

# **Remember Me Like This Study Guide**

**Remember Me Like This by Bret Anthony Johnston**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Remember Me Like This Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Part One: Chapters 1-3.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Part One: Chapters 4-6.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Part Two: Chapters 7-9.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Part Two: Chapters 10-12.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Part Two: Chapters 13-16.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Part Three: Chapters 17-19.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Part Three: Chapters 20-23.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Part Three: Chapters 24-26.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>
<a href="#">Part Four: Chapters 27-29.....</a>	<a href="#">50</a>
<a href="#">Part Four: Chapters 30-33.....</a>	<a href="#">53</a>
<a href="#">Part Four: Chapters 34-Epilogue.....</a>	<a href="#">57</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">61</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">65</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">68</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">70</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">74</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">75</a>



# Plot Summary

Remember Me Like This, by Bret Anthony Johnston, is a story about a family struggling to deal first with the abduction of their son, Justin, and later with his return. The story starts while Justin is still missing. He had been missing for four years at this point.

During his time away, his family experienced many feelings of defeat as they searched for Justin without success. Each family member dealt with these feelings in a different way. When Justin's parents receive a call from the district attorney saying that there has been a development in the case, they rush to the police station in Corpus. They had been called under similar circumstances several times during the last four years to meet with runaways, kidnapped boys, and deceased children who had similar characteristics to their son.

Justin's mother, Laura, is concerned that this will be another false alarm. Happily, it is not, and their son has been brought to the police station, along with his abductor, Dwight Buford. After a medical exam for Justin and a meeting with Mr. Garcia, the district attorney, the Campbells are able to bring Justin home. The family is instructed not to ask Justin questions about his time in captivity. Justin is also required to meet with a social worker/counselor who hopes to help him readjust to life with his family.

The Campbells are overjoyed to have Justin back in their home. Each member of his family tries to spend quality time with him without doing anything to remind him of the tragic circumstances that he encountered while he was away. Just as they are all becoming optimistic about their family becoming whole again, they are informed that Dwight Buford will be released on bond. His rich father, Mayne Buford, is posting his bail. As soon as they find out this information, they begin to worry and all of the progress they've made halts. No one in the family wants to upset Justin and make him worry about Buford being out of jail. Likewise, he doesn't want his family to worry, so he tries to seem calm and unaffected by this event.

While Dwight Buford is out on bond, he remains in the house of his parents. Justin's father, Eric, parks near the Buford home and spies on the house to ensure that Dwight is not roaming about. Mayne Buford, who is a previous acquaintance of Cecil's, Justin's grandfather, has discovered that his home is being watched and asks Cecil to make Eric stop. Mayne also asks Cecil for the opportunity to go out on his boat with his wife and son one last time, and he will convince Dwight to plead guilty and save both families from the agony of a trial. At first, Cecil is enraged and doesn't want anything to do with making a deal. Once Cecil realizes that his son and the entire family are in jeopardy of being ruined by fear, Cecil and Eric devise a plan to make the agreement with Mayne. However, what Mayne doesn't know is that the Campbell men don't plan to let Dwight get on that boat at all. They acquire guns and plan an ambush for early the morning of the boat excursion.

When Laura, Eric's wife, suspects what is about to happen, she asks Cecil to call it off. She explains that their family has been through enough hurt, and this would make



things worse. Cecil waits until the last minute, then tells Eric that it's not a good idea, and they need to let the courts handle the situation. Cecil neglects to tell Eric that he intends to carry out the plan without him. While waiting in the marina, Cecil is met by Mayne who proceeds to inform Cecil that his son, Dwight, is missing. They have no idea where he is, and there will be no boat ride.

As the Campbell family is getting ready for the end of the summer Shrimporee festival, Mr. Garcia calls to inform them that the body of Dwight Buford has been found dead; the cause of death is drowning. The suspicion is that Dwight couldn't handle the pressure of the trial and committed suicide, maybe by jumping from the Harbor Bridge which connects Corpus to the Campbell's town of Southport. With this news, the family is relieved and is able to go the festival feeling safe and secure. They now know that their lives will only improve from here on.



# Prologue

## Summary

In this section, the setting that occurs most commonly throughout the novel is established. The Port of Corpus Christi is located near the town of Southport, Texas, in which the main characters live and suffer from the disappearance and subsequent return of their oldest son, Justin Campbell. The Harbor Bridge crosses over the Port of Corpus Christi which is where an unknown body is discovered. This section describes the construction, the materials, the naming, and the many uses and events associated with the bridge. It also pinpoints the time of the discovery of a floating body in the water below the bridge as the first weekend in September. Although no one thinks of the disappearance of Justin “years before” or any possible connection, this body will have a profound effect on Justin and all of his family.

## Analysis

This section takes place out of sequence with the actual plot line of the story. It is the discovery of the body, at the end, that brings closure to the family. The Prologue is offered to the reader in order to establish tone, setting, and to give some backstory on the case. The theme of Family is touched upon lightly, and lays the foundation for many of the other themes later on in the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the primary location of the story?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the author's purpose for introducing this scene out of sequence?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the possible theme of Family.

## Vocabulary

notoriously, spate, garishly, sullied, sadistic, respite



# Part One: Chapters 1-3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

In this chapter, the reader learns that Eric Campbell is having an affair with Tracy Robichaud, the wife of Dr. Kent Robichaud. Although Eric likes Kent, he tries not to think about him when he's sleeping with Kent's wife. Kent and Tracy own a home in Corpus, but come to their condo in Villa Del Sol, Southport, to be closer to the marina. The Robichauds are wealthy. They have high end kitchen counters and luxurious furnishings as well as separate air conditioners for the first and second floor of the condo.

Eric teaches seventh grade and is currently teaching summer school. He meets with Tracy on Wednesdays after class. His son, Griffin who just turned 14, usually sleeps in or plays video games until it is cool enough to go skateboarding. He is required to call either his mom or dad for permission to leave the house when he's home alone. Because Griffin is the only person who usually calls Eric, he is not concerned that his wife, Laura, will call to ask what he is doing. Laura works for a dry cleaner and volunteers at the Marine Lab in Corpus where she is currently assisting in the care of a bottle-nose dolphin that was found beached. The family routine is always the same, especially on these Wednesdays when Eric is being unfaithful. The three family members meet at the house for dinner to talk about their day, and Laura excuses herself directly after dinner to retire to her room for the night, even if the sun is still shining.

Eric recalls that, years before their son, Justin, went missing, Eric took Laura and the boys to the Villa Del Sol to look at the model homes. There was no way they could afford such luxury in a home, and Laura tried to make him feel more at ease by explaining that she and the boys loved the house they still lived in, although it needed a new roof and the foundation had to be raised regularly, and that he had no reason to feel that he constantly owed them more. During that same house hunting afternoon, Laura told Eric that she was concerned that Justin, then 9 years old, had asked her to marry him and was crushed when she said she was already married. Eric had just said that Justin had good taste in women.

In the present day, Eric is at Tracy's condo and thinking about how he can't remember the last time that he saw his wife, Laura, naked. Since Justin went missing four years ago, she had lost a lot of weight, let her hair grow, and stopped shaving her legs or under her arms. He doesn't worry that she'll call or catch him on his Wednesday adulterous meetings because she never calls his phone nor asks where he's been or what's he's doing. Tracy wants him to stay with her longer, but he is determined to get more flyers up about Justin's disappearance, one that lists the reward money that he and Laura had double-mortgaged their house to put up. Despite the length of time Justin's been gone, Eric keeps his flyers and billboards up-to-date. Eric also wants to



leave to get shrimp for dinner. Griffin has recently been acting weirdly and not eating regularly, and Eric suspects that his behavior is thanks to some girl Griffin is interested in.

Through his discussion with Tracy before leaving her for the day and through memories that Eric flashes back to, the reader learns a lot about Justin; he was a skateboarder; he loved the Blue Angels; he collected rocks; and he had been excited about starting middle school. The reader also learns a lot about Griffin, the younger son; he admired his brother and wanted to mimic him; he had gone through a period of time where he lost a lot of friends and got into a lot of fights; and he's feeling down because of some girl who is older than he is.

Tracy's story begins to develop as well. She's crying when Eric goes to leave her for the day. She claims that it's not his fault, but she does sometimes cry about him. The reader learns that Tracy is a writer for a travel magazine. Although she really doesn't travel to the destinations that she writes about, her publisher sends her a package containing information, statistics, and other interesting tips about the place she's to pretend to visit each month.

The Robichauds live across the street from two elderly ladies, Ruth and Beverly Wilcox, who are very aware of the affair between Tracy and Eric. These ladies are both widows who watch through their window the comings and goings of Eric and Tracy. They have noticed that Eric's wife, Laura, has stopped coming to church on Sundays and that he looks beaten down. They believe that the loss of a child beats the loss of anyone else in a person's life, and they feel sorry for him. They call his Wednesdays with Tracy "The Soap" as if it's more interesting to them than a soap opera on television. Ruth remembers the one time that she had come into contact with the Campbells and their boys before Justin went missing. Justin, although at the time Ruth didn't know the child's name, ran around the ladies acting so rowdy that they almost fell. Ruth recalls Eric making Justin apologize to the ladies and later that day, Justin giving her a small rock from his collection as a way to make it up to her.

## Chapter 2

Laura loves to work in the Marine Lab in Corpus. She is currently helping nurse a bottle-nose dolphin to health. She sometimes asks Eric if he wants to come and help out there, but is always relieved when he declines. Laura had previously been seen as a competent, pretty lady, but since Justin's disappearance, she admits that she has made drastic changes in all aspects of her life. She actually is cognizant enough of this fact that she's glad her parents are not living to see what she has become. She has become so disconcerted in public that Eric has had to leave school to come and pick her up. She has been warned by authorities for shoplifting nail polish from a store. She acted out by throwing a glass of sweet tea in the face of a woman who asked about Justin, and had purposely slammed her fingers in drawers, locked herself in the bathroom, and sat in the empty tub until day turned to night. She joined many different local support groups for grieving parents to no avail. It wasn't until she began volunteering at the Marine Lab that she truly found some peace. Working under her maiden name, she ensured the



security of her identity. At the lab, she felt anonymous peace and had the opportunity to focus on helping sea animals instead of obsessing about Justin's disappearance.

At the present, Laura is very invested in her job of caring for the wounded dolphin that had been found beached and injured by Eddie Cavazos, who names the dolphin Alice. Laura's attention to Alice is therapeutic. On this particular Wednesday, she stays with Alice well after the end of her shift. A sparrow has flown into the lab, and Laura watches the bird and wonders if Alice can hear the chirps of the bird too. Because Laura's work relief is feeling ill from her pregnancy, the woman's husband is filling in for her, and he doesn't really know what he's doing. Laura watches him watch Alice and explains some facts about dolphins. Laura knows these things from her work there, of course, but also from the many library books that she's studied. Although the books are well overdue, no one contacts Laura to ask for their return.

She finally realizes that she needs to make the hour's drive from the Lab to her house in Southport. She knows Eric is planning to fry shrimp for dinner, and she wants to get Griffin a copy of a skateboarding magazine to cheer him up because of his recent sadness over some girl. Laura also reminisces about her earlier years with Eric. They would go floundering at night and enjoyed themselves so much, they would stay out all night. She loved those days; she also loves the dolphin necklace that Eric and Griffin gave her as a gift. Because she doesn't wear it, she knows they feel they have given her the wrong gift. She just doesn't care enough about herself that, besides not remembering to eat, she has also lost her interest in jewelry.

Before she starts her car to drive away, she becomes vaguely aware of Eric pulling up beside her. He insists that she get into the car for a required trip to Corpus. Laura begins to feel faint. She has flashbacks to the days of searching for Justin and stares at the stars looking for the constellation forming Delphinus, which is dolphin-shaped. She feels herself in the air, looking down on Eric and herself in the parking lot, until she is enveloped by Eric's arm and helped to the truck.

### Chapter 3

Cecil, Eric's dad, is working in his store, the Loan Star Pawnshop, when his employee Ivan takes a message from Eric asking his dad to pick up Griffin and to allow the boy no TV, radio, or internet. Although Cecil wishes he could talk to Eric, he slowly and surely moves forward with his son's instructions. He goes to Eric's house expecting to find Griff, who is not there, and instead finds Rainbow, the family dog, barreling through the gate and meeting him at his truck. He is worried about how to explain to Griffin the "randomness" of a visit from his grandfather. In this chapter, the reader learns that Cecil is a tough old guy who has been imprisoned for gambling and is in possession of an unregistered, illegally obtained handgun about which he has no intention of telling his family. Being such a tough guy himself, Cecil worries about Eric. Cecil and his deceased wife, Connie, always wanted more for their son than they had....maybe college, getting out of Texas, etc. After her death, Cecil worries that they made a mistake in not toughening up Eric. Cecil worries that despite the stoic front that Eric tries to display, that he is truly the most vulnerable in the situation, not Laura or Griffin.





When Cecil gets to Eric's house, he doesn't find Griffin, but does find the unkempt backyard that he now realizes his son has been keeping from him out of shame for about a year. He sees that even Rainbow's bowl is full of water, but not clean. Cecil calls for Rainbow, who runs to meet him at the truck. Together they set out to look for Griffin.

After checking the Whataburger, the grocery store, and a few other places, he is not able to find Griff. As he rides, he thinks about the fact that most people already assume Justin is dead, but his family hasn't gotten there yet. He worries about what kind of emergency his son is experiencing at this moment. He compares their entire situation to a hurricane. Cecil becomes frantic when he doesn't locate Griffin, while at the same time he's reliving the events of life since Justin's disappearance. He calms himself by bringing a vision of his wife Connie into focus. While stuck in traffic, contemplating the extreme heat, and worrying about his family's woes, he decides to turn the truck around and head for the marina, where he hopes to find Griffin.

## Analysis

### Chapter 1

Although Eric does seem to feel guilty about his affair with Tracy, he continues cheating anyway, as if he can either justify his reasons for doing this or place the indiscretions out of his mind completely. As he showers and gets dressed to leave his secret afternoon with Tracy, he thinks about his current relationship with his wife. He is saddened that she doesn't call him or even ask where he goes or what he does, like she doesn't even care. He focuses on his wife, Laura's, behavior since Justin's disappearance four years prior. It's as if the distance that she seems to be putting between herself and her family is a justifiable reason for Eric's affair. Eric further focuses on the physical changes in Laura; such as her lack of hygiene by neglecting to shave her legs and under her arms, her total disregard of her appearance by allowing her hair to grow unkempt and losing unhealthy amounts of weight. In addition to these changes is her obvious façade of trying to act interested in the family's daily activities, only to have superficial discussions and retire to her room before the sun goes down. All of these instances point to one of the largest themes in the novel: grief.

Eric, obviously, has a love for his wife as he remembers the way they used to be before their family tragedy. As he recalls their visit to the very housing development that he goes to for his weekly affair now, he remembers Laura as alluring and beautiful. He is reminded that that very day Laura expressed her worry to Eric over the fact that Justin had asked his mother to marry him, that she told him she's already married, and after seeing that he was crushed, allowed him to sneak the family Lab, Rainbow, into his room for the night. As she expressed her concerns to Eric, he merely explained that his son had good taste in women. This explains that Eric had a great love for his wife; he watched her normal movements in secret admiration of her physical attributes. Because he struggles to put these thoughts from his mind, it alerts the reader to the fact that he needs to pretend that he still feels the same way, despite his extra-marital affair. It also



helps him to justify in his own mind that what he is doing is okay because she is not the same person he married.

The fact that Laura worried about Justin's "proposal" makes the reader think that Laura was concerned about her son's development, maybe an unnatural attachment to her. But, Eric merely saw the incident as an innocent event and felt there was no need to be concerned. He revels in these memories. He demonstrates the theme of Perseverance versus Giving Up, in comparison to his wife's fragile emotional and mental state.

Eric has the ability to not only separate his regular life with his family from the affair; he also mentions that he actually likes Tracy's husband, Kent, whom he also places out of his mind during the afternoon trysts with Kent's wife. Tracy, also, doesn't seem bothered by her indiscretions with Eric. She cries when Eric is preparing to leave. She tells him that her tears are not about him, but this is a lie. As yet, her entire emotions are not revealed, but she does feel sad when Eric gets dressed to leave. She asks about his family's intimate daily dealings and rituals as if she were part of his "real" life. She doesn't, however, mention her husband at all. She mentions cleaning the sheets once Eric leaves, which implies that she is erasing the evidence of her dalliance.

The only other people she mentions are the elderly widows who watch her from across the street and whom she also watches. Tracy is shown to have empathy for these old women who seem to be without proper air conditioning, expressing her desire to buy them one. Whether she feels guilty about the affair or not is unclear at this point in the novel; however, her concern for the ladies shows that she is not a hard-hearted person. Her interest in discussing Eric's family proves that she feels alone, isolated, and desirous of being included in a family.

Ruth and Bev Wilcox are the elderly widows who live across the street from the Robichauds in the neighborhood of Villa Del Sol. The ladies are very nosy and watch from their window the comings and goings of Eric Campbell as he obviously carries on an affair with Tracy Robichaud. Although most people, especially from their generation, would believe that an affair is wrong, the ladies actually make light of it and watch the comings and goings of Eric at Tracy's home. They express how sad they feel about the fact that his son is missing and that his wife no longer attends church with him on Sundays. Where the ladies may not normally condone such behavior, they seem to understand and even encourage his need for female companionship. They believe he is a good father as they remember a time when one of his boys was rude to them, and Eric made the boy apologize. The boy later gave one of the ladies a rock that he had from his collection as a gift of apology. This action, although not forced by Eric, made the ladies believe that he had done a good job raising the boys. They do not think of, or mention, the wife's role in the boys' upbringing, but merely sympathize with Eric because Laura seems to be spiraling out of control and not helping with the welfare or advancement of the family.

Through his use of similes, descriptive imagery, and detailed description of characters, the author helps to further explain why Eric is unfaithful to Laura and offers the reader a chance to not condemn his actions, but to sympathize with his situation.



## Chapter 2

Although Laura is aware that her behavior is unacceptable and odd, she cannot seem to control herself. She consciously realizes that others are trying to make her feel better, but she is separating herself from all outside contacts lest she have an episode of grief and a dramatic outburst. In her own way, knowing that she is not helping anyone, especially herself, deal with Justin's disappearance, she does try to get help. First, she tries attending the grieving groups. When that doesn't work, she begins to volunteer at the Marine Lab. She finds that this is the only location in which she feels calm and at peace.

In the Marine Lab, she doesn't have to have constant reminders of her loss. She volunteers under her maiden name, so no one knows that she is the mother of the missing boy. She is able to separate herself from her painful daily life and concentrate on helping the animals. Although Eric feels it's a good distraction for Laura, she knows that it's actually a place for her to decompress peacefully, detach herself from her problems, and regain enough emotional energy to deal with her time in the real world. The Lab is like an emotional charging station for her.

While on duty at the Lab, Laura is engulfed in the care of the sick dolphin, Alice. Laura is very meticulous about monitoring Alice's condition and noting them in her file. She is able to channel her motherly care into the sick animal, but she doesn't realize that she has another son who needs her mothering comforts more than Alice. Laura may have lost Justin, but Griffin, who also has to deal with the pain of loss, needs her support and care. Instead, she avoids her family, trying to distance herself from the trauma that being with them causes; although, she does not realize the added agony and burdens that she is placing on her family who are also grieving and distressed about Justin. She is aware of her detrimental behavior because she expresses that she is relieved that her parents are not alive to see how she is acting.

Her fragile state of mind can be seen as Eric drives into the parking lot, telling her to get in and travel with him to Corpus, and she is in a trance-like state. She needs assistance getting into the car and collapses in Eric's arms. Laura is in such a state of depression that she has given up on her physical appearance, her family ties, her political correctness in public, and even her common sense. She may have lost Justin, but her family has lost Justin and Laura.

## Chapter 3

When a family member can understand a short-handed message like, "Pick up Griff. No TV, radio, computer" and realize that the emergency most likely has to do with his missing grandson, it shows that Cecil is really tuned into his son's needs. Cecil realizes the importance of his mission. He wants very much to protect and support his family. Cecil does not believe in moving fast; he's more calculating and methodical because this is his way of keeping the situation in control. That's exactly what he is doing in his search for Griffin. From Eric's message, he understands the importance of finding Griffin



as soon as possible, but also knows that rushing around without careful planning will get him nowhere.

As he drives, he recalls many emotions that have plagued his family and the town since Justin's disappearance. Although his family may not realize it yet, the members of their community already believe that Justin is dead. Cecil knows that he must be strong for his son and the rest of the family. Initially, Cecil and Connie tried to create a new, easier life for their son, Eric. Their intention included him going to college and leaving Texas. Since Connie passed away when Eric was only 17, Cecil is worried that he did a poor job of making Eric a strong, tough person emotionally. Outwardly, the town sees Laura falling apart and Griffin getting into fights and losing friends, while Eric puts on a brave face. Only his father, Cecil, sees beyond that mask and believes that Eric is the most emotionally fragile of them all. Although Cecil is methodical and moves with caution, he is becoming alarmed by not finding Griffin. When Cecil is in distress, he focuses on his wife, Connie, who has a calming effect on him.

Secrets run rampant throughout this family. Although Cecil does not advocate violence, he does keep the secret of owning an unregistered gun which he hides under his truck seat. He wants this to remain a secret from his family, but is comforted by its existence and the ease at which he can obtain it for use to protect his family. In addition to Cecil's secret, Eric's secret is discovered when Cecil sees his son's back yard. Cecil is a proud man and has obviously passed that trait on to his son who hides that fact that his yard has gone to ruin. Cecil encounters the yard as he looks for Griffin and is finally cognizant of the fact that Eric has avoided showing his dad his back yard for at least a year. The unruly, unattended back yard at Eric Campbell's house is his "tell" to his father, Cecil. This is strong evidence to Cecil that Eric is merely wearing a mask. His normally manicured lawn is no longer maintained; knowing this would mean something to Cecil, Eric avoids allowing Cecil to see his backyard for about a year.

Thus far, the reader has been exposed to many concealed emotions and attitudes. Laura is acting completely out of character by having public, angry outbursts, disassociation with her family, and ignoring her own physical appearance. Since Justin's disappearance, Griffin has often been in fights and is losing friends, despite their problems which are seen by all, Eric's faking of being the all-together-strong-guy is only seen by Cecil. At this point, Cecil doesn't know that Eric has gone as far as straying from his marriage.

## Discussion Question 1

Despite a lack of discussion about Kent, what is the intended impression of the relationship between Tracy and Eric?

## Discussion Question 2

Being a convicted felon, why would Cecil risk owning and carrying an unregistered gun?



## Discussion Question 3

What makes Cecil believe that Eric's masked strong behavior is more worrisome than Laura's public outbursts?

## Vocabulary

notoriously, spate, garishly, sullied, sadistic, respite, ethereal, moot, tedious, succumb, stalwart, arrogance, austerity, refracting, stoically, façade, capaciousness, mordant, ballast



# Part One: Chapters 4-6

## Summary

### Chapter 4

Eric and Laura are racing to Corpus to the DA's office. Eric received a call that they should get there as quickly as possible. The authorities won't tell them what is going on, but this type of summons has occurred before. Previously, they have been called to Corpus to identify runaways and dead bodies that resemble Justin's description. As with this invitation, they have never been told what to expect when they arrive, just to get there as soon as possible.

Eric is driving above the speed limit trying to get them to the destination to find out what's going on. Laura is in shock. Her behavior is not much different than it has been for the past several years, but she is in the truck without a seat-belt acting as if she doesn't understand why this is happening. Eric urges her to buckle up. He's driving fast and dangerously. Eric is nervous himself; otherwise, he would not be driving recklessly.

Laura remembers to ask Eric if she needs to call someone to let him/her know that they've been summoned to the authorities in Corpus. He informs her that he's already contacted his dad, Cecil, who will be getting Griffin and keeping him away from all media. Laura feels guilty remembering that over the years she has wondered if things would be different if Griffin instead of Justin had been taken. She, then, realizes that it would be impossible to choose if she had been faced with the dilemma of choosing the fate of one of her children over the other. This brings home one of the other themes of the novel, which is that of Family Hardships. In many respects, the mother is the backbone of the family, holding everyone together. With Laura falling apart, so, too, has the family.

On the trip to Corpus, Laura does something she hasn't done in years. She begins to think of things that normal people would consider in an event such as this. She asks Eric where he was and what he was doing when he got the call. Eric is surprised and unprepared for those questions, but he falls back on what he believes will be a sensible answer. He tells her he was just leaving school, which Laura believes makes sense. Laura also realizes that she is going to this important meeting wearing a dirty t-shirt from work that smells of fish and wearing her hair long and stringy instead of at least in a tidy ponytail.

### Chapter 5

Griffin is totally infatuated with Fiona Moore. He first knows that she is interested in him when they are hanging with friends outside the Whataburger on Station Street. Fiona walks across the parking lot and kisses him...his first kiss. He can't stop thinking about how good she smells and the fact that she's made the first move. Griffin goes home and



stares for hours at her yearbook picture. She wears mostly black all the time. She is very smart and belongs to the National Honor Society, but she does things to get herself in trouble at school. She claims to love Halloween and hate Christmas. She tries to look like a tough girl. Fiona is two years older than Griffin, the same age as his missing brother, Justin. She is old enough to drive, but chooses to only ride her bike. Until she made that first move, she and Griff were just friends.

She uses her bike to pull Griff on his skateboard. At one point, Fiona admits that she once had a crush on Justin. This evokes the realization in Griff that he, too, harbors a similar feeling for his older brother. Although Fiona usually dates older guys, she has her sights set on Griff. She doesn't keep it a secret; as a matter of fact, she calls his name one day as he's skateboarding and she's riding by on her bike and pulls up her shirt to flash her "lacy black bra" at him.

While still in an undetermined relationship with Fiona, Griffin goes to her house, sits in her room, and listens to her guy problems, offering advice, but hoping she'll choose him. Once as Fiona leaves her room to steal rum from her parent's liquor cabinet, Griffin takes off his socks, soaks them in her perfume, and later puts them in a zip lock bag first in his closet and later between his mattresses, so he can smell her whenever he wants. This is Griff's way of coping and pushing aside the constant pain of his brother's loss. The theme of Coping is demonstrated in his actions.

For days after the surprise kiss at Whataburger, Griffin's calls have gone unanswered. He worries that he's a bad kisser, she lost a bet and had to kiss him, or even worse, that she only kissed him because of his brother. He is miserable, but he doesn't tell anyone. He just tells his mom he has a sick stomach and needs to stay home from school.

Since Justin's disappearance, people at school have treated Griff differently. He's been invited to parties, picked for teams, and so forth, but Fiona has not pitied him. He fears that is changing now. His school status is not the only change in his life. His parents, who formerly were loving toward each other, now fight all the time or ignore each other. Griff assumes that one day soon, they will be divorced. Because Griff has tin-foiled his windows and is acting odd, Eric tries to cheer him up and to see if he can find out Griff's reason for acting differently. Eric offers to take Griff for late night burgers and asks if he wants to talk. When trying to make Griff feel better, more optimistic, he always brings up traveling and taking family trips. Laura and Griff both understand that and give each other knowing glances, but don't burst Eric's bubble when he's trying to cheer them up.

This occurs the Tuesday night before his parents are called to Corpus. Griff hears his mom up in the middle of the night washing dishes. He knows that his parents grieve terribly for Justin, and he does too, but he doesn't want to tell them that he is slowly forgetting him...little things about him; his memories are fuzzy. He tries to remember details about his brother. He remembers details about Justin such as his favorite TV shows, things he hates, and things he likes.

Unfortunately, his most vivid memories of Justin are when Justin was mean to him. He doesn't want to tell his parents about those times. The very day that Justin went





missing, before he left, he had been very mean to Griff. He poured salt into his drink instead of sugar, kicked Griff in the privates when he threatened to tell, and other similar actions. He made vague attempts to apologize, but Griff wouldn't accept. When Justin left, they never saw him again. Griff never told his parents what happened. Griff also feels guilty because Justin had offered for Griff to go with him that day, and because he was mad Griff said no. Griff believes had he gone, Justin may not have been taken.

On the Wednesday that his parents are called to Corpus, Griff is at the empty pool on the grounds of the Teepee Motel where he usually skates. He is hoping to see Fiona, but since she isn't there and he doesn't want to look like he's waiting for her, he gets a broom and starts sweeping the empty pool in preparation of safe skating. Fiona eventually shows up. She has dyed her hair bright green which Griff doesn't care for, but tells her he likes it. They begin to reminisce about a seagull that a fellow student, Blake Boggs, injured and what has become of it. Griff knows that Coach Cantu wrung the bird's neck

Just as Fiona is about to kiss Griff, they hear a loud whistle. It's Griff's papaw, Cecil, looking for him. Griff doesn't want to act as if he is scared of his papaw, but in fact he is. Cecil tells Griff that business is slow and when he drove by their house, the dog ran out to him. He offers to keep "Rainbow's escape to himself" if Griff will help him clean out the garage. Cecil will even feed him steak for dinner. Griff knows he has to agree; he also realizes that Fiona has already gone when he turns to say goodbye.

## Chapter 6

(Flashback)

When Justin first disappeared, the entire town worried and searched with the family. They hung posters, searched the areas, and tried to support the family in any way they could. They believed that the Campbell family was a very nice family and were very nice individually. The police covered the area in search of Justin...after days, months, and then years, he was still missing. People tried to appear optimistic in front of the family, but truly felt it was hopeless. In one of the shops where posters were hung worked a psychic, Ms. Esther. She told the family she had a vision of Justin's capture, but it was very vague. Laura went back a few times trying to get a sharper image from the woman, but to no avail. Finally, Cecil paid Ms. Esther a visit and insisted that she never speak to his family again. Eventually, search parties stopped, sympathetic mail dwindled, and the town went back to its usual daily tasks. After the second year of his disappearance, a post card arrived post marked Bakersfield, California saying, "Don't Stop Looking". The post card is placed on the 'fridge as a sign of hope.

Because Justin would be turning 16 in November, he had begun getting the normal mail teenagers get from credit card companies, advertisements, etc. Laura couldn't bear to throw them away, so she put a container in his room and saves all of his mail, junk or not. She also kept his room exactly as it was the day he left and continued to buy him birthday and Christmas presents— all of which she stored in his room. Before his abduction, Justin had made each family member a painting. Each family member





cherished that art work and each family member still hung his or her picture. Sometimes, when his parents wouldn't know or suspect, Griff would go into Justin's room to look at his things. He even took a t-shirt or two that he has now grown into.

In the present day, Eric and Laura sit quietly in the police station while a deputy tells them that a boy matching Justin's description has been picked up with a man at the Tradewinds Flea Market. Someone had recognized Justin from the flyers and called the police. The man is being questioned and the FBI is on their way to interview him as well. At that moment, the boy is undergoing a medical exam. Before being brought into the room with the couple, the deputy tries making small talk about the hot weather. Laura wants to ask specific questions. She asks which vendor at the flea market Justin was at when the woman recognized him. The deputy tells her that he was buying mice to feed his snake. Laura can't wrap her mind around this statement because Justin had previously been afraid of snakes. Laura is sure it is not Justin. When Solomon Garcia, the district attorney, enters the room he is followed by a young man who turns out to be Justin. Both parents can't stop touching him to see if he is real. When they tell him they never stopped looking, he nods that he knew that already. Laura cries, and Eric does his best to stay strong and not cry, but he isn't able to hold it in.

As Eric watches Justin walk, he detects a slight limp that had never been there before. Laura notices the same thing as Justin walks to the rest room. As Laura and Justin wait in the main part of the station, Eric is taken into an interview room with Mr. Garcia where he is briefed about what to expect in the coming days and months. Eric is assured that the kidnapper is not his retarded neighbor, Ronnie Dawes, as once suspected. He is told that Dwight Buford, a 41-year-old white male who delivers newspapers in Corpus, is the assailant. As Eric asks for details about Justin's capture, he becomes so ill he has to throw up in the garbage can. Garcia sends them home with strict instructions not to ask Justin anything about what has happened to him. They are told Justin will be meeting with them starting tomorrow, and then regularly, until they get all they need to know.

Meanwhile, Cecil is keeping Griffin occupied at his house. They clean the garage and load his truck to haul away the junk. Cecil makes them bologna sandwiches, not steak, and Griffin stews over being taken from Fiona just when she was about to kiss him again. When the phone rings, it is Eric telling Cecil he has someone who wants to speak with him.

As they prepare to leave the station, and during the ride home, Eric and Laura act differently toward each other. They hold hands; Eric brings her hand to his mouth to kiss her. They acknowledge that bringing Justin home under these circumstances is very similar to when they brought him home as a new-born baby. Mostly, they are thrilled but do not know what to expect.

## Analysis

### Chapter 4



The theme of Grief is evident in this chapter as Laura's deteriorated physical and mental state parallel the deteriorated state that the entire family is in. As Eric arrives to pick up Laura to take her to the DA's office, he is met by the same shaky, disoriented, fragile person he has been living with since Justin's disappearance. She collapses into his arms and must be helped into the truck. She sits in a trance in the front seat of the truck without wearing a seatbelt. Eric must tell her over and over again to buckle up. She seems frantic about what awaits them. She asks Eric questions about the official's tone of voice or any hints he may have picked up from the call. Although she asks Eric if she should call someone, when he mentions that his dad will be picking up Griffin, Laura seems to come to or sober up to the situation. First, she is reminded that many times over the years, she has imagined that it was Griffin that was taken instead of Justin. After considering this shocking thought, she realizes that she would be unable to ever choose between her children...which one she would rather be missing.

After she is shocked into this realization, she starts to acknowledge the reality of her current situation. She is acting mentally unstable, her clothes are dirty and smelly, and her hair is unkempt and dirty. What kind of sight would she be to the officials in the office, or worse yet, to Justin if they have truly found him? At this point, she does not look or act at all like the mother from whom he was stolen. Before reaching the station, Eric's shaky hand takes Laura's as a sign of support and shared fear. This marks the first time that Laura reaches her normal senses in years. This is shown by the facts that she thinks about Griffin, thinks about where Eric was when he receives the call, and thinks about her overall appearance. Not only does she think of how she looks, but she realizes that it is inappropriate to be in public, as she is improperly dressed and groomed.

Eric, who has sought the comfort of another woman, holds hands with his wife on this nerve-racking trip because they previously had a strong connection and happy life, they both have gone through this terrible ordeal together, and depending on what they learn, they may be on a road to recovery.

## Chapter 5

When Fiona expresses that she had a crush on Justin, it forces Griff to realize that he had somewhat of a crush on Justin too. He, obviously, doesn't have a romantic crush on him; he just admires - almost idolizes - Justin, first as his older brother and second as his missing, idealized brother. Griff harbors guilty feelings about Justin. He doesn't tell his parents the bad things that Justin did to him because he doesn't want to tarnish their memory of him, and he feels like in a way it's his fault anyway. He also feels guilty that at 14 he's forgetting many things about his brother who was taken when he was 10. His parents are holding on to memories of Justin so desperately, he feels they will not understand if he is forgetting. They may think he no longer cares for Justin. He already sees that his parents' relationship is unstable and doesn't want to add any trouble to their already shaky situation.

Griff is experiencing the first feelings of love for Fiona. They begin their relationship as friends, but he falls under her spell when she makes the first move and kisses him. She



previously dated older guys, or so she said, and would ask Griff for advice concerning her love life all the while he had a crush on her. Although pouring her cologne on his socks to smell her later sounds strange, many 14-year-old boys with crushes on girls do similar things. He doesn't want his parents to know, though.

Because he feels the guilt of beginning to forget his brother and the burden of worrying that his parents are splitting up, he doesn't want to bother them with his Fiona situation. The theme of Guilt is evident and demonstrated in this section as Griff attempts to live a normal life, but here, even in an innocent interaction with his first girlfriend, the ghost of his brother's disappearance haunts him. He may not have told them about her, even if his life were back to normal, because many boys think of girls in their lives as secret subjects where parents are concerned. At this point, Fiona has not yet expressed her true feelings for Griff. She kissed him, but then hasn't returned his calls. He is stuck in a world of uncertainty and uncharted territory. This is a topic that a younger brother may discuss with his older brother, that is, if Justin were around.

His parents, who are usually wrapped up in grief over Justin or avoiding their own problems, have noticed that Griff is acting strangely. Eric offers to take Griff out for late night burgers where they can talk, but Griff isn't interested. Both Eric and Griff act in ways that they think are being protective of the other; meanwhile, neither feels comforted.

Cecil tries to be the strong one in the family. Since Eric left the message to get Griff and allow no media, Cecil figures that this has something to do with Justin. Cecil tries to find Griff before whatever may appear in the media is exposed. Although Cecil, himself, is worried and wonders what's going on, he does as his son asks and tries to occupy Griff until further notice.

## Chapter 6

In the beginning of this trauma, the entire town, police, friends, as well as the family, had searched and were positive that Justin would be found. As time goes by, everyone is still polite and tries to seem optimistic even though they have lost hope. Instead of giving in to losing hope, Eric and Laura have, over the years, turned away from each other and changed individually in many ways. It's as if the longer that Justin has gone missing, the worse they are as individuals and as a couple.

Before actually seeing Justin, Laura refuses to believe that he's the boy who has been found. She is reminded of the several times before that they have been summoned to the police station to identify live and dead boys in hopes of finding Justin. Laura is already emotionally fragile; she's scared of getting her hopes up and finding that this boy is not her son. Neither she nor Eric can believe that Justin has been only an hour away for all of these years. They are overwhelmed with joy when they finally see the boy who is undeniably their son, Justin. Eric and Laura can't stop touching him as if it's all really a dream. Justin doesn't seem to be bothered by this attention. He claims to be as happy to return home as they are to have him back.



As Eric is taken into an interview room to be debriefed, Laura sits in the main station and is in awe of the fact that her son is really back. Many emotions flood the parents; they both cry and let go of pent-up emotions that have plagued them since his disappearance. Laura doesn't want to let Justin out of her sight. Eric is debriefed by Mr. Garcia. He is told very little about what happened to Justin during the four missing years; however, he is told the name of the abductor, Dwight Buford, and where he lives, but not much else. At the thought of all of the bad things that could have happened to Justin, Eric becomes overwhelmed and throws up in the garbage can. They have their son back, but have very few answers to the missing time. They are also asked not to question Justin about what happened to him. Although this is distressing, they are more excited about his return.

Another odd emotion that begins to appear is the loving feelings and actions between the estranged Eric and Laura. Once they verify that it is truly Justin, they hold hands, smile at each other, Eric kisses her hand, and they appear to be a loving couple. They liken taking Justin home now to the day they brought him home as an infant. They are excited, but have no idea what is to come or what to expect.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Family.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Guilt.

## Discussion Question 3

How has each family member felt guilty about Justin's disappearance?

## Vocabulary

maudlin, feigned, oblivion, banality, morose, cloistered, unassailable, deferential, cloying, replete, demoralizing, goaded, vestal, pristine, rebar, pivoted, trawling



## Part Two: Chapters 7-9

### Summary

#### Chapter 7

Word of Justin's return sparks joyous celebrations all over town. He is not ready to be seen in public. The family tiptoes around Justin's actions and feelings once home. His sleep is inverted. He sleeps all day and is awake at night. At first, his parents check on him to see if he is okay. Gradually, they are comforted as they fall asleep by the noises they hear him making as he makes sandwiches, watches TV, etc. They are overjoyed when they see old habits like leaving a messy bed, holding burping contests in Griff's room, and cutting pancakes with a fork instead of a knife. Some things have changed about Justin since they last saw him, though. He has become lactose intolerant, his voice has become deeper, he's grown taller and bigger, he reads the newspaper, and drinks black coffee. Despite these changes, Eric and Laura are overjoyed at the fact that they are turning back into a real family.

Eric and Laura feel very strange about not having all of the facts about Justin's time away. They feel helpless about the fact that they don't know what Buford looks like, or any other details about him. They are only told that he had weapons and pornography in his home as well as video games, a karaoke machine, and a foosball game, among other things. Eric feels like he's at a disadvantage because he doesn't know any more than that about Buford. He is somewhat pacified when he watches the first press conference and realizes that the public is not told as much as the family had been, that despite asking to see Justin, the public is denied, and that the district attorney asked the public to leave the family alone. Eric starts to feel more in control after this press conference.

The family watches Justin intently. In addition to the other changes, Justin has become very tidy, and Griff follows suit. Although he limps, his medical reports do not comment about what happened, so the family still doesn't know why. Because he squints his eyes, they believe he may need glasses. He does complain about a sore tooth and needs to visit the dentist.

Changes happened almost daily after Justin's return. Reporters ask for interviews to which Laura says no. They set up weekly visits with Letty Villarreal, the social worker in Corpus, and animal control returns Justin's gray rat snake, Sasha, to him at his home. When he was found at the flea market, he had mice for feeding Sasha in a bag. He brought the mice to the house that same night, and Laura couldn't bear the thought of them dying, so she named them and took care of them as pets.

Luckily, the press respected the wishes of the district attorney to leave the family alone. Instead of hounding the family, they focus on Buford's boss and the neighbors at his home, the Bay Breeze Suites in Flour Bluff. Although the family is asked not to question



Justin about his time away, he has many questions about what happened at home while he was gone. Laura takes leave from work and her volunteering at the Marine Lab. She calls it maternity leave. Just as when she had been on maternity leave when she first had Justin, she resumed the habit of calling Eric during the day to tell him what Justin was doing at that time. Every night now, Fiona visits the house and stays for dinner and to play games, then Griff walks her home. Justin is surprised that Griff has a girlfriend; he is realizing the big changes that happened there while he was gone.

Eric realizes that he has not been alone with Justin very much since his return. After thinking about it, he senses that he never really has spent much time with Justin, but has idealized what their relationship was while Justin was missing. Eric begins to feel uneasy for an unexplained reason. One night, Eric finds Justin in the back yard with the dog. He is taken off guard when Justin tells Eric out of the blue that he went on Buford's paper route with him. He explains that that is the reason his days and nights were confused. Justin then explains to Eric that Buford will plead not guilty because that's what he said he'd do if he were ever caught.

## Chapter 8

Buford's plea of not guilty is not a surprise to anyone, but it somehow infuriates Eric. Meanwhile, Laura remains unaffected. She pretends to be upset, but really doesn't care about the trial at all. She doesn't seem to care about anything that happened before Justin returned home, nothing good or bad. She realizes that she was not an easy person to live with or to be around while Justin was missing. She even admits that she doesn't deserve the second chance she's been given, based on her former actions. On the other hand, Eric is very upset with the situation. Buford is being represented by a high-end lawyer, Edward Livingstone, who has taken his case for free. Where Laura doesn't want to see the court proceeding more than that first time, Eric watches it over and over online.

Laura knows that there will be a time somewhere in the future when she will feel regret and guilt over not being able to help her son and allowing him to endure all that he has undergone. She feels as if she doesn't deserve to have him back safely. Although she wishes harm to Buford for what he had done, she also, at times, feels gratitude toward him for Justin returning, even though he had nothing to do with the return. She decides that she will make it all up to Justin. She will grant his every wish. If he wants to leave Texas, she admits, she would leave within the hour. She feels "reborn" and finally at peace; nothing else matters now.

When she takes Justin to the dentist, he is not ready to see anyone in public yet, so the dentist agrees to meet them outside of regular hours. She tries to make small talk, relishing her alone time with Justin. They make small talk about the state of the back yard and the barbecue that Eric is planning for Saturday, the Fourth of July. Laura hopes the dentist will be running late. She really wants an opening that will allow her to ask him questions about his capture.





Hoping to open the conversation, Laura tells Justin that Eric wants things perfect for him and that while he was gone, Eric would go out looking for Justin sometimes and come back obviously having cried, but he wouldn't tell her that. She tells Justin that his father had often slept in his clothes in hopes of being called in the night to find him or run to his rescue. Justin seems to want to hear what she has to say about this topic. He opens up enough to tell her that he appreciates that she kept his mail and that she continued to buy him gifts. He also likes her hair long the way she's wearing it now. She reassures Justin that whenever he's ready to talk, she and his dad are there to listen.

On this night, Laura wakes from sleep in the middle of the night. She realizes that before Justin's return, she would have gone for a walk or a drive, watched the stars, wanted to run away. While he was gone, she would have loved to drive until she was in a place where no one knew her and she could become someone else as surely as her son had been forced to do. Tonight, instead of leaving, she just thinks of her sons and the time Justin was missing. She recalls that Griff wanted to go to a sleep-over a year after Justin was abducted. They thought it over and reluctantly agreed. During the night, Griff called to say he was sick and needed to be picked up. It wasn't until tonight that she realized that he only did that to spare his parents from waking with another son gone. She realizes that kids are more perceptive than they're ever given credit for.

## Chapter 9

Three days before the Fourth of July, Eric goes to Cecil's shop, the Loan Star Pawnshop, to borrow a new grill that has recently been pawned. He plans to use it for his big barbecue. He is surprised to see how empty the shelves are in the shop. Cecil says that business had picked up since Justin's return, but Eric thinks he is just being nice. While Cecil is in the back getting the grill, Eric looks into the gun case in the shop.

He remembers that Buford had guns in his home and wonders if his dad carries those types and what they would feel like in his hand. He realizes that they are hard to see in the case because the glass has been very scratched up. When Cecil returns to see Eric in front of the gun case, he warns him away. He explains that it will not look appropriate for Eric Campbell, father of the abducted child, to be looking at guns. Eric lies and says that he was just looking.

As they roll the grill out, and some tiki lights Cecil thinks Laura will like, Cecil tells Eric that Buford will be put away forever. Eric says that this is not a certainty. Saying this out loud, Eric realizes he's been harboring this fear. The fact that Cecil thought Eric had the potential to retaliate against Buford makes Eric feel proud that his dad sees him as a man of courage and vengeance. Cecil reminds Eric to let the law take its course. Eric explains that that is a difficult prospect. Eric always believed that after a certain age or time in life, one no longer needed advice and words of wisdom and encouragement from one's father. Today, he realizes that isn't the case. He is somewhat relieved by his talk with Cecil.



## Analysis

### Chapter 7

Although the family is very excited to have Justin home, there is a wealth of new emotions shooting through everyone in the house. Laura is beyond excited. She's taken leave from work that she calls "maternity leave." Eric is just as happy. Although he continues to work, his students and the town are all making a huge deal about Justin's return. Eric and Laura are acting again as if he were the newborn they had brought home almost 16 years earlier. Laura calls Eric during the day to report what Justin is doing or how he is acting. This is reflective of many incidents since Justin's return in which Laura and Eric's behavior mimicked him being a newborn, not a teenager returned after being kidnapped. The symbolism of motherhood is defined and explored in this chapter as in many respects both Laura and Eric have reverted back to some of the same characteristics they displayed when Justin was an infant.

Another aspect of the parents' behavior that changes is their reaction toward each other. They seem like giddy lovebirds who are bonding and glowing in the light of their newly found son. They snuggle in bed listening to him putter around the house as his days and nights are confused. They share joy in the things that he does or says that seem similar to his behavior before he was taken. During her leave, Laura makes a transformation in her demeanor and her appearance. She scrubs the house like a pregnant mother nesting to prepare for her newborn child. She pays attention to her hygiene and her clothes. Her attitude is probably the most changed. She mentions how she feels renewed and sunny, that she wonders what everyone else is doing at that exact moment. She even asks Eric for the first time if he knows why they haven't heard from that nice lady, Tracy Robichaud. This is a frightening question for him, because his relationship with Tracy is one of the many things from the time of Justin's absence that Eric wants to pretend didn't happen.

The mice that eventually caused Justin to be spotted at the flea market represent the hope of his rescue. Usually viewed as pests, something to be rid of, these mice saved Justin and returned him to his family. On some level, Laura acknowledges this and takes them home that very night, naming them and refusing to allow them to be fed to the snake.

Eric's biggest concern is his uneasiness toward his relationship with Justin. He feels that something is not right. He always thought that if Justin ever returned, he would be so changed that they would have to adjust and accept the "new", possibly damaged, Justin. Other than a few expected changes, Justin is mysteriously similar to his former self. He doesn't discuss anything that happened while he was gone, not even how he acquired the limp that everyone has noticed, but is not asking about. Eric began to really worry about what Justin must have gone through all of those years, but has not told them about. When alone, Justin and Eric make small talk, awkward talk about past events or animal habits. Only once so far does Justin offer any information about his abduction; that's when he tells his dad that he went with Buford on his paper route and





that Buford will plead not guilty. Eric is taken by surprise and feels even more awkward about his strained relationship with his son. His chest tightens, and he doesn't know what to say. He is perplexed by his uneasy relationship with the son he has grieved over for so long.

## Chapter 8

Although Eric seems worried and disconnected from Justin since his return, Laura has the exact opposite feeling. She revels in his company, hopes to have alone time with him, wants to soak up all of the attention and information he will share with her. She has become the exact opposite of the way she was while Justin was gone. Before, she was introverted. She had no time or attention for her other son, Griff, or her husband. She didn't care about her appearance, the world around her, or what anyone else thought of her. She was so overwhelmed with grief that nothing and no one else mattered then. Her only refuge was caring for the dolphin, Alice, and that was mainly because her identity as the missing kid's mom wasn't known there and she could care for a fragile animal when she couldn't care for her fragile son.

The symbolism of the dolphin is made more prominent in this section as the reader can clearly see that she substituted the distressed dolphin for the care that she wished she could be giving Justin. Now, with Justin back, she's only too willing to let others step in at the Marine Lab to cover her shift.

Now that Justin is back, Laura doesn't really care about what others think, and reverts to an optimist, cleans the house, worries about her appearance and caring for Justin, and has no concern for the outside world except that she realizes now that it exists. She is obsessed with all things Justin. She admits that she's noticed that Griff has stepped back in the shadow in order to let Justin move forward. She also admits that she will do anything that Justin asks of her without question. Although she seems kinder and happier around all of the family, she is abnormally fixated on Justin. Where Eric dreads alone time with Justin because it is awkward and unfamiliar, Laura longs for alone time with Justin because she wants to soak up every moment with him. She has agreed to forget the past, the good and the bad, as long as she can have an optimistic prospect with Justin, only looking ahead to a sunny future for them. The theme of Coping is evident in her reaction to suddenly having Justin, literally, back from the dead. Likewise, Eric is having difficulty adjusting to having Justin home.

Although Justin has acknowledged that he wants to know what happened in his home while he was gone, he doesn't offer much to them about what happened to him. He wants to hear that his dad cared, worried, and slept in his clothes hoping to get a call to pick him up. He loves the fact that his mom kept his mail and continued to buy him presents. He expresses appreciation and notices small things, like her hair, that keep her reassured that they will be fine. However, he offers little from his own absent history. He does tell Eric that his days and nights are mixed up because he worked the paper route with Buford and that Buford would plead not guilty. He knows they are riddled with questions about what happened to him, what was done to him, if he missed them, why



he has a limp, and many other questions, but does not offer any information to ease their minds.

Although Justin offers very little information, Laura is giddy with hope and appreciation of anything he offers...thanking her for the gifts, saying her hair is pretty, and admitting that he doesn't expect his dad to redo the yard just for his homecoming. Laura takes all of this as positive signs that he is reconnecting with his family.

## Chapter 9

Eric doesn't realize how much anger and resentment he has been keeping inside. It isn't until Cecil warns him not to look at guns and to let the law take its course, that Eric sees just how upset he is and how he has been hiding his angry emotions about Buford and the possibility that the law may not find justice for Justin and their family. He realizes a side of himself that he did not know existed, the desire to obtain a gun to protect his family from Buford and his dangers. He also realizes his need for fatherly advice and guidance regardless of his age of 44. He still needs his father.

For some reason, Eric feels extremely ashamed of his lack of upkeep in the back yard. On the day that Justin was found, Cecil saw the neglected yard for the first time in years. He was shocked at the state of the grass and the yard in general. When trying to relate to Justin one night while he was letting Rainbow out in the yard to go to the bathroom, Eric expressed to Justin that he knows that the yard looks bad and that he let it go. Justin merely shrugged, but Eric took that partly as a judgmental attitude. Despite the fact that they can't afford it, Eric is determined to have new sod laid in the yard before the barbecue. No one believes it's necessary but Eric. His dad seems bothered by the purchase, and Eric lies and says that the nursery was selling it for a cheaper price. This is in addition to the lie he told Laura about the original price he is paying, which is actually double what he claims. He believes that a happy family barbecue with his family sitting on fresh green grass will somehow make a difference in the way he feels and the way his family feels about him.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism and significance of Eric wanting to repair the back yard.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Coping.

## Discussion Question 3

What type of relationship does Eric have with his father, Cecil?



## Vocabulary

deferential, upended, affront, gaunt, unassailable, meted, innocuous, reticence, porosity, ambivalence, meridian, duplicitous, repulsed, repellent, sallow, awash, brazenly, boon, scoured, heft, rangy, abated



## Part Two: Chapters 10-12

### Summary

#### Chapter 10

Griff is surprised by all of the many changes that have occurred since Justin's return. He didn't realize that he was judging what Justin would look like after this time, but he was. He recognizes him as looking more like his vision than the drawings the police made. He is surprised by the fact that his brother can master any new video game. He often finds himself staring in disbelief at Justin; it is like he is more knowledgeable than he was before he was taken.

After the new sod had been put down, Griff suggests to Justin that they go skateboarding. Justin says he doesn't want to go public until he practices. The boys realize that Justin's board from four years ago is very outdated and no longer has the ability it should, but even when Justin uses Griff's board, he can't seem to do any of his old tricks. He even falls and cuts his elbow on the concrete. Griff doesn't want him to feel bad, so he purposely messes up when he does tricks too. Justin confides in Griff that he had been bored while gone, but that he did go to play bingo, had friends, and even had a girlfriend. Justin even admitted that he had seen the many flyers that his family had posted and that he hated the photo they used. This surprises Griff who had not thought of anything normal about Justin's captive life before.

Griff has been enjoying more and more the continued closeness with Fiona. When he walks her home at night, they make out on the playground. One night, as they are getting "friendly" by the Teepee Motel, Griff confides in her some of the information that Justin has told him. She, in turn, tells him that her parents know the abductor's parents, that the mother is on oxygen, sick with cancer, and that they will probably flee to Florida at some point. He tells her that his family has taken the post card stating not to stop looking for Justin off of the 'fridge because they don't want reminders of their time apart and don't want to make Justin self-conscious or feel bad.

On the Fourth of July, the family prepares the celebration barbecue while Justin sleeps during the day. Laura brings up the topic of feeling new and fresh again. She says that she's hungry all the time and that she doesn't remember eating at all while Justin was gone. She is wearing the dolphin pendant that Eric and Griff gave her. Her hair is down, clean, and shiny. She's a new woman. During this time, Griff admits to Eric, Laura, and Cecil what Justin had relayed to him about his captive life. They are all in shock to hear anything about that time. Eric tells Griff that he has done a good job being a "detective" listening for and reporting back to them information that Justin reveals. As Justin arrives in the back yard, they all try to act normal. They enjoy the rest of the day, eating, laughing, and taking photos.

#### Chapter 11



Laura knows that she should be glad that he had such a normal experience as a girlfriend, but she is upset by it. It made her realize just how long he'd been gone. When he left, he thought girls were "strange," and finding out that he had transitioned from that to having a girlfriend in the time he's been away is jolting to her. Laura is jealous of the girlfriend and jealous of the fact that Buford was the one who watched her son fall in love with his first girlfriend instead of her and Eric. It may seem silly because she knows he was in captivity, but she still feels slighted. She feels extremely guilty, like Justin has the right to hate her and hold these things against her.

During his visit with Mr. Garcia, Eric, Laura, and Griff go to the mall. Laura insists that Justin needs new clothes. She goes on a shopping spree that worries Eric that she will overspend. Justin is very excited to have the new clothes. He is thankful to smell the newness of his things.

Each week, Justin has to meet with Garcia on Wednesday and Letty Villarreal, the social worker, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They want him to retell his story over and over to ensure that nothing in his statement changes. Laura is plagued by the fact that strangers know what happened to her son when she does not. Laura tries to be optimistic. After picking Justin up from therapy, she offers to take him anywhere he wishes. He wants to get mice to feed his snake, Sasha. After visiting several pet stores to no avail, Justin tells Laura that Sasha can wait a bit longer.

That same day, Justin tells Laura that he understands that the state will be seeking the death penalty against Buford. When she asks how he feels about it, he says it would be "sweet." He tells his mom that Buford used to say that sometimes it was good to thin the herd when he heard about people being executed. He thought it was a joke. Justin thinks he may still see it as a big joke.

Laura can't get the fact that Justin had a girlfriend while he was captured out of her mind. She wonders what the poor girl must be thinking. That same week, Letty, the counselor, asks them if they'd ever heard of Stockholm Syndrome. Letty explains that Justin feels "tainted" and is afraid to let go of friends from his captured time and afraid of reuniting with old friends from before. She also explains that parents can go through a sort of post-traumatic stress disorder during these times as well. Although she says that Justin misses his friends, she says that he is not ready to see any of them under any circumstances. He must sever all ties with those people from that time in his life. Letty tells them that Justin is not "fine" and doesn't want to hurt their feelings, so often he doesn't know how to act around them. Laura checks out several books from the library that explain this syndrome. Meanwhile, Eric decides to teach Justin how to drive. They are both very excited about the prospect of this adventure.

## Chapter 12

Life seems to calm down. Eric is teaching his summer classes and in the evenings, teaching Justin to drive. Griff is all wrapped up in Fiona, who comes to dinner so often that Laura now includes her as a fifth person for dinner every night. On nights when Justin and Eric go driving, Griff goes to the Teepee to skate and returns home before



they do. He knows that Justin isn't ready to skate the Teepee. On nights that Fiona eats over, Griff walks her home. They leave earlier and earlier. When Laura asks if they think she should take Fiona home because Griff may be scared to walk her, Justin is quick to express that Griff is enjoying the arrangement as it is.

One afternoon as class is letting out, Eric hears heels clicking in the hallway. He figures that it's one of the teachers asking for help with a school project. He has planned to tell her to wait until after the trial is over and he can adjust, but when the knock on the door is answered, the visitor is Tracy Robichaud. Eric hasn't seen her since Justin's return. He doesn't quite know how to act. She gives him a sexy look, turns and locks the classroom door.

## Analysis

### Chapter 10

Eric has paid a lot of money to refurbish the backyard, so his family can make memories there as before and not think of him as a failure for not keeping up the yard maintenance, for letting them down, which is only in Eric's minds and no one else's. This is symbolic of the state of his own mind while Justin was gone. Now that Justin is back, he longs to have things return to normal. But, the grass is so new that it hasn't put down roots, much like the new life that includes Justin is going to take some time to get adjusted to.

Griff is so worried about making the wrong move that he pretends not to be good at skateboarding because Justin was way better than he was before he left. Griff is scared of making him feel worse than he already feels. Griff lies about the tricks he's able to do and lies about winning contests. It is a jolt to Griff's senses when he realizes that Justin had a semblance of a normal life away from them that consisted of having friends, playing bingo, going fishing, and having a girlfriend. He is struck by the fact that some of Justin's friends had actually attended the skateboard competitions in Corpus where Griff won while his parents handed out missing child flyers of Justin. He is also shocked to hear that Justin actually saw the flyers and commented that he didn't like the picture. If Justin had seen the flyers and was able to move around with friends, Griff can't wrap his mind around why Justin didn't at least try to contact them. This mystery is not lessened by the fact that Justin is extremely closed-mouthed about his time away. So, his family keeps wondering and doesn't know what to say or how to act.

Griff's dad, Eric, had asked Griff not to probe for answers from Justin, but to alert him to any information that Justin may volunteer about his time during the abduction. When Griff lets his family know what Justin has shared, they are stunned and somewhat puzzled, but glad that Griff tells them. They also decide not to call Griff by his nickname, Lobster, while Justin is around. They had given him that name when he broke his arms trying a skateboard trick and his casts made his hands look like lobsters. They don't want Justin to be left out of any "private jokes" that took place while he was away. Once



in a while they will slip and call Griff Lobster which eventually prompts Justin to ask why. Griff explains the circumstances.

## Chapter 11

Laura is obviously riddled with guilt, but now with jealousy as well. It's a strange combination, but although she feels horribly about what happened to Justin, she also envies the fact that Buford got to experience some of the normal things in a boy's life that she and Eric did not experience. This demonstrates the theme of Guilt as well as Family Hardship. Although she realizes that it's ridiculous to be jealous in such a tragedy, she doesn't quite know how to connect with Justin. She feels sad that there will always be a part of him that she doesn't know about, no matter how horrible it is. She feels it would be better for her to know than not.

She is trying everything she can think of to make things up to Justin, new clothes, sunglasses, a skateboard, but inside she realizes that these are just things. She's pleased that they make him happy at the time, but she is once again distressed when they are in town looking for mice, and when she makes a suggestion of a certain pet store, he says, "they usually have them." This is an indication to her that he's been there before...without her...with his abductor.

When Justin volunteers the news that the state will be seeking the death penalty, Laura is anxious to know how he feels about it. Although he says that he's glad, she notices that he stares away, looking into what is unknown to her. Laura and Eric must come to understand the effects of Stockholm Syndrome. After reading about it, Laura understands that it involves the victim feeling torn between his rightful natural life and the life he had to create to survive while in captivity. For this reason, they are told that Justin is not ready to see any old friends or his girlfriend from during that time. They realize that this is going to be an uphill battle for all of them, especially Justin. No one will quite know how to act and should not put pressure on making everything "normal."

When Eric realizes that Justin is at the age of preparing for his driver's license, both Eric and Justin feel relieved and excited to be doing a normal activity that would take place in any household. It creates a bit of normalcy on the one hand and an excitement on the other.

## Chapter 12

Laura and Eric are pleased with the kindness that Griff shows Justin about skateboarding. He knows that Justin isn't ready to skate the Teepee. Griff knows that Justin feels bad about himself, so Griff only goes skating when Justin isn't home, so he doesn't feel bad. This makes Eric and Laura very happy. It makes them feel like they've raised a kind, sensitive kid, especially in spite of all of the failure and guilt they feel over Justin.

The entire family welcomes Fiona's company. She is included as part of the daily family meal rituals. Griff's parents are pleased to see that he is developing normal relationships for his age.



Although Eric is feeling better about his private driving time with Justin, his good-looking back yard already full of happy family memories, and Griff's kindness to Justin, he is thrown off balance by a visit at school from his former mistress, Tracy Robichaud. He doesn't know how to act or what to expect as she smiles, flirts, and locks his classroom door.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does the family want to hide inside jokes or nicknames like "Lobster" instead of including Justin on the joke?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Family Hardships.

## **Discussion Question 3**

What justifications had Eric used for his affair with Tracy?

## **Vocabulary**

swath, eddying, relegated, heady, timbre, gubernatorial, nettled, ballast, sieve, feigning, leered, placating, unassailably, delve, slogging, bulbous, capaciousness, cumbersome, supplanted, breadth





## Part Two: Chapters 13-16

### Summary

#### Chapter 13

Griffin is awakened in the night by Justin, who drives Griff in his father's truck to the marina. At first Griff is worried that Justin is going to torch the Buford family boat docked at the marina, but then he begins to tell the story about the day he was kidnapped. Justin explains that he misjudged a skateboard jump and broke his ankle. Buford, in a white van, came to him after he lay in pain for a while and helped him to the van, saying that he was taking him to the infirmary. Griff learns that Buford re-injured Justin's ankle so he couldn't get away. He was forced to write down everything about his family, and Buford told him that if he escaped, he'd kill them all. Justin wrote all false information about his family to throw Buford off.

Justin explains that when Buford got him, they forgot his skateboard, which has his name on it; that's why someone was able to find it and a year later, try to sell it to his papaw's pawn shop. Justin had heard about it in the news. Griff takes this opportunity to explain to Justin how much his family did to try to find him. Griff tells him about all of the volunteer searches, the police interviews, the theory that their father had something to do with his disappearance, the theory that Justin had run away, the fact that his parents took a second mortgage on the house for reward money, and everything else they went through searching for him. Griff left out the part about their parents' marriage being in trouble.

Justin asks Griff if he wants to ask if Buford raped him. Griff tells him that he only wants Justin to tell him what he wants. Justin asks again if Griff wants to know anything. Griff asks how often he takes their dad's truck out at night. When Justin said most every night, Griff agrees to keep it a secret. Both boys go home a bit more understanding about what each went through during the missing years.

#### Chapter 14

Cecil is feeling old and useless. When Justin was missing, he saw himself as the protector of the family, but now, although they'd be happy to see him, he's worried that his presence around them is just a sad reminder for Justin. He chooses not to go to their house. Cecil thinks back to Mayne Buford, Dwight's father, who is a rich man living in a fancy house. He would sometimes come into the pawn shop and chat with Cecil when Justin was missing. During the time when Justin was missing, Mayne gave his sympathies to Cecil and told him about how he had lost both of his sons, the youngest, Giddy, to a car accident, and the oldest Dwight had just run away from them. He and his wife still grieved over Dwight.



Mayne had told Cecil that they hadn't known where Dwight was, haven't seen him in years, and all of their letters to him were returned to sender. Cecil had expressed sympathy for Mayne and his situation. Cecil even told Mayne that he hoped he would find Dwight. In the present, Cecil thinks that it was very ironic that neither of them had any idea at that time that Mayne's missing son, Dwight, was the one who kidnapped Cecil's missing grandson, Justin. Although he hasn't seen Mayne since all was revealed, he believes they will be running into each other and that a gun could be involved.

Cecil takes a ride; he thinks about his wife and the stories he told Eric as a child. As he drives, he realizes that he is passing the Buford home and heading toward the Bay Breeze Suites, the apartment complex where Dwight kept Justin for those four missing years. At the complex Cecil meets Marcy, Justin's girlfriend from his days of captivity. She assumes he's a pervert looking for a tour of the place where the perverted man kept that poor nice boy. Cecil never tells her who he is, but asks her questions about what it was like when Justin lived there. Cecil sees that Marcy really cares for Justin and misses him. She reveals that just recently Dwight's dad, Mayne, came to the complex and was not given a warm reception. Before he leaves, Marcy asks Cecil to tell Justin hello and that she misses him. Cecil has to tell her that he's just there sight-seeing. He can't let her that he knows Justin, but she believes he does.

## Chapter 15

Laura looks very optimistic about life, although she's still scared to think too many good things about their future. She decides to go to the library and run errands on her own today. While she's out she thinks of all of the nice things that have happened since Justin's return, hopeful things. She hopes to bring Justin to the library when he's feeling better about being in public. She laughs to herself about finding Griff's socks soaked in Fiona's perfume while she changed his sheets. As she leaves the library, the widowed sisters Bev and Ruth Wilcox are waiting by her car to give her a box of cookies as congratulation for Justin's return. They are very sweet to her and talk about how Dwight Buford will get what he deserves and that they are so happy for her family.

Laura had planned to surprise Eric at school and take him to lunch, but when she drove by he had already left the school parking lot. She decides to meet him at home. Meanwhile, Griff is excited to have the house to himself, even though Justin is sleeping. He asks Fiona to come over, but she can't. When Justin wakes up, Griff tells him where their parents are. Justin says that their dad is pacing angrily on the phone in the driveway. Griff's afraid that Eric found out about their taking the truck for night drives. He hopes that Justin will ask him to go with him again.

When Laura gets home, she finds Eric on the front porch. He has to share the bad news that Dwight Buford's parents have used their house as collateral to post his bail. He will be out of jail in two to three days. Although they are both distraught, they decide to be positive and pretend that it's not a big deal.

## Chapter 16



The news of Buford's bail is devastating to each member of the family. That night they are not able to sleep. Laura feels like the town will look on her with pity and say that this wouldn't have happened to their child, like Laura was to blame. Eric lays in bed thinking about how he could afford to pack up and move his family away from this town. He ends up crying into his pillow. Griffin is restless and is startled by the branch scraping the house in the wind and thinks about damaging the Buford's boat. Cecil is getting his gun ready in case it's needed. When he goes to Justin's room, Cecil doesn't expect to see him, but since his light is on, he enters anyway. The room is empty and quiet. The mice, Willie and Waylon, are gone. Justin is gone, and Griff is afraid that Sasha is missing too, but then he sees her with two bulging mouse shaped lumps in her belly.

## Analysis

### Chapter 13

Justin takes this opportunity to share with his brother how he was abducted in the first place. Justin tells Griff what happened and why he didn't try to get away. He wants Griff to know that he was trying to protect his family by staying. Justin also is giving Griff the opportunity to ask the question that everyone, including the reader, wants to know...was he raped or tortured? Griff plays by the rules given to his family by the authority and tells him to only say what he wants to say. This shows great restraint for a kid of 14 who wants to know everything.

Griff tells Justin how guilty he feels about letting him go alone after they had the argument the morning of the abduction. He tells Justin that he feels responsible, that he could have run for help or averted the situation in some way. Justin explains that Griff has nothing to do with what happened to him. If Griff had come along, they may both have been taken. Justin is trying to ease Griff's guilty conscience by letting him know that not only could he have been of no help, but that Justin doesn't blame him, which is the bigger issue. The theme of Forgiveness is demonstrated in this exchange between the brothers, and it is healing for both of them.

Griff also has an opportunity at this point to let Justin know how desperately they all searched for him. He wants Justin to know that they didn't give up or take this lightly. Being so close the entire time, Justin feels that he should have been found sooner if they tried. On the other hand, the family is baffled that Justin saw the flyers, knew about things in their town, went places with friends and a girlfriend, and never tried to escape, ask someone for help, or contact them. This conversation between the brothers sheds light on each person's concerns and provides answers for the main questions....why didn't you find me? And...why didn't you contact us if you were roaming around with friends? The boys return home with a better understanding of each other's situation during this tragedy.

### Chapter 14



Cecil cares for his family more than anything in the world. He sees himself as a strong intimidating man who is respected and feared. He is a tough character to the public, but Cecil is a softy where his family is concerned as shown through the detailed make-believe stories that he shared with Eric as a child.

Although he's glad that Justin has come home, he no longer feels useful and doesn't want to be a reminder to Justin or the family of the hard times they've been through. He feels old and useless. He's worried that his time to be important and useful is fleeing. He is reminded of a saying his own father had about the worst thing that can happen to a man is for people to no longer see him as dangerous. This is the way Cecil is feeling.

When he thinks back to his previous casual visits with Mayne Buford, Dwight's father, he is struck by the fact that they were both consoling each other over their losses at the time, neither knowing the connection that each had to the other. Although Cecil believes that Mayne never knew what Dwight was doing to Justin or even where he was, Cecil still has no use for the man and hopes that Mayne fears their crossing paths. The author uses irony through Cecil's memory of telling Mayne that he hopes he finds his son. The irony is that although neither knows it, by Mayne getting his son back, Cecil gets his grandson back.

When Cecil visits the apartment complex where Justin was held, he hopes to find answers, especially whether or not the people there knew who Justin was and whether or not Mayne knew what was going on. Through the tough, sassy character of Marcy, Justin's girlfriend, Cecil finds what he needs to know and more. He sees that these people didn't know, nor did Mayne, but that Marcy truly cares for and misses Justin. From her reaction and the way she speaks about Justin, she also feels badly that she didn't know and that no one knew what was happening or that they could have helped him.

## Chapter 15

Laura's first sign that she's getting back to normal is her interest in being intimate with her husband. She even tells him that she is back. The fact that Laura is feeling confident enough to go out on her own is a major breakthrough for her. She has left the boys home alone and is happy to be out and about. She's so proud of herself; she can't wait to tell Eric. She is even more encouraged and pleased when the only people who seem to recognize her are the Wilcox sisters, who want to tell her how happy they are about Justin's return.

Eric is worried about running into Tracy again. Although nothing happened in his classroom but a hug, he is still worried that if they run into each other, he'll be weak and cheat again. This worry lessens when Laura begins to become herself again, even being intimate with him. He realizes that his afternoons with Tracy were nothing, compared to what he has with his wife. This demonstrates the theme of Family Hardships and the fact that they are beginning to heal. He is upset about Dwight getting out on bond. They have been doing so well. This is a big setback. When he tells Laura, she's just as upset, but they both realize that they need to put on a brave front for the



boys. The boys then won't want their parents to worry, so they'll be brave as well...all the time knowing that they will all be lying.

## Chapter 16

The family is on the verge of losing it again. The feelings of strength and relief that the family has been feeling up to now are quickly dissolving. In the quiet of the night, they each have withdrawn to sad and scary thoughts. Laura blames herself for everything. Eric is trying to think of a way to move his family away. Griff briefly considers burning the Buford's boat; Cecil is cleaning his gun in case he has need of it soon. Justin's feelings are only shown through the symbolism of him feeding the mice his mom has named as pets to his snake. They were feeding mice, but because they were with Justin when he was found, she couldn't part with them. By feeding these pet mice to his snake, Justin is saying that he knows this is not over. His life is in ruins again and their lives needed to end. He doesn't need them as a sign of his happy return because he doubts whether it will last. He fears for their safety as well as his own.

### **Discussion Question 1**

What does it represent that Justin fed the mice to the snake?

### **Discussion Question 2**

How has Buford's release on bond affected the Campbell family?

### **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss Eric's character.

### **Vocabulary**

calamity, pylon, turret, liberation, infirmary, sully, mete, languid, marrow, roused, accrual, lassitude, scrimshaw, toggles, anguish, sallow, meridian, nuanced, sleight, ebbed, circumvented, ephemera, beseeching, galvanized, eke, eluding, degradation



## Part Three: Chapters 17-19

### Summary

#### Chapter 17

(Flashback)

Eric thinks back to the days while Justin was held captive. He had his class do a project about a white girl who'd been captured by Indians and kept for ten years. She became one of them. She forgot where she came from and when she was "rescued," she starved herself to death because they wouldn't let her go back to the Indians. Laura had been worried that Justin would end up that way too, but Eric assured her it was a different situation. During those first years, Eric had been called at school to come to a store where Laura had broken a shell and cut her hands all over with the shards. She had been sitting in the floor of the store bleeding and crying.

Back in the present, Eric can see that Laura is slipping away again. She had started working at the laundry again and taking shifts watching the dolphin. Eric started driving near the Buford home and watching the house through binoculars. He had yet to see Dwight. He has however, slept with Tracy again. Even though he felt kind of guilty, he only thought of Laura during his time with Tracy, worrying if she would hurt herself again. Tracy let Eric use her car, and he used his truck and Laura's car, so the Buford family wouldn't notice his stakeout.

Griff has pulled away from Fiona. He is avoiding her and not taking her calls; he's tired of hanging out at the Teepee Motel to skate because the group of guys hanging out there are bad news. He's been hanging out at the marina hoping not to see the Bufords on their boat. He visits Cecil, but all they have to talk about is Dwight, so he avoids going there too. Justin asks general questions, like what happened to this person or that. No one in the family talks about anything of substance. It's like Buford is there with them.

#### Chapter 18

Laura has fallen back into her patterns of panic, crying, and anxiety. She had hoped to never see Dwight Buford, but found herself looking for his face everywhere. Laura is worried that Paul won't let her work with the dolphin, Alice, anymore. She is wrong. He tells her to sign up for as much as she wants. She is relieved. She starts to think about her mother. She feels bad that she doesn't think about her deceased mother as much as she should. She starts to think about the few things she does remember about her childhood.

One day as she's leaving the Marine Lab, a truck pulls up; a man starts toward her, and calls her Mrs. Campbell. Laura panics, thinking that it is Buford, but it is Rudy, a man who is filling in for his pregnant wife at the Lab. They chat for a bit about his wife's



pregnancy and cravings. When she leaves, she is stricken by the fact that although she works there under her maiden name, Wallace, Rudy called her Mrs. Campbell. Instead of stressing about this, she starts thinking about all that she has learned about dolphin mothers and how they care for their young. She also thinks of the fact that dolphins don't only save their own children, they lift other dolphins, animals, and even people to the surface if they are in distress in the water. Laura feels like she had enjoyed a slight reprieve from the terror of Justin's abduction, but now that Buford is out, she feels like she's drowning in it again. She wishes a dolphin would rescue her.

## Chapter 19

Justin wants to learn to drive over high bridges, so Eric takes him to the Harbor Bridge leading to Corpus and back. He's nervous, and when he's nervous, he has a habit of picking the beds of his fingernails and cracking his neck. He does a good job and is very proud of himself. He mentions riding on the causeway, and Eric said it will be easy for him. Eric also connects that to get to the causeway, you have to pass the Buford family home. He doesn't believe that Justin has made the connection. When they decide to take the bridge one more time before going home even though it's late, Justin tells Eric that he's good with keeping secrets. Later this phrase haunts Eric and makes him wonder what he meant by it.

When they return home, Laura has gone to bed with a headache because she has migraines, and is hoping to ward off an extreme one. Eric worries that maybe her headache has something to do with the fact that Tracy Robichaud called, asking questions because she's in charge of Justin's celebration at the Shrimporree. He finds that's not the case. Laura is in the kitchen in the morning with fresh coffee and sweet rolls. She tells Eric that she woke up from a bad dream about Buford making a delivery at the Marine Lab, but later explains that she has realized why Justin never tried to run. He must have felt like Buford was always around because that's how she feels.

Eric continues to watch the Buford house. Because he never sees Dwight, he worries that he isn't even there. When Justin and Eric are out driving, they stop a few times at Cecil's house. He acts strangely. He doesn't let them in and blocks the door. One day, he gives them boxes of his belongings to keep, saying he has to spray for roaches. Eric begins to wonder if his father has Dwight tied up in his house. He's worried that Cecil will do what Eric believes he, himself, should do in this situation.

Justin asks Eric if he should apologize to his mom about giving the mice to Sasha. Eric makes light of it because Laura did take it personally, but he doesn't see a reason to bring it up again. Justin admits that Letty suggested that he do it because he was still angry with his family because it took them such a long time to find him when he was so close all along.

## Analysis

### Chapter 17





The author mentions Eric's previous history assignment to remind the reader that some people who are abducted do suffer from trauma such as a Stockholm syndrome. Although Justin doesn't suffer from the type of situation that the girl from the history lesson did, he is still very damaged by his experience. The author uses similes, metaphors, and distinct imagery to set the scene and the tone of the chapter, allowing readers to get a true feel of the feelings that are going on in that family during this time of Buford's release.

Unfortunately, in light of this sad development, both parents have retracted to the behaviors they exhibited during his absence. Eric is feeling like a coward and resuming his affair with Tracy. Laura is a nervous wreck and is throwing herself into her work at the laundry and at the Marine Lab. The boys are trying not to rock the boat or make their parents feel worse, but individually, they are not doing well either.

## Chapter 18

The reader is given a deeper look into how Laura thinks about life and in particular her present situation. She compares her happy time when Justin returned as the remission of the cancer that has now returned to her life in the form of Buford. She thinks about her mother and why she doesn't remember her more often. She wants her boys to remember her and feel her influence, but Laura herself doesn't do that with her own mother's memory.

As before, she loads herself down with work at the Marine Lab, but is troubled by the fact that Rudy calls her by her married name. She doesn't understand what that could mean. She signs up and works under her maiden name. She's taken care not to let others know who she is to ensure that she has a refuge from the constant pain and reminders of what has happened to Justin. All of her research about dolphins has come in handy in her own life. As she thinks about how therapeutic dolphins are and about their life-saving skills, a parallel is drawn between what dolphins in the wild do for drowning people, to what her work with Alice does to save her from drowning in despair. This also illustrates the theme of Coping. Working with the dolphins is her way of coping with something that she feels she has no control over.

## Chapter 19

Laura's attitude changes when she comes to see how affected she is, worrying about Buford being out of jail, and this leads her to believe that Justin had to have felt the same way when he was in captivity. This understanding will eventually lead to her own healing as well as Justin's.

Eric is concerned that Cecil is planning to punish Dwight as Eric should have done himself. Eric is feeling more and more insecure and emasculated. He had been feeling better about himself with the driving lessons, but now he's feeling knocked down again. He feels even worse when Justin first says that he's good at keeping secrets. This worries him and makes him wonder about what secrets he's keeping. Then, Eric is further burdened and nearly devastated when Justin offers to apologize to Laura about





feeding the mice to Sasha. Justin says that his therapist asked if he did that because he is still mad at his parents. This shocks Eric because he hadn't realized that Justin was angry with them. When he asks why, Justin answers that he was upset because they hadn't found him faster, and he was so close. Eric tries to explain that they did their best. Justin says he knows that now. But Eric is still shaken to his core.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Laura upset when Rudy calls her by her married name?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Laura cope with Justin's abduction and the news that Buford has been released on bail?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the dolphins to Laura?

## Vocabulary

mealy, mire, thwarted, resilience, burnished, conspicuous, gorges, emboldened, echelon, slipstream, dulce, trilled, happenstance, cleaved, lethargic, bawdy, atone, beleaguered, winnowed, perilous, eliding, fraught



## Part Three: Chapters 20-23

### Summary

#### Chapter 20

Cecil begins taking his belongings from his home to the pawn shop slowly. He cleans his illegally owned gun, and begins visiting his departed wife, Connie's, grave. He begins cleaning her grave and talking to her about his plans. While there, Cecil recalls a time when the family was searching for Justin, and Laura had enough vision and foresight to ask him if he had enough room in his plots to bury Justin if they found him dead. Since that time, although she has acted undone, Cecil has felt that she was still a strong woman.

As Cecil returns home, Mayne Buford is waiting at his house to talk to him. First, he tells Cecil that Eric is staking out his house, and his wife and son are scared. Then, he asks Cecil if he'll make a deal with him. If Cecil will allow Mayne to take his dying wife and his son out on their boat once more, on the day of the Shrimporee, then Mayne will get Dwight to change his plea to guilty. He promises to bring him back. He reminds him that his wife is on oxygen and needs care, so he can be trusted to return. Cecil turns down the offer and threatens to kill Dwight if he comes near his family.

#### Chapter 21

Laura had lied to Eric about the bad dream she had the other night. The thing that kept her up was her worry about Rudy calling her Mrs. Campbell at the Marine Lab the other day. She just couldn't figure it out and what it meant. While Justin was gone, she wanted to have a place to go where no one knew she was the mother of the missing kid, to feel normal. Now that is all gone.

Laura tries to put the Rudy/name situation aside so she can focus on spending time with Justin during their home schooling. She enjoys an afternoon of helping the boys move the furniture in Justin's room. They all laugh and joke around and for a time everything seems normal.

On Sunday morning, Laura is supposed to work with Alice, but she calls in sick to see if Paul will call Rudy to come in as her replacement. Once she is sure that her replacement will be at the lab, she drives there to confront Rudy about the name situation. He is surprised, but admits that he is a police officer in Refugio and knows all about her son because he learned about Justin's rescue the morning he was found, even before Laura and Eric found out. Rudy spends time talking to Laura, asking not only about Justin, but about the entire family. He asks if Griff also saw a counselor, something she hadn't really given a lot of consideration. Although he surprises her with this information at first, she is calmed by talking to him. When she asks if their boss,



Paul, knew, Rudy says that he's too interested in the animals to worry about such things.

While Laura is at the lab, Paul drives up, sees Laura's car, and drives to another lot to take a nap in his car rather than have to confront whatever is going on with Rudy and Laura. He has known all along who Laura was and has purposely swayed volunteers who asked if it's really her, assigning them to other shifts. Rudy is actually Officer Rudy Trevino.

## Chapter 22

As Griff helps Justin move his furniture again, they somehow begin talking about Fiona. Griff admits that he is avoiding her. Justin tells him not to take the wimpy way out and wait for her to break up; if he wants to break up with her, be a man and do it. Griff tells Justin that Fiona has been with a lot of guys, older guys, but Justin tells him that this is a bunch of bull. So Griff begins to question himself. He calls Fiona and asks her to meet him at the marina. He sneaks out of the house and heads that way with a million things buzzing in his head. Griff stops along the way to watch the fireflies, to think of loneliness, and how lucky people who disappear are. Because of Justin's words, because Griff is scared of Dwight Buford, because he doesn't know what to do with himself, and because he believes that Fiona deserves better, he is on his way to break up with her.

## Chapter 23

Eric, Laura, and Justin are watching TV, assuming that Griff is in his room, which he's not. Eric is feeling almost content. He claims that if Griff had not been in the room, he would have professed his love to his whole family. It's the first time they've watched TV without screening it to ensure no one would be traumatized. Eric is still upset about the fact that he feels that Dwight may have left his family's home and about the fact that Justin admitted that he was angry with his parents while in Corpus in captivity because they hadn't yet found him. Pushing those two heavy thoughts aside, Eric feels like he is in a calm, happy family moment...all they need, to make it complete, is Griff.

# Analysis

## Chapter 20

This chapter shows how serious Cecil is about protecting his family. He shows that even though Laura has lost her cool and her senses many times over the last four years, he still thinks she's a woman who can hold herself up well and make things happen. He becomes sentimental, which he has never been, and begins to visit his wife's grave. He goes there to talk to her because he can't share these thoughts with anyone else. He worries constantly about his family and how Dwight Buford affects them now and may do so in the future.



When Cecil is confronted by Mayne, his true anger becomes apparent. Mayne tries to make a deal with Cecil to help both families avoid the trauma of a trial. Cecil refuses the deal. He acts insulted and angrily tells Mayne that he will kill his son if he comes anywhere near Cecil's son's family. When Mayne tells him that the police will suspect him right away, and he could even call them now, Cecil says he doesn't care, that once he kills Dwight, he will call the police himself.

## Chapter 21

The importance of Laura learning that Rudy is a police officer who is rooting for her is important in helping her feel at ease. She can trust him and actually share things with him that others may not understand or are too close to personally. He asks about Justin, about Griff, about her family as a whole. He tells her that he and his wife pray for them. Laura doesn't like that he's praying for her because she's been turned off to praying and God because of the griever's groups she's attended in churches.

They made her feel like if she didn't pray hard enough, her son wouldn't come home. When he asks her how the whole family is, she says she and her family feel as if they are drifting apart. They are going in their own directions instead of unifying to conquer this situation together.

Although Rudy alluded that Paul didn't know about Laura, he actually does. He and Rudy have spoken about her and her situation many times. He feels horrible that she is such a broken woman, who is trying desperately to hide her identity. Because of this, Paul also shields her from onlookers.

## Chapter 22

Griff is a confused kid. He wants to seem mature and grown up, but he is a sheep when it comes to Justin. He listens to all he says and follows his lead. He is scared about Buford being out of jail and doesn't know who to talk to about his fear. He believes that Fiona really has had pilots and sailors as "lovers" and doesn't believe he's worthy to have her. Because of all of these reasons, he is choosing to break up with her. He doesn't want Justin to think he's a wimp for waiting for her to break up with him. So, he's taking action. Along the way, he is distracted by bugs and everything he has been going through. Justin may be the abductee, but a young Griff suffered many consequences because of this too.

## Chapter 23

Eric wants them to be a normal family again. He looks at Justin and Laura watching a TV show that hadn't had to be screened. He's overcome with a feeling of love and family, only Griff's missing to complete the moment. He does take pause to contemplate the fact that he is worried about Buford's disappearance from his parents' home. This makes him uneasy, and he would never worry Laura, who already believes that Buford is everywhere. He is also bothered still by the fact that Justin had been angry with his parents. Knowing that Justin had seen the flyers, had watched the news, read the



newspaper, and was able to hang out with friends would make it hard for Eric to believe that Justin could be upset that they didn't try hard enough.

Laura almost lost her mind. Eric could lose his family because he sought the comfort of another woman's arms. They put a second mortgage on the house to cover the reward money, and after four years he still rehung flyers of Justin...age progressed even...all the time. Eric just can't wrap his mind around this since he and Laura already felt guiltier than anyone could imagine.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Justin upset with all of them in regards to the abduction?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss Mayne's offer to Cecil.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the theme of Grief in the novel.

## **Vocabulary**

bitterns, grackles, precluded, reprieves, implication, inevitability, whelk, poise, perversely, illicitly, broached, marauding, craven, cowed, elusive, clandestinely, confound, iteration, ephemeral, trenchant, complacent, monastic, sanguine, vet



## Part Three: Chapters 24-26

### Summary

#### Chapter 24

As Griff gathers his thoughts and heads out to meet Fiona, who is probably already angry with him, he passes the Teepee Motel. He sees that some older guys are skating, drinking, and doing drugs. He keeps hearing a loud noise behind their van. When Griff tries to see what is happening, a buddy of his tries to hold him back and not let him see what is going on.

Griff pushes through and sees that the guys are tearing out the coping around the pool and ruining the skateboarding site. When Griff tries to say something about it, an older guy, Mike, insults Justin and makes crude comments that imply that because Justin had been molested, he is now gay. This enrages Griff, who proceeds toward the intended fight and is hurt badly. He is cut up, beaten, and bruised; yet, the whole time, Griff feels like this is a penance that he had deserved because he had sneaked out of the house without his parents knowing, he is about to break up with Fiona, and for all the guilt he felt about Justin's kidnapping. He is truly sorry. Then everything goes black.

#### Chapter 25

Laura is startled by a phone call on the 800 line that was set up when Justin went missing. She had been meaning to disconnect the line, but hasn't yet. She hears the distinctive ring and answers, thinking it may be a prank caller. The woman on the other end is Tracy Robichaud, who informs Laura that she has her son, Griff, and that he's in the emergency clinic. She says that he has been beaten up. Laura is very upset, but explains the situation to Eric and Justin on the way to the clinic.

#### Chapter 26

Laura is very grateful to Tracy for what she's done for Griff. She hugs her goodbye after Tracy informs her to let her know if there's anything special she would like for Justin's tribute at the Shrimporee. Eric's guilt won't let him watch. She shakes Eric's hand and also shakes Justin's hand, telling him she's glad to meet him and that he's home. Laura writes a thank-you note to Tracy and looks her address up in the volunteer registry from Justin's search party. She even asks Eric to which of their two houses should she send the message. He says he doesn't know.

Griff gets stitches and is broken up and bruised, but is otherwise okay. Justin calls Fiona and tells her what has happened. She is waiting in Griff's room with chocolate milkshakes when he wakes up. She informs him that this is what happens when someone tries to break up with her. He apologizes. They tell each other they love each other, and then she proceeds to take care of him. She and Justin both, while the parents



are at work, take care of Griff's every need. He has to admit he loves it. He feels guilty that he loves the attention.

No one believes that Griff doesn't remember everything that happened the night of the fight, but it is true. He remembers the guys destroying the coping, the mean words said about Justin, some of the fighting, and a woman in a nice car driving him to the emergency clinic.

When Justin comes to talk to Griff, Justin admits that he called Fiona and that because his dad wanted him to have a hobby, he lied and said he was into football, but he wasn't. Justin even admits that he hates his room. Griff offers to switch and Justin says he'll let him know. Justin tells him that he doesn't want him to be alone, and that's why he called Fiona. When Griff says that he's not alone because he has him, Justin replies, that in some way, everyone is alone.

Cecil busts Eric about his stake-outs at the Buford home, while Laura tells Griff what a sweet girl Fiona is and that despite the fact that he feels like he's burdening them, Fiona and Justin like taking care of him. At this point, Griff admits that he has always felt guilty because of the argument that he and Justin had the morning of his disappearance, over a prank that Justin pulled on Griff. Laura feels even worse because she realizes that the prank that Justin pulled on Griff is the same prank that she had previously pulled on Justin. Once again, she feels that it's her fault. She assures Griff that Dwight Buford is the only one at fault, but she still privately carries the guilt.

The next morning, Eric confesses to Laura that Cecil and Mayne caught him spying on the Buford property. He explains the offer that Mayne made to Cecil and that he had already asked the DA about it. The deal was done. Mayne could take his family on the boat for the day, and Dwight would plead guilty. Eric admits that Cecil gave him a gun that he put in the truck. Laura insists that he remove it from the truck. He agrees. He also tells her that he and Cecil will be taking Dwight into Mexico to leave him, in order to avoid a trial and any problems with their family.

## Analysis

### Chapter 24

Griff has been attached to the skating pool at the Teepee Motel for years. He regularly checks to make sure the coping is intact. It always was....until tonight. Since these older, drunken druggie guys had begun skating there, Griff rarely even went, but since he was close, he decided to check it out. Hearing all of the partying noises, he stopped and spoke to Baby Snot who warned him with a metaphor that, "This is a carnival ride you're not tall enough for" (258). Griff went forward anyway. As Mike insulted Justin to Griff, Griff got madder and madder, not just because of what he was saying about Justin, but because of everything that is strained in his life. He commenced to fighting with Mike and got his butt kicked. He is definitely the injured party at the end of this fight.





## Chapter 25

The irony of Laura being called about Griff being beaten up and in the hospital on the phone line she set up for Justin's disappearance is not lost on the reader. Actually, it's not lost on Laura, either. Although Justin is home, she had neglected to disconnect the line and automatically jumps when it rings even though Justin is sitting by her on the couch. It is lucky for them that the person who found Griff beaten up, Tracy Robichaud, remembers the 800 number from the billboard and calls for help for Griff. Another ironic thing is that Tracy is the woman with whom Eric has been having an affair. Even though she knows Eric's number, she calls the 800 number, as if she's not familiar with the family. This saves Eric from being outed as a cheater and saves Griff at the same time.

## Chapter 26

Eric is afraid that Laura will know that he's having an affair with Tracy, and he doesn't want to comfort Laura in the waiting room because he doesn't want Tracy to see him holding Laura's hand. Tracy leaves with dignity, and Laura, not knowing the truth, sends a thank-you card to her for helping Griff.

Although Griff feels guilty about all that happened and about the extra attention he's getting, he is reveling in it. He does confess to his mom that he feels partly to blame about Justin's abduction because of his anger over the prank Justin had played on him earlier that day. However, this just makes Laura, who already feels at blame, feel worse because the prank was one she had originally pulled on Justin before.

Fiona is truly in love with Griff and stays by his side to help Justin care for him while his parents are at work. Justin expresses to Griff that even though people are with him, he is still alone.

Cecil catches Eric spying on the Buford house, explains the proposed deal, calls the DA and decides to accept it. However, Cecil and Eric really plan to take Dwight before he boards the boat, take him to Mexico, and leave him there forever, away from their family. Cecil gives Eric a gun for the kidnapping. Laura freaks out and wants the gun out of the truck, so Eric hides it in his closet.

## Discussion Question 1

What is Cecil's plan for Dwight?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the most probable reason that Griff picked a fight with the boys at the Teepee?



## Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about the call that comes in on the 800 number?

## Vocabulary

cowbirds, nostalgia, contrails, iridescent, yoked, creosote, staving, leaching, Inoculated, aping, rangy, cloying, doffing



## Part Four: Chapters 27-29

### Summary

#### Chapter 27

A huge storm blows through town as preparations are being made for the Shrimporee. The town is afraid that they will have to cancel the festival for the first time in history. During the storm, Fiona brings over games for the family to play. When the lightning and thunder grow loud and Fiona jumps, Griff holds her hand as comfort and brings it to his lips to kiss. The entire family is touched by this. Luckily, the storm ends before the festivities, but the town will have to scramble to still make it on time. Everyone in town helps out. Private homes boil shrimp and cook jambalaya and étouffée for the festival. Shops close, and workers help clear the roads and prepare the festival grounds. Eric lets his last summer class out early to help their parents with the festivities.

During these preparations, Laura wears her dolphin pendant and remembers to water the remaining plants that came during Justin's welcome home. Although she is glad that Eric moved the gun, she is still cold towards him. Eric takes Justin for a driving lesson after the storm to let him see how to adjust to driving under these conditions. He's doing well with his lessons and has been able to answer any questions set to him about the road and driving, he's settled on an arrangement for his bedroom, and his sleep schedule is correcting itself. He is still feeling sad, though.

Knowing what Eric is planning to do, Laura tells Eric that he doesn't have to do it. He claims that it should already have been done. Eric takes Griff for a ride in the truck to check out how the Teepee withstood the storm. Griff asks Eric if he'd fought as a kid. Although he'd only had one fight that was pretty lame, he tells Griff, that he was in a few scuffles. He doesn't want Griff to see him as less of a man. Griff tells his dad that the guys had said mean things about Justin. Eric tells him that that would all die away soon enough because people forget, that people have short memories.

#### Chapter 28

On the day before the Shrimporee, Laura has gone grocery shopping. She later lies and says that she forgot something at the market. She goes there and gets some laundry detergent and a loaf of bread. After that, she heads to Cecil's Loan Star Pawn Shop. Because there is a customer's car in front, Laura parks in the back, waiting for the customer to leave and gathers her courage for what she has come to say. She has planned to visit Cecil and say what she needs to say, take Justin to see his therapist, Letty, then return home to have dinner with her family...maybe for the last time.

Because Eric has told her the plan that he and Cecil have concocted, she feels the need to confront Cecil and tell him what she didn't dare say to her husband. Despite the



fact that she feels angered by Eric, she has been intimate with him, so that no matter what happened, he could remember that he had a wife who loved him, no matter what.

Although Laura is scared, she enters the loan shop with confidence determined to have her say. Cecil is finishing up with a customer as Laura pretends to look around. Once the lady leaves, Laura turns the door sign to “closed.” When she speaks to Cecil, she explains that she loves Eric, that he doesn’t have “a poker face”, he doesn’t have in him what Cecil’s asking him to do, and that she thinks Cecil should call it off. She tells Cecil that they should see how it will play out in court. She doesn’t want to lose him, and there’s no telling what could really happen out there. Cecil is noncommittal and says that she doesn’t know how things will play out.

### Chapter 29

After Laura leaves, Cecil reviews the plan in his mind. They will meet the Bufords in the morning. They will tell Mayne that it’s not good enough for him to be in jail; he needs to be out of the country. They will explain that he’ll ride with Cecil to the Mexican border, then three hours into the country where Eric, in Cecil’s truck, will pick Cecil up and head home. Dwight will be guaranteed work in Mexico by a former associate of Cecil’s. He doesn’t see how it wouldn’t work.

## Analysis

### Chapter 27

The town didn’t want to have a blemish on their record that they had to close the end of the summer Shrimporee Festival because of bad weather. They all pulled together to get it going, not for Justin’s sake, but for the sake of the town’s history.

Laura understood what Eric was trying to do, but didn’t approve. So, she sent mixed signals. She was cheery overall, wore her dolphin pendant and other jewelry, but was still cold towards Eric. She tells Eric that this is not something he has to do, but he says he should have already done it. Eric’s issues all stem from feeling inadequate compared to his father. As the head of the household it was his responsibility to keep them safe. And in his mind, he had failed his family, especially Justin.

### Chapter 28

Laura understands that Eric feels the need to do this for his family, but she’s not sure he can go through with it. She doesn’t want to lose him. Cecil may be made of the stuff to pull something like this off, but Eric is not. Laura appreciates what Eric wants to do for his family, but she knows that he is not strong enough to do those things.

Laura tries to ask Cecil what Mayne’s offer has to do with the ambush they are planning for Dwight tonight. As she admits to Cecil that she’s not the best wife or mother, but she’s trying, Cecil says that Eric is trying too. Laura asks Cecil if Eric is trying or if he, Cecil, is trying? Laura pleads with Cecil that everything could go wrong, and Cecil says,



everything could go right. Their conversation continues as such...but Laura at least gets to tell Cecil that she loves Eric, that he'll do whatever Cecil says, and that she doesn't want to lose him.

## Chapter 29

Cecil may plan to tell Mayne that story, but the truth is that Dwight will not make it to Mexico alive. Each of them has an illegal, untraceable gun that can do the job. With Cecil's past criminal record, he'd probably be held up at the border anyway, especially with a firearm. Cecil believes that he and Eric are ready for the task at hand. At this point, Cecil is determined that this plan makes the most sense.

### **Discussion Question 1**

What motivates Laura to confront Cecil?

### **Discussion Question 2**

Compare Cecil to Eric.

### **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the theme of Family Hardships.

### **Vocabulary**

skittish, frigate, mangroves, cavalier, desolate, coquettishly, hock, duping, encroaching, stymied, cusp, inconsequential, assailed, concentric, diffident, presaged, jaded, duped, reticence, surly, cordoned



## Part Four: Chapters 30-33

### Summary

#### Chapter 30

When Laura returns, she has laundry detergent and bread to use as her ruse for going back to the store. Griff asks if she needs help, and she says yes, okay, but when he asks if there is more in the car, she acts like she doesn't understand what he's talking about.

Griff tells Justin about how weird their parents are acting. Justin just says that they are always weird. Griff tries to agree with him and says that he's sure they'll be back to normal tomorrow.

#### Chapter 31

While Laura has taken Justin to counseling and Griff is helping Fiona with a booth for the Shrimporee, Eric wanders through the house. He pretends that he is a buyer and how he would react. He knows he would not realize that this was the home of an abducted boy, or a family pulled apart by it all.

Eric knows how men in town regard his father. They fear him, give him plenty of room so as not to crowd him, and avoid eye contact. There are stories about how rough and tough his dad had been back in the day. He even remembers a story about an employee who worked for his dad disappearing and never coming back. Cecil told Eric and Connie to never associate with him again. Later in life, employees told Eric that Cecil had held him under water, punched him out cold, taken him to a cotton field two hours away and left him without a shirt, boots, or wallet. They never heard from him again. He was believed to be in Saltillo, Mexico.

Eric decides to go by Tracy's house to say goodbye. She asks him if this was the part where the man cuts and runs. Eric says no, but agrees that he didn't plan to sleep with her now or ever to return.

#### Chapter 32

When Laura drives Justin to his counseling session, she feels bad that she hadn't thought to let him drive. She says he can drive on the way back. She asks if he is still okay will being the center of attention with all of those people at the Shrimporee. He says that he is. She hopes that he'll talk to her about serious things, not just general chatter. She asks him if he takes his dad's truck at night to go see Marcy. This shocks Justin. In a nervous habit, he cracks his neck.

She explains that she is fine with him sneaking to see Marcy, but she needs to know if he's visiting someone else. He reassures her that he's not seeing Dwight. He thinks that



Griff told on him, but she reassures him and says that she suspected him taking the truck and was reassured when she felt the warm hood when she came home one night.

Truthfully though, she had no idea and merely guessed. She feels in her gut that that's why she insisted that Eric move the gun from the car to the house. He admits that he wants to see Marcy, but hasn't yet. She instructs him not to use the truck because it stalls. If he decides to go, take her car instead. She is worried that she's made a bad mistake, but Justin seems so happy, and he calls her cool. She really wants to seem like a good, responsible mom. She does ask him not to go that night, however, and he agrees.

### Chapter 33

Worrying about what life may be like after tonight and the scheme that Eric and Cecil are planning, Laura is insisting on a good family meal. They plan to eat outside, but the bugs are too bad, so they move indoors. Eric eats extra pork chops, trying to show Laura how much this meal means to him. The table is tense. The boys expect them to announce they are divorcing or that Papaw is dying or something, but thankfully, that isn't the case.

To break the tension, Justin announces that his counselor thinks they are all doing a great job. It is very awkward. Laura reaches for Justin and Griff's hands, then Griff and Justin give their hands to Eric. They all close their eyes, and for the first time, they all pray together.

## Analysis

### Chapter 30

Laura is trying her best to seem normal, so she is thrown when Griff asks if she needs help with the groceries. At first she says yes, but when he asks if there are more in the car, she acts confused. When Griff tells Justin that their parents are acting weird, he isn't surprised.

Griff is surprised at how Sasha looks. Justin explains that she's shedding her old skin and that she's scared. Justin thinks their parents always act weird. Griff tell him that Laura bought detergent when he saw detergent in the wash room and that she bought a loaf of bread and set it next to the first loaf of bread. Justin still writes it off to parents acting weird, so Griff agrees that they'd probably be normal by tomorrow.

The symbolism of the snake shedding its skin is significant in that the family would like to 'shed' their old skin, the one where Justin was missing, and their family has a gaping hole in it. This foreshadows the fact that they will soon be able to release themselves from that old life.

### Chapter 31





Eric admires the way that people had always feared and revered his father. He knows that people don't feel that way about him. Eric wants so badly to be seen in the eyes of others the way his father is seen. He feels like a coward and knows that he runs in the face of adversity, not to mention potential danger. That's why he has agreed to do this project with Cecil. He wants his family to be proud of him. He doesn't realize that they'd rather have him with them in person, than be proud of a man in prison or a dead man.

When he goes to say goodbye to Tracy, it doesn't exactly go as he had planned. He thought he'd be able to go to Tracy and explain that it had been fun, but his family is in need, and he couldn't chance being with her. However, she is very stoic about his decision; she was expecting it really, but he still never actually came out and told her the bold truth...I can't see you because I love my wife and my family.

### Chapter 32

Laura is so worried that she isn't a good mom that she goes overboard sometimes. The police and counselors have asked that Justin not see any acquaintances or friends from his time in captivity, but because she wants to seem like a good, cool mom, she tells him it's okay to visit Marcy at night as long as he takes her car because it's safer, and he doesn't go that particular night. She is trying to avoid him running into his father and grandfather in their grand scheme of getting rid of Dwight Buford.

### Chapter 33

Although the boys don't know what is about to happen this night, Laura does, and she wants a happy family dinner memory in case anything goes wrong. Eric appeases her by eating two pork chops to try and show her how much he appreciates the meal, maybe their last meal. Being in the dark, the entire meal is a mystery and strange to the boys; Griff is ready to leave the table; Justin makes small talk about how his counselor thinks they are all doing a great job. When Laura extends her hands to the boys, then they extend theirs to Eric, the family begins to pray their first prayer together, demonstrating the theme of Forgiveness. Eric's prayer, oddly enough, is about being grateful, and about forgiving each other.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Laura go against the counselor's advice and allow Justin to see Marcy?

## Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Laura want Justin to go visit Marcy tonight specifically?

## Discussion Question 3

What has led Laura to fear that Justin might try to contact or go visit Dwight?



## Vocabulary

momentous, conspicuous, piqued, variegated, mired, blatancy, heft, berth, shill, asunder, unaffiliated, viscous



## Part Four: Chapters 34-Epilogue

### Summary

#### Chapter 34

After dinner that night, Justin chooses to help Laura with the dishes. She is very happy. She tells him that the driving today was a test that he'd passed, and now he will be her chauffeur. Justin smiles and thanks her for permission to see Marcy. He says to keep her from worrying, he'll tell her when he plans to go there. Laura is very happy. When Laura tells him how happy she had been to get his arrowhead post card, he is baffled. He says he didn't send it and had never been to California.

After dishes, unknown to the rest of them, Griff sneaks out to Fiona's house. He tells Fiona that things are weird at his house...they'd prayed at the table and his mom discovered that the arrowhead post card wasn't from Justin. Fiona claims that she tried really hard to copy Justin's handwriting when she sent the post card, at Justin's request, while on vacation in California with her parents. They agreed that it didn't really matter now, that it had given his mom hope during a desperate time, and that was what they'd hoped to accomplish.

Cecil is dressed in dark clothes, sitting in his chair, thinking that if his life ends tonight, he's been very lucky with the family he has had. Meanwhile, at Eric's home, Eric and Justin watch football, Eric can tell that Justin is about to leave. He wants to say something meaningful to Justin, but can't think of what to say.

While Laura is running the shower in the bathroom, most of the time is spent crying over the post card. She had compared the card to Griff's and Eric's writing, but it didn't match either. When she actually showers and comes out, she sees that Eric is wearing a black sweatshirt. When she tells him he'll be too hot, he says that Cecil told him to wear dark clothes. Laura tries to tell Eric that he doesn't need to prove anything or make up for anything for her or the boys by going through with this. They could move away like he suggested.

He says that's not enough anymore. He tells her that while Justin was gone, he'd go to the dump to look for his body in the trash because he'd given up on him being alive. She tells him again that she couldn't bear it if he didn't come home and that she'd prayed that night for the food to be under-cooked and make him too sick to go tonight.

Griff apologizes to Fiona for wanting to break up with her and admits that he was scared. He tells her that his mom found out that Justin didn't send the post card and wondered if he should tell her that they did it. He stays with her and they have sex.

Cecil starts getting ready after midnight. He packs sleeping bags, coffee, food, a tarp, a Coleman™ stove, gas cans, jugs of water, and his gun. He changes his mind and takes the wedding ring and watch that he had previously left in the medicine cabinet. Laura



has fallen asleep, but wakes up to worry if Cecil has already picked up Eric. Eric has the gun from the closet with him. Cecil drives his loaded truck to the marina where the Buford's boat is docked.

He calls Eric, who is waiting for him on the porch, and says that he has changed his mind and is calling it off. He tells Eric that Laura had come by the shop and talked him out of it. Eric is all wired up and claims that he could go and do it alone. Cecil reminds him that he has an illegal gun and that although he may not call the police, Laura might. When Laura wakes again in the night, she runs to the porch and finds Eric there holding the phone, with the gun sticking out of his pants. He tells her that Cecil has called it off.

He also admits that he wouldn't have taken Dwight to Mexico; he'd have killed him.

Meanwhile, Cecil has lied to Eric and decided to take this one on his own. He arrives at the marina to wait there for the Bufords. Mayne Buford walks up to Cecil at the marina. He tells him that Dwight has been gone for a day, and if Cecil showed up tonight, he'd know that he had nothing to do with it. Cecil puts the gun to Mayne's head. He tells him he wished he would pull the trigger. Cecil tells Mayne that if he showed up he'd kill him, then he'd come to Mayne's house for him. Then, he takes his gun and shoots several holes into the side of Mayne's boat. At that same time, Griff is riding his skateboard back from Fiona's. He hears gunshots and hides behind the wall of the carwash across the street. He is scared, then when he looks, he thinks he sees his Papaw's truck leaving the marina.

## Chapter 35

Before heading to the Shrimporee, Eric and Laura receive a call from Mr. Garcia. He says that he wasn't making it public until after the Shrimporee, but the dead body found floating in the water after the storm is definitely Dwight Buford. He has been dead for two, maybe three days. They are overjoyed. They decide not to tell the boys today and not to upset the festivities. The surprise that Tracy Robichaud has for Justin and his family is that she has found and brought to the festival the lady from the flea market who called the police and saved Justin, Mrs. Sheppard.

The family, especially Justin, is overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. When the family talks to her about the reward, she says that she doesn't need any reward money, just to buy mice for the snake from her. Papaw agrees to take a video from one of the kid's phones, but really doesn't know how to. He runs into Fiona who says she'll take the videos and tries to get him interested in either Ruth or Bev Wilcox. She thinks they may be sweet on him. Everyone is overjoyed and happy when Justin, his family, and Mrs. Sheppard are introduced. Overall, the family has a wonderful day.

## Epilogue

Officer Rudy is at the festival. Because his wife isn't feeling well and because she feels that she owes him, Laura offers to take his shift with Alice, the dolphin later that night. Laura spends the evening talking about the dolphin. Eric looks at Laura, amazed that this is the woman who wouldn't tell him, but who went to Cecil to save Eric from himself.



The boys want to go home and look at the stars. They want to find Delphinus for their mom. She tells the family the story of Arion the musician and Delphinus from mythology. The boys are impressed by the story. The family rides home in peaceful contentment, looking forward to finding the stars from their mother's story.

## Analysis

### Chapter 34

Eric wants to show his family that he can protect them. He seems disappointed when Cecil calls the scheme off, but because he didn't act on his own, he is really relieved that someone else put a stop to it. In that way, he isn't the coward who wouldn't go through with it. Laura is glad. She had begged him not to go. She loves him, but knows that he's not that kind of man...the kind of man that Cecil is. She doesn't want him to get hurt or arrested and leave the family. Because she expressed her concerns to Cecil, he realized she was right and tried to spare his son and still allow him to save face with his wife and kids. Luckily, Cecil was spared as well... Dwight went missing, and he didn't have to harm anyone or break any laws. He is still able to be with his family.

Although Mayne is distraught over the final loss of his son and the impending loss of his wife, he is also relieved not to have to carry the burden and feel the guilt of his son's sins. Griff believes he sees his Papaw, but is more worried about getting home before he gets into trouble.

### Chapter 35

Since Eric and Laura had an encounter with Tracy and Kent, the feeling is awkward for Eric and Tracy, even though they are both with spouses who seem to adore them. Everyone is overjoyed at the appearance of Mrs. Sheppard, especially Justin. She even brought mice for Sasha. An even bigger surprise and treat for the family is that she refuses the reward. This means that they will be able to pay off the second mortgage they've taken out on their house.

Fiona is very friendly towards Papaw Cecil and even tries to set him up with one of the Wilcox sisters. But, Cecil is actually looking for Marcy, Justin's girlfriend, but she isn't there. In spite of that, the entire family has a wonderful time. The affair between Eric and Tracy seems to be over and settled as they both seem wrapped up in their own respective spouses. Justin has had his first exposure to the public and has handled it like a champ. Griff is over the moon about Fiona, who feels the same for him.

### Epilogue

This section offers the reader closure and features the theme of Forgiveness. Everyone has experienced a measure of healing and forgiveness throughout the novel, but now, joined as a family unit, they will go home to look at the stars. The significance of the stars is suggested in the stories from mythology. They will be together forever, just as



the characters in the stories, made stronger by their trials. That they are able to literally 'look up' as a family is representative of the future and its outcome.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why did Cecil lie to Eric and tell him he was calling it off?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Forgiveness.

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the most likely scenario concerning Dwight's demise?

## **Vocabulary**

benevolent, pitiable, veracity, perilous, chaste, languidly, insidiously, cantilevered



# Characters

## Justin Campbell

Justin is the son of Laura and Eric Campbell who disappears when he is 11 years old, four years prior to the start of this story. He is loved and missed by all. His younger brother, Griffin, looks up to him with admiration and wants to be like him. He is found when he is 16 years old. He returns a different person than the boy his family remembers.

Neither the family nor the reader truly learns what has happened to Justin during his captivity, but many allusions are made to paint the picture of his life of agony. He has developed a few new traits since he's been gone. Due to a broken ankle, he has a slight limp. When he's nervous, he cracks his neck and peels the beds of his fingernails. Although he is happy to be home, he carries a resentment toward his family for not finding him sooner when he was so close to them.

While in captivity he had a girlfriend named Marcy; he is not allowed to see her after he returns, but by the end of the story, his mom gives him permission to visit her now and then. He seems to share his problems with his therapist which is why he is probably able to hold it together at home. He intermittently shares certain things with different family members.

He loves his snake Sasha who was named by Marcy. It is strange to his family at first because he had always been afraid of snakes before. He tries very hard to please everyone in his family.

## Eric Campbell

Eric is 44 years old and is Justin and Griffin's father and Laura's husband. He is a seventh grade history teacher. He is well liked by the small town. He is determined to never give up on Justin until he is found. After a few years of Justin's disappearance, unknown to his family, Eric would follow garbage trucks, then search the dump for Justin's missing body.

People admire his commitment and pity his situation. He doesn't know how to connect with his wife, not even how to deal with her new persona. She is not only distant from him, but is prone to harming herself, which drives him to seek escape in the arms of another woman.

He turns to Tracy Robichaud, a surgeon's wife, on Wednesdays for comfort and escape from his burdened life. He feels guilty, but not guilty enough to stop the affair. Throughout the story, he is tied to Tracy through civic activities and his children. When his youngest boy is beaten up, Tracy finds him and takes him to the clinic. Although Eric claims to feel guilty, he also expresses that he doesn't trust himself around her.





Eric is very down on himself. He thinks of himself as a loser and as unmanly. He lives in the shadow of his father, Cecil, who is very masculine, but Eric is almost the opposite of his father. He is shy and timid. He doesn't even like to broach controversial questions with Justin when he returns home. He'd rather be in the dark than rock the boat.

## **Kent Robichaud**

Kent is a surgeon and is married to Tracy Robichaud. Although their main home is in Corpus, they stay at their condo in Villa Del Sol in Southport to be by the marina. He is unaware of his wife's affair with Eric Campbell. At the Shrimporee, where the reader first meets him, he seems sweet and very attentive to his wife, Tracy, who planned the event.

## **Tracy Robichaud**

Tracy is married to Kent Robichaud, but is having an affair with Eric Campbell. She appears to be a lonely person who is not receiving the love and attention she craves from Kent. Although she enjoys her Wednesday afternoon trysts with Eric, she is just as interested in knowing about and being involved in the lives of Eric's family, even his wife, Laura.

Tracy writes travel articles for a magazine. She doesn't visit the places she writes about; she merely creates stories from the facts and information forwarded to her from her boss.

She is the person who finds Griff when he is beaten up by older guys at the Teepee Motel. She is kind to him and to his family. She calls Laura, not Eric, to inform her of Griff's injuries. She asks Laura what she would like to see happen on Justin's behalf for the Shrimporee festival of which she is in charge where the Justin returns celebration is concerned.

Although she is attracted to and having an affair with Eric, she seems to be interested and drawn to the entire family. She even tells Eric that if they were not in the situation that they are in, she would want to be friends with Laura, his wife.

## **Griffin (aka Griff or Lobster) Campbell**

Griffin is the younger son of Eric and Laura Campbell. He is currently 14 years old. He misses his brother terribly, but tries not to show it too much because his parents, particularly his mom, are already so distraught. He loves to skateboard, and when the weather isn't sweltering hot, uses the empty pool at the Teepee Motel. He has a huge crush on Fiona Moore who is two years older than Griffin. He admires his brother and doesn't want to sully his memory by telling his parents the mean jokes Justin played on him before he went missing.



When his brother, Justin returns, he is very careful not to say anything that he thinks may upset him or make him think of his time in captivity. Although Justin sometimes shares things with Griff, he never pressures Justin for information. He tells Justin he only wants to hear whatever Justin wants him to know.

Griff is in love with Fiona who eventually becomes his girlfriend. When he is under a lot of pressure at home, he thinks he wants to end things with her because he doesn't deserve her, but she sets him straight, and they stay together.

## **Laura Campbell**

Laura is the mother of Justin and Griffin and the wife of Eric. She has always been a good mom, competent and reliable, and very attractive. She falls apart when Justin goes missing. She acts extremely out of character, not caring about her responsibilities, her family, or her appearance. Although she realizes the slippery slope she is riding, she can't snap out of it and only finds relief and peace at the Marine Lab where she cares for a sick dolphin named Alice. When Justin returns, she is elated. She can't stop looking at him and touching him to make sure he is really home.

She went through a terrible, out of control time while Justin was away. She had public outbursts of crying and acting out. She broke a shell in a store, sliced her hands up with it, and sat in the floor crying and bleeding until her husband came to get her. She feels overwhelmingly responsible for Justin's disappearance...if only she'd been a better mother, if only she hadn't let him go that day, etc...

Although her husband, Eric is having an affair, she seems totally oblivious to it. She spends all of her time working at the laundry or volunteering at the Marine Lab. Caring for Alice, the dolphin, is very therapeutic for her. When Justin returns home, she has a new burst of happy energy. She cleans the house and cooks their favorite meals, but when his abductor is out on bond, she returns to the anxiety ridden shell of a woman that she had been while he was gone.

## **Rainbow**

She is the Campbell's family dog, a black Lab.

## **Ruth and Beverly Wilcox**

Ruth and Beverly Wilcox are widows who live in the condo across the street from Tracy and Kent Robichaud. Ruth's husband died of cancer, and Beverly's husband was killed in the Korean War. They are sweet elderly ladies who like to watch the comings and goings of the Robichaud's home. They do not really know Eric Campbell, but they are very familiar with his story. They feel horrible for the loss of his son, Justin, and for the terrible way his wife, Laura, is reacting to their situation. Because he has so much on



his plate and they are sympathetic, they allow for his indiscretions with Tracy. They call the Wednesday affair “The Soap.”

When Justin is returned, the ladies wait for Laura outside of the library to give her a box of cookies as a way of saying that they are happy that Justin is home. They also flirt with Papaw Cecil at the Shrimporee.

## Cecil Campbell

Cecil is Eric’s father and Justin and Griffin’s grandfather or PaPaw as they call him. He is just as heart-broken as the rest of the family over Justin’s disappearance, but he is part of the glue that holds the family together. He steps in to help with Griffin, the house, the dog, anything he can do to help make life easier for his family. When they seek the advice of a fortune teller and stand the chance of becoming addicted to her services, Cecil pays her a visit and insists she never meets with them again. He is the owner of the pawn shop Loan Star Pawnshop. He is a widower with a previous gambling problem and has learned many life lessons from the world around him, one being that there is no need to rush through life. He is a feisty 67-year-old man whose wife, Connie, died when Eric was 17 years old. Cecil always worries that he has not properly prepared Eric to be a strong person. He worries about his son often.

In his early years, he was imprisoned for gambling. Despite his record, he keeps a gun under the front seat of his truck since Justin was taken. He is prepared to do anything to protect his family. He even plots to kill the abductor when he is out on bail.

He is sentimental about his deceased wife Connie, but is a tough guy with everyone else. He feels power and strength in being feared. His biggest worry is that as he grows older people won’t fear him, which to him means that people won’t respect him.

## Eddie Cavazos

Eddie is a park employee on sea turtle patrol. He is the person who discovers Alice, the dolphin, beached and in distress. He calls for help, and Alice ends up at the Marine Lab. Because the person who finds a distressed animal gets to name it, Eddie chooses to name her Alice after his late grandmother because she was “a sturdy and stubborn woman.”



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Sparrow

Sparrows are mentioned several times in the novel. The symbolic meaning of a sparrow is the mother who is always foraging and providing for those in her nest. Laura, in this story, could be considered a sparrow who is always trying to do what is best for her family once Justin is returned.

## Dolphin

As Laura mentions in the book after studying dolphins, she finds that they are caring, tender creatures who will rescue others in distress whether it is another dolphin, another animal, or a human, and they will carry the distressed being to the surface and help it get air, strength, and buoyancy. Animals are also helpful to people in distress as a way of calming them and taking their minds off of things that are troubling them. Caring for an animal can make a person feel good about himself/herself.

## Independence

Justin and Griff both exhibit independence as they try to shield their parents from harm or sadness. When Justin was missing, Griff came home “sick” from a sleep-over, not because he was ill, but because he wanted to spare his parents the pain of waking up without a child at home. When Justin returns, he tries to keep a cheerful demeanor to ensure that his parents are in a healthy state of mind and won't feel bad about themselves.

## Motherhood

Motherhood is mentioned several times in this novel. Laura feels most of the time as if she's a horrible mother. She worries that others will judge her as such because Justin was abducted, as if it were her fault. When Justin returns, she does everything she can to make up for the times he missed being with his mom. She cooks his favorite meals, buys him new clothes, takes an interest in his pet snake, and many other things. Along the way, she realizes that she doesn't think about her deceased mother as much as she probably should. With that in mind, she tries to do all that she can to have special time with each of the boys so that she will always have a place in their lives.



## The Mice

The mice, Willie and Waylon, for Laura are symbols of Justin's homecoming. They were with him when he was found. The lady from that booth at the flea market is the one who called the police. She's sees the mice as a sign of his freedom and his return home.

## Child Abuse

Although neither Griff nor Justin are ever abused by their parents, Justin is obviously abused in many ways by his captor, Dwight Buford. The abuse he received from Dwight is a binary opposite of the love and affection he gets from his parents. His abuser frightened him and made him concerned about trying to go home or contact his family. The opposite is true of his family. The love they show him makes him not even want to share that he ever harbored anger towards them. He feels safe with them, and his mom even gives him the okay to see his girlfriend from his days in captivity. Unfortunately, love and understanding cannot totally erase the terror of abuse.

## Cowbirds

The family notices cowbirds in their yard. Cowbirds typically lay their eggs in other bird's nests. This is symbolic because Justin (Laura's egg) was taken and placed in another's nest (Dwight Buford). These birds are mentioned in the story when Buford's family posts bail for him, and the Campbells feel threatened by the man who took their child.

## Seagulls

Since the story takes place in Texas on the Gulf Coast, seagulls are mentioned often. Seagulls can be symbolic of opportunity, purity, and integrity. They are birds who fly high and can see the complete picture from above. They are also thought to be messengers of the spirits. Because Justin was held captive by the ocean water, seagulls were prominent. Although they are not carrier pigeons who could take a message from one place to another, they can give the hope of impending opportunity, such as being rescued from a kidnapper.

## Forgiveness

So many people in this story are emotionally wounded that the act of forgiveness is a symbol of healing. Justin admits that he was angry at his family for not finding him sooner when he was so close. Laura asks for forgiveness because she feels that she let him down as his mom before he was taken and because she is trying so hard when he returns. She also asks forgiveness from Griff who has worried and grieved all of these years while Justin was away because he didn't forgive Justin for a prank he pulled on him the day he was abducted. When Laura learns of Griff's guilty feelings, she in turn

asks forgiveness because the prank that Justin pulled on Griff was actually a prank that she had first pulled on Justin days before. Eric asks for forgiveness because he feels like a weak man, but never asks for forgiveness for his specific weaknesses like his affair with Tracy.

## **Guns**

Despite a criminal history and not being allowed to legally have one, Cecil begins keeping an unregistered gun in his truck after Justin's disappearance. Cecil likes knowing it is there and, therefore, he can protect his family from any further pain. Toward the end of the novel, Cecil gives Eric an unregistered gun, which is intended to be used in their plan to kidnap Justin's abductor and ultimately kill him. Guns are a symbol of perceived power in this novel, as both Cecil and Eric feel more powerful, and believe others will find them more powerful/manly, with a gun in their possession.



# Settings

## Padre Island National Seashore

This is the place, specifically near Mile Marker 18, where Eddie Cavazos, “a park employee on sea turtle patrol,” found the stranded bottlenose dolphin named Alice who was subsequently moved to the Marine Lab in Corpus.

## Loan Star Pawnshop

This pawnshop is owned and operated by Cecil Campbell, Eric’s dad.

## Teepee Motel

The Teepee is a motel that has been partially torn down. The empty pool is still intact, and that is where Griff loves to skateboard and practice his tricks. Later, as the spot is overtaken by older hoodlums, it’s also the spot where Griff is beat up and has to be taken to the hospital.

## Campbell's Home

A good deal of the action takes place in their two story suburban home. Each boy has their own room, and Justin’s room is kept intact by Laura, his mother, because she has never given up hope that he was alive somewhere. This is also where the family returns together to watch the stars at the end of the novel.

## The Marina

This is where Cecil and Eric plan to meet Mayne and capture his son to take him to Mexico. This is where Cecil learns that Dwight has gone missing and he shoots holes into Maynes’ boat.

## Corpus

This is a larger town than the Campbell’s hometown of Southport. To reach the town from Southport, one must drive over the tall Harbor Bridge. Corpus is where the court proceedings against Dwight Buford were to be held. This is the town in which Justin was recognized at a flea market and taken to the police station before returning home with his family. This is also where Justin’s counselor is located, as well as the Marine Lab.



## Mustang Island

Mustang Island is an island off the Gulf Coast of Texas. To get to the island, one must take a ferry boat. The ferry docks at a port in Southport, Texas. The island is a favorite of fishermen and sunbathing beach-goers; however, in the summer heat during a drought, even those who can dunk themselves into the water to cool off, find no relief. People can be seen using their beach towels to enable them the ability to sit on the hot seats of their cars.



# Themes and Motifs

## Grief

Whenever a loved one is missing for any reason, runaways, kidnapping, death, etc., the family grieves that person's loss. In this story, the family grieves over the disappearance and four-year absence of their oldest son, Justin. Grief is shown in many ways throughout this novel. Even when Justin returns, his family grieves for what he has had to endure while he was a captive. They grieve over time lost with him during his growing, formative years. They grieve over mistakes they have made in their lives that could have led to his abduction. Almost every character in the story feels grief at one time or another. The main characters, the Campbell family, are drowning in grief.

Laura, Justin's mom, is a perfect example of a grief-ridden person. She feels that Justin must have been taken from them because she is a bad mother. She looks at the people in the town and sees pity in their faces. Laura believes that behind the concern in their faces is the judgment that if she had been a better mother, he wouldn't have gone missing. She is so stricken by heartache that she is unusually harsh towards herself. Although her parents are dead, she feels guilty that she doesn't remember as much about her mother as she used to. She feels that she has been careless enough to let her mother's memory go. She is pained by the fact that Griff has also suffered. She feels that it's her fault that he hasn't had a normal childhood and that he's been neglected or pushed aside because of all of the attention given to Justin.

Griff feels grief over the day that Justin went missing. That morning, Justin pulled a prank on Griff by putting salt into his coke. Griff was extremely upset and no matter what Justin said to apologize, Griff wouldn't forgive him. Justin even offered to take Griff skateboarding with him that day, and Griff refused. For all of the years that Justin has been missing, Griff has never told anyone what happened between them that day, and he has always blamed himself for Justin being taken.

Eric, Justin's father, is challenged by his wife's emotional breakdown, but he caves in and begins an affair with another woman, Tracy Robichaud. He says he feels guilty, and he is very worried that Laura will find out, but he still continues the affair while Justin is missing. He starts the affair again after Dwight Buford is let out of jail on bail.

## Giving up vs. Perseverance

Four years is a long time to wait with hope and the optimism that a missing child will return, but that is exactly how this family reacted during their search for their abducted son. They didn't give up on finding him even when everyone else did. Their perseverance was rewarded by his return to them. When the police and the volunteer searches were convinced that Justin must be dead, his mother never gave up. Long after any stores would voluntarily hang Justin's picture in the window, Eric would scour



the town and those nearby with his own tape and staples and hang fresh pictures of Justin every week or so.

Justin also didn't give up and persevered when he was held captive and had no idea if or when his family would find him. Although he knew that he only lived about an hour or so from home and he saw flyers of himself that his parents had posted, he felt pained at being so close, but so far, but his hope and desire not to give up was renewed when he knew that his family was still searching for him.

Griff never gave up on his ability to help hold his family together. While Justin was missing, Griff could see that his parents were falling apart individually and as a couple. That's why he made sure to never be a problem for them. He also wanted to provide hope when he was worried that his mom would give up. He asked his girlfriend, Fiona, to send a post card to his house, as if it were from Justin, asking his family to keep searching for him. Although it was later discovered that Justin didn't send the post card, Griff accomplished his goal. He kept his family hoping and persevering.

## Family Hardships

Fortunately, most families don't have to endure the hardship of an abducted child, but some do, as did the family in this story. In addition to this trauma, they each endured individual hardships stemming from the abduction. Griff got into fights and had to defend his brother. Laura had emotional breakdowns, private and public. She gave up on herself emotionally and physically. Not only did she have to endure those hardships, her family had to help her through this traumatic time. Eric handled his in a secretive way that was never exposed to his family, but he cheated on his wife while she endured the pain that she was suffering. Justin, of course, endured the worst hardships as he was abused in many ways by his abductor.

When Justin returned to them, Laura described their relationship as if everyone in the house were not on a ship together, but on separate rafts floating in different directions. Although they now live in a house together, they still have not bonded as a natural family would or as they would have before the abduction. They must endure the hardships of trying to blend and become normal around each other.

Laura endured the hardship of her parents dying while she was still young. She still harbors grief over the fact that her memories of her life with her parents has faded away. In enduring the sorrow while Justin was missing, she also worries about her hardships with a domineering father from her childhood and how she doesn't even remember enough to pass on to her children. Because of this, she wants to eliminate any hardships that her boys may encounter while she also feels responsible for their angst.



## Coping

Everyone must cope with something in life, and everyone has different coping skills. Laura was lacking in this area. Although during hard times, she retreated to her methods of dealing with trouble, they were not always healthy emotionally or physically for her. She had emotional breakdowns; she withdrew from her family life; she neglected personal hygiene by not shaving her legs or under her arms, by not showering and washing regularly, and by growing her hair out in an unruly fashion; she also threw herself into work....work at the laundry mat where she got a pay check and volunteer work with a sick dolphin at the Marine Lab.

Unfortunately, Eric coped with his fears, sadness, and the drama he had at home by having an extra marital affair. He looked at this affair as if it were a parallel life to the one he lived with his wife and family. He felt guilty, but the benefits of how the affair made him feel outweighed the possible consequences. He felt that Laura wouldn't find out anyways because she was too wrapped up in work, volunteering, and her own guilt to care about what is happening in his life. She never even asks where he's been or what he's been doing.

Griff has a difficult time coping with his life at home. He feels guilty and partly responsible for Justin's abduction. He worries about the impending doom of his parents' marriage, and he wants to help keep hope alive about finding his brother. He copes with these problems by not burdening his parents with any problems from his life and by not worrying them at all. For instance, when he was finally allowed to go to his first sleep over, he faked being ill so that he could come home, sparing his parents the ache of waking up with yet another child missing from the house. He, himself, coped many times by involving himself in his relationship with his girlfriend, Fiona, and by crowding his days with skateboarding and burying himself in learning tricks to impress his brother when he returns.

## Forgiveness

In this story, there are many types of forgiveness that occur. Justin must forgive his parents when he's angry that they didn't find him sooner. He saw the flyers with a reward for his return and knew that his family was still searching, but still he harbored ill feelings that it took so long for him to be found. His hurt feelings over this come to light when Griff is in the emergency clinic, and his parents are so happy that someone they knew found him right away and brought him to safety. Justin wished that the same thing had happened when he was hurt. In spite of acknowledging his hurt feelings, he does admit that he understands that they tried constantly for four years, and he forgives them.

The parents and Griff must forgive themselves for whatever it is that they individually think they did or didn't do that contributed to Justin's abduction. As previously mentioned Griff and Laura feel the guiltiest about Justin's situation. Laura believes that she wasn't a good enough mother. Griff thinks that if he'd only forgiven Justin on the



day of the prank, Justin may not have been taken. The point here is that, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Justin has forgiven his family for whatever may have happened. They need to find ways that work for them to forgive themselves.

When Griff is extremely upset and doesn't know how to handle Buford being out on bond, he acts in a strange way. Where previously when in pain, Griff would turn to Fiona for help, in this instance, he doesn't. As a matter of fact, he plans to break up with her because he feels that he messed up and is not good enough for her. On his way to meet Fiona to break up, Griff is beaten up at the Teepee Motel by a bunch of drugged out, drunken older guys who have taken over the empty skating pool. When Justin calls to inform Fiona that Griff is hurt, she shows up with milkshakes and tells him that she forgives him for the way he was thinking about her. She makes him feel as if he is worthy of her after all and he is able to forgive himself.

# Styles

## Point of View

The entire story is told from a third person narrative point of view. The narrator describes the setting and tells the reader how the main character during that chapter may feel and what he/she says, but the characters' thoughts are not given unless the narrator explains them. The reader can get a description of what is happening and hear what is being said, but only selective thoughts are expressed.

## Language and Meaning

The author gives detailed descriptions/imagery of the setting and the emotions that each character goes through.

Besides imagery, similes and metaphors are the most used figurative language devices to express to the reader how something looks or feels and how the people look and feel.

## Structure

Each chapter focuses mainly around one character and whomever that person interacts with. Many of the chapters contain Justin because he is the focal point of the story throughout.



## Quotes

At the foot of the walkway hung an engraved sign from the Coastal Bend Church of Christ: FEELING DESPERATE? 'EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.' ROMANS 10:13."

-- Eric (Prologue)

**Importance:** This is the engraved sign that hangs at the foot of the Harbor Bridge. It is important because the Campbell family does feel desperate over the loss of their son for so many years and again feel a desperation after his reappearance. This is the bridge where the elderly walkers find the floating dead body. Before Justin reappears, the reader isn't sure if the dead body is Justin or not. The bridge is important to the town and many of the people in the town have feelings of desperation where Justin and his grieving family are concerned. In this Southern area, most people have a strong faith and turn to God for comfort.

...but to lose a child was an altogether worse kind of hurt, a scar that would absolve all manner of sins."

-- Wilcox Sisters (Chapter 1 paragraph )

**Importance:** This is something that Ruth and Beverly Wilcox believe. They are both widows who have experienced loss, but admit that there can be no loss greater to a person than that of his own child. Although the ladies do not approve of a married man having an affair, they do believe that because of all of the anguish Eric is going through and the continuing struggles with his own wife that he will be forgiven for the affair due to the suffering he experiences on Earth.

Do you know the worst thing about being an old man?' 'No, sir,' 'People stop seeing you as dangerous.'"

-- Cecil (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Cecil is reminiscing about something that his own father had told him years ago. He has always felt like a tough guy. He finds that when people fear it, they respect the fact that he's a man who can take care of himself and his family. If people no longer fear him, he feels useless and less of a man.

He was feeling turned around and trapped, like the wreckage he'd been swimming through was collapsing around him.

-- Eric (chapter 7)

**Importance:** This quote describes how Eric feels when he's trying to connect with Justin after his return. They have been told not to ask Justin anything about Buford or what has happened to him. Justin casually expresses to Eric that at Buford's hearing the next day, he will plead not guilty because he always said if he ever got caught that's how he'd plead.



Sometimes you have to thin the herd.”  
-- Dwight (chapter 15)

**Importance:** This quote is important because soon after Buford pleads not guilty, Justin says this phrase and tells Laura that that is something that Buford used to say about people and that he'd laugh and say that when he heard they are going for the death penalty. This phrase is more important on this page because Laura is the one who repeats the saying to the Wilcox sisters when they try to make Laura feel better and tell her that they hope he goes in front of a firing squad. It's interesting that as much as she hates him, Laura uses his exact words.

It had been a bolstering relief, like losing control of a car and then swerving safely back onto the road.”  
-- Eric (chapter 15)

**Importance:** This is a thought from Eric Campbell. After Justin returned, he had not seen nor contacted Tracy Robichaud. He is happy to be trying to put his family back together. He doesn't know how to come to terms with his family life and his former secret life with Tracy. After summer classes one day, Tracy shows up at his classroom and closes and locks the door. Although nothing happens but a hug, Eric doesn't trust himself being alone with Tracy. He's worried that he doesn't have the will-power to resist her.

She knew it made no sense, knew she couldn't explain or defend it, but what Laura felt was punished. Punished for venturing out of the house. For leaving the boys alone.”  
-- Laura (chapter 15)

**Importance:** Laura started her day feeling optimistic and ready to set herself on a path to her old, normal self. She went to the library alone and had planned to surprise Eric at school. She put on a nice outfit and did her hair and makeup. She is feeling very good about herself and life in general until she arrives home to find Eric on the porch looking upset. He informs her that the DA, Garcia, has let him know that Dwight Buford's parents are posting bond, and he'll be out in a day or two. Laura automatically reverts to her frazzled self. She has always blamed herself in one way or another for Justin's disappearance, now she feels that she was right to think that. Bad things happen when she lets her guard down and doesn't devote 100% of her time and attention to the boys.

They wear confident masks and go through the motions of hopefulness, and in turn, their sweet boys would rally, acting compliant and consoled and unafraid, and none of them would believe any of it.”  
-- Narrator (chapter 15)

**Importance:** After learning of Buford's impending release, Eric and Laura try to pretend that they are not devastated by this occurrence so that they will not scare the boys. They know that if they act calm and cool, the boys will follow suit. Unfortunately, they do realize that this is just a charade that they will all be putting on to make the other family members feel that they are being comforting. In reality, they will all be scared to death.





They never talked about anything real, certainly not about Dwight Buford. In that way, he was always there, watching and listening like a new member of the family.”

-- Narrator (chapter 17)

**Importance:** In an effort to try to prove that they are not going to let Buford’s release control their lives, they are doing just that. They try to make their evenings seem normal by talking about their days and what they believe they should be sharing with their family. They are not, however, talking about anything that can help any of them feel better. They are not talking about real life or their problems. They are being superficial, having conversations one would have with strangers. It’s comparable to not talking about “the elephant in the room” or the problem at hand. By ignoring the problem at hand, they are actually allowing Buford to control them even more; in that way, he’s always with them.

...briefly she felt as if she’d been buoyed, lifted to the surface where she could draw a breath before being pulled under again.”

-- Laura (chapter 18)

**Importance:** This is a thought that Laura has after Buford is released. She has been researching dolphins and their habits. She finds that dolphins will protect other dolphins, other animals, and people if they feel the other is in distress. The dolphin will carry the distressed creature to the surface of the ocean to help them breathe. She looks at the recent incidents in her life. Since Justin’s disappearance, she has been in a trance-like state. Then, when he is returned and she begins to think that things are looking up and life can become normal for them, Buford is released from prison. While Justin was away, she felt like she was drowning. When he returned, she felt a reprieve, a remission from her pain. Now that Buford is out and they are in fear, she feels that after a short breathe of intermission from pain, she is being pulled beneath the surface again into drowning in pain.

Because you feel like he’s always with you. You feel like he’s always watching you, hovering, always close enough to touch you. You feel like there’s no getting away.”

-- Laura (chapter 19)

**Importance:** Laura says this to Eric after they have spent a little time with Buford out on bail. She tells Eric that she knows why Justin never tried to run away from Buford, even though he obviously had chances to at least tell someone what was going on. This has been a mystery and a worry for Eric and Laura since Justin’s return. She is so paranoid about running into Buford, feeling that he’s sneaking around watching their every move, she feels almost paralyzed with fear. Because of her anguish and fear of Buford’s potential presence, she now understands why Justin didn’t try to make a run for it or reach out to them. He must have been terrified of Buford’s presence all the time.

It’s a small world for some people,’ he said. ‘Not for everyone.’”

-- Justin (chapter 26)

**Importance:** This is something that Justin says in the waiting room of the hospital after



Griff has been beaten up at the Teepee Motel. Tracy Robichaud happens to be driving by the motel while Griff is being beaten up. She is able to call his parents and take him to the emergency clinic for help. Although he suffered from the beating, it was stopped when Tracy showed up, and he had help immediately. Justin doesn't believe it's such a small world that someone known to the family should happen upon a tragedy and rescue the person. He had been hurt in the marina. No cars drove by; no one he knew came to his rescue. He was abducted and abused for years not saved immediately after his injury occurred. He is happy that Griff is okay, but he is also bitter about the fact that he got hurt so close to home and was being held so close to home, but no one found him for four years.