

Elsewhere Study Guide

Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin

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Plot Summary

Elsewhere is a novel by Gabrielle Zevin. In this novel, Lizzie has been killed in a hit and run accident. When she wakes on a boat, she thinks that she is dreaming. However, as Lizzie comes to understand the truth, she finds herself fighting reality and breaking the rules to get back to her family. Elsewhere is a fascinating story of what happens to people after death.

Lizzie has died in a hit and run accident on her way to the mall. Only fifteen, Lizzie wakes on a boat and holds on to the idea that she is only dreaming because she cannot imagine dying so young. However, when Lizzie is allowed to watch her own funeral, she is forced to realize the truth. When the boat docks, Lizzie refuses to disembark in hopes that she can return with the boat to her previous life.

On Elsewhere, Lizzie is met by her grandmother, Betty, who died in the months before Lizzie was born. Betty explains to Lizzie that on Elsewhere, people age backwards. Betty was in her fifties when she died, but is now in her thirties. Lizzie becomes angry at this thought because she had so looked forward to turning sixteen, but now she never will.

On her first full day on Elsewhere, Lizzie attends her acclimation meeting, a meeting with a counselor in which Lizzie learns about Elsewhere and is assigned an avocation. Lizzie's counselor, Aldous, suggests that Lizzie work as a counselor with newly arrived animals, but Lizzie hesitates at the offer.

Lizzie begins spending all her time at an observation deck on a lighthouse near her grandmother's house. From the telescopes on the observation deck, Lizzie can watch her family and friends back on earth. Lizzie becomes obsessed with watching over the next few weeks. Lizzie desperately misses her life on earth and refuses all of Betty's attempts to pull her out of her depression and away from the observation deck. Then Lizzie decides she must communicate with her family, so she decides to visit a forbidden place in the ocean where it is said she can communicate with her family and friends. However, Lizzie is caught by Betty and realizes that her attempts to return to earth are futile. The next day, Lizzie accepts the job with the Division of Domestic Animals.

As time passes and it comes close to Lizzie's dad's birthday, Lizzie recalls a sweater she bought for her father that is hidden in her closet. Lizzie feels overwhelmed with the need to get the sweater to her dad. Once again, Lizzie goes to the Well. This time Lizzie manages to speak to her family and can see that her brother Alvy has heard her. Just as Lizzie is talking with Alvy, a net comes and drags her to the surface. A cop whose job it is to keep people away from the Well, chastises Lizzie and shows her the unhappiness she has caused her family. However, when Lizzie explains her reasons to the cop, Owen Welles, he decides to go to the Well himself and explain the situation to Alvy.



Lizzie and Owen become friends and quickly begin the transition into a more romantic relationship. Owen, who died at twenty-six, desperately missed his wife after his death. With Lizzie, Owen is finally able to let go of his feelings for his wife. However, things become difficult when Owen's wife dies from the flu. For several weeks, Owen pushes Lizzie away and tries to resume his relationship with his wife, but they both soon realize that they have both changed and their relationship is not working.

Lizzie and Owen return to one another. Betty marries a former musician. Together they all grow younger until Lizzie is once again an infant. Lizzie finally returns to Earth and is reborn.



Prologue: In the End and Chapters 1-3

Prologue: In the End and Chapters 1-3 Summary

This is a novel that describes for readers this author's view of the afterlife. This author believes that people who have died go to a place called Elsewhere and age backwards, returning to Earth to be reborn when they are seven days old.

Lucy misses Lizzie greatly, taking little solace in the parents telling one another that Lizzie must not have felt pain because the car accident was so quick. Lucy does not believe this and has decided to pretend that Lizzie has simply gone off to college and chosen not to visit. Lucy is a dog.

Lizzie wakes in a small cabin on a boat. There is a girl sleeping in the bunk over Lizzie. Lizzie believes she is dreaming. Lizzie's bunkmate, who is several months older than Lizzie at sixteen, shows Lizzie a hole in the back of her head. It is small and red, but appears to be healing.

Lizzie and her bunkmate, Thandie, go in search of some food. Thandie is impressed with the amount of food and vows to eat a little of everything before they reach their destination. As they eat, they are joined by a young man who comments that it seems they are the youngest people on the boat. Lizzie recognizes this young man as the lead singer of Machine, Curtis Jest. Curtis shows Lizzie his arm and tells Thandie he died of a drug overdose. Thandie tells him that she died when hit in the head by a bullet. Lizzie still thinks she is dreaming. Lizzie returns to her cabin and wills her mother to wake her up.

Over the next couple of days, Lizzie continues to believe she is dreaming even though she sleeps and wakes on the boat. Lizzie's head is shaved and she has stitches behind her ear. Slowly memories come to Lizzie of lying in the hospital, of being hit by a taxi, but she refuses to believe any of it is real. One day a package comes to Lizzie's room, an invitation to view her funeral. Lizzie goes to the top of the ship to the observation deck and watches her own funeral through the telescopes there. Lizzie is upset that her best friend, Zoey, is not there. Lizzie runs into Curtis as he watches his own funeral. Lizzie finally admits that she may be dead just as land comes into view.

Prologue: In the End and Chapters 1-3 Analysis

In the prologue, the reader learns from Lizzie's dog that she has died in some kind of car accident. In the first chapter, Lizzie herself wakes on a boat, but she does not understand where she is and believes it is a dream because she has just studied the Nile in school and the boat is called the Nile. However, while interacting with others on the ship, Lizzie slowly comes to realize that she died in a car accident.



Lizzie was riding a bicycle that was hit by a taxi as she made her way to the mall. All the signs of the accident are still present, including a shaved head and stitches above her ear which were more than likely the fatal wounds. However, Lizzie holds on to the idea that she is dreaming because she is only fifteen and most children of that age believe they are somewhat immortal. It is a difficult situation for Lizzie and this struggle suggests for the reader that Lizzie will not accept her death easily even as she comes to realize that she is not dreaming.



Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 4-8

Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 4-8 Summary

When Lizzie returns to her cabin, Thandie is excited to realize they have reached their destination. When they dock and the captain announces that everyone must disembark, Thandie is among the first to leave. Lizzie, however, remains in the cabin in hopes that she can sneak back to life when the boat makes the return trip. Lizzie does not realize that her grandmother, Betty, is waiting for her. Lizzie also does not realize that the ship only goes one way until the captain, who is only seven, comes into the cabin and talks her into leaving.

On the way home, Betty tells Lizzie some of the facts of Elsewhere, including the fact that the dead age in reverse on Elsewhere until they become seven days old at which time they return to Earth to be reborn. Lizzie becomes upset, angry that she has waited so long to turn sixteen and now she learns she will never be sixteen. Lizzie, who is driving, begins to speed as she struggles with the reality of her death. Lizzie wants to return to Earth, but Betty explains there is no way to do that until she is a baby. Upset, Lizzie runs the car off the road and Betty is forced to take over.

Lizzie dreams that she was hit by a taxi cab, but she woke in the hospital and recovered. When Lizzie wakes up and discovers she is still on Elsewhere, she becomes angry. Lizzie wants to stay in bed all day, but Betty insists she must get up for her acclimation appointment. Betty offers Lizzie any clothing from her own closet since Lizzie only has the white pajamas offered on the ship, but Lizzie does not like Betty's clothing. Betty drives Lizzie to the Registry building and drops her off.

Lizzie has trouble finding the Office of Acclimation in the Registry building. When she finds it, the rude clerk puts Lizzie in a small room where a movie is supposed to explain the rules of Elsewhere. Lizzie already knows most of them from Betty and falls asleep during the last few minutes. The clerk returns and chastises Lizzie for falling asleep. The clerk then takes Lizzie to her counselor, Aldous Ghant. Aldous asks Lizzie about her likes and dislikes to help her choose an avocation. Aldous then tells Lizzie about the Sneaker Clause in which someone who dies young can choose to return to Earth within the first year of their death.

Aldous then takes Lizzie to another office where she is supposed to verify her last words. Lizzie is annoyed to learn her last word was 'um' and she vows to never say it again. Lizzie runs into Thandie who tells her her last words were full of anger and cursing. Aldous comes and finds Lizzie again and tells her that there is an opening in the Department of Domestic Animals being a counselor to newly dead animals. Lizzie is excited at first, but begins to hesitate when Aldous asks if she speaks Canine. Lizzie rushes out of the Registry building and asks Betty to take her to an observation deck.



Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 4-8 Analysis

Lizzie arrives on Elsewhere and begins to learn some of the rules of death. Lizzie still cannot accept that she is dead and the idea of aging backwards after she fought so hard to age forward just adds insult to injury. Lizzie is quickly descending into a depression as she tries not to deal with the reality of death.

Aldous Ghant is a funny man who seems to be facing his own death with humor. Aldous explains some of the rules to Lizzie and tries to help her, but she refuses to be helped. Lizzie also runs into Thandie, who could potentially be a good friend to her, but she is so wrapped in her own depression she cannot see it. Lizzie also fights her grandmother, Betty, whom she never knew because Betty represents all that is wrong with Lizzie's world. Lizzie then decides to go to the observation decks, setting her up for a walk in the past that cannot be healthy for her at this point.



Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 9-14

Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 9-14 Summary

Lizzie goes to the OD, or Observation Deck, and watches her family and friends in five minute snippets. For a month Lizzie goes regularly to the OD, using money Betty provides to her. One day Betty makes Lizzie go sightseeing with her, but Lizzie is unhappy and refuses to participate in anything. Lizzie buys some postcards and mails them to the people from her previous life, aware they will not get to their destination. Lizzie runs into a dog one night and has a conversation with it, unaware that she understands what the dog is saying.

One day Lizzie overhears her parents talking about her death and she realizes that the man who killed her is still unidentified. Lizzie begins using all her money to find the cab driver who ran her over with the intention of somehow telling her parents who it was. Lizzie then calls Thandie and asks her how to find the Well, a mysterious connection between Elsewhere and Earth. Thandie is angry with Lizzie for not seeing her sooner and refuses to answer. Lizzie goes to see Curtis Jest, who has become a fisherman, and asks him. Curtis tells her the Well is in the middle of the ocean on the ocean floor. Curtis says she will have to dive to reach it and when she attempts to communicate she has to be careful the way she speaks since she is underwater.

Lizzie, who was scuba diver certified when she was alive, prepares for the dive to the Well by buying a scuba suit and tank with money she told Betty was for clothing. The next day, Lizzie puts on the scuba suit under her clothing and tells Betty she is going to a party at Thandie's. Betty, however, finds the box for the air tank and goes to find Lizzie. By the time Betty finds Lizzie by the shore, Lizzie has already changed her mind. Lizzie has come to accept that her death was an accident and hurting the man who hit her will solve nothing.

Lizzie begins her first day at the Department of Domestic Animals. While changing into her uniform, Lizzie explains to a newly deceased dog that she should not drink out of the toilet. The dog is so grateful to Lizzie for this information that she asks if she can go home with her. Then Lizzie learns that this dog, Sadie, is her first client for the day. Lizzie and Betty adopt Sadie.

Lizzie settles in well with her new job and soon has made enough money to pay Betty back for all she used while visiting the OD. When her father's birthday approaches, Lizzie remembers a green sweater she bought for her father months before her death and hid in her closet. Lizzie thinks it might help her father with his grief if he found the sweater, but it is so well hidden she is sure he will not find it on his own. Lizzie decides to go to the well to tell her father about the sweater. When Lizzie begins communicating with her family, all the water in the house turns on and her voice is garbled. However, her brother Alvy finally hears her. As he begins to speak to her, Lizzie is dragged back to the surface by a net. Owen Welles, a detective with the Bureau of Supernatural Crime



and Contact, tells Lizzie that she is only hurting her family by trying to contact them. Lizzie finally relents when Owen shows her the argument that ensued between her brother and father, especially when Alvy looks in the wrong closet for the sweater.

After attempting to speak to her family, Lizzie lies in bed and reaches behind her ear to touch her stitches, the last piece of her life she has. However, the stitches are gone and at first Lizzie is terribly upset by this. Soon Lizzie realizes that it was just a piece of string. Later, she makes a list of all the things she misses the most from her life and realizes they are not that important.

Part 2, Book of the Dead: Chapters 9-14 Analysis

In these chapters, Lizzie continuously watches her family, trying to be a part of a life she no longer has. When Lizzie realizes the man who killed her has gotten away with the crime, she searches for him with the idea of telling her family about him to help them with their grief. However, Lizzie eventually realizes that the man who hit her was as much a victim in the whole thing as she. In fact, Lizzie remembers that she crossed the street without looking.

Lizzie seems to have finally accepted her situation and she begins to settle into her death on Elsewhere. Lizzie even gets a job working with animals and discovers that she has a gift for speaking to dogs. Things seem to be looking up for Lizzie until she remembers a gift she bought for her dad that she really wants him to have for his birthday. Lizzie risks everything to go to the Well to tell her family about the gift. This seems to show the reader that Lizzie has adjusted to her death, but she is still attached to her family and needs to help them in some way to help her manage her own death. Lizzie is caught and meets Owen Welles, a detective for the Bureau of Supernatural Crime and Contact. Owen also died very young and seems to understand Lizzie's situation, perhaps foreshadowing a friendship that will help Lizzie continue to adjust to her new situation.



Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 15-19

Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 15-19 Summary

Owen died at the age of twenty-six in a fire while trying to find a missing cat. Owen was a fireman. Owen was married and deeply in love with his wife, Emily, since they were both thirteen. After his death, Owen spent a lot of time at the ODs, watching his wife. Owen also made more than one hundred and fifty dives on the Well in an attempt to speak with Emily. This is how Owen became a detective. Now he only watches Emily once a week at the ODs.

Owen cannot stop thinking about Lizzie and her situation. Finally Owen decides to dive on the Well and tell Alvy which closet to look in for the sweater. Owen then goes to Lizzie's house to tell her her father got the sweater. As a thank you, Lizzie invites Owen to Thanksgiving Dinner.

Betty and Lizzie have a full house for Thanksgiving, including Aldous Ghent and his wife, Thandie and her cousin, and Owen. It is a pleasant evening and everyone seems to get along. After dinner, Lizzie talks Owen into helping with the dishes.

Owen calls Lizzie a few days later and inquires about adopting a dog. Owen goes to Lizzie's office and is immediately chosen by a golden retriever named Jen. Owen is not sure about owning a female dog, but Jen and Lizzie convince him. The next night Lizzie and Sadie go to Owen's for dinner. Over dinner, Lizzie asks Owen to teach her to parallel park and three point turns so she can get her license. Owen teaches Lizzie every evening for three weeks before Lizzie finally gets it figured out.

Lizzie asks Curtis how one knows they are in love and he tells her that no one person actually needs another. Owen goes to Lizzie's a few days later and offers to teach her how to parallel park on hills. Over the next month, they spend a great deal of time together and Lizzie successfully gets her license. Soon afterward, Lizzie and Owen begin dating.

Thandie, who reads the arrivals on the local news channel, tells Lizzie that Owen's wife, Emily, is due to arrive on that week's ship. Lizzie tells Owen and is hurt when he is excited at the idea and tells her that Emily will be coming to live with him. Emily and Owen are thrilled to be reunited. However, Emily was allergic to dogs in life and appears to still be allergic. Owen takes Jen to stay with Lizzie. Lizzie is saddened by this change between her and Owen, so Betty suggests they invite Owen and Emily over for dinner. It is a strained dinner and Owen and Emily quickly leave. When Lizzie discovers that Jen has peed on her bed, she rushes to Owen's and yells at him for abandoning Jen. As they argue, they kiss. Emily sees them, but she does not appear upset.



Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 15-19 Analysis

Owen cannot stop thinking about Lizzie, so he finds excuses to see her. At first it is hard for Owen because he has been alone since coming to Elsewhere and he desperately misses his wife on Earth, Emily. However, seeing Lizzie makes Owen feel so much better. At first they refuse to acknowledge that they are falling in love, but soon it becomes obvious to the reader that there is more to this relationship than the friendship Lizzie insists that it is. One of Lizzie's biggest gripes with being dead was the fact that she would never fall in love and be intimate with a boy, but it seems that she had finally found her chance with Owen.

As Lizzie and Owen become closer and closer, it seems their relationship will blossom into something Lizzie had thought she would miss out on. However, just as the relationship seems to be moving into the more intimate areas, Emily dies of the flu. Owen is thrilled to see his wife again, a woman he thought he would never meet again. However, Emily is thirty-five and Owen is seventeen on Elsewhere. This is quite a difference in ages and although other relationships like this have survived in Elsewhere, the reader begins to doubt if this one will. Perhaps Lizzie is not as out of the picture as she thought she was.



Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 20-23

Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 20-23 Summary

Saddened by Owen's new relationship with Emily and feeling as though she has nothing left on Elsewhere, Lizzie jumps at the Sneaker Clause when Aldous comes to tell her she is running out of time to use it. Lizzie tells Curtis the day before, but swears him to secrecy. At the same time, Emily tells Owen that she thinks they cannot continue their old relationship and that she wants to move out.

Without telling anyone, Lizzie goes to the river bank on a Sunday morning and is prepared for the week long journey down the river to earth. However, as Lizzie floats down the river, she begins to realize she had more on Elsewhere than her relationship with Owen and that she should enjoy what is left of the life she had on Earth because once she goes back, she will forget it all. At the same time, Curtis tells Betty what has happened to Lizzie. Owen joins them and they rush to the river to stop her. As Lizzie fights the river current, she falls to the bottom of the river and cannot free herself. Owen, Betty, and Curtis search for Lizzie for two days before Owen sends Betty and Curtis home. However, Owen is determined to keep looking.

Lizzie tries one last time to free herself, thinking that she can see her watch on the surface of the water. Finally Lizzie is able to swim to the surface, but the watch turns out to be Owen's boat. Owen rescues Lizzie and takes her home.

Lizzie spends two weeks at a healing center. Curtis comes and asks for her permission to date Betty, which Lizzie gives happily. Owen gives Lizzie a gold watch that is nothing like her old pocket watch, but she likes it anyway.

Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Chapters 20-23 Analysis

Lizzie had adjusted to being dead and even found some small happiness in her new situation. However, Emily's return only underscores everything that Lizzie has lost. For this reason, Lizzie jumps at the opportunity to return to Earth early with the Sneaker Clause. Lizzie sneaks away without telling anyone but Curtis. Soon, though, Lizzie discovers that there was more about Elsewhere and about her death that she values than her relationship with Owen. Lizzie decides to go back, but becomes trapped on the bottom of the river. She cannot drown because she is already dead, but she can remain trapped there until she is an infant and begins her float back to Earth.

The reader sees just how much her friends and family love Lizzie when they learn of her decision and try to stop her. Ironically Owen has come to realize that he cannot



recapture the relationship he had with Emily on Earth and has allowed her to go free. This might be too late, however, as Lizzie has already gone. Owen refuses to give up on Lizzie, just like he nearly refused to give up on Emily after his own death. This stubbornness seems to work out and Lizzie and Owen are reunited. However, the reader cannot forget that on Elsewhere they will continue to age in reverse, leaving the reader wondering what kind of life or death that they will have together.



Part 3, Antique Lands: Chapters 24-30 and Epilogue: At the Beginning

Part 3, Antique Lands: Chapters 24-30 and Epilogue: At the Beginning Summary

Lizzie makes the conscious choice to be happy in her death. Five years pass and she is nine years old.

Lizzie receives a wedding invitation to her best friend, Zooey's, wedding from a message in a bottle. Lizzie and Owen decide to dive down to the Well to make a toast at the wedding. However, there is no water source close enough to the reception for Lizzie to get Zooey's attention. However, Lizzie's brother Alvy hears her and they have a nice talk at a water fountain. A few days later, Curtis asks Lizzie's permission to marry Betty. The wedding is romantic and Curtis sings a song he wrote, the first he wrote in Elsewhere, for Betty.

Sadie becomes a puppy again and soon Lizzie has to take her to the river. Lizzie is sad because she is worried that Sadie will not be adopted by people who will take good care of her. Lizzie swears she will not adopt another dog, but a week later Lucy comes to Elsewhere. Lizzie takes Lucy home.

The day that Lizzie retires from the Department of Domestic Animals, Amadou Bonamy comes to visit her. Amadou tells Lizzie that he wants to apologize for killing her. When Lizzie asks why he did not stop, he tells her that he was afraid of losing his source of income, especially since his son was chronically sick. Lizzie forgives him and sends him off with a balloon for his son.

Lizzie is four and Owen is six. They now behave like young siblings toward one another.

Lizzie is now a week old. Betty, Curtis, Thandie's cousin, and Emily take her to the river to say goodbye. Owen is only two and does not seem to truly understand what is happening. At home, Betty throws a party.

Liz is not sad to be a baby, but content in the life she lived.

Liz is reborn.

Part 3, Antique Lands: Chapters 24-30 and Epilogue: At the Beginning Analysis

In this section of the book, Lizzie has finally accepted that her death is a part of her life and she decides to live it to the fullest. Lizzie and Owen remain together even as they



grow younger, becoming more like siblings than lovers. Betty and Curtis find love with one another after many heartbreaks on Earth for each of them. Lizzie meets the man who killed her and finally comes to understand why he did what he did.

This book is almost written in reverse and it presents the reader with a story that is both a story of life and death, a story that tells the reader to live life to the fullest no matter what their situation is. It is a touching story that is so much more than death and what happens to the spirit.



Characters

Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Marie Hall

Lizzie is a fifteen-year-old girl who one day was riding her bicycle to the mall to help her best friend pick out a dress for the prom when she was hit by a taxi cab. Lizzie was in a coma for a week before dying. Lizzie wakes on a ship called the Nile and believes she is dreaming. In truth, Lizzie has died and the Nile is taking her to Elsewhere, the land where dead people age backwards until they are ready to be born again. Lizzie is not happy with her death and hates the idea that she will never become an adult and experience all the things teenage girls look forward to doing.

Lizzie struggles for the first month she is in Elsewhere, but soon comes to accept that she is dead. When Lizzie meets Owen, it seems some of what she was going to miss out on on Earth might still have a chance of coming true. However, Owen's wife dies and joins him on Elsewhere. Lizzie decides she no longer has a reason to be on Elsewhere and she attempts to return to Earth, but changes her mind at the last minute. Lizzie becomes trapped on the bottom of the river until she spots Owen's boat floating above her.

Finally Lizzie accepts that death is only a continuation of her life. Lizzie accepts her life and lives it happily with Owen, Betty, and all her other friends until she reaches infancy and is sent back to Earth where she is once again born.

Elizabeth 'Betty' Bloom

Betty Bloom is Lizzie's grandmother. Betty died in the months before Lizzie's birth, which is why Lizzie was named for her. Betty and her own daughter, Olivia, had a volatile relationship because Betty had an affair in her marriage and her daughter could not forgive her. However, when she died of breast cancer, Olivia was left with regrets.

Betty was in her fifties when she died, but when Lizzie comes to Elsewhere she is in her thirties. Betty does all she can to help Lizzie adjust to being on Elsewhere and becomes something of a parental figure to her. At the same time, Betty finds her own happiness when she marries Curtis Jest.

Thandiwe 'Thandie' Washington

Thandie is a sixteen-year-old girl who is sleeping on the bunk over Lizzie when she first wakes on the Nile. Thandie was shot on the street in Washington while she was walking with her boyfriend, Slim. Thandie remembers her own death immediately and seems to accept it. On Elsewhere, Thandie lives with a cousin who died of an overdose before her and gets a job announcing new arrivals on the local television station. Thandie seems well adjusted and almost happy in her death.



Curtis Jest

Curtis Jest was the lead singer of Lizzie's favorite band, Machine. Curtis died of a drug overdose about the same time Lizzie died and travels on the Nile with Lizzie and Thandie. Lizzie often turns to Curtis in times of need because he is a good listener and sometimes seems to have good advice for Lizzie. When Lizzie decides to use the Sneaker Clause, Curtis is the only one she tells. When Curtis decides someone else should know despite his promise to Lizzie, he meets Betty and falls instantly in love even though he has sworn off of love. Eventually Curtis and Betty are married.

Owen Welles

Owen Welles was a twenty-six-year-old fireman married to his childhood sweetheart when he was killed of asphyxiation during a fire. Owen misses his wife, Emily, deeply and spent the first year of his time at Elsewhere watching his wife or trying to communicate with her through the Well. However, Owen finally accepted he must allow Emily to go on with her life and began only watching her for a short time on Thursdays.

When Owen meets Lizzie, he is fairly content with the idea that he is destined to be alone until his rebirth. Lizzie awakens something in Owen and brings happiness to his life. Unfortunately, before Lizzie and Owen can truly fall in love, Emily comes to Elsewhere. Owen believes he and Emily can make their relationship work despite the time that has passed, but Emily has grown up where Owen has grown younger. They decide to separate and Owen reclaims his relationship with Lizzie.

Aldous Ghent

Aldous Ghent is Lizzie's counselor. Aldous tries to help Lizzie upon her arrival in Elsewhere, but she refuses everyone's help. Eventually Aldous gets Lizzie a good job and becomes one of her closest friends, even inspiring her to read Shakespeare.

Emily Welles

Emily Welles is Owen's wife. Emily continues to live for nine years after Owen's death and has become a doctor. Emily dies from the flu and comes to Elsewhere, destroying the relationship that was still in the early stages between Owen and Lizzie. Emily recognizes almost immediately that her relationship with Owen is not sustainable because she has matured where he has become young again. Emily suggests to Owen that they separate and that he pursue Lizzie.



Alvy Hall

Alvy is Lizzie's little brother. Alvy is the only one who can hear Lizzie when she tries to contact her family through the Well to tell them about the sweater she bought for her father. Later, Alvy speaks to Owen about the same thing and finally finds the sweater, which helps their father to heal from Lizzie's death. When Zooey marries, Lizzie is able to speak to Alvy and learn a great deal about what has happened on Earth during her years on Elsewhere.

Sadie

Sadie is a dog that Lizzie meets on her first day with the Department of Domestic Animals. Sadie is so grateful to Lizzie for telling her what a toilet is that she asks Lizzie to adopt her. Sadie becomes one of Lizzie's closest friends. Lizzie is saddened when Sadie becomes a puppy again. Lizzie worries who will care for Sadie in her new life.

Lucy

Lucy was Lizzie's dog when she was alive. The novel begins with Lucy grieving for Lizzie. Toward the end of the novel, Lucy dies and comes to Elsewhere. As a counselor for the Department of Domestic Animals, Lizzie finds Lucy immediately and takes her home even after swearing she did not want another pet after Sadie.



Objects/Places

Scuba Suit

Lizzie buys a scuba suit so that she can swim to the Well and tell her parents the name of the man who killed her. However, Lizzie changes her mind and decides not to attempt to contact her parents until much later when she realizes that her father will never find the birthday present she hid for him.

Infinity Tank

Lizzie buys an air tank called the infinity tank that the salesman tells her will never run out of air.

Books

Lizzie begins reading a great deal after her ordeal during her aborted Sneaker Clause attempt. Among these books are works by Shakespeare and some books Lizzie read when she was a young girl.

The Well

The Well is a well at the bottom of the ocean outside of Elsewhere that allows the dead to speak with the living. However, it is forbidden for people of Elsewhere to go to the Well.

Observation Decks

On the Observation Decks, or ODs, in Elsewhere, the dead can look through telescopes or binoculars and see the family and friends they left behind on Earth.

Department of Domestic Animals

The Department of Domestic Animals is where Lizzie works. This department helps domestic animals adjust to death and find a new home on Elsewhere.

Department of Acclimation

The Department of Acclimation is designed to help new people to Elsewhere adjust to their deaths and to find an avocation.



The Registry

The Registry is a building in downtown Elsewhere that houses all the important departments required to run Elsewhere. The building is constantly under construction, causing it to be difficult to find the right departments.

Lucky Cab

The Lucky Cab is a taxi cab with four-leaf clover air fresheners hanging from the rear view mirror. This is the taxi cab that hit Lizzie and killed her.

The Nile

The Nile is a ship that transports the dead from Earth to Elsewhere.

Elsewhere

Elsewhere is a round island where the dead go to live after leaving Earth. On Elsewhere, everyone ages backwards until they are one week old. At that point, the babies are returned to Earth where they are reborn.

Earth

Earth is the place where the living remain. The people of Elsewhere can see the people on Earth through the Well or Observation Decks, but are forbidden to attempt to interact with them. When the people of Elsewhere return to infancy, they are sent back to Earth to be reborn.



Themes

Grief

When Lizzie is killed by a taxi cab, her family is devastated. As Lizzie watches over them, her parents become withdrawn and dark, her brother a comic attempting to get his parents' attention. Lizzie too grieves for her life. When Lizzie comes to understand that she is not dreaming, that she is really dead, she is filled with anger at all the things she will never experience in her life. Lizzie becomes obsessed with watching her family and friends on Earth and even tries to get word to her family about the man who hit her in the hit and run accident. Even as Lizzie appears to have come to accept her death, she finds that her death has little meaning and she attempts to return to Earth.

Owen was also devastated when he died at the age of twenty-six. Married to his childhood sweetheart, Owen cannot let his love for his wife go. Owen goes to the Well over one hundred and fifty times, as well as becoming obsessed with the ODs for the first year of his death. Over time, Owen realizes that these actions are not good for Emily and he cuts it down to just one night a week at the ODs. However, Owen still has not let go of his grief nine years after his death.

Grief is a difficult thing. In this book, not only do those left behind grieve, but those who must accept their own deaths, also grieve. It is a difficult process and not everyone can survive it. It appears that both Lizzie and Owen will never get over their own deaths because of what they lost when they died so young. However, in time they find peace in one another and this helps them adjust to the pain.

Acceptance

At first it seems that Lizzie will never accept her death. As time passes, Lizzie becomes deeply depressed and obsessed with watching her family and friends at the ODs. However, Lizzie soon comes to realize that she is just as responsible for her own death as the man who killed her and this helps her to adjust to her death. However, Lizzie still cannot let go of her past when she realizes that the sweater she bought for her dad's birthday will remain hidden unless she can tell them where to look. Lizzie goes to the Well and is caught, causing her to create trouble for her brother without meeting her goal.

At the same time, Lizzie continues to struggle with her death, Owen cannot let go of his wife whom he has realized he will never see again. When he meets Lizzie, Owen finds a kindred spirit, someone who is just as unhappy as he has been for nine years. They begin to spend time together and become good friends. However, when Owen's wife dies and joins him on Elsewhere, it seems that Lizzie has lost all she once had all over again.



Owen and his wife struggle to take up where they left off, soon coming to the realization that because Owen has regressed where Emily has matured, that they no longer have anything in common. Owen allows Emily to leave, realizing that he has come to accept his death and his loss of the love that was once so important to him. At the same time, Lizzie realizes there is more to her life on Elsewhere than Owen and everything she has lost. Lizzie too begins to accept her death.

Meaning of Life

At first glance, this novel appears to be about death. The author begins with Lizzie's death on Earth and the impact it has on the people in her family. However, in truth this is just the beginning of Lizzie's story. In her death, Lizzie begins to understand what it is that makes a life meaningful.

Lizzie grieves when she first comes to Elsewhere for everything she will lose by leaving Earth and coming to Elsewhere. However, as time goes on, Lizzie begins to understand that there is more to life than growing up and having boyfriends. Lizzie soon begins to understand that life is about the people in your life, but it is also about finding happiness not only in the external things in life, but also the more internal things. Lizzie realizes that she can find happiness in simple things that she once thought were boring or dumb. Life is about finding happiness and not about boyfriends and driving.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person point of view. The narrator in the prologue is Lizzie's dog, Lucy, who does not understand what has happened to Lizzie. The narrator then becomes Lizzie as she wakes on the Nile and struggles to accept her own reality. As the novel continues, most of the novel is told from Lizzie's point of view, but there are a few times when the author moves into Betty's point of view or Curtis' or Owen's. The author does this so that the reader can see the plot in full, even things that Lizzie is not aware of and cannot tell the reader.

The point of view of this novel is strong, but not necessarily consistent. When the author moves into the mind of Betty Bloom early in the novel, it is an abrupt shift that can confuse the reader. The majority of the novel is told from Lizzie's point of view, making it somewhat jarring when the narration moves from Lizzie to other characters in the novel. However, the author is consistent with the third person point of view and tells a strong story that is thought provoking, making the narration acceptable to this purpose.

Setting

The majority of the novel takes place on Elsewhere. Elsewhere is an island in the middle of an unnamed ocean where the dead go to live after they leave Earth. The dead come to Elsewhere on a ship and live there until they are infants again, at which time they are sent down a river to Earth. Elsewhere has its own rules and its own style of living. People are not expected to work, but they are supposed to take on a job that is something they greatly enjoy.

The setting on the novel is somewhat fantastic, but it is also a setting that is similar to what one would expect to see on Earth. The rules and the people on Elsewhere are different from Earth, but everyone works and plays, everyone lives their lives much the same as they might have on Earth. The setting is not so fantastic that the reader cannot understand it, but it is fantastic enough to work well with the plot of the novel. For this reason, the setting of this novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is intended for young adults and therefore the novel's language is simple. The main character is a teenager though much of the novel, therefore the language is simple enough to make her seem authentic, but complicated enough that the reader does not feel as though they are being talked down to.

The language of the book works well both for the intended audience and the characters in the book. The language is not filled with slang and foreign words, but clearly and

concisely gets across the story the author is trying to tell. The language of the novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel has both a prologue and an epilogue. The novel also contains three parts and each part contains multiple chapters that are each given a name that gives the reader a hint to what is going to happen in the chapter. The novel is told in a linear fashion, beginning with Lizzie's death and ending with her rebirth more than fifteen years later. The novel contains both narration and dialogue that tells the story in scenes rather than just telling the story without well written scenes.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Lizzie as she struggles to accept her death and move on with it. One subplot revolves around the relationship between Lizzie and her grandmother. Another subplot revolves around Lizzie's budding relationship with Owen. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"For Lizzie's sake, Lucy wants to believe that the end was quick and painless, a quick end is a good end" (Prologue: In the End, p. 6).

"Elizabeth Hall wakes in a strange bed in a strange room with the strange feeling that her sheets are trying to smother her" (Part 1, The Nile: At Sea, p. 11).

"All at once, Liz needs to get there. She sense that when she reaches the Observation Deck, something definitive will happen" (Part 1, The Nile: In Memory of Elizabeth Marie Hall, p. 25).

"Out my window, you'll see a library built by Frank Lloyd Wright. People who know these things say it's better than any of the buildings he built on Earth" (Part 2, The Book of the Dead: A Long Drive Home, p. 37).

"How long does it take to say goodbye to everything and everyone you've ever known?" (Part 2, The Book of the Dead: Sightseeing, p. 64).

"Although she hadn't noticed at the time, her daily routine at the Observation Decks had become less and less satisfying: each day blending into the one before it, bleary images that seemed to become blearier and blearier, her eyes strained, her back sore" (Part 2, The Book of the Dead: The Big Dive, p. 84).

"Why do two people fall in love? It's a mystery" (Part 2, The Book of the Dead: A Mystery, p. 119).

"What is the point of loving anyone? To Liz, all the effort of working, living, loving, talking has begun to seem just that: effort" (Part 2, The book of the Dead, Sneaker Clause, p. 143).

"There will be other lives" (Part 3, Antique Lands: Time Passes, p. 163).

"Betty cries, and Curtis cries, and Owen cries, and Thandi cries, and Sadie cries, and Jen cries, and Aldous Ghent cries. But Liz doesn't cry. She's too happy to cry" (Part 3, Antique Lands: Two Weddings, p. 174).

"For better or worse, this is my life, she thinks" (Part 3, Antique Lands: Two Weddings, p. 175).

"A life isn't measured in hours and minutes. It's the quality, not the length" (Part 3, Antique Lands: Amadou, p. 181).

"And in response, this baby, who is Liz and not Liz at the same time, laughs" (Epilogue: At the Beginning, p. 191).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Lucy? Why is she the narrator at the beginning of the novel? How does the reader come to understand Lucy's relationship to Lizzie? What happened to Lizzie as Lucy understands it? What does Lucy plan to do to help her deal with Lizzie's passing? How does Lucy imply that Lizzie's parents are dealing with her death? Alvy?

Who is Lizzie? What does she think when she wakes in a ship's cabin? What does Lizzie think happened to her hair? Why does Lizzie not realize immediately what the hole in the back of Thandie's head is? Why does Thandie figure out what happened to them before Lizzie does? How does Lizzie finally come to realize she is dead? How does Lizzie react to this?

Who is Betty? Why does Betty come to meet Lizzie at the Nile? What does Betty tell Lizzie that upsets her so much? Why does Betty not become angry with Lizzie for crashing her car? How does Betty try to get Lizzie to stop going to the ODs? Why does Lizzie refuse to do so? What does Betty reveal was the cause of tension between she and her daughter, Olivia? How does this impact Betty's life on Elsewhere?

Who is Curtis Jest? Why does Lizzie know who Curtis is? How did Curtis die? Why does Curtis become a fisherman? Why does Lizzie criticize this choice on Curtis' part? Why does Lizzie always turn to Curtis when she needs advice? Does Curtis give good advice? Who does Curtis eventually fall in love with? Why does this surprise Curtis so much? How does Curtis react to this new feeling? How does Lizzie feel about this?

Who is Owen? Why can Owen not accept his own death? Who does Owen often go to watch at the ODs? What is Owen's job? Why did Owen choose this avocation? How do Owen and Lizzie meet? What does Lizzie ask of Owen that continues their relationship? How does Owen react as his relationship with Lizzie continues to grow? What happens to end this growing relationship?

Why does Lizzie hesitate to join the Department of Domestic Animals? What language does Aldous want Lizzie to be able to speak to do this job? Why does Lizzie think she cannot speak this language? How does the reader learn that Lizzie can speak this language? How does Lizzie realize she can speak this language? What is unusual about the ability to speak this language on Elsewhere? Why could Lizzie not speak it on Earth?

What is the Sneaker Clause? Who tells Lizzie about this clause? For what reason? Why does Lizzie decide to take advantage of this clause? What happens when she does? Why does Curtis tell Betty about Lizzie's decision? What does Betty do? Why does Owen refuse to stop searching for Lizzie? Was his decision correct? How does Owen finally find Lizzie?