

Message in a Bottle Study Guide

Message in a Bottle by Nicholas Sparks (author)

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Message in a Bottle Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Prologue and Chapter 1.....	5
Chapters 2-3.....	7
Chapters 4-5.....	9
Chapters 6-7.....	10
Chapters 8-9.....	12
Chapter 10.....	13
Chapter 11.....	14
Chapters 12-13.....	16
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	21
Themes.....	23
Style.....	25
Quotes.....	27
Topics for Discussion.....	28



Plot Summary

Message in a Bottle is a novel by acclaimed novelist Nicholas Sparks. In this novel, Theresa Osborne is still grieving the sudden end of her eight year marriage when she finds a bottle on the beach that contains one of the most touching love letters she has ever read. When Theresa publishes this letter and discovers others, she decides to meet the romantic author. Soon Theresa and Garrett Blake find themselves wrapped in a passionate affair that is marred only by distance and Garrett's continued devotion to his deceased wife. Message in a Bottle is a beautiful love story that deals with the difficult subjects of grief, loneliness, and surviving despite tragedy.

Theresa Osborne, on a rare vacation, is running on the beach, thinking of the demise of her eight year marriage and the difficulties of dating with a twelve-year-old son at home. Theresa admits to herself that she is lonely, not because she misses her husband specifically, but because she misses the companionship inherent to marriage. As these thoughts are going through her mind, Theresa sees a bottle on the beach. Inside is one of the most touching love letters Theresa has ever read, apparently a letter from a man to his lost love. When Theresa shows the letter to her friend and editor, she is talked into publishing the letter in her parenting column in the Boston Times. The reaction of the readers is overwhelming and Theresa returns from vacation to piles of letters and many phone calls from people wanting to know more. One of these phone calls comes from a woman claiming to have another letter written by the same man.

Theresa is fascinated with the letter and decides to do some research on messages in bottles. In an article of the subject, Theresa finds a third letter quoted. Theresa convinces this man to give her copy of the letter. Then Theresa takes all three letters to her editor and together they use the information in the letters to locate Garrett Blake, the author. Deanna, Theresa's editor, talks her into going to Wilmington, North Carolina to check Garrett out for herself, if for nothing but to satisfy her curiosity. Theresa reluctantly agrees and finds herself on a plane the following day.

When Theresa arrives in Wilmington, she goes to Island Diving, Garrett's diving shop. At the shop, Theresa sees a picture of Garrett and reads several articles about his diving career and the wood hull boat he restored with his wife the year before her death. From there Theresa visits the boat, Happenstance, and runs into Garrett. Garrett is drawn to Theresa for reasons he cannot explain and decides to take Theresa for a sail on Happenstance. This sail leads to lunch the following day, then dinner, and soon Theresa and Garrett find themselves inseparable.

Theresa and Garrett spend four days together before Theresa must return to Boston. Three weeks later, Theresa brings her son, Kevin, to visit Garrett. Garrett teaches both Kevin and Theresa to scuba dive, helping them to get their certification. After that visit, Garrett and Theresa find their time together to be sporadic and difficult to arrange. Theresa finds herself canceling a trip to see Garrett at Thanksgiving, a visit his father had looked forward to because it would be their first meeting, in order to go to a meeting with syndicate representatives who might be interested in picking up her column.



When Garrett sees Theresa next, he learns that her column has been picked up by one of these syndication companies and that her career will be taking a more demanding course. Garrett asks Theresa to give it all up and move to Wilmington to be with him. Theresa becomes upset, unsure that Garrett is offering her more than a love affair doomed to end. Theresa leaves the apartment to clear her head. Garrett goes into Theresa's bedroom to search for paper, wanting to write down his feelings in a way that he believes will help him express them clearer. Instead of paper, Garrett finds three of his letters that he dropped into the sea. When Garrett questions Theresa about the letters and learns that she published one of them, he becomes convinced that she concocted a scheme to meet him and seduce him. Garrett leaves in anger.

Theresa follows Garrett to his home in Wilmington and explains what happened with the letters. Instead of making up, however, Theresa tells Garrett that she does not believe he can ever forget Catherine, his deceased wife, and she cannot live in that shadow for the rest of her life. Theresa suggests that they end their relationship now, before either of them can be hurt any deeper. Theresa drives away despite the fact that Garrett attempts to chase her down and stop her. A few days later, Theresa gets a call from Garrett's father asking her to return to Wilmington. Jeb tells Theresa that Garrett died when he went sailing during a storm. His body washed ashore and they are able to bury him together.

A week or more later, Theresa finds a package from Garrett waiting for her. Theresa opens it and discovers a bottle with a message inside. The letter tells her that Garrett has finally realized that Catherine has brought them together and it is time for him to let her go. Garrett also says in the letter that he went out on Happenstance that day to send one final letter to Catherine before devoting his life to a relationship with Theresa and Kevin. A year later, Theresa sends a letter to Garrett via a message in a bottle, thanking him for coming into her life and teaching her that she can go on despite her overwhelming grief.



Prologue and Chapter 1

Prologue and Chapter 1 Summary

Theresa Osborne is a columnist for the Boston Times. Recently divorced, Theresa is having a tough time finding a good man willing to commit to a long term relationship and to a relationship with a woman with a child.

In the prologue, someone throws a bottle off the side of a boat or ship. The author takes this moment to explain how messages in bottles have been used for hundreds of years both to send messages and to track ocean currents. Then he returns to the bottle, telling the reader that it has, by some quirk of currents, ended up on a beach near Chatham, twenty-six days and seven hundred thirty eight miles from where it began its journey.

In chapter one, Theresa Osborne arrives at Cape Cod alone on a cold, December day, returning to the place where it all began. Theresa looks over three letters that cause her to think back on events that began more than a year ago. Theresa is jogging on this same beach in early summer, on vacation with her friend and editor, Deanna, while her son is in California visiting his father. Theresa thinks about the end of her marriage, four years ago, when she learned her husband was cheating on her. They were separated a year, divorced now for three years. David, her husband, then moved to California where he found religion and began a new family with his new wife, Annette. Theresa worries about the devotion David has for Kevin now, afraid it will change once the baby grows older. Theresa also thinks about how hard it is to date as a single mother. Few men want to begin a relationship with a woman who has children. One man even told her outright he did not want a ready-made family. This has left Theresa lonely in the moments that are not filled with her job as a columnist and her son.

Theresa decides she will indulge herself this week, spend time alone on the beach, read a little, and go shopping for things other than clothes and sporting goods for her son. As she finishes her run, Theresa steps into the water to cool her feet. As she stops to put her shoes back on, Theresa spots a bottle in the sand nearby. Theresa picks it up and notices a note wrapped tightly inside. This excites Theresa as she recalls doing something like that as a child. Theresa opens the bottle and finds the most touching love letter from a man to a woman she has ever read.

Prologue and Chapter 1 Analysis

The prologue introduces the bottle that carries a letter that will change Theresa Osborne's life forever. The author does not tell the reader what the letter contains at this point, but gives a brief history of bottles and messages, including a story of a sailor who was shipwrecked and sent a message in a bottle that would turn up in his home village a hundred years later. This seems to imply some mystic about messages in bottles,



giving the novel a sense of the miraculous before the main characters are even introduced.

Chapter one introduces Theresa Osborne, a columnist and single mother who is struggling to balance work and motherhood with dating. Theresa admits to the reader that she rarely goes out and when she does, the men usually make it clear they do not want a woman with children. This causes Theresa to be lonely, a theme of the novel, a great deal of the time. Theresa does not actively date, but she would not mind finding a man to share her life with. Theresa is grieving the loss of intimacy, of love, in her life. Therefore, when she finds a letter written from a man to the woman he deeply loves, Theresa cannot help but be touched by it. This chapter opens with Theresa coming to Cape Cod, this same place where she finds the bottle, alone, suggesting to the reader that the letter has changed her life, but has also introduced sadness into it, leaving the reader anxious to find out what happens.



Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary

In chapter two, Deanna goes back to the house she is sharing with Deanna and her husband Brian, and Deanna asks why Theresa has been crying. Theresa shows Deanna the letter. Almost immediately Deanna begins pressing Theresa to publish the letter in her column. Theresa is reluctant, convinced that it is morally wrong. However, Deanna promises to remove all reference to location and to only use initials, not names. Theresa spends the day thinking about it as she and Deanna go shopping and attempt to relax. That night over dinner, Brian admits to having read the letter and tells them that Wrightsville Beach, a location mentioned in the letter, is in North Carolina. Theresa finally agrees to publish the letter and spends the evening writing an introduction to it before she and Deanna take it to a stationary store to be rewritten. They see it in the paper the next morning and Deanna assures Theresa that it will be a hit with her readers.

In chapter three, Theresa returns to her empty apartment and spends a quiet weekend alone before returning to work on Monday. At the office, Theresa is surprised by the volume of mail produced just because of the one column featuring the message from the bottle. Later in the afternoon, while working on her newest column, Theresa is interrupted by a phone call. The woman on the other end of the line claims to have a letter written by the same man who wrote Theresa's letter. When the woman faxes a copy, Theresa is excited to see it is from the same man. Theresa briefly begins to research Wrightsville Beach, but realizes she does not have enough information at this point to find the author. Theresa promises herself she will put it all aside, until she finds another letter three days later.

Chapters 2-3 Analysis

Deanna is Theresa's friend and editor. Deanna is a childless woman who has taken Theresa under her wing and treats her almost like a daughter. Theresa loves and trusts Deanna deeply; therefore, she decides to trust her when she pushes her to publish the letter she has found. Theresa, the reader feels, would not have thought of publishing the letter if it were not for Deanna's assurance that it was something the women of the country had a right to see—how romantic men can sometimes be. Deanna sees it as a way to encourage those women who are struggling, like Theresa, in finding a good man who can love them the way they deserve to be loved.

Theresa returns home and is overwhelmed by the response to the letter. When she sees another letter similar to the one she found, Theresa finds herself fantasizing about meeting the man who could be capable of such romance. Theresa is lonely, a theme of the novel, and this loneliness is leading her to fantasize about a man she has never met. However, Theresa is also realistic and set in her ways; therefore, she has no



trouble putting two letters aside and convincing herself they mean nothing. The reader, though, suspects that something will change when the author finishes the chapter by suggesting that Theresa will find a third letter in three days.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

In chapter four, Theresa is doing research on autism and decides to look up articles on messages in a bottle as well. In one of these articles, Theresa finds a quote from a letter that must be a third letter written by the mysterious Garrett. Theresa calls the author of the article and offers to buy a copy of the letter from him. When it arrives, Theresa is happy to find that it is also written to Catherine by Garrett, like the other two letters. Theresa takes all three letters to Deanna and together they begin doing some research to find out where Garrett might live. They learn the name of a dive shop that is mentioned in a letter by calling a list of dive shops operating in the Wilmington area, then they learn that the Garrett Blake they have located is the same Garrett who owns the sailing vessel Happenstance, also mentioned in the letters. With this information, Deanna books a flight to Wilmington for Theresa, insisting she go meet Garrett to put her curiosity to rest. Theresa hesitates, but eventually agrees.

In chapter five, Theresa wakes early in Wilmington and heads over to Island Diving, Garrett's business, with no plan in mind. Inside, Theresa wanders around, scanning every male face, trying to guess which is Garrett. Finally Theresa finds some newspaper articles hanging on the wall and one features a picture of Garrett. Theresa is pleased to find he is a young man, somewhere in his thirties. Theresa also reads an article about Happenstance and decides to go to the dock to take a look at it after a store employee tells her that Garrett is also on the dock. Theresa stands in front of Happenstance for a few minutes, disappointed that Garrett does not appear to be there. Then she notices a man watching her. As he approaches, Theresa realizes it is Garrett. Garrett allows her to take a closer look at the boat, describing its attributes to her. When Garrett learns that Theresa has never gone sailing, he invites her to go sailing on Happenstance with him that evening. Theresa accepts, even offering to bring dinner along.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

When Theresa discovers there is a third letter that has been found, written by the same man to the same woman, she is unable to deny her curiosity any longer. Theresa takes the letters to Deanna and together they use information from the letters to track down Garrett Blake, the letter's author. The reader is unclear at this point why Theresa wants to meet Garrett so badly, but it is clear that Deanna is hoping that a little romance will erupt. Theresa goes to Wilmington with no plan or even any idea what she could say should she meet Garrett, but she goes to his shop anyway. Soon Theresa is able to concoct a scheme to meet him, and suddenly she has a date to go sailing with Garrett. The reader is surprised by this quick reaction on Garrett's part to Theresa, but not surprised by the guilt he quickly feels when he thinks of his deceased wife.



Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary

In chapter six, Garrett thinks about Catherine, his wife, as he prepares Happenstance for the night's voyage. They had known each other since early childhood but drifted apart until Garrett returned home after finishing college. After running into each other on Wrightsville Beach, they were inseparable and married a short time later. Now Garrett remembers their first sail on Happenstance. A speeding old man took her away and Garrett cannot imagine going on without her. Garrett's father, Jeb, lost his own wife twenty years ago and has tried to push him into moving on, but Garrett resists. As these thoughts are moving through Garrett's mind, Theresa arrives. Garrett professionally moves the sailboat out of her slip and through the intracoastal waterway to the ocean. When the boat is on a good course, Garrett shows Theresa around the cabin. While in the cabin, Garrett thinks of a time when his wife went sailing with him and prepared a romantic supper for the two of them. Theresa draws his attention back to her and they decide to drop anchor and have dinner. It is a nice dinner in which they talk about their own stories. Even as they talk, Garrett finds himself thinking how much Theresa reminds him of Catherine and of the night he and Catherine made love on the boat, and he promised he would marry someone new if she ever died. Finally they turn back and say their goodbyes at Theresa's car, not exchanging any information that would lead either to believe they would see one another again.

In chapter seven, Garrett has breakfast with Jeb and tells him about Theresa. Jeb pushes Garrett to see her again, but Garrett refuses. Later, Garrett goes to work and spends most of the morning fixing the engine on his boat. At the office, Garrett is in the middle of going over paperwork when Theresa calls. Theresa says she left her jacket on Happenstance and asks Garrett to find it for her. Garrett does and when Theresa comes to retrieve it, he awkwardly asks her to lunch. Over lunch at a local restaurant, they again share personal stories. Theresa tells him all about Kevin and is pleased to discover he does not mind that she already has a child. After lunch they go for a walk on the beach and Garrett gets up the courage to ask Theresa if she is seeing anyone. When she says no, Garrett finds himself telling her about Catherine. This causes Garrett to remember another incidence with Catherine when he came home early and found her working in the garden. Garrett then drives Theresa back to his shop and asks her to join him for dinner at his house that night.

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

The reader learns how Catherine died. It was a sad, tragic accident in which an old man hit her as she stepped off the curb. This has caused Garrett a great deal of pain, wondering how things might have been different. It has added to his grief, a grief that seems to be so profound that even three years later he is having trouble dealing with it. In these chapters, as well, the reader learns that Garrett often has memories of his wife,



memories that seem to be leading up to revealing one important fact to the reader, and dreams that have often spurred the letters he writes. These facts prove to the reader that despite Garrett's intense interest in Theresa, he is clearly still in love and grieving his wife.

Theresa, on the other hand, is thrilled to have met Garrett, but does not expect it to go much further than a night of sailing. However, she does leave her jacket behind on purpose, giving her an excuse to call Garrett the following day. This leads to lunch and Garrett's confession about his wife. Despite Garrett's obvious struggle with the death of his wife, he appears to be the perfect man for Theresa. He is gentle, charming, manly, and he does not mind that she has a child. Theresa is excited and the reader is excited for her, wondering where this might lead.



Chapters 8-9

Chapters 8-9 Summary

In chapter eight, Theresa arrives at Garrett's for dinner. Theresa looks around Garrett's house and finds a picture of his wife on the nightstand beside the bed. Theresa admires Catherine's beauty. Garrett begins cooking steaks on the grill as they once again fall into easy conversation. As they prepare dinner together and talk, Garrett again remembers an afternoon with his wife when she appeared ill even though she swore she was fine. At the same time, Theresa is in the house setting the table, lighting candles rather than ruining the ambiance with electric lighting. After dinner, Theresa and Garrett go on another long walk along the beach, sharing stories about their childhoods, their relationships, and Kevin. Soon they find themselves kissing. Theresa takes Garrett into the bedroom and they make love. Sometime during the night, Theresa wakes to find Garrett gone. Theresa searches the house and finds him sitting on the back deck, where he welcomes her into his arms.

In chapter nine, Garrett cancels lunch with his dad and calls in at his shop so he can spend the day with Theresa. For the next four days they spend all their time together. During this time, Garrett continues to have memories of Catherine, specifically of a weekend she spent at her sister's even though Garrett did not want her to leave. On her last night in Wilmington, Theresa and Garrett argue over whether or not they can continue their relationship despite the distance between their homes. Garrett does not think they can, but Theresa pushes him to commit to the relationship. When Theresa leaves, she finds herself wondering if she could possibly be falling in love with Garrett. At the same time, Garrett has a dark dream in which he has to choose between Theresa and Catherine. When Garrett chooses Theresa, he can no longer find her.

Chapters 8-9 Analysis

Theresa goes to Garrett's house for dinner and ends up not leaving for four days. The relationship between these two characters has exploded from a casual friendship to a committed relationship in a matter of minutes. When Garrett doubts that the relationship can last with the distance between their homes, Theresa nearly becomes hysterical. However, even Theresa is not sure where this relationship will lead them and if she really cares about Garrett. In fact, the reader finds themselves wondering if perhaps Theresa is still in love with the man who wrote the letters, not the three dimensional man she has become involved with. On top of this, Garrett continues to think of Catherine and dream about her, causing the reader to wonder if he can truly commit to Theresa when he is so clearly still committed to Catherine. Even his dreams seem to reflect this doubt as he dreams that he has to make a choice, but loses both women in the end.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In chapter ten, Garrett calls Theresa first thing in the morning and confesses that he already misses her. At the office, Theresa finds a bouquet of roses on her desk with an affectionate card from Garrett. Deanna takes her to lunch and demands to know all the details, which Theresa gladly provides. In Wilmington, Jeb comes to visit Garrett at his shop and demands to know about Theresa. Jeb warns Garrett to give the relationship a chance and not to run away too soon. That night, Garrett tries to write a letter to Catherine, but finds he cannot. Over the next few weeks, Theresa and Garrett spend long hours on the phone together. When Kevin returns home from California, Theresa tells him about Garrett and that they are going to see him the following weekend. When they arrive, Kevin is a little nervous, but when Garrett tells him that he can get him certified as a diver in a few days, Kevin is excited. At the hotel, Garrett gives Kevin a book to study and he rushes to do it, giving Garrett and Theresa a few moments alone on the porch.

The following morning, Kevin wakes Theresa early and makes her prepare for the diving lessons. When Garrett arrives, they go to the pool to begin. Kevin is a natural, but Theresa has to work at it for a while. After the lessons, Kevin and Theresa go to Garrett's for dinner. Kevin falls asleep on the floor, so they decide to stay the night. Theresa wakes Garrett in the middle of the night and they make love on the couch. The following day, they continue their diving lessons and Garrett takes them sailing. That night, Garrett confesses that he is falling in love with Theresa. The next day Kevin and his mother dive on a wreck in the ocean. Afterward, Garrett gives them their certification. After dinner, Theresa and Kevin must return to Boston. On the flight, Kevin asks if Theresa plans to marry Garrett and, if so, where they will live.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Garrett and Theresa are in the honeymoon phase of their relationship and everything seems great. He is romantic and caring, sending her flowers and candy. Later, when she goes to visit him with her child, Garrett is gentle and understanding, teaching the boy how to dive and spending a great deal of time with him. This proves once more that Garrett is exactly the man Theresa hoped he would be. However, Kevin points out how much distance there is between the couple and wonders where they would live if Theresa were to marry Garrett. This introduces some tension into the novel and suggests one thing that could throw a monkey wrench into the perfect relationship.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In chapter eleven, Garrett has another dream in which Catherine is about to run off a cliff and there is nothing he can do to stop her. The dream causes Garrett to doubt his feelings for Theresa. Garrett talks it over with his dad, who tells him he is just afraid. Garrett and Theresa often try to make plans to see one another, but their schedules make it difficult. Finally Garrett is able to make a trip to Boston. While he finds the city interesting, Garrett is overwhelmed by the size and noise in the big city. During this time, Garrett learns that Theresa is something of a celebrity because of her column. Before he leaves, Theresa takes Garrett to lunch with Deanna and Brian. Deanna asks Theresa if she thinks Garrett would be willing to move to Boston. Over the next few months, Theresa and Garrett see one another three more times, once in Wilmington and twice in Boston. At Thanksgiving, Theresa is supposed to go to Wilmington for an early Thanksgiving dinner before going to her parents. Jeb has his house cleaned and buys a tie in his excitement to meet Theresa. However, Theresa cancels at the last minute for a business conference, causing Garrett to rethink their relationship.

Garrett spends a great deal of time thinking about Theresa and their relationship, even going out on Happenstance so he can think in peace. However, no solution appears. Then Garrett has a dream in which he thinks he sees Catherine while window shopping with Theresa in Boston. When Garrett chases after her, she turns into Theresa. The following day, Garrett announces to his father that he wants to marry Theresa. Although Jeb has pushed Garrett into his relationship with Theresa, he asks him to stop and think about this step before taking it. The following weekend, Garrett goes to Boston to visit Theresa. They have a good time until the night they have dinner with Deanna and Brian. Deanna tells Theresa that a syndication company has decided to take on her column. The two women are clearly excited, but Garrett is lost in the conversation. That night, Garrett asks Theresa to move to Wilmington. Deanna becomes enraged because she cannot give up her career now that it is finally becoming successful. Theresa leaves the apartment. Garrett goes into her bedroom and begins searching for some paper to write Theresa a letter. Instead, he finds the three letters he wrote to Catherine. When Theresa returns, she attempts to explain, but Garrett is so angry he cannot stop to listen. Garrett accuses Theresa of setting him up, or seeking him out intentionally, and tells her that she can never replace Catherine. Then Garrett leaves.

Chapter 11 Analysis

As Garrett and Theresa begin their long distance relationship, Theresa's busy life and Garrett's busy shop leave little room for either to find time to see the other. To make things worse, the small town beach bum Garrett does not like the big city, but city girl Theresa does not feel she can leave the culture of a city she loves. This finds the lovers at a standstill as far as the distance between them and making a choice over who



should have to move. To add to this problem, Garrett is still having dreams that cause him to doubt his commitment to Theresa. Finally, Theresa is given good news about her column, resulting from a meeting she went to instead of being with Garrett, and now her career is more important than ever. It appears that neither can move without giving up a whole life. Therefore, when Garrett finds his letters in Theresa's drawer, not only does it appear to be a betrayal, but it also seems like the perfect excuse to end the relationship. Garrett is deeply angered by the presence of the letters and he begins to think that Theresa trapped him intentionally, causing him to say some hurtful things that will test the relationship like it has not been tested up to this point.



Chapters 12-13

Chapters 12-13 Summary

In chapter twelve, Garrett goes home, his thoughts again going to Catherine. Garrett recalls the day his wife told him she was pregnant, a day filled with happiness. However, that day would forever be overshadowed by her death a short time later. Garrett's father comes over to find out what is going on and he tries to talk Garrett through his anger at Theresa. When Garrett goes into the kitchen, a knock on the door draws Jeb away. Jeb meets Theresa for the first time and leaves her to talk things out with Garrett. Garrett and Theresa make love. Afterward, Garrett falls asleep and wakes to find Theresa in the kitchen. Theresa explains about the letters and her decision to meet him. Then Theresa tells Garrett that she does not believe he is over his wife, nor will he ever be over her, and therefore they should end their relationship so that she would not have to live her life in the shadow of Catherine. Theresa then leaves, leaving Garrett standing in the middle of the street alone. On the plane, Theresa sees Garrett in the terminal watching as she takes off.

In chapter thirteen, the narration returns to that cold December day and Theresa sitting on the beach in Cape Cod. Theresa remembers how Jeb called her a few days after she returned to Boston and asked her to fly to Wilmington. Upon her arrival, Theresa learns that Garrett died when he took Happenstance out during a rough storm and that his body had been found the previous morning. Theresa stays for the funeral then returns home in a state of shock. For a week or so, Theresa remains in bed, unable to face the future without Garrett. Finally, Theresa begins to return to normal life. When Theresa begins going through the mail that has accumulated, she finds a package from Garrett. Inside is a bottle that contains a message. The letter tells Theresa that Garrett dreamed of Catherine one last time and she told him that she brought the message in the bottle to Theresa so they could be together. Garrett tells Theresa that he plans to come to Boston and ask her to forgive him and to give him another chance. Now, on Cape Cod, it has been a year since Garrett's death. Theresa has written a letter thanking Garrett for all the gifts he gave her, including the knowledge that she can go on with her life without him. Theresa throws it into the water and watches until it vanishes.

Chapters 12-13 Analysis

In these final pages, Theresa ends her relationship with Garrett, afraid by what he said to her when he found the letters that he can never move past the death of his wife and enter freely into a relationship with her. Garrett denies this, but the reader knows he has had the same doubts, based on his many dreams. Theresa leaves, only to learn a few days later that Garrett has died in a sailboat wreck during a terrible storm. In a letter from Garrett, Theresa also learns that he intended to ask her to take him back and that he was on the ocean to send a final message to Catherine, telling her goodbye. Now, in an ironic twist of fate, Theresa is the one grieving the one person she loved most and



faced with the reality of moving on. However, Theresa has learned from Garrett's experience and feels she can move on, showing the reader that Garrett's pain has come to some good, for Theresa at least. The symbolism of the message in the bottle is also underscored in this final chapter as first Garrett sends Theresa a letter in a bottle, proving to her that he loves her as much if not more than Catherine, and later when Theresa sends Garrett a message in a bottle.



Characters

Theresa Osborne

Theresa Osborne is a columnist for the Boston Times. Theresa is recently divorced and raising her twelve-year-old son on her own, except for the occasional visits he makes to his father in California. Theresa is lonely and finds it difficult to date because most men are not eager to date a woman with a child. When the novel begins, Theresa is on vacation with her friend and editor, Deanna. During a jog on the beach, Theresa finds a bottle with a message closed inside. Theresa's life will soon change upon reading this letter, a letter that expresses a man's deep devotion to a lover he has lost. When the letter is published, Theresa comes across two other letters that this same man has sent to his dead wife. Theresa decides she wants to meet the man capable of writing such a letter.

When Theresa flies to Wilmington, she has no plan for what she will say to this man. However, when she meets Garrett Blake, nature takes its own course and Theresa finds herself starting a passionate affair that will change her life. However, it is soon clear to Theresa that Garrett will never be able to get past the loss of his wife. Theresa breaks up with Garrett only to learn of his death a few days later. Now Theresa finds herself in the same place Garrett was in when she met him and now she has a deeper understanding of what Garrett faced in their relationship.

Garrett Blake

Garrett Blake is a sensitive, masculine man who has lost his wife. Garrett's wife died when she was hit by a car as she was crossing the street. Garrett takes the loss of his wife hard and fails to deal with the death in the first few months. Eventually Garrett begins living again, but he refuses to even consider dating again. Garrett has frequent dreams about his wife, dreams that bring back his feelings and make him feeling guilty for living. To deal with these dreams, Garrett writes letters that he drops from the bow of his sailboat in hopes that the letters will reach Europe, a place his wife had always wanted to visit.

When Garrett meets Theresa, she reminds him frequently of his wife, Catherine. However, these reminders come less frequently as they begin a passionate affair. Garrett eventually comes to the realization that he would like to marry Theresa. However, before he can tell her this, Garrett learns about the letters and why Theresa came to see him. Now Garrett is angry and hurt. However, he comes to realize that he does love Theresa and that he is willing to move to Boston if that is what she wants. Before he can tell Theresa this, however, he decides to send one more letter to Catherine. A storm overcomes Garrett and his boat sinks, causing him to drown in the ocean.



Kevin Osborne

Kevin Osborne is Theresa's twelve-year-old son. Kevin is highly athletic, often spending his weekends playing soccer. When Theresa introduces Kevin to Garrett, he is excited by the fact that Garrett is a diving instructor. They spend the weekend learning to dive so that Kevin can be certified. Kevin is not a large part of the plot as a character, but his existence causes Theresa a great deal of trouble finding a boyfriend and leads to the mentality that causes her to go to Wilmington to meet Garrett.

Deanna

Deanna is Theresa's best friend and editor. Deanna is an older woman who has been happily married for more than thirty years. Deanna always wanted to have children, but learned early in her marriage that she had scarring that would prevent her from ever conceiving. This realization nearly ended her marriage, but both Deanna and Brian found a way to move on. Instead of putting her energy into a family, Deanna put her energy into her career, working her way up the ranks at the Boston Times. Eventually Deanna would begin taking young reporters under her wing, starting with Theresa. It is largely because of Deanna that Theresa has become a successful columnist.

Brian

Brian is Deanna's husband. Brian is an accountant whose favorite hobby is golfing. Whenever Brian and Deanna go on vacation, Brian often spends a great deal of his time golfing. Brian is a laid back, gentle man who appears to be good for Deanna. Toward the end of the novel, Brian befriends Garrett and assures him that being married to a newspaper woman is easy to become accustomed to once one is around it all the time. This frightens Garrett and pushes him to ask Theresa to move permanently to Wilmington.

Jeb Blake

Jeb Blake is Garrett's father. Like Garrett, Jeb lost his wife. She died of cancer twenty years earlier. Jeb chose not to date, keeping himself busy raising his son and working on a shrimp boat. However, as an older man, Jeb has come to recognize that not dating was a mistake and that he should have gone on with his life rather than choosing to be alone. Jeb pushes Garrett to date again, but Garrett often resists his advice. When Garrett dies, it is Jeb that informs Theresa. Jeb and Theresa become friends, keeping in touch in the year after Garrett's death, often sharing stories with one another.



Catherine Blake

Catherine Blake is Garrett's wife. Catherine and Garrett knew one another since they were small children. Upon their wedding, Catherine gave back to Garrett two valentines he had given her when they were small children. Catherine and Garrett are married six years before she is hit by a car. As Garrett and Theresa become involved, Garrett recalls the final few months of Catherine's life. Through these memories, the reader learns that Catherine was in the first trimester of pregnancy when she was killed. It is also to Catherine that Garrett writes the letters that will lead Theresa to his front door.

David Osborne

David Osborne is Theresa's ex-husband. David was unfaithful to his wife from the first year of marriage. When Theresa was given a hotel receipt from David's jacket at the dry cleaner, she confronted him and learned the truth of his infidelity. It is this that ended their marriage. David would eventually move to California where he would become involved in religion and meet the woman who would become his second wife. David is an active part of Kevin's life and will often bring him to California for visits.

Annette Osborne

Annette Osborne is David's second wife. Annette is highly religious and she encourages her new husband to follow her religion. Annette and David have a new child and Theresa is afraid this child will interfere with Kevin and David's relationship later on. Annette calls Theresa by her first name, rather than referring to her as Kevin's mother, causing Theresa some hurt feelings. Kevin likes Annette and she is the first adult he is allowed to call by her first name.

Dan Mandel

Dan Mandel of Media Information Inc. is the man who wants to place Theresa's column in many of his newspapers. This causes Theresa to gain a great deal of success in her career and comes at a time when her relationship with Garrett is becoming complicated by their distance. Theresa must choose between her career and moving to Wilmington to be with Garrett.



Objects/Places

Message in a Bottle

Theresa is running on the beach in Cape Cod when she finds a bottle on the beach. Inside is a love letter from a man to his wife or lover that causes Theresa to cry. Theresa's editor, Deanna, talks her into publishing the letter in her newspaper column.

Second Letter

A woman calls Theresa the week after the message in the bottle appears in her column and tells her that she also found a letter written by the same man to the same woman. Theresa has the woman fax the letter to her.

Third Letter

Theresa does some research on messages in bottles and discovers an article that contains a portion of a letter that matches the style of the two letters she has already found. Theresa pays the author three hundred dollars for a copy of the letter. It is this third letter that inspires Theresa to find the author.

Final Letter

Garrett writes a final letter to Catherine when he realizes that he wants to be with Theresa. Garrett takes this letter out into the ocean during a storm in hopes that the letter will reach Europe.

Package

After Garrett's death, Theresa discovers he sent her a package that includes a message in a bottle. This letter tells Theresa that Garrett intended to pursue their relationship despite their break-up.

Theresa's Message to Garrett

Theresa sends a message to Garrett in a bottle from Cape Cod a year after his death to tell him that she plans to go on with her life the way he taught her she could.



Mementoes

Garrett keeps a number of mementos of Catherine, including some valentines he gave her as a child, in order to keep her memory close to him.

Catherine's Picture

Throughout his relationship with Theresa, Garrett keeps a picture of Catherine on his bedside table.

Happenstance

Happenstance is the name of the wooden hull boat Garrett and his wife, Catherine, restored. This sail boat was built in the early half of the century and was built as a fishing vessel. This boat is also how Garrett got his messages into the ocean in hopes they would go to Europe, a location his wife had always wanted to visit.

Island Diving

Island Diving is the name of the diving shop Garrett owned with his wife and continues to own. This is where Theresa first saw a picture of Garrett.



Themes

Grief

As the novel begins, Theresa Osborne is running on the beach filled with thoughts of her son and her ex-husband. Although it has been four years since she learned of David's infidelity and three years since her divorce became final, Theresa is still grieving the death of her marriage. Theresa always believed that her husband was as devoted to her as she was to him and that they would be one of those couples who would be together for fifty years. When that did not happen, Theresa found herself searching for someone or something to blame. Theresa never imagined herself as the woman who did not see, as the wife who was the last to know. Now she is alone and wishing she could turn back time. As she thinks about these things, Theresa finds a bottle that contains a letter from a man to a woman he clearly loved. This causes Theresa to begin to believe that romance does still exist, just not for her.

Garrett Blake is a widower. Three years ago, Garrett's pregnant wife was hit by a car as she stepped off the curb to cross the street. Garrett lost not only his wife, the love of his life, but also the family that would have been. Garrett was lost in his grief after his wife's death, unable to function. Now Garrett functions, but he refuses to spend time with people other than his employees, customers, and his father. Garrett sees no point in dating because he does not believe he could ever find anyone who could take his wife's place. Garrett deals with his grief privately, writing letters to his wife that he places in bottles to throw in the ocean with the hope that they will go to Europe, a place his wife had always wanted to visit. It is one of these letters that Theresa Osborne finds that morning on the beach.

Jeb Blake, Garrett's father, is also wrestling with his own grief. Jeb's wife died when Garrett was only twelve. Now, twenty years later, Jeb is still alone, unable to imagine another woman taking his wife's place. When Garrett dies, it plunges both Jeb and Theresa into a grief neither had imagined they would ever experience. Theresa's grief is compounded by the fact that she broke up with Garrett just days before his unexpected death. Grief becomes an overwhelming theme of this novel because it affects all the main characters at one point or another in the narration.

Loneliness

Theresa begins the novel by thinking about the loneliness that has become such a central theme of her life since her divorce. Theresa no longer misses her husband, but has come to realize she misses having a companion, someone to talk to after work, someone to fix her coffee in the mornings, someone to share her bed. Theresa is not the type to be with men just to fill a space; therefore, she feels as though her loneliness will only continue to grow because most of the men she dates either do not want a long term relationship or they do not want a woman with a child.



Garrett, on the other hand, is content to live with the memories of his wife until he meets Theresa. Theresa fills a hole in Garrett's life that he was not aware of before. Garrett feels this loneliness acutely when Theresa goes home. For the next few months, Garrett struggles with this feeling of loneliness and his feeling of betrayal toward his deceased wife.

Jeb, who lost his wife twenty years ago, also struggles with loneliness. Jeb never thought he could fall in love again; therefore, he lived his life pretty much like Garrett has up to the moment he met Theresa. Jeb is older now, convinced that it is too late for him to find a new love. Jeb admits to Garrett how lonely he truly is, trying to encourage Garrett not to repeat his father's mistakes. It is these things that make loneliness a theme of the novel.

Moving On

Theresa is a divorcee who has learned from the moment her husband left her that she cannot dwell on the unpleasant but must focus on the future in order to provide for her child. Unfortunately, Theresa does not believe this includes romance because few men are interested in a woman who comes with a child attached. When she meets Garrett, Theresa begins to believe that she can move on in romance as well as other aspects of her life.

Garrett loved his wife with every part of his soul. Garrett cannot imagine moving on with his life without Catherine. At first, Garrett hides in his house, refusing to do anything but drink and think about Catherine. However, Garrett eventually realizes he must get back to work at the very least in order to provide for himself. This is as far as Garrett is willing to go. When Garrett meets Theresa, he falls deeply in love, but a part of him continues to hold on to Catherine. Garrett cannot give up his devotion to his wife and it is this that eventually ends his relationship with Theresa. However, Garrett will soon come to the realization that he can love two women at the same time. Unfortunately, this realization comes too late.

After Garrett's death, Theresa finds herself overwhelmed with grief, just as Garrett had been after the death of Catherine. Theresa cannot imagine moving on, living life without Garrett. However, Garrett taught Theresa that it is possible to love someone and to let them go, in order to allow them to move on. Theresa promises Garrett that she will move on, making this a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person. The main character, Theresa Osborne, is often the character through whom the author tells his story. However, when Theresa meets Garrett Blake, the story can occasionally switch to his point of view without warning. The third person point of view allows the reader to see the story through the eyes of a specific character and to see that character's emotions, without giving the additional intimacy of a first person point of view.

The point of view of this novel works because it allows the reader to see the actions of the plot through the eyes of the main character, Theresa Osborne. It is essential to the development of the plot that the readers know about Theresa's frame of mind and the decisions she makes based on those thoughts. Therefore, it is important that the reader be given insight into Theresa's thoughts. Also important to the plot's development is that the reader understand the depth of Garrett's grief for his wife, Catherine, and his feelings for Theresa. Therefore, the writer also dips into Garrett's thoughts from time to time, allowing the reader to see for themselves what he is thinking. Although the switch from character to character is often jarring, it is an important switch that helps the readers understand the plot that much better.

Setting

The novel begins in Cape Cod, where Theresa Osborne is vacationing with her friend, Deanna. On this beach, Theresa finds a message in a bottle that is destined to change her life. The setting then moves to Boston, a large city where Theresa lives and works with her twelve-year-old son, Kevin. Finally, the setting becomes Wilmington, North Carolina, a beach-side town where Garrett Blake lives and works.

The various settings of the novel are important because they both lend reality to the overriding theme of a message in a bottle as well as adding tension to the plot's development. The novel opens on Cape Cod where Theresa finds a bottle with a message inside. This message will change her life as it leads her to Garrett Blake, a man with whom she will have a passionate love affair. The setting then changes to Boston, where Theresa lives in the heart of the busy city, a city for which she is passionate. When Theresa decides to find Garrett, she goes to Wilmington. This is a laid back, tourist infested beach town. Garrett has a good life in Wilmington, a business and a family that cares about him. The contrast between Wilmington and Boston cause a great deal of tension between Theresa and Garrett as they become involved in a passionate affair. Eventually Garrett will ask Theresa to give up her life in Boston to be with him in Wilmington, a request that will lead to the shattering of their affair.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The language does not include any slang or foreign phrases, keeping it simple enough for even the youngest readers to comprehend. There are no regional words, no unfamiliar phrases, or anything else that might make the novel difficult to read. Most of the novel is written in words of romance, both in the letters that Garrett and Theresa write throughout the novel, as well as the development of the plot surrounding Garrett and Theresa's relationship.

The language of this novel works because the dialogue is simple and sounds like something people would actually say to one another. At the same time, the exposition is filled with words of romance that express the growing devotion the two main characters feel for one another. At the same time, the letters that the characters write to one another are filled with rare sentiment that leaves the reader weeping in admiration and envy. The novel is easy to read and simple enough for even the youngest reader to understand.

Structure

The novel begins with a short prologue that discusses some of the history regarding a message in a bottle. The novel then is divided into thirteen chapters. These chapters are of moderate length, each filled with both exposition and dialogue. The novel also include multiple letters, most of them written by Garrett and placed in bottles in the hope that they will reach Europe. There are also a few letters written to Theresa and a letter Theresa has written to Garrett after his death.

The novel is simply written and has only one plot. The plot follows Theresa as she finds a message in a bottle and decides to find the man who wrote the message. When Theresa finds this man, they begin a passionate affair that is complicated by the distance between Theresa and Garrett's residences. In the end, Theresa breaks off the affair, afraid that Garrett will never truly get over the death of his wife, Catherine. Before Garrett or Theresa can rectify this situation, Garrett is killed in a shipwreck.



Quotes

"The bottle was dropped overboard on a warm summer evening, a few hours before the rain began to fall." Prologue, p. 7

"And it was there, after 26 days and 738 miles, that it ended its journey." Prologue, p. 10

"It had started with her alone, and that was the same way she wanted it to end." Chap. 1, p. 12

"At night when I am alone, I call for you, and whenever my ache seems to be the greatest, you still seem to find a way to return to me." Chap. 1, p. 34

"She wanted a little color by the time she got back to work, if for no other reason than to look as though she had taken some time to do absolutely nothing." Chap. 2, p. 52

"Where are you? And why, I wonder as I sit alone in a darkened house, have we been forced apart?" Chap. 3, p. 77

"The day she discovered the third letter, she had of course expected nothing unusual." Chap. 4, p. 86

"Without you in my arms, I feel an emptiness in my soul." Chap. 4, p. 89

"Yet part of him wanted to try, wanted Theresa of all people to understand." Chap. 7, p. 202

"He was reminded again of that lazy summer afternoon with Catherine, when he'd come home to surprise her for lunch—a day that in retrospect seemed so fraught with signs...yet how could he have foreseen everything that would happen?" Chap. 8, pp. 220-221

"Just before they soared into the clouds that would obliterate everything below, she put her hand against the glass and touched it gently, imagining the feel of his hand once more." Chap. 12, p. 422

"But most of all, thank you for showing me that there will come a time when I can eventually let you go." Chap. 13, p. 463



Topics for Discussion

Why do people put messages in bottles? What kind of messages are normally found in these bottles? What story does a writer in the plot relate about a message in a bottle? How is this similar to a story Theresa tells about a bottle she and friend sent as children? What kind of message would you send in a bottle? What does the prologue say about the use of bottles in the ocean? How does the bottle Garrett sends end up in Cape Cod? What is unusual about the movement of this bottle?

Who is Theresa? What happened four years ago that has changed the course of Theresa's life? Why does Theresa think she will be alone for the rest of her life? What is it about Theresa that men find it difficult to become committed to Theresa? What does Theresa do for a job? Why does this keep her so busy? How does this affect Theresa's ability to date?

Who is the author of the note Theresa finds? Who is he writing to? What does Theresa believe the message means? Why does Theresa publish the letter? Does Theresa feel right about publishing this letter? Was this a moral thing to do? Was it a legal thing to do? How does this letter relate to the overall subject of Theresa's column?

Who is Garrett? Who is he grieving when Theresa meets him? Where does Garrett invite Theresa to go on their first meeting? Why? How does Theresa remind Garrett of the person he is grieving? Is this why Garrett continues to see Theresa? Why does Garrett feel guilty when he begins to date Theresa? How does this affect their relationship? Who does Garrett eventually choose?

Who is Jeb? Why does he continuously encourage Garrett to move on with his life? What happened in Jeb's life that compares with the situation in which Garrett finds himself? How does Jeb feel about Theresa when he learns she is dating Garrett? How does Jeb react when he learns that Theresa is coming to Thanksgiving? How does this inject some humor into the novel? What happens when Theresa backs out of the visit? When do Theresa and Jeb finally meet? What is sad about this circumstance?

What does Garrett slowly reveal about Catherine to the reader as his relationship with Theresa develops? What makes her death doubly tragic for Garrett? Did Garrett and Catherine have a strong relationship? Was Garrett right when he said that what he had with Theresa would never match what he had with Catherine? Why does this statement hurt Theresa so deeply? Did Garrett mean to hurt Theresa in this way? How does the reader come to learn the truth about Garrett's feelings for Theresa?

Discuss long distance relationships. What was the hardest part of the relationship between Garrett and Theresa? Which person should have moved? Which person had the least to lose in a move? Which had the most to lose? Why did Theresa become angry when Garrett suggested she be the one to move? What might Garrett have said to make her reaction less intense and less negative? Would he have eventually have said it?