thoughts, implying to her daughter-in-law that Hester herself speaks from her own experience. When Dellarobia questions her further on why Hester will not accept Dellarobia as part of the family after ten years, Hester slowly reveals some shocking truths about her past that make her disturbingly similar to Dellarobia: she married Bear because her parents thought it was a good idea even though Hester wasn't sure she loved him. She too had been pregnant before Cub - before she was married to Bear, and with another man's child. She lost that child to adoption just like Dellarobia lost hers to premature birth. Hester wishes she had gone farther afield to have the baby boy adopted, never realizing she might run into him in the future, and Dellarobia finally realizes that Pastor Bobby, locally famous for having been found in a basket like Moses and adopted, is actually Hester's son.

Chapter 13: Mating Strategies Analysis

As the butterflies begin to mate again on the cusp of spring, readers may recall their "mating strategies" Ovid explained earlier in the novel, the massing of the monarch from all parts of North America to spread out the gene pool and strengthen the species. Metaphorically, Dellarobia chose a much different strategy, one that was impulsive and ultimately a poor choice, and there is an irony in the physical resemblance of the monarchs' mating to fighting, as Dellarobia has been fighting to maintain her marriage



ever since it began. And late in the chapter, Dellarobia recognizes what she has been missing in her thoughtless mating strategy when she observes Ovid and Juliet together. She never gave herself a chance to find such a suitable, perfect mate.

When Dellarobia forces Cub to face the truth of their marriage, he blames the butterflies for changing her, wishing they had never come to Feathertown. Dellarobia protests that her discontent began long before that, but in a way, Cub is right. That lake of fire Dellarobia witnessed on the mountain was the metaphorical beginning to her personal End of Days: a version of Dellarobia died on that mountain, and someone new emerged. The new Dellarobia takes the world more seriously, having finally pulled her head out of the sand to acknowledge it. She wanted the butterflies to have a significance but it turns out to be a significance she creates for herself: she chooses to use their appearance to change her life, to avoid a mistake and start speaking her mind more frequently and to pursue knowledge alongside her insatiably curious son. On the other hand, Dellarobia appears at this stage to still be in the caterpillar stage of her birth. She tells Cub how she feels but then leaves him to act on it. She does not want to be the one to end their marriage, scared of the consequences and self-blame that might engender.

Dellarobia revisits Hester's flock comment from Chapter 12, that a flock is the sum of all one's past choices. Dellarobia finds a paradox in this: "Mistakes wreck your life, but they make what you have. It's all kind of one" (Page 594-5). Dellarobia's marriage was a mistake but it gave her children she loves; it puts her in a position to see the phenomenon of the butterflies and to learn about their nature. If a mistake has good results, is it still a mistake? And even if you appreciate the results, does that mean you should continue in the mistake?

Though she knows Ovid is upset about the viral video of him lambasting Tina Ultner, Dellarobia can't help but feel the video "redeems" her, "striking down all the falsehoods committed in her name, and with her image" (Page 598). Her use of language equates Ovid to a Jesus figure in her life, and her desire to have him, a man, save her. It is questionable whether Dellarobia's honesty about her dissatisfied marriage to Cub coupled with her instinct to try to find a new "protector" may just cancel each other out. She may not have made the unforgivable mistake she planned with Jimmy, but it appears Dellarobia is simply finding new ways to make the same mistake.

Preston's fixation with an encyclopedia reference to "perfect females" and his follow up clarification with Ovid of what they are (female insects who have both male and female reproductive organs, so that they can spawn a new colony all by themselves) should key readers in to the importance of this concept in the final chapter that bears its name.



Chapter 14: Perfect Female

Chapter 14: Perfect Female Summary

Dellarobia wakes up the next day shocked to find the world covered in deep drifts of snow, after the temperature had risen to fifty degrees only a few days before. The kids are excited for a snow day but Dellarobia knows what this probably means for the monarchs. As she gazes at the white world, she notices one of the ewes behaving strangely in the field above the house. Thinking it might be in labor, she goes out to investigate and is shocked when the ewe drops a filmed-over little lamb and moves away from it. Calling to Cub for assistance, she does everything she can think to get the unmoving lamb to breathe, wiping it clean, holding it close to her body for warmth, breathing into its nose. She finally spins it around by the back legs just as the vet book she and Preston studied advised. Cub can only watch her helplessly but Dellarobia will not accept defeat and amazingly, the lamb starts breathing. She and Cub get the ewe to the barn to claim and feed her baby. Having already made some decisions, Dellarobia uses the highly emotional experience to catapult herself out of her marriage, warning Cub that they have to let go of each other and move forward, no matter how hard it might be to do.

A few days later, the day before Preston's birthday, her son shows Dellarobia a spectacular sight out his bedroom window: a bud colony of monarchs has attached itself to the dead peach orchard on the Cooks' property. Against all odds, some of the butterflies survived the snowstorm, though Dellarobia realizes there might not be enough to propagate the species. She tries not to take their miraculous beauty as a sign of an actual miracle. She takes Preston out into the melting snow for a closer view. She takes the opportunity to tell him about his dead brother, as a way of explaining their family history; she claims that baby made Preston's birth possible by forcing Dellarobia and Cub together. Next she gives him his birthday present: a smart phone they will share, so he can have internet access and answer all the questions his curious mind thinks of. Finally, she breaks the biggest news of all: she, Preston, and Cordelia are moving into an apartment in Cleary with Dovey while Dellarobia works and attends college to study science, thanks to the intervention of Ovid with the school's administration. Preston does not like the news that his father will remain at the farm and he and Cordelia will commute between homes. Dellarobia does not sugarcoat the divorce for him: though their marriage might have been a mistake, their decision to have Preston and Cordelia was conscious and planned for and miraculous. She gently pushes him to accept the idea of life's consequences, and that it will not return to how it used to be.

The next day is Friday, and Dellarobia prepares for Preston's informal birthday party. She listens to news on the radio of a horrific tsunami in Japan, but even her own backyard is flooding with all the melted snow. She emerges from the house to explore, seeking high ground to avoid water rising to her knees. She watches the rising water as it seems to unhinge the house from its very foundation. She raises her eyes to the



monarchs who have been detaching from their bud colonies and are now flying away en masse, and she wonders if perhaps enough survived to keep the species going. Having come this far, she believes they have as good a chance as she herself of surviving the chaos of the world around them.

Chapter 14: Perfect Female Analysis

Kingsolver uses ironic imagery to describe the snowstorm at the beginning of Chapter 14. The pure white smoothness of the world reminds Dellarobia of a "fresh start" and a "clean slate" but the snow is treacherous, destroying the monarchs' chances of survival at the eleventh hour. And just like the "lake of fire" she witnessed in the first chapter, the beauty of this white world moves her, just as both phenomena act as harbingers of doom.

Readers will happily note that the insight into the strange practice of swinging stillborn baby lambs to resuscitate them pays off in Chapter 14 as Dellarobia resurrects a lamb. This act is a symbolic gesture toward the baby she was helpless to save, and the new strength she feels as she takes control of her life. She is trying to muscle in a new construct of reality: rather than accepting death as Cub would readily do, she is determined to write a narrative of life for the lamb. The theme of resurrection is threaded throughout the chapter: first the lamb, then the butterflies, and finally Dellarobia herself.

Dellarobia long cast her lot in with an imperfect man, and throughout her marriage she sought a better match, coming close to switching allegiances for another bad match. In Ovid she thought she found the right man to balance her, but she did not recognize she was not the right match for him. In the end, Dellarobia finally lets go of the idea of needing a man to be complete. The "perfect female" is a metaphor for herself; she has everything in her she needs to strike out on her own and start over. Both she and the monarchs have adapted to a rapidly changing and frequently dangerous world. They have survived a tough test of strength and will live to fight another day.

The final section of Chapter 14 takes on a surreal quality that is different from the rest of the novel; the flood waters surrounding Dellarobia's house (mimicking the faraway tsunami that actually occurred in Japan in March 2011) seem to pull it off its foundation, and Dellarobia watches passively as her car begins to float away. Her lack of panic and her zen-like thought that her children will have to deal with this just as all people do, mark an unbelievable shift in her character. Readers may wonder if this ominous vision of real-world End of Days is meant to be taken literally. Most likely Kingsolver ends it as a metaphorical scene encapsulating the themes of the novel: the dark outlook for the earth's future but life's resiliency and ability to adapt and be reborn in the face of the worst adversity. Dellarobia herself symbolizes this; she climbs for higher ground and recalls Ovid's method for reviving monarchs: throwing them from a height and letting them sink or fly. Dellarobia stands on this cusp. As she watches the departure of the monarchs, there is a sense of hope for a new tomorrow.



Characters

Dellarobia Turnbow

Dellarobia Turnbow is the twenty-eight year old protagonist of *Flight Behavior*. Short and pretty, she frequently associates her flame-red hair with her perceived sinfulness: her constant attraction to men other than her husband, and her feeling of superiority to the people around her. Though Dellarobia is restless and has long considered herself wild and fearless, as the bigness of the world comes to live on her doorstep she realizes how apathetic and passive she has been since the death of her parents destroyed her faith in anything bigger than herself. But she brushes off her long dormant curiosity and desire to know the "whys" of the universe with the arrival of the butterflies and tries to open her mind to ideas she has been taught to disapprove of, such as climate change. She is frequently motivated by a desire to make the dreams of her children come true; Preston's burgeoning passion for science inspires her to follow suit. Dellarobia starts the novel ready to throw away her marriage on a whim for a meaningless affair, but ends it making a conscious and studied choice to end her marriage for the sake of giving both herself and her husband a chance to find what they deserve. She shifts from believing her sense of fulfillment rests on a connection with another human being to recognizing that she has the capacity to make herself happy. Negative circumstances force her to adapt, just like the butterflies, and like them, she survives.

Cub Turnbow

Cub Turnbow is Dellarobia's twenty-eight year old husband. A former high school football star with that former athlete's faded-but-not-gone physical attractiveness and dark hair and dark eyes, Cub walks passively through life, getting married because he "had" to, becoming a farmer because it was what his parents decided, and allowing his mother to continue to order him around after ten-plus years of marriage. Cub is agreeable to a fault, never taking initiative or trying to think for himself. But he is kind, and loyal, and a good, trustworthy man. Cub has a simple faith in God that bolsters him to finally take a stand against his father regarding the logging. More than just God, he has faith in Dellarobia, believing in her vision and a greater purpose to the appearance of the butterflies. Despite his innate goodness, he is not quite capable of personal change or growth: despite acknowledging the soundness of the science Dellarobia shares with him, he cannot believe in climate change. He would rather stay in his marriage than not, and she must force a separation on him.

Hester Turnbow

Hester Turnbow is Cub's mother, a tough, self-sufficient woman who dresses in country-chic despite the hard work she does tending the farm. She has long held Dellarobia at a distance, recognizing that she and her son are mismatched and never expecting



Dellarobia to stick with the marriage - which turns into something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. A woman of devout faith, or at least a strong sense of entitlement, Hester is shaken by the butterflies, unable to find any clear-cut message from above in them. She does not like ambiguity and this confusion torments her. Her devotion to church is at least slightly motivated by the fact that Pastor Bobby is actually her son, though no one knows it. She spends her stock of maternal warmth on Bobby rather than Cub. She gets what she wants through sheer force of will and thus Bear capitulates on logging, because Hester has decided against it. Despite their antagonistic relationship, Hester has more in common with Dellarobia than either cares to admit but by the end of the novel Dellarobia has a better understanding of her mother-in-law.

Bear Turnbow

Bear Turnbow is Cub's father, the patriarch of the family, a Vietnam vet and a lifelong farmer. He has conservative views and of all the characters, his change the least over the course of the novel. He still wants to contract out his land for logging, and he has little use for climate change. Bear acts as the villain of the novel, but he never comes across as much of a threat because of Hester's dominant assertion of her will. Bear believes in hard work and paying one's debts and keeping one's word. He is motivated by a need for money, but a genuine one - he has a lot to lose if the bank forecloses on its loan. He is not a person driven by greed or malice, but simply the desperate circumstances in which he finds himself. He is willing to believe that the truth comes from those who have similar values and beliefs as he does.

Preston Turnbow

Preston Turnbow is Dellarobia and Cub's five year-old son. Preston is bright and inquisitive, sensitive and helpful, and often susceptible to passively accepting what life gives him even if it is disappointing. He already wears glasses, underscoring his bookish nature, and he idolizes the scientist Ovid Byron, making Cub fearful that Preston will grow up "smart." Yet Preston remains self-assured in his desire to learn, and it is implied that he has the force of will to rise above his background and get a good education and do something meaningful in the world.

Cordelia (Cordie) Turnbow

Cordelia (Cordie) Turnbow is Dellarobia and Cub's daughter, approximately a year and a half old. Cordelia likes to make messes and take charge even at her early age. Dellarobia loves her happy daughter even if she can be demanding at times. She is described as "reckless, cheerful, physically striking in a way that would get noticed, self-centered in a way that might persist" (Page 533). In this description, readers are given to see that Cordelia is a metaphorical distillation of one half of Dellarobia's personality, the half that took precedence as Dellarobia made her major life choices, just as Preston represents the smart, curious, ambitious other half.



Dovey

Dovey is Dellarobia's best friend from childhood, sharing her rebellious streak and joy in teasing men, but they also share a certain sense of inertia ten years out of high school. Dovey still lives in her brother's house and though she hates it, she makes no move to change her situation. As an attractive and petite woman, she butchers meat at the local market, working in a man's world and thriving. She is troubled by less anxiety than Dellarobia, having given up her Catholic roots without feeling remorse or any spiritual gap. Loyal and strong, Dovey allows her friend to make mistakes without being critical, offering a kind of unconditional love and like-mindedness that Dellarobia lacks in Cub. Readers never see her inner thoughts, so it is hard to discern what motivates her beyond a simple desire to enjoy life without too much worry. She finally finds the drive to move at the end of the novel, motivated and supported by Dellarobia, when the move in together with Dellarobia's children.

Ovid Byron

Ovid Byron is a doctor of biology, an expert in monarch butterflies, his life's passion. As an educated forty-ish African-American born in St. Thomas, he is as much of an outsider as one can be in Feathertown. He is motivated by a burning desire to know the "why's" and "how's" of life, particularly in regards to the unbroken chain of migration among monarchs across generations. A compassionate man, his interest has a strange endpoint: he wants to observe and understand, but he does not believe it is his place to save the monarchs. His concept of a scientist does not include playing God and trying to influence the course of natural events; he is not even sure of his ability to influence human events, shirking a sense of responsibility to educate others about scientific truths. Ovid also has a sometimes awkwardly elitist view of the world, unable to comprehend places exist where men don't wear ties and children don't learn math. He must learn about the broader world just as much as the inhabitants of Feathertown must.

Bobby Ogle

Bobby Ogle is the pastor of the popular local Christian church, Mountain Fellowship. He is a large man, a former football player who graduated a few years before Dellarobia from the local high school. As a shepherd to his flock, Bobby is a gentle leader, a New Age kind of Christian who has taken hell and fear out of the religious conversation. His sermons are rarely straightforward, requiring attention and thought to understand his subtext. He favors the idea of good stewardship of God's earth, and supports the family against Bear and the logging, even though much of his message revolves around paying one's debts. Though most townsfolk know Bobby was adopted, no one knows that Hester is actually his mother, having given him up before she married Bear.



Crystal Estep

Crystal Estep is a local woman from a longstanding community family, who got pregnant at an early age like Dellarobia, but couldn't get the man to do his duty. Crystal lets her children run wild without checking them, and worries more about her pride and reputation in a feud with a former friend than she does about working hard or living her faith despite being "saved." She has some sense of shame at being an unwed mother, and has no problem throwing herself at the loyal and married Cub.

Josefina Delgado

Josefina Delgado is a five year-old friend of Preston, a recent immigrant from Mexico in the wake of terrible flooding and mudslides that destroyed her native town. Quicker at adapting than her parents, she takes on the responsibility of acting as family translator, and shares the history of the monarchs with Dellarobia, forcing the decades-older woman to start expanding her worldview. Josefina also tells Dellarobia about a theory that the monarchs are the souls of dead children.

Lupe Delgado

Lupe Delgado is Josefina's mother, a new immigrant to Tennessee from Mexico, desperate for work and opportunity after her home is destroyed by the effects of climate change. Lupe babysits Dellarobia's children when she starts working in the lab, allowing Dellarobia to spread the wealth around and integrate a "foreigner" more fully into the standoffish community.

Pete

Pete is a postdoctoral assistant to Ovid Byron in his research on monarchs. He has a negative attitude toward the media who skews the news to fit their advertisers' agendas, as well as those who are less educated than himself, treating it as a universally conscious decision. Ultimately he comes to respect Dellarobia's work ethic and curiosity despite her lack of formal education.

Juliet

Juliet is Ovid Byron's wife, an African-American woman with a doctorate in folklore, who studies indigenous folk art that uses monarch butterflies as a symbolic motif. Dellarobia considers her a "rival" for Ovid's affections until she meets the tall and beautiful Juliet, whom Dellarobia recognizes as Ovid's intellectual and emotional equal, as passionate about her field as Ovid is about his.



Tina Ultner

Tina Ultner is an attractive and experienced TV news reporter and mother of two who is only interested in getting a warm and fuzzy story about the butterflies in order to captivate an audience with their miraculous beauty, rather than reporting the ominous news that the butterflies presence on the Turnbow farm might foretell terrible things in terms of climate change. She would rather talk to Dellarobia about an uplifting but untrue version of the story in which the butterflies prevented Dellarobia from suicide rather than speaking with an actual scientist about the facts of the story.

Mr. Cook

Mr. Cook is Dellarobia's neighbor who has been hit hard by the strangely bad weather, losing his orchard because of too much rain. In addition, his young son has cancer, turning him against the use of chemicals in farming. Though he doesn't appear directly in the novel, his vocal opposition to possibility of Turnbow logging is often mentioned in the text, demonstrating his affinity for nature. Mr. Cook was not raised locally and this leads Hester to treat him as an outsider.

Jimmy

Jimmy is the attractive twenty-two year-old telephone line repairman for whom Dellarobia almost destroys her marriage. Though he does not make an actual appearance in the novel, he has a significant effect on Dellarobia's view of herself when she discovers Jimmy is a town flirt who felt nothing as meaningful about his near-fling with Dellarobia as she did.



Objects/Places

Monarch Butterflies

Monarch Butterflies are central to the novel, since millions have incorrectly migrated to a rural Tennessee mountain farm for the winter rather than to their usual location in Mexico. Their mis-migration speaks ominously about the rapidity with which climate change is occurring, and means the monarchs could end up extinct.

Sheep

Sheep are the main livestock raised on the Turnbow farm, shorn for wool sales or slaughtered for meat.

Christmas Tree Ornaments

Christmas Tree Ornaments are a bone of contention between Dellarobia and Hester. Dellarobia wants to borrow some from Hester for her and Cub's Christmas tree, but Cub is too intimidated by his mother to ask. Alternative ornaments could be purchased from the local dollar store, but Dellarobia is disgusted by their cheap, flimsy quality as well as being daunted by the cost of buying enough to cover the tree.

Mountain Fellowship Church

Mountain Fellowship Church is the Evangelical Christian church attended by the Turnbow family and run by Pastor Bobby Ogle, a gentle and charismatic preacher. The church is full of rooms including a café, giving congregants a variety of options for experiencing the worship service.

Mako's Watch

Mako's Watch is a digital wristwatch with a variety of functions, coveted by Preston, who asks Santa Claus to bring him one just like it. Due to a tipoff from Preston's schoolteacher, Dellarobia knows he wants a watch, but knows he'll hate a cheap plastic one. Mako, sensing Preston's desire, generously donates it to Dellarobia to give to Preston for Christmas, unwittingly proving to Preston that Santa exists.

Anganguero, Michoacán

Anganguero, Michoacán is the town in Mexico in which the monarch butterflies usually spend their winter. Because of logging, flooding, and mudslides, the entire town was



destroyed, leading the Delgado family to immigrate to Feathertown. The monarchs are so thrown off by the climate change they don't make it to Angangueo and instead end up in Feathertown as well.

The Equipment Loan

The equipment loan is the reason Bear signs a contract with the logging company. Because of the economic recession, Bear gets less work repairing machinery than he had before, and cannot afford the payments on the loan he took out to buy equipment to do the machinery repairs.

The Dollar Store

The dollar store is where Dellarobia and Cub go to buy their children Christmas presents, though they are both disappointed they cannot do better for their kids. Dellarobia is disgusted by the cheap quality of products available at the dollar store, destined to fall apart within a matter of months.

The Encyclopedia Set

The encyclopedia set is an outdated set of books focusing on the animals available at a secondhand store. Preston buys all sixteen for a dollar by arguing to the store staff that if one book couldn't be purchased because it would break up the set, then the whole set was simply one thing that must be sold for the same price as any other one book.

Cleary

Cleary is a neighboring town to Feathertown, slightly more cosmopolitan because it has a Wal-Mart, a community college and some restaurants. Dellarobia has slid so deeply into the shell of her marriage that she thinks Cleary is too far to travel for most things, as well as unconsciously adopting a loyalty to her in-laws negativity toward the more progressive town.



Themes

Faith versus Science

The residents of Feathertown, spurred by Cub and Hester, believe the butterfly invasion is the direct work of God, channeling a miracle through Dellarobia, which could perhaps pull the community out of the economic dumps if they can turn them into a tourist attraction. God graced them with the butterflies. The media focus on the spiritual side of the story, constructing a narrative in which the butterflies save Dellarobia from suicide, a type of miracle. Yet Ovid Byron and the environmental groups that hover around the mountainside know quite differently: the butterflies' millennia-long migratory patterns are shifting, an on-the-fritz reaction to rising global temperatures which is rewriting the landscape around them. Two narratives to explain a single phenomenon: faith versus science.

While Dellarobia is hardly a person of faith, she initially views the monarchs with a sense of possessive significance. If not God, at least the universe is trying to tell her something directly. She even becomes resentful at the idea that the butterflies actually portend something negative, denying her the right to find solace in their beauty. But as she learns the facts behind the migration of the butterflies, the circumstances too big to be simply coincidence, she is forced to come round to the side of science. She bridges the gap in the great debate.

The divide between science and faith runs along heavily demarcated class lines as well, making it a battle between the well-off and the poor and the liberal versus the conservative. Some readers might find it slightly stereotypical to portray anyone with an education as lacking in religion, or anyone who is poor as viewing science as an oppressor. But the novel attempts to round out complexities in characters who are, as all humans are, motivated by more than one thing. There may be surprises on both sides. For all his passion and intelligence, Ovid has an uncomfortable detachment from the plight of the monarchs; he has no intention to intervene and try to save them from distinction, willing to let nature run its course, even if nature has become warped. Pastor Bobby, on the other hand, has a great desire to save his flock, but without the usual trappings of a Christian leader - he does not emphasize hell and punishment for sin, but has a gentler, almost Buddhist approach to guiding people away from the source of their own unhappiness. The scientist is not the almighty savior of the future, and the priest is not the one-dimensional villain, nor vice versa. There may be room for these opposing ideologies to coexist.

Reality

Flight Behavior makes the case that every individual creates his own version of reality, often shoring it up by allying himself with like-minded people. Once entrenched in their network of beliefs, people rarely take the time to view the world from the perspective of



someone who disagrees with their outlook. Thus the novel is divided among the poor, rural, religious community of Feathertown and the well-off, liberal scientists who try to force climate change upon them. Kingsolver attempts to portray the weaknesses on both sides, the assumptions and flaws in each way of thinking. She often presents the argument somewhat didactically in the form of a dialogue, but there are also more subtle representations of this universal tendency.

For example, Dellarobia sees herself as a smart and rebellious woman, but over the course of the novel this image of herself is broken down: the scientists make her see how little she actually knows about the world, and her own friends and family. Dovey and Hester point out that she stayed stagnant in an unsatisfying marriage rather than risk setting off into the world alone. By nestling deep inside her blinded vision of reality, Dellarobia has lived in fear of straying too far from the path she has known. Yet by the end of the novel, she has dismantled the pieces of her world and reassembled them so that she matches her concept of herself: she walks away from her marriage and returns to school. What she doesn't know she will learn, and what a man can't give her she will give herself. Her reality has changed in a literal sense, but all she has done is bring herself into alignment with the reality she desired.

She also constructs a narrative for Hester, that her mother-in-law simply does not like her and doesn't want her as part of the family. She slowly learns that she has more in common with Hester than she could have ever known - sharing a youthful, unexpected pregnancy and a marriage that was not based on real love or respect. Hester's distance was based on an all-too deep understanding of Dellarobia, and a fear that she would ultimately walk out. Hester's construct of the reality of Dellarobia is far from accurate as well, but it isn't until the women begin communicating directly with each other that they can discover their common ground and misconceptions.

These two intimate examples act as metaphors for a greater divide in ideological constructs of reality, and underline the importance of finding common ground with differing points of view to combat the petrification of one's own perceptions.

The Intersection of Global and Personal

The titles of the novel's chapters, which expand and contract from a single person to the whole world and back, indicate the book's desire to connect an individual's personal life with the greater plight of mankind and the planet itself, stopping at the variety of interconnected communities in which all human life participates along the way. The issue of climate change is the most obvious example of this in the novel. When Dellarobia first sees the butterflies on the mountain, she thinks they are there for her alone, a sign for her personal life to change her behavior, a miraculous joy intended to shore up her soul with beauty. But as the narrative unravels, readers understand the global impact, the massive and dangerous implications of the monarchs' presence in Tennessee. Climate change touches Dellarobia's life on a personal level (also in the constant rain and flooding that destroys her family's income), and so she takes her head out of her navel and engages with the wider world by gathering information, working to



understand what's happening to the butterflies, and changing her lifestyle (by returning to school to study science) to do more for the planet in the future.

But this is not the first time Dellarobia has encountered the way the global and personal intersect. Her father hand-built furniture and her mother was a seamstress, making entire suits from pattern to hemming. Her parents were involved in skilled labor that was ultimately outsourced to factories in foreign countries. Her parents' talents were degraded and ignored, leaving them poor despite their skills, and the result was that now most products Dellarobia tries to buy in stores are mass-produced and poorly made yet not particularly cheap. Dellarobia is resentful of the way her sense of pride and worth were diminished, and Dellarobia herself is still paying the price for it, literally.

Finally, Dellarobia is shocked when the story of the butterflies leads to her own notoriety, as Photoshopped pictures and edited videos of herself sounding suicidal float around on the Internet for anyone around the world to access. Her personal life suddenly becomes disturbingly public in the age of instant gratification and realityTV-driven hunts for scandal. Dellarobia never contemplated suicide but because of the video she cannot convince others of her own thoughts, as if she no longer has control or rights to them. The Photoshopped "Birthday Venus," in which she looks almost naked, acts as a metaphor for her sense of physical and emotional violation, a vulnerability arising from a global incapacity for boredom or respecting privacy.



Style

Point of View

Flight Behavior is told from the perspective of a limited third person narrator. Readers are given complete access to the inner thoughts and feelings of Dellarobia herself, but can only learn what other characters are thinking when they specifically articulate their thoughts to Dellarobia. For example, Dellarobia always feels a tension between herself and Hester but doesn't understand why Hester likes her so little until Hester explicitly tells her that she has constantly expected Dellarobia to walk away from her marriage ever since the loss of the baby that engendered it. Similarly, Dellarobia does not understand the relationship between Ovid and his wife because Ovid never speaks of her, and what he does say is negative (albeit gently). This feeds her self-delusion about their potential for a romantic relationship, until Juliet, Ovid's wife, appears on the farm and by observing their behavior as a couple, Dellarobia sees his complete and utter devotion to his wife. Thus the narrator does not give readers any insight into the minds of anyone but Dellarobia, and readers are left to speculate with the protagonist about the motivations and feelings of those around her. Dellarobia is on a journey of discovery, recognizing her own fears and self-delusions, as well as opening her eyes to the scope of the world around her - what's important on a global scale. Keeping the narration limited to her own perspective underscores that process of peeling back life's layers for the reader, allowing them to take the journey with her.

The novel is set in the very present moment America: America since the economic collapse, where Barack Obama is present, and a tsunami rocks Japan. Despite this, Kingsolver writes the novel in the past tense. This choice might diminish the urgency of a novel that has an abstract concept like "climate change" as an antagonist. Even a "victory" against this villain would be unlikely to have an immediate or observable payoff, and by writing in the past tense, as if this were a story that is "over" (when climate change is obviously an important issue to grapple with in the current world), rather than linking it to the readers' daily lives through the present tense, Kingsolver might create more distance between readers and the narrative than would be ideal.

Setting

The novel takes place over a period from November to March in present-day Tennessee, in a fictional place called Feathertown that is a rural, farming community. Feathertown exists in the southern Appalachian Mountains, which accounts for the mountainous nature of the Turnbow property. The time is the immediate present. Hints throughout the text place the story in an America of economic recession, where Barack Obama is President, and Japan is experiencing a catastrophic tsunami, which occurred in March 2011.



Feathertown has been hit hard by the recession, as well as by a bout of bad weather - and weather is of utmost importance to farmers. The previous summer had unprecedented rain, causing crops to rot, die, or float away. The strange weather continues with unseasonable warmth even as winter approaches. These unusual weather conditions underscore how climate change can have real and personal consequences. The novel's rural setting and slew of religiously zealous and undereducated characters, where Cub cringes at the thought of his son being "smart" will bring to mind automatic connotations for an American audience: that of conservative, narrow-minded people, though Kingsolver works to present the locals as more than just a stereotype, or at least to have some reasonable justifications for their actions (the Turnbows could literally lose their farm if they can't pay their bills). But the socioeconomic class divide wrongs clearly along the line of these locals versus the outsiders who arrive in Feathertown to "save the butterflies," represented primarily by the Harvard-educated ecologist Ovid Byron. He is everything Cub does not want Preston to turn out to be, yet Preston wants nothing more than to become just like Ovid, creating many layers of tension among the characters. Kingsolver makes a conscious choice in her setting - to have the butterflies alight in New York or California or a more liberal community would not result in the same divided reaction or struggle for action that is engendered in Feathertown.

Language and Meaning

Though Dellarobia has an ambivalent relationship with her church and an issue with the idea of faith (she constantly wants to see things in order to believe them), she has clearly internalized her religious upbringing. The novel is littered with religious references, from Dellarobia's first reaction to the sight of the orange mass on the mountain as a "lake of fire" from the Book of Revelations to references to Job at the possibility of losing the entire monarch population just as Job lost his family to the continuous suggestion by a variety of characters of God's direct intervention in their lives. But more than just religious touchstones, Dellarobia, consciously or unconsciously has co-opted the negative aspects of religious metaphor and belief. The sight of the monarchs on the mountain is breathtakingly beautiful but she associates it with the lake of fire in Revelations where sinners are burned alive. She has a constant sense of guilt and awareness of her own sinfulness, born out in thoughts like she was "in no way deserving of a miracle" (Page 111) or "She felt like a woman stoned for the sin of motherhood" (Page 197). As the novel progresses, the religious terminology diminishes, underscoring Dellarobia's personal journey as she learns more about biological data and scientific facts. As her mind and worldview expand, her need to rely on Biblical references grows weaker.

Colorful descriptions also abound, quite literally. Constant reference is made to Dellarobia's red hair, which connects her visually with the monarch butterflies and their similar flame-colored wings, suggesting parallel journeys or life changes. Yet red hair historically has many negative connotations, and the color red in general is frequently associated with the devil, again underscoring Dellarobia's internalized notion of herself as a "bad," sinful person.



In earlier life Dellarobia loved literature, and she has held on to rules of grammar from high school of which most of her community were probably never aware of in the first place. Her interest in and use of language sets Dellarobia apart from her neighbors, making her feel in some ways superior, yet with the arrival of the hyper-educated Ovid Byron with his slew of scientific terminology with which Dellarobia is unfamiliar, Dellarobia once again must face the smallness of the world in which she lives.

Structure

Flight Behavior is divided into fourteen long (mostly fifty-plus page) chapters. The titles of the chapters offer a key metaphor for the progress and significance of the novel. These titles mimic the growing concentric circles of Dellarobia's world: moving from a single person "Measure of a Man" to larger and larger communities (family, congregation, town, nation) and peak halfway through the novel with a sense of the global, before growing smaller and smaller back to "Perfect Female." This movement outward and then return inward acts as a metaphor for the way Dellarobia can use her new, broader worldview to make herself a better woman - and use those skills to make a better world. She intends to end her marriage in Chapter One in an infamous way, but ends it in Chapter Fourteen with compassion, honor, and understanding. Rather than passively feeling stunted intellectually by her narrow community and somewhat resentful of her unexpectedly cut-short education, she takes action at the end of the novel and returns to school.

The novel focuses more on character than plot, sketching character studies of life in a rural town, as well as developing a didactic and impassioned plea about the dangers of climate change. The question of whether Bear will go through with the logging and if the butterflies will survive the winter outside their natural habitat are not presented with a sense of urgency; readers are not driven to keep turning the page to see what happens next. There is never a sense that the logging could start at any moment and ruin the butterfly community; the constant rain keeps the loggers at bay as much as a conscious decision. Dellarobia herself references a traditional narrative theme from her high school days when she thinks of the butterflies' plight: "Man versus Nature." But this novel would more accurately be described as "Woman versus Herself," as Dellarobia comes to grips with the idea that the main thing that has held her back over the years is her own fear and inertia.



Quotes

"A certain feeling comes from throwing your good life away, and it is one part rapture" (Page 1).

"By no means was she important enough for God to conjure signs and wonders on her account. What had set her apart, briefly, was an outsize and hellish obsession. To stop a thing like that would require a burning bush, a fighting of fire with fire" (Page 25).

"For some reason she thought of Honors English, the great themes: man against man, man against himself. Could man ever be for anything?"(Page 206).

"'Terrible, beautiful, it's not our call,' Ovid said. 'We are scientists. Our job here is only to describe what exists. But we are also human. We like these butterflies, you know?'" (Page 229).

"There were two worlds here, behaving as if their own was all that mattered. With such reluctance to converse, one with the other. Practically without a common language" (Page 235).

"Maybe her father was lucky to die young with his pride of craftsmanship intact. What would he make of this world? Realistically, it probably wasn't slave children, but there had to be armies of factory workers making this slapdash stuff, underpaid people cranking out things for underpaid people to buy and use up, living their lives mostly to cancel each other out. A worldwide entrapment of bottom feeders" (Page 246).

"Nobody truly decided for themselves. There was too much information. What they actually did was scope around, decide who was looking out for their clan, and sign on for the memos on a wide array of topics" (Page 256).

"She despised this account, the butterflies led astray. She'd preferred the version of the story in which her mountain attracted its visitors through benevolence, not some hidden treachery" (Page 351-352).

"She had begrudged the clubbish vocabulary at first, but realized now she had crossed some unexpected divide. Words were just words, describing things a person could see. Even if most did not. Maybe they had to know a thing first, to see it" (Page 387).

"They couldn't close out the whole world, maybe, but they could sure find something on their TV or radio to put scientists or foreigners or whatever they thought he was in a bad light. Truly, they were no better than the city people always looking down on southerners...If people played their channels right, they could be spared from disagreement for the length of their natural lives" (Page 400).

"'Seriously,' she said, 'is it hateful if you don't agree with your home team about every single thing? Because I can agree on maybe nine out of ten. But then I start to wander



out of the box on one subject, like this environment thing, and man. You'd think I was flipping everybody the bird" (Page 472).

"Nothing stays the same, life is defined by a state of flux; that was basic biology. Or so Dellarobia had been told, perhaps too late for it really to sink in. She was an ordinary person. Loss was the enemy." (Page 476).

"Beyond all half-answers and evasions one question had persisted, since forever, and it was why. In Dellarobia's childhood it plagued and compelled her, one word...Unsatisfactory answers crowded the waters around it, she could measure her life in those: because you are too young, because it was his time, because it isn't done, because I didn't raise you to behave that way, because it's too late, because the baby came early, because life is like that, just because. Because God moves, it goes without saying, in mysterious ways. Why the butterflies, why now. Why here?" (Page 540).

"You never knew which split second might be the zigzag bolt dividing all that went before from everything that comes next" (Page 547).

"She saw the pointlessness of clinging to that life raft, that hooray-we-are-saved conviction of having already come through the stupid parts, to arrive at the current enlightenment. The hard part is letting go, she could see that. There is no life raft; you're just freaking swimming all the time" (Page 611).

"The key thing is...once you're talking identity, you can't just lecture that out of people. The condescension of outsiders won't diminish it. That just galvanizes it" (Page 612).

"Things look impossible when you've not done them" (Page 649).



Topics for Discussion

Flight Behavior explores the rift along class lines between rural, poor, and uneducated people and college-educated, wealthier, urban people. Describe the differences in attitudes between these two groups toward climate change and some reasons the novel offers for these differences. Do you think the novel presents an unbiased view of each side or does it favor one side over the other? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

In what ways do the monarch butterflies act as a metaphor for Dellarobia herself and her life thus far? Compare the meaning of "survival" for each (the monarchs as a species and Dellarobia herself) at the end of the novel. Do you think the ending is optimistic or pessimistic for their future? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

Describe Dellarobia's faith life. Compare and contrast her religious attitudes to those of her family. Do you think she believes in God? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

Discuss one way besides global warming that Dellarobia's personal life is intertwined with a global phenomenon. Do you think the novel presents such personal to global dynamics as positive or negative? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

Compare and contrast Dellarobia and Dovey as two women of the same age, living in the same community. What do their outlooks and attitudes say about the role of women in the world they grew up in? Do you think one is more typical than the other? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

By the end of the novel, Bear is the only character still in favor of logging. Discuss his reasons for this choice. Do you think his argument is presented fairly? Do you think he is presented as the villain of the novel? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

Describe the relationship between Dellarobia and Hester throughout the novel. What preconceptions does each have about the other? Is their relationship better, worse, or the same at the end as it was in the beginning? Do they understand each other more or less? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

Choose one chapter and discuss how its title relates both to the events in the life of the butterflies and in Dellarobia's personal life within that particular chapter.