

The Perfect Son Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Ella Fitzwilliam is the wife of Felix Fitzwilliam, and together they have a son, Harry Fitzwilliam. With Harry's Tourette's diagnosis the two parents have established separate roles. Felix is the breadwinning workaholic, and Ella the helicopter parenting wizard, always there for Harry. When she suffers a heart attack Felix and Harry are left alone, presenting a new challenge for Felix.

At first there is a battle of wills, as Harry's tics and boundless energy prove too much for Felix. He is unable to accept his son for who he is despite his own troubled past. Somewhat unwelcome, the presence of Ella's friends Katherine and Eudora provide new points of view and perspective that begin to open Felix up to who he is and greater acceptance of his son. Felix is able to see the world through their eyes and relate to different aspects of their lives. He finds the ability to open up to his son about his abuse as a child as well as the death of his homosexual brother Tom to AIDS.

Ella begins her path to recovery, one that sends her home and back to the hospital and finally settling in her house waiting for a heart transplant. Her condition worsens to stage four and she is constantly battling depression and anxiety that she will not be able to care for her son, that Felix will not be able to take over for her effectively enough. Felix struggles with this side of Ella as he is racked with insecurity about her willingness to stand by his side as a wife. He questions why that is.

Harry flourishes in his new found independence, meeting a girlfriend, Sammie, who accepts him for who he is. He believes himself to be in love, and at the perfect time in his life right when his mother is no longer able to take care of him, he finds a new individual to take up all of his attention.

Over the course of the novel the relationship between Felix and Harry grows to the degree that Harry takes a flight to Boston to visit Harvard with his friend Max. This is his big chance to earn his father's pride and he succeeds up until an altercation with a student and campus security sends him to the hospital. Felix races to Harry's aid and has a crisis of fatherhood on the plane ride that causes him to realize that he has OCPD (obsessive compulsive personality disorder). He arrives at the hospital and admits his own issues to Harry, expresses his pride of Harry and resolves the situation.

They return from Boston and Ella passes away, leaving Harry and Felix in a great position to succeed as a father/son team.



Section One: Chapters 1-7 pg. 1-80

Summary

The Perfect Son is a story with three points of view from the Fitzwilliam family: Ella (the mother), Felix (the father) and Harry (the son). It is told in the present tense and deals with the unique struggles and responsibilities of each member of the family.

The novel opens with Ella, 47, on a turbulent plane flight. She is traveling from London, returning from visiting her father after his successful surgery. Her plan is to arrive in North Carolina in order to meet her son Harry and embark on a tour of the University of North Carolina (UNC), where she hopes he will be spending his collegiate years. During conversation with a passenger seated next to her certain details are revealed about her son and husband. When the passenger mentions his own three-year-old child, Ella thinks of Harry and the boundless energy that his Tourette's Syndrome brought him. She also reveals that Felix is a corporate finance "rock star", as his partner in the syndicate refers to him. She begins feeling the symptoms of heartburn, only this time it is worse. As she begins to lose consciousness due to a heart attack, she remembers that her mother died of a heart attack at 47. She fades away as she thinks only of Harry.

The focus and point of view shifts away from Ella to Felix, giving the reader a quick look at his personality as he tells Harry to move his boots out of the hall into their place in the cubby. Harry, 16, enters but does not clean up his mess. Felix thinks of what he imagined his son would be, an outlet for bragging, but these hopes were dashed with the Tourette's diagnosis. He thinks that his last bastion of pride lies in the perfect GPA and SAT scores that could lead his son to becoming a Harvard man. There is also the first mention of Ella's friend Katherine, from Felix's point of view, the "she-devil". When Harry has a large tic as a result of Felix rushing him, the system for dealing with these tics comes to light; Ella would handle them while Felix goes to a separate den. Since Ella had been gone on her trip, Felix has been feeling lonely and under-equipped to handle Harry. As he drives Harry to the airport he reflects on the downfall of his sex life with Ella. They arrive to the airport to sirens blaring, as Felix assumes some worker had experienced a mishap. Harry wakes up in the passenger seat after a nightmare where something bad happened to his mother. As they enter the airport they are called for by the PA system to come to the Air Florida Desk.

Again the point of view changes, this time to Harry. He starts having numerous ticks as a result of his worry towards his mother, and wonders how his father will be able to deal with them, as neither his best friend Max or his mother are there to quell the situation. They make it to the flight desk where they are informed that Ella may have experienced a heart attack and is on her way to Raleigh Regional hospital. As they leave the airport Harry's phobias are revealed to the reader: hospitals, driving, spiders and flying. Felix begins to call Harry Hazza, a remnant name from Harry's childhood. Harry decides to go to the hospital because he knows it would make his mother proud, as well as his father although the latter is far less of a given fact.



The point of view is now Felix's. During the stressful drive Harry shouts out driving suggestions as Felix misses an exit while thinking of all of the people he needs to call. Felix ignores his son as he believes in his own decision making ability. When it turns out that Harry had been right all along, Felix is irritated. They arrive near the ER and Harry calls his friend Max. As they enter the hospital Felix thinks of his brother Tom which triggers a flashback.

In the memory, Felix is 6 years old in his father's study, answering questions about capital cities and the like. Tom, his brother and protector from his father's rages, was out of the house at the moment. Felix digs his fingernails into his palm to stop himself from sucking his thumb, a habit his father abhors. Felix cannot recall the capital of Finland (Helsinki) until it is too late; he has failed and his father begins to whip him, once, twice, and three times until Tom bursts into the room, pushes his father away and carries Felix out of the room.

Felix crashes back to reality, stabbing his palm with his fingernails as he did as a child. Felix takes control of the situation by asking for a private room as Harry's phobia was on the edge. More of Felix's life is revealed. His older brother Tom was a homosexual. He gets a glimpse of his future; sole parent responsible for Harry (something he feared that he would never be able to do as his own parents were poor). They get their private room where Felix barrages the nurse with questions about the prognosis, the cardiologist, his wife's current state. All he is able to find out is that Ella is conscious and will not die. The nurse wheels Ella in where she says she is proud of Harry for coming into the hospital. Felix continues to barrage the nurse with questions about the heart monitor and the doctor's credentials. Ella interrupts and tells Felix that she is fine, and that he should go home and call Katherine. Felix fights with her over this but eventually leaves after telling her he loves her. His last thought is that without her, he would be unable to function.

Felix continues to have the point of view. They arrive home and Max is waiting there to hug Harry, something that Felix finds odd. He first texts his partner at the syndicate to let him know that Ella had a heart attack, then answers the phone when Katherine calls. Through this conversation he learns that Ella was successful in the cath lab and that her heart is in a stent. They throw underhanded barbs at each other as it is very clear that Katherine has a low opinion of Felix as a husband, and Felix has a low opinion of Katherine as a romance novelist (or porn writer as he thinks). They agree on a truce and hang up.

Felix wakes up the next morning at 6 a.m., earlier than he is accustomed. He takes a shower where he reveals his insecurity about his own self worth, thinking that one day his wife will simply say she can do better than him. He also reveals that has not cried since the day of his flashback, not even when his brother Tom was diagnosed with aids. He wakes up Harry at 7:30 a.m., which is too late as Harry expected to leave for school at 7:45 a.m. Harry asks Felix if he can let him know of any new developments regarding his mom, and Felix says that he will, with no censorship which is surprising to Harry, as his mother usually edited the information she told him. Felix plans to arrive at the



hospital by 9:30 a.m. to meet with the cardiologist. Harry stays positive throughout this out-of-routine morning, as he believes it will make his mother proud.

For the first time since the heart attack the perspective of the narrative is Ella's as she lies in her hospital bed. Katherine is by her side. The reader finds out that the doctor is actually arriving earlier than 9:30 a.m., and that Ella gave the wrong time to Felix on purpose to avoid confrontation, an example of her censorship of information. Ella finds out from the cardiologist, Dr. Beaubridge, that the heart attack was caused by a genetic condition, and there is a chance of another one in the future. Felix arrives earlier than 9:30 a.m., and meets the cardiologist. He insists that she be transferred to Duke hospital but Ella rejects this idea. After a semi-hostile conversation with the doctor Felix finds out that Ella will be unable to return to work for 3-6 weeks, which comes as a shock to Felix.

After the doctor escapes from Felix's incessant questioning, Ella asks Felix to look after Harry, she asks that he use all of his focus on making sure that Harry is okay. Felix is unable to make that promise in person, and Ella falls back asleep. Felix returns to thinking of work, and the upcoming hundred-million dollar Life Plan deal that would purchase a company printing 3-D medical organs. Felix decides to drive to the ocean, as he and Tom used to do. He thinks of the first time he got drunk, Tom was there as the responsible overseer. He imagines Tom performing better in his role as a father. As he walks along the beach the sand blows into his face like "Lilliputian spears". He picks up some shells, assymetrical but still important. He views them as "currency to buy back a life", as he will never be the horrible abusive father that his own Pater was. He decides to take a step back at work and allow his coworker Curt take the lead. He then texts Ella promising to make Harry the center of his life. He leaves the beach with the mentality of a soldier entering battle; resolute and ready to take on this new challenge.

The narrative switches over to Harry. He is at his locker after school when he turns around to see Sammie, the girl that he has a crush on and had recently dreamed about the night before. She smiles at him and he smiles back. Then she leaves for class. Max arrives shortly after and they start talking about their fathers; how it was weird that Harry's went to the beach, and how Harry thinks that Max's dad is too much of a friend to be effective as a parent. Max then gets to the point and gets Harry to say that he likes Sammie, even though Harry views that information as private. Here the reader gets a description of Max; his dyed black hair, his sharpie sleeve tattoos and painted nails. Sammie enters the room and Max makes up an excuse to leave, leaving Harry and Sammie alone. The two high schoolers bond over Harry's mom being in the hospital and Sammie's dad fighting through cancer. Sammie asks Harry to eat lunch with her the next day and they almost share a kiss before Mr. George the math teacher bursts in and stops the PDA before it can even begin.

Analysis

When this story first begins it seems clear that the protagonist will be Ella Fitzgerald, the struggling heroic mother who has singlehandedly raised her Tourette's affected son with



little-to-no hands on support from her husband, almost the antagonist in the first couple of chapters. She was forced to give up her promising jewelry design career in order to care for Harry, which also brings up the issue of traditional gender roles in the family. However, Barbara White immediately wipes this expectation from the reader's mind by essentially building up a potential character and whisking her away from the action by giving her a heart attack. As soon as the diagnosis is given that Ella will be bedridden for 3-6 weeks and will not even be able to return home for several days, it is clear that she will not be the central character. Ella plays a side role, that of a mobile mediator passing on the reigns to her husband Felix.

The way that the author shapes the novel, by giving each member of the family their own narrative voice depending on the chapter, lends itself to come across as a powerful display of familial relationship, as each character gets to share their own voice with the reader in the way that a family would. Each member of the family has a chance at being the main protagonist, and as a result it seems like the laurel of "main character" is passed seamlessly between the three of them dependent on situation, with Felix arguably being given the largest and most fleshed out role. This novel features character development through its plot as the main story element, as the reader will get to see the growth of the three members of the family both individually and in relation to each other over the course of the novel. This is the focal point of the novel; at this point the reader is wondering how Felix and Harry will manage without Ella in the middle, while at the same time worrying about Ella's recovery as it seems imperative to both Felix and Harry's mental and physical health that she does, in fact, recover.

Thematically this novel is very rich, as each character has numerous issues and backstories that are presented as they are introduced. Ella carries the themes of familial responsibility, an overprotective nature and a lack of desire to relinquish the mothering of her son. She also has been placed in the role of the traditional stay-at-home mother, having given up her career when Harry was born. Harry presents the reader with the theme of coping with mental illness, and actually being incredibly successful despite his mental setbacks. Harry also deals with acceptance both from society and his father, as well as entering the complex theme of teen affection. However, Harry is given arguably the easiest of issues as his is for the most part physical, out in the open and therefore easily dealt with. He already has the support system for his problems, the teacher of his school being a part of "Team Harry", as well as his incredibly protective and supportive friend Max. However he will have to undergo the trial of independence, as the setup of UNC vs. Harvard seemingly leaves him without a say at this point in the novel. College in general sets Harry up for the removal of his support system and the fear that he will be unable to remain successful enough for his father without his mother and best friend around as checks and balances. Both Harry and Felix share the struggle for paternal pride and acceptance, and although it is too late for Felix to gain that from his Father, it is certainly not too late for Harry.

Felix has arguably the most complex character as his backstory includes an abusive father, a mother who had no interest in anything but a false cover life as well as a homosexual older brother who died of aids at a very young age. Felix is set up as an anti-Harry, an individual with certain issues that are not entirely visible to the public at all



times as Harry's tics are. He is the result of a different parental strategy, one of abuse and ridicule, and as a result he is constantly in fear of his own reactions and relationship with his son. His insecurities regarding his wife's love are only available to the reader, and are yet another result of the abuse he suffered as a child. He is the character about to undergo the hardest test, as he is finally unable to hide as a parent. In a way he is utterly unprepared for this role, as he knows what not to do from the example of his father, but with only his brother Tom as a positive male role model he has little to go on in terms of positive experience. He refers to himself as Gilligan, while on the beach with his reference to "Lilliputian spears", perhaps suggesting his personal inability to fit in with his own family despite being a financial giant. He is dealing with issues of acceptance and judgement himself, as his wife's best friend, Katherine, openly dislikes him for his over-working and lack of parental presence, even though Ella seems to choose to deal with Harry on her own accord.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast your opinion of Felix before and after his revealing flashback. Does your opinion of him as a father and man change at all? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

The Fitzwilliams employ a traditional familial structure to the extreme, with the wife giving up her career to care for the child and the husband working to provide for his family. In this case however, there is the added intensity of Ella's parental responsibility as well as Felix's perfectionist and workaholic attitude. Is the parental strategy utilized by the Fitzwilliams an effective one in this case or in the real world?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think of the timing between Harry losing the physical presence of his mother and gaining that of Sammie (at least the beginning of a relationship)? Is Sammie going to play a caretaking role like that of Ella or will she be able to help Harry achieve the next level of independence?

Vocabulary

polar vortex, Tourette's Syndrome, workaholic, defibrillator, ergonomic, aerodynamic, tic, prognosis, AIDS, inhibition, cath lab, stent, phobia, kaleidoscope, neurological, angioplasty, asinine, grotesque, genetic, 3-D printing, tete-a tete,



Section Two: Ch. 8-15 pg. 81-156

Summary

Chapter 8 begins from Felix's perspective, as he relates that his partner Robert had not been happy with his decision to step back. It's the morning, and he begins to make Harry's sandwich, Turkey. He is unsatisfied with his first two attempts, and they are tossed out. His third is an aesthetic success, after which he wakes up Harry by sliding an ice cube down his back. Harry responds to this action with an expletive, and an accusation that Felix was torturing him. Felix is startled by this and refers to Harry by the Hazza nickname again. He recalls his promise never to hit Harry, a promise he has broken only once before. After he drops Harry off at school he answers a phone call from Katherine to coordinate hospital visits, as well as field the numerous calls that Katherine had been receiving from Ella's friends wanting to help, constituting of Katherine dropping off a lasagna later that evening. Felix then is driving to pick up Harry from school, easily finding his abnormal head bobbing through the crowd when he notices Sammie, and is amazed by her attractiveness and ability to accept Harry for who he is, while Felix is still unable to do so.

The scene shifts to Ella's hospital room, where Ella thinks of all the things she misses about her home: the noises at night, her walks with Eudora (her elderly neighbor), and even the house itself. She thinks of her son and husband and calls Felix, his voice alone excites her. They talk about Harry, his homework and schooling. Then, Felix asks her why she had never left him. She answers simply, as if it were obvious, that she loves him. She then speaks with Harry, she had neglected his text messages throughout the day due to her lack of energy. He tells her about Sammie and she encourages him to ask her out quickly. He mentions the sleepover he had planned for the upcoming saturday, and how he would rather cancel it than speak to his father about it. She ends the conversation by telling him to speak to his father, but Harry is not done just yet as he texts her numerous times until Ella is forced to ignore him in order to get some guilt-free sleep.

Felix is the narrator once again as he is eating at a cafe with his son Harry. Felix brings up Sammie, immediately jumping to sexual conclusions that Harry shuts down as untrue. Felix tells Harry the story of meeting his mother, then telling her to go back home from London to be with her grandfather. Ella returned to London five years later and that is when they began their relationship. Harry is a little surprised by this story, as Ella's version of events was far more romantic and included details such as Felix catching her when she fainted on the Tube (subway) and altogether leaving out the five years apart. This whole conversation is very difficult for Felix, it is simply too intimate. The conclusion they drew was that Ella had accepted Felix for who he was. Harry brings up his sleepover, to which Felix surprisingly responds positively even though his true motivations lie with impressing Ella and fulfilling his textual promise. Harry is overjoyed and immediately begins to plan. After Harry's singing lesson he asks Felix what he



thought of it, to which Felix responds honestly, mentioning a missed note, which disappoints Harry. They spend the drive home in silence.

Felix is looking at his Thursday to-do list with a lot of worry and a strong headache. He then starts on the to-do list for Friday, including items such as: Midnight curfew on noise, go to Harris Teeter and pick up birthday cake and tidy up. He is unsure about the exact number of everything, be it soda, pizza, candy etc. and this unknown element is unwelcome. Felix arrives to pick up Harry from school only to find that Sammie is anticipating an early arrival to the sleepover. He reluctantly agrees to drive her to his home early, after an awkward argument with Harry. The house guests arrive at 6 p.m., taking their shoes off but leaving them scattered across the hall, to Felix's chagrin as he trips over a white sneaker. After they eat, Felix cleans everything up and is filled by anxiety by 9 p.m., so much so that he picks up and smokes four puffs of a half used joint of marijuana that he finds in his wife's dresser drawer. He is filled with relief at once, but it is short lived as his anxiety turns into paranoia and panic. Katherine (the she-devil) arrives with the lasagna and realizes instantly that Felix is high. She places him back into the room, into an armchair and takes over for him with his remaining party duties. She agrees to tell Harry that he is having a headache and he dozes off. He awakens in the armchair at 11:30pm to Katherine staying in the room. She informs him that the girls have left, and the boys are all in Harry's room. She then tells him some negative information regarding Ella; a blood clot in the stent. Felix begins to freak out as usual, but is stayed by Katherine who relays Ella's wishes. She then tells Felix that maybe he is not as much the arch villain in Ella's story but merely the antihero. Felix thanks her for all of her help, but Katherine rejects this thanks as unnecessary, as she would "take a bullet for Ella."

Harry wakes up from the sleepover late the next day to a note from his father under the door asking Harry to have his room clean before he gets home. Harry gets a text from Sammie and they make plans to meet up tomorrow, his actual birthday. He had kissed Sammie the night before, and he had no tics throughout the experience. He is confused by his dad saying he was bringing home mexican food later, a food Felix despises, and immediately thinks the worst has happened to his mother. Felix reassures him over text and tells him to deal with it. Harry begins to blame himself for his mother's heart attack, but regains his positivity when he thinks of how proud his mom will be of his clean room, and his ability to take charge of his own life.

Felix is stuck folding laundry at 11 p.m. that night. Under Ella's orders he has her cell phone, and has accepted her demand that Harry not see her in her current state. Harry is sad about this new development, but is reassured by Felix that it is for Ella's own good that she focus only on her own wellness. Felix admits that he is terrified of losing Ella. They begin to talk about Sammie again and Harry states that he feels like he is in love. He thanks Felix for being honest about his mom's condition, and that he takes solace in the fact that they are both afraid. Harry attempts to talk about Felix's father, but Felix says that he is not to be talked about. Felix then apologizes to Harry for hitting him on the knees. Harry responds nonchalantly and brings up the rages he used to have when he was a child, and how he was grateful for the order that Felix created in all of that chaos. Harry asks Felix if his father ever hit him, but Felix is unable to answer. In



fact, the only people that knew the story of his abuse were his father and Tom, both of them deceased. Felix wishes Harry a happy birthday and returns to folding laundry, reflecting on the fact that his hitting Harry all those years ago only held importance for himself, not for Harry. He scrolls through Harry and Ella's text conversations, rarely finding his own name.

Felix is awakened by Harry the next morning as he talks about hearing rats or mice in the walls. The doorbell rings and Eudora enters the house. She has just come from gardening, and is an unwelcome helper in Felix's view. They narrow down the possibilities to one squirrel, and Felix straps on kitchen gloves. The squirrel bursts out of the wall and they chase it into the bedroom. Eudora agrees to make Harry a carrot cake for his birthday, and has a cup of tea with Felix.

Felix calls a pest removal company and they take care of the squirrel problem. He receives a phone call from Robert who wants him back in the office, to which he responds no. Robert is not understanding, calling him lazy which is the worst insult possible to Felix. Harry overhears part of the conversation and begins to talk with Felix about work, and the decision his mother made to become a stay-at-home mom. The conversation moves towards new territory, as Felix reveals to Harry that his birth was unplanned, or an accident. Felix assumed Harry had always known, but this was all new information for Harry and he stomps off to his room angry about the lack of information shared with him. Felix returns to fixing the hole in the house that the squirrels had left.

Analysis

The second section of this novel brings to light some cultural and social themes regarding the father's and man's role and expectations. Felix's partner Robert seems to believe that men like himself and Felix, men of that socioeconomic stature should not have to deal with any familial issues whatsoever. That is the role of the wife or hired help. When Felix explains his situation Robert suggests he hire a taxi driver for his son, hire a cleaner for the house etc. There is an expectation from Robert that anything less is Felix failing at his job, something that Felix is very afraid of. He is stuck between his paternal responsibility and his fear of not living up to the expectations of others. At this point in the novel he is struggling with his definition of success, whether it is solely linked to financial gain, intellectual prowess or that it can be achieved through the support of others.

Felix's own obsession with perfection takes center stage as he discards food that he does not feel looks good, finds fault with his son's singing, methodically cleans up after a group of teenagers and does not allow the pest removal company to fill the hole in his house even though it is part of the money that he paid them. He has a need to do things himself, especially when it regards the house itself, as he has transformed it to match his image of perfection.

The relationship between Katherine and Felix takes a strong step forward as Katherine no longer views him as a negative actor in Ella's life, just as an individual unequipped to



handle certain situations. This coupled with Felix's increased understanding of her as an individual and friend of Ella's gives their relationship a serious chance to grow. In fact, Katherine was there to support Felix during a serious lapse in his mental judgement, as he resorted to drugs to deal with his anxiety.

The reader is given more insight into the relationship between Ella and Felix, as he finds out that Ella has stayed with him out of love, something that he should already have known but reserved doubts about. This is perhaps because Felix did not love Ella at once, it took the birth of Harry for Felix to love Ella as a mother and part of his family.

This information comes as a shock to Harry, as he had never been told the circumstances of his birth. He is confused and shocked by this information, but really only seems bothered by the fact that it was kept from him. This deals with the censorship idea, one perpetuated by Ella but not supported by Felix. Felix takes a small step forward in his relationship with Harry by apologizing for hitting him when he was young, an event that had troubled Felix for years but is brushed off by Harry as a non-issue. He almost takes a further step into intimacy by revealing his abusive past, but is unable to do so. He struggles with the idea that a father-son relationship requires raw emotion and being honest. Although he is able to have conversations about his son's relationships (Sammie), it is much harder to talk about his own.

Discussion Question 1

What defines success? Can there be one definition or is it on a personal basis?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think Felix's episode with marijuana will do to his judgmental attitude? Does it make his actions justifiable that he was acting under severe stress?

Discussion Question 3

When is it okay to keep information from a child? More specifically, at what age should a child have a right to know his personal birth history?

Vocabulary

banal, rejuvenation, demoralizing, quintessential, debilitating, amorphous, duvet, philandering, stigma, disaffected



Section Three: Ch. 16-23 pg. 157-231

Summary

Felix converses with Dr. Beaubridge, he is quite angry that Ella's stent got clogged on his watch. He is able to tone back his attitude when he sees the negative impact it is having on his wife's waning health. Dr. Beaubridge reveals that her condition has now become inoperable, and that Ella will need a heart transplant. Felix tells his wife 'I love you' again and thinks about how easy that phrase is to say when someone is dying. Ella decides to call her father to inform him of the situation. Felix brings up that Harry knows about the pregnancy, and Ella can only think of how much Harry is like his father. She's lost a lot of weight, she is unable to eat due to nausea. This brings up the topic of food, and all of the help that Eudora had been in the house. Ella reveals that Eudora is a retired horticulturalist and that she believes that Felix has perhaps met his match in Eudora Jones.

Felix is seated on a porch with Eudora drinking iced tea, something that Felix had refused to drink as a result of his British background. Eudora reveals that she is a lesbian, which shocks Felix into stating that he had a gay brother, Tom. The two relate over meeting life-changing women; Ella for Felix and Dahlia (the previously married woman). Felix tells her the story of how he met Ella in greater detail, mentioning that she was with her boss and other details. While in conversation he recalls that he would have travelled across the world to see Ella even if she was not pregnant, they were right together. Eudora asks for a drink, and Felix thinks it is a little too early. However, he opens up to Eudora about his fears regarding Ella and they both have a drink before she leaves.

Harry begs Felix to see his mother at the dinner table, he brings up the fact that Felix flew out to see Uncle Tom when he was dying. They argue for a few minutes, with Felix quickly taking the losing side of the argument. Harry seals the deal when he asks Felix if someone told him that he couldn't visit Ella would he obey? And of course Felix answers that he would not be able to.

Some time has passed, it is after Harry had visited his mother and it is in the heart of spring. He is ecstatic about being able to make his mother smile. He thinks about balance in the family, and that it is necessary for Ella to return to the original balance. He does, however, admit to a new balance between himself and his father. He asks his dad for a driving lesson, so that he can gain more independence as his relationship with Sammie is getting more serious. Harry takes a ritalin pill and the driving lesson begins, in the safer CR-V, not his father's mini-cooper. During the driving lesson Harry tells Felix about a dream he had the night Uncle Tom died, that Harry and Felix should look after each other. He apologizes for not telling him until this point, saying that Ella had told him to keep it inside. Felix says he wishes that Ella wouldn't be that protective. Harry begins to notice some of his father's nervous habits could be viewed as tics. He returns from the drive successful, and gets a "good job" from his father,



because he did not exhibit any tics. This leads Harry to a depressing realization; that the only way to earn his father's approval is to not tic for the rest of his life.

Felix walks into Harry's messy chaotic room and finds an unopened letter from Harvard admissions. He picks it up along with the rest of the college mailings and starts to organize it, to Harry's irritation. When Max is on his way out Harry calls him a faggot which offends Felix. They get into a discussion about college, albeit fighting through Harry's ADHD. Harry wants to stay at UNC to be near his mother if she does not recover, which angers Felix into shouting that she will recover. Maybe if he yelled it loud enough it would come true.

Felix arrives at the Nasher museum of art on the Duke campus to discuss college with Harry, starting with a snack at the cafe. Harry is unable to think clearly when he is hungry. On the drive over Felix and Harry discuss the possibility of Ella being depressed, and Harry mentions that one of his friends who is dealing with depression, leading Felix to say that he does not discuss mental health no matter how difficult it is to hold that all in. The waitress at the cafe is able to relate to Harry's Tourette's as she admits that she's bipolar, something she does not admit very often. The food arrives and the two discuss helping each other buy jewelry for their respective mates. Felix starts to have the college conversation with Harry, but Harry is unwilling to talk about this, not willing to set up a plan for his future. As Harry wanders through the art gallery he fears the future, he thinks that his dad only wants to push him away while his mother had only protected him. There is an interactive exhibit which states "A man is...". Harry notices his dad has added to this exhibit the word "alone".

When they return home Harry argues with his father saying that no one is giving him a fair say in his own future. He directs the conversation away from college and asks his father if his obsession with order could perhaps be viewed as odd. Felix admits to being a perfectionist, and Harry accuses him of establishing standards that are impossible to live up to. He is more responsible than the average teenager but has gotten no respect from his father for this behavior, only attacks on his disorder and lack of perfect cleanliness. He yells at his father for the first time and tells him to google obsession with order. Harry retreats to his bedroom and texts Sammie and Max, both asking them somewhat jokingly to leave the house. Felix sees his father's face in the mirror and shudders at the fact that he almost wanted to hit his son. Harry announces that he is going to Sammie's, and Felix establishes a 10 p.m. curfew. He goes into Harry's room and attempts to turn off his laptop, but instead leaves it open. He finds that Harry had written "my dad terrifies me". Eudora calls and Felix opens up to her about his fear that his son hates him. She arranges for them to meet at Duke Gardens to talk.

Felix arrives to the garden late on purpose to cut his talk with Eudora short. Eudora begins to take him on a short tour of the garden, its history and traditions. The garden reminds him of Tom, the landscape architect. The two relate over the deaths of their loved ones, Tom to AIDS and Dahlia to cancer. They notice some ivy, and Felix mentions that it represents survival in celtic culture, something he learned from Tom. The garden reminds Felix of Ella's jewelry designs. Eudora is able to point out Felix's main flaw, mainly the fact that his mind can only focus on flaws not the positive things in



life. Felix is not quick to accept these comments, especially the one that Harry is scared of his future. He leaves the garden politely, but not exactly amicably.

Analysis

The theme of acceptance is the most prevalent one in this section, as there are numerous individuals who seem altogether easily accepting of Harry's defects while his father cannot. Sammie is clearly accepting as she becomes a steady girlfriend, his neighbor Eudora sees only his positive aspects during her conversations with Felix, even the waitress at the cafe seems able to relate to him through her own acceptance of her mental issues. Felix seems to be unable to accept any mental illness or even talk about it. He struggles to discuss the possibility of his wife's depression, and admits that mental health is not something to be discussed in public. He strongly rejects both Harry's and Eudora's accusations regarding his own issues, obsessions with flaws and overall perfection. He renames his personal tics as nervous habits, a phrase that wipes himself from responsibility. For Felix, mental illness is something to be covered up and never discussed, and hopefully it will never show itself. This opinion is strongly based on his own troubled past, as he has built his life on covering up the abuse he suffered as a child. Interestingly enough, for all of the acceptance that Felix has trouble to find for mental illness, he can easily find acceptance for homosexuality, both in his brother Tom and his neighbor Eudora. In fact, he is offended when Harry uses a homophobic slur, showing his strong feelings towards that particular abnormality.

Acceptance is an issue for Harry as well, acceptance of his father's issues and obsessive nature seems to come more naturally to him than Felix feeling likewise, but nevertheless Harry strives and struggles to achieve acceptance from his father, coming to the heartbreaking realization that as long as he has tics his father will not be able to be proud of him.

Independence is another important topic that comes up in this section, namely regarding Harry's future, one that has been decided for him up to this point. He is frightened of life without his mother, of life alone in the world, and even more so than that he is afraid of living on his own in a world that he had no say in creating. This is the cause of his continued avoidance of the college issue in general, and the cause of his first vocal lashing out at his father.

Felix continues to grow more open in all of his relationships, opening up to both Harry and Eudora about his relationship with Ella. He feels that it is too little too late to do so, as he is only feeling this urge after Ella's diagnosis. However, this speaks to the theme of information, and who should be privy to what information. Felix still remains in the middle, as he is fine with sharing some information and does not like Ella's constant censorship but at the same time he is not willing to discuss the possibility of any of his own personal flaws.



Discussion Question 1

Why is there a stigma surrounding mental health in today's culture? Should a mental issue be as common to talk about as a broken bone?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Felix have such an issue with flaws and imperfection if these beliefs were founded by a father he despised and feared?

Discussion Question 3

How much influence should Harry's parents get in the selection of his college, given that they are paying for his medical bills, tuition, etc.?

Vocabulary

horticulturalist, iridescent, cohabit, qualifiers, dopamine, bipolar, transfix



Section Four: Ch. 24-31 pg. 232-284

Summary

Harry texts Sammie later the next night and she convinces him to be the bigger person and apologize to his dad for their previous conversation. He apologizes and proposes a compromise, that they have a college afternoon the next weekend which Felix agrees to. All seems good until Felix brings up the fact that he read through Harry's messages, which enrages Harry into thinking that he'd rather his dad was in the hospital with a heart attack and not his mother.

Some time has passed, and Felix apologized to Harry since the reader has last seen him. He's at work, but with his mind elsewhere he texts Katherine and asks to meet for coffee. His receptionist, Nora Mae covers for him and he offers to bring her back a pie. Felix meets Katherine and grows in appreciation for her personality, straightforward and honest. Felix thanks Katherine for her help in getting Harry to see Ella and asks her for another favor, to fill in for him when Ella comes home so he can lock up the Life Plan deal, Katherine accepts with a subtle dig at Felix choosing work over family. Felix responds by revealing his plan to take a less stressful position on the firm and then starting out on his own. He needs more freedom and flexibility with Ella's long term stability in question. Katherine brings up that she has noticed Ella's depression just as Felix has, and they discuss the possibility of antidepressant pills. At the end of their conversation Katherine shares her own feelings of lack of self worth following her divorce, something that Felix can relate to as he has stated earlier that he feels inadequate for his wife.

Ella returns home, full of anxiety, and notices changes around the house including Felix's takeover of the dining room table as his personal work space. Harry rushes over to Ella and hugs her, then announces he will be making dinner, French Toast. He's been practicing all day and Ella can smell it. Ella falls asleep, and awakes to Harry's singing and asking Felix if he can go see if she's awake to which she has a negative reaction and a slight panic. She is having trouble readjusting to being Harry's center of attention. She eats her dinner in bed, mainly for show as she still cannot really eat. Felix agrees to sneak her in some crackers, returning in a small way to being her protector like he was on the subway.

Harry enters his mother's room, and sees through her white lies regarding how she is fine and good. Harry is expecting to find out the secret to conversing with his father, but Ella has nothing for him. Ella reveals that Felix's grandfather was physically and emotionally abusive, and she urges Harry not to judge his father by his control issues. She thinks that he should go on the college tour with his father, she orders Harry to cut her out of the equation. Harry leaves her room disappointed that his mother seems to be accepting that she will die as well as his dislike for being told what to do. He texts Max his emergency code, (code spongebob) and they decide to work on a new plan for life.



Felix converses with Katherine in the kitchen, as they decide to make a symbolic fresh start. It is clear that they are becoming friends. Suddenly Eudora screams and Ella is unable to breathe. Harry blames himself.

Ella has been taken to the hospital and seems to be okay, it was merely a stress based incident. Max, Harry, Felix, Katherine and Eudora all gather in the kitchen. Felix then leaves to meet Robert in the office, Max volunteers to drive Harry to and from school. Everyone seems to be getting along very well, surprising given the situation.

Felix receives a phone call from his mother, a conversation full of Felix repeating himself and giving his mother information he was sure she already had. He's at the hospital with Ella, and manages to relate to Dr. Beaubridge over the doctor's wife's tragic death in a car accident. He tells Felix that Ella is now in class four heart failure and all they can do is wait on the transplant list hoping for the best.

It is February 8th and still quite cold, Ella is home. Felix has completed the Life Plan deal and is about to step down. Ella leaves the bedroom and Harry offers to make them breakfast. Katherine and Eudora arrive to keep Ella company while Felix and Harry discuss colleges. Harry opens the discussion with a proposal; that he and Max fly to Brandeis (Boston) on a visit alone. Harry views this as a trial run on his independence, a chance to prove his worth to both his mother and father. Felix decides to believe in him and the two start to draw out a budget plan, hiding this information from Ella just like she hid information from Harry. Felix reveals to Harry that his father whipped him with a riding crop. Harry decrees that he hates Felix's father and the two try to keep positive given the foreboding nature of Ella's health.

Analysis

The issue of the definition of success comes up once again for Felix, and this time it appears he has a decidedly different answer. He has a new plan for himself, one that ends with him leaving his highly successful firm and relying solely on his own reputation in order to take over for what Ella will no longer be able to do. He seems at peace with this, and it helps him in building his relationship with Katherine as she can see him as less of the workaholic-type husband.

The theme of acceptance comes up again slightly, as Ella tries to get Harry not to judge his father for his control issues even though Felix does not seem willing to do the same for Harry and his tics. There is more growth in Felix's character as he opens up once again to Harry, sharing intimate details about his childhood, leading Harry to bond with Felix.

The overbearing theme for this section is the foreboding inevitability of death. Every character is fighting the realization that Ella has a very good chance to die, Ella included. Katherine and Felix have a pact to remain positive, to the point that Felix will not let Eric mention the phrase "heart attack". Ella seems to be wallowing in her depression, unable to fight her way out except for short periods of time. However her



conversations with Harry point him towards a life with only his father. Harry's own tone betrays his attitude, as he refers to his mother's protection in the past tense.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it that Felix, a man who finds fault in everything, has an optimistic attitude towards his wife's condition?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that it is a good idea for Harry, with his neurological incapacities, to travel with Max to Brandeis? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Is the Fitzwilliam's home still a toxic environment for Ella? Her stress was arguably the cause of her heart attack, and when she returns she has an anxiety attack.

Vocabulary

contagion, reprehensible, ESP, catatonic, manifesto, moonshine, lackadaisical



Section Five: Ch. 32-37 pg. 285-333

Summary

It's Valentine's day and the power has gone out due to high winter storms, putting a damper on Felix's plans for a romantic awakening (featuring lobster dinner and a garnet ring). Harry is equally bummed out by the cancellation of his school's Valentine's day dance, to which he expected to take Sammie. The family takes advantage of the outage to play a game of Monopoly, with Ella being the first to run out of money leaving just Felix and Harry. Felix and Harry inform her of Harry's solo flight plan, which draws a negative reaction at first as Ella is scared of letting her son go. She quickly comes around to the idea however and then heads off to bed.

Felix musters up his courage to slide into bed next to Ella. He wakes up at 6 a.m., the power is back on. Ella is not in bed with her, she is in the living room. She announces that she needs to tell Felix things, to clear her mind with no regrets. She tells him that when Harry was young she had a real struggle to love him. This seems to have been a secret that plagued her. She then shares the fact that she looked into sending Harry away, as she felt unable to deal with his tics and personality. Felix responds by saying that he truly fell in love with Ella when he saw her with Harry. She then shares the final secret, that she had set up the pregnancy, had planned on getting pregnant with Felix's child. She chose him to be the father of her child. This news at first angers Felix, but he is quickly filled with joy at the realization that she had in fact chosen him. He then tells her he chose her too, not just to do the honorable thing but because he wanted to spend his life with her. They are able to achieve some sort of solace. Felix mentions wanting to turn the shed into a jewelry workshop for Ella, an idea that makes her happy.

Max, Harry and Sammie are seeing a movie, and Harry receives a long text from his mom. He discusses the road trip with Max, and thinks to himself about how scared he is.

Harry and Ella are packing for his flight, he admits that he is a little nervous. They make a pact not to worry about each other. Harry asks his dad if he thinks he can do this, and Felix is unable to give him a straightforward yes.

Max and Harry are on the airplane when it is revealed to the reader that Max will not be attending college. Harry says that he is trying to prove to his parents that they do not need to worry about him anymore.

Harry and Max are on their tour when the tour guide gives Max a strange look, causing Harry to write off the school entirely, not as if he was planning on attending in the first place. They both leave the tour and head off in separate directions, Harry following later trying to find Max. He meets a girl (Annie) outside of a dormitory and they go to grab coffee so Harry can ask her questions about Harvard. While they drink coffee Annie's boyfriend Steve shows up and asserts his possession of Annie. Harry's tic causes him



to spill hot chocolate on Steve enraging him, He shoves Harry, and a campus cop arrives on the scene. Another one of Harry's tics causes him to kick the cop, influencing the cop to throw him to the floor and cuff him. Max arrives and Harry tells him to "Get Dad."

Analysis

There is some obvious symbolism in the monopoly game as Ella is "out" first, leaving Harry alone with Felix, just as she did when she had her heart attack, and what the family fears will happen for good in the near future.

Felix and Ella's relationship gains closure as they both admit their insecurities, Ella sharing numerous secrets that lead them to realize that they both chose each other and were meant for each other. Felix's long lasting fears are swept away.

Harry seems to be well on his way to achieving the independence and respect that he believes he deserves. He made it on the plane ride, made it to Harvard, skipped out on his first boring college tour, and even made his first college friend. Unfortunately his Tourette's gets in the way once again, this time in an environment of people ignorant of his condition and a tic is mistaken for assault. There is the fear that this could happen on any college campus, as they simply do not know who he is and society generally thinks the worst of people.

This section also depicts humanity as pessimistic, as both Steve and the campus police officer assume the worst regarding Harry, and are rendered deaf when Max attempts to explain the situation for what it is.

Discussion Question 1

Does Ella need to die for Felix and Harry to maintain their current relationship? Will they relapse if she makes a full recovery?

Discussion Question 2

Is the situation experienced by Harry at Harvard an isolated incident? Or is it one that has a fair chance of happening again?

Discussion Question 3

If Ella had wanted Felix as a father why go the unorthodox route of tricking him into impregnating her? Why not be honest with him, as he was clearly infatuated with her?

Vocabulary

histrionic, inclement, pyromaniac, klonopin, astrophysicist, dispossess, kaleidoscope



Section Six: Ch. 38-Epilogue pg. 334-369

Summary

Felix answers Max's frantic call relaying Harry's situation. When he tells Felix that Harry asked for him he starts looking for flights to Boston. Robert challenges him on this, but Felix responds vehemently that he will get to Harry no matter what. He hides the information from Ella using Katherine as a buffer. Felix speaks with the doctor at the university who tells him Harry will have to undergo a CT scan to check for concussions. He then speaks to Harry and they tell each other that they love each other. Felix begins to cry as he boards the plane.

Felix purchases Internet on his plane ride to look up the credentials of the doctors when he is stricken with guilt over Harry's actions, realizing that Harry had only gone to Harvard to impress his father, just like he had gone to Oxford to impress his. He wonders why he cannot just be proud of his son's accomplishments and decides to google perfectionism. His search leads to an article on OCPD (Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder), to which he relates to 100%. He also finds that Tourette's is a genetic link to OCPD. He decides that he will stop at nothing to be there for his son and vows to attend therapy and commits to change.

Felix arrives at the hospital where he thanks Max for all that he did for Harry. Harry wakes up and apologizes to his father for the situation, saying he only came here to impress Felix and make him proud. Felix says that he is proud of Harry for facing his fear of flying. He admits to Harry that he has mental problems of his own and is seeking therapy. They both decide to take Harvard off the table as a possibility. Harry fills in Felix on what had happened with Steve, and Annie enters the room and apologizes to Harry. The campus officer also apologizes and presents Steve. Annie dumps Steve, and Felix takes Steve outside to inform him about Tourette's Syndrome.

Felix and Harry discuss the stigma of mental illness, Felix asking questions about how to cope, how open to be. Finally, the overarching theme of the novel is brought up by Felix; Acceptance. The two share a hug.

Harry and Felix return home; Harry to Sammie and Felix to Ella. Ella greets them with a smile. She mentions the day they met on the Tube and then crumples. Felix cannot catch her this time. She sees a white light but is unable to walk into it.

Five years pass, it's Harry's undergraduate graduation, also Mother's day. Max is a successful rock star, Eudora is pushing Ella's father in a wheelchair. Felix and Katherine walk hand-in-hand. Ella watches this all, invisible, until she walks into her mother's embrace and into the white light.



Analysis

At this point in the novel the theme of acceptance is brought into the mouths of the characters, as they reference it directly (both Felix and Harry). Felix is able to begin his own self acceptance, realizing his own mental deficiencies and that he needs personal help. Once Felix does this Harry is all too willing to accept his father, as this is all he wanted, Felix gives Harry his love and pride and the two of them reach the apex of their growth. They are able to accept each other for who they are.

Ella has the easiest job of any character; she struggles with letting go of Harry, and her death should give her that necessary release. However, even in death she is unable to fully let go until Harry has graduated college, after which she states "I'm ready" and leaves for the white light.

A complex novel has a rather simplistic ending. The death that all were dreading comes to place as expected, Felix and Harry seem more than fit to live together sans Ella, and by giving the reader a short epilogue any loose ends are tied up. Felix even has the ability to move on with Ella's friend Katherine, something that the author hinted at during each one of their interactions earlier in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What does it say about Ella's growth if she is unable to let go of Harry when she initially dies?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Felix will be able to become less of a perfectionist as a result of his therapy? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do Felix and Harry both adapt to each other, or does Felix merely adapt to Harry?

Vocabulary

epileptic, CT scan, obtrusive, consultation, penetrate, polyurethane



Characters

Ella Fitzwilliam

Ella Fitzwilliam, 47, is one of the three main protagonists of this novel. She is a former jewelry designer turned full time mother after her accidental pregnancy with Felix, later her husband. She is currently living in North Carolina due to her husband's employment, but would rather be living in the country, perhaps California. They have lived in North Carolina for all of Harry's life. Following the birth of her Tourette's affected son, she abandoned her designing career to take on full responsibility for her child's well-being. Accused of being a helicopter parent, she set up code words and phrases in order to Harry to discreetly leave his classrooms to blow off steam, and all of Harry's teachers from a young age are a part of "Team Harry". She is the keystone in the Fitzwilliam family, without her presence the family simply could not function.

She suffers a life changing heart attack on the plane ride home which leaves her depressed, anxious and worst of all selfish. This heart attack, while possibly triggered by stress, is most likely genetic as her own mother had a fatal heart attack at the same age. She moves between hospital and home periodically during her illness all the while slowly allowing herself to pull away from the control that she has over her son's life to prepare for the possibility of her death. Her heart condition worsens as the novel progresses, all the way to stage four.

She is able to come to terms with her own life regrets, and admits certain failings as an individual and as a mother to her husband Felix, only to have him accept her completely. This gives her the ability to be at peace with herself and she passes away. However, she does not allow herself to move into the light, or next world until Harry has graduated college and Felix has moved on romantically.

Felix Fitzwilliam

Felix is the most complex character of this novel, and arguably the main protagonist. He comes from a troubled family, his father was emotionally, verbally and physically abusive towards him while his mother preferred to ignore the situation rather than stepping in to help him. He suffered from various nervous habits as a child, habits that his own father could not accept and beat out of him. Felix strongly believes that he would not have survived his childhood if it was not for his older brother Tom, a homosexual. Tom saved him from his father numerous times, and when Tom died of AIDS at a young age Felix was deeply affected.

As a reaction to his upbringing Felix feels very insecure in his relationship with Ella, he does not feel like he is a worthy enough husband or father. He is very afraid that interacting with his son Harry, who has Tourette's Syndrome, as he is fearful that he will become his own father, a hateful man. To avoid this possibility altogether he works long



hours at his financial syndicate, and is known as a financial "rock star", while spending little time at home with his son. He justifies this as necessary to pay for Harry's medical bills. As a father figure he is a perfectionist, almost a control freak when it comes to the house, maintaining its cleanliness and overall design is his job only. He is not comfortable with Harry's tics, and would rather that he not have them.

He really has to adjust his mentality when Ella suffers her heart attack, leaving Felix as the sole parent. He takes over driving Harry to school and his numerous activities and he even hosts a sleepover. Through this experience he has real growth, although he would not have been able to achieve this growth without the help of Katherine and Eudora, two of Ella's friends. Although he is slow to warm up to them, he eventually is able to relate to them as a result of their own life experience. He strikes a pact with Katherine to remain optimistic about Ella, no matter how bad it looks.

By the end of the novel Felix has been able to accept his own mental deficiency; OCPD, while also accepting that of Harry. The two of them seem to be headed towards a strong father/son relationship at the time of Ella's death.

Harry Fitzwilliam

Harry, 17, is the son of Ella and Felix Fitzwilliam. He has the neurological disorder known as Tourette's Syndrome. For Harry, this disorder presents itself in the form of physical tics, boundless energy and a general lack of inhibition. His mother's efforts have quelled some of the more irritating tics, and has also set up a system wherein Harry can leave his classes to expend energy when he needs to. Harry's best friend Max acts as his protector when his mother is not around, defending him against the ignorant and uninformed masses. The one thing that Harry struggles with is winning affection and pride from his father Felix.

Although Harry has a perfect GPA and SAT scores, this is still not enough for his perfectionist father who is constantly frustrated by Harry's tics and general lack of care for cleanliness in the same way Felix does. This does not become a major issue until Ella is stricken with a heart attack, and now Felix has to take over the role of the protective parent.

Harry is constantly frustrated by Felix's desire for him to go to Harvard, as if he does not even care about Harry's own thoughts regarding college. They attempt numerous times to discuss Harry's future and college, but Harry has a really difficult time with this for two reasons. The first, is that he is afraid of leaving home and his routine and entering a world that does not yet accept him for who he is. Secondly, he is afraid of his mother not being a part of this decision and not being there for him in the future. For Harry, who views his mother's heart attack pessimistically, the future does not include his mother and he feels that all of his time spent with his father is to prepare for the inevitability that his mother will no longer be there as a buffer.



Harry grows in independence over the course of the novel, overcoming both of his major phobias: driving and flying. He decides to embark on a college visit to Harvard with his friend Max alone, in order to prove his ability to be independent to his mother and to make his father proud of him. Upon his arrival all goes well until his Tourettes causes an incident with campus police. Felix rushes to his aid, abandoning his work and declaring his love and pride for his son. The two are able to live in harmony by the end of the novel.

Katherine

Katherine is Ella's best friend, whom she helped through a horrific divorce. Katherine would take a bullet for Ella but has a negative opinion of Felix at the start of the novel, in fact urging Ella to break off the marriage. A romance novelist and liberally minded individual, Felix thinks very lowly of her as well. She is thrust into a friendship with Felix in order to appease Ella and keep Harry functioning. Over the course of several meetings with Felix she saves him from a sleepover fiasco, bonds with him over their insecurities and they become friends. There are slight romantic undertones between the two throughout the novel, so it is no surprise that they end up together in the epilogue.

Eudora Jenkins

The Fitzwilliam's next door neighbor, a retired horticulturalist and Ella's walking partner. A southern woman, full of hospitality and good cooking. She is a lesbian, with her own tragic love story as her partner passed away from cancer. She provides Harry with some motherly care as well as giving Felix insight into how to cope with death and how to spend the last moments with your loved one while they are still alive.

Mad Max

Harry's best friend and rock, this punk/math geek has died black hair, painted fingernails and fake sharpie tattoos covering his arms. He has parental issues of his own, mainly due to his rebellious nature, but seems more interested in assisting Harry than getting any emotional relief from his own situation. He has always been there for Harry; he helps him get together with Sammie, is a simple phone call away in an emergency and gets Harry help during the Harvard incident which earns him the respect of Felix. He provides some comic relief as well as giving Harry someone to talk to other than Felix. In the epilogue it is revealed that he, too, had a crush on Sammie and backed off for Harry's benefit.

Sammie Owens

Arguably the prettiest girl in the 10th grade, Sammie takes a liking to Harry and becomes his first girlfriend. The two bond over illness in their family, as Sammie's dad is suffering from cancer. She takes over the role as Harry's rock from Ella when she is



incapacitated, and arrives on the scene at the perfect time in Harry's life. In the epilogue it shows that they have remained together through undergraduate college.

Robert Sharpe

Felix's partner in the syndicate, he is less than supportive as Felix takes time off from work to help Harry. He views the father's role as simply to work and make money, and that is the definition of success. He believes that Felix should be using his money to hire people to clean the house, taxi Harry etc.

Nora Mae

Felix's secretary at the syndicate, she is very supportive and helpful to Felix and covers for him on numerous occasions. She also arranges his emergency flight to Boston when Harry has the Harvard incident.

Dr. Beau Carlton Beaubridge

Ella's doctor at Raleigh Memorial. He is a man who has also lost his wife recently, in a car accident. He is not exactly forthright with the details of Ella's condition when talking to Felix until the very end, which strongly irritates Felix. He often finds himself in the position of Felix's punching bag, taking insults and shots at his credibility while trying to keep Ella alive.

Tom Fitzwilliam

Present only in flashbacks, Tom represents the closest thing that Felix had to a real father. Tom was his protector and teacher, everything he knows he learned from Tom. Tom, a homosexual landscaping architect, died tragically of AIDS at a young age.

Pater

Also present only in flashback, he is the abusive father figure responsible for the man that Felix is today. A hateful and vindictive individual, he represents the opposite of what Felix strives to be as a father.



Symbols and Symbolism

Ivy

There is ivy in two places in this novel, in the gardens and on the Fitzwilliam house. Felix explains the significance of ivy for his family as signifying survival, as his brother Tom had taught him that this meaning comes from celtic folklore. The ivy could also represent Felix in his stubbornness to give up and his willingness to adapt to the climate for his son.

French Toast

The meal that Harry decides to make for his mom is filled with symbolism, as it represents Harry's growth into independence that his mom is not cooking for him, but he is cooking for his mom. It also represents the full family, as whenever Ella is in good enough health to eat, Harry makes this french toast.

Tea

Tea has a certain symbolism in this novel as it represents Felix's british roots. Earl grey is his drink of choice and he despises the American iced tea. His acceptance of Eudora's iced tea when sitting on the porch marks a significant change in his ability to handle new things and see the world from a perspective unique from his own.

The Texting Symbol for Heart

The texting symbol for heart holds a large level of importance in this novel for all three members of the Fitzwilliam family. For Ella and Harry it represents the ease in which they are able to express their love, between each other and between Harry and Sammie. It also shows a generation a lot more accustomed to sharing intimate emotions with each other. Felix is at first unable to even see that the symbol is a heart, and is confused at the ease in which his wife and son use it. When Ella thanks him and includes the symbol it takes on new meaning for him.

Shoes

Shoes represent numerous things in this novel. Mainly they are a trigger for Felix, as he is unable to believe that Harry has issues tying his shoes, and also putting them away in the hallway cubby. Shoes are constantly left around the house for Felix to pick up and they are a strong symbol of his obsessive nature with regards to cleanliness.



The song Simple Minds

This song holds significance for both Harry and Felix, as Harry relates to the lyrics in the same way that Tom did when he was alive. This song allows Felix to remember his brother in a positive light, and it will be kept alive through his son Harry.

Harvard University

Harvard represent so much more than just a college in the eyes of Felix, it represents the ability for him to be proud of his son. He can talk to his friends about his son, the Harvard man, not his son the Tourette's ridden child. Harvard represents Felix's dream for Harry, one that is not necessarily in Harry's best interests.

Sandwiches

Sandwiches are a minor symbol for the character of Felix, as he is reminded of his mother's views on perfection when he makes Harry's sandwich for lunch. This gives light to the importance of aesthetic appeal to Felix, as he discards two perfectly good sandwiches for no reason other than they were not perfect.

The White Column of Light

This column of light symbolizes Ella's next step, perhaps heaven, perhaps a spiritual world with her mother. She is unable to enter this white light right away, it is only after witnessing the success of her husband and child with her not on the earth that she is ready to move on and finally relax, take relief from her responsibilities. The white light represents a welcoming future for Ella and the Fitzwilliam family.

Voice Lessons

Harry's beautiful singing voice represents the beauty that can be found below the surface of a mental illness, that a boy can sing so beautifully and tic-free when his whole life he has been plagued with uncontrollable action. Ella grasps the significance of his singing, but Felix is unable to until the very end of the novel.



Settings

Durham, North Carolina

This is the home of Duke University and the surrounding suburbia where the Fitzwilliams have settled down. This setting, while quaint, is really the result of Felix's desires. Ella had wanted to live in California, in a rural country house but Felix was not open to that idea. The result is a house that Felix has completely retooled, but an outdoor garden that is Ella's attempt to give the house a more rural feeling. With Duke university right next door there are plenty of art galleries, gardens and the campus itself which Felix fell in love with.

London, England

This is Felix's home country and city, it is also the place where Felix met Ella on the London subway or the Tube. Ella is returning from visiting her father in London at the start of the novel, and Felix's major flashback also takes place in this city. It has an influence in the novel as Felix's mannerisms and general demeanor are decidedly British.

Harvard University

This setting has a symbolic as well as a literal meaning for the novel. For Felix it represents the pinnacle of American collegiate education and a way for him to be proud of his son. For Harry it represents the same thing, but also a high level of stress that is associated with Ivy league schools. As a physical location it represents the greatest independent success that Harry had as well as the bond that he shares with his father after Felix came to help him. It sets up a great climax between the two characters that they are reaching the apex of their relationship at the peak of potential pride in the beginning of the novel.

The Hospital

There are two hospitals prominently featured in this novel: Raleigh Memorial and the hospital and Harvard University. The first hospital carries a lot of negative weight for all of the characters. Ella is taken there when she suffers her heart attack, Harry has a natural phobia of hospitals as a result of his Tourettes, and every time Felix enters a hospital it triggers memories of Tom, his brother who died in a hospital. This setting flips with Harvard's hospital, as instead of representing everything negative it represents the positive; Harry's independence and Felix's ability to be there for his son.

Terrace Gardens

This is the garden at Duke University that Eudora takes Felix to. It is a beautiful garden, beautiful enough that Felix loses track of time looking at the flowers and admits that to Eudora, a rare occasion for Felix. It is here when the ivy's symbolism is realized, and the reader is made aware of the fact that Felix is the most troubled individual of the Fitzwilliam family and is the protagonist. It serves as a way for Felix to come close to nature so that he can start to realize his own nature, as well as grow in appreciation for the garden work that Ella had been doing for the outside of the house.



Themes and Motifs

Acceptance

Acceptance is the largest and most far reaching theme of this novel. It spreads across numerous characters and meanings and is prevalent in nearly every analysis. Throughout the novel there is the consistent need for/lack of acceptance from society, acceptance from friends, lovers, and family. This is acceptance of a person how they are, with no censorship or hidden elements of their personality. It is something that society has a real fear of, the lack of acceptance in a community or the inability to fit into a group or family. As a result, this overarching theme has the power to hit hard with the reader as well as play an important role in the novel itself.

The first character that has to deal with acceptance is Harry, as his Tourette's makes him more difficult as a child and as a friend, but surprisingly enough not as a lover. The struggle to gain acceptance from his peers and educators is glossed over for the most part, but when Ella brings up past events the reader can see how much of a struggle it really was for him and how much his mother paved the way for the current state of his life. His friend Max is also an excellent supporter of Harry as not only has he accepted him Tourette's and all, he defends him against those who are nervous or threatened by someone different like Steve at Harvard. Harry even has a girlfriend that accepts his Tourette's, something that he is surprised happened and his father is incredibly surprised happened. This is because the one individual that Harry cannot gain true acceptance from is his father. This is the key struggle of the novel, and it will be explained in greater detail in the theme Father/Son Relationship. For the purposes of this theme Harry needs his father to not look at his tics as a negative thing but as part of Harry's person. Felix is unable to do so until the very end of the novel when he finally gets over his own struggles and past to accept Harry on the Harvard hospital bed.

Ella, too, has some issues with acceptance of her true person. She has numerous secrets about the consummation of Harry that she is too afraid to share with Felix for fear that he will reject her. This is all put to rest rather quickly as Felix is able to forgive her because she chose him to be the father of her child.

Felix has the most diverse issues with acceptance, as he struggled with being accepted as a child and still does as an adult. At the same time he struggles to accept his own son for who he is. His struggles with acceptance stem back to his own father being unable to accept him for his lack of perfection, and also abusing him on a physical and mental level. As a result Felix turned his brother into a father figure, as Tom accepted him fully. He developed OCPD as a result of this lack of parental acceptance, turning him into a perfectionist like his father, lacking the abuse. He is unable to accept his son's failures because he is unable to see himself in his son, and unwilling to see elements of his own father in himself. Eventually he is able to accept himself fully by recognizing his mental incapacities and accepts Harry. He also struggles with Ella's complete acceptance of him as a man and doubts her ability to love him as he does not



see himself as the perfect father. This is cleared up when Ella admits that she chose him to be the father of her intentional son and gives him the confidence to accept his own failings and to accept Harry.

Inevitability of Death

This theme enters the novel from the second chapter as Ella's heart attack places her on the brink of death, to which her condition only worsens over time. This creates problems for all of the characters of the novel, as Harry and Felix as well as Ella herself struggle with imagining a future without her. Katherine, her friend, is also experiencing fear at the loss of Ella who helped her through the darkest period of her life. This is a bonding point between Felix and Katherine as both of them struggle to find what their future will be like without Ella. Death is also a theme for Eudora, as her lover and partner Dahlia died of cancer, a similar uncontrollable occurrence as Ella's.

Felix is incredibly distraught over the possible and ever growing probable reality of Ella's death, as he does not think that he will be able to survive losing her again, and for good. He places a lot of his personal self worth in Ella loving him and staying with him so there is a need for him to create personal self esteem before her death, something that is difficult for him to do. Katherine also shares this sentiment as she relies on Ella to be her rock, and owes her the equivalent of a life debt. The two of them are able to bond and stay sane throughout this process through false optimism, refusing to lose hope in the idea of Ella's recovery until she reaches stage four and her condition is simply too bad to ignore the fact that she is very close to death. Felix is constantly reminded of his brother Tom's tragic death throughout this process and his inability to even mention his brother's name without feeling sadness overwhelm him.

Harry is equally affected by the potential loss of his mother, although is more of a realist about his situation. He appreciates the honesty and candor that his father displays in telling him her medical information and keeping him updated on her worsening condition. He is unafraid to face the facts and speak about her heart attack openly, but at the same time is filled with fear of a future not only away from his friends and hometown but also with his mother no longer physically on the planet. He blows off his dad on numerous occasions when Felix wants to discuss college because of this, this fear of a future without Ella. His saving grace is Sammie, who arrives in his life at the perfect time as he moves on from the need of a matronly figure to a romantic figure.

The inevitability of death affects Ella the most of all involved as she is the one most involved in her own demise. She experiences depression and feelings of guilt as her survival instinct kicks in and she becomes more selfish and less there for her son 100% of the time both physically and mentally. She seems to be at times the most unable to deal with her own death and the most at peace with it. Her ability to accept her fate hinges on what she believes to be a positive ending to the story; Felix and Harry being able to cohabit peacefully and successfully. She is able to get this ending to the story and it appears that she is happy in the afterlife.



Homosexuality

This is more of a motif than a theme, but it comes up numerous times in the novel. It plays the counterpart to mental illness, as it is readily accepted without much question by all characters in this novel, where there is a dichotomy when it comes to mental illness. The character Eudora Jenkins readily tells Felix that she is a lesbian, and although he is surprised by her openness he is not at all put at odds by the fact she is a lesbian, he is more irritated by the fact that she had an affair with a married woman.

Felix's brother Tom was a homosexual and this was not at all okay with Pater, their father. Felix, on the other hand, could take no issue with the way that Tom was because Tom meant everything to him. He learned everything from Tom, and Tom was his protector from his abusive father. Felix is aware of the touchy feely nature of his son's friendship with Max and wonders at times if they are not both homosexuals, but the thought of that really does not bother him. The author creates a world where mental illness is more of a societal abnormality than homosexuality, which, in popular opinion, is becoming more and more the case. Homosexuality is becoming more accepted and less of something that should be hidden away, while mental illness remains an issue both in the novel's world and today's.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is a prevalent theme in this novel, as both Felix and Harry suffer from it. What the author creates is an interesting dichotomy between the two different ways that people deal with mental illness. For Harry he is open and forthcoming with his mental disability, to the point that he makes flashcards to inform people of the fact when he travels alone to Harvard. Felix, on the other hand, does not accept that he has a personality disorder until much later in the novel, and as a result he is a man that hides his imperfections and expects nothing less than perfection from those around him.

Harry has a slightly better situation, as he has had a support group around his mental illness from day one, unlike Felix, whose father forced him to hide his nervous habits from a very young age. While this is the case, Harry represents a more modern viewpoint on mental illness as a whole. As a theme it is a very timely one, as mental breakdowns and even suicides at the collegiate level are becoming more commonplace at American universities. There is a common belief that while physical injuries are nothing to be ashamed of, you just go to the doctor and get the necessary drugs and treatment to heal, mental injuries attach a certain stigma that you or those around you have failed as individuals. For Harry there is nothing wrong with sharing mental issues such as depression, since people knowing that you suffer from something are more capable and able to help you cope with that issue.

Felix is a firm believer of the first method, and believes it to be a personal failure of his own that Harry even has Tourette's in the first place. He also associates mental illness so strongly with failure that he is unable to accept his own personality disorder until very late in the novel. At the same time he is quick to recognize and discuss Ella's apparent



depression with Katherine. The author makes it clear that she believes mental illness should be something that should be discussed in the public domain without the negative stigma of failure attached to it.

Honesty

Honesty plays a major role in this novel in terms of information shared and information kept secret, even if it may be for the greater good. Ella is the main culprit in this hiding or censoring of information, as she believes that there are certain things Harry should not find out. It is not as if she is hiding everything from him, rather, it is a clever weaving of information so that certain things are found out only by the right individuals. Felix does not subscribe to this method of parenting; he is very straightforward with Harry about possibly difficult information because he believes that keeping it honest and straight is a necessary trait to have. This is slightly hypocritical as he is unable to share with Ella his biggest fear, but is more than willing to keep Harry in the loop about his mother's worsening health.

An example of information that Ella has hidden from Harry that Felix reveals to him is in relation to Ella and Felix's relationship. She does not tell the whole story of how they got together, leaving out the five year gap as she figured out her life. This comes as a minor surprise to Harry when Felix tells him. The greater shock is when Felix reveals that Harry was an accident, something that he assumed Harry already knew, but Ella had refrained from telling him. Besides these two incidences Harry generally approves of his father's openness and Felix shares more details about his own father and his brother Tom. Harry, in turn, tells Felix about a spiritual/supernatural visit he had from Uncle Tom on the night of Tom's death, a story that Ella did not allow Harry to tell his father.

Felix believes himself to be generally out of the loop of his son's life, something that he does not appreciate but has come to accept because he made the decision to take himself out of the role of parent. He did not know that Harry learned about drugs, alcohol and sex at a very young age, because Ella handled that conversation and Felix was never made aware of this until he attempts to have it for the first time and Harry says he already had the discussion with his mother. Harry does not feel comfortable sharing details of his school life with his father until he has to because Ella is not there and uninterested. The two share a bond in talking about their love lives, Felix recounting his and Ella's relationship and Harry asking for advice along his road to a relationship with Sammie. This allows Felix to really open up, something he was not comfortable with earlier in his life.

There is also the question of privacy, that a person's internet and phone messaging should not be looked through by the non-owner. On two occasions Felix looks through other people's electronic devices. He looks through Ella's messages when she gives him her cell phone, which is somewhat reasonable as they are a married couple but still a breach of her privacy as she did not allow him to do that. The worst that he does is looking through Harry's messages with his friends, something that a parent should never do. This brings up conflict with his relationship with Harry, as Harry obviously



does not appreciate that breach of privacy. The author does not seem to take a clear stance on this issue, as although it was clearly a breach of privacy there were still positive steps gained as Harry and Felix would not have been able to hash out a particular difference without Felix bringing it up.

Father/Son Relationship

The father/son relationship is at the apex of this novel, as this is the central objective of Ella once she has her heart attack, the success of Harry and Felix as a father/son team is what she needs to be able to die peacefully and move on to the next world. This novel goes deeper into this relationship than most family based novels do because as soon as the author introduces the mother, she whisks her off to the hospital and the role of a supporting character while leaving the Father and Son at the center of the action. She then adds another wrinkle to this relationship, that Felix had a failed one with his own father, in fact, it was a horrible relationship. There is plenty of the usual father/son issues, the rebelliousness of a teenager, the inability of the father to relate to youth culture, but that is not the crux of their issues.

Felix was abused mentally, emotionally and physically by his father. He was beaten out of his nervous habits, he developed habits that bordered on self harm and he gained a warped worldview that accepts nothing short of perfection as normal. He believes that if his brother Tom was not there to be his savior and alternate father figure he would have died at the age of six. As a result, he has little faith in his own abilities as a father and dreads the idea of being a father because he does not want to become his own. He is fearful of his rage and when he hit Harry once on the leg when Harry was little, he retreated altogether from the parental role because he feared his own inabilities and genes. At the same time that he does not want to be an abusive father, his perfectionism is his main personality trait and causes him to be unable to accept or be fully proud of his high achieving son because he has tics, he does not keep a clean room, his shoes are always all over the place. This is the main point of contention between the two of them as Harry only wants his father to be proud of him, but Felix is unable to do so until he realizes he has OCPD.

Harry is unable to accept that his father cannot be proud of him, because he has friends, he has a girlfriend and he has amazing grades. He comes to the realization after a driving lesson that Felix will never be able to be proud of him until he is without tics and normal - something that will never happen. This issue is unresolved between the two of them until Harry goes to visit Brandeis/Harvard, a bold act that he only does to prove his independence and make his father proud. When he experiences a tragic accident, Felix rushes to his aid, realizes he is suffering from OCPD and is able to accept Harry for who he is as the two of them can now relate through their battle with mental illness.

Styles

Point of View

The narrative of this novel is written from three points of view: Ella's, Felix's and Harry's. The story is told primarily in the present tense, with only a few instances of the past tense used when the characters remember past events such as Ella and Felix's meeting, or Harry's childhood. These stories are not told in the flashback style, rather just included as if the speaker was remembering them. This is meant to give the reader a look inside the minds and mentalities of all three of these important characters at a near equal level, although Ella's narrative fades off as her heart condition worsens. This narration differs on a chapter-by-chapter basis, with the occasional character getting two chapters in a row (Felix, for the most part). The dialogue between characters provides the mechanism to move the story along, as there are few actual events or changes in setting besides Harry's college trip or Ella's anxiety attack. This novel is primarily about what goes on inside of the character's heads, and so there is a large amount of exposition and character development done through first person narrative thought.

As the novel progresses, the narrative becomes a trade-off of perspectives between the two opposites; Harry and Felix. This places the reader directly in the middle of their relationship, in the head of each of them through every battle, every hardship and their bonding moments. Since the same arguments tend to repeat throughout the novel the reader is able to get both sides of each argument and point of dispute so they really know exactly where Felix and Harry are coming from when they make their points.

The shifting between character all speaking in the first person is a narrative style that helps to break up the potential monotony of a single character dialogue/monologue and can significantly raise suspense as it does in this case. It lets the reader experience all three member's of the family's inner thoughts, feelings and emotions. The author often shifts the narrator so that there is little time passed between the last perspective that the reader had. This has the power of giving the reader the reaction and thoughts of the other person in the conversation without having the awkward and choppy shifts between two first person narrators in the same chapter. Overall, the points of view that the author chooses to tell her story give the reader a deeper look into the minds and decision making processes of the Fitzwilliam family without sacrificing action or dialogue.

Language and Meaning

The language of this book is quite complex in its diversity, as each character has their own voice and background as well as vocabulary. Ella has the ability to speak intelligently to her husband and friends while at the same time, being an active mother in her son's life, including the ability to talk in text shorthand and emoji as well as understanding her son's teenage lingo. The author does a fantastic job of displaying



text-speak, something that is difficult to do as it is full of slang, smiley faces and lack of punctuation. She is able to do this all and make it believable that Felix sent this text, and Max sent that text while making the observation that Max uses perfect grammar in his texts, something that is one of the few defining aspects of texting. There is no feeling that the dialogue over text was written by an older, off-base author. The character of Katherine is another difficult character to write as she is an intelligent author with a cynical and sarcastic side to her, which is another unique language style. Eudora, is written as a southern matron and yet she is also a lesbian and has a strong spirit and straightforwardness about her. She also is a horticulturalist, and there is a scene in the garden at Duke where she displays this knowledge naming the latin names of plants as well as their history in the garden.

The characters of Max and Harry are also well written, as their conversations as teenagers include a large amount of modern slang and general informal language that teenagers employ which shows the author's flexibility writing both young and old characters. The inclusion of strong uncensored language when Harry becomes angry or is just joking around with his friends adds to the youth and immaturity of the teenager's dialogue and is a welcome bit of realism. There are a few sequences where Max's comedic lines feel a little forced and make it very clear that he is the comic relief, but that is not because of the slang/informality of his dialogue, just the timing. The teenage language is in direct contrast with Felix's incredibly formal british speaking style. He not only utilizes proper grammar throughout and no slang whatsoever (until the end of the book which only makes it stand out and be more forceful), but he lets loose numerous examples of his british roots. He spouts off some idioms, slang, and even refers to a twenty dollar bill as a twenty dollar note.

Perhaps the most difficult language element of this novel, and most likely required the highest level of research is in the doctor's office and prescription drugs. The doctor characters hold nothing back in their professional doctoral speech which helps to create the realism of a doctor's visit as well as the stress of not fully understanding what is being said. The prescription drugs that Harry takes are accurate for his mental condition and help with the details of what he needs to do to control some of his tics.

Structure

Structurally, this novel follows a chronological pattern from the moment of Ella's heart attack through her death, a month or so later (with an additional five years added on in the epilogue). There is only one true flashback when Felix describes in vivid detail the day that Tom saved him from near death at the hands of his father. This flashback is told entirely in italics, which separates the reader from reality and makes it very clear that this is more of a memory, Felix is reliving this event along with the reader. This adds to the realism as well as the emotional connection to the character of Felix. Felix and Ella both consistently remember their meeting on the London Tube throughout the novel giving the reader a reminder that they have a love at first sight story. Every time that Felix remembers moments with Tom, the reader is reminded of who Felix got his life values and his upbringing from his older brother, not his father. There is a short epilogue



that takes place after Harry has graduated college, but this is told in the same first person narration as the other chapters.

The most important structural decision that the author makes is in the timing between chapters, where she usually shifts point of view between Felix, Harry or Ella. The key aspect of these shifts in terms of structure and pace is that no time has passed between the shift for the majority of the chapters. For some of them, she even rewinds time to give the reader the other side's mind during the last chapter's action. There was only one or two times that there was a significant time lapse between chapters, and this did not interrupt the pace of the novel. The timing and structure of the changing of the narrative guard gives the reader more insight into the minds of every character. It also makes the reader reactionary, as they get the reaction of the next character to the last chapter's action while filling in what is going on in the mind of the other character on their own. The best example of this is when Felix and Harry have a heated argument from Harry's perspective, he slams his bedroom door in anger to end one chapter, and the next chapter begins with Felix hearing that door slam and thinking about what just took place.

This structural chapter turnover system keeps the pace of the novel quick and entertaining, as the only real physical action is the deterioration of Ella's health. It also allows for suspenseful ending to chapters where something will happen to one character (Harry's incident, Ella's heart attack), and then go back in time an hour or half an hour to an uninvolved character's point of view to show the reader how they react when they receive the news and what their actions are prior to arriving in the situation. This structure also allows the author to skip over the parts of the story that a reader can easily fill in themselves such as a trip from an EMS vehicle to the hospital, then to the ER etc. The decision to gradually move Ella to the sideline is a strong one as it lets the reader almost forget that she is a member of the family just as Felix and Harry become so concerned about their own relationship that Ella fades from the center of conversation.



Quotes

After seventeen years of marriage she was tired of being the family fulcrum.

-- Ella (chapter 1 paragraph 11)

Importance: This quote is important in not only establishing Ella's character, but her role in the family. She is the center of her family, and it is weighing on her. This quote is especially important in showing the level of stress she feels especially right before her heart attack.

For sixteen, seventeen next week, she alone had been responsible for the decision making that affected Harry's life.

-- Ella (chapter 1 paragraph 13)

Importance: This quote is significant in defining Ella's role in Harry's life specifically, as she is the sole individual responsible for Harry's current life status and personal well being.

Felix had been the breadwinning workaholic.

-- Ella (chapter 1 paragraph 13)

Importance: This quote hold weight, as it not only informs the reader of Felix's role in the Fitzwilliam family, but gives light to Ella's viewpoint of that role. The term workaholic holds negative weight.

When they met, he used to say no one designed earrings like Ella. Now he said no one wore earrings like Ella. Ella Bella.

-- Felix (chapter 2 paragraph 15)

Importance: This quote is great, as it not only gives the reader insight into the love that Felix has for Ella, it also tells us that she gave up her job as a jewelry designer. Now, the only comments that Felix can make on her jewelry is how she wears it, not how she creates it. This shows how much Ella has given up for the family, along with Felix's adapting level of love for her.

Felix counted and charted the tics every day, seeking nonexistent triggers that could solve the mystery of where the Tourette's came from. He stopped when Ella pointed out that his hovering made the tics worse. The holiday had been ruined then, lost to the knowledge that he'd inflicted pain on his child.

-- Felix (chapter 2 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote is important in establishing Felix as an individual and as a father. He is methodical and organized in his attempts to determine the source of Harry's tics. It also shows that he has a great fear of hurting his son in any way, as he interprets Ella telling him to relax as implying that his actions made the Tourette's even more prevalent.



Without Mom or Max as buffers, Harry was trapped in his own worst nightmare: just him and Dad against the world.

-- Harry (chapter 3 paragraph 12)

Importance: This quote is important in establishing Harry's relationship with his father; he views it as nightmarish to be in a world where he only has his father for support.

But Dad was wrong. Failure was always an option, because the knowledge that you couldn't win every time gave you the courage to try.

-- Harry (chapter 3 paragraph 29)

Importance: This quote is important because it establishes a fundamental difference between Harry and Felix's definition of success. For Felix there is no point in trying and failing, there is only success. Harry has a different opinion because for him, his whole life has been founded on trying to get better and doing so gradually with small failures in between.

Pater called it his annoying habit, but it always made Felix feel better and reminded him not to suck his thumb, which no one but Tom knew he still did. Sometimes he dug his fingernails into his palm hard.

-- Felix (chapter 4 paragraph 23)

Importance: This quote gives the reader insight into Felix's past and present, as he has tics or nervous habits of his own as a result of his father's abuse. At the end of this flashback and later in the novel Felix shows this tic, the palm grabbing one, which gives the reader the thought that Harry's Tourette's could be a result of his father's genes.

But this damaged family was his family. Mine. He shuffled the smooth shell pieces until he had three in each palm. Coins from the ocean. Currency to buy back a life. "Mine".

-- Felix (chapter 6 paragraph Third Section)

Importance: This quote is important for Felix as makes a turning point in his family life. He decides to fight for this family, because unlike his childhood family this one is actually worth it.

Although I'll admit, I had miscast you as the archvillain when you're actually more of the antihero.

-- Katherine (chapter 11 paragraph Section Four)

Importance: This quote shows Katherine's honesty and her willingness to admit she was wrong in her previous judgment. This is a turning point in her relationship with Felix as they have moved on to becoming friends.

A bazillion times during school, he'd think, "I need to tell Mom this." But then the end of the school day came, and it was just him and Dad. And by the time he talked to Mom, he'd forgotten half the school gossip. Mom used to love school gossip. Funny, she didn't seem that interested these days.



-- Harry (chapter 19 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote has significance as it shows the relationship between Harry and his mother prior to the heart attack included he talking about Harry's life all the time, even when it was trivial as gossip is. He does not feel comfortable talking to his dad about this stuff, and is not really used to it. The second half of this quote is important as it shows Ella's shift into depression, often marked by selfish behavior. She is unable to be interested in those aspects of Harry's life anymore. Harry is seemingly oblivious of why that is, although his mom's being in the hospital should make it clear.

In my world, one doesn't discuss mental health. One pretends life is lovely and suffers silently.

-- Felix (chapter 21 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote shows the difference between Felix's and Harry's worldviews. Harry believes that mental health should be talked about with friends in order for the individual to heal. Felix strongly disagrees and feels that life should be a personal struggle. This makes sense based on Felix's background, but is important in seeing exactly how Felix views those who want to get help from others.

Felix pulled out his wallet and pushed a twenty-dollar note across the table.

-- Felix (chapter 21 paragraph Section 2)

Importance: This seemingly innocuous quote is important because Felix still refers to money in the British/European sense, using the word note. This shows that even though he lives in the United States he has not adapted to their culture even in the common everyday object of a dollar bill.

She chose me. All these years he'd been wrong! She hadn't married him because it was the best decision; she'd married him because she wanted him.

-- Felix (chapter 33 paragraph Section 2)

Importance: This is an important quote for the character of Felix as he has the greatest doubt, fear and insecurity of his entire life wiped away by Ella's declaration that she chose him to be her husband and the father of her child. This is a life changing moment for Felix.