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Mrs. Kimble
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Mrs. Kimble didn't begin as a treatise on marriage and divorce. The book, as I first conceived of it, was about a single mother and her child: Birdie (Ken Kimble's first wife) and her son Charlie. As I wrote about these two, I became increasingly curious about Charlie's father. I found myself very drawn to this character, a man who is defined largely by his absence. I wanted to know who he was, how he came into Birdie's life, and where he went when he left.

Ken Kimble is what I call a "serial husband" — a man who marries again and again, who somehow, in spite of his obvious flaws, has no problem finding women to marry. It's a phenomenon I've observed a few times in life, one that raises an obvious question: what exactly is wrong with these women, so willing to pledge their lives to a man they barely know? The answer, I think, has to do with the way women are socialized. We're raised to believe that marriage is what completes us, that unless we've achieved that particular goal, nothing else we accomplish counts for much. This belief has survived feminism, the sexual revolution, the sweeping social changes of the past 50 years. Women, even bright, successful women, still subscribe to it. One result of thinking this way is that we marry the wrong men. The three Mrs. Kimbles are women of different generations; they have different expectations of men, and of themselves. Birdie is a product of the 1950s, a woman who resists learning to drive, who's perfectly happy being a passenger. Joan is in many ways a woman ahead of her time; she chooses career over marriage in an era when few women did, but she's ambivalent about her choices, and in the end chooses a more traditional life. Dinah, who's much younger, expects more from a husband; she's frustrated that Ken isn't a more involved father to their son. Birdie, on the other hand, would have been content to do all the child-raising herself as long as Ken came home every night, paid the bills, acted like a husband, even if he wasn't faithful to her. *Mrs. Kimble* also looks at the changing shape of family, what that word means in an era of rampant divorce, of blended families with all their prefixes: step-this, half-that. Early in the novel, Birdie's shame over being divorced is part of the reason she drinks. She lies about where her husband is; Charlie, who's only seven years old, picks up on her shame and starts lying about it too. At the end of the book we see something of how the world has changed in 25 years, a recognition that blended families can be quite happy and functional, prefixes and all. The three Mrs. Kimbles aren't victims. Ken Kimble isn't some kind of sociopath. He is, in fact, a very ordinary man; he simply takes what is given to him. He is in some sense a blank slate, a cipher; and that works to his advantage. Birdie, Joan and Dinah are looking for different things; yet each is able to convince herself that Ken Kimble is what's missing from her life. The novel examines how and why that happens. In that way *Mrs. Kimble* truly is a meditation on marriage: why women hunger for it, what we're willing to sacrifice in order to have it. I hope that you enjoy *Mrs. Kimble*.