

The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon Study Guide

The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon by Stephen King

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Plot Summary

The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon tells the story of nine-year-old Trisha McFarland, whose Saturday afternoon outing with her mother and brother turns into an eight day nightmare when Trisha gets lost in the woods. Still reeling from the fallout of her parents' divorce, Trisha has begun to feel invisible whenever she is around her mother, Quilla, and her brother, Pete. Quilla and Pete have been arguing continuously since Quilla moved the children away from their former home and schoolmates after the divorce. As the novel opens, Trisha finds herself ignored, as usual, by her mom and brother, who argue so intensely as they walk along the hiking trail that they don't even notice Trisha. They don't hear her ask for a drink of water nor do they hear her tell them she needs to go to the bathroom. Irritated and hurt, Trisha decides to teach them a bit of a lesson by stepping off the trail to do her business without telling them. She gladly pictures the look of worry on their faces when they turn to notice that she is not there.

But her childish plan to scare them a little turns into a true disaster when Trisha realizes she has wandered too far off the trail, and cannot find her way back. Before her mom and Pete even notice that she is gone, Trisha has wandered several miles away from safety in her desperate quest to find the trail again. As darkness begins to fall over the New England woods, Trisha accepts that she is thoroughly lost, and must rely on her own resources for survival.

But Trisha is not completely alone. Her active imagination, helped along by the fever she contracts in response to her prolonged exposure, conjures up the friendly image of her hero and heartthrob, Red Sox pitcher Tom Gordon. Tom Gordon is an excellent role model for a girl lost in the woods, because the quality both Trisha and her father, Larry, admire most about Tom is that he has ice water in his veins. Always cool under pressure, Tom Gordon possesses another quality which helps Trisha through her ordeal: faith in God, which Gordon expresses after each win by pointing an index finger up at the sky.

With the faith of Tom Gordon to aid her through her darkest hours, Trisha learns that she, too, has ice water in her veins. The little girl summons the courage and faith she needs to survive loneliness, hunger, and the threat posed by an unknown creature which stalks her through the forest. In the end, Trisha saves herself, and perhaps even her family, with whom she is ultimately reunited. The crisis brings her family closer together, and Trisha learns that no matter what curve balls life may throw at her, she is capable of standing up to them.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

At ten a.m. on a morning in early June, nine-year old Trisha McFarland was sitting in the back seat of her mother's Dodge Caravan, playing with her favorite doll, Mona. By ten-thirty, she was lost in the woods. By eleven a.m., Trisha was fighting back the terror of realizing she was in mortal peril. Her plight was because she had needed to relieve herself and hadn't bothered to tell her mom and her brother Pete that she was stepping off the trail because the two of them were locked in another one of their fights. But mainly, she realizes, she hadn't told them because she had needed to get away from them and their endless fighting before she lost her temper and yelled at them to cut it out.

Trisha's parents had divorced a year before, and her mom had gotten custody of her and Pete. Pete had bitterly protested moving away from his dad and his friends in Boston to live with their mother in her new home in Maine. Trisha knew that Pete's complaints about missing his dad were mainly designed to upset his mother; Pete's real problem was his lack of friends at Sanford Middle School in Maine. Pete was a computer nerd, but that hadn't mattered in Boston, where he'd run the computer club and had lots of like-minded friends. In Maine, however, Pete is teased mercilessly at his new school; he's become a lonely loner and seems to blame it all on their mother, Quilla Anderson - formerly Quilla McFarland.

Quilla is a highly determined woman. As Trisha's father once said, "If Quilla had been at Little Big Horn, the Indians would have lost." (pg. 11) Since the divorce, Quilla's determination has been geared towards dragging Trisha and the unwilling Pete on weekend family outings. They've seen the auto museum in Wiscasset, the Shaker Village in Gray, The New England Plant-A-Torium in North Wyndham, the Six-Gun City in Randolph, New Hampshire, been canoeing down the Saco River, and skiing at Sugarloaf, where Trisha had sprained her ankle. Trisha's injury had resulted in a screaming fight between her parents and Trisha had felt caught in the middle of the painful divorce once again. On each outing, Pete would spend his time complaining, while Quilla tried to employ her iron will to force him to enjoy himself. This weekend they were hiking the Appalachian Trail, and Pete and Quilla were locked in their usual battle. Trisha did her best to fake the interest which Pete refused to show, and she had begun to feel like weak glue holding her broken family together. Trisha wishes her mother would give up the enforced outings, and that her brother would stop being so selfish.

All through the car ride this morning, Pete had complained about not wanting to go, about how stupid hiking was, how bad the bugs would be, and how it was likely to rain. By the time they arrived at the little dirt parking area on Route 68 which marked the beginning of the trail, Quilla was already furious with her son, and Trisha knew it was going to be a really long day. Trisha's attempts to divert them from their fighting by exclaiming over picturesque scenes as they drove by had been ignored by both warring



parties. So Trisha retreated into her own private refuge - her imaginative fantasy world, currently structured around Red Sox pitcher Tom Gordon.

Trisha was wearing her Red Sox cap which had been autographed by the man himself. She and her dad both thought Tom Gordon was the best. He was a closer, called into the game in late innings to protect the lead when the Red Sox were on top by a slim margin. Her father, Larry McFarland, said Tom Gordon had ice water in his veins, and Trisha always said the same thing. To her friend Pepsi Robichaud, Trisha admitted that Tom was pretty good-looking, but only her doll Mona knew that Trisha thought he was the handsomest man alive. So today, as her mom and Pete bickered in the car, Trisha's mind had been home in Sanford, where she imagined Tom Gordon just happened to meet her in the park, and offered to buy her a hot dog in exchange for directions to North Berwick. Only when Quilla turned into the dirt parking area and stopped the car did she notice Trisha was off in her own world again, staring fixedly at her autographed cap.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The McFarland's divorce has hurt Trisha deeply, but she is not vocal about her feelings like her brother, Pete. Trisha has taken it upon herself to try to hold what's left of her nuclear family together, but her efforts are ignored by her combative mother and brother. She feels left out and scared, yet as an imaginative girl, she draws upon her inner resources, handling her feelings by turning inward and creating a rich fantasy life. Her crush on Tom Gordon, her father's favorite player, reveals her respect for her father's opinions, and she mimics everything her dad says about Tom. Being a fan of Tom Gordon gives Trisha something in common with her father, Larry, and the depth of her regard for Tom is the author's way of showing us the depth of her regard for her father.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The bickering between Mom and Pete halts as they gather their things from the van. Pete even helps Trisha by fixing the straps on her backpack, and Trisha feels a moment of optimism about the day ahead. Mom makes sure they all have their lunches and ponchos, then leads them onto the trail. Her mom asks Trisha if she remembered the bug spray, and Trisha brightly responds that she did, although she's really not sure. Trisha is afraid that if she stops to rummage through her pack for the bug spray, the pause will give Pete an opportunity to start back in on his mom. But Pete starts in anyway, complaining as they step onto the trail that he already hates this. Trisha prays to God to send something to distract him from his complaints, like a raccoon, a deer, or even a dinosaur. But God sends only mosquitoes, and by the half mile point on the trail, Pete and Quilla are fighting again, paying no attention to the woods, the trail, or Trisha. Trisha thinks that this is a shame, because they're missing some pretty neat stuff like the piney smell and the low-hanging clouds.

Trisha begins to enjoy the hiking experience, and when they pass an old-fashioned pump with a sign indicating the water is safe to drink, she calls out to her mom to ask if they can stop and taste it. Trisha's got a water bottle in her pack, but it lacks the rustic appeal of the pump. Unfortunately, Quilla is too absorbed in telling Pete how to make friends at his new school to even hear Trisha's request. Trisha begins to feel invisible, and when she announces to her family that she needs to stop and pee, they don't hear her. At a fork in the trail, Trisha sulks off towards the opposite branch, looking for a suitable spot to do her business. The last thing she hears before she leaves the trail is "her brother's hurt, indignant voice: —*don't know why we have to pay for what you guys did wrong!*" (pg. 23) She hopes they'll look back while she's taking care of business, notice her missing, and start to worry about her.

She takes a half dozen steps off the trail. When she looks back she can still see the path, and realizes that means any passersby could see her, so she wanders a little further into the woods. Trisha remembers what her mother taught her about identifying poison ivy, oak, and sumac, and is careful to avoid squatting in a poisonous patch. Business complete, Trisha hikes up her pants and decides to go forward to intersect the trail Mom and Pete are on instead of backtracking to the branch-off she took a few moments before. "There was no chance of getting lost, because she could hear the voices of the other hikers so clearly. There was really no chance of getting lost at all." (pg. 25)

Chapter 2 Analysis

Only half-conscious of her motives, Trisha has left the trail with the intent of causing her mother and brother some worry. She does not intend to be gone long, just long enough



to take care of her business and for them to notice her absence. Pete's outspokenness about the divorce has overshadowed Trisha's feelings, and she is not getting the attention she needs or deserves from her family. Trisha seems mature for her age, but she's still a nine-year-old girl, and not above stepping off the trail just long enough to give her mother a good scare.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Trisha begins to climb back out of the tucked-away ravine she'd chosen as the spot for her toilet. She heads up the opposite side, intending to intersect with the main trail, but finds that the west end of the ravine is quite a bit steeper than the shallow incline she'd followed down. She hauls herself up by hanging onto small, scrubby trees, swerving occasionally to go around clumps of thorny underbrush. Each time she swerves off her heading, she keeps her eyes trained on the direction the main trail is in, to avoid getting lost. But after ten minutes of hiking, she feels a sense of disquiet in her stomach; she should have hit the trail by now.

She stops to listen for voices, but hears only the whine of mosquitoes and a woodpecker. She picks up her pace, anxious to get back to the trail. A fallen tree blocks her path, but rather than risk losing her way by going around it, Trisha decides to wriggle underneath it. Wet leaves soak through her shirt, and her backpack catches on the tree. Telling herself she's not scared, Trisha wriggles back out, takes off her pack, and pushes it in front of her as she ducks back under the tree. Halfway out from under the tree, she feels something move under her hand and looks down to see a fat black snake. "For a moment every thought in her mind disappeared into a silent white explosion of revulsion and horror. Her skin turned to ice and her throat closed. She could not even think the single word *snake* but only feel it, coldly pulsing under her warm hand." (pg. 29)

In her panic, she tries to stand up, but the tree is on top of her, and a branch pokes hard into her back. Trisha forces herself to wriggle forward until she's free of the tree. Thankfully the snake is gone and didn't bite her, but now Trisha realizes the woods must be full of snakes, along with a bunch of other nasty creatures that could harm her. For the first time, the thought strikes her that she's lost in the woods. She begins to argue out loud against that thought, but trips on a rock and lands hard on her back where the tree branch had poked her. She tells herself to calm down and go back to the fallen tree; if she stands where she came out from underneath and looks straight ahead, that'll be the direction of the main trail. Or is it? If she was headed the right way, wouldn't she have already rejoined the trail? With no better plan in mind, she fights back tears and returns to the tree.

Back at the tree, she looks with loathing at the spot where she'd seen the snake. Trisha's shirt is covered with mud from crawling under the tree, and this more than anything disheartens her. If she had been on the path, her Red Sox shirt would still be clean and dry. She reaches around to feel the spot on her back where the branch poked her, and is further disheartened to realize it punched right through her shirt and put a bleeding hole into her back. Trying to stay positive, she tells herself at least it wasn't a rusty nail. Trisha tells herself to keep her cool and she'll be back on the trail in a minute. She takes a sighting from the tree trunk which she determines must be the right



direction. Before moving towards it, she wonders for a moment if it might not be better to stay put and wait to hear voices from the trail. But Trisha can't bear to wait; she wants to put this brief, frightening episode behind her. She puts her pack back on, wishing her brother were there to adjust the straps.

Mosquitoes cloud around her head; remembering her mother's advice, Trisha waves them away like a horse does with its tail instead of slapping at them. Her mother had told her that slapping actually seems to attract the small bugs - the minges and noseeums - and it makes the slapper even more uncomfortable. She fixes her eyes on a tall pine tree forty yards ahead in the right direction and moves toward it. She sees a clump of bushes dotted with red berries which remind her of Quilla. "Her mother had pointed them out on one of their nature-walks, and when Trisha explained they were birdberries and deadly poison-Pepsi Robichaud had told her so-her mother had laughed and said, "The famous Pepsi doesn't know everything after all. That's kind of a relief. Those are checkerberries, Trish. They're not a bit poison. They taste like Teaberry gum, the kind that comes in the pink pack." (pg. 33) Trisha walks up to the bushes and inhales the scent of their green leaves - also edible, according to Quilla. She doesn't pick any berries as she's not hungry; instead, Trisha takes another straight line sighting, this time choosing a split rock as her landmark. The next landmark she chooses is a cluster of birches, and after that, a nestle of ferns halfway up the slope.

By the time she reaches the ferns, Trisha estimates she's been walking for a mile, and is afraid that her straight line of travel may have been a straight line in the wrong direction. She waves away more minges and noseeums, and the hateful mosquitoes which cloud her face. She drops to her knees and searches her pack for the bug spray, which, it turns out, she does not have after all. She puts some suntan lotion on her face instead, hoping it will keep the bugs away. She certainly doesn't need it for the sun, which is already beginning to fade. Still not hungry, she nevertheless takes a moment to inventory her supplies: she has a bottle of water, a bottle of Surge, her lunch, and a Gameboy. An inner voice tells her she may never get out of these woods. Trisha tells that voice to shut up, stunned to find such a cold, cruel voice inside her own mind. She strains her ears to pick up any voices from the trail, but hears nothing. Trisha then finally concedes that she's lost. She stands up on leaden legs and screams out for help. When no answering voice responds to her call, Trisha finally allows the tears to come.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Trisha's brief foray off the trail becomes something entirely more serious. Her gradual acceptance of the fact that she's lost is symbolized by the ragged state of her Red Sox t-shirt. Had she remained on the trail, her t-shirt would be pristine white and she would be safe. Stephen King also lays some important groundwork in this chapter for her coming struggle. He allows us a brief glimpse into the contents of her backpack; these few possessions are all she will have to stave off death in the woods. We also learn that she has a rudimentary knowledge of the flora and fauna along the trail, taught to her in happier times by her mother. It may not be much, but it's all Trisha has.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

For fifteen minutes, Trisha yells herself hoarse, cupping her hands around her mouth in an effort to project her voice in the direction she thinks the trail might be. Then she cries for another few minutes, which makes her feel a little bit better. The bugs surround her face again, and it takes all her willpower not to slap at them. Instead, she waves them away with her autographed Red Sox cap while she reasons out her situation. Should she keep walking or stay put? Before she can reach a rational decision, fear propels her feet forward, and Trisha is again on the move.

She has trouble accepting her situation; after all, only a short while ago she had been safe in her mother's van, listening to Quilla and Pete snipe at each other. She recalls again Pete's last words, "*-don't know why we have to pay for what you guys did wrong!*" (pg. 38) and wonders gloomily if they're the last words she'll ever hear him speak. Her tears dry up more quickly this time, and she waves at the bugs automatically now with her cap. She imagines what must be going through her mother's mind right about now, and imagines her mother turning back on the trail to search for her in the parking area. When Quilla discovers that Trisha's not waiting by the van, she will surely be terrified. Trisha feels guilty for causing her mother such fear, and for the ensuing fuss that will probably involve the game wardens and Forest Service officials. And it's all her own fault, thinks Trisha, for she had left the trail. Guilt-ridden, Trisha moves faster now, no longer pausing to sight a straight line to the next landmark; she is desperate to rejoin the trail before search parties are sent out to look for her. Trisha would be stunned if she knew that at this point, her mother and Pete are still so busy with their argument that they have yet to notice she is missing.

As she walks, she listens and calls, plowing straight through the underbrush now, no longer bothering to skirt the thorns. Her pace gets faster and faster as panic gradually overtakes her, until she is running flat out, barely avoiding the branches which loom before her eyes. Trisha gives in to pure physical sensation, enjoying the cool wind which whips at her, not even feeling the thorns which tear at her blue jeans and arms. When she reaches the edge of a cliff, her body registers the danger and she swerves to the left as she's running too fast to stop in time. She runs along the edge of the cliff, vaguely aware that she nearly just plunged over it to her death. Her progress is finally halted by an ash tree hanging partially over the edge of the cliff; she grabs onto it like a life preserver as she looks to her right and sees the fifty foot drop off.

A vivid image of herself falling over it comes to her mind, complete with her landing on a dead branch which punches through her chin, through the roof of her mouth, and into her brain, killing her instantly. She screams in fear and tries to let go of the ash tree, but panic causes her to sway on her feet. She grabs the tree again, holding onto it until her panic gradually subsides. Telling herself over and over that she's okay, Trisha looks out from her vantage point and sees no signs of human life. Eventually she lets go of the



tree and takes a step back from the drop off. Her calves brush against something which is probably a bush, but her traitorous mind thinks "*(snakes snakes)*" (pg. 42) and she sinks to the ground in a dead faint.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, Trisha behaves like a nine-year-old girl lost in the woods, which is precisely the case. She runs thrashing through the forest, panic in charge of her mind, calling out over and over for her mother. Only the instincts of her body prevent her from running right off the cliff, and her shocked mind realizes the danger only after it has passed. This chapter shows Trisha in her darkest moments, before she has fully accepted her frightening circumstances. She has only begun to be tested, and she does not yet know what inner strength and reserves she might have to draw from in the coming hours.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Lying with her eyes closed, Trisha listens to the sounds around her, and thinks that her mother must be moving furniture around. Something cold splashes her nose and she opens her eyes. The sound she heard was the rain beginning to fall in the forest. A crash of thunder startles her into movement, and she begins to roll. Remembering how precariously close to the cliff she still must be, she curls into a fetal position to stop her slide. The skies open up dropping torrents of rain, and Trisha instinctively stands and replaces her ball cap on her head. She watches a tree in the valley below be shattered by lightning, and backs up, heading for the cover of the woods again. Then she kneels down and retrieves her blue rain poncho from her backpack, slips into the poncho, flips up the hood, and waits under a tree as the rain continues. The cloud of bugs still surrounds her face despite the rain, and Trisha pictures them feeding on her dead body. This thought brings the tears forth once more, and she cringes each time thunder strikes overhead.

When the rain finally stops, Trisha gets up again, realizing she's hungry now. She wonders what evils may be in store for her, but waves away the thought as if it were a mosquito. Trisha estimates it's three or four in the afternoon now, but she can't be sure; she's left her watch at home. She inventories her lunch more thoroughly now: a hard-boiled egg, tuna fish sandwich, celery sticks, small bag of chips, the large water bottle, the bottle of Surge, and a pair of Twinkies. She goes for the Surge first, her body feeling the need for some quick sugar. She doesn't allow herself to gulp the whole bottle, telling herself she's all alone and needs to think like an adult to get through this. She knows her mom and dad would tell her to conserve her supplies, so she allows herself three big gulps of soda, then turns her attention to the hard-boiled egg. As she carefully peels the egg, she remembers being in the kitchen at home last night, carefully wrapping up her lunch for today's hike. But hunger drives that discomforting thought from her mind and she eats the egg gratefully, wishing she had three more. Trisha wraps the discarded shell carefully back in the Baggie and stows it in her pack, not thinking that to leave a trail of litter might be a good thing in this case. Following the egg, she eats one of the Twinkies, then quickly puts away the rest of the food before hunger tempts her to eat it all.

That's when she notices her Walkman. Reverently, she unwraps it and slips the earphone on her head. She turns on the radio and hears the comforting sound of human voices. She tunes in the local news and is both relieved and disappointed to hear no mention of herself. Just as she's about to switch it off, she hears an ad for the Red Sox - Yankees game the station plans to air that night at seven. Trisha turns off the Walkman, feeling better than she had all day. But now what? She tries to remember everything she's ever heard about the woods, and wishes she had matches to light a signal fire. Then she remembers that she'd once read in a *Little House on the Prairie* book that if you wanted to find your way out of the woods, you should find a stream and



follow its path. The stream will lead to a larger stream, and eventually would take you all the way out of the woods towards the sea. She decides to find the bluff she almost fell off of and follow it until it leads her to a brook.

Trisha reshoulders her pack and follows the cliff at a safe distance from the edge, heading to the left. She listens for running water and finally hears it. Carefully, she works her way to the edge of the bluff and looks out across the valley. The drop-off is only twenty feet now, and no longer very steep. Lost in a daydream of finding a hunter's cabin with a working telephone, Trisha nearly steps into a stream which cascades down the rubble-strewn slope. Telling herself that water leads to people, she makes her way as carefully as possible down the slope. Partway down, the watery slope drags her off her feet and she slides the rest of the way, avoiding a broken neck only by protecting her head and neck with her hands. She slides into a dead tree at the bottom which houses a wasp's nest. The wasps sting her fiercely, and she runs towards the stream to escape them.

Fear clutches her at the thought that her Walkman's broken, but when she digs into her pack, she finds a shattered Gameboy and an intact Walkman. Her lunch was squashed, but basically okay except for the chips, which had opened up and smashed to crumbs. She turns on the Walkman to make sure it still works, and hears a news story about herself, missing in the woods. She thinks of her mother for the first time, and tells herself if her mother gets mad at her she'll defend herself by saying she wasn't properly supervised. She puts everything back inside her pack again, and then notices the muddy river bank. Trisha daubs her stings with cooling mud, then starts to walk beside the stream.

She follows the stream for maybe four hours before darkness starts to fall. To comfort herself against the coming night, she picks out and names the trees, birds, and bugs which her mother had taught her about. But so much remains unnamed that Trisha realizes at last that her mother is really a city girl who had read a few nature guides. It is not a comforting thought, so she replaces it in her mind with visions of search parties, combing the woods to find her. But she hears nothing and her mind rebels at the idea of spending the night in the woods. She fights down the panic and finds an enclosed bower with a fallen tree trunk for a bench. She sits down and tries to pray, but has no religious background to draw from. She had once asked her father if he believed in God, and he told her what he believed in was the Subaudible. He reminds her of their old house, and the sound the electric heater made. She doesn't remember the sound, and that proves his point - the electric hum had always been there, but she hadn't noticed it because she'd gotten used to it. God, for Larry McFarland, is the Subaudible; an insensate force for good. "I think there's a force that keeps drunken teenagers-most drunken teenagers-from crashing their cars when they're coming home from the senior prom or their first big rock concert. That keeps most planes from crashing even when something goes wrong. Not all, just most. Hey, the fact that no one's used a nuclear weapon on actual living people since 1945 suggests there has to be *something* on our side." (pg. 66)



"She had gotten it but hadn't liked it. It was too much like getting a letter you thought would be interesting and important, only when you opened it it was addressed to Dear Occupant." (pp. 66-67) Dad had responded to Trisha's disappointment by changing the subject to Tom Gordon, calling him her "heartthrob." Trisha had laughed out loud with pleasure, because Tom Gordon was her heartthrob, and she loved her father for understanding that and for being sweet about it instead of teasing her. But now, lost in the woods, Trisha balks at the idea of praying to the Subaudible. She knows she can't pray to Tom Gordon either, but realizes she can listen to him pitch. She takes out her Walkman and turns it on, thrilled to hear the sound of the announcer Jerry Trupiano's voice.

At the end of two and a half innings, the Yankees lead two to nothing. She listens to an auto repair jingle telling her to call 1-800-54-GIANT as she realizes the stage of the game means it must be eight o'clock; she'd been on her own for ten hours. Trisha listens to the game, eating half of her tuna sandwich and the remaining, squashed Twinkie, followed by three more swigs of Surge. Throughout the third and fourth innings, she picks up potato chip crumbs from her backpack with her finger and licks them off. By the sixth inning, Jim Corsi's still on the mound and Trisha knows Gordon won't be called in to close a game where the Sox are down by three runs. She thinks she should turn off the game to conserve her batteries, but can't stand the thought of hearing the night noises from deep in the woods. And then Mo Vaughn hits a home run and the Yankee lead is cut to one. In the bottom of the eighth, Nomar Garciaparra gets a two-run hit, and the Sox are up five to four. Tom Gordon comes onto the mound in the bottom of the ninth to protect the single run lead. Trisha sits up straight, not even noticing the mosquitoes or her wasp stings. Suddenly she gets the idea that if Tom Gordon can save the game, she too can be saved.

Meanwhile her father was on a Delta flight out of Boston to join Quilla and Pete. Quilla waits in a Castle View hotel room, in terrified agony. The Castle County state police barracks have been designated Rally Point Patricia, and search parties just like Trisha had imagined are combing the woods. The search was concentrated in the unincorporated township labeled TR-90 on the map, because the searchers didn't think a little girl like Trisha could've gotten very far on her own. They would have been stunned to know that Trisha had gotten nine miles west of the area they were searching.

Superstitiously, Trisha listens to the game, believing her life hangs in the balance. With two on and two out in the ninth, the Red Sox still cling to a one run lead, but the "always dangerous" Darryl Strawberry steps up to bat. Trisha is furious with the announcer for calling him dangerous, believing that it actually makes him dangerous. But Gordon's first pitch burns across the plate, causing Strawberry to swing and miss. His next pitch is a ball, low and outside, followed by a foul up the line by Strawberry. Two more balls and it's a full count. The pressure's on, and Trisha thinks of what first caught her attention with Tom Gordon. It wasn't his handsome good looks, but rather his stillness, his intense, confident concentration on the mound. Tom Gordon, the man with ice water in his veins, delivers a curveball which freezes Strawberry in place, and strike three is called. Trisha bursts into tears. "She was lost but would be found. She was sure of it. Tom Gordon had gotten the save and so would she." (pg. 76)



Mind still at Fenway Park, Trisha turns off the Walkman and settles down for the night on top of her poncho. She pictures what Tom Gordon had surely done upon clinching the game: he would have pointed at the sky, as he always did after winning the game. Trisha, in the darkened woods, points at the sky, too. The act makes her feel like she's pointing at God, because there was really no point in pointing at the Subaudible or at simple dumb luck. She wishes her father were there to carry her out of the woods in his strong arms. Her final thought before falling asleep is that she even misses her endlessly complaining brother. In the dark, unheard by the sleeping girl, something moves.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter Trisha regains her equilibrium after the panic she felt in the previous chapter upon finally acknowledging the truth of her situation. Now Trisha begins to manage her food supplies, and she formulates a plan which she hopes will lead her to safety. Trisha considers the possibility that God may be a resource for her in the woods, but she has not been raised to believe in God, and her father's less than thrilling, vague belief which he refers to as the Subaudible provides her no comfort.

Trisha believes it's miraculous that the Walkman didn't shatter when she fell down the incline. Could God be acting through the "miracle" (pg. 57) of the Walkman? And is it sheer coincidence that her hero, Tom Gordon, is pitching in the game broadcast on the radio that night, when Trisha most needs comfort? Trisha must feel that God is speaking to her through the broadcast, because she develops the belief that if Tom Gordon can save the game, she too will be saved. She's never heard Tom Gordon speak of God, but his finger points to the heavens after every win, as if acknowledging the help of a higher power. So although her father does not truly believe in God, Trisha can ultimately take comfort in her hero Tom's display of faith.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In the backyard of her father's small house in Malden, he and Trisha sit in rusty lawn chairs. Trisha watches the lawn dwarves, which seem to grin at her with ugly, secret smiles. Trisha's dad, who was always kind to her, and never mean, is now acting meanly toward her, and she cries as he insists she go down to the cellar to fetch him a beer. Her upset is so deep she's broken out in a rash; her face and arms itch madly. But Daddy doesn't relent, he tells her she has not a single drop of ice water in her veins and taunts her until she moves to the cellar door and lifts it up. But underneath she finds not the cellar stairs which lead into the darkness, but instead only a "monstrous bulging wasps nest." (pg. 80)

Trisha wakes from her nightmare to find minges and mosquitoes crawling all over her. Stiffly, she crawls out from under her tree trunk shelter into the night air. The small clearing where she'd made her bed is filled with moonlight. She looks up at the cold face of the moon and thinks that an uncaring Subaudible is indeed a more plausible belief than a caring God. She bends over the stream and splashes her throbbing face, catching sight of her swollen, wasp-stung reflection. Trisha doesn't drink from the stream, recalling she'd once been told that woods water could make her sick. But she does scoop up mud from the stream bed, and coats first her face and then her entire body with the soothing mud, hoping it will keep the insects at bay.

The cold little voice in her head tells her she'll die out in these woods, and one day a hunter will find her skeleton. She tells the voice to shut up, but it promptly counters that maybe she won't simply die, maybe the thing out there will kill her instead. Trisha feels like the dark trees along the shore are creeping closer towards her. She hears a twig snap nearby, and the voice tells her the thing is coming for her. She denies that there is any such thing, but the voice tells her all about it. It's the special thing that preys on the lost; it hasn't come for her yet because it's waiting for fear to sweeten her flesh. The voice tells her when she finally sees the face of the thing, she will go mad, and will be laughing hysterically as it kills her. Trisha stops arguing with the voice in her head, because she is suddenly certain that there is something out there. Her instincts can feel it, and she can no longer deny its presence.

Meanwhile at the Castle View motel, Larry comforts his ex-wife. Quilla tells him she knows Trisha is in trouble, and despite Larry's protestations that it's just a bad dream Quilla had, Quilla knows that Trisha is in terrible danger.

Trisha calls out to the unseen thing in the woods, begging it not to hurt her. Another branch cracks, closer by than before. "It was very close, whatever it was, and it was deciding. Either it would come and tear her apart, or it would move on. It wasn't a joke and it wasn't a dream. It was death and madness standing or crouching or perhaps perching just beyond the edge of the clearing. It was deciding whether to take her



now...or to let her ripen a while longer." (pg. 89) She crawls back into her shelter, clutching her pack to her chest. She thinks to imagine something nice, like being saved, but realizes that will only make her fear worse - like imagining a cold glass of water when you're thirsty. Realizing she is thirsty, Trisha allows herself a few swigs from her water bottle and puts it back away. Trisha decides to imagine Tom Gordon here in the woods with her, guarding her from whatever that thing may be.

Speaking aloud to her imaginary hero, Trisha asks Tom Gordon what the secret of closing is. He tells her you have to get ahead of the opponent. The batter comes to the plate thinking he's better than Tom Gordon, and Tom has to take that idea away from him. "*Establishing that it's you who's better, that's the secret of closing.*" (pg. 91) With these thoughts in her mind, Trisha drifts off to sleep, while far away, her parents make passionate love in the Castle View motel. Only her brother Pete lies awake, remembering over and over the moment when he turned and found Trisha gone.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Why would Trisha have such a vicious dream about her father, who has never been anything but loving towards her? When she's frightened in the woods at night, it is not her father she imagines, standing guard over her, but rather Tom Gordon. What does Tom have to offer her that her own father does not? Perhaps it is Tom's belief in God - a real God, one who cares about a little girl lost in the woods. Larry McFarland's belief in the cold, impersonal Subaudible provides Trisha with no hope to grasp onto, and perhaps that is why she feels that her dad is being mean to her in her dream. She feels that he has in some way let her down through his lack of faith.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Trisha awakes the next morning with a severely stiff neck, but grateful to be alive. In the bright light of day, she tells herself there had been no thing in the woods, but on some deeper level she still knows it was actually there. But with day comes hope of being rescued by a search party, and Trisha feels she deserves to be rescued after all, especially after spending a night alone in the woods. She spreads more mud on her face, remembering the time she and Pepsi had painted their faces with so much makeup that Quilla had laughed until tears came to her face. Now Trisha remembers how her mother had taught them to cleanse their faces with the cold cream by spreading it upward, gently, as Trisha now does with the mud.

She checks her supplies again uneasily. She has less than half a bottle of Surge, half a bottle of water, and a few celery sticks. She tells herself it will be all right. Even if the search parties don't find her, the stream will lead her to people. But as the day wears on, the stream leads her only to woods and more woods, and her hopes begin to sink. Then late in the morning, sudden silence descends on the woods. Trisha tells herself it's just her imagination, but she knows deep inside that it isn't not true. At that moment, she notices the stream narrowing. A few minutes later, the stream peters out into muddy patches, and the muddy patches become a muddy marsh on the edge of a dead forest. Fire has swept through this patch of woods, and dead trees inhabit the marsh, surrounded only by standing water, mud and muck, dotted with weed-covered hummocks rising up out of the stagnant water.

Trisha stops to consider her options. If she stays where she is and nobody finds her, she would have to spend the night in this dead swamp - an unbearable thought. She spots a patch of rising green ahead of her, beyond the marsh. She decides to move forward through the disgusting swamp towards the patch of green, which holds for her the promise of finding more checkerberries. She takes a couple of small steps forward, and doubts her decision as muddy water seeps up around her sneakers. She hesitates again, but eventually, propelled by blind hope, she moves forward into the dead forest. She imagines that safety lies ahead, and refuses to sit still and die because she's afraid of a little goo.

"Eventually-it might have been half an hour after starting forward again, it might have been forty-five minutes-Trisha discovered what thousands (perhaps even millions) of men and women before her have discovered: by the time it gets too gross, it's often too late to go back." (pg 100) Trisha is caught in the middle of a seemingly endless swamp which appears to go on endlessly. She has been moving from hummock to hummock to avoid stepping directly into the stagnant water, which she fears will treat her like quicksand if it gets a hold of her. But now she steps on a hummock which wasn't actually a hummock at all, just some weeds growing right out of the stagnant mess. Her foot is sucked down into the water, and when she yanks it back, the mud keeps her



shoe. Trisha screams at the bog that it can't have her shoe, and sticks her arm into the scary water. She feels something swim by her hand, but manages to rescue her shoe. She stands there in the murk, holding her slime-covered shoe, and looks ahead to the green patch she's been headed for. In that moment she realizes that the green she saw was nothing more than a mass of hummocks in an area even more swampy than where she stands.

She knows she can't go backward; at this point she's committed to her course. She thinks of Tom Gordon and that special stillness he calls upon in times of pressure. She thinks she can make it across the swampy traverse if maybe, just maybe, she has a little bit of ice water in her veins. She takes a deep breath and rolls up the cuffs of her jeans. She removes the other shoe and ties them both around her neck, leaving her socks on "*as an oog-shield*" (pg. 103) and resolutely continues on her way. She starts setting landmarks as she had done the day before, to ensure she's moving in a straight line. She travels for two hours, from hummock to hummock, before the bog takes over and she's forced to wade through hip deep water for several steps between each hummock, as they are now further apart than before. Yellow bubbles rise with each step she takes into the cold water. She chants the word "gross" over and over like a mantra as she traverses the bog.

She takes a break on a fairly stable hummock and peels off her socks. She wrings them out and puts them back on, forcing herself to continue. She has reached the point where she is no longer living, but merely surviving. Movement becomes automatic, and she finishes off her Surge and water bottles without even realizing what she's doing. A few times she falls into the horrifying muck, and about this time she begins to converse with her friend Tom Gordon. She hears, incongruously, the whirling rotors of a helicopter, but the sound merely fades away. A few minutes later, the bog becomes a stagnant pond, with no hummocks to break the muck. Looking ahead, she sees a line of twigs and branches breaking up the endless water. Sitting on top of the woody piles are a line of beavers. Unaccountably, delight overtakes her at the amazing sight. She thinks of the kindly creatures in *The Wind in the Willows* and smiles in awe at the beavers, who, seeing her, abandon their posts and swim off into the water as a group. Knowing they have sharp teeth, she waits for them to clear away before moving forward again, towards an extra large hummock just beyond the beaver dam.

As she approaches the large hummock, she realizes with glee that it contains dark green ferns called fiddleheads. Her mother had several times made delicious salads with fiddleheads on their family camping trips, and Trisha moves forward with the hope of filling her belly. But a few feet away from the hummock, she pauses uncertainly. She can see blood splashed over the green fiddleheads on the hummock. She veers to the left and avoids the large hummock, but as she passes it she looks over and sees the severed head of a small deer. She fights back a fainting spell, knowing she's doomed if she tumbles into the water, unconscious. Pushing ahead, she wonders what could have torn the deer's head off, but the cold voice in her head tells her she already knows what did it. It was the special thing, says the voice, which is watching her right now. She talks to Tom, hoping he'll tell her there's nothing watching her at all, but even Tom has deserted her. She tries to settle her nerves, but she passes a dead tree, sticking up



through the water, which is scored with razor sharp claw marks. She looks around but sees only water, more hummocks, and up ahead another patch of green, which gives her no comfort because she assumes it's just another island of fiddleheads.

But she's wrong, the patch of green is actually solid ground this time. As she approaches it, hardly daring to hope, she sees bushes and trees and blessedly, no more stagnant water. And on top of that good news, there are plenty of edible fiddleheads growing amongst the bushes and trees. She picks and eats the fiddleheads which line the last stretch of water on the way to solid ground. They taste delicious to her starving body, and hope fills Trisha as the hip-deep water gives way to shin-deep water. There is only one passable channel leading towards the solid ground and Trisha is forced to take it, although her instincts warn her away because she can hear flies buzzing just as they'd buzzed around the dead deer's head. She must clamber over a fallen tree which blocks the channel; Trisha can see that the tree didn't really fall - it looks to have been pulled out by its very roots. At the end of the channel, where Trisha finally climbs out of the swamp onto dry land, lies the remainder of the deer's body, polluting a large clump of otherwise edible fiddleheads. Trisha tries not to vomit up the greens she'd eaten, and wonders if the thing had intentionally polluted the edible fiddleheads with the dead deer to prevent her from seeking nourishment.

Just then, she hears the helicopter again, and this time can see them hanging in the distant sky. But they do not see her, and the sound of their rotors fades away, leaving her alone. Except Trisha doesn't feel alone; she feels watched by the thing. She's so hungry she considers going back for the fiddleheads by the dead deer, but is afraid that whatever killed the deer might be lying in wait. She decides not to press her luck, and moves forward into the woods instead. Several hours later, hunger is replaced by an all-consuming thirst. The thirst is so powerful that it frightens her; she knows it might kill her before anything else does. As the light starts to fade, Trisha is surprised to hear the sound of running water. She dismisses it as a convenient hallucination, but her body propels her into a flat out run towards the sound anyway. Ignoring the brambles which tear at her passing body, Trisha finds the source of the sound: a splashing brook which makes the one she followed earlier seem like a tiny trickle.

She throws her face into the water and drinks deeply, aware that the water might make her sick, but also aware she has no choice but to drink from it. And it tastes wonderful. Water and hope fill her empty body, and she believes her plan to follow the stream might work out this time with this larger brook. She fills her water bottle from the stream, and crosses over it to the other side, which seems like a safer area to walk. On the opposite bank, she carefully crafts a lean-to from some fallen pine-boughs. But before she can crawl into it for the night, her bowels loosen and she struggles to avoid throwing up. The voice in her head informs her she's been poisoned by the brook water and will be dead by morning. She shuts out the voice by turning on the Walkman, and is gratified to hear Joe Castiglione, the baseball announcer, calling the Red Sox game. It's the bottom of the fourth.

Before she can settle into the rhythm of the game, soupy vomit forces its way up from her stomach. Shaking from the spasms, she vomits again, more fiercely, and a sudden



bout of diarrhea leaves her barely enough time to pull down her pants before it strikes her with a devastating strength. Lightheaded afterwards, she tries to stand and instead falls down into her own feces. She still wears the Walkman, and without taking it off, removes her jeans and underwear and walks back to the stream to clean off. Once clean, she dresses herself again, and vomits once more before she can reach her shelter. Her bowels threaten to give way again, and she cries out to God to stop it. The cold little voice in her head tells her it's no good praying to the Subaudible. Yet, the spasm passes and she is able to crawl into her shelter at last, headphones still clamped firmly to her ears.

The Yankees are up eight to one. But the Red Sox come on in the eighth, scoring four runs. Trisha's body forces her to return to the stream for another long drink, and she crawls miserably back into her shelter afterward, sure she'll be dead by morning. The Sox, now down eight to five, have three men on base. Nomar Garciaparra hits a deep drive into center field. Had it gone over the fence, the Sox would have won nine to eight. But Trisha's luck is not so good, and Nomar's line drive is caught by a Yankee, and they lose the game after all. Trisha shuts off the Walkman to save her batteries, and cries herself to sleep.

Meanwhile at the state police barracks in Castle Rock, Maine, an anonymous tipster informs the police that Trisha was snatched by a violent sex offender named Francis Raymond Mazzerole. Manpower is diverted to the search for Mazzerole's blue Ford van.

While the police are searching for Mazzerole, Trisha's body continues to void vomit and diarrhea, which have both taken on the consistency of weak acid. She is overcome with fever, and prays to God to stop the vomiting. That's the moment when she sees Tom Gordon for the first time. He stands in the moonlight, wearing his uniform and his glove. She watches him as he winds up for a pitch, the stillness radiating from his shoulders. Trisha gets the idea that she can claim that stillness as her own, and ward off the shaky cramps which keep causing her to vomit. She grabs onto a tree and tries to find that stillness inside her. Gradually, she wins as the stillness takes over and soothes the cramps in her guts. After awhile, the shivering and cramps disappear entirely; even her shaky stomach has settled. Finally, she falls into a deep sleep which lasts the night. In her sleep, something approaches her small form and watches her. It watches for a long time before moving off into the bushes. But it stays near the sleeping girl.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Trisha has unearthed reserves in herself that most adults don't possess. Her instinct for survival keeps her moving through the horrible swamp despite the fact that moving forward into that mess tests every ounce of courage and strength she possesses. Her only other option, once she's locked deep in the swamp, is to keep pressing forward or die. Again she summons the spirit of Tom Gordon - who represents her belief in God - to help her through. The fiddleheads, seemingly placed in her path by a benign divine force to sustain her, are contaminated with death by an apparent opposing force. The thing in the woods seems to represent the devil, and so Trisha McFarland is locked in a



timeless struggle between the forces of good and evil. As she lies in the woods vomiting up her very life force, she is actually undergoing the classic 'dark night of the soul.' And her faith wavers, symbolized by the Red Sox losing the ballgame. Yet each and every time she calls on God, her prayers are rewarded. The rewards seem small, really - she is able to stop herself from vomiting, for example - but these small things make a difference. Perhaps they will make the difference between death and survival.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

To her surprise, she awakes in the morning. Glad to be alive, she is nevertheless consumed by wracking pains of hunger. Trisha knows she must find food or perish. She starts her day by drinking deeply from the contaminated stream, and refills her two bottles with water. Her hope that the stream will lead her to people has faded, but with no other option, she forges ahead. She follows the stream, refusing to admit utter defeat. Her illness did not miraculously abate during the night, and she now finds it much easier to hallucinate Tom Gordon's presence. He walks with her along the stream.

Around noon, Trisha trips over a rock and sprawls to the ground. When she tries to get up, her legs fail her. She tells Tom she thinks she's going to die. She thinks of the helicopters, but realizes that her fever deranged mind can easily supply any sound or vision she wishes to experience. So Trisha resolutely takes her mind off of rescue so as not to fool herself with more hallucinations. Her hope is that if she keeps her mind off hopeful sounds, then if she does hear or see something positive, it will come as a surprise, and therefore likely be real.

Back in Castle Rock, psychiatrists are putting Quilla and Pete under hypnosis, hoping to extract any memories they might possess of having seen Mazzerole's blue van at the parking area where they entered the trail. Quilla and Pete realize the police believe Trisha was kidnapped by a sex offender, and they both dissolve into tears. The search teams, now looking for Trisha's dead, molested corpse, have tightened the search perimeter, figuring Mazzerole would have dumped her body very near the trail. Meanwhile, Trisha is some thirty miles west of the newly tightened search perimeter. Without realizing it, she has crossed the border from Maine into New Hampshire.

Around one o'clock, Trisha spots some checkerberries, hardly daring to hope that the bushes are not just figments of her imagination. Her doubts disappear when her approach frightens off two crows which had been feasting on the berries. She grabs them in clumps, eating the leaves as well as the berries and staining her entire body with the red juice. Her body welcomes the berries, and Trisha actually cries at the taste of food. She eats her way through berry patch, and when she reaches the end, she is startled by a large doe that stands just beyond the berry patch. The doe watches her calmly, then turns and takes a few steps back towards two young fawns. Trisha is moved to delight by the beautiful deer family, and follows them into the clearing, which glows golden from the rays of the sun. The deer take off, leaving her alone in the clearing, and that's when it occurs to Trisha to wonder what they had been doing there. She looks down and spots the beechnuts which litter the forest floor.

To Trisha, the berries and nuts feel like Thanksgiving dinner. To her surprise, the beechnut shells open easily under her stubby fingernails, and her body welcomes the taste of the nuts as well. She realizes she needs to stock up while she has access to



this food supply. Her energy improved by the food, she eagerly fills her backpack with beechnuts, and then loads of berries, eating as she works. Trisha feels whole again, and says the word out loud. She trudges her full pack back to the water's edge, and is further gratified to see silver trout leaping along its flow. She hulls a dozen beechnuts, mixes them with berries, and pops them in her mouth all together. This improvised trail mix tastes heavenly, and Trisha's whole body is grateful to be full.

Happiness and gratitude fill her up as she looks into her full backpack and thanks its contents for saving her life. She watches butterflies play in the sunlight across the stream, and feels at peace for the first time since losing her way in the woods. Trisha realizes in that moment that joy and contentment in life are made up of the little things, like feeding oneself and feeling at peace. She doubts she'll ever be able to explain this great truth to her family should she see them again. Her contentment is unmarred by her adult realization that life has teeth, and can be full of great sadness. She thinks of her brother's complaints, and realizes that in many ways, she is now older than Pete.

Lazing on the sunny bank, she looks downstream and notices that her brook merges with a larger stream. Her hope of following the water to the land of people is renewed. Her eyes wander over to the opposite bank, and she sees three robed, hooded figures watching her. Two of the robes are white; the figure in the middle wears black. She speaks to them, asking who they are, and asking them for help. She feels drugged by the food she ate. The figure on the left steps forward and removes its hood. It is a man who looks very much like her favorite science teacher, Mr. Bork - the man who taught her about plants and animals in northern New England; the man who taught her to recognize a beechnut. The Mr. Bork-like figure tells her that he comes from the God of Tom Gordon; the God Tom points to after each save. He tells her that Tom's God is too busy to help her today, and that he is not even a Red Sox fan.

The other white-robed figure steps forward and drops its hood. She asks herself if she's dreaming, but she touches her face and can feel the reality of the wasp stings. The second figure looks very much like her father. He tells her he is the Subaudible, and was forced to take the shape of someone she knows so she would recognize it. The Subaudible father figure tells Trisha apologetically that it is too weak to help her very much. She asks it if it is drunk, as her father had been so often since the divorce; it smiles at her sheepishly and steps back.

Now the third figure steps up and lowers its black hood. In place of a face is a wasp's nest. The wasps crawl over each other, forming rough features that approximate a human face. It tells her it comes from the thing in the woods, which it calls the God of the Lost. It has been waiting for her; she is its miracle. Trisha screams at it to go away, but instead it tells her that the world is a worst-case scenario, and everything she fears is true. It tells her its argument is persuasive, for she has seen the world's teeth for herself, and it asks for her agreement. Trisha cries out that she doesn't believe it. And with that cry, all three figures disappear. Trisha tells herself she must have been dreaming, but can recall no break in her consciousness. Then an idea occurs to her: the nuts and berries she ate might indeed have gotten her high. She thinks the culprit was



perhaps the checkerberry leaves which she ate, and swears off eating the leaves in the future.

She now feels trapped by the clearing which had given her shelter. The feeling of being watched has returned, stronger than ever. In an effort to prove to herself that the figures were a hallucination, she crosses the stream and examines the spot where they stood. She finds no footprints, but when she turns her head, she sees a splash of blood in the forest to her right. She approaches the stain, and finds a coil of animal intestines, still bleeding as if freshly spilled. She spots a swatch of brown fur with white spots, and knows with a cold certainty that it is the remains of one of the fawns she had seen earlier. Tracking further into the woods, Trisha finds an alder tree with claw marks slashed deep into its bark, high up where only a tall man could reach, though of course she knows no man made those marks. She realizes the thing has been watching her, and that although the three robed figures might have been a hallucination, the deer intestines and the claw marks are quite real. She is certain that she is not hallucinating the feeling of being watched; it is an instinctual certainty which she can no longer deny.

She runs terrified back to the brook and across it to her little clearing. The clearing would have been a good place to spend the night, but Trisha cannot bear to stay so close to the dead deer and the watcher in the woods. She moves on downstream. She opens her pack and munches on her food supply, expressing again her gratitude for the food. After a bit, she even begins to sing.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Trisha's hallucination of the three robed figures reflects for the reader her internal struggle to find faith in God. The figure representing the Subaudible tells her it is but a weak force, and cannot much help her. This of course is her own view, being parroted back to her by her hallucination. She has already determined that her father's belief in the Subaudible is a weak blessing at best, and insufficient to see her through this difficult time. The figure which represents Tom Gordon's God tells Trisha it is too busy with larger world events to help her out, and seems disinclined to help a Red Sox fan anyway. This reflects the weakness of Trisha's tentative desire to believe in a loving God who will reach out and help her through the forest. She wants to believe there is such a loving God, but the figure speaks her fear that even if such a God exists, it does not love Trisha in a personal way, and is in fact too busy to help her out. The final figure represents the force of evil and fear, which works against all good in the Universe. Without a deeper faith in God, Trisha finds it easy to believe in this embodiment of fear. And yet, when she cries out that she will not give into the fear, the figures disappear.

Outside of the hallucinations, the forces of good and evil appear to be warring over Trisha's fate. The providential appearance of the beautiful deer which lead her to food and a clearing bathed in golden light as if it were a sign from God, fill Trisha with nourishment, happiness, and gratitude. When evil makes itself known by killing one of these beautiful deer, Trisha fights off her fear by remembering her gratitude for the food, and by finding within her a well-spring of faith and joy which allows her to keep moving,

and to sing a song about love. That choice which she makes, to choose gratitude and love over fear, is a powerful choice which seems to represent that Trisha is winning the war for her soul.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

As darkness falls, Trisha approaches a rocky clearing covered in drifts of soft pine needles. From this clearing, she can see the stars, and decides it is a decent place to spend the night. She drinks again from the stream, pleased that despite the on-again, off-again cramps she's felt all day, her body seems to be adapting to the woodsy water supply. She lies down on a makeshift bed, covers herself with her rain poncho, and slips the Walkman headphones over her ears.

When she turns the radio on, she finds she's lost the signal to WCAS, the station which had been broadcasting the games. She finds nothing at all on the FM dial, but on the AM dial she finds WEEI in Boston - a Red Sox flagship station. It's an open date however, meaning there is no game to broadcast. But Trisha listens to a sports talk show, and hears a caller named Walt asking why Tom Gordon points to the sky after each save. Walt thinks Tom should point to Joe Kerrigan instead.. Kerrigan is the pitching coach who decided to turn Tom Gordon - once a weak starting pitcher - into a game-ending closer, where Tom finally found his niche. The talk-show host suggests that God gave Joe Kerrigan the idea to turn Tom into a closer in the first place.

Upset that there's no game, Trisha spins the dial hoping to find another team playing somewhere. Instead she learns that hope is fading for the missing nine-year-old, Patricia McFarland. She learns that police efforts had been concentrated on finding her supposed kidnapper, Francis Raymond Mazzerole, but that Mazzerole had been located and turned out to have an airtight alibi. Disconsolately, she turns off the Walkman and puts it away, wondering if anybody anywhere is still searching for her. The night is cold, and she snuggles for warmth under the fallen pine boughs, looking up at the stars and wonders about them. As she looks skyward, a meteor shower blooms in the night sky. She had never seen anything like it, and watches the brilliant sparks until she falls asleep.

She dreams that she and Tom Gordon are in an old meadow, once cleared by people, but now being gradually taken back by nature in the form of bushes and young trees. Tom stands next to a very old wooden post, which is bolted on top with a rusty ring bolt, which Tom flicks back and forth between his fingers as if to call her attention to it. She asks Tom why he points to the sky after each save. Tom tells her he points because it is God's nature to come on in the bottom of the ninth, especially when the game looks hard to win.

She wakes from this dream in the night and gets slowly to her feet, noticing how much weight she has lost. She is hit with a wracking cough as she goes to gather more pine boughs for warmth. Coming back, she stops dead in her tracks, feeling an unfriendly presence in the night. She yells out for it to give her a break and leave her alone. In response, she hears a soft, inhuman grunt, and tries to place the source of the sound.



She feels with horrified certainty that the thing is in the pines, and had been mere inches from her while she gathered the boughs which she still holds in her arms. Another coughing fit prompts her to lie back down under her replenished supply of pine boughs, but a certainty fills her that the thing will find her cowering under the boughs and rip her to pieces. She accepts her fate, and waits with resignation to be killed. When she awakes Tuesday morning, she finds that the pile of pine boughs right next to the pile under which she slept had been disturbed in the night. Something had dug right into it, spraying needles all around and tearing up the earth underneath. She cannot deny the evidence before her, and decides the creature must have decided to give her one more night of fear to sweeten her flesh before it finally comes for her.

She turns in a circle, and tells Tom that whatever it is has gone for the moment. Tom tells her it will be back, and sooner or later she will have to deal with it. Trisha sits on a rock and munches on berries and beechnuts; the berries are beginning to grow stale, and don't taste nearly as good as they did yesterday. But she forces down three handfuls, then goes to the stream for a drink. The sun has begun to warm her, her cough is fading a bit, and something like hope returns to Trisha as she sees more trout in the river. She looks around for a sharp rock, and uses it to cut the hood off her poncho. She intends to try to catch one of those trout using the cut off hood, knowing it's probably useless, but choosing to try anyway. She sings to herself as she works on the poncho.

When it's ready, she drops the hood into the stream, and the current pushes hard against the submerged hood. Trisha's frail body fights with all its strength to keep her balance as the water presses against her. She knows she can't maintain her position for long, but looks upstream and sees three flashes of silver darting towards her. With no time to react or do anything at all other than keep holding onto the hood, Trisha watches as two of the fish swim right into her improvised snare. She screams with joy, not even bothered by the fact that one of the fish drops out when she lifts the hood from the stream. On the bank, she asks God what to do now as she stares, baffled, at the little fish swimming in her hood. Her body instinctively responds before she can give it any further thought, and she dumps the hood onto the ground and waits for the fish to give up its struggles. Then she slits its belly with her cutting stone and digs out the entrails. Promising herself she'll never tell Pepsi about this, she picks up the fish and devours it, tail and all. To Trisha, it tastes like life.

When she is done eating, Trisha stands still for a moment, willing her aching stomach to hold down the food. She succeeds in keeping it down, and revitalized by the food, makes her way downstream again. Today, Trisha has no sense of being watched, and is grateful that the thing has left her alone. She talks to Tom about her life at home, her schoolwork, and trick-or-treating with Pepsi; Tom is an excellent listener. But she trails off in mid-sentence suddenly as the woods become eerily quiet once again. Trisha realizes that what is missing is the sound of the brook; it has tapered down to a small stream of water, just like before. She tells Tom that if the brook leads to another swamp, she'd rather die than cross through it again. But she forges ahead, and an hour later finds the end of the stream.



It is another marsh, but unlike before, this one doesn't look dead or scary. The sun shines on the standing water, and birds fly hopefully overhead. Despite its friendlier look, this new marsh stretches for a mile or two before ending in a pine-covered ridge. Trisha sits down on the ground and gives in to tears. She cries out to the indifferent forest that she wants her mother. She cries herself to sleep, and when she wakes up, the morning is gone and Trisha feels hot and faint. She eats an afternoon meal of dried up berries and drinks some stream water from her bottle. Spotting some fiddleheads on the edge of the marsh, she eats those too. Trisha looks at the marsh and realizes she cannot face crossing it. Instead, she turns north and skirts the east side of the marsh as she travels. Unknown to her, had she climbed the marsh and topped the ridge on the far side, she would have looked down on several cottages and a camp road on the outskirts of Green Mount, New Hampshire. Instead, her trek northward will take her towards the Canadian border. The closest slice of civilization in this direction is Montreal, some four hundred miles away.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Trisha's hopes, renewed by her discovery of the larger stream, die out as the stream dead-ends on another marsh. This chapter provides her little reason for hope, and it is only her iron will which keeps her moving. However, her forbearance will soon prove to be the right course, for in this chapter the author foreshadows the positive end to Trisha's story. It is God's nature to come on in the bottom of the ninth, when the game looks in doubt, but can still be won. While there's life, there's hope, as the old adage says, and sometimes we just need to keep moving ahead, and by not giving up our faith we will be rewarded. Everything Trisha needs to know in order to survive is revealed in her dream in this chapter, but she doesn't know that yet. Had she not kept moving and instead given up, she might never have saved herself nor learned that faith often requires patience and perseverance.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Trisha recalls very little of her journey that day, and by nightfall that Tuesday, the boundary between reality and make-believe has all but disappeared. The four days which followed Trisha's decision to turn north passed by in a haze. By Saturday night, she has spent a full week in the woods, and no longer realizes that her traveling companions, Tom Gordon and Pepsi Robichaud, are but figments of her imagination. But sometime on Saturday, Pepsi and Tom walk behind a clump of trees and disappear. When Trisha goes to look for them, she finally recalls that they were hallucinations, not real people at all, and the return of this knowledge causes her to sit down and cry. As she cries, she thinks back over the last few days, fragmented in her memory, and recalls having several hallucinations of helicopters and rotting deer which appeared and disappeared even as she watched them. She had found and then lost another stream, and recalls that when she drank from it she had seen a huge face staring up at her from the stream bed. She remembers talking trees and voices calling her name, but her return calls went unanswered because the voices hadn't really been there.

Mixed in with these hallucinatory memories are memories that seem real to Trisha. She's pretty sure she did fill her Surge bottle from that lost stream, and she's certain the beautiful bed of white flowers was real, as was the headless corpse of a dead fox. She remembers catching tadpoles in her hood and eating them, and strangely enough, one memory which seems impossible but has a quality of reality is her memory of seeing a crow hanging upside down from a tree, cawing at her. Her body, she knew, had been fighting a dreadful fever and accompanying infection. She remembers, most clearly of all, listening to the Red Sox win two out of three games in Oakland, with Tom Gordon getting the save in both wins. Despite her fevered state, she had remembered each night to turn the radio off before falling asleep so that she wouldn't run out the batteries. Now as clarity finally returns to Trisha, she realizes that she has discovered deep reserves of strength within her, and yet also realizes that the strength is all but gone. She is, she knows, nearly finished.

Back in the civilized world, Trisha's parents have already begun to discuss the possibility of holding a memorial service for Trisha right away, or whether they should wait for her body to be found. And how long should they wait? Her body might never be found. Pete has spoken little in the past week, and has claimed Trisha's doll Mona for himself; he won't even allow his mother to touch it. The world believes Trisha to be dead. Yet in the woods, she clings to life. She has walked a nearly straight line since she turned north, and her body continues to fight off its deadly infection with tenacity. But one other thing about Trisha has also never wavered: her certainty that she's being followed and watched by something in the woods. This is a feeling she is unable to chalk off to fever or hallucination; Trisha's certainty runs deep.



Now as she crosses a clearing in the woods, she is wracked by another coughing fit, this one so bad that she's forced to grab onto a tree stump for balance. When the coughing has subsided she looks down and realizes that it's not a tree stump she's holding, but a wooden post. On top of the post is a rusty ring bolt. It looks familiar, and Tom Gordon's voice reminds her that she dreamed about this very post with the rusty ring bolt. She remembers now: it was the night of the meteor shower. Her hand glued to ring bolt, she walks a complete circle around the post, considering her surroundings carefully. She realizes she's not in a natural clearing, but in the overgrown remains of a man-made meadow. She drops to the ground and finds a rusty hinge half-buried by the post. The hinge tells her that the post must have once been a gate. She is overjoyed to discover even this ancient evidence of human life.

Tom tells her soberly that this is her last chance. He disappears again, and she thinks again about the secret of closing, and how important the late innings of the game can be. Her last chance, she thinks to herself. But she doesn't know what to do with it, and now even Tom has deserted her. She circles the post again, thinking hard. Her fingers find tiny holes on either side of the post where bits of barbed wire remain. She gets it: the barbed wire on either end of the post once stretched in a straight line to another post. She crawls in the direction the stumps of wire point to, and quickly finds the stump of another post. She ties a strip of her blue poncho to the post stump, and begins to walk in a straight line in the direction the barbed wire must have once led. Turning back often to look at the strip of blue poncho, she maintains a straight line, but finds nothing in that direction. She returns to the poncho-marked post and proceeds in a straight line now in the exact opposite direction. This time, she finds another post in her path; Tom calls her attention to it.

She feels along the new post, and finds barbed wire and prays to God; she prays to Tom Gordon's God, the God who can help her in the late innings of the game. When she opens her eyes after praying, she sees the faint remains of a path, running straight ahead from the post. Trisha follows the path, and shortly comes to another post, and another. It is what remains of a fenced trail made by farmer Elias McCorkle in the year 1905. Trisha follows the faint trail, guided as much by her instinct as by the occasional posts she passes. Trisha marches along the faded path for seven hours. Then, as twilight falls, she comes to the end of the trail, marked by three wooden posts which still support the remains of an old wooden gate. Just beyond the gate, she sees wheel ruts criss-crossing the earth. Trisha has found an old woods road. She realizes that even if the road is no longer in use, it wouldn't exist if it didn't lead somewhere. Grateful tears spring to her eyes and she falls down in the dirt, thanking God for the road.

Chapter 10 Analysis

As Trisha had hardly dared to believe, God does indeed come on in the late innings of the game. Just when her strength is ebbing and she can take no more, she finds the very wooden post she had dreamed about several days before. Trisha knows now that the hand of God is indeed at work in her life, and her renewed faith allows her to summon the strength she needs to travel the ancient trail for hours in search of

humanity. The game is not yet won, but the tying runs are on base, and Trisha knows at last that she has a real chance of survival.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Trisha picks herself up out of the dirt and travels down the road for another hour, until night falls and rain threatens. She finds a thick clump of trees beside the road, and unshoulders her pack, prepared to spend a rainy night in their shelter. As thunder rumbles overhead, she spots something on the right side of the road. It is an abandoned truck cab, overgrown with ferns. Enthralled at this evidence of humanity, she takes a branch and pokes it through the broken windshield at the seat of the cab. Dust and a flood of chipmunks rises up from the seat, escaping out into the night. She tries to make a joke to the retreating chipmunks, but her resulting laughter provokes another coughing fit. The deep cough changes Trisha's mind about spending the night in the dusty cab, and so she moves back to the shelter of the woods.

There, she eats some nuts and drinks her water, noticing that her food supply is low, but is too tired to worry about it at the moment. She hopes that the road will take her where the streams did not - to safety and civilization. With that hopeful thought, she thanks God and drifts off to sleep. Several hours later, she is woken by a downpour. The rain drives her towards the shelter of the abandoned cab. A tree falls in the woods, and Trisha is suddenly aware that the thing is back; she feels its presence close by. When she gets to the truck cab at the side of the road, she sees something standing on the opposite side of the dirt road. "It was *her* god, the wasp-god, standing there in the rain." (pg. 188) It has slumped shoulders, black eyes, and large pointed ears that look like horns. She screams in a loud voice for it to go away and leave her alone as she simultaneously dives into the shelter of the cab. Thunder and rain answer her scream, and Trisha falls asleep while waiting for the thing to come claim her.

She awakes in full daylight; birds twitter happily in the cheerful sunshine. The cab had kept her dry all night, and as she remembers the thing by the road, she wonders if it had been there at all. In the pure light of day, it is quite easy for her to dismiss it as a shadow caused by the gloom of the storm. But when she exits the cab, she sees something she can't dismiss and suddenly feels a thousand years older. All around the cab, something has cleared a circle in the underbrush - "a curving line of wet black earth in the greenery." (pg. 190) Trisha looks at the handiwork of the God of the Lost and thinks the circle had been drawn around her sleeping form by this god to claim her as its property.

Chapter 11 Analysis

It is now very late in the game. Trisha's discovery of the road has renewed her spirits enough to carry her through another day, but her food supply is practically gone, and the wracking cough which signals a bad illness has settled into her lungs. The battle

between good and evil continues, as God's gift to Trisha - the road - is answered by the wasp-god, who appears to Trisha in the night and marks her as its own.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

A low, hazy sky hangs over Sunday as Trisha moves on down the road. By early afternoon, the rain puddles in the road have begun to dry up, and Trisha stops to replenish her water supply before they evaporate, filtering the muddy water through her dirty Red Sox cap and into her water bottles. She is aware all day of the presence of the wasp-god, tracking her every step on the road. She can feel it, off to her right in the woods, and occasionally catches a glimpse of movement through the trees. Warily, she thinks as she has before, that it is only toying with her. It may allow her to get close to freedom, but it will never allow her to actually get out of the wilderness. Meanwhile, Trisha has consumed the rest of her food supply. Unless she finds something in the road, which she doubts, she'll have nothing come tomorrow. She sees some berries and some mushrooms, but doesn't recognize either species and is too wise to take a chance.

Around four p.m., she stumbles, falls, and can't get back up. Ever determined, Trisha simply decides that means it's time to listen to the Red Sox for a while. Mercifully, after spinning the dial for a few moments, she hears the familiar voice of announcer Joe Castiglione. Nomar hits one over the fence and puts the Red Sox up two to nothing. Trisha dozes out of consciousness, for the first time leaving the radio on as she sleeps. At some point in the fifth inning, something steps out from the woods and watches her sleep. It points at her with its razor-claw hand, then retreats into the forest.

Chapter 12 Analysis

It's coming down to the last inning now. Trisha has eaten the last of her food, and fallen asleep with the radio on, surely eating up the remaining power in her batteries. The loss of her supplies coincides with the sapping of her strength; Trisha's very life force threatens to desert her. If she cannot make it out of the woods in the coming day, she will have absolutely nothing left to sustain her.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Night has begun to fall by the time Trisha wakes from her afternoon sleep. She vaguely recalls waking up late in the game, but her memory of the announcers' voices has them talking about the Seattle Monsters and the killer who was coming up to bat. The color man, Jerry "Troop" Trupiano, had asked the announcer where was God when you need him? Trisha realizes it must have been a dream, tinged with the sound of the game playing in her ears. She is horrified to find that she fell asleep with the Walkman on, and morosely checks it to verify that the batteries have indeed gone dead. It was like losing her only friend. She shoulders her nearly empty backpack, amazed at how heavy it feels.

Despite her worries that the road might go on for a hundred miles only to dead end in the forest, she resolutely continues walking down it. The pack slips from her shoulders as night fully falls, and Trisha briefly considers abandoning it. But remembering that her water supply is inside, she turns the pack into a pillow instead, and lays her head down for the night. She calls out into the night to the thing whose presence she still feels, telling it to leave her alone. It hears her, she knows. She drinks a little water and remembers her vision, the Mr. Bork-like figure which told her God was not a Red Sox fan. Dismayed, she considers calling out again, telling the thing to just come take her. Instead, she takes off her Red Sox cap and runs a finger lovingly over it; despite its sorry condition and the now-blurred Tom Gordon signature, it is still her very best possession. Her father had purchased the cap for her, and sent it to Fenway Park with a letter asking Tom Gordon to sign it. The cap had been returned, duly signed, in the self-addressed stamped envelope her dad had enclosed. She looks at the signature again, almost gone, but heartens herself with the thought that even though it has nearly faded away, it is in fact still there. She asks God if he can't be a Red Sox fan, to at least be a Tom Gordon fan. With that thought, she drifts into a fitful sleep.

In the night, the illness deepens within her body. By morning, Trisha is amazed that she is still there. She tests her legs, wondering if they will support her. Trisha is resolved to crawl down the road if she can't walk. But her legs do work, and after much effort, she is able to stand up and reshoulder her backpack. In a fevered delirium, she cannot recall which way she was headed down the road. She pauses, confused, then notices her Walkman on the ground. Too exhausted to reopen her backpack, she wonders if she should give it up or struggle to bring the now useless radio with her. The solution comes to her: she will clip it onto the waistband of her jeans. Before she can do so, another coughing fit grabs her, and she is startled by the sight of the bright red blood which heaves up from inside her. The frightful sight actually clears her mind, however, and she immediately recalls the direction she'd been traveling.

Gingerly, she begins to move again, knowing she can't possibly survive another night in the woods. A few yards into her journey, she pauses to clip the Walkman to her jeans.



That's when she hears the sound, like gunfire, split the quiet of the day. She knows the sound is for real because it startles a flock of crows into flight. Trisha recognizes the sound, not gunshots at all, but the backfire of an old muffler. It is the sound of another road, a traveled road, and it's just ahead. She wants to run, but forces herself to walk so she doesn't expend her remaining energy before reaching the road and salvation. That would be like "blowing the save when the opposing team was down to their last strike." (pg. 201) Such things happen, of course, but she was not going to let it happen to her.

An hour further down the road, she's seen and heard no other signs of life, and begins to think the backfire noise had been only in her head. But as she tops a rise, she sees below her that the road she's on intersects with another dirt road. Trisha moves to stand on the new road. The ruts on this road are deeper, and no grass grows in between them, signifying to Trisha that it is a better traveled road than the one she just left. But she has another choice to make: Which direction should she take on the new road?

Had she turned east, Trisha would have walked herself even deeper into the no-man's land of the woods. But instead, because going east meant the brutal sun would be in her eyes, Trisha turns west. She has no way of knowing that this is the right decision, but only four miles ahead in this westerly direction lies New Hampshire Route 96, the source of the loud backfire she had heard earlier. After forty-five minutes of walking west on the new road, Trisha cocks her head like a dog to listen. She hears the hum of tires on pavement. Trisha prays to God that the sound is real, that she didn't make it up. Her prayer is interrupted by another sound. Behind her, she hears the splintering sound of a tree being broken by something, and she knows what that something is. It had allowed her to get this close to rescue, but would allow her to go no further. Slowly, Trisha turns to face her demon.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Tom Gordon's faded signature on her Red Sox cap gives Trisha the small comfort she needs to get through the night. For the signature, like her, has nearly faded into nothing; but it is still there, and so is she. Stephen King has titled this chapter "Bottom of the Ninth," and Trisha's job has been to persevere through this final inning. With her food supplies gone, her hope is nonetheless restored by her discovery that she's nearly reached a traveled, paved road. But she knows she must make it to safety now, or else never. And as the bottom of the last inning draws to a close, the wasp-god - the God of the Lost - has finally stepped up to the plate for its turn at bat.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The thing emerges from the trees into broad daylight, and Trisha's first thought upon seeing it is, "*Is that all? Is that all it ever was?*" (pg. 205) For the thing which has paced her through the woods reveals itself to be a common, fully grown, North American black bear. It grasps a branch in its paw like a scepter, and as it rises onto all fours in the middle of the road, Trisha realizes it is not a bear at all. The thing that looks like a bear peers at her out of empty eye sockets, and Trisha knows deep in her bones that she is face to face with the God of the Lost. It is sixty feet away, and it has come for her at last.

The God which inhabits the body of the bear calls to her mind, telling her to run from it. Maggots and wriggling flies surround its eyes as it mentally calls out again for her to run. "Trisha looked back at it, up at it, and understood what she must do.

She must close.

It's God's nature to come on in the bottom of the ninth, Tom had told her. And what was the secret to closing? Establishing who was better. You could be beaten...but you must not beat yourself." (pg. 207) Trisha knows that it wants her to run, it wants her to show her fear, and thereby beat herself. But she won't do it.

Instead, she summons the stillness that comes from the shoulders and radiates out around the body like a cocoon of utter confidence. Trisha tells herself she has ice water in her veins and finds within her the confidence to summon the stillness. She pulls her cap low over her brow, the way Tom Gordon wears his. She takes a stance like a pitcher, pulls the Walkman from her waistband, pulling the cord free and letting it drop to the ground with the earphones. Holding the Walkman like a baseball, she calls to the wasp-god to come on if it's coming — batter up.

The bear thing drops its stick and falls to all fours, pawing at the hardpan surface of the road. Then it comes for her with surprising speed, ears flat against its head. From within its gaping maw Trisha can hear the sound of wasps. She realizes it is filled with wasps, of course. It calls silently for her to run as it swift approaches her, telling her it's her last chance. But Trisha remains firm in her knowledge that the stillness is her last chance - the stillness and a good hard curve ball. She puts her hands together, the Walkman feels now not like a radio, but like a baseball in her cupped hands. She takes a beat to strengthen the stillness which now surrounds her, recognizing that this is how Tom Gordon must feel. She thinks the thing may eat her, it may beat her, but she's not going to beat herself and she's not going to run.

It stops before her and sniffs her face. Trisha pauses one final moment to throw off the batter's timing and make it second-guess itself. She can smell its maggoty breath and sees the wasps which line its open throat. It stinks of death, and its face shifts and



changes into faces of friends, loved ones, and the dangerous stranger who offers children a ride. This beast, thinks Trisha, this is the real Subaudible. It rises on its back legs and makes a playful swat, missing her by inches, not yet ready to strike. It calls for her to look upon it. Helpless to resist, Trisha raises her head and looks into its empty eyes. She sees her own death there, and thinks courage and stillness will not be enough. But it's all she has, and it's time to close.

With no further thought, Trisha goes into motion - not the pitching motion her father had taught her in the back yard, but the one she'd learned from watching Tom Gordon on tv. She pulls her arm back, preparing to release some serious heat, and the motion throws the bear-thing off balance. It falls backward, creating some space between them, and that's when the shot rings out.

Travis Herrick, hunting illegally and out of season, had come across the scene some twenty seconds ago. From the rise where he stood, he had seen the little girl facing down a black bear in the road. He immediately aimed his gun at the bear, but it was too close to the child and he had been afraid to shoot. But when the bear fell backward, off-balance, it created enough space between them and Travis took his best shot. He didn't kill the bear, but his shot shredded its ear and it turned and fled. But before it ran away, Trisha completed her motion and nailed it right between the eyes with her Walkman. Triumphant, she screamed out "*Strike three called!*" (pg. 212) and that's when the bear turned to run.

When the bear disappeared down the road, Trisha turned to her savior, running towards her in his hunter's gear. She was not a bit surprised to see that he wore a Red Sox shirt. Trisha, nearly incoherent, asked him if he saw - if he saw the thing; if he saw her triumph. Trisha fell down in a faint before he could answer, but Travis knew in his heart what she meant. Although he would never tell another living soul, he knew that that bear had not really been a bear at all. Travis also knew exactly who Trisha was, having heard about the lost girl on the radio and tv. How on earth she had gotten this far, however, that he didn't know. He picked her up and carried her to safety. Trisha, hovering in and out of consciousness, tried to tell him that the bear had been backing away even before he fired his gun. She tried to tell him that she had gotten the save.

Chapter 14 Analysis

There is a philosophy, often spoken, but perhaps best put into words by former American President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. During this country's Great Depression, he brought new hope to the populace by telling his fellow Americans that *there is nothing to fear but fear itself*. Fear, many people believe, is the antithesis of love. If God represents love, then fear represents his opposite - symbolized in this novel by the wasp-god, the bear-thing, the God of the Lost. This belief is what prevented Trisha from running away from the bear. She knew if she gave into fear, she would have beaten herself. So instead, she summoned up grace and courage and literally faced down her fear. A providential hand sent her a Red Sox fan to shoot the bear, but Trisha knows in her heart that it was she who closed the game, by refusing to give into fear, and by

summoning her courage in the face of it. The battle for her soul has been won, and it was Trisha who got the save.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Trisha dreams that she is in the woods again with Tom Gordon. He stands next to a post with an iron ring bolt, flicking it back and forth with his finger. Trisha remembers that she's already had this dream, but when she looks back at Tom, she realizes the dream is slightly different this time. Instead of his away jersey, Tom now wears his home uniform. The road trip is over. She tells him she closed, and he tells her he knows, and that she did a good job. She asks him how much of it was real, and he tells her everything. Trisha hears her mother's voice call her name, wondering what her mother is doing out in the woods.

Another woman, a stranger, responds to her mother, telling her that Trisha can't hear her. The woods around Trisha darken, and the dream fades around her. She opens her eyes and discovers that she is in a hospital room. Her brother leans over her anxiously, hopeful. Her mom and dad also stand by the bed, accompanied by a nurse dressed in white. Trisha tries to smile at her family, but is too weak to move her lips. She sees her Red Sox cap on the chair next to her bed, and tries to call out to her father. The nurse tells her not to try speaking, and informs her that she has pneumonia in both lungs.

Mom strokes Trisha's arm, tears rolling down her cheeks. Pete, too, cries silently. His tears surprise Trisha, and she is even more touched by them than by her mother's tears. She looks into her father's eyes, and mouths the word "*Dad!*" (pg. 217) She succeeds in reaching him with this silent communication, and he bends down over her, asking her what she's trying to tell him. The nurse tries to shoo them out of the room, and Mom and Pete move to leave, with parting words of love for Trisha. But Dad ignores the nurse, and asks Trisha again what she wants. Trisha signals with her eyes towards her Red Sox cap. A smile of understanding lights his face, and he picks up the cap, starts to place it on her head. With great effort, Trisha reaches her hand out for it instead, and Larry McFarland puts the cap in her hand, and kisses her fingers when she closes them around the ball cap.

The nurse tells him again to leave, but Trisha shakes her head at the nurse. Holding her father's eyes, Trisha slowly transfers her cap to the other hand, and then with her free hand, she taps the visor of the cap, and then points her index finger at the sky. "The smile which lit his face from the eyes down was the sweetest, truest thing she had ever seen. If there was a path, it was there. Trisha closed her own eyes on his understanding and floated away into sleep.

Game over." (pg. 219)



Chapter 15 Analysis

Trisha dreams her divinely inspired dream a second time. The dream of the rusty ring bolts which had earlier saved her life now sends her the message - through Tom's change of uniform - that she has made it home. Trisha's faith in God has been rewarded, and her last act, before allowing herself to finally rest, is to communicate her newfound faith to her father. His understanding smile shows Trisha that she had been on the right path all along.



Characters

Patricia (Trisha) McFarland

Trisha McFarland is quite a little girl. At the beginning of the novel she is a typical nine-year-old who loves her daddy, loves baseball, loves pop music, and adores the cool catch phrases her best friend Pepsi likes to use. But suddenly, lost in the woods with nothing but a Walkman, her packed lunch, and her Red Sox cap, Trisha must rely on her wits, her instincts, and her developing faith in God to guide her over the many long miles to safety. Had Trisha reacted to her predicament as a nine-year-old girl might be expected to react, she would surely have died within forty-eight hours. But from somewhere deep inside her, Trisha summons the strength, discipline, and maturity to last more than a week in the wilderness. And in the end, it is not the search parties that find her. Trisha, with a little help from divine providence, finds her own way to freedom and essentially saves herself.

Her creative imagination is one of her strongest inner resources. The same creative mind which helped her escape from the bitterness of her parents' divorce by retreating into daydreams also helps her cope with the solitude, hardship, and fear she encounters in the woods. She overcomes her fears by imagining that her hero, Tom Gordon, is with her, and stands guard over her at night while she sleeps. Her conversations with the illusory Gordon also help her to clarify her true beliefs about God and give her the courage and faith to (in Trisha's words) "keep on truckin.'" Trisha's character is so realistically human that one wonders if Stephen King really created an *unusual* child character, or if perhaps we as a society merely underestimate our children — perhaps any nine-year-old could be as extraordinary as Trisha if given the opportunity.

Larry McFarland

Trisha is a daddy's girl, and she loves her father more than anyone in the world. Larry McFarland is unfailingly kind to his daughter, and they have bonded over the years with their shared passion for baseball, and their mutual respect for Red Sox pitcher Tom Gordon. Since the divorce, Trisha's faith in her father has wavered a bit, since she has begun to notice that he more and more often smells like beer. Since faith is such a central need for Trisha when she's lost in the woods, she winds up feeling disappointed by her father's weak belief in the Subaudible - his impersonal substitute for God. In the woods, Trisha becomes angry with her father for his lack of faith, but her love for him remains strong, and her first thought, upon waking up in the hospital room to find him standing over her, is to share her newfound belief in God. She demonstrates this belief by pointing her index finger skyward, as Tom Gordon does after winning a game. It is a testament to the strong bond between father and daughter that Larry understands the gesture, and is moved to joyful tears by his daughter's winning attitude.



Quilla Anderson

Trisha's mother traded in her married name, McFarland, for her maiden name, Anderson, after her divorce a year ago. In the subsequent months, her ex-husband has given in to depression and excessive consumption of alcohol, while Quilla has gone the opposite route, becoming ultra-responsible in her attempts to be superwoman and supermother. Quilla's iron determination manifests itself when her son, Pete, refuses to participate willingly in her Saturday outings. These weekend trips are designed to provide her children with cultural, educational, and physical outlets; the outings have become Quilla's new, post-divorce, family ritual. Her intentions are positive, as she seeks to channel her children's energy into constructive activities, but the kids would be just as happy spending their Saturdays at the local pool or better yet, at home. Quilla's determination to show them a better life may also have the hidden agenda of showing up her husband by being a 'better' parent on the Saturdays when Larry doesn't have the kids. Whatever her reasoning, her son Pete despises the outings, and Quilla shows her stubbornness by trying to force him to enjoy himself. Most of the outings turn into mother-son battles, and it is this very bickering which Trisha tries to escape when she leaves the hiking trail.

Tom Gordon

Tom Gordon is Trisha's hero and heartthrob. He is player number 36 on the professional baseball team, the Boston Red Sox. Gordon had once been a mediocre starting pitcher, but when the pitching coach moved him to the closing position, his star took off. Closing out a game and saving the win in the final innings is Tom's specialty. Trisha's father says it's because he has ice water in his veins, and, indeed, remaining cool under pressure is where Tom excels. On the mound he seems to surround himself with a Zen-like stillness, his focus and concentration actually improving when the pressure is highest. Trisha loves to watch him cloak himself with calm confidence before delivering the final pitch. After each game he saves, Tom points his index finger to the sky, as if thanking the heavens above. It is this gesture which provides Trisha with hope during her darkest hours. Tom's apparent belief in God provides her much more comfort than her father's weak belief in some vague life force. Although Tom Gordon never appears in the book, Trisha hallucinates him into being, and he becomes her guardian and adviser in the woods. In her dreams at night, Tom tells Trisha two important truths which she clings to: that the secret to closing is showing your opponent you're better, and that the nature of God is to come on strong when the game nears the end. Both these beliefs help Trisha overcome her darkest fears, and ultimately help her survive her strenuous journey.

Pete McFarland

While Trisha is the peacemaker in the family, her older brother Pete McFarland thrives on creating conflict. The adolescent boy has been deeply hurt by his parents' divorce, and wants to make sure they know it. Not only is he damaged by the loss of his father, but Pete has also lost the home he knew and loved, and most painfully for the boy, he



has lost his friends. Pete had carved a comfortable niche for himself in his former school, where he was head of the computer club and friends with all its members. But at his new school, he is singled out as a computer nerd, and endures the cruel teasing so prevalent in the middle school years. Pete has lost everything, and has so far not adapted well. Unable to gain equilibrium in his new school, his energy is spent complaining rather than adapting. His mother, as the custodial parent, endures the brunt of Pete's complaints. To her dismay, he does not listen to her endless advice about accepting his lot and learning to make friends. Quilla's iron will is equally matched in her son, and perhaps because they are so alike in their stubbornness, they have the most trouble getting along with one another of all the family members.

Pepsi Robichaud

Pepsi is Trisha's best friend. She does not appear directly in the narrative, but while lost in the woods, Trisha often thinks of her friend and the better times they have had. As Trisha's fever progresses, she begins to hallucinate, and so for a time, it does seem to her that Pepsi accompanies her in the woods.

Francis Raymond Mazzerole

The sex offender whom police mistakenly believe snatched Trisha from the Appalachian Trail. The bulk of their manpower is directed towards finding Mazzerole, who has an airtight alibi for the time of Trisha's disappearance. Although Trisha never in her life laid eyes on Mazzerole, this red herring lead causes the police to focus their efforts in the wrong direction, leaving her more than ever on her own in the woods.

Travis Herrick

The hunter who helps save Trisha from the bear-thing. He had been hunting illegally out of season, but his rescue of the child led authorities to overlook his transgression, and instead of being punished, a float was dedicated in his honor at the Fourth of July parade. Travis is the only other person besides Trisha who saw the bear-thing for what it really was: the God of the Lost.

Joe Castiglione

The baseball announcer whose voice keeps Trisha company during her darkest hours in the woods.

Jerry "Troop" Trupiano

Joe Castiglione's side-kick; the 'color man' who provides colorful commentary as Castiglione calls the game.



Objects/Places

Trisha's Walkman

Trisha's Walkman, which she had packed for her hike along with a Gameboy to ward off potential boredom, becomes a lifeline for the little girl after she gets lost in the woods. The sound of human voices coming through the radio helps her feel connected to the world, and the simple pleasure of listening to a Red Sox game allows her to forget where she is for a little while each night. At the end of the story, the Walkman is the projectile which Trisha throws at the wasp-god in lieu of a baseball.

Trisha's Red Sox Cap

The autographed baseball cap which her father gives Trisha as a gift. It is her favorite possession, and the little girl with the big imagination has only to trace her finger over Tom Gordon's autograph on the bill in order to launch herself into a daydream about meeting the famous pitcher.

The Appalachian Trail

It is from this trail, a popular tourist attraction, which Trisha disappears, unnoticed by her mother and brother, who are locked in their usual argument. Her brother Pete can't get the trail out of his mind, reliving over and over the moment when he turned and saw that his sister was gone.

TR-90

The area on the map where the search parties concentrate their efforts in the mistaken assumption that the lost little girl hadn't strayed very far from the trail.



Social Sensitivity

The *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* begins with a note of fear and despair: "The world had teeth and it could bite you with them anytime it wanted. Trisha McFarland discovered this when she was nine years old" and lost in the Maine woods. It ends with a triumphant Trisha reunited with her family, having overcome her fears and the powerful external adversaries she encounters during her nine-day journey.

At first glance, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, Stephen King's tale of a young girl's struggles to find herself while lost in the wilderness, would appear to have no important social context. This absence makes the novel uncharacteristic of King, for his novels have achieved wide-ranging popularity precisely because they touch upon concerns central to American life at the end of the twentieth century. For example, King had protested the Vietnam War as a college student, written of its impact on a small group of students in *Rage*, which he published as Richard Bachman, and finally addressed the damage the war inflicted on an entire generation of Americans in *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999). *The Green Mile* (1996) tackles another significant social issue, the death penalty, and demonstrates that the racist American justice system often executes innocent people especially when they are people of color. Indeed, almost all King's novels address the evil lying beneath the bucolic surface of American small towns—*Carrie* (1974), *'Salem's Lot* (1975), *Christine* (1983), *IT* (1986), *The Tommyknockers* (1987), *Needful Things* (1991), and *Storm of the Century* (1999)—or the even more pervasive evil at the very center of human existence—*The Stand* (1978), *Firestarter* (1980), *The Eyes of the Dragon* (1984; revised and enlarged 1987), and *The Talisman*, which King wrote with Peter Straub in 1984.

While *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* focuses on the struggles of a single individual, King touches on a social issue that preoccupied him in the mid-nineties: the emotional and sexual abuse of women and children. However, while *Gerald's Game* (1992), *Dolores Claiborne* (1993), and *Rose Madder* (1995) center on the psychological horror of abuse, the possibility of abuse is somewhat of a red herring in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*. When Trisha is lost in the woods, an anonymous caller notifies the Maine state police barracks that she had been kidnaped by Francis Raymond Mazzerole, a convicted pedophile. Although Trisha is not confronted by a human predator, the reference to Mazzerole may be King's reminder that late-twentieth-century America is still a place where children are victimized. Indeed, King tends to sympathize with his childish protagonists at the same time that he demonstrates their resilience and, frequently, their ability to emerge from whatever terrorizes them. That strength and resilience are clearly evident in *The Shining* (1977), *Firestarter*, *The Eyes of the Dragon*, and *IT*, as well as *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*.

Of course, children sometimes suffer even when they are not the victims of abuse, and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* also tackles the question of divorce and what happens to children when their parents divorce. Less angry with her parents than her fourteen-year-old brother is, Trisha feels the pressure of trying unsuccessfully to make everyone happy. "And how did she feel to herself these days? Like glue holding



together two pieces of something that was broken. Weak glue." Attempting to escape from her brother's quarrel with their mother, Trisha hears her brother's accusation "don't know why we have to pay for what you guys did wrong!" right before she steps off the path. During her nine days in the woods, Trisha is often reminded of how much she misses her father and of what the divorce has done to her family.

While the divorce has apparently undermined Trisha's self-concept and made her feel like *The Invisible Girl*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* is about far more than what happens to children when their parents divorce. Indeed, what happens to Trisha McFarland is much more primal and pits the young girl against large, impersonal cosmic forces rather than against other human beings. Alone in the woods, she struggles to assert herself against these forces and, in the end, discovers who she is. Like Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, King's short novel becomes a parable of the quest for self-identity in the presence of seemingly overwhelming odds.

Techniques

The *Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* can be placed in the long tradition of baseball novels in American literature, many of which compare life to the game of baseball. The list begins in the early decades of the twentieth century with the works of Ring Lardner and continues with works such as *Bang the Drum Slowly* by Mark Harris, *Shoeless Joe* by W. P. Kinsella, *The Natural* by Bernard Malamud, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* by Robert Coover, and *The Great American Novel* by Philip Roth; and King reminds readers of the tradition with a variety of strategies.

Not only is the title an allusion to a baseball player, but the book is organized by innings rather than chapters, and the last sentence, as Trisha drifts off to sleep, is "Game over."

Equally as important as the allusions to baseball is King's experimentation with narrative point of view. Certainly one of the characteristics that makes King's novels so popular is the fact that readers can identify with his compellingly drawn characters, especially with the characters from whose point of view the novels are told. While King has experimented with first-person point of view in various novels, including *Misery*, *Gerald's Game*, and *Dolores Claiborne*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* focuses on Trisha's perspective while also expanding into the minds of Pete, Quilla, Larry, and even Travis Herrick. Not only do these forays make the reader aware of circumstances of which Trisha would be unaware, but these brief periods serve to trivialize these other characters and remind readers of Trisha's strengths.



Themes

Man against Nature

Since the dawn of man our species has tested itself against nature, and since the dawn of literature, authors have written about this timeless struggle. Stephen King has taken a slightly different tack in his story, which is not actually "man" against nature, but rather "little girl" against nature. In order to survive her ordeal in the woods, Trisha must summon a level of courage and maturity which many adults do not possess. To survive in the woods is an exercise which pits a person's very character against the often harsh backdrop of nature. In the woods, all of the advantages which we have gained as a species from our inter-cooperative civilization simply disappear, and a person is left with nothing but their guts, strength and determination to see them through.

Another aspect of this classic struggle which Stephen King tries to bring across is that it is not, and has never been, man *against* nature. For every human being that survives in harsh natural conditions does so because of the bounty of nature. We are not - or should not be - locked in a war against the very earth which sustains us. Young Trisha is wise enough to understand that her survival depends on the generosity of mother earth, which yields to her the fruit of its trees and the fish from its streams. By acting in harmony with nature, Trisha saves her own life. The lesson she takes from the woods is that the true struggle has always been man against himself; Trisha vows not to defeat herself, and nature sustains her and helps her to keep that vow in the end.

Good vs. Evil

Despite mankind's ability to tame nature to suit the needs of our species, the world remains a mysterious, often murky place, where the forces of good and evil often seem to vie for our hearts and minds. Trisha McFarland finds herself locked in a struggle between these two forces, and the outcome will determine her very survival. Evil is expressed in the story through Trisha's fears, which become embodied in the form of a black bear. The bear is more than a bear; it represents the antithesis of goodness, and some primal instinct within Trisha tells her that the bear's body is inhabited by something more sinister.

Good, in the novel, is harder to define. Trisha's views on God are incomplete, as she lacks a religious or spiritual background of any kind. She tries to turn to her father's view of God, which is not really God at all, but just a weak belief in some vague, benign force for good. His paltry belief system is not enough to give Trisha the courage she needs to overcome her fears - especially when her fears take the form of the bear-thing and start chasing her through the woods. Trisha's own tentative faith in God is equally lacking; of the three robed figures she hallucinates in the woods, the one which represents Trisha's tentative faith tells her that God is too busy with larger matters to be bothered with one missing nine-year-old girl. So due to Trisha's lack of faith, she, as the narrator, cannot



give a voice to God. It is up to nature to speak on behalf of the All-Good, and on a deep level, Trisha intuitively understands that the cooperative deer which leads her to food, and the trout which unaccountably sacrifices itself by leaping into her hood, are direct answers to her prayers, and represent the forces of good. When this helpful force leads her to salvation through the overtly miraculous act of sending her a prophetic dream, Trisha realizes that the true nature of evil which the bear represents is the weak substitute for faith which her father possesses. Better no faith at all than a plausible, devil's logic-type belief that the universal force for good is cold and uncaring. Such a belief is dangerous, Trisha realizes, because it insidiously chips away at one's hope to find a greater good in an often frightening world.

Broken Families

The tragedy of divorce has become a very popular subject for modern novelists, particularly as the divorce rate has risen dramatically in the United States over the past three decades. We are only now beginning to cope with the long term effects which divorce has on the children caught between warring parents - children like young Trisha McFarland and her brother Pete. Trisha and Pete are both deeply affected by their parents' divorce, but each child reacts in a very different manner. Trisha internalizes her pain, acting as the family peacemaker. She tells the reader she often feels like very weak glue bonding her loved ones together. Although she never complains, she feels the pain of watching her beloved father become lonely and start to drink too much. She feels the pain of having her parents, the two people she loves most and is most like, tear each other down and insult the very qualities she admires in them and in herself. And most often, she feels the pain of watching her outspoken brother battle endlessly with her mother. Eventually all of her bottled up feelings surface, and Trisha's decision to leave the trail is actually a small girl's cry for help and attention - as well as an attempt to cause her mom and Pete to worry about her absence. She gets more than she bargained for, however, and when she realizes she's lost, her first thought is guilt at the worry she must be causing her mom.

Pete's reactions to the divorce are more outspoken; he doesn't need to leave the trail to get his revenge on his mother. Pete handles his anger by putting down everything Quilla does, and refusing to be an active participant in the new life she's carved out for herself and her children. Pete's feelings are not much different than Trisha's, but because he is outspoken in his anger, he is designated the family troublemaker. Thus, in addition to having to deal with the divorce, the subsequent move, and a new school, Pete is further burdened with his mother and sister's blame for causing conflict in the family. And yet Pete is not the cause of the conflict at all. The divorce itself caused the conflict, and Pete's role is merely to vocalize the conflict which already exists in the family.

The *Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* begins by transporting Trisha McFarland from her familiar urban surroundings to the Maine wilderness, and the dangers of that shift are clear from the first sentence. In fact, King, who is thoroughly grounded in the American literary tradition, quickly immerses both Trisha and his readers into a typically American



landscape, where he confronts his human protagonist with a seemingly endless and hostile wilderness.

Like many characters in classic American literature, Trisha discovers that Nature is much more complex than she first imagined. Worried initially about her situation, she tries "not to let herself think. This is serious, this is very serious. Trying not to think that sometimes when people got lost in the woods they got seriously hurt. Sometimes they died." Certainly King does not minimize the dangers of untamed nature, for Trisha experiences a violent thunderstorm her first night in the woods; she is bitten by mosquitoes and stung by wasps; she experiences severe hunger and thirst once she has consumed the contents of her sack lunch; she is tracked by what is either a fully grown North American black bear or a horrible monster; and she finally contracts pneumonia, which leaves her wracked with fever, chills, and what may well be hallucinations. Even without possible supernatural explanations for what happens to her, Nature is presented here as unfriendly to individuals who are unfamiliar with it.

On the other hand, with life reduced to its essential elements, Trisha discovers that she can survive in Nature by feeding herself on checkerberries, fiddlehead ferns, beechnuts, and even a raw trout she catches using the remains of her poncho. She also discovers that the natural world is full of wonders as well as things of which she is profoundly afraid. For example, while lost in the woods, Trisha encounters a family of beavers as well as a mother deer and her two fawns. Her delight at the beavers is palpable: "She stood on tiptoes, holding the trunk of the tree for balance. . . . He appeared to have whiskers, and his fur was a luxuriant dark brown. . . . Looking at him made her think of the illustrations in *The Wind in the Willows*."

Although alone in the wilderness, Trisha never entirely loses her connection to other human beings. She is able to fend off starvation because she remembers her mother's teachings about checkerberries and fiddleheads and because she had learned about beechnuts "from science class at school." As long as its batteries hold out, her Walkman serves to keep her connected to civilization as well as to her hero, Tom Gordon; and, even when the batteries go dead, she hangs on to it as her last connection to civilization and humanity. As a result, Tricia has a missile to hurl at the bearcreature. It is a desperate move, and it may well have saved her life: "She looked into the bear-thing's empty eyes and understood it meant to kill her no matter what.

Courage was not enough. But so what? If a little courage was all you had, so what? It was time to close." And even before that final confrontation with the unknown, when she spends the night in the cab of a longabandoned truck, she discovers that the human connection retains some power over the forces of the unknown: "It came for you, it meant to take you. Then you climbed into the truck and it decided not to, after all. I don't know why, but that's what happened."

While it is possible to read *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* as a simple adventure story about a young girl lost in the wilderness, King also uses his protagonist's plight as a metaphor for being spiritually alone.



Like Dante Alighieri, whose character began his famous Comedy having "strayed into a dark forest, / And the right path appeared not anywhere," Trisha is both physically and spiritually lost. In fact, King even uses the same metaphor, having Trisha observe that "she had learned to stay on the path. . . . On the path you were safe." When she tries to pray, she finds that she cannot: "Neither of her parents were churchgoers— her Mom was a lapsed Catholic, and her father . . . had never had anything to lapse from—and now she discovered herself lost and without vocabulary in another way."

In the woods, she encounters three figures that seem to represent different spiritual possibilities. One tells her that he comes "from the God of Tom Gordon. . . . The one he points up to when he gets the save." The next, who resembles her father, tells her that he is the Subaudible, her father's way of characterizing the force that "keeps drunken teenagers . . . from crashing their cars. . . .

That keeps most planes from crashing even when something goes wrong. Not all, just most." This figure confesses, "I'm actually quite weak. I can't do anything for you, Trisha. Sorry." Most terrifying is the third figure who announces that he comes "from the God of the Lost" and who warns her, "The skin of the world is woven of stingers, a fact you have now learned for yourself.

Beneath there is nothing but bone and the God we share." This third figure will haunt Trisha almost until the novel's conclusion: "You could call it whatever you wanted— the lord of dark places, the emperor of understairs, every kid's worst nightmare."

Countering this evil force is Trisha's hero, baseball player Tom Gordon, who serves both as her guardian angel and as Virgil to her Dante. On her first night in the woods, she turns on her Walkman and is fortunate to find the Red Sox game on a day when Gordon wins the game, a circumstance to which she attaches almost mystical significance: "She was lost but would be found.

She was sure of it. Tom Gordon had gotten the save and so would she." King also suggests that Gordon's characteristic gesture after he wins a game is indicative of his faith in God: "Gordon did what he always did when he secured the save: pointed at the sky. Just one quick point of the finger."

Trisha briefly finds faith in Gordon's God when "she pointed briefly up, the way Gordon did. And why not? Something had brought her through the day. . . . And when you pointed, the something felt like God."

Trisha's faith wavers through the course of the novel, but she finally remembers what Gordon had told her when she comes to confront the bear/God of the Lost: "It's God's nature to come on in the bottom of the ninth. . . . And what was the secret to closing? Establishing who was better. You could be beaten . . . but you must not beat yourself." Trisha finally manages to overcome the God of the Lost because of her faith in Tom Gordon and his god but also because of her faith in herself. King concludes the novel with Trisha in her hospital bed suffering from pneumonia but surrounded by a family that has come to accept this God as well. Nodding to her father, she points her right index



finger up. "The smile which lit his face . . . was the sweetest, truest thing she had ever seen. If there was a path, it was there. Trisha closed her own eyes on his understanding and floated away into sleep." It appears that Trisha manages to redeem not only herself but her family as well.

Thus, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* is both a spiritual biography and a bildungsroman—a kind of novel that focuses on the formative years of the main character—which deals with Trisha's emotional development. While she spends only nine days in the woods, she comes to recognize that she has gained a lifetime of experience.

In fact, she recognizes that "in a lot of ways she was older than Pete now." It is also one of the most recent in a long list of novels that uses baseball, the American national game, as a metaphor for the American search for something larger and more powerful than the individual. However, if other writers have used baseball as a metaphor of the game of life, few have taken the image of the save quite as far as King does.



Style

Point of View

The author has constructed quite a challenge for himself by writing this novel from the point of view of a nine-year-old girl. Not only is the story seen through her eyes, for the vast majority of the book, she is the only character present. The narrator, however, is actually an omniscient third party, who tells the tale from Trisha's point of view. But by choosing an omniscient third person narrative style, Stephen King allows himself the freedom to jump occasionally into the minds of Trisha's worried family.

The author also employs the device of fictional characters in the form of hallucinations, which give Trisha an expanded point of view, and allow her to bounce her thoughts and ideas off her imaginary friends. Trisha's hero, Tom Gordon, is a central character in the novel, but he actually represents part of Trisha herself. The imaginative little girl is able to put herself in her hero's shoes and speak to herself from his point of view. Tom Gordon represents Trisha's best, highest self. Since he is but a figment of her imagination, the omniscient narrator never allows us into his mind, but the words he speaks to Trisha are actually her own most positive thoughts. Because her thoughts are spoken by Tom Gordon, they carry more weight in Trisha's opinion, and she is therefore better able to believe their positive message.

Setting

The challenge for author Stephen King in writing *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* was the constrictive nature of the novel's setting. Because Trisha spends the entire book lost in the woods, passing through terrain in which one hill looks just like the next, King must find ways to keep the setting interesting for the reader, even long after Trisha herself gets bored with the monotony of her surroundings. To this end, the author carefully researched the flora and fauna found in the woods of northern New England - not only for accuracy, but also to keep the reader involved in Trisha's ongoing quest to identify safe foods to eat and good places to secure shelter for the night.

The swampy bog Trisha must traverse is by far the most striking setting in the book. Stephen King's detailed description of the revolting quagmire reminds readers that nature can be cruel, and there are forbidden areas which mankind would do best never to enter. The murky, stagnant water is depicted so vividly that no sane adult would wish to cross it, and thus the reader is led to sympathize deeply with the hapless nine-year-old girl who braves the frightening marsh so admirably.

Language and Meaning

The language in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* is easily accessible to readers of all educational levels without being either simplistic or plain. Stephen King's popularity



rests partially on his knack for making his characters sound very human through the words he puts into their mouths. Trisha's vocabulary is that of a nine-year-old girl, and her cute catch-phrases sound like the language a nine-year-old would use. And yet with this limited and immature vocabulary, King still manages to convey Trisha's deepening maturity, along with the profound convictions she acquires through her journey. Thus the language in the novel is artfully deceptive. Stephen King has a powerful talent for conveying plot, structure, and even subtle shades of emotions with resonant prose that is both fun and easy to read. He also displays a strong knowledge of human nature through his dialogue, which rings true regardless of whether he is writing for a nine-year-old or for a professional baseball player. This is partly why suspension of disbelief comes so easily for readers of Stephen King books, for despite the fantastical nature of his storylines, his characters resonate humanity and the dialogue is always appropriate to each character's age, life experience, and cultural background.

Structure

Stephen King is a huge baseball fan, and like many other authors have done, he uses the game as a metaphor. The story is loosely structured on the game of baseball, with each chapter representing a segment of the game. There is a Pregame chapter, and a chapter for each inning. But just like a baseball game, some innings are more important than others. When the author reaches a crucial turning point in the plot, he creates a separate chapter for the top and bottom of the inning. There is even a Seventh Inning Stretch chapter which allows the main character a hopeful break from her traumatic situation. The ninth and final inning is the all important climax, and the author devotes three full chapters to this final inning. Just like a baseball game, the plot proceeds in a linear fashion. The linear narrative, however, is broken up frequently by the protagonist's reminiscences of better days. Several vivid dream sequences and hallucinations further break up the linear action, as Trisha's inner world reacts to and interacts with her surroundings. Both her inner and outer worlds trend towards the same conclusion, and the author does a wonderful job of showing the interconnection between our thoughts, beliefs and actions. Trisha's real world and her dream world both demonstrate her character growth, and dovetail together nicely at the end to bring about a highly satisfactory conclusion.



Quotes

"The world had teeth and it could bite you with them anytime it wanted." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"What's funny?' Mom asked.

'Just me thinks,' Trisha replied, and Quilla frowned-'me thinks' was a Larry McFarlandism. *Well let her frown, Trisha thought. Let her frown all she wants. I'm with her, and I don't complain about it like old grouchy there, but he's still my Dad and I still love him.*" Chapter 2, pg. 20

"Besides, you may never get to be Pete's age, that disquieting inner voice said. How could anyone have such a cold and scary voice inside them? Such a traitor to the cause? *You may never get out of these woods.*" Chapter 3, pg. 35

"Mom would be frightened. The thought of her fright made Trisha feel guilty as well as afraid. There was going to be a fuss, maybe a big one involving the game wardens and the Forest Service, and it was all her fault. She had left the path." Chapter 4, pg. 38

"She shelled it, careful to put the pieces of shell back in the Baggie the egg had come in (it never occurred to her, then or later, that littering-any sign that she'd been there-might actually save her life), and sprinkled it with the little twist of salt." Chapter 5, pg. 46

"*It's the thing you hear, Trisha,* said the cold voice. Its tone was sad on top, unspeakably gleeful underneath. *It's coming for you. It's got your scent.*" Chapter 6, pg. 86

"Trisha stood a moment longer, her thoughts now going to Tom Gordon and that special stillness of his-it was how he stood on the mound, watching one of the Red Sox catchers, Hatteberg or Veritek, flash the signs. So still (the way she was standing now), all of that deep stillness seeming to somehow spin out around him from the shoulders." Chapter 7, pg. 102

"*I don't know why we have to pay fro what you guys did wrong!* That was the last thing she had heard Pete say, and now Trisha thought she knew the answer. It was a tough answer but probably a true one: just because. And if you didn't like it, take a ticket and get in line.

Trisha guessed that in a lot of ways she was older than Pete now." Chapter 8, pg. 141

"The stream's new quietness was what had first distracted her from her fascinating conversation with Tom Gordon (pretend people were such good listeners)." Chapter 9, pg. 167

"One night she awoke with something pressing down on her chest and thought the thing in the woods had finally come for her, but when she reached for it there was nothing



there and she could breathe again. On several occasions she heard people calling for her, but when she called back there was never any answer." Chapter 10, pg. 173

"In its glare Trisha saw something with slumped shoulders standing on the far side of the road, something with black eyes and great cocked ears like horns. Perhaps they *were* horns. It wasn't human; nor did she think it was an animal. It was a god. It was *her* god, the wasp-god, standing there in the rain." Chapter 11, pg. 188

"The thing was watching her, pacing her through the woods to her right. A couple of times she thought she actually saw it, but perhaps that was only the sun moving through the tree-branches. She did not want to see it; she had seen all that she wanted to in that single flash of lightning the night before." Chapter 12, pg. 191

"She tried to tell herself the batteries couldn't have lasted much longer anyway, but it didn't help and she cried some more. Knowing the radio was dead made her feel sad, so sad. It was like losing your last friend." Chapter 13, pg. 196

"It's God's nature to come on in the bottom of the ninth, Tom had told her. And what was the secret to closing? Establishing who was better. You could be beaten...but you must not beat yourself.

First, though, you had to create that stillness. The one that came from the shoulders and spun about the body until it was a cocoon of certainty. You could be beaten, but you must not beat yourself." Chapter 14, pg. 207

"The smile which lit his face from the eyes down was the sweetest, truest thing she had ever seen. If there was a path, it was there. Trisha closed her own eyes on his understanding and floated away into sleep.

Game over." Chapter 15, pg. 219

Key Questions

King's novels explore ideas that are timeless, many of them connected to ideas explored by writers in the ancient world and during the Renaissance as well as in works of classic American literature. By choosing as his protagonist a nine-year-old girl, King reduces humanity to its lowest common denominator and reveals her at the end as triumphant. Emulating the gesture of her hero, Red Sox pitcher Tom Gordon, she nonetheless acknowledges that she did not triumph without help.

1. Parables exist in a number of religious traditions, including the New Testament, Islamic mysticism, Jewish exegetical literature, and Zen Buddhism. An extremely short and plausible story, a parable draws an analogy between a particular example of behavior and human conduct at large and thus illustrates an ethical standard, a religious doctrine, or a standard of conduct. Does *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* correspond to this definition of parable? If so, what moral or religious values does it depict?

2. Gothic literature often relies on mystery and the question of whether the monsters are real or figments of a character's imagination. For example, in Poe's "The Black Cat," it is difficult to determine whether the narrator is besieged by a supernatural monster or whether he is simply mad. The same ambiguity is often true of stories by H. P. Lovecraft, including "The Rats in the Walls." In *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, King also maintains this ambiguity. For example, is the monster that stalks Trisha the God of the Lost? Or is it simply a hungry North American black bear? Does Tom Gordon actually appear to Trisha or is she hallucinating?

3. In an interview, King once confessed that one book he wishes he'd written was *Lord of the Flies*, a novel about the savagery to which a group of English school boys revert when they are shipwrecked. However, William Golding's novel, which he wrote in 1954 during the Cold War, is ultimately pessimistic about what happens when human beings are removed from the structures provided by law and civilization. King is more optimistic. When Trisha confronts the God of the Lost in the middle of the woods, she does not fall down and worship it. What do you think makes King more optimistic? Provide evidence from the novel.

4. Is Trisha a believable nine year old? What strategies does King use to help you believe in her? What might he have done to make her more believable?

5. A work's point of view is the perspective from which it is told. The three main points of view are first person, third person limited omniscient, and objective. King has often experimented with the first-person point of view, in which the story is told by "I," one of the characters involved. A third-person limited omniscient narrator can see into the mind of one or more characters and can thus tell the story by looking into the minds of several characters. A camera eye narration generally looks at events from the outside but doesn't attempt to examine the consciousness of the characters. How would *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* change if King had chosen a different point of view?



6. Writers sometimes depict nature as far more than a setting for the story's action. For example, it can be, in the words of William Wordsworth, a moral guide, "a friend to man," or a major obstacle the character must ultimately overcome. Evaluate King's depiction of the natural world. Pay particular attention to the "Author's Postscript" in which King is careful to point out the accuracy of his description of the Maine woods and the fact that Trisha could have found fiddleheads into early July: "The woods themselves are real. If you should visit them on your vacation, bring a pass, bring good maps . . . and try to stay on the path."

7. Many books that center on the American "national pastime" feature base ball as a metaphor for playing and winning the game of life. Carefully examine all the examples of baseball imagery in the novel. Is it significant that Trisha's hero/guardian angel is a pitcher rather than a shortstop, catcher, or outfielder?

8. Like many writers today, King is interested in gender issues. He is obviously comfortable examining life from a masculine point of view, as he does in *IT*, *The Dead Zone*, all the works he wrote as Richard Bachman, and *The Talisman*, which he wrote in collaboration with Peter Straub. Many of his more recent works feature female protagonists and examine problems unique to girls and women in the twentieth century. How would the novel change if the protagonist had been a nine-year-old boy instead of a nine-year-old girl?

9. In a 1973 essay, "The Horror Writer and the Ten Bears," King described his personal fears in ascending order of importance: fear for someone else, fear of others, fear of death, fear of insects, fear of closed-in places, fear of rats, fear of snakes, fear of deformity, fear of "squishy" things, and fear of the dark. To what extent does *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* depict King's personal fears?

10. King is obviously close to his own family. Indeed most of the works he has written have been dedicated to members of his or his wife's family. King often mentions in interviews that he finds the family at risk and he depicts the horrors of family life in numerous novels, including *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Cujo*, *Rose Madder*, and *Dolores Claiborne*. To what extent is Trisha supported or harmed by her family?



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the challenges an adult male author might face in writing a story from the point of view of a nine-year-old girl.

Do you believe the "wasp-god" actually existed in the story, or was it a symptom of Trisha's pneumonia-induced fever? Explain your position.

Given the context of Trisha's family situation, discuss the symbolism of her becoming lost in the woods.

Of all the things Trisha did right to assist her own survival, which do you think was most important and why?

What inner resources did Trisha display which helped to keep her alive?

The Subaudible represents Larry McFarland's weak faith in God. What do you think the author was trying to communicate at the end of the novel when Trisha realizes that the wasp-thing is the real Subaudible?

What do you believe motivates Quilla Anderson to continue taking her children on weekend outings despite the fact that no one in the family enjoys them?

Literary Precedents

King sometimes jokingly refers to himself as a bestsellersaurus, but it is useful to look at *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* in terms of the American literary tradition.

Indeed, King, who earned an undergraduate degree in English from the University of Maine and taught English before establishing himself as a writer, is thoroughly grounded in literary precedents. Many of his novels and short stories are full of allusions to other writers; and *Danse Macabre*, a nonfiction book that analyzes horror in literature, film, and other aspects of popular culture reveals his familiarity with the American literary tradition.

Of these precedents, one of the most important is the American Gothic tradition, which takes the mystery and overwhelming horror out of the castle and transplants it into ordinary life. Certainly, most of King's novels combine a sense of being in the presence of something overwhelming with locations that are ordinary, even mundane.

One doesn't need to look very far to see similarities in works by Edgar Allen Poe or even H. P. Lovecraft. However, there are several eerie parallels between *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* and the short story, "Circumstance" by the almost forgotten American writer Harriet Prescott Spofford, who writes of a woman trapped in a tree by a mountain lion. Unlike Trisha McFarland who throws her Walkman at the bear/God of the Lost, however, the central character in Spofford's story manages to save herself by singing. While the connections to earlier Gothic literature are palpable, King also seems to be aware of numerous classic works of American literature that emphasize the wonders and terrors of the natural world.

Most notable in this category are works by James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Perhaps the clearest literary precedents, however, are Dante's *Comedy* and Faulkner's "The Bear." Not only do both Dante Alighieri and Trisha McFarland find themselves in despair at the beginning of their respective works because they have strayed from the path, but both find themselves in the presence of significant spiritual teachers (Virgil and Beatrice, for Dante, Tom Gordon for Trisha) who help them overcome despair.

The result in both works is spiritual regeneration. There are also numerous parallels to "The Bear." Trisha, like Faulkner's Ike McCaslin, must come to terms with her family's past weaknesses and, loving them, nonetheless find a way to surpass them.

Furthermore, both Trisha and Ike come to terms with themselves in the wilderness.

Ike, for example, finds himself once he is brave enough to confront Old Ben without the mechanical assistance of watch, gun, or compass; and Trisha finds herself face to face with the God of the Lost once she is bereft of all remnants of civilization—including the food she has packed from home, clothing, and even her beloved Walkman.



Finally, both Ike and Trisha find their spiritual mentors in the wilderness, Ike in the appropriately named Sam Fathers, who serves as spiritual father and priest, and Trisha in Tom Gordon, the Red Sox closer, who teaches her more about God and herself than her parents had been capable of doing.



Related Titles

Because King is preoccupied with broad questions such as the nature of Good and Evil and the search for both meaning and identity in the modern world, it is possible to see similarities between *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* and many of King's other works. There are also similarities in that so many of King's novels feature children; several point to the wonder and indifference of nature; others have their central characters come to recognize that they cannot wait for others to rescue them. Finally, King has written a number of books in which characters seek for something positive in which to believe and a smaller number in which characters find something in which to believe.

Among the books that feature children are *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Firestarter*, *Cujo*, *The Eyes of the Dragon*, *The Talisman*, and *IT*. While the child characters in all these novels suffer and some of them even die, King consistently presents them with courage and resilience in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. In fact, he suggests that the world would be a better place if adults would only listen to the children.

In addition, several of King's other novels have featured the natural world as an almost palpable presence, as it is in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*. Among the most striking of these are *The Shining*, *Misery*, and *Storm of the Century*, all of which feature a natural world that isolates protagonists from forces that might save them. *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, unlike these three works, demonstrates that nature's power is not confined to the extremes of blizzard or storm. In fact, Trisha's ordeal takes place in the Maine woods in summer and turns a weekend holiday into a confrontation with the unknown.

Although Trisha McFarland initially hopes to be rescued, she quickly accepts her responsibility to save herself, a common idea in King's novels. Among the other King novels in which characters come to recognize that they cannot rely on other people to rescue them are *Cujo*, *Misery*, and *Gerald's Game*. In fact, the protagonists in all three stories, like Trisha, ultimately find strength within themselves.

In addition to seeking rescue from something overwhelming, characters in King's novels often seek for something positive in which to believe. Faced with supernatural opponents, as the vampires in *Salem's Lot* or alien invaders in *The Tommyknockers*, these characters often encounter despair when their faith is tested. Indeed Father Callahan in *Salem's Lot* seems to embody the failure of religious faith in the modern world when he fails to stand up to the monstrous Barlow because his faith is too weak.

Most of King's earlier novels suggest that there is little beyond human character in which to have faith, and even that core of decency is often threatened by powerful external forces. More recently, however, he has authored books in which characters find something in which to believe. In *Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne*, that something is a basic human decency and strength of character. In *The Green Mile* and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, that something seems to come from a more spiritual dimension.



In fact, an external spiritual goodness is clearly depicted in *The Green Mile's* John Coffey, who may be an angel or a symbol of Jesus. His hands impart healing to all that he touches. And like the Jesus on whom he seems to be modeled, he is sacrificed. In both *The Green Mile* and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, King seems to be moving away from merely human responses to cosmic evil. By personifying larger forces of goodness in the world that lie outside humanity, he is moving beyond the well-intentioned but generally ineffectual humans he featured in works like *Pet Sematary*, *Cujo*, and *Salem's Lot* to a more hopeful vision.



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