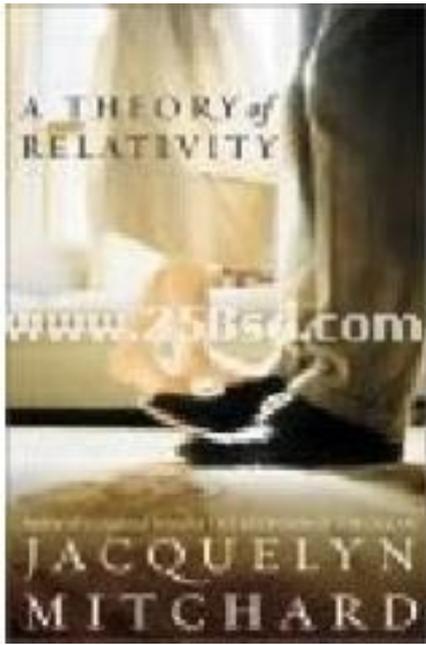


A Theory of Relativity



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Amazon.com "They died instantly." When it comes to first sentences, it's hard to beat the car-crash immediacy of *A Theory of Relativity*. What follows, alas, is even more wrenching, if not nearly as black and white. Having perished in the wreck, Georgia and Ray McKenna leave behind an orphaned 1-year-old girl named Keefer--and handsome, self-involved Gordon McKenna decides to adopt his adored sister's child. Unfortunately, that's not what his affluent in-laws have in mind. The ensuing custody battle turns into a protracted legalistic horror show: a kind of *Bleak House* for the Oprah age, complete with appeals, retrials, PR campaigns, and even last-minute legislation. The case is all about what's best for Keefer--right? Actually, it's also about what constitutes a family, how much genes determine our fate, and the precise meaning of blood relative. Author of the gripping family dramas *The Deep End of the*

Ocean and *The Most Wanted*, Jacquelyn Mitchard is no stranger to this fictional territory. To her credit, she has created a story without heroes or villains--but also one that could have used a little more editorial nip-and-tuck. The narrative is strongly weighted toward monologue and exposition, and as a result, a compelling story ends up hampered by an awareness of its own consequence. (There's also an abundance of dialogue like "no wettie!" and "uckie, " which reminds us that fiction is one place where toddlers should be seen and not heard.) Still, Mitchard is a canny student of the human heart, and in the age of cloning, in vitro fertilization, and alternative families, the nature versus nurture debate seems more relevant than ever. The author may be no Dickens, but you could call her sentimental in the same way: unafraid, that is, to appeal to her readers' strongest emotions. --Chloe Byrne From Publishers Weekly

When real life inspires fiction, an authentic and convincing voice is often the happy result. Here Mitchard draws on her own experience as an adoptive parent and as a one-time participant in a custody suit to produce gripping fiction on a par with her Oprah pick, *The Deep End of the Ocean*. Once again, she excels in rendering domestic scenes and family relationships while providing a suspenseful story that tugs at the heartstrings. Keefer Nye, only a year old when her parents die in a car crash near Madison, Wis., is the focal point of a bitter, protracted and precedent-setting custody battle. Keefer's bachelor uncle, 24-year-old science teacher Gordon McKenna, seems the most appropriate custodian for his tiny niece, since he helped his elderly parents care for Keefer while his sister (Keefer's mother, Georgia) battled cancer. Challenging his claim, the affluent Nye grandparents, country-club Floridians, believe that their niece and her husband, born-again Christians, should get custody. Mitchard's nuanced character portrayals are her strong suit; no one is without frailties. But she subtly favors the McKenna family, conveying their anguish when Keefer is swept out of their arms by a court order. The decision hinges on the fact that both Georgia and Gordon were adopted by the elder McKennas, and a state law decrees that adoptees are not considered blood relatives when they themselves wish to adopt a family member. Keefer becomes a pawn in legal maneuvering as the ability to nurture is weighed against genetic connection. A weeper that tackles provocative issues, this novel pushes all the right buttons. Agent, Jane Gelfman. 10-city author tour; simultaneous audio and large print editions; rights sold in France, Italy and the U.K. (July) Forecast: After the disappointment of her second novel, *The Most Wanted*, Mitchard hits her stride again in this bound-to-be bestseller. The circumstances of her own life as a widow with five adopted children, the popularity of her syndicated newspaper column, and the recent movie version of *The Deep End of the Ocean* will be factors in a fast take-off. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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