

The Memory Keeper's Daughter Study Guide

The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards

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Plot Summary

The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards is a poignant story of marriage, parenthood and a secret that entwines itself throughout the emotional lives of a family and, eventually, tears it apart. Happily married, Dr. David Henry and his wife Norah are expecting a child in the middle of a stormy winter in 1964. Having made the treacherous drive through deep snow with Norah in labor, they meet with David's nurse, Caroline Gill, and prepare Norah for the birth. Norah gives birth to a healthy baby boy, but shortly thereafter, also gives birth to a small girl who has obvious signs of Downs Syndrome. David asks Caroline to remove the girl baby so that his wife will not know. He tells Norah that she did give birth to a daughter, but that the little girl was stillborn. In the meantime, Caroline Gill, per instructions, takes the tiny infant to a home and finds the conditions so deplorable she is unable to leave the baby there. Unmarried and somewhat in love with her boss, David Henry, she decides to keep the baby herself and raise her as her own.

Since Norah was never allowed to see the girl baby named Phoebe, and David tells her that he had the child buried already, Norah holds a service for her and mourns her loss, even though she is happy to have their healthy son, Paul. Not seeing the lost baby, however, begins to haunt her and she feels Phoebe's presence, becoming obsessed with the loss of her. David finds out from Caroline Gill that Phoebe is with her and, although he means and intends to tell his wife the truth, it has gone too far and would be too difficult to shock her with the knowledge that her daughter is alive. David begins to live in the throes of guilt and withdraws from his wife and son for reasons unknown to them. He becomes obsessed with photography, while Norah begins to have affairs with other men. Paul, as he grows up, is emotionally neglected by both parents due to their being so wrapped up in their own pain. Norah becomes a successful travel agent, Paul finds his talent as a musician. David, on a journey to his ramshackle childhood home, discovers a pregnant young girl whom he takes under his wing, sharing his secret of Phoebe with her. He eventually moves away from Norah and Paul, and spends his time with a young woman named Rosemary and her little boy, Jack. David eventually dies, and Caroline Gill finally goes to Norah with the truth about her daughter, who is now grown and wants to get married. Norah and Paul take Phoebe into their hearts and try to adjust to having her in their lives. It is a sweet ending to a very sad and destructive series of events that could have been avoided if David had not wanted to protect Norah from the pain of having a retarded and, perhaps unhealthy, daughter. Because he saw his own mother suffer over the loss of his young sister, he feels he can eliminate that pain for Norah, not considering that it may be more painful for Norah to have never had Phoebe.



Pages 3 - 20

Pages 3 - 20 Summary

In March of 1964, a heavy blanket of snow is falling. Osteopath Dr. David Henry and his wife of one year, Norah, are snugly at home in Lexington, Kentucky, contemplating what is it like to be in utero. David is loving and attentive to his wife. He recalls meeting her for the first time in a department store, following her and pretending to shop until he could make contact with her, buying a robe he claimed was for his sister. Three months later they were married. David's sister had been dead for ten years. David, although a very good doctor, still holds a sense of not being good enough, having come from a poor, unambitious family. He chose the study of bones because they are solid and predictable.

Norah goes into active labor, and they head out on the treacherous trip in the snow to meet the obstetrician at his office. They are met there by Caroline Gill, David's nurse, who informs them that the obstetrician will not attend the birth. Caroline and David have experienced a moment of mental intimacy at one time, and are fond and respectful of one another. Together, David and Caroline work with Norah to deliver her baby. With the intermittent use of gas for her pain, Norah gives birth to a perfect baby boy.

Unexpectedly, she proceeds to give birth to a small girl child whose features tell David she is "mongoloid," or has Downs syndrome. Remembering his mother's grief over his own sister's heart condition and early demise, David, in a dreamlike state, asks Caroline to take the baby into the back room, and gives her the address of a home to which he wants the baby delivered. He wants to protect Norah from the kind of grief his mother experienced. He tearfully tells Norah they had twins, but that the little girl died in childbirth.

Pages 3 - 20 Analysis

This is a couple who has only been married a year. Although they are in love, it is clear they might not know one another as well as they should. David is extremely attentive to Norah and has romantic memories of meeting and courting her. Wanting her to wear the same coat and gloves gives us the idea that he is very much invested in the romantic aspect of their relationship. David's white lie about buying the robe for his sister should be a sign for Norah.

David has a tender heart and is still not over losing his sister when she was twelve and witnessing his mother's deep grief. He thinks he can avoid the grief for Norah and for himself by just not acknowledging the existence of Phoebe. He trusts Caroline Gill to keep his secret, knowing that she is fond of him. With the onset of labor occurring three weeks early and the blizzard causing him to slide in the snow, added to having to deliver his own babies in the middle of the night, David Henry has made a quick decision based on a memory that will now haunt him forever.



Pages 21 - 35

Pages 21 - 35 Summary

Caroline Gill braves the terrible weather, taking tiny Phoebe wrapped up in a box to head out to the home. The driving is treacherous and she reviews the night's events as she drives. Caroline recalls being raised by older parents who over-protected her, forcing a life of calm quietude upon her childhood. Having lived her adult life in solitude, she is capable and has faith in herself. She had dreamed of having her own clinic in China or Burma, a result of reading Pearl Buck books, but let the dreams go when Dr. Henry arrived. She felt Dr. Henry was involved in her destiny. She observed him sleeping at his desk and when he awoke, the two made an emotional connection, but Dr. Henry married Norah Asher.

Arriving at the institution, she notes that it is in a state of tattered disrepair. Reviewing her memories, she goes through the home and sees the patients in different stages of their lives, one having her long hair cut off. She dreads having Phoebe grow up in this dust and loneliness, remembering her own childhood. She encounters the head of the home, who misunderstands her reason for being there. Rather than explain, Caroline retrieves baby Phoebe and leaves.

After miles of driving, Caroline stops at a store that is closing up. Exhausted, out of gas and with a dead battery, she cries out for help, adding that she has a baby.

Pages 21 - 35 Analysis

Caroline Gill, having had a rather uneventful life, has shocked herself, not only by agreeing to keep this secret with Dr. Henry, but by deciding to keep the baby for herself. Her love for the doctor and her lack of love in her life has weakened her logic, perhaps. However, she seems to sense that this is the big thing she has been waiting for; this is her life's purpose. She experiences a moment of resentment toward Norah Henry, who has a healthy son and is married to David, whom she loves for his generous kindness.. This has probably played into her decision, as well as her exhaustion and her lifelong need to be loved.

Caroline has responsibly brought along warmed formula and diapers, prepared to take care of Phoebe, but has not prepared herself emotionally for the fact that she intends to keep her and raise her as her own child. Realizing the enormity of the situation, she is momentarily panicked over her dead battery and isolation.



Pages 35 - 69

Pages 35 - 69 Summary

Norah experiences the extremes of happiness and sorrow as she nurses her child. She is trying to come to grips with giving birth to a dead child and hersuffering from not having seen her. She has been dreaming of lost things. Norah's headstrong college-student sister, Bree, is staying with her to help out. Bree was a wild teenager and their mother was ashamed of her, but Norah somehow envies her. Bree sees Norah's organized, tidy life as a sitcom. David has gone back to work; Norah wonders if little Paul misses his twin.

Norah is uncomfortable with visitors who have come to see the baby, and they feel awkward about her grief. She wants Phoebe's birth acknowledged. Bree suggests she proceed with a memorial service for Phoebe, which helps Norah get focused. She cleans the house and tells David of her plans when he gets home. He is not supportive, but tries to understand. Norah finds solace and peace while nursing Paul.

Caroline Gill cannot get back into the store, and is invited by a trucker, Al, to sit in his truck. After talking a while, he offers to give her a ride home. Her nosy neighbor sees them go into Caroline's apartment, where Al stays on the sofa bed. Al invites her to Nashville, but she decides she wants to move to Pittsburgh. He thinks she is a single mother. He leaves and Caroline becomes a full-time mother, calling in sick to her job. She lies to her neighbor, saying Al is her cousin whose wife is in the hospital seriously ill; she says Al has left his three-week old baby with her to care for.

Caroline feels David Henry will eventually do the right thing and tell his wife about Phoebe, but she sees a notice in the paper for Phoebe's memorial service and realizes he has told Norah the baby died. David comes to her apartment and she confesses she could not leave Phoebe at the home. He tells her to do what she must, but that he cannot tell Norah. David kisses her hand with tears in his eyes, and she feels an enormous bond with him. He tries to give her money, and asks that she not do anything without telling him first. Caroline packs and makes arrangements, and heads to the memorial service, where she is unnoticed. She decides not to interrupt the course of things, and realizes she is going to keep Phoebe, since Phoebe is now dead in the eyes of the world. Caroline drives away to start a new life, away from Lexington and the Home for the Feebleminded, toward Pittsburgh.

Pages 35 - 69 Analysis

Norah's grief over losing her daughter is enormous and unresolved, since she never saw or touched her. She is blissful about her son, and in deep mourning for her daughter. She does not know why David is so strange over the memorial service, even though he tries to be reasonably understanding. Norah's meltdown in front of her



company demonstrates how much she has held back, and how people not acknowledging the baby's brief existence has hurt her feelings. Her pain is stronger than her gratitude toward these people who have come to see her baby boy. Her sister Bree has disgraced the family in the past, but Norah envies her freedom and courage.

Caroline's organized life had come unglued, as she gets locked out of the store, and now turns to a stranger for help. Al is a kind man who shows affection toward Phoebe, and Caroline is comfortable enough with him to allow him to sleep in her home. It is clear that he will show up again in the story. Taking Phoebe has given Caroline an opportunity to start her life over again, now with more meaning. As the minister commits Phoebe's imagined body to dust, Caroline commits to her new life as a mother.



Pages 70 - 89

Pages 70 - 89 Summary

Norah has decorated their new house for a romantic anniversary dinner with David, who is detained with an emergency. She has redecorated the house; David has changed jobs. Norah is making frequent trips to the cemetery. Disappointed, Norah drinks the wine Bree has brought as a present. Bree shares that her boyfriend betrayed her; Norah feels she could not break all the rules like Bree does.

Bree takes the baby home with her and Norah thinks about how her marriage has changed. She becomes drunk on the wine, and questions why they ever got together, reminiscing about their past. She unwraps the camera she has bought for David and goes to the house where they used to live. She takes photos of details in the empty house, cutting her foot on a broken flash bulb. She has a minor car accident driving home, hitting a trash can. When she arrives, David and Paul are there, and Bree is out looking for her. David tends to her foot, and asks her not to be sad, and she has decided to leave the past behind. The camera's box has the words, The Memory Keeper. David has brought her a necklace of dark stones for their anniversary, and it seems that things will be better now.

Pages 70 - 89 Analysis

Norah is still obsessing over her lost daughter and David is still feeling guilty and distant. Norah has never had too much to drink before, and does not handle it well. She is afraid to let go of their old house because it will make the past final. After coming home and having David show her some affection, she is finally willing, however, to let the old house go and leave the past behind as a gift to her husband and the baby. Somehow the Memory Keeper adds a comforting idea to this rough evening they have spent, since David has reassured her he will never forget about their daughter and the camera was bought with the hope that he would capture every moment, and never forget. There is mention that Norah is suffering from depression which, in 1965, was not recognized as a valid condition that required treatment. It does explain Norah's unwillingness to let go, and her ongoing despondency over her lost daughter. This is more than post-partum depression, but in this decade would have been treated long before getting to the stage in which Norah finds herself.



Pages 90 - 105

Pages 90 - 105 Summary

Phoebe is ill with croup. Caroline now lives with a woman named Doro, who has a Ph.D. in physics. Caroline works as a companion to Doro's failing elderly father, Leo, whose mind is not altogether sound. Doro tries to tell Caroline how different he was when he was younger. Caroline tells Doro that Phoebe has Down's syndrome, and Doro wonders what will become of her. Doro's fiance was killed, and Doro never married or had children. This is her childhood home, where a freeway has been built nearby where her father once picked flowers for her mother.

Caroline writes David Henry a letter to tell him she and Phoebe are fine and that Phoebe shows no signs of heart trouble, but she is afraid to send it for fear of losing Phoebe. At eleven months, Phoebe still cannot feed herself or grasp objects. Old Leo is cantankerous and Caroline has to talk back to him. Caroline's friend Sandra brings her child, Tim, for play days. The two women are determined that their special needs children will have an education, and they work with them in the mornings to help them learn. Leo escapes the house for the third time, and Caroline again goes looking for him, with Phoebe in the stroller. He is lost, and when he sees her, puts on a show of running up a set of stairs. Leo compliments Caroline on her tenacity in putting up with him.

Al appears at her house, having looked for her for a year. Caroline is shocked to have been found. She invites him in for tea. He is very glad to see Phoebe, and Phoebe reaches out and is able to grab a medallion on his chest, a feat she has been unable to accomplish until now.

Pages 90 - 105 Analysis

Caroline is settled into her life as a mother and, even though her circumstances are entirely different from the life she left behind, she seems happy. She is concerned about Phoebe's health, and just as concerned about losing her. Doro is a good friend and although Leo is a pain, Caroline feels compassion for him. The house is old and the bathroom is purple, but Caroline seems to have a sense of contentment with it and her new friend, Sandra. She is enthused about getting involved in fighting for an education for Down's syndrome children, and her life seems to have new meaning. Al, of course, has found her. He is good with Phoebe, so Caroline sees his arrival as a stroke of luck.



Pages 106 - 123

Pages 106 - 123 Summary

Norah and David are at the river, he looking for fossils and she running toward the water. David stops to check on a woman whose heart may be in trouble, having educated himself on heart problems because of his sister. David has received Caroline's letter. Norah is feeling better; the photos she took of the old house have been destroyed. But David is suffering from guilt, his sister's face at times replacing Phoebe's in his mind. David is photographing Norah, her adventurous spirit making him nervous. David reminisces about his parents, wishing they were alive to meet Paul, and remembering how they never felt comfortable in a city. He sadly remembers his sister with love, and questions again, whether he should have given his daughter away. Norah wants to know what is wrong between them. David asks what she wants; she discusses her parents, whose love was somewhat one-sided and silent. He is unable to be intimate with Norah because he has lied to her; he almost confesses, but changes his mind. Norah wants another child but David does not feel they are ready, secretly fearing another Downs syndrome child.

David rests, thinking about artifacts and ancient stones, and catching rattlesnakes as a child for food money. When Norah calls to him, he jumps up and throws a stone at what he thinks is a snake, but it is only a stick. Although she was a responsibility for him as a boy and he felt a faint resentment for her, he loved June. He recalls her untimely death, his mother's grief and his decision to be a doctor.

Norah tells him she hates his trying to protect and rescue her all the time. He feels anger at himself and Caroline, and holding the geode from his pocket, contemplates all the mysteries concealed within the earth, "these dull rocks. with their glimmering hidden hearts."

Pages 106 - 123 Analysis

This chapter seems to represent a turning point for David and Norah. She is breaking out into her own life, feeling her strength and braveness, and resenting his trying to rescue her. David, on the other hand, is withdrawing more into his thoughts, memories, photographs and his anger and guilt. It is symbolic that he is carrying the baby to the picnic, and Norah is the one who carries him back. Norah does not know what is wrong with David, but she has decided to survive, while he is trapped by his guilt over Phoebe, which is entwined with his grief and guilt over his sister. In this chapter, Norah is looking ahead at Paul's future, smelling the flowers, while David is looking back, farther and farther into isolation from her and Paul.



Pages 124 - 139

Pages 124 - 139 Summary

A nervous Norah has put Paul in school, where he is thriving and already singing solos. Norah runs into Kay Marshall, the perfect mother, whose daughter was born around the same time as Paul and Phoebe. Kay now has another little girl; she mentions the unrest at the local university and the incident where four students were shot at Kent State in Ohio, and says she wants Paul to sing a duet with her daughter at a fund-raiser. Norah has become overly-busy filling up her time, calming herself with afternoon gin or vodka, taking long, solitary drives to other towns, to escape and drink. She is heading home to take down a wasps' nest above her garage to prepare for a party she has planned when she comes to the congested area of the university where demonstrations are taking place. She sees Bree, who introduces her to a disabled veteran friend named Mark. Norah is waiting to hear if she gets a job at a travel agency where she has interviewed and, when Bree encourages her about it, they have words.

Back at home she stares at the photo David took of her at the beach, regretting having bought him the camera with which he has become so obsessed. Norah proceeds to knock down the wasps nest. After being stung several times, she vacuums the insects with her new Electrolux, and hooks the hose to the tailpipe of her car to trap them, but when the gas fumes build, the vacuum shoots across the yard taking a piece of the tailpipe with it. She pulls out the vacuum bag and stomps on it wildly. She can hear the protesters from her yard and senses that life will never be the same.

Pages 124 - 139 Analysis

Norah's restlessness is a result of not knowing where she belongs. She is drawn to the protesters and this newly dawning age of imagined freedom, and is also envious of Kay Marshall, the perfect middle class wife and mother. She is drinking to medicate the pain she feels from being so distant from David, and is taking dangerous chances, like driving under the influence with her son and hooking the vacuum up to the exhaust of her car. She is resolved that she won't have any more children, so that part of her future is packed away. The job at the travel agency is frightening to her and at the same time attracts her in a new way. Norah is internally conflicted, and Bree brings that out in her by challenging her values. Dancing on the bag of her brand new ruined vacuum clear, killing the potential pain inside of it, symbolizes a turning point in Norah's life. This is a volatile time in history and the spirit of protest is infectious; Norah's sense of oppression on a personal level coincides with the developments in the United States that made people decide that they would no longer accept lies or authority based on fear and ignorance.



Pages 140 - 157

Pages 140 - 157 Summary

After scolding him for opening the darkroom door, David examines fossils with Paul. He notes that the party has been a lot of work for Norah and suggests she hire a caterer, which only frustrates her. David is regularly receiving mail from Caroline Gill, and sends her money in return. He has tried to find her, and has dreams about the moment he caught her staring at him. Paul has his new fossils on a string around his neck and Norah is afraid he will choke on it as he plays. David and Bree disagree, and the three discuss the fire that burned the ROTC building on campus the night before.

David is slightly hostile toward Bree's boyfriend for his role in the protests; David and Mark realize they are from the same home town, but Mark makes David uncomfortable and feeling empty of pride.

Norah's distance makes him feel lonely. Norah does not want David taking pictures at the party. Paul climbs a tree and falls to the ground, breaking his arm. They both leave the party to take their son to the hospital. David loves his work and is still amazed at the human body and is fascinated with bones. Little Paul apologizes again for ruining the photos earlier that morning. Norah tells David she has a job at the travel agency and he feels her decision has something to do with him and they argue as Paul plays with the stethoscope. Returning home they find the party is over, and David puts Paul to bed, reliving the wonder he experiences when seeing an x-ray of bones. David reads to Paul and notices dogwood petals falling, which remind him vaguely of snow.

Pages 140 - 157 Analysis

Norah and Paul both have trouble living in the present moment. Norah's unrest seems partially due to the mutual distancing between them; Paul is becoming more withdrawn into his work and photography, while she is becoming more drawn to the outer world and developing her talents outside the home. In the meantime, Paul, although not being neglected, is adjusting to the friction between them, perhaps blaming himself and his childish mistakes for their unhappiness. One wonders if he fell out of the tree to get them focused on what is important, but it only seems to increase the distance between them. David thinks that Norah getting a job has to do with him, and she accuses him of being self-centered. They are both selfishly nurturing their own wounds while neglecting their marriage.

Norah's paranoia about Paul getting hurt makes his accident ironic; she was afraid he would choke on his necklace or get stung by a wasp, but instead he fell out of a tree, fulfilling her beliefs about how dangerous everything is.



Pages 158 - 188

Pages 158 - 188 Summary

Caroline Gill has managed to get Phoebe into a preschool, where she has fit in with other children, her differences unnoticed. Caroline is involved in a group that is working to get the Board of Education to accept Down's syndrome children into public schools. Leo has died, and Al comes regularly to visit. Doro is in love.

Caroline attends a meeting of the Board of Education, whose members feel that the Down's children who have learned and developed, have done so only with special attention, which the public system cannot afford. They are afraid the schools will be flooded with retarded children and be a drain on resources, as well as unfair to brighter children. A large group of parents has filed a class action suit to force them into accepting their children in public school. Al arrives after a long trip, bringing Caroline a letter and money from David Henry from one of her post office boxes. Dancing with Al on the lawn, Caroline has decided that this time if he asks her to marry him, she will say yes. While they are dancing, Phoebe gets a bee sting and has an allergic reaction. Almost totally unable to breathe, the hospital nurse asks Caroline if she really wants Phoebe to be revived, and Caroline tries to slap the nurse's face. Phoebe survives the reaction, and Caroline tells Al in the hospital waiting room that she has been a fool, and that she will marry him.

Seven years later, Norah is posing on the beach in Aruba for David's photographs. David is trying to get a photo of her as part of the landscape, blending into the sand. Paul is thirteen, and they are on a trip she has won as a travel agent, a job at which she became a professional and eventually bought the business. Paul runs every day and plays the guitar. In spite of his father's wishes for him, he wants to go to Julliard and be a musician.

A man from a neighboring cabin comes by and discusses photography with David. They invite him to dinner. Howard says he is getting a divorce and is very complimentary toward Norah, who responds to his flattery with a renewed sense of her sexuality. While the men discuss photography, Paul goes off to play his guitar, about which he is very serious. David's photos of Norah have made her an abstract object. Howard puts his hand on her thigh in the dark. He asks them to come by to see his camera obscura, and goes home. Norah and David agree that they like him.

the next morning Paul and David go fishing and Norah goes to Howard's cabin. She poses so he can look at her through the camera obscura, and she takes her clothes off, dropping them in the sand. She goes into his cabin with him this time, and ten more times, in a dreamlike state, even though she sees a letter from his wife saying she misses him and indicating he will be returning home soon..



Pages 158 - 188 Analysis

Caroline Gill, not having known for years what her purpose was, has finally found her life's work as a full time mother and advocate for Phoebe. Finding her voice politically, she is determined that children like Phoebe are entitled to equity in education. This correlates, also, to the times in which the story takes place when, historically, people were standing up and speaking out about injustice. Doro, who believes in love, encourages Phoebe to spend time with Al, and they are becoming a happy family, another unexpected but welcome change in Caroline's formerly empty life, and also connected with Phoebe.

Norah has become an object in David's photography, as he works to make her blend with the natural scenery, attempting to camouflage her in the photos. His disregard of her needs and feelings makes her so desperate for attention that she naturally succumbs to the first flirtation available. She is so needy that she becomes careless about being seen with Howard, even leaving her clothes in the sand. The extremely telling part of this fling is that she knows Howard really is married and that he will be heading home to his wife and children, but she ignores it and continues to be intimate with him, risking her own marriage.



Pages 189 - 237

Pages 189 - 237 Summary

Paul is giving a guitar performance at school. Norah and David are arguing, and a woman in the audience asks them to be quiet so she can hear her son play the piano. It turns out that both David and Paul had seen Norah's clothes in the sand in Aruba, but neither had mentioned it. David is overcome with emotion listening to his son's incredible performance and remembering the difficult past and all of its challenges and losses. Paul is now withdrawn from both his parents and shows his anger toward them. They go home and Paul goes to his room and sneaks out his bedroom window. They are upset and David blames himself for everything. He finds Paul walking, and in the car, Paul lets David know that he knows about Norah's affair with Howard.

Worried that Paul will not live up to his potential, David takes him into his studio and shows him an amazing photo of a heart that looks like a tree silhouette. He tells Paul that photography uncovers secrets, and Paul says that music touches the pulse of the world. Paul feels David wants him to live a dream that is not his and they argue again. David sits down and writes to Caroline Gill, saying he wants Paul to know his sister. He develops a photo of Howard and Norah, but hangs it where it will fade to black. In their own orbits, David feels that he is responsible for creating the distance among them all.

Paul and his friend Duke are playing dangerous games, jumping in front of trains. Paul recalls the day he saw his mother's clothes on the beach, and how he ran back home, unable to talk to his father. Duke's family, although not wealthy, makes Paul realize that not all families hold secrets from one another. Paul wonders if it was his job to protect his family. Duke and Paul go to Paul's house to smoke marijuana and play music while his parents are out. Norah calls to tell him she will be late, and the two decide to get more pot. They go to David's darkroom where Paul took money from the envelope David kept in the refrigerator, which was to send to Caroline Gill. Two older boys arrived with the marijuana and they smoked it indoors, rather than go outside in the rain. This time Paul became afraid, and the three other boys began to rummage through David's files of photos, scattering them; they draw on the walls, break glass and spill beer. After they leave, Paul studies an old photo of David and his sister and parents.

Paul wakes up to David and the ruined photos and negatives. David tells him he will have to help reconstruct the files, and then explains his own sad childhood to Paul, who wishes for this closeness with his father. Paul tells David how much he loves music, and David asks him not to close any doors yet. Paul imagines his father's work, healing patients, and he picks up the damage in the house.

The day of Phoebe's confirmation party, Caroline and Al have been married five years. Phoebe has had to learn not to hug everyone just because she likes them. Doro has decided to go on a year long cruise with her lover, Trace, and she has deeded the house to Caroline. Al is glad about Caroline's having the house, but wonders if they



might sell it some day and travel together. He wonders what will become of Phoebe when she is grown up, and whether she will live with them forever. Caroline tells Al about the letter from David Henry asking to meet Phoebe. She explains the circumstances that led to keeping Phoebe, but Al has already guessed the truth and promises to support her decision. While Caroline is inside contemplating how to respond to David, Phoebe disappears from the porch and Caroline finds her down the street in the woods, inside a pipe trying to rescue a cat. Caroline was forced to get into the pipe, which was filling with water, and pull Phoebe out, along with the kitten she was claiming to be hers. Caroline agrees Phoebe can keep the cat, and decides not to respond to David, since he wants too much, too late.

Pages 189 - 237 Analysis

Paul is clearly a musician at the soul level; he is not playing rock and roll, but Segovia, and is serious about his music. Paul and David, through rough experiences, are trying to reconnect. Paul is trying to get David to understand that music is a real passion for him; David is fearful that Paul will waste his potential for doing good in the world if he squanders himself on music. Paul has no way to understand why his parents are so distant from one another and from him. He does not understand why his father would turn a blind eye to his mother's infidelity, or why his mother would do such a thing. As David tells him, it is complicated. This story is set during a time when people in therapy were considered to be on the fringes of society, and when those who sought psychological help were stigmatized. This is a family who certainly would have benefited from family counseling, as their secrets and barriers become more destructive over time.

Paul's mishap with people who turn out not to be friends is also typical of those times, as well as today, when there is such a large gap between those who have and those who do not, that it creates resentment and anger. Although Paul is innocent, his friends see his family as "rich," and themselves as poor. But Paul's family is to be pitied for their lack of communication and stilted love. Although David blames himself entirely for their circumstances, Norah could be held accountable, as well, for making things worse.

Caroline is torn about responding to David, unsure if she still loves him, wondering if he has changed. When Phoebe gets in a life-endangering situation, she realizes how much responsibility she bears every day for Phoebe, and decides that David's pleas to see Phoebe have come too late. She has come to appreciate the safety and comfort of the home that now belongs to her and, although she is concerned for Phoebe's future, she is, for now, contented. She cannot risk the possibility that David, after all these years, might want to take Phoebe from her, or hurt Phoebe's feelings without realizing, like he had done before. The author wants us to see the ups and downs of raising this special child and how, even when she does something exasperating, her attention immediately goes on to the next thing. For instance, just after being saved from drowning in the pipe, she sees the mailman; her world is simple and happy. That David has chosen to forego all of this angers Caroline, and she has the upper hand in the situation.



Pages 238 - 275

Pages 238 - 275 Summary

Nora has gone with Al twice on road trips, but never again since. She takes the bus across town to the museum for a photography exhibit by David Henry, who will be speaking at the event. Caroline looks at his photos, getting a different feel for Norah Henry. Watching him speak, Caroline is surprised at how David has aged. David does not recognize her, but after she speaks to him, they go into a storage closet to get away from the crowd. He wonders why she has stayed hidden, and he is being pressured to come out and mingle with his audience. But Caroline tells him she had been in love with him, and he admits he knew. She is angry that David never asked about their lives until the one letter he wrote. He reminded her that he begged for her address, and says he has kept all her letters. He admits he saw her at the memorial service, and says he went straight to her apartment afterward, but she had gone. She tells him Phoebe's heart is fine and that she goes to public school, has friends and is learning to do office work. David is summoned back to the crowd, and wants Caroline to stay so they can talk more; she gives him some photos, but does not want to wait. She slips out and walks home, feeling that David never had really "glimpsed her." Seeing people in the taverns makes her feel isolated, but as she reaches her home, Caroline sees Phoebe through the window, and sees that Al is home early. She realizes that she likes her life, with all its complexities.

David is trying to be patient and attentive to a professor who is questioning him about his photography. He becomes panicky when he realizes Caroline has left, and has to talk himself down from his emotional response to the loss. The photos show Phoebe on her sixteenth birthday and one playing basketball, which Paul would not take an interest in. He is in the town where he went to college; he walks out into the night. He thinks of Norah, who is now a powerful executive; he thinks of time spent with Paul trying to protect him from poverty, worry and grief, but creating other problems. David contemplates suicide. He remembers being accepted to the University, the letter being addressed to David Henry, omitting his last name of McCallister, and his acceptance of the truncated name. After vomiting into the river, he walks into town to the bus terminal. David takes a seven hour bus ride to his childhood home town in West Virginia. He contemplates compensation, or the give and take, of the universe, walking out into the hills up the winding road, taking an hour to reach the old house. The house is dilapidated and empty, but there are signs someone is living there. He sees artistic paper cutouts hanging everywhere. Feeling the stark contrast between this place and his life with Norah, he reviews old memories of childhood and falls to sleep. When he awakens, he is tied to the bed by a young woman named Rosemary, obviously pregnant and afraid for her own safety. He tells the girl about giving Phoebe away at birth. Being in the house causes him to weep. Rosemary explains the art of scherenschnitte paper cutting. He explains how his lie about Phoebe has strangled his marriage and turned photography into an obsession meant to obscure what he had done. David spills his life story and all of his pain to this girl, who finally cuts his wrists free.



Pages 238 - 275 Analysis

Caroline is a homebody, and traveling with Al is not fun for her, nor does it help with her insecurities about Phoebe. Caroline's motivations for going to see David Henry are mixed. She may still be in love with him, she may be angry, but she also does not want to risk losing Phoebe. What she thinks she realizes is that David has never really cared a thing for her, which is not necessarily true. He was not in love with her, but he respected and trusted her enough to hand over his daughter to her. What Caroline still does not realize is that David is not reactive; he saw her at the memorial and, rather than acknowledging her, went directly to her apartment afterward. In this exhibition, he carefully pockets the photos of Phoebe, but Caroline sees it as a careless move. When he pays attention to his audience, as he is expected to do, Caroline takes it as a snub and leaves, not realizing how much it means to him to see her and find out about his daughter.

David comes so close to finding Phoebe that this time he finally cracks. Returning to his roots to re-live his childhood and the pain he experienced over losing his sister and living with distant parents is a reckless move, designed to either kill him or heal him. He does not know that he will run into Rosemary, who has her own huge set of problems and pain, and whose presence allows him to talk about things he has not talked about. The fact that she has tied him up makes it impossible for him to run from her, or his past. He is forced to lie there and think, cry and remember; Rosemary is a good listener. This is the kind of therapy David should have had long ago, but has avoided. Rosemary's hastily made decision to have sex has changed the course of her life, as well, and she will keep her baby at all costs. This creates some kind of connection between the two.



Pages 276 - 306

Pages 276 - 306 Summary

David has gone missing. Paul is home pretending illness, and Norah needs to take Bree to the doctor for tests. Bree and Norah now work together in Norah's business. David appears, bedraggled and ruffled, with Rosemary in tow; Norah is furious and accusing. Paul is interested in her, perhaps sexually. Rosemary knows all about Paul; she tells him that David made her come home with him, and that she had been staying in David's old house, which Paul now remembers his father telling him about long ago. The two become friends; Rosemary asks him if he was an only child and he tells her about Phoebe, but she says nothing about what she knows, but she implies that she knows more about David than Paul knows. David and Norah return home and argue about his disappearance and Rosemary, Norah suggesting there is something between them more than friendship. David could not bear to leave Rosemary in that house. Paul overhears David offering to move out, and tells him that he has been accepted to Julliard. Instead of the expected lecture, David tells Paul he is proud of him. But Paul is confused and afraid about his parents' behavior, his aunt's diagnosis, Rosemary and college — and he begins to run with his guitar. He jumps into an empty car and drives away with his guitar strapped in, heading for California. Paul's music was a way to fill up the emptiness in the house left by Phoebe, but now Rosemary's presence has changed something and he can see the family through her eyes.

Norah and Bree, now high-powered businesswomen, are preparing a proposal for IBM, when a former lover calls Norah at work offering his support for her; Paul has been missing for twenty-four hours. Norah tells him never to call her again. Bree has become quite thin with her illness.

Paul is caught in Louisville stealing cheese, and the police are holding him until he is picked up by his parents. Bree drives Norah to pick him up; it is now Norah who feels she has run into a wall. Norah and Bree agree that something is changing; Bree tells Norah that she was not happy in the past. She wants to survive her cancer and start a support group for others.

They find Paul at the police station; he thinks his father has not come, but David is right behind them. David tells Paul he will not be able to rehearse and Paul comments that his sister doesn't know how good she has it, whereupon Norah slaps his face, saying she will not lose another child. When they leave, Bree takes them out into the country to a small church. Norah begins to cry over all of her losses. When she comes out, Paul apologizes and Norah tells him that his dad is right - there will be conditions to meet. They drive out to an abbey where Thomas Merton had once lived, and Paul finds some crinoids; they hear the bells summoning the monks. Norah realizes how hard David has tried to make a good life for them.



Pages 276 - 306 Analysis

David could not let Rosemary stay in that decrepit house, as Caroline Gill could not leave Phoebe in the nursing home. David has recognized an opportunity to help a young girl and, because Rosemary and he have bonded so closely, he takes responsibility for her situation upon himself. It has been healing for him to just be able to talk to Rosemary about Phoebe and about his family. However, this new person in the house, added to all of the crazy events Paul has lived with, including his mother's infidelity and his father's disapproval, and his own addiction to sex with a girl at school — have finally taken their toll on him. He has tried to be a good kid, but he has no more solutions and does not want to see what happens next. Like Norah, Paul does not really know why he is unhappy, but the reader knows that David's guilt has affected all of them. He has tried to help his parents see the beauty in the world through music, but has failed. Bree has been a positive force for Paul with her free spirit, and now even she is ill. Paul is desperate to escape the family pathology.

Paul has caused a huge worry and uproar in the family, just as his father did a few days earlier, by disappearing. He seems perpetually in conflict with his father over his love for music and David's wish for him to do something more. Bree has the wisdom to take Norah and Paul to a sacred site where they can feel some peace and let some of their fear and anger dissolve. Finding the fossils, as he did when he was a child, is a sweet irony since it was one of the things that linked him to his father. For many reasons, their lives have been more difficult than they should have been and they still don't understand why. At this point, it is not clear whether Bree will live, but she is a spiritual force in Norah's life, and a sibling, such as Paul never got to have. Paul's meeting with Rosemary is symbolic of meeting a sister as well - his fascination with her and attraction to her could be likened to his longing for his sister's companionship as a lonely, only child.

The comment is interesting that Bree never carried a map, and Norah always did, but could not find her way in her marriage. It is also poignant that Norah wept "for Paul, the rage, and lostness in his eyes. For her daughter, never known. For Bree's think hands. For the multitude of ways in which their love had failed them all, and they, love."



Pages 307 - 323

Pages 307 - 323 Summary

David has left his former practice when he had to turn a patient away for lack of health insurance. He now works from his home, offering help to all patients, in a duplex which he shares with Rosemary and her son, Jack. They do not pay rent; David enjoys Jack's presence in a way he was never able to enjoy his own son. Rosemary has had the opportunity to go to college. Their emotional connection is the secret David has shared with her. He was with Rosemary for the birth of her son, and there is a secret door to Rosemary's half of the duplex, but David never enters her home, respecting her autonomy and privacy at all times. Rosemary's house is full of scherenschnitte, the pictures emerging from the paper and her scissors.

Rosemary informs David she has a job in Harrisburg near her mother, with whom she has become closer. She also tells him she will marry Stuart, her boyfriend. When she thanks him, Jack says he has been accused of "trying to hard to rescue people." Rosemary feels he ought to tell Norah about Phoebe. He had gone to Caroline's house to tell her he was going to tell Norah, but instead sat outside watching the little family through their windows, realizing that Phoebe's life is already fully developed with Caroline and Al. David stopped taking photos after his suicidal moment in Pittsburgh.

Rosemary tells David that Paul has called from Seville where he is studying flamenco guitar. David decides to take a run and stops by Norah's home, where he once lived, intending to tell her about Phoebe. But Norah is in Europe, so David fixes her leaking faucets instead and leaves her a happy birthday note.

Norah and Bree are waiting at the Louvre for Paul to arrive. David has died of a massive heart attack nine days earlier. Paul does not know his father has died and that he missed the heavily attended funeral. Bree has married a minister. Norah's relationship with Frederic has grown. Norah is thrilled to see her son. Paul is sad over the news, but still feels his father did not love him. They discuss David's emotional distance from them, as well as Norah's relationship with Frederic. Paul's girlfriend, Michelle, arrives, and they walk Norah to the train so she can return to the pension she shares with Frederic. The two have dinner and wine in the courtyard, and Norah has a moment of dizziness from the "long day of grief and joy."

Pages 307 - 323 Analysis

The separation of David and Norah, although it caused a scandal, seems to have been beneficial to everyone. David's life is more settled and peaceful now that he lives next to Rosemary, the only person who knows his secret besides Caroline Gill. The tension between Norah and David is gone, and he has found stability and comfort in his life living next to Rosemary. Rosemary is certainly doing better, finishing college and raising



her son with David for support. David is able to treat his patients in a more altruistic way, and Paul is thriving in his career as a musician. Norah is happy in a new relationship and traveling the world. Paul and Rosemary have become friends.

Edwards wants the reader to know that David is a good man; he has not meant to cause the destruction in his family that has kept them so distant. He was simply acting out of an old childhood-based sense of protection on Norah's behalf. His good treatment of Rosemary is a way of making up for his mistake. One should remember that Caroline Gill was attracted to David because of his goodness, his willingness to work after-hours seeing patients who could not afford his services. David's love for Jack is not tainted with the secret of Phoebe, and is not so complicated as his love for Paul.

Norah is entrenched in grief for all that she has lost, especially the connection with David. Her memories of being with him at the river, and her frustrated drives to the river when she was young, overwhelm her as she sits in Paris with the familiar smells and sounds of the river.

Bree and Norah are deeply connected as sisters, as well as business partners. Bree is moving into old age gracefully, finally marrying someone with whom her own values resonate. Her presence in Norah's family remains solid and important.



Pages 324 - 338

Pages 324 - 338 Summary

Norah and Bree are waiting for Paul at the Louvre in Paris. David has passed away nine days ago; Paul is not aware of it, or that he has missed his father's well-attended funeral. Norah has been home to take care of David's funeral, and Bree has returned to Paris with her for support. Paul is in love with a flautist, Michelle. Norah thinks about Frederic's idiosyncrasies and wonders if she might not tire of them some day; she does not know whether she will marry him, but is happier than she has ever been. She is thrilled to see Paul arrive, and suddenly understands David's desire to fix things in place. Paul is very upset about his father and the lost opportunity to communicate with him. He still feels his father did not love him, but Norah assures him he did. Paul reassures Norah that there was nothing unseemly between Rosemary and his father. Norah daydreams about what it might have been like to grow old with David. Paul looks forward to talking with Frederic about arrogant Americans.

Norah meets Michelle and they all plan to meet for breakfast. Paul and Michelle walk Norah to the train so she can return to the pension she shares with Frederic. Norah retires to the courtyard and thinks about how her life has changed. When Frederic comes home, he joins her for dinner. Norah is overcome with grief, joy and the memories of the smells and sounds of a river long ago, triggered by the river below her.

Pages 324 - 338 Analysis

Norah is overwhelmed with grief over David, not only because she had loved him but also because of all of the incomplete communication that hung between them. She has never really understood the distance among all of them, and mourns the loss of any hope to mend things with him. She is happy with Frederic now, happy to have her sister with her and very happy to see her beloved son, but the intensity of it all is overwhelming for her.

Norah realizes that Frederic is not perfect, but is willing to focus on his goodness. She has finally healed from her tendency to want to flirt with men, and feels grounded with him, unlike her relationship with David that made her want to run, travel and take long drives away from home.

It appears that Paul will not suffer the inability to have true intimacy, as his tender moments with his girlfriend illustrate. Bree, who has always needed some kind of belief to cling to, has become religious over the years, as well as spiritual.



Pages 339 - 358

Pages 339 - 358 Summary

Phoebe has met a boy named Robert, who is social and happy, and she wants to marry him. They are all on a bus headed for a dance at the Upaide Down Society; Al is tired from work and Caroline is tired of having him gone so much. The facility's director has warned Caroline that Phoebe is starting to discover her sexuality. Caroline has learned of a secret bank account in her name, and that David has been dead for three months. Al and Caroline dance like they did when they were younger. Phoebe is on a waiting list for residence in a facility for others like her.

Caroline finds Phoebe and Robert in an erotic embrace and explains to her that she cannot get married, although Phoebe naively thinks that she and Robert can buy a house and have babies. Their old neighbor Avery has had a child, but Caroline tells Phoebe that caring for a child is like caring for a cat, and takes a lot of work. Al reminds Caroline that she has always insisted that people not underestimate Phoebe, and Caroline cannot imagine life without her. Al is not as disturbed about the secret bank account; he assures her he will not leave her, but that he needs to get up in the morning and head for Toledo. Al would like Caroline to come along on some trips again, but Phoebe is dependent upon her.

Phoebe has encountered someone on the bus who is up to no good, inviting her to come home with him to see his bird. Caroline goes with Phoebe on the bus the next day, but the man does not appear. Caroline reminds Phoebe that anyone who doesn't know her secret word can not be trusted. She files a police report and begins driving Phoebe to work each day.

Al has a dangerous accident, totaling his truck and breaking his leg. Caroline is now driving Phoebe to work and caring for Al. Phoebe and Robert come home, having skipped work and spent the day together, and riding the bus. The two brought Phoebe flowers, as Al has always done on Saturdays. Al tells Caroline he has decided not to drive a truck any longer; she tells him that the account David left her is large, but Al is reluctant to take anything he has not earned himself. She is coming around to thinking that maybe Phoebe will be alright without her, and there is a sense that she is about to turn a corner.

Pages 339 - 358 Analysis

Caroline struggles between wanting Phoebe's capabilities to be recognized, and being frightened at the thought of Phoebe's independence. She is also unable to imagine herself without Phoebe, but she is getting tired and she and Al could retire comfortably now. The fact that Phoebe and Robert took the bus to the store and bought roses for her shows her that they are certainly capable of doing everyday things, and because Al



came so close to having a fatal accident, Caroline's world view is shifting somewhat. Al knows that it is time to stop driving and, as always, he wants what is best for Caroline. This chapter is skillfully written because, instead of telling us exactly what is happening and about to happen, the author lets the events tell the story and the reader feels the change coming about in Caroline.



Pages 359 - 374

Pages 359 - 374 Summary

David's photography is in demand again since his death. Norah is going through his photos feeling nostalgic with memories of her past. She realizes that no one can tell from these photos what was in her heart at the time. Frederic has been transferred to France and Norah plans to marry him and go there with him. She is very different now, no longer afraid of everything, as she was after Phoebe died. She and Frederic will live in Chateauneuf by the river, two hours from Paris by train. David's collections include many photos of babies, and a section of photos of girls, arranged by age from very young to young women. Another box contains photos of Paul, and Norah realizes he had been keeping a record of Phoebe's absence, that he had felt her loss deeply. But she is quite happy and content now, her life with Frederic a soothing end to a bumpy ride.

Caroline Gill shows up on Norah's doorstep. Caroline remembers her help during childbirth. Caroline wants to talk to her; she tells her that Phoebe did not die but was born with Down's syndrome, and David thought the prognosis was bad. She tells her that she was unable to leave her at the home in Louisville, and that she kept and raised Phoebe all these years. Norah feels like the ground has gone out from under her, but she knows Caroline is telling her the truth. Caroline explains that she felt like a hero, fighting for Phoebe's education and health care, but in the end she admits she had no children of her own and was in love with David from a distance. Norah is devastated that David never told her and had tried to protect her. Caroline tells her that Phoebe does not yet know about Norah and Paul, and she tells Norah that David loved her very much.

Norah is extremely upset, remembering how hard it was to let Phoebe go, but also remembers what a good person David was. She begins to drink, and later begins throwing David's photos, which would have brought a lot of money, out the window into the yard, box by box. In the morning the photos have blown about; Norah she feels she is claiming history by destroying them. Saving photos of Paul, she makes a circle of stones and lights David's valuable photos on fire. She is extremely angry at David, and commits his captured memories to ashes and dust.

Pages 359 - 374 Analysis

The climax of the story, the exposing of David's lie, is almost as devastating to Norah as the death of her baby was many years ago. That someone else has loved and cared for Phoebe is more than Norah can stand, after all the pain she endured thinking Phoebe was dead. Norah now seems to understand David's obsession with photography, although it does not comfort her. Even while realizing that David's guilt is what kept him



at a distance, Norah is still outraged that he could have kept Phoebe's existence from her for all these years.

Caroline Gill has taken a huge step by coming to Norah at this time, but David's death has, perhaps, freed her up. She knows that there was never anything between them, at least from his perspective, with the exception of Phoebe and now, having been a mother, can relate to Norah's pain over losing Phoebe. Giving Norah the photos of Phoebe and telling her that they were always hers, is Caroline's way of acknowledging that she only borrowed this child, and she has always been aware that Phoebe was never really hers.

It is interesting how Caroline has chosen this stage of Phoebe's life to reveal this information to Norah, since several times in the last chapter she felt that things were getting to be too much for her, with Robert's presence and Phoebe's budding independence. Perhaps this indicates Caroline's need for independence, as well, now that Al has retired.



Pages 375 - 390

Pages 375 - 390 Summary

Paul and Michelle are arguing about having a child, as they discuss the possibility of marriage. Her career is just taking off; he knows she will leave him. He heads for Lexington to play music at a pub. Paul no longer needs a formal venue to enjoy performing, now that his father is gone. When he arrives at the old house, there are ashes floating; he looks for his mother and finds her on the back porch where she has been burning photographs. She tells him what she has learned about Phoebe, and he is stunned. His fear of not being good enough, which had morphed into anger against David when Paul was a child, now seems clear. He remembers that his father saw each person as living in their own universe; he is surprised David didn't give him away, too. But Norah is now understanding David's emotional wall. Norah tells Paul Phoebe is quite high functioning and that Caroline made no requests. Paul wonders what it will mean to have a retarded sister. He calls Michelle to tell her the news, but she hangs up and remains unavailable by phone.

Paul and his mother set out to meet Phoebe. When they arrive, they see her and take in the differences in her appearance, and notice her graying hair. When they approach Phoebe, she touches Paul's cheek and introduces herself. Phoebe shows Norah her loom and promises to make a scarf for her. Norah finally tries to talk about the future and tries to make Phoebe understand that she, too, is her mother. Phoebe announces she does not want to live with Norah, but wants to marry Robert. Phoebe and Paul go to her bedroom; she tells Paul he looks sad. They listen to music and talk, and become friends. Phoebe tells him about her job, and feels Paul is lucky to be able to live alone. Realizing that Phoebe is happy being Phoebe, Paul realizes how foolish all of his striving and competition has been. Phoebe tells Paul that her father, Al, is at work, driving a bus.

Pages 375 - 390 Analysis

This is a poignant chapter. Paul's misgivings about being able to relate to a retarded person are resolved when he has some time alone with Phoebe. Phoebe is a real person who can think and who likes music and herself. Paul has had a lonely childhood, and this meeting with his twin sister seems to be very meaningful for him. Her existence, although strange and confusing to both of them, is somehow magical and mysterious. Norah and Caroline do not seem to have any conflicts between them, and both are willing to do whatever makes Phoebe happy. Norah's offer for Phoebe to live with her is quickly rejected, but she is understanding and does not push her. This sudden appearance of a biological family would be difficult for a normal child to grasp, but for Phoebe, it is just another part of her life and does not seem to cause her any grief or pain whatsoever.



Pages 391 -401

Pages 391 -401 Summary

Norah marries Frederic, accompanied by organ music played by a friend of Paul's. Phoebe is dressed up, a member of the wedding party along with Paul. The wedding has taken place at the little chapel where Bree took Norah and Paul long ago. Paul plans to take Phoebe to France to visit their mother, whom Phoebe still does not refer to as her own mother. Phoebe does not want to eat snails. They both wish Robert could have come to the wedding; Phoebe is sad that weddings cost money, but she does not think elopement is any way to have a wedding and besides, she wants an eight-layer cake. There is an uneasiness between Norah and Phoebe, and Paul is sad that they missed everyday life with her. He realizes that Phoebe accepts everything at face value and does not really question the changes in her life. Norah has decided to try to forgive David. Paul is deciding to take a job in Pittsburgh, and his mother tells him he cannot try to fix the past, but he wants to get to know Phoebe. Paul will take Phoebe home and stay at Caroline's house. Paul tells his mother to go and be happy; Norah gives Phoebe her flowers and leaves with Frederic for France. Paul and Phoebe drive with the windows down toward her home, Paul remembering the long drives with his mother when he was young.

Paul imagines his father's experience and the decision David made when Phoebe was born, and how it must have stopped the "small singing" in David's brain that started when Paul was born. Paul takes Phoebe to visit their father's grave. Not understanding, Phoebe tells Paul that if her father died, she would be sad, too. Phoebe begins to sing a hymn and Paul realizes that he loves her. Paul begins to harmonize with her, their voices matching. After a moment, he notes the smallness of his sister's hands, just like their mother's. He touches her shoulder and takes her home.

Pages 391 -401 Analysis

The reader knows now that Michelle has left Paul and that he had some depression over it, but this new chapter of his life is unfolding unexpectedly. What the reader can assume is that knowing his sister will fill a huge gap in Paul's life, as well as Norah's. He was a lonely child and never felt accepted or loved enough by his father. Now, with a better understanding of his father, he is accepting and loving this twin who is so different from other people and yet so endearing.



Characters

David Henry McCallister

Having been raised in poverty, David Henry has made the decision to have a better life than his parents were able to provide. As a young child, he watched his younger sister, June, suffer from a heart condition, and then watched his mother's inconsolable grief when June died. His compassion and his wish to fix things for people resulted in his decision to become a doctor, however, he chose osteopathy because of the solid, predictable nature of human bones. David is a compassionate doctor, spending time after hours to help those who cannot afford his services. He is in love with his young wife, Norah, and after a harrowing ride through a blizzard, delivers his own babies. However, in a state of shock and extreme stress, when Norah gives birth to a second child who has obvious Downs syndrome features, David makes the quick decision to save Norah from the grief and pain of having an ill child who might have heart trouble, such as his sister had. While Norah is under the effects of anesthesia, David hands the girl twin, Phoebe, over to his loyal nurse, Caroline Gill, and asks her to take the child to a home where retarded children are cared for.

Unable to tell Norah, and wanting her to get past the idea of having a daughter, he tells her that the girl twin died at birth and that he has already dealt with having her buried. Frustrated with her grief, he wants Norah to focus on their healthy son, the way he wished his mother would have been more focused on him as a child. But the lie he has told haunts him throughout their married lives. David, in his guilt, becomes withdrawn over time and hides behind the lens of his camera, hoping to capture fleeting moments in time and somehow make them permanent. Norah, not understanding his emotional withdrawal, becomes less dependent upon him and begins to have extra-marital affairs. David is aware of the affairs, but feels that he is the cause of them and, therefore, says nothing, but the heartbreak between them deepens. David clearly does not want any more children. He loves his son, Paul, and tries to spend quality time with him when he is young, but later pressures Paul to do something more tangible than play the guitar, at which Paul is gifted. David is afraid Paul will not have a viable career, and finds it hard to encourage him with his music, which creates an even larger gap between father and son. The fact that his daughter is alive haunts David day and night.

His photos have been noticed by the public and, while giving a lecture at a gallery, David sees Caroline Gill, who has come to see him. He wants desperately to talk to her about Phoebe, but is pressured into talking with his audience, and Phoebe disappears. Distraught at missing his chance to see his daughter, David comes close to committing suicide. Instead, he makes his way to his childhood home which has sat abandoned for years. He meets a young pregnant girl named Rosemary, to whom he tells his entire story. The secret bonds them, and he brings Rosemary back home with him, and cares for her and her young son for the rest of the story. In his way, Rosemary is taking the place of David's sister, his daughter, and even Norah by being his close friend. Although he considers many times telling Norah about Phoebe, David dies, taking his secret with



him. He has been a generous man who some have said tried too hard to help people; his funeral is crowded with former patients. Having shortened his name in college to David Henry, his gravestone bears his full family name.

Norah Henry

Norah is a sweet and innocent young woman when she meets David Henry in a department store. She has fairytale dreams of how a marriage should be, and she is very much in love with David. When she learns that her daughter died in childbirth, she wants desperately to see the baby, but accepts David's explanation that he has already taken care of having Phoebe's body buried. Sensitive and grief stricken, Norah feels Phoebe's presence in the edges of her consciousness throughout her adult life, and mourns her loss, perhaps, more than most people would mourn a stillborn child. Although she is delighted with her son, Paul, and appreciates him deeply, she is haunted by the loss of Phoebe. Even more upsetting is the loss of David, emotionally. David has withdrawn from her and she has no idea why. She would like more children, but he objects. As David retreats behind his camera lens, he begins having Norah pose for him, trying to create images of her blending with nature, blending with the background, so that one can barely make out the fact that there is a person in the photo. Norah feels objectified, since the photos are not of her as much as they are of her body as a prop.

Norah is envious of her sister Bree's free spirit and rebellious political activities, but Bree's world is somewhat frightening to her. Norah begins to drink alcohol, and takes long drives into the country to be near the river, coming back the same day, driving too fast. Although she loves Paul, as a little boy he feels her distance and pain. Knowing she must do something with her life, Norah takes a job at a travel agency, and eventually does so well that she is able to buy the agency. She becomes successful and worldly — a different woman from the one she was before. Because she is terribly lonely and feels as though she has become unimportant and unattractive, Norah begins to have affairs with various men who make her feel more alive and desirable. She becomes more like her sister Bree in the respect that she has broken out and had the courage to do something meaningful with her life, and Bree partners with her in the business.

Although they have been separated for years, Norah feels a deep grief when David dies, primarily because they never really communicated and because she lost him long ago, never able to retrieve their closeness, and does not know why. When Caroline Gill tells her Phoebe is alive and explains what happened, Norah is overcome with rage toward David and begins burning his collection of now-valuable photographs, but stops the process when she remembers that these are her son's inheritance.

Norah finally meets Phoebe and feels the pain of not having raised her, since Phoebe cannot quite make the connection that Norah is her mother. Norah remarries, and makes the decision that she will forgive David, and tries to understand his motivations that led to the lie that ruined their marriage.



Caroline Gill

Caroline Gill is an organized, capable nurse who is in love with David Henry from a distance. She bravely travels through a blizzard to help David with Norah's childbirth, and, because she is devoted to him, takes Phoebe away as he has requested. However, Caroline is in her thirties with no prospects of marriage. After a long and somewhat treacherous drive to deliver Phoebe to the care home where David has sent her, Caroline realizes that she cannot leave little Phoebe to be raised in this dark, unpleasant environment. Although she is prepared with formula and diapers, in her exhaustion, she leaves her car lights on and cannot get back into the store, which has closed for the night. In an atypical response, Caroline cries out for help, which is when she meets the man she will eventually marry.

When she realizes David has told Norah that baby Phoebe is dead, she sees no reason not to keep Phoebe. In fact, she senses that this is her destiny, since Phoebe fills a gap in her life that would otherwise continue to plague her. Caroline falls in love with Al Simpson, who is steady, honest and attentive, even though he is gone all week driving his truck. More than anything, he is good to Phoebe, which is of ultimate importance to Caroline.

Caroline cares patiently and firmly for Leo, an obnoxious and cantankerous older man. His daughter, Doro, who owns the house where they live, becomes her closest friend and eventually turns the deed to the house over to Caroline. Caroline becomes so invested in being Phoebe's mother over time that she fears David will try to take Phoebe from her if he knows where they live. She makes sure that her communications to him are postmarked from different cities.

Caroline fights for Phoebe's right to an education, and becomes actively involved in programs to assist children with Downs' syndrome. She finds her voice before the Board of Education, as she petitions for her child to attend public school. She knows Phoebe is capable of more than she is given credit for, and Caroline admonished people not to underestimate Phoebe. However, when Phoebe wants to move away and get married, Caroline is almost panicky, doubting whether Phoebe can handle it, and wondering what her own life will be without her. But, being the strong and capable woman she is, Caroline eventually goes to Norah and tells her about Phoebe, inviting her to be involved in Phoebe's life. It is a huge and brave step, but Phoebe sees Caroline as her mother and Al as her father, and Caroline's feelings for Norah, as a mother, finally take priority.

Phoebe Henry

As a Downs syndrome child, little Phoebe goes through life in her own small world, unaware for the most part that people notice her differences and that she makes people feel awkward. She is innocent and loving, and understands most of the basic concepts that Caroline and Al have taught her. Phoebe loves cats and weaving; Caroline has made sure that Phoebe has a full life in spite of her slowness. But Phoebe is sadly



naive, and a potential target for people with bad intentions. Caroline allows her to ride the bus alone for a while, but when a man tries to talk Phoebe into going home with him, Caroline no longer lets her ride the bus. They establish a secret word to distinguish strangers from friends.

Although she resembles her twin brother, Phoebe is short with stocky limbs and small hands. Her almond-shaped eyes and flattened face are typical of Downs syndrome, and her thinning, graying hair is held back with barrettes. She has a clear and pretty singing voice, which one can assume she gets from her father's side, since his sister June was musical. When Phoebe meets her biological mother and brother, she is polite but not automatically warm toward them, since she does not know them. She is honest and accepting of whatever comes into her life, and not particularly surprised, since each day for her is an experience. Her emotions quickly change; she can be angry or sad and in the blink of an eye, forget about what is troubling her and then become happy again.

Phoebe is aware enough to know that she wants to marry Robert, and wants to have babies. She knows that it is alright to kiss someone if you love them, and she is already planning the details of her wedding. She does not think she has enough money for a wedding, but she is planning one, regardless. She knows that her childhood neighbor, Avery, has had a baby, and she wants one, too. Phoebe is totally lovable and the only character in the story who is without emotional baggage.

Paul Henry

The son of David and Norah, Paul Henry is an adorable child who loves to collect bones and artifacts with his father. He is fascinated with fossils, and is a typical little boy. His mother is overly protective of him, since his twin sister died in childbirth. As he grows up, he is less able to please his father, whose expectations for him do not coincide with Paul's talent for music. Paul senses the pain in his family, and rides in the back seat with his mother, taking long, fast drives to the river for no apparent reason. He senses the distance in his parents, and longs to be close to his father. As an adolescent, he is running on the beach and spots his mother's clothes lying in the sand, and realizes she is having an affair with another man. He is disgusted with his mother, and also with his father for letting it go. He begins to act out as a result of his anger and, although he knows music is his life, he also uses it as a weapon to fight with his father. Paul eventually becomes an important musician, playing large venues and fulfilling his dreams, his father sometimes in attendance without his knowledge. After his father dies, and Paul learns he has a sister, he decides to move to Pittsburgh and take a job there to be nearer to Phoebe, forfeiting his life of concerts and travel to play in small pubs. Concerned that he will have to take care of Phoebe in some way, he realizes that Phoebe likes her life and has a contentment he has never known.

As a young man, Paul is supportive of his mother and turns out to be a kind, compassionate man like his father.



Rosemary and Jack

Rosemary was a pregnant teenager living in an empty, decrepit house in the country that belonged to David Henry. When David, distraught, visits his childhood home and finds Rosemary there, she very capably ties him up while he sleeps, just in case he is dangerous. Rosemary is estranged from her parents due to her pregnancy and is hiding here, taking care of herself with no heat or electricity. She cuts beautiful designs from paper, called *scherenschnitte*, a craft she learned from her Swiss grandmother. She is an intelligent and compassionate woman who listens without judgment to David's confession about giving up his daughter. She goes home with David and becomes a daughter figure to him. David is with Rosemary when she is in labor and, when he leaves Norah, he takes Rosemary with him to a duplex, where she and her baby, Jack, live next door rent-free. David supports Rosemary while she goes to college and is very sad when she decides to move away and start her life. She is grateful to him, and encourages him to tell Norah the truth about the baby.

Rosemary's presence in David's home caused a scandal and is a source of confusion to Norah, but her bond with David is strong.

Al Simpson

Al is a truck driver who sees Caroline Gill in the parking lot of a store on a wintry night. Caroline's battery is dead and she is desperate, with newborn Phoebe in a box. Al invites Caroline to get warm in his truck and figure out what to do. He eventually takes her home and spends the night on her sofa, much the nosy neighbors' delight. When Caroline moves away without telling anyone, Al spends a year trying to track her down. He eventually finds her in Pittsburgh and returns every weekend to spend time with Caroline and Phoebe. He and Caroline get married and live together in Doro's old house. Al is a kind and compassionate man, and is good to them, bringing them presents and flowers every Saturday.

When Doro deeds her house to Caroline, Al is uncomfortable. Later, when they learn that David has left a large amount of money to Caroline, he is again uncomfortable about taking anything that he did not earn himself.

As Phoebe gets to be an adult, Al wishes that he and Caroline could have some freedom from their responsibilities. Although he seems to love his life on the road, when he gets into a bad accident, Al decides he is finished driving a truck. He is a strong support for Caroline and Phoebe, and a loving and kind character.

Bree

Bree Ascher, Norah Henry's sister, is a rebelliously spirited young woman. She is involved in the protests against the war and against the shootings at Kent State in Ohio, and surrounds herself with politically active friends. She becomes closer to her sister



when Paul is born, and she provides some sense of adventure and freedom for Norah that Norah cannot seem to find in herself. Eventually, Bree becomes Norah's business partner, an executive in expensive suits doing business with big clients. As Norah becomes more like Bree, Bree becomes more like Norah, and together they are a successful team. Bree is a doting aunt and sister, and is very supportive. When Paul gets into trouble as a teenager, Bree takes Norah and Paul to a small church where they let go of their anger and are able to talk calmly and clearly. Bree has a definite spiritual side to her, and she begins attending an Episcopalian church. When she survives breast cancer, Bree becomes so grateful to be alive that she cuts back on her work and begins volunteering her time. She also marries a minister and her life is steady and solid. She admits to Norah that when she was young and seemingly so free, that she was miserable.

Doro and Leo

Doro lives with Leo in an old house in Pittsburgh that was her childhood home. The house once had a field of daffodils next to it, but now has a freeway instead and is in the middle of town. Doro is an educated physicist and an academic, like her father once was. Her father, Leo, is suffering from dementia, which is why Doro hires Caroline Gill as an assistant for him. Leo challenges Caroline and congratulates her on being the only person who is able to handle him.

When Leo dies, Doro asks Caroline to stay on because she loves having her and they have become close. Doro encourages Caroline's relationship with Al. She eventually marries a man named Trace and goes off traveling. Before she leaves, she deeds her house to Caroline, where Caroline remains as she raises Phoebe. The last one hears from Doro is through a postcard sent to Caroline from the Aegean Sea.

June McAllister

The reader knows of June only through her brother, David's memories. She was born a small, wan child who suffers from a heart defect. She is the focus of her parents' attention, and David, although he loves her dearly, holds some resentment toward his parents. June, who loved to sing, died at twelve years old and David watched his mother's horrible grief. June and David were close as siblings and he misses her. His mother is never the same and she eventually moves away, never seeing David again. June is the reason that David decided to withhold the truth about Phoebe from Norah. He could not bear to see Norah go through with Phoebe what his family had gone through with June, and he feels the prognosis for Phoebe is bad.

Frederic

Frederic is Norah's second husband. He is fastidious and has some irritating habits, but is in love with her and is a good, stabilizing force for her. She is comfortable with him



and finds true happiness for the first time in her life with him. He is a French Canadian with relatives in France. He is a worldly man, but a steady force for Norah.

Howard

Howard is a photographer who comes to Norah and David's beach cabin while they are on vacation, supposedly to discuss photography with David. He tells them he is in the process of a divorce. But he is coming on to Norah, and the next day she goes to his house and undresses outside before joining him in his cabin. Norah goes to him ten more times, even though she finds out that he is happily married and expected at home soon. Howard is not necessarily a good man, and he preys on Norah's obvious vulnerability.

Kay Marshall

Kay Marshall is, to Norah, the perfect mother. She always seems organized and perfectly dressed, and is involved in social activities. Norah has a vague envy of Kay. Kay, however, tried to come on to David at a party, an offer which David refused. She is not a likable character.



Objects/Places

Down's Syndrome

Formerly referred to as "mongolism," Down's syndrome is a form of retardation that is marked by almond-shaped, slightly slanted eyes, stubby limbs and digits and a somewhat flattened face. Many people affected with Down's syndrome live into middle age and can often be high-functioning, which is how Phoebe Henry is described in this story.

Blue Baby

A blue baby is a term used for a stillborn child who never draws a breath. David Henry describes Phoebe as a blue baby to Norah Henry.

Lexington, Kentucky

The home of David and Norah Henry, and the birthplace of Paul Henry

Fraternal Twins

Fraternal twins occur when two eggs are fertilized by two sperm; the babies are not identical. Paul and Phoebe are fraternal twins.

Versailles, Kentucky

Versailles is the small town where Caroline became stranded with the newborn Phoebe and was rescued by Al Simpson.

Sewing Circle

A group of women who get together regularly to sew together and share friendship. Norah Henry has a small group of sewing friends who try to welcome Paul into the world, but Norah is so upset over losing Phoebe she shuns them.

Louisville, Kentucky

The town where the home for the retarded is, where Caroline was asked to drop Phoebe when she was born.



Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Caroline Gill took Phoebe and moved to Pittsburgh. She moved in with Doro March to take care of Doro's father, Leo, and ended up raising Phoebe here.

River Confluence

A confluence is a place where two rivers converge and join. David Henry almost ended his life at the river confluence in Pittsburgh.

Crinoids

Crinoids are button-like fossils that were once part of the stem of a sea lily. Paul found some as a little boy in Kentucky and made a necklace of them.

Camera Obscura

This is a sealed mahogany box with a pinhole to look through that is reflected onto a mirror so that a photographer can easily isolate a particular scene. It is the precursor to the camera. Norah's first affair was with a man who had made a camera obscura

Carnegie Museum

The museum in Pittsburgh where David Henry lectured about his photos, and where Caroline Gill met with him and gave him photos of Phoebe.



Themes

Deceit Weaves a Tangled Web

The one lie that David Henry told his wife turned into a force that ruined their relationship, ruined his relationship with his son, made him withdraw into guilt and sadness, and changed the lives of his daughter and Caroline Gill forever.

Made on the spot, a split second decision, David did not intend to keep the birth of Phoebe from his wife, Norah. But the fact that Phoebe might be prone to heart trouble was so upsetting to David that he wanted to keep Norah from experiencing that and so sends Phoebe to a place where he feels she will be better off. Compounding the fact that he never allowed Norah to touch or see Phoebe, he proceeds to tell her Phoebe was dead at birth, rather than admitting that he gave their child away. This information, of course, causes great pain and grief for Norah, who seeks completion by holding a memorial service for Phoebe. David has to arrange for this lie, as well, saying that Phoebe was buried on his friend's farm. Once Caroline Gill sees the notice in the newspaper, and sees the gathering at the memorial service, she realizes that she has no choice but to raise Phoebe because, legally and for all intents and purposes, Phoebe is dead to the rest of the world anyway.

Because Caroline is afraid of losing Phoebe, she withholds the truth about where she is living, sending David letters from different post offices so that he cannot find her. Although Caroline has lied to Doro and to Al about being Phoebe's mother, she eventually does tell them the truth.

In the meantime, David's terrible guilt and Norah's haunting feeling that Phoebe is somehow close by, wears on them personally. Norah does not get over her grief, and David withdraws into an emotional vacuum, knowing that he has made a terrible mistake by giving up their daughter. Because of his distance, Norah begins having affairs with other men. David is not able to fully enjoy his son, Paul, whose sister he has disposed of. David's only sense of completion comes when he is able to take in Rosemary, having shared his secret with her. He still intends to tell Norah the truth, right up until his death, but is never able to do so.

The raw rage and pain that Norah feels when she finds out that someone else has raised her daughter is yet another effect of David's lie. Norah will never have a day-to-day relationship with her daughter because Phoebe sees Caroline and Al as her parents and, being retarded, does not exactly understand the appearance of a new brother and mother.

Much of Who We Are is Based on the Past

All of the characters in this book can be said to be reacting from their past experiences, particularly from childhood. Caroline Gill was an only child, born late in the lives of her



over-protective parents. She was not allowed a normal childhood because her parents were too old to freely let her run and play; they had learned too much about the hazards of life and had become extremely overly-cautious about their only daughter. Therefore, Caroline was a lonely, somewhat isolated child who was in her thirties when she fell in love, at a distance, with David Henry. Meticulous and capable, she is a strong person, but is sorely lacking for companionship and purpose when she is asked to take Phoebe away as an infant. Sensing that this was the undertaking that would fill the empty gap in her life, she decides to raise Phoebe. Because she was raised alone, she is independent and resourceful, having learned from her parents' fear, is unafraid of striking out on her own.

David Henry was raised with the constant awareness of his little sister's illness. He is also acutely aware of his family's poverty. Although he goes to college and becomes a wealthy doctor, David still harbors insecurities about who he is. He allowed his name to be changed in college, and goes overboard to help people less fortunate than him. His decision to give Phoebe away rather than allow Norah to suffer over her condition was made as a response to his own childhood, when the focus was all on the ill child and he was forced to watch his mother's devastating grief when June died.

Paul, as a child, feels his father's disapproval of the thing he loves the most, which is music. Although he loves his father very much, David is distant from him and uses every opportunity to remind Paul that he will need to do something successful and lucrative as an adult. Paul acts out against his father, pushing hard in his musical career to prove himself to David. Once David passes away, Paul no longer needs to prove anything, and settles into a more sedate job.

Bree, who was the free spirited, wild sister when they were young, fascinates Norah with her ability to create scandal and uproar, and not be upset about it. Bree runs off with a man early in her life and goes through several men in her hippie days. But later, after she grows and gains some insight, she admits to Norah that she was unhappy during those years, and she seeks the comfort of church. Bree also ends up marrying a minister, and is a spiritual rock for Norah and Paul.

Rivers as Symbolism for Life

Kim Edwards uses the device of water, rivers in particular, to suggest a deeper meaning for her characters. David and Norah have wonderful moments on the river when he asks her to marry him and again when Paul is a baby. They make memories there they will never forget. Caroline Gill crosses the Ohio River and almost gives Phoebe to a home, but turns back.

Nursing her baby, Norah "grew calm, became again that wide, tranquil river, accepting the world and carrying it easily on its currents."

In her angst as a young woman, Norah also drives toward the river with little Paul in the back seat, seeking something she is missing in her life, and dealing with her grief. David



tries to camouflage Norah in his photos on the river's beach, wanting to obscure the beauty as well as his pain. When David considers suicide, standing at the confluence of rivers in Pittsburgh, he faces a choice to live or die.

Late in Paris, when Norah has returned after David's funeral, the smells and sounds of the river, "the dank mud," bring up emotions for her that make her swoon. She and Frederic later rent a small house near a river in Chateauneuf, France.

Caroline watches the "river of traffic" from her house as she talks on the phone to David's lawyer.

The consistent flow of the river represents the fact that life continues to move along, despite our emotional ups and downs, our lies and our joy. It is a constant in a world that is constantly changing.

Protecting Others

David Henry spends his adult life helping people who are less fortunate, just as he spent his childhood protecting his weaker younger sister. He tries to assist patients who have no insurance, and stays after hours at his clinic in order to see those who cannot afford his services. His biggest mistake in being protective, of course, is protecting his wife from the truth of their baby daughter, which creates havoc throughout his life.

Norah is protective of Paul and afraid, because of losing her daughter, that something will happen to him. She is afraid when he swings with a necklace of fossils on his neck that they will fly up in his face and hurt him. She is afraid he will be stung by a bee at school. Later, when he becomes depressed after getting in trouble, she becomes afraid over his suicidal comments. In a way, she protects Paul from his father by supporting Paul's desire to study music.

Caroline Gill is the primary protector of Phoebe, keeping her from a life of misery in a home for the feeble-minded, and championing her cause to get her an education and be respected. She teaches Phoebe a password so that she cannot be hurt by strangers. Al Simpson, having rescued Caroline and Phoebe initially, takes care of them emotionally throughout the story by being stable and strong and consistently there for them.

Bree is protective of her sister and wants her to be happy and secure. David's ongoing failure to tell Norah the truth about Phoebe is his way of protecting her from pain. He takes in Rosemary to help and protect her and her baby through a rough time in their lives.

Everyone is constantly seeking some form of protection and stability, and we all find it in different ways and through different people. But, sometimes, the tendency to protect others can cause extreme pain and confusion.



Style

Point of View

Kim Edwards takes a strictly omnipotent perspective as an author. She is not only able to tell us the story, but she reaches into her characters' minds to tell us what they are feeling and thinking. She shifts her focus from one character to the next in each chapter, however, her view is always omnipotent. She not only describes what the characters are going through, but provides dialogue that reveals their feelings, as well.

This point of view is important to this story because there are several characters who are deeply impacted by the events in the story. Because their lives and the lie that is told are intertwined in unique ways, it is necessary for the author to have the full range of knowledge about each of the characters, including their innermost emotions. The story is told equally through exposition and dialogue, as well as the author's descriptions. Although David Henry is the main character in the book, it could be construed that the author intended to have Caroline Gill and Norah Henry and Paul Henry as equally important characters. Thus, one character's point of view would not have been able to fully tell this multi-faceted story.

Setting

This story is set primarily in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. The Henrys live in Lexington in an upscale home in the suburbs with their son. The reader knows they have a nice house because Norah has spent time redecorating it and they have parties in their large garden. They live within a few blocks of a university where demonstrations take place after the Kent State shootings.

The family travels to the Ohio River for picnics, and the little church where Bree takes them is in a beautiful setting out in the country. The Henrys travel to the Caribbean where Norah has an affair. Norah, later, lives in Paris in a "pension" near the river with her lover, Frederic.

Caroline Gill takes Phoebe to live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where they live in an older house right in town near a freeway. They, too, have parties and even a wedding in their yard, but the house is old and, when Caroline arrives, the bathroom is purple. Throughout the story there are many flowers and plants mentioned and one gets the sense of a lush terrain and countryside, with beautiful rivers and carefully tended yards.

Later in the story, Norah and Bree meet with Paul in Paris at the Louvre. They all seem quite at home in France, where Norah and Frederic are staying together and where Paul and Bree have apparently been many times. Paul is in Paris with his girlfriend, Michelle, and has been in Seville learning flamenco guitar. There is a brief sense of France offered in this part of the story, with the two dining out on a terrace near the river, and Frederic's renting a house later in Chateauneuf.



The story begins in 1964 and ends in 1989, which is important to the story, given the times and the changing American culture during that period.

Language and Meaning

Kim Edwards' narration is straightforward and quite American. The style is casual and simple, although not simplistic. Edwards goes into great detail and symbolism as she touches upon Norah's ongoing sense of loss and the destruction David's lie creates. She uses detail and description to lend a sense of reality to the story, but at times, tends to tell one too much rather than let the reader draw his own conclusions. Edwards repeats the main event in the story line many times throughout, as if to solidify it as the central problem and remind the reader of the central theme of the story, which is the lie that David Henry told about his daughter's death. Her language is modern-day and uncomplicated; she manages to avoid using references to Americana, like many modern writers are prone to do. Edwards tries to bring an international flair to the story by having Paul traveling to foreign countries, having Norah and Bree becoming high-powered travel agents and traveling the world, and Norah eventually marrying a French man. Paul's girlfriend, Michelle, is not American, nor is his friend Alejandra, whom one meets at Norah's wedding to Frederic. This also provides a contrast between the lives of the two families; Caroline Gill never goes anywhere and has stayed in the same house for twenty-five years, raising Phoebe. She and her family travel by bus and live an extremely simple life. In this way, Edwards attempts to vary the flavor of the families and broaden the scope of their experiences for the reader.

Structure

This book is divided unevenly, the chapters at times revealing a certain date, and at other times being divided into sub-sections under the same date. There is no specific pattern to the divisions. The story begins in March of 1964 and spans a period of twenty-five years, ending in September of 1989. The story flows from the meeting of Norah and David Henry, through the birth and growth of their son, the growth of their estranged daughter, the death of David and finally, the meeting of Norah, Paul and Phoebe. The passing of time is marked by events, as well as the emotional milestones experienced by the characters. Era-specific details, such as Norah receiving gas while giving birth, are important to the plot of the story. The focus changes with each chapter and jumps from one family to the other, one character to the other, but it is a nicely woven web of people and events that tie their lives together in a most unusual way. Although the sequence of the story is linear, it is a difficult story to write because it has to catch up with each of the characters at different stages in their lives, as well as their interactions with one another. The book reads quickly and easily and is based on an interesting premise.



Quotes

"He found himself wanting to protect her instead, to carry her up flights of stairs, to wrap her in blankets, to bring her cups of custard. 'I'm not an invalid,' she protested each time, laughing. 'I'm not some fledgling you discovered on the lawn.'" p. 4

"He'd had tears in his eyes when he opened them, raising his head from the desk. The nurse was standing in the doorway, her face gentled by emotion. She was beautiful in that moment, half smiling, not at all the efficient woman who worked beside him so quietly and competently each day. Their eyes met, and it seemed to the doctor that he knew her — that they knew each other — in some profound and uncertain way. For an instant nothing whatsoever stood between them; it was an intimacy of such magnitude that he was motionless, transfixed." p. 12

"'Don't you see?' he asked, his voice soft. 'This poor child will most likely have a serious heart defect. A fatal one. I'm trying to spare us all a terrible grief.' He spoke with conviction. He believed his own words." p. 19

"'I want to see her,' she said, her voice a whisper, yet somehow forceful in the quiet of the parking lot. 'Just once. Before we go. I have to see her.' David shoved his hands in his pockets and studied the pavement. All day, icicles had crashed from the zigzag roof; here they lay shattered near the steps. 'Oh, Norah,' he said softly. 'Please just come home. We have a beautiful son.' 'I know,' she said, because it was 1964 and he was her husband and she had always deferred to him completely." p. 38

"She hated what Bree had done to them all. She wished desperately that she'd done it first." p. 41

"'You have to tell her,' she said. His face was pale, still, but determined. 'No,' he said. 'It's too late now. Do whatever you have to do, Caroline, but I can't tell her. I won't.'" p. 65

"'Oh, David,' she said. 'I left your present in the car.' She thought of the camera, its precise dials and levers. The Memory Keeper, it said on the box in white italic letters; this, she realized, was why she 'd bought it — so he'd capture every moment, so he'd never forget." p. 88

"What would happen, they conjectured, if they simply went on assuming their children would do everything. Perhaps not quickly. Perhaps not by the book. But what if they simply erased those growth and development charts, with their precise, constricting points and curves? What if they kept their expectations but erased the time line? What harm could it do? Why not try?" p. 98

Norah slid into the front seat and slammed the car door shut. He fished in his pocket for his keys and instead pulled out the last goode, gray and smooth, earth-shaped. He held it, warming in his palm, thinking of all the mysteries the world contained: layers of stone,



concealed beneath the flesh of earth and grass; these dull rocks, with their glimmering hidden hearts. Page 122

"Why not? Norah, just yesterday you were desperate for that job. You were so excited. It's David, isn't it? Saying that you can't."

Norah, annoyed, shook her head. 'David doesn't even know. Bree, it was just a little box of an office. Boring. Bourgeois. You wouldn't be caught dead in it.'

'I'm not you,' Bree pointed out, impatient. 'You're not me. You wanted this job, Norah. For the glamour. For heaven's sake, for the independence.'

It was true, she had wanted the job, but it was also true that she felt anger flaring up again: fine for Bree who was out here starting revolutions, to consign her to a nine-to-five life.

'I'd be typing, not traveling. It would be years and years before I earned any trips. It's not exactly what I imagined for my life, Bree.'

'And pushing a vacuum cleaner is?'" p. 133

"Even after it was clear that all the wasps inside the bag must be dead, Norah kept dancing on the pulpy mess, wild and intent. Something was happening, something had changed, in the world and in her heart." p. 138

"He carried Paul inside and up the stairs. He gave him a drink of water and the orange chewable aspirin he liked and sat with him on the bed, holding his hand. So small, this hand, so warm and alive. Remembering the light-filled images of Paul's bones, David was filled with a sense of wonder. This was what he yearned to capture on film: these rare moments where the world seemed unified, coherent, everything contained in a single fleeting image. A spareness that held beauty and hope and motion — a kind of silvery poetry, just as the body was poetry in blood and flesh and bone." p. 157

"Far below the water swirled, foamed white against the cement piling, surged away. The arch of his foot, that's where David felt the pressure of the concrete edge. If he fell or jumped and couldn't finally swim to safety, they would find these things: a watch with his father's name inscribed on the back, his wallet with \$200 in cash, his driver's license, a pebble from the stream near his childhood home that he had carried with him for thirty years. And the photos, in the envelope tucked into the pocket above his heart. His funeral would be crowded. The cortege would stretch for blocks." p. 259

"Her silence made him free. He talked like a river, like a storm, words rushing through the old house with a force and life he could not stop. At some point he began to weep again, and he could not stop that either. Rosemary made no comment whatsoever. He talked until the words slowed, ebbed, finally ceased. Silence welled. She did not speak. The scissors glinted; the half-cut paper slid from the table to the floor as she stood. He closed his eyes, fear rising, because he had seen anger in her eyes, because everything that happened had been his fault. Her footsteps and the the metal, cold and bright as ice, slid against his skin. The tension in his wrists released. He opened his eyes to see her stepping back, her eyes bright and wary, fixed on his, her scissors glinting. "All right,' she said. 'You're free.' p. 275



"She was smiling, gentle in her motions, and she touched Phoebe's hair, smoothed it back, as if she were still a little girl. Phoebe pulled away, and Paul's heart caught; for this story there were no simple endings. There would be transatlantic visits and phone calls, but never the ordinary ease of daily life." p. 393



Topics for Discussion

There is a theme associated with siblings woven through this story. Discuss the sibling relationships and their significance in the story.

Are there elements of the story that do not add up? What are some discrepancies, and how could they have been resolved?

What purpose does photography serve in David Henry's life?

Why do you think Caroline Gill never told Norah about Phoebe until she was grown? Is there more than one reason?

This story would not be the same if it had not been set during the time period Kim Edwards chose. What elements of the story are shaped and affected by the decade in which they were set?

Were David Henry's reasons for keeping his secret valid? Discuss why, or why not.

Why did Norah Henry have numerous adulterous affairs? Why did David not object?

What role does Bree play in the story? Discuss her importance in Norah's life.

How was Norah affected by the Kent State shootings and the university demonstrations?

Discuss the outlook of a high-functioning Down's syndrome person. How does Phoebe handle life's disappointments?