Characters

Jill: married to George, likes to play the violin and classical music in an orchestra, doesn’t want to be a teacher (p.110), brought up in an orphanage (p. 91) She was “a girl whose life was given to the study of the violin and had no other interests” → “That was not quite true”

Everything in her life is described as ordinary except when the narrator describes her playing the violin p.82 “Even with me turning somersaults she played in public.

Majestically thickened, with her long red hair lying in a bush around her shoulders, her face broad and glowing, her expression full of somber concentration, she played a solo in her most important recital so far. The Mendelssohn violin concerto”.

Her pregnancy is for the conservatory people, “treated [...] tactfully, as if it was a tumor”

Here, when she plays, her stomach’s “majestically thickened”

George: husband to Jill, soldier in the war in Europe in 1945 where he dies and leaves Jill widowed and alone to raise their unborn child. Only direct speech of him p.84 “Well I’m off, George said, I’m off to die a hero on the field at Passchendaele…” → shows he has a sense of humour.

Ailsa: George’ sister 12 yrs older than him p.84 (oldest of family). Jill’s sister in law.

Caregiver with her sister Iona when George dies in the 1945 war in Europe (intruder? / caregiver). Becomes Jill’s close friend in the end. P 85

They “wore new hats and suits, as if they were the ones who had been recently married”

Ailsa is seen as the dominating older sister p84, she often scolds Iona. Is worried about what other people think: “Get her [the mother] out the way if she starts make a spectacle”

Iona: George and Ailsa’s other sibling, intruder into Jill’s life as sort of takes Jill’s place as other of the baby, takes care of the baby when Jill is more into her music. For the baby she is the “unofficial mother” Iona has “Never been able to exert authority over anybody in her live” → probably why she likes the baby so much, because the baby is listening to her. Iona is starting to take control of the situation, repetition of *screaming* x6 - crucial, key moment to the story (p.103)

Dr. + Mrs Shantz : Mrs. Kirkham’s (George’s mum) neighbours + Dr Shantz was George’s friend. Mrs Shantz helps Jill have birth. She defends Jill all the way.

Both sisters apparently “don’t seem to share his sense of humo[u]r either”, have to take care of their mum Mrs. Kirkham : has trouble remembering things : p.86 “But the truth comes back to her suddenly as it went away “is there news?” She says. “News about George?” And it’s then that the weeping starts that Aisla was afraid of.

Every character has their own ways of dealing with grief.

Jill describes it as : p.88 “She had lost something, certainly. But not something she really got hold of, or understood as more than a hypothetical layout of the future”
Baby: unknown name—can be thought to be a girl at the end? develops an attitude before she is even born, we want to punch her (p.83). seems like she's a know-it-all, more intelligent than the average baby as makes so many remarks before her birth she's a baby and an adult simultaneously

Group work:

**Group A:** Relationships

**Group B:** Life/death/rebirth

**Group C:** Women's struggle

**Group D:** Dreams

**Answers:**

**Relationships**

- **Failing relationships:** Mrs + children, George + Jill
- **Mother & child**
- **(Re)new(ed) relationships:** Jill & child, Ailsa & Jill
- **Sibling rivalry** (mother intervenes!)
- **Loyalty / Disloyalty:** Sisters-in-law with Jill & Child

**Life/Death/Rebirth**

- New life for Jill & Baby
- Idea of survival love
- “Death of Iona + mother due to mental illness
- Baby’s choice to live or not = fragile boundary between life + death
- **July 1945**
- **BORN DURING A FUNERAL**

**Women's struggle**

- Motherhood + domestic duty
- Career / Independence
- Marital choices

**Dreams**

- Begins with dream (induced by taking Ailsa’s medication)
- Is it really “just a dream”? → Fiction / Reality
- Beginning is foreboding + foreshadowing

When the baby gets covered by the blanket when Jill feed her breast milk with sprinkles of sleeping pill, we can be redirected back to the beginning of the story—**the mother’s**
dream where she is lost, panicked and confused as she can’t remember where she left her baby; in the snow or not? for how long?, since when? - > linked as she is covered by the blanket and cannot be seen- in reality Iona panics as she can’t find the baby and thinks she’s dead and in dream- Jill panics as can’t find the baby and aso thinks she’s dead.
-> reference to the title

**Key quotations:**

P.98 “We were monsters to each other. Jill and I.”
P.83 “She thinks that once I’m out I won’t give her so much trouble”
P.103 "Jill took care of the baby. She went out and found the baby and covered it up.”
Reference back to the mother’s dream - the reader is now lost as we can interpret this comment as a flashback to the dream but also we realise that this could actually be reality, and makes us question whether or not it was actually a dream or reality from the start.
P.109 “I believe that it was only at the moment when I decided to come back, when I gave up the fight against my mother (which must have been a fight for something like her total surrender) and when in fact I chose survival over victory (death would have been victory), that I took on my female nature”
P.109 “I don’t believe that I was dead, or that I came back from the dead, but I do think that I was at a distance, from which I might or might not have come back. I think that the outcome was not certain and that will was involved. It was up to me, I mean, to go one way or the other.” - > The narrator made a choice. And , perhaps even more significantly, she attaches a meaning to that choice.
P.91 “Jill really knew nothing about living in a family. She had grown up in an orphanage.”
P.103 “You’v killed my baby”
P.103 “Jill took care of the baby. She went out and found the baby and covered it up”
P.99 “What is it about an infant’s crying that makes it so powerful, able to break down the order you depend on, inside and outside of yourself? It is like a storm—insistent, theatrical, yet in a way pure and uncontrived. It is reproachful rather than supplicating—it comes out of a rage that can’t be dealt with, a birthright rage free of love and pity, ready to crush your brains inside your skull.”

**Last slide**

Last word the story: “ghost” → is she dead or is she not dead????????????
We don’t know what is reality what isn’t
We think we know where we are but we don’t
Reader is left uncertain and lost

**Useful things we found (not needed to be said):**
Summary

She is torn between her child and her career. She meets a man and gets pregnant; the man goes off to war and dies, and she must take care of her fatherless baby. The dead husband's sisters intervene; one, in particular, becomes a kind of unofficial mother. (Meanwhile, the real mother resumes playing her violin. Auditions approach; she must master a piece by Beethoven.) Motherhood and artistic success do battle; whenever the young mother starts to rehearse, her baby screams. Left alone one day with her needy infant, she decides she will sprinkle just a tiny bit of sleeping medication into a bottle of breast milk. This way, she can practice her music in peace. Does the baby survive the dose of drugs? Does the mother make a career for herself? Is it possible to be both a good artist and a good person? What do you sacrifice to get what you want?

Stuff

Dealing with loss:

Secrets and lies: We don't know Iona's past, we don't know George's past, we don't know anything about George's mum

Public gaze: Ailsa's concern (what will the neighbours think?), Jill plays classical music

Life/death/rebirth: Survival love, "death of Iona + mother due to mental illness, July 1945, fragile boundary bw life + death (child's choice)

Relationships: Loyalty/disloyalty: Ailsa + Dr, Dr + Mrs Shantz

Failing relationships: Mrs + children, George + Jill

Mother + child

Renewed relationships: Jill + child, Aila + Jill

Sibling rivalry (mother intervenes!)