

The Memory Keeper's Daughter



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KIM EDWARDS

Kim Edwards was born in Texas and raised in upstate New York. A graduate of Colgate University and the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop, her short stories have been published widely in respected literary journals, and her collection *The Secrets of a Fire King* was a finalist for the 1998 PEN/Hemingway Award. Edwards sprang to national prominence in 2006 with her first novel, *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, which received a Barnes and Noble Discover award and went on to spend 20 weeks at #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list, and another 100 weeks moving up and down the charts. Edwards has stated that she's drawn to writing about explorations of the past and the long-term effects of lingering secrets. She currently teaches at the University of Kentucky.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Memory Keeper's Daughter spans a period of 25 years, as the events of the novel begin in 1964 and continue to unfold through 1989. Those 25 years in American history encompass some of the country's most important social changes and conflicts, and throughout the novel, there are references to the Vietnam war, the Kent State massacre of 1970 (and the burning of the ROTC building at the University of Kentucky in Lexington in response to the Kent State shooting,) and the education reform of the 1980s. As the characters within the novel grow and age, the society they live in changes, too—the strict gender roles and repressive social atmosphere which mark the earlier portions of the novel give way to social protest and revolution, sexual liberation, and a more equitable education system for special-needs children like Phoebe.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Memory Keeper's Daughter, a massive bestseller which lingered for 122 weeks on the New York Times Best Seller list and was included in uncountable book clubs across the country, is in many ways an issues book—a novel which deliberately asks hard questions of its readers, often engaging them in an ethical dilemma and forcing them to confront the choices they might make were they placed in the characters' shoes. David Henry's decision to give away his Down syndrome-affected daughter Phoebe sparked a national conversation, and the book quickly joined the ranks of popular book-club reads like Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, and Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*
- **When Written:** 2000s
- **Where Written:** Kentucky
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Literary fiction; family saga; coming-of-age tale
- **Setting:** Lexington, KY and Pittsburgh, PA
- **Climax:** After David Henry's death, Caroline Gill travels to Lexington, Kentucky to inform Norah Henry that her daughter Phoebe is alive and well in Pittsburgh.
- **Antagonist:** David Henry
- **Point of View:** Third-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration. Rumor has it that Kim Edwards got the idea for the stranger-than-fiction premise at the heart of *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* from a local pastor who told her a story about a man who, much later in life, discovered he'd had a twin brother with Down syndrome who'd been placed in an institution at birth.



PLOT SUMMARY

In Lexington, Kentucky on a **snowy** winter night in 1964, Norah Henry goes into labor. Her husband David Henry, an orthopedic surgeon, is forced to deliver the babies himself when their obstetrician gets caught in the snowstorm. With the help of a nurse, Caroline Gill, David delivers a beautiful baby boy named Paul—and is shocked when a second baby arrives. The second child, a girl named Phoebe, is born with Down syndrome. Recognizing the medical—and social—complications that accompany the syndrome, David gives Phoebe to Caroline and orders her to take the child to an institution in the countryside. Caroline drives through the snow to the address David has given her, but once she sets eyes on the poor conditions, she absconds with the baby and returns to Lexington. When her car stalls out, a kindly trucker named Al brings her and Phoebe back to her apartment. David, meanwhile, has told Norah—who was slightly drugged during the birth—that though she delivered twins, the girl died at birth. The devastated Norah returns home with her son Paul and attempts to push through the grief she feels—grief no one else around her will acknowledge. Norah insists on holding a memorial service for Phoebe, and David reluctantly agrees. Caroline, meanwhile, sees an ad for the memorial service in the

paper, and decides to take Phoebe out of town and give them both a fresh start.

Over the years that follow, the novel follows the perspectives of David, Norah, Caroline, and Paul as the four of them wrestle with the unspoken secret at the heart of all their lives. While Norah tries to ignore the eerie sense that her daughter is still out there somewhere, David struggles with the desire to tell the truth—and the fear of what will happen if he does. He is haunted by a past marked by poverty, grief, and loss—David’s younger sister June died of heart failure as a child, and his desire to prevent pain like that from seeping into his marriage to Norah was at the heart of his plan to give Phoebe away. He develops an obsession with **photography** as a way of coping with his inability to control time, always hoping that he will be able to capture one moment that feels as important and life-changing as the moment in which he chose to give his daughter away. Meanwhile, Norah balks against David’s distant, aloof refusal to admit to the grief he feels over their daughter’s loss, or to even talk about her. She develops a slight drinking problem and often behaves recklessly for attention. As Paul grows older, she becomes deeply overprotective of him, desperate to keep her remaining child safe for as long as she can. Caroline, meanwhile, finds work as a private nurse to a grouchy old man named Leo, and takes up residence in the large house he and his daughter Doro share. She reunites with Al and struggles with her fear that Phoebe will never be able to have a normal life. As Phoebe grows older, Caroline finds a community of other parents of children with Down syndrome, and together they form the Upside Down Society in order to advocate for their children’s right to education, equality, and fair treatment. She begins sending letters and photographs of Phoebe to David, and he sends money—but never any letters—in return.

As Paul grows into a teenager, he becomes angry, moody, and rebellious. He smokes marijuana with his friends, plays music nonstop, and finds himself wondering often about the sister he never knew. He knows his parents’ marriage is on the rocks—his mother, now a high-powered travel agent, has had at least one affair, and though his father’s photography career has gained traction, David balks at Paul’s own desire to become a musician and study at Juilliard, insisting Paul needs to find a more traditional career. Paul, Norah, and David orbit one another but have no real sense of family or connection.

On a trip to Pittsburgh for the opening of a museum exhibit dedicated to his photographs, David is shocked to find himself face-to-face with Caroline Gill. The two talk privately, and Caroline tells him that Phoebe is growing up to be a happy, healthy girl who is able to attend public school with other children. David tells Caroline to stay until the end of the opening, hoping to continue a conversation with her and discuss reuniting their two families, but he is dismayed when she slips away. David, reeling from the pain of what he’s done to

his own family, takes a bus to West Virginia and returns to his parents’ house, to which he still holds the deed, hoping to confront the past. He finds a pregnant sixteen-year-old girl named Rosemary squatting there—he tells her the truth about who he is and the things he’s done, but Rosemary doesn’t judge him or look down on him. Taken in by her beautiful paper cuttings and moved by a desire to shelter a young woman to make up for his cruel treatment of Phoebe, David brings Rosemary home to Lexington, where a furious Norah demands David move out.

Years later, David has been living platonically with Rosemary for years, helping her to raise her son Jack. She announces that she’s going to move home to Pennsylvania, and David accepts her decision with both sadness and optimism. He goes out for a run, determined to visit Norah and tell her the truth about Phoebe once and for all—but when he gets to the house they used to share he finds it empty, and remembers that Norah is on vacation in Europe with her new boyfriend Frederic. David tries to leave a note explaining the past, but can’t find the words. He fixes a leaky faucet for Norah and resumes his run.

Weeks later, in Europe, Norah meets with Paul at the Louvre. She has been on vacation, and Paul has been touring Europe and studying music in various countries. She breaks some sad news: David passed away from a massive heart attack nine days ago. There wasn’t time to contact Paul for the funeral, which Norah returned home briefly to organize and attend. Paul is shaken, but has trouble feeling grief for his father, with whom he always had a contentious and painful relationship. Norah insists that David always loved Paul. As she bids her son goodbye and returns to the hotel where she’s staying with Frederic, Norah gives thanks for her life—and for the roundabout ways in which her struggles ultimately made her stronger.

In Pittsburgh, Caroline and Al are dealing with the now twenty-four-year-old Phoebe’s burgeoning sexuality and desire for romance and independence. Phoebe has a boyfriend named Robert, and she is determined to marry him and live on her own. Caroline is afraid to let her daughter go and move her into a group home—but when a local bank calls to inform her that an account with a large sum of money in it has been created by David Henry in Phoebe’s name, Caroline and Al begin to realize that perhaps they and Phoebe can each have a shot at independence for the first time in all their lives.

A year later, Norah is preparing to move out of the house in Lexington she once shared with David and Paul. She is moving to France with Frederic. As she combs through David’s photographs, preparing his archives for appraisers who believe his work is worth over fifty thousand dollars, she finds a puzzling cache of photos of girls and young women. When the doorbell rings, Norah answers the door to find Caroline Gill standing on her doorstep. Caroline tells Norah the full truth about Phoebe and then leaves, promising that her home in

Pittsburgh is always open should Norah want to meet Phoebe at last. Though devastated by the news, Norah cannot deny a sense of relief as all the strange, “jagged” pieces of her life begin to make sense. She starts to understand why David was always so determined to bury the past and yet linger in it as well. Unable to cope with the feelings she’s having, Norah angrily begins burning some of David’s photographs. Paul arrives to help her pack up the house, and Norah tells him the truth about Phoebe. Paul is similarly confused, shocked, and angry—but he urges Norah to stop burning the photographs and focus instead on packing up the house and removing themselves from their obsession with the past.

Shortly after packing up the house, Paul and Norah decide to drive to Pittsburgh to meet Phoebe. The meeting is awkward and difficult, uncharted territory for everyone involved, and yet Paul and Phoebe make a profound connection. Paul and his sister share a love of music, and Paul finds himself realizing that though Phoebe is different, there’s nothing about her to pity or grieve—in many ways, she’s more well-adjusted to the world and optimistic about the future than Paul himself is.

Months later, at Frederic and Norah’s wedding in Lexington, Paul and Phoebe enjoy the festivities and prepare to send the newlyweds off to their lives in France. As Paul and Norah watch Phoebe dance, eat cake, and dream aloud about a wedding of her own, Paul expresses anger at the fact that David derailed all their lives and kept the truth from them for so long. Norah, though, urges Paul to forgive his father—or at least to try. After the party, Paul, who is driving Phoebe back to Pittsburgh to stay with her while Caroline and the recently-retired Al take their first solo vacation ever, pulls over at the Lexington cemetery. Together, he and Phoebe visit David’s grave. Phoebe begins singing a hymn for the father she never knew, and Paul takes her hand and sings along.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dr. David Henry – The novel’s protagonist and its most inscrutable, complex character, David Henry is haunted by a past full of poverty, grief, and loss when he makes the painful decision to send away his newborn daughter Phoebe—who has been born with Down syndrome. David lost a sister, June, to heart failure in childhood and, knowing the medical risks associated with Down syndrome, he fears having to watch Phoebe die too. Accordingly, David sends Phoebe away with nurse Caroline Gill and constructs a terrible lie, telling everyone that Phoebe died at birth. The lie, though meant to spare his family pain and grief, ultimately becomes the source of its slow, painful dissolution over the decades that follow. David is desperate to outrun the secret he’s allowed to flourish, but he’s unable to escape the weight of what he’s done to his

family. He believes until the day of his death—ironically, from a heart attack—that he’ll one day tell the truth and set things right. Rather than owning up to his mistakes, though, David retreats into an obsession with **photography**, which stems from a desire to find one perfect moment that will carry the same weight as the moment he chose to give Phoebe away. He alienates himself from his wife Norah and son Paul, and when he tries to find redemption by sheltering a sixteen-year-old pregnant runaway, Rosemary, he estranges himself from his family even more deeply. David is both protagonist and antagonist in many ways—he is his own worst enemy, and his hubris affects everything around him. Stubborn yet sensitive, with a debilitating need to try and fix the past and master the future, David’s individual arc ties in with all of the novel’s major themes.

Norah Henry – At the start of the novel, Norah Henry is a young, subservient wife whose only hope is to be taken care of. When she unexpectedly has twins, her husband David, who delivered the children, tells her that the girl, Phoebe, died at birth. After this point, Norah’s idyllic life as a doctor’s wife is derailed by grief, loss, sorrow, and frustration about her community and her own husband’s failure to acknowledge the magnitude of her loss. Though Norah tries to suppress her grief for years, she feels a horrible presence taking root in her marriage, and she knows that her husband is drifting further and further from her all the time. Norah tries to mend things for a while, but after David proves increasingly inaccessible, she embarks on a career of her own as a successful travel agent and has a series of sexual dalliances, which empower her even as they estrange her from her husband and her son Paul. Norah becomes headstrong and self-assured in her later years, divorcing David and finding love with Frederic, a Frenchman who shares Norah’s passion for travel. Norah remains haunted by the loss of her daughter, and often feels she can sense Phoebe’s presence just out of reach. When Caroline Gill arrives on her doorstep a year after David’s death to reveal the truth that Phoebe has been alive the whole time, Norah is angry and devastated—but also relieved as she feels the “jagged pieces” of her life beginning to make sense at last. Norah undergoes a serious transformation over the course of the novel, and her arc ties in with major themes including secrets and lies, and memory and the past.

Caroline Gill Simpson – Caroline is the novel’s secondary protagonist, a sensitive yet strong nurse in Lexington, Kentucky who gets more than she bargained for when she assists in the birth of the children of Norah Henry, the wife of one of the doctors at the clinic where she works. Caroline has nursed a crush on David for years when she helps deliver his children—and so when he asks her to do the terrible deed of taking his Down syndrome-affected daughter Phoebe away to an institution, Caroline agrees. She soon realizes, though, that she can’t leave the child behind. While David spreads the lie

that Phoebe has died at birth, Caroline absconds with the child to Pittsburgh, where the two of them begin new lives together. Over the decades that follow, Caroline grows stronger, more political, and more empathetic. She fights tirelessly for Phoebe's right to a mainstream education and becomes an activist in her community. She finds love with Al Simpson, a kindly trucker, and eventually marries him, learning throughout their relationship that sometimes the strongest families are the ones you make—not the ones you're born into. Caroline is tender, fierce, thoughtful, and anxious, and she constantly puts Phoebe first—though towards the end of the novel, when she takes it upon herself to reveal the truth to Norah after nearly twenty-five years, she is able to admit that her motives in raising Phoebe were not entirely pure. Caroline herself was always desperate to be a mother, and she agreed to keep David Henry's secret so her own dreams could come true. One of the novel's most complex figures, Caroline's arc ties in with the novel's major themes of families born and made, difference and prejudice, and secrets and lies.

Paul Henry – Artistic, passionate, and often angry, Paul Henry grows up in the shadow of the twin sister he never knew. Adventurous and curious as a little boy and later introverted, focused, and creative as a young man, Paul wrestles constantly with the secrecy, isolation, and animosity at the heart of his family. Aware of his parents' distrust and dislike of one another and crushed by the pressure his father David puts on him to succeed in life, Paul vacillates between isolating himself and lashing out wildly for attention. He develops a serious talent for music, and later pursues a specialized education at Juilliard even against his father's wishes. Music, Paul says, is the only thing that makes him feel "alive"—and he chases that sensation no matter the cost, desperate to escape the crushing, stifling soullessness of his parents' house. When Paul learns the truth about his sister Phoebe after his father's death, he struggles deeply with feelings of anger and resentment that he hasn't felt since childhood. But after meeting Phoebe and beginning to heal from the wounds of the past alongside his mother Norah, Paul begins to understand how important it is not to waste one's life trying to fix past mistakes. From Phoebe, he begins to learn how to live in the moment and accept the simple joys of life—and sees that differences can bring people closer rather than dividing them.

Phoebe Gill Simpson – Phoebe, born with Down syndrome, is rejected by her father, David Henry, at birth. Caroline Gill is charged with taking her to a special home on the outskirts of Lexington—but unable to leave the child in such a grim place, Caroline adopts Phoebe instead. As Phoebe grows up in Pittsburgh, knowing nothing of her origins—or the fact that her birth mother, Norah, believes she is dead—she becomes a loving, outgoing—but "mercurial" and "quicksilver"—individual with big dreams. In spite of the obstacles and prejudices she faces, Phoebe develops into a self-assured young woman who

holds a job at a local copy shop and has a loving relationship with a Down syndrome-affected man named Robert. Phoebe loves music and animals, and dreams of getting married one day in a big, beautiful wedding. Deeply emotional, highly sensitive, and often fanciful, Phoebe shows everyone she meets that there is beauty to be found in difference.

Bree – Bree is Norah's younger sister. A rebellious, intelligent, and free-spirited young woman, Bree caused a scandal in their family when she ran away from home before graduating high school to elope with a much older man. In 1964, already divorced, the twenty-year-old Bree is reclaiming her youth by enrolling in college. Bree nurtures Norah's more emotional side and urges her to rebel against societal expectations of women—and the strict demands her marriage to David makes on her. Throughout the years, Bree retains her same wild, soul-searching core, but she softens and becomes more interested in spirituality and religion as she grows older. Bree's unapologetic pursuit of personal freedom and autonomy inspires a deep envy within Norah, who feels restricted by her marriage and bound to a certain way of living even as, over the years, social and sexual norms change and evolve.

Rosemary – When David Henry returns to his childhood home in West Virginia—a property to which he still holds the deed—he discovers sixteen-year-old Rosemary squatting there. Pregnant, abandoned by her boyfriend, and disowned by her family, Rosemary has nowhere to go, so David makes the impulsive decision to bring her back to Kentucky with him. Norah rejects the idea of having Rosemary in the house, prompting a split in their family; David moves out of the house to live with Rosemary, and for years they share a platonic friendship. Rosemary, who is the same age as Paul—and Phoebe—represents, to David, a chance at redemption. If he cares for Rosemary, he believes, he'll be doing some sort of penance for his failure of Phoebe. Ultimately, after giving birth to her son Jack and graduating from school, Rosemary decides to marry her new boyfriend and move home to Harrisburg, where her family, having forgiven her for the delinquency of her youth, is ready to welcome her back. Rosemary is headstrong and stubbornly self-sufficient, though she softens through the years as she makes a home and a family with David.

Albert "Al" Simpson – Al is a kindly trucker whose chance meeting with Caroline Gill on the fateful night of Phoebe's birth transcends time and distance, and eventually blossoms into a romance and marriage. Al is patient, steadfast, and devoted to both Caroline and Phoebe. Though Caroline constantly worries that Al will become frustrated by Phoebe or the demands she makes on Caroline's time, Al is nothing but supportive, and he has an enormous amount of love for both Caroline and her daughter.

Dorothy "Doro" March – Doro is a Pittsburgh woman who hires Caroline to care for her elderly father Leo. Doro takes a chance on Caroline despite not having any references in

support of her job application—when Caroline explains that she and her daughter are in a kind of hiding, Doro takes pity on Caroline and welcomes her into her family. Doro becomes a support system for Caroline and the two remain close friends—close, even, as sisters—even after Leo’s death.

June – June is David Henry’s deceased sister. June died in her youth from heart failure after years of illness, and her loss is in part why David gives Phoebe away—he knows that Down syndrome children have a higher risk of congenital heart defects, and he wants to spare Norah the pain of losing her early.

Howard – Howard is the first man with whom Norah has an extramarital affair. Norah and David meet Howard while on vacation in Aruba, and while David and Howard discuss their shared interests in art and **photography**, Norah develops an attraction to Howard. The two of them spend much of the vacation in Aruba making love in secret, and Norah doesn’t learn until later that Paul and David knew what she was doing the entire time.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Leo March – Leo is Doro’s father, a stubborn, difficult, elderly man affected by dementia whom Caroline is hired to care for. Caroline has a calming effect on Leo, and he confides in her that she is the first nurse in ages to stay with him longer than a week.

Sandra – Sandra is one of Caroline’s good friends in Pittsburgh. Sandra’s son Tim also has Down syndrome, and together, Caroline and Sandra fight for their children’s rights to be mainstreamed in school and receive a decent public education.

Tim – Tim is Sandra’s son. Like Phoebe, he has Down syndrome.

Dr. Bentley – An obstetrician at the hospital where David Henry works. On the night of the birth of Norah’s twins, Dr. Bentley gets stuck in a **snowstorm**, forcing David himself to deliver the babies—and changing the fate of the Henry family forever.

Lucy Martin – Lucy Martin is one of Caroline’s nosy neighbors in Lexington.

Kay Marshall – Kay Marshall is a wealthy, fashionable Lexington woman.

Mark Bell – Mark Bell is Bree’s boyfriend, a protestor and Vietnam veteran.

Ron Stone – Ron Stone is a lawyer who supports Sandra, Caroline, and other parents of children with Down syndrome in their fight against the Board of Education.

Duke Madison – Duke Madison is Paul’s best friend in school, a stoner and a gifted pianist.

Trace – Trace is Doro’s lover. They leave Pittsburgh together to travel the world.

Avery – Avery is one of Phoebe and Caroline’s neighbors.

Jack – Jack is Rosemary’s young son.

Frederic – Frederic is Norah’s boyfriend and, later, her second husband.

Michelle – Michelle is Paul’s girlfriend, a free-spirited flautist. Afraid of commitment and resistant to the idea of having children, she leaves him when he expresses interest in getting married.

Robert – Robert is Phoebe’s boyfriend. Like Phoebe, he has Down syndrome. Robert is a kind, outgoing, loving man who dreams of building a life with Phoebe in spite of the challenges they both face as differently-abled individuals.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SECRETS AND LIES

At the heart of the story of *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter* lies a terrible secret: Dr. David Henry’s choice to send away his daughter Phoebe, born with Down syndrome, while telling his wife Norah that the baby was stillborn. This lie—meant to save Norah, David himself, and their “normal” son Paul, Phoebe’s fraternal twin, from a life of difficulty—ultimately casts a shadow of secrecy, pain, and estrangement over the Henry family, and causes Norah, David, and Paul to resent each other in small and large ways as the years go by. As Kim Edwards tracks the family’s development in the shadow of this dark secret, she ultimately suggests that the lies people tell and the secrets they keep from one another—even in hopes of sparing another person pain and suffering—erode relationships until there is nothing real left.

When David Henry makes the decision to send Phoebe away in the arms of the nurse who helped deliver her, Caroline Gill, he believes that Phoebe will be taken to a group home where she can grow up with other people like her, away from the eyes of society—and unable to cause her mother pain, worry, and strife. David’s own sister, June, died as a young girl from a heart defect, and it is this that motivates him to spin a lie so enormous and egregious that it ultimately serves to ruin his life, and the lives of his wife and son. Though David believes he is being generous and benevolent, he is only hurting his family—and himself. David tells Norah that her daughter died at birth, and refuses to let her see the baby—whom he has already pressed into the arms of nurse Caroline Gill, and urged her to take the baby to a home for the incapacitated somewhere out

of town.

David's lie to Norah doesn't have its intended effect, though—Norah takes the death of the baby hard, and is unable to find happiness with the knowledge that Paul “survived.” She is wracked with grief, and even after a “memorial service” for Phoebe—a service David allows to happen, even knowing that it's a sham which will keep him from ever revealing the truth—Norah spends the entire novel trying to overcome the grief of having “lost” a child. If David hadn't acted out of fear and cruelty—or had, at any point in his and Norah's lives together, revealed the truth—he might have been able to stop the cracks spreading through his marriage and family from deepening.

At one point in the novel, Edwards shows that David does indeed realize, after all, just what his secrets and lies have done to his family. His marriage with Norah is on the rocks; the teenage Paul is distant and moody, hyperaware of his mother's longing for the daughter she never knew as well as the inexplicable strife between his parents. As David reflects on his choices, Edwards illustrates his thoughts for her readers: “[David] had given their daughter away. This secret stood in the middle of their family; it shaped their lives together. He knew it, he saw it, visible to him as a rock wall grown up between them. And he saw Norah and Paul reaching out and striking rock and not understanding what was happening, only that something stood between them that could not be seen or broken.”

David knows that the secrets and lies he's told have eroded the foundations of his family—and created “wall[s]” between them that can never be broached. Throughout the novel, there are repeated references to things growing, standing, or festering in the middle of the Henry family—vines, walls, and weeds—which symbolize the painful barriers that have grown up because of the silence, mistrust, and unspoken questions born of David's deceit and dishonesty.

Ultimately, the Henry family dissolves. David moves out, Paul begins acting out and later moves to New York, then Europe, and Norah throws herself into her work, becoming a high-powered and single-minded business owner. Paul and Norah do not discover the truth about Phoebe until after David's death, when Caroline comes to town to reveal his secrets. By that point, David has gone to his grave carrying the secret which effectively tore his family apart—though it festered and grew first, dividing them for years and rendering them strangers to one another, devastated by their own private pain, fear, and confusion, all of which revolved around the grand lie of Phoebe's death.

the past—for different reasons, but all with the same desperate energy. David takes up **photography** as a way of slowing down and inhabiting moments, in a retroactive effort to understand his own past decisions, while Norah combs through memories of her early courtship with David and their happy first year of marriage in a futile attempt to understand what has broken between them. As Paul grows up, he, too spends time lingering in the past as he attempts to imagine what his life might have been like if his sister had not “died” at birth. As the characters in the novel wrestle with the pull of the past, Edwards argues that too much attention to time gone by is dangerous—attempts to keep history from repeating itself as well of the act of lingering in memory will only derail one's life further.

The members of the Henry family all wrestle with the inexplicable pull the past has on them—but none so intensely as David Henry, the novel's protagonist. Kim Edwards turns the novel into an exploration of how the past can distort the future—and she uses David as the primary example in her careful character study. David Henry is in many ways both the protagonist and antagonist of the novel—he is trapped in a terrible, lonely world of his own making, created by the horrible secret he engendered when he sent Phoebe away with Caroline Gill. Locked in a constant battle with himself over whether or not he should tell his devastated wife and lonely son the truth about their family—that there is one member, still alive, whom they are missing—David finds himself living almost entirely in the past, pulled again and again to the memory of the night he made the fateful choice that would change his life and his family's forever.

David's preoccupation—perhaps even obsession—with the past is symbolized through his late-in-life success as a photographer. Years after Norah gives him the gift of a camera as an anniversary present, David begins honing his skills as a photographer and starts taking pictures (often using Norah as a model) which focus on the unseen, embedding Norah into wide shots that focus on the background and obscure the person in the frame so that they're just a small part of the picture. David's obsession with freezing moments in time speaks to his inability to release himself not just from the most pivotal moment of his life—the moment in which he chose to give away Phoebe—but all the moments after, in which he has doubled down on his decision, letting the secret grow and fester. David's art of erasure also speaks to how he has erased Phoebe from his family—and how he's unable to forget her, yet has no idea who she's growing into or what she looks like. Phoebe is the invisible in his life—not seen or felt, but a part of the canvas, lurking just below the surface of everything he does.

It's important to note that David isn't just haunted by his recent past. His impoverished childhood, made more unbearable by his sister's death at just twelve years old from a heart defect, is the root of who he is today. He chooses to give Phoebe away in part because he wants to spare Norah the pain of losing



MEMORY AND THE PAST

As the secrets and lies within the Henry family deepen, David, Norah, and Paul find themselves retreating more and more often into memory and

her—being a doctor himself, he’s aware of the risk of congenital heart defects that accompanies Down syndrome—and spare himself the repeated pain of losing someone to heart failure. Ironically, David himself dies of a heart attack towards the end of the novel, demonstrating that no matter how hard people try to escape their pasts, they cannot outrun them forever.

David Henry’s fatal flaw is his simultaneous fear of and obsession with the past. David seeks to keep the past from repeating itself, but cannot live with the choices he makes in pursuit of this goal, and spends nearly his whole life feeling like a prisoner to the memories of his poor decisions, mistakes, and losses. He represents Edward’s larger argument that there are no answers to be found in the past—and spending one’s life obsessed with what’s already transpired only keeps one from enjoying the present and building towards a future.



DIFFERENCE AND PREJUDICE

From David Henry’s startled, almost disgusted realization that his daughter Phoebe has been born with Down syndrome to the nurse at the hospital who, when Caroline Gill brings Phoebe in during an allergic anaphylactic reaction, asks if Caroline would like her to let the young girl simply die, *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter* is suffused with the pall and poison that prejudice casts over society. Through the character of Phoebe—a slow learner and “late bloomer,” but a deeply sensitive, intelligent, and capable individual—Kim Edwards shows how bigotry divides people unnecessarily, ultimately arguing that those who appear and act in unusual or special ways are disproportionately harmed by society’s fear of difference.

From the very first chapter of the novel, when Paul and Phoebe are born on a snowy winter night, the characters within the book are forced to confront their personal prejudices and fear of difference. Though David Henry orders Caroline Gill to bring the Down syndrome-affected Phoebe to a home for the impaired out of a desire to shield himself and his wife from the heartbreak of what he believes will be a short, painful life for the girl, there’s a seed of judgment and intolerance in his decision, as well. When Caroline brings Phoebe to Pittsburgh, she does so out of love and a belief that Phoebe deserves to live a normal life—a life where she’s given equal opportunity and never has to feel hidden, neglected, or ashamed. Caroline’s struggle throughout the novel to fight for equitable rights, fair treatment, and good opportunities for her daughter is an uphill battle—one which exposes the deep prejudices running through American society not just in the 1960s, but beyond.

When Phoebe is stung by a bee and develops anaphylaxis—a closing of the throat in an acute allergic reaction—Caroline and her boyfriend Al rush the confused, frightened Phoebe to the hospital. A nurse sees Phoebe struggling to breathe, turns to Caroline, who is begging for a doctor, and asks her—in coded speech—if she’s sure she wants Phoebe to receive medical

attention, and wouldn’t just rather let her die. Caroline, outraged by the woman’s cruelty (as well as the assumption that Caroline sees Phoebe as a burden), tries to slap her, but Al holds her back. This is the most pointed and indeed the most evil of several smaller encounters Caroline has with people who immediately pick up on Phoebe’s difference and react to her out of fear, judgment, or disgust rather than relating to Phoebe as a whole, capable person with her own personality—a person worthy of life, happiness, and attention.

Caroline also encounters difficulty finding a place for Phoebe to go to school. Through Sandra, the mother of another Pittsburgh boy with Down syndrome, Caroline begins to find and develop a community. The parents petition the school district to let their children partake of a normal, mainstream education—but the local officials refuse their request, claiming that the “mentally retarded” children would only “overwhelm the system” and drain resources from “normal” children who, in the eyes of the state, are more deserving of attention and education. Outraged by this decision, Caroline, Sandra, and other parents of other children with Down syndrome ultimately form the Upside Down Society—a place where their children can meet others like them and learn, play, and form relationships free of the judgement of those who don’t understand them (and don’t even want to try to).

Overall, Kim Edwards uses the relationship between Phoebe and her twin brother Paul to crystallize how cruel, divisive, and ultimately pointless prejudice and judgment are—and how deeply they can wound. In the novel’s final chapters, as Paul gets to know his sister, Phoebe, better and better, he observes how other people’s “strained, uncertain” ways of talking and listening to Phoebe minimize and ignore her personhood. Paul loves and appreciates his twin for who she is, and grows sad as he thinks about “the difficulties she encounter[s] in the world simply by being different.” Paul is comforted by the fact that Phoebe’s “direct and guileless love” serves to “propel” her through the hardships and prejudices she’s faced already, and will surely continue to face as she ages. Phoebe is different, but as Paul has learned, differences can be respected and celebrated instead of met with fear, disgust, or hatred.



FAMILIES BORN AND MADE

When Phoebe Henry is sent away for no reason other than her difference, Caroline Gill—the nurse who helped deliver the child—is unable to leave her at the dirty, understaffed home Dr. David Henry has sent her to, and instead adopts Phoebe as her own daughter. Throughout the novel, as Caroline and Phoebe make a new life together in Pittsburgh while the Henrys remains in Lexington—with Norah and Paul unaware that their family is incomplete—Kim Edwards calls into question what it means to be part of a family. She ultimately argues that some of the strongest families are made consciously by people who love

and support each other, rather than by people simply born into the same household.

The most potent example of a “made” family within the novel is that of Caroline Gill. After she adopts Phoebe as her own daughter and moves with her to Pittsburgh, she steadily and carefully creates an extended family for herself as the years go by, slowly erasing the loneliness she’s always felt and realizing that she is not “some sort of vessel to be filled up with love,” but instead a person with so much love to give that she unites all kinds of people from all different sorts of places. Caroline intends to make a family with just Phoebe—she feels an intense amount of love for the child, and never once pities, judges, or looks down on her as she grows. As Caroline and Phoebe settle in Pittsburgh, however, the united front of their little family draws in everyone they meet—and together, they build a larger family based on love, respect, and mutual desire to weather the world together.

Caroline takes a job working as nurse and caretaker to Leo, an elderly man whose harsh exterior melts the more he gets to know her. Leo’s daughter, Doro, who hires Caroline and takes a chance on her in spite of her lack of references (due to the fact that she and Phoebe are in a kind of hiding) also becomes charmed by Caroline and Phoebe’s bond—and Doro becomes a sort of sister to Caroline as the years pass by. Caroline eventually marries Al, a trucker she met on the night Phoebe was born. When Caroline and Phoebe were caught in the snow, Al gave them a ride home in his rig. As the years go by, Caroline wonders often where the kind, handsome Al ended up—and one night, on the dark streets of Pittsburgh, he finds her, revealing he has been searching for her for years. Caroline and Al begin a courtship, and yet Caroline rejects Al’s offers of marriage for fear that Phoebe will one day prove a burden to him. When Al heroically helps Caroline through one of Phoebe’s health scares, Caroline becomes convinced that Al is the right man for her—and chooses to add him to her family, assured of his worth and his desire to choose her and Phoebe right back, every day.

Towards the end of the novel, another “made” family emerges—after David Henry visits his childhood home and finds the pregnant, sixteen-year-old drifter Rosemary living there, he invites her to come back to Lexington with him and live with his family. Norah rejects Rosemary outright, believing that David is either in love with the girl or the father of her child. On a psychological level, Rosemary, who is the same age as Paul—and Phoebe, whom Norah believes is dead—reminds Norah of the daughter she never knew. While for David, this fact makes him want to shelter and protect Rosemary as penance for his secret deeds, Norah is unable to cohabit with the girl. David and Rosemary move out and into a home of their own, where they live together platonically for several years while Rosemary gives birth to and raises her son, Jack, and takes classes. David—through circumstances of his own

making—has felt like an outsider in his own family for nearly two decades. The family he chooses with Rosemary and her son is nontraditional and strange, even, but David feels more at home with the two of them than he ever did with Norah and Paul.

In sending his daughter away and breaking apart the family that was born to him, David Henry commits an unspeakable and, by some standards, even evil act. However, as the novel progresses and the far-flung characters within it form and make families based on choice, trust, and mutual respect and love, Edwards shows that true family is made of the people who show up for one another out of love and commitment rather than obligation alone. Blood, goes the old adage, is thicker than water—but *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter* shows that sometimes, the inverse is true.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



PHOTOGRAPHY

The most potent symbol throughout *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter* is that of photography—cameras, poses, and pictures. When Norah gifts David a camera for the first wedding anniversary they celebrate following the birth of Paul and the “death” of Phoebe, David begins what will become a lifelong obsession with photography, and eventually a mercurial but successful career as a lauded artist. David’s preoccupation with the art of taking photographs stems from his desire to return to the most fateful moment of his life—the moment in which he chose to give Phoebe away. David is obsessed with the fact that one moment has changed the fate of his family forever, and though he knows that at literally any time he could reveal the truth and change the course of his life again, he chooses instead to retreat into memory and try to freeze moments of the past rather than focus on changing the future. David maintains that he doesn’t use photography to “escape the world,” but instead to linger in moments he enjoys. He wants to capture as many happy moments as he can, in hopes of obscuring the one moment most painful to him. As a symbol of retreat into, lingering within, or selectively remembering the past, photography ties in with the novel’s major themes of memory, secrets, and lies.



SNOW

On the night Phoebe and Paul are born, an uncharacteristically serious snowstorm has hit Lexington, Kentucky. Snow blankets everything, and falls softly and dreamily as David and Norah make their way to the

hospital. The streets are abandoned, and Norah's obstetrician, Dr. Bentley, is caught in a drift and unable to get to the hospital. David, an orthopedic surgeon, is forced to deliver the babies himself—as a result, he is given the freedom and control to make the terrible decision of sending Phoebe away when he realizes she has been born with Down syndrome. As Caroline, the nurse present for the delivery of the babies, takes Phoebe first to a home for the impaired and later, after refusing to leave her there, drives through the snowy streets of Lexington unsure of what to do, snow emerges as a symbol of things blanketed in secrets—of facts and choices covered-up, hidden, and yet bound to be revealed one day when the truth melts off the surface of things. Snow, beautiful and blank but impermanent, represents the threat that comes along with a secret—one day, it will surely be brought to light.



BEES

At around the same time in their lives, when they are young children, Phoebe and Paul experience swelling and anaphylaxis as a result of their allergies to bees. When Paul touches a dead bee on the windowsill of his bedroom and his hand begins swelling, Norah and David know what to do for him—David, too, has a terrible bee allergy. When Phoebe, however, is stung by a bee far away in Pittsburgh and her throat begins closing up, Caroline is unprepared for the severity of the reaction, and together with Al, rushes Phoebe to a hospital for treatment. The near-simultaneous but very different experiences Paul and Phoebe have with bees symbolize their parallel but very different lives—the ways in which the twins are growing up facing many of the same issues, but without one another to rely on.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 10-11

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's opening pages, a light snow begins to fall over the city of Lexington, Kentucky. As the storm worsens, Norah Henry begins going into labor, and her husband, David Henry, helps her pack for the hospital and rush out to the car. As the two of them prepare to get into the car, Norah asks David to stop for a moment. She points out the beautiful snow falling all around them, and expresses her optimism and excitement about the impending birth of their first child. This brief passage, however, soon takes on a darker meaning. The snow falling symbolizes the heavy blanket of secrets which will soon cover the Henry family—and while the Henrys' world "will never be the same," it will not be because of the great joy they feel, but because of the interminable grief they'll each suffer. Norah is about to deliver twins—the boy, Paul, will be born healthy, but the girl, Phoebe, will be born with Down syndrome. David will send Phoebe away, then tell Norah she died at birth. The Henrys' world is indeed about to change, as Norah says here—but the changes that are coming will bring grief and sorrow that reverberate throughout their lives for years to come.

☞ He cut the cord and checked her heart, her lungs. All the time he was thinking of the snow, the silver car floating into a ditch, the deep quiet of this empty clinic. Later, when he considered this night—and he would think of it often, in the months and years to come: the turning point of his life, the moments around which everything else would always gather—what he remembered was the silence in the room and the snow falling steadily outside.

Related Characters: Dr. David Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

When David Henry, to his great surprise, realizes that his



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* published in 2005.

Chapter 1: March 1964 Quotes

☞ When they reached the car she touched his arm and gestured to the house, veiled with snow and glowing like a lantern in the darkness of the street.

"When we come back we'll have our baby with us," she said. "Our world will never be the same."

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Dr. David Henry

wife is having twins, he delivers the second child feeling that his joy has doubled—but when he sees the baby’s face and realizes she has Down syndrome, horrible thoughts flood his head. David, whose younger sister June died of a heart defect as a young woman, is still reeling from the trauma of that loss. Knowing that babies with Down syndrome often suffer fatal heart problems—and that even if the baby is healthy, her disorder will be a burden their family must bear for years—David makes the decision to send the child away and tell Norah she died at birth. The snow falling as David makes this pivotal decision, one which will become “the turning point of his life,” symbolizes the heavy weight of secrets pressing down upon him. Though David has ample time to reconsider his choice, he remains steadfast in his decision, and so sets in motion a terrible lie which will consume his family from the inside out for years to come.

Chapter 2: March 1964 Quotes

☝ She began to laugh. It wasn’t a normal laugh; even Caroline could hear that: her voice too loud, halfway to a sob. “I have a baby,” she said out loud, astonished. “I have a baby in this car.” But the parking lot stretched quietly before her, the lights from the grocery store windows making large rectangles in the slush. “I have a baby here,” Caroline repeated, her voice thinning quickly in the air. “A baby!” she shouted then, into the stillness.

Related Characters: Caroline Gill Simpson (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Caroline Gill is charged with taking Phoebe away shortly after her birth and bringing her to a home for the incapacitated in the Kentucky countryside. Caroline, a nurse who has had an intense but secret crush on David for years, is willing to do whatever he asks of her—but when she arrives at the home, she cannot bring herself to abandon the baby. Instead, Caroline puts Phoebe back in her car and drives through the snow aimlessly, stopping for food at a grocery store. After exiting the store during closing, Caroline realizes that her car battery is dead—and the lot and store are abandoned. No one can hear her cries for help, and yet she shouts anyway into the snowy night. This passage is packed with symbolism. Caroline’s getting stuck in the snow symbolizes how the secret in which she is

now complicit will stick with her for life, while her unheard scream into the night foreshadows just how hard she’ll have to work all her life to secure respect and equal rights for her daughter.

Chapter 3: March 1964 Quotes

☝ She too had been shocked by Bree’s nerve, her daring, and she was angry that the rules seemed to have shifted, that Bree had more or less gotten away with it—the marriage, the divorce, the scandal.

She hated what Bree had done to them all.

She wished desperately that she’d done it first.

But it would never have occurred to her. She’d always been good; that was her job.

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Bree

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which occurs when Norah’s sister Bree comes to help her with Paul in the days shortly after his birth, shows the simmering jealousy between the two sisters. Norah, who has “always been good” and followed a simple, traditional path in life, is boiling with envy over her sister’s free-spirited approach to being alive. Norah feels trapped by the expectations of perfection placed upon her first by her parents and now by her husband—she longs for more than she has, but in the repressive atmosphere of 1964 in the American South, she isn’t sure how to ask for it. As the novel progresses, Norah’s secret desires will rise up until they are unstoppable—fueled by grief, longing, and restlessness, Norah will soon shed her good-girl persona and, like Bree, go confidently in the direction of her wildest dreams.

☝ “He had a sister,” Norah whispered, determined, looking around at all the faces. They had come here out of kindness. They were sad, yes, and she was making them sadder by the second. What was happening to her? All her life she had tried so hard to do the right thing. “Her name was Phoebe. I want somebody to say her name. Do you hear me?” She stood up. “I want someone to remember her name.”

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill

Simpson, Paul Henry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

When some women from Norah and David's church come over to meet Paul and bring gifts for the baby, the grieving Norah explodes in a fit of hysteria. None of the women will acknowledge that Norah lost a child—they are only willing to talk about the bundle of joy that is Paul. Norah, who feels her grief is already being ignored profoundly by her absent husband, can't take any more people denying the loss she's still going through. As the novel progresses, Norah will struggle with this sentiment again and again: she wants to know why more people, especially David, won't acknowledge Phoebe, never understanding that the lie at the heart of her marriage makes David desperate to escape the past and his terrible mistakes.

Chapter 4: March 1964 Quotes

☹☹ It was strange; she disliked him so much for these words, but she felt with him also at that moment the greatest intimacy she had ever felt with any person. They were joined together now in something enormous, and no matter what happened they always would be.

Related Characters: Caroline Gill Simpson (speaker), Dr. David Henry

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Caroline Gill sees an ad in the newspaper for Phoebe's "memorial service," David Henry shows up at her apartment to beg her to keep his secret—the fact that he has given Phoebe away. As David begs Caroline to have mercy on him, she is full of a kind of revulsion for the man she thought she knew—and thought she loved—but at the same time, Caroline can't help but feel a lingering spark of excitement at the idea that she and David now share a "great[er] intimacy" than he has even with his wife. Caroline feels that the fact that they are "joined together" is a blessing—she doesn't yet realize that this terrible tether between them will tear at each of them over the years, and will eventually derail David's entire life. This passage demonstrates the toxic nature of secrets and lies—and yet

shows that even the darkest kinds of deceit hold an unstoppable allure.

Chapter 5: February 1965 Quotes

☹☹ "Please don't be sad. I didn't forget, Norah. Not our anniversary. Not our daughter. Not anything."

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

Related Characters: Norah Henry, Dr. David Henry (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

After Norah recklessly drinks and drives over to her and David's old house on the night of their anniversary, after he gets stuck in surgery and doesn't come home for dinner, she returns home to find her husband concerned and angry with her. Norah, who has had mixed feelings about leaving their old house—and thus, in her view, permanently leaving their daughter behind—attempts to repair the damage she's done to her husband's confidence by telling him that she's at last ready to accept an offer on the house. David senses Norah's sadness and assures her that he hasn't—and won't—forget about their past. Norah thinks of how she chose his gift—a camera called "The Memory Keeper"—expressly to remind him how important the past is. Norah doesn't yet realize how photography will amplify and deepen David's obsession with trying to still time and reclaim the past. Here, Norah doesn't want to move on from her grief, but feels pressured to by her husband to do so. As the novel unfolds, however, their roles will reverse, and David will take up the mantle and the burden of being their family's "memory keeper," to the detriment of his and Norah's bond.

Chapter 7: May 1965 Quotes

☝☝ He took a deep breath, fighting a wave of vertigo, afraid even to glance at Norah. He had wanted to spare her, to protect her from loss and pain; he had not understood that loss would follow her regardless, as persistent and life-shaping as a stream of water. Nor had he anticipated his own grief, woven with the dark threads of his past. When he imagined the daughter he'd given away, it was his sister's face he saw, her pale hair, her serious smile.

Related Characters: Dr. David Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson, June, Norah Henry

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

On a beautiful summer day, Norah and David take Paul for a hike. David is hardly able to enjoy the day, though—he is assaulted over and over again by memories of the past, and he grows frustrated with his own inability to live in the moment and forget the grief he himself has created within his own family by giving Phoebe away. David claims that all he ever wanted to do was spare himself, Norah, and indeed Paul the pain he felt when he lost his sister, June, at such a young age. David is slowly realizing, though, that he's caused his family a different kind of grief. By manufacturing a tragedy, and then refusing to mourn along with his wife—by dragging them forward into the future—he is only salting the wounds he himself built into the framework of his family. David's good intentions have backfired terribly—and yet rather than tell the truth, expose his lie, and begin to heal, he will only dig in deeper as the years go by, further damaging his relationships with his wife and son.

Chapter 9: May 1970 Quotes

☝☝ “Put the camera away,” she said. “Please. It's a party, David.” “These tulips are so beautiful,” he began, but he was unable to explain himself, unable to put into words why these images compelled him so.

“It's a party,” she repeated. “You can either miss it and take pictures of it, or you can get a drink and join it.”

“I have a drink,” he pointed out. “No one cares that I'm taking a few pictures, Norah.”

“I care. It's rude.”

Related Characters: Dr. David Henry, Norah Henry (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

By 1970, David's obsession with photography is in full swing. He has established a darkroom for himself out back, and he enjoys spending time in there more than he does with his family. When Norah painstakingly prepares a May Day party for their friends, family, and neighbors—and David insists on photographing every moment of it—Norah grows frustrated and angry with her husband's inability to live in the present. She doesn't understand the larger impulse behind his preoccupation with photographing as much of the world as he can—and it's possible that at this point, David himself doesn't even fully understand his own motivations. What's becoming clear through these lines, however, is that David doesn't want to live in the moment—he seeks to halt time, capture what's already past, and keep himself at a stark remove from the rest of the world around him.

Chapter 10: June 1970 Quotes

☝☝ Caroline thought again of Phoebe, such a loving quicksilver child. A finder of lost things, a girl who could count to fifty and dress herself and recite the alphabet, a girl who might struggle to speak but who could read Caroline's mood in an instant.

Limited, the voices said. Flooding the schools. A drag on resources and on the brighter children.

Caroline felt a rush of despair. They'd never really see Phoebe, these men, they would never see her as more than different, slow to speak and to master new things.

Related Characters: Caroline Gill Simpson (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Caroline and the rest of the Upside Down Society—a group she and her friend Sandra have formed in order to advocate for the Down syndrome children of Pittsburgh—are at a hearing with the Board of Education, attempting to secure rights to mainstream education for

their children. The Board, though, is prejudiced, cruel, and thoughtless—they see the children of the Society only as “a drag on resources” who do not deserve to be in school with “brighter children.” Caroline has spent years advocating on Phoebe’s behalf—she loves her daughter not in spite of but because of her differences, and wishes that other people could see past their own fear and judgement and look more closely at people like Phoebe as individuals. Caroline’s struggle for Phoebe’s rights is passionate and ongoing throughout a large portion of the novel—Phoebe has been her family since the moment she took her from the hospital, and Caroline is prepared to fight nonstop to make her daughter’s needs visible.

Chapter 11: July 1977 Quotes

☝☝ The photographs they were discussing were all of her: her hips, her skin, her hands, her hair. And yet she was excluded from the conversation: object, not subject. [...] She had tried, by posing for David, to ease some of the distance that had grown between them. His fault, hers—it didn’t really matter. But watching David now, absorbed in his explanation, she understood that he did not really see her and hadn’t for years.

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Howard, Dr. David Henry

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

As David and Howard, a man they’ve met on their vacation to Aruba, pore over some pictures from David’s portfolio, Norah stands at the edge of the conversation, uninvited to contribute—and unsure of what she’d say if she were actually asked something. Norah is an “object” in David’s life, she realizes—constantly observed but never truly seen. Norah doesn’t realize yet just how accurate this assessment is, or how deep its reverberations travel. David has, for the entirety of their marriage, assumed he knows who Norah is, what she wants, and what’s best for her—he has never given her a shred of agency, going so far as to decide for her that her Down syndrome-affected daughter should be taken away. Norah knows none of this, of course—but she’s beginning to vocalize the sad emotional truths at the heart of her marriage, even if she doesn’t see the full picture yet.

Chapter 12: August 1977 Quotes

☝☝ He had given their daughter away. This secret stood in the middle of their family; it shaped their lives together. He knew it, he saw it, visible to him as a rock wall grown up between them. And he saw Norah and Paul reaching out and striking rock and not understanding what was happening, only that something stood between them that could not be seen or broken.

Related Characters: Dr. David Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson, Paul Henry, Norah Henry

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 193-194

Explanation and Analysis

As David reflects on his wife’s recent affair, and the growing animosity not just between the two of them but with their son Paul, as well, he thinks about the unfair playing ground at the heart of their family. Norah and Paul, confused by David’s distant nature, continue “striking rock” as they attempt to reach out and connect with him. They don’t know the reason he’s put up the walls and shut them out the way he’s been doing for years—they just know that he’s not available to them. David knows this is deeply unfair to his family, but he has no idea how to correct what he’s done. The secret at the heart of their lives together has grown into the fabric of their existence, and David isn’t able to reveal the truth. Until he does that, though, he knows that his marriage to Norah and his relationship with Paul will only continue to deteriorate—and yet he is chronically unable to bring himself to make a change and ease his family’s pain.

Chapter 15: April 1982 Quotes

☝☝ “She was lucky, I guess; she never had a problem with her heart. She loves to sing. She has a cat named Rain. She’s learning how to weave. [...] She goes to school. Public school, with all the other kids. I had to fight like hell for them to take her. And now she’s nearly grown I don’t know what will happen. [...] What else can I say? You missed a lot of heartache, sure. But David, you missed a lot of joy.”

Related Characters: Caroline Gill Simpson (speaker), Dr. David Henry, Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

When Caroline comes to one of David's photography exhibit openings in Pittsburgh, it marks the first time they have seen one another in nearly twenty years. They have both changed so much that they hardly recognize each other—but as they begin talking, David and Caroline admit some hard truths about their pasts to one another and each seek information about how the other is doing. David especially wants to know about Phoebe—he has heard some updates through the letters Caroline has sent over the years, but now, face-to-face with the woman who has taken in his daughter, he asks her if Phoebe is happy. Caroline replies with a long monologue in which she lists things about Phoebe, attempting to express to David what a special girl his daughter has grown up to be. Caroline, it seems, wants to prove to David just how wrong he was about Phoebe—she's not trying to be cruel, but she wants him to understand that by judging Phoebe for her difference and assuming what her life would be like, he has missed out on the opportunity to know and raise an incredible individual. Caroline's fight for Phoebe's equality and for people to see her as a whole person extends past the Board of Education and the nurses who care for her—it even reaches Phoebe's own birth father.

great and terrible weight of the moment he chose to give Phoebe away, in hopes of lessening the ongoing pain, grief, and shame contained within that “turning point.” David believed that in stopping time he might be able to beautify or even alter the past—but he never paused to realize that his entire life was passing him by, along with the opportunity to make any kind of real amends for his mistakes. David is sickened by the secrets and lies he's allowed to take hold of his life, but he's completely lost and uncertain of how to undo the damage he's already done.

☝ Her silence made him free. He talked like a river, like a storm, words rushing through the old house with a force and life he could not stop. [...] He talked until the words slowed, ebbed, finally ceased. Silence welled.

She did not speak. [...]

He closed his eyes, fear rising, because he had seen anger in her eyes, because everything that happened had been his fault.

Her footsteps and then the metal, cold and bright as ice, slid against his skin. The tension in his wrists released. [...]

“All right,” she said. “You're free.”

Related Characters: Rosemary, Dr. David Henry (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

After his photography opening in Pittsburgh, David—traumatized by his meeting with Caroline and desperate to actually reckon with his past—returns to his hometown in West Virginia to visit the house where he lived as a boy. There, he falls asleep, exhausted, and wakes up to find that a pregnant teenager named Rosemary, who has been squatting in the house, has tied David up after believing him to be an intruder. Restrained and vulnerable, David tries to give Rosemary a reason to let him go—but as he reckons with the truth of who he is, he begins to understand the harm he has done and the depths of the mistakes he's made. David begins confessing everything to Rosemary, telling her all about Phoebe and his refusal to correct his past mistakes. After David can speak no more, Rosemary severs the ties binding him to the bed and tells him he's “free.” This highly symbolic moment implies that through confessing the truth, David has achieved a kind of freedom he's never had before. Even though the people who need to hear the truth (David's family) still haven't heard it, in confiding in just one person, he's given himself a

Chapter 16: April 1982 Quotes

☝ His life turned around that single action: a newborn child in his arms—and then he reached out to give her away. It was as if he'd taken pictures all these years since to try and give another moment similar substance, equal weight. He'd wanted to try to still the rushing world, the flow of events, but of course that had been impossible.

Related Characters: Dr. David Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, wandering the streets of Pittsburgh after Caroline leaves his photography opening, David considers his obsession with the medium and the fruits of all his labor. He realizes that his entire preoccupation with photography has, all along, been an attempt to “give another moment” the

chance at redemption—which is the most he’s had in a very long time. David has been holding his guilt and grief inside for years, repeatedly working to convince himself that he did the right thing all those years ago, and denying the fact that his choices have splintered his family and created even more pain than he thought possible. Now, in acknowledging the truth of who he is and what he’s done, David is able to decide what he wants to do next.

Chapter 21: November 1988 Quotes

☞☞ Phoebe’s face was falling, tears were slipping down her cheeks.

“It’s not fair,” she whispered.

“It’s not fair,” Caroline agreed.

They stood for a moment, quiet in the bright harsh lights.

Related Characters: Caroline Gill Simpson, Phoebe Gill Simpson (speaker), Robert

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 346

Explanation and Analysis

When Caroline finds Phoebe and her boyfriend Robert—a boy who also has Down syndrome—kissing at an Upside Down Society party, she separates the two of them and tries to explain to Phoebe that there are limits on the kind of relationship she can have with Robert. Phoebe tells Caroline that she wants to get married to Robert and have lots of babies—as Caroline slowly, painstakingly details the reasons why this kind of future isn’t possible for Phoebe, Phoebe breaks down in tears, stunned by the unfairness of the situation. Caroline, who has spent her entire life trying to fight for her daughter’s rights to equality and happiness, agrees that “it’s not fair” that there are just some things that are out of Phoebe’s reach. Caroline has worked hard to make Phoebe feel safe, supported, and loved—now, as Phoebe grows older, Caroline faces a new set of challenges as a mother, and she must learn to push back against her own preconceived notions of what her daughter can do and who she can grow to be.

Chapter 22: July 1, 1989 Quotes

☞☞ For a long time Norah sat very still, agitated, on the edge of knowing. And then suddenly the knowledge was hers, irrevocable, searing: all those years of silence, when he would not speak of their lost daughter, David had been keeping this record of her absence. Paul, and a thousand other girls, all growing.

Paul, but not Phoebe.

Norah might have wept. She longed suddenly to talk with David. All these years, he’d missed her too. All these photographs, all this silent, secret longing.

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson, Paul Henry, Dr. David Henry

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

As Norah goes through David’s photography archives after his death to prepare them for some curators, she comes upon several boxes marked “SURVEY.” They contain some photos of Paul at different stages of his life—but mostly consist of photographs of random babies and children, all females. As Norah considers the strange photographs, she realizes they’re not sexual or voyeuristic in nature—David has spent a large part of his time behind the camera capturing the vitality and innocence of young girls in hopes of imagining what Phoebe might have been like, and grieving the daughter he never knew. Norah is relieved and saddened to realize that her husband suffered the same “secret longing” she did for years, in total silence. Though Norah still doesn’t know the full truth about Phoebe, she’s able to see at last how losing Phoebe affected David—and that in spite of the walls he put up over the years, he really did share in Norah’s pain.

☞☞ Caroline said it again: Phoebe, not dead but taken away. All these years. Phoebe, growing up in another city. Safe, Caroline kept saying. Safe, well cared for, loved. Phoebe, her daughter, Paul’s twin. Born with Down syndrome, sent away. David had sent her away.

“You must be crazy,” Norah said, though even as she spoke so many jagged pieces of her life were falling into place that she knew what Caroline was saying must be true.

Related Characters: Norah Henry (speaker), Paul Henry, Dr. David Henry, Phoebe Gill Simpson, Caroline Gill Simpson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, taken from the novel's most climactic scene, Caroline reveals the truth about Phoebe at long last. David has been dead for a year, and took the truth to his grave—Caroline, though, is determined to bring it to light, and to allow Norah access to her daughter if she wants it. As Norah takes in the news, she is stunned, confused, and angry. She tries to deny the truth—but even as she does, she can't help but feel a wash of relief in the back of her mind as several of the painful, confusing, “jagged” details of her life fall into place. Norah is at last able to understand what went wrong between her and David—and why he became so fixated on the past, yet reluctant to ever discuss it. Norah must accept the horrible truth in order to move forward, even if it means realizing that her husband lied to her for over twenty years. Secrets and lies have defined Norah's whole life, though she hasn't realized it. Now that she has the whole truth, she is able to look back on the past and begin to heal all the frustrating, perplexing suffering which defined so many of her years—and came to mark her relationships with her husband, her son, and indeed even herself.

Chapter 23: July 2-4, 1989 Quotes

☝ Paul reached out into the hot, humid air, feeling as if he were standing in one of his father's photographs, where trees bloomed up in the pulse of a heart, where the world was suddenly not what it seemed. He caught a flake in one palm; when he closed his hand into a fist and opened it again, his flesh was smeared with black. Ashes were drifting down like snow in the dense July heat.

Related Characters: Paul Henry (speaker), Dr. David Henry

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 379

Explanation and Analysis

In this highly symbolic passage, Paul arrives at his childhood home to help Norah pack up their old belongings, get rid of their furniture, and comb through David's valuable photography archives. When he arrives, he is unaware of the hole that has just been blasted in the middle of his mother's life—she's just found out the truth about Phoebe from Caroline, and now she's trying to take retribution against David by burning his photographs. As Paul believes he's seeing a strange, uncanny mid-July snow, he reaches out to touch the flakes, only to have them dissolve into ash. This “melting” of fake “snow” symbolizes that the secrets which once blanketed the Henry family are about to dissolve, giving way to something new and unexpected—something that will upend their entire understanding of their lives up to this point.

☝ He realized, with a deep sense of shame, that his pity for Phoebe, like his mother's assumption of her dependence, had been foolish and unnecessary. Phoebe liked herself and she liked her life; she was happy. All the striving he had done, all the competitions and awards, the long and futile struggle to both please himself and impress his father—placed next to Phoebe's life, all this seemed a little foolish too.

Related Characters: Paul Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 390

Explanation and Analysis

As Paul gets to know his sister Phoebe, he realizes that all of his fears of her difference, and insecurities about how he'd possibly relate to her are moot. Phoebe is a smart, funny, and capable individual—all the differences Paul worried about are not as insurmountable as he believed they'd be. Meeting Phoebe forces Paul to reconsider not just his prejudices, but indeed his past actions—he has a lot to learn from Phoebe in spite of the ways in which she's considered by many to be disadvantaged. It is Paul who has faced challenges that have stunted and derailed him—not Phoebe. Paul feels guilty for being so small-minded, and he resolves in this moment to let himself learn from his sister rather than assume—like his father once did—that he knows what's best for her, what she wants, or what she's capable of.

Chapter 24: September 1, 1989 Quotes

☛☛ “How?” he asked softly. “How could he never tell us?”

She turned to him, serious. “I don’t know. I’ll never understand it. But think how his life must have been, Paul. Carrying this secret with him all those years.”

He looked across the table. Phoebe was standing next to a poplar tree whose leaves were just beginning to turn, scraping whipped cream off her cake with her fork. “Our lives could have been so much different.”

“Yes. That’s true. But they weren’t different, Paul. They happened just like this.”

“You’re defending him,” he said slowly.

“No. I’m forgiving him. I’m trying to, anyway. There’s a difference.”

Related Characters: Norah Henry, Paul Henry (speaker), Phoebe Gill Simpson, Dr. David Henry

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 396

Explanation and Analysis

At Norah’s wedding to her new beau Frederic, Paul and Norah watch as Phoebe eats a slice of cake and dances, enjoying herself. They have each gotten to know Phoebe a little bit since meeting her several months ago—and though their relationships with her are still new, they both love her and care for her. Watching Phoebe now, Paul angrily wonders how David could have sent Phoebe away—and, more importantly, how he could have kept such a terrible secret from Paul and Norah for so many years. Norah admits that she’s just as confused as Paul—but she doesn’t want to waste time being angry, or wondering about what could have been. She feels it’s important to “try” to forgive her husband—though Paul still harbors anger towards his father, Norah is trying to show her son that to linger in the past and remain furious about what’s been done to their family would only be to repeat David’s mistakes. The time for obsessing about what’s past is over—Norah wants for herself, Paul, and Phoebe to focus on the future, and to be grateful that at least they found each other in the end.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: MARCH 1964

A light **snow** begins to fall in Lexington, Kentucky. David Henry builds a fire after eating dinner with his pregnant wife, Norah, who is due to have their first child in three weeks. The two of them have only been married for a year. While David puts logs in the fireplace, Norah muses aloud about “what it’s like [...] before we’re born,” and what their baby might be experiencing at this moment. David admits he doesn’t know—Norah points out that, as a doctor, he ought to. David tells her that he’s just an orthopedic surgeon, and doesn’t know much beyond his field.

Norah is eleven years younger than the thirty-three year-old David, who has recently moved to Lexington. Shortly after arriving, he spotted Norah in a department store, and was so bewitched by her beauty that he followed her upstairs—into the lingerie department. He came up with a flimsy excuse for being in the department, claiming to be buying a robe for his sister when in reality his sister June had been dead for years, and he had no “living family that he acknowledged.” After securing Norah’s phone number, he purchased the robe and left. Several days later he called her and took her out to dinner—three months later, they were wed.

At eleven, Norah goes to bed, and David stays up reading medical journals for over an hour. When he goes up to bed, he finds Norah on the edge of the bed and in visible pain. She says she believes she is in labor, and as her contractions worsen, David agrees that the baby must be coming early. David summons his medical training to remain calm as he helps Norah pack for the hospital, guides her to the car, and begins driving through the heavy **snow**. As they make their way through the worsening storm, David reassures Norah that he has called her obstetrician, Dr. Bentley, and the man will meet them at the clinic where the two men practice medicine.

When Norah and David arrive, they enter to find that no one is there but one of the nurses, Caroline, who gives David the news that Dr. Bentley is stuck in the **snow** and won’t be arriving. David knows that Caroline has a crush on him, and he once even caught her watching him while he napped with his head down at his desk. Caroline is the best nurse at the clinic, though, and David is glad she is there to help him—he realizes he will have to deliver the baby himself.

The opening passages of the novel show Norah and David as a young, happy couple who are very much in love. The snow falling around them, though, is a symbol of the secrets that will soon fall between them, changing everything.



This passage gives a playful view into the early days of Norah and David’s relationship—but also shows that there is a part of David that is hidden from the world, a part of his past he denies and skirts. His behavior here also raises a note of trouble: he lies and manipulates to get into Norah’s life.



Norah’s baby is coming early, and David is surprised and nervous but calm. As they drive through the snow, the potent symbol portends the fact that they are heading into the unknown—and a mountain of secrets from which they may never be able to extricate themselves.



The picture-perfect, idyllic plans the Henrys had for their child’s birth are falling apart quickly. The several hiccups and obstacles they’re facing show that sometimes even the best-laid plans fall apart—people cannot control everything.



Caroline helps Norah up onto the table while David cleans up and puts on a lab coat. When he examines Norah, he realizes that she is ready to deliver. Norah says that she wants the baby to be called Phoebe if it's a girl, and Paul if it's a boy. Caroline gives Norah some gas while David help Norah to push—David has delivered babies before, back in medical school, and he calmly but mechanically guides Norah through labor until a baby boy is born. Caroline takes the baby away to clean him up, and David assures Norah that their son is “perfect.” Norah begins having another contraction, and David prepares to help her deliver her afterbirth—but as she cries out, he realizes that she must be having twins, and another baby is on the way.

To help with the pain, David urges Caroline to give Norah some more gas. David urges himself to remain calm as he coaches a woozy Norah through more pushing. After several minutes, a baby girl is born—but when David looks upon her face, he sees that her eyelids are marked by epicanthal folds and her nose is flattened—“a mongoloid,” David thinks, frightened. He remembers his own sister, June, who was born with a heart defect and grew slowly and unsteadily before dying at just twelve years old. As David reflects on his mother’s grief, and his own, he remembers that children with Down syndrome often have congenital heart defects, and knows what he must do.

David begins cleaning the baby girl up, cutting her umbilical cord and checking her heart and lungs. He does not realize that this quiet night, with **snow** falling silently outside, will become “the turning point of his life.” David gives this baby to Caroline and instructs her to keep her in the other room for now—he doesn’t want Norah to “know” the truth about her. Caroline takes the girl into the next room while David delivers the half-conscious Norah’s placentas and then stitches her up.

While Norah rests, David goes into the other room and writes a name and address on a piece of paper. He instructs Caroline to take the baby girl away to a “place” where she can grow up. Caroline is horrified, but David tells her that there is a high chance Phoebe will have a fatal heart defect—he is, he says, “trying to spare [them] all a terrible grief.” Caroline realizes how deep David’s conviction is and unhappily agrees to do what he has asked of her.

Early the next morning, Caroline puts Phoebe into a shallow box lined with blankets and takes her out to her car. She drives away into the **snow** as David watches her go. He returns back inside, where the sleeping Norah has awakened to nurse Paul. She doesn’t seem to remember the end of her labor, and David calmly, sadly tells her that, although she delivered a second baby, the little girl “died as she was born.”

David’s fascination with Paul’s being “perfect” (and with perfection more generally) will reverberate throughout the novel in painful, unexpected ways. A huge surprise—the fact that Norah is having twins—complicates things even further. The Henrys’ lives have just changed in an instant.



As the second baby is born, David recognizes right away that there is something wrong with it. He is repulsed not by the baby’s appearance or the fact that she is different, but rather by the grief, pain, and loss that a sickly child threatens to bring into David’s picture-perfect family and by his painful memories from his own childhood.



David makes the most crucial decision of his entire life almost on a whim. He doesn’t yet see how this moment will come to define his entire life—he’s too blinded by the desire to make things “perfect” and to keep another terrible loss at bay.



Caroline is willing to do whatever David tells her to because of her feelings for him. She knows what he’s asking is wrong—but her feelings cause her to feel greater empathy for David than he deserves.



Caroline’s drive into the snow represents the fact that she, too, is now party to David’s terrible secret. As he lies to Norah about the death of their daughter, he is setting in motion the very grief and loss he’d hoped to avoid, though he doesn’t know it yet.



CHAPTER 2: MARCH 1964

After carefully tucking the baby in the back of her car, feeling uneasy about her mission, Caroline Gill drives carefully through the **snowy** streets of Lexington. The car skids twice, and she nearly turns back, but soon she's on the interstate headed out towards the countryside, on her way to complete "Dr. Henry's astonishing request." On the one hand, Caroline thinks what David is doing is "unspeakable"—on the other hand, she knows that there was genuine "pain and confusion" in his request. Driving along the highway, Caroline decides that Dr. Henry's decision is not her "affair."

In the countryside outside of Louisville, Caroline pulls up to the circular driveway of a large, red brick building—an institution for the feeble-minded and incapacitated. She takes the baby from the car, along with a bag full of diapers and formula, and heads up to the building. The air inside is hot and murky with the smell of stewing vegetables. Caroline waits for someone to greet her, reflecting on the choices that have brought her to this moment. Thirty-one years old, she is unmarried and still waiting "for her real life to begin." She once dreamed of traveling the world and being a nurse to sick people in faraway lands, but after David arrived at the clinic where she worked, she developed feelings for him and decided to stay in hopes of persuading him to love her.

Now, Caroline wanders through the institution, hoping to find someone to take the baby from her. After spotting several of the patients in a series of grim, humiliating conditions, Caroline decides she cannot leave the child here alone, and begins running out of the hospital. As Caroline steps out into the **snow** and cold air, she feels as if she is "being born" again.

Caroline settles Phoebe in the back of the car and drives away, unsure of what her plan is but certain that she cannot take the baby back to such a horrible place. As Caroline approaches Lexington and encounters traffic due to an accident ahead, she notices that her gas gauge is low. Knowing she can't risk stalling out on the highway with a baby in the back, she maneuvers onto the shoulder, reverses all the way to a nearby exit, and gets off the highway in a small town near Lexington.

Caroline's halting, twisting journey through the snow represents her uneasy descent into participating in a secret that is much larger than her. She justifies her actions by telling herself that David only wants the best for his family—later in the novel, Caroline will confront her true motivations, but for now, she believes she's simply doing the right thing.



As Caroline stands on the precipice of a major decision she cannot take back—a decision she's making for David—she reflects on the circumstances that have brought her here. She is desperate for love and desperate to help people, and both these things push her to do whatever David asks of her.



Caroline refuses to leave the baby in the shabby, substandard institution and instead sets in motion a series of secrets of her own—symbolized, again, by her stepping out into the snow.



Caroline is driving blind, her sense of duty overwhelmed by her feelings of tenderness towards the little life in her hands.



Caroline parks in the lot of a grocery store and goes inside for some food—she realizes neither she nor Phoebe has had anything to eat for hours. A cashier tells Caroline that the store is closing soon, and she hurries through the aisles, picking out food as Phoebe begins to cry. Caroline feeds Phoebe some formula from the bag of supplies, hurriedly pays for her groceries, and returns to the car. Caroline sits and eats her groceries, ravenous. After the lights in the store go out and all the employees leave, Caroline realizes that her car’s battery is dead. She steps out of the car to see if there is anyone around, but there’s no one—the store is closed, and the **snowy** streets are empty. Caroline lets out a noise that is “halfway to a sob,” and shouts aloud to no one, “I have a baby in this car.”

Caroline’s isolation in this scene, and her devotion to keeping Phoebe safe against terrible odds, foreshadows the larger journey the two of them will take as the novel unfolds. Often, they’ll only have each other to rely on, and Caroline will have to fight and improvise in order to keep Phoebe safe from harm.



CHAPTER 3: MARCH 1964

Home from the hospital, Norah wakes to the sound of Paul crying. She reaches out to the basinet where he is asleep beside her bed, lifts him out, and begins nursing him, amazed by “the powers of the body” and the small life she has created. Even in a peaceful, lovely moment with her baby, Norah feels a deep “sorrow” take hold of her—she loves Paul, but mourns the stillborn daughter “who never took a breath.” Norah’s memories of delivering the babies are fuzzy and disordered, and she doesn’t remember ever laying eyes on her baby girl. As she nurses Paul she nods off, dozing as she reflects on her memories of the last few days.

Norah is deeply torn between the feelings of joy and love she has about her new son Paul and the pain, grief, and sorrow she feels when she thinks of the huge loss she’s suffered. Her life has been suffused with joy—but something precious has been lost, and she mourns the daughter she will never know.



Before leaving the hospital, Norah begged David to see the baby girl’s body, but David refused to let her, insisting that she needed to be grateful for their “beautiful son.” David told Norah that he’d already had the baby girl’s body taken out to a farm and buried, and promised that he’d take her there later in the spring.

This passage shows that David is cruelly, desperately trying to keep his wife from mourning because it threatens to expose the lies he’s spreading. Like when he met Norah and told the lie about the robe, it’s clear that he prefers to use lying and manipulation to get the outcome he wants, rather than hashing out messy realities with his wife.



Three hours later, Norah wakes up, changes Paul, and brings him into the living room to feed him. Bree, Norah’s younger sister, comes downstairs. She is about to make breakfast, and asks Norah if she can bring her anything. Norah asks for some water, and thinks quietly of how surprised she is that her sister—“her opposite, her nemesis”—is the person she wants here with her as she mourns Phoebe and adjusts to life with Paul. At only twenty, Bree has already eloped with an older man, divorced him, and changed her name from Brigitte. Norah is both resentful and jealous of her wild younger sister, and a part of her wishes “desperately” that she’d rebelled first and shed her “good” nature. Bree often tells Norah that Norah’s perfect, traditional life is “like a TV sitcom,” and when she says things like this, Norah stews silently in resentment and envy.

The relationship between Bree and Norah is a source of sensitivity for Norah. Norah has always felt pressure to be perfect in the face of her sister’s wild streak—but secretly, Norah longs to have the freedom, gumption, and daring that her sister has. Norah resents being a cookie-cutter, picture-perfect wife, and this feeling will deepen as the novel goes on, spurring her into actions she might regret.



Bree comes back from the kitchen with toast and coffee for herself and Norah. She says she heard David get up and leave for work earlier, and comments that he's been working almost nonstop. Bree worries that David has gone back to work so soon, but Norah retorts that if she had a job to go to, she'd go. Bree tells Norah that it's better to feel one's feelings than hide oneself away—like David is doing. Norah wonders if it is “macabre” that she wishes she had been able to see her daughter's body before it was taken away, but Bree says it isn't—it's “completely reasonable.” Norah thanks Bree for coming to stay with her. As she looks down at Paul, she wonders if he will grow up with a “sense of loss” weighing down on him.

Later, while Paul sleeps, Norah takes a shower and tries to get dressed. She is upset that she still can't fit into any of her pre-pregnancy clothes, and she settles for wearing a maternity romper. She hears the doorbell ring and listens as Bree answers the door and a familiar set of voices ring out in the living room. In spite of her insecurity about her appearance, Norah goes down to greet her guests—three women from her church. Bree serves tea while the women ask Norah how she's doing. Norah insists she's all right.

When one of the women—who suspected from Norah's size that she might be having twins, and excitedly told Norah for months that she was knitting her two blankets—presents Norah with just Paul's blanket, Norah demands to know where “the other blanket” is, and devolves into hysterics when the other women refuse to acknowledge Norah's loss and instead tell her to focus on her “beautiful baby boy.”

Norah collapses on the couch in tears, and Bree urges the church ladies to leave. After they do, though, Norah apologizes to Bree for acting dramatically, and admits that she should probably just “focus on the baby [she has.]” Bree, though, suggests that the more Norah tries to forget about Phoebe, the harder of a time she'll have—she thinks Norah should have a memorial service for Phoebe, for her own peace of mind. Norah agrees. She calls her pastor and begins inquiring about holding a small, quiet service at church, and then places an ad in the papers for the service.

David's desire to push the “loss” of his daughter from his mind isn't really what it seems to be—he's trying to forget the lie he's told and bury it in the past. Norah, though, truly is grieving—and as such, she's having a harder time getting back to normal. She wishes she could bury her head in the sand like David, but the sensitive Bree insists that Norah shouldn't shut down her emotions because it's convenient to.



Though Norah is grieving, she's desperate to maintain her physical and emotional appearance. She doesn't want to betray how deeply affected she is by the loss of her daughter for fear of disturbing her picture-perfect exterior.



Norah can't keep up a façade for long—the moment she's reminded of her loss, she breaks down in angry tears, furious that everyone around her but Bree seems to be ignoring the huge trauma she's facing.



Bree is supportive of her sister's emotions and wants for Norah to grieve properly so that moving on will be easier. Norah, feeling validated by Bree, begins doing things her way—this is the first push for independence she's shown, but it will not be the last.



Bree leaves for class at her university, and Norah walks through the house, taking in the mess, disarray, and “chaos” that have settled in since Paul’s birth. Surveying the mess, she pulls herself together and, after briefly checking on Paul, she cleans the house top to bottom before heating up dinner for her and David to share. When David walks in the door, she fixes him a whiskey and asks him about his day. The two catch up, and Norah asks David to get Paul up for a feeding, but David suggests the two of them enjoy some quiet time together.

Over dinner, Norah tells David about her desire to have a memorial service for Phoebe—but as she does, she can see David’s eyes growing dark. She asks him if he disapproves of the idea, and tells him that it “isn’t wrong” of her to want some closure. David lashes out, saying that though it isn’t wrong, he wishes she would have told him before placing an ad in the paper. Norah, growing angry herself, tells David there’s “no shame” in grieving their loss. David doesn’t answer her, and Norah realizes that, after over a year of marriage, she barely knows her husband. Norah asks David “what is happening” to the two of them, but David answers stiffly that Norah is “making a mountain out of a molehill.”

Paul begins crying, and Norah storms out of the room to go fetch him. Norah promises herself that no matter what, she will go through with having the service—for herself. As she nurses Paul, she revels in the “sacred” bond she has with her son.

CHAPTER 4: MARCH 1964

Caroline, still stuck in the grocery store parking lot, retrieves Phoebe from the car and goes around to the back of the store, hoping to find a way in—but she is unsuccessful. She kicks at the back door, hurting her toe, and hears a man’s voice tell her that no one is left inside. Caroline turns around and sees a large man in a bulky coat standing at the foot of the loading dock. Slightly frightened, she explains her situation—that she is alone with a newborn baby, and her car has stalled out. The man calmly explains that he’s a trucker who just finished making a delivery to the store an hour or so ago and has been waiting for the weather to let up. He offers to let Caroline and the baby sit for a while in the warmth of his truck. Reluctant but desperate, Caroline agrees.

Norah is determined to feel her feelings—but she doesn’t want to surrender her life to the chaos grief creates. She still desires a semblance of control over things, evidenced by her meticulous cleaning and insistence on doing her “wifely duties” of preparing dinner and drinks for her husband.



Norah and David are arguing about the same issue from completely different points of view. Norah has no idea of David’s deception—though she realizes that something between them has changed. David, in a desperate attempt to get away from the past and stifle Norah’s questions about their daughter, seeks to undermine her and convince her that her emotions and actions are inappropriate.



Norah is determined not to let whatever is happening between her and David derail her from her commitment to her son. This drive will be tested as the novel progresses.



Though the large, imposing man who comes upon Caroline in the snow seems at first glance like he could be suspicious or even dangerous, Caroline is desperate to keep Phoebe safe. This demonstrates how deeply she already loves the child, and how devoted she is to Phoebe’s well-being.



The trucker helps Caroline get some things from her own car and then settle into the cab of his truck. Caroline feeds Phoebe some formula, and she drinks hungrily. The trucker and Caroline make small talk—he reveals he’s from Akron, Ohio but has been on the road for over five years. Caroline asks the man if he gets lonely—he says it is a lonely life, but he is grateful that on strange nights like tonight, he sometimes gets to “meet someone unexpected.” Caroline feels herself relax, and is no longer afraid that the man would ever hurt her or Phoebe.

After determining that they are both on their way to Lexington, but were derailed by the accident and the **snow**, the trucker offers to give Caroline a ride home. She agrees, and they set out. Caroline is grateful for the company of this man, whose name, she learns as they drive on, is Albert Simpson, or Al. Caroline is doubly grateful that Al knows nothing about her—or her precarious situation.

Back at her apartment complex, Al helps Caroline bring her things inside from the truck. She can see one of her nosy neighbors, Lucy Martin, spying on her through the curtain of her living room. Caroline feels a sense of “vertigo” as she thinks about how completely different her life feels just since she last left the apartment. Once inside, Caroline—in spite of the part of her that still believes Al could be “a serial killer, or a rapist, or a con man”—invites Al to spend the night in her apartment rather than out in the cold in his truck. Al asks if Caroline has a husband—she lies and says she’s divorced.

In the morning, Caroline wakes to the smell of bacon frying—Al is making breakfast in the kitchen. Phoebe is still asleep, and Caroline makes small talk with Al. She says she’s thinking of moving to Pittsburgh—the words surprise her even as they come out of her mouth. Al invites Caroline and Phoebe to come to Nashville with him—but Caroline says she has things to “settle” in Lexington before she moves on. After breakfast, Al leaves—Caroline wistfully watches him go, fighting the temptation to run after him.

Over the weekend, Caroline tends carefully to Phoebe, adjusting to the schedule of having a baby. On Monday, she calls in sick to work before entertaining a visit from the gossipy Lucy Martin—Caroline deflects Lucy’s attention by explaining that she had a cousin whose wife is in the hospital come to stay. She claims that the baby is his, and she’s only watching it for him. Caroline is shocked by how proficiently and easy she’s able to spin a lie.

As Caroline warms up to the trucker, their meeting begins to take on the air of fate and chance. The trucker has found Caroline in a moment of deep need, and there is an almost instantaneous connection between the two of them.



Caroline has been a nervous wreck over what to do about Phoebe, afraid of being separated from her or caught with another person’s child—but with Al, she doesn’t feel she has to hide, as he has no reason to doubt that Phoebe is hers.



Caroline’s whole life has changed in just a few short hours, but she is emboldened by this fact rather than frightened or debilitated. As Caroline welcomes Al into her home, she begins testing how much she’s willing to lie and how many secrets she’s prepared to keep in order to protect Phoebe.



Caroline feels a strange intimacy with Al and a deep comfort in his presence. She’s sad to watch him go—but she knows that there are things she must attend to in order to keep Phoebe safe and figure out their next move.



Caroline’s proficiency as a liar comes to light in this passage—even she is shocked to realize how well she can spin a story. Just like how David and Norah’s life is now based on a lie, Caroline’s is also beginning to be based entirely on one large secret.



As the days go by, Caroline revels in the peaceful time she spends with Phoebe—she is beginning to “fall in love” with the baby, even as she tells herself that something will soon swoop in to tear them apart. She believes that David Henry will soon come to collect Phoebe and “do the right thing.” One morning, though, as Caroline reads the newspaper, she spots an announcement for Phoebe’s memorial service—it is scheduled for the following day. Shocked, she calls the clinic and tells the receptionist to have Dr. Henry call her.

An hour later, David comes over to Caroline’s apartment. He explains that Norah arranged the service and placed the ad without telling him. Caroline tells David he can’t possibly let his wife go on thinking that her daughter is dead. She confesses that she was unable to leave Phoebe at the “awful” facility in Louisville, and has been watching over her all week. David admits that he never saw the group home in person, and had only heard of it.

Caroline begs David to tell Norah the truth, but he shakes his head and tells her it’s “too late now.” Caroline feels a hatred for David, but also knows that they now share a “great intimacy.” She senses genuine pain and confusion in David as he tells Caroline that Phoebe is now in her hands—he warns her that the child will need medical care as she gets older, but that if she wants to take her for herself, she can. He also grimly tells Caroline he’ll understand if she calls the authorities—or Norah—to tell the truth. He gives Caroline three hundred dollars in cash for Phoebe’s care, and before leaving, asks her to “warn” him before she does anything that might tear his life apart.

After David leaves, Caroline has no desire to go to the authorities—as she looks around her drab apartment, she decides that all she wants to do is leave and start over somewhere new. Caroline begins making arrangements to have her furniture given to Goodwill, her newspaper delivery and utilities stopped, and her bank accounts closed. She gets her car back, and, in the morning, packs it up and sets out.

Before leaving town, though, Caroline stops briefly at the church to look in on the memorial service. Holding Phoebe in her arms, she approaches the door of the church. She sees Norah crying and wonders if she should step forward with Phoebe and tell the truth. She prepares herself to do just that, but can’t make herself do it. Instead, she turns and goes back to her car, tucking Phoebe into her little box in the backseat. She begins the drive to Pittsburgh, feeling “reckless” and excited—she and Phoebe are both “vanishing from the face of the earth.”

Caroline is waiting on tenterhooks for Phoebe to be taken from her. All of that changes, though, when she sees the memorial service announcement—and realizes that David Henry has done something terrible, something he cannot take back.



Caroline tries to steer David in the right direction in this scene and force him to own up to the mistake’s he’s made—but he feels he’s too deep in now to turn back and change the story that he’s told not just Norah, but the whole town.



Caroline’s anger towards David is mitigated by her lingering feelings for him. She again extends him empathy that he doesn’t exactly deserve as she takes his money and tacitly agrees to keep his secret for him, even in the face of an egregious and deeply unethical public lie.



Caroline realizes that she doesn’t want to turn David in—or give Phoebe up. She begins considering making a life with the child who has fallen into her lap, but knows that to do so, she’ll have to abandon her life as she knows it.



Caroline has one final chance to come clean, and to put the Henrys’ lives—and her own—back on track. She finds she cannot betray David’s secret, though, both out of a desire to protect Norah and to keep Phoebe for herself.



CHAPTER 5: FEBRUARY 1965

It is David and Norah's wedding anniversary, and Norah is hard at work decorating the house in streamers and paper chains for a celebration. Paul, now eleven months old, plays gently in the corner of the kitchen—he is a curious, excitable child. Norah receives a phone call from the hospital, and one of David's nurses informs her that David has been called into emergency surgery to operate on teenage victims of a bad car accident. Norah asks how long David is going to be, and the nurse says the surgeries may take many hours.

Bree walks into the kitchen, her school bag overflowing with books and papers, and comments on how beautiful the decorations look in the new house. David and Norah have recently moved, though their old house still hasn't sold—they both agreed they needed to find somewhere they could make new memories instead of lingering on the grief of the past. Bree calls Norah "Suzy Homemaker," and Norah takes offense at the term. She starts to get angry with Bree, but then admits that she's just frustrated because David is now going to be late for their anniversary celebration.

Bree comforts Norah by pulling out a present she's bought for her and David—a bottle of wine. Bree pours two glasses—and though Norah very rarely drinks, she allows herself to indulge with her sister. She feels happier than she has in a long time. Norah realizes that, although she is "supposed to be content," she's often gloomy and depressed. Norah asks Bree about her love life, and Bree admits that she found her boyfriend cheating on her and left him. Norah is concerned, but Bree says she's fine—the relationship was mostly about sex, and she's happy it's over. Norah remarks that she could never "blow everything up" and live a freewheeling life the way Bree always has.

The women continue drinking and snacking as the night grows dark outside. Norah tells Bree that she's bought David a **camera** for their anniversary, and she can't wait to give it to him. Bree offers to take Paul for the night so that Norah and David can be alone, and Norah admits that'd be a great help—she'd like some time with just David. Norah packs up some things for Paul, and Bree heads home with him in tow. Norah returns to the empty kitchen and opens another bottle of wine.

This slight jump into the future shows that, although Paul is growing and flourishing, Norah and David's marriage has not yet recovered—Norah is still putting in all the effort while David spends most of his time at work, apart from her and their child.



Just as in their last interaction, Bree pokes fun at Norah's picture-perfect life while Norah simmers in resentment and jealousy. Norah has been giving her all, it seems, over the last eleven months to be the "Suzy Homemaker" character she believes her husband wants her to be—to no avail.



Norah spends so much of her time hiding behind a façade that in the rare moments she's allowed to drop it and just be herself, she feels almost a surge of happiness. She still admires the carefree Bree, even as Bree admits to disappointments in her own personal life. Norah longs for more, but doesn't know how to secure a different life for herself—or even articulate that she wants one.



The introduction of the symbol of cameras and photography shows that there's a part of Norah that wants to encourage David to capture the present rather than linger in the past—but David will come to use the camera in the opposite way, instead trying to reconfigure moments that have already passed them both by instead of focusing on what's around them.



Norah realizes she hasn't really been alone since Paul was born—she has tried not to be, to keep her grief at bay. Norah swears that sometimes, when she's alone, she feels her daughter's presence. She continues drinking as she walks through the house and gets lost in memories of the night the twins were born. She has changed so much since then—David is quiet and distant now, and she feels she cannot bridge the wide gap between them.

Norah pours herself yet another glass of wine and continues fretting about her emotionally closed-off husband. She wonders why he wanted to marry her so badly in the first place, when now he barely acknowledges that she even exists. She remembers the night they got engaged—Christmas night—as being joyous and full of potential. Now, though, standing in the over-decorated kitchen, alone and drunk for the first time in her life, Norah wonders if there is anything left between her and David.

Norah realizes that she has spilled wine on the wrapping paper of David's present. Impulsively, she tears it open and inspects the beautiful **camera** herself. She begins taking some pictures of the empty house. As she glances at a clock and realizes it is nearly ten at night, she wonders whether David will be home soon. Remembering that he walked to work this morning, she decides to drive down to the clinic to wait for him and surprise him.

Norah gets in the car and begins driving to the clinic, but quickly becomes sidetracked and starts heading to their old house. She misses living there, and though she and David have recently received a lowball offer on the house, she doesn't want to sell it. She parks in front of the darkened house and goes inside, taking her shoes off at the door. Norah feels deeply drunk and stumbles through the house with the camera, **photographing** details in every room. She feels a pain in her heel and looks down—she has stepped on broken glass, and is bleeding.

Though not even a year has passed since Paul's birth, Norah and David's relationship seems to have changed irrevocably. Norah is still haunted by grief, and the lingering feeling that something isn't right. The Henrys are stuck in the past, unable to move forward and away from their shared loss.



Norah's drinking problem begins on this night, as she gets drunk for the first time and realizes that alcohol can numb the pain of her loss and allow her to distance herself from the confusing, conflicting emotions she feels.



Norah uses the camera to desperately document her loneliness and confusion. She is angry with David, but still believes they can repair what's broken between them. She vacillates between wanting to show him how he's wounded her—by taking the photos, for instance—and wanting to do things to please him—like going to surprise him at the clinic.



Norah's attachment to the old house, and her desire to document it on film, show that she's not yet ready to let go of the past. She still feels she's missing answers as to what happened to her daughter, and hasn't been allowed the time she needs to grieve—David has been rushing them along towards the future with no regard of what they've been through.



Norah heads back out to the car and begins driving through the rain. She is drunk and can't see very well, and soon collides with a trash can in the street, jumps the curb, and gets stuck on the median. Her windshield cracks, and she can feel her forehead bleeding. The entire experience feels very strange and distant to Norah, and she is more amused and puzzled than frightened. A man stops to check on Norah and offers to give her a ride to the clinic, asking if she needs a doctor. Norah replies that her husband is a doctor, and she doesn't need any help. She tries to disguise her drunkenness by claiming that a cat startled her and caused her to veer off the road, and soon the man reluctantly leaves her alone. Norah is able to navigate the car back to the street, and she drives home carefully.

Inside, David is sitting on the sofa—Paul is in his arms. He is shocked to see Norah bleeding, and explains that when he came home to find her missing, he called Bree in a panic. She brought Paul over and went out looking for Norah. Norah explains that she went over to the old house and hit a trash can on her way back. David asks Norah if she drank two full bottles of wine, and warns her that the teens he operated on earlier were also out driving drunk. Norah insists that she was not drunk at all. The phone rings—it is Bree. Norah tells her sister that she's all right, and thanks her for watching Paul.

Upstairs, David puts Paul in his crib and then helps clean Norah's wounds on her heel and forehead. As he tenderly picks glass out of her foot, Norah thanks David for being so "good" to her, in hopes of bridging the gap between them with her words. David asks Norah why she went back to the old house, and why she's so reluctant to leave it behind. Norah explains that selling the house is "the final way [they] leave [Phoebe] behind." When David reacts angrily, telling Norah that most people would be grateful for a big, beautiful new house, Norah quickly acquiesces and says she'll call the realtor tomorrow so that they can accept the offer. Even as she speaks, though, she can feel "a barrier" growing between her and the past.

David can see the hurt and pain on Norah's face, and promises her that he hasn't—and never will—forget their daughter. Norah, feeling a rush of goodwill, tells David that his present is in the car. He goes down to get it. Norah thinks of the camera's pretty box, which reads "**The Memory Keeper**." She has gotten it for David in hopes of allowing him to collect memories—and never forget the past.

Norah is endangering her own life—perhaps on purpose, as a kind of cry for help. She is so alone, desperate, and confused that she has no idea what to do, and her dangerous (but stupid) accident symbolizes just how profoundly she's lost her way in life.



Norah's reckless behavior has thankfully only caused a few minor injuries. Her family is relieved to find that she's okay—but David and Bree, in all likelihood, recognize that Norah's behavior is growing increasingly erratic and unpredictable.



Norah is trying desperately to get closer to David—but there is still a great distance between them. They cannot agree on the most fundamental problem of their lives—again, because they see Phoebe's "loss" from two totally different angles. Norah is forced to give up what she wants and needs in order to make room for her husband's demands, and this pattern erodes their relationship until eventually there is no truth at all between them.



The camera is called "The Memory Keeper"—a title David himself will come to metaphorically (and ironically) adopt as the novel goes on. He becomes dedicated to keeping "memories," but maintains the fundamental lie about his family's past all his life.



Norah goes into Paul's bedroom to kiss him while he sleeps. She watches him for a moment, and then hears David come in behind her. He tells her to close her eyes, and he puts a necklace around her neck—it is beautiful, made of gold and emeralds to match her engagement ring. Norah thanks David for the present, and the two of them embrace. Norah wishes she could freeze time—but she knows that every moment, every day, will only carry them all forward, and take her further “away from [her] lost daughter.”

In this sweet moment, David and Norah seem to meet each other on equal footing for the first time in a long time. Norah is happy that her relationship seems to be recovering—but sad that the cost of happiness with David is leaving the memory of her daughter behind.



CHAPTER 6: MARCH 1965

One night, Caroline paces back and forth in her bathroom with Phoebe. She is running the shower so that the room fills with steam—Phoebe has a terrible cough, and the humidity is the only thing that helps loosen the mucus in her chest. The door swings open and Doro, Caroline's friend and employer, walks in. She can't sleep and is worried about Phoebe, but Caroline assures Doro that the steam will help. Doro closes the door to trap the steam and sits down.

Caroline has built a life in the year since Phoebe's birth—but as the mother of a special-needs child, she faces a unique set of circumstances and complications that require more of her than the average parent.



Eleven months ago, when Caroline arrived in Pittsburgh, Doro hired Caroline to be a private nurse for her elderly father Leo, who suffers from dementia. Though Caroline had no references to speak of, admitted she was running away and in hiding, and came with a baby in tow, Doro took a chance on Caroline—and the two have been friends since. Though Leo is difficult and often tests Caroline's patience, the two of them as well have an affinity for one another.

Caroline has found a family in an unexpected place. Though she set off on her own with Phoebe into the unknown, she has developed a real closeness with Doro and Leo, and begun to build not just a family but a community.



Now, as Phoebe finally falls asleep, Doro asks Caroline what's wrong with the child. Though she's almost a year, she can barely sit up, Doro points out. Caroline has spent hours in the library hunched over books about Down syndrome, trying to chart Phoebe's development and learn about the risks that might plague her later in life. Now, Caroline tells Doro about Phoebe's disability, and Doro expresses sadness and pity. Caroline urges Doro, though, not to have pity for Phoebe—and says that the uncertainty Phoebe faces in life is no different than what anyone else faces. Caroline knows that Doro suffered a great loss many years ago when her fiancé was killed jumping from a bridge into a river on a dare. Doro has been alone since.

This passage shows that when people first hear about Phoebe's disability, their instinct is to express grief, sorrow, and pity. What Caroline—and the novel more largely—are trying to do is show that difference doesn't need to be feared or reviled. Phoebe's life will have a different trajectory than most people's, but the challenges “most people” face are often just as difficult as the ones Phoebe will.



Caroline takes Phoebe to bed and tucks her into her crib. Looking at her daughter in the dark, she does feel a twinge of fear as she wonders what will become of her. Caroline looks over at her desk, where a half-composed letter to David Henry and several photographs of Phoebe are sitting, waiting to be sent. Caroline cannot bring herself to finish the letter and mail the photos. Feeling uneasy and exhausted, Caroline pushes her anxieties from her head, gets into bed, and falls asleep.

Although Caroline is determined to give Phoebe a good life and treat her like any other child, she still feels fear creep in every once in a while—and is uncertain of how to handle the dark secret at the heart of Phoebe's life.



In the morning, Caroline takes Phoebe downstairs and feeds her breakfast, briefly greeting Leo, who is in his office reading. Caroline tries to get Phoebe to hold her own spoon, but Phoebe cannot maintain a grip on it. Caroline starts to worry. After breakfast, Caroline plays with Phoebe and then makes some food for Leo, who speaks to her gruffly. Even though Leo gives Caroline a hard time, Doro has encouraged Caroline to stick up for herself and hold her own against the difficult man. Sometimes, though, when Leo is being tough, Caroline finds herself wondering what she's doing in Pittsburgh, and whether things will be all right for her and Phoebe.

After Caroline brings Leo his breakfast, the doorbell rings. She excitedly answers the door—her friend Sandra and her three-year-old son Tim, who also has Down syndrome, have arrived for playtime. Sandra has brought along stacking toys in hopes of helping both children work on their motor skills. Caroline and Sandra first met at the library and bonded over their frustration about the lack of resources available to parents of children with Down syndrome—and society's desire to place people with Down syndrome in homes and institutions rather than try to help them thrive in the world. The two women now meet regularly with the goal of helping their children, learn, grow, and succeed at their own paces.

After a couple hours of playtime, during which Phoebe succeeds in rolling over and very nearly reaches for some shiny plastic toy keys, Sandra and Tim pack up and head out to their car—Caroline helps them carry their things. Caroline is frustrated by Phoebe's delay in grasping things, but Sandra assures her that Phoebe will get the hang of it soon. When Caroline goes back inside, Leo's office is empty—he has snuck out the back. He often tries to wander off, and part of Caroline's job is supposed to be making sure that he doesn't succeed.

Caroline puts Phoebe in her stroller and goes out to look for Leo. At the end of the block, she finds him. As she sees Leo she's filled with both anger and compassion. He runs toward Caroline, hoping to prove to her that he's still young and fit—he's always trying to stave off the reality of his illness and his age. Leo follows Caroline back towards the house. On the way, he tells her that she's a "smart" woman, and quietly admits he's grateful for her—he's had eight nurses, and none of them have lasted more than a week.

Caroline has a lot to deal with—she has a demanding job which is intimate, personal, and centered on her home life, and on top of it all, she has a developmentally-challenged child who needs extra support and encouragement. All of this is too much for Caroline sometimes—but still she pushes through, knowing she's all Phoebe has.



Caroline is building a community in Pittsburgh. With no family to take care of her and no one from her old life aware of her whereabouts, she takes it upon herself to begin building a family for herself in her new home. Phoebe's disability sometimes makes Caroline nervous about her daughter's future—but it also galvanizes Caroline into action and helps her to find people with similar fears, goals, and experiences.



This passage shows just how intensely Caroline's attentions are split, and how hard she has to work up to keep up with the demands of her unique job—and her unique child's specific, almost all-consuming needs.



In spite of the struggles Caroline has with Leo, it's clear that he has not only affection but also respect for her. Leo is in a difficult stage in his life, and he is bitter about the deterioration of his mind and body—but Caroline brings light into his days.



Later that night, Caroline cleans up the kitchen after dinner and takes out the trash, walking down a small alleyway at the back of the house. As she bins the trash, she notices a man standing at the end of the alleyway—at first she’s frightened, but when he opens his mouth and calls out to her, she realizes who it is: Al. Surprised, shocked, but not unhappy to see him, Caroline asks Al how he managed to find her—he says it wasn’t easy, and became a kind of “hobby.”

Al explains that after he stopped in Lexington to say hello and found Caroline’s apartment empty, he became worried—she’d had “trouble written all over” her when the two of them first met, and Al tracked her down in Pittsburgh to make sure she was all right. Al also admits—somewhat sheepishly—that he’d thought the two of them had “hit it off.” Sensing Caroline’s shock at having been found—and fear of being discoverable—Al insists that it took him a full year to find her, and he hit many dead ends before he did. Al assures Caroline that she is safe from whatever she’s running from.

Caroline invites Al in to have a cup of tea and see Phoebe. He sits in the kitchen while Caroline fetches the baby from upstairs. When she brings Phoebe down and passes her to Al, he is elated to see how big she’s grown, and remarks on how beautiful and sweet she is. Phoebe coos, smiles, and laughs in Al’s arms—and, to Caroline’s great surprise, she reaches for the necklace he’s wearing and grabs it. Caroline feels a “quick burn of joy”—her daughter is “grab[bing] the world.”

CHAPTER 7: MAY 1965

Norah and David take Paul on a hike and a picnic one breezy spring day. David collects small stones and old fossils on the way, and briefly pauses to feel the pulse of an older hiker he notices struggling. When the woman claims she’s just suffering mild palpitations, and has had them all her life, David is thrown back in time to memories of his sister, June, who was born with a congenital heart defect and struggled with her health all her life until she died at the age of twelve. David also thinks of Phoebe—in the pocket of his jacket there is a letter from Caroline Gill, which was delivered to his office earlier. The letter states that Phoebe is happy and has no heart troubles.

Caroline is happy to see Al—but at the same time, startled that he’s been able to find her. She thought she’d hidden herself away in Pittsburgh and left behind no trace, and yet Al’s persistence has paid off.



Caroline has not forgotten Al—and it’s clear that he hasn’t forgotten her, either. The connection between them was and is palpable, and as Caroline recovers from the shock of being found, she finds herself happy to be reunited with Al.



As Caroline reunites with Al, who doesn’t even seem to register Phoebe’s differences, Phoebe coincidentally—or fortuitously—breaks through a major milestone, renewing Caroline’s patience and faith. Caroline wants “the world” for her daughter, and is determined to help her attain the things she wants.



David gave Phoebe away because he was petrified that history would repeat itself, and that Phoebe would die of a heart defect and cause the family a grief from which they could never recover. Now, though, their family feels a different kind of grief—for which David is directly responsible. To top it off, hearing from Caroline Gill that Phoebe is perfectly healthy makes him question the fateful, irreversible choice he’s made.



Things between David and Norah have been better lately. She has invested deeply in raising Paul, and her grief over Phoebe seems to have abated. After getting rid of the negatives of the **photographs** Norah took the drunken night she went to the old house, David has started over with new film, and often photographs Norah in the garden or playing with Paul. Now, as Norah peeks down the mountain over a precipice, David takes a photograph of her. As he does, he wishes that he could have protected her from grief and loss—he didn't understand that in giving Phoebe away, he'd be adding to her grief, and his own. The letter from Caroline was postmarked from Cleveland, and David believes she and Phoebe are there.

Norah leads David to a meadow where wild strawberries are growing on thick bushes. They unpack a picnic and remove Paul from his carrier, letting him sit on a blanket on the grass. Norah and David nibble lazily at the spread and feed Paul cheese and berries. The afternoon is perfect, and Norah reminisces aloud about playing with Bree in a field near the farm where they grew up. David massages her feet, and Paul takes a nap in the shade. As David looks at the sleeping Paul, he is determined to make sure that Paul does not “grow up, as David had, suffering the loss of his sister.”

Norah, noticing the darkness pass over her husband's face, asks him what's wrong, and why he's so “far away.” David says he's just lost in thought. He asks Norah what her dreams are for Paul, and Norah answers that she hopes Paul will be like his father. David deflects, insisting Norah shouldn't want Paul to take after him. Norah asks David what has gone wrong between them, and David grows annoyed that she is “stir[ring] things up again.” Norah continues on, though, asking David why he refuses to acknowledge the fact that Phoebe ever existed. David begs Norah not to “ruin the beautiful day” they're having.

Norah replies that she still thinks often about what their daughter would be like. She demands to know whether David misses Phoebe, too, and David admits that he “think[s] about her all the time.” Norah kisses David deeply, and he leans into the embrace before pulling away, unable to stop thinking about how he has lied to his wife. Norah asks David what's wrong—he lies again, telling her he's concerned about a case at work. Norah asks him if they should try for a second child, but David says “the timing [feels] wrong.” Norah protests that they should do it for Paul—who no doubt remembers being in the womb with his sister, and misses her. David retorts plainly that he's “not ready” for another child.

David's best-laid plans have backfired on him, leaving him with a grieving wife, a lonely son, and a personal burden he may never be able to get out from under. His retreat into photography coincides with all of this new emotional weight, as he seeks to freeze time—and to find moments that take away from the pain of the moment in which he chose to give Phoebe away.



Even in the midst of a beautiful, idyllic afternoon in nature, David is unable to escape thoughts of the terrible thing he's done—and how it may affect his family more profoundly than he ever believed it could.



Norah wants for their family to be able to acknowledge that Phoebe existed, and mourn what happened to her—but hearing Norah's earnest desire to remember their daughter only triggers shame and self-loathing in David, and he tries to shut down Norah's attempts to keep things between them from calcifying.



Even when David and Norah experience a moment of connection, it is brief—David's guilt is just too profound for him to overcome, and yet he won't come clean and try to clear the air, either. Instead, he begins leading himself, Norah, and Paul down three very separate, very lonely roads, denying his wife and son any more chances at connecting with him.



Norah admits that sometimes, when she's alone in the house, she feels like Phoebe is "so close, just in the other room." David is startled by Norah's admission, and finds himself thinking about how profoundly his sister June's death "broke" his mother. David warns Norah that having another baby won't "fix things." Norah stands up and walks off angrily across the field. David feels for the envelope in his pocket and thinks about the **photographs** of Phoebe within it.

Emotionally exhausted, David lies back on the blanket and drifts off into memory. He thinks back on rattlesnake hunting with his father—the snakes were valuable, and the money the two of them earned trapping and selling them paid for food, medical bills, and, eventually, David's college tuition. When Norah's faraway voice startles David from his reverie, he mistakes a stick near the edge of Paul's blanket for a snake, and picks it up and throws it angrily across the field. Norah, perturbed by David's sudden violence, suggests they pack up and go home.

On the hike back down, David recalls the other duty he had in childhood in addition to snake trapping: caring for his sickly sister June. David's mother wanted him to watch her constantly, but David often found himself growing bored of his wan, weak sister. One weekend, when he came home from college, his mother told him that June was dead. She implored him to use his time in college to "learn something that could help in the world." In that moment, David felt a strong sense of resentment that even after June's death, his life was still not his own.

Back at the car, Norah tells David, in reference to the stick-throwing, that he doesn't have to try to be a "hero" all the time. She declares that she "hate[s]" feeling like David is always trying to protect her. As Norah buckles Paul into his car seat, David feels a flurry of emotions—among them, anger at both himself for giving Phoebe away, and Caroline for making "an impossible situation even worse."

CHAPTER 8: MAY 1970

As Norah drops Paul off for his first day of school, she watches him on the playground with the other children—and warns his teacher that he's terribly allergic to **bees**, and had a bad reaction recently after simply picking a dead bee up off the windowsill. The allergy is hereditary, Norah explains—her husband is allergic, too. Paul's teacher assures Norah she'll keep a watchful eye on him.

Norah's sense that Phoebe is not very far away at all is eerie and almost supernatural. It only causes David's guilt to flare even more as he realizes what he's slowly doing to his wife—he has "broke[n]" her in a different way.



David is beginning to fumble the line between past and present. This scene shows how haunted he is by his own past—and how haunted he will be by the present once it, too, is behind him. David is not a man who moves on easily—and he allows his demons to overcome him.



David's grief over losing his sister was paired with another emotion: anger over the fact that while June lived, she was the center of his parents' world and the main source of their grief—and that after she died, she remained those things to them, while David felt like a spare all his life. This is another piece of the puzzle, and another reason why David perhaps gave Phoebe away: to spare Paul these feelings.



David, reeling from the difficult day he's had, seeks to blame someone other than himself for the strife that will not leave his and Norah's marriage. He deflects his anger onto Caroline rather than dealing with and trying to fix his own mistakes.



Norah's revelation that Paul is allergic to bees signals to the reader that Phoebe is, too, and foreshadows the disadvantages children like Phoebe face. Norah and David knew to expect an allergy from Paul—but Caroline and Phoebe have no idea about the hereditary allergy.



Norah runs into Kay Marshall, a beautiful and wealthy acquaintance whose oldest daughter is Paul's age. Kay greets Norah happily and introduces her to her baby daughter, whom she's pushing in a fashionable stroller. Norah suddenly feels dowdy and vulnerable, but makes small talk with Kay and coos over her baby anyway. The women discuss the violence happening at Kent State university, and Kay tells Norah that she's excited for an upcoming party Norah is throwing. Norah says she's excited, too, and the women discuss their children's friendship and Paul's musical talent. Norah can't stop thinking, all through the normal conversation, about the reckless behavior she's engaging in lately—she's drinking more often, and sometimes goes on long, spontaneous drives to nowhere in the middle of the day.

Norah walks back to her car and starts driving home. On her way through town, she passes a travel agency—yesterday, she had a job interview there, and though she didn't really feel passionate about it when applying, she now wants the job very badly. Norah drives out towards the university, parks her car, and walks through the throngs of protestors—some of whom are burning American flags. She spots Bree, dressed like a hippie and passing out flyers, and feels a deep envy of Bree's "sureness and freedom."

Norah approaches Bree, who's startled to see her. Bree introduces Norah to a man named Mark, a Vietnam veteran who was injured in the war. Norah realizes that Mark is the boyfriend Bree has been talking about lately, and when Bree takes Norah aside, Norah congratulates her sister on being in love. Bree says she wants to bring Mark to the party, and Norah says she should. The two of them talk about the violence on campus—as well as Norah's job interview—and Bree encourages Norah to accept that times are changing and demand more from her life. As Bree returns to her friends, Norah wonders how it's possible that she envies both the refined Kay Marshall and the wild-child Bree.

Back at home, Norah makes herself a gin and tonic and steels herself for the task ahead of her this afternoon—dismantling a wasp's nest hanging off the front porch. After swallowing the drink, Norah puts on her garden gloves and a large hat and goes outside to confront the nest, determined to get rid of the insects herself.

Norah is falling apart at the seams. When she sees Kay Marshall, Kay's polished persona—and two healthy children—remind Norah of all the ways in which her own life is rapidly falling apart, and how she is, in many ways, complicit in extending and deepening her own pain.



Things in Lexington are changing rapidly. The protests at the university demonstrate the social unrest boiling to the surface of society, and Norah's decision to try to get a job further shows how social roles and responsibilities are changing even in the home.



Bree's wild, free, open nature has always inspired envy in Norah. Her decision to apply for a job of her own is sparked in part by her desire to emulate Bree, and to experience the same sense of freedom her sister has. At the same time, Norah admits that she's torn between her own desires and society's expectations of what a wife and mother should be.



Norah is now drinking in the middle of the day, showing that her dependence on alcohol to numb her feelings has escalated. She's still drinking before doing dangerous tasks, demonstrating the reckless side of her personality.



Using a garden hoe, Norah begins attacking the nest. She gets a couple of stings, and, realizing she has agitated the wasps, heads back in for another drink. The alcohol galvanizes her, and she gathers up a can of insect repellent and a brand-new vacuum cleaner, hoping she can suck the wasps into the hose. Outside, the wasps have calmed down, and Norah seizes the opportunity to stick the vacuum nozzle directly into the nest—the wasps grow angry again, but Norah succeeds in sucking them all up. She is afraid that when she turns the vacuum off, though, they'll all escape, and so she drunkenly attaches the vacuum hose to the tailpipe of her car while she looks for something more permanent to stuff it with. Norah turns the machine off and goes inside to clean up.

Soon, Norah realizes that it is already time to pick Paul up from school. She gathers up her house keys and heads outside—only to watch in horror as the vacuum explodes and smokes on the front lawn, the gasoline fumes from the car ignited by the vacuum's hot but dormant engine. A few wasps drift out of the tailpipe and fly away. Furious, Norah goes over to what's left of the vacuum, opens it up, and begins stomping on the bag in order to obliterate what's left of the nest, thinking all the while of all the things that have been expected of her all her life. When her tantrum is finished, Norah calmly gets into the car and drives off to collect her son from school.

CHAPTER 9: MAY 1970

David is developing **photographs** in his darkroom shed in the backyard when he hears Paul calling for him from the other side of the door. He tells Paul to wait a moment, but Paul opens the door—flooding the room with light and ruining the pictures. David lashes out at Paul, but when Paul appears sorry and frightened, David apologizes for losing his temper and invites Paul into the room. David asks Paul what he has to tell him, and Paul opens his fist to reveal several small, flat stones in his palm. Paul explains that he found them in a creek at one of his friend's houses. Paul wants David to help him find a description of the rocks in a special book they have, and David follows Paul out of the darkroom.

Outside, it is a beautiful spring day. The backyard is all set up for a party—Norah has arranged flowers and plates on some tables, and erected a maypole covered in bright ribbons. David tells Paul to hurry inside, promising to follow him and help him look up the rocks. David cleans up the **darkroom**, enjoying the peace and quiet. When he's finished, he heads inside to find Norah in the kitchen, and asks her if she needs any help. She insists she's fine without him. David asks why Norah has gone to so much trouble for the party and didn't hire caterers, but Norah snaps and says she enjoys using her "talents" in planning and cooking.

Norah wants to achieve perfection in her house, and keep Paul and David safe. Her attack on the wasp's nest is a desperate attempt to secure both of these things—but her untraditional and unsafe methods of doing so show that she's unable to shoulder the burden of being the only person engaged in protecting her family.



The vacuum explodes, symbolizing the boiling point Norah is reaching in her own life. She needs change, and cannot go on with things as they are—otherwise she, too, might "explode."



David seems to care for his work more than for Paul, lashing out at his son when Paul's normal childish behaviors get in the way of David's hobby. At the same time, David is still putting in the bare minimum for Paul—but the balance between his work life and his family life is out of whack.



Even though it's a beautiful spring day and Norah has arranged a party to celebrate the change in seasons, David prefers the quiet cool of his darkroom to the real world. He doesn't appreciate the life around him, or the efforts Norah makes on behalf of their family.



David heads upstairs to get ready. Lost in thought as he shaves, thinks about Phoebe and what she might be doing at this moment—every few months, he receives letters and pictures from Caroline. The P.O. boxes they're delivered from are always in different cities, but the letters are intimate and detail both Caroline and Phoebe's lives. David keeps these letters locked in a filing cabinet in his **darkroom**, where Norah and Paul will never find them. Once, David tried to find Caroline and even drove to Cleveland—but he gave up and has not made an attempt to seek her out again. Still, he hopes that one day Caroline will come out of the woodwork and their two families can patch things up. David wants badly “to tell Norah the truth,” and yet can never work up the courage to do so.

Paul comes up to get David, and reminds him that they're supposed to look at their rock book together. David follows Paul downstairs and helps him look up the kind of rock he's found—they determined that it's a fossilized sea animal. Paul, excited, picks up his fossils and runs outside to show Norah. David can see that some of their guests are beginning to arrive. As Norah greets them, David marvels at how his shy, quiet wife has blossomed over the years into someone so gregarious. David thinks that he barely even recognizes Norah.

Paul strings the fossils into a necklace and wears it around his neck while he plays outside. Norah warns him not to play while wearing the necklace, as it's “dangerous.” David tells Norah to relax and let Paul have fun—she is about to argue back, but Bree and her boyfriend Mark arrive, and Bree agrees with David.

Bree introduces Mark to David, and as they start having a political discussion, Norah walks away to greet Kay Marshall. David recognizes Mark from the news—he gave a speech on TV during the riots at the University of Kentucky, during which the ROTC building was burned down by protestors. David and Mark talk about their lives amiably, and Mark marvels at David's humble beginnings and success as a doctor. After Mark and Bree walk away to get a drink, though, David feels empty—his accomplishments mean nothing to him.

David goes up to his darkroom, loads a new roll of film into the **camera**, and heads back downstairs to photograph the party. He captures as many details as he can, enjoying observing his friends through the eye of his camera, but Norah urges him to put the camera away and join the party. When David insists he's just enjoying the party in his own way, Norah complains that David is snubbing all her hard work. David apologizes and kisses Norah, but she pulls away and chides him for kissing her in front of their guests.

David is torn between his private life—his photography, the strange, one-sided relationship he has with Caroline—and coming clean to his family, and making all of their lives better and more whole. He knows that to come clean would be to put himself into a precarious position, and depend not just his own family but the family Caroline and Phoebe are building together, too.



David has spent so much time focusing on his own hobbies and passions that he's shut out the changes happening in his own family. He's becoming a stranger to the people closest to him—and vice versa.



David scoffs at Norah's overprotective nature, unable to empathize with her desperate need to keep Paul safe from any kind of harm.



Even though Mark is impressed by David, David feels empty. He knows he's a fraud, and that at the heart of his success in both medicine and photography, there is a terrible, overwhelming lie. This makes David just feel more and more isolated.



Norah is cross with David for not behaving the way she wants him to. There is evident tension in their marriage—and the deeper, more private emotional issues they're having are giving way to petty squabbles and more surface-level strains as the foundation of their marriage grows shakier.



Paul calls to David and Norah from up in a tree. Norah urges him to get down, but David points out that it's normal and fun for kids to climb trees. Within a minute, though, David hears a rustle of leaves and a terrible crack—Paul has fallen out of the tree and broken his fossil necklace. David rushes over to Paul and urges him to stay calm while he regains his breath, but Paul begins crying, complaining that his arm hurts badly. David carries Paul to the car so that he can take him to the hospital for X-rays, and Norah joins them, leaving the party behind.

David helps Paul and Norah get settled in a bed in the ER, and then after the X-rays are taken, David intercepts the technician from bringing them to the room and instead takes them into his own office. He takes down his own photographs, pinned up to the lightboards by which he reads his patient's X-rays, and puts Paul's up to look at them alone. He is able to see the damage clearly, and though the break is sizable, it's easily fixed. As David walks back to Paul and Norah, he finds himself thinking of June—nothing, now, but bones.

David takes the X-rays back to Paul and Norah, and shows them both the break. He begins readying materials to make a cast for Paul, but Norah cries, miserable that her son got into an accident—and upset that her careful watching over him and destruction of the wasp's nest still couldn't keep him safe. David applies Paul's cast, and tells him he'll have to avoid swimming and sports for the summer.

While Paul plays with the stethoscope, David tells Norah that he's concerned about her. She tells him he doesn't have to be—yesterday, she got a job at a travel agency in town. David is clearly unenthusiastic about the news, and Norah berates him for being unsupportive of her dreams. She says that she wants freedom and a life of her own. David retorts that no one is truly free—he certainly isn't. Paul interrupts them by joking about the things he's hearing on the stethoscope, and they stop fighting.

Waiting for the elevator, David apologizes to Norah, but she is sick of David seeing himself “as the center of the universe.” Back at home, the party has dissipated, and Bree and Mark are cleaning up the mess. David brings Paul inside and upstairs and administers some aspirin. David thinks of his son's bones on the X-ray and is full of wonder for his son's life. He wishes he could “capture on film” the love he feels for Paul. David reads a book to Paul while downstairs, Norah, Mark, and Bree finish tidying up. He looks outside the window and sees a dogwood shedding its petals—he is perturbed because the falling white blooms look, for a moment, “like snow.”

Norah's fears come true as Paul falls out of the tree and injures himself. Her whole life is structured around making sure no harm comes to her only remaining child—but it's also true that one cannot stave off grief, worry, and pain forever.



David, too, must admit that he's traumatized and frightened by Paul's injury. He's not as openly desperate as Norah to keep Paul from harm at any cost—but when harm does befall Paul, David is launched into traumatic memories from his past and the old fear of losing someone close to him.



Norah is upset that her efforts to protect Paul have failed—but David calmly and methodically begins repairing the damage. This demonstrates that, even though David is wracked with guilt and pain, he's still often the less emotional one—and more capable, sometimes, of handling things at an emotional remove.



David and Norah are on the precipice of a painful fight—but perhaps also a breakthrough. Norah is at last admitting her frustrations, and David is revealing the pain and self-loathing he feels in spite of the “freedoms” he has as a man.



In spite of the issues in David and Norah's marriage, David maintains a deep love for his son. He knows, though, that he is failing in many ways—and wishes he could stop time from marching onward and revealing all the ways in which he's insufficient. The petals which resemble snow remind David of the secrets and lies of the past—and signal that they are ongoing, and he is unable to escape their weight.



CHAPTER 10: JUNE 1970

On the east side of Pittsburgh, in a factory that has been turned into a progressive school, Caroline watches six-year-old Phoebe and her other disabled preschool classmates play together with jars of lentils. Doro is visiting, and comments on how alike Phoebe and Caroline's hair is. Caroline is touched by the comment, even though she knows there's no way she and Phoebe could have the same hair.

Over the last several years, Caroline's friendship with Sandra has "grown into a political force." The women have formed the Upside Down Society, a Down syndrome advocacy group with over 500 members—and a school of their own, as their children are being shut out of public schools. As Caroline remarks that she wishes the Board of Education could see Phoebe and her friends playing, learning, and flourishing together, Doro tells Caroline that she and the other Society members have a "good lawyer" and will come out on top. Caroline is on her way out to go to a hearing at which the Society is arguing that their children should be mainstreamed. Doro asks Caroline if AI is coming this weekend, and Caroline admits she doesn't know. Doro teases Caroline about being in love with AI, but Caroline insists they're "just close friends."

Caroline drives off in her new car—Leo's old Buick. Last year, Leo died, and Caroline offered to move out, but Doro encouraged her and Phoebe to stay as long as they wanted. As Phoebe enters the building where she and the others are meeting with the school board, she steels herself for what's to come.

During the meeting, although the Upside Down Society's lawyer Ron Stone argues for equity in education and fair opportunities for all children, the Board of Education members maintain that "mentally retarded" children should not be allowed in mainstream schools—they argue that these "retarded individuals" will only "overwhelm the system" and slow normal children down. Ron explains that the Board is being "pejorative" and cruel, but the Board cannot see the special-needs children as anything but "a drag on resources." Caroline stewes in sadness and anger, wishing she could have these people meet Phoebe and show them how beautiful, special, funny, kind, and smart she is.

Caroline has concealed from everyone in her life the truth of Phoebe's parentage. Though she knows they're not related, no one else does. When Doro comments on how similar Caroline and Phoebe are, it warms Caroline's heart and makes her feel even more like she deserves to be this child's mother.



Caroline took Phoebe in knowing full well the challenges, prejudice, and discrimination Phoebe would face as she grew older. Rather than just take these hits lying down, though, Caroline has decided to rise up and become a force for change. She loves Phoebe deeply, and wishes the world could see her daughter through less judgmental eyes.



Caroline has found a family where she least expected it, and the loyalty she showed Leo and Doro when they needed it most has been repaid in spades.



The Board of Education's cruel attitude towards children with Down syndrome and their refusal to invest in all children equally angers Caroline and her group. Caroline doesn't understand why people fear difference and allow their prejudices to blind them to the sanctity of all human life.



Caroline stands up and begins speaking out of turn, telling the Board that Down syndrome children “want to learn” just like every other child—and deserve the chance to do just that. When the Board suggests that the most these children can hope to accomplish in life is to one day learn a “productive and useful trade,” Ron Stone pulls out a sheaf of papers and announces he’s filing a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the Upside Down Society. He and the Society parents file out of the room, promising to “be in touch.”

Outside, the other Society parents congratulate Caroline on her brave speech. Caroline feels slightly drained, and thanks them for their support before rushing off to collect Phoebe from school. They drive home together through the beautiful weather with the windows down, and once at home, Phoebe plays on the lawn while Caroline sits on the porch, waiting for Al to arrive. When he walks up to the house, Phoebe shouts in glee and greets him with a big hug. Al has a bouquet of lilacs in his hand for Caroline, and he greets her warmly and asks about the meeting. The two catch up about their weeks, sharing stories and watching Phoebe play.

Al hands Caroline some mail he’s picked up for her from a P.O. box in Atlanta—it is a letter from David Henry, with money enclosed. Al knows that the money is for Phoebe from her father, but Caroline has never told Al the true story of Phoebe’s birth and parentage.

As a song comes on the radio and wafts outside from the house, Al asks Caroline if she’d like to go dancing sometime. Caroline replies, “Why wait,” and invites Al to dance with her on the porch. As they sway back and forth, Caroline thinks about all the times Al has asked her to marry him—and all the times she’s been too scared to say yes. Now, she thinks to herself that if he asks her again, she’ll agree.

The beautiful moment is interrupted when Phoebe begins sobbing and holds up her hand—Caroline can see she’s gotten a **bee** sting. Caroline runs to Phoebe and comforts her, but soon Phoebe’s sobs turn to wheezes and her hand begins to swell. Caroline realizes that Phoebe is having a reaction, and she and Al hurriedly lift her into the car and rush her to the hospital.

Caroline takes a stand, unable to sit quietly by and listen as odious people disparage and discount individuals like Phoebe. Ron Stone and the rest of the Upside Down Society are behind Caroline—and as the meeting comes to a close, their lawsuit foreshadows that there will indeed be justice for Phoebe and her friends.



Caroline loves Phoebe and would do anything for her. She sees her daughter’s innate worth and beauty, and though she laments that the rest of the world cannot see Phoebe that way, at home in their own private little universe, all is calm and happy. Al, too, loves and supports Caroline and Phoebe—and though Caroline is afraid to admit how much she cares for him, it’s clear that Al has become an important presence in both their lives.



Al dutifully helps Caroline stay hidden from Phoebe’s father—even though he doesn’t know the truth and suspects that Caroline was once married to a man who abandoned her, he remains loyal and supportive.



Caroline is in love with Al, and in spite of her fears about being a burden on him, she seems at last ready to surrender to the potential of love and partnership.



Phoebe’s allergy to bees, foreshadowed in the novel’s earlier pages, becomes evident to Caroline and Al now. Caroline, unprepared for this specific problem, remains calm in spite of her fear for Phoebe’s life.



When they arrive, Al lifts Phoebe onto a gurney while Caroline tells a nearby nurse that Phoebe is having a reaction and needs a doctor immediately. When the nurse looks at Phoebe, Caroline watches the woman “taking in” Phoebe’s markedly different face—the nurse then asks if Caroline is “sure” she wants to call for a doctor. Caroline raises her hand to slap the nurse, but Al stops her, and orders the woman to find a doctor.

After a doctor arrives and halts Phoebe’s reaction, Caroline and Al sit together in the waiting room holding hands. Caroline shakily remarks that Phoebe could have died—Al replies that Phoebe is fine. Caroline raises Al’s hand to her face and kisses his palm, grateful now more than ever for his years of patience, love, and support. Al tells Caroline there’s something he wants to ask her—without even hearing the question, Caroline tells Al she will marry him.

CHAPTER 11: JULY 1977

Norah, David, and Paul are on vacation in Aruba—a vacation Norah has won through work as a reward for selling the highest number of cruise packages in the whole state of Kentucky in her job at the travel agency. Norah lies on the sand posing for David, who is **photographing** her, while Paul, now thirteen, runs along the shoreline. Norah is uncomfortable with the position she’s holding, but there’s a certain shot David is after, and he promises her that in just a few minutes he’ll be done.

Norah looks back on the early years of her marriage, and realizes she never imagined the life she’s living now. Over the last several years, Norah has learned the ins and outs of the travel business and risen to prominence as a travel agent—she bought the business from its former owner, and is now in charge of the entire agency. David, meanwhile, has become a devoted **photographer**.

Norah asks David why he’s so obsessed with putting her in the photo, when the goal is to get her to “disappear into the landscape.” David insists he’s trying to play with people’s perception and expectations—he wants people to have to “find” Norah in the photograph. As Norah listens to David describe his intent for the **photograph**, she feels sad—he used to talk about medicine, or even about her, in such reverent terms. Now, most of their conversations are “perfunctory” and devoid of passion. She has brought her family on vacation in hopes of restoring a sense of closeness between all three of them—but even here, they’re spending all their time doing separate things.

Caroline once again encounters ugly, overwhelming prejudice—in a hospital, of all places, where people are supposed to be valued and cared for equally. The pain is more than Caroline can bear.



After a frightening episode, Caroline at last realizes just how deeply devoted Al is not just to her but to Phoebe, too. She decides to accept his marriage proposal, knowing and believing that Al will make their family complete.



Norah’s main priority has become work, while David’s has become photography. As David struggles to get the perfect shot of Norah amidst the dunes, she considers how she has become a part of her husband’s work—even as their lives have diverged.



Norah, who once resented being called “Suzy Homemaker” and playing the part of the perfect wife, has at last realized her dreams of expanding her horizons and establishing some independence.



David’s whole life has been subsumed by his art. In the face of a difficult relationship with Norah and a lack of common ground as their interests have diverged, he has retreated entirely into his artistic process. David, Norah, and Paul, this passage suggests, have all become strangers to one another.



David finishes up the shot, and then begins talking to a man who has been running on the beach and stopped to admire David's **camera**. The man introduces himself to Norah and David as Howard, and the two of them invite him to come by their bungalow later to have dinner and look at some of David's work—he's brought his portfolio along with him. Paul, who has been on a run down the beach, sidles up to the group and introduces himself. David compliments Paul on his athleticism and says he wishes Paul would give basketball a shot. Norah rolls her eyes—David has been harping on the issue for months, but Paul is only interested in music and running.

Back at their beach house, as Norah slices cucumbers alone in the kitchen, she thinks of the last several years and all her family has been through. The daughter she and David “lost” has hung between them and “shaped” their lives—she has begun to feel like their shared loss is the only thing holding them together. Norah thinks about Howard and how attractive she found him. She imagines Bree's voice in her head, telling her to “have some fun.” After lunch, as the sounds of Paul's guitar drift down from upstairs, Norah falls into a nap.

Later that evening, Norah wakes up, changes into a sundress, and begins preparing a seafood feast for dinner with Howard. Paul and David fire up the grill, and soon Norah hears Howard's voice join theirs outside on the porch. She goes out to say hello, and only Howard looks up at her—Paul and David barely register her presence. As she meets Howard's eyes, she feels a moment of “communion” pass between them. The moment passes, though, and as dinner begins, the night feels ordinary and comfortable. Norah listens to David and Howard talk about their shared passion for **photography**, but feels she has nothing to contribute.

After dinner, Paul goes upstairs to play guitar. Norah feels bad for her son—he's so passionate about music, but David discourages him from pursuing it at every turn. As David and Howard continue discussing photography and turn to looking at David's photographs, Norah is struck by the realization that although all of David's **photographs** are of her, she's an object alone in their conversation—not a participant. She understands that, in spite of photographing her regularly, David doesn't “really see her.”

This passage shows that even David, Norah, and Paul are able to present themselves as a unified family, there are deep divisions between them. Norah, David, and Paul don't really know one another, or respect each other's passions—they seek to control and manipulate one another, unable to connect on any kind of common ground.



Norah realizes that the loss of Phoebe is at the heart of the divisions in her marriage to David and it affects her relationship to her son Paul, as well. Norah wants more and more out of life and longs to escape the trappings of her marriage through work—and through, perhaps, other kinds of freedom.



Norah cannot deny her attraction to Howard, but as the night goes on, she begins to fear it is one-sided. Just as she felt trapped and minimized in the early years of her marriage, she still feels discounted because she is a woman—even after all the hard work she's put in and the success she's achieved.



This vacation represents a breaking point for Norah. Alone with David and Paul for long stretches of time, she's able to carefully examine the problems in their family and see that just as David doesn't “see her,” none of the three of them, perhaps, are able to see or recognize one another.



Norah goes inside to clean up and take out her anger on the dishes. Afterwards, she brings the trash outside to the dumpster. David and Howard are still on the porch, talking, even though it is completely dark outside. They call Norah over and she stands with them in the darkness and listens as they continue talking. She is shocked when she feels Howard's hand reach out and grab her leg. She feels overcome by desire as he strokes her thigh, in full view of David but obscured by the darkness. The two men discuss alternate **photography** techniques, including pinhole cameras, while Norah grows faint. She says she's going to go inside—Howard invites her to come take a look at his camera obscura the following morning.

In the morning, David and Paul leave before dawn to take a fishing trip out at sea on the other side of the island. Norah showers and dresses and then heads over to Howard's bungalow, steeling herself. Howard greets her warmly and offers her coffee, but does not make any reference to their charged interaction the night before. He shows her his unique pinhole **camera**, and then Howard asks if he can draw Norah as she lies on the beach. Norah agrees, and lies down in the sand. She takes off all of her clothes, and Howard stops drawing her and approaches her. He embraces her, and then the two of them retreat inside the bungalow to make love. Norah leaves her clothes on the sand, unafraid of being spotted or caught. For once, she feels she is the one "who ha[s] stopped time."

For the rest of the vacation, Norah continues sneaking off to make love with Howard. She is surprised to find that her secret makes "the distance between herself and David seem more bearable." She knows that their affair is impermanent and only physical, but she is so happy to finally feel seen that she returns to Howard again and again.

CHAPTER 12: AUGUST 1977

David hurries into Paul's school from work—he is "very late" for Paul's concert. He enters the auditorium and an attendant hands him a program—they are on performance number five, and Paul is number seven. David hurries to the front of the theater to sit with Norah, who chides him for being late. Even though David was in surgery, Norah is visibly angry. David tells her she's been short with him "ever since Aruba." A man puts his hand on David's shoulder and asks him and Norah to be quiet so he can hear his son, Duke, play. David watches the boy on stage—Paul's best friend—play the piano.

Norah realizes that the attraction between her and Howard hasn't been only in her head—he wants her, too. This information, though, overwhelms her, and as she considers embarking on an affair with the man, she finds herself uncertain of what to do.



As Norah makes the decision to start an affair with Howard, she is taking another step in the direction of her own personal liberation and freedom—but abandoning any hope of repairing her marriage or putting her family back together in the process. Norah's actions are just as selfish, in some ways, as David's—but it is he who has pushed her to the brink and imbued her with his own desire to "stop time."



Norah is invigorated by her affair and grateful for the feeling of being close to someone again after so many years. She doesn't feel any guilt about what she's doing—she sees the affair as an inevitability, the result of years of neglect and pain.



David knows that something has shifted in his marriage—and while he's blindsided and angry, there's a part of him that knows he has to admit responsibility for the way his own actions have pushed his and Norah's relationship to the brink.



David thinks back to Aruba, and remembers discovering Norah's discarded clothes on the beach. His and Paul's fishing trip was canceled that morning, and they headed back to the bungalow. Paul went out for a run but came back upset—David went out for a walk, saw Norah's clothes on the beach in front of Howard's cottage, and realized that Paul must have seen them, too. David was upset, but not unsurprised—he knew for years that the secret in the “middle of their family” would tear him and Norah apart eventually.

Duke's performance ends, and Paul walks out onstage with his guitar. He begins playing a classical piece, and David is moved by the familiar music, amazed by the young man—talented but inscrutable—Paul is growing up to be. David thinks of his sister June, and her talent with music—she was a skilled singer. He feels a pang of grief, and tries to push his feelings away. After the performance is over, Norah and David applaud. Norah leans over to David and tells him Paul deserves to go to Juilliard, like he wants to. David insists, though, that Paul is, at thirteen, “too young to shut doors” to other opportunities.

After the concert, David and Norah congratulate Paul. Paul, though, is standoffish, and rebuffs his parents' attention—especially Norah's. Norah suggests they go home, have dinner, and celebrate with Bree, but Paul insists he wants to go home and be alone. Back at the house, when Paul goes straight up to his bedroom, Norah says she's going to go up and talk to him, but David insists on being the one to do it. When David enters Paul's room, though, he finds it empty—Paul has snuck out the window.

David goes downstairs and tells Norah that Paul has snuck out—most likely to hang out with Duke. They call Duke's parents, who give them the address of a post-show party, and David grabs the car keys. Norah insists on accompanying him, but David says that Paul probably doesn't want to talk to her right now—and watches a sad look pass over her face as she understands why.

David catches up with Paul a block before the house where the party's being held, and orders Paul to get in the car. Paul reluctantly obliges. The two drive in silence for a minute, but then David tells Paul how proud he is of him. He asks Paul if he's sure he wants to go to Juilliard, and reminds him there are many other things he could do in life. Paul, though, insists that music is the only thing makes him “feel alive”—and he is not going to walk away from it and end up miserable like his parents.

David knows the truth about what Norah did in Aruba—and it's implied that Paul does, too. David accepts Norah's actions with a hurt but understanding chagrin—he knows that he is culpable for the disintegration of their marriage and their family more largely.



Paul's musical talent reminds David of June's—and it is perhaps for this reason that he wants to push Paul away from pursuing music seriously. David hates and rejects anything that reminds him of his painful youth, and is taking his own prejudices, fears, and traumas out on Paul just as he did on Phoebe years ago.



There has been a shift in Paul. Where in Aruba he was simply aloof and contemplative, now he's actively angry towards and dismissive of his parents. He clearly wants to spend as little time around them as possible.



This passage makes it clear that Norah, too, is aware of how her own choices and errors have impacted her family—even if she's not ready to vocalize her own guilt and air out her mistakes.



Paul will not be swayed from his goals, or pushed away from the only thing in the world that brings him joy. Paul's whole childhood, it seems, has been marked by pain and animosity. He has found refuge in art—just like David—and feels it's unfair that he's being pressured to relinquish the only thing he truly cares about.



As David and Paul arrive home, David asks Paul to come with him into his darkroom. There, he shows Paul some of his **photographs**—and explains that he understands how deeply Paul loves music, because that’s how much he loves taking pictures. David says he loves photography because he loves that it’s “all about secrets”—Paul balks and retorts that music is about the opposite: connection. He walks out of the darkroom, leaving David alone.

David opens the refrigerator where he keeps his chemicals and reaches into the back, pulling out a fat envelope full of cash. Though usually he mails money to Caroline wrapped in a blank sheet of paper, tonight, he sits down and begins composing a letter to her, pouring out his “regrets about the past” and his “hopes for Phoebe.” He can’t stop thinking about the loneliness he sees Paul carrying—and wonders if things would be different if he’d grown up with Phoebe. David writes in his letter that he wants to at last have a relationship with Phoebe—because of Paul. He seals and stamps the envelope, and plans on mailing it tomorrow.

Unable to get thoughts of Aruba out of his head, David begins developing some of the **pictures** he took there. In one picture, from the night of their dinner party with Howard, he sees that he captured a moment between Norah and Howard in which they were laughing and smiling at one another. He hangs the picture on a clothesline to dry, planning on leaving it exposed and untreated until it darkens and obscures itself.

CHAPTER 13: AUGUST 1977

Paul and his friend Duke walk together along the train tracks outside of Lexington. They hear a train approaching, and though Duke jumps into the weeds at the side of the tracks, Paul remains standing, facing the oncoming train head-on, until the very last minute. Paul loves the “rush” he gets from playing this game. It allows him to release some of the rage he’s held inside ever since the trip to Aruba—when he discovered his mother was having an affair with Howard after finding her discarded clothes on the beach during a run.

Paul has, for many years, thought that all the animosity and secretiveness between his parents was “normal” until he began hanging out with Duke more and met Duke’s family. Although the Madisons don’t have much money, they love one another and are happy, and they talk to one another like equals.

David tries to connect with his son over their shared love of art and artistry—but it turns out that David and Paul are approaching the things they love from different angles. David wants to hide in his art, while Paul wants to use art to discover himself.



Profoundly alienated from his wife and son and trapped in a tower of lies, David turns to the only person in the world who knows the truth about him—Caroline. His actions are partly selfish, but he also realizes that perhaps he has a chance to salvage his family before it’s too late by exposing the terrible secret at the core of all their lives.



Again, this passage illustrates how David tries to use photography to selectively remember and reframe the past. When he encounters an image that upsets him, he erases it—believing if he removes it from the canvas, so to speak, he can remove it from his consciousness too.



Paul is engaging in the same reckless behavior his mother favors in order to feel the deeper emotions that his home life doesn’t allow him to. He wants to escape the pain his family brings him—pain that has been visited upon him even in spite of his mother and father’s relentless attempts to shield him from it.



By expanding his social circle and worldview, Paul has come to realize that not all families are like his—and that there are people who are actually happy in their home lives and love and support each other.



Now, Duke and Paul wander across the tracks, wondering what they should do next. Duke fishes in his pocket and pulls out a bag of marijuana—Paul admits he has never gotten high before, but Duke promises that it’s both “amazing” and safe. Paul says that they can smoke at his house—his parents aren’t home, and won’t be for hours—and the boys pick their bikes up from Duke’s and head over to Paul’s.

Back at the Henrys’, Paul and Duke smoke a joint together, and Paul gets deeply and immediately stoned. The two boys laugh, snack, and play music all afternoon as they ride out their highs. As dusk falls, they order pizza and eat hungrily. After dark, Paul’s parents still aren’t home—Norah calls the house to tell Paul that she’s taking clients to dinner and will be home as soon as she can. Paul promises his mother he’s okay on his own, but she still seems worried and expresses anger at David for not coming home on time. Paul hangs up, unable to deal with his parents’ squabbles.

Paul picks up his guitar and plays, thinking briefly about the sister he never knew. He wonders what she would be like if she hadn’t died. Duke decides to call his dealer to buy more weed, since their highs are abating. Paul continues getting lost in memories of his childhood, and recalls going, when he was nine or ten, to the cemetery where his sister was buried. Ever since, he has internalized the fear that his sister’s death was somehow his fault.

Duke asks if Paul has any cash, and Paul leads him out to David’s darkroom. In the last few years, David’s **photographs** have gained some attention in the art world, and now David spends most of his time in the darkroom. His most famous photograph is several years old, and shows the ruins of the University of Kentucky ROTC building. Paul opens his father’s refrigerator while Duke looks around, and pulls out a few twenty-dollar bills. He found the money several months ago, and has been stealing twenties one or two at a time ever since. His father never seems to notice, and Paul’s secret makes him uneasy.

Two older boys from Duke and Paul’s high school arrive with more weed. Paul pays them for the drugs, and then the four boys smoke a joint together inside the darkroom. Paul has a different high this time, though—he feels lost, empty, and paranoid. When the older boys begin touching David’s **photographs** and equipment, Paul grows agitated. The older boys trash the place and then ride off on their bikes, leaving Paul and Duke behind with the mess.

Paul turns to marijuana the same way Norah turned to drinking—as a way of silencing his pain and coping with his feelings.



This passage shows how even when Paul tries to escape the difficulty of his home life, his parents can’t help but put him in the middle of their fights and their drama. Paul is fed up and frustrated with the way his parents treat him, but unable to change his situation.



Paul has many painful memories associated with his childhood because of the trauma associated with Phoebe—another example of how, although David chose to give Phoebe away to spare his family pain and grief, her loss only created more of those things for all of them.



Paul knows that his father is hiding money in his studio—but he has no idea what it’s for. Paul’s secret, his theft, is wrapped up in David’s secret—and it’s possible that even if David has realized that Paul is stealing from him, he won’t confront his son for fear of bringing the truth behind his own secret to light.



Paul carelessly invites people he doesn’t really know or trust into his father’s space—and they destroy it. Paul knows how sacred his father’s art is, and is terrified of what is going to happen to him as a result of his poor judgement.



The next thing Paul knows, it is morning, and he is awake on the floor of the darkroom—with David standing over him, shouting about the mess and demanding to know what happened. He asks if Paul is responsible for what happened—Paul says he isn't, but also admits that he “didn't stop [it]” from happening. As punishment, David says, Paul will need to help him clean up the mess, reorganize the **photographs**, and reconstruct the files. To make time for all the work, David says, Paul will need to give up music rehearsals. Paul angrily accuses David of looking for an excuse to stop him from playing, but David says he'd never to do that to Paul.

David picks up a photograph of a family Paul doesn't recognize. David tells Paul that the family in the photo is himself, his sister June, and their parents. David calmly explains to Paul that when he was growing up, money was painfully tight—sometimes, the family didn't know where their next meal would come from. David reminds Paul that he's worked very hard to ensure Paul wants for nothing—and warns Paul not to “throw it all away” on drugs. Paul apologizes for his actions and promises to help clean up—but tells David he'll never give up on music. Paul and David together set to work cleaning up the ruined darkroom.

CHAPTER 14: SEPTEMBER 1977

At a party for Phoebe's confirmation, Caroline takes **pictures** of her daughter and their guests using a Polaroid camera. A summer storm is gathering in the distance, but for now, the weather is beautiful. Phoebe, now thirteen, runs and plays with her neighborhood friends—including the eight-year-old Avery, who plays with a stray kitten, and Sandra's son Tim. Phoebe runs around the party shouting “I'm confirmed!” and hugging and kissing her guests. As Phoebe has grown older, Caroline has had to help her reign in her exuberance and affection, reminding her that hugs are just for friends and family.

A three-layer cake stands on a table at the center of the party, and its three layers represent all that Caroline, Phoebe, and their extended family are celebrating to day: Phoebe's confirmation, Caroline and Al's wedding anniversary, and Doro's retirement—she is leaving soon to travel the world with her new beau Trace. In preparation for her departure, Doro has given Caroline the deed to the house they've shared for years. Al doesn't know the good news yet—he still works as a trucker, and only comes home on the weekends—and Caroline is planning to tell him after the party.

David wants Paul to own up to his actions—but Paul and David's relationship is so antagonistic that Paul sees even a fair punishment as an unjust attempt to alienate him further from the things he cares about and bring more isolation and misery into his life.



As always, David feels superior about his efforts to outrun the past and build a better future for his family. He still can't see that his desire to remove pain, grief, and suffering from the equation is backfiring more and more all the time. David can't make things perfect for Paul in the future—and he can't correct the past without confronting it.



As Caroline takes pictures of Phoebe at her confirmation party, it becomes clear that Caroline is nursing the same instinct as David—the desire to freeze time. As Phoebe grows older, Caroline feels more uncertainty and apprehension about the future—but still meets the unique challenges that raising Phoebe presents head-on, without fear.



Caroline, Phoebe, and Al have built a family together—and their extended family and friend circle has gathered around them to support them. Caroline struck out on her own in a new city with nothing to her name—and has made a beautiful, bountiful life for herself and her daughter.



Phoebe brings Avery's cat over to Caroline and asks if they can get one of their own. Caroline reminds Phoebe that Doro is allergic, and Phoebe's mercurial temper threatens to explode. To calm her, Al suggests they get the kitten a dish of cream. As they walk away together, Caroline looks around at all her guests and thinks about how beautiful and unexpected her life has become. She feels as if she, too, has been "confirmed" today—all her hard work is paying off.

The party lasts until late into the evening. As Doro and Caroline clean up the yard, Doro remarks that leaving is bittersweet—she's going to miss her life in Pittsburgh. Caroline reminds Doro that she has an early flight in the morning, and the women hug goodbye before Doro leaves with Trace. Caroline tells Doro that she saved her life years ago—Doro says Caroline did the same for her.

After Doro and Trace leave, Caroline and Al sit together on the porch, and Caroline tells Al that Doro has given them the deed to the house. She expects Al to be excited, but instead he expresses a kind of envy at Doro and Trace's chance to get out of Pittsburgh and explore the world. Caroline replies that she doesn't have the "urge" to travel anymore, and privately wonders whether she doesn't really know Al at all.

Al tells Caroline that Phoebe is growing up—she's thirteen, and soon she'll want more independence. Al suggests that at a certain point, he and Caroline will want their own lives, as well. Caroline feels weary, unable to think so far into the future—or imagine living a life without her daughter around her. Caroline asks if they can return to the discussion later, and Al says they can.

Caroline says that she wants to talk to Al about a letter she received this week—a letter from Phoebe's father. Caroline describes the letter, which asked to meet Phoebe and "make amends." Caroline takes Al's hand and says she wants to tell him the whole story—the true story—about Phoebe. Caroline at last tells Al about David Henry's request that Caroline bring Phoebe to an institution in the countryside, and about her inability to follow through with it. She apologizes for not having told Al the truth earlier, but he insists he understands. He says that whatever Caroline decides to do about David's request, he'll support her. Together they head inside and go up to bed as the rain begins to fall.

Phoebe is growing into a sensitive and moody girl, whose sweetness touches all who meet her but whose desires are sharp and strong. Caroline loves Phoebe regardless of her "mercurial" nature, and even finds joy in the way Phoebe experiences the world.



Though Phoebe and Caroline are a profound example of a "made" family, Doro is a part of that family too—she took Caroline in when Caroline had no other options, and has become a friend and confidante over the years, accepting and loving Caroline and Phoebe as they are.



Caroline and Al are a united front—but there are still secrets between them, and challenges in their marriage. The difference between Caroline and Al and David and Norah is that Caroline and Al bring their differences out into the open, and love and support each other as they open up to one another more and more.



Al is able to see certain things about Phoebe more clearly than Caroline, who is blinded by love for her daughter and a fierce desire to protect her from the world. Al, though, knows that Phoebe can't stay the same forever—their family will have to change as she does.



As Caroline reveals the whole truth to Al, she takes a brave step in their relationship, bringing it to a more honest, open place. She has been afraid for years that Al would judge or reject her for her participation in David Henry's lies—but instead, Al is as steadfastly supportive as always.



The next morning, it is still raining. At breakfast, Phoebe remarks that it's raining cats and dogs—and then asks Caroline, again, if they can get a cat. Caroline tells her no, but Phoebe will not drop the issue. Caroline yells at Phoebe, warning her not to mention cats again. Phoebe says she wants to go outside on the porch and watch the rain, and Caroline says she can go. Caroline feels bad for losing her patience, and knows that she's just distressed about the letter from David.

Caroline begins composing a letter back to David, but pauses as she does. She feels guilty for being confused about David's desire to meet his daughter—with all the detailed letters and photos she's sent over the years, how could she have expected, she wonders, that anything else might happen? Unable to think about David any longer, she pushes the letter aside, pays some bills, and drinks some more coffee. As the rain begins to fall harder, she peeks out onto the front porch—Phoebe is not there.

Caroline runs out to the street, where some neighbor-children are playing. She asks if they've seen Phoebe, and they tell her that Avery's cat has run away—Avery and Phoebe have gone into the woods to find it. Caroline rushes into the forest and soon finds Avery crouching at the edge of a huge drain pipe. Avery explains that the cat ran into the drain pipe—and Phoebe has gone in after it. Caroline crawls inside and quickly feels Phoebe in front of her—she urges her daughter to come home, but Phoebe is determined to get the cat. Caroline promises Phoebe that she can have the cat if she follows her out, saying what Phoebe wants to hear out of desperation to get through to her.

Caroline and Phoebe emerge from the drainpipe, soaked and freezing. Phoebe clutches the cat in her hands. Across the street, Caroline sees the mailman walking up to the house. Full of fear and anger, she decides not to write to David again—she believes he wants “too much from her [...] too late.”

CHAPTER 15: APRIL 1982

On a spring evening, Caroline stands on the street waiting for the bus. She is on her way to an art opening downtown. She arrives at the museum where it's being held and looks up at the banner fluttering over the entrance: “MIRROR IMAGES,” it reads; “**PHOTOGRAPHS** BY DAVID HENRY.” Caroline trembles as she heads up the steps into the building, merging with the large crowd pouring into the museum.

Caroline is beginning to feel the unique stresses of raising Phoebe. Phoebe is single-minded in her wants and needs, and though Caroline tries to be sensitive to Phoebe, sometimes real life gets in the way. Any parent struggles with these issues—but for Caroline, dropping the ball with a sensitive child like Phoebe has even higher stakes.



Caroline realizes that she has backed herself into a corner. She never realized that her letters and photographs would make David feel curious about Phoebe, or attached to her—but now, she understands that her mistake was to underestimate the feelings of loss and longing David might have buried deep.



The challenges of raising Phoebe as she grows older and wants more from the world becomes painfully evident in this passage, as Caroline realizes that she can no longer control Phoebe. Phoebe has desperate wants and needs—and is just independent enough to seek them out while worrying Caroline.



Caroline realizes that the more time she spends trying to figure out what to do about David, the less available she is to Phoebe. She refuses to let anyone come between her and her daughter.



Caroline prepares to confront David Henry in public. Years of letters and money exchanged has perhaps not been enough for her—she wants to look the man in the face after all these years and see who he is now.



Caroline proceeds into a large gallery room and finds herself face-to-face with his most famous **photograph**—a picture of Norah on the beach, dwarfed by large sand dunes. Caroline has had a singular image of Norah in her mind for years, but is now forced to confront the fact that Norah is “a woman she ha[s] never known.”

Applause rings out as David Henry enters the room, stands in front of the crowd, and gives a short speech. The two of them lock eyes as he begins, but his attention is not broken. Caroline, however, barely focuses on what he’s saying, distracted by the ways in which his face has changed over the decades. After David’s speech, Caroline approaches a small group of press gathered in front of him. David smiles at her blithely, not recognizing her. She places her hand on his arm and asks if he truly doesn’t remember her—as they lock eyes once more, she watches recognition wash over David’s face.

David hurries Caroline away into another room where they can talk privately. David asks if Caroline has been living in Pittsburgh all this time, and she remarks that she wasn’t all that hard to find. She acknowledges that she “wanted to be lost,” but says that David probably didn’t look for her very hard himself. As Caroline looks at David and sees how much he’s changed, she realizes that’s she has “held him in her mind all this time like a **photograph**.”

Caroline tells David that she was once in love with him—David says he knows, and apologizes for using that knowledge to coerce her into doing his bidding and taking Phoebe away. Caroline tries to push down the anger she feels as David asks how Phoebe’s doing, and whether the two of them are happy. Caroline asks David if he “really want[s] to know,” considering that, with one exception, he never wrote a letter. David retorts that when Caroline herself stopped writing, he felt “like [she’d] slammed a door” on him. Caroline admits she never thought David actually read her letters.

The image of Norah on the beach—so loaded with David’s desire to let Norah disappear into the larger landscape of his life and his obsession with his art—is his most famous work. It’s fitting that this photograph makes Caroline realize that she doesn’t know Norah—the photograph resulted from David’s inability to see Norah for who she is, so Caroline certainly wouldn’t be able to know Norah from looking at it.



The fact that David—such an important force in Caroline’s life and thoughts—doesn’t recognize her surely stings her a little bit. It shows her that, though David looms large in her consciousness, she might not necessarily take up much space in his. They are on uneven footing.



Though David insists that he’s looked for Caroline, she knows that AI was able to track her down—if David had really wanted to find her and Phoebe and reconnect with them, he would have.



David admits that he preyed upon Caroline’s feelings in order to coerce her into doing his bidding—and carrying out a decision that would change both their lives forever. Caroline and David have their own issues to work out—though they were never lovers, there is a lot of pain between them, and there are things they wanted from each other that they never pushed hard enough to get.



David asks again whether Caroline and Phoebe are happy, and whether Phoebe is in good health. Caroline replies that Phoebe is perfectly healthy—and her heart is fine. She tells David that Phoebe has a cat named Rain, and loves to sing and weave. She tells him that Phoebe goes to public school—an opportunity Caroline “[fought] like hell” for. Caroline admits that she doesn’t know what the future holds—but she says that while in giving Phoebe up, David has missed a lot of heartache, he’s also “missed a lot of joy.” David grimly says he already knows that to be true. He tells Caroline briefly about his own life, but the curator of the show enters the room and summons David to rejoin the party.

David begs Caroline to wait for him to finish talking to a few people—he wants to know more about what he’s missed, and offers to take her to dinner. Caroline doesn’t answer—instead, she reaches into her purse and pulls out an envelope filled with **photographs** of Phoebe. Caroline watches David mill about the main room for a minute, but then hurries out of the museum and heads for home.

As Caroline approaches her house, she watches Phoebe weaving at her loom through the downstairs window. She thinks about the life they’ve built together with AI—and is surprised to see him, too, through the window. He’s come home early from a trip, she guesses, to surprise them. Filled with warmth and gratitude for the life she has, Caroline climbs the steps to the front porch and goes inside.

CHAPTER 16: APRIL 1982

At his opening, David tries to focus on the questions an art history professor is asking him about his work—but his eyes keep flicking across the room, trying to keep tabs on Caroline. He is afraid she’s going to leave, but is desperate for her to stay so that they can continue their conversation. As he searches the room after one of the professor’s questions, though, he’s unable to find Caroline, and he excuses himself to search for her.

Caroline is gone. David feels overcome by “loss and grief,” and reaches for the envelope she gave him to flip through the **photographs** inside. He takes in Phoebe’s “gentle-seeming” face, and is startled by a picture in which she’s playing basketball—the sport Paul “refuse[s] to play.” Rather than going back inside the museum, David begins walking through the streets of Pittsburgh.

David tried to stave off the pain of losing Phoebe—and the burden of caring for a child with a disability. Caroline, in this scene, almost tries to rub David’s face in the pain he’s caused himself. Raising Phoebe is hard, she admits, but it brings more joy than pain—and she wants David to know that he has denied himself the chance to get to know a special person. Caroline remains hurt and angry about the ways in which people judge and dismiss Phoebe—and doesn’t want to let David off easy for doing so himself.



Caroline gives photographs to David, knowing how important they are to him. For all the lingering resentment she has towards him, she wants him to have a piece of Phoebe—if only so he realizes the full weight of all he’s missed in abandoning her.



Caroline wanted to see David in order to experience a part of her past—but as she returns home, she realizes that all she needs is right here. She has made a family against all odds, and there’s no one else’s time, attention, or approval she wants.



David prioritized his own personal image over an important person in his life—just as he always has. When Caroline runs away, he is surprised—though he shouldn’t be, after seeing what’s happened to the people he’s treated as disposable over the years.



The photograph of Phoebe playing basketball makes David consider how his prejudice has come back to hurt him. He didn’t want Phoebe because he thought she’d be a burden—but in many ways, she would have been a blessing and a gift if only he’d given her a chance.



David passes his old college neighborhood and travels on through the city streets. He thinks back on the moment he handed Phoebe over to Caroline, and realizes his whole life has “turned around that single action.” His **photography**, he realizes, has been an attempt “to try and give another moment similar substance,” but has failed to “still the rushing world.”

David is able to understand, finally and clearly, his own motivations in retreating into photography. He sees how deeply his life has been affected by his own poor choices, and how irrevocably he’s changed the course of his own life and his family’s.



David realizes his life has passed him by. Norah has become a powerful, successful travel agent and has, he knows, sustained several affairs over the years, while Paul has suffered under the lie at the heart of his parents’ marriage. David realizes his efforts to spare Paul and Norah “poverty and worry and grief”—the things that marked his own childhood—have only “created losses” he never could have foreseen.

David tried to spare his family pain, but failed to realize that his cruel actions would only create more grief for them all—and his refusal to right things over the years while retreating further into himself has damaged them all beyond repair.



David reflects on another lie that has marked his life—the fact that when he was admitted to the University of Pittsburgh, a clerical error shortened his name from David Henry McCallister to simply David Henry. He never told anyone, and took refuge in the new identity—which allowed him distance from his grieving parents, his impoverished childhood, and his past burdens. As David comes upon a river, he considers throwing himself in—but decides against it at the last minute.

David’s whole life, it turns out, has been based on a lie. He has always been trying to outrun the pain of his past—but he has failed grandly, creating only more strife, confusion, and suffering for himself through his attempts to stave off the pain that is a necessary part of life.



In the morning, David boards a bus to West Virginia, and travels to the small town where he grew up. He walks down the quiet, familiar streets and finds them abandoned and covered in graffiti. He knows that he does not belong here, and “never” has—and even as he realizes Paul and Norah must be worried about him, he feels compelled to do something while he’s here.

David’s impulsive decision to return to his childhood home is yet another selfish, reckless choice. He knows it may splinter his family and harm his wife and son—but he puts himself first, as he always does.



David walks along the shoulder of the highway into the mountains—towards the house where he grew up. As the home comes into view, David feels “taken [...] powerfully into the past,” and half-expects to see his mother and sister waiting on the porch. Even though the roof now sags and the yard is overgrown, as David enters the house, he sees that the floor has been swept clean and there are flowers in jars around the house—someone, he realizes, is living here.

David has spent so long outrunning his past—but now, he confronts it head-on. He is determined to exorcise his own demons, but doesn’t count on someone else being present for this journey.



As David looks around more closely, he realizes that there are paper cutouts hanging everywhere around the main room—intricate, detailed, and beautiful little pieces of art. Exhausted, his head throbbing, David sits down on a pile of blankets in the corner and closes his eyes, thinking of his life back in Lexington. He soon falls asleep, and dreams of his childhood and his sister.

David is exhausted and disoriented. Even as he realizes that someone is living in his childhood home, he’s unable to do anything or investigate further—he’s tired out from the physical and emotional journey he’s been on since the night before.



David wakes up to find a teenage girl standing nearby in the kitchen, cooking on the stove. It is dark out, and David's wrists are bound—he cannot sit up. David asks the girl what her name is—she tells him she's called Rosemary, and that her boyfriend is coming home any minute. David doesn't believe she has a boyfriend at all, though—the girl moves through the house as if she lives there alone. David asks her for some water, and she brings it to him, but refuses to untie him. David explains that he is the owner of the house, and that technically, Rosemary is trespassing—the girl sarcastically asks if David has “technically” come to claim his property. David admires Rosemary's wit and fire.

David asks the girl how old she is, and she tells him she's sixteen. He asks her, again, to untie him, but she refuses. When she turns to face him, David can see that she is pregnant. He tells her he's a doctor, and asks once more to be released, but Rosemary insists on looking through his wallet. Even after confirming his identity, and the fact that he's a physician, Rosemary doesn't trust David. He urges her to look through the envelope in his jacket pocket—it contains pictures of his daughter Phoebe, who is Rosemary's age. Rosemary looks through the **photos** and remarks that Phoebe is pretty.

David asks if Rosemary's family knows where she is—she says they don't, and that she can never go back to them. David wishes he could comfort Rosemary, but knows there's nothing he can say or do. Unsure of what to say, he begins telling Rosemary the story of Phoebe—how she was born with Down syndrome, and how he gave her away. Rosemary is silent for a while, and David asks her when her baby is due. She tells him that she's due in five months, and also divulges that, although she's from Pennsylvania, she used to come to West Virginia in the summers to stay with an aunt.

Rosemary picks up some scissors—but instead of untying David, she begins working on a paper cutting. David admires her work, and Rosemary says she learned how to make them from her deceased grandmother, whom she feels closer to when she's creating. David tells Rosemary about his own **photography**, and the two of them connect over the fickle demands of artmaking.

David's encounter with Rosemary opens up a new chapter in his life—though he doesn't yet know it. He's instantly protective of the young girl—and on some subconscious level must be aware that she's the same age as Phoebe. Caring for Rosemary, then, will soon become David's way of trying to repent for his misdeeds against his true daughter.



When David realizes that Rosemary is pregnant, he feels even more compelled to care for her. David tries to get Rosemary to trust him and set him free—but he is forced to confront the reality that he is not the most trustworthy man.



Rosemary and David share their secrets with one another, and bond over the struggles they're facing. David senses that he and Rosemary might be able to find comfort in one another, if they can simply get past the barriers they've respectively put up over the years to shut out the world—and anyone who might care about or for them.



David and Rosemary both try to stave off the pain of their lives and the weight of their poor choices by retreating into their respective forms of creating art.



David once again begs Rosemary to untie him. She demands to know how he could give his daughter away, and urges him to correct his mistake—she tells him it’s not too late. David, though, believes it is too late. Every day for over sixteen years, he’s woken up each morning thinking that he would “put things right”—but each day, he’s failed to own up to his lies and mistakes, instead retreating into photography in order to try and “stop time.” David tells Rosemary all about the frustration and regret he feels, and she listens quietly to his entire story. When David can speak no more, Rosemary comes over and unties him, declaring him “free.”

As David pours his heart out to Rosemary and confesses years and years’ worth of secrets, she feels empathy for him. In untying him from his bonds once he’s tired himself out, Rosemary proclaims him “free”—in more ways than one. David has laid bare his mistakes for the first time in his life, and though nothing has really been fixed, he’s at least “free” from the burden of keeping everything inside. Rosemary is offering David a chance to redeem himself.



CHAPTER 17: APRIL 1982

Paul hears his mother coming to wake him up for school, but he pulls the covers over his head and says he’s sick. After three days of radio silence, Paul’s father returned home to Lexington the night before. Norah calls Paul’s bluff, and says that if he’s planning on faking sick and staying home, he needs to clean up his room. Paul promises he will. Norah says she wishes she could stay home, too—through tears, she says she’s taking Bree to the doctor for some tests.

As Paul’s home life has continued to deteriorate, he wants to hide himself away from the world exceedingly often. David has engaged in this pattern for years—and now Paul is replicating it.



After Norah leaves, Paul goes downstairs. He is alone in the house—except for “the girl,” a pregnant teenager his father brought home last night. The girl is asleep on the couch in the den, and as Paul watches her, he thinks about the “pretty, wasted, eerie” girl from school he’s had sex with several times this spring. When he looks upon Rosemary, he realizes that he simply wants to be near her and comfort her—not necessarily sexually.

The arrival of Rosemary has turned Paul’s home life upside down. He’s confused about what her presence means—for his family, and for his own desires. Paul has spent a lot of time in his life thinking about the sister he never had—and now a sister figure of sorts has come along.



Rosemary wakes up suddenly. Paul demands to know what she’s doing here in Lexington, and who she thinks she is “latch[ing] on to” David. Rosemary begins crying and insists that she didn’t ask to come here—it was David’s idea to bring her home. Paul asks why his father would do something like that, and Rosemary admits she doesn’t quite know—he simply told her she couldn’t stay in his old house any longer. When Paul asks which old house, Rosemary says she was squatting in David’s childhood home. Paul is full of jealousy that Rosemary has been to a place so important to his father, when he never has.

Paul’s curiosity about Rosemary makes him feel vulnerable, and so as soon as she’s awake he begins lashing out at her and demanding answers from her to disguise his own confusion. He’s jealous of Rosemary without really knowing who she is—all he’s sure of is that his father feels a debt to Rosemary that he has never seemed to feel to Paul.



Paul goes upstairs to retrieve his guitar, and a folder of **pictures** of his father's childhood. He goes out on the porch to play some music and look through the photographs. Rosemary comes outside and compliments Paul's playing. She says she used to take piano lessons, but would be embarrassed to play in front of Paul. She asks if he's an only child, and Paul says he had a sister who died. As the two begin talking, Paul feels an affinity for Rosemary, and shows her the pictures from David's childhood. Rosemary describes the house for Paul, speaking of it lovingly.

Paul confides in Rosemary, telling her he's gotten into Juilliard off the wait list—he hasn't told his father yet. Rosemary says that she, too is determined to go to college, in spite of her unexpected pregnancy. When Paul suggests that he'll have to pay for college himself, because David doesn't support his dreams, Rosemary says cryptically that Paul doesn't know "the whole story" about David.

Rosemary and Paul sit in silence for a while, and soon Norah and David pull up in separate cars. They fight and snipe in the driveway, and though the screened porch is shrouded in several climbing vines, Paul overhears Norah suggesting that David has impregnated Rosemary—but David insists that he did not, and has no feelings for Rosemary other than a desire to protect her. David says he'll move out if he has to—but he won't turn Rosemary away.

Paul, unable to take anymore, stands up and goes to the driveway. He asks his parents if either of them care about what he wants before announcing that he's going to Juilliard. He is expecting David to discourage him, but instead David congratulates him and encourages him to "go and work hard and be happy." Paul, overwhelmed with emotion, has no idea what to do or where to go—so he takes off running down the street, guitar in hand. Ten or so blocks away, he spots an empty car running--he gets in, shuts the door, and drives away. He heads west, towards Louisville, desperate not to be trapped in his parents' house for "whatever happen[s] next" between them.

Paul's jealousy towards Rosemary abates somewhat in this passage, and he tries to connect with her over the photographs. This time, when Rosemary talks about David's childhood home, Paul listens with interest rather than jumping straight to jealousy or anger.



Paul and Rosemary are getting closer—but when Rosemary suggests that there are things about David Paul doesn't know, Paul's jealousy and suspicion seem to rear their heads.



In the midst of Rosemary and Paul's moment of connection, Norah and David return home and immediately begin squabbling, destroying the burgeoning empathy between Rosemary and Paul. David's desire to prioritize Rosemary over his "real" family hurts and confuses both Paul and Norah.



Paul has had a confusing life—and the more recent developments within it are downright destabilizing. Unable to make sense of his father's actions—or his change of heart regarding Paul's desire to attend Juilliard—Paul runs away, wanting to get some distance from the discord and dysfunction which have taken over his home entirely.



CHAPTER 18: APRIL 1982

Norah is at work, preparing to greet a big client with Bree, who also works at the agency, when she receives a call from a former lover—a man with whom she had a brief tryst six months ago. She orders him not to call her anymore, and in spite of his protestations that he cares for her deeply, dismisses him. Norah has had four affairs since Howard. Norah's lover tells her he's worried about Paul, and she hangs up. Paul has been missing for twenty-four hours, having stolen a neighbor's car and driven off. The car turned up in Louisville last night, but there's still no sign of Paul. Norah feels that Paul's disappearance is a kind of "punishment" for her and David's anger with one another.

Norah's phone rings again—this time, it's David, calling to tell her that Paul has been found shoplifting cheese in Louisville. David says he's driving down to collect Paul from the police station, and Norah asks for the address so that she can go, too. Bree, overhearing the phone call, volunteers to drive Norah.

As Bree and Norah make their way through town, Norah admits feeling embarrassed for being so worried about Paul—after all, he's eighteen, and in just a few months he'll be off at college anyway. The sisters drive the rest of the way to Louisville in near silence. Bree, who has recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, remarks that she feels like "things seem different," and a change is coming. Norah says she's afraid to lose Bree, but Bree promises Norah she'll be fine—she is, she says, on the prayer list at church. Norah reflects on her sister's newly-minted fascination with religion, noting that Bree has been going to church now for just over a year.

Norah and Bree arrive at the police station and see Paul waiting on a bench in the main room. He is sweaty and unshowered, but Norah rushes to him and embraces him. Paul looks at Norah and Bree and remarks that he's "lucky" his father hasn't come to get him—Norah, though, says that David is on his way. Paul asks if he's going to jail, and Norah says she hopes he doesn't have to.

Norah is at the nadir of her professional life, and indeed her personal life as well. Overwhelmed by work, pursued by men she has strung along but doesn't care about, and alienated from her runaway son, she has too much on her plate—things are about to reach a boiling point for her. She cannot outrun her grief and self-destructive behavior any longer.



Norah is relieved that Paul has been found—but it's clear from David's phone call that Paul has gotten himself in a whole lot of trouble.



Bree's prediction that a change is coming to their family is accurate. Things have clearly reached a point of no return for Norah and David, whose marriage has crumbled into almost nothing—and Paul has been caught in the crossfires, driven to flight and theft to escape the toxic environment at home.



Norah is angry with Paul, but grateful that he's escaped harm. She's been so overprotective of him his whole life, desperate to keep him safe and not lose another child—but he has tested his boundaries and her grip on him.



David arrives at the station next—he envelops Paul in a huge hug right away, to Norah’s surprise. An officer approaches them and tells them that, although he’d like to throw the “smart-aleck” Paul “in the slammer,” his neighbors aren’t pressing charges, and he is free to go. David grows stern, then, telling Paul that he will need to pay their neighbors every cent it is going to cost to repair their damaged car. David tells Paul that he’s not allowed to see friends or play music for the rest of the year. Paul retorts that he’d rather “be dead” than give up music, and won’t come home if he’s not allowed to practice with his friends. Paul’s parents don’t respond, and he bitterly says that his dead sister has things better than he does.

Norah slaps Paul across the face. David warns him not to continue saying things he’ll “regret for the rest of [his] life.” David turns to Norah and suggests they leave Paul to spend a night in jail after all, but Norah retorts that she will not lose “another” child. David apologizes for “fail[ing]” Norah and Paul, and storms out.

Bree leads Norah and Paul to the car, and the three of them drive back towards Lexington—but after a while on the highway, Bree exits and takes a detour into the countryside, explaining that she wants to take Norah and Paul on an “adventure” to find a famous nearby abbey. Norah points out that Bree doesn’t even have a map—but then considers her statement, and realizes that, for all the “maps” she and David have had all their lives, they’ve still ended up in the wilderness.

Bree stops at a nearby church to ask for directions to the remote abbey. Norah follows Bree inside while Paul waits in the car. Sitting in a pew to rest and think, Norah begins crying, confronted with memories of the loss of Phoebe. She knows that she has lost David forever—and is risking losing Paul, too.

After collecting herself, Norah heads back outside, where Bree and Paul are waiting for her. Paul apologizes for the horrible thing he said, and Norah accepts his apology—but warns him to never again “think [his] life” isn’t worth anything. The three of them get back in the car and continue driving down the road towards the abbey, which Bree says isn’t far.

Though David is happy to be reunited with Paul and doesn’t come down on him as hard as he might ordinarily, Paul’s resentment over his parents’ attempts to control him has reached its apex. He lashes out in the cruelest way he can—by reminding them all of the shattering loss at the center of their family, and expressing his desire to be dead rather than put up with his parents’ rules.



Norah is angry about what Paul has just said—but David is clearly rattled on a deeper, more profound level. He knows well that there are some things a person says that they can never take back.



Norah is nervous when the freewheeling Bree takes their group off-course without a map—but as she reflects on her own life, she begins to realize that perhaps Bree’s way of living has always been the best way. “Maps” and societal expectations have only ever failed Norah and her family.



Norah is aware that she has lost control of her life. She weeps in grief for all the pain and hardship that have taken control of her family—and for the tough journey she knows is ahead as she attempts to extricate herself from the mess.



Norah can’t stay angry with Paul—but she does warn him that there are some words and actions that can’t be rescinded. She knows he has no clue how much he means to her, and can’t understand the magnitude of loss she felt when Phoebe “died.”



After a few minutes, Bree, Norah, and Paul arrive at the Abbey of Gethsemani and can hear bells calling monks to prayer through the car windows. As they get out to look around, Paul reaches into his pocket and pulls out some small rocks—fossils, just like the ones he loved so many years ago. He shows them to Norah and tells her that while she was in the church he collected some off the ground. Norah remembers the day Paul broke his arm and thinks about “how hard David had worked to make things good for all of them”—and yet never could surmount the strange difficulty at the heart of their family, which made them all seem to be “swimming the shallow sea that once had covered all this land.”

As Norah thinks about the years of pain and suffering she, David, and Paul have endured together, she wonders why things have been so hard for them—even in the face of David’s efforts to provide for them and keep them safe and happy. So much of her life doesn’t make sense—and she’s unable to think of why a marriage that began with so much love has become a painful burden. She can’t even begin to guess at the secret which has infiltrated the heart of her and David’s lives together.



CHAPTER 19: JULY 1988

David sits in the home office of his new house, looking out the window at the summer day outside. Rosemary is downstairs in the garden, planting flowers. Her son Jack, now five years old, sits near her, playing with a toy truck. David loves Jack like his own son—but also regrets that he doesn’t have many memories of Paul at this age, since back then, David was always working. He thinks, now, that he’s never really known either Paul or Norah—the secret that “blossomed in the center of his family” kept him from them.

David has chosen to move out of his house and live platonically with Rosemary rather than stay with his own family. This shows just how deeply he believes—or wants to believe—that in “raising” Rosemary and providing for her, he can repent for his mistakes with Phoebe years ago.



For years, David and Rosemary have lived together in this duplex—Rosemary has offered to pay rent, but David has refused, insisting that she spend her money on school instead. His motives in raising Rosemary and Jack up in this house are not “entirely altruistic”—even Rosemary once observed that she “fill[s] up the place left by the daughter [David] gave away.” David can’t argue with this—it’s even true that over the years, Rosemary and Paul have become friends, and even behave sometimes like brother and sister.

David knows—as does Rosemary—that in sheltering her and Jack, he’s seeking absolution for the mistakes he’s made in the past. But along the way, he has indeed come to create a sort of new family—a family in which even the angsty Paul is a participant.



David goes downstairs, admiring the paper cuttings in Jack’s room before putting on his shoes and preparing to go for a run. He heads outside and greets Rosemary and Jack. Rosemary tells him that she has her last-ever class tonight, and David congratulates her and apologizes for forgetting—he’s been busy, he says, with his new clinic, which turns away no patient regardless of their insurance situation.

David has tried to repent in other ways—the clinic which treats patients of all financial standings is yet another way David has tried to give back to the community and make up for his sins and errors. He gave up Phoebe because of a prejudice—but now, he turns away no one.



Rosemary tells David she has news for him. She has been offered a job back in Harrisburg, her hometown—and wants to move back home. She has recently reconciled with her family, and wants to be near them—plus, she says, the job will pay for her to go to college. Though David has tears in his eyes as he hears the news, he congratulates Rosemary. Rosemary tries her best to express her gratitude to David for essentially saving her life—but after so many years, she stumbles over the words. Rosemary also tells David that he should at last tell Norah and Paul the truth. David says he can't promise Rosemary he will.

David reflects on a time, several years ago, when he set up trust funds for both Jack and Phoebe. He located Caroline's address and drove out to Pittsburgh, determined to find where she and Phoebe lived and then at last come clean to Norah—but at the last moment, as he approached the house and saw Phoebe, Caroline, and Al through the front window, he knew he couldn't disrupt their family. He got back in his car and drove away, determined to "spare" his family the pain of knowing that Phoebe had moved through her whole life unaware of them.

Rosemary interrupts David's thoughts by telling him she has one more piece of news—she is planning to marry her long-term boyfriend, Stuart. He is going to come to Harrisburg with her. David says that he's happy for Rosemary, and all her news is making him feel old. Rosemary laughs, and asks David if he'll give her away at her wedding in a few weeks. He promises he will, and asks Rosemary to send **photographs** of her and Jack's lives in Harrisburg. Rosemary says she will. David has given up photography, exhausted by the "task of trying to transform the world into something else."

David is about to set off on his run, but Rosemary says she forgot to tell him that Paul called from Seville, where he's studying flamenco guitar. Rosemary says Paul didn't leave a number, but sounded happy and promised to call again. David stretches and then sets off on his run.

As David runs, he realizes it is Norah's birthday today. He thinks back to the early days of their marriage and becomes determined to go to her house—their old house—and tell her the truth, once and for all. He turns down the street where he used to live, but finds Norah's driveway empty. He catches his breath, and then lets himself in through the back door for a drink of water. He walks through the house, taking in the changes Norah has made in the years since he's left.

Rosemary is moving on—just like a real daughter would at her age. David is sad to see her go, but there's also a twinge of hope and gratefulness for the chance Rosemary has given him to redeem himself. He doesn't know, though, whether he'll be able to live up to the hopes she has for him, and come clean at last.



David continually feels pulled in the direction of the right thing—but is unable to make himself go through with it. The lie he told years ago has grown so large that dismantling it would affect not only his family, but the new family Phoebe has become a valued part of.



David no longer believes that photography can save or transform him—and yet he's still attached to the potential photographs hold, and longs for picture of Jack so that he can experience the ethereal freezing of time he's chased all these years.



This passage shows that while there may still be some lingering tension between Paul and David, they do have a relationship after all these years.



David once again edges close to telling the truth once and for all—before being foiled or sidetracked by another element of life. This shows that even the attempt to expose or redeem secrets is often futile—life gets in the way of redemption.



In the kitchen, near the phone, there is a yellow legal pad for messages. David picks up a pen and begins writing a note to Norah—he tries several different ways to communicate the truth, but feels written words are insufficient. He tears the paper up. Hearing the bathroom sink dripping, David goes out to the shed and gathers tools to fix the leaking faucet. While he works, he hears Norah’s voicemail pick up—a friend is leaving a message wishing her a good trip in Europe, and David remembers that she’s gone for a few weeks with her new boyfriend. Finished fixing the sink, David returns to the kitchen where he writes her a brief note—“I fixed the bathroom sink. Happy birthday.” David leaves, locks the door behind him, and continues his run.

David chooses to perform an act of grace and service to better Norah’s life rather than leaving her to find a secret that will shatter everything she knows. At this point in their lives, this in and of itself is an act of kindness—David has waited too long, and now the secret between them, he believes, holds too much weight and power.



CHAPTER 20: JULY 1988

Norah and Bree are sitting on a stone bench in the gardens at the Louvre museum in Paris, waiting for Paul. They have made a plan to meet Paul, who is traveling in Europe with his flautist girlfriend. Apart from this plan, made months ago, before Paul left for Europe, Norah has known nothing of his itinerary—and so has been unable to reach him the last few weeks to let him know that David has died after being struck by a “massive heart attack” during a run. Paul has missed the funeral—he and David “never really resolved” the issues between them.

Ironically, David has died of a heart attack. He was so devastated by June’s heart-related death that he pushed Phoebe away, believing she was destined from birth for a similar fate. All along, it was he who was fated to die of a matter of the heart—a metaphor for the ways in which David’s secrets and lies weighed on him too heavily for him to sustain any longer. .



Norah’s boyfriend Frederic, who works for IBM, is working in the countryside for the day, and so she and Bree are meeting Paul alone. Bree touches Norah’s shoulder and tells her that once Paul arrives, she’ll “slip away” so that Norah can deliver the news privately. Norah thanks Bree for her discretion, and for all the help planning David’s funeral. Though the two of them have been divorced for six years, Norah felt responsible for putting a memorial service together for him—and hundreds of people, many of them patients at David’s new clinic, showed up to mourn him.

Through it all, Bree has been there for Norah—though now Norah is the one with the free spirit and the wandering heart, traveling the world with her lover. Norah mourns David, and after all these years she felt, at the time of his death, not resentment but the desire to help the community that loved him mourn him as well.



Norah spots Paul walking across the garden, and stands up to hug him. Bree embraces him, too, but then says she has to be off. As Bree walks away, Norah begins to cry. Paul asks her what’s wrong, and she asks him to sit with her on the bench. She tells him that David died nine days ago of a heart attack, and watches grief and confusion spread across Paul’s face. She tells him that the funeral was last week, and apologizes that there was no time to track him down before the service. Paul admits that he is shocked by how much he “care[s]” that David is dead. Norah tells Paul that David loved him, no matter their differences—he just had “a very hard time revealing himself to anyone.”

Paul’s reaction to David’s death shows that, although the two of them had a relationship when he died, they were never able to repair the full extent of the damage done in Paul’s youth—Paul feels he never really knew his father, and his emotions upon hearing of his death are shock and confusion rather than grief and sorrow.



Norah tells Paul that she empathizes with the feelings he must be having—that there was “a wall too high to get over” between David and the two of them. Still, she assures him that David loved them both very much. Paul cries softly, and asks Norah if she is going to marry Frederic. Norah loves Frederic deeply, and the two of them have a lot in common—they’re both divorced with grown children, and both have demanding jobs. Norah is deeply attracted to Frederic, and just thinking of him makes her feel warm inside. Still, she wonders if she should marry him—but now she admits to Paul that she can indeed see building a life with him, and that she knows herself better now than she did when she embarked upon her first marriage.

Norah notices Paul’s face brighten, and watches as he waves to a slender, graceful woman across the park. Paul tells Norah that the woman is his girlfriend, Michelle, and he goes over to greet her before bringing her over to meet Norah. The three of them talk for a while, but when Paul invites Norah to dinner she declines—as much as she wants to spend time with her son, she senses a “restlessness” in him. Norah says she’ll meet Paul for breakfast in the morning instead, and then he and Michelle walk her to the metro.

It is dusk by the time Norah gets back to the hotel where she and Frederic are staying. She goes out to the courtyard, orders a glass of wine, and waits for Frederic. When he arrives, they catch up on their days. Norah tells Frederic that she broke the news about David’s death to Paul, and that Paul is in love. The two of them order dinner, and as Norah considers how far she’s come in life, she feels deeply at peace and incredibly alive.

CHAPTER 21: NOVEMBER 1988

Caroline is riding the bus with Al, Phoebe, and Phoebe’s boyfriend Robert—another boy with a developmental disability who joyfully greets all the other passengers on the bus with a handshake before sitting down next to Phoebe. They are all on their way to the Upside Down Society’s annual dance. Caroline can tell that Robert and Phoebe are in love, and is happy for them for having found such a “rare” thing. As the bus moves through the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, Phoebe counts aloud how many stops away they are from their destination.

At their stop, Caroline realizes that Al has nodded off. She shakes him awake, and they all disembark the bus. Caroline expresses worry for Al—he still drives his rig, but as the two of them get older, they tire more easily and long for time to themselves. Caroline asks Al if he’s going to be in good enough shape to head out on the road tomorrow morning. Al insists he’s fine.

As Norah reflects on her dead ex-husband, she laments that she could never quite get close to him despite the promising start to their marriage. Now that she is older, she’s a better advocate for herself—and she believes that if she chooses to marry Frederic, she’ll be doing so out of true love rather than the mere desire to be taken care of.



Norah, who was once so afraid of losing Paul, growing distant from him, or having anything bad happen to him, has now learned that her son is his own person—he needs to be able to have his own freedom and make his own choices (and mistakes.)



Though Norah is saddened by David’s death, at the end of the day, she’s ultimately just grateful for the life she has—and for the fact that whatever thorns grew up between her and David, she was able to hack her way out of them and begin anew on her own terms.



Phoebe is growing up—and though Caroline never had the same degree of panic and nervousness about Phoebe that Norah had about Paul, now, as Phoebe grows older, Caroline does feel happiness mixed with a tinge of worry.



Al is getting older, too. His tiredness in this passage—and the unique way it could affect him at his job—foreshadow that a change is coming for him.



Last week, Caroline received a letter from a law firm downtown, instructing her to contact the office “regarding an account in [her] name.” She called at once, and learned that David Henry died three months ago—before his passing, he set up an account for Phoebe. Caroline doesn’t know how much money is in the account, and she needs to visit the firm to find out. She hasn’t broached the topic with Al yet, and is waiting for the right moment to do so.

At the day center, the dance is in full swing. Al and Caroline join Robert and Phoebe on the dance floor. Phoebe spends time at the center several days a week already, and is on a waiting list for a room of her own. Caroline can tell that Phoebe wants more independence—but as the day of Phoebe’s move inches closer, she finds herself unable to imagine daily life without her daughter.

Caroline steps off the dance floor to get some punch. She doesn’t see Phoebe anywhere, and decides to go look for her. She wanders the halls of the center into the kitchen—where she finds Phoebe and Robert kissing. Caroline tells the two of them to break it up—Phoebe protests that she and Robert are going to get married. Caroline asks Robert to leave her and Phoebe alone for a moment, and he glumly leaves the room. As he passes Caroline, he tells her that he and Phoebe are in love.

After Robert leaves the room, Phoebe crosses her arms and defiantly tells Caroline that people are allowed to kiss the ones they love—she points out that Caroline and Al kiss often, and reminds Caroline that she wants to marry Robert. Caroline tells Phoebe that she can’t get married. Caroline asks Phoebe where the two of them will live, and Phoebe answers simply: she and Robert will buy a house, live there, and have babies. She points out that the two of them have money from their jobs. Caroline reminds Phoebe that she won’t be able to work and have babies at the same time—her heart breaks as she does, knowing she is poking holes in her daughter’s simple, beautiful dreams.

That night, at home, Caroline tells Al about her conversation with Phoebe. They fret about what to do about her burgeoning sexuality and desire for independence. At last, Al reminds Caroline how hard she’s worked all her life for Phoebe’s autonomy and independence—maybe, he says, it’s time to let Phoebe move to the group home and have some freedom. Caroline tells Al that she fears he feels burdened by Phoebe’s presence, and is afraid he’s going to leave the two of them. Al asks why Caroline is lashing out at him—in response, she shows him the letter from the law firm.

Caroline doesn’t feel very much about David Henry’s passing—she’s confused, but also intrigued by whatever he has left behind. As usual, Caroline wants to work through the new information she’s gotten before sharing it with Al—she still doesn’t quite trust that all of the issues in her life won’t scare Al away, even after all these years.



Caroline has made her whole life about Phoebe—caring for her, fighting for her, and raising her. Now that it’s time for Phoebe to have some independence, Caroline is sad—Phoebe is the most important person in her life.



Although Phoebe and Robert are adults, and are clearly very much in love with one another, Caroline knows that they can’t have a normal adult relationship—there are obstacles that prevent them from doing things that other couples do. She wants to spare them both the pain and confusion of being unable to replicate the relationships they see around them.



Caroline hates breaking Phoebe’s heart—or reminding her that she’s different and will face unique challenges in her life—but she knows that, as Phoebe’s mother, it’s her duty to keep her sense of reality in check. Some parts of mothering Phoebe are difficult in unique ways, and Caroline still wrestles with the right course of action sometimes.



Al believes that Phoebe should be able to have the life she wants—there are resources available to her. He doesn’t want her out of the house for any reason other than her own desires—but Caroline, conditioned as she is by society to see Phoebe through others’ eyes, still worries that Al views her daughter as a burden.



Al reads the letter, and suggests the two of them go together to the firm to find out how much money is in the account. He offers to take a day or two off later in the week to help Caroline sort things out. Caroline, relieved by Al's simple outlook and ability to turn her problems into non-issues, expresses how grateful she is for him, and the two of them kiss tenderly.

In the morning, Caroline makes breakfast for her and Al. He suggests the two of them try taking a trip alone soon, leaving Phoebe with a caretaker to see how she does on her own. Caroline says she likes the idea, and wants to make it happen soon. Al leaves in his rig, and Caroline realizes that they need to begin preparing Phoebe to live on her own—the two of them are not going to live forever.

The next day, during dinner, Phoebe takes out a small plastic puzzle and begins playing with it. Caroline asks where Phoebe got the puzzle, and Phoebe tells her that she got it from a friend she met on the bus. Phoebe also divulges that this new friend, Mike, asked her to come over to his house to show her his pet bird. Caroline, sensing something fishy, offers to take the bus with Phoebe tomorrow so that she, too, can meet "Mike." The next day on the bus, there is no sign of Mike. Caroline sadly tells Phoebe that whoever the man was, he was probably trying to trick her. Caroline reminds Phoebe that not everyone she meets is good and nice.

On Friday, Caroline arrives at Phoebe's job at a local copy shop to pick her up from work. She watches through the window as Phoebe makes copies and jokes with a co-worker. She marvels at how far Phoebe has come—but the incident on the bus has reignited her concern for Phoebe's well-being and ability to live on her own.

Caroline takes Phoebe home. When they arrive, the phone is ringing. Caroline picks it up—and learns that Al has driven off the road and been involved in an accident. He is in the hospital nearby with a broken leg. Caroline hangs up, carefully explains to Phoebe what has happened, and drives both of them to the hospital to visit Al. Caroline is grateful that nothing worse has happened to the man she loves, and embraces him as soon as she sees him. Phoebe, frightened, begins crying. Al comforts Phoebe, and helps her understand what has happened to him. When she asks where his truck is, Al tells her it's "really smashed up."

Time and time again, Caroline thinks Al will grow overwhelmed or frustrated and leave her—and time and time again, Al proves that he loves her and Phoebe wholly and steadfastly, and is committed to their family.



Caroline, for all her fears and reservations about Phoebe's independence—and what it means for her own life—realizes that it's time to start making a change.



Caroline is suspicious of Phoebe's new "friend"—and rightly so. She knows that the world is cruel to people like Phoebe, and that Phoebe's trusting personality can put her in a unique kind of danger. These interactions are the kind of things Caroline fears as she considers letting Phoebe go out into the world on her own—and they give her pause about moving Phoebe to the group home permanently.



Caroline knows that Phoebe can hold a job and interact with the world—but she can't shake her fear that something terrible could befall Phoebe if she's in the wrong place at the wrong time.



Al's accident is a bad one, but thankfully he escapes with a manageable injury. At the same time, between his exhaustion, his desire to travel the world with Caroline at his side, and now his accident, it's clear that Al needs a change—their whole family does.



Al comes home after two days in the hospital. He is a terrible patient, and as the days go by, Caroline finds herself exhausted and worn out. A week after the accident, Caroline is preparing to pick Phoebe up from work when a noise out the back door startles her. She looks out the window to find Robert and Phoebe standing there. Phoebe happily announces that she took the day off after swapping shifts with a co-worker, and she spent the day with Robert. Phoebe reiterates that she and Robert are getting married. Caroline, frustrated, tells Robert that he needs to leave and go home.

Before he goes, Robert presents Caroline with a bunch of red roses. When Caroline asks what they're for, he tells her that it's Saturday—she realizes that Saturday is usually the day Al comes home from his long haul, with flowers and a gift in hand. Caroline realizes that Robert and Phoebe must have purchased the flowers together. Warmed by the gesture, she tells them both to come inside.

Caroline hears Al calling for her, and goes up to check on him. She asks him how his pain is, and he tells her he's feeling okay, but announces that he's not going to drive a truck anymore. He confesses that a part of him has been expecting an accident like this for years—now that it's finally come, he doesn't want to push his luck further. Caroline tells Al it would be a good time for him to retire—she reveals that she has gone down to the bank to check on the account for Phoebe, and found that there is a lot of money in it. Though the money's just for Phoebe, it's enough that she'll be taken care of—and Caroline and Al can live off their own savings.

As Caroline heads back downstairs to fix dinner, she hears Phoebe and Robert laughing and joking together in the living room. Caroline pauses and takes a deep breath—everything is all right. Her husband is home, her daughter is happy, and all is calm.

CHAPTER 22: JULY 1, 1989

Since his death, David's **photographs** have become popular and valuable. Norah enters his old darkroom studio for the first time in years in order to get the collection ready for some curators to come view the following day. She is nervous about the task ahead of her, afraid of going through boxes that contain years of memories, but she sets to work calmly and methodically, determined to get through it.

Phoebe's desire for independence, love, and control over her own life will not be quelled. Caroline begins to realize that she can't keep Phoebe under her control forever—Phoebe is a grown woman with her own wants and needs, and she's indeed capable of steering the ship of her own life.



Caroline has been so worried about Phoebe and Robert making a mistake or being unable to provide for one another—but this scene shows that Caroline and Al have given both of them a model relationship to emulate, and a sense of what true love feels like.



Al and Caroline have a new opportunity unfolding ahead of them—all the strife and confusion they've been dealing with lately may have an answer, and that answer may lie in relinquishing the tight control they've tried to maintain over several different aspects of their lives.



Caroline reminds herself to be at peace with all she has—she's built a good life for herself and her family, and they all deserve to enjoy their separate but collective hard-won happiness.



David's photography always symbolized his desire to freeze time in its tracks and contain the past—now, as Norah dives into years and years of David's work, it's almost like the opposite is happening and the past is coming alive once again.



As Norah picks through years and years of photographs, she can't help but be drawn in by her memories. When her emotions grow to be too much she takes a break, going inside for a Coke. As she thinks of her memories in this house, she feels a twinge of sadness at the idea that, in two months, she is going to marry Frederic and "leave this place forever"—the two of them are moving to France.

Norah, refreshed and renewed, returns to the darkroom to finish what she started. As she opens up several new boxes of **photographs**, she's puzzled by their contents—they all hold pictures of babies and young girls. The photos are not fetishistic or sexual in nature—the photos seem instead to highlight innocence. The boxes are marked "SURVEY," and as she opens the last box marked with the same name, she sees that it contains photographs of Paul at every stage of his life. She sees that David has been photographing anonymous girls alongside Paul to keep a "record of [Phoebe's] absence." Norah is stunned by her husband's "silent, secret longing."

Norah spends several hours looking through the SURVEY boxes, and stops only when she hears the crunch of gravel in the driveway—someone is pulling up to the house. She hurries to the front door and answers it to find a "vaguely familiar" woman standing on the porch. As she looks into the woman's eyes, she realizes it is Caroline Gill. Norah asks Caroline what she's doing here, and Caroline says there's something "rather difficult" she needs to discuss with Norah. Norah tells Caroline that David is dead, but Caroline says she already knows.

Norah is confused, but she lets Caroline come inside. They go together to the kitchen and make small talk while Norah pours them each a glass of water. Norah sits down at the table with Caroline, and Caroline begins speaking. She says there's no easy way to say what she has to say—she reveals that on the night Phoebe and Paul were born, Phoebe did not die. She explains that Phoebe was born with Down syndrome and that David, believing Phoebe would have a short and painful life, asked Caroline to take her away. Caroline explains that rather than leave Phoebe with strangers, she herself took the baby in—Phoebe, she says, is alive, and "very well."

Norah is stunned by the information, and tells Caroline that she "must be crazy." Even as she says the words, though, she feels all the "jagged pieces of her life" start to make sense. Caroline slides some **photographs** of Phoebe across the table, and Norah asks why Caroline would do such a thing. Caroline admits that, for many years, she believed her motives in taking Phoebe were pure—now, though, she knows well enough to see that she wanted a child of her own badly, and wanted to sustain the secret love she had for David.

Norah goes for a Coke rather than an alcoholic drink, symbolizing that she's attained a sense of control over her coping mechanisms over the years. She's getting ready to move on from this part of her life—and though she clearly has anxiety about it, she's getting through it at her own pace.



Norah and David hardly ever spoke about Phoebe—all because David refused to. He kept his grief about their daughter under lock and key, and he and Norah grew estranged from one another because of that impulse when all along they could have found refuge in one another. Norah is touched and saddened to realize that her husband always missed their daughter as much as she did.



The unexpected arrival of Caroline Gill is confusing for Norah—but readers know exactly what's coming, and realize that after all these years it will be Caroline who brings Norah the truth rather than David.



Caroline comes straight out with the truth about Phoebe. She explains why David gave her away—again expressing empathy for the painful decision he made rather than judgement. Caroline's life, she knows, has been changed by David's actions—but things for her have unfolded for the better, while Norah has had to grapple with unimaginable pain and loss every day.



Norah wants to deny the information coming at her—but even as she rejects it, she can't deny that it explains so much of the unfathomable, painful parts of her life and her marriage to David. Caroline, too, is forced to admit some unpleasant truths—including the fact that she was not entirely altruistic in rescuing Phoebe.



Norah thinks back to the memorial service they had for Phoebe, shaking and breathing heavily. She wonders aloud why David would never have told her the truth in all their years together. As she looks back on the years of their marriage, though, she understands what the weight of his terrible secret did to him, and large swaths of their life begin to make “a terrible kind of sense.”

Caroline slides a piece of paper with an address and phone number on it over to Norah. She explains that Phoebe has had a happy life—she is going to move into a group home next month, and has maintained a good job at a photocopy shop for years. Caroline says that Phoebe does not know anything about David or Norah, and that if Norah decides she doesn’t want to meet Phoebe, things will stay that way. Norah says she doesn’t know what she wants—she’s in shock. Caroline says that Norah can come visit any time she wants, then stands up to leave.

After Caroline departs, Norah stumbles through the house, thinking of all the mundane tasks she has to do. She has to take care of David’s **photos**, meet with a furniture appraiser, and tomorrow, host Paul. She wonders how she’s going to get through any of it with all the anger and grief now swirling inside of her. Norah goes back out to David’s studio—she knows that his collection is valued at about fifty thousand dollars, but as she looks upon the photographs, she feels only revulsion. She throws the boxes haphazardly out onto the lawn, then goes inside to take a shower.

For the rest of the evening, Norah drinks and naps, slipping in and out of sleep and dreaming of Phoebe. She wakes at dawn and looks outside to see that David’s **photographs** are scattered everywhere. Norah gets dressed, goes outside, and drags as many boxes as she can to the backyard. She places them in a pile, and lights them on fire. “You bastard,” she thinks as she watches David’s life’s work go up in flames.

Norah is angry with David—but she also sees now that he struggled in an profound but unfathomable way with the secret he held. Norah felt one kind of grief all her life, while David felt another—and their separate experiences ripped them apart.



Caroline wants Norah to be a part of Phoebe’s life. Years ago, when she met David in Pittsburgh, she wasn’t sure what she wanted, and ran away before she could decide. Now, she knows that the right thing to do is to include Norah in Phoebe’s life, and give their two families the chance to heal at last.



Norah is overwhelmed by the introduction of this secret into her life. She still has responsibilities—but they’ve all been eclipsed by the magnitude of what she’s just learned, and how her life has become upended in the process. Nothing she knew to be true was real—and the man she tried to love lied to her for over twenty-five years.



Norah’s drinking problem rears its head again as she seeks to block out the pain of the huge secret she’s just learned. Her anger at David is immense—and she tries to get back at him, even in death, by destroying that which he always held more dearly to his heart than even his family: his work of trying to stop time.



CHAPTER 23: JULY 2-4, 1989

Early one morning in their apartment in Cincinnati, Paul and Michelle argue about the future. Somehow, a simple discussion has spiraled into a fight about marriage and having children. Michelle accuses Paul of speeding up their relationship so that he can have his “heart’s desire”—a child—at the expense of her own career. At the apex of their fight, Michelle goes into the bathroom to take a shower. Paul taps on the door and tells her he’s leaving to go to Lexington to help his mother pack up the house. He tells Michelle he’ll be back in time for her concert.

The narrative is hinting that Paul is at the risk of becoming like David—trying to salvage the past or make up for what’s lost, when in reality, there is no fixing the mistakes of time gone by.



As Paul drives into Lexington, he's overcome by memories of his childhood. As he pulls up to his childhood home, he turns the ignition off and sits in the driveway, thinking about the last year of his life. His father is dead, his mother is marrying a new man, and Paul, as "caretaker of the past," must now help her pack up their home.

Paul's desire to have a child seems like a desire to bridge the gap left in his life by his dead sister—but now, as Paul pulls up to his old house, he shows that he does have a sense of maturity and duty when it comes to putting the past in its place.



As Paul steps out of the car, he notices that the air seems to be full of **snow**—as he catches a flake, he realizes it is not snow but ash. He goes inside, calling for Norah, but cannot find her. He goes out the back door and finds her sitting on the back porch, watching a dwindling bonfire on the back lawn. He looks around at the scattered boxes, and realizes with horror that his mother is burning his father's **photographs**. Norah, seeing Paul's face, tells him not to worry—she was only able to burn one whole box before she lost courage and salvaged the rest.

Snow, a symbol for lies and cover-ups, seems to be falling over the yard—but as Paul touches the flakes, he realizes they are ash. This symbolizes that the truth is about to come to light at long last.



Paul asks his mother what has happened to make her angry enough to burn David's **photos**. Norah tells him that yesterday, she had a visit from Caroline Gill, the nurse who helped deliver Paul and his sister. Caroline, she says, revealed that Paul's twin has been alive all these years, living in Pittsburgh with Down syndrome—and David never told them.

Just as Caroline knew there was no easy way to break the news about Phoebe, Norah knows there's no way to ease Paul into the realization that his sister is, after all, alive and well.



Paul is shocked and saddened to hear that his father sent his sister away because she was "not perfect." He feels anger, but then relief, as he begins to realize why his father demanded perfection of him all his life. Paul asks how David could keep such a secret, and Norah confesses she's been up all night wondering the same thing. Paul remembers one afternoon, helping David develop **photographs**. His father told him that the word "camera" came from the French word "chamber," or room. "To be *in camera*," David said then, "was to operate in secret."

Just as Norah felt a strange sense of relief at the news and began to look at the events of the past with a new kind of understanding, Paul, too is now able to see the ways in which his entire life was calibrated by his father's secrets.



Norah gets up and retrieves some **photographs** of Phoebe—she brings them back to Paul so that he can look at them. In one of the photos, Phoebe is playing basketball, and Paul snidely remarks that David gave away "the wrong kid." Norah tells Paul not to be bitter; Paul retorts that he can't help but be bitter—David went so far, he says, as to give Phoebe a fake grave, which they visited often.

Though Paul feels a sense of relief at the news, he's still angry with his father for putting him and his mother through so much, when he could have eased all their pain and suffering at any time.



Paul asks why Caroline came to tell the truth after so many years. Norah says that Caroline doesn't want anything from them—she was just “opening a door.” A silence falls over them, and Paul suggests they get to work cleaning up the **photographs**. Paul stays in Lexington for several days, helping Norah. He calls Michelle to try and explain why he won't be back for her concert, but she hangs up on him and refuses to take any more of his calls. On Tuesday, after the photographs and furniture have all been squared away, Norah and Paul get in the car and drive to Pittsburgh to meet Phoebe.

Pulling up to Caroline's house, Paul and Norah spot her working in the garden. As Norah sees Caroline, she admits to Paul that she may have made a mistake—she's not sure she can go through with meeting Phoebe. Paul reminds her that Caroline is expecting them, and they've driven such a long way. Suddenly, Paul sees another figure emerge from the house into the garden, carrying two glasses of water—it is Phoebe. She is pale and stocky, but her face's features are delicate. Norah puts a hand to her heart as she sees her daughter for the first time.

After a few moments, Norah and Paul get out of the car. Caroline and Phoebe see them, and stand up from the garden to meet them. As the four of them come together, they are all nervous—Paul looks down at his sister, unsure of how to talk to her, highly aware of how different she is. Phoebe, though, is the one to break the silence—she extends her hand to Paul and says she's pleased to meet him. She does the same to Norah, and then Caroline suggests they all go inside to get out of the heat and drink some of the iced tea Phoebe made earlier.

Inside, Phoebe shows off her loom and her weaving projects while Caroline fixes drinks. The four of them sit down together and Norah, deeply nervous and unsure of what to say, tells Phoebe that she's her mother—and offers Phoebe the chance to come live with her. Phoebe, though, takes hold of Caroline's hand, and explains that Caroline is her mother, that she is going to get married to Robert, and that she doesn't want to live anywhere else. Caroline comforts Phoebe, who is clearly overwhelmed by all the information.

Paul and Norah pack up their old house in a metaphorical cleaning-up of the past. They are ready to move on from the part of their lives that represents pain, secrecy, and suffering—and begin a new chapter marked by openness, togetherness, and directness.



As Norah spots her daughter for the first time ever—and Paul spots his sister—emotions are running high. The two of them are moving into uncharted territory, and though the girl they're reuniting with is their blood, she has been living a life of her own for twenty-five years.



Though Paul isn't repulsed by Phoebe, he's unable to focus on anything other than her disability as he meets her for the first time. This, too, is a kind of prejudice—and yet Phoebe subverts Paul's expectations of her through her outgoing personality and directness.



This passage makes it clear that, though Norah wants to reconnect with Phoebe and rebuild the last twenty-five years, Phoebe knows who her family is—it is the family Caroline has built through love and hard work.



Norah apologizes to Phoebe, and says she just wants the chance to get to know her. She walks her request back, and says that all she meant to express is that her doors are always open to Phoebe. Phoebe agrees that “maybe” one day she’ll come and visit. She then abruptly stands up and invites Paul to come to her room and look at her record player. On the way upstairs, Phoebe tells Paul about her boyfriend, Robert, and explains that they’re getting married. She asks Paul if he’s married, and he says he isn’t. Phoebe turns around and stares at Paul. He tells her she’s being impolite, and she replies that Paul looks sad. He admits that he is indeed “very, very sad.”

Up in Phoebe’s room, she puts on a Beatles record, and the two siblings talk about music. Paul tells her he plays the guitar, and Phoebe says she loves trombones. She asks Paul where he lives, and if he lives alone. When he says he lives by himself in Cincinnati, she tells him he’s “lucky.” As Paul watches Phoebe change the record and listens to her talk about her job at the copy shop, he realizes that whatever pity he felt for her at first is misplaced—Phoebe is happy and content with her simple successes in life, and he suddenly feels sheepish about his own constant desire to impress other people.

CHAPTER 24: SEPTEMBER 1, 1989

Paul stands outside a church beside Phoebe, listening to organ music spill from inside as his mother and Frederic—newly married—happily head outside into a spray of confetti. Phoebe remarks how pretty the wedding is, and asks Paul if Norah is really going to live in France. He says that she is—and reminds Phoebe that the two of them are scheduled to go visit Norah and Frederic in a couple of months. Paul sees worry flash across Phoebe’s face, and he asks her what’s wrong—she replies that she doesn’t want to eat any snails while she’s there.

As Paul and Phoebe watch Norah and Frederic join the party on the lawn and cut into their wedding cake, Phoebe talks dreamily about her own wedding. She says she wants a big cake, and “lots and lots of pink flowers.” Paul thinks of Phoebe’s parents, Caroline and Al, who have left her here for the weekend while they take their first real vacation together.

Paul asks Phoebe if she likes Pittsburgh—he has just been offered a job there with an orchestra. Phoebe says Pittsburgh is nice. Paul asks her if she’d like it if he moved there—she says it would be nice, and as a bonus, he could come to her wedding. Phoebe’s face darkens, though, as she remarks how unfair it is that weddings are so expensive. Paul silently thinks to himself how unfair a lot of Phoebe’s life has been—in spite of the fact that she deserves the world.

As Paul and Phoebe get to know one another, he is surprised and slightly off-put by her directness, emotional acuity, and outspokenness. Paul, reeling from a breakup, his father’s death, and the sudden news about Phoebe, is full of conflicting emotions that he feels he perhaps shouldn’t have—but the practical and straightforward Phoebe accepts his sadness and doesn’t shame him for it.



As readers see Phoebe through Paul’s eyes, Edwards suggests that, for all of the ways in which society pities those who are disabled or different, it is often the hard-working people on the fringes who are the most well-adjusted. Paul is learning that the differences between him and his sister aren’t as insurmountable as he thought they might be.



Phoebe has spent all her life growing up in one family, but now, she is happy and relaxed around her “new” family, as well. The way Phoebe experiences the world has shielded her from the grief and confusion that Paul, Norah, and David suffered for years.



As the novel approaches its end, many characters are getting the things they’ve longed for. Norah reconnects with her daughter and finds love to boot, while Caroline and Al explore a new part of their relationship.



Paul’s desire to move to Pittsburgh shows that he wants to spend more time around his sister and get to know her better. He clearly loves her, and yet there is a bittersweet quality to their relationship, as he knows that he has advantages in life that Phoebe never will.



Phoebe runs off to dance, and Norah comes over to Paul. The two of them watch her, and Paul, stricken by pain and sadness, asks Norah how David could never have told them about her. Norah encourages Paul not to be angry with David, but instead to have empathy for how his life became warped by such a huge secret. Paul accuses Norah of defending David—she says that what she’s really trying to do is forgive him.

When Paul tells Norah that he might take a job in Pittsburgh, Norah warns him that he can’t “fix the past”—his life is his own, now, and Phoebe is okay without them. Norah embraces Paul and tells him how proud she is of him.

At the end of the celebration, as Frederic and Norah drive off together, Paul and Phoebe get into Paul’s car and head back to Pittsburgh—Paul is going to stay with her for a couple days. As they drive through the countryside, Paul considers all the what-ifs of his and Phoebe’s lives, and wonders what things would be like had they been able to grow up together. Before getting on the interstate, Paul decides to take a detour.

Paul and Phoebe arrive at the Lexington cemetery, where they visit David’s grave. As they look at the headstone, Paul feels an overwhelming sadness, and Phoebe comforts him. Paul is grateful to be able to see through the haze of anger he’s felt for so long. Paul is startled and touched as Phoebe begins to sing a hymn in her thin, lovely voice. Paul joins her in song and takes her hand. It is small, he notes—“just like their mother’s.”

Though Norah has great reason to be angry with David and rail against the course her life took in the wake of his cruel decision, she instead is choosing empathy—she wants to be able to forgive her late ex-husband, move forward, and be grateful for the things she does have.



Norah warns Paul against making the same mistakes his father made—trying to reclaim the past, or even alter it.



Even though Paul has heard his mother’s advice, he can’t help but wonder what his and Phoebe’s lives might have looked like had their father made a different decision. Paul has let go of his resentment, but has not healed fully.



At David’s gravesite, Paul unexpectedly finds peace as he shares a profound moment of connection with the sister he spent his whole life dreaming of. They may have been deprived of getting to grow up together—but they have one another to lean on now.





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