

# **The Age of Miracles Study Guide**

**The Age of Miracles by Karen Thompson Walker**

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## Plot Summary

The novel "The Age of Miracles," by Karen Thompson Walker tells the story of an adolescent girl struggling with coming of age at the same time that the world around her seems to be coming apart. Julia's world changes dramatically when scientists announce that the rotation of the Earth has begun slowing. This slowing results in solar storms, power outages, and daylight days that stretch beyond the normal period of 24 hours. Themes in the story include the effect uncertainty has on those around Julia and they way they cope with their personal fears as well as the special challenges these changes have on those who are still trying to determine what life is all about.

Ten-year-old Julia's world is rocked when scientists announce that the rotation of the Earth is slowing. Days have already grown by nearly one hour and are getting longer each day. Julia believes that this change in the Earth's rotation leads her family down a troubled and rocky path. The trouble for Julia begins when her best friend, Hanna, moves to Salt Lake City for religious reasons. This leaves Julia feeling alone. She is unprotected at the school bus stop and becomes a target for bullies.

At the same time, Julia's mother becomes affected by gravity sickness. This sickness causes her to pass out one day while driving and kill a pedestrian. Julia is horrified when she hears her father lie to her mother and tell her that the pedestrian lived. When Julia realizes how relieved that her mother is after she hears this lie, Julia decides not to tell her mother the truth. Julia is again horrified by her father when she catches him in what she believes is a relationship with another woman. Julia's father begs her not to tell her mother.

Julia's only friend during this period of time is a boy named Seth Moreno who she has a crush on. The two develop a deep friendship in which Julia tells Seth the secret of her father's affair. Seth encourages Julia to confront her father about what is happening. After the confrontation, Julia is afraid that her father will not return home to them but is surprised when he does come home. Julia is crushed again when Seth is diagnosed with gravity sickness and he and his father move to Mexico. After one short e-mail message from Seth, she never hears from him again. Thirteen years later, even though she is now aware that the Earth is dying, Julia still holds onto the faint hope that Seth will come back to her.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

The novel "The Age of Miracles," by Karen Thompson Walker tells the story of an adolescent girl struggling with coming of age at the same time that the world around her seems to be coming apart. Julia's world changes dramatically when scientists announce that the rotation of the Earth has begun slowing. This slowing results in solar storms, power outages and daylight days that stretch beyond the normal 24-hours. Themes in the story include the effect uncertainty has on those around Julia and the way they cope with their personal fears as well as the special challenges these changes have on those who are still trying to determine what life is all about.

In Chapter 1, officials go public with their discovery of the phenomena they refer to as "the slowing," which is causing the Earth's rotation to slow. This has caused the day to grow longer by 56 minutes. At first, there is a worldwide panic. People try to move to escape what is happening, but the slowing is affecting the whole world.

In Chapter 2, Julia records the activity in her home the day the announcement of the slowing was made. Her friend, Hanna, had spent the night with her. She and her family noticed nothing unusual until her mother returned from buying bagels. She comes in the house and orders the family to turn on television. The family, which has become accustomed to her exaggerations, ignores her warnings initially.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

These first two chapters describe what is happening to the world. There is a feeling of unreality as the announcements made on public television set in. Chapter 1 focuses on the activity worldwide. It describes people panicking and trying to run from what they see as a catastrophe. Others claim that they had already known that something was wrong. In Chapter 2, the focus of the story narrows to just Julia's household. What started as a normal day turns out to be anything but normal. Julia's mom hears the announcement on the car stereo and uses words like "hellacious" and "God awful" to try to make her family understand what is going on outside. Since they are accustomed to her tendency to overstate things, they seem nonplussed by her words.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

In Chapter 3, Julia and Hanna run outside, but cannot detect any immediate changes. Inside the house, Julia's mother is taking stock of all of their emergency supplies. Hanna decides to go home. She is afraid that her mother is worried. By watching the television news, Julia's family learns that the Earth's rotation is beginning to slow down. The family forgets about Julia's soccer game.

Julia's mother becomes increasingly more worried about what might happen to the Earth. Julia's father seems to be disturbed more by his wife's worrying than by what is happening with the world. He tries to distract Julia by suggesting that they go and kick around a soccer ball but they stop playing when they lose the ball. Julia asks him if he thinks the birds know there is something amiss with nature. Her mother calls out to them that the scientists also believe the slowing might affect gravity. He tries to convince Julia that humans will be able to handle whatever is happening.

That evening, Julia's mother is upset when her husband leaves for work as planned that evening. She asks him not to go, but he refuses to change his schedule. Julia sits on the couch with her mother and watches as a Jewish family, who is still not aware of what is happening because it is their Sabbath, walk down the street.

That evening, Julia and her mother, as well as others on the block go outside to watch the sun set. Julia's old friend, Gabby, is sitting on the roof of her house. Helen is checking the batteries in the family's flashlights and worrying because she has not heard from her husband yet. Sylvia, Julia's piano teacher, is tending her garden as usual and does not appear to be concerned about what is happening.

Hanna calls. She tells Julia that her family will be moving to Salt Lake City. Julia learns that the Mormons have a site there that they believe will be the location of Jesus' return. When Julia gets off the phone, a bird flies into the window, scaring both her and her mother. They leave the bird's body for the Joel to take care of. That night, Julia is aware of her mother being awake all night. The next morning, even when it should have already begun to get light, it is still dark outside. Julia's mother tells her that her father is going to work a second shift. She adds that he had a rough night because a woman had died.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, there is a deepening sense of doom as what is happening sets in. Adding to this sense of doom are the images of death that are included in the chapter. Julia and her mother are already unnerved by the recent announcement and a bird flying into their window causes them additional alarm. To make matters worse, Julia learns that her father had a patient die during his shift at the hospital.



Preparedness is a major focus of this chapter. Julia indicates that she had thought of Californians as being prepared for natural disasters because they always had to be on their toes as far as earthquakes were concerned. Even the Californians, are not prepared for what is happening to the world. Julia makes a very poignant point for a 10-year-old that it doesn't seem to be the things that one worries about or prepares for that happen, it is those that no one even considers that take us by surprise.

That evening Julia and other members of the neighborhood go outside to watch the sun set. Julia's mother has been worried all day. She has checked emergency supplies and batteries in the family's flashlights. Julia's father has gone to work as usual even though his wife asked him not to. He appears to be more upset by his wife's worrying than he is about what might be happening to the Earth. Sylvia, Julia's next door neighbor, is working in her yard and caring for her plants as usual. She does not appear to be concerned about what is happening. Julia learns that her friend Hanna will be going with her family to Utah. Since they are of the Mormon faith, they are going to a spot in Salt Lake City where they believe Jesus will appear for the second coming.

Julia has mixed feelings about what is happening to the world. At first, she senses excitement in the changes. She begins to feel the affect of what is happening when she learns that her friend, Hanna, will be moving away because of the slowing. It is not until Julia learns that her father had a patient die during his shift at the hospital that Julia really begins to worry. She feels that having a woman die in childbirth was something that never should happen with modern medicine. This points to an underlying theme in the novel that even with all of the wonders of modern science and the ways that men have bettered and changed their world, there are still some things that are out of their control.



# Chapters 4 and 5

## Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

When Julia's father returns from work in Chapter 4, Julia tells him that she's sorry about what happened. He lies and tells her that nothing happened. She later hears her parents talking, then arguing through their bedroom door as her mother apparently asks her father if he was really at work. Her father snaps back that he was at work. Also during this time, the humans are dealing with the effects of the stronger pull of gravity. Anything that falls, falls faster. Julia also believes that this slowing affected relationships, as well as the course of her own life.

In Chapter 5, the start of the school day is pushed back 90 minutes to accommodate for the changing time of the sunrise. At the bus stop, Trevor Watkins worries that the government isn't telling them everything. More than half the kids who are usually there are absent. Julia hears a skateboard and knows it is Seth Moreno, the boy on whom she has a crush.

As Trevor continues to talk about the calamities that the world is facing, Julia feels awkward without Hanna. She stands beside the glamorous Michaela. Daryl snaps Michaela's bra and she playfully tells him to stop. Julia regards Seth, whom she believes is concerned with more serious things. His mother is sick with cancer. As she watches him, Daryl tries to snap her bra strap but she isn't wearing one. Without her ally, Hanna, Julia feels unprotected. She lies to Daryl, hoping to save face. Daryl asks her to let them see it, catching the attention of everyone at the bus stop except Seth. Although Michaela tells Daryl to stop his teasing, he pulls up Julia's shirt. When Seth sees what is happening, he pushes Daryl in the shoulder and smiles at Julia. Julia sees a look of pity in his eyes. On the bus, Julia realizes her necklace with the gold nugget from Alaska that her grandfather gave her is missing.

In science class, the students make new sundials based on new calculations. One of the questions that Mr. Jensen chooses to answer in their science class deals with Nostradamus' prediction. Mr. Jensen seems depressed by this question, but is unable to answer it completely. He updates the 24-hour sign on the solar system wall with a Post-It note reading 25 hours, 37 minutes. More and more cases of gravity sickness are beginning to appear.

In math, Trevor speaks up that something strange is happening outside. Other students also notice that it is getting dark outside. Although Mrs. Pinsky calls for the class to stay calm, students scatter. Seth grabs Julia's wrist and pulls her with him. They lay on the grassy hillside behind the school holding hands with other kids screaming and crying around them. Cars stop on the road as their drivers step out to look at the blackness. Julia's cell phone buzzes, she knows that it is her mother, but doesn't answer. Seth wonders aloud if this is how they will die.



Mr. Jensen finally reaches the students, telling them it is just a solar eclipse. The eclipse had been forecasted for a different area of the world. The slowing had changed the location for the eclipse. Seth seems disappointed. He confides in Julia that he wants to be a hero, be able to save someone's life. They sit quietly for awhile. When Julia tells Seth that she is sorry about his mom's sickness, the comment seems to anger him. He walks off even as Julia tries to apologize to him. On her way back into the school, she meets Michaela and some other students on their way to the beach. They laugh at her when she asks about class.

Julia's mother is angry at her when she picks her up after school because she did not answer her cell phone. When Julia tells her mother that Hanna moved to Utah, her mother becomes less angry. Although her mother tries to assure her that Hanna and her family will be back, Julia doesn't believe they will be.

That night Julia's father claims that he was not scared, even for a minute by the eclipse. Helen does not believe him. The baseball playoffs continue without interruption but are terrible because of the changes in gravity. By the time Julia goes to bed that night, the length of the day has increased by another 30 minutes.

## Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

In this section of the novel, Julia records that this is the first time that she has ever heard her father tell a lie. This could be a hint that her father is trying to run away from what is happening instead of facing it head on. Julia later also hears her parents arguing about something in their room and her mother asking her father if he was really at work. Although Julia believes that the slowing somehow is having an effect on the relationships between her family members, it could be that she is just now noticing things that might have been happening already. Her mother seems to suspect her father wasn't really at work. Meanwhile, Julia is troubled by the fact that he father has told her a lie. She notes, however, that this is not the boldest lie that her father will ever tell. Throughout the novel, Julia drops hints of what was is coming in her family and the world's future. The story is told in the first person point of view, but is told in the past tense, as if Julia is looking back on what happened. She includes clues and hints of foreshadowing to let the reader know what is coming and to alert them to things to which they should pay attention.

Julia's experience with Daryl at the bus stop is made more vivid with the imagery that the writer uses in describing the scene. Julia is feeling sad and out of place already because her best friend is not at her side as usual. It is on this morning that Daryl decides to pick on her. Julia feels empty, her life is like the house that has slid off the cliff which serves as the backdrop for the scene. A driveway that leads nowhere and a yard full of weeds are the only things left of a house that used to stand there. The limestone cliff had collapsed, causing the house to fall to its ruin. Julia feels much the same way without the sturdy foundation of her friend, Hanna.





In this same chapter, there is a reference to the way that the Earth is still unpredictable and can still offer nasty surprises for those who inhabit it. Although solar eclipses are well understood phenomena, it doesn't stop both adults and children from being scared when one comes unexpectedly. Like their less scientific ancestors, modern men had allowed themselves to think the sudden darkness was a sign of the end of the world. Under normal circumstances, this eclipse would have been predicted and would not have surprised anyone but because of the Earth's slowing rotation, the eclipse happened in a place for which it was not forecasted. The scare serve to warn Julia that even with modern science, the Earth is still capable of taking its inhabitants by surprise.

It is also in this chapter that the author makes reference to the age of miracles. While it could seem this age would refer to the current changes in the Earth and its atmosphere, it appears the age of miracles is actually the adolescent years. It is these years in which children will turn into the people they will be the rest of their lives. Boys' voices change, girls' bodies change — these are the miracles to which the author refers.



# Chapters 6, 7 and 8

## Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

In Chapter 6, Julia's family is one of the few that stays in California. Julia and her mother drive out to her grandfather's house to check on him. There are long lines at the gas stations. People roam the streets testifying that the end of the world is coming. Julia's grandfather lives on a one-acre plot of farmland that he refuses to sell even though the land is surrounded by a lush developed community. Julia's grandfather tells them that he believes that the lengthening of the days is a trick by the government to take their minds off the war in the Middle East. Helen's phone rings and she steps outside to talk.

Meanwhile, Julia's grandfather asks her to look around and see if there is anything among his collections of things that she wants. He talks about his time in Alaska and a teen who had died in his yard after being trampled by a horse. He speaks of the Americans testing radiation on the people in the 50's. Julia knows that her grandfather also built a bomb shelter on his property in the 60's. When Julia will not pick out anything for herself among his possessions, he has her dig out a coffee can that holds an old gold pocket watch from a secret compartment in a kitchen cupboard. Although Julia does not want the watch, she accepts it. He also gives her a ten-dollar bill with the instructions to do something fun with it.

On the way home, Julia and her mother listen to the effects of the phenomena on the religious population. Christians everywhere are declaring that the end of the world is coming. As they continue to drive, Julia sees that the beachfront homes have all been abandoned. Workers are also not busy preparing for the county fair but have left preparations half finished.

In Chapter 7, the clocks become out of sync with the rising and setting of the sun. The start time of school varies from day to day. The schedules of planes and trains are interrupted as new schedules are devised and then abandoned as the days get longer and longer. Julia's mother stocks their cabinets with emergency supplies. The days lengthen to 30 hours.

In Chapter 8, the slowing begins to affect the birds. They are unable to fly and are seen walking great distances. Sea gulls wash up on the beaches and pigeons droop on the sidewalks. Even the finches kept by Julia's piano teacher seem to be affected by the changes. Sylvia tells Julia not to worry about the birds, but Julia cannot help but stare at them during her lesson. Sylvia believes the deaths of the birds is the last step for a planet of people that have been poisoning their atmosphere.

The doorknob turns and Seth comes in for his lesson. The phone rings and a man's voice comes over the answering machine. Sylvia gets the phone and takes the call upstairs. As Julia and Seth wait, one of the finches lets out a loud screech. Julia goes to



look at the birds and discovers they haven't eaten. Seth taps on the cage, trying to get the attention of the bird in the bottom of the cage. He opens the door of the cage and touches it. The bird is dead. They heard Sylvia headed downstairs and make a silent agreement not to say anything. After her lesson, Julia thinks of the astronauts who are trapped on the international space station, unable to come home.

## Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader gets a view of the reaction to the slowing by the older generation. Julia's grandfather speaks of the bomb threats of the 60's and the suspicion that the government was testing radiation on people in the 50's. The indication is that each generation has its own troubles. Julia's grandfather, however, does not really believe that there is anything wrong with the Earth. He believes that the slowing is something the government has come up with to take the minds of the people off of the wars.

Julia loves her grandfather, but hates to see what age has done to him. He can no longer see well and is almost mournful because he has lived so long. His wife and all of his friends have already passed away, leaving him alone. Besides Julia and her family, Gene is friends with an odd teenager who lives in the housing development that surrounds his acre of land.

The religious people of the time are getting their say in on the cause of the slowing. They claim that his phenomenon is the proof that the end of the world is near. They try to cajole and convince people that it is time to get right with the Lord. Christians are making final arrangements and looking forward to the coming of Christ. Julia indicates that she and her family are a different kind of Christian, the kind that is "embarrassed by the mention of miracles."

As the days get longer, the increased pull of gravity begins to have an affect on the birds. They are unable to fly. Even birds kept inside as pets are dying, as is shown by Sylvia's finches. During her piano lesson, Sylvia tells Julia that she believes that what is happening to the birds is a result of all of the damage that humans have done to the environment. She believes that it is a message that humans need to change their ways before it is too late. Also during the lesson, Sylvia gets a call on the phone from a man. She quickly cuts off the answering machine before Julia can recognize a voice, but Julia wonders what Sylvia's boyfriend might look like. She imagines someone outdoorsy, with a ponytail.

As Julia leaves Sylvia's house that afternoon, she takes notes of the things around her. The sun is shimmering on the sidewalk, her cat is laying on the porch, she picks a dandelion in the yard. Her closing sentence indicates that this is one of the last real afternoons. This foreshadows a change coming in the next chapters.

Note also the imagery in this chapter. The expensive beachfront homes are being abandoned because tides are coming in higher and higher and flooding them. Another

image that stands out is the idea of the half-finished fairgrounds. Work has stopped in the middle of setting up rides. The half erected rides are described in terms of death and end times. For instance, the roller coaster is a "skeleton" while the one bucket on the Ferris wheel is described as the "last fruit of summer."



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, two weeks after the initial announcement, broadcasters break into the World Series to announce that it has been decided United States residents should return to "clock time." Julia is in disbelief as the clock shows it is 11 a.m., but outside it appears to be late afternoon. She doesn't think the change to clock time is possible. Julia's mother also voices the opinion that it will not work. Julia's father is silent. Julia does not understand at first the full implications of this plan. Night will no longer be the period of darkness while day is the period of light. Also, there will be some in the U.S. who will not go along with the government's plan.

In Chapter 10, with days now 32 hours long, schools, governmental offices, corporations and television stations all switch to clock time. Those who chose to stay with daylight time or "real time" soon became out of sync with the world. The first day on clock time is a Sunday. The sun rises about 7 a.m. Their first day on the clock flies by. To avoid her parents, Julia walks down to Gabby's house. Gabby thinks clock time will be cool as she likes being out and about in the dark. Gabby is giving herself a tattoo and asks Julia if she wants one. Julia realizes how different she is from Gabby.

That night, Julia's father brings her home a telescope as a gift. He shows her Mars. It is on this planet that scientists are working to create a human settlement. Julia uses the telescope not only to look at the stars, but also to spy on the others who live in her neighborhood. Because of clock time, the family goes to bed while the sun is still out. It doesn't set until around 2 a.m. The next morning is still dark. Julia's father calls their lives "amazing times."

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The return to "clock time" is the big announcement in this section of the novel. Julia had foreshadowed this change in Chapter 8 when she referred to the afternoon of her piano lesson as the "last real afternoon." In order to maintain some sort of order, the government is requesting that everyone begin living within the bounds of a 24-hour day again even though the daylight hours will no longer match the time of day. The government chooses an arbitrary time for clock time to go back in force. While her father refers to the times they are living in as "amazing" Julia does not necessarily seem to think that getting up and going to school in the dark is that amazing.

Also in this chapter, Julia makes mention of her father's tendency to be very secretive. She indicates that she never knows what is going on in his brain because he keeps so much a secret. She indicates that there are "other lives" in his mind, a foreshadowing of things that Julia will learn about her father as time passes.



# Chapters 11, 12 and 13

## Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Summary

In Chapter 11, it is dark the next morning at the bus stop. At school, workmen are installing stadium lights throughout the campus. The sun finally rises at lunchtime. At the same time the sun comes up, Julia notices a girl that looks just like Hanna. She discovers that it is Hanna but is surprised that Hanna had not told her they were back. When Julia asks Hanna why she wasn't at the bus stop, Hanna tells her that she spent the night at Tracey's house. Tracey walks up with lunch for herself and Hanna. They are wearing identical outfits. Tracey and Hanna walk off together when the bell rings. At soccer practice, Hanna barely speaks to Julia. Julia invites Hanna over but she declines the invitation. Julia remembers the way that Hanna had treated the girl who had been Hanna's best friend before her. Sylvia tries to convince Hanna that clock time will not last, as they have their 3 p.m. piano lesson in the dark. Julia is surprised, though, how quickly everyone adjusts to clock time.

In Chapter 12, Julia reports that Sylvia has decided to join the real timers. Julia's mother admits that she never liked Sylvia or her lifestyle. Tom and Carlotta, neighbors down the road, also join the real-timers. Gabby tells Julia that her mother thinks that Tom and Carlotta are drug dealers. Meanwhile, Gabby has met a boy online who thinks there will be a revolution against clock time. At school, Julia notices that Mr. Jensen looks tired. The next day, they have a substitute science teacher. The students hear that Mr. Jensen has gone "off the clocks."

In Chapter 13, Julia notes that prescriptions for sleeping pills have increased. Manufacturers of blackout blinds and sleep masks can not keep up with demand. Julia's mother, who had always struggled with insomnia, finds it particularly hard to sleep during the white nights. She develops bags under her eyes and is easily upset. The birds continue to suffer and die. One afternoon, Julia finds a dying sparrow on the sidewalk when she gets off the school bus. Seth suggests that it might need water but the bird will not drink. As they watch the bird, Daryl grabs it and slings it over the edge of the canyon. In retaliation, Seth throws Daryl's backpack into the same canyon. A short while later, Seth's mother dies. Julia sends a sympathy card.

## Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Analysis

Since much of Julia's world has returned to "clock time" days sometimes fall when it is dark outside. Julia's mother waits with her at the bus stop the first morning because it is still dark. Julia notes to herself that the bus stop is no less scary for her at night than in the daytime after her encounter with Daryl. School officials put up floodlights on the school's campus to make it appear light even though the sun is not up. During her piano lesson, Sylvia tells Julia that she does not believe that clock time will last as the humans fight against their natural instincts to sleep in the dark and be awake during the light.



Many people struggle with the inability to sleep. Julia's mother is particularly hard hit with insomnia. She is often unable to sleep at all when it is light outside at night. This lack of sleep causes her to be moody and irritable. In this section of the novel, several members of Julia's neighborhood decide to go back to observing daylight hours instead of clock time. Also other members of the neighborhood become suspicious of these people.



# Chapters 14, 15 and 16

## Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Summary

In Chapter 14, the days have reached 40 hours long. While the sun is out, the street becomes too hot to walk on barefoot. During the nights, frost comes, killing grapes and avocados. About six weeks after the slowing began, the hour counts for each day begin to drop off the newscasts. Those who follow real time continue along their chosen paths but they are considered freaks by those who follow clock time. Sylvia, and Tom and Carlotta are left out of the neighborhood block party. Their trees are toilet papered. When the people learn the Kaplan family has been keeping real time for the sake of their Sabbath, this family is also shunned. Julia watches Sylvia through her telescope as she goes about her days. She believes Sylvia looks even sadder and lonelier than Julia is.

Julia and her father drive to the beach to look at all the houses to see what the extreme high tides had done to the beachfront homes. Her father entices her into a Cape Cod washed out by the tide. Julia is hesitant. She has heard stories of teens who have drowned in houses when the tides came in quickly. Her father seems obsessed with the house as he had visited it once. It is not until the water level in the house has reached their calves that Julia's father allows them to leave. Her father chides her in the car on the way home because she had been braver at one point in her life.

In Chapter 15, Tom and Carlotta are arrested for growing marijuana. A neighbor had given the police a tip that the couple was growing the drugs. Because they are being shunned by those on clock time, the real timers begin to gather into makeshift communities.

In Chapter 16 the days have swelled to 42 hours long by early December. Despite the chaos, the neighbors celebrate and decorate for Christmas as normal. Julia's mother becomes almost obsessive in her interest in Christmas. They bake Christmas cookies. Julia suggests they take some to Sylvia but her mother discourages the idea. Julia takes her a handful of cookies anyway. She notices that Sylvia has no Christmas tree or decorations in her home.

Two days later, a live Christmas tree is delivered to Sylvia's home. During a dinner with her grandfather, the family discusses Tom and Carlotta's arrest. Joel thinks they should have left the couple alone but Helen argues that growing the drugs was illegal. After the dinner, Julia's father is unexpectedly called in to work. After he leaves, Julia's mother tries to get her to talk to her about boys.

When she finally gets upstairs, Julia notices that Sylvia has put decorations on her tree. She can see Sylvia dancing. A man is with her but there is no additional car in the driveway. As she continues to watch, Julia realizes that the man dancing with Sylvia is her father.





## Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Analysis

The major center of attention in this section of chapters is the way those who have decided to go off clock time are treated by those who observe clock time. Their homes are vandalized and they are considered outcasts by those around them. They are not invited to neighborhood parties. Tom and Carlotta are arrested for growing marijuana in their house. Julia believes that someone gave the police a tip about the drugs only because the couple did not observe clock time.

Julia continues to have quite a bit of curiosity about the people who have chosen to observe daylight time. She watches Julia through her telescope and believes that she is even more lonely than Julia. When Julia sneaks some Christmas cookies to Sylvia, Sylvia at first cannot speak because she has not spoken to anyone yet that day. Julia doesn't feel as friendly toward Sylvia, though, when she sees her through her telescope dancing with her father.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

In this section of the novel, people begin to suffer with the effects of the length of the sunlight to which they are exposed. Murder and violence rates begin to spike during these stretches of daylight. People take more risks and are not as able to control their impulses. Julia thinks this lack of control caused by prolonged sunlight may have been the cause of her father's relationship with Sylvia. The next morning when her father comes in from "work" Julia hates him. She is angry at the way that he is so relaxed. Julia is surprised that despite the secret she has learned, the world continues to spin.

On New Year's Eve Julia's mother drives her to stay at her grandfather's house to spend the night. She tells Julia that her New Year's resolution is to worry less. She also tells Julia that she wants to start acting again. Julia wonders if her mother knows about Sylvia. In a split second, Julia's mother says that she doesn't feel well, then passes out. The car strikes a pedestrian. The man had been passing out religious tracts; some witnesses say he seemed bent on suicide.

Julia's mom asks if the man is all right, but cannot get a straight answer. Helen is taken to the hospital where she is diagnosed with a concussion. Julia's father comes to pick her up. He asks if she hit her head and studies her eyes. She suspects he has just left Sylvia's house. He drives her to her grandfather's house. The house is different with all his possessions cleared away as he appears to be preparing to pack them up. He also locks his door, something he never did before. Julia's father heads for the hospital.

Among her grandfather's things, she finds a box with four sticks of gold. He tells her that gold is the safest thing that there is. He also tells her that he has realized that the slowing is really happening. He seems concerned that no one is doing anything to prepare for what might be coming. He describes the birds, which are all dying, as the messengers of the world. He tells Julia that he wants to teach her how to shoot a gun.

The following morning when Julia's parents pick her up, they have no news of the pedestrian. The tests run by the doctors do not show any abnormalities in Helen's brain. Julia notes, however, that little is known about the syndrome, which has become the common term for gravity sickness.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The sicknesses affecting people as a result of the lengthening of the days is a major aspect of this chapter. Not only are people struggling with gravity sickness, they are also more impulsive and less inhibited. During the stretches of white nights, crime and violence have been increasing dramatically. Julia blames these same emotional disturbances which are causing people to murder and steal for the affair that she



believes that her father is having with Sylvia. She thinks that if the slowing had never started, the affair with Sylvia would also have never started.

Another major worry for people is the increasing numbers of them diagnosed with gravity sickness. It is learned that Julia's mother suffers with a form of this disease when she hits a pedestrian. Julia is riding in the car with her mother when the accident happens and sees her mother pass out for just a minute. As a result of her accident, Julia's mother becomes very withdrawn, refuses to drive and spends her time trying to find out if the pedestrian survived the accident or not.

Meanwhile, Julia spends the night with her grandfather who is packing up all of his things. He does not tell Julia why he is packing and she does not ask.



# Chapters 18, 19 and 20

## Chapters 18, 19 and 20 Summary

In Chapter 18, it appears the Julia's mother is being affected by what is known by the people as gravity sickness or simply, the syndrome. As Julia's mother continues to struggle with her illness, Seth comes back to school. Believing that a boy from a real time settlement is coming to get her, Gabby shaves her head. She has heard other girls in that community are doing the same thing. When her parents find out what has happened, Gabby's cell phone is taken away and she loses her computer access. Julia continues to spy on Sylvia as Sylvia's behavior becomes more and more bizarre. One week, someone cuts the electric lines to the houses inhabited by the three real time families in the neighborhood.

In Chapter 19, Julia continues to have an attitude toward her father. He takes her to soccer practice but she retaliates by walking away from practice to a shopping center where she buys a bra. She lies to her father about soccer practice and is surprised that he believes her. At home she tries on the bra and is disappointed by how cheap and girlish it looks. Later that night she buries the bra in a trashcan.

In Chapter 20, it is February. Julia catches her father with Sylvia again. Also during this time Julia hears her father tell the worst lie that she has ever heard from him. She hears him talking to someone on the phone who tells him that the pedestrian who was hit by Helen's car died. Instead of telling his wife the truth, however, he lies to her and tells her that the man survived.

Meanwhile, the Kaplan family is moving to a Jewish community where everyone agrees on the Sabbath. Julia sees Sylvia in her yard and wishes that she would move as well. It is when Julia goes back inside from seeing Sylvia that her mother tells her that the pedestrian survived. Julia realizes how this lie has affected her mother's mood and even though she believes her father should have told the truth, she cannot bring herself to do so.

## Chapters 18, 19 and 20 Analysis

In Chapter 4, Julia had foreshadowed that her father would tell a lie even worse than the one he told Julia about the woman not dying in childbirth the day that the slowing began. It is in Chapter 18 that he tells this lie. He has had someone checking up on the pedestrian whom Julia's mother hit with her car in an attempt to discover if he lived or died. Julia overhears a conversation where a hospital employee tells Joel that the man was dead when he arrived at the hospital the day of the accident. When Joel reports the news to Julia's mother, however, he tells her that he discovered that the man had lived. Julia is horrified that her father would tell such a lie but realizes that it was what her mother needed to hear.



# Chapters 21 and 22

## Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

In Chapter 21, when the days stretch beyond 50 hours, the Bermuda grass in the yards begins to die because of lack of sunlight. The country begins to depend on greenhouses and sodium lamps to grow food. These greenhouses take a toll on the electric systems. Researchers look for a way to devise and grow foods not dependent upon the sun. The days continue to lengthen.

In Chapter 22, Julia now has to face dance parties as a member of the sixth grade. She is never invited to these parties. As one of the quiet ones, school seems a dangerous place for Julia. She is more comfortable in her room at home. One afternoon as she is reading, Gabby stops by to check her email on Julia's computer. She announces to Julia that Keith, her boyfriend, will be picking her up on the following day to take her to Circadia. Gabby begs her not to tell anyone and Julia assumes that she really won't go anywhere. The next afternoon, Julia goes to Gabby's house to check on her but no one is at home.

That same night Julia's mother brings up the subject of her birthday. Julia finally agrees to a dinner but with just them and her grandfather. Gabby's mother shows up a little after 8 p.m. that night to ask if they had seen her daughter. Julia tells Gabby's mother that Gabby went to Circadia with a boy, but asks that she not tell Gabby how she found out. Her parents find her and bring her back home but Julia notices that Gabby is not the same after that trip. She describes Circadia to Julia as if it were some sort of utopia. Gabby's parents send her to a boarding school soon after this experience and Julia's last friend is gone.

## Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

As school becomes more and more lonely for Julia she begins to find refuge in her room and books. One of the books that she reads deals with a country where the sun comes out only seven years. Julia may relate to the girl who is locked in a closet as a joke by some other kids her own age. While she is locked in this closet, the sun comes out and the other kids enjoy it but the one girl is not able to. By the time she is freed, the sun will not be seen for another seven years. This act of cruelty would easily relate to a girl living in a world where stretches of darkness were getting longer and longer.

Also in this section, Gabby finally runs away with her boyfriend to Circadia. Her parents find her and bring her back less than 24 hours later, but to Julia, Gabby does not seem the same after her time there. Because of her impulsiveness, Gabby's parents arrange to have her sent to a boarding school. Although she and Gabby had not had much in common, Julia feels as if she is losing her last friend.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

In Chapter 23, Julia records that most people found their lives worse because of the slowing but that Michaela and her mother were two people whose lives improved during this period. Michaela's mother has a rich new boyfriend and they have moved into his house. She has a party which Julia is invited to attend. When she first arrives, Michaela's mother offers to read her horoscope. She seems disturbed by what she reads or her chart but tells Julia not to worry, just to be careful for awhile. Another boy comes in the house, Kai, a Hawaiian whom Julia knows from school.

When her parents leave, Michaela suggests they get in the Jacuzzi. Josh steals some beer from the safe room where his father has stored canned food and supplies in case of an emergency. In fact, the entire house has been retrofitted to help the family handle the changes in the daylight hours as it has blackout shutters and automatic lighting. Josh sits next to Julia in the Jacuzzi. After they finish there, they order pizza and watch movies. Julia begins to feel that she belongs again. Then Josh suggests they play a game. He makes the house dark with the shutters. The game is one of hide-and-seek with those who find the hidden person staying with them until all the others have joined. Julia is chosen to be the first to hide. She chooses a spot in the safe room. Josh finds her first. Josh tries to kiss her but misses and hits her chin. He wants to try again but she won't let him. He tells her that he should have known that she would be lame and leaves. He tells her that Michaela only invited Julia because her mother wouldn't let her have her boyfriend over unless someone responsible was there as well. Julia waits there until she sees light under the safe room door. Michaela and Kai are watching television. They tell her they couldn't find her so they stopped looking.

Julia is the first one awake in the morning. She calls her parents to come pick her up and leaves without saying goodbye. Her father asks her why she decided to come home so early. She can respond only that she felt like coming home.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Michaela's life has improved after the slowing began. Her mother has moved in with a rich boyfriend who has a house that has been retrofitted for the troubles caused by the lengthening light and dark hours. The entire house has steel shutters that can be closed to make it dark inside even if the sun is shining outside. Julia toys with the term "dark as night" to describe the darkness in the house and realizes how obsolete the saying already seems. The family has a sunbed for proper sunlight exposure as well as automatic lights in the house that dim and brighten to mimic the affects of the rising and setting sun. There is also a safe room stocked with food where the family can stay in case of raids or famine.



Note also in the chapter the way that Michaela uses Julia. Josh tries to kiss Julia while they are hiding together in the safe room. When she will not let him, Josh becomes angry with her. He tells her that the only reason that Michaela invited her was so that she could have her boyfriend attend as well. He calls her "lame" and then leaves her alone in the room. When Julia finally comes out, she realizes the others stopped looking for her and had been watching television for some time.



# Chapters 24, 25 and 26

## Chapters 24, 25 and 26 Summary

Two days before Julia's birthday, whales begin to beach themselves in Chapter 24. Although Julia's science teacher tries to convince the students the changes in the oceans may have nothing to do with the slowing, Julia is doubtful. She has started spending her lunch break in the library. She is surprised when Seth walks into the library during one lunch period. He whispers to Julia that he can no longer take it out in the lunch area with the rest of the kids. Before they leave the library, Seth asks Julia if she wants to come with him that evening to look at the whales. She accepts. They stop at Seth's house to leave their backpacks. Once they get to the shore, they help the rescuers trying to save the whales.

In Chapter 25, the eucalyptus trees are beginning to die. As Julia lays awake thinking about her time with Seth, she hears a crash. A eucalyptus tree has fallen onto a corner of Sylvia's house. Her parents rush outside. Her father goes into the house and brings Sylvia out. Sylvia is upset because the tree hit her piano. She is determined that it was not an accident.

The next morning at the bus stop, Seth meets Julia's eyes, but they don't speak. He walks past her onto the bus without speaking. She feels embarrassed. She hopes all day that he will speak to her but he does not. She gets no balloons that day for her birthday. Before they leave to go pick up her grandfather, Julia's father calls a tree service to cut down the last of their trees. At her grandfather's house, Julia knocks on the door but her grandfather does not come. Julia's father goes inside the house to determine that Julia's grandfather is not there. Julia notices that the boxes that her grandfather had been packing were gone. Julia's father searches the area but can still find no one. He learns that Chip has moved to Circadia and wonders if he took Julia's grandfather with him.

In Chapter 26, Julia and her family head for Circadia. They find Chip, but he tells them that he did not come there with Gene.

## Chapters 24, 25 and 26 Analysis

Much happens in these three chapters. First, Julia and Seth go together to look at the whales that have beached themselves. They join the volunteers trying to help keep the whales alive until the tide comes high enough that they can get back into the water. Julia is overjoyed by Seth's invitation to come with him. The next day, Julia feels lonely again and embarrassed when Seth passes her without speaking to her. The day is also miserable for Julia because it is her birthday, a day that she has no friend to recognize her special day with a balloon. To make matters even worse, the family drives to pick up





Julia's grandfather for her birthday dinner and cannot find him. They drive to the settlement of Circadia to look for him but he is not there either.

Also during this time period, a large eucalyptus tree falls and hits Sylvia's house. It goes through the roof and damages her piano. Although it is clear the tree was sick and would have fallen anyway, Sylvia swears that it was no accident. She tries to convince Julia's father somehow the tree fell on her house for a reason, because she followed real time. Julia's father does not believe her.

Also note that the author takes the opportunity that Julia's missing grandfather provides to show what Circadia is like. Julia is skeptical of the settlement but Chip, the boy who used to care for her grandfather swears that they are living in reality while others are living a dream.



# Chapters 27, 28 and 29

## Chapters 27, 28 and 29 Summary

Chapter 27 begins with the story of Gene's uncle, Rolf, who disappears in Alaska. Gene believes that he saw the man once on a bus but the man walks into the woods and is never seen again. Julia tries to sleep that night but her parents stay up all night calling hospitals.

In Chapter 28, three days later, no word has been heard from Gene. Seth is also keeping his distance from Julia. NASA has decided to try to bring the astronauts home from the international space station despite the threat to their lives. Julia plans to watch the astronauts come home alone. Seth, however, interrupts her plans by asking if she plans to watch the rocket.

As they sit together to watch for the rocket, Seth asks Julia why she acted so odd the week before. She tells him that she believed it was he who was acting odd. He smiles at her. It is Seth who realizes that the rocket has not arrived as planned. The turn on the television and learn that the rocket was destroyed on re-entry. The astronauts have died.

In Chapter 29, Seth and Julia become constant companions. They sit together on the bus and eat lunch together. Julia is with Seth on the day that the slowing passes the wheat point, the point that there is no longer enough sunlight for wheat to grow. Panic returns. Crime sprees take place on white nights and the real timers are blamed. Sylvia's car windows are broken and her home vandalized.

Seth and Julia collect grass and flowers to press in a dictionary as relics. They are at Seth's house together the first time the power goes out. As they wait in the candlelight for Julia's mother to pick her up, Julia tells Seth about her father's relationship with Sylvia. After the candles burn out, the two put on their swimsuits and sit in Seth's Jacuzzi. They kiss. The power comes back on in two hours but to be careful, the government begins to put restrictions on electricity use.

Seth and Julia both get invitations to Michaela's birthday party but decide not to attend. During the extended periods of daylight, temperatures become dangerously hot. The darkness brings extreme cold as well as snow one night. Seth and Julia go out in it. It is their first time to experience snow. Julia's father helps them build a snowman. Her mother, however, will not come near the snow.

## Chapters 27, 28 and 29 Analysis

There is both positive and negative in this section of chapters. The positive is that Seth and Julia finally realize that they both like one another. Seth invites Julia to watch the astronauts come back to America. They realize that they both had thought the other



acted strangely the day after they helped care for the whales. After this encounter Seth and Julia are constant companions. They collect the last of the dying wildlife and plant life from their area and preserve it so they will be able to remember the way that life was like at one time.

The negative in this chapter is that the astronauts that are brought back from the international space station are killed when they re-enter the Earth's atmosphere. NASA had left the astronauts there until they felt they could bring them home safely but were afraid they would last no longer in space as their food supplies were dwindling. The destruction of the shuttle and death of the astronauts is just one last show of proof that the Earth is not entirely under the control of humans.



# Chapter 30, 31, and 32

## Chapter 30, 31, and 32 Summary

In Chapter 30, the Earth's magnetic field is altered. Some hear it, Julia's mother has her most severe case of sickness yet at the same time. It is believed that a rift in the magnetic field that once protected the Earth has allowed radiation into the atmosphere. Humans are warned to avoid all exposure to the sun as the risk of radiation is higher. People only begin to go out at night. Julia's mother will only let her out of the house during the day to go to school. As soon as the sun sets, Seth arrives at her door and the two spend all the time they can together before the next sunrise.

Julia does not see Sylvia anymore. She and Seth talk about Sylvia as they enjoy the remainder of dark time. Because Sylvia's papers don't pile up and her mailbox never overflows, Seth reasons that Sylvia is still in her house. He decides they should spy on her one white night to see if she ever comes out of her house. Julia calls her mother to tell her that she will be spending the night at Hanna's house. They sit by the pool as they soak up the forbidden sunlight.

When they arrive at Sylvia's house, the back gate is open and Seth whispers they should go back there. As they wait in her yard, the side door opens and she emerges. Seth coughs and gets Sylvia's attention. When she sees them, she tells them that they need to go home. They don't go when she suggests. The door opens and Julia's father comes out carrying two suitcases. There is a standoff. Although Julia's father tells her to go home, she does not. She finally agrees to go back to Seth's house. They fall asleep there.

In Chapter 31, Seth and Julia wake up the next morning with the worst sunburns of their lives. Seth vomits from his pain. He is scared. Julia's mother scolds her as she applies aloe. She plans to have Julia's father look at her as soon as he gets home. Julia wonders if he will be home. Her mother discovers that Julia has been burned through her shirt. That same morning, Julia watches as Sylvia's things are moved into a moving van. Sylvia and her car are already gone. Early that afternoon, the lights go out. Then the cats begin to yowl and dogs howl. Julia and her mother are unable to get any reception on their radio. They later learn this is a solar superstorm caused by the deterioration of the magnetic field. Julia's mother is unable to get an answer from her father's cellphone. Julia believes that her mother knows something is wrong.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 32, a golden retriever is helping another drama to unfold. The dog had been spooked by the solar storm. His owners follow him onto Julia's grandfather's land where he is digging at a trapdoor. Julia's mother calls to her as her father finally comes home. He apologizes for not calling. The solar storm had knocked out cell phones. Julia learns he had been to her grandfather's house.



It turns out that Julia's grandfather had been repurposing the old bomb shelter for the troubles of their new age. Many of the things that her grandfather had packed up from the house are found in the shelter which he has prepared for both himself and Julia's family. The night of Julia's party, he had apparently carried a final load of supplies to the shelter. The ladder had slipped and he fell, resulting in his death. In his coat pocket is a birthday card with Julia's name on it and a \$20 bill inside.

## Chapter 30, 31, and 32 Analysis

This section is emotionally charged for Julia. First, she finally tells Seth about what is happening with her father and Sylvia. Seth, like Julia, is interested in Sylvia's way of life and the two decide to spy on Sylvia during one of the white nights. They happen to be spying on her from the backyard when Julia's father comes out of Sylvia's house carrying two suitcases. Seth stands beside Julia as she confronts her father about what he is doing with Sylvia.

The following day, Julia is afraid that her father is not coming home. Her mother tries to call him on his cell phone over and over again only to get no answer. Julia is happily surprised when her father's car pulls up in the driveway. This happiness is replaced by sadness when she learns that her grandfather's body has been found. He fell while going down the ladder into his bomb shelter and died, probably on the day of Julia's birthday party. Again, Julia has the feeling that nothing they worry about are the right things. The family had never dreamed that Gene might have been preparing a radiation shelter for the family. Julia runs the scenario with her grandfather going down the ladder over and over again thinking about the things that might have made the outcome different.

When Seth and Julia go out together during the white night, they are badly burned by radiation. Julia recovers from her sunburn quickly, but Seth is sick for several weeks. In her thoughts about their activities that night, Julia writes that the two were not thinking about the damage they might have been doing to their bodies on the night that they went out. They were thinking only that they were young and wanted to spend time in the sunshine.



# Chapters 33 and 34

## Chapters 33 and 34 Summary

In Chapter 33, it rains the day of Julia's grandfather's funeral. Seth is sick for weeks after the sunburn incident. Doctors are unsure of the cause of his illness. In May, earthquakes begin on a nearly daily basis. The last day of school that year seems somber as if students are afraid they will not return to school again. All the students seem more nostalgic than usual. Even Hanna insists on signing Julia's yearbook. After school is finished, Hanna and her family go back to Utah.

Seth and Julia keep track of that summer's solar storms. Although they do not understand most of what the scientists are saying about what is happening, they do know that what is happening now to the Earth once happened on Mars. Julia's mother begins to learn to predict when spells of her sickness will come. She also notices that her father seems to be taking care of her mother more tenderly than in years past. Julia never sees Sylvia again nor does she know if her father had really intended to run away with her. Her father spends his time cataloging his father's things. When the police report of Julia's mother's car wreck comes in the mail, her father burns it before she can see it. Her father speaks of Sylvia only once when he asks Julia one day as they are practicing soccer if she knows what a paradox is. On the Fourth of July, daylight days stretch to seventy-two hours long.

Seth finally seems to have recovered from his sunburn. One day, however, he has a nosebleed but brushes it off as if it is nothing. Sylvia's house remains empty. Julia wonders where she has gone. She learns on the news that three people in Circadia died of heatstroke in one day. Eventually these real time colonies all close with the human body unable to adjust to the length to which days have ballooned. Some of the people join those on clock time while others go crazy with sleep deprivation. Suicide cults become common that summer.

The government launches the Life Garden campaign. Julia's family tries to grow vegetables in their greenhouse. People begin to take vitamins to make up for the lack of fresh foods. There are soon shortages in vitamins. People, including Julia's mother, continue to hoard canned food. Julia notices that she is beginning to forget some things like the way her grandfather looked, the feel of sun on her skin and the taste of strawberries.

In August, work crews dig up parts of the street in front of Julia's house. When they are finished and new concrete is poured to fill the holes, Seth and Julia decide to make a mark in the cement. It takes them a long time to decide what to write. One day as they are walking home from the beach, Seth has a seizure. Julia runs to a woman's house and has her call an ambulance. Seth spends the night in the hospital. The next morning Seth tells her the doctors believe he is being affected by the syndrome, but Julia has already guessed the cause of his sickness. Seth gets rapidly weaker soon he can barely



walk. Seth's father closes his lab. He takes Seth to Mexico where it is believed the radiation is weaker. Seth gives Julia his skateboard, asking her to keep it for him. Seth tries to convince Julia they will be back as she cries. She gets a short email from him a few days later but hears nothing else from him.

In Chapter 34, Julia is surprised by how little was actually known despite how intelligent the scientists and doctors of her time were. They never determined the cause of the slowing. Julia is 23 when scientists plan to send the Explorer into space so that it can serve as a type of time capsule to tell what life on Earth had been like. Julia writes that those on Earth had come to accept that they were dying, but it doesn't keep them from continuing to live. Daylight and darkness now last for weeks at a time as the slowing has continued. Julia has decided to try to become a doctor. She still finds herself thinking about Seth and wondering if he will come back to her. She does know that even after she is gone, their names, the date and the words "we were here" will still be written in the concrete outside her house.

## Chapters 33 and 34 Analysis

The conclusion of the novel is bittersweet. The relationship between Julia's parents seems to have deepened since Julia's confrontation with her father and his return to their home the following day. Julia notices that her father treats her mother with more tenderness than ever before. Seth, however, becomes sick. He is suffering from the same syndrome that Julia's mother has. Instead of having spells, as Julia's mother does, Seth's illness becomes steadily worse. His father decides to take him to Mexico where he has heard that the radiation is not as bad. Julia gets one email message from Seth but hears nothing else from him.

In the final chapter, Julia is twenty-three. Julia writes about what has happened to the Earth in the past twelve years. Although they have come to realize that the Earth is dying and that their race will soon go with it, people continue to live their lives. They marry, and they have babies. Julia is studying to be a doctor but wonders if there will be a place for her to practice when she is finished. In the back of her mind, Julia still holds out hope that one day, Seth will come back to her.



# Characters

## Julia

Julia is the main character and narrator of this novel. In the beginning of the novel, she is a 10-year-old girl. She has her 11th birthday during the course of the novel. Julia is in the sixth grade. During the course of the novel, Julia is struggling with both the beginnings of adolescence as well as the changes in the Earth as a result of the slowing. In the beginning of the novel, Julia is best friends with Hanna, a Mormon girl whose family moves to Utah. Julia is lonely without Hanna. When Hanna returns to California with a new best friend, Julia is hurt and alone. Suddenly, other kids begin picking on Julia. One of the main kids who causes Julia the most trouble is Daryl, a boy who pulls Julia's shirt up to prove that Julia is not wearing a bra. When Daryl does this, a gold nugget that Julia's grandfather had given her is lost.

Julia is troubled by the normal pre-teen angst. She believes that she is not attractive and is not lovable. She is concerned because she is one of the only girls who is not yet wearing a bra. Julia is mortified because she is not invited to the same parties as the other girls are attending. The one party to which she is invited is Michaela's party. Julia learns later that she has only been invited to the party because Michaela's mother would not let her have her boyfriend if Julia was not there.

Meanwhile, Julia records the strange phenomena connected with the slowing of the planet's rotation that are affecting the Earth. She writes that these phenomena seem to be affecting her the relationships between the members of her family as well as her relationships between Julia and her friends. Julia seems to believe that her relationship troubles are a result of the slowing.

## Joel

Joel is Julia's father. He works at a hospital as an obstetrician for women with high-risk pregnancies. During his first shift after the slowing starts, a woman dies in childbirth. He believes that it is because the hospital was so short staffed. When Julia comments to her father that she is sorry that one of the patient's died, he lies and tells her that no one died. Julia's father also lies when he tells Helen that the pedestrian that she struck with a car as a result of the syndrome had not died. Although Julia finds this lie repulsive, she realizes what an affect that it has on raising her mother's spirits. She recognizes that her mother needed to hear the lie more than she needed to hear the truth.

Julia's father tries to pretend that he is not affected by the slowing. He tries to show no emotion or concern about what is happening to the world around him. It is only when Julia catches her father sneaking time with Sylvia that she realizes what an affect that the slowing has had on him. Although she never learns what has drawn her father to Sylvia, she believes that it had to do with the common belief that the slowing caused





people to be more intuitive and think less about the outcomes of their actions. At one point in the novel, it is indicated that Joel might be preparing to run away with Sylvia. However, he returns to his family the next day with the news that his father's body had been found. After this, Joel appears to be more caring and tender with his wife than ever before. He tries to explain to Julia the meaning of a paradox. It is from this conversation that Julia and Joel come to the silent agreement that they will say nothing to Helen about his time with Sylvia.

## Seth Moreno

Seth Moreno is the boy in Julia's class on whom Julia has a crush. Julia first spends time with Seth on the day of the solar eclipse when he grabs her by the hand and leads her out to the grassy hillside. As Julia is talking to Seth she tells him that she is sorry about his mother, a statement that seems to make him angry. Seth does not approach Julia again until the whales begin beaching themselves. He invites her to go with him to see the whales and they wind up helping the people who are trying to save the whales. It is not until the two sit on Seth's roof to watch Orion bring the astronauts back that they realize that they like one another. They are with each other all the time after that.

Seth is the only person that Julia tells that she has seen her father messing around with Sylvia. He decides they need to go and spy on her during one of the white nights. While they are out, both the children are badly burned by the sun's radiation. Seth has a bad reaction and is sick for nearly two weeks. Julia learns later that Seth, like her mother, is suffering from the syndrome. Seth's father takes him to live in Baja, Mexico where he has heard that the radiation is not as strong. Julia gets a short email from Seth soon after they move, but then never hears from him again.

## Michaela

Michaela is a girl who is in Julia's class at school. Unlike Julia, however, Michaela is overly concerned about her appearance and attracting boys. Michaela's mother is young and glamorous because she had Michaela when she was still a teenager. Michaela's mother is also crazy about men and not as attentive to her daughter. When the slowing begins, Michaela lives in an apartment where she and her mother don't even have cable television. At the conclusion of the novel, Michaela and her mother are living in the home of a man named Harry, who is rich. Although Michaela and Julia aren't close friends in middle school, she invites Julia to her house to spend the night because her mother will not let her have her boyfriend over if someone responsible is not there. The two had been close in elementary school but since that time those bonds of friendship had faded. Michaela brags to Julia one day about dancing with Seth at a party. She stops talking when Seth arrives at the bus stop as if the version that she was telling wasn't the truth. Later, when Julia and Seth are dating, Michaela invites the two of them to her party but they decide not to attend.



## Gene

Gene is Julia's paternal grandfather. He is Joel's father. Gene is an old-timer who lives on the acre plot of his family farm despite that fact that a planned community has grown up around him. He refuses to sell his property. To Julia it seems that her grandfather hates the fact that he has lived so long. His wife and all of his friends have already passed on and left him alone. Every time that Julia visits her grandfather, he tries to get her to pick out what she wants from among his things. He reasons that once he dies, his wife's younger sister is going to try to take all of his things.

When the slowing is first announced, Gene does not believe that it is real. He does not feel that the scientific community knows what they are talking about and believes that the slowing is something that has been made up to distract them from the wars. As the slowing progresses, though, Julia's grandfather realizes how real the phenomenon is. He secretly begins retrofitting an old bomb shelter in his backyard as a radiation shelter. Julia and her family do not learn about his plans until a golden retriever discovers Gene's body where he has fallen in the shelter when his ladder slipped.

## Helen

Helen is Julia's mother. She was an actress. She tends to be very emotional and overreact to things. When she learns about the slowing, she seems determined that the end of the world is coming. As the slowing continues, Helen becomes affected with the syndrome. The syndrome is not detected until Helen passes out one day as she is driving and hits a pedestrian. She continues to struggle with the effects of the syndrome throughout the rest of the novel. She finally begins to learn to identify when she will have her attacks by a faint metallic taste in her mouth.

Helen takes the threats of the slowing seriously. She begins collecting canned food and emergency supplies for her family. She becomes angry with her husband because she believes that he does not take the threat seriously. This anger comes out one day when she catches him eating one of the jars of peanut butter she had put aside for emergencies. Helen also orders a greenhouse without her husband's knowledge and had it erected in the backyard so they can grow vegetables.

## Hanna

Hanna is a Mormon girl who is Julia's best friend before the slowing begins. On the day that the news of the slowing is broadcast, Hanna had slept over at Julia's house. They are supposed to go to a soccer game that day. Instead, Hanna goes home to her family when she hears the news. She calls Julia later that day saying that their family is going to Utah where the Mormons are supposed to gather for the end of the world. Julia hears from Hanna only once by phone and gets one postcard from her friend while she is in Utah. Hanna does not call Julia to let her know that the family has returned to California until Julia happens to run into her at school one day. By this time, Hanna has chosen



Tracey Blair to be her new best friend. Hanna appears to forget Julia which hurts Julia's feelings deeply. At the conclusion of the novel, Hanna and her family move back to Utah. Even though the two had not interacted during the school year, Hanna insists on signing Julia's yearbook at the conclusion of the school year before she moves away.

## Sylvia

Sylvia is Julia's next-door neighbor. Sylvia teaches piano lessons to Julia before she decides to go off clock time and become a real timer. Because Sylvia does decide to deviate from clock time, many people in the neighborhood retaliate against her. She is one of the three real time families in the neighborhood whose power is cut. Someone also paints a vulgar threat on her garage. When one of Sylvia's eucalyptus trees falls on her house and smashes through a portion of the roof, Sylvia believes that the accident was intentional. Using the telescope that her father got her as a gift, Julia sees her father dancing with Sylvia inside her house. During one of the white nights, Julia and Seth catch Julia's father helping Sylvia to pack her car. After Sylvia leaves that day, Julia never sees or hears from her again.

## Gabby

Gabby is one of Julia's friends from elementary school. Since that time, however, the two have grown apart. Gabby has taken to the goth crowd. She wears black and dyes her hair. Due to this, her parents have sent her to a private school. Gabby tells Julia that she has been talking with an older boy who wants her to come and stay in Circadia with him. In preparation for her trip, she shaves her head. When she does shave her head, her parents take away her cell phone and ground her from using the computer. She visits Julia in order to use her computer to get messages from Keith. After Gabby leaves with Keith, Julia tells Gabby's mother where her daughter has gone. After Gabby's parents retrieve her from Circadia, they arrange for her to attend a boarding school.

## Tom and Carlotta

Tom and Carlotta are a couple of real timers who live on the same block with Julia and her family. The couple is arrested when police are given a tip that they are growing marijuana in their house. Julia believes the couple had been growing the drugs for some time but were only snitched upon because the neighbors didn't like their choice to observe daylight hours. Julia also believes that it was Gabby's mother who told on Tom and Carlotta because of a comment that Gabby had made about her mother suspecting the two were doing drugs.

## Miss Mosely

Miss Mosely is the name of the teacher who substitutes for Mr. Jensen, the science teacher, when he disappears. Miss Mosely stops the class from updating the length of



days as posted on Mr. Jensen's mural of the solar system. She also tries to explain to her students that the whales beaching themselves could be a natural phenomenon with nothing to do with the slowing but the students don't believe her explanation.

## Josh

Josh is Harry's son. He is 13, nearly three years older than Julia. It is Josh that suggests they need beer at their party. Josh becomes angry with Julia and calls her a loser when she won't let him kiss her. He tells her that the only reason that Michaela has invited her to the party was so that she could have her boyfriend there also. Julia later hears the sounds of one of the boys throwing up in the bathroom. She believes that it is Josh.

## Rolf

Rolf was an uncle of Julia's grandfather who disappeared in Alaska. Gene told Julia that he believed that he had seen the man several years later on a bus in Norway but Rolf never acknowledged that he knew Gene. Julia remembers this story when her family discovers that her grandfather is missing on the day of her birthday party.

## Trevor Watkins

Trevor Watkins is one of the kids that waits at Julia's bus stop with her. He believes there is something about the slowing that the government is not telling them. He is described as being skinny and friendless. It is Trevor who first notices the total solar eclipse that scares all of the students badly because they had no warning it was going to take place.

## Daryl

Daryl is a new kid in Julia's school. She describes him as a bad kid because he has to go to the nurse's office every day to take medication for ADHD. Daryl is the one who pulls up the front of Julia's shirt to prove that she isn't wearing a bra. He is also the one who throws the sparrow that Seth and Julia are trying to save into the canyon.

## Chip

Chip is a teenaged neighbor of Gene's who helps to take care of him. Chip wears black and has a lip ring. Julia's family first suspects that Gene may have gone with Chip to Circadia when he disappears. They find Chip and learn that Gene is not with him. Chip does, however, encourage Julia and her family to join the realists in Circadia.



## **Tracey Blair**

Tracey Blair is a Mormon girl with whom Hanna became friends during her family's first trip to Utah. When Hanna returns from Utah, she and Tracey are new best friends. Because of Tracey's careful gait and the callouses on her hands, Julia suspects that Tracey is a gymnast.

## **Kai**

Kai is Michaela's boyfriend. He is a year older than both Julia and Michaela, and is half Hawaiian. Julia learns from Josh that the only reason that Michaela has invited her to her party is so that her mother will also let her have her boyfriend there.

## **Chloe and Tony**

Chloe and Tony are the two Siamese cats owned by Julia's family. Chloe is soft and sweet while Tony is elderly. Julia often wonders if her cats do not sense the changes in the atmosphere before the humans do.

## **Mr. Valencia**

Mr. Valencia is a next door neighbor to Julia and her family who fills his garage with emergency supplies at the beginning of the snowing. After the grass in the yards dies, Mr. Valencia replaces his grass with lava rocks.

## **Ruth**

Ruth is Julia's grandmother's younger sister. Julia's grandfather believes that when he dies, Ruth is going to try to take all of his belongings so he encourages Julia to take what she wants when he is still alive.

## **Alison**

Alison was Hanna's best friend before Julia. Julia remembers the way that Hanna treated Alison when she was ready to be away from her. Julia is stung when she senses that Hanna is doing the same things to her.

## **Ben Harvey**

Ben Harvey is an employee from St. Anthony's Hospital who calls Julia's father to let him know that the pedestrian who was struck by Julia's mother was dead when he arrived at the hospital.



## **Molly Kopachek**

Molly Kopachek is a girl that Julia recognizes in the settlement of Circadia because they played on the same soccer team. The girl says that she hasn't seen Julia's grandfather but does show the family where Chip is living.

## **Seth's Father**

Seth's father is a bioengineer who spends most of his time trying to develop a type of corn that will grow without light. When Seth becomes sick with the syndrome, his father takes him to Baja, Mexico where he has heard that there is less radiation.

## **Mrs. Pinsky**

Mrs. Pinsky is Julia's math teacher. She is described as being morbid and intimidating. It is while Julia and Seth are in Mrs. Pinsky's class that the total solar eclipse takes place, scaring all of the students.

## **Keith**

Keith is Gabby's boyfriend from Circadia. He is 16. Gabby runs away with Keith to Circadia but is found the next day by her parents drinking wine at a barbecue with Keith. Keith is also a teenaged run away.

## **Jesse Schwartz**

Jesse Schwartz is one of the boys who spends his lunch period in the library because he is being punished. Julia is not sure for what he is being punished.

## **Harry**

Harry is Michaela's mother's new rich boyfriend. Harry is Josh's father.

## **Alma**

Alma is Harry's maid.



# Objects/Places

## Sixth of October

The sixth of October is the date on which officials formally announce that the rotation of the Earth has changed and the days are getting longer.

## The Slowing

The Slowing is the term that is given to the lengthening of the days caused by the slowing of the Earth's rotation.

## My Grandfather's Tiny Gold Nugget

Julia wears this tiny gold nugget that her grandfather found in Alaska on a chain around her neck. The gold nugget is lost when Daryl pulls up Julia's shirt to prove that she is not wearing a bra.

## A Post-It Note

A Post-It note is what Julia's science teacher, Mr. Jensen, uses display the length of each day in hours.

## Gravity Sickness

Gravity sickness is a term used loosely to describe a variety of symptoms, including dizziness, fainting, shortness of breath, that have become associated with the increased strength of gravity. Both Julia mother and Seth are affected by gravity sickness which is later also referred to as "the syndrome."

## Utah

Utah is the state to which Hanna and her family moves just after the beginning of the slowing.

## Seth's Skateboard

When Seth and his father leave California, Seth gives Julia his skateboard.



## **Total Solar Eclipse**

Less than a week after the slowing begins, there is a total solar eclipse which makes many people believe that the end of the Earth is near.

## **A Bomb Shelter**

Julia's paternal grandfather has a bomb shelter in his backyard which he built in the sixties. He has been preparing this shelter to protect himself and Julia's family from radiation when he falls on the ladder and is killed.

## **A Tarnished Gold Pocket Watch**

Julia's grandfather gives her this tarnished gold pocket watch during her first visit to him after the slowing begins.

## **Game 7 of the World Series**

Television broadcasters break into the seventh game of the World Series to tell people that they are to return to "clock time" despite when daylight hours might fall.

## **Clock Time**

Clock time is the term used to refer to the traditional 24-hour day.

## **The Virginia Project**

The Virginia Project is the name of an attempt made by scientists to find a way to manually alter the rotation of the Earth.

## **Pioneer Project**

The Pioneer Project is the name of a project that would create a habitat for humans on Mars.

## **Van Gogh's Starry Night**

The sympathy card that Julia sends to Seth has a rendition of Van Gogh's Starry Night on it.





## **The Real-Timers**

The Real-Timers are those who try to live by the daylight hours instead of abiding by clock time as the government has suggested they do.

## **White Nights**

The "white nights" are the nights during which the sun shines.

## **Slow Time Cure**

Scientists believe at one point that the slowing in time might have an effect on aging and disease because it affected the metabolism.

## **Four Thick Sticks of Solid Gold**

Julia finds these sticks of gold in her grandfather's possessions. Her grandfather tells her that gold is the best thing that there is.

## **The Syndrome**

Julia's mother is diagnosed with the syndrome, also referred to as gravity sickness, caused by the differences in the Earth's rotation. Her boyfriend, Seth, is diagnosed with the same illness.

## **Circadia**

Circadia is the city in which real timers are escaping. It is a partially completed subdivision in the desert.

## **Sixth Grade**

Julia is in the sixth grade when this story takes place.

## **Eucalyptus**

It is a Eucalyptus tree that falls on Sylvia's house.

## **Sylvia's Roof**

A corner of the roof of Sylvia's house is damaged when a tree falls and hits it.



## **Sylvia's Piano**

Sylvia's piano is one of the items smashed when the tree falls on her house.

## **The Homes at Rancho Domingo Del Sol**

The Homes at Rancho Domingo Del Sol is the unfinished subdivision that becomes the home of Circadia.

## **Orion**

The Orion is the name of the space shuttle expected to bring the astronauts home from the international space station. Unfortunately, the craft disintegrates 200 miles off the coast of California.

## **A Telescope**

Julia's father gives her the gift of a telescope that he intends for her to use searching the sky. Instead she uses it to spy on her neighbors.

## **Snow**

Although it is spring in California, the city is blanketed by five inches of snow during one of the cold, dark stretches.

## **Dynamo Effect**

The dynamo effect is what appears to be happening to the Earth as a result of the effect of the slowed rotation of the Earth on the planet's magnetic field. This magnetic field appears to be withering causing radiation to affect the Earth's navigational systems and satellites.

## **Vitamin D Tablets**

The people of Earth begin taking vitamin D tablets when the Earth's magnetic field is disrupted and they are no longer able to go out in the sun.

## **Sunburns**

Both Julia and Seth get severe sunburns, even through their clothes, when they decides to stay out in the sun one day despite the warnings.



## **A Golden Retriever**

A golden retriever draws attention to the underground bomb shelter where Julia's grandfather has fallen and died.

## **Underground Bomb Shelter**

Julia's grandfather has reworked this underground bomb shelter as a radiation shelter for himself and his family. On one of his trips to the shelter with a load of things, he falls, resulting in his death.

## **Faint Metallic Taste**

It is by a faint metallic taste that Julia's mother gets in her mouth that she begins to recognize when she will have an attack of gravity sickness.

## **Seth's Nosebleed**

It is Seth's nosebleed that is Julia's first clue that there is something medically wrong with him.

## **Life Garden Campaign**

The Life Garden Campaign is a program launched by the government in an attempt to encourage people to grow their own food in covered greenhouses.

## **Bag of Sour Candy**

Seth and Julia are sharing a bag of sour candy when he has a severe attack as a result of his gravity sickness.

## **Explorer**

The Explorer is a type of high tech time capsule sent into space by the people of the Earth when it became clear that the end of the Earth was near.



# Themes

## Coping Techniques

One of the major themes in the novel is the way the various characters deal with the uncertainty that comes with the slowing. Julia's mother is probably the character with the most common reaction to the slowing. She is worried and almost at the point of panic. The first day that the slowing is announced, she wants to keep her family close to her to be sure that they are safe. She sets about getting her family's emergency supplies in order. She also begins to collect canned foods and bottled water in case there are shortages. Julia's father, on the other hand, seems to believe that his wife is overly concerned with what is happening. He remains calm, almost to the point of being stoic. As a doctor, he is accustomed to thinking scientifically and does what seems most reasonable to him. He goes on with his daily routine as if nothing is happening.

Religious people of the time try to use the slowing to benefit their causes. The streets fill with people preaching and declaring that the end of the world is coming. The man who Julia's mother hits with the car is one of these who has been handing out fliers. The Mormons gather at a particular place in Salt Lake City where they believe Christ will appear during his second coming. Others join suicide cults who kill themselves in large numbers in order to avoid the stress of the uncertainty.

Julia's grandfather at first believes that the slowing is something that the government has come up with to take the people's minds off the wars. As time passes, though, he comes to realize that what is happening is real. At this time, he decides to take care of himself and his family by retrofitting a bomb shelter in his backyard as a radiation shelter.

The real timers take a completely different view of the slowing. They think that their bodies will be able to adapt to the lengthening days so they choose not to go on clock time. Soon, however, the days stretch beyond the real timers' ability to cope. Their sleep deprivation causes many of them to go mad. There are stories that many of them have starved despite the fact they had plenty of food stored up for themselves.

## Gravity Sickness

Gravity sickness or "the syndrome," is another theme in this novel as it affects both Julia's mother and Seth. While gravity sickness is often associated with the lack of gravity or diminished gravity, it is used in this novel to denote the symptoms of illness caused by too much gravity. Some, but not all of the people in the novel experience gravity sickness. It is not affecting just one gender or one age group, but a variety of people. Symptoms range from dizziness and passing out to total incapacitation. The sickness suffered by Julia's mother causes her to pass out which in turn causes her to hit a pedestrian with her car. She continues to have dizzy spells and sickness through



out the novel. No cure or cause is ever found for the illness but she does learn to determine when she will have a spell by a faint metallic taste in her mouth. Seth, on the other hand, does not seem to have spells with his sickness. After his seizure, he becomes steadily worse. It can only be assumed that he dies in Mexico because Julia does not hear from him any more. While some accept gravity sickness as a real disorder, there are also some who dismiss it as a symptom of the people's paranoia.

In addition to gravity sickness, Julia indicates that people are also affected emotionally by the increasingly long days. She writes that people, such as her father, seem to lose their inhibitions and their ability to control themselves. While she knows that her mother would argue with her that each person is responsible for his own actions, Julia likes the idea that her father's fling with Sylvia might be the result of some emotional disturbance beyond his control.

## Coming of Age

All the while these terrible changes are happening to the world, Julia is dealing with the changes of adolescence that have tormented children for ages. It is almost as if there is a sort of parallel between Julia's own struggles and the increasing difficulty of life on Earth. Before the slowing, Julia seems to have an ideal life. She spends most of her time with her best friend, Hanna, and not much thinking about the world around her. For religious reasons, Hanna moves away when the slowing is announced and Julia finds herself alone. She tries to reunite with old friends from her childhood, but finds these girls have taken different routes than she. Gabby has gotten into goth and is busy giving herself tattoos and getting into trouble. Michaela seems a half-hearted friend as she is more interested in using Julia to copy homework and get permission to have a boyfriend at a sleepover.

Even as Julia is struggling with her first crush, bullying, and her own insecurities about her body, the adults in her life are preoccupied with what is going on in the world around them. Her father tries to get her to explore an abandoned house with him and chides her for becoming a worrier, like her mother. In the course of the novel, however, Julia does see the miracle of reconciliation as her father returns to his family after she had thought that he was planning to run away with Sylvia. She notices that he becomes more tender and loving toward her mother, and that her mother tries to be less of a worrier. Although she does not believe it is right to lie, Julia and her father come to a silent agreement to keep his relationship with Sylvia a secret realizing that the truth would do more harm than good.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is recounted from the first person point of view of Julia, a 10-year-old girl who is struggling with the first stages of adolescence as the Earth becomes affected by some strange phenomena that causes its rotation to slow. This point of view is very important to the story as it is a coming of age story. The action of the novel is focused on Julia's feelings and emotions as Julia not only faces the changes that come with growing older but also the changes that coming to her world as people panic in the light of changes in world as they know it.

Approximately three-quarters or more of the novel is told in exposition while the remaining parts are told through dialogue. The expository sections of the novel cover Julia's thoughts and emotions as she deals with her day-to-day life. She describes her interactions with other pre-teens as well as her first experience with love. Julia also keeps track of what is happening in the world. She records the length of the days and the ways different people - especially those close to her - are dealing with the changes in the world. A large portion of the book covers about a year of Julia's life. Near the end of the novel, time fast forwards about twelve years to give readers a chance to see what the long term effects of the slowing has been.

## Setting

The story is set in a coastal California city that is not given a specific name. This is the city in which Julia has lived all of her life. She and her family live in a middle class suburb. Their home and the surrounding neighborhood is one of the main settings of the novel. Julia's bedroom is a major setting as it is here that she spends much of her time while at home. Her father gives her a telescope as a gift which she uses to spy on those around her from her bedroom window.

The bus stop where Julia and many of her friends and acquaintances from school gather each morning is another significant setting in the novel. This is where Daryl makes fun of her one morning because he believes that she is not wearing a bra, then pulls her shirt up to prove his point. It is also during this incident that a necklace given to Julia by her grandfather is lost.

Julia's grandfather's house and property is another significant setting in the novel. This is because it contrasts so greatly with the neat suburb that has grown up around it. Julia's grandfather's house is reminiscent of another time and he is the last hold out from that time. His property includes a bomb shelter that he built himself in the 60's. He is in the process of retrofitting this shelter as a radiation shelter when the ladder slips causing him to fall to his death.



Another important setting in the novel is the town of Circadia. Julia and her family travel here because they believe that Gene may have gone to live in this city. Circadia is one of the settlements in the desert inhabited by real timers. The town is powered by solar panels and water has to be trucked in because the settlement is so far out in the desert. These real timers took over a subdivision that was in the process of being built when the contractor ran out of money.

Michaela's house is another setting worth mentioning in the novel because it shows the way the rich are dealing with the slowing. The whole house has steel shutters that close over windows to make a dark night inside the house even when the sun is shining. All the lights are dimmable and on timers to mimic the fading light of the sun at the end of the day. There is also a safe room hidden in the home. It is made of steel and architecturally invisible so the family will be safe if anyone tries to break into the house. It is here they store their emergency supplies. The room is also outfitted with guns and a security system so that the family can protect itself in the case that there is a food shortage and other people try to steal their food.

Sylvia's house is another important setting. It is here that Julia notices her teacher's birds are sick one day during her piano lessons. Sylvia tries clock time but soon gives and becomes a real timer. Julia spends much time spying on her neighbor's house because she is curious about her lifestyle. It is while she is spying on Sylvia's house that she sees her father inside, dancing with Sylvia. It is also in Sylvia's backyard that Julia catches her father with Sylvia and confronts him.

## Language and Meaning

Although this story could be considered science fiction, it is not written in the jargon of a science fiction novel. The story is told from the view of a 10-year-old who describes what is happening to the world in the terms that a 10-year-old would use. By using this method of describing what is happening to the world, the story does not get lost in science fiction wordage and an unbelievable plot. The author never makes an attempt to describe what might have happened to cause the slowing of the Earth's rotation but that does not matter to the story. What matters is the way that Julia and those around her react to what is happening to the world.

In telling her story, Karen Thompson Walker uses imagery, metaphor, and simile to help describe what Julia is feeling and what is happening to her. One example of a simile can be found in Chapter 17 after the car accident. The flyers the pedestrian was handing out are said to have fluttered away "like dandelion seeds." The imagery of the story is present in the abandoned, flooded home that Julia and her father enter. It is a human dwelling that has become inhabited by the sea. Another example of imagery is the description of the house that fell into the canyon because its foundation collapsed. This image is important because it is similar to the ways that most people are living at the time of the novel. They feel as if everything that has ever brought them support has been taken away. What remains of life as they knew it is a pile of rubble.

## Structure

The novel is comprised of 34 chapters, with chapters averaging about eight pages long. The shortest chapter is two pages long while the longest is 20. The story is told in the past tense. Julia is looking back over her experiences as a child and writing about them. Although the story is mostly told in linear fashion, there are quite a few times where Julia will make reference to something that will happen in the future, or that she will point out a significant action that will be of importance later on in the novel. At the end of the novel, Julia also gives the reader a glimpse of what has happened to the Earth since it began slowing 13 years before.

The major plot of the story is the affect that the slowing of the Earth's rotation has on the people in the novel. This plot runs parallel to Julia's own coming of age story. As she grows up and begins to face hard issues in life, she is also dealing with the ways that the slowing is affecting the Earth. Other threads in the plot include Joel's fling with Sylvia, Julia's crush on Seth, and Julia's loss of her best friend, Hanna.





## Quotes

"The slowing, we soon came to understand, had altered gravity" (Chapter 3, p. 26).

"But I guess it never is what you worry over that comes to pass in the end. The real catastrophes are always different - unimagined, unprepared for, unknown" (Chapter 3, p. 29).

"Maybe everything that happened to me and to my family had nothing at all to do with the slowing. It's possible, I guess. But I doubt it. I doubt it very much" (Chapter 4, p. 34).

"I could tell he was hoping not to scare us, but that was the thing: We kids were not as afraid as we should have been. We were too young to be scared, too immersed in our own small worlds, too convinced of our own permanence" (Chapter 5, p. 45).

"Amid all this newness, my grandfather's dusty acre persisted, invisible, like a patch of dark matter: You could tell it existed from the way the roads curved around it, but you couldn't see it from the outside" (Chapter 6, p. 59).

"New minutes surfaced everywhere. Time was harder to waste. The pace of living seemed to slow" (Chapter 7, p. 69).

"A series of meetings between congressional leaders, White House officials, and the secretaries of Commerce, Agriculture, Transportation, and the Interior had produced a radically simple plan: in the face of massive global change, we, the American people, would be asked to carry on exactly as we always had" (Chapter 9, p. 83).

"As obvious as the implications would be later, the effects of the plan were not immediately clear to me. What would become apparent soon enough was this: We would fall out of sync with the sun almost immediately. Light would be unhooked from day, darkness unchained from night. And not everyone would go along with the plan" (Chapter 9, p. 84).

"I think we lost something else when we lost that crisp rhythm, some general shared belief that we could count on certain things" (Chapter 11, p. 96).

"And he was right: I had grown into a worrier, a girl on constant guard for catastrophes large and small, for the disappointments I now sensed were hidden all around us right in plain sight" (Chapter 14, p. 119).

"Rates of murder and other violent crimes also spiked while the sun was in our hemisphere - we discovered very quickly the dangers of the white nights" (Chapter 17, p. 130).

"In the cosmetics aisle, fifty feet of shelving displayed in glittering packages all the powders and the polishes and the creams, the shimmer sticks and eyebrow pens, the tweezers and clippers and razors that, I had begun to suspect, if applied in the correct



combinations, might begin to transform me into a girl more lovely and more loved" (Chapter 19, p. 153).

"Of all the strange phenomena that befell us that year, maybe nothing surprised me more than the sound of that small question rolling out of Seth's Moreno's mouth: 'Want to come'" (Chapter 24, p. 191).

"That's why the whales are beaching themselves. They use the magnetic field for navigation, and now it's decaying because of the slowing" (Chapter 24, p. 194).

"I was with Seth on the day we passed the wheat point. Now it was official: Wheat could no longer grow on this planet without the aid of artificial light" (Chapter 29, p. 224).

"Officials blamed the outage on the sunlamps and the greenhouses - they were straining the electrical grid. That was when the energy rationing began" (Chapter 29, p. 228).

"But the sun had developed an alarming new trick — it had burned us right through our clothes" (Chapter 31, p. 244).

"And this one fact seemed to point to other facts and others still: Love frays and humans fail, time passes, eras end" (Chapter 31, p. 245).

"Much study has been devoted to the physical effects of gravity sickness, but more lives than history will ever record were transformed by the subtler psychological shifts that also accompanied the slowing. For reasons we've never fully understood, the slowing - or its effects - altered the brain chemistry of certain people, disturbing most notably the fragile balance between impulse and control" (Chapter 31, p. 246).

"Some say that love is the sweetest feeling, the purest form of joy, but that isn't right. It's not love — it's relief" (Chapter 32, p. 248).

"I should have known by then that it's never the disasters you see coming that finally come to pass; it's the ones you don't expect at all" (Chapter 32, p. 248).

"There was a feeling on that last day of school, as we zipped up our backpacks and stacked our books in the book room, that we might never return to those halls" (Chapter 33, p. 252).

"The same solar wind now pummeling our skies had once, long ago, lapped away the oceans and the atmosphere of Mars" (Chapter 33, p. 253).

"And still the days grew and kept growing. We hit seventy-two hours on the Fourth of July" (Chapter 33, p. 257).

"As the days grew longer, it proved less and less possible for the human body to adjust. The promise of slow time went largely unfulfilled. For real-timers, the consequences of long periods without sleep began to interfere with certain cognitive functions. Some



gave up and joined the rest of us on the clock. Many of those who persisted in the colonies faded into madness. A group in Idaho was found close to starvation, delirious and hallucinating — the whole group had stopped eating, though their cupboards were full of canned food" (Chapter 33, p. 258).

"It was two days later that the whole of North America went dark, the largest power failure in history. For seventy-two hours, we lived by candlelight and rationed our supplies" (Chapter 33, p. 264).

"Sometimes the saddest stories take the fewest words: I never heard from Seth Moreno again" (Chapter 33, p. 265).

"And yet, the unknown still outweighed the known. We never determined the cause of the slowing. The source of our suffering remained forever mysterious" (Chapter 34, p. 266).

"Though the pace of the slowing had slackened over the years, it had never stopped. The damage had been done, and we had come to suspect that we were dying" (Chapter 34, p. 267).



## Topics for Discussion

Why does Karen Thompson Walker title her book "The Age of Miracles?" To what age does she refer? What are the miracles?

What effect does Hanna leaving California have on Julia? What is it like when Hanna comes back?

Discuss Julia's relationship with Seth.

How does the author use imagery in her novel? Cite at least three examples.

Is it significant that no cause of the Earth's slowing ever discovered? What do you think this might signify? How does it relate to the theme of death, dying, and wearing out?

Research the human being's circadian rhythm. What effect does light have on this rhythm? How would the instability of daylight hours affect a person's mood, ability to sleep, and sense of well-being?

Is there a disease known as gravity sickness? What are its symptoms? How is it similar or different from what is described in the novel?

How does Julia's entrance into adolescence and the things that she suffers during this year parallel what is happening to the Earth? Do you think this symbolizes a period of "old age" for the Earth?

If you were living during this period of time, do you think you would have adhered to clock time or would you have tried to stay or real time? Why or why not?