

The Leftovers Study Guide

The Leftovers by Tom Perrotta

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Plot Summary

“The Leftovers” by Tom Perrotta is the story of a devastating tragedy that took place in the far reaches of the world on October 14th three years before the story unfolds. The Sudden Departure as it came to be known was the day that people just literally disappeared into thin air. Some people referred to the event as the Rapture; others refused to attach any religious significance to it and had other theories; most were just clueless. One aspect of the occurrence that everyone agreed with was that the impact on the “leftovers” – those left behind by missing loved ones – was tragic and devastating and had turned lives upside down.

The focus of “Leftovers” is the impact that the event had on Mapleton, a small town in Mid-America where Kevin Garvey is the Mayor. He didn’t directly lose anyone on the Sudden Departure but the event had a profound effect on his life and family. His wife, Laurie, was swept up in the chaos that followed the event and felt compelled to join a cult-like group called the Guilty Remnant where she could express her fears and share her grief with other members. But the group wasn’t as innocent as Kevin first thought. As a member, Laurie became a Watcher, took a vow of silence and could not speak again. Her role was to follow certain individuals around and stare at them to remind them that God was watching. Laurie cut off all contact with her family.

Kevin’s son, Tom, went off to college and never returned. He became involved with another cult called The Healing Hug. The leader of this cult claimed to have the ability to take the pain of the Sudden Departure away from leftovers and absorb it himself. Tom became a follower and initially lost contact with his family. As time passed, Tom realized that their charismatic leader, Holy Wayne, was corrupt and was sexually exploiting young female followers. Tom ultimately realizes that the cult is not for him. He becomes emotionally attached to one of Holy Wayne’s “wives,” a sixteen-year old Asian beauty who has Wayne’s child. Holy Wayne abandons Christine and his other young wives. A devastated Christine runs off and leaves Tom with her baby. Tom follows hoping for a future with her.

Jill is Kevin’s daughter. She is a leftover who misses her mother and brother and was traumatized when her girlfriend evaporated on October 14th while she was sitting right next to Jill. As a result, Jill’s view of life was thrown into utter chaos. She had been a conservative straight-A student but took up with Aimee who introduced her to drinking, drugs and sex play. Kevin is extremely concerned about the welfare of the only member of his family who is left. He sees she is going down a very dark path but he treads softly because she’s had so many devastating losses.

Kevin becomes involved with Nora who lost her husband and two young children on the Day of Departure. She doesn’t let him get close to her and doesn’t want to talk about the event. It is too painful. Nora tries every form of distraction that she can think to avoid dwelling on the tragic loss of her family. But nothing works; the pain is always looming. She wants to runaway and become someone else but she doesn’t know how to start.



Kevin has double worries. He is a father and husband worried about the welfare and future of his family. He is also the Mayor of Mapleton who must deal with three mysterious homicides that occur after the Sudden Departure.

In the end, Tom rediscovers himself with hopes of rescuing Christine. Jill distances herself from Aimee and begins to return to her former identity and its values and traditions. Laurie is astonished with a nefarious mission she is given by the GR but she is in too deep and sees no way out. Kevin is grateful to see Jill's recovery and for the phone call he finally gets from Tom. Just when Nora is about to leave, she finds a purpose to stay and, ironically, she finds that reason on Kevin's front porch.



Part One: Three-Year Anniversary

Summary

Mayor Kevin Garvey walks toward Mapleton High School and the predetermined assembly spot for the parade marchers. It's the first annual Departed Heroes' Day of Remembrance and Reflection. The mood is somber. Grief and bewilderment are in the air. Kevin is pleasantly surprised by the good turnout. Initially, critics were against the parade insisting it was too soon. Over time their objections have faded. Never the less, Kevin realizes that it will be a difficult day. People are carrying signs and photos of loved ones.

Kevin tries to avoid Revered Matt Jamison of the Zion Bible Church but is unable to do so. Matt thrusts a newsletter in Kevin's face. The paper's headline reads, "October 14th was not the rapture!" Matt, like other Christians, had been traumatized by the event fearing that Judgment Day had come and gone and he'd been left out. Matt leads the members of Rapture Denial. Kevin reluctantly promises to read the newsletter.

Mapleton Center is packed. Kevin has left his daughter Jill and her friend Aimee sound asleep at home. He had half-heartedly tried to encourage Jill into marching for her lost friend, Jen. Jill had responded that Jen was dead and didn't care if she marched or not. He's had a rough year with Jill. She has violated her curfew repeatedly, shaved her head and spent too much time partying with Aimee. He keeps reminding himself that she's seventeen.

Jill had been an Eyewitness – something she'll have to deal with for years. She and Jen had been together on October 14th, laughing and watching TV when suddenly Jen was gone and Jill was screaming. Jill's brother never returned from college. Her mother moved out of the house and took a vow of silence. Only Kevin remains in her life; but, he's confused and never says the right thing.

Kevin lost his wife to the Guilty Remnant (GR). He had initially thought it was an innocent group that just wanted to grieve together but they'd become a problem. Kevin lays a wreath at the foot of the Monument to the Departed in Greenway Park. There is a moment of silence following the benediction by Father Gonzalez. Nora Durst gives the keynote address. The crowd grows angry when the Guilty Remnant makes its appearance during her speech. They display large letters that spell, "Stop wasting your breath." Laurie, Kevin's wife, is among them. Kevin tries to make contact with Laurie, but she won't look at him.

Jill didn't want to fall in the trap of romanticizing the missing. She was an Eyewitness but hadn't really seen anything. They had been watching YouTube and suddenly Jen was gone. Jill only understood the impact of the day when her mother joined the GR. She had hungered for her mother after she left. She read a list of her mother's faults when her absence got to her. Now she's accepted the reality that her mother wanted to



leave. Jill only misses her mother when she gets up in the morning. Her father tries to fill the gap but they are not on the same wavelength. Jill asks if there's any word on Holy Wayne, the cult leader who was arrested. They both wonder what Tom might be thinking.

Aimee dawdles on the way to school and makes Jill miss her chem test. Aimee's mother was an alcoholic who disappeared on October 14th leaving Aimee with a step-father she didn't like. Aimee moved in with the Garvey house. The only problem for Kevin was his attraction for the pretty teenager. Aimee was sexy and restless; Jill was a conservative A student. Aimee introduced Jill to the party life of drinking and drugs and sex. If her mother had still been there, it wouldn't have happened. When Jill peeks into her chem classroom and sees her empty desk. She's beginning to feel like she no longer exists.

The FBI arrested Wayne Gilchrest for multiple counts of rape and sodomy, tax evasion and illegal transport of a minor. Gilchrest who is a self-proclaimed messiah, will have a hard time recovering from his downfall. Tom, Christine, a young beautiful young Asian girl, and Tom's roommates, Max and Luis, are watching the newscast together. Max and Luis had been sent from Chicago to assist Tom in the San Francisco Healing Hug Center. Tom is charged with watching over Christine, who is one of Gilchrest's wives. It is the first night he didn't pray for the missing to return. He has come to the realization that they are gone forever.

When Tom started college three years before, he had been a normal young man, a B+ student who was going for a degree in business. He was just beginning to feel comfortable when on October 15th all classes were cancelled. Jill was reluctant to talk about Jen's disappearance other than to say that she just vaporized. There was a lingering doom hanging over the family. Would more go "missing?" Tom learned that a childhood friend, Jon Verbecki, had been working out at the gym when he was suddenly gone. Later Tom found an old photo of Jon who looked terrified as if he was reaching out from the past.

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Tom returned to the university when it reopened in February, but he didn't get back "into" college life. Even being a frat boy was meaningless to him now. He'd stopped going to most classes. He told his parents about his fraternity, avoiding the fact that an active frat brother, Chip Gleason, had gone missing on October 14th. He'd been having sex with a girl named Stacy Greenglass when he evaporated. Stacy had to be hospitalized from trauma. Tom saw Stacy at a party. She seemed fine and was having a good time. He wondered how she could forget Chip when he couldn't get Jon out of his mind.

Frat brother Trevor "Hubbs" Hubbard confronted him. Hubbs was haunted by the disappearance of Chip. They decided to attend a church event in Rochester where a man, Wayne Gilchrest, who was gaining a following, would be speaking. Gilchrest was humble in those days. He handed out flyers with a photo of his son Henry, 8, who went



missing. Tom recognized the fear in the eyes of the child's image. Gilchrest talked lovingly of his son. Tom, who fidgeted in class, found Gilchrest's voice to be calming. Gilchrest confessed that he was emotionally abusive to his wife after his son was gone.

Henry came to him in a dream. Henry was upset that Gilchrest has been hurting his mother. The next day Gilchrest hugged his wife and told her he loved her. He told her to give him his pain. He immediately felt a sharp jolt to his stomach. His wife gasped and collapsed in his arms. Gilchrest proclaimed that he was a "sponge for pain" and wanted to hug everyone there to take away their pain. Hubbs let out a yelp a few moments after Gilchrest embraced him. Tom felt a loosening within after the embrace and suddenly remembered what it felt like to be himself.

Tom quit school. He told his parents he'd be traveling for a while. Tom and Hubbs began to work for Gilchrest whose following was growing just as his ego was. Hubbs resigned. Tom remained a loyal employee of the Healing Hug Movement. He was placed in charge of the San Francisco Special Someone Meditation Workshops. In the face of growing criticism, Gilchrest moved to a remote ranch in Oregon. Tom was stunned to see that six teenage girls were living with him. One of the girls would give him a new child, something Tori couldn't do. Tom was growing uneasy with Gilchrest.

Tom and Christine got along well but she wanted to return to the farm. Tom told her she couldn't go back. The feds would make her testify against Gilchrest. Christine revealed that she was pregnant.

Analysis

There is a somber mood that has settled over the town of Mapleton. The residents are celebrating the anniversary of the Rapture-like departure of loved ones. Even though a celebration is going on, the people are still grieving over their losses during an event that occurred three years hence. A parade is being held to commemorate the Sudden Departure; but, the parade; which was designed to honor the departed, is a symbol of the loss, suffering, pain, and confusion that stubbornly refuse to leave. The last float depicts an empty hearse decorated in black, imagery that brings a touch of reality to the event. The parade is a symbol of moving on which is in contrast with the leftovers who have not been able to do so.

Reverend Matt Jamison represents hubris and false pride. He refuses to refer to the departures as the Rapture. God would have chosen him if that were the case. Matt symbolizes the disruption and chaos that the event caused. He was a minister; but, his beliefs are in doubt and he feels lost. His life has been turned upside down. Instead of ministering to those left behind, he is obsessed with proving that what happened wasn't the Rapture. God would not have left him behind.

Another character who is a symbol of confusion and uncertainty is Jill. She lost her best friend right in front of her eyes. Jen evaporated while sitting right next to Jill. Laurie, Jill's mother, was so traumatized by the events that she felt compelled to leave her family



and join a cult-like organization that reminded people that God was watching them. Jill is so hurt and terrified by the event and the loss of her friend and mother that she has sought refuge in alcohol, drugs, and sex games. Jill, like many of the characters, is in denial about the profound impact that the Sudden Departure had on her. She doesn't want to "romanticize" the missing. She won't allow the hurt to overwhelm her. These people weren't heroes any more than her mother who abandoned her. Tom, her brother, tried to find reason in the event that had no apparent logic by being swept up in a cult whose nihilistic leader presented himself as a savior and exploited his followers.

The premise of the story is a metaphor of the ramifications of events that disrupt the norm and force people to face challenges, deal with sudden change, and survive tragedy. It deals with the differing emotions and reactions that people can have to the same event. In today's world, some react to terror with anger and a need for revenge while others are duped and become submissive and join the terrorists' cause. The occurrence of 911 changed people forever. People were certainly "zapped" during that tragedy and are gone forever. On that day, many people were left behind, some of whom found God while others lost their faith.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Reverend Matt Jamison adamant that the event on October 14th three years hence was not the Rapture? What does it mean to him on a personal basis?

Discussion Question 2

Why didn't Jill want to romanticize the missing? What was her personal involvement in the departures? Describe how Jill probably felt after her experience.

Discussion Question 3

Even though no one in the Garvey family disappeared on the Sudden Departure day, describe how the event impacted each member of the family and destroyed the family unit.

Vocabulary

ozone, pathos, retrospect, ecological, nostalgia, discordant, blasphemous, malcontents, constituents, futile, virtuous, fortitude, exasperated, irrevocable, monastic, emphatic, en masse, interlopers, commiseration, makeshift, banal, troubadour, amorphous, stoically



Part Two: Mapleton Means Fun

Summary

Jill and Aimee head out for the night. Kevin reminds them that it's a school night and cautions them not to get drunk. Kevin doesn't like Aimee living there, but it seems to make Jill happy. Kevin heads for The Carpe Diem tavern to hang out with friends. In the men's room, Kevin avoids looking at the framed photo of Ernie Costello, the town barber. The photo was hung on the wall in his honor after he went missing. Kevin bumps into Melissa Hulbert whose husband had left her for Ginny, a younger woman. On October 14th, Melissa had hoped that Ginny was among the missing. But it was Bob, her ex-husband, who vanished that day.

Kevin and Melissa leave together and are making out in a wooded area when two Watchers, wearing their standard white apparel and carrying lit cigarettes, rush them. Melissa is angry at the older Watcher who had been stalking her. She screams at them to go away, but they just stand there staring. Their goal is to remind people that God is watching them. Kevin and Melissa move on after Melissa spits on the older woman who doesn't flinch. The Watchers follow close behind Kevin and Melissa.

After October 14th Nora moved in with her sister to try to cope with the unspeakable tragedy that had befallen her. When she returned home, she drank wine to sleep and spent her days wandering aimlessly through the empty house. When she happened upon SpongeBob one night, she felt exhilarated, experiencing the show like she was watching it with her kids again. Nora bought an entire season of the show on DVDs and binge-watched it. Ultimately, the shows ceased being amusing and seemed sad more than anything. With each show she watched she felt she was losing her children again and again. Nora takes long afternoon rides on a bike trail during the week, avoiding the weekends when the trail is crowded with families and kids. She realizes that she needs to get a job even though she had received generous insurance payments after the Sudden Departure had been deemed an Act of God. Having a job to go to each morning would give her purpose.

Reverend Matt Jamison drops by to visit. Matt is bitter and obsessed and no longer preaches at the Zion Bible Church. He focuses only on his research and newsletters. He had helped Nora through her darkest hours. She began to realize that he was the one falling apart. He had had not be chosen for the Rapture and eventually had a nervous breakdown and took a leave of absence from the church. He then started writing the newsletter. Matt hands Nora an envelope with his latest newsletter. It's about her husband.

Laurie is in charge of training Meg Lomax, a new member of the Watchers. Laurie sometimes forgets her purpose and the sacred vow she took and enjoys the gossip she hears about people. She is most surprised by how normal people seem and how they've moved on with their lives. She reminds herself to reject anger and jealousy and



keep her mind on saving others. It hurt when she learned that Kevin had been involved with a few women. She withstood the pain and wouldn't let herself cry.

Laurie and Meg crouch in the bushes in front of Steve Grice's house. Meg is growing restless and is freezing in the dark night. Laurie writes the word, "patience" on her pad. Writing on their pads is the only approved way of communicating. Laurie offers Meg a cigarette. It's a hard-fast rule, "A Watcher in Public View Must Carry a Lit Cigarette at All Times." (134) Laurie shoves a cigarette in Meg's mouth and lights it. The Watchers smoke to proclaim their faith.

Laurie recalls how tough training was for new recruits. Laurie had become obsessed with Rosalie Sussman's pain over the loss of her daughter, Jen. Laurie found it difficult to go on and pretend that life was normal. That was what she found appealing about the GR. She found purpose for her life.

After they try to follow Steve but lose him, Laurie and Meg sign back in at the sentry house. They have been assigned a third-story bedroom in the Blue House. Laurie takes a long shower filling the bathroom with steam. There are no mirrors to steam up since they aren't allowed in the house.

During training the Vow of Silence isn't in full force and recruits are allowed fifteen minutes in the evening to express their feelings. Meg is upset. She had been afraid when they were out that she might run into Gary, her former fiancé. Her relationship with Gary had been great until October 14th when she lost her mother. She postponed the wedding and it had been rescheduled but the wedding reminded her of her mother. She kept hoping things would get better. She wanted to postpone it again but Gary refused. That's why she's there at sentry house.

Nora looks forward to the dance at school. Not for the event itself but for the chance to publicly forgive Matt Jamison for the article he wrote. Nora brings her sister Karen with her. No one else would go with her. They thought it was too soon after the article about Doug having had an affair with Kylie Mannheim was distributed. Kylie was her kids' young nursery school teacher. Everyone's attention is drawn to Nora when she enters the party. Kylie is at the dance and apologizes for her affair with Doug.

Aimee and Jill play "Get a Room" with other youngsters at Dimitri's house. Aimee's first spin lands on Zoe Grantham. Aimee crawls over and kisses Zoe without any sign of passion. Nick Lazarro, the cutest guy, lands on Dmitri, but he gets to take another spin. The rules are sexist. Girls have to make out with both boys and girls while boys only have to make out with girls. Jill lands on Nick whose kiss tells her he's not interested. He's in love with Aimee. Eventually, everyone votes for Nick to get a room with Aimee. Jill winds up in a room with Max. There are no sparks between them, but Jill likes him. They talk about school and how Mr. Coleman, the science teacher, claimed that the Sudden Departure was the earth's autoimmune reaction to fight off humanity.

Nora asks Kylie if Doug is going to leave her. Kylie responds that he talked of leaving at first but then the talk just faded away. They only saw each other briefly once a week, if



that. They had used Nora's house once when she took the kids to visit her parents. Kylie tells Nora that Doug talked about her all the time. He always said that he loved her. Kylie admits that she was jealous of Nora because she had everything that Kylie wanted.

Kevin is at the party. He asks Nora to dance. He is amazed by her agility and movements. She makes him feel more awkward than ever. Kevin feels a strong attraction for Nora.

Analysis

The author uses Aimee as the foil to Jill. Initially, she is the antithesis of Jill. Aimee is wild and free and has no interest in school. Jill is a good student who follows the rules. However, after the devastating Sudden Departure, Aimee's independent spirit and lack of empathy for fellow man draws Jill whose life has been completely devastated. Aimee symbolizes a new beginning for Jill, one that is free of worries and cares. Jill aspires to be like Aimee who always does what she wants and seems to be totally pleased with herself. Kevin sees the dangers ahead for his daughter but fears that any strong interference with his daughter's relationship could send her the other way.

The character Nora Durst symbolizes utter victimization. She is a sympathetic character who has lost everything – her husband, her young son and young daughter to the strange event on October 14th. Although it's been three years, Nora has enjoyed very little in the way of recovery. She has repressed her feelings when interacting with others, allowing her pain and depression to simmer and eat at her from within. She's tried going on solo vacations to warm and sunny places, but the darkness follows her.

Nora has been obsessed with watching the SpongeBob TV series because she used to watch them with her children every evening. They represent the past and a visceral connection to her children. The memories of those good times are all she has left, and SpongeBob represents smiles and happy moments together. But like any obsession, hers is not healthy. She finally has to face the reality that the TV show has no connection to her children who are in an unknown place and time. When she discards the show, the revelation that it is meaningless to her hurts; but it is a step toward reality, resolution, and, eventually, recovery.

When Reverend Jamison gives Nora a newsletter that contains a scorching article about her husband Doug's affair with the children's young nursery school teacher, Nora is jolted into the reality of her idolized relationship with Doug. Although the revelation hurts, she enjoys a moment of vengeance when she thinks that she's glad he's gone. Nora's public forgiveness of the Reverend's offensive article is actually a declaration of forgiveness for her cheating husband. The author uses irony when Nora learns that her husband really loved her and wasn't going to leave her from Kylie, the young woman with whom he was having an affair. The irony continues when Kylie admits to Nora that she was jealous of Nora who, in her mind, had everything that she wanted.



Discussion Question 1

Why did Nora binge watch SpongeBob TV show episodes? Why did she suddenly find watching these TV shows actually a negative pursuit? Why does Nora decide she needs a job?

Discussion Question 2

What revelation does Matt make about Doug, Nora's missing husband, in his newsletter? Describe how Nora handles the potential scandal. Why is the confrontation between Nora and Kylie important to Nora?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the game known as "Get a Room" that Jill and Aimee played. Why did Jill feel jealous of Aimee during the game play? How was the game sexist?

Vocabulary

camouflage, impromptu, gabfests, exorbitant, mediocre, vestigial, harbinger, fanfare, appendage, inane, amorphous, conscripted, pariah, platitudes, compendium, scurrilous, improvisational, contrite, mortifying, lethargic, languid, autoimmune



Part Three: Happy Holidays

Summary

Tom and Christine hitchhike from San Francisco to Denver. Christine is tired of hitching rides. They decide to take a bus the rest of the way. Tom gets into an unpleasant exchange with a soldier named Henning who's waiting for the same bus to depart. He notices that Tom and Christine are dirty and that they reek. They're disguising themselves as Barefoot People, dirty street people, to throw off anyone trying to track them. Tom and Christine, like the Barefoot People, wear bullseyes on their foreheads so that the Creator can recognize them. They haven't showered in a week and when they board the bus, other passengers mutter about their odor. They have been fighting the sexual tension between them. Tom's mission is to deliver Christine to Boston where friends of Gilchrest will take her in.

Tom doesn't buy into the hype about Christine's baby being the Miracle Child. But, if Gilchrest is really a holy man, perhaps, the baby is a savior. But, he doesn't know what saving the world really means. Will all those people come back? Henning will soon be shipping out to Yemen. Henning and his family are Christian fundamentalists and believe that the End Times have come. Henning decides he doesn't want to go to war and leaves to hitchhike his way to San Francisco to join the Barefoot People.

Kevin arrives at town hall early to meet constituents. Even though he sold the family business and is independently wealthy, he likes having a purpose. He and Laurie had always looked forward to his early retirement. But Laurie's gone. Running for mayor had been the perfect solution for him. It got him out of the house without having a "real" job. He rarely puts in more than three or four hours a day. Kevin stops by to see Chief of Police Rogers. The Chief reports that there was one DUI and one domestic incident the night before. Roy Grand had threatened his wife again and spent the night in jail.

Three weeks before, Jason Falzone a twenty-three year-old Watcher, had been murdered execution style and left at the Monument to the Departed in Greenway Park. The police have no leads. Surprisingly, there is no citizen outrage that the murder isn't solved. Many thought he got what he deserved. The GR is very unpopular in Mapleton. Even Jason's parents released a statement that their son had become a fanatic.

Kevin and Jill have lunch at Daisy's Diner. Her grades have taken a nose dive. The school counselor had laid part of the blame at Kevin's feet. He wasn't supervising her properly. After graduation, Jill wants to stay home and take some classes at a local college. Outside the diner, he waves at Nora who rides by on her bike. He hadn't seen her since the dance. He had wanted to call her but he thinks she's out of his league. Nora thinks about Kevin and decides he only danced with her out of pity. She had felt a jolt of life returning to her when she was in his arms. She detected what she thought was an attraction on his part. She berates herself for not stopping to talk to him when she saw him at the diner.



On Christmas morning the eighteen residents of Blue House view a PowerPoint presentation. Laurie glances at Meg who is having a difficult time with the holidays. The message of the slide show is that Christmas is meaningless and that the Watchers will not be celebrating it. As in all the presentations, the slide show drives home the point that the old world ended three years before on October 14th. Christmas is part of that old world. The slide show ends reminding the Watchers that they are part of the new world and that they are “living reminders” that the old world is gone. The faces of Jason Falzone and Phil Crowther flashes onto the screen. He is a martyr for the cause and the Watchers must be prepared to become martyrs themselves.

Kevin lets Jill and Aimee sleep in on Christmas morning. That afternoon, Kevin and the girls have a good time opening their presents. A small one is left under the tree. Jill tells Kevin that it's for her mother in case she comes by.

Laurie and Meg ring Gary's bell but no one answers. They are to visit their loved ones to disrupt their holidays and to stop the temptation to reject the Rapture. The GR focuses on the Old Testament with a God who demanded obedience versus the New Testament with the forgiving Jesus Christ. The GR wasn't a religion; it was a way of life in the post-Rapture world. They wait outside for Gary to return. Laurie is concerned that Meg is excited about seeing Gary again. Meg runs to Gary when he pulls up in front of the house. Gary is mystified, even angry, that she's there. Gary is with Gina, Meg's cousin, who reminds him that Meg can't talk. Gina feels guilty that she's involved with Gary. Gary can't stand to see Meg in her white garb . He is unable to talk and walks off.

Nora has disciplined herself not to look at old photos of her kids. She fears that she will develop narratives about them and shut out other fond memories of their time together that may surface. She has found that old remembrances often emerge during her long bike rides. She is supposed to have Christmas brunch with her sister Karen and her family; but Nora says that she's not feeling well. She'll see everyone at their mother's house later. Nora takes a long ride on the bike trail. She isn't looking forward to going to her mother's house. Everyone tiptoes around her as if she were terminally ill. She stops and calls Karen and leaves a message saying she is too ill to come to their mother's house.

Kevin is feeling lonely. The girls left to be with their friends. He doesn't know what to do with the long evening before him. He's watching, “It's A Wonderful Life” and feeling like George Bailey but without a guardian angel. In the midst of his self-pity the doorbell rings. Kevin is flustered to see Laurie and Meg standing on the front porch but invites them in.

Kevin tells Laurie that Jill misses her. He tells her that she and Meg can stay the night, but Laurie shakes her head, “no.” Kevin answers his cell phone. Nora is returning a call from him which she had been surprised to receive. She's been drinking wine and initially thinks of inviting him to meet her for coffee. Instead, she asks him if he'd like to go Florida. He is stunned but says that he could go with her the day after tomorrow. He promises to call her back.



After leaving Kevin, Laurie is lagging behind Meg on their return to the house. The meal they had at Kevin's was delicious, but it's making Laurie sluggish. Kevin runs after Laurie and gives her the present that Jill put under the tree for her. Later, Laurie stops under a streetlight and opens the present. It's a BIC lighter with "Don't Forget Me" painted across the barrel. Laurie and Meg light up using the new lighter. Laurie becomes emotional but since the lighter is an object to treasure, Laurie has to throw it away. She drops it down a storm drain.

Analysis

The author uses a form of the stream of consciousness device in the narrative that describes the private thoughts and emotions of the characters. He toggles back and forth between telling the main story, explaining the thoughts and motivations of the characters in the present, and flashbacks to their past experiences.

Christine symbolizes a new start for Tom. He has grown disenchanted with the Healing Hug and its leader, Holy Wayne. Tom is conflicted because of his deep feelings for Christine. He has kept quiet and not left the Healing Hug ranch because he wants to stay with Christine who he has fallen in love with. Tom must repress his feelings for Christine since things are complicated. She is one of six young wives of Holy Wayne. She is only sixteen and is pregnant with Holy Wayne's child.

Tom is Christine's hero and champion even though she is too immature to recognize it or realize that he is acting out of love. Tom must hide his resentment and criticism of his nemesis Holy Wayne from Christine who still idolizes him even after he's been arrested for multiple crimes. The author tosses out an allusion when he refers to the Miracle Baby that Christine is having; a baby that will save the world. Christine has been duped by the charismatic Holy Wayne and holds onto the hype that the baby will be the savior. The older and wiser Tom knows the truth but understands that he can't confront the fragile Christine with it in her current state of mind and delicate condition. Tom is conflicted about his future. He is ready to return home but wants a future with Christine. He is not sure he can have both. Also symbolizing sacrifice is the dead body of Jason Falzone that was left at the "altar" to the missing, the Monument of the Departed. The imagery is striking... was he the sacrificial lamb?

The character Laurie represents sacrifice, but she is guided by a distorted view of selflessness. She has become inundated in the cult known as the Guilty Remnant. She is a Watcher who reminds others that God is watching them. Laurie has a brief reconnection with her old self when Kevin gives her a Christmas present that Jill had left for her. She is so indoctrinated in her new world that she tosses the gift away because it is something that could be idolized. Throwing the gift that her daughter gave her in the sewer is symbolic of Laurie's complete break with her family. Her daughter made a loving gesture. Laurie was touched; but, in the end, she elected to adhere to the rules of the cult.



Foreshadowing is in play when Patti tells Laurie and Meg that Jason is a martyr for the cause and that they, as Watchers, must also be prepared for martyrdom. The words are tantamount to a warning and hint that something profound and even nefarious lies in the future for Laurie and Meg.

The goal of the cult is to stimulate guilt in targeted individuals. Ironically, in the end it is Laurie who suffers from the guilt of leaving her family. She feels a more profound remorse, one that she could have never imagined, engendered by the juxtaposition of the cult's requirement for martyrdom against values that she had tried to abandon and leave behind. Obviously, those values still linger.

Nora tries to use avoidance to overcome her sadness and grief. She epitomizes being self-centered by inviting Kevin to go on a trip with her. She knows that he has feelings for her and wants a deeper relationship. She is using him in an attempt to avoid her pain. Her obsession with her own misery obliterates any consideration she might have of the hurt that she may be causing him by the false signals she sends.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Tom and Christine disguise themselves as Barefoot People? What is the purpose of the bullseyes painted on their foreheads? Describe Tom's real feelings about Holy Wayne at this point in the story.

Discussion Question 2

What diverse feelings do Kevin and Nora have about each other after they danced together at the party? They are attracted to each other but what is keeping them apart?

Discussion Question 3

What training are the Watchers given about Christmas at the GR? Why are Laurie and Meg dispatched to the homes of their loved ones on Christmas Day? Describe the reactions of Meg, Gary and Gina when Laurie and Meg confront Gary in front of his house.

Vocabulary

verisimilitude, disparaged, prophecy, judicious, bionic, solstice, ballistics, stymied, retro, emporia, nostalgia, festoons, resilience, formidable, fugue



Part Four: A Better-Than-Average Girlfriend

Summary

Kevin returns from Florida two weeks before the January town meeting. There is a big turnout at the meeting. He hopes to adjourn the meeting by nine o'clock which is when he told Nora to expect him. Kevin moves those gathered quickly through the agenda then opens the floor up for Public Comment. Kevin claims to like Open Comment but in truth he dreads the forum that allows all the freaks and cranks to air their grievances.

The meeting runs late and Kevin apologizes to Nora as he enters her house carrying a bottle of wine. As Kevin talks, Nora nods at what she judges to be appropriate times and does her best to demonstrate that she's a good listener, a good girlfriend. But Nora no longer considers herself to be a good girlfriend although it had been part of her identity for many years. She wants to be Kevin's girlfriend but she's forgotten how to do that. Kevin hopes for a closer relationship with Nora but senses that she doesn't. They went to places and did things in Florida. Back in Mapleton, Nora won't go to the movies or out to eat. They stay in her house. They struggle with conversation and watch SpongeBob. She won't tell him why SpongeBob is important to her.

Nora wishes she could be as free and open as she had been in Florida but she shut down when they came home. She hasn't let him stay all night after their return. She struggles with guilt. She had invited him to Florida; she had pursued him but now pushes him away. She's misled him. Nora is a broken woman with no love to give Kevin or anyone.

Friendships are discouraged in the GR. Personal attachments aren't conducive to progress. A little more leeway is allowed between trainer and recruit. The prospect of separating is making both women feel agitated and depressed. The morning of Meg's graduation, they have a tearful goodbye. They meet Patti Levin, the Mapleton Chapter director, who notices that Meg's been crying. Laurie takes the blame for getting too attached to Meg. To their surprise, Patti tells them that they're both being transferred to Outpost 17.

Laurie and Meg move to new quarters called Outpost 17, a small Cape Cod style house. The inside is cozy and warm. They will be living with the two middle-aged men, Julian and Gus, who already occupy the house. Gus writes on his pad, "We've been waiting for you." The men give Laurie and Meg a tour of the house. The women will get the entire second floor to themselves – two bedrooms and a shared bathroom.

Aimee tells Kevin that she thinks it's time she started paying rent. Over the last few weeks, Jill had been putting a little distance between she and Aimee. She doesn't go out every night and tries to keep up with her homework. Aimee is going to drop out of



school and already has a job lined up as a food server, so she'll have money to pay rent which Kevin insists he doesn't want. Jill promises herself that she'll do better, let her hair grow back and start hanging around with her old friends. Kevin tries to convince Aimee to stay in school. She's too smart to quit. But Aimee has made her decision. Kevin tells her that after she works a few months, they can figure out the rent issue.

Laurie is having a difficult time adjusting to being alone in her own room at the Outpost. She had been married twenty-three years and then spent the last year in communal living. She misses being with Meg. She is sure she hears Julian and Gus talking late at night. Life at the Outpost is in general much easier than at the Compound where there are more rules. Laurie is trying hard not to become too attached to Meg. She thinks what things would be like if she returned to her husband and daughter.

Patti had given Laurie her Joint Petition for Divorce which she needed to have Kevin sign. Laurie hasn't taken it to him. The GR had urged her to finalize her divorce. Any proceeds she receives in the settlement will be given to the GR. After all, they have a lot of expenses. She can't bring herself to ask Kevin for half of everything she turned her back on. Laurie invites Meg to sleep in her room when Meg is unable to get sleep because of the sounds of rough sex going on in the master bedroom between Julius and Gus. Laurie says they won't report them because it's none of their business.

Tom and Christine are in Cambridge staying with the Falks. Christine is in the third trimester of her pregnancy. The Falks watch Christine closely and are in contact with Gilchrest who is concerned about her safety. Tom is taken with Christine who is even more beautiful as her pregnancy proceeds. Tom wants Christine to walk to Harvard Square with him but Marcella Falk doesn't allow her to go.

Tom has completed his mission and gotten Christine to the Falks. He is free to leave but he can't. Tom has realized that he's not a true-believer. He is finished with Gilchrest and company but doesn't know what the next phase of his life will be. Christine is the reason he doesn't want to leave. They had shared many experiences on the road and had developed a close relationship. He had begun to think of Christine, her baby and himself as a family. That fantasy dissolved when they arrived at the Falks where Gilchrest's mark was everywhere. Tom intends to stay until the baby is born.

Nora buys a new dress for Valentine's Day and immediately regrets it. She has allowed herself to get caught up in a new relationship. She should have never gotten involved with Kevin. He had made dinner reservations for Valentine's Day. Nora used to love Valentine's Day. Doug always sent flowers and planned romantic evenings. Now she realizes it was all a show, a lie. At dinner, Nora resents the questions that Kevin asks about her past. Kevin tells Nora that Tom had called that afternoon. He hadn't heard from him for months. He's thinking about coming home and going back to school. He's done with Holy Wayne. Kevin breaks down when he tells Nora that he has misses Tom because he is his little boy. He recovers in the men's room and feels like a fool. When Kevin returns to the table, Nora is gone.



Kevin knows he can catch up to Nora on foot but it was her choice to leave and walk home. If she doesn't call to apologize, he's afraid he will be weakened and call her. There are two Watchers standing by his car. One of them is Laurie. She is holding an envelope that she gives to him. She breaks her vow and tells him she's sorry and that there is no other way.

Aimee has dropped out of the "Get a Room" group. The group has no life without Aimee. Jill still has a crush on Nick but he's hopelessly in love with Aimee. Jill decides she is through with the "Get a Room" group, too. After she leaves Dimitri's house for the last time, she opts to take the shortcut home that goes through some desolate areas. Scott and Adam Frost pull up alongside of Jill and startle her. She declines their offer of a ride. Jill rushes through the lot where rows of school buses are parked. A bearded man hiding between two buses frightens her until she realizes that he's a Watcher. The man is breathing heavy but calms down after he uses his inhaler. Jill walks on wondering how she would have felt if one of the Watchers had been her mother. As she runs down a hill she sees a white-clad figure on the ground – another Watcher. His head is surrounded by a pool of liquid.

Analysis

The author portrays Kevin in a largely positive light. Kevin was a wonderful choice by both the people and the author for the position of Mayor of the town. He has strong leadership skills and he is the only character who seems to keep it all together. He puts on a good public persona in the face of fear and uncertainty while silently acknowledging that it is the nuts and cranks who come to the public square to complain. Kevin has shown strength of character, respect and patience – all heroic qualities that symbolize hope for a brighter future.

Nora is a paradox. While she is miserable and naturally wants to be free of her pain and anger, she will not let go of it. Despite Kevin's positive qualities and his obvious feelings for her, Nora still cannot pull herself out of the dark abyss that she has spiraled into. Nora's happiness is in the past. She does not want to step into the future. There is nothing there for her even though Kevin is holding out a strong hand to her. Nora cannot see past her sadness and grief. When Kevin breaks down when thinking about his son who he hasn't seen for several years it is too much for Nora and she abandons him right when he could use a friend. But Nora is not ready to be anyone's friend. Her bitter reaction is based on the reality that Kevin's son is alive and he will probably see him again. Her son is gone forever. She'll never see him. How dare Kevin cry over his son!

Patti has an eagle eye out for any sign of weakness on the part of her Watchers. She sees that Meg has been crying, assumes that the women have formed a friendship and immediately makes a decision that will mark a pivotal point in the lives of both Laurie and Meg. There is a hidden message in Patti assigning Laurie and Meg to the comparatively luxurious Outpost 17 home after alluding to their failure epitomized by their breaking the friendship taboo. If they are failing, why would they be rewarded? Were the women more astute they would have been leery of the move. Patti's



insistence that Laurie immediately secure Kevin's signature on her divorce documents also foreshadows that the calculating Patti has a secret agenda.

Including the episode in which Laurie and Meg listen through the wall and hear what is obviously rough sex between Julian and Gus at first seems out of place with no apparent relevance to Laurie's story. Looking more deeply, the author is juxtaposing the relationship between Julian and Gus against that of Laurie and Meg. While Laurie and Meg are not homosexual, they have formed a close relationship which is against GR rules. Why does Patti assign pairs of Watchers who have violated the rules to the cozy and comfortable Outpost 17?

Jill is putting distance between herself and Aimee. Jill wants to return to the person she was before the Sudden Departure day. Aimee was useful in distracting her from her pain and grief but that usefulness has run its course. Now Jill is emerging as a stronger figure and no longer needs Aimee as a crutch. Aimee has matured herself and knows who she is. She is not a scholar. She wants a job and wants to pay her own way – good qualities that she may have picked up from living with Kevin. When Jill walks away from Dimitri's house, she is doing more than merely ending her participation in the "Get a Room" game. The scene symbolizes the ending a dark chapter of her life and the rediscovering herself.

Tom continues to be besieged with conflict over his feelings for Christine. He is free to leave but his love for Christine keeps him with her. Although she presents an independent persona, Tom knows that she is fragile and immature and needs a positive force in her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Nora feel more comfortable with Kevin on their Florida vacation? Why does she limit their interactions back in Mapleton? Why does Nora feel guilty about her treatment of Kevin?

Discussion Question 2

What reaction did Patti Levin have to Meg's tears? What relevance did Meg's show of emotions have to the GR? Why is Patti anxious for Laurie to have Kevin sign divorce papers? Speculate why Patti assigned Laurie and Meg to nicer living quarters after she showed her disappointment in their performance.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Nora resent Kevin's questions at dinner on Valentine's Day? Describe why Kevin's show of emotions was upsetting to Nora. What stops Kevin from catching up with Nora after she leaves the restaurant?

Vocabulary

integral, mortifying, soliloquies, arcane, intricacies, chaste, anticlimactic, communal, meandering, trajectory, onerous, trimester, archipelago, flagellant, melancholy, stoic, hypothermic



Part Five: Miracle Child

Summary

A sense of foreboding had gripped the community after the second Watcher was found murdered on Valentine's Day. Kevin hasn't signed the divorce papers yet. He knows the marriage is over, but he doesn't want to pile more bad news on Jill. He was proud of how she conducted herself after finding the murdered Watcher. The Watcher whom Jill encountered on the school bus parking lot was Gus. The victim was Julian. Kevin is startled to learn that they lived in the same group house as Laurie. Aimee has matured and has become a sympathetic and platonic friend to Kevin while he copes with his problems with Nora.

Gilchrest has insisted that Christine go through childbirth with only a midwife. No drugs, doctors, or hospitals will be allowed. The Falks are claiming that a deal is in the works that could free Gilchrest by the time the baby is born. Christine has invited Tom to live at the ranch, but he plans to return to Mapleton after the baby is born. Christine still believes in Gilchrest's powers. She is sure the world will soon find out about his greatness.

Laurie and Meg are dispatched to the Headquarters. Patti tells them that new roommates will be moving in soon. Patti tells them that Julian is a hero and that the GR is taking care of Gus. It had taken a lot of courage to do what he was told to do. Patti tells the women that she hopes they maintain the tradition of Outpost 17.

Holy Wayne pleads guilty and is going away for a long time. Gilchrest admitted that he took advantage of many vulnerable kids. He blames the trauma of losing his son for his actions. Nora decides to change her name and change her hair color from dark brown to blond. Jill is unable to identify the asthmatic Watcher she saw to the police. She is being recruited by Holly Maffey who became a Watcher after her husband disappeared on October 14th. Holly invites Jill to visit the compound to see what life is like there and to understand what her mother is going through.

Laurie and Meg are sleeping together in the master bedroom. They don't become lovers; but, they do become close partners. They enjoy a few free days during which they can abandon their vows of silence. Laurie thinks about her life when her kids were little. Meg focuses on her marriage to Gary that never happened. Looming before them is a job they soon will have to carry out.

Nora writes a goodbye letter to Kevin. She writes that the Nora he knew no longer exists. She apologizes for her actions and recognizes how hard he tried to make things work. She shares what happened when her family went missing. They were having a family dinner when her daughter Erin spilled her cup of apple juice. Nora hurried to the kitchen and grabbed a handful of paper towels. When she returned, they were all gone – Doug, Jeremy and Erin. She wishes Kevin happiness. She liked dancing with him.



Tom tries to convince Christine to stopover in Mapleton for a visit with his family. Christine had had her baby, a girl. They are on their way to Ohio where Christine's family lives. Tom is trying to buy a little more time with Christine and her baby before they are no longer part of his life. Tom, Christine, and the baby all have a bulls-eye on their foreheads. Christine hasn't named the baby yet. She tells Tom to name the her because she doesn't care about the name.

Christine was hurt by Gilchrest's guilty plea and his public statements that his wife was the only woman he truly loved. When she went into labor, she insisted on being taken to the hospital. Tom stayed with Christine during the birth. Christine refused to hold the newborn. When they returned to the Falks' house, the Falks were out of town. They left a note asking Christine, Tom, and the baby to leave at once.

Kevin is sitting in his car down the street from his house waiting for Aimee to leave for work. Jill isn't home, and he no longer trusts himself to be alone with Aimee. That morning they had a close call. They were standing at the refrigerator when suddenly Aimee's body brushed up against his. He thought about her all day.

At a rest stop, Tom feeds the baby while Christine visits the ladies room. After the baby finishes her bottle, Tom walks around in the picnic area where he is greeted by a group of Barefoot People. They invite him to go to a solstice festival. Christine is waiting at the car for him. Tom confronts Christine about her sullen attitude. She is upset that the baby wasn't a boy as Gilchrest had predicted. He urges her to hold the baby and take care of it and think of a name for her.

Kevin decides he needs to have a talk with Aimee and confess to his attraction for her and ask her to move out. He needs to wean himself from Aimee – her warm smile in the morning and the positive feeling and promise she gives him. While Kevin is away, Aimee packs all her belongings. She tells Jill that it's time she moves out. Kevin doesn't know she's leaving. She's going to stay with a friend for a while.

Tom is astonished that Mapleton looks exactly like it did two years before. While he goes to the bathroom, Christine abandons him and the baby. He thinks that she must have left with the Barefoot People. Christine isn't ready for the responsibility of a baby. She doesn't realize how much better off she is without Gilchrest.

With trembling hands, Laurie has Meg pinned against a brick wall at the elementary school with the gun barrel just inches away from Meg's temple. Meg tells Laurie that she's doing her a favor. A car is waiting for Laurie to take her away from Mapleton. But, Laurie can't do it. Meg takes the gun from Laurie and shoots herself. Laurie climbs into the back of the waiting getaway car. She drops the gun into a plastic bag held open by one of the men in the front seat. She is handed tissue to wipe the blood from her face. Laurie settles into her seat as the car takes off for parts unknown.

Nora walks across town to deliver the letter to Kevin. Leaving town is more difficult than she thought. She can't decide where to go or what new name to give herself. Her stumbling block was selling her house. She heads for the mailbox on Kevin's dark front



porch. She almost trips on a small object on the porch. It's a baby. There's a note that says the baby has no name and needs to be taken care of. Tom speeds out of town. Maybe someday he could return with Christine to reclaim the baby. He is heading to the solstice festival to find her.

Jill is dreading her visit to the compound. As Jill walks toward the Guest House, she is startled by a gunshot coming from the direction of the nearby school. The Frost twins pull up next to her and ask if she needs a ride. She goes with them and thinks of an excuse that she can give Holly for not showing up.

Kevin receives a text message from Jill that Aimee moved out. He feels relieved that he doesn't have to ask Aimee to leave but sad that she's gone. She's another person he cared about who has moved on. As he approaches the front door, he realizes that a slender blonde woman is standing there. As he nears her, he realizes that it's Nora and that she's holding a baby. She smiles and says, "Look what I found."

Analysis

Fear and worry has shifted from the Sudden Departures to the series of murders. In a plot twist, obvious connections between the murders and the GR have been revealed. Kevin's worries are increased because his wife Laurie was a roommate of the murdered man and his daughter, who is already frail and recovering, discovered the latest body. Kevin will have to call upon his strength and leadership skills to help support the community and bring them through yet another tragedy.

Patti hinted at her real agenda by declaring that the murdered Julian was a hero. The subtext of her reaction was that Julian had become a martyr for the cause. There was a not-so-subtle inference that GR was involved in the murder by her statement that Gus, who was being "taken care of," had fulfilled his duties. What exactly were those duties?

Gus was discovered hiding and out of breath by Jill right before she discovered Julian's body. Laurie and Meg were assigned to Outpost 17 after they became a failure in Patti's eyes. Julian and Gus were gay lovers something that could not have been sanctioned by the GR since even friendships were verboten.

The author provides a sufficient number of hints to pose the question, "Did Gus kill Julian?" There is also enough foreshadowing to make the theory that either Laurie or Meg might be the next to be targeted for martyrdom plausible. This suspicion is confirmed when Jill is given the mission to kill Laurie. Although Patti and the powers that be at the GR considered their martyrs as successes for their cause, the dead bodies of the slain Watchers were actually symbols of the GR's failure.

Christine is hurt by Holy Wayne's rejection. She is too immature to realize that it was a good break for her. Tom shows some of the same restraint and strength as his father by sticking with Christine. He is in love with her and is willing to be patient and pursue a future with her. Ironically, Jill feels some temptation to join the same cult as her mother,



but in the end it turns out that Jill is more like her father. She has the strength to reject the appeals of a recruiter who is trying to lure her into the GR.

At the novel's end, Christine's baby remains unnamed. She is a symbol of hope for both Nora and Kevin. Perhaps, the child is even a chance for them to have a future together.

With all the loose ends at the book's conclusion, the story was set up for a sequel to answer all the unexplained.

Discussion Question 1

What causes Christine to finally give up on her relationship with Holy Wayne? Describe Christine's relationship with the baby and the reasons she is struggling in her new role as a mother.

Discussion Question 2

What tragedy occurs between Laurie and Meg? Why were they given this final mission? What were the emotions of Laurie and Meg during their last time together?

Discussion Question 3

Although Tom never ascribed to the notion that Christine's baby would be the Miracle Baby, describe how the little infant might in a sense be a miracle baby – small m, small b. What loose ends remain at the end of the story that point to a possible sequel?

Vocabulary

foreboding, genocidal, circadian, paranoid, propaganda, trepidation, apostolic, daunting, noxious, riveting, viscerally, mewling, copacetic, catatonic, tenacity, extricated, insidious, solstice, mantra, symmetry



Characters

Kevin Garvey

Kevin Garvey is the Mayor of Mapleton, a small town in Mid-America. Three years before, the town had been devastated by the Sudden Departure which occurred on October 14th. The Sudden Departure was an event felt around the world. As Mayor, Kevin has to deal with the grief and sadness that maintains a grip on the town as well as his own worries and concerns about the tragic day's impact on him and his family.

Kevin had everything going for him as a young man. He had enjoyed being a star on his high school's football team and became a prominent businessman in town by expanding his family's chain of liquor stores and making them highly profitable. He was eventually able to sell the business and retire. The year before, 200 citizens petitioned him to run for Mayor of Mapleton. Subsequently, he accepted the nomination of the Hopeful Party and became its mayoral candidate. He won in a landslide.

Kevin has to cope with the trauma of his daughter, Jill, who was an Eyewitness to a friend's "evaporation." Jill had been a great student but after the shocking turn of events on Sudden Departure day she had fallen under the influence of her friend Aimee who was leading her down a dark path of alcohol, drugs, and sex. Kevin tries to gently nudge her in the right direction, but he doesn't want to be too insistent after the devastation Jill experienced from the Sudden Departure. Kevin is also coping with his wife Laurie leaving home and joining a strange cult. She takes a vow of silence and abandons her family to become a Watcher. As a Watcher she follows certain targeted individuals around to remind them that God is watching them. Kevin's son, Tom, also joined a cult called the Healing Hug whose leader turns out to be a fraud and a criminal.

Kevin becomes involved with Nora who lost her husband and two children in the Sudden Departure. She doesn't want him to get too close. As the story ends, Nora seems to have some hope and resolution about the tragedy which gives Kevin some hope. Ironically, the apparent change in Nora's attitude was indirectly thanks to Kevin's son Tom.

Jill Garvey

Jill Garvey is the 17-year-old daughter of Kevin and Laurie Garvey. Jill is a conservative young girl and a straight-A student. However, everything changes drastically for her when on the Sudden Departure day when 87 of her fellow citizens of Mapleton disappear into thin air. They were not kidnapped, and they did not run away; they were simply gone. What made the situation worse for Jill was that her friend Jen was sitting right next to her on the couch watching YouTube when Jen suddenly evaporated. Jill's distress was doubled when her mother felt compelled to join a cult to prepare for the apocalypse. Her mother took a vow of silence and hasn't been home or talked to Jill



since she left the year before. Jill misses her mother and is deeply wounded by the abandonment. Jill takes another blow when her brother who was away at school never returns. He joined a cult, quit school, and hasn't been home in years.

Jill is in grief and suffering from great despair. She wants to jump out of her skin. Since she cannot do that, she does the next best thing and undergoes a change in appearance and personality. She begins hanging out with Aimee who introduces Jill to sex, drugs, and drinking. Jill's grades plummet, and she runs the risk of missing out on attending a good college. Kevin is greatly worried about Jill and her future, but he goes soft on her because he knows how fragile she is and that she can't any more pressure.

Jill is nearly recruited by a GR Watcher, but she decides against a planned visit and has no interest in the cult. Eventually, Jill works her way through her issues and decides she wants to return to her original identity. She distances herself from Aimee and finds resolution about the tragedies involved with Sudden Departure day. She isn't fully recovered, but she is well on her way.

Laurie Garvey

Laurie Garvey feared that the end of the world was coming and that she must make drastic sacrifices in order to be blessed and survive the apocalypse. She was compelled to join a cult known as the Guilt Remnant. She left Kevin, her husband, and her daughter Jill. Kevin thought it was an innocent group that merely got together to share their grief and express their fears. But the group isn't so innocent; in fact, it is hardcore.

Laurie is required to take an oath of silence in order to become a Watcher. As a Watcher, Laurie must wear white and smoke cigarettes as a sign of her faith. Also, she must follow certain individuals to remind them that God is watching.

Laurie is assigned to train a new girl, Meg. The two form a friendship which is taboo in the GR. They aren't doing well in their watching assignments and both are sent to stay at Outpost 17. They can't believe their good fortune. Outpost 17 is a large, comfortable, ranch style house stocked with all the food one can imagine. Conditions are far superior to their living quarters at the Compound. But the nice house and all the food is just a ploy. What Laurie and Meg don't know initially is that they will be required to make a profound sacrifice that by the Grace of God will yield a martyr for the GR.

Tom Garvey

Tom Garvey was not directly lost on Sudden Departure Day. He went away to college after the Sudden Departure. His mother collapsed under the weight of her delusion and fear. His father tiptoed around his mother like she might break – which happened eventually. His sister freaked out after her friend evaporated before her eyes. Tom was a smart kid who knew that everything was changing forever.



Tom attends a talk by a man, Wayne Gilchrest, who is gaining a following on the Internet. Gilchrest claims to be able to hug the pain of the Leftovers away from them and absorb it himself. Tom is vulnerable to a way that he can help people like his mother and sister and feels he is being called to help Gilchrest who is by then known as Holy Wayne.

Tom eventually becomes disillusioned in Holy Wayne, but then he falls for one of Holy Wayne's six young wives. Christine is a beautiful Asian girl of sixteen who is pregnant with Holy Wayne's child. The FBI arrests Holy Wayne on multiple federal crimes. Christine has the baby, but she isn't ready for that responsibility. When Tom is driving Christine to her family home, she abandons Tom and the baby at a rest stop. He sees to it that the baby is cared for and takes off after Christine hoping for a future with her.

Nora Durst

Nora Durst is the Grand Marshall and keynote speaker at the three-year anniversary of the departures. She lost her whole family on October 14th. She, her husband and two young children were having dinner in the dining room. Her 3-year-old daughter, Erin, spilled her apple juice which sent Nora running for paper towels in the kitchen. When she returned seconds later, all three were gone. She has never seen or heard from them and no one can explain what happened to them and the other departed.

Naturally, Nora is nearly destroyed by the devastating tragedy. Three years after the event, she is still struggling with her pain and grief. She begins binge-watching SpongeBob TV show episodes because it makes her feel closer to her children. She takes many long bike rides to distract her from her new reality. She tries going on vacations and other activities that might blunt the impact of the departures. But nothing works.

Kevin runs into Nora at a community dance and is immediately taken with her. They begin dating, but Nora won't let him get too close. Nora finally decides to change her name, bleach her dark hair blond and start over again somewhere else. Just as she's delivering a goodbye letter to Kevin, she stumbles onto a baby lying in a carrier on Kevin's front porch. She picks the baby up just when Kevin comes home. She looks at Kevin and smiles and says, "Look what I found." The story ends there but it ends on a positive note and one that begs for sequel.

Aimee

Aimee's alcoholic mother had been taken on Sudden Departure day. Aimee becomes a fixture in Kevin's house before he realizes it. Aimee moves into Kevin's house and takes over Tom's bedroom. Jill tells Kevin that if Aimee remains living with her step-father it won't be healthy or safe, as her step-father has made advances toward her. Aimee is what Jill needs to distract her from her pain, but Aimee isn't "good" for Jill. Aimee introduces Jill to sex, drugs and alcohol. Jill's friends blame Aimee for the changes in Jill, and they are right, but Jill needs to change at least temporarily.



Kevin, who is trying to hold everything together, can't help but notice Aimee's beauty and sex appeal. He fights his attraction to her. She becomes a good friend and talking partner for Kevin. She's much more amenable than his own daughter. Aimee never loved school and decides to quit school. She senses that the attraction between her and Kevin can't lead to any good place. She is mature enough to pack her things and leave.

Holy Wayne

Wayne Gilchrest lost his beloved 6-year-old son Henry in the Sudden Departure. He and his wife were heartbroken. He was unkind and abusive toward his wife after Henry's departure, taking out his hurt and grief on her. Henry came to Gilchrest in a dream one night and told his father not to hurt his mother. Rather, he should help her, hug her. The next day Wayne hugged his wife and there was a strange sensation that both Gilchrest and his wife experienced. She felt a release of the tension and pain within and he felt as though he was punched in the stomach.

Gilchrest begins giving talks at small churches and other venues. He tells his story, hugs Leftovers, and 'takes their pain'. Wayne gains a following on the Internet, and soon the legend of Holy Wayne went viral. He has thousands upon thousands of followers. Tom Garvey becomes one of those followers and works for Holy Wayne at the Healing Hug ranch.

Gilchrest's "gift" goes to his head and his ego grows in tandem with his legend. He begins molesting young female followers and through his charisma and "power" he takes over their lives. He has six young wives in addition to his wife of many years. The FBI is on his tail and ultimately he is arrested on multiple charges. He pleads guilty and apologizes for his sins and crimes.

Christine

Christine is the 16-year-old bride of middle-aged Holy Wayne. She is one of six young wives who are in addition to Holy Wayne's wife of many years. Christine is totally infatuated with the charismatic Holy Wayne and believes that he will save the world. Holy Wayne is arrested by the FBI on multiple federal counts just when Christine is ready to deliver their baby. When Holy Wayne pleads guilty to the charges against him and proclaims that his first wife is the only woman he ever loved, Christine, Tom and the baby head for Christine's family home in Ohio. Tom has fallen in love with Christine and is hurt when she abandons him and the baby without an explanation. After Tom sees to it that the baby is cared for, he takes off for Ohio to try to find Christine in hopes of having a future with her.

Ralph Sorrento

Ralph Sorrento, the town's plumber, stops Kevin complaining that he never answers his emails. Ralph empathically tells Kevin that he's not going to pay the \$100 fine for



shooting a pack of stray dogs. What made matters worse was that one of the dogs ran off badly wounded and died in front of the Little Sprouts Academy and some of the kids watched the suffering animal die. Kevin asks Ralph to call Animal control in the future. Ralph tells Kevin to tell the cops he'll be waiting for them with his shotgun when they come to collect the fine.

The Reverend Matt Jamison

The Reverend Matt Jamison was the pastor of the Zion Bible Church. After the Sudden Departure day, Matt is obsessed with proving that what happened to the missing people was not the Rapture. He has a breakdown over his quest and gives up his position as church pastor. He devotes all his time to a newsletter that pokes holes in claims that the Rapture had occurred. His obsession is not based on religion as much as it is based on hubris. If the event had been the Rapture, God would have most certainly chosen him and not left him behind.

Dr. Hillary Edgers

A photo of Dr. Hillary Edgers was on the front page of a newsletter that Reverend Jamison distributed. She was a pediatrician who along with eighty-seven other residents and untold of millions around the world disappeared three years before. Matt insisted that these missing people not be treated like heroes. Matt digs up some dirt about Hillary and includes it in an article about her. Kevin points out that Hillary and the others shouldn't be disparaged. No one needed to know who Hillary slept with in college.

Jen Sussman

Jen really wasn't really Jill's best friend, but they had grown up together because their mothers were best friends. Suddenly, one day Jen had a killer shape and drew the attention of new friends – the popular kids headed by Hillary Beardon. Jen drifted away from Jill. It was a hard transition for Jill. They didn't see each other much; so, it was an unusual occasion that Jill and Jen happened to be together on October 14th when Jen evaporated.

Trevor “Hubbs” Hubbard

One evening at school, another student named Trevor “Hubbs” Hubbard confronts Tom. He sees through the veneer to the depression that Tom is suffering from. Hubbs tells Tom about a guy on the Internet who lost his son in the event. They go together to listen to the man, Wayne Gilchrest, who later becomes the celebrated Holy Wayne with millions of followers. Tom and Hubbs both work for Holy Wayne at one of his centers.



Mark Henning

Mark Henning is a soldier who Tom encounters at a bus terminal when he and Christine are traveling cross-country to Boston. Henning notices the “aroma” of Tom and Christine who haven’t showered in a week. They are disguised as Barefoot People who don’t consider hygiene a top priority. Henning is scheduled to be shipped out to Yemen in the next week. After talking with Tom, Henning becomes interested in the Barefoot cult and decides he doesn’t want to go to war. He goes AWOL and starts hitching his way to San Francisco to join the Barefoot People.

Rick Malvern

Rick Malvern was Mapleton’s mayor before Kevin was elected to the position. Rick burned his house down in an act of purification and now lives in a tent in his front yard.

The Falks

After Holy Wayne is arrested by the FBI, he arranges for Christine to stay in Boston at the home of his friends, the Falks. The Falks are followers of Holy Wayne and keep an eye on every movement Christine makes. After Holy Wayne pleads guilty to the federal charges, the Falks ask Christine and Tom to leave at once.

Patti Levin

Pattie Levin is the director of the local chapter of the Guilty Remnant. She is a sharp, astute woman who stringently enforces the laws of the cult. When she sees that Laurie and Meg have formed a friendship, which is against the cult’s rules, she assigns them to a house where she set up failed Watchers for a unique mission.

Phil Crowther

Phil Crowther was a Watcher, a middle-aged man and father of two. He was proclaimed GR’s first martyr after being shot to death in the Compound by the police during a raid. The police suspected that two missing girls were in the Compound.

Jason Falzone

Jason Falzone was a Watcher. He was murdered and his dead body was left at the foot of the Monument to the Departed in Greenway Park. He was revered by the GR and considered a true martyr for the cause.

Gus and Julian

Gus and Julian are the roommates of Laurie and Meg at Outpost 17. Gus and Julian are homosexual lovers. Julian's body is discovered by Jill one dark night. After the incident, Gus is nowhere to be found.

Al and Josh

Patti arranges for Al and Josh to move into Outpost 17 after Julian and Gus are no longer there. They are enthusiastic about living in the cozy house. Laurie thinks to herself that they should enjoy it while they can.

The Frost Twins

The Frost twins, Adam and Scott, seem like slackers to Jill. However, they accidentally intercede when Jill is on her way for a visit to the GR Compound. She takes a ride with them and, instead of going to the Compound, she goes to their house and watches them play ping-pong. They aren't slackers after all.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Sudden Departure

The Sudden Departure occurred three years before the start of the story. It was the day on October 14th that certain people in Mapleton disappeared into thin air. They just evaporated according to some Eyewitnesses. Some called it the Rapture; others refused to attach any religious meaning to it. What everyone had to agree on was that October 14th devastated the community. Sudden Departures also occurred worldwide on the same day.

Commemorative Parade

A police motorcade leads the parade that includes among others floats representing local civic and commercial establishments, marching bands, dancers and karate kids. It seemed like a typical parade until the last vehicle passes by. It's a flatbed truck draped in black with a completely empty bed. The parade marks the third anniversary of the October 14th Sudden Departure. The parade with its lively floats are in contrast to the mood of the town and of those left behind.

The Leftovers

Three years before this story unfolds, the town of Mapleton along with the rest of the world is struck with an event during which 87 residents of the small town disappeared into thin air. Some refer to it as the Rapture while others are sure that it is not the Rapture. Most have no clue what it was that took their loved ones away. What everyone agreed to is that those left behind are devastated and are referred to as the Leftovers.

The Guilty Remnant

The Guilty Remnant, referred to as the GR, is a cult-like group that rose to prominence in Mapleton after the Sudden Departure. The Guilty Remnant recruits individuals to be Watchers. The Watchers follow people around and stare at them to remind them that God is watching them. Laurie Garvey joined the group because she felt it gave her life purpose after the Sudden Departure. The GR presents itself as a innocent group that was formed just to grieve. There is a nefarious side to the group that is revealed near the conclusion of the story.

The Watchers

The Watchers are part of the Guilty Remnant which is a cult-like organization whose members must take a vow of silence. Watchers are tasked with following and watching



individuals targeted for surveillance. The Watchers wear all white, express themselves with pencil and pad because they cannot speak and they all smoke cigarettes. They claim that smoking cigarettes is a show of their faith. The Watchers confront their targets by just staring at them. Their mission is to remind the people they watch that God is also watching them.

SpongeBob

Nora Durst watches SpongeBob every evening because she and her kids always watched it before bed time. It was a way for her to maintain a contact with her children. Nora takes her SpongeBob watching seriously. She purchases the entire series on DVD and binge watches the shows over and over and takes scrupulous notes about each episode. She finds it clever and edgy and a symbol of hope, of better times to come. To her it is a symbol of reunion that she hopes for more than anything. She comes to a point that the TV shows make her sad. She admits to herself that neither the TV shows nor anything else will bring her children back.

The Healing Hug

Tom becomes involved with Wayne Gilchrest who lost his young son in the Sudden Departure. Gilchrest gains a small following when he appears at churches and other community venues and talks about his experiences. He is appealing and charismatic. He tells the groups that after his young missing son came to him in a dream, he was able to take the pain from Leftovers by hugging them and absorbing the pain himself. He forms the Healing Hug, becomes famous as Holy Wayne and has a huge following.

The Eyewitness

It was rare for someone to be an Eyewitness to the disappearance of one of the departed. Some felt it was a special honor to witness a disappearance. Jill was sitting right next to her friend Jen when she literally evaporated in front of Jill's eyes. Jill does not think there is anything special about her experience. In fact, she is traumatized and haunted by the event.

The Outpost 17 Tradition

Laurie and Meg are assigned to live with roommates Gus and Julian at Outpost 17 which is a comfortable and roomy ranch style house. Laurie and Meg are thrilled with the move from their cramped rooms at the Compound. Patti, the local director of the GR, sounds an ominous note when she tells the women that she hopes they continue the tradition of Outpost 17. She doesn't explain what that tradition is but a short while later, Julian is murdered and Gus is nowhere to be found.



The Barefoot People

Tom and Christine disguise themselves as Barefoot People on their cross-country drive from San Francisco to Boston. The Barefoot People are a religious sect who have very low hygienic standards and often offend others with their body order. They are barefoot most of the time. The only footwear that is allowed are flip flops which they can wear in the snow. The Barefoot people are distinguished by the bullseyes painted on their foreheads so that God could spot them right away.



Settings

Mapleton

The story takes place in a Midwestern town called Mapleton. It is still devastated by the impact of the Sudden Departure day even though it has been three years since the event took place. Kevin Garvey is the Mayor of Mapleton and he has coordinated with other officials and citizens to organize a commemorative parade in honor of the departed. As Kevin rides down the parade route, he takes note of all the sad faces of people holding photos of their missing loved ones or wearing t-shirts with their images. The last float in the parade is decorated like an empty hearse.

The Guilty Remnant Compound

The Compound consists of a Sentry House where the Watchers are required to sign in at night. There are strict security measures surrounding the Compound because the cops, equipped with a search warrant and battering ram, had once raided it in the middle of the night. They were looking for two missing little girls. The girls weren't there but Phil Crowther, a middle-aged father of two, was shot to death by the cops. Laurie lived in the Gray House at the Compound until she began training Meg. They both are staying at the Blue house during Meg's training. Patti Levin is the Director of the Mapleton chapter of the GR and on occasion calls the Watchers into coach them on their performance.

Carpe Diem

Kevin is the most level-headed character in the story of "The Leftovers." He is a husband and father who was impacted by the departures, but he is also the Mayor so he has had to keep a composed exterior. If he didn't, he couldn't expect anyone else to and things could quickly deteriorate. One of his favorite places to go in the evening is the Carpe Diem Bar and Grill. He is a social person who often finds himself alone. Meeting friends at the Carpe Diem helps him stay balanced and provides a way to express his frustrations. He plays for the softball team that is sponsored by the tavern. He avoids looking at the photo of the missing Ernie Costello a frequenter of the bar that hangs in the men's room. One evening he encounters Melissa Hulbert a girl he knew since high school. He's seen her a few times but the relationship has gone nowhere although Melissa still hopes for more.

The Monument to the Departed

The Monument to the Departed is located in Greenway Park. It is described by some as a "creepy bronze sculpture" that was created by one of the high school art teachers. On the day of commemoration honoring those who have gone missing, the parade ends at



the Park where Kevin places a wreath of remembrance at the foot of the monument. Nora Durst gives a keynote speech there to honor the missing loved ones. One day the body of 23-year-old Jason Falzone is found at the bottom of the monument. He was a Watcher who had been shot and murdered. An investigation is on-going but no suspects have surfaced.

The Healing Hug Center

The followers of Wayne “Holy Wayne” Gilchrest are known as the Healing Hug Movement. It is believed that Holy Wayne could take away a Leftover’s pain just by hugging the person. Upon the embrace, the pain is transferred from the Leftover to Wayne who absorbs it into his system. Tom joins the movement and is assigned to run the San Francisco Healing Hug Center. Holy Wayne has six underage wives who live on the Gilchrest Ranch in southern Oregon with him. When Holy Wayne gets in trouble with the law, Tom is assigned the mission of getting Christine, one of his young wives who is pregnant with Holy Wayne’s Miracle Child, safely across the country to Boston where friends of hers will watch over her. Tom leaves the Healing Hug Center and sets out with Christine to drive cross country.

Dimitri’s House

Aimee’s friend Dimitri is where she and Jill play “Get a Room.” It is a sex game that is like spin the bottle with the volume turned up. The player spins the bottle and must make out with whoever the bottle lands on. If their making out turns heated, the others vote on whether they should “Get a Room.” A girl has to make out with whoever she lands on – boy or girl. Boys don’t have to make out with other boys. They can spin again until they get a girl. When Jill is finally done with this game, as she leaves the house she looks back as though she’s leaving part of herself, the bad part, behind.



Themes and Motifs

Abandonment

An overarching theme in this story about those left behind in the wake of a Rapture-like event is not surprisingly one of abandonment. Kevin Garvey is the Mayor of Mapleton, a small town in middle-America. The town was devastated when on October 14th three years before people disappeared. The missing ones didn't run away from home and weren't kidnapped; they disappeared into some unknown state. They evaporated, were zapped, were physically gone.

Some thought the Rapture had taken the people. Others who didn't believe in the apocalypse had other theories or just had no clue. In spite of the cause of these disappearances, those left behind, the Leftovers, felt profoundly abandoned by their loved ones. The Sudden Departure caused anger, hurt and the rage of abandonment but without any clear way to channel their anger or identify the responsible culprit. Should they blame their broken-hearts on a God who took their loved-ones, on an alien invasion, or on some unknown terror that is still lurking out there to which they may become victims themselves?

The Sudden Departure had repercussions on the community beyond just the loss of loved ones. The abandonments set people off in different chaotic directions. Laurie left to join a cult called the Watchers whose goal was to remind people that God was watching them. Tom joined another cult called the Healing Hug which was led by Holy Wayne who claimed he could transfer pain from the leftovers to himself. Those who left to join these causes that sprung up after the event also abandoned love-ones who were already hurting from the loss of the departed ones.

Fear

There is nothing more terrorizing than noises that bump in the night or the thought that an intruder is possibly lurking outside one's door ready to pounce. The anticipation of an assault or ambush is at least as fearful as the act itself. Fear of the unknown allows for frightening scenarios to be created in the minds of those who feel vulnerable and at risk. After 87 residents of small-town Mapleton virtually vanished into thin air, fear took a firm grip on a community that was otherwise unremarkable.

Fear in the story told in "The Leftovers" is multi-faceted. There is the natural fear of danger with the fear of the unknown a close rival. In the case of the people who went missing on Sudden Departure day, both of these fears are part of the scenario for those left behind. Will whatever caused these traumatic departures return for more victims? Will I be next? The fear of danger and physical harm is in the mix as well. Being evaporated can't be a walk in the park. What will happen to me physically if I'm the next one to be zapped? Can I withstand the pain associated with being evaporated?



Fear drove the people of Mapleton, normal and neurotic alike, to re-evaluate life itself. Fear made people question their values and purpose. Laurie did not lose a loved one in the event, yet she was sent in a downward cycle of confusion, fear and conflict. To fend off the worst and deal with her fear, she decided to make her life, what was left of it, more purposeful. People she knew literally vanished from existence. If she proved to God that she had purpose and was his loyal and dedicated follower, surely she would be spared.

The fear of what happened to the loved ones is perhaps the biggest fear of all. Nora would hardly allow herself to engage the topic. What happened to her three-year-old daughter and six-year-old son? The possible answers to that question are too frightening to see the light of day. Questioning why loved ones were chosen for the departures is another frightening question that the Leftovers had no way of answering. Kevin's family has been torn apart. He lives in fear that it is broken forever.

On top of all the other terrifying elements of the departures, the bodies of three murdered Watchers were found. The tentacles of terror were unfurled onto the community. An already traumatized community were forced to deal with the murders and whether they were somehow connected to the Sudden Departures. Was a serial murderer on the loose? Would there be more bodies and who would be next?

Envy

Envy is a theme that emerges in this story of tragedy and loss. Jill has pulled on a new cloak of identity. She was the conservative straight-A student before the Sudden Departure. Although she didn't lose anyone directly in the event, her world was turned upside down in many ways. She decided to take a walk on the wild side and became friends with Aimee who was far more advanced socially than Jill. Aimee introduced Jill to alcohol, drugs and sex.

Despite their close relationship, Jill always stood slightly in awe of Aimee. Jill aspired to be more like her. It seemed that Aimee could act any way she wanted to and always get what she wanted. It didn't seem fair. Jill was the one who did the hard work at school and in her personal life. Aimee lost her mother during the event but Aimee didn't love her alcoholic mother. Jill, the good girl, had loved her mother. Jill envied Aimee's free spirit and apparent lack of emotions over the dark areas of her life.

The envy that Jill felt for Aimee transferred over to their social interactions. Jill who had led a sheltered life had sex with a boy named Nick. He was the cutest and most charming guy in their group. But Jill had no chance with Nick because he was desperately in love with Aimee. Jill even noticed that her father, Kevin, perked up around Aimee who was dynamic and charismatic. She even wondered if he was attracted to her.

Nora experienced a much different type of envy. She envied anyone who hadn't lost their children. Her resentment led to bitterness and disallowed her from making



progress in the recovery from her losses. People felt they had to tiptoe around her and they did. They sensed that she was always on the verge of collapse. Kevin was sensitive to Nora's bitterness and her inability to open up about her pain and losses. When Kevin breaks down over not seeing his son in years, Nora has no sympathy for him. After all, he had years with his son and raised him to adulthood. Nora had six brief years with her son. His whole life was stolen from him without explanation. It wasn't fair. But envying those who still had their children wouldn't bring her own kids back.

Exploitation

Exploitation often accompanies tragedy. People who are hurt and confused and lost are vulnerable to others who would use them for their own purposes. There are examples of the exploitative nature of man in "The Leftovers." Wayne Gilchrest was a charismatic speaker who had lost a young son to the departures. He claimed that he could physically take the pain away from another Leftover was suffering merely by hugging him. This claim was never proven but his charm and speaking skills attracted a following and ultimately the Healing Hug Movement was established and Holy Wayne was a celebrity and phenomenon and maybe even the Messiah with a huge following.

Holy Wayne used his charm and position to lure young female followers into his clutches. Before being arrested by the FBI, he had amassed six young "wives." One of these girls was sixteen-year-old Christine who was pregnant with his child when he was arrested. When he decided to plead his case, he publicly proclaimed that he loved only his first wife of many years and apologized for his behavior. He was going away for a long time but that didn't take away the hurt and devastation that he caused by the exploitation of his young followers.

Laurie, who appeared to be extremely vulnerable after the departures, felt a need to join a cult where she could share her grief and express her pain. She joined the Guilty Remnant and became a Watcher. Laurie was an easy mark for this organization that convinced her to abandon her family, take an oath of silence, never form any friendships and always be seen smoking cigarettes. Patti Levin the director of the Mapleton GR readily saw that Laurie was fragile and vulnerable to their recruiting and training methods. Many of the other Watchers were undoubtedly in this same condition and susceptible to words that encouraged them to join the cause and be closer to God during the uncertain times.

Religion

Religion is a sub-theme that appears throughout this story of the Rapture-like departure of scores of citizens of the small town of Mapleton. Of those left behind, many thought that the Rapture had occurred. The Rapture is the Christian belief that when Jesus Christ returns to earth that his most devoted followers will be lifted up to greet him.

The Reverend Matt Jamison who was a Christian was one person who did not believe the Rapture had occurred. In fact, he became obsessed with proving that the event was



not the Rapture. The reason he was so sure had to do with him personally. He was such a devout Christian and a minister that he was sure that if the Rapture had occurred he would have been one of the first selected to greet the Lord.

Nora, who had lost her entire family, sought comfort from Pastor Jamison who complained that he had given everything to God, yet he'd been excluded from the Rapture. The pastor read from the Bible that, "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left." He was sure that Nora's children were with God because it was written in the Scriptures. It was he who should have been with God. His obsession with the matter led to a nervous breakdown and his stepping down from his ministerial position.

The cult that Laurie joins in anticipation of the apocalypse that many figured would soon be coming was a religious organization. Laurie became a Watcher and had the responsibility of staring people down as a reminder to them that God was also watching them. The director of the cult saw to it that a number of Watchers was sacrificed and became martyrs. This was also accomplished to please God.

For a short while Tom joined a movement called the Healing Hug which was led by Wayne Gilchrest who was also known as Holy Wayne. While Holy Wayne did not claim to be a minister, he did hint that he could be the Messiah. And if he wasn't the Messiah, the son one of his wives was about to have would be the Miracle Baby that would save the world.

Tom and Christine disguised themselves as Barefoot People when they traveled cross-country. The Barefoot People wore no shoes and painted a bullseye on their foreheads so that God could spot them immediately.



Styles

Point of View

“The Leftovers” by Tom Perrotta is written in the third person omniscient. From this perspective, the reader is able to learn the thoughts, doubts, motivations, fears and intentions of multiple characters. For example, the reader understands that Kevin Garvey, the Mayor of Mapleton, puts on a brave face in the wake of the missing, the disruption in his own family and the homicides of three people. The reader also learns of his attraction to a young girl - which he tries to fight - and his doubts about his appeal to other women. Using this perspective in this story is crucial since the reactions to the same event were so diverse.

Jill Garvey, Kevin’s teenage daughter, is going through a rebellious period following the abandonment by her mother. Although she has shaved her head, has let her grades decline and is engaging in drinking, drugs and sex games, the reader understands that she is not acting out and is really hurt and angry.

Laurie, Kevin’s wife and Jill’s mother, has abandoned her family because she responds to a higher purpose. The reader has privy to her private thoughts that are rife with doubt and confusion. Tom, Kevin’s son, like his mother felt the pull of a higher cause but ultimately the reader learns through Tom’s thoughts that he realizes he was duped and that, unlike his mother, he is looking forward to a future that he will choose for himself.

By presenting the vulnerabilities of the characters, the reader is able to become engaged in the story and root for them to survive the tragedy that they are living through.

Tom Perrotta has a long career as an author and screenwriter. He has shown an interest in social, religious and political topics in his writing which is also reflected in, “The Leftovers.”

Language and Meaning

“The Leftovers” by Tom Perrotta is filled with unfamiliar names that are identifiable with their meaning. On October 14th three years prior to the time this story takes place, 87 citizens of Mapleton, a small town in Mid-America, simply disappear all at exactly the same moment. They evaporate; there one minute and gone the next. Some refer to this event as the Rapture. The Rapture is an event that some Christians believe in. The event came to be known in Mapleton as the Sudden Departure. Those left behind during the Sudden Departure are the eponymous “Leftovers.”

The story opens when there is a parade commemorating the third anniversary of the Sudden Departure winds up at The Monument to the Departed in Greenway Park. Jill Garvey was particularly traumatized by the event. She was sitting right next to her friend



Jen on a couch watching YouTube when Jen literally evaporated right before Jill's eyes. Jill is considered fortunate, at least in some circles, that she was an Eyewitness.

Laurie Garvey did not disappear in the Sudden Departure. However, she is just as "missing" as if she did. She was struck by a sense of duty to the departed and felt compelled to join the cultish Guilty Remnants where she became a Watcher. Watchers had to take a vow of silence and follow targeted individuals around as a silent reminder that they are being watched by God. They were expected to sacrifice all worldly possessions and even be prepared for martyrdom.

Tom Garvey, like his mother, feels he is "called" by a higher power to join a cult. The Healing Hug was founded by Holy Wayne Gilcrest who thought he was the Messiah because he could embrace a Leftover and take their pain away by absorbing it into himself. One of his six young wives, Christine, was pregnant. He prophesied that the baby would be the Miracle Baby that would save mankind.

Aimee introduces Jill to a sex game called, "Get a Room." It is a take on the spin the bottle kissing game but the results go much further than kissing a call for the involved couple to "Get a Room." It's not only a sex game, it's also a sexist game. If the girl spinning lands on a girl she must make out with her. If a guy spins and lands on another guy, he can spin again. When Tom and Christine travel cross-country, they disguise themselves as Barefoot People. The people in this cult are filthy and smell badly from lack of bathing. They wear no shoes and have bullseyes painted on their foreheads so God can spot them.

GR headquarters are referred to as the Compound. Laurie lives in the Gray House; new trainees live in the Blue House. Roommates who are failing at being Watchers are assigned in pairs to Outpost 17. They have a second chance to prove their devotion. There are no more chances after that.

Structure

"The Leftovers" by Tom Perrotta is divided into five main parts. Part One: Three-Year Anniversary contains three chapters which describe the event on October 14th that came to be known as the Sudden Departure day and the impact that the event had on the Garvey family as well as other citizens of Mapleton.

Part Two: Mapleton Means Fun tells the story of Kevin the Mayor of Mapleton and a lonely man whose family had been ripped apart by the disappearances. Nora's story and her struggle to deal with her losses are also described. Laurie's decision to join the cult and the impact of that decision on her family are also included in this section as is Jill's personal decline after losing a friend and virtually losing her mother and brother.

In Part Three: Happy Holidays, the characters cope with celebrating Christmas and struggling with their recoveries and dealing with their new realities. Part Four: Be My Valentine finds Nora wanting to escape and change her identity and Laurie destined to carry out a mission she could have never imagined. Part Five: Miracle Child finds some



resolution to the problems the characters have been forced to deal with. There are hints that the baby who was marked as the “Miracle Child” might turn out to be a miracle child.

There is a section entitled, “Official Tom Perrotta Chronology” which describes Perrotta’s background and long career as a writer.



Quotes

God bless us, the ones who are here and the ones who aren't. We've all been through so much.

-- Nora Durst (Part 1 paragraph Page 30)

Importance: Nora is giving a keynote address at a ceremony honoring those who the town lost on October 14th three years before. The people just disappeared. No one knows where they went. She is asking for blessings for those present and those who are missing. She still hopes that her husband and two sons will reappear some day. She's not asking for a great day at the beach. She'd be happy to have them back under any circumstances – even like the weekend they all suffered from the flu together.

There was an almost unbearable tension in the air, a mood of anxious waiting, though no one seemed to know whether they were waiting for a logical explanation or a second wave of disappearances.

-- Narrator (Part 1 paragraph Page 56)

Importance: This passage captures the confusion and chaos and terror that following the October 14th disappearances. It illustrates the state of mind that the Garvey family and the citizens of Mapleton were suffering under.

One night my son came to me in a dream... This was my son, clear as day, and he said, 'Why are you hurting my mother?' I denied it, but he just shook his head, like he was disappointed in me. 'You need to help her.'

-- Holy Wayne (Part 1 paragraph Page 75)

Importance: After Wayne Gilchrest's son Henry went missing on the Sudden Departure day, he began to mistreat his wife due to misdirected anger over his loss. His son came to him in a dream and told Holy Wayne that he should help instead of hurt her. After the dream, Holy Wayne had an epiphany and hugged his wife. During the embrace, his wife's pain was transferred to Holy Wayne. It was the first sign that he had a special power which he eventually turned into a movement.

He'd tried for a while to restrict his hugs to his own child, but Aimee didn't like being left out. It was awkward at first – he was far too conscious of the contours of her body and the length of their embraces.

-- Narrator (Part 2 paragraph Page 91)

Importance: On top of all his other problems, Kevin had to deal with the attraction that he had for his daughter's gorgeous friend who was living with them. The phrase, "the length of their embrace" indicates that it was Aimee who prolonged their hugs. She was either attracted to Kevin or she was toying with him knowing that he had an attraction for her.



One evening, aimlessly flipping through the channels, she happened upon a familiar episode of SpongeBob.... The effect on her was instantaneous and exhilarating.... It wasn't just that she could sense her little boy in the room, sitting right beside her on the couch; at times it was almost as if she were Jeremy, as if she were watching the show through his eyes, experiencing a six-year-old's wild pleasure, laughing so hard she almost lost her breath. When it was over, Nora cried for a long time, but it was a good cry, the kind that makes you stronger.

-- Narrator (Part 2 paragraph Page 110)

Importance: This passage underscores how Nora is grasping at the past through a silly TV show in order to attempt to connect with her missing son. By feeling that she is Jeremy she is once again giving her son life. The TV show not only gives Nora false hope for recovery, it actually retards any progress she may have made.

When Meg continued to resist, Laurie jammed a cigarette... between the younger woman's lips and held a match to it. Meg choked violently on the first drag, as she always did, then released a small whimper of revulsion after the fit had passed.... If she could've spoken, she [Laurie] would've recited the motto both of them learned in Orientation: We don't smoke for enjoyment. We smoke to proclaim our faith.

-- Narrator (Part 2 paragraph Page 134)

Importance: This captures the strange GR rule that requires Watchers to always be seen smoking. Cigarette smoking is almost considered anti-social nowadays. Perhaps the rule was put in place to demonstrate the GR's independence and break with general society.

Kevin was a social animal: He liked having somewhere to go in the morning, a reason to shave and shower and put on decent clothes. He liked feeling busy and important, certain that his sphere of influence extended beyond the boundaries of his own backyard.

-- Narrator (Part 3 paragraph Page 189)

Importance: This quote captures an important element of Kevin's personality. Although he has remained strong through the trauma of the Sudden Departure and his wife's and son's subsequent abandonment, he is forward thinking and wants to make a positive contribution to the community. The October 14th event and its impact have not defeated Kevin.

Kevin pointed at the solitary gift under the tree, a little box tied with ribbon that looked like it might contain jewelry... 'It's for Mom. In case she stops by.

-- Narrator/Jill (Part 3 paragraph Page 223)

Importance: Jill remembers her mother at Christmas although she abandoned her family to join the cult. Jill's present for her mother symbolizes her hope that her mother may still return to them.



I see you've been crying.' Meg blurted out like a heartbroken teenager, 'It's just really hard!' Laurie winced at the breach of decorum.

-- Patti/Laurie/Narrator (Part 4 paragraph Page 265)

Importance: Patti sees the evidence that Laurie and Meg had formed a friendship which is against GR laws. The exchange goes on with both Laurie and Meg blaming themselves. Laurie tells them that the blame rests on her shoulders. They could see what was happening and should have separated them. She adds that there won't be a next time. The back and forth does not have an ominous tone, but Patti is seething inside and is angry that the women violated one of the fundamental rules of the organization.

He was my little boy. I was always so proud of him.' Kevin could feel his mouth stretching, the pressure building inside his eyeballs... He clapped his hand over his mouth, trying to muffle the sound of his blubbing.

-- Kevin/Narrator (Part 4 paragraph Page 306)

Importance: Kevin and Nora are having dinner on Valentine's Day. In one of the few times the Kevin lets his emotions get the better of him, he breaks down when he speaks of his son who he hasn't seen in several years. He recovers in the men's room. When he returns to the table, Nora is gone. She resents his blubbing over not seeing his adult son for two years. She will never see her six-year-old son again. How could Kevin be so self-centered?

It would have been bad enough if Kevin had simply been dealing with the crisis of an elected official, but he was involved as a father and a husband, too, worried about the psychological well-being of his daughter and the physical safety of his soon-to-be-ex-wife.

-- Narrator (Part 5 paragraph Page 318)

Importance: This passage captures the stress that Kevin is under after another person has been murdered. His daughter discovered the body and the dead man was Laurie's roommate. And he is the leader that the community will be looking to for answers. His responsibilities and concerns are complex and multilayered.

The woman didn't reply, but by now she was close enough for him [Kevin] to recognize her as Nora. The baby in her arms was a complete stranger... 'Look what I found,' she told him.

-- Narrator (Part 5 paragraph Page 375)

Importance: Nora is about ready to leave town and is in the process of leaving off a goodbye letter to Kevin when she finds Christine's baby who was left on Kevin's porch by Tom. The baby represents a sign of hope and a new future for both Nora and Kevin.