

Synopsis

Sara Godfrey, age 14, is having the terrible summer of her life. She believes that she is hopelessly unattractive. She is discontented but is not sure why. She even complains about looking after her mentally handicapped brother, Charlie, with whom she ordinarily shares a close and loving relationship. At her aunt's insistence, Sara takes Charlie on a walk to the lake to see a flock of migratory swans. The birds fascinate Charlie and Sara has difficulty getting him to leave. That night, when everyone else in the house is asleep, Charlie slips out to return to the lake, becomes disoriented and loses his way. The next morning, when the family discovers him missing, Sara recalls how much Charlie enjoyed the swans, and decides to walk to the lake to see whether he is there. Unable to find him, she returns home and finds that Aunt Willie has telephoned the police and is about to telephone the children's father.

Sam Godfrey moved to Ohio after his wife's death and has rarely returned to West Virginia; Sara is convinced that her father no longer cares about her or Wanda and Charlie. When he does not offer to drive home to join in the search for Charlie, Sara is disgusted. As she is walking to the home of her friend Mary, Sara runs into Joe Melby, a classmate, who offers to join the search. Believing that Joe once stole Charlie's prized watch, Sara rebuffs him. She walks on alone to Mary's, and the two friends resume the search. When Sara mentions how much she dislikes Joe, Mary informs her that Joe did not steal the watch but, in fact, retrieved it from a group of boys who were teasing Charlie. While they are searching, Mary and Sara come across Joe, who has found one of Charlie's

slippers near a fence. Mary leaves to tell the other searchers the news, and Joe and Sara press on together. As they talk, Sara discovers that Joe is kind and funny, and she apologizes for accusing him of stealing. After a careful search, Sara and Joe find Charlie. When they return home, Sara sees the swans flying overhead, and she speculates that the birds are returning to their home, just as she and Charlie have done. Sara is pleasantly surprised when Joe invites her to a party. She is equally surprised when her father telephones and insists on talking with her. After an awkward conversation, Sara gains new insight into her father's limitations and her own strengths. Sara begins feeling more at peace with her world.

