

Where Things Come Back Study Guide

Where Things Come Back by John Corey Whaley

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Plot Summary

Lily, Arkansas is a small town where things come back. John Corey Whaley describes small town living with all of its idiosyncrasies from the perspective of a young man named Cullen Witter, Cullen and his family live in Lily and have been there long enough to be a fixture of the town. When Cullen's younger brother simply disappears without a trace one day, Cullen and his best friend Lucas are devastated. Cullen's mother and father, and Gabriel's best friend, Libby Truett, are also shocked and unhappy. Despite an extensive search, no trace of Gabriel can be found.

Cullen and his family work their way through the stages of grief. Lucas sleeps on Cullen's floor more often than not, having lost his own brother, and for the most part adopted Cullen and Gabriel as surrogates. Two weeks after Gabriel's disappearance, a man named John Barling show up in town, having come from Oregon, and insists that he's seen a Lazarus woodpecker, considered extinct for the last sixty years. He causes more commotion than Gabriel's disappearance does, and breeds a great deal of resistance as a result.

At the same time, Benton Sage is being sent on his first mission on behalf of his church. Reverend Hughes, responding to a request from Rameel Desta, sends Benton to Ethiopia. Benton is excited at first, and ready to do God's work, but life as a missionary is not at all what he expected it to be. Rameel takes him from town to town where they hand out food and medicine, and talk about God. Benton thinks his talents are wasted here and that there is little being done in the way of bringing these people to God. He sends a letter to the Reverend, asking to be relieved. Six weeks later, an envelope with a plane ticket home arrives, and Benton leaves Ethiopia. When he returns, expecting to be given a different assignment, Reverend Hughes tells him that he should rethink his plans to serve the church. Even his own father is so disappointed in Benton that he won't speak to him. Benton decides to accept one of the scholarship offers and returns to school at the University of Atlanta where he meets Cabot Searcy. When Benton commits suicide on Christmas, Cabot is tasked with boxing up his things. In the process, he discovers Benton's journal, which leads him to the Book of Enoch, and the beginning of a quest that will consume him.

He meets and marries Alma Ender (as a result of a pregnancy scare) who left Lily to live with her grandmother in Atlanta and go to University. When she tires of his inability to hold a job of any kind, and leaves him to return to Lily, he follows her, convinced that he can talk her into coming home. Alma believes she is home, and asks him to sign the divorce papers she sent, and leave her alone. When she adds that she has a date, Cabot is crushed. He can't just go home. Instead, he hangs around a convenience store until he discovers where he can find Cullen Witter, drives to his house and when a young man comes out, he presumes it is Cullen. He lures him closer, and after bashing him in the head with a flashlight, pushes him into the trunk. When Gabriel wakes sometime later, he has no idea where he is or why. Cabot will hold Gabriel for weeks, convinced that he is the angel Gabriel and that God had sent him to repair the damage that he had done the first time. Gabriel must maintain his composure in order to keep



his life, while his family struggles with the idea that he might be dead. When he finally returns to Lily, and Cullen sees him walking up the driveway, he isn't sure Gabriel is real at first. He touches him without speaking and then knows for sure that in Lily, things come back.



Chapters One and Two

Chapters One and Two Summary

Lily, Arkansas is a small town where things come back. John Corey Whaley describes small town living with all of its idiosyncrasies from the perspective of a young man named Cullen Witter, Cullen and his family live in Lily and have been there long enough to be a fixture of the town. When Cullen's younger brother simply disappears without a trace one day, Cullen and his best friend Lucas are devastated, along with Cullen's mother and father, and Gabriel's best friend, Libby Truett. An extensive search is conducted, but there is no trace of Gabriel.

Oslo had been putting drugs into his veins for so long that Cullen Witter isn't surprised to find himself faced with having to identify his body. It is in fact the second body that he has seen up close. The first was a woman in her late forties or early fifties who had no visible cause of death. Oslo's arms are full of bruises and track marks, and Cullen says little as they pull the sheet back for him to provide identification. His mother and brother Gabriel wait for him in the car. Cullen drives them home, wishing his Dad had come along to be the man of the hour, but he'd been called that afternoon to haul oil well equipment to Harrison. When they get home, he is still gone. Gabriel is asleep in moments, while Cullen's mother and aunt half talk and half cry in the other room. He lies in bed that night, thinking about the phone call that summoned them and about his cousin and how nothing can be done to fix that situation. Two days later, and bored beyond belief, Cullen calls Lucas who offers to pick him up. They drive to Burke's Burger Box, and Lucas asks him how Gabe and his aunt are coping. When they get there, Mena kisses them each on the cheek and gets into the back seat. She begins to complain about being snubbed at lunch by a cheerleader, and Cullen tunes out, thinking about zombies instead.

Benton Sage is from Atlanta, Georgia. He is sent to Awasa, Ethiopia to act as an emissary from their church. Reverend Hughes believes that he will bring many new souls to the Lord. Benton isn't so sure, especially once he arrives and realizes how difficult things might be with the language barrier. Hundreds of people are crowded into the market with him as he searches for bread, hoping to find someone who speaks English. He finally finds something that passes for bread and then spends several minutes trying to determine how much to pay the old woman who is selling it. He goes back to his room above the clinic, and eats almost all of it before he is reduced to tears. Two days later, he is introduced to Rameel, the young man who originally contacted the church for help. Rameel and his ministry provide food, some medical attention, and water to smaller outlying villages, while hoping to convert them in the process. By the time that Benton arrives, Rameel's ministry numbers 1,740 people. The small village of Kwalessa is filled with hungry, sick and dying people. They go from hut to hut, handing out water, rice and grain. The next morning, Benton wakes alone and goes outside. Five boys, laughing and joking, each carrying a shovel go by and when he asks Rameel about them, he learns that they are grave diggers.



Chapters One and Two Analysis

Cullen Witter is disappointed to find that he is the one who must assume the responsibility for identifying his cousin Oslo's body when the authorities call. His father had been called to work earlier in the day, making Cullen the man of the house for the time being. He drives his mother and younger brother Gabriel to the morgue where he does what he must. It is not an unexpected death, as Oslo had abused drugs and needles for some time. Cullen takes his family home. Cullen is smitten with Ada Taylor - the girl he dreams of, despite her current attachment to Russell Quitman. Called the 'black widow' of Lily, Arkansas, Ada had previously dated both Conner Bolton (who died in a car accident where she was the unhurt passenger) and Aaron Lancaster (who drowned in the White River before Thanksgiving). It seemed almost as though dating Ada was tantamount to having a death wish, but Cullen didn't care. Like most young men who adored her, he believed that death was a small price to pay for some quality time with Ada. Then of course there are also the Russell Quitman's of the world, who in Cullen's opinion deserved to be one of the ones who crashed and burned. Cullen calls his best friend Lucas two days later, too bored to stay home, and jumps on the idea of going for a drive. Lucas picks him up and takes him to Burke's Burger Box where they pick up his girlfriend Mena. Mena is a southern girl, whose forward behavior irritates Cullen. He ignores her as best he can, tuning her out completely whenever possible.

When Benton Sage learns that he will be the one sent to Ethiopia on a mission for the church, he is overwhelmed, excited, and panicked - all at the same time. His stomach lurches as the congregation surrounds him, and prays. Once there, however, Benton is not as confident, and when searching the market for bread of any kind and discovering his inability to communicate with the locals, he realizes that he is in way over his head. Two days later, he meets the young man who was responsible for his arrival in Ethiopia, Rameel, and on their first trip west together, Benton has a vision in a dream. In it, he is introduced to the angel Gabriel. A large bird lands on the angel's shoulder and lets out a call. Gabriel tells Benton that he has found favor in God's eyes and has been called to change the world. He wakes in a cold sweat to find Rameel standing near him. They spend the day going from hut to hut in Kwalessa and handing out supplies. Later that night, Rameel tells Benton that he truly is a blessing because he brought hope with him. The next morning, Benton wakes in time to see five boys heading out to dig more graves.



Chapters Three and Four

Chapters Three and Four Summary

Three days a week, Cullen works at the Handy Stop beside I-40. It is easy to get bored, and allow the mind to wander, returning only to service the 'ding, ding' signifying someone had come in. Cullen serves one man, selling him cigarettes. Then Russell and Neil enter, leaving Ada Taylor in the Jeep alone. Cullen daydreams about her until Neil asks him for cigarettes. Cullen refuses, despite Neil's assertions that he is eighteen now. Unhappy with the outcome, he pays for the other items and shouts at Ada to pump the gas in a way that is less than flattering. While she does, they ask him about Oslo, trying to confirm his cause of death. Cullen is tasked with taking his family to the funeral as well. Even Reverend Wells is emotional at the service. On the way back, Lucas tells Cullen and Gabriel about the woodpecker that was presumed extinct but recently was spotted in Lily. After the last day of school on Monday, Lucas, Gabriel and Cullen pick up Mena and go to the river. They talk about the woodpecker sighting and what it might mean to the people in Lily. Gabriel insists that the townsfolk need something like this to have hope where now there is none. He insists that none of the adults in Lily seem fulfilled. Then he adds that even if they do find it, it's unlikely that they'll be happy.

Two weeks into his service, Benton Sage is becoming comfortable with the roll of passing out food, water and information about Christ. He has a small crisis of faith, and Rameel speaks to him - words that ring in his ears throughout the following day. Despite this, he pens a letter to Reverend Hughes, telling him that he believes he has made a mistake. He tells the Reverend that he'll stay until he hears from him, and mails the letter from Addis Ababa where they tell him that it will likely take between three and five weeks to get there. Two months later, an envelope arrives containing nothing beyond a single plane ticket home. He is scheduled to leave in one week, but before that happened, Rameel insists that Benton meet his wife and children who were returning from London for the summer. They eat in the formal dining room of the house that Isadora and her children stay in when they are home. Isadora, in making conversation, compares Benton to Gabriel, referring to the Book of Enoch in the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible. It is a scripture Benton is not familiar with.

Chapters Three and Four Analysis

Cullen is at work when Russell and Neil come in. Neil tries to buy cigarettes, but Cullen knows he is under age and refuses. He maintains a polite front when they question him about Oslo, but neither offers the kind of standard condolences that he'd heard from so many others since Oslo's death. In a way, the honesty is comforting. Cullen doesn't mind that Gabriel is bunking in his room with him. He's quiet, doesn't rummage through Cullen's things, and even listens to his ideas for books that one day Cullen wants to write. Cullen also can't remember a single time when Gabriel had told a lie or half truth. Cullen's relationship with his father however had been one of ups and downs. Their



relationship had definitely improved since his father had quit drinking when Cullen was thirteen, but Cullen still managed to say things to him at times that came out sounding ungrateful or hurtful, even when he didn't mean to be. One of those occasions occurs when his father informs him that he will have to drive his mother to Oslo's funeral the next day. He responds, telling him he will, as always, earning him a 'look'. Cullen had decided at the age of sixteen to be nasty to his father, although if asked, he couldn't put a reason to his behavior that made sense. After the funeral, Gabriel talks to Cullen, expressing his anxiety that something might happen to Cullen, leaving him alone. Cullen tries to comfort him, but Gabriel begins to cry and Cullen holds him awkwardly until he pulls himself together. They go to school on the last day, Gabriel hoping to catch a last glimpse of Ada, who never shows up. Then Gabriel, Lucas, and Cullen pick up Mena and head for the river where they talk about the possible effects that finding evidence of an extinct woodpecker might have on the town of Lily.

Benton Sage told his family that he was doing God's work. It is the first lie that he had ever really told. He spends his evening pouring over scriptures until Rameel reminds him that he is always with God. When Benton expresses his misgivings and his fears that they are accomplishing little, Rameel reminds him that by example they mirror the ways of Christ. Benton tells his second lie just before leaving when he tells Rameel's wife Isadora that he has enjoyed his time there. He is surprised to discover that Isadora's family is well off and when she and the children are home with their father, they live in a very nice house in Addis Ababa. Isadora compares Benton to Gabriel who in the Book of Enoch in the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible killed the children of the fallen angels, banishing Grigori and the others to hell for introducing humankind to concepts such as the arts and astrology.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

It takes only two weeks before everyone is talking about the bird, but like Gabriel, it doesn't take long for Cullen to realize that if he saw the bird himself, he wouldn't tell a soul. Lucas comes into the store and announces that he's found a date for Cullen - not that Cullen is looking. At first Cullen refuses outright, but when Lucas tells him that it is with Alma Ember. She is returning now to Lily, and Lucas infers that she is ready to experience something she previously hasn't. The date is set for seven that evening, with Mena and Lucas picking Alma up around six. When Lucas pulls up at just after seven, Mena kisses Cullen's cheek and Lucas makes introductions. They drive to one of the drive ins that still remains and Alma does her best to convey her desire to take Cullen home, but Cullen plays stupid until they drop her off, telling Lucas afterward that she's too serious. Gabriel isn't home when Cullen gets there, and he decides to sit in his room and wait. He turns on the television and minutes later is asleep on the floor. In the morning he wakes and Gabriel still isn't home. He showers, dresses and goes downstairs for breakfast. Three hours pass during which they call everyone they know, and drive through and around town twice. When Gabriel still hasn't been found or heard from at that time, they call the police. The day Gabriel vanished is a Thursday. On the same day, John Barling tells the world via national television that the Lazurus woodpecker is alive. Cullen spends that day (Friday) speaking only to police. For reasons even he can't fathom at the time, he simply can't talk to anyone. Lucas and Mena stay with him until he is questioned. Right after he leaves, driving his mother's car to the White River and stripping to his boxers, he jumps in. After venting into the water, he lays on the bank, imagining that a Lazurus bird lands nearby and discusses helping him find Gabriel. Lucas finds him and when Cullen insists that he knows Gabriel is dead, Lucas punches him in the face and leaves. For two weeks Cullen's mother and father seem to draw closer while forty people hiked and canoed the region searching for Gabriel. Gabriel, bored and out of sorts, finds himself walking to Alma's where she is successful in distracting him.

Chapter Five Analysis

Cullen had been known for his cynicism until Gabriel broke him of the habit. Cullen used his cynicism as a defense mechanism, making comments that were witty but cut down the people they were aimed at in an effort to win the respect or even admiration of his friends. Gabriel had witnessed one such episode, quietly announcing that to act as though he hated everyone must be exhausting. Cullen realizes he is right. Cullen has a great deal of free time between customers at the store and he is happy to see Lucas when he comes in. Lucas has news. He has set up a date between Cullen and Alma Ember. At nineteen (almost twenty) years of age, Alma is older and has already been married and is heading for divorce. When Lucas picks Cullen up, he notices that Alma doesn't look the least bit nervous. Cullen's confidence slowly rises all evening as he



submits to Alma's obvious attentions. She does her best to convey her interest but Cullen has other ideas. He's convinced that in a year he'll be leaving Lily for greener pastures where the selection of women will surely be greatly improved. Gabriel goes missing on the day that Cullen has his date with Alma. Though for two weeks, forty people searched for Gabriel, the truth was that since Gabriel was fifteen years old, most people simply thought he'd run away from home. As such, they didn't take his disappearance even as seriously as they take the possible sighting of a Lazurus woodpecker, and Cullen is disgusted. After a week has gone by, Cullen and his parents drive to Little Rock to paper the region with missing notices, and afterward, Cullen finds himself walking to Alma's mother's house. She let him in, and Alma is most accommodating, curing Cullen's boredom in short order. He is so tired of the 'I'm so sorry' conversations already that he has no intention of going to the town meeting to endure them, even if that means that he will not be able to meet the famous John Barling.



Chapters Six and Seven

Chapters Six and Seven Summary

Benton's homecoming is less than welcoming, especially from his father who doesn't say a word. Reverend Hughes summons him to inform him that he's reconsidered Benton's duties. When Benton insists the problem wasn't his but where he was sent, and explains his lack of faith in Rameel's ministry, the Reverend tells him he will no longer be going anywhere in a ministerial capacity. When Benton's father finds out, he is so disappointed that he stops talking to Benton entirely. He begins to call the universities where scholarships had been offered before he went to Ethiopia in the hopes that he could simply just go away.

Three weeks after Gabriel vanishes, Cullen's mother begins to behave almost normally. Many of the younger boys in town came to her for the newest 'Lazarus' haircut - a Mohawk with the tips dyed bright red. Duke Lister is the first one to have it done and like lemmings, the others can't wait to copy him. Everyone around Cullen copes with Gabriel's disappearance in different ways. His mother appears to go back to normal one day, as though acting that way could make it real; his father spends every day hounding police, newspapers, and creating a website dedicated to finding Gabriel; Cullen is convinced his brother is dead; and Lucas is suddenly sure that Fulton is holding him captive next door. He actually storms over there and begins questioning Fulton, who goes from surprised to saddened, and then hugging Cullen, he tells him how sorry he is and that Gabriel was one of the good guys, just like Cullen. Lucas realizes he's made a mistake, and before they get back into Cullen's house, he announces that it has to be John Barling instead. Months after moving to Lily to find the Lazarus woodpecker, leaving his wife and two children behind in Oregon, John Barling goes canoeing and manages to record a Lazarus woodpecker as it knocks on a tree, and then lets out a call that the National Ornithological Society confirms is unique to that particular species. Soon after, Lily is flooded with people interested in birds, and Cullen is sick to death of it, the people who have invaded his town, and the attention paid to the bird that after four weeks no one has been able to capture a single photograph of.

Chapters Six and Seven Analysis

Benton isn't welcomed home the way he might have expected to have been, though the summons to see Reverend Hughes is no real surprise. Benton had tried to please his father all his life, mostly by embracing his religious fervor, but failed. At the age of sixteen, when his father had cancelled his prom date after telling her mother that her daughter had been seen behaving like a harlot with a former boyfriend, Benton had almost rebelled, but instead he had simply taken off his tie and gone back to his room. The next morning, his father told him he was proud of him for trusting his decision. That one comment from his father made all the rest okay. Now, at eighteen, he'd disappointed his father again. When Benton tells him about the Reverend's decision to



cut him from ministerial work, his father quit talking to him altogether. All Benton wants to do then is leave.

Three weeks have passed since Gabriel went missing. While Cullen's mother begins to act somewhat normally, giving children the latest haircut fad - a Lazarus Mohawk, his father spends all day every day on the phone talking to police across the state, and convincing newspapers to ensure Gabriel's picture would be run. He also works diligently to create a website dedicated to helping find his son while Cullen simply gives up all hope that Gabriel will ever be found alive. Sometimes he'd wake with the sure feeling that this would be the day Gabriel would return, and other days he would wake with the certainty that his body would be found that day. Mostly, however, Cullen was sick to death with hearing about the Lazarus woodpecker. Lucas becomes convinced that their neighbor Fulton Dumas is responsible, and is obsessed with the idea that Gabriel could be right next door. Unable to hold back any longer, he finally storms over and rings the doorbell. He confronts Fulton, whose response soon deflates Lucas. They leave, Lucas apologizing, and heading back across to Cullen's house, Lucas assures Cullen that it had to have been John Barling. Cullen is just sick to death of the whole issue. He is tired of his town overrun by ornithologists and bird lovers of all descriptions, and the fact that no one seems able to capture a single photo of the darn bird. It has been four weeks since Gabriel was last seen, and the Lily Motel changes its name to the Lazarus Motel, which doesn't improve Cullen's demeanor.



Chapters Eight and Nine

Chapters Eight and Nine Summary

In August, Benton begins attending the University of Atlanta. He meets his new dorm mate, Cabot Searcy, and for the first time voices his intentions to use his English degree to be a novelist. Cabot wants to change the world, and is studying philosophy to that end. Both young men have a different approach to University. Benton studies relentlessly while Cabot enjoys the companionship of different women and events. One day Cabot asks him if he is gay. Benton vehemently denies it, but Cabot insists that if he isn't, he should make a point of coming out with him now and then. Benton counters by suggesting perhaps Cabot should study more often. By the next morning in English class, Cabot has decided to change his approach. In English, he sits up straight and pays close attention to the lecture, highlighting passages and making notes in the margins. Cabot begins to care about the grades he gets and by the end of the semester he is surprised to learn that he has actually passed. Benton, on the other hand, learns he will have to repeat two of his classes. Cabot invites Benton to join him for Christmas break in Vidalia, but Benton opts to stay behind and begin his first book. On Christmas Eve, Benton decides he doesn't believe in Christmas and is sure that God has misled him. As the church bells begin to toll at midnight, Benton climbs the stairs of the bell tower and on the stroke of the twelfth bell, he jumps, knowing his last breath as he connects with the ground below.

Five weeks after Gabriel's disappearance, Cullen goes downstairs to find his mother, father and Lucas sitting silently at the table in front of a stack of uneaten pancakes. The newspaper reveals that Russell Quitman had been in an accident in Florida and was paralyzed from the waist down as a result. Cullen decides to end his short relationship with Alma, and she cries when he tells her, but this does nothing to change his mind. When Cullen is at work on a July Saturday morning, he is surprised when Ada comes in. She has just returned to town, and her first stop is to see Cullen and relay her sympathies regarding Gabriel. She tells him that after hearing, she thought about him and his family a great deal, and wanted to tell him how sorry she was. The enormity of it all suddenly hits Cullen, and he sinks into the metal chair behind him, overwhelmed by the fact that he will likely never see Gabriel again. Ada kneels beside him, putting an arm around him as he cries.

Chapters Eight and Nine Analysis

Cabot is enigmatic, with the kind of personality that people just naturally respond to and Benton is exactly the opposite. While Cabot embraces life at University, dating, going out and generally making new friends wherever he went, Benton stays in the dorm room and studies. Cabot tries to convince him to join them, and when Benton refuses, Cabot asks why he just sits every night and studies. Benton tells him he enjoys it, and has no desire to go out, suggesting that perhaps he try it himself. Oddly, Cabot spends more



time thinking about their conversation than Benton does afterward. He thinks about the two classes he has already dropped and the many times he has fallen asleep in other classes that semester. Once he begins to care about his grades, things change for Cabot and at the end of the semester, he tells Benton in an amazed voice that he actually passed. Benton, however, did not do as well, learning that he will have to repeat two classes. When Cabot leaves for Christmas break, Benton stays behind. On Christmas Eve, overwhelmed with self pity and longing for a life that would never be, Benton climbs the bell tower and when the bell rings for the last time, Benton jumps to his death.

Five weeks into Gabriel's disappearance, Russell Quitman is in an accident that takes all feeling from the waist down. When Cullen hears, he is surprised to realize that he actually feels sorry for the Quit Man. Lucas comments that it is fortunate that he's broken up with Ada two weeks earlier. With her track record, it would have been more likely he'd have died and become her third boyfriend to lose his life while dating her. Cullen is beginning to see Alma Ember as an inconvenience. She cries when he breaks up with her, and lost for words, he just leaves. One Saturday, working at the store, Ada shows up and tells him she has just returned to town. She stopped to see him first because she felt guilty about not having called to see if he was okay, or come back to help search for Gabriel. Something about the sincerity of her feelings touches Cullen and his standard response sticks in his throat. It is not okay. The idea that he has lost his favorite person in the world unmans him. He sinks into the chair behind him and Ada puts an arm around him quietly while he cries for the first time.



Chapters Ten and Eleven

Chapters Ten and Eleven Summary

Cabot waits two weeks before packing Benton's things into boxes. It takes three boxes in total and the last thing that he does is strip the bedding. Under the mattress, he discovers a diary of sorts and sets it aside. He carries the first box down the stairs and then begins flipping through the pages of Benton's book. The introduction makes him smile, and he thumbs forward to the entry that follows their meeting. Page number forty seven begins with Benton's impressions of Cabot, and they make him laugh. He takes the second and then the third box down, holding back the journal again. For the next two nights, he flips through it reading Benton's often comical entries. Benton's description of him 'looking much smarter than he actually is' has Cabot laughing again. The book is barely half full, and Cabot pens the final entry himself, sounding much like a death notice. Then, thumbing idly through before closing the journal for good, he stumbles upon an entry from the Book of Enoch that proclaims how Gabriel was sent to heal the earth while Azazel is ascribed all sin.

The website that Cullen's father puts together generates little in actual help. There were some false sightings, and condolences, but little else. Cullen and Ada talk about Gabriel frequently, trying to provide some guess as to where he might have gone. Cullen's mother begins behaving somewhat normally but his father struggled. When Gabriel had been gone for six weeks, Cullen's father brought Vilonia Kline - a spiritual guide. Vilonia asks for a t-shirt of Gabriel's and then wants to see Gabriel's room. Lastly, she asks about his hobbies, and learning that Gabriel read a lot, she asks to see a most recently read book. Cullen gives her *The Catcher In The Rye*, which Gabriel had mentioned he'd read for the eleventh time just before he disappeared. Vilonia hums *Stairway To Heaven* and comments that many prayers have been spoken in Gabriel's bed. She adds that Gabriel is not near water, and left a lot of energy behind in his room. What rattles Cullen to his core is her comment that Gabriel had a strong spirit. Cullen stalks outside, so obviously distressed that Lucas grabs his arms and shakes him. He continues to hold Cullen as Cullen sinks to the ground. When he learns what upset Cullen so much, he calms his best friend, telling him she couldn't possibly know. Cullen sees his mother come out, and follows her. She announces that they are going to find Gabriel. Cullen waves Mena and Lucas over and lets them get into the truck with him. The day is increasingly bizarre.

Chapters Ten and Eleven Analysis

The Book of Enoch describes how two hundred angels who came to Earth after falling in love with the females they watched over. Led by Azazel, they began reproducing with human females, their children called the Nephilim. The Nephilim destroyed all man's possessions, moving on to the beasts, reptiles and birds afterward. The Grigori (fallen angels or Watchers as they were known) begin teaching the humans who remained



vanity, astrology and the arts of war. God then orders his left hand, Gabriel, to descend to Earth and put an end to the lawlessness. The Grigori are bound to hell for eternity because of their sins. Later, God tells Noah - the great - grandson of Enoch - to save the animals and his family from the flood and Enoch himself is made into the angel Metatron and thereafter kept the throne of God, invented writing and taught God's word to the people of Earth. In 1773, James Bruce discovers three copies of the Book of Enoch, missing then for almost a thousand years. Only one church includes this in their Bible - the Ethiopian Orthodox Church whose followers included Rameel and Isadora Desta in Addis Ababa. Cabot cries when he gets the news that Benton has killed himself. He cannot believe that the Benton he knew would do such a thing. When he returns to school, he is surprised that none of Benton's family arrives to box up his things. After waiting two weeks, he finally does it himself. As he goes through and boxes things, he finds a small album marked family with photos of Benton and his siblings, parents, and a slim, black man whose smile lights up the photo. Cabot sorts through and assembles three boxes of Benton's things, finding and reading the journal he discovers lastly. The journal has entries that are funny, making him laugh out loud in places. The last entry, Cabot himself pens, citing the end of Benton's life and how much he will be missed. Before putting it away for good, he finds the final passage from the Book of Enoch.

Cullen's father's refusal to return to work quickly exhausts what little funds they have, and they are forced to accept the charitable donations that had been offered by the First United Methodist Church of Lily, even though they only attended the church on a casual basis. Lucas gets angry with Cullen and doesn't speak to him for a couple of days, but quickly apologizes for his behavior. Cullen learns to appreciate Mena, but she helped out in so many ways that amazed him, but most surprising of all was that she managed to convince the local paper's editor to run a photo of Gabriel in every issue until he was found. Lucas is spending more time with her too. Cullen continues to see Ada, able to talk to her about Gabriel when he could talk to no one else. Cullen's mother begins to return to normal, but just as she does, his father brings home a spiritual guide who claims to be able to find Gabriel. When she is finished, Cullen is outside and his parents are following her to some unknown destination to find his brother. He wonders if his life can get any more crazy.



Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Summary

Cabot finds an Ethiopian Orthodox Bible in the library. He had researched the Book of Enoch for an hour instead of attending his Human Anatomy lecture, and finding the Bible, he opens it and scans the contents. He opens it to the Book of Enoch and turning to chapter ten he reads the quote that Benton left behind. It serves as the focus of Cabot's endeavors. The scripture is highlighted and some passages are even circled as well. At the bottom of the page, he discovers a comment written in black ink, and verifies by comparing it to Benton's journal that he was the one responsible. This comment becomes a form of posthumous assignment from the grave - a 'mission of discovery' from Benton to Cabot. It is a quest for the truth of humankind's very existence. Reading further, he believes he understands Benton, going back and forth from Genesis to Enoch. The next semester, he tries to converse on the subject with his new roommate, Chuck Stoppard, but Chuck isn't interested in theology, and tells Cabot that he is an atheist to put an end to the conversations.

Vilonia Kline takes Cullen, his parents, Lucas, and Mena to an empty field. She mumbles, wandering a hundred feet out into the field before announcing that Gabriel is beneath her. Lucas and Cullen's father dig where she instructs, carving out a hole that is at least ten feet deep, but finding nothing. Cullen, sitting in the truck, imagines her finding Gabriel bit by bit, but after digging for some time, they finally give up. Vilonia insists they might not have gone down far enough, but Cullen's father tells her to be quiet. Cullen is struck with a sudden need to know if his brother was happy, and goes to Gabriel's best friend Libby to pose the question. She thinks he basically was content, as she herself had been before Gabriel vanished, she admits. When Cullen gets home, he discovers Agent Perry who came to announce his dismay that without new leads they have exhausted their resources. They walk him back to his car, and stand there as he pulls out. Later, Cullen talks to Lucas about it, but Lucas is convinced it means nothing, and changes the subject. Lucas suggests they double date that coming Friday, and Cullen agrees. After the drive in movie, Ada takes Cullen back to her house where he spends most of the night. At five thirty Ada wakes him and tells him to get out. She isn't kidding, and doesn't care that at this hour he will have to walk the four miles home. An hour and fifteen minutes later, he gets home. It is three days before Cullen talks to Ada, and she apologizes, explaining that her mother is very strict.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen Analysis

Cabot is fortunate that Dr. Sentell referenced the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible in an earlier divinity course, and as such, the book was available to him. Cabot had spent his Human Anatomy class researching the Book Of Enoch, and now examined the source. The Book of Enoch is divided into five sections, but Cabot is particularly interested in the Book of Watchers, Chapter Ten. There he finds the quote from Benton's journal. The



passage, and several others, are highlighted, and as he reads, Cabot is swept up in the possibility that he could solve the greatest mystery of mankind. Cabot finds a small notation at the bottom of the page and after confirming that Benton wrote it, he considers it carefully. Cabot is so motivated by what he reads that he imagines himself to have been given this assignment by Benton himself, posthumously. It is a quest for the truth behind the very existence of mankind, and Cabot thinks about how he can solve the mystery of it himself. Somehow, he knew he would change the world. The next semester, he talks to his new roommate, the discussion dealing with the reasons Noah built the ark. Chuck Stoppard is so disinterested that he lies to Cabot, telling him he is an atheist to end the conversations on the subject.

Cullen is more than skeptical that Vilonia will find Gabriel, but since his mother and father have both jumped onto this bandwagon, he sees no alternative but to go along. There is something comforting about having Lucas and Mena along, and he is more than grateful when Vilonia decides on a location. His father tosses a shovel in his direction, and heads to the spot to dig. Lucas sees the look on Cullen's face and picks up the shovel, telling him to go and sit in the truck while he digs. Cullen does as he's told, and Mena sits with him, keeping him company, her head on his shoulder. The whole thing seems surreal. His mind wanders, imagining how Vilonia might find articles of clothing and other items belonging to Gabriel before pulling out his little brother's remains. That is not what happens however. After digging down about ten feet, and finding nothing, they give up. Vilonia is frustrated and insists they likely didn't dig far enough down, but Cullen's father has heard enough. He tells her to be quiet for the rest of the ride, and she is. Cullen goes to see Libby, suddenly needing to know if his brother was happy. She believes he was, and when Cullen asks about herself, Libby struggles to maintain her composure, telling him that she was. Later, Cullen arrives home to find Agent Perry talking to his mother and father, admitting that they are stymied and have no further leads to follow. Cullen's mother is devastated, and angry, but his father calms her and thanks Perry for his efforts thus far. They all walk him to his car. Cullen talks to Lucas about it, but Lucas is sure that it doesn't mean anything. He changes the subject, asking him about Ada instead. Cullen tells Lucas about a conversation they had in which Ada wanted to know if he feared her. When he asks her why, she claims she is cursed. He suggests they all go out on Friday night, and Cullen agrees. Friday evening comes and just before they are going to leave, Ada calls Cullen, demanding to know whether or not he slept with Alma Ember. Cullen admits he did, and they all go to the drive in where Ada pumps him for more about Alma. Then she takes him back to her house for most of the night, kicking him out just after dawn, insisting her mother can't find him there with her. He walks the four miles home and it is three days before he speaks to her and she apologizes.



Chapters Fourteen

Chapters Fourteen Summary

Alma Ember decides to move in with her grandmother, who is so pleased with the idea that it takes only a phone call to have the ticket and cab fare in Alma's hands. Beverly Ember greets her enthusiastically when she arrives, looking nothing like her age of seventy six. Having decided not to accept the scholarship offered by the Arkansas University, Alma opts instead to attend the Savannah College of Art and Design to learn photography. Her freshman year is challenging, but she still manages to finish with an A average. Cabot Searcy graduates with a degree in philosophy, and announces that he'd like to continue with graduate school where he wants to study ancient theology. His father, Richard, believes he's done nothing but waste money so far, and refuses to continue supporting his studies financially. Alma finally accepts an invitation to go out to dinner with another student in her design course named Nico. He is a perfect gentleman, and in the three weeks that follow, she spends every night at Nico's but for two. Alma talks her grandmother into letting Nico stay in her spare room while he is looking for a place to live, and five weeks later announces they are getting married the following month. Cabot's cousin Josh asks him to escort him to the movies, and having nothing better to do, he agrees. They sit in the back row. Alma and Nico are attending the same film showing, and are seated near the front row. Alma isn't thrilled with their seats, and complains. It takes less than forty minutes before Alma realizes the movie is boring her to death. She escapes, telling Nico she needs to use the restroom, and sits on a bench in the lobby. She considers calling someone when a young man sits down beside her and echoes her sentiments where the movie is concerned. They introduce themselves to each other and two days later, Alma asks a dazed Nico to leave, breaking off their engagement. Alma is so taken with Cabot, seeming carefree and everything she wished she could be. Cabot sees Alma as innocent and adventurous. Just six weeks later, Alma learns she is pregnant, but Cabot isn't upset. He simply suggests they get married, and before long has her convinced to go with him for a marriage license the following day.

Chapters Fourteen Analysis

Beverly Ember is thrilled that her granddaughter has decided to join her in Georgia and go to school. She is supportive in every way, not only providing a place for Alma to live, but paying for her courses in photography as well. Having inherited a great deal of money from her third husband, Beverly has no financial worries, and is happy to support her granddaughter. Alma rewards her faith by returning an A average in her freshman year. Cabot also graduates with a degree in philosophy that his father, Richard, believes was a complete waste of time. He sees no reason to celebrate a degree with no possibility of employment following. When Cabot announces his desire to continue graduate studies in ancient theology. Richard tells him he is on his own financially. Three years have passed since Benton's suicide, and Cabot's interest in the truth



behind humankind's existence hasn't dimmed. Though Alma hasn't dated much, and in fact doesn't like to date, she finally gets tired of life with a seventy six year old and accepts an invitation to go out with a twenty two year old named Nico. For the next three weeks, Alma is seldom at home and her grandmother doesn't approve, believing she is being corrupted. She tries to convince Alma that her behavior is unladylike, but Alma doesn't agree. One night Nico takes her to a movie. They arrive late and Alma is frustrated before the film even starts because they are forced to sit in the front row. She takes a deep breath and tries to calm herself down. Forty-five minutes into the film, Alma is bored to death. She tells Nico that she has to use the ladies room and escapes to the lobby. She sits on a bench and pulls out her phone trying to decide who she can call to pass the time when a young man sits down beside her. They commiserate as to how bad the film is, and Cabot Searcy introduces himself to her. Cabot is an interesting free spirit. He didn't try to be perfect, and seemed to be everything that Alma wanted to be herself. Just one month later, Alma finds herself pregnant, and Cabot can't help but smile. He suggests they get married immediately, and when Alma voices her concerns about what people might think since they'd known each other such a short time, he counters with his observation that her growing belly in an unwed state would have tongues wagging as well. She agrees, and he assures her it is the right thing to do. The following day, they plan to get the licence.



Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen Summary

Aunt Julia seldom leaves the house after Oslo's death. Where at one time Aunt Julia would have stopped in regularly to visit, now Cullen's mother made daily visits to her, usually bringing food with her to ensure that Aunt Julia was eating. One Saturday, Cullen is asked to make the daily visit to Aunt Julia and he reluctantly goes. When Cullen gets home, Lucas informs him that John Barling finally managed to get a photo of the Lazarus woodpecker, to be unveiled at the following weekend's festival. Cullen has news as well, telling Lucas that he had called Ted that morning and quit his job. Now, he's hoping that Ada will come by. Lucas tells him that Ada is at Russell's. Barling can be heard leaving early each morning and Fulton is so sick of him that he is almost ready to slit his throat. Cullen goes to the festival, although he has no interest in it, strictly in the hopes that he will see Ada and find out why she's been avoiding him. What he sees is Ada kissing Russell's cheek in a familiar manner. He goes home and sits outside on the swing set, inadvertently overhearing a conversation John is having with his wife Kathy. When he gets off the line, he joins Cullen on the swings, repeating most of what Cullen had already heard. He admits that he is aware that most people think he is a bad person, but he isn't a travelling salesman or a con man after their money. All he's ever wanted is to prove that the Lazarus woodpecker is still alive, feeling as though it is his destiny to do so. He warns Cullen to find his destiny before he starts a family, and walks back to the Dumas house. Cullen closes his eyes, and sees Gabriel's face again.

Chapter Fifteen Analysis

Aunt Julia changes after Oslo's death. Before, she would bake, and drop in uninvited to chat with Cullen's mother, but now she has become a recluse of sorts, seldom going out, or even bathing. Cullen's mother took food to her every day, and when she couldn't, she made sure that someone else could. Cullen isn't thrilled with the assignment, but promises his mother and follows through, picking up a number three hamburger with fries on the way. Lucas fears his aunt, and won't come with him. Cullen finds Aunt Julia in a silk nightgown, and she ties into the hamburger with the appetite of a lion on a gazelle. She offers Cullen some fries and when he refuses she yells at him. Cullen goes into a self protection mode which always occurs when someone yells at him. He makes himself as small as he can, looking down at the table, and does as he is told. A moment later, her demeanor changes again and she reaches out to touch his hand with a smile. He smiles back at her. She leaves him for a few minutes, returning dressed, and commenting that it isn't right that they be left behind to rot. He suggests she come home with him for a while, but she says they have enough to deal with. Nothing can change the fact that having lost her husband and her only son, she is alone. Before leaving, he wraps her in his arms, hugging her. Once home again, he learns that Barling has finally managed to photograph the elusive Lazarus woodpecker, and the town was having a



festival to celebrate. The fuss being made over the woodpecker is enough to make Cullen want to scream. It is as though everyone suddenly believes that by finding the bird, they've struck gold. He tells Lucas that he quit his job that morning. Lucas wants to know why, but Cullen is just tired of hoping each time the bell rings that his brother is going to walk in. The disappointment is too much, and all he really wants to do is be with Ada, who is still avoiding him. Lucas quietly mentions that she is with Russell. The information has him crying ten minutes later - another thing he never does (not even at Oslo's funeral). He sits in his room, remembering events with Gabriel with such clarity that finally he can sit no longer. Eight weeks have passed since his disappearance without a trace. Fulton Dumas has had enough of Barling as well, and Cullen only attends the festival with Lucas on the off chance he might see Ada. The town has pulled out all the stops. When Cullen sees Ada walk up to Russell and kiss him on the cheek, he imagines Russell as a zombie. Later, he tells his mother that he thought the whole bird fuss was stupid and his mother sternly reminds him that it helps to believe that life can give you second chances. Cullen goes out and sits on his old swing set, inadvertently listening in on a conversation that Barling is having with his wife about access to his daughters. When he is done, he strolls over to Cullen and sits on the swing beside him. They talk about his desire to find the woodpecker, and Cullen's thoughts on Gabriel. When Barling leaves, he closes his eyes and sees Gabriel clearly.



Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Sixteen Summary

Cabot and Alma didn't have a baby after all. Cabot regrets nothing, but Alma is beginning to question every decision she makes. Her grandmother gives up involving herself in Alma's life. Alma works at a coffee shop while Cabot continues to pretend to seek employment, and works on understanding the scriptures in the Book of Enoch. Four months later, Cabot finally finds work doing satellite sales and Alma moves back to her grandmothers. Cabot loses his job and refuses to leave his bed. He calls her almost sixty times in a three day period, and blames God for all the world's evils, including the loss of their child. Alma begins to fear him. Cabot becomes so engrossed with his religious studies that his slant on life itself is changing. Benton's original notes have been blown so far out of proportion that Alma becomes convinced that he will never find his way back to a semblance of reality. She did the only thing she could by leaving him.

Chapter Sixteen Analysis

Alma doesn't have the baby she and Cabot planned on, and instead finds herself sitting in a sparsely furnished apartment, staring at the television and second guessing every decision she's ever made. The apartment is depressing, and she gets up to clean. Cabot isn't at all regretful. He knows their marriage was rushed into, but simply wonders what will come next. Beverly Ember continues to give Alma a weekly check, and hopes Alma uses it for rent or food. Alma thanks her, expressing some guilt, but accepting it nonetheless. Cabot's uncle Jeff is less generous when he discovers that Alma is pregnant, cutting off Cabot's income entirely. Now, he spends his days pretending to seek employment while Alma works at a coffee shop. He finally finds work, although it takes him four months, and Alma, relieved and sad at the same time, moves back in with her grandmother who tries to hide how relieved she is. For the first few days, Cabot calls her relentlessly, still unaware that it is largely his study of the Book of Enoch that drove her away. Cabot has become convinced that had God not killed the Grigori angels, their baby would have survived. He continues his studies with a feverish intensity, and soon loses the job it had taken him so long to find. It isn't the first time Cabot has cast blame in God's direction. He began keeping lists, blowing Benton's notes so far out of proportion that they are unrecognizable now. Alma realizes that Cabot would never find his way back to sanity and begins to fear her new husband who had once seemed so charming to her.



Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Seventeen Summary

In July, Cullen's father begins to probe him where college is concerned. Even his mother joins the bandwagon, asking him which coast he would prefer to live on. Frustrated, Cullen leaves and walks to Ada's but she isn't home either, so he goes to see Lucas, bemoaning the fact that Ada seems to prefer a guy in a wheelchair to the able bodied one she had. The next day, Cullen promises Lucas that he'll stop talking about Ada just as his mother comes home for the first time in three days and announces that Aunt Julia is officially on her own. She tells Cullen that she and Julia had been talking about Oslo as a baby, and Julia began talking about heaven and her theory that we all got to become babies again. She imagined that Oslo and Gabriel were up there crawling around together. Nine weeks after Gabriel's disappearance, Cullen's mother simply gives up everything from shopping to cleaning, from bathing to going to work. His father calls her clients and postpones all of her appointments indefinitely. Then she begins throwing things around the kitchen. Cullen goes down to help, but his father stops him, telling him to stay back. He patiently calms her down, bringing her water, and pills when necessary. One night, Cullen asks his father if he thinks that Cullen would be able to room with Lucas if he went to the University of Arkansas.

The next day Lucas is up early, getting ready for the Woodpecker Relay, telling Cullen that he and Mena had signed him up as well. Cullen loses his temper, insisting he has no intention of running in any stupid race. Lucas tries to insist, but Cullen stalks away telling Lucas to leave him alone. When Gabriel has been gone for ten weeks, Cullen's mother moves into his bedroom. She stays in there, listening to Gabriel's music, and obsessing over his taste in books. One day she pulls Cullen in to listen to one of the songs. He listens, and asks her if she ever plans to come out of his room again, but gets no answer beyond her assurances that everything is going to be okay. Ada finally agrees to meet with Cullen who tells him that Russell needs her, and she is sorry. Three days after Cullen asks Lucas to leave he returns with a swollen and purple jaw. Cullen asks what happened, but Lucas doesn't want to discuss it. He changes his mind then, and tells Cullen about how when Barling shot the pistol to start the race, Mena began running while he ran up to the stage and punched Barling in the nose. It was his way of letting Cullen know that he still understood what was important. The next morning, Cullen's father tells him that he contact Student Housing and learned that with a simple form, he and Lucas could share a dorm room. Cullen dreams a weirdly connected dream that includes everyone he knows, it seems, from those he liked to those he really can't stand. They are all speaking, and Gabriel even stands on a chair with a guitar and sings a song, but Cullen can't hear a thing. The event turns into a zombie dinner after which Gabriel whispers to him that this is how it all ends.



Chapter Seventeen Analysis

When Cullen's father begins to press him regarding what college he'd like to go to, what his interests are and what he feels like majoring in, Cullen is somewhat angry at first. It is the first time in seventeen years that Cullen can remember his father showing him any attention but right now, it is the last thing Cullen wants. In fact, he feels as though he is fading into the background of life. Cullen is even questioned by his mother regarding which coast he'd prefer, and he doesn't tell her that all he wants is to be on the same coast as Gabriel is. The truth was that Cullen couldn't bear the thought of leaving Lily when Gabriel could come home at any time. Compared to that, college simply didn't matter. Ada continues to see Russell and though Lucas assures him it isn't his fault, he feels somehow responsible. Cullen promises to stop talking about Ada. At the same time Cullen's mother stops looking after Aunt Julia, having become angry with her over a conversation they had about Oslo and Gabriel, who in Julia's mind were playing together as children. Cullen wonders if Aunt Julia is right. Lucas tells Cullen that they both analyze things to death and need to stop because they often ruined things before they started. Cullen's mother finally loses her grip on herself when Gabriel has been missing nine weeks. She begins to throw things, and Cullen's father is the epitome of patience as he brings her pills, water, and anything else she needs. He continues to talk to Cullen about college as well, which Cullen finds exhausting, but he knows his father is trying, so he says nothing. Lucas is of a similar mind, signing Cullen up for the Woodpecker Relay without his knowledge or consent.

When the day arrives, and Lucas tries to convince him to go, Cullen gets into his face and in a low and controlled voice, he reminds Lucas that he recently lost his brother and that if Lucas wants to pretend everything is okay, that is his prerogative, but Cullen hasn't forgotten. Lucas leaves without a word. Cullen's mother closes herself off in Gabriel's room, listening to his music, and trying to connect with him in any way possible. She tells Cullen everything will be alright, and Gabriel will be back. Ada meets Cullen for coffee and tells him that Russell needs her now, and had he never met her, he might not have had the accident, so she feels responsible for his current physical state. Cullen is disappointed and confused. It is three days before Lucas returns with a swollen purple face, revealing that Barling didn't look much better. Cullen dreams about people he loves, and people that he can't stand the sight of all together in his house. He can't hear them, but in the end, Gabriel tells him that the zombie dinner is how it all ends.



Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Eighteen Summary

Alma decides to return to Lily, having dropped out of college after struggling with morning sickness and poor grades in her third semester. Her grandmother pays for the flight, and two hours later she is back in Arkansas. She begs Cabot to sign the divorce papers she sent, but Cabot only wants to know why she left him. Alma thinks about the Lazarus woodpecker, deciding if she were the one to spot it, she wouldn't tell anyone. By sheer coincidence, she runs into Lucas who invites her to double date that evening with Cullen as her date, and Mena. Alma agrees. Cabot flies to Little Rock and manages to find his way to Lily after renting a car, hoping to patch things up with Alma. He stays at the Lazarus Motel and in the morning finds his way to Alma's mother's house. She sees him, and heads him off, telling him that Alma wants nothing to do with him. She tells him to go home, but he refuses, sitting across the street in his car until Alma returns. When she does, she is blunt when she tells him that their marriage is done. He thinks about his past, and stops at a grocery store where he pays a clerk to learn where Cullen lives. Cabot goes back to his motel to wait until evening. Then he packs his things, and heads for Cullen's house. Lucas is gone, and so is Cullen's father. His mother sleeps on the couch and Gabriel quietly makes himself a bowl of cereal. He reads the paper left behind by his father that morning, and finishing his cereal, he takes the garbage out to the can and rolls the can down the long driveway.

At the same time, Cabot is driving down the road searching for a sign with a name or a mailbox that will tell him which house is Cullen's. He sees Gabriel, pulling the trash can down the driveway and pulls over to wait for him to get there. Gabriel asks if he is looking for someone, and Cabot says the name Witter. Cabot grabs a metal flashlight and before Gabriel realizes something isn't right, he swings, connecting with the side of his head. Gabriel goes down to the ground without a sound and doesn't move. Cabot opens the trunk and manages to muscle Gabriel into it, announcing that his date has been cancelled. Cabot drives to a small convenience store and sits there trying to decide what he could do to scare Cullen away from Alma permanently. He turns out onto the highway and heads for Little Rock. When Gabriel regains consciousness, it takes a few minutes for him to figure out where he is. His head is aching, and he tries not to move much. The car stops and his captor opens the trunk, asking Gabriel if he can stand. He does, looking around at what appears to be an empty parking garage.

When Cabot addresses him as Cullen, Gabriel corrects him, telling him that Cullen is his older brother. Cabot isn't happy with that information and isn't sure what to do. Gabriel tells him to just drive away, but Cabot forces him to get back into the trunk instead. Knowing that he can't sustain another hit on his head, he complies. As Cabot is closing the trunk, he notices that Gabriel's t-shirt has a picture of an angel with one arm stretched towards the heavens. Cabot thinks about all that has happened since he found Benton's journal, and stopping at a red light, he suddenly understands his destiny.



Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Alma decides to go home to Lily where life is more familiar and people are more supportive and there is also much less Cabot. Harassing her endlessly, Cabot sends her flowers, candy, stuffed animals and calls at all hours, even sending messages through friends. Beverly pays for her flight, crying when she leaves and telling her she is so loved. Her arrival in Arkansas two hours later is a happy affair. Alma speaks to her husband only once after returning to Lily, begging him to sign the divorce papers she sent. She tells him she is getting on with her life, and he should go back to Georgia and do the same. Reminding him to mail the divorce papers after signing them, she walks away, thinking about all the things she probably should have said and didn't. Then she changes her mind, and turning back she tells him that though he wasn't a bad husband, she just knew it was done and there was no way to fix it. She tells him she has to get ready for a date, and Cabot promises to go home if she tells him his name. She tells him that her date is named Cullen, and he drives away.

Alma will not see her husband again. Cabot drives away, thinking about his life up until that moment. He considers the girlfriends, the one night stands and casual encounters, college, Benton and his advice that Cabot should change his ways and then finding the notes in the margins of the Book of Enoch in the library. He realizes that he can't simply go back to Georgia. Instead, he manages to get the information that will help him to locate Cullen's family home, and then goes back to his motel. He spends several hours trying to talk himself into just going home, but in the end, he checks out and drives down the road that Cullen lives on, hoping to discover the house he lives in. Gabriel happens to be taking the garbage can to the curb at the time, and when Cabot asks him where the Witter house is, Gabriel tells him he's found it. Mistaking Gabriel for Cullen, Cabot clubs him with a flashlight and stuffs him in the trunk, satisfied that at least he won't be seeing Alma tonight. He tries to think of a way to convince him to stay away from his wife, but a stern talking to won't do it. When Gabriel wakes in the trunk of Cabot's rental, he is confused and his head is pounding. The car finally stops and Cabot opens the trunk, sure that Gabriel knows who he is already, but the surprise is Cabot's when he discovers that he doesn't have Cullen in the trunk at all. Gabriel tries to convince him to just leave, promising he won't say a word, but Cabot is convinced that he will end up in jail. He loads Gabriel back into the trunk and in doing so finally notices the t-shirt Gabriel is wearing. A man with wings stands with one hand stretched to the heavens and for Cabot, it is a sign from God. Sitting at a red light around the corner, he realizes his destiny.



Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen Summary

Cullen, Lucas, and Mena go out to Burke's Burger Box for burgers, and for the second time only, Mr. Burke leans over their table and tells them that their meal is paid for. Lucas and Cullen are playing basketball when Lucas announces he'll likely marry Mena, telling Cullen that of course, he would be his best man. When it came to having children though, he tells Cullen that Gabriel would be their godfather as he is much more responsible. Cullen smiles, realizes that Lucas had just talked about Gabriel with confidence that he would be there to take part in life ahead. The whole idea makes him smile. The next morning, Cullen suggests they take one of Merle's Famous Lazarus Boat Tours. Lucas is surprised, especially given Cullen's attitude when Lucas had signed him up for the last Lazarus event. Merle had previously been a fishing guide, but sighting of the Lazarus woodpecker caused the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to declare the area to be included in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. Now, instead of fishing, Merle charges twenty five dollars a head for a three hour tour through the bayou. On the way home, Cullen asks Lucas if he thinks they'll ever find Gabriel. Lucas is confident and his positive response comes without hesitation. He is convinced that Gabriel will come home.

Chapter Nineteen Analysis

Cullen thinks about the fact that Lucas punched Barling in the eye, and decides that he is his new hero. Mena tells Cullen later that Lucas had to be pulled off of Barling and was lucky he wasn't charged. They eat at the Burger Box where Mr. Burke tells them their meal is on the house. Cullen thinks about how people respond to a family who is dealing with a crisis. They give things to the family, offer advice and even put various books in their mailbox. Those that don't spend their time avoiding Cullen and his family instead, never making eye contact or hiding in the next food aisle over to avoid the issue entirely. Cullen wishes that people would just treat him the same way they did before Gabriel vanished. Cullen and Lucas are playing ball when Lucas announces that it's likely he'll wed Mena, with Cullen as best man. As they talk about the future, Lucas includes Gabriel as though it is normal, and makes the assumption that wherever he is, he'll be back by then. Cullen is struck by the normalcy of the conversation. The next day, Cullen makes an effort to make up for the way he treated Lucas earlier and suggests they go on a river tour. Lucas is stunned by the suggestion, and jokes about ulterior motives, but agrees to go. On the way home again, Cullen asks Lucas point blank if he truly believes that Gabriel will be found and Lucas answers without hesitation.



Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty Summary

Cabot Searcy is convinced that Gabriel is the reincarnation of the archangel by the same name. Once a day he sits with him and asks him questions about heaven and asking whether or not he is doing everything right. Gabriel asks repeatedly to be released, but Cabot is careful. Gabriel passes the time thinking about his family, and about Libby. When his thoughts get around to Cullen, he becomes more emotional.

He also knows how badly this would affect his brother. After five weeks of captivity, Gabriel complains about the lack of at least a television, and the following day Cabot brings one. Excited, Gabriel turns it on to discover there is no cable. It takes days before he has it hooked up. Gabriel immediately searches for any sign that they are looking for him, but his name is never mentioned. He finally gleans that he is somewhere in Georgia after listening to a local newscast. When ten weeks had passed since Cabot asks Gabriel if he'd tell him if it was all just a test. Gabriel tries one more time to convince him that he is just a kid, and not an angel, but when that doesn't work, Gabriel asks him what happens now. Cabot thinks and then suggests that to return things to how they should be, Gabriel has to go. Cabot believes that Gabriel has to return to God. Gabriel recaps the events as Cabot has described that now lead him to believe that Gabriel is the archangel Gabriel. He leaves and Gabriel can hear him yelling and crying. When he comes back again he asked Gabriel what he is supposed to do and again Gabriel calmly tells him that he has no idea. Cabot becomes animated and agitated so Gabriel begins to pray, asking God to help him find his way. Cabot loses his composure and knocks Gabriel over, kicking at his legs and back. He grabs Gabriel and flings him into the side of the television where Gabriel tells him calmly that he is not the one. Looking at the television, Cabot sees a broadcast from Lily that reads no second chances in Lily, Arkansas. Cabot laughs out loud when he sees it, and getting up he tells Gabriel that it is time to say goodbye.

Chapter Twenty Analysis

Gabriel has been held captive for two weeks and contemplates Cabot's theory that he is the archangel Gabriel with some amusement. Gabriel begs to be released, promising to forget Cabot, but Cabot fears he is lying to get free and Cabot's arrest would follow soon after. He tries to apply logic to Cabot's certainty that he is an angel, suggesting that if he were, he would have flown away by now, but Cabot simply announces that it must not work that way. Gabriel's next comment involves the lack of television, and the next day Cabot arrives with a small one, almost bringing tears to Gabriel's eyes. Since there is no cable, he turns the static noise up loud and lies on the floor seeking patterns in the volume. Cabot is angry when he returns, telling Gabriel he's working on getting him cable. Finally, he manages to do so. It is now six weeks since Gabriel's capture and Gabriel is finally able to get some rest. Until now, he had been unable to sleep in the



total darkness and quiet of the room. The television provided information as well. Though he sees no mention of his disappearance and is at first confused and disappointed that no one seemed to be looking for him, he later realizes that he is likely in Georgia, and the coverage there would have been minimal anyway after the first two weeks. Cabot continues to come into the room and ask Gabriel questions such as "Is this a test," "Would you tell me if this were a test," and "What does God want me to do?"

To all of these questions, Gabriel continues to respond with the truth. He was just a kid. He had no idea what God wanted of him. Finally, he responds as though he is Gabriel - God's left hand man, and Cabot announces his belief that Gabriel has to return to God in order to have balance restored. Gabriel recaps all he knows about Cabot, and argues that his behavior on Earth was God's will. Cabot, losing touch with reality completely, tells him that now God has given him the information, bringing them here to this point in time. Gabriel tries everything he can think of before finally lifting his arms and telling God he is in His hands now. He loudly prays that Cabot find his way and asks the Lord to help him Cabot. Cabot explodes, throwing Gabriel across the room. In a small voice, Gabriel tells him he isn't the one. The television continues to broadcast. A news flash comes on from Lily with headlines that speak of no second chances. Cabot laughs out loud and tells Gabriel it is time for goodbye.



Chapter Twenty One

Chapter Twenty One Summary

One morning, Cullen sees John Barling getting into his car with his bags, and with a two fingered salute to Cullen, drive away. It turns out that the birds sighted in Lily were not Lazarus woodpeckers but were in fact albino pileated woodpeckers. Not as large as the Lazarus variety, they are just big birds a scientist announces. One of the most notable differences beyond their size is the color of their beaks - the pileated one distinctly darker in color. The albino variety of the species are almost the correct color. The disappointment throughout the town is deafening. One day, Cullen is sitting in his bedroom, and glancing out the window he sees his younger brother walking up the driveway slowly. He jumps up, knocking things over in his haste to race down the hall and open the front door. When he sees his little brother standing in the driveway, he thinks about running, but his legs and arms are shaking. Still unsure whether what he is seeing is real or a mirage, he walks forward slowly and carefully, his arm extended to poke Gabriel on the left shoulder just to ascertain he is real. He smiles.

Chapter Twenty One Analysis

Fulton Dumas is so thrilled when John Barling finally leaves for good that he can't help running around the house and hollering his approval. It turns out after much testing that the Lazarus woodpecker had not returned to Lily. Instead, they had actually stumbled across a group of extremely rare albino woodpeckers from the pileated family. Cullen wonders if things will ever feel normal again. He wonders if Gabriel will ever really come home, and if Lucas really intends to marry Mena. Cullen asks Dr. Webb about the meaning of life, and Dr. Webb tells him it is different for each individual. In truth, he hadn't managed to discover the meaning of his own life yet. On the day that Cullen sees Gabriel from his bedroom window, he races to the door and vaults the porch steps, slowing on the driveway to accommodate his shaking legs. He considers running to his brother, but part of him still isn't sure that Gabriel is real. So he reaches out with one finger and pokes his left shoulder, allowing the smallest of smiles when Gabriel still remains there - a solid, real person and his long-lost brother.



Characters

Cullen Witter

Cullen Witter is Gabriel's older brother and they spend most of their free time together, until Gabriel's disappearance. Cullen's best friend Lucas spends so much time with them both that they become a surrogate for the brother he lost. Cullen, unlike his brother Gabriel, never really wanted to grow up or to become an adult.

When his brother Gabriel disappears, he takes to wearing his t-shirts, but can't reconcile why exactly. Town folk begin treating Cullen and his family with a different attitude that ranges from overcompensation to outright avoidance and Cullen just wishes that they would all treat him the same as they did the day before his little brother disappeared. His best friend Lucas keeps telling him that Gabriel will come home, but Cullen isn't convinced. He has hallucinations that include two foot Lazarus woodpeckers who promise to help find his younger brother, but like the Lazarus woodpecker, Gabriel seems to have simply vanished.

Cullen is briefly involved with Ada Taylor who is drawn to him by his misery. When Cullen is cheered by her presence, he no longer appears to be so needy, and Ada moves on to her old boyfriend Russell Quitman who apparently needed her more after an accident takes his mobility and leaves him confined to a wheel chair. Though devastated at first, Cullen finally comes to the conclusion he doesn't care just about the same time as Gabriel walks down the driveway, finally returning home.

Gabriel Witter

Gabriel doesn't care what anyone else thinks of him. Since the age of eleven, Gabriel would go outside on the porch and read one chapter of a book. He likes to listen to bands that no one has ever heard of, and usually walks through the halls at school with his head down. By the time Gabriel entered junior high, he had almost fifty different ties, and wore a new one to school every day. Gabriel is religious at heart, and prays for those he loves regularly.

Gabriel's best friend is Libby Truett. He seldom wears anything other than his brown Dickies or faded blue jeans and a t-shirt that sported the name of some band or another that he favored. He had blue eyes and dimples like his brother and would have passed for Cullen's twin but for the smaller nose and somewhat thicker eyebrows. Gabriel is also an inch taller than his brother and once their uncle Joseph had died, he became the tallest member in their family.

When Gabriel is taken by Cabot Searcy, he maintains remarkably calm. He listens to Cabot rant and rave, and quietly continues to insist that he is just a normal kid who wants to go home. He promises to forget all about Cabot, but Cabot is so deeply invested in the idea that Gabriel is the angel sent by God that he cannot let it go. For



weeks he holds Gabriel captive, feeding him, and even giving him a small television set to watch. In the end, Gabriel finally pretends to be THE Gabriel, and prays loudly to God that He help Cabot find his way, and see his mistake. Eventually, Cabot sets him free.

Lucas Cader

Lucas has a habit of being able to shut the world out whether he is awake or asleep. At six feet two inches tall, Lucas is distinctive looking with a taut, swimmer's build and ready smile. Lucas always managed to look like he was ready for a photo shoot, with slightly mussed brown hair and could easily be called a preppie. He plays football, and dates a girl named Mena Prescott. Lucas was only twelve years old when his brother was killed in a car accident in Little Rock. It was a subject he didn't discuss. His mother had become overly protective, and Lucas suffered the consequences of his brother's decision to drive drunk. What most people didn't know about Lucas was that he wasn't as happy as he looked. When no one was looking, he wore an expression that bordered on confusion and boredom. When Lucas is concentrating hard on something, he often chews his bottom lip without thinking. His father drank excessively, and in the past had paid Lucas and his older brother to fight in the yard, and his mother was quiet and seemed sad. She didn't stop her husband from hitting the two young children, and no one in the family is disappointed when he leaves them in the middle of the night when Lucas is nine. His brother, following in his father's alcoholic footsteps, died in a car accident just three years later.

Lucas dated most of the girls in their school by the time he was a sophomore, and slept on Cullen's floor at least four times a week. He missed Gabriel as much as Cullen did.

Cabot Searcy

Cabot is a tall, muscular young man, lean in stature and wears his brown hair neatly combed. He has a serious demeanor and piercing eyes. Cabot is Benton's new dorm mate in the University of Atlanta. Cabot is confident and when he speaks, he easily gains the attention of the entire room. Girls are drawn to him, and his moods seem to radiate through any room he is in. Cabot graduates, obtaining a degree in philosophy, and his father believes the entire experience was a waste of money. He is still continuing his quest to find the truth behind our existence, and debates it to exhaustion with theology majors and local pastors.

Cabot meets Alma Embers in a theater where they both had decided the movie was a complete waste of time. She is charmed by him, and decides in a blink to expel her fiance from her life. Confused at the sudden change, he leaves and Alma begins spending all of her time with Cabot. Cabot talks to her about the angel Gabriel, and how God sent him to Earth when he decided that the angels previously expelled were teaching humankind too much. When just a month into their relationship, she discovers she is pregnant, she is horrified, but Cabot takes it in stride, telling her they'll get married. When their marriage fails, largely as a result of Cabot's increasing religious



views and research, Cabot comes off the rails. He follows her back to her hometown of Lily and discovers that she is already going out on a date, and wants nothing to do with returning to him. Cabot, still sure that he was shown Benton's religious ideals for a reason, decides that the only way to get his wife back is to convince Cullen to leave her alone. He manages to find out where the Witter family lives, and kidnaps the young man who comes out of the house, not realizing until later that he has taken Gabriel, Cullen's younger brother instead. In his confused state of mind, he mistakes Gabriel Witter for Gabriel the archangel, and insists that he is the key to fixing the world as is his purpose in life. It is weeks before he finally sets Gabriel free.

Benton Sage

Benton Sage lives in Atlanta, Georgia and is overwhelmed to find himself the emissary of his church. At first, he believes that in Awasa, Ethiopia, he can truly make a difference, exerting his faith on others. When Benton returns from Ethiopia, he is in disgrace both with his father, and with the Reverend Hughes. Benton decides to use one of the many scholarships he received before going to Ethiopia, and begins his studies at the University, but after a difficult semester during which he studies relentlessly and still fails two courses, Benton climbs the bell tower on Christmas Eve and throws himself off, committing suicide.

Rameel Desta

Converted five years previously, Rameel contacts the church that Benton Sage attends and requests a missionary's help. Happy to oblige, the church sends Benton Sage, whom Rameel calls Been-tone Sog. Rameel already has over 1700 converts to Christianity before Benton arrives, and is certain that even just Benton's presence is a help to those who are suffering.

Rameel is married to Isadora, a British woman, and they have a daughter named Ezra and a son named Micah. Rameel met Isadora in a Literature class when he studied English in London.

Russell Quitman

Russell is dating Ada Taylor, the 'black widow' of Lily, Arkansas. He is eighteen years old, and well built and earned the nickname the Quit Man for being a cruel, and monstrous douche bag (in Cullen's opinion). Russell has a car accident that leaves him without the use of his legs, and feeling guilty Ada leaves Cullen to return to him and care for him until he gets back on his feet, if he ever does.



Dr. Webb

Full of good advice, Dr. Webb claims most people live in their own little bubble, grouping those around them into their own bubbles as well. It is their way of keeping track of themselves and others in relation to them. Dr. Webb insists that the only way to deal with closed minded people

Mena Prescott

Mena and Oslo met at a party where in a drunken state, they made out. She was only a freshman at the time, and the two dated on and off for several weeks. Now, however, she is Lucas Cader's girlfriend. Mena makes Cullen uncomfortable. She hugs and kisses him whenever she sees him, and seems oblivious to the fact that Cullen is repelled by the attention. She has a strong Southern accent.

Libby Truett

Libby is Gabriel's best friend. She wears her long hair tied back in a pony tail, and her eyes are green. Cullen has always greeted Libby, tacking on 'my darling' to the greeting. Libby considered a career in nursing, but decided it wasn't the career for her when she realized that she couldn't be around blood. She loves Gabriel, who makes no secret of the fact that he loves her too, Libby believes that Gabriel was happy, basing that assumption on the fact that while he was around, so was she.

John Barling

The man who claimed to have seen the Lazarus woodpecker just outside the town of Lily, although it was thought to be extinct. He had decided a year earlier that the bird wasn't gone, and set out in search of it. Since February, John had been living with Shirley Dumas and her son Fulton who describes him as maniacal, egotistical and power hungry. John left his wife, and two children behind in Oregon, along with his job at the University there, to chase the elusive Lazarus woodpecker to Lily, Arkansas. He wears a safari hat and tries to present himself as a southern gentleman of sorts. John and his wife, Kathy have two children Valerie is seven years old, and her sister Susanna is almost three. Since coming to Lily to find the Lazarus woodpecker, John's wife has restricted his access to his girls. Part of that likely has roots in his current living arrangements.

Fulton Dumas

Sixteen year old son of Shirley Dumas who lives next door to Cullen and his family, Fulton is lanky, tall and could be referred to as disheveled in appearance.



Ada Taylor

Ada is Russell Quitman's girlfriend. She earned the nickname 'black widow' after not one, but two of her former boyfriends died. The first was Conner Bolton who dies in a freak car accident just before Christmas in which she was a passenger, but was unhurt, and the second was Aaron Lancaster who drowned in the White River just before Thanksgiving. Though many young men avoided her after that, those like Cullen who truly loved her would have braved the bad mojo just to be near her for a while.

Reverend Hughes

Reverend Hughes, responding to a call for help from Rameel, sends Benton Sage to Ethiopia to act as missionary from the church. When Benton asks to be relieved of this post, the Reverend sends him a return ticket, and then summarily dismisses him from service to the church.

Beverly Ember

Beverly is Alma's grandmother. She lives in Georgia and as a result of the death of her third husband, she now enjoys financial freedom previously thought impossible. As such, she is happy to support Alma both in her studies and in her cost of living. Beverly is seventy six years old, but looks nowhere near her age. She wears strong perfume and enjoys Alma's company.



Objects/Places

Lily

Small town in Arkansas, Lily is located almost exactly half-way between Memphis and Little Rock. Lily is a town with an abundance of trees and apparently a population of 3,947.

Quit Man

This is the nickname given to Russell Quitman, earned for the many times "Quit, man. Quit!" could be heard as he tortured those less fortunate.

Pretty Paradox

This is Cullen's opinion of pretty girls who all seem to prefer boyfriends or men who treat them like garbage. This is one of the most baffling phenomena Cullen can think of.

White River

This is the name of the river that runs alongside the edge of Lily, Arkansas.

Burke's Burger Box

This is the burger joint that Lucas and Cullen drive to after Cullen is finished with family obligations involving his cousin Oslo and the identification of his body.

Awasa, Ethiopia

This is where Benton Sage is sent as a missionary from his church at the request of Rameel.

Kwalessa

This is Benton's first experience with handing out food and water in an impoverished Ethiopian village.

Handy Stop

This is the convenience store where Cullen works part time.



Lazarus Woodpecker

This is a species of woodpecker thought to have been extinct for sixty years or more.

Atlanta

This is where Benton is living when he gets the summons to go to Ethiopia as a missionary.

London

This is where Rameel studies English and meets his wife Isadora.

Ethiopian Orthodox Bible

This is the Bible which has the Book of Enoch describing how Gabriel was tasked by God to kill the children of the fallen angels as punishment to the Grigori for teaching humans about things like astrology and the arts. It contains the largest canon of any Bible in print in the world.

Grigori (aka Watchers)

This is the name given to the fallen angels who were banished to hell by God.

Nephilim

Children of the Grigori, these giants were killed by Gabriel under instructions from God according to the Book of Enoch in the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible.

Singer Tract

The last sighting of the Lazarus woodpecker happens here.

National Ornithological Institute (NOI)

This is the organization that confirms the recording John Barling made is indeed the distinctive call of the Lazarus woodpecker.



University of Oregon

This is where John Barling works until he leaves his job, wife and two children behind, claiming to be sure that he can find the Lazarus woodpecker in Lily, Arkansas.

Lily Motel

This is the motel in town that changes its name to the Lazarus Motel.

University of Atlanta

This is where Benton Sage manages to reinstate himself after he returns from Ethiopia.

Vidalia

This is where Cabot goes for Christmas, inviting Benton to join him.

Catcher In The Rye

This is the name of the book that one week before his disappearance, Gabriel claimed to have read for the eleventh time. It was first read to him out loud by Cullen when Gabriel was only twelve.

Book of Watchers

This is the tenth chapter in the Book of Enoch, and the one that Benton quotes in his journal.

Savannah, Georgia

This is where Alma Ember's grandmother lives and where Alma goes to live and attend school.

Savannah College of Art and Design

This is where Alma Ember decides to go to school.



Themes

The Book of Enoch

Over the history of our civilization, many versions of the Bible have been presented. There are some that have entire sections in them that exist in none of the other Bibles in print. An example of this is given in this story where the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible contains the Book of Enoch. In this Book, the angel Gabriel, called the Left Hand of God, is sent to earth to banish the fallen angels (Grigori) to hell. God asks him to do this because the Grigori not only began teaching humans about the arts and astrology, but also begin to fall in love with some and reproduce. The humans become too smart, and too inquisitive, so God sends Gabriel to dispatch them to hell. The children, called the Nephilim are giants, and Gabriel kills them in front of their parents, making them watch.

This particular Book is the basis for Benton's religious focus, and as a result of his writing and suicide, it becomes an obsession of Cabot Searcy. Cabot discovers references to the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible in Benton Sage's journal after Benton commits suicide on Christmas. The more he reads, the more he wants to know, and the deeper he digs, the more obsessed he becomes with one of Benton's questions. What would have happened had Gabriel not been tasked with sending the Grigori to hell?

Missionary Work

In 'Where Things Come Back,' Benton Sage is sent to Ethiopia for his first taste of missionary work. Excited at first, Ethiopia is an eye opening experience for Benton. When Reverend Hughes first gives him the assignment, he is overwhelmed. Excited and nervous, he stands with his family while the entire congregation applauds. It is finally an opportunity for Benton to exercise his faith in a way that is meaningful. Though only eighteen years old, and afraid of travel (especially so far from home, and by plane so high in the air), Benton leaves. He manages to get to Awasa, Ethiopia, and there realizes that he is in way over his head. No one speaks English, and Benton keeps speaking louder in an effort to make himself understood. His first experience buying bread from the market is enough to reduce him to tears in his hotel room.

Two days later, Benton is finally introduced to Rameel or the man who originally requested that a missionary be sent from the church. Rameel had been converted for five years and when he asks Benton's church for someone to come and help travel the country and provide medical attention, food and water to small villages, converting as many as possible as they go along. Benton is more than just a bit discouraged. He is convinced that the job he is doing is beneath him, and beneath the work of a missionary. Unwilling to continue to do what he sees as charity work, he calls his church and asks Reverend Hughes for a ticket home, explaining his feelings. Having done many years of missionary work himself, the reverend is less than sympathetic.



What Things Come Back?

Where Things Come Back is a story by John Corey Whaley that tells several simultaneous stories about things that come back and what happen when they do. The story begins in the town of Lily, Arkansas where Cullen and his brother Gabriel live. It is also the town where John Barling swears he has witnessed the return of the Lazarus woodpecker. It is the first of several returns that are described. The next return occurs when Alma returns to her hometown of Lily after briefly attending school in Georgia. Alma's return to Lily sets off a chain of events that results in Gabriel's kidnapping.

Of the things that return to Lily, the most important return is the return of Gabriel after Alma's former husband Cabot finally releases him, but this return is largely overshadowed, as is Gabriel's entire disappearance, by the Lazarus woodpecker sighting. Needing to believe that sometimes there are second chances, the entire town rallies around John Barling, who seems to enjoy the brief notoriety. Cullen, on the other hand, is resentful that his brother's disappearance is given less time and attention than the stupid woodpecker. Cullen doesn't much care about the woodpecker one way or another. Though Gabriel comes back, the Lazarus woodpecker does not.



Style

Point of View

Where Things Come Back is a fictional account which is told from the alternating first-person perspective of Cullen Witter, and the third person multiple perspectives of supporting characters beginning with Benton Sage. The story starts from Cullen Witter's first-person perspective. He describes his feelings after having to identify his cousin Oslo's body after he dies of an overdose. The second chapter is told from the third-person perspective of Benton Sage. This chapter reveals Benton's feelings as he is given his very first missionary post in Ethiopia. In the third chapter, Whaley returns to the first person perspective of Cullen and introduces the Lazarus woodpecker. The fourth chapter follows the alternating format, returning to the third-person perspective of Benton in Ethiopia. In Chapters five through nine, the same format continues, alternating between Cullen's first-person perspective and Benton's third-person perspective with each chapter. Chapter ten introduces the third-person perspective of Cabot Searcy, formerly introduced in the story by his university dorm roommate, Benton Sage. Chapters eleven through thirteen follow this format - alternating between Cabot's third-person and Cullen's first-person perspectives. Chapter fourteen is told from the third-person perspective of Alma Ember. The format continues to alternate Cullen's first-person perspective and Alma's third-person perspectives throughout the remainder of the book.

Setting

Where Things Come Back, by John Corey Whaley begins in a small town in Arkansas called Lily where Cullen and his brother Gabriel live with their family. The town of Lily is also the place where John Barling is convinced that the Lazarus woodpecker has made a reappearance after it was thought to be extinct. Alma Ember, also from Lily, decides to go to school in Atlanta, moving in with her grandmother, who is only too happy to pay for her schooling and living expenses. Benton Sage is an eighteen year old boy committed to the church in Atlanta, and is asked to do his first stint of missionary work in Ethiopia. While there, he will learn about the Book of Enoch (part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible) and will get his first exposure to the concept that the angel Gabriel was sent by God to kill the Grigori. Benton travels to some of the small towns in Ethiopia with Rameel before he returns to Atlanta, unable to cope with missionary work, and deciding to return to school instead. There, he meets Cabot Searcy who is his university dorm mate. Benton talks to Cabot about changing his ways and when Benton commits suicide, Cabot reads his journal, tumbling down the same rabbit hole of religion that Benton did, believing that he alone is tasked with finding the truth behind the human condition. Cabot meets Alma in Georgia and after dating for a month, she becomes pregnant. They marry, but when Alma loses the baby, she also loses interest in her marriage to Cabot whose religious questions have become obsessions. Alma returns to Lily, and Cabot follows. He kidnaps Gabriel, mistaking him for Cullen, and then deciding the error



is all part of the divine plan. He takes Gabriel to Atlanta where he holds him captive for several weeks.

Language and Meaning

John Corey Whaley writes this fictional account about two men who are obsessed with the Book of Enoch and the possibilities, and the affect that they have on the Witter family. The language used is regular English, interspersed with religious segments that relate to the Book of Enoch which is the focus of attention for both Benton Sage, and then later Cabot Searcy. Benton first discovers the Book of Enoch when he is sent as a missionary to Ethiopia. There he meets Rameel who tells him about the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible and the Book of Enoch. When Benton learns the story of the Grigori, he becomes obsessed with the thought of what might have happened had the angel Gabriel not been dispatched by God. Though Benton commits suicide, he writes enough in his journal - questioning the actions of Gabriel and the possible future humans could have had - that he intrigues, fascinates and inspires Cabot Searcy who is the first to read it. Cabot becomes convinced that he has been chosen to unravel the mystery of human kind. When he inadvertently kidnaps Gabriel Witter instead of his brother Cullen, he sees it as a further sign from God that he is on the right track. Cabot holds Gabriel for over six weeks, begging him to tell him what he is supposed to do. Finally, Gabriel tells Cabot that he is not the chosen one, and Cabot finally allows him to return home.

Structure

Where Things Come Back, by John Corey Whaley is a fictional novel of one hundred and sixty pages when in electronic format. It is divided into twenty one chapters that range in length from four to twelve pages and average just over seven and a half pages each. Each chapter is titled with a fragment of the chapter's contents. For example, chapter two, titled "Mysterious Kid With Shovels" is a chapter that deals with Benton's experiences in the outlying villages of Ethiopia. The children referred to here are the local grave diggers that Benton sees one morning as they are on their way to dig more holes. It is a sad example of what has become normalcy in these villages where death is so commonplace that even the children think nothing of being provided with shovels to dig graves for people they most certainly know that are likely to expire that day. Some of the chapters are titled with the name of the main character dealt with in the chapter, such as chapter six titled "Benton Sage" and chapter ten, titled "Cabot Searcy." These chapters provide insights into the thoughts and ideas of those titled. All of the chapters are all represented by numbers (in numerical format) as opposed to written out in words or with the use of roman numerals.



Quotes

"I almost think of him as my little brother sometimes" (Chapter 1, p. 17).

"I mean, what if all of a sudden you up and die and then it's just me here with Mom and Dad and Aunt Julia down the street with her screaming and crying" (Chapter 3, p. 29).

"If I saw the bird, I wouldn't tell anyone" (Chapter 5, p. 40).

"I believe we have perhaps chosen you too quickly to be a missionary" (Chapter 6, p. 50).

"Maybe you should study more yourself" (Chapter 8, p. 63).

"Warning: The following pages, whether used as a journal or for ideas, are most assuredly filled with melancholy, cynicism, and woe" (Chapter 10, p. 73).

"So then he sends Gabriel down to kill the angels, and sooner or later he talks to Noah and sends the flood to kill off all the humans who had gotten too smart" (Chapter 12, p. 86).

"Well, Alma, what will they think when you're walking around with a baby in your stomach?"

"Cullen, ya know, it just isn't right that we should all be left her to rot like this" (Chapter 15, p. 107).

"The point is, you - sorry, we need to learn how to just calm down and take everything in before trying to pick it all apart" (Chapter 17, p. 123).

"So go get your girlfriend, go run your race, get the hell out of my house, and don't come back until you're ready to start acting like you didn't forget that my little brother and your friend is still out there somewhere having God knows what done to him by God knows who" (Chapter 17, p. 124).

"Cabot Searcy, you turn around and get back in your car and get outta here" (Chapter 18, p. 136).

"Today we join expert tour guide Merle Hodge on a lavish journey through the Arkansas bayous to seek out the elusive Lazarus woodpecker" (Chapter 19, p. 148).

"You're not the one" (Chapter 20, p. 155).

"They're big birds, just not quite as big as the Lazarus was" (Chapter 21, p. 157).



Topics for Discussion

Why does Cullen have an issue with Russell? What is Russell's nickname? How did he get it? Why? In what way does Russell continue to inadvertently affect Cullen's life?

Where is Benton Sage sent on his first missionary? How does he come to be sent there? Who does he meet on the other end? What duties is he expected to perform? How does Benton feel about his first missionary assignment and what does he do about it?

What happened to Lucas Cader's brother? How old was Lucas at the time? What does Cullen know about Lucas that most people don't? Why does Lucas take Gabriel's disappearance so hard?

What does Benton do when he returns home from Ethiopia? How does his family receive him? What does Benton believe will happen? What happens instead that surprises him? What does he decide to do instead?

Who convinces the town of Lily that the Lazarus woodpecker has been seen? What is the significance of the sighting? Where was this woodpecker last seen and when? How do the townsfolk feel about the bird's presence overall? Give examples.

Who is Alma Ember's husband? Where did she meet him? How long had they known each other before they married? What kind of work does Alma's husband do? What inspired his main focus in life? How did this come about?

Why does Alma leave her husband? What are the contributing factors that lead up to her return to her grandmother's? Where does she go after that? Why? What kind of reception does she get there?

Who is the first person that Alma dates after leaving her husband? How does that evening come about? What happens when he takes her home? Why does he remain in the car instead of taking her to her door... and beyond?

On the same evening as Alma's date, what significant event occurs? What instigates the event? What mistake is made and by whom? What does he see that makes him believe it is all part of the greater plan?

What does Cullen do after he is questioned by the police? What does he see? What information is he promised and who makes the promise? What does he say to Lucas when Lucas finds him that makes Lucas punch him in the head?

How does Gabriel's disappearance affect each of his family members? How long is he gone in total? Where is he during this time? Why is he finally released? What does he say that might have affected the decision to free him?



What event does Cullen outright refuse to participate in? Who invites him and what happens when Cullen is pushed on the issue? What does Cullen do to make up for the incident?

What is the eventual scientific explanation for the bird seen in Lily? How does John Barling take the news? What is the overall mood of the town as a result?

Where does Cullen work when Gabriel is taken? What prompts him to quit his job? How does Cullen respond to the efforts or reactions of the town to the disappearance of his brother?