

The Pact Study Guide

The Pact by Jodi Picoult

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Plot Summary

The Pact by Jodi Picoult is a heart wrenching story of love and betrayal that will leave readers questioning what they thought they knew of their own morals long after they have returned the book to the shelf. Chris and Emily grow up together, destined to be lovers before they are even old enough to talk. They are closer than siblings, able to feel each other's pain in a way no one else can possibly understand. One night, all of that changes, however, when their parents get the phone call all parents dread. One child is dead. The other is charged with her murder. Two sets of parents will question their own roles in this tragedy, wondering how they could not see it coming, how they could allow it to happen. Everyone will want to point their finger at someone. Where the blame really lies, however, is an answer that will challenge everything these people thought they knew about themselves. The Pact is a story of love as much as it is a tragedy, a story that will keep the reader guessing to the very end.

The Golds and the Hartes have been neighbors for more than seventeen years, ever since Gus and Melanie were both pregnant with their first children. Those children, born within months of one another, grew up together. The Golds and Hartes always thought it would be great if their children, Emily and Chris, were to fall in love and get married one day. Now it seems that this might become a reality as Chris and Emily have been dating for three years. However, just hours after the Golds and Hartes share a meal together, both households get a phone call all parents dread. There has been an accident. The children are injured.

James Harte arrives at the hospital in time to watch his son being assessed by the emergency room doctors. Chris has a large laceration on his head but otherwise appears to be unharmed. In another part of the emergency room, the Golds arrive. They are escorted to a quiet room where they are told their daughter died upon arrival at the hospital. Emily was shot. Thoughts of carjackers or drive-by shootings pass through their minds as they struggle with the news that their only child is dead. The police tell them there was no one else at the carousel where the children were found. It appears to have been a suicide.

Within a day, however, a police detective begins to make waves, suggesting to the Golds that Chris Harte shot their daughter. Melanie Gold grabs on to this information and allows it to swallow her whole, happy to have someone other than herself to blame for this tragedy. Michael Gold is not so sure the sweet young boy who was practically a son to him could have done this. The Hartes also find this idea ludicrous. Their son could never hurt Emily. When Chris tells the police that it was a suicide pact gone wrong, the Hartes find the idea easier to accept, but now are terrified that Chris might try to take his life in the days to come.

It is only a few short days after Emily's funeral that her parents learn the results of the autopsy. It turns out that Emily was pregnant, something neither Michael nor Melanie knew. This information gives the police a motive. The police detective theorizes that Chris killed Emily to keep the baby from interfering with his future. A few days later, on



his eighteenth birthday, Chris is arrested. Chris is charged with murder and remanded to the county jail to await his trial. Chris finds it difficult to get along with the other inmates, so he spends as much time alone as possible. At the same time, Chris's lawyer, Jordan McAfee, begins to prepare a defense.

Jordan does not want Chris to tell him what happened the night Emily died. Jordan wants to be able to prepare a defense that has as little to do with truth as possible. Jordan plans to say that the night Emily died, Chris and Emily had intended to die together in a suicide pact. The fact that Chris now claims he was never suicidal keeps Jordan from allowing Chris to testify. However, the longer Chris is in jail, the more he wants to tell the truth. When his cellmate is convicted of killing his infant son and commits suicide in federal prison, Chris becomes desperate to tell the truth to someone. Finally Chris blurts the truth to his mother.

Gus has to testify for Chris the next day and finds it difficult to lie under oath. Chris sees his mother struggle and stops the testimony. Chris insists he must testify, that he needs to tell the world what happened that night. Jordan allows this under protest. Moments into his testimony Chris announces that he shot Emily. Jordan calls a recess in order to learn the truth for the first time in the months he has represented Chris. Jordan puts Chris back on the stand, and Chris tells the jury how Emily begged him for help in committing suicide and how he thought he could stop her if he pretended to go along. However, when Emily refused to back down, Chris left her alone with the gun. When Chris returned, he discovered that Emily could not do it. Chris cannot live with the pain he sees Emily carrying and agrees to help her. Chris holds the gun, but Emily lifts her hand, pulling the trigger with him.

Everyone believes Chris will be found guilty, even Jordan; however, when the jury returns the following day, they return with a not guilty verdict. Chris is allowed to go home. However, the relationship between the Golds and the Hartes is forever shattered. The Golds move out of their house, leaving behind seventeen years of memories.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Now, November 1997

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The Hartes and the Golds, neighbors and friends now for seventeen years, meet for dinner at a local Chinese restaurant, a standing date for many years now. James and Melanie arrive first, then Melanie's husband Michael. Finally Gus breezes in, rushing, as always, between jobs. Gus runs a business where she stands in lines for her clients, and tonight she is waiting in line for concert tickets. The couples talk about their children, the Golds' daughter Emily, and the Hartes' son Christopher and daughter Kate. Emily and Christopher are dating and plan to be out that night. It is a rushed dinner as Gus runs off before the main course has arrived, pausing only long enough to open a fortune cookie.

The Golds follow James Harte home before settling in for the night. Emily is not home yet, but they are not worried, since they know she is with Chris Harte. It is three in the morning when the phone calls come. James leaves first and is followed quickly by the Golds. At the hospital James finds Chris has a head injury; no one knows how serious yet. James insists on being with his son during his examination but is kept away by the hospital staff. The Golds arrive and see James, rushing over to find out what is happening. When a nurse hears their name, they are quickly escorted to another part of the emergency room. Within minutes they are told that their daughter died of an apparent self-inflicted gun wound. Gus arrives moments later and learns about Emily.

Chris is taken for a CT scan. Gus and James are terrified for their child, imagining what has happened to him and Emily. A carjacker, a mugging. When Chris returns from the exam and pronounced to be uninjured other than the laceration on his head, Gus wants to go downstairs and see if she can get information on what happened. Before she can leave Chris's room, however, Gus finds a police detective outside the door. The



detective wants to speak to Chris. Gus refuses to allow her in, insisting that Chris needs his rest. The detective is determined, however, announcing that she believes Chris shot Emily.

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Now, November 1997 Analysis

Six main characters are introduced in this first chapter. The first four are the parents. Melanie Gold and James Harte are quiet people, who are content to sit back and let their more extroverted spouses dominate the conversation. Melanie is a little mousy, a librarian who is more comfortable with her library and cold, hard facts than social settings. James Harte is an eye surgeon, who would rather be performing surgery than entertaining the neighbors. Michael Gold and Gus Harte are the total opposite. Gus is outgoing, vibrant and full of life. Gus runs the show, as the reader can see when the dinner party seems dead before Gus arrives and is equally boring after she leaves. Michael Gold, while not quite as vibrant as Gus, is friendly and open, outgoing in a way his wife is not.

The children are also introduced in this chapter. Emily is an artist and Chris an athlete. The children have grown up together because their mothers have been best friends for many years. Emily and Chris are also high school sweethearts, something their parents clearly are happy about if the reader is to go by the way their parents spoke about them at dinner. There is great love among all six of these characters; the reader can see it in the way they are with each other and the way the parents react when they get the phone call from the hospital.

Tragedy strikes in the middle of the night. The children have been attacked by someone. Emily is dead of a gunshot wound and Chris has a laceration on his head. None of the parents know for sure what has taken place this night, but it is clearly a tragedy. Gus immediately goes into a protective mode, wanting to know everything that is known about the events of that night and then keeping the police from talking to Chris. Gus does not want Chris to find out from some cop that the love of his life is dead. However, even Gus is stunned when the cop claims that Chris might have shot Emily. This is the first that the reader hears this theory and is as curious as Gus as to how the police could come to such a conclusion. It is ironic to think a boy who grew up with and loved a young woman could be her killer.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Fall 1979 and Now, November 1997

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Fall 1979 and Now, November 1997 Summary

Fall 1979. Melanie and Michael are still unpacking in their new house when Gus, their new neighbor, introduces herself by barging into the house and helping them unpack. Gus is seven months pregnant and Melanie four, a fact that bonds the two women quickly. Their spouses, James and Michael, do not connect quite as quickly. Michael is a veterinarian and James is an avid hunter. Michael cannot understand James' desire to kill animals, but he is not the type to criticize. Both men support their wives' friendship because they both know that these women need the support of each other. This becomes more obvious when just three months after Christopher is born, Melanie finds herself going into labor while Michael is away on a call. Gus rushes Melanie to the hospital and stays with her throughout the labor, welcoming tiny Emily into the world moments before Michael arrives. When the chaos of the moment is over, Gus lays Chris in the bassinet with Emily. Emily unintentionally reaches out and holds Chris's hand, less than an hour after her birth.

November 1997. Police detective Anne-Marie Marrone insists on speaking to Chris. Gus is adamant against it but relents when the detective implies that she has something to hide. Chris is uncomfortable and confused when the detective begins questioning him. All Chris can really tell her is that Emily committed suicide. Chris says that he and Emily had made a suicide pact, but he passed out before he could kill himself. Gus is devastated by this news and makes the detective leave. Gus and James stay the night with Chris before James insists on going back to work, acting as though everything is normal. Across town, Michael has just put Melanie to bed with the help of a sedative an ER doctor was kind enough to offer. Michael goes into Emily's room, trying to remember his last conversation with her, wondering if there was something he missed. Later, the couple goes to the funeral home to arrange Emily's funeral. Melanie feels as though the whole thing is surreal, and she cannot make herself participate in the arrangements except to insist that everything be the best. When Michael presents the funeral director with some clothes for Emily, Melanie becomes upset because he has chosen an outfit Emily would never have worn.

When Michael and Melanie arrive home, Anne-Marie Marrone is waiting for them. Anne-Marie wants to ask a few questions, but Melanie is not able to participate because shock has left her uncommunicative. However, Melanie is listening and when Detective Marrone tells them about Chris's story, but suggests that Chris murdered Emily, Melanie latches on to it and does not let go. Detective Marrone also promises to allow Michael and Melanie to have a copy of the autopsy report when it is available, giving Michael hope that it will offer more answers. Later, Michael goes to check on one of his patients.



Gus comes over to check on Melanie, helping her pick out a new outfit in which is Emily to be buried.

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Fall 1979 and Now, November 1997 Analysis

Gus and Melanie become friends almost from the minute the Golds move in next door. Both Gus and Melanie are pregnant, which bonds the women even quicker. Gus and Melanie's friendship is the basis of Emily and Chris's relationship; therefore, it is important for the reader to see how it began and how quickly it developed. Later, when the babies are born and Emily reaches for Chris' hand, this connection moments after Emily's birth is symbolic of the relationship these two will have seventeen years later. In it, however, there is irony when the reader adds in the idea that the police have suggested that Chris killed Emily.

The police detective interviews Chris and learns that Emily's death was a suicide pact gone wrong. This suggests that both children were deeply depressed. However, the detective later tells Michael that she finds the whole idea ludicrous, since Emily did not show any outward signs of depression. Clearly the police detective thinks that Chris killed Emily for some reason and Melanie, who is devastated by her daughter's death, latches on to this little bit of information, desperate to have someone other than herself to blame. Melanie's reaction to this information is not compatible with a continued relationship between her and Gus, but Melanie welcomes Gus' help when trying to find a new outfit in which to bury her daughter. Melanie is so grief stricken that perhaps she is not thinking clearly, but this leave the reader wondering how her behavior will change when the shock begins to wear off.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Summer 1984 and Now, November 1997

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Summer 1984 and Now, November 1997 Summary

Summer 1984. Gus is pregnant again and keeps having a recurring dream in which she must choose between her children during a carjacking. Gus is upset by this dream and her stress is aggravated by the illness of the family dog. The dog has developed diabetes. Gus takes the dog to Michael every weekend for treatment, but he only seems to be getting worse. The dog often vomits and wets on the rugs, causing a great deal of frustration for both Gus and James. When the dog does this during a dinner party with Michael and Melanie, James decides something must be done. James takes the dog out into the woods and shoots it. Gus is devastated by this behavior and decides to move in with the Golds for a few days. However, Michael explains to Gus that what James did was put the dog out of its misery, something that he felt was right. Gus returns home and that night when her recurring dream takes place again, James is there to help her rescue both children.

November 1997. While Chris is moved to the psychiatric ward at the hospital, James announces he wants to hire a lawyer for him. Gus is against this, thinking it will make Chris look guilty. Chris, in the meantime, wants to go to Emily's funeral, but the doctors are afraid it will cause him to try to kill himself again. Chris is sedated to keep him from becoming agitated when he is refused his request. After the funeral, Melanie is unable to handle the reception and goes to bed. Michael sits in his own living room, welcoming friends and family, but when he is faced with one of Emily's teenage friends, he finds he cannot handle the situation and he leaves. Michael goes to the hospital and begs Chris to tell him about the night Emily died, but Chris claims he cannot remember.

The autopsy report arrives on Detective Marrone's desk. Two things jump out at her. First, the path of the bullet suggests that Emily did not shoot herself, since it would be physically impossible to hold the gun to her own head and have the bullet move through her skull the way it did. Second, the report shows that Emily was eleven weeks pregnant. This suggests a motive for murder to the detective. Detective Marrone goes to the Golds to explain these findings to them. Melanie and Michael are shocked to learn about their daughter's pregnancy, something they knew nothing about. Detective Marrone comes right out and says that she thinks Chris killed Emily at this point. Michael immediately jumps to Chris's defense, making Melanie angry. That night Melanie and Michael argue. Michael says that he will not allow Chris to be persecuted because he believes he is all they have left of their daughter. Melanie, however, sees Michael's position as him protecting her daughter's killer.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, Summer 1984 and Now, November 1997 Analysis

The death of the Hartes' dog not only touches on the theme of assisted suicide, but it also shows clearly James' opinion on the morality of allowing a living creature to live in pain. James kills his dog because he believes it is in pain and this is the only way to stop that pain. Although Chris is only five when this takes place, he is old enough for it to make a psychological impression on him. This episode makes the reader wonder how much Chris was paying attention, and if this situation had anything to do with his decision to become involved in a suicide pact with Emily. It is also interesting that Gus is upset at first about James' decision, but later she has a dream in which James is helping her rescue her children, suggesting that this action made James more heroic in her mind. The reader wonders if this will still be Gus' opinion when the perpetrator is Chris and the victim Emily.

Chris desperately wants to go to Emily's funeral, but he is under a suicide watch and the doctors deem this trip too stressful. Chris is sedated, giving the impression to the reader that he is emotionally unstable. Later, when Michael comes to visit, Chris claims to not be able to remember what happened the night Emily died. These two events together serve to make Chris appear to be unstable and suicidal, just as he claims to be. However, quick on the heel of this impression, the reader finds out that Emily was pregnant and that the journey of the bullet through her brain shows that she could not have shot herself. The detective believes Chris killed her because he was not ready to become a father. Michael and Melanie are shocked by this information, but each sees it in a different light. Michael finds the whole thing insane, believing Chris could never hurt his daughter. Melanie, however, latches on to the idea of Chris killing her daughter and refuses to consider any other scenario. Melanie needs to believe that someone is responsible for her daughter's death besides Melanie. These differing opinions causes a rift between Melanie and Michael, causing concern for the health of their marriage.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, 1989 and Now, November 1997

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, 1989 and Now, November 1997 Summary

1989. Chris and Emily are making crank phone calls. Chris dares Emily to call his mother and pretend to be the secretary at their school, claiming Chris is in trouble. Emily does because she cannot turn down a dare and appear to be a chicken. The children get in trouble after Gus goes down to the school and confronts the principal. Both are grounded and spend their punishment communicating through Morse code with flashlights from their bedroom windows. Later, Chris steals the Joy of Sex from the library, and he and Emily take a look at the pictures, finding most of them physically impossible. Chris again gets caught, causing Gus some concern about his curiosity at such a young age. Chris is not the only one curious, however. During a sleepover, Emily dares Chris to kiss her, which he does despite claiming disgust. A few days later Chris gets Emily back for the kiss by daring her to go into the men's room at the local McDonalds. Emily cannot turn down the dare if she does not want to look like a coward. Emily goes into the men's room and returns some time later, upset but hiding her emotions.

November 1997. Anne-Marie Marrone takes her suspicions about Chris to the prosecutor, who agrees to take the case to a grand jury. At the same time, Melanie tells Gus that she cannot be friends with the mother of her daughter's killer. Gus is devastated by this since she feels that now is a time when she needs her best friend more than ever. Chris is released from the hospital and immediately agrees to be interviewed by Detective Marrone. During the interview, Chris becomes emotional when he talks about Emily, but admits that he brought the gun on his date with Emily as well as a bottle of liquor. At the same time Melanie returns to work. However, she finds herself getting a morbid sense of satisfaction out of misdirecting patrons who come to her for help. At work, James learns that he has been named top surgeon in a national magazine just a day after meeting with an attorney who has agreed to take Chris's case. At home, Chris insists on going to the cemetery to visit Emily's grave. Gus watches as Chris has a conversation with the unadorned grave site.

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, 1989 and Now, November 1997 Analysis

Emily and Chris are nine in the first part of this chapter, already the closest of friends. The two children indulge in the sort of behavior in which all kids participate, making crank calls, exploring sex and daring each other to do strange or dangerous acts. This last is important in this chapter because Chris' dares cause the children to get in trouble



several times. When Emily dares Chris to kiss her, he is embarrassed and ashamed of the way it makes him feel, as any child his age would feel. To get her back, Chris sends Emily into the men's room of a local restaurant, unaware of the danger this situation might represent for a little girl. The reader has an idea, however, and alarm bells begins going off when Emily returns to the dining room upset, but hiding her feelings. This moment seems significant, but the reader will not know the impact of it until much later in the novel.

Detective Marrone is intent on proving Chris killed Emily. The detective has gone to the prosecutor to begin the ball rolling toward arrest while she is busy interviewing Chris. Chris admits to bringing a gun and a bottle of liquor on his date with Emily that night. Chris denies that he hurt Emily and continues to insist that it was a suicide pact gone wrong. At the same time, Melanie ends her relationship with Gus after seventeen years. Melanie is still clearly grieving as she returns to work and acts completely out of character. James is given an award by a national magazine, something that is tarnished by what Chris is going through. Finally, Chris goes to the cemetery to speak with Emily. Gus watches, but does not know what Chris says to Emily. Chris appears to be grieving just like everyone else, suggesting that he did not murder Emily with premeditation. However, there are people who think he did, so Chris's future appears to be in question as he tries to begin a life without Emily by his side.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, December 1993 and Now, Mid to Late November 1997

Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, December 1993 and Now, Mid to Late November 1997 Summary

December 1993. The Golds and the Hartes take a ski trip to Sugarloaf over the Christmas holiday. James meets a man on the ski lift who offers to take James and Chris hunting. On the trip, Chris shoots a rabbit. Chris finds the death of the tiny animal revolting and he throws up, embarrassing himself and his father. Later that night, Chris sneaks downstairs and gets into a bottle of liquor, trying to make the memory of the hunting trip go away. Emily comes down and joins him, trying to talk him into putting the liquor away. However, Chris dares her to take a drink, which she does seconds before both sets of parents come down. Emily tells on Chris, and he is punished by being forced to miss presents Christmas morning. When Gus lets Chris go skiing, Chris decides to get Emily back by making her go down an expert slope with him. Emily loses control of her skis on the way down the hill, breaking her leg in a fall. Chris feels so badly that he spends the rest of the week inside with her. On New Years Eve, Chris and Emily are watching television when Chris is overcome with a sense of affection for Emily. Emily and Chris kiss. James walks in on the children and rushes back to a party to tell the others, all of whom are thrilled at the idea of their children getting married one day.

Mid to Late November 1997. Melanie begins getting phone calls from someone asking for Emily. At first, Melanie just hangs up on the person. However, when the third call comes, Melanie announces that Emily is dead and insists on knowing the caller's identity. It is then that Melanie learns that Emily ordered an expensive watch for Chris, whose eighteenth birthday is approaching. At the same time, Chris begins seeing a psychiatrist. Chris talks to the doctor only a little at first but soon begins to talk about his relationship with Emily. James decides that things should go back to normal as soon as possible, so he insists that Chris return to school. The adjustment is difficult for Chris, who feels as though everyone is staring at him. When the school has a memorial service for Emily, Chris finds the whole thing ridiculous. The principal tries to get Chris to say a few words, but he finds himself bursting into hysterical laughter. The psychiatrist assures Chris that this is perfectly normal since intense emotions sometimes come out in strange ways. A few days later, on Chris' eighteenth birthday, Gus prepares a huge meal for the entire family. They decide to begin with the cake. Before Chris has a chance to finish his piece, however, several police officers arrive to take Chris into custody. Chris has been indicted for murder.



Part One, The Boy Next Door: Then, December 1993 and Now, Mid to Late November 1997 Analysis

Chris and Emily are now thirteen years old and clearly still very good friends. However, when Emily tattles on Chris, he is not beyond trying to get her back. Chris once again decides to give Emily a dare he knows she will not turn down that will put her safety at risk. Chris makes Emily go down an expert ski slope, even though he knows her skiing skill is not good enough to make it down. Chris does this because Emily told on him. Emily breaks her leg, causing Chris a great deal of remorse. On New Year's Eve, while the children are alone, Chris is overcome with emotions for Emily and they kiss. This appears to be the beginning of what the reader already knows is a long, intimate relationship between these kids. The reaction of the parents is also significant to the reader as they appear to be thrilled that their preteen children are becoming romantically linked. They imagine marriage and grandkids in the future, forever linking these two families.

Of important note in this chapter is also the hunting trip. Chris and his father go hunting rabbit, something they have not done before. Chris shoots one of these tiny creatures and finds the sight of blood on the white fur disturbing. Chris has gone hunting before, but always for large animals who are better capable of defending themselves. The shooting of the rabbit is a parallel image of Emily's death, who at seventeen, was a young, innocent girl just like the rabbit was a tiny, innocent animal. Chris's reaction might suggest that he would not have had the stomach to do to Emily what he did to the rabbit.

Back in the present Chris goes back to school because James is anxious for life to go back to normal. James' need to pretend nothing bad has happened is becoming more apparent, and as the plot continues to develop, the reader expects it will begin to interfere with his ability to cope with the situation. Chris is uncomfortable with school and his emotions come to a head when there is a memorial ceremony for Emily. Chris outrageously begins to laugh. The reader, and perhaps the people in the audience, might believe this to be proof that Chris is some sort of psychopath who killed Emily and now finds it amusing. However, the psychiatrist Chris has been seeing suggests this reaction is a normal expression of overwhelming emotion. At the same time, Melanie finds that Emily has ordered an expensive watch for Chris's birthday. To Melanie, and perhaps to the reader as well, this suggests that Emily intended to be around for Chris's birthday. Instead, Chris himself is being arrested that very day.



Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Late November 1997 and Then, April 1996

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Late November 1997 and Then, April 1996 Summary

Late November 1997. Gus and James immediately call Jordan McAfee, Chris's lawyer, who meets them down at the police station. Chris has already been booked and put in a cell. Jordan meets with him, explaining that he will have to remain in jail until the next morning when he can be arraigned. In the meantime, Chris will be moved to the Sheriff's jail. Chris is again booked, searched and placed in a cell. James and Gus spend a restless night, with James witnessing Gus crying in the darkness of the laundry room but doing nothing to comfort her. The next morning, Michael wakes in his house to find Melanie making breakfast, suddenly returned to the woman she was before. Melanie insists that Michael cancel his morning appointments so she can take him somewhere special. Michael does not know what Melanie has in mind until they arrive at the county courthouse the next town over. During Chris's arraignment, Melanie makes a spectacle of herself as she calls him a murderer and disrupts the proceedings. Melanie is escorted out of the courtroom while Chris pleads not guilty. Chris is remanded into custody and will spend the next few months in jail until a trial can be scheduled. Gus is outraged, but Jordan assures her the longer it is before trial, the longer he has to come up with an adequate defense.

April 1996. Chris and Emily appear to be the perfect couple, closer than any other couple attending their high school. Everyone assumes they are intimate and Chris finds himself embarrassed when forced to perpetuate this misconception. Chris wants to become intimate with Emily, but it is Emily who keeps putting off the next step. Chris has begun to pressure Emily, unclear why they should wait. Chris assumes he and Emily will be together forever, with marriage and a family only a few years in the future. Emily, on the other hand, is uncomfortable with sexual situations. Chris works at a park running a carousel ride. One night he and Emily go there and Chris pushes an intimate encounter. Emily becomes violent and a fight begins. Emily suggests that she and Chris break up and Chris agrees. As soon as they are apart, Chris begins dating another girl, who is willing to indulge Chris's sexual desires. However, it is not the same to Chris because he would rather be with Emily. At the same time, Emily feels lost without her friendship with Chris. Emily goes to Chris and begs him to take her back.

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Late November 1997 and Then, April 1996 Analysis

Chris has been arrested and booked at the local police station. Later he is moved to the Sheriff's jail and booked there as well. All this is a great shock to Chris, but Chris



handles it without falling apart, which attests to his character and his strength. However, when he is remanded to jail for an unforeseen amount of time, Chris is understandably scared. Gus, too, is upset by this, showing her depth of emotion when it comes to her child. The only person not visibly shaken is James, who has decided that he is not going to let the unpleasantness of his child's situation bother him. James would rather ignore the situation than become emotionally involved, not only showing his character flaws, but setting up a situation in which Gus will take the full weight of the stress of this situation, which will insert tension into her marriage as the plot continues to develop.

Melanie almost appears to be celebrating when Chris is arrested, returning to some semblance of her earlier self. However, Melanie is cruel when she attends the arraignment, proving that her old sense of self has not returned. In place of the quiet, thoughtful Melanie is a new, bitter woman, who wants only revenge for what has happened to her only child. Melanie is still gripped by the depth of her grief and wants only for the person responsible to pay for what he has done.

In the past, Emily and Chris appear to have had a perfect relationship, closer than other children their own age seem capable of. Everyone believes Chris and Emily are sleeping together, so Chris feels pressured to make this come to pass. Chris believes it is a natural progression of their relationship. Emily, however, is reluctant and this reluctance causes them to break up for a time. Chris finds another girl to fulfill his needs, but finds it is not the same without Emily. Emily also finds she misses Chris, but her need for Chris is more as a friend than a lover. Emily begs Chris to take her back and Chris assumes this means as her boyfriend, but the reader is left wondering if this is really what Emily wants. It seems that Emily is not ready for the intense relationship Chris wants, but she is unable to express this hesitation in terms Chris can understand. As the plot continues to develop, the reader expects this difference in emotions will become an obstacle Emily and Chris will have to confront.



Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, May 1996

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, May 1996 Summary

December 1997. Chris is placed in maximum security with the option to petition to be moved to medium security but has to wait nearly a week before he can petition. In the meantime, Chris vows to keep to himself, which should be easy since he has a cell to himself. However, there are a couple of inmates who have taken an interest in him and appear to be intent on getting him in trouble. Gus and James visit Chris, a visit that ends in an argument, and Chris asks that James not come back. Jordan comes to see Chris but refuses to allow Chris to tell him what happened the night Emily died. Jordan does not believe the truth has any impact on a trial. However, Chris insists on telling Jordan that he was never suicidal, which causes Jordan to make the decision that he can never allow Chris to take the stand. Jordan tells Chris that he intends to go with the defense that Chris and Emily had a suicide pact, and Chris was unable to complete his end of the deal because the sight of Emily caused him to pass out. Jordan then warns Chris not to talk to anyone else about that night, even a trusted cell mate or his family members, and that he cannot see his psychiatrist either. Jordan is afraid that anything Chris might say can be used against him.

Later that day Chris gets a cell mate. His cell mate, Steve, is accused of shaking his infant son to death. This crime makes Steve an outcast among the other inmates as well as Chris due to their association. When the guards do a return search of the cells that night, they find an illegal cigarette in Chris's shoe. Chris knows that it had to have been planted there by the other inmates because of Steve, but Chris refuses to tell on them. Chris is put on a five-day disciplinary lock down, meaning he cannot leave his cell except to shower. This will make it impossible for Chris to have visitors or to petition to be moved to medium security. However, it gains Chris new respect among the inmates. The first night Chris is back in his old cell, he hears Steve in the throes of a nightmare. After he wakes Steve from his dream, Steve tells Chris about the crime of which he is accused.

May 1996. Emily is beginning to have dreams and memories of a sexual assault. The more Chris pressures Emily into having sex, the more intense these memories become. Emily's reluctance is causing a great deal of tension between she and Chris. It seems all they do is argue about sex. Finally, afraid of losing him, Emily agrees to sleep with Chris. They plan ahead, deciding to share this important moment at the carousel. Suddenly Chris becomes patient and supportive; on that night, Emily is nervous. The act is painful and afterward she has a clear memory of being sexually assaulted as a child. Emily does not say anything to Chris, however, allowing him to believe that she is happy with their newfound intimacy.



Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, May 1996 Analysis

Chris is settling in at the jail, unhappily. Trouble seems to be brewing between Chris and the other inmates. When Chris is set up with an illegal cigarette, he takes the blame and the punishment without turning in anyone else. This again shows Chris's character as a strong young man who understands how things work. This time it does seem to work as Chris becomes a kind of hero in the jail. Chris also gets a cell mate, who is accused of killing his infant son, a crime that is considered heinous even among inmates. Chris takes a liking to this young man and tries to comfort him when nightmares of his crime haunt their nights. This young man's crime seems to parallel Chris's crime in that they are both accused of killing an innocent. However, the reader is still not clear on how innocent Emily was and whether her death was intentional.

Gus and James visit Chris, but the visit ends with Chris asking that James not come back. Chris' decision is important because it shows the strained relationship between father and son, and it is also Chris in a way giving James permission to distance himself from the unpleasantness of his son's situation. Jordan visits Chris and makes it clear from the beginning that he is not interested in the truth. Jordan believes that the truth is not necessary to win a trial. Chris does not understand this, as he is ready to tell someone what happened that night. Jordan will not allow Chris to do this, however, causing Chris some frustration that leads him into blurting out that he was not suicidal that night. This small amount of information causes the reader to wonder if maybe the police might be on the right track with Chris.

Emily finally agrees to sleep with Chris in May of 1996, a full year before her death. However, Emily has begun to have memories of sexual abuse, a theme of the novel. Emily's sexual abuse is unclear as the memories begin, but after she and Chris are intimate, Emily has a clear memory that causes the reader to remember back to the dare in which Chris made Emily go into the men's room at the McDonalds when she was only nine. Clearly Emily was attacked by an employee of the restaurant and repressed the memory because it was too traumatic. Now the memory has returned and it seems to be the root cause of Emily's distaste of sex. How Emily handles the surfacing of these memories will have a large impact on her future emotional health, so the reader is surprised when she does not immediately tell Chris, her closest friend. If Emily does not feel safe telling Chris this terrible thing, the reader should wonder who else she might be able to trust with the information.



Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, September 1997

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, September 1997 Summary

December 1997. Gus goes to the grocery store and overhears a couple women gossiping about Chris. Gus confronts them only to be told everyone is talking about it because of an article in the local paper. Gus reads the article and believes that it is one sided, based mainly on a series of interviews with Melanie Gold. Gus goes to the newspaper and demands an apology, but the editor has no sympathy for her plight. All the editor will offer is to have the writer interview her and do a series of articles from her point of view. Gus refuses. Later Gus visits Chris at the jail and learns that Chris was never suicidal. Gus is relieved by this and believes it means her son is a hero because he was with Emily trying to stop her from hurting herself. That same day, Chris and Steve are moved out of maximum security into medium and allowed to stay together in the same cell. That night, James accepts an award from the hospital for being named one of the top surgeons in the country, but in his speech he forgets to mention Chris. Gus is offended by this, believing it was intentional, causing them to argue.

The next day, Selena Damascus, Jordan's investigator, goes to interview Michael. Selena gets close to Michael by pretending to be working in a stable where he is visiting a patient. Later Selena tells Michael who she really is and invites him to have coffee. Michael readily agrees, appearing to need someone with whom to talk. Michael talks about how close Chris and Emily were, how they seemed to be two sides of the same coin. Michael also admits that if something important was happening in Emily's life, she would be more likely to tell Chris before anyone else. Michael will not go so far as to say he does not believe Chris would kill Emily, but he does appear sympathetic to the defense. At home, Melanie goes into Emily's room. Melanie begins taking away all traces of Chris in the room, from pictures to a sweater Emily kept wrapped around her pillow because she believed she could smell him on it. In Emily's closet Melanie finds a journal hidden in a hole in the wall. Melanie reads the journal cover to cover before taking it, the picture and the sweater and burning them in the fireplace.

September 1997. Emily is enrolled in a health class that is reviewing birth control techniques, but she suspects it is too late for her. Emily takes a home pregnancy test and is devastated to see it is positive. Emily travels by bus to the Planned Parenthood office in the next town. Emily's pregnancy is diagnosed and a counselor comes to talk to her about her options. Emily insists that the father is not in the picture and she will not be telling him. The counselor tells Emily that she can get an abortion, but it will cost over three hundred dollars. Emily takes a check from her mother's checkbook and has Chris



take her to the bank in order to cash it. However, when it comes time to have the abortion, Emily panics when the male doctor tries to touch her. Emily feels as though she is out of options. Emily knows the moment she tells Chris, she will also have to tell him about the abortion and the sexual assault she experienced. Emily cannot bring herself to do that. One afternoon while learning how to fire a gun with Chris, Emily begins to think that her only option is to die, to stop everything now so she will not have to face the future.

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, December 1997 and Then, September 1997 Analysis

Melanie has spoken to a reporter and made it seem as though Chris were a cold-blooded killer, who murdered her innocent daughter for no reason other than to be cruel. Gus is angry when she sees this article, but there is nothing she can do to change it. This is frustrating for Gus who likes to be in control of things, pushing her personality to a point where she is ready to break. Gus gets a reprieve when she learns Chris was never suicidal, making her believe that he is actually a hero. Gus wants to believe the best about Chris, so it is easy for her to make this leap. Gus is not so gracious with her husband, however. When James forgets to mention Chris in an acceptance speech for an award, Gus immediately assumes the worse, that James has emotionally disowned their son. Gus' anger injects a great deal of tension into her marriage, and the reader suspects that things will only get worse in the coming months.

Selena Damascus talks to Michael, who is more than willing to discuss Chris and Emily with anyone who will listen. Michael talks about the close relationship Chris and Emily shared, the maturity they showed and the hopes both sets of parents had for their children. Michael's openness comes off as a willingness to help the defense, which can only look good to a jury when the case goes to trial. At the same time, Melanie finds a journal that talks about Emily's feelings in the months before her death. The reader does not get to know what is in the journal but can only guess based on previous chapters. It seems the journal could prove Emily's state of mind in the days before she died, but instead of turning it over to the prosecutor, Melanie burns it. This act shows how desperately Melanie needs Chris to pay for what happened to Emily.

Just a few months before she died, Emily found out she was pregnant. Emily is devastated by this news and decides to have an abortion, but cannot go through with it because the doctor is a man and she cannot stand to have strange men touch her. Now Emily is in a position where she must tell Chris, as well as her parents, about the baby. Emily knows Chris will be happy and want to marry her, cementing them to each other for the rest of their lives, something Emily is not sure she wants. Emily also believes that she will have to tell Chris about the sexual assault she suffered and she cannot do that either. Emily is stuck in a bad spot, unable to move backward, but unwilling to move forward. While shooting a gun with Chris, it occurs to Emily that there is one way to stay where she is forever. The reader reads Emily's motivations and realizes that this is basically what Chris said.



Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Christmas 1997

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Christmas 1997 Summary

Michael goes to the jail to see Chris. They talk for a short time, but Chris refuses to talk about that night because of the warnings Jordan made to him. Michael does not seem to mind. Michael only wants to be with someone who loved Emily, too. At the grocery store again, Gus runs into Melanie. Gus tries to talk to her, but Melanie runs away. Jordan comes to the jail to go over the evidence with Chris. The prosecutor has given Jordan piles of paperwork that he and Chris go over together. They discuss the gun, which Chris admits getting out of his dad's gun case, and the trajectory of the bullet through Emily's head, suggesting someone else held the gun. When they get to the autopsy report, Chris is physically stunned by the fact that Emily was pregnant. Chris is so shocked, in fact, that he passes out. Chris is taken to the infirmary, where he is cared for by a kind nurse.

Selena visits Emily's art teacher and learns that Emily was highly talented. Selena is shown a series of paintings Emily has done over the years and is told that Emily was a perfectionist who had to have every detail exactly correct. Then the art teacher shows Selena the last thing Emily was working on. This painting, unlike the others which were all realistic portraits, is a surrealistic painting of a skull floating in a dark background. The painting is disturbing and suggests to Selena a change in Emily's emotional state. When Selena goes to Jordan's to get him up to date, she walks in on the tail end of a fight between Jordan and his thirteen-year-old son, Thomas. Jordan found a pornographic magazine in Thomas' room. Jordan also has to decide whether or not to allow his son to visit his mother in Paris for Christmas. Jordan would rather bury himself in the case. Jordan tells Selena about Emily's pregnancy and suggests she find a doctor who confirmed the pregnancy, hoping to prove Chris did not know since Jordan believes the pregnancy will be the core of the prosecutor's case. Selena visits several clinics in the area, finally arriving at the Planned Parenthood clinic. Selena is turned away by the receptionist, but the counselor who worked with Emily agrees to talk to her. The counselor tells Selena that up to the day that Emily died, she had denied that there was a father in the picture.

Jordan arranges for Chris' psychiatrist to see him in the jail. Jordan insists on staying through the meeting in case anything is said that could be used against Chris. Chris talks about a dream he has had of Emily. Chris admits to being angry with Emily for not telling him about the baby. Chris also says that he is afraid that Emily did not feel the same way about him as he did her. Later that day, Jordan goes to the Hartes' home in order to talk to Gus and James about testifying for Chris. Gus is attentive and eager to help anyway she can; however, James outright refuses to testify, afraid of what his



testifying might do to his professional reputation. Back at the jail, somehow the other inmates have learned that Emily was pregnant. One of the inmates accuses Chris of killing his own child. Chris attacks the inmate and is thrown into solitary. Chris is angry and agitated, calling out to anyone who will listen. Someone throws him a Bible. Chris finds himself reading about forgiveness. For the first time in a long time, Chris gets on his knees and prays.

Selena speaks with Chris' English teacher. The teacher clearly adores Chris and thinks he is a very good student. The teacher shows Selena several of Chris' essays, including one Chris wrote recently. It is an essay in which the students were supposed to come down on one side of an issue. Chris chose abortion. Chris' conclusion is clearly pro-life, suggesting that he does not believe killing should be condoned at any stage of life. A few days later, Christmas arrives. Kate wakes her parents and presents them with gifts she bought for them. However, it soon becomes obvious that Gus and James forgot about Christmas; Kate is crushed. At the cemetery, Melanie is opening gifts for Emily and arranging them around her grave. Jordan is at the airport seeing Thomas off to Paris. Chris returns to his cell, and Steve presents him with the equipment necessary to give each other a tattoo. Michael visits Chris in jail and runs into Gus in the reception area. They agree to meet after for coffee.

Part Two, The Girl Next Door: Now, Christmas 1997 Analysis

Michael begins visiting Chris in jail. Michael is still grieving for his daughter, touching on the theme of grief and needs to be with someone who is willing to talk about her. Melanie is lost in her own world of grief and cannot reach out to Michael or anyone else. Michael needs human contact and to be with people who love Emily. Chris is the closest person Michael has to his daughter anymore. At the same time, Chris meets with Jordan and begins to learn the details of the prosecutor's case against him. Chris sees the autopsy report and learns for the first time about Emily's pregnancy. Chris is so shocked that he passes out. Jordan sees this as a good sign, since it seems obvious that the pregnancy will be a big part of the prosecution's case. Things look even better when Selena finds the counselor who spoke with Emily, and this woman admits that Emily swore there was no father in picture up to the day she died.

Selena visits the high school and talks to Emily's art teacher. Emily was a talented artist who had a bright future. However, Emily was a perfectionist and would often rework a piece hundreds of times before being satisfied. Emily's perfectionism shows another part of her personality and perhaps goes a short way in explaining why she could not bring herself to admit to anyone about the sexual assault she suffered, an assault that made her less than perfect, less than pure. Emily's art teacher also shows Selena a new piece Emily was working on in the weeks before her death. Where Emily's pieces were realist pieces, portraits mostly, this new work is dark, surreal. The painting is disturbing and might be the only concrete evidence the defense will be able to find to show Emily's state of mind in the weeks before her death. Selena also visits Chris' English teacher, who shows her an essay Chris wrote against abortion. This essay is a clear



representation of Chris' feelings about abortion and seem to contradict any opinion that Chris might have killed Emily in order to get rid of the baby she carried.

Jordan allows Chris to see his psychiatrist and listens as Chris describes his anger at Emily. Chris is upset that Emily did not tell him about the baby and suggests her motivation for doing this is because she did not feel the same way about him as he felt for her. It is the first time this idea has crossed Chris' mind. Later, Chris gets into a fight with another inmate and is put in solitary confinement. Chris is understandably agitated, but when someone gives him a Bible, he finds himself praying for the first time in a long time. Chris is a lost soul, grieving for Emily and for the child that will never be. The Bible helps soothe some of this. Christmas arrives and everyone spends it in a different way, most wrapped in different degrees of grief, touching on the theme of grief. As the plot races quickly toward Chris's trial, all the main characters are wrapped in their own fears and self-doubts, raising the tension of the story.



Part Three, The Truth: Now, February 1998 and Then, October 1997

Part Three, The Truth: Now, February 1998 and Then, October 1997 Summary

February 1998. Jordan and the prosecutor, Barrie Delaney, go to the judge's chambers for pretrial hearings. Both sides make motions to suppress some of the evidence. Barrie wants to keep Chris' essay on abortion out of court, while Jordan argues to throw out the interview Detective Marrone had with Chris in the hospital. The judge listens to them argue and says he will rule by the end of the week. The jury selection is set for May, coincidentally falling on Emily's birthday. Jordan gets the news at the end of the week; his motions were accepted, while most of Barrie's were denied.

Gus and Michael have been seeing each other regularly since Christmas. They spend their time talking about the past and all the good memories they share. The relationship is purely platonic, but the fact that they are keeping it secret makes it exciting. At the same time, James is planning a birthday lunch for Kate. Gus is late to the lunch and then rushes off before eating, lying to James by claiming that Chris has visiting hours twice that day, and she does not want to disappoint him. Chris is angry because his mother did not come visit him in the morning when she normally does. Chris asks that James come see him. Michael tells Melanie the truth, that he had lunch with Gus and is rewarded with anger.

On the sixth month anniversary of Emily's death, Michael and Melanie have her gravestone installed during a quiet ceremony with their Rabbi. Gus attends, but Melanie pretends she does not see her. Gus and James have been sleeping in separate bedrooms ever since James decided not to testify for Chris; however, that night Gus goes back to their bed. Later, James goes to the jail to see Chris. James is full of remorse and promises Chris he will support him from that moment on.

Chris's cell mate, Steve, goes on trial and is quickly found guilty. Steve tries to kill himself the night before he is transferred to federal prison, but Chris stops him. At the same time, Melanie learns that Michael has agreed to testify for the defense. Melanie tries to seduce Michael, hoping that in the afterglow she will be able to talk him out of it; however, Michael catches on and stops the seduction scene. Melanie flies into a rage, accusing him of betraying their daughter, but Michael refuses to back down. Michael and Gus meet for dinner a few nights later at the same restaurant where the four of them once met every Friday night. The waiter mistakes them for a couple. Gus quickly sets him right and then begins to wonder if Emily felt the way she did at that moment. Gus wonders if maybe Emily did feel pressured to be with Chris and stuck in a relationship she did not want.



May 1997. When Emily tells Chris she wants to die, he thinks she is joking, and then he becomes angry and tries to talk her out of it. Emily keeps bringing the idea up, and Chris finds himself forced to talk to her about it. Finally Emily asks if he will help her. Chris reluctantly agrees, thinking that if he agrees to help he has a chance to talk her out of it. Emily comes up with the idea of using a gun, afraid that pills or gas might allow time for her to be rescued. Emily also suggests that Chris do it with her; that way they can both remain as they are forever. Again Chris agrees, hoping if he goes along, he can talk her out of it. On the night Emily has chosen, Chris takes his father's Colt from the gun cabinet and two bullets, unsure why he took two instead of one.

Part Three, The Truth: Now, February 1998 and Then, October 1997 Analysis

The trial is coming closer. Jordan and Barrie make the usual pretrial motions and Jordan wins most of his. The date for jury selection is chosen and is ironically Emily's birthday. Chris sees this as a good sign. At the same time, Michael and Gus have grown closer. They meet for lunch several times a week, with Gus lying to her family to hide the relationship. There is a tone of sexual tension in this relationship, suggesting to the reader that an affair might be around the corner. However, Gus turns to her husband instead, taking him back into her bed. At the same time, Gus sees how people perceive them and begins to wonder if Emily did not feel pressured to be in a relationship with Chris and if that might have contributed to her depression.

Michael has decided to testify for the prosecution. The reader is unsure about Michael's motivations in this decision, only that he seems to want to save Chris, since he was unable to save Emily. Michael's choice places a great deal of tension on his marriage with Melanie, making a rift that the reader suspects might not be repairable. At the same time, Chris's cell mate has been convicted of killing his son and sentenced to life in federal prison. Chris catches Steve trying to kill himself, and when Steve begs Chris to let him do it, Chris refuses. Chris alerts the guards and Steve is placed under suicide watch. Chris' actions seem different from how he reacted when Emily decided to kill herself. However, in the next chapter the reader sees how Chris tried desperately to keep Emily from killing herself. Chris agreed to do anything Emily wanted as long as he could continue to talk her out of her depression. However Emily had her mind set on what she wanted and would not be talked out of it. On the night Emily chose to die, Chris takes the gun from his father's cabinet, taking two bullets but not sure why. Chris never had any intention of killing himself or allowing Emily to kill herself. The reader finds themselves wondering, however, what went wrong.



Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997 Summary

On the first day of testimony, all the main characters prepare to go to court. Melanie and Michael go in separate cars; Gus and James travel together; Barrie spills her coffee; Jordan's son interferes with his routine of eating chocolate cereal before court. Chris is allowed to dress in a suit and is escorted in to the courtroom in shackles. Jordan immediately demands that the shackles be removed before they can taint the jury's opinion of Chris. Barrie begins the case with her opening remarks, telling the jury that Chris took Emily to the carousel, got her drunk and killed her in order to keep her baby from ruining his future. Jordan tells the jury that Chris and Emily entered into a suicide pact, intending to kill themselves together. However, Chris passed out after Emily died and was unable to fulfill his end of the bargain.

Anne-Marie Marrone is the first witness for the prosecution. Anne-Marie testifies to finding Chris and Emily at the carousel. Emily was not dead yet, but had already been shot. Chris had a laceration to his head and was sitting with Emily's head in his lap. Detective Marrone reports that she found a gun near Emily's body and tests indicate it had only Chris's fingerprints on the handle, but Emily's were on the barrel. The detective also testifies to having found gunpowder residue on Chris's clothes, but none on Emily's hands. Finally, Detective Marrone introduces the fact that Emily was pregnant. In conclusion, Detective Marrone says that Chris claims to have watched Emily kill herself, but the direction of the bullet through her brain suggested Chris held the gun to her head.

Jordan cross examines Detective Marrone and forces her to admit that Emily's hands were not tested for gunpowder residue before she went to the hospital and that they might have been washed, removing any residue. Jordan attacks the fingerprint evidence, getting Detective Marrone to admit that there were no clear fingerprints on the trigger, so Emily could have killed herself, and then Chris destroyed the fingerprints on the handle by picking up the gun. Finally, Detective Marrone admits that Chris's hands were never tested for gunpowder residue.

The medical examiner testifies next. The medical examiner goes over the evidence discovered on autopsy, including the pregnancy. Then the medical examiner explains why the angle of the bullet is not consistent with Emily holding the gun to her own head. The bullet traveled nearly straight back through Emily's head, from her temple to the back of her head. In order for Emily to do this, she would have had to have held the gun at an unnatural angle. However, when Jordan cross examines the medical examiner he establishes that the gun could have slipped, allowing the bullet to travel as it did with Emily holding the gun. During the medical examiner's testimony, Barrie asked for Chris



to stand up. In front of the jury, Barrie has Chris hold her from behind and hold the gun to her head, as she suggests that Chris did to Emily. Jordan, on his cross examination, has Chris do the same, but he holds the gun. Jordan is unhappy with the entire demonstration, but believes he controlled the damage.

Next Barrie calls the clerk from the jewelry store to the stand. Barrie establishes that Emily bought a very expensive watch just a few weeks before her death to be given to Chris on his birthday. Chris's birthday was not until several weeks after Emily died. Barrie hopes to establish that Emily did not intend to die, and the purchase of the watch demonstrates this. However, Jordan uses this testimony to show the speed with which Emily's depression appeared, explaining why so few people were aware of it. This witness is the last of the day.

The next morning, Barrie calls Emily's closest female friend, Heather. Heather testifies to the close relationship between Emily and Chris and how shocking it is that Emily could kill herself since she seemed so happy in the weeks before. However, Jordan manages to get Heather to admit that she was not as close to Emily as Chris. Melanie is called to the stand next. Melanie testifies to the horror of finding out her daughter was dead. Then Melanie flies into a tirade against Chris, calling him a murderer from the stand. Jordan, however, gets Melanie to admit that Emily never told her about her pregnancy, and that Emily spent more time with Chris than with her and her husband.

November 7, 1997. Emily gets out of the shower and begins to dress. Emily thinks about leaving a note for her parents, but she cannot think of what she could possibly say that would make things better. Chris picks Emily up, feeling agitated and worried. Emily is cheerful, however, and tries to get Chris to talk to her. They play on the carousel for a time and talk. Chris asks Emily what she wants him to do afterward, but she has not thought about that. Chris loads the gun, then tells Emily that if she loves him she will not do it. Emily says she is doing it because she does love him.

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997 Analysis

Testimony in Chris's trial begins. Detective Marrone presents all the evidence against him in a clear and convincing way. Chris's fingerprints are on the gun, but Emily's are only on the barrel. Emily is pregnant. Emily has bruises on her wrist. The bullet's trajectory through Emily's brain is unusual and only explained by someone else holding the gun. It all seems pretty clear. Until Jordan gets up and starts poking holes at the prosecution's theories. Jordan does the same when the medical examiner testifies. However, Barrie manages to make Chris implicate himself in her theory by making him stand up and hold the gun to her head much the way she suspects he did to Emily. Jordan tries to fix the damage done here as well by presenting his own demonstration, but the reader suspects that perhaps the damage has already been done.

A friend of Emily's takes the stand, but the only thing she can offer is that Emily spent a lot of time with Chris and if she were depressed, Chris would be the only one likely to



know. The jewelry store clerk offers proof that Emily intended to live at least until Chris's birthday because she bought him an expensive gift. This seems damaging to Jordan's case, but the reader suspects the idea will be visited again as the case continues. Then Melanie takes the stand. The reader is already aware of how deep Melanie's grief runs, and how she has turned into a person that is unlike the woman she was before Emily's death. Melanie's transformation appears complete now as she becomes a violent, bitter woman on the stand. Melanie calls Chris a murderer and attacks him verbally, spewing her grief for everyone to see. The reader is both struck both by the depth of her emotion and the anger that has clouded her vision. Melanie no longer sees Chris as the little boy who grew up with her only child. Melanie only sees someone she can freely blame for Emily's death.

On the day of her death, Emily showers and dresses as though she is about to go on a normal date. Emily then meets Chris and seems to be in good spirits, playing around on the carousel and talking about her own death as though it is a movie she wants to go see later that evening. Chris is grieving already, trying to talk her out of her decision, while at the same time trying to respect her need to end her pain. Chris loads the gun, an important act that seems to go along with both the prosecutor's and the defense's theories on what happened that night. Finally, Chris tells Emily that if she loves him she will not do this, but Emily insists she is doing it out of love. This statement is ironic, since the last thing Chris wants is for Emily to die. Emily is not dying for Chris, but for herself.



Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997 Summary

May 1998. Jordan begins his defense by calling a physician's assistant from the hospital who testifies that she washed Emily's hands, the assumption being that she washed away any gunpowder residue before the detectives could run their tests. Jordan then calls a doctor who specializes in suicidal teenagers. This doctor tells the jury that it is possible for Emily's depression to have come on quickly and for there to be no outward signs. The doctor also says that suicidal teens often give away prized possessions in the time before they die, and the watch Emily bought Chris could be a part of this behavior. The doctor also testifies that he read a profile on both Emily and Chris and believe that they are likely candidates for something he calls fusion, in which two personalities are so closely linked that they could enter into a suicide pact, even if only one is suicidal. On cross, however, Barrie establishes that Emily was not exhibiting any of the classic signs of a suicidal depression.

Jordan then calls an art therapist to the stand. This therapist talks about how she uses art to help emotionally troubled children and teens communicate. The therapist looks at Emily's last painting and says that it not only suggests depression and a fixation on death, but also hints at sexual abuse. At this, Melanie leaves the courtroom and becomes ill. When Barrie cross examines her, the therapist looks at a painting from a well known artist and admits that it appears to show signs of emotion disturbances, but she is unaware if this particular artist suffered emotional problems. Next Jordan calls Chris' English teacher who introduces the essay he wrote against abortion. However, Barrie points out that by entering a suicide pact with Emily, Chris contradicts some of his points in this paper.

The counselor from the Planned Parenthood testifies next, asserting that Emily refused to tell the baby's father up to the day she died. Michael Gold testifies to the closeness of Emily and Chris's relationship, asserting that if Emily was depressed, Chris was most likely the first to know. Michael will not, however, say that he does not believe Chris killed Emily. Testimony ends for the day and Chris is taken back to jail. There Chris learns that Steve has killed himself in federal prison. Still reeling from this news, Chris is escorted to visit with his mother, who is anxious to know what is going on since she cannot attend court until after she testifies. Chris becomes annoyed with his mother and blurts out that he killed Emily.

The next day, Gus takes the stand, frightened that she must lie for her child. Jordan begins taking Gus through her testimony, but she cannot make herself look at Chris. Finally Chris makes Jordan stop. Chris insists that Jordan take Gus off the stand and put him in her place. Jordan is not happy and makes Chris sign a waiver, claiming that



he is forcing the loss of the case. Chris gets on the stand and announces that he killed Emily. Jordan takes a break and makes Chris tell him the truth. Then Jordan returns Chris to the stand and begins to run him through the events of November 7, 1997.

When Emily continues to insist on killing herself, Chris becomes angry and tells her to do it. Chris leaves her with the gun and runs off. However, when some time passes and he does not hear a gunshot, Chris returns. Emily is sobbing. Emily cannot pull the trigger. Chris sees Emily's pain, and he cannot stand to see her hurting so deeply. Chris agrees to help her. Chris holds Emily in his arms and puts the gun to her head. Emily presses his hand and the gun fires.

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Then, November 7, 1997 Analysis

Jordan begins his defense with a bang, quickly putting holes in most of Barrie's case. First, Jordan proves that Emily's body was washed, wiping away evidence. Jordan then calls an expert on suicide who underscores Jordan's assertion that Emily's depression could have developed quickly. This is important to Jordan's case because no one saw any symptoms of depression in Emily, giving weight to Barrie's assertion that Emily was murdered, not suicidal. Then Jordan calls an art therapist, who uses Emily's final painting as an example of her growing depression those final weeks of her life. The therapist is controversial, but she seems to make a strong case for depression. When the therapist also suggests that Emily's painting suggests sexual abuse as well, Melanie leaves the courtroom and becomes ill. The reader sees this and knows that Melanie is upset because she knows that Emily was sexually assaulted. This gives weight, at least in the eyes of the reader, to the therapist's theories.

Chris's teacher testifies and introduces his essay on abortion. However, this does not seem to help much when Barrie claims that his opinions against abortion seem to belie his actions the night Emily died. Finally Michael Gold testifies. Michael helps the defense by illustrating the close relationship between Emily and Chris. However, Michael refuses to say that he does not believe Chris could kill Emily, which is what Jordan wanted him to say. The day seems to have gone well, however, and they break for the night. Chris finds out when he returns to jail that Steve killed himself. This is a shock to Chris, who is beginning to see himself going to federal prison. Chris imagines himself in the same position as Steve and cannot imagine spending the rest of his life in jail. Chris goes to meet his mother and becomes so agitated that he blurts out that he killed Emily. The reader is just as shocked as Gus, who is devastated by the admission. Gus cannot wrap her mind around what Chris has told her, but she gets on the stand the next day to lie for him anyway. Gus's character is showcased, proving her once again to be a strong, determined woman, who loves her son enough to put her own freedom in jeopardy.

Chris cannot watch his mother lie for him and decides to testify. Chris needs to tell the truth once and for all. Jordan is not happy, since he still believes that truth has no place in court. Jordan has no choice, however, and allows Chris to take the stand. Chris tells



the jury that he shot Emily, shocking everyone in the process. Chris could no longer talk Emily out of her decision, so he leaves her with the gun. Emily cannot do it and Chris cannot watch her live in pain. Chris decides he has no choice, exactly as Emily decided she could not live any longer. Chris holds the gun but it seems they both pulled the trigger. This illustrates the theme of assisted suicide since it appears that Emily did not kill herself, but Chris did not kill her. They committed the act together, just like they did everything else from the moment of Emily's birth.



Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Epilogue

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Epilogue Summary

Jordan leads Chris through his story, underscoring the fact that Chris does not know who pulled the trigger, him or Emily. Barrie tries to emphasize the fact that Chris was holding the gun and that he went there with the gun. Jordan has Chris stress that he did not go to the carousel that night with the intention of killing anyone, himself or Emily. Jordan rests his case after Chris leaves the stand. Barrie is confident that Chris has already sunk himself and it does not matter what she says in her summation. Jordan, however, offers the most important summation of his life. Jordan, despite his own disbelief in truth, stresses truth in his summation. Then it is time to wait. Everyone is on pins and needles, except for Barrie, who is sure she has won. However, the next morning, the jury returns with a verdict of not guilty. Chris passes out for the third time in his life.

The Golds sell their house and move out, without speaking a single word to the Hartes. Gus makes a gesture to say goodbye to Michael, but there do not seem to be words. Chris watches from his bedroom for them to leave. When they are gone, he tracks down the can by which he and Emily once passed notes. Chris finds a note in it and it is blank.

Part Three, The Truth: Now, May 1998 and Epilogue Analysis

Despite the fact that Jordan believes the truth no longer matters in a court of law, he leads Chris through the true events of the night of November 7. Jordan emphasizes the fact that Chris cannot tell for sure who pulled the trigger, him or Emily, once again touching on the theme of assisted suicide. Then Jordan stresses the truth when he makes his summation, telling the jury that he does not believe in the truth, but that this is exactly what Chris has forced him to present. Jordan says that Emily died by her own choice, with her own hand, and that Chris has told the truth. The jury must believe him because they vote to acquit.

The Golds move away, wiping away seventeen years of memories between the two families. Gus tries to say goodbye, but there do not seem to be words. There is too much bitterness, too much pain. Chris finds a note that either he or Emily had tried to send to the other. It is blank and that seems appropriate, symbolic of all that has taken place this past year. Life is a blank slate for Chris now, and he has to do the best he can, going on with his life without Emily in it.



Characters

Christopher Harte

Christopher Harte is a seventeen-year-old boy when the book opens. Through the course of the novel, however, the reader gets to see Christopher at different phases of his life. Chris lives with his parents in a small town in New Hampshire. Next door, lives another family, his mother's best friend, and their daughter, only three months younger than Chris. Chris and Emily grow up together, best friends, never apart. When one falls, the other bleeds. Together they grow and mature, eventually blossoming into mature teens, who find intimacy with each other the same way they discovered all else about life.

Chris's parents had always hoped the two kids would one day fall in love and marry, uniting these two families legally as well as emotionally. When, at thirteen, the children seem to fall in love, the parents are thrilled. Chris, too, is happy with this change in his relationship with Emily. Chris believes himself deeply in love with Emily and wants only to spend the rest of his life with her. When Emily resists the intimate part of their relationship, Chris is confused and hurt, pressuring her more than he perhaps intended. When Emily ends the relationship, Chris turns to another girl for affection but finds it unsatisfying.

Emily reunites with Chris and eventually agrees to commit to a sexual relationship. Chris feels as though their relationship is stronger than ever. This is why Chris is surprised when Emily tells him she wants to die. Chris tries to talk Emily out of her depression, but she is determined to end her life, with or without Chris' help. Chris cannot stand the idea of Emily dying alone, without him, so he agrees to help her. All the while, Chris expects to be able to talk Emily out of her decision. However, on the night Emily has chosen to die, Chris is unable to talk her out of it. When Chris sees how much pain Emily is truly in, he decides to help her. Chris holds the gun that takes Emily's life, causing him to appear to be a killer in the eyes of the law.

Chris is arrested and placed in jail until his trial. Chris spends this time trying to survive the cruel world of prison rather than being in high school, where he should have been. Chris befriends a young man, who is accused of shaking his infant son to death. This friendship is dangerous for Chris because inmates are not kind to baby killers. However, Chris needs someone to relate to, someone to talk to. When this friend goes to trial and is convicted, Chris stops him from committing suicide. However, there is no one there to stop him at the federal prison. Chris is saddened by this news and it takes away his hope of surviving should he also fail to win his case. Chris decides to tell the truth in court no matter what happens. Surprisingly, Chris is found not guilty.



Emily Gold

Emily Gold is the only child of Michael and Melanie Gold. Emily grows up with Chris Harte, the son of her mother's best friend. Emily and Chris are very close. When one falls, the other often bleeds. It seems a natural progression when Emily and Chris grow to be lovers. However, for Emily it is a complicated relationship that leaves her with a dilemma she cannot handle. At nine, Emily is assaulted in the restroom of a local fast food restaurant. Emily does not tell anyone about this assault and buries the memory in the back of her mind. However, when Chris begins to pressure her to have sex, the memories begin to resurface.

Emily struggles with these memories and the pressure Chris places on her to have sex. At one point, Emily breaks up with Chris, but finds that not only has she lost her boyfriend, but she has also lost her best friend. Emily cannot deal with the loss of both, so she allows herself to be taken back into Chris' affections. However, Emily now knows she does not love Chris the way she should in order to have an intimate relationship. It is due to these feelings that sexual relations with Chris compound her emotional struggle with the sexual abuse she once suffered. It is as though every time she makes love to Chris, she is being assaulted again.

When Emily becomes pregnant, she knows that the news will delight Chris, and he will want to marry her. Emily cannot see any way to stop this marriage except to end the pregnancy. Emily tries to have an abortion, but when the male doctor tries to touch her, Emily's emotional damage from the sexual abuse causes her to react violently. Emily cannot handle being touched by a man. Emily is desperate to get out of the situation and to keep from having to marry Chris. One day, it occurs to Emily that death is the only way to spare everyone pain. Emily asks Chris to help her. At first Chris is reluctant, but when he sees how much pain she is in, Chris agrees. Chris gets a gun and helps Emily kill herself, neither one thinking of the consequences of their actions.

Augusta 'Gus' Harte

Gus Harte is an outgoing woman, who is vibrant and full of life. Gus runs a unique business in which she stands in line for people who do not have the time. Gus is on one of these lines when she gets the call about Chris and Emily. Gus rushes to the hospital to learn her best friend's daughter has been killed, and her son is the prime suspect. Gus has known Melanie and Michael Gold for seventeen years. Gus and Melanie are close friends, who have raised their children together. They live a blessed life and expect their children will marry one day and make the union between the two families a legal one.

Gus is devastated by Emily's death and more so by Melanie's determination to see Chris pay for Emily's death. Melanie cuts Gus out of her life as though the jury has already made its decision. Gus suffers through the pretrial months, listening to people gossip behind her back and unable to turn to the one person she had always counted on before, Melanie. Gus continues to offer support to her son, often visiting him in jail,



without ever asking if he is guilty, believing it is not something she needs to know. However, when Chris tells her he shot Emily, Gus is devastated and not sure she can lie for him on the stand. Gus tries, however, determined to keep her son out of prison.

James Harte

James Harte is an eye surgeon. James grew up with severely-reserved parents and never really learned how to deal with his emotions. Marriage to Gus has helped, but when Chris is arrested, James reverts back to his old patterns. James tries to pretend that the whole situation is not taking place. When James is awarded a prize through his hospital for being listed as one of the best doctors in the country in a national magazine, he leaves out Chris in his acceptance speech. Gus takes this as disrespect toward Chris, and it puts a strain on their relationship. The fact that James does not visit Chris in jail does not help the situation. However, James eventually comes around and offers his son his full support during the trial with the exception of testifying. James refuses to testify to the fact that Emily could have gotten the gun out of his gun case herself.

Melanie Gold

Melanie Gold is Emily's mother. Melanie is a quiet, reserved woman, almost the complete opposite of Gus. Melanie and Gus are close friends and raise their children together, causing Chris and Emily to be nearly inseparable. It is Gus and Melanie's hope that their children will eventually get married, making them a legal family. However, when Emily dies, everything changes for Melanie. Melanie is devastated by the loss of her child. Melanie ceases to function, and when she begins to recover, her entire behavior is changed. Melanie needs to blame someone for her daughter's death. When the police tell Melanie that they suspect Chris of murdering her daughter, Melanie seizes on this information and will not let it go.

Melanie wants to believe that Emily could not possibly kill herself. Melanie thinks that if Emily killed herself, then somehow her death is Melanie's fault. Melanie does not want to feel as though she let her daughter down. Melanie is determined to make sure Chris pay for what happened to Emily, even going as far as getting rid of evidence. When Melanie finds a journal Emily wrote that chronicles her feelings about Chris and her sexual abuse, Melanie burns it. Melanie does not want anyone to know how deeply she failed her daughter.

Michael Gold

Michael Gold is Emily's father. Michael, too, is devastated by the loss of his only child. However, Michael readily accepts the idea that Emily killed herself rather than believe a boy, who was practically his son could do something so terrible to his daughter. Michael begins visiting Chris in prison, unsure what it is he wants from these visits, but feeling closer to Emily with Chris. After one of these visits, Michael runs into Gus. Michael and



Gus begin sneaking away to have lunch together, talking a great deal about the past. The relationship begins to turn romantic, but Gus ends that before anything can happen.

Michael decides to testify for the defense when Chris goes on trial. This decision causes a great deal of friction between Michael and Melanie. However, when Michael takes the stand, he cannot force himself to say that Chris is incapable of killing Emily because he is still unclear about how Emily died. When Chris confesses on the stand that he held the gun to Emily's head, Michael can no longer force himself to believe that Chris is innocent.

Jordan McAfee

Jordan McAfee is the lawyer that James hires to defend Chris. Jordan is middle aged, single and raising a thirteen-year-old boy of his own. Jordan never asks Chris if he killed Emily because Jordan strongly believes that the truth has no place in the courtroom. However, as the case continues Jordan finds himself unable to believe that Chris did not kill Emily. In court, Jordan decides to present a case of a suicide pact that went awry. The case appears to be going well until Gus takes the stand. Then suddenly Chris insists on taking the stand despite Jordan's insistence that he not. Chris gets on the stands and tells everyone that he shot Emily. Jordan believes his case to be lost then and is surprised when the jury returns a verdict of not guilty.

Selena Damascus

Selena Damascus is Jordan's investigator. Selena is a friendly person, who can get people to talk where they might not talk to the police. Selena is also smart, manipulating conversations to get the information she wants. Selena finds the counselor from the Planned Parenthood center, who tells her that Chris never knew Emily was pregnant, something the prosecution says is motive for murder. Without Selena, Jordan might not have had as strong a case as he does. Selena also appears to have romantic feelings for Jordan. Selena gives Jordan a kiss to keep his mind off the case after closing arguments.

S. Barrett Delaney

Sue Barrett Delaney is the prosecutor in Chris's case. Barrie, as she is known, is determined to win a sensational case in order to further her career. When Anne-Marie comes to her with Emily's autopsy report, Barrie is convinced that this is the case that will make her career. Barrie believes from the evidence that Chris learned of Emily's pregnancy and killed her to keep the baby from ruining his future. This is what Barrie bases her case on, despite the fact that Selena finds evidence that Chris never knew about Emily's pregnancy. When Chris confesses to shooting Emily on the stand, Barrie believes her future is written in stone. However, this changes when the jury votes to acquit.



Anne-Marie Marrone

Anne-Marie Marrone is the detective who investigates Emily's death. Anne-Marie is a small-town detective, so this is only the second violent death she has ever investigated. However, Anne-Marie is a competent detective and does a good job collecting evidence. The only thing Anne-Marie fails to do is get a gunpowder residue test on Emily's hands before her body is washed at the hospital. This proves to be critical to the case, especially since Jordan argues that Emily was suicidal and took her own life. Anne-Marie is careful in the rest of the investigation, especially after she sees Emily's autopsy report and learns about the pregnancy. Like Barrie, Anne-Marie automatically assumes Chris killed Emily because of the baby. Anne-Marie never gets to ask Chris about this, however. Anne-Marie is the one who tells Emily's parents about the pregnancy, surprised to find they did not know about it beforehand. Anne-Marie might also be surprised that the first Chris learns about the baby is in the autopsy report as well.



Objects/Places

Carousel

Chris once worked running the carousel at a local park and has a key to its power box. It is here where Emily and Chris make love the first time, and it is also here where Emily is fatally shot.

Antique Colt

Chris takes his father's antique Colt from his gun collection and uses it to shoot Emily.

Emily's Autopsy Report

Emily's autopsy report shows that she was eleven weeks pregnant at the time of her death.

Jeep

Emily and Chris spend a great deal of time making out in Chris' Jeep. It is also here that Chris loses his virginity to another girl during a brief break in his relationship with Emily.

Emily's Journal

Melanie finds Emily's journal months after her death and learns about her daughter's pregnancy through it as well as her feelings toward Chris and her memories of sexual abuse. Melanie burns this journal.

Chris' Swimming Sweater

Emily has one of Chris' swimming sweaters, which she keeps wrapped around her pillow because she can still smell him on it.

Emily's Bedroom

Michael and Melanie both spend a great deal of time in Emily's bedroom after her death in order to be closer to her. Emily's bedroom window looks out toward Chris' bedroom window. On the floor, Emily purposely left clothes scattered about to leave a sense of herself for her parents.



Secret Messages

As small children, Chris and Emily strung a string between their bedrooms on which they passed a can filled with secret messages. The can got hung up after a few passes, and they were not able to dislodge it. Shortly after being released from jail, Chris finds the can and a note left inside, but the message has been washed clean.

County Sheriff's Jail

Chris is held at the Sheriff's jail in the months preceding his trial. While there, Chris makes friends with a young man who is accused in the shaking death of his infant son. When his cell mate is convicted and subsequently kills himself, Chris begins to lose hope he will win his own case.

Solitary

Chris spends a short period of time in a solitary cell for punishment in an attack on another inmate. Chris is given a Bible during this time that helps him come to terms with Emily's death.

Planned Parenthood

Emily went to the local Planned Parenthood clinic to have her pregnancy diagnosed and to seek an abortion. During these visits, Emily claimed that the father was not involved.

Emily's Paintings

Jordan uses Emily's paintings to show her emotional state in the months before her death. Emily went from painting realistic portraits to working on a surrealistic skull floating in a dark background, indicative of depression according to the art therapist Jordan calls as a witness.



Themes

Assisted Suicide

When someone thinks of assisted suicide, it is normally in relation to the assisted death of someone suffering a debilitating disease. However, this novel takes a new view of this controversial subject. Emily is a perfectly healthy teenager, who has her whole life before her. Emily is preparing to graduate high school and going on to a good art school. Emily also plans on getting married one day and having a houseful of children. However, Emily has become depressed and cannot face the next few years of her life. As Emily explains it to her best friend and boyfriend, Chris, she can see her life ten years from now but cannot see how to get there. On top of this, Emily has learned she is pregnant. Emily does not want to tell Chris she is pregnant because she knows he will want to marry her. Emily is not sure she wants to marry Chris but is positive she does not want to voice her reluctance to him.

Emily and Chris have been pushed together by their parents. While there is a great deal of affection between them, Emily grew up with Chris and still finds herself thinking of him in more of a brotherly fashion rather than a lover. On top of this, Emily was sexually attacked as a small girl, and this attack has left her with a fear of intimacy. Chris has pressured Emily into sexual activity, compounding her discomfort, leaving her with an intense fear of men. This fear has made it impossible for Emily to comfortably allow a man to touch her, causing her to be unable to go through with the abortion that would solve her immediate problem. Emily feels as though she no longer has any options except for a life she does not want.

Emily has decided that dying is the only way to solve her problems. However, Emily does not want to use pills or any other method that might take so long that someone might be able to save her. Emily wants to use a gun, but she needs Chris's help. Emily tells Chris what she wants to do and begs him to help her. Chris is reluctant, but it occurs to him that if he pretends he is going to help Emily, he will have the chance to talk her out of it. Chris tries up until the final moments to talk Emily into living, but she continues to insist that death is her only option. However, when Emily tries to shoot herself, she cannot do it. Finally Chris realizes that he cannot continue to watch Emily suffer. Chris takes the gun, holds it to Emily's head and allows her to pull the trigger. In this way, Chris has assisted in her suicide, by giving her the strength to do what she wants to do. While it is different from giving medication to a dying patient, it is still assisted suicide. Through Emily and Chris's actions, assisted suicide is a major theme of the novel.

Grief

Melanie Gold has lost her daughter. Emily was Melanie's only child and now she has lost the one thing she has lived for in the last seventeen years for. Melanie is so



devastated that she cannot function. In fact, even when Melanie seems to be recovering, she finds herself acting in bizarre ways, such as misdirecting the customers at the library where she works. Her overwhelming grief has also caused Melanie to turn on the closest friend she has had over the past seventeen years, Chris' mother, Gus. Melanie completely turns her back on Gus, blaming Gus for her son's actions. Not only this, but Melanie needs to blame someone so turns her anger on Chris, accusing him of murder even before the police begin to focus on his actions. Melanie's grief is so complete that even when she finds written evidence from her own daughter of her depression, Melanie destroys it rather than allow Emily's words to help Chris.

Michael Gold is also in a great deal of pain. Michael handles his grief differently, however. Michael begins visiting Chris in jail because Chris was closer to Emily than anyone else, and it makes Michael feel close to Emily when he is with Chris. Michael also chooses to testify on Chris's behalf, despite the strain this decision puts on his marriage. When Gus learns of Michael's visits to her son, she reaches out to him, needing to be close to Melanie, even if it is only through her husband. Gus and Michael begin meeting for secret lunches, spending a great deal of time talking about the past and about Emily. These meetings begin to take on a romantic overtone as the trial date looms. Gus pulls back, finally realizing how easy it is to fall into a romantic relationship based on the intimacy of a close friendship and finds herself wondering if Emily felt as she does, pulled in but not feeling the depth of emotion that physical intimacy requires. Michael, on the other hand, is disappointed in losing Gus's affections and ends up moving away from her as well.

Grief also affects the other characters, especially Chris. Chris loved Emily his entire life, and her death is devastating, especially when he is accused of murdering her. However, Chris' grief turns to anger when he begins to understand the depth of Emily's selfishness at asking him to help her, unconcerned about the consequences he will face. Gus and James also suffer over the death of Emily, but their grief is more centered on their own child, who spends his senior year of high school in county jail. This stress nearly pulls Gus and James apart, but their mutual love for their son brings them back together, saving their marriage and putting their lives back on track. It is the effect of grief on these various characters that makes grief a major theme of the novel.

Sexual Abuse

On a dare, Emily goes into the men's bathroom in a restaurant when she is nine years old. While in the bathroom, a man sexually assaults Emily. Emily never tells anyone and tries to put the incident out of her mind. However, when Emily and Chris begin to explore the intimate side of their relationship, memories begin to haunt Emily's dreams. Emily cannot stand the idea of a man touching her, even Chris. The more Chris pushes Emily to have sex, the harder it is for Emily to deal with these emerging memories. However, Emily is soon forced to remember the abuse in detail, and it leaves her questioning her feelings for Chris because he is the reason she has been forced to relive this terrible event.



It is not that Emily blames Chris for what happened to her all those years ago. However, it is difficult for Emily to separate that event from her relationship with Chris. Chris is the one who dared her to go into the men's room. It is also Chris who has forced the issue of sex, causing this memory to surface once more. Due to these facts, Emily associates Chris with the abuse, and it causes her to feel uncomfortable with their physical relationship. Not only this, but Emily loves Chris and wants him to be a part of her life, but she wants him to be her best friend the way he has been all her life. Emily feels that the only way Chris can remain her best friend is if she continues to have an intimate relationship with him. All this puts Emily in a position where she is forced to live outside her comfort zone, which leads to the depression that will eventually take her life. This fact is why sexual abuse is an important theme to the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the first person omniscient. Not only is the reader allowed to see the actions taking place and being reported by the narrating characters, but the reader is invited to read the characters' thoughts and to be privy to their emotions. This point of view offers the reader an intimacy that is valuable in the connection the reader makes between themselves and the characters. The narrating character shifts often in this novel, moving among the six main characters from chapter to chapter and scene to scene. By using the third person, the writer allows the reader to develop a close relationship to all six of these characters but also allows enough distance so the reader is not confused when the narration shifts to a new character.

The point of view of this novel works for many reasons. First, there is the idea of intimacy that is developed between the reader and characters. This is important because the plot requires the reader to make a moral judgment about one of the characters and that judgment might be difficult to come by if the reader does not feel sympathy for the character. Second, another point of view might cause confusion when the narration moves from character to character. Finally, this point of view works because it allows the story to be seen by many different pairs of eyes, giving insight to parts of the story that might not be obvious if seen through a different point of view.

Setting

The novel is set in the small town of Bainbridge, New Hampshire. Bainbridge is the type of small town where everyone knows everyone else's business, and no one feels the need to lock their doors. The Hartes and the Golds live on a sequestered street in this little town, their two homes within sight of each other on a tree-lined street, close enough to foster friendship but far enough apart to offer privacy when it is desired. The children grow up playing in the woods behind the houses, the same woods where James Harte goes hunting with his favorite hunting dog. Bainbridge is idyllic, the kind of place where murder is just a sad reality in someone else's neighborhood.

The setting of this novel works perfectly because it adds not only to the reader's shock at the circumstances of Emily Gold's death, but also to that of her family and friends. No one expects such a thing to happen in their hometown, especially to someone they know. However, when it happens in a town like Bainbridge it seems all the more tragic because people move to towns like this to avoid the dangers of big cities. The setting is also important because after Chris is arrested, his family has to deal with the rumors that spread after an event of this type. In a small town, these rumors spread faster and tend to be more vicious, since everyone in a small town believes that their neighbor's business is their own. Finally, the setting works because the close friendship between the two families that grew over the many years they were neighbors is essential, not



only to the prosecutions case against Chris, but to the defense. Both claim their close relationship is the reason Chris either could or could not have killed Emily.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. There is some slang in the dialogue between the children and legal terms are thrown around quite a bit toward the end of the novel, but these words are easy to decipher and do nothing to impede the ease with which a reader can understand the text. If anything, the slang and legal words enhance the text, giving it a more realistic feel. There are no foreign words in the text, no words specific to a specific origin and no words that a person with limited education would have trouble understanding. The language in this novel is simple, but not demeaning, used in many ways to lend a feel of realism to the plot.

The author uses language to enhance her story and make it feel more realistic. In this way, the author deepens the meaning of the language for the reader. The language in this novel works because it is a tool as well as an expression, telling a story but also giving her story authenticity. The language is simple enough for readers of all ages and education levels, making it easy to read, easy to follow and easy to understand. In this way, the language of the novel works on all levels and goes a long way to making the plot successful.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts and an epilogue. Each part contains chapters that are titled either Now or Then. These chapters tell the story of Chris and Emily, moving back and forth in time as the story requires. The story is told in both exposition and dialogue, telling a story as much as showing the events that make up the bulk of the story.

The novel follows one main plot with many subplots added to pepper the story. The main plot follows the arrest and trial of Chris Harte, a young man accused of the shooting death of his lifelong friend and recent lover, Emily Gold. In telling this main story, the subplot of his mother's friendship with Emily's mother is explored. This friendship ends almost immediately after Emily's death, but it proves to be a pivotal part of the story before Emily's death. Another subplot added to the story is the daily struggles of Chris' young lawyer, Jordan McAfee. Jordan is a single father raising a teenage son, with the same struggles the Golds and the Hartes have faced while raising their own children. These subplots expand upon the main plot and support it, giving the main plot a bigger impact for the reader as the story unfolds.

Quotes

"They were linked by the one thing they had in common—Augusta Harte—but Gus had not yet arrived. So they sat in the companionable awkwardness caused by knowing extremely private things about each other that had never been directly confided, but rather blurted by Gus Harte to her husband in bed or to Melanie over a cup of coffee." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Now, November 1997, pg. 4

"'I'm very sorry,' the doctor began, the only words that Melanie could not rework into anything but what they signified. She crumpled further, her body folding into itself, until her head was so deeply buried beneath her shaking arms that she could not hear what the man was saying." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Now, November 1997, pg. 15

"Was it challenge she's felt from someone like Gus, who devoured intricate historical novels as if they were pulp fiction? To find out that she was only skimming through, looking for something strong and classic to call her baby...well, it should have depressed Melanie. But it didn't." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Then, Fall, 1979, pg. 25

"At the hospital, he had spoken to the detective assigned to the case. Michael had assumed a masked assailant, a mugging, a drive-by shooting. He had been fantasizing about wrapping his hands around the throat of the stranger who'd taken his daughter's life. He hadn't realized that person was Emily." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Now, November 1997, pg. 36

"S. Barrett Delaney had spent most of her adult life trying to live down the fact that she was a lawyer named Sue." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Now, November 1997, pg. 88

"Chris remembered once when he had gotten a butterfly to land in his palm. He'd kept absolutely still, certain that if he even thought a weird thought the beautiful creature would flutter away. It was like that, now, with Emily. She hadn't said a thing and neither had he, but for the past forty-two minutes he'd had his arm around her as if it were a perfectly normal thing for him to do." Part One, *The Boy Next Door*, Then, December 1993, pg. 119

"In the day's after Emily's death, Melanie found herself riveted by the most ordinary things: the whorl of the wood of the dining room table; the mechanism of the Ziploc baggie; the pamphlet on toxic shock syndrome in the tampon box. For hours at a time she could stare at these things as if she had not seen them a million times before, as if she had never known what she was missing. She felt a call to detail that was obsessive, but necessary. What if, tomorrow morning, one of these things turned up missing? What if her only knowledge of these items came from memory? She knew now that, at any



time, she might be tested."

Part One, The Boy Next Door, Now, Mid to Late November, 1997, pg. 122

"In the movies, when things like this happened, the heroine somehow found her way home. But all Emily could think was that in real life the ultimate indignity was having to shove your boyfriend away, then still need him to drive you home."

Part Two, The Girl Next Door, Then, April 1996, pg. 186

"Gus wondered if Chris missed making decisions."

Part Two, The Girl Next Door, Now, December 1997, pg. 231

"It also meant Chris, unjustly accused to begin with, was being condemned for being a hero. And that, had he turned to someone else to help him save Emily, this entire horrible outcome might never have come to pass."

Part Two, The Girl Next Door, Now, December 1997, pg. 239

"He was crying so hard at this point that when he looked at Emily from the corner of his eye, her face wavered, and he believed that he'd already begun to forget her. But then he blinked and she was beautiful and calm and waiting, her mouth parted like it sometimes did when she fell asleep. She opened her eyes and all he could see was her conviction."

Part Three, The Truth, Then, November 1997, pg. 475

"She wanted to get closer, under James' skin; to become a part of him so that she wouldn't have her own thoughts, her own worries." Part Three, The Truth, Now, May 1998, pg. 490



Topics for Discussion

Who is Chris Harte? What happened to him? Why does Chris tell the police detective that he and Emily had a suicide pact together? What is a suicide pact? Explore the word pact. Why does the writer chose to call the book *The Pact*? Is it true that Chris and Emily had a suicide pact? In what way is this true? In what way is it not true?

Why does Chris Harte agree to help Emily Gold kill herself? Why does Chris take the gun to the carousel when he does not want Emily to die? What would have happened if Chris had not taken the gun? Do you think Emily would have found another way to die? What should Chris have done differently? How would Emily have reacted if he had?

Why does Emily Gold become depressed? What impact does her past sexual abuse have on her depression? How much of her depression has to do with Chris? Do you think she would have become depressed if she had not gotten pregnant? Why is the pregnancy such a source of depression? Is Emily worried about college? Is it marriage to Chris that Emily does not want?

Why does Emily not tell Chris she does not love him the same way? What is Emily afraid will happen if she tells the truth about her feelings? Do you think Chris would react badly? What impact does Chris's actions during his and Emily's brief breakup have on her decisions? Do you think the fact that Chris once cut her out of his life is a part of the reason Emily does not want to tell Chris the truth?

Discuss Gus' relationship with Michael. In what ways is it similar to Emily's relationship with Chris? How is it different? How does this relationship help Gus understand Emily better? Do you think Michael was in love with Gus? Why does Michael reach out to Gus? What are Michael's motivations? Why does Michael visit Chris? What does Michael hope to achieve from these two relationships?

Discuss assisted suicide. What is assisted suicide? How is this like an assisted suicide? Do you believe Emily pulled the trigger, or did Chris? Does it matter who pulled the trigger? Why do you think the jury let Chris go? Do you think they were right? Do you think Chris would have received more sympathy if Emily were terminally ill rather than depressed? Was Chris right to help Emily die?

Discuss irony. How many examples of irony can you find in this novel? Is it ironic that Emily wants to die to end her pain, only to force pain on everyone she loves? Are Emily's actions selfish? In what way? How could Emily have handled the situation differently? Why do you think she chose to die? How would you have handled the same situation?