

Leaving Time Study Guide

Leaving Time by Jodi Picoult

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Plot Summary

(Please note this plot summary and some sections of the guide contain spoilers for a major plot twist.)

The love of a daughter for her mother transcends even death in the novel “Leaving Time” by Jodi Picoult. Psychic Serenity Jones believes she has lost the ability to communicate with spirits when thirteen-year-old Jenna Metcalf comes to her for help in locating her mother, Alice Metcalf. Alice had disappeared the same day another woman was killed on the grounds of the New England Elephant Sanctuary. Jenna can’t believe her mother would have abandoned her willingly. Her hunch turns out to be right as she, Serenity and Virgil Stanhope, one of the cops who originally investigated the incident at the sanctuary, work together to unwind the mystery of Jenna’s past. The plot of the novel takes the reader through a variety of twists and turns in Jenna’s search for answers.

When Jenna decides to take her search for her missing mother into her own hands, she begins by contacting a psychic. Although her mother was a scientist, dedicated to researching elephant behavior, one of her journals includes a statement that even in science, there is a small part of some things that can’t be explained except by magic or the paranormal. When Jenna contacts Serenity, she does not know that Serenity’s career and name were tarnished years prior when she incorrectly predicted a senator’s kidnapped son would be found alive. Serenity has not heard from her spirit guides or from anyone in the spirit world since that time. However, after Jenna contacts Serenity, Serenity has a dream about Jenna’s mother and then later a computer glitch that she interprets as someone on the other side indicating to her she needs to help Jenna.

Meanwhile, Jenna also gets in touch with Virgil Stanhope, the washed up, alcoholic private investigator who had originally helped in the investigation of the death at the elephant sanctuary the night her mother disappeared. Although Jenna doesn’t know it, Virgil has been plagued by guilt because he believes he did not handle that case properly. Even though there were signs a murder had been committed, Virgil’s commanding officer encouraged him to ignore the evidence because he was getting pressure from the government to hush up the incident.

Together, the unlikely trio of investigators unravels the mystery behind Alice’s disappearance and discover that although Alice had run away from the elephant sanctuary that night, it was not she but Jenna who was missing. The novel address themes of grief and abandonment, mental illness and the paranormal as well as the helplessness one can fall into when questioning his own abilities.



Prologue — Part 1: Chapter 1; Jenna

Summary

Jenna debunks the myth that there is an elephant graveyard. Her mother could have told her the scientific evidence against the myth, she says. She wishes that there was such a thing, but not just for elephants, so she'd be able to find her mother.

Alice remembers being obsessed with elephants even as a nine-year-old girl. One Saturday morning, her mother took her to Springfield, Massachusetts to see an elephant. The elephant, Morganetta, was not what Alice imagined. She and her mother were both stunned to see the elephant was chained to a concrete block with sores on her hind legs because of the shackles she was wearing. On the way home, Alice decided to become an elephant advocate. She wrote to the mayor of Springfield asking him to give Morganetta more room in her enclosure. The mayor did so. Alice was even invited back for the opening of the elephant's new larger pen. Even so, Alice felt that elephant still carried with her all of the anger from the cruel things that had been done to her. After that zoo closed, Morganetta was moved to a zoo with other elephants and an enclosure with a pond. Two years later, she was found dead at the bottom of that pond. From that experience, Alice realized that no matter how much a person wanted to improve any given situation, there were some that were just destined to have unhappy endings.

A poem about elephants and their distress by Dan Chiasson opens Part 1 of the novel. In Chapter 1, Jenna talks about being an expert at memory. Her first memory is of her mother giving her a piece of cotton candy when she was only nine months old. Most people can't remember things from this young an age and Jenna wonders if it were a trade off because she couldn't remember the day her mother disappeared. Jenna's mother, a scientist, studied the effects of post-traumatic stress on elephants as well as elephant memory. Memory is linked with strong emotion, Jenna's mother had learned. She noted there was a fine line between a negative emotion and a traumatic one. While negative emotions are remembered those that are traumatic are forgotten or distorted to the point they can't be recognized.

Jenna lists the facts she knows about that night when her mother disappeared. Her mother had been found unconscious the same night an elephant caregiver was killed. She was taken to the hospital from which she disappeared before dawn the next day. Jenna was not mentioned in the police reports. After her mother's disappearance, Jenna was taken in by her grandmother. She is generally ignored at school. Her father is living at Hartwick House, a psychiatric facility. Jenna remembers being woken from sleep believing she was hearing Maura, the elephant, trumpeting and feeling as if the animal were trying to tell her something. Based on the basics of research she's learned from reading her mother's journals, Jenna knows that scientific discoveries start with a hypothesis. Jenna's hypothesis is that her mother would not have left her willingly. She intends to find out for sure.



When Jenna wakes, Gertie, who came to live with them a year after Jenna did, is draped over her feet. Jenna remembers having only one friend at school. Chatham had suddenly stopped coming to school and Jenna found a for sale sign on the girl's house. Jenna felt abandoned all over again. She's determined that although she can't change her past she can change her future. She searches the missing persons websites each morning looking for information about her mother. Her grandmother calls her, telling her breakfast is ready. Before she goes downstairs, Jenna adds a delicate blue scarf to the outfit she's wearing. Her grandmother is unhappy when she sees the scarf Jenna is wearing. Her grandmother won't talk about Alice's disappearance; Jenna assumes she is angry with her daughter.

Jenna remembers that she started looking for her mother when she was eleven. She has learned through a book that when dealing with a missing persons case, the first question to ask is whether or not that person wants to be found. That question is the one that scares Jenna the most as she doesn't know if her mother hasn't returned because she is dead or because she doesn't want to come back. Jenna had found one small bite of hope that her mother was alive, a sound byte on a psychosocial research site dated 2006, two years after she disappeared, but Jenna has her doubts if the date is legitimate.

On this day in particular, Jenna has decided she is going to visit a psychic. Although her mother taught her to focus her beliefs in facts, Jenna had found an elephant her mother had made out of a one-dollar bill in one of Alice's journals. That section of her mother's journal indicated that a small portion even of science is not quantifiable, even scientists can't explain how they happen. Jenna has chosen Second Sight by Serenity because she is within biking distance and is cheap. At Serenity's apartment, Serenity tells Jenna she doesn't do kids. The woman whom Serenity had been working with comes to the door asking Serenity if she is okay. Serenity threatens to call the police if Jenna doesn't leave. Instead of Jenna leaving, Serenity's client leaves. When Jenna offers to pay Serenity double, Serenity agrees to do a reading. Jenna tells Serenity she wants her help in finding her mother, who disappeared 10 years ago.

As she waits for Serenity's response, Jenna remembers a journal entry in which her mother recorded the details of a stillborn elephant. The mother had stood over her baby, grieving for three days. At that time, Alice did not yet know she was pregnant with Jenna. Serenity tells Jenna she doesn't do missing people. Jenna pushes her scarf toward Serenity who becomes angry as she says that she won't help Jenna find her mother. She disappears into the restroom. When she returns she tells Jenna she won't charge her for the visit. Leaving the apartment, Jenna asks the woman to at least tell her if her mother is still alive. Serenity says that she is not dead. Jenna wonders if the woman's response is a lie.

Instead of going home, Jenna bikes to the Stark Nature Preserve. That property was once the New England Elephant Sanctuary, which was owned by her father, Thomas Metcalf. She walks to her favorite place, a piece of ground covered with purple mushrooms under a large oak tree. Jenna searches information about Serenity using the Internet browser on her phone. Jenna learns Serenity had once specialized in



missing persons cases but had botched a reading about the kidnapped son of Senator John McCoy. The family had sued her. Jenna finds a long list of Serenity's correct predictions. After the McCoy incident, Serenity's reputation had gone downhill. She wonders if Serenity was ever actually psychic or just lucky. She feels like her mother's case is what Serenity needs to get back her ability to find missing people.

Analysis

The basis for the novel is laid out in its prologue and first chapter. Thirteen-year-old Jenna wants to find her mother who disappeared ten years prior. She was found unconscious about a mile from the body of a worker at the New England Elephant Sanctuary, which was owned by Jenna's father, and taken to the hospital. She disappeared from the hospital and has not been seen since. Jenna lives with her grandmother. Her father is in a psychiatric hospital.

The novel is told from the first person point of view of a variety of characters. So far, the reader has heard from Jenna and her mother, Alice. Both Alice and Jenna have sections in the prologue of the novel. The novel is also written in the present tense as it relates to Jenna. Alice appears to be telling her story as she looks back on it from a point that was her present at the time she was doing the writing. Her one entry appears to be a portion of her journal as she details the behaviors of elephants and describes how she became interested in studying elephants. Jenna also tells her story in the present tense as she goes about looking for help in finding her mother.

Since this is a story about a little girl, now a teenager, who is separated from her mother it makes sense that one of the major themes of the novel would deal with Abandonment and Grief. In her section of the prologue, Jenna speaks of some people's belief that there is one specific place where elephants went when they died. Jenna believes if there were such a place she might know where to look to be able to find her mother. Even though Jenna doesn't believe in the paranormal, she reaches out to a psychic in this section of the novel in hopes that what her mother said about even some scientific discoveries having no basis in fact was true. Jenna also speaks of the one friend she had in school, who suddenly disappeared from Jenna's life with no explanation. This new abandonment reminds Jenna of her belief that everyone will eventually leave her. Abandonment has been such a given in her life that Jenna wonders if there is something wrong with her that makes people want to leave. Although the journal entry that Jenna remembers during her visit to Serenity — in which the mother elephant grieves over the body of her dead baby for three days — seems to have no impact on the story at that time, the subject matter of the entry does turn out to be significant. Jenna remembers her mother writing that while much research had been done about elephant babies abandoned by their mothers, the part of the journal entry that seems significant, the part of the entry where Alice wonders how the mother whose baby dies handles the grief will turn out to be more significant. Note this journal entry was written before Alice even knew she was pregnant with Jenna.



Another important theme in the novel is that of the elephants. Jenna's mother was a lover of and advocate for elephants even at the young age of nine. From what Jenna has shared about her mother, Alice grew up to research and care for elephants as her job. In this section the theme of the elephants is tied in with the theme of grief as Alice describes the first elephant she ever met in person. Even though Alice's attempts to get the elephant, Morganetta, better treatment and more freedom, Alice felt the grief and rage harbored by this elephant as a result of the bad treatment she endured still remained even after she was given a bigger pen with companion elephants. This grief she sensed in Morganetta helped Alice realize how badly elephants in captivity were being treated. It was the start of what became a passion for Alice, but also one that helped Alice to realize not all situations have a happy ending, no matter how desperately a person wants or tries to make it so.

Other themes introduced briefly in this section include that of the Paranormal and Self-doubt. The idea of the paranormal is introduced when Jenna decides that she is going to talk to a psychic for help finding her mother. Jenna decides on a psychic because private investigators are too expensive. She also discovers a one dollar bill folded into the shape of an elephant, a symbol that will reappear in the novel, tucked inside one of her mother's journal. The elephant, which Jenna remembered her mother making, is marking a passage in which Alice discusses the idea that even in science there was some small room for magical, unexpected things that no one could explain through cause and effect.

Another theme that is touched upon in this section of the novel is that of Self-doubt. As Jenna researches Serenity's background, she notices there was a point in that woman's career as a psychic that her reputation was ruined. Serenity made one bad prediction in a high profile case. From that point, she seemed to have lost her gift. Jenna wonders if working her mother's case could give Serenity the affirmation she needs to regain her once strong psychic ability.

An object first mentioned in this section of the novel that will become more important is the blue scarf that Jenna wears. It is her mother's scarf. It doesn't fit with her outfit but Jenna wears it anyway. Jenna's grandmother is unhappy to see the scarf. She sees it as a symbol of her missing daughter. While Jenna misses her mother, Jenna's grandmother seems angry with Alice. The scarf brings this anger to the surface. It is this same scarf that Jenna attempts to give to Serenity when she asks her to search for her mother.

Because this novel has a major, unexpected twist at the end, there is a motif that needs to be discussed as it relates to each section. Those who want to be surprised by the ending of the novel should not read this as it will take the surprise out of the novel's ending. There are certain things the reader should notice in relation to death and ghosts. Not all of the characters who appear to be alive are actually alive. The author does a magnificent job of keeping the reader in the dark about who is dead and who is alive but upon a close reading, the reader will notice some interesting interactions between Jenna and the other characters in the book. First, notice the way that Jenna indicates that most people ignore her. Notice her comment, "I've always been a loner,



and I've never really felt like I belong here" (p. 15). The idea of one not belonging where they are will come up again later in the novel.

Notice also the interaction between Serenity, Jenna and the woman with whom Serenity had been having a session before she was interrupted by Jenna. Notice that Jenna believes the woman left because she was upset by the way Serenity was treating Jenna. Now, look at the conversation from another angle. Consider how the conversation might appear if only Serenity were able to see Jenna. This scenario makes the action of the lady for whom Serenity was originally conducting a reading make much more sense as she would believe that Serenity was threatening to call the police on her. This explains why she left so quickly.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe in the paranormal and psychic readings? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Jenna and her grandmother share such differing views of Jenna's mother? Why do you think Jenna's grandmother is not helpful in trying to find Alice?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of elephants so far in the novel.

Vocabulary

titans, voyagers, vicinity, pachyderms, matriarch, retrospect, advocate, demise, facility, proximity, deteriorating, sieve, pelt, botched, tercets, melancholy, procrastination, scheme, amnesiacs, adage, microcosm, hierarchy, pore, obsessively, raptured, denominator, naturalist, sleuthing, cherub, procreation, pivots, catatonic, disbanded, psychotic, egotistical, monopoly, scullery, lucidity, riveted, quantifiable, variance, succeeded, stilted, coiffure, prescient, omniscient, scrying, hack, replicate, precognition, telepathy, smorgasbord, imminent, wrangle, disgraced, acquittal, exonerate, colossal, keynote, hype, reels



Part 1: Chapter 2; Alice — Chapter 4; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 2, Alice gives several examples proving that elephants have long memories. As she believes she adequately describes what elephants remember, she wonders what, if anything, these creatures won't forget.

In Chapter 3, Serenity remembers she was eight years old when she realized she could see people that no one else could. When she was school aged, Serenity was told she needed to hide her Gift if she didn't want to get hurt. She managed to keep her mouth shut until one day when she imagined her best friend breaking her leg when she jumped off the swings. Serenity didn't tell her friend what was about to happen, but it was on that day she decided it was better for her to get hurt than for others to get hurt. At the same time, Serenity realized there were things she wasn't supposed to know. For instance, she didn't know her father's business would burn to the ground and he would kill himself. She also didn't know that her mother would have a stroke.

It was a friend in college who suggested to Serenity that she ask her spirit guides to introduce themselves. Through that friend's help Serenity met Lucinda, a black woman whose spirit used to sing Serenity to sleep at night, and Desmond, a gay man. They taught her how to control her Gift and told her that she was not allowed to read another person if she was not asked. While Serenity was working as a waitress a gubernatorial candidate and his family visited the restaurant where she worked. She remembered the mother's dismissiveness when Serenity told her that her daughter had cancer. A week later the mother came back thanking Serenity because the leukemia was caught so quickly. This woman got Serenity a spot on the Cleo! show. After that, Serenity says her life changed overnight. A reunion between Cleo and her daughter, prompted by Serenity's prediction that Cleo's daughter was looking for her, won Cleo an Emmy. Serenity got her own show. She worked with police departments, particularly in missing child cases.

She talks about the case with Senator McCoy saying she was too distracted during the search for his little boy to listen to the spirits trying to speak to her. She assumed that Lucinda and Desmond would come when she called them but they did not give her the information she needed. When the boy was found dead, Serenity blamed Desmond. She told him that she didn't want to hear from him or Lucinda again. From that point on, all of the predictions that Serenity made were wrong. She became the swamp witch, a type of fake psychic she'd been critical of before her fall. She barely earns enough money doing cold readings to keep herself alive.

Serenity returns her story to the present, noting what a disaster that day had been. She says she'd truly tried when Jenna asked if her mother was dead, but had gotten no



response from her spirit guides. She feels bad about giving Jenna hope when she really did not hear from the spirits at all. She takes a Xanax and falls asleep on the couch. As she sleeps, she dreams of a woman wearing a blue scarf lying near a sugar maple tree with an elephant standing over her, protecting her. The elephant pulls something leather bound from under the woman's hip.

The sound of knocking on the door wakes Serenity. She knows it will be Jenna. Jenna tells her she'd left something really important and proceeds to look around the room for that item. She pulls the same blue scarf that Serenity saw in her dream from between the cushions of the couch and winds it around her neck; happy she's found it. As Serenity thinks back over her dream she realizes the elephant was checking to see if the woman was still breathing. The elephant left the woman not because she was dead, but because she was alive. Serenity asks Jenna if her mother was involved in elephants in some way. The look of wonder on Jenna's face when she turned back to Serenity made Serenity realize Jenna was meant to find her. She also realizes she was meant to find Jenna's mother.

In Chapter 4, Alice notices the reverence with which elephants treat the remains of other elephants. Many researchers have noticed that the huge creatures have death rituals. She watched one herd of elephants that witnessed the death of their matriarch. These elephants had covered this elder with dirt and tree branches once she was dead. They stayed with the body for two and a half days before they left. Even as long as eleven years later, the herd still treated the spot where she died with reverence. In fact, Alice believed the young elephant belonging to the matriarch recognized those bones as belonging to its mother.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, the theme of self-doubt is addressed again. The reader gets the story of Serenity's failed prediction from her point of view. She describes how she stopped listening to the voices of the spirits who were trying to guide her. Instead of her goal being to help the family find its missing son, Serenity instead was focused on the fame and notoriety a successful find might bring her. She was surprised when Lucinda and Desmond, the spirits who had guided her up to that point were silent. Because of her failure, she grew angry with the pair and told them she didn't want to hear from them again. Since that time, both of them have been silent. Serenity doesn't necessarily seem to think that she is able to make reparation for the bad job that she did on the Senator's case, but she doesn't want to hurt anyone in that way again. She scolds herself for giving Jenna false hope that her mother might still be alive.

In the theme of the paranormal, Serenity has a dream that convinces her that she is meant to help Jenna. In this dream, Serenity sees a woman, whom she believes is Jenna's mother, lying under a tree. She is wearing the blue scarf that Jenna accidentally left in Serenity's apartment. The woman is alive. Serenity believes this is so because an elephant had been standing over her, feeling the woman's chest with its trunk. When the elephant walks away, Serenity believes this is because it realizes the woman is alive.



Consider this dream and the behavior of the elephant in terms of what has been learned about elephants in this section of the novel. In her research of elephant herds, when a member of a herd dies, the elephants will stand guard over the deceased for several days. The behavior of the elephant in Serenity's dream indicates that the woman is indeed alive as the elephant might have continued to stand watch if she were dead.

Notice also in this section that Alice notes that when a revered member of an elephant herd dies, the other members of that herd would cover it with branches and dirt, almost a rudimentary burial. This habit these elephants have of covering up those who are important to them who have died will become significant later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Jenna is drawn to Serenity for a specific reason? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Serenity's spirit guides were silent when Serenity asked for information about the location of the kidnapped McCoy boy? What were they trying to teach her?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Serenity's dream? Why is it important in the context of the novel?

Vocabulary

jumbled, mahout, scoline, culling, anecdotes, ecosystem, olfactory, pheromonal, shaman, dowagers, peripherally, tarot, occult, empath, navigate, virtual, parameters, predictions, gubernatorial, intervene, leukemia, entourage, snarky, syndicated, faux, bilked, charlatans, berated, detractors, scrutinizing, endorsement, paranormal, arsenal, remission, improvised, legitimately, premise, kaleidoscope, dexterity, elaborate



Part 1: Chapter 5; Jenna — Chapter 6; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 5, Serenity tells Jenna the police won't use information from her dream to reopen an investigation about her mother. Jenna asks Serenity how she used to deal with missing person cases when she worked with the police. When she learns that Serenity would retrace the last steps of the person's life, she suggests to Serenity that they take a drive. They wind up at the Stark Nature Preserve, the land that used to be the New England Elephant Sanctuary. Even though she isn't happy about it, Serenity begins bushwhacking down the overgrown trail. Jenna asks Serenity if she would tell her if she knew her mother was dead. Serenity describes to her the difference between spirits and ghosts. She explains that dead air on phone lines, computer glitches and other such interferences were all possibly ghosts attempting to communicate with humans.

Serenity suddenly says she feels something. Jenna tries to give her the scarf, believing it might be helpful if she held it. Serenity pulls away from the scarf that Jenna has already let go of. It blows away like it did in Serenity's dream, finally getting caught in a tree. Serenity helps Jenna to climb the tree and pull the scarf free. A black wallet containing Alice's driver's license, cash and credit cards, falls from the tree as well. Jenna believes this find is solid evidence they can use to reopen her mother's case. Serenity warns Jenna, that if she does find her mother and she is alive, she needs to be prepared to hear the reason why her mother left her.

They drive past the police station and Jenna asks Serenity to stop. Serenity refuses to go in. Jenna gets out of the car and goes in without her. The first dispatcher ignores Jenna. An older lady named Polly finally talks to her. She tells Jenna she remembers the case but that the officer who investigated the case is dead.

After leaving the police department Jenna goes to the facility where her father lives. She remembers an incident where a patient had thrown a knife at her but her father hadn't even noticed. On the day of her visit Jenna's father was trying to make a bracelet out of colored thread. She asks why he didn't report Alice as missing but realizes he thinks she is Alice. To him, Alice was never missing.

Later, at her house, Jenna wonders what her next move should be since one detective that worked the case at the sanctuary is dead and the other has Alzheimer's. She wonders how she can go about getting the detectives to reopen a case on a woman who was never reported as missing. On a whim, she does some research on Virgil Stanhope. She finds an article announcing there would be a ceremony to make Stanhope a detective. She next finds the record of his death. He died the same day as the ceremony in a car accident. As she continues to research, she finds a Vic Stanhope



who offers services as a private investigator. There is a picture of Vic Stanhope which Jenna believes is either a twin of Virgil or the same man. She calls and gets an answer. The man tells her he is not Virgil Stanhope anymore. Jenna believes if he faked his death because he wanted to disappear, he is the perfect person to help find her mother.

In Chapter 6, Alice puts research effort into determining if elephants know the difference between bones of an elephant who was part of their herd, and one they did not know. In controlled experiments, the elephants showed equal interest in skulls of an elephant that was their matriarch as compared to ones of elephants unfamiliar to them.

Analysis

In discussing the theme of the paranormal in this section of the novel, Serenity gives Jenna some important background information about spirits and ghosts. She explains spirits are those who have just died but have not crossed over yet while ghosts are those who have stayed around in another dimension of life because they haven't yet settled things in the life or have been told they'll be going to hell when they do cross over. Serenity gives the impression that these ghosts live in a dimension of the world where they are in the world, but can't really interact with living humans.

Serenity's act of refusing to go in the police station with Jenna sparks Jenna's fear of abandonment. Jenna reverts to her go to method of walking away first when she gets a feeling she is about to be abandoned. Even as Jenna deals with her fear of abandonment, remember that Serenity is dealing with her own fears. Not only does she know that she will not be taken seriously if she were to approach the police to offer a lead on a ten year old case, but she also does not want to face the humiliation she will feel because she believes everyone knows her story of failure. Notice also in this section of the novel Serenity tries to make Jenna understand the difference between solid evidence that the police will take into consideration when dealing with a case and speculation, which includes dreams and psychic visions. Even though Serenity had worked with the police before, she had never gone to them to offer her services, she always waited until she was called upon because she knew many officers were skeptical of the paranormal.

Again, spoiler alert, this section deals with the motif of ghosts and recognizing people who are living and who are ghosts. Remember that Jenna complains quite often of being ignored. She was ignored by people at school, and she is ignored by the first dispatcher who she tries to talk to at the police department. Jenna believes this first dispatcher ignored her because the dispatcher was a young person, probably only recently graduated from high school, who was being rude. Notice that Jenna's explanation does work, the girl could have just been rude, but if you've read to the end of the book, you know that Jenna is a ghost. Odds are, the young dispatcher doesn't know she's there. The older dispatcher who actually does deal with Jenna is probably a ghost as well.



Another of Jenna's experiences for which she gives a plausible explanation for why it might have happened the way it did is her experience with the girl holding the knife in her father's psychiatric facility. Jenna recounts the girl had gotten ahold of a knife somehow and came straight for her. Instead of checking to be sure Jenna was okay, the nurses there were concerned with trying to calm the patients down. Jenna was most perplexed with her father's attitude, as he didn't appear to have realized anything had happened. Jenna excused her father's lack of response because she felt he lived in an altered universe anyway because of his mental illness.

As Jenna tries to determine what might have happened the night her mother disappeared, Jenna also has to deal with her father's mental illness. Whenever Jenna visits him, Thomas refers to her as Alice. Jenna comes to the realization that her father did not file a missing person report on her mother because to him, she was never really missing. Even in his altered mental state, Jenna is impressed when her father talks about his research. She's said for his sake that he is so intelligent, but unable to save himself from his own mental failings.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Serenity warn Jenna that if she wants to find her mother, she needs to be prepared for what she might learn? How is this Serenity's way of protecting Jenna?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Jenna's interactions with the dispatchers at the police department. Do you think it is significant that Jenna is ignored so often? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the findings of the controlled studies that show elephants showed no preference to the bones of elephants they knew? How does it differ from the experiences Alice has observed in the wild?

Vocabulary

metaphor, pivots, transition, animators, transparent, manipulating, hummock, ironic, simile, enterprising, substantial, grenade, placid, enterprising, ballistic, broach, lucidity, bangle, shroud, intriguing, tribute



Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil — Chapter 8; Alice

Summary

The missing Alice Metcalf and the knowledge that he failed when working her case haunts Virgil Stanhope in Chapter 7. Although he works as and calls himself a professional private investigator, when he wakes from a drinking binge, he hears Alice's voice telling him he isn't the professional he thinks he is.

Virgil remembers that his senior officer, Donny Boylan, was two weeks away from retirement when Nevvie's death was reported. He and Donny had to wait nearly two hours in a small office while the workers corralled the elephants into barns so the scene could be investigated. Virgil was looking at some strange writing on the wall of the office when Thomas Metcalf entered. After all the elephants but one were corralled, Donny, Virgil and some other officers were allowed into the area. Gideon, whom Virgil described as a giant, was sitting next to the body, holding the woman's head in his lap. The woman who had died was Gideon's mother-in-law. When they told Thomas they needed to speak with anyone who interacted with the elephants, Thomas indicated one of those people was Alice, whom he had assumed was with Gideon. Gideon said he hadn't seen Alice since the night before. Thomas wondered who had his daughter since Alice was gone.

Virgil interrupts his own story to describe his landlady, Abigail Chivers whom he believes is two hundred years old. Along with his drinking, she suspects he is doing something illegal in his office. It was while Abigail was in Virgil's office, asking him where he kept his liquor, that Jenna called. Up until that time he'd thought that by staring over and taking his father's first name, he could escape the ghost of Alice Metcalf. He thinks to himself that the voice he'd heard on the phone, Jenna's voice, sounded exactly as he'd always imagined Alice Metcalf's voice might sound.

Virgil returns to his account of the night that Nevvie died. He remembered there was no reason at that time to think that either Alice or Jenna was missing. When dealing with Gideon, Virgil felt Gideon's grief was sincere. Gideon said he'd not often seen the elephants there act aggressively and didn't seem to believe his mother-in-law had been killed by an elephant. When he was asked about Alice, Gideon said Alice had come to him for help because Thomas had scared her. She'd said something about taking Jenna, her daughter, someplace safe. When Donny asked Gideon if there was anyone human who might have wanted to hurt Nevvie, Gideon didn't really answer his question. Virgil had wondered at the time if Donny had noticed.

Virgil interrupts his story again as he hears knocking on his office door. He thinks at first it is Abigail but then realizes the person knocking is only five feet tall and is wearing a blue scarf around her neck.



Back in Thomas Metcalf's office the day of Nevvie's death Virgil remembers looking at reams of paper covered with what looked like a code. Virgil believed it was chemistry. He noticed as soon as Thomas entered the office he'd begun rolling the papers up. Virgil was surprised when Thomas seemed more concerned that his notes were missing than he was about his missing wife and daughter. Virgil realized the code that was written on the papers that Thomas was moving around was the same thing he saw written on the wall of the office. Donny asked Thomas about his recent bouts of fighting with his wife while Virgil asked to go to the restroom. In the bathroom, Virgil noted there were three prescription bottles for antidepressants in the cabinet. Back in the office, Thomas told Donny and Virgil he was about to make a breakthrough with a chemical compound that could erase traumatic memories. Alice, he said, had been trying to steal his work. Donny sent Virgil to tell the rest of the MCU to wrap up their investigation while he talked to Thomas a while longer. As he walked toward the crime scene, Virgil felt the hair stand up on the back of his neck and turned to see an elephant watching him. He got the feeling she wanted him to follow her. When he didn't follow, she touched Virgil's cheek with her trunk. When she walked away again, he followed. He found the elephant standing over the body of a woman. Virgil tried to walk up to the woman but the elephant swatted him away until he made it understand he wanted to help the woman. He felt the elephant understood they were on the same side and realized why Thomas had wanted to open the sanctuary to protect these animals. The woman was alive though her hair was matted with blood and her face bruised and swollen. He picked her up and ran with her toward the other officers.

Virgil remembered a hallucination he'd had once when he'd been drinking that had made him go sober. He stayed that way for three days but then he had dreamed about his promise to the elephant that the woman it had helped him find would be okay. He stared drinking again.

Virgil's story returns to the activities of the day when he found Alice. He'd given the paramedics who took her to the hospital orders to call him as soon as she woke up. Cops from neighboring towns were called in to sweep the elephant sanctuary, looking for Jenna. Virgil and Donny waited at the hospital but were called away by a frantic call from Gideon. Thomas was in his bathrobe and bare feet trying to shackle an elephant saying he wanted to get the U0126 into her system. Gideon said it was against their policy to restrain the elephants. When they finally talked Thomas out of the enclosure, they handcuffed him and took him to a psychiatric facility. On the way home, the detectives received a phone call that Alice was awake. Since they'd been working for 16 hours, Donny said they would talk to her the following morning. Virgil called that his biggest mistake as Alice had left the hospital and disappeared by the time they got there the following morning.

Back in the present, Virgil the girl knocking at Virgil's door asks if he ever wondered what happened to Alice Metcalf. He asks her to go away but she refuses to do so until he admits he dropped Alice off at the hospital ten years prior. He realizes the person standing in front of him is Alice's daughter, Jenna. Because the nurse who had checked Alice out of the hospital said Alice had mentioned someone named Jenna, Donny assumed Alice had taken her daughter someplace safe, like she'd told Gideon she



planned to do. Donny had pushed Virgil to forget about the case. He said there was nothing else they could do unless Alice was reported as a missing person. Virgil tried to report her as missing, but Donny wouldn't let him, telling him to let the case go. Back in the present, Jenna tells Virgil she wanted to hire him to finish his job and find her mother.

Virgil remembers there was one aspect of the case he never told anyone about. He'd gotten the final report from the medical examiner on the day of Donny's retirement party. The cause of death was listed as the accidental trampling by an elephant. One of the items found on the body was a single strand of red hair. He showed the report to Donny arguing it was proof there might have been a struggle but Donny asked him to keep it quiet. He believed Virgil would cause more panic if he tried to open a murder investigation. Donny insinuated that the governor had even encouraged the press not to make a big deal about the death as it was an election year and the governor was planning on running on a zero crime platform, one that wouldn't hold up if Virgil started a murder investigation. Virgil went back to his office and removed the last page of the ME's report, the one about the hair, folded it and put it into his pocket. Six months later when he was promoted to detective, Virgil put this page into the breast pocket of his suit as a reminder that he was no hero.

Back in the present, Virgil asks Jenna if her mother has run off again. Jenna replies she hasn't seen her mother in ten years. He tells Jenna they'd assumed Alice had run off with Jenna. Jenna tells him her grandmother said she had filed a missing persons report a week later but that nothing had come of it. Virgil suggests to Jenna there might be a reason why Alice ran away and didn't take Jenna with her. He tells her that she should put her mother's disappearance behind her. Jenna offers proof her mother didn't leave on her own free will, handing Virgil the wallet. Virgil suggests Alice dropped the wallet but Jenna asks how it wound up in a tree. Gideon comes to Virgil's mind but he doesn't say anything. He also wonders if Alice could have been responsible for Nevvie's death. Although he felt a bit guilty because he might wind up also finding out that Alice was a murderer, Virgil agreed to help Jenna.

In Chapter 8, Alice describes the parts of the brain involved in memory as well as their individual areas of responsibility in storing memories. She speaks also of people who can't forget, like those with PTSD. It is believed, she says, that stress hormones can disrupt memory. Her favorite story of elephant memory is that of a trainer named Randall Moore who'd brought to adult female elephants to act as matriarchs of herds of orphaned elephants. After twelve years, Felicia, one of the elephants, was bitten by a hippo. Randall Moore was called in to help treat her. She answered to his call, knelt when he asked her to do so and let him climb on her back. She also followed his commands, allowing the vet to treat her wounds with no anesthesia.

Analysis

In this section of the novel the reader gets the first detailed look at what happened the night that Jenna's mother disappeared. These details of the day Nevvie's death were



reported from the point of view of Virgil. At the time, Virgil was still a young cop working under the wing of an older detective. His story alternates between his current state, working as a professional private investigator who drinks to forget the botched job he believes he'd done on Alice's case, and the story of the night that Alice disappeared. To Virgil, Alice's case is one he did not deal with properly. He is haunted by Alice's memory as well as the promise that he made to an elephant, that he would make sure Alice was okay.

As he tells his story, Virgil expands upon the theme of elephants. Although Virgil had no experience with elephants, he got the feeling one of the beasts wanted him to follow it the day of Nevvie's death. As he followed the elephant to the location of Alice's body, he got the feeling that the elephant knew more than he gave it credit for. He realizes why Alice and Thomas spent so much time and energy to care for the elephants. He also understands why Gideon could not quickly say that one of the elephants might have been responsible for killing Nevvie.

Notice in this section that what Virgil saw when he arrived at the scene where he found Alice was much like what Serenity saw in her dream about Alice. In both these images, the elephant was standing over Alice's body as if it were protecting her. In Serenity's dream, once the elephant had verified that Alice was breathing and was okay, it walked away. Similarly in Virgil's experience as soon as the elephant realized that Virgil was going to take care of Alice, it walked away as well.

Notice also Thomas Metcalf's behavior in this section of the novel. Although he was acting in a disturbed manner Donny told Virgil they could not arrest him as a person of interest because they could not talk to Alice. Remember the strange markings that Virgil noticed on the walls of Thomas' office as well as the papers on his desk. These strange markings, which Virgil believed might be chemistry, will become an important symbol in the novel as they seem to represent Thomas' mental breakdown.

Remember that in a previous chapter, the dispatcher at the police station told Jenna that Virgil Stanhope was dead. Jenna even finds a death notice for Virgil. However, she also finds an article for a private investigator named Vic Stanhope with a picture that looks exactly like Virgil. The explanation that Virgil gives is that he had wanted to redefine himself. He'd decided to make a new start by changing his name and beginning a career as a PI. Jenna believes he might have faked his death in order to try to start over with a clean slate.

Significant also in this section of the novel is the suggestion that Virgil wanted to continue the investigation into Alice's case but it was Donny who encouraged him not to do so. Central in the conversation is a comment Donny made to Virgil that it was not Donny who was making the decision not to continue the investigation. Donny told Virgil it was the governor who was at the head of the attempt to stop the accident at the elephant sanctuary from becoming a major story. The people hadn't wanted the sanctuary there when it was first opened. Three years after the opening, the public had gotten used to the sanctuary being there. The governor was preparing for a new run for



office, Donny also told Virgil. He planned to run on a crime free platform, one he couldn't pursue if Virgil opened a murder case.

Even after Virgil got the full medical examiner's report the day of Donny's retirement party, Donny would still not allow Virgil to open a missing persons case or a murder case. When Virgil pointed out to Donny that a red hair, one that he believed could be Alice's, was found on Nevvie's body. Virgil said the red hair was evidence that Nevvie might have been murdered. Donny believed it was only a coincidence as the two women worked together all day long and could have been transferred in day-to-day activities.

It seems that several assumptions were made in Nevvie's case. Because Gideon told the detectives that Alice had said she was scared of Thomas and was going to take Jenna someplace safe, they assumed Jenna was with Alice. Gideon told the detectives he didn't know where Jenna was, Thomas told the detectives he assumed Jenna was with her mother on the grounds of the sanctuary. A fleet of cops was called in to search for the toddler but she was never found. Virgil believes he has finally solved the mystery of where Jenna was when she told him that she had been with her grandmother.

Notice that as Thomas' mental illness became more severe, his behavior became more and more erratic. Virgil has checked Thomas' medicine cabinet and seen that he was on three different kinds of antidepressants. As the cops try to question Thomas, he accused Alice of trying to steal his research and seemed to be more concerned with his missing notes than his missing wife and daughter. Even Virgil, who had no eye for chemistry or scientific research, realized that Thomas' notes looked like gibberish, written over and over again. Finally, Thomas seemed to have a complete psychotic break when he tried to shackle an elephant in order to give it some type of medicine. Gideon had called the police because he was afraid of Thomas. Gideon said Thomas had created the sanctuary on the idea that the elephants would be able to roam free, never being chained or restrained. Ironically, that man had broken so far from reality that he was trying to chain one of the elephants.

For those not wanting to have the ending ruined, consider this a spoiler alert. Consider this section from the viewpoint that Jenna is a ghost. She is apparently one of the dead who doesn't realize she is dead. She gets in contact with Virgil, who can see her and talk to her, to be her private investigator. The reader has to wonder if Virgil, like Jenna, is a ghost who has stayed on Earth because he has unfinished business. One has to wonder if his unfinished business is Alice's case. Even though Jenna believes that Virgil might have faked his death to allow him to start over, it is more plausible that Virgil is a ghost since both the dispatcher at the police station and information on the Internet confirm that Virgil is dead.



Discussion Question 1

After getting the “full story” from Virgil’s standpoint of the night that Alice disappeared, what do you think happened? Do you think Nevvie’s death was truly an accident, or intentional?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Virgil’s encounter with the elephant the night he found Alice. How did this experience help to elevate his opinion of elephants?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Virgil agrees to help Jenna find her mother? What are his motivations?

Vocabulary

litany, rookie, chastised, albeit, concentric, hieroglyphics, entice, stampede, mottled, condone, throes, dementia, indulged, vise, cognition, chagrin, jaunty, calliope, hemorrhaging, satanic, perimeter, pharmacological, conjecture, blatantly, shackles, accusation, legitimate, emphatically, cryptically, stupor, quarantine, immersed, rogue, revelers, violation, reliable, analogy, retrieve, scenarios, serendipitously, consolidated, spatial, atrophy, postmortem, archive, migratory, translocated, surrogate,



Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna

Summary

Jenna remembers a conversation between her mother and father that was so important to her mother that she had recorded it in her journal. Alice lies with her head in his lap as they talk about monogamy in the animal world. At the end of their conversation, he gives her a pebble, telling her that a penguin would give a pebble to another penguin whom he felt was his perfect mate.

As Jenna thinks about her attempts to piece together the information she has compiled about her mother, she thinks the best way to ensure that Virgil will go through with his promise to help her is to make sure he remembers his promise by getting him sober. At a diner, the waitress walks past Jenna and Virgil when Jenna tries to get her attention. She tells Virgil that is what it's like being a kid and that's why she didn't speak up about her mother being a missing person earlier. She asks him if he would even have listened to her had he still been working at the police department and she'd come to his office. He tells her that he is listening now. She tells him what she remembers of her mother including the necklace Alice never took off and their jaunts into the elephant enclosures on the ATV even though Jenna's father said it was too dangerous. They also wore matching pink converse sneakers.

As Virgil tells Jenna that the wallet isn't necessarily a sign that her mother was the victim of a crime, Jenna realizes he's actually saying that her mother might have been responsible for Nevvie's death. Jenna asks him why they didn't go after her mother if there was any suspicion she might have killed Nevvie's. Jenna reasons that her mother didn't trample Nevvie to death but suggests that instead Nevvie came after Alice and one of the elephants retaliated.

Jenna remembers her parents fighting when Alice let Jenna into an elephant enclosure and Thomas watched as the child chased a butterfly near where the elephants were. Jenna was crying when she was suddenly cuddled by a pair of warm arms. Jenna told the woman, who was not identified, that her parents were mad. That person assured her they were instead scared, but that it sounded the same as anger.

Virgil tells Jenna he has a plan and they agree to meet at 11 the following morning. At home, Jenna hears what sounds like footsteps upstairs even though there's no one there. She had once believed her grandmother's house was haunted. Her grandmother has convinced her the sounds are just the house settling. At dinner Jenna asks her grandmother why there was never a search for her mother. Her grandmother admits that though she went to file a missing persons report, she never actually filed one. She tells Jenna she didn't know if it would be worse to learn Alice was dead or that she was alive and didn't want to come home. She suggests Jenna is braver than she for continuing to want to find out what happened to Alice.



Jenna notes that while reading her mother's research notes she notice a time when her mother was 31 when there was some crisis at home that had caused her mother to have to take a leave of absence from her work in Botswana. When she returned she'd had an experience where a young elephant, named Kenosi, had gotten his truck caught in a snare. The injury would mean a slow death for Kenosi but the agent with the Department of Wildlife said he was too busy to euthanize the animal. There is a blank space of several pages in Alice's journal. Jenna imagines her mother threatening her boss to get the wildlife agent there. When Alice's notes started again, the wildlife officer had come. He shot the elephant in the head, a shot that even Jenna knew would not kill the animal. In his pain, Kenosi began bellowing. Before Alice could react, Kenosi's mother, who was in a different herd from Kenosi's came running for her son. The agent shot again, this time hitting Kenosi behind the ear. She noted how the mother elephant stood over her son touching him as if she were trying to say goodbye. From that experience, the researchers in the field were given the freedom to euthanize an elephant if the need arose. Alice also learned that even in the elephant world, a mother was always a mother. It was on that day that Alice decided to narrow her study to the effects of grief on animals. Jenna doesn't think the experience was all that tragic as before the young elephant died, he saw his mother coming back to him.

Jenna is surprised how uncomfortable Virgil is at the police department. He won't even use the front door. Instead they sneak in before the back door closes after another officer has gone inside. Virgil talks only with Ralph, the old man who works in the evidence room. Virgil gives him a Twinkie as a bribe and then asks to see the evidence from one of his cold cases. Virgil locates the four boxes containing evidence from Alice's case. Jenna asks him to open the bags labeled woman's shirt, shorts. Virgil pulls out the clothing that belonged to Nevvie. Jenna doesn't see anything unusual about the clothes. Virgil finds the bag with the loose hair in it, and then instructs Jenna to help him carry the boxes outside.

As they put the boxes in his car, Virgil tells Jenna the next step is to sweet talk someone he knows at the lab into doing a DNA test on the hair. As Virgil backs up from his parking space at the police department one of the boxes of evidence turns over and Jenna works to collect the things that have fallen out of it. One of the things is a tiny pink Converse sneaker. Jenna recognizes her shoe and knows it means she was there the night that her mother disappeared. She and Virgil both wonder who put Jenna's shoes on her that night when her father thought she was sleeping.

Jenna remembers one day she and her father had been playing hide and go seek in the elephant enclosure when the elephants were getting foot treatments done. Jenna had let out a squeal as she'd run for home base. Her father had run after her but was stopped when Maura hit him across the face with her trunk. When Alice came to intervene so that Thomas could get up, Thomas complained because Maura didn't like anyone but Alice. Alice pointed out that the elephant apparently liked Jenna as well.

Back in the present, Jenna watches as Virgil flirts with Tallulah in an effort to get her to do a buccal swab DNA test quickly. Tallulah has to leave to answer her cell phone.



When she returns, Jenna begins to cry saying she just wants to find her mother. Lulu, as Virgil calls her, agrees to do the swab.

Jenna returns to talk about the memory she had of her mother and father at the beginning of the chapter. She says that her memory must be fuzzy because sometimes when she thinks about the conversation about mating for life, she sees another man's face.

Analysis

Jenna and Virgil begin their investigation into Alice's disappearance in this section of the novel. Jenna learns she may be faced with a third option as to why her mother has not come back for her. Based on the hair found in Nevvie's body bag, Alice could have been involved in Nevvie's murder. For Jenna, this would mean that her mother had not returned to her because she was a criminal and was avoiding punishment for her crime.

Important in this section is the toddler-sized pink Converse sneaker that Jenna finds among the evidence relating to Nevvie's case. Although Jenna's location at the time of the murder had never been concisely pinpointed, the shoe seems to indicate that she was somewhere in the elephant sanctuary and had lost one of her shoes at some point during that night. To Jenna the shoe is proof that she was there, at the crime scene, the night that her mother disappeared. She draws on what she has learned from her mother's notes as she considers that her mother had come to the conclusion that negative events were remembered while tragic ones were forgotten. Although her thought along this line is not completed, Jenna must be wondering if she doesn't remember the events of that night because they were traumatic.

Also important during this section of the novel is the two takes that Jenna gives on the memory that she has of a conversation that she originally thought was between her parents. Jenna believes at the end of the chapter that her memory of this event might be fuzzy as she indicates sometimes she believes she sees her father's face when she thinks about this conversation and sometimes she sees a face that is not her father's. Also strange in the conversation is the man's comment that he shouldn't have fallen in love with a scientist. From the information that has been given so far about Thomas Metcalf, he was a scientist as well. It seems strange that he would criticize Alice for her desire to contemplate things based on fact, a desire he should have shared with her if he were indeed a scientist.

Contributing to the theme of Abandonment in this section of the novel Jenna continues to wonder why her mother left her. When she asks her grandmother about the circumstances under which she filed a missing person report for her mother, Jenna finally learns the truth. Her grandmother never filed a missing person report. She had been too afraid of what the police would learn. Although her grandmother has shown a determined demeanor when it came to her desire for Jenna to learn to live her life without her mother, Jenna's grandmother seems just as torn up by Alice's



disappearance as Jenns. She feels that learning her daughter didn't want to come back to her would be just as bad as learning that she was dead.

Meanwhile, Jenna's desire to see her mother again and her belief that her world would be right if she could learn what happened to her mother is emphasized in this section of the novel by the story of Kenosi and his mother. While Jenna's mother felt the whole situation had been tragic because Kenosi had died a painful death, Jenna saw the experience from her own point of view. She believed although Kenosi might have been in physical pain, he died with the knowledge that his mother did love him and would come running to help if he needed her. It is the same affirmation that Jenna hopes finding her mother will give her.

Significant also in this chapter is the vague reference to the "bad news" that Alice received for which she took a leave of absence. The reason she had to go back to the United States will be significant as the author works through her plot twists. Notice also that it was after this short stint away from her work in Botswana that Alice decided to focus her studies on the effects of grief in elephants.

Broadening the theme of elephants and their unique personalities is the story that Jenna tells of Maura hitting Thomas. Maura apparently misunderstood Thomas' actions and thought he was trying to hurt Jenna. Notice that the author does a good job of covering her tracks and explaining why Thomas was playing with Jenna in the elephant enclosure when he'd earlier gotten so angry with Alice for letting Jenna play there. In the context of Maura rushing in to help Jenna, remember that when she talks with Virgil about Nevvie's death Jenna reasons that Nevvie could have been trying to hurt Alice the night of Nevvie's death. She guesses one of the elephants could have retaliated by hurting Nevvie in an effort to protect Alice. Virgil seems surprised to learn that elephants could act in a retaliatory nature. But it seems possible, especially based on Maura's extreme action against Thomas when he was playing with Maura.

Spoiler alert for this final section of this analysis. This discusses the idea that people who seem to be alive are really dead and are functioning as ghosts. Those who have read to the end of the novel know that both Jenna and her grandmother are ghosts. It is ironic that Jenna would hear footsteps in her grandmother's house and believe the house was haunted when it was they who were the ghosts. It is possible in this scenario that Jenna is hearing to footsteps of the living people who actually own the house. Also, notice Virgil's strange behavior at the police department. It seems unusual that a grown man and teenaged girl would be able to sneak into a police department and out again, this time carrying two boxes of evidence each, without being noticed. The only person with whom Virgil interacts is Ralph, who is described as being a thousand years old. It appears this is because Ralph, like Virgil and Jenna, is a ghost.

Also interesting in this section is the interaction with the waitresses at the restaurant. Several waitresses walk right past the table where Jenna and Virgil are sitting without waiting on them. It is not until a waitress comes from the back and goes straight to their table that they get service. Again, Jenna chalks the act of the waitresses ignoring her up to the fact she is a kid. It seems that the fact people ignore Jenna so often is because



she is a ghost and they can't see her. It appears that it is only the other people who are ghosts are the ones who can interact with Jenna and Virgil.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that the man with whom Jenna had seen her mother talking about monogamy might not have been Jenna's father? With whom do you think Alice might have been flirting?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Maura's actions when she thought Thomas was going to hurt Jenna. Why are her actions significant based on the cause of Nevvie's death?

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think it was who comforted Jenna during her parents' argument about her getting into the elephant enclosure? Why do you think the author chose not to identify this person?

Vocabulary

dialogue, monogamy, relevant, trekking, assumption, mirage, empathy, anthropomorphize, extrapolate, extenuating, personas, altercation, retaliated, blitzed, contagious, methodically, colossal, tactical, primates, sieve, silhouetted, vague, ratcheted, roving, severed, homeys, objectivity, euthanize, rival, consistency, implosion, consequential, protocol, mitochondrial, dislodged, indulgence, corrugated, lob, rebuffs, contraception, menopausal, profound, buccal, wily, nonchalant



Part 1: Chapter 10; Alice — Chapter 11; Serenity

Summary

In Chapter 10, Alice describes research proving that elephants are capable of empathy. She points to a case she had experienced where an elephant that had lost a good deal of his trunk was fed by the other members of his herd. While some would argue there was an evolutionary advantage for the elephants in keeping members of their own species alive, Alice points out an example where elephants even helped a baby rhino that was stuck in the mud. She also relates a story of a mother who adopted an orphaned baby elephant. She notes that there is a special empathy between mothers and babies, even in the elephant world.

In Chapter 11, Serenity notes how the loss of her mother made her a better psychic. She knows what it is like to wish for a message from a deceased loved one. One day when Serenity got into her car, she saw her mother sitting in the passenger seat. Although she was a psychic, Serenity thought she was dying or having heatstroke. She realizes from her experience with her mother that people come back in the form in which they want to be remembered.

Serenity takes her computer to a Mac store to have a printing problem diagnosed. The tech frowns, then suddenly, the store's printer begins working, printing out page after page of gibberish. As Serenity tries to catch the pages as they fly out of the printer, one lands right in her hands. In the center of the page is a rectangle filled with hearts. Jenna's name is in the center. Serenity believes this is a sign that she should help Jenna, but isn't sure which way the sign is pointing. She wishes her spirit guides would step forward and help her out.

Serenity calls Jenna. Even though Jenna is still unhappy with Serenity for leaving her at the police department, she is willing to listen when Serenity tells her she's gotten a sign that someone on the other side thinks that she isn't done helping Jenna yet. Serenity thinks they should go back to the place where the sanctuary used to be. Serenity hears a male voice talking in the background on Jenna's phone. Jenna tells Serenity there is someone she needs to meet.

Virgil and Serenity take an immediate dislike to one another. Virgil clearly does not believe in the paranormal while Serenity sees Virgil as a washed up cop who had seen better days. The two go different ways at the sanctuary with Jenna following Serenity. When they reconnect, Serenity wonders if she's not supposed to be there just for Jenna, but perhaps for Virgil as well. They begin to walk around and Virgil locates the spot where Nevvie's body was found. As she looks at the vegetation he's disturbed, Serenity sees something glint at her and pulls out a necklace. She holds it up and Jenna recognizes it as her mother's, a necklace she never took off.



As Serenity argues with Virgil about the necklace, a boy at the stand where she bought their food watches. She snaps at the boy but notices he continues to watch strangely. Jenna tells them it was her father who gave Alice the necklace. Virgil suggests they should go talk to him even though Jenna says he won't be helpful. Serenity had sworn she wouldn't go back to a psychiatric hospital, but doesn't want Jenna to go to see her father with only Virgil. She'd spent some time in one of the hospitals after her incident with the Senator. Her roommate was a paranoid schizophrenic who had predicted she was going to get struck by lightning even though she was inside. When lightning came through the window in the girls' room and burned a hole in Gita's mattress, Serenity realized the people that are termed insane may be more sane than ordinary people. Serenity sends Jenna to the car to get her sunglasses. While she's gone, she asks Virgil why he wants to go see Jenna's father. Virgil tells Serenity he believes that Thomas might have been abusing his wife.

Serenity admits to herself that she realizes that many people termed "insane" are just functioning on a different level than other people. Serenity realizes many of these people have the same gift she does but don't know what to do with it. Even though everyone can't see the people with whom they are having conversations, it doesn't mean those people aren't there.

Jenna continues to discourage a trip to the psychiatric facility until Serenity says that she agrees with Virgil that it would be a good idea. When Jenna learns she's outnumbered, she admits she didn't want them to go with her because her father would often talk about her mother, an experience she didn't really want to have to share. Serenity, however, indicates she'd love to hear his story.

Analysis

Serenity and Virgil meet in this section of the novel. Their personalities clash immediately. Like a scientist, Virgil has been taught to build his cases on fact and evidence. The abilities that Serenity brings to the investigation have no basis in fact. Serenity notes that as she tries to search for clues about Jenna's mother when they returned to the former sanctuary, she has to fight past the negativity she feels coming off Virgil because he is so determined that she is no use to him and that her abilities are fake.

Serenity shares a good deal of insight into not only her own psychic abilities but also the realm of mental illnesses. She believes that many of the people who are deemed as mentally ill simply don't have the ability to control the psychic gift that they have. She dreads returning to a psychiatric ward, even to visit Jenna's father, because she is jealous of the mentally ill who see and interact with spirits, a Gift she wishes she were still able to access.

Interesting also is Serenity's reaction to her own visitor from the dead. Even though Serenity is a psychic, even she is not prepared when she is visited by her mother's spirit. Notice that she describes her mother as being just as solid as any other live



person she'd met that day. She was not shimmery or translucent. This description of Serenity's mother's ghost as being solid, just like any other person will be significant later in the novel.

In the chapter told in Alice's voice, Alice focuses on elephants and their ability to show empathy. Although Alice was a scientist, a good deal of her research and observations dealt with how the elephants interacted with one another as well as with other species. She notes that there seemed to be a special bond between mothers and babies, even if the babies had been orphaned. Alice's sections of the novel differ from the rest of the text as her information appears to have been gathered prior to Jenna's birth. These sections seem to be important discoveries Alice has made when watching the elephants interact with one another. These observations that Alice has made about the interactions and the bond between mothers and their babies will become more important as the novel progresses.

This section of the analysis deals with the recognition of those in the novel who are dead so those who don't want the ending spoiled should stop reading here. When Serenity is talking to both Virgil and Jenna after they find the necklace at the elephant sanctuary she notices the boy who sold her their hot dogs continues to look at her strangely. Virgil tells Serenity it is because she has pink hair while Serenity believes that although the boy is young, he recognizes her as the failed psychic. In all reality, since it is learned at the end of the novel that Virgil and Jenna are both ghosts, it doesn't appear to the boy that Serenity is talking to anyone but air. As Serenity has indicated, however, just because a person can't see the other side of a conversation, it doesn't mean it isn't happening. It is ironic because Serenity believes she has lost control of her Gift and no longer has any psychic abilities but in reality is carrying on a conversation with two ghosts. Apparently, just as Serenity's mother appeared to her as a solid human body, Jenna and Virgil also appear as solid humans, no different from anyone else.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Alice's observations of elephants being empathic toward other elephants and even other species. Why do you think her observations are significant in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Serenity and Virgil and the types of work they do. How are they different? Are they similar in any way? How do their types of work complement one another?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Serenity finds the pebble necklace? How has that same necklace been important in the novel thus far?



Vocabulary

anecdotal, biological, collateral, disoriented, luscious, compromising, viscerally, reincarnated, amalgam, skeptical, translucent, eradicate, narcissistic, digress, incarnation, adjacent, gibberish, mojo, dissipated, perfunctorily, philosophical, clarify, hack, debunking, bypass, traipsing, tsunami, legitimate, intuition, orient, concentric, epitome, calibrated, proficient, prototypes, niggling, transparent, sojourn, discreet, posse, ballistic, clarity, stim, clairvoyance



Part 1: Chapter 12; Alice — Chapter 14; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 12, Alice records the grief of the elephants in Mmaabo's herd, and even the matriarch from a different herd, when Mmaabo died. Alice realized she was crossing a line when she attributed emotion to these animals but continued with her work anyway. She stayed with the dead matriarch for nearly 36 hours because she wanted to see if the daughter, Onalenna, would come back. She did and as Alice watched the interaction, Anya drove up in the Land Rover. She said that Grant had something for Alice to do. Alice replied she'd be there soon. Alice told the dead elephant's daughter that she would have to let go, but wasn't sure which one of them she was trying to convince.

Alice felt as if Grant was punishing her by making her escort a man from New England who was coming for a week's visit. That man turned out to be Thomas Metcalf. Alice was giving Thomas the usual spiel they give visitors until Thomas began talking about his six elephants. Alice assumed he owned a zoo or circus and liked him even less than she did at first.

Later, she and Thomas sat in the Land Rover waiting for the bush vet to join them for a collaring. Thomas watched the collaring and equated the trauma of the sedation, which paralyzed the elephant but left her aware of what was happening around her, to one of his elephants on the sanctuary that had been submerged for 48 hours during a flood. The vet indicated the amount of trauma was not the same but Alice realized Thomas also believed elephants had the capacity for emotion. As she listened to him talk, she realized that Thomas wanted to provide a life for his elephants in America that was more like their lives in wild. He was not running a zoo or circus but instead a sanctuary for animals that had been kept in captivity.

Later, Alice asked Thomas what had happened to Wanda, the elephant that had been submerged in the flood. He said it had taken a lot of work and several sets of wet clothing, but that she would now swim in the sanctuary's pond. He said he'd worked as an assistant to the head keeper at a circus one summer. When he'd commented that the elephants remembered how badly they were being treated, he was fired. Alice shared her change in focus to elephant grief with Thomas and was surprised when he said elephants were better at grieving than most humans. Thomas told her a story of Wanda keeping an old tire with her as a security blanket of sorts until she made friends with Lilly. When Lilly died, Wanda took the tire to Lilly's burial spot, almost as a tribute. Alice decided to take Thomas to the spot where Mmaabo had died. Onalenna and some others are there, still mourning. Thomas suggested to her a way that she could scientifically measure the elephants' grief levels by tracking the levels of stress hormones in their feces.



When Alice went to Thomas' cabin later that day to escort him to dinner, he gave her an elephant he'd made from a one-dollar bill. The evening before Thomas was to leave, Alice took him to a huge baobab tree on top of a hill. The bones of an elephant, Mothusi, were scattered beneath the tree. They collected the bones and put them together. He suggested she come back to the United States with him. She told him of the elephant calf she'd seen die. She couldn't move on from the memory of that death on even though the calf's mother seemed to have done so. He asked who she had lost that she still hurt so badly.

In Chapter 13, Jenna notices the nurse looks at Serenity only when the three came into the psychiatric facility. Jenna hears her dad shouting down the hall and runs to his room. Two orderlies are struggling with Thomas who is clutching a box of cereal. Thomas sees Jenna and calls her Alice, a reference that surprises Virgil. Serenity comes into the room, asking what is happening. The orderlies say Thomas got upset when they tried to throw out the box of cereal. When he calms down, they leave and he shows Jenna the fact about elephants printed on the box. He has reasoned that if the elephant can speak six Korean words as its handler says it can, it has learned to do so for social reasons.

When Thomas picks Jenna up and swings her around in jubilation after he shares what believes he's learned about the elephants, Virgil breaks in telling him they need to ask some questions about the night Alice disappeared. He tells Thomas that the person Thomas thinks is Alice is actually Jenna, his daughter. Virgil holds Jenna in front of Thomas, forcing him to look at her. Thomas realizes that she is indeed his daughter and hugs her. When Virgil asks Thomas about his wife, Thomas notices the pebble Jenna has around her neck and jerks it off. He slaps Jenna and calls her a bitch.

In Chapter 14, Alice relates a story told to her by a bush vet about an elephant he had darted but then couldn't get to in order to collar her. The other members of the herd surrounded her protectively, and covered her up with branches and soil. Researchers weren't quite sure why elephants did this, but it seemed more common in deaths that are aggressive or unexpected. Elephants will even cover humans or animals who are not of the same species. A week before she left Botswana, Alice laid down under the Baobab tree and had gone to sleep, unusual for her. She woke to find herself covered with branches and dirt. She believed her strange behavior was because she was pregnant.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, Alice's sections of the text begin to converge with Jenna's story. The stories of Alice's research have finally worked themselves up to the point where she met the man who became Jenna's father. Notice that Thomas recognized the reason that Alice had become so fixated on the way that animals deal with their grief was because Alice had her own loss that she was struggling to deal with. Notice also that although Thomas asked Alice who it was that she had lost, Alice never told him or at least the name of that person was not included in the text. Also important in this



section of Alice's memories is the fact her obsession with the passing of the matriarch in Botswana focuses a good deal on the relationship between the matriarch and her daughter. Alice paid special attention to the way this daughter worked through her grief after her mother's death.

In this section of the novel the reader gets glimpses of the way Thomas and Alice's relationship both began and ended. They fell in love with one another because of their similar beliefs about animals, elephants in particular. Thomas was the only person with whom Alice had been able to share her research on elephant grief without being criticized. Later, when Thomas refers to his wife as a bitch in the psychiatric hospital and slaps Jenna, believing he is slapping Alice, it can be assumed that the relationship between the two ended badly. Notice that it was the pebble necklace, the one that Jenna believed had been given to her mother by her father, that sparked his anger. Remember also that Jenna had some doubt in her mind that it was actually her father that she saw in her memory of the pebble.

Note Jenna's fascination with her father and his intelligence even though he is paranoid with the fear that everyone around him is trying to steal his research. Even though his mind is clouded with his mental illness, Jenna can see hints of the genius that he used to be as he gleaned information from a cereal box. He used this information as an example of an elephant learning to copy another language so it could communicate with those around it as it. Even though Thomas did not respond to Virgil's question about the night Alice disappeared, or even ever seem concerned that his wife was missing, the pebble necklace apparently sparked a very strong emotion for him as it caused him to curse and slap Jenna just because she was wearing it.

Again in this section of the novel, and please note the spoiler for those who want to not know the ending, the topic of the dead and the way the author treats the idea that some of the characters who appear alive are actually ghosts must be discussed. This is important in the section of the novel where Serenity, Virgil and Jenna go to visit Jenna's father. Notice that Serenity is the only one in the group to which the nurse at the front desk speaks. Jenna believes this is because the three of them seem to be a family unit. However, it is unusual that the nurse would not direct her questions to the male of the group. In reality, knowing that Jenna and Virgil are both ghosts, Serenity is probably the only one of the group that the desk clerk can see. Notice also in Thomas' room, the orderlies do not interact with either Jenna or Virgil. They speak directly only to Serenity. Thomas, however, is aware of both Jenna and Virgil and interacts with both of them.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the Thomas Metcalf presented in Alice's memories and the one that Serenity and Virgil meet in the psychiatric hospital.



Discussion Question 2

Consider Thomas' anger when he sees the pebble necklace that Jenna is wearing. Why do you think this necklace sparked such anger? Do you think it is possible that he might have done something to hurt Alice?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think it was significant that the elephants covered Alice with brush and dirt when she had laid down under the baobab tree for a nap? What do you think this covering symbolized?

Vocabulary

skein, dirge, cognitive, rigorous, discrete, intricate, mundane, guillotine, vocalize, temporal, magnanimousness, musth, spiel, spontaneous, endorsed, exploitation, jaded, prevalent, entity, eulogies, novices, contagious, flustered, meandered, receded, implying, patently, legacy, ethical, precursor, anomaly, plateau, crested, antics, refrain, syncopated, residual, accumulated, grimace, renowned, dissertation, dysfunctional, imbecile, communal, impassive, comatose, lapse



Part 1: Chapter 15; Serenity — Chapter 17; Jenna

Summary

In Chapter 15, Serenity believes it is with a superhuman force that she shoves Thomas away from Jenna and she caught the girl before she hit the floor. Virgil smacks Thomas so hard he falls back into his chair. The orderlies come running and ask Serenity if she is all right. Serenity says she is, but realizes there is something strange going on in the energy surrounding Thomas. The orderlies say they're going to sedate Thomas and suggest Serenity and Jenna come back later. Virgil had already left the room. As Serenity walks Jenna down the hall, she notices the patients are openly staring but the caregivers seem to be pretending not to see her.

At the car, Virgil tells Serenity and Jenna that another employee had suggested that Thomas had been abusing Alice. At this suggestion Jenna extrapolates that her mother might have run away because she was afraid of Thomas, not because she killed Nevvie. Virgil gets a phone call. While he's talking, Serenity gets the feeling that Jenna's mother is stuck, but isn't sure where she's stuck. When Virgil completes his call, he says the DNA test came back on the red hair in the body bag. It is Alice's hair. Jenna gets angry with Virgil for his theories, first making her mother a murderer, then her father an abusive husband. She tells him he's fired and then walks off.

Virgil suggests that Serenity go after Jenna. Before she does so, Serenity suggests to Virgil that he stop trying to be invested in where the investigation leads and just follow where the clues lead him. He admits to Serenity he thinks Thomas is angry with Alice because she was having an affair.

In Chapter 16, Alice discussed the mothering habits of elephants. The babies are protected not just by the mother but by the entire herd, a technique Alice referred to as all mothering. She noted that biological elephant mothers and daughters would stay together until one of them died.

In Chapter 17, Jenna is walking along the highway when Serenity stops to pick her up. A police car pulls up behind Serenity and the officer asks if there is a problem. Serenity tells Jenna to get in the car and Jenna complies. She finds a dollar bill in the floorboard and folds it into the shape of an elephant. As Jenna looks at the monster cover on Serenity's steering wheel and the cross hanging from her rearview mirror, she wonders if a person can believe in two completely different lines of thinking at the same time.

Realizing that Serenity is happy just because she exists, Jenna asks her about the meaning of life. Serenity says that her spirit guides have told her the universe wants two things from people. First, they shouldn't hurt themselves or anyone else intentionally and second, they should get happy. Jenna wonders if her life happy will be happy if she



finds out what happened to her mother. She drops Jenna off at the rack where Jenna had locked her bike. Instead of going home, Jenna goes back to the sanctuary. She lies down in the spot where the purple mushrooms grow and dreams about her mother.

She remembers being told in nursery school to draw a picture of her family. Jenna drew herself with five parents. Her teachers had asked her about all the people in her picture, and then questioned Alice about the picture when she came to pick Jenna up. Alice said the photo was accurate as all five of the adults helped to take care of Jenna. However, the figure she had labeled as her dad wasn't the figure that represented Thomas. Thomas was in a corner, almost pushed off the page. Jenna believes she had been able to see more about the relationships of the people around her than anyone expected. Jenna suddenly realizes it was Gideon who gave her mother the necklace. In order to find her mother before Virgil does, Jenna knows she had to find Gideon first.

Analysis

These are the final chapters in Part 1 of the novel so it stands to reason that the discovery that Alice was having an affair with Gideon is some sort of turning point in the novel. Virgil realizes Alice was having an affair with someone after he witnessed Thomas' behavior at the psychiatric hospital when he saw the pebble necklace Jenna was wearing. It is not until after Jenna has the dream about her preschool interpretation of her family that she realizes it was not her father who had given Alice the pebble it was Gideon. Jenna comes to the conclusion that she must find Gideon before Virgil does so she can warn her mother that Virgil believes she killed Nevvie.

Several other significant things can be found in this section of the novel. Foremost are the results of the DNA test Virgil had ordered on the red hair found in Nevvie's body bag. This hair did turn out to be a match to Jenna, meaning that the person to whom it had belonged was related to Jenna. Virgil also finally chooses to tell Serenity and Jenna that Thomas had been acting strangely the night of Nevvie's death and that he suspected Thomas had been abusing Alice. Jenna is confused and angry because neither of her parents are turning out to be who she thought they were.

Notice that Serenity gives Virgil some advice after he becomes so upset after Jenna's tantrum when he suggested her father was abusive. Serenity tells Virgil that he needs to stop directing his investigation in a particular direction and just try to follow the clues. She shares with him her experience of trying to hide from her clients any information that she thought would hurt them. She compares their job to that of a ventriloquist and a dummy. While Virgil thinks she just enjoys telling him he is a dummy, she's actually making a point that he isn't in charge of the results of his investigation; he's just in charge of putting all the facts together correctly.

Interesting in this section is that Alice's parenting plan seems to be modeled after the elephants' example of allmothering. Jenna's preschool teachers think that she doesn't have a good grasp on the idea of who is included in her immediate family as she includes all of the employees at the elephant sanctuary in her drawing. What should



have concerned the preschool teachers, and Alice, was that Jenna had developed the idea that Gideon was her father. Thomas had been pushed off to the side of the page almost as if Jenna wished he were not there.

Finally, it may be becoming more and more clear to the observant reader that there are some strange things going on in the novel. It is known that Alice had to take a leave of absence for an emergency situation back in the states. When she returned, she fixated on grief, particularly the grief of elephants that had lost a parent. Logic would lead one to the conclusion that Alice's mother had died while Alice was in the states. However, that conclusion is contradicted because Jenna is living with her grandmother, who has been identified as Alice's mother.

Also notice the unusual reaction on the officer's part when he pulls up behind Serenity as she is trying to get Jenna to get in the car with her. He seems confused and offended when she tells Jenna to get in the car, almost as if he believes she is talking to him. Also unusual is the way the orderlies interact with only Serenity in Thomas' room at the psychiatric ward. One of them asks Serenity if she is okay, but doesn't seem to notice Jenna. When Serenity asks Jenna what she wants to do, the orderly seems to think Serenity is talking to her. Notice also that as the two walk back down the hallway, the patients all stare at Jenna and her red check. Serenity believes the caregivers are simply being courteous in not looking up at Jenna, but it almost seems as if they believe nothing unusual is going on.

Discussion Question 1

How does the knowledge that Alice was having an affair with Gideon change your opinion of what might have happened the night that Nevvie was killed?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it significant that Alice noted in her chapter that mother and daughter elephants stayed together until one of them died?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Serenity's encounter with the police officer when she is trying to get Jenna into the car with her. What is strange about their conversation?

Vocabulary

hysterical, denominator, transcending, inexplicable, somatic, intuition, sheen, agitated, proximity, ventriloquist, susceptible, inviolable, absentia, ornate, bevy, enthused, quirks, permutations, disastrously

Part 2: Chapter 18; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 18, for Alice, keeping an eye on Kagiso, a pregnant elephant, was a reason for her to get out of bed. Alice was not yet aware that she was pregnant as well. She looked back on her romance with Thomas like she would a summer affair. When Alice did find that Kagiso had delivered her baby, it was dead. She realized that Kagiso had not just lost her baby, but also her identity as a mother.

Alice didn't notice she was pregnant until her shorts no longer fit her. Several days after the death of Kagiso's baby, she drove to town and took a pregnancy test. It was positive. Back at the base camp she asked for a three-week leave of absence and called Thomas to tell him she wanted to visit his sanctuary. She didn't tell him she was pregnant. She wanted to get to know him better before she decided if he was a proper parent for the baby she was carrying.

When Thomas met her at the airport, he was holding an uprooted plant upside down, his interpretation of a baobab tree. On the way home Thomas told her a new elephant, Maura, would be arriving at the sanctuary soon. When Thomas took Alice into his tiny house, Alice wondered what she was doing there. He stood uncomfortably and Alice asked to take a shower. She worked out a way to leave quickly while in the shower, deciding she had made a mistake. When she came out of the bathroom, Thomas was putting sheets and blankets on the couch. She thanked him and he told her she was to sleep on the bed while he slept on the couch. Thomas told her that as his guest, she could do what she wanted. She let the towel covering her fall to the floor. They didn't make it to the couch, instead making love on the floor.

Alice learned the habitants of the sanctuary consisted of five Asian elephants and one African elephant with another on the way. Thomas and his staff tried not to interfere with the lives of the elephants unless they had to. They also went into the enclosures to feed and give the elephants medical treatments if necessary. The elephants were not punished for any reason. The only type of behavior modification allowed was positive reinforcement and rewards.

Thomas took her around the sanctuary on an ATV introducing her to the elephants. As they were talking about Dionne, an Asian elephant, Thomas got a phone call about the new Asian elephant that was on the way. Alice stepped closer to Dionne and let the elephant explore her with her trunk. Alice laughed when the elephant blew a raspberry into Alice's palm with her trunk. A tiny woman walked up behind Alice and told Alice Dionne liked her. Alice learned the woman was Grace. Thomas told the women he had to go to the office about Maura's transport. Alice offered to help Grace. Grace told Alice about the duties that she, her mother and her husband tended to at the sanctuary. Grace told Alice she'd never intended to work this far north or with elephants. She had wanted to be a second grade teacher. When she watched as Alice interacted with the



elephants, Grace commented that Alice was like Nevvie and Gideon as their love for elephants was in their blood.

Grace told Alice she usually didn't go into Hester's enclosure, as that elephant was a bully. Alice offered to feed Hester for her. The first time she went into the enclosure with a bucket of food Hester swiped at her with a stick. When Alice went back with a bale of hay, Hester charged at her. Alice stood her ground until a man grabbed her from behind and pulled her out of the enclosure. Gideon asked Grace why she didn't call him. She hugged him as he continued to look at Alice as if he were trying to decide if she was a moron.

As Alice was watching the elephants play, Nevvie came up behind her, mentioning that the elephants' noises sounded like gossip. Nevvie told Alice she'd wanted to work with animals after she'd met Wimpy, an elephant owned by a private zoo. Years later Nevvie had met Wimpy again when she worked for the Bastion Brothers Traveling Show of Wonders. Wimpy was now owned by that group and had been labeled as a dangerous animal and was kept chained. Her calf was the second "dangerous" elephant in the show. He kept tearing down his fence because he wanted to be closer to his mother. To keep him where they thought he belonged, the circus owners had fashioned metal caps on his tusks to give him an electric shock every time he tried to touch the electric wire of his pen. Nevvie said that Thomas sold his car to pay for Wimpy's transport to the sanctuary. She was his first elephant. Wimpy died two days after she arrived at the sanctuary. Before she walked off, Nevvie told Alice that Thomas might know about the baby.

While Alice helped the staff at the sanctuary prepare for the arrival of Maura, which had been moved up a week, she tried to start a conversation with Gideon when she saw him working on one of the elephant's feet. Gideon indicated Grace should have known better than to have let Alice go into Hester's pen. He told her that Wanda, the elephant he was working with, had broken his leg once, but that she'd gotten over her fright and now let him take care of her. He was surprised at the amount of abuse elephants were willing to excuse. Alice thought of Grace who'd wanted to be a teacher but wound up cleaning up after elephants.

When Maura first arrived at the sanctuary the staff spent hours trying to coax her out of the trailer. As night fell, Hester noticed the trailer in her enclosure and began to explore it. She seemed to be saying hello to Maura. Hester managed to convince Maura out of the trailer. As Alice stood there watching the elephants make friends with one another, she realized she wanted a forever home for herself and her baby just like Maura had just gotten. She told Thomas she had something to tell him.

Analysis

One of the themes addressed most significantly in this section of the novel is that of the elephants. Alice got to interact with the elephants more closely at the sanctuary than she had in the wild. Also, the sanctuary was home to elephants that had been abused in



the past. Both Nevvie and Gideon told Alice stories of the elephants they had seen abused and how these elephants could behave dangerously if something happened that reminded them of their abuse. Even though these animals had a great ability to remember their past hurts, they also seemed to have a great ability to forgive and overlook these hurts.

The characters with whom Alice interacted and are important in her story are developed more fully in this section of the novel. Grace seemed sad as she admitted to Alice that she never intended to work with elephants. She had traveled with her husband and mother-in-law to work at the sanctuary. Alice had described Grace as being a tiny person and it is easy to see how she might not have stood a chance fighting against her husband and mother-in-law for what she wanted. However, when Alice suggested to Grace that she could teach school in the city in which she was now living, Grace seemed to dismiss the idea. Alice believed that Grace was somewhat like an elephant that had been caged against her will. Grace also indicated to Alice that both her mother and her husband had elephants in their blood while she did not. She worked hard at the sanctuary and did her part, but her heart didn't seem to be in her work. In fact, Gideon seemed frustrated with the way his wife acted around the elephants especially when she allowed Alice to go into Hester's enclosure alone.

Gideon's character is not fully developed in this section of the novel though Alice does describe him as being a big man with deep black skin and eyes. He pulled Alice from Hester's enclosure as if he believed the elephant would do her harm if she had the opportunity. He not only scolded Grace for not calling him to take care of Hester but also seemed to think Alice was acting foolishly when she went into Hester's pen.

Nevvie believed that Thomas had saved her at the same time he saved one of the first elephants that he brought to the sanctuary. Wimpy was an elephant that Nevvie had met earlier in her career, and then met again after Wimpy had been abused for years. Nevvie's experience with the changes she saw in Wimpy convinced Nevvie the way the circuses were treating the elephants was not right. Nevvie probably was the one who did the most to encourage Alice to stay on at the sanctuary. She told Alice the things that she wanted to hear about Thomas. Nevvie also recognized that Alice was pregnant and told her that Thomas might already know about the baby.

Notice Alice's concern that Thomas might not be a fitting parent for the baby she was carrying. Several occurrences seemed to convince her that he might be suitable even though the two hadn't known each other very long. First, even though Jenna was much too young, Alice believed she felt the baby move when she first heard her father's voice at the airport. Alice was also caught up in the way the workers at the sanctuary welcomed Maura to her new home. She realized she wanted that same kind of home for her and her baby. Even though it seemed that all would turn out well for Alice at the elephant sanctuary, her concern is a foreshadowing that Thomas will not turn out to be the man for which she hoped.



Discussion Question 1

Do you sense anything strange in the relationship between Grace and Gideon? Describe your impression of their relationship based on examples from the novel.

Discussion Question 2

How are the elephants that Alice encountered at Thomas' sanctuary similar to those she studied in Botswana? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

How does the death of Kagiso's baby affect Alice?

Vocabulary

impending, listless, respective, serenading, vantage, pandemonium, dispassionately, interfere, cowardice, figment, oblivious, liability, ludicrous, pathologically, delusional, transpired, averting, primordial, bioluminescent, ricocheted, verdant, unobtrusively, dotage, riveted, fluent, segregated, periscope, flaxen, rudimentary, elevation, entwined, hefted, palate, discrepancy, liquidated, synonymous, girder, hypnotized, propriety, sauntered, animated, cacophonous, tentatively, tandem



Part 2: Chapter 19; Virgil — Chapter 20; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 19, Virgil goes through the evidence from Nevvie's death again. He's looking for proof that Nevvie's death was a murder. His landlord, Abigail, walks in on him. She asks if he's been drinking. Even he is surprised when he tells her that he hasn't. Abigail then tells Virgil he's incorrect. She'd overheard him muttering that dead people didn't talk. She said her husband talked to her even though he'd been gone for 22 years. She tells him, in fact, she would have evicted Virgil years ago if her husband hadn't convinced her to let Virgil stay. After she leaves his office, Virgil goes over the clothes worn by Nevvie the night of her death. It is not until his third pass over the shirt that he finds a fingernail stuck in a ripped hem. He also finds a receipt in the pocket of the shorts from Gordon's Wholesale. He wonders if the employees at that grocery store might remember the employees at the sanctuary.

Without even knowing he had done so, Virgil calls Serenity. He asks if she has heard from Jenna. He also asks Serenity if she will go with him to Gordon's Wholesale. He recognizes that Serenity knew how difficult it was to live with one's self if they didn't correct what they'd done wrong. As they drive to the supermarket, Serenity points out all of the things they have in common as an investigator and a psychic, like knowing what questions to ask and not to ask, their fluency in body language and their dependence upon their intuition.

At the store, Virgil goes for the oldest employee. He continues to mention Gideon in the conversation until the old man asks if he is talking about Gideon Cartwright. He says that Gideon left when the elephants were taken to the sanctuary in Tennessee. Serenity and Virgil also learn from this man that Grace had died about a month before Nevvie's death. She had drowned herself in the Connecticut River.

In Chapter 20, Alice writes that the relationship an elephant mother formed with her baby was so strong that if anyone or anything came between the elephant and its baby, the mother would kill them. Alice remembers that they'd had no idea that Maura was pregnant when she'd first come to the sanctuary. When they did discover her pregnancy, she was quarantined. This was Maura's second baby. The first had been taken from her when it was only two. Alice makes a promise to Maura that she will not allow that to happen again. Thomas believes the baby elephant will be a money draw for the sanctuary.

At that time, Alice was focusing on the positive aspects of her time at the sanctuary instead of the negative. However, there were negative influences she was beginning to notice. Thomas was worried about how they could keep the sanctuary open and was taking medicine to help him sleep. Alice also felt guilty because she hoped that an



elephant would die so she could continue her studies about grief. She had even begun getting into arguments with Nevvie because Nevvie believed she knew more than Alice about the elephants. Nevvie and Alice disagreed also on Maura's delivery date. Alice thought Maura would deliver soon while Nevvie estimated the birth was still three weeks away.

On one of her daily visits to check on Maura Alice noticed signs that she was about to give birth. Nevvie said it would be awhile as elephant babies were always born at night. Thomas decided to along with Alice's supposition. After two hours Maura had not progressed in her labor so Alice suggested they call the vet. Nevvie said it wasn't needed. After six hours Thomas agreed with Alice to call the vet. Alice was worried she would jinx Maura's birth by thinking about the dead calf in Botswana. She watched as Maura gave birth and realized right away that something was wrong. The calf was dead. Alice was in tears by the time Thomas and Gideon arrived. When Thomas asked what happened, Alice felt as if Thomas were accusing her. She asked him to call back the vet and tell him not to come. She would not allow a necropsy to be done until Maura was finished grieving.

It was about three in the morning before Maura picked up her baby and began carrying it north. When she reached a spot with a tree where Maura liked to come in the hottest part of the day, she laid the baby down. She covered her baby with branches, and then stood over the body. Knowing that Maura would need water, Alice asked Gideon for a favor. He brought her a swallow tub and several gallons of water. Although there was a chance that Maura could have hurt them badly, she instead stopped her charge when Gideon stopped the ATV and allowed Alice to pull the tub off and fill it. Maura drank, and then stroked Alice's shoulder with her trunk.

Seventy-two hours after the baby's death, Alice tried to get Maura to leave her baby. At this point, Alice was so tired she was hallucinating. Nevvie and Gideon forced her to go home. Nevvie promised to stay with Maura. Grace was sleeping on the couch next to Jenna's crib. Thomas was wearing the same clothes from three days ago, had been taking medicine and drinking. When Alice suggested he go to bed Thomas yelled at her and threw the ledger book across the room. Alice looked at the journal and realized it was full of blank pages. She had not learned until after they were married that Thomas had been diagnosed with depression after his father's death. She took Jenna to bed with her and went immediately to sleep.

Alice woke the next morning to the sound of a backhoe. Thomas was passed out in the office. Alice bundled Jenna up and headed toward the place she'd left Maura and her baby. Nevvie and Gideon had separated Maura from her baby using hot wire. The baby was chained to a pallet. Nevvie was directing Gideon where to dig a grave. Alice stood up to Nevvie, asking what she was doing. Nevvie said she'd asked Thomas and he'd told her to use her judgment. When Thomas did wake, he gave Nevvie a lecture for taking things into her own hands. Gideon and Alice removed the straps from the baby. Maura stood over him for another 45 minutes then walked away. After she was gone for 10 minutes Alice told Gideon it was time. As soon as they finished the burial Alice fell to her knees crying. Gideon put his arms around her. As they embraced, Grace came up,



carrying a pitcher of tea. Alice wondered what she thought when she saw the two of them together. Even after Gideon left, holding hands with Grace, Alice could still feel his hands on her.

Analysis

Grief is a major topic in this section of the novel as Alice insisted that Maura be allowed the time she needed to grieve the loss of her calf. She stayed with Maura and the calf taking notes and observing Maura's behavior. Knowing that Maura would not leave her calf's body even to take care of her own needs, Alice asked Gideon to help her take some water to the elephant. Notice the elephant stroked Alice's shoulder with her trunk after drinking the water. This seems to be a sign that Maura understood and appreciated what Alice was doing for her. Notice also that when Maura decided to move her baby, it was to a spot under an oak tree. This same spot will turn out to be a very important setting later on in the novel. It is the same one that Jenna goes to that is covered in purple mushrooms. After Maura had taken her baby to her selected spot, she covered the baby with branches and dirt, just as Alice had described that elephants would do with their dead.

Notice also in this section that some friction seemed to be developing between Nevvie and Alice. Both had their own opinions about elephant behavior and both seemed to have a need to establish a pecking order between them. Nevvie believed she was top dog because she was a long-time employee of the sanctuary. She'd always had her way before and had been considered the leader, second in command to Thomas. When Alice came, she disrupted Nevvie's control because Alice was married to Thomas, a relationship that Alice felt should have given her a certain amount of leadership. Nevvie frustrated Alice by redoing all of the meals Alice had prepared for the animals. Then she angered both Alice and Thomas by going over Thomas' head and demanding that Maura's calf be buried. Gideon was caught in the middle of the power struggle between the two as he admitted to Alice he had sometimes been punished for doing his own thinking when it came to taking care of the elephants.

In the theme of Mental Illnesses, Thomas' mental illness seemed to be taking over him as he struggled with the stress of funding the sanctuary. He struggled with a huge blow when Maura's calf was stillborn. He'd hoped this calf would lure new investors. Alice felt he blamed her when the calf was born dead. She noticed that he was turning to alcohol and drugs as he became more and more stressed. On the night she returned from her vigil with Maura's calf, Alice was frightened when Thomas threw a ledger book at her when she suggested they go to bed. This was the first time she'd ever seen him lash out at her for no reason. Alice's concern deepened when she realized the ledger book he appeared to have been poring over contained only blank pages.

When talking to the man at Gordon's Wholesale, Serenity and Virgil make a significant discovery about Gideon and his wife. Remember that the night of the investigation when Virgil asked Gideon about his wife, he'd only said that she was gone. It was assumed she'd left him. Gordon tells Virgil, however, that Grace had killed herself about a month



before Nevie's death. Virgil believes the two deaths are connected but does not draw the proper connection. He thinks that somehow Gideon was responsible for the death of both his wife and his mother-in-law. While the two deaths are connected, it will turn out Virgil's first guess is not the proper connection.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the conflicts between Alice and Nevie. How might they be significant in relation to Nevie's death?

Discussion Question 2

Why might it be significant that Grace died just a short while before her mother? How does this put suspicion on Gideon?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the circumstances of the death of Maura's calf and her time of grief. Why did Alice feel so guilty about the calf's death? Why was Thomas angry that the calf died?

Vocabulary

ballistic, unadulterated, felonious, inefficiency, subconsciously, paraphernalia, versatile, detritus, evicted, inconclusive, riddance, inconsistency, lapsed, fluent, intuition, clairvoyant, perverse, sanctioned, ageist, sustainability, charlatans, condolences, proximity, paramour, protocol, bevy, cobbling, miniscule, discombobulated, ministrations, jinx, amniotic, equivocate, caul, necropsy, barometric, aborted, sustenance, encroaching, reverence, depleted, sentinel, subdued, miffed



Part 2: Chapter 21; Jenna — Chapter 23; Serenity

Summary

In Chapter 21, Jenna uses her knowledge that few people pay attention to her to get on a Greyhound bus without having to pay the fare. She is going to the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee because she knows that is one place that Gideon stopped after he left New Hampshire. Just more than a day after she left New Hampshire, Jenna arrives in Nashville. She hides in the bed of a truck bound for Columbia, which she has learned is close to Hohenwald. A little boy is the only one who notices her but she claims to be playing hide and seek.

In Chapter 22, Alice describes the mating rituals of elephants. She wonders if the younger female elephants learn the estrus song from their mothers. She also wonders if the younger elephants learn from their mothers' mistakes.

In Chapter 23, Serenity admits that one time prior to her failed attempt to find the Senator's son, she had lost the ability to communicate with spirits. She'd been doing a reading for a college aged woman trying to get in touch with her father. The girl's mother had come along and when the girl went to the bathroom, the mother told Serenity her husband had killed himself with a shotgun, a fact of which her daughter was not aware. He'd also been having an affair with one of the boys on the basketball team he coached. Two days later, the daughter called Serenity to say the recordings they'd made of the session were completely blank. Not even their voices had picked up on the tape.

In the parking lot outside the grocery store Virgil asks Serenity to try to contact Grace. Serenity isn't able to hear anything and tells Virgil it was sometimes like that when dealing with people who had committed suicide. She immediately wonders if she can't get in touch with Alice because she killed herself. The two consider a variety of reasons how Nevvie might have been killed based on this new information that Grace had killed herself.

Serenity urges Virgil to call Jenna and let her know they are going to Nashville. They have to go to Serenity's apartment and refer to the ledger that Jenna signed to get her phone number. Serenity's home phone doesn't work and she can't get cell service so they drive to Jenna's house on Greenleaf Street instead. They find themselves in a neighborhood that seems inconsistent with Jenna and her personality. The woman who answers the door tells Serenity the address is the one Jenna gave, but Jenna does not live there. Virgil insinuates Jenna gave Serenity a false address because she didn't trust Serenity. He tells Serenity he believes that Jenna has already gone to Nashville.



Analysis

In this section of the novel Serenity and Virgil finally catch up to Jenna's line of thinking and decide the only way they might get any answers to their questions is by talking to Gideon. Like Jenna, they discover his first move after the New England Elephant Sanctuary closed was to escort the elephants to a sanctuary in Tennessee.

Virgil challenges Serenity to try to contact Grace's spirit but Serenity is unable to do so. She has already described an incident prior to her experience with Grace when she tried to contact a man who had committed suicide but was unable to do so. She doesn't seem all that surprised when she is unable to contact Grace.

Again, it is necessary to discuss this section as it relates to the discoveries the reader will make when he reaches the end of the novel. Notice that Jenna describes how she sneaks around getting on the Greyhound bus at each stop and hiding in the bathroom when the driver counted heads. Although Jenna believes she is being sneaky, she really didn't have to worry about all the sneaking around as she was a spirit that few people could see anyway. The only person who questions any of her behaviors during the entire trip is one small boy. His family dismisses his claim that he saw a girl as a figment of his overactive imagination.

Notice also the strange glitches and serious of events that get Serenity and Virgil to try to contact Jenna at her home. They notice the neighborhood they enter doesn't seem like the kind of place Jenna would live. Because Jenna died when she was three years old at the elephant sanctuary, Jenna never did live there even though that may be the house that Jenna's spirit has taken up residence in since she's been staying with her grandmother.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant in Alice's research of elephant mating that she wonders if the female elephants learn from their mother's mistakes? Do you think this question had any relevance in Alice's life?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Serenity's claim that it is hard to reach the spirits of those who had committed suicide. Do you think it is a possibility that Alice killed herself? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Upon what does Virgil base his assumption that Jenna gave Serenity a false address? Do you think he is correct in his assumptions?

Vocabulary

antisocial, incapable, stowing, plight, scenarios, alias, hearse, hoist, canvassing, aversion, guttural, estrus, integral, flukes, legitimate, acquisition, meticulous



Part 2: Chapter 24; Alice — Chapter 25; Virgil

Summary

In Chapter 24, Maura grieved deeply after her baby was born dead. She even stopped eating. With no herd to console Maura and help her through her grief, she was an interesting study for Alice's research. Alice noted Thomas had thrown himself into a new funding project and didn't seem anything like the man he'd been in the days just following the death of Maura's calf. Alice hoped to never see that man again. She planned to do everything she could to ensure that Thomas wouldn't go down that road again.

Two weeks later, when Alice went to pick up food at Gordon's Wholesale, the credit card was denied. She went to the bank for cash but the account was closed. The clerk told her Thomas had cleared out the account and had applied for a second mortgage that same day. She drove straight home looking for Thomas. She was unable to find him but Gideon came to her asking if she knew anything about a shipment from a nursery. When she finally found Thomas, she asked him what he was doing. He talked about making an observation deck above the Asian barn, with a field of orchids. Alice knew the orchids were a waste of money as they wouldn't grow in the soil they had. He told Alice he planned to do the work himself. Even though he spent his days working in that space, he wouldn't let Alice see his progress.

One day while she and Grace were working on the elephants' meals together, Alice asked Grace if she and Gideon even fought. Grace's response seemed guarded. Alice commented about the way Thomas had been in his office after the death of Maura's calf. Grace told Alice Thomas always bounced back from those episodes, indicating to Alice that he'd been that way before. Alice remembered Thomas having only told her about one time he'd had an episode of depression, after the death of his father. Alice asked Grace why he would lie to her. Grace explained his purpose might not have been to lie to her, but to protect her. For Grace, she was keeping a secret from Gideon, the secret that she could not have children. Grace begged Alice not to tell Gideon.

That night after Thomas had gone to sleep, Alice snuck out to the barn. In the attic, she was at first awed by the view but once she turned on the lights, she was shocked to see that the same letters and numbers had been written over and over again on every square inch of the walls. Alice realized at this point that Thomas was not just sick, but was mentally unstable and that he needed help. She woke Gideon and asked him to paint over all of the walls of the attic by morning.

Alice recognized the letters and numbers Thomas had written on the walls as being the chemical formulas for five drugs she'd written about in a paper. These drugs could be administered to an elephant after a trauma and would keep the animal from coding



those events as painful memories. In the end of her paper, Alice had concluded that it was perhaps not in an elephant or a person's best interests to chemically erase upsetting memories. Alice wasn't sure what had attracted Thomas to the paper. She knew even with the codes painted over, she could never forget the flaw she'd discovered in her husband.

The next morning, Alice was distracted as she helped Nevvie put Hester into the same enclosure with Maura. Hester followed Nevvie to the spot where Maura stood but the reunion didn't go well. Maura charged at Hester but Nevvie and Alice got her moved to another part of the sanctuary before either was injured. Afterward, Alice went back to the attic of the African barn. Thomas was busy rewriting the letters and numbers on the walls. He told her it was going to be a surprise for her as he believed he had figured a way to erase a past trauma. He wanted to use Maura as the subject. Thomas claimed he had been told he could regress a mind. When Alice asked for proof, he pulled a letter from the credit card company that he had used to make an anagram from the words "account balance." Alice put her palm on his cheek, telling him he was sick. He grabbed her hand and squeezed it telling her he was sick of her doubting him.

Alice made a trip to Dartmouth College, which had the closest inpatient psychiatric facility to Boone. Dr. Thibodeau told Alice it sounded as if Thomas were suffering from bipolar disorder. He told her the condition was treatable with medication. Because he hadn't hurt Alice, however, Thomas couldn't be institutionalized involuntarily. On the drive home, Alice decided the only way to get Thomas to go to the doctor willingly was to try to convince him that she loved him and wanted him to be well. Alice said nothing to Thomas that night, however, because when she got home Thomas wrapped his arms around her and told her that he was afraid she had taken Jenna and left for good. For the next few months, things seemed to improve. Maura began moving further and further away from her calf's grave. Thomas stopped working on the observation deck. A grant came in, giving them some extra funding.

One day when Alice was doing a trunk wash on Dionne, Thomas grabbed her from behind by the neck. He demanded to know who Thibodeau was as he hit her head against the steel of the barn. He had found the business card for the psychiatrist she saw at Dartmouth. Thomas accused her of wanting to lock him away and steal his research. Suddenly Gideon grabbed Thomas from behind and punched him. Alice ran from the barn and Gideon followed, catching Alice when she fell. She pushed him away, telling him she didn't ask for his help. She went to Thomas' office and looked at his ledger book. At the end of the pages with legitimate entries were those filled with the chemical codes for the five drugs.

Alice wrapped a scarf around her neck to hide the bruises and went to sit with Maura near her calf's grave. Thomas walked up to the fence and told her he was going away to a place he'd been before that could help him. He said the contact information was on the table. After he left, Maura walked away from the grave, then turned around and looked at Alice. Alice followed her. Maura walked to the hot wire fence and looked longingly at the pond. Even though she didn't have tools, Alice disengaged the fence and opened it. Maura went as far as the edge of the pond. Determined she hadn't done



all that work for nothing, Alice took off her shoes and went into the pond, flicking water at Maura. Maura responded by spraying Alice with water, a playful response that made Alice laugh. Gideon had been watching. When Alice heard him comment that since Maura was playing she must be letting go, Alice felt silly. She apologized to Gideon for pushing him away after Thomas attacked her.

That night, Alice called a staff meeting telling them Thomas would be out of town dealing with investors for awhile. They would run the sanctuary without him. After she put Jenna to bed, she removed the scarf and looked at the bruises that Thomas' hands had left. In the kitchen she found the phone number for Morgan House, the place Thomas claimed to have gone for rehabilitation. When she called the number, Alice learned it had been disconnected. She did an Internet search and found there was no rehabilitation center named Morgan House anywhere.

In Chapter 25, Virgil worries that he and Serenity will miss their flight. She ordered their tickets over the phone and Serenity's ticket came out of the automated ticket machine with no problem but Virgil's instructed him to see the ticket agent. They are worried Gideon might be responsible for Alice's death and that he might hurt Jenna if she were to confront him alone. Serenity heads to check in which Virgil heads for the ticket line. He pushes his way to the front but does not get the outrage he expected because he is cut short by an airline employee. The ancient employee who confronts him tells him he doesn't belong there, Virgil explains he is in a hurry because someone he cares about is in trouble. She works the automated machine for him and hands him a boarding pass. He runs for the plane, barely making it before the flight attendant closes the door. Serenity is surprised Virgil made it and tells the man next to her that she got worked up for nothing. He smiles stiffly. The flight is grounded in Baltimore because of thunderstorms. It is nearly 6 a.m. before they are in the air again. Serenity rents a car in Nashville and asks for directions to the elephant sanctuary. Virgil, meanwhile, finds a G. Cartwright in the white pages. They decide to go to the residence, which the phone books gives with a Brentwood address, to check.

The house is unkept and has a condemned sign on the front door. When they knock, however, the door is answered by an old woman who jokes with them, telling them she hasn't seen Gideon in years, because she is blind. She says it is her daughter, Grace, who owns the house. Virgil introduces himself as Thomas Metcalf. She invites them inside to visit while they wait for Grace. He asks for a glass of water. While Nevvie is gone Serenity asks what was going on as she thought Nevvie had been trampled. Virgil realizes it was Gideon who identified the body and might have given them an incorrect identification. Virgil didn't ever get close enough to see the victim's face, even if he could have recognized it.

Virgil asks Nevvie how long she's lived there but the lady doesn't know. She said Grace took care of her after the accident. She tells Virgil, whom she believes is Thomas, that she didn't blame him or Maura for what happened. When Serenity asked who Maura was, the woman realizes there is someone with Thomas. Thomas tells her that Serenity is Alice. Nevvie drops her glass of water. Virgil tries to mop up the water but more and more comes from the walls and ceilings. Nevvie is leaning back in her chair, crying.



Virgil and Serenity run from the house, believing it is about to collapse. When they look back there is no sign of the water except their wet footprints.

Analysis

The visit to the house they believe might be owned by Gideon Cartwright or one of his relatives changes Serenity and Virgil's outlook on the death at the sanctuary. The woman gives Virgil reason to believe that not only did he not act properly as he did not open a murder case on the death at the elephant sanctuary, he didn't even have the correct identity of the person who was killed. They are thrown off course because they believe the woman they have encountered is really Nevvie. Even after Grace shows up in the form of what Serenity believes is a water poltergeist, they never consider that the woman who introduced herself as Nevvie might have been a ghost as well. Meanwhile, the crying house set off by the mention of Alice's name is a symbol of the hurt and pain that Alice caused both Grace and Nevvie when she had her affair with Gideon.

Meanwhile, in Alice's sections of the novel she continued to work through the story of her time at the elephant sanctuary. She was more and more convinced that Thomas was mentally ill. Although she wanted to get him help, there wasn't much she could do if he wasn't willing to admit he was sick. One day when talking to Grace Alice learned that Thomas had several of these episodes during the short time Grace had known him but that he always snapped out of them. Alice was angry with Thomas for lying to her and wondered if she could trust him. Hoping to share that all couples keep secrets from one another, Grace told Alice she'd never told Gideon she couldn't have children. Despite Grace's attempt to pass off secrets between married couples as normal, Alice doesn't believe marriage should be filled with lies.

Even though Thomas' behaviors had been getting more and more manic, including his writing of the chemical compounds for five drugs over and over on the walls of a barn attic, Alice learned she had no way to force him to get help unless he had hurt her. Thomas may have know this because on the day that he did try to strangle her, he told her he was leaving that day to get help. Even though he left the name and phone number of the place he'd be staying, Alice discovered that the place was made up. She had no idea where he had actually gone. Because he had hurt her and she had proof in the form of the bruises around her neck Alice could have had Thomas put into a reputable institution where he might have gotten the help he needed. By going out on his own, it was not known by Alice if he actually had a good mental health doctor or not. For Alice this was one more addition to the list of things that Thomas was keeping from her.

Significant also in this section are the words of the ticket agent to Virgil. "Just remember, no matter what happens, you'll get there eventually" (p. 285). It is this same ticket agent who earlier told Virgil that he didn't belong there. Because she was trying to help him, Virgil didn't argue with her. He also didn't seem to hear her promise that he would get where he was going eventually. Remember back when Jenna was talking about her life



without her mother that she often commented that she didn't feel as if she belonged there.

Meanwhile, back to the motif of ghosts. After reading the book through to the end it is never verified but can be assumed that it was Nevvie's ghost who answered the door at the broken down house in Brentwood. Her intention was probably to throw Serenity and Virgil off track in their investigation, as she didn't want Alice to have to opportunity to be reunited with her daughter. Notice also that the people waiting in line at the airport do not act they way Virgil had thought they'd act when he cut in front of all of them. He thinks the uproar is stifled by the ticket clerk who tells him he can't break line, but it is likely none of those people in line never even knew he was there.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the experience that Serenity and Virgil had at the house in Brentwood. What do you think this experience means? Do you think it was really Nevvie who was injured and not Alice?

Discussion Question 2

Consider Thomas' worsening mental state. Do you think it is right that a mentally ill person can only be involuntarily committed after they've harmed someone?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Thomas' obsession with Alice's research on memory. Why is it significant that he was borrowing from her research when it had been he all the time who claimed his research was being stolen?

Vocabulary

tandem, solace, affixed, enrichment, viscous, depleted, allocate, feral, enticed, daunting, clarified, surrogate, infinitesimal, inadvertent, occult, gibberish, retrospect, controversies, relevance, emissary, incentive, placidly, intimidation, confrontation, reaffixed, crimped, equilibrium, regress, jetty, anagrams, disintegrate, garish, voluntarily, inpatient, fortified, subjective, sanity, stagnant, buoyed, abroad, linear, queue, intercepts, mandatory, unequivocally, crux, disheveled, cavernous, autopsy, latent, ramshackle



Part 2: Chapter 26; Alice — Chapter 28; Alice

Summary

In the two months Thomas was gone, Alice had started over in Chapter 26. She'd taken charge of running the sanctuary with the help of Gideon. After she completed her day of financial work, Alice would pick up Jenna and join Gideon with whatever manual labor he was doing. It was at this point the two fell in love. One day they were talking about Lilly, one of the elephants on the sanctuary when Gideon noticed Jenna had wandered up to where Maura was standing. Gideon went for Jenna who began to scream when he picked her up to take her back to Alice. Alice tried to take the screaming, kicking child but Gideon insisted on holding her until he managed to calm her down. Alice commented that Gideon would be a good father. He said that he thought he would be a father by that point. When Gideon asked Alice if she worried what would happen if Thomas didn't come back, Alice told him she worried about what might happen if he did come back.

The elephant Syrah had colic. Alice had called a vet even though they couldn't afford the cost. The vet gave Syrah muscle relaxers and advised Alice and Gideon to make her drink. Gideon suddenly asked if Alice used baby oil on Jenna's skin. When she said she had at one time he went to her cottage and returned with two bottles of the oil and a pound cake. He pierced the cake with a knife, then poured the oil over it. Syrah ate the cake. As Alice watched Gideon stroking the elephant, she wished he would touch her that way. To get away from her feeling, Alice went to check on Jenna. She told Grace she needed to tell Gideon about her inability to have children. She wanted their relationship to be so strong she couldn't break into it.

The next morning Alice buried herself in paperwork until she heard a sound she believed meant someone was dying. When she reached the barn, Alice saw that Gideon was spraying Maura and Hester with the hose the fire department had donated to them. When Alice asked if he'd finished all the work that needed to be done, he turned the hose on her, telling her she needed to chill out. She grabbed it from him and sprayed him. As they played, Alice wound up in his arms and he kissed her.

She avoided Gideon for the next two weeks until he radioed her from the African barn telling her they had a situation. Clyde, who supplied their hay, wouldn't take a check because the last one had bounced. Alice got the man to agree to leave the hay and let them pay the next month with 20 percent interest. Both Gideon and Alice were tired of running the sanctuary and struggling with the lack of funds. Gideon asked Alice what she wanted and she told him she wanted to be a scientist again. She was finally honest and told him she wanted to be happy too. They made love. When Alice returned to her own cottage, she was surprised to find Thomas there with Grace and Jenna.



In Chapter 27, Jenna slips into the back of a truck she believes might be headed for the elephant sanctuary once she is in downtown Hohenwald. Once out of the truck at the sanctuary, she hears a man, Gideon, ask who let her in. Suddenly she recognizes him and tells Jenna she looks just like Alice. He asks where Alice is. Jenna tells him she was hoping Alice was with him. He tells Jenna that he tried to cover for Alice when the police came, that he had assumed she had taken Jenna and run off as she had intended to do. As Jenna struggles with her disappointment Gideon tells her there is someone he wants her to meet. Jenna recognizes Maura when she sees her. Gideon tells Jenna he stayed at the sanctuary in Hohenwald because he thought one day Alice would come to check on Maura. As they talk, Maura carves the bark off a log and drops it over the fence. When she looks at the log, Jenna can see the Xhosa word for sweetheart carved in the wood.

When Jenna's stomach growls, Gideon tells her that he is taking her to get something to eat. As they drive, she notices he's wearing a uniform like the workers at the New England sanctuary wore instead of the ones like those of the Hohenwald workers. For the first time she realizes it was scary and not necessarily lucky that Gideon was the first person she ran into at the sanctuary. She suddenly wonders if Gideon had something to do with her mother's disappearance. When Jenna asks Gideon if he killed her mother, Gideon tells her that he loved Alice and that he wanted to take care of Alice, Jenna and the baby. Jenna gets out of Gideon's van, which has stopped, and runs. She calls Serenity, begging for help.

In Chapter 28, five months after Thomas returned there were no signs of his break from sanity. He was on new medications and had checks from three new investors. Even though he seemed better, Alice couldn't trust him. He knew she didn't trust him and started locking the door of his office to keep her from snooping. She was still sleeping with Gideon and suspected Thomas knew. Both of them had thoughts of divorce and wondered who might be better equipped to care for Jenna.

Because there was so little privacy at the sanctuary, Gideon and Alice had begun meeting in the attic of the African barn. They meet that day as the rain poured down. They didn't know how long Grace had been watching them. She'd come because Jenna's preschool had called to say Jenna was running a fever. Alice cried and begged Grace to forgive her and not tell Thomas. She retreated into her research. She began to think of running away and taking Jenna with her. On the day she planned to make her escape, Gideon had come into her cottage asking if she'd seen Grace. He showed her the suicide note Grace had left.

Analysis

Much happens in this section of the novel. Although Alice fought against her attraction to Gideon, the two wound up having an affair anyway. She tried to avoid Gideon but that was impossible since the two worked in such close proximity. In a way, one can almost point to Thomas as contributing factor in the affair. He left his wife and daughter and was not honest about where he was going. He did not tell them when he would be back.



He left Alice and Gideon together to try to keep afloat an elephant sanctuary that was drowning in bills. They did not even have the money to buy hay for the elephants at one point. Grace also perhaps contributed to the affair by not being honest with her husband, even when Alice told her she needed to. It is clear by the way that Gideon treats Jenna that he wants children of his own. He seemed surprised that he and Grace had not had a child yet.

Despite the factors that contributed to Gideon and Alice's affair, Alice knew what she was doing was wrong. Because Gideon's character is not one that is given his own voice in the novel, the reader does not know what Gideon's motivation was when he encouraged Alice to have the affair. It is clear, however, that he did not fight against his attraction to Alice as hard as she fought against her attraction to him.

Notice, ironically, that it was on the first day that Alice and Gideon made love that Thomas decided to return home. He has with him an upside down plant, like the one he had with him when he met her at the airport when she first came to America. It was a sign that he wanted to start over, a reminder of their first sexual encounter with one another. Because of what she'd experienced, however, Alice was not able to forget what he'd done to her and start over with a clean slate. She didn't trust him and couldn't hide her lack of trust in him. Instead of being understanding, as he had been responsible for losing Alice's trust, and realizing he had to work to regain it, Thomas made himself seem even more untrustworthy by locking his office. Of course, if Thomas does realize that Alice was having an affair with Gideon, he would have felt as betrayed by her as she felt she had been by him.

Sadly, the one person who did not seem to know about the relationship between Gideon and Alice was Grace. She was shocked when she found the two together. Even though she had kept a secret from her husband for years, the fact she couldn't have children because of a hormone problem, she couldn't deal with the idea that her husband also had secrets. Of course, the reason Grace might not have told Gideon she couldn't have children might have been because she was afraid he would leave her for a woman who could give him children. When Grace saw Gideon and Alice together, it could have been her worst fear realized. It was at this point that Alice began her plan to take Jenna and run away. On the day that she planned to go Gideon found Grace's suicide note.

Notice in this section of the novel that Jenna finally begins to see the oddities in her happenstance meeting with Gideon at the elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. She didn't suspect him of having done anything to her mother until she was actually alone with him in his vehicle. When she did confront him, he did nothing to hurt her physically, as Virgil had feared, but gave her some information about her mother that stuns Jenna. Jenna had never known that her mother was pregnant with Gideon's baby at the time of her disappearance. Now, along with losing her mother, Jenna knows she also lost a sibling.

Even Jenna is perceptive enough to realize there is something strange about the fact that it was Gideon she ran into first off at the sanctuary. She thought at first this was a bit of good luck but later thought it might have been because Gideon was looking for her. Jenna also notices it is strange that Gideon still wears his uniform from the New



England Elephant Sanctuary instead of the one the other workers at the Tennessee sanctuary wore. Notice also that when Jenna asks Gideon how long he has worked there he gives her the vague answer “years.” It is the same answer Nevvie gave Virgil about how long she’d lived in Brentwood, almost as if they can’t remember exactly how long they’ve been there. Notice also that Gideon tells Jenna he stayed at the Hohenwald sanctuary because he thought Alice might come to check on Maura.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that Alice never visited the Tennessee sanctuary to see how Maura was doing?

Discussion Question 2

How do you think Alice and Thomas’ relationship might have fared had Alice not had the affair with Gideon? Do you think the relationship was doomed anyway? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Had Alice left sooner, do you think things might have turned out differently for Grace and Gideon? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

cerebral, brawn, subordination, compartmentalize, vicinity, validation, perspective, boluses, impaction, palpating, optical, siphon, hefted, chortling, vestiges, swiveling, brusquely, credibility, debacle, vista, pristine, redundant, mahogany, electroluminescent, infused, antidote, cretaceous, hefty, recuperation, trysts, monsoon, anonymity, cairn



Part 2: Chapter 29; Serenity — Chapter 32; Alice

Summary

In Chapter 29, Serenity explains the meaning of the term poltergeist. These ghosts are those of people who were wronged and never got to fight back. They sometimes appear as one of the natural elements — water, fire or wind. Serenity tells Virgil she believes they were chased out of the house by Grace, who had visited them as a water poltergeist. Just as Virgil is asking why Gideon would have faked Nevvie's death, Serenity's cell phone begins to ring. It is Jenna.

Jenna tells them she found Gideon and although she'd thought he might have hurt her mother, she learned that Alice was pregnant with Gideon's baby. They tell her they'd visited Nevvie, who is still alive. Jenna senses that Virgil believes Gideon had been trying to cover up a murder but Jenna tells Virgil that Gideon did not kill her mother because Alice was pregnant. Jenna comes to the conclusion that it was her father who killed her mother. She asks Serenity if she will let her talk to her mother whenever she wanted to. Although it is against Serenity's beliefs, she said she would.

On the way home Virgil asks Serenity what he should do if it was really Alice who was killed instead of Nevvie. He admits he always thought it was Donny who messed up the investigation but it was really him. He had assumed the woman he found was Alice. He couldn't even remember what she looked like. Even though Serenity tried to convince Virgil he didn't intentionally try to mislead anyone, Virgil corrects her telling her that he covered up the red hair he found on the body of the dead person. That hair indicated the death was more than just a trampling. But because Virgil covered up that bit of evidence, he was proclaimed a hero and was the youngest man to get promoted to detective status.

Virgil went on to tell Serenity he had taken the page of the ME's report about the hair and put it in his pocket the morning of his promotion ceremony. On the way there he drove his car over a cliff. He says he even messed up his attempt to kill himself as he flatlined, but came back. At that point he didn't have to tell anyone he was a good guy anymore but began promoting himself as an alcoholic loser. After Virgil's confession, Serenity made her own confession, telling Virgil she hadn't had any psychic communication since the debacle with the Senator's son. As Serenity thinks about the pieces they are all missing, she wonders if together, they might be whole. She comments that Jenna couldn't have picked two worse people to help her if she tried. Virgil agrees but says that's all the more reason to try all that much harder.

In Chapter 30, Alice did not go to Grace's funeral. She believed what Grace had done to herself was punishment for the affair she and Gideon had. She stayed busy trying to keep herself from thinking about what had happened. When she saw Gideon at the



sanctuary again, she gave him her condolences. When she turned back to the food she'd been preparing, she was surprised to see Nevvie standing there. Nevvie indicated there was nowhere else she could go.

A few days later, Alice lost Jenna. Jenna had been fighting against her mother's attempts to get her to take a nap. She called naps the Leaving Time. She believed that if she went to sleep that her mother wouldn't be there when she woke. As soon as Alice had finally gotten Jenna asleep, Gideon had come to her for help. Alice didn't want to leave Jenna but both Thomas and Nevvie were busy. After they finished the job Gideon asked Alice if she missed Grace. Alice said she did. Gideon said they couldn't continue because he didn't miss her. Alice held him while he cried.

When she arrived back at her own cottage, the door was open and Jenna was gone. She called upon Gideon for help. She raced around the sanctuary looking for Jenna until Gideon contacted her on the radio telling her that he had Jenna. She was sitting on Nevvie's lap, eating a Popsicle. Nevvie told Alice Jenna had woken up looking for Alice. Alice hadn't gotten angry because she thought the relationship between Jenna and Nevvie would be good for them both.

Alice described an incident she had witnessed when an elephant had tried to kidnap another elephant's calf by picking it up by the neck. That night after her scare with Jenna, she dreamed about that calf. She saw a riverbed filling with water and Grace Cartwright filling her pockets with stones. Suddenly it was Alice who was drowning. She woke with Gideon's hand over her mouth. As Alice thought about her dream, she realized the last time she'd dreamed like that she had been pregnant with Jenna.

In Chapter 31, Jenna's grandmother is relieved and angry when Jenna finally returns home. When Jenna asks if her grandmother called the police to report her missing, her grandmother raises her hand as if to slap her. She changes her mind and instead sends Jenna to her room. Jenna takes a bath. She wonders how her mother felt as she was dying and wants to feel that same way, to share something with her mother. She remembers her mother bathing her in the tub and knows she has felt something her mother felt, that she felt loved.

Even though Jenna feels empty because she believes her mother is dead, she also feels relief because she knows Alice didn't leave her willingly. Virgil has told her that somehow he will find a way to do a DNA test of the body that everyone thought was Nevvie's. Although Jenna knows she might finally have closure, she doesn't have her mother.

When Jenna's grandmother finally comes to talk to her, Jenna confesses she went to Tennessee. She plays with her mother's scarf as she tells her grandmother she believes that her mother is dead. Jenna's grandmother agrees, takes the scarf from Jenna, and then rips it in half. Her grandmother takes the stack of her mother's journals as well. On her computer, Jenna deletes her mother's missing person profile.



Jenna uses an emergency ladder her grandmother had put in her room in case of fire to sneak out of her bedroom. She rides her bike to Serenity's apartment. Jenna tells Serenity she heard what she and Virgil were talking about on the way home. Even though Serenity thinks that she is a fraud, Jenna doesn't think so. Jenna asks Serenity if she misses talking to people who are gone. When Serenity says that she does, Jenna says she does as well.

In Chapter 32, Gideon and Alice dreamed of taking Jenna and running away together. Gideon finally worked up the courage and told Nevvie about the baby. She told him that she hoped he got everything he deserved. Knowing that Gideon had told Nevvie, Alice had to face Thomas. After spending much of the day with Thomas she told him she was in love with Gideon. Although he knew about the affair, Thomas cried when Alice told him she was leaving. When Alice told Thomas he'd done nothing wrong, he slapped her. Alice went for Jenna but Thomas grabbed her wrist and got to the child first. He told her that she would take Jenna with her only over his dead body. Alice ran for help, leaving Jenna behind.

Analysis

In this section of chapters Alice's story seems to be working to a climax. Gideon has told his mother-in-law that Alice was carrying his baby. Alice had told Thomas she was leaving him. There seems no way for them to turn back from what they have decided to do. The only glitch that Alice didn't expect was Thomas' quick actions in getting to Jenna before she could. She had intended to take the child with her but since Thomas got his hands on Jenna first, Alice had no choice but to go for help to get the child away safely.

Notice Nevvie's behavior in this section of the novel. Even though her own daughter was dead, Nevvie was not yet aware that Alice was pregnant with Gideon's child. Alice had struggled to get the toddler to go to sleep for a nap and didn't want to wake her when Gideon came needing help. Alice thought the child would be all right for a few minutes but Jenna was gone when Alice returned. Nevvie had taken the child to her cottage instead of staying at Alice's. Apparently she was trying to make a point to Alice that she didn't need to leave her daughter alone as something could happen to her. Alice is angry with Nevvie for scaring her so badly but doesn't scold her because Alice had taken much of her parenting lessons from the elephants. Alice believed in the idea of allmothering and believed the same technique could work with human children. Notice the foreshadowing of evil as Alice indicated she believed at first that Nevvie's relationship with Jenna was a match made in heaven as Nevvie needed a new baby to take care of since Grace was gone. Notice also Alice included in this section a description of a female elephant that had tried to kidnap another elephant's baby.

In the theme of self-doubt and reparation, Virgil and Serenity finally share with one another the stories of their defeat. Virgil admits to Serenity he tried to kill himself because he was being treated as a hero in the elephant sanctuary case, but knew he was not a hero. Now, believing that he even messed up the identity of the dead person, Virgil blames himself even more for not opening a murder investigation despite his



superior officer's warnings. Serenity shares with Virgil that she has not had any real psychic experiences since her botched prediction in the case of the senator's son. They agree they are the two worst people that Jenna could have picked to help her. What they don't realize is that they need Jenna as much as Jenna needs them.

Meanwhile, Jenna seems to have hit a low point as she tries to accept that her search for her mother turned out more badly than she'd thought. When she began her search, she feared her mother was dead. Now she believes her mother is dead and that her father was the one who killed her. Even though Jenna thinks she finally knows what happened to her mother, she still feels empty.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Jenna, Virgil and Serenity are right in believing that Alice is dead? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Virgil and Serenity believe they are the two worst people Jenna could have picked to help her? Why might they actually be the ones best suited for the job?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Nevvie's behavior and attitude toward Alice when she "finds" Jenna. Do you think she has evil intentions? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

poltergeist, legitimate, occult, manifests, spontaneous, deluge, conviction, suffice, recalibrating, credibility, capacity, presumptuous, extricated, reluctant, roused, synchronicity, contorted, litany, oblivious, reprimand, catalyst, barricade, pantomime, random, mortified, cringe, periodically, kamikaze, convulse, rappel, protocol, navigate, concedes, resolve



Part 2: Chapter 33; Virgil — Chapter 39; Virgil

Summary

In Chapter 33, Virgil runs into roadblocks trying to verify whose body was buried ten years ago. He knows a DNA sample should have been part of a state autopsy but eight years of these files, including the one for the elephant sanctuary death, were destroyed when a pipe burst in the state lab. At his office building, Virgil is confronted by Serenity and Jenna. He realizes he might be able to use the blood stained shirt and fingernail he found in it for DNA. Virgil takes the fingernail and shirt to Tallulah for DNA tests. As Jenna watches her manipulate the shirt, she says she is going to throw up and runs from the room. Virgil goes after her. She tells him she didn't want to learn that her mother was murdered and her father was that murderer. Virgil explains to her that wasn't necessarily the case, Nevvie might have been responsible for hurting Alice.

Later the three discuss the case in a restaurant. Serenity notices the waitress give her a strange look when she refills Serenity's coffee cup. As she continues talking with Jenna and Virgil, Serenity notices even the customers are giving them strange looks but thinks it is because they are talking about a murder investigation. Finally, the waitress asks Serenity if she is done. She lies saying they need the table. Serenity pays the bill, giving a three-cent tip and they leave.

Outside, Jenna asks Serenity if Serenity can teach her to be psychic. As Virgil listens to Jenna beg Serenity to give her a chance, he understands why she needs the closure. Because Virgil is able to admit that he doesn't like to be left hanging, he also has to admit that he believes, just a little bit, in the same metaphysical realm with which Serenity deals.

In Chapter 34, Alice explains that one reason infants can't remember events is because they haven't learned to speak and describe those events. Instead of speaking, a child can only cry when they need help. This ability to cry for help never goes away, Alice says.

In Chapter 35, Serenity, Virgil and Jenna go to the spot where Maura's calf was buried. Under Serenity's direction, Jenna tells her mother aloud why she wants to talk to her. Getting nothing, Serenity pretends to see Jenna's mother. She tells Jenna it is her last chance to see her mother, causing Jenna to scream for her. As Serenity leans forward to hug Jenna, she is poked by something sharp. She digs it out to reveal a tooth.

In Chapter 36, Alice notes how young female elephants who have no experience in raising babies make terrible messes when trying to raise their own children. She makes a connection also between these badly behaved young elephants and the fact they'd



seen their families killed in front of them as a result of culling. Grief because of the violent death of a family member is different from traditional grief, she notes.

In Chapter 37, Jenna assumes the tooth is from Maura's calf. They are back in the room where they met Tallulah just a few hours earlier. Serenity thinks they should take the tooth to the police but Jenna isn't ready to believe her yet as Serenity has told Jenna she lied about seeing Alice. As soon as Tallulah sees the tooth, she knows it doesn't belong to Alice Metcalf. She says it belong to a child younger than five years old. Pain erupts in Jenna's mouth as she realizes what really happened.

She woke up and her mother is gone. She starts to cry but someone other than her parents picks her up. She gives her ice cream and puts Jenna's jacket and shoes on her. The woman takes her into the elephant enclosure and Jenna begins to cry because she knows her father doesn't want her in the enclosure. The woman soothes her, telling her they are going to play a game. She has Jenna lie down and see if she can see an elephant in the stars. Jenna starts to cry again and the woman puts her hand over Jenna's mouth. She has a rock in her other hand. Jenna sleeps and then wakes up, watching herself from above. She watches as Maura picks up her body and carries it a long way before putting her down. The elephant covers her with branches. Back in the present, Jenna sees Serenity fading in and out like static. Suddenly, she loses connection.

In Chapter 38, Alice says they never found Jenna's body. She had seen her baby's dead body but when the police got there, Jenna was gone. She couldn't tell the police about Jenna because then the police would put her in jail. She thinks about her actions when her mother died. She'd thrown herself into her work to avoid her grief. She wondered why she'd always argued with her mother instead of telling her that she modeled herself after her mother. As she dealt with the grief she felt from losing her mother, Alice began studying grief in elephants. The second time she went to Africa, after Jenna's death, the elephants were in danger from poachers again. Alice found an injured mother in the bush with her daughter with her. She knew the mother would have to be euthanized. Without her mother the baby would die unless Alice was able to do something. She set up a rescue center for orphaned elephants. The babies are eventually integrated into wild herds. The natives have begun calling Alice "Misali," which became the name of her facility. She concludes her chapter saying that the intention of her facility is to allow the elephants to live independently one day but it is that when these babies die too young that their deaths do not make sense.

In Chapter 39, Virgil realizes the tooth he'd been holding drops because there is no resistance to his hand. He tries to grab onto Tallulah but his hand slices through her body, which looks like smoke. The same thing is happening to Jenna. He realizes why so many people walked past he and Jenna without seeing them. He remembers the crash. He remembers asking Serenity what she thought it felt like to die. To her answer, he could add you think there is a world you are part of even though you are dreaming it. He looks at Serenity and realizes she is still solid. Even though Serenity had thought she was a lousy psychic, Virgil realizes at that point that she was really a great one.



Analysis

Although her actions have been questionable for so long, the main key to unlock the reason why Alice Metcalf left her daughter behind is finally uncovered. It is not Alice who is technically missing, it is Jenna. Jenna was killed by a yet unnamed woman ten years ago on the same night that Nevvie was trampled by the elephant. Although it was never really specified in the novel, it was probably Maura who trampled Nevvie after the elephant saw what had been done to Jenna. Consider Maura's reaction when Thomas was chasing Jenna when the two were playing a game. Just as Maura had done for her own dead calf, she took Jenna's body to the same spot under the tree. As Alice has described as a ritual of respect done by elephants, Maura covered Jenna's body with branches and dirt. This is why the police did not find Jenna that night even though they searched the sanctuary for her. They did not expect her to have been buried in this way. When Jenna was not found after a sweep of the sanctuary, the police assumed Alice had taken Jenna with her. It turns out, however, that Jenna is one of those spirits who does not realize she is dead. She had believed for ten years that she had survived that night and that her mother abandoned her.

In this section of the novel, it is learned that since Jenna's death, Alice has stayed busy operating an elephant orphanage in South Africa. She has dedicated herself to saving those elephant babies almost as if by doing so she could save her own babies. After her mother's death, Alice also threw herself into her work with the elephants. It is in this section that the reader learns for sure that it was Alice's mother's sickness with cancer and her death that caused her to take a leave of absence and return to the United States. With this information in mind, that means that Jenna's grandmother is a ghost as well. Even if Jenna's grandmother had gone to file a missing person report on her daughter, no one at the police department would have been able to help her as she was a ghost.

Consider also in this section of the novel that Alice's entries seem to focus on the difficulty elephants have in getting over deaths that have been caused by some tragic force or murder. She insinuates that the grief felt by an animal or human who has seen a family member killed can affect a variety of different aspects of the creature's life including its ability to raise children.

Discussion Question 1

Are you surprised at the author's twist in this section of the novel? Did you suspect at any point that Jenna and Virgil were ghosts? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does Alice's research on elephant grief, especially when it came to mothers and daughters, make more sense now that the reader knows for sure that Alice's mother is



dead? How does a good deal of the information given by Alice about elephants make sense now that one sees Maura's actions the night of Jenna's death?

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think is the woman responsible for killing Jenna? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

posterity, civilian, marginally, disarrayed, ravenous, annoyance, heliotrope, replicate, hordes, presides, ethereal, suckle, awry, belligerent, perpetrators, deciduous, scrutinized, palindrome, translucent, reprimand, jostle, integrate, obviously, prohibition, detach



Part 2: Chapter 40; Alice — Chapter 43; Jenna

Summary

In Chapter 40, Alice writes that even before she left the hospital the night of Nevvie's death she knew she had miscarried her baby. She stays busy, trying to ignore her grief, but knows she's destroying herself. She thinks about Jenna all the time. She knows Thomas is in an institution and that Gideon died in the war in Iraq. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. She has one remnant of her life in America. It is a club created by Maura. Alice bought the club online during a fundraiser shortly after Maura died. The club has hung on the wall across from her bed for five years. As she watches it, the club falls from the wall and breaks it half. At that moment, the phone rings. The man on the phone asks for Alice Metcalf. It is a detective from Boone, New England. He tells her that Jenna's body has been found.

In Chapter 41, Serenity searches for the tooth Virgil has dropped and has just put it in her pocket when a man comes in and asks if he can help her. After verifying he is alive, Serenity says she's looking for Tallulah. He tells her that Tallulah died three months prior. Serenity thinks she must be wrong about what she is thinking because so many people saw her in public with Jenna and Virgil. At the diner, when she questions the waitress, she tells Serenity that she was alone.

Serenity goes to the Boone Town Office she looks at the death records for Nevvie and Virgil. There is no death record for Jenna because her body was never found. Serenity realizes there was no mistake on the death record. It really was Nevvie who was killed. She also realizes the reason Alice wouldn't communicate with her or Jenna was because she wasn't dead. Serenity thinks back to all of the interactions she had with Virgil and Jenna. Suddenly the strange way people had reacted to her is clear.

Serenity realizes she never knew how small the gap was between the living and the dead. Serenity goes back to the address Jenna gave her on Greenleaf. The mother voices her irritation when she sees Serenity at the door. When Serenity asks, the woman says they bought the house in 2000 when the woman who lived there died. She spells the word "died" because she says her son has an active imagination. He tells Serenity he sees a grandmother and a girl. Serenity tells the boy they don't want to hurt him but they are real. The mother threatens to call 911. Serenity tells the mother her son's ability isn't any different than him possibly having been born with blue hair.

When Serenity tells the desk sergeant at the police department she's found human remains she's referred to Detective Mills. When the detective asks Serenity why she thinks this is a second fatality associated with the elephant sanctuary death, she hears Lucinda's voice in her head. Serenity is escorted to the grounds of the sanctuary by two officers. She finds the spot where the purple mushrooms grow. The forensic expert says



the purple mushrooms grown in places with a high nitrogen content, consistent with a shallow grave. Serenity tells them an elephant calf was also buried in that same spot.

When the policemen begin digging, Detective Mills asks why Serenity was there and how she knew about the elephant calf. She lies and tells him she was a friend of the family. When the policemen who are digging uncover the calf's skull, they do not question her any more. When the officers stop digging again, she sees one of them holding up a small broken rib cage. Serenity knows it is Jenna's

Serenity tries to get in touch with Jenna's spirit but is unable to do so. Lucinda and Desmond, however, are communicating with Serenity again and tell her to be patient. Serenity rebuilds her relationship with her one steady client, Mrs. Langham and suddenly has clients again. She spends her lunches at Virgil's grave. She brings him things she thinks he'd like and asks if he's talked to Jenna yet. One day during her grave visit Serenity sees a small gathering and recognizes Detective Mills. He tells Serenity it was nice of her to come as he's sure Dr. Metcalf appreciates the support. The woman looks like an older version of Jenna.

In Chapter 42, Alice admits she almost didn't come back to America for Jenna's burial. She was afraid she'd be arrested for Nevvie's murder. After the burial, Alice goes to Hartwick House. She'd hoped that Thomas could help her understand the memories of what happened that night but instead he is stuck in his own world. At the hotel, Alice is surprised by a knock at the door. It is Serenity. She tries to explain how Jenna got in touch with her but Alice pushes her backward accusing her of making light of her situation. Serenity explains that Jenna loved her and didn't realize she was dead. She thought her mother had left her behind.

Alice tells Serenity to go away. As Serenity walks down the hall, Alice notices a small origami elephant made from a dollar bill that had fallen from her Serenity's purse. Serenity tells Alice she got it from Jenna. Alice asked what else Jenna had told Serenity. Serenity names a few things but then Alice asks if Jenna also told Serenity she was a murderer.

Alice's memory goes back to the night of Jenna and Nevvie's deaths. The cottage door had been open when she arrived with Gideon. Jenna was gone. Thomas was passed out in his office. Gideon radioed Nevvie but she didn't answer. Alice finally spotted her just inside the fence of the African enclosure. When she asked if Nevvie had the baby, Nevvie smiled and asked how it felt to lose her baby. She grabbed Nevvie, finally getting her hands around her throat. Alice struggled with Nevvie until she tripped over Jenna's bloody body. She fought against Nevvie because her child was dead but fell into an old watering hole and was knocked unconscious. Alice can't remember the next part but remembers seeing Nevvie staring up at her with her skull cracked open. Jenna's body was missing. Alice ran because she'd lost her daughter again and because she couldn't remember if she'd killed Nevvie. She woke up in the hospital.

Back in the present, Alice admits to Serenity she hadn't known what to do. If she had told she'd seen Jenna's body, she would have been a suspect in Nevvie's death.



Although Serenity tries to convince Alice that Nevvie's death probably wasn't her fault, Alice told her she ran because she didn't know what else to do. Alice felt as if the whole thing had been her fault because of her affair with Gideon.

As she talks, she hears a voice calling "mom." In the mirror, Alice sees a girl with an auburn French braid. When Jenna asks her mother why she left, Alice explained she knew Jenna was dead when she saw her on the ground. She tells Jenna she loved her very much, just not very well. Jenna tells her mother that it wasn't her fault, causing Alice to break down. Alice realizes how badly she needed to hear those words. As Jenna walks away, Alice notices Serenity looking at a vanishing point in the mirror. A man is waiting for Jenna, Virgil. They wave at one another. Maura, the elephant, is standing beside Virgil. She wraps her trunk around Jenna, giving her the hug that Alice wishes she could give her daughter.

In Chapter 43 Jenna says she sometimes goes back and visits her mother just before morning. Her mother tells her stories about the elephants she is taking care of. Jenna's favorite story is of a man named Lawrence Anthony who had saved two herds of elephants by taking them to his game reserve. When the man died, the elephants made the trip to his house to stand vigil for two days. No one knew how the elephants realized Anthony had died. Jenna says she knows how they knew because if a person thinks about someone they've loved and lost, they're already together. The rest, she says, is just details.

Analysis

In this final section of the novel, the loose ends are tied together as Serenity takes the tooth she's found on the former grounds of the elephant sanctuary and makes up a lie that she's a friend of the family to convince them why she has so much personal information about the Metcalf family. In an ironic twist, Serenity turned to hard evidence by going to the public records to verify Virgil was really dead and that Nevvie was really the woman killed at the sanctuary before she can let herself believe the paranormal encounter she has just had.

When Serenity goes to talk to Alice about her daughter, it is the origami elephant that proves to Alice that Serenity had really had an encounter with Jenna. These elephants, made out of dollar bills, have been an important symbol since the beginning of the novel. It was one of these elephants that Jenna found tucked in her mother's journal that convinced her to go to Serenity for help. Jenna remembered her mother making these elephants for her when Jenna was a child. It was Thomas who first made the origami elephant and gave it to Alice when he visited the elephants in Botswana. Serenity had one of these elephants that Jenna made in her purse. It happened to fall out when Alice pushed Serenity. Alice saw it laying on the floor and called Serenity back when she realized what the elephant symbolized.

Note in this section of the novel that the cause of Nevvie's death is never really known for certain. Alice admits to Serenity that she struggled with Nevvie with the intention of



killing her because of what Nevvie had done to Jenna. However, Alice fell and was knocked unconscious during their struggle. When she regained consciousness, Nevvie was dead with her skull cracked open and Jenna's body is gone. Based on information given in the novel the assumption can be made that it was Maura who trampled Nevvie after she saw what the woman had done to Jenna.

Interesting in this section is the fact that Alice has a club that Maura engraved similar to the one that Maura's ghost made for Jenna the day Jenna visited the elephant sanctuary. While Jenna believed she could read the Xhosa word for sweetheart written on her club. Alice believed the markings on her club looked as if it were some type of message that could be decoded, she does not indicate what she thinks her log might say. Just as the phone rings when the investigator from the United States calls to say that he has found Jenna's remains, Alice's log falls off the wall and splits in two. It is almost as if the police detective is calling to tell Alice what Maura had perhaps wished she could share with her for so long.

Significant also in this section is the scene where Jenna appears to her mother in the mirror of the hotel room. The two finally get to say their goodbyes to one another. Jenna's mother tells Jenna she would never have left her willingly but knew Jenna was dead when she ran from the hospital. Notice also that it is Maura, Alice's favorite elephant and in a way Jenna's surrogate mother, who wraps Jenna in a hug as Alice watches them in the mirror.

Discussion Question 1

Who do you think was responsible for Nevvie's death? Support your answer with examples and information from the book.

Discussion Question 2

How was Serenity able to convince the police officers she knew the identity of the child whose remains were found on the grounds of the elephant sanctuary without it looking as if she were involved in Jenna's death?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the significance of the club made by Maura in this section of the novel. What do you think it means when the club falls off the wall of Alice's bedroom and breaks in half?

Vocabulary

activist, posthumous, remnant, recoils, barnacle, font, quadrants, compensate, lieu, hounding, verbatim, demise, colleagues, porous, phalanges, ludicrous, naïve,

hypothesis, encoded, rhetorical, resolved, interred, geyser, repetitive, morphing, erratic,
bane, angular, rehabilitated



Characters

Jenna Metcalf

Jenna Metcalf is daughter of Alice and Thomas Metcalf. She was conceived when the two met one another while studying elephants in Botswana. At the beginning of the novel, Jenna is thirteen. She has decided to actively start to look for her mother who disappeared from the New England Elephant Sanctuary ten years earlier. Jenna lives with her grandmother, her mother's mother, but doesn't remember exactly when she started living with her grandmother. Jenna has tried to talk to her grandmother about finding her mother before but learns that her grandmother had not even filed a missing persons report on Alice because she was afraid of what she might find.

Jenna begins her search by contacting a psychic, Serenity Jones. When Serenity disappoints Jenna by refusing to go to the police department with her, Jenna tracks down one of the men who had originally worked the investigation the night of Nevvie's death at the sanctuary. Even though Jenna employs the two adults to help her locate her mother, she is very intelligent and wary of the adults so she does a good deal of investigation on her own as well. Fearing Virgil wants to put her mother in jail because he suspects she had something to do with Nevvie's death, Jenna sneaks off to an elephant sanctuary in Tennessee to talk to Gideon, with whom her mother was having an affair before she disappeared. Jenna came to the conclusion she needed to talk to Gideon even before Virgil and Serenity realized they needed to look for him.

It is not until Jenna, Virgil and Serenity find a tooth at the New England Elephant Sanctuary, which a worker at a lab identifies as a baby tooth, that Jenna remembers clearly what happened the night that Nevvie died. Jenna had been alone in her parents' cottage when Nevvie came for her, saying she wanted to play a game. She'd taken Jenna into the elephant enclosure and hit the child with a big rock, killing her. Jenna's mother had never abandoned her. Jenna was one of the ghosts that Serenity had described as not realizing they were dead. Because Jenna didn't know she was dead, she'd been tormented with the idea that it was her mother who left her. In reality, Jenna was the one who left as she was killed when she was only three years old. Maura, the elephant, had taken Jenna's body to the spot where Maura's stillborn calf was buried. Maura covered Jenna's body with branches and dirt. No one reported Jenna missing because they thought she was with her mother.

Alice Kingston Metcalf aka Hannah aka Ms. Ali

Alice Kingston Metcalf was Thomas' wife and Jenna's mother. She was a researcher who was involved in observing elephants in Botswana. She had begun her research on elephant memory but centered her focus on grief in elephants after she spent time with her mother when she was dying of cancer. Alice had a special interest in the way elephants dealt with grief particularly when it came to a mother's loss of a baby or a



daughter's loss of her mother. Alice met Thomas while he was visiting Botswana. They had a one-night fling and Alice got pregnant. Although she did not know Thomas well she decided to marry him and work on his elephant sanctuary in New Hampshire. Thomas had told Alice he'd had an episode of depression after his father died. It was not until after Maura's calf was born dead that Alice saw one of these spells for herself. She was scared by Thomas' manic antics and his almost catatonic episodes. One day, he tried to strangle her when he learned she'd gone to try to get him help from a psychiatrist.

While Thomas was gone for psychiatric help, Alice and Gideon began to have an affair. Grace discovered the affair and killed herself. Just a month later, Alice learned that Nevvie killed Jenna in retaliation for Grace's death. Alice attacked Nevvie in her anger and grief but it is never known for certain if Alice was responsible for Nevvie's death. Believing she was responsible for the woman's death and knowing that Jenna was dead, Alice ran from the hospital before the officers had a chance to talk to her about what had happened that night. During the events of that day, Alice also miscarried Gideon's baby she was carrying. In her grief, Alice made a new life for herself in South Africa where she opened an orphanage for elephants. It is at this orphanage that Detective Mills contacts Alice telling her that they had finally located her daughter's body. While Alice is in the United States for the funeral, she meets Serenity, who helps Alice connect with Jenna and say goodbye to her daughter.

Thomas Metcalf

Thomas Metcalf is Alice's husband and Jenna's father. He is the founder and owner of the New England Elephant Sanctuary. He met Alice during a trip he made to Botswana to study elephants in the wild. Thomas has a mental disorder that causes him to be housed in a psychiatric hospital when the novel opens. Jenna remembers her father was catatonic for much of the time she was taken to visit him when she was younger. Now, he talks to her but believes she is Alice. Thomas told his wife he had a major depressive episode after the death of his father. He didn't tell her about his ongoing mental issues but the staff at the sanctuary indicate to her that he has had mood swings since they began working for him. Alice witnesses Thomas' major break with reality for the first time when Maura's calf was still born. He'd been hoping the calf would bring income to the sanctuary that they needed to meet the payroll and expenses. It was after Nevvie's death that Thomas completely broke with reality and had to be hospitalized.

Thomas had already realized that Alice and Gideon were having an affair by the time Alice told him. Even in his mental instability Thomas was working on a medication he believed would erase an elephant's traumatic memories. He'd wanted to use this medicine on Maura to erase her memory of her stillborn calf. He thought he could win Alice's love again when he proved he was able to return Maura to her emotional state before the death of her calf. While visiting Thomas in the psychiatric hospital, Virgil realizes that Alice had been having an affair on Thomas when he saw Thomas' reaction to the pebble necklace that Jenna was wearing. At that point, Virgil had wondered if Thomas was in some way responsible for Alice's death because of his anger about the



affair. Thomas never really seemed to have a clear grasp that his daughter, Jenna, was killed the same night that Nevvie died. When Alice visits Thomas after Jenna's funeral, she feels he is lucky because he is able to hide from the truth in his mental state.

Maura

Maura is one of the elephants that was housed at the New England Elephant Sanctuary before it closed. Afterward, she was transferred to the elephant sanctuary in Tennessee where she lived until her death. Maura was Alice's favorite elephant because she arrived at the sanctuary about the same time that Alice did. Although they didn't know it at the time, Maura was pregnant when she arrived at the sanctuary. Her calf, however, was stillborn. Although the other workers fought Alice, Alice insisted that Maura be allowed to grieve over her calf before it was buried. When Alice felt the time was right, the calf was buried under a tree. Jenna met Maura when Jenna traveled to Tennessee in an attempt to find her mother. Gideon, who was also a ghost, introduced the two. While Jenna was at the sanctuary, Maura carved what looked like the Xhosa word for sweetheart into a club.

Even though it is never known for certain, it is suspected that Maura had some responsibility for Nevvie's death. Alice remembers falling into a hole the elephants had dug while looking for water when she was fighting with Nevvie the night Nevvie was killed. Alice hit her head and blacked out. When she woke, Nevvie was dead with her skull cracked open. Alice can't remember if she was responsible for Nevvie's death or not. It could have been Maura who killed Nevvie, believing that Nevvie had hurt Jenna and intended to hurt Alice. Jenna remembers Maura carrying her away from the spot from where Nevvie had left her and covering her with branches. Because Maura moved Jenna's body, Alice was afraid to report her daughter's death to the police because she was afraid they would blame her for Nevvie's death.

Serenity Jones

Serenity Jones is a struggling psychic who Jenna contacts to help her find her mother. Jenna decides upon Serenity because her apartment is within biking distance and because she is cheap. When Jenna begins researching Serenity, she realizes that Serenity was a well-respected psychic, even used by the police to aid in missing persons cases, before she made a prediction that didn't come true about the kidnapped son of a senator. What Jenna doesn't know is that Serenity became angry with her spirit guides during that experience and asked them to leave her alone. Since that time, Serenity has not had any contact with the spirit world.

Even though Serenity doubts she can help Jenna and doesn't want to hurt her, Serenity receives several signs, including one from her computer printer, which she needs to help Jenna. The day that Jenna visits her, Serenity has a dream about a woman lying on the ground at the elephant sanctuary. The dream includes the blue scarf Jenna had brought with her as well as a leather object. She and Jenna make a trip to the sanctuary



and find Alice's wallet. Serenity also finds a necklace worn by Alice and Jenna's baby tooth. When Serenity realized she was dealing with two ghosts — Jenna and Virgil — her belief in her natural ability to communicate with spirits came back to her.

Jenna's Grandmother

Jenna's grandmother is never given a proper name at any point in the course of the novel. She is Alice's mother. It is learned later in the novel that Jenna's grandmother actually died of cancer while Alice was doing research in Botswana, before Jenna was actually born. Alice had taken a leave of absence from her work at that time to care for her mother until her death. Although Jenna questions her grandmother's reasons for not being more active in searching for Alice, her grandmother discourages Jenna's attempts to find her mother. Jenna also learns her grandmother never filed a missing person report on Alice. She told Jenna this was because she didn't feel there was anything good that could come from it. She knew she'd be hurt if she learned her daughter was dead. She also knew she'd be hurt if she learned that her daughter was alive and just didn't want to come back to her. After Jenna disappeared to Tennessee to look for Gideon, her grandmother punished her by tearing up the scarf Jenna had that once belonged to her mother and taking Alice's journals away. Her actions only made Jenna angry and more determined to find out what had happened to Alice.

Gideon Cartwright

Gideon Cartwright is described by Virgil as being a strong giant of a man. He stands more than six feet tall and is well muscled. Gideon was Grace's husband and Nevvie's son-in-law. Nevvie had gotten Gideon his first job working with elephants. He went with Nevvie, who had become his mother-in-law and his wife, Grace, when they joined the staff at the New England Elephant Sanctuary. After Alice had married Thomas, Gideon saw Thomas choking Alice in a rage. Gideon pulled Thomas off Alice, and then punched Thomas. Later, after Thomas went for help with his mental illness, Gideon and Alice fell in love with one another and began having an affair. Gideon's wife, Grace, killed herself after she saw Alice and Gideon together. A short while later, Alice realized she was pregnant with Gideon's baby. When Virgil and Donny were escorted to the murder scene when Nevvie was found dead at the sanctuary, Gideon was cradling Nevvie's crushed head in his lap. Because he was the only member of the sanctuary staff left, Gideon went with the New England elephants to Tennessee. At some point after he left Tennessee Gideon joined the Army and was killed in Iraq.

Virgil Stanhope aka Vic Stanhope

Virgil "Vic" Stanhope is a police lieutenant who assisted in the murder investigation of Nevvie Rheul at the elephant sanctuary. Six weeks after the investigation, Virgil was promoted to a detective in the department. Virgil, however, drove his car off a cliff killing himself before he could be promoted because he felt so badly about the way the case



was handled. He believes he'd survived the crash and had woken up in rehab but in reality he is a ghost. He began a career as a private investigator and took on his father's first name, hoping to make a fresh start for himself. Jenna realizes Vic was Virgil because she recognizes his picture from a newspaper article about his promotion. She hires him to help her find her mother. In helping Jenna find her mother, Virgil also put his own doubts about himself to rest because he was able to solve the mystery surrounding what had happened to Alice. Her memory and the memory of how badly the case had been botched had haunted Virgil for years.

Nevvie Ruehl

Nevvie Ruehl was the caregiver who was killed at the New England Elephant Sanctuary. The original death investigation indicated Nevvie's death was accidental, the result of trampling by an elephant. She was forty-four years old when she died and had been an employee of the elephant sanctuary since it had opened. At the conclusion of the novel, there is some question of whether Nevvie was killed by an elephant or if Alice killed her. It turns out that Nevvie killed Jenna, Alice's three-year-old daughter, in retaliation because Nevvie's own daughter, Grace, had killed herself when she learned that Alice and Gideon, Grace's husband, were having an affair. Alice struggled with the woman after she learned Nevvie had killed Jenna but fell into a hole and was knocked unconscious. When Alice regained consciousness, Nevvie was dead. When Virgil and Serenity went to visit a house in Brentwood owned by a G. Cartwright, they meet Nevvie's ghost. The two leave with the impression that Nevvie is alive and was the woman that Virgil found unconscious in the sanctuary. Their strange encounter with this woman leaves Serenity and Virgil more confused than ever about what might have happened at the sanctuary. They believe after talking to this woman, that it was Alice who was killed that night at the sanctuary.

Donny Boylan

Donny Boylan is the senior detective who worked Nevvie's death at the elephant sanctuary. He was two weeks away from retiring when the call came in about the death at the sanctuary. He did not want to have to work another big case and encouraged Virgil Stanhope not to dig deeper into the case. He also discouraged Virgil from opening a missing person file on Alice or a murder investigation on Nevvie because Donny was getting pressure from the government to hush up the incident. By the time that Jenna began trying to find out what had happened to her mother Donny was of no use to her because he had Alzheimer's.

Gita

Gita is the girl who was Serenity's roommate while she was at a psychiatric ward. Gita had been diagnosed as being a paranoid schizophrenic. Gita had been determined one night she was going to get struck by lightning. Although the nurses insisted to Gita she



couldn't get hit inside the hospital, a bolt of lightning broke the window and burned a hole in Gita's mattress. Serenity tells Gita's story to Jenna in the context of the help Jenna's father, who is in a psychiatric ward, might be able to provide them. Serenity argues those people who are labeled as insane might actually be more sane than those who are termed "normal."

Grace Ruehl Cartwright

Grace Ruehl Cartwright was Nevvie Ruehl's daughter and Gideon Cartwright's wife. She was the first person Alice met at the sanctuary. Grace was not able to have children because of a hormonal condition but would not tell her husband about her infertility. Grace caught Alice and Gideon having an affair. She put rocks in her pockets and walked into the Connecticut River. She later appeared to Serenity and Virgil as a water poltergeist.

Tallulah "Lulu"

Tallulah is the technician at Genxymatron Labs who had dated Virgil. He goes to her for help in getting a red hair that had been found inside Nevvie's body bag tested for a DNA match to Jenna. Later in the novel it is Tallulah who tells Virgil the tooth found by Serenity on the grounds of the former New England Elephant Sanctuary was a baby tooth. It turns out that Tallulah was also a ghost. She had died three months prior of an undiagnosed heart condition while preparing for a half marathon.

Gordon Gordon

Gordon Gordon is the name of one of the workers at Gordon's Wholesale Market. When Virgil brings up Gideon, Gordon tells Virgil he remembers a worker at the elephant sanctuary by that name. He is also the one who told Serenity and Virgil that Gideon's wife, Grace, had killed herself a month before Nevvie's death. Gordon suggests to Virgil that he check at the elephant sanctuary in Tennessee for Gideon.

Dr. Thibodeau

Dr. Thibodeau is the mental health physician at Dartmouth that Alice talks to about Thomas' odd behavior. Although Dr. Thibodeau agrees with Alice that Thomas has a mental illness, he could not forcibly admit the man to the hospital because Thomas had not hurt Alice. He told Alice that under the circumstances, Thomas would have to come to their hospital willingly in order to get treatment.



Detective Mills

Detective Mills is the young detective with whom Serenity worked when she located Jenna Metcalf's bones on the property that had once been part of the New England Elephant Sanctuary. He is the detective who was finally able to call Alice and tell her that her daughter's remains had been located.

Lucinda

Lucinda is one of Serenity's spirit guides. She is described as a black lady who smelled like lilies. When Serenity was a child, Lucinda would sing her to sleep. Later, it was Lucinda who sympathized with Serenity's desire to help others with her gift. When Serenity begins hearing her spirit guides again, it is Lucinda's voice she heard first.

Desmond

Desmond is the sassy man who is one of Serenity's spirit guides. He is very snarky and enjoys being critical of Serenity. He is the one who would not let Lucinda give Serenity a full vision about the location and condition of the McCoy's son. He is also gay.

Ralph

Ralph is the records clerk at the police department where Virgil formerly worked. Ralph is a ghost, like Virgil, but he allows Virgil and Jenna into the evidence storage area to get the evidence boxes that were part of Alice's case.

Abigail Chivers

Abigail Chivers was Virgil's landlord at the office that he rented. She, like many of the characters in this novel, was a spirit or ghost.



Symbols and Symbolism

A Blue Scarf

The blue scarf represents Jenna's mother. It is one of the few things that Jenna has that was her mother's. It angers Jenna's grandmother when Jenna wears this scarf because it reminds her of Alice. Jenna wears it to spite her grandmother. It is this scarf that Jenna gives to Serenity when she tells Serenity she wants help finding her mother. Serenity has a dream about the scarf in which she sees it wrapped around the neck of a woman who is being protected by an elephant. The reader later learns that Alice wrapped a blue scarf around her neck to hide the bruises that Thomas caused when he tried to choke her.

Dollar Bill Folded into an Elephant

This dollar bill folded into the shape of an elephant is also a symbol of Jenna's mother. Jenna remembered her mother folding one of these elephants for her when she a toddler. The reader later learns that it was Thomas who taught Alice how to make these elephants. It was after found a part of her mother's journal marked by one of these elephants that Jenna decided to go and see a psychic. That part of the journal indicated that even in science there is some room for the unexplained. Jenna taught herself how to make these elephants from the dollars, using her mother's bill as an example.

Cracked Black Leather Wallet

When Serenity first visits the spot where the New England Elephant Sanctuary was at one time, she found this wallet hidden in a tree. This wallet is a sign to Jenna that her mother did not leave her willingly. It contains Alice's driver's license and credit cards.

Strange Series of Marks on the Wall

These strange marks on the wall of both the attic of the African barn, the walls of Thomas' office and his ledger book represent his mental disorder. He writes the symbols of the chemical compounds that he had gleaned from Alice's research over and over again in an obsessive manner when his mental illness was at its peak. Virgil Stanhope, one of the original detectives at the scene of Neevie's murder noticed the strange markings but was encouraged by the other detective at the time not to pursue what the strange marks might mean.



A Single Strand of Red Hair

This single strand of red hair, which DNA tests revealed belonged to Alice, was found on Nevvie after she was killed. The hair represents the possibility that Nevvie was killed not by a tragic accident but instead purposefully and that Alice was in some way connected to that murder.

Folded Page of the ME's Report

This page of the medical examiner's report represents to Virgil what he believed were his failings as a detective. It is a symbol to himself that he wasn't the hero people thought he was. When he got ready for his ceremony to become a detective, he put this page in the breast pocket of his coat. Instead of going to the ceremony, however, Virgil drove his car over the edge of a cliff, killing himself.

Necklace with a Small Polished Stone

Serenity also finds this necklace with a small polished stone on the property that was formerly the elephant sanctuary. To Jenna's father, the necklace is a symbol of his wife's infidelity. Jenna believed at first she remembered seeing her father give her mother this pebble but then realized it was Gideon who gave it to her. When Thomas sees Jenna wearing it, he is furious. He believes she is Alice and calls her out for cheating on him.

Alice's Journals

To Jenna, her mother's journals are a symbol of her mother. They contain her mother's thoughts, observations and feelings about her favorite subject, elephants. Jenna is distraught when her grandmother takes these journals from her.

Tiny Pink Converse Sneaker

When Jenna was still alive, she and her mother wore matching pink converse sneakers. Among the evidence collected at the scene of Nevvie's murder was one of Jenna's shoes. When Jenna found this shoe among the evidence collected at Nevvie's murder scene it is proof to her that she was at the sanctuary when Nevvie was killed and her mother disappeared.

A Huge Baobab Tree

It was under a huge baobab tree in Africa that Jenna was conceived by Alice and Thomas. The tree became a symbol of the love between Alice and Thomas as Thomas brought with him a plant, held upside down to look like the tree, to the airport when he



met Alice when she came in from Africa. He brought another of these plants when he returned to the sanctuary after he said he'd attended rehabilitation.

Purple Mushrooms

The purple mushrooms that grow underneath the tree at the sanctuary where Maura's calf was buried are a representation of Jenna's favorite place on the sanctuary. Although she didn't know it at the time the purple mushroom grew not only because Maura's stillborn calf was buried in that spot but also because Jenna had been buried in that same spot.

A Tooth

This deciduous, or baby, tooth found at the sanctuary is the symbol needed to spark Jenna's memory about what actually happened the night that Nevvie was killed and her mother disappeared. Nevvie had taken her from her parents' house to the spot under the tree where she hit the toddler over the head, a retaliatory killing because she lost her own daughter, Grace, to suicide when Grace learned Alice and Gideon were having an affair.

An Engraved Club

When Jenna visits Gideon at the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee she is introduced to Maura, the elephant that was her mother's favorite. While Jenna is there, Maura carves the Xhosa word for sweetheart into a club of wood and drops it at Jenna's feet. Alice has bought a similar club during a fundraising auction because she knew it was carved by Maura. It is the only thing that she had in South Africa to remind herself of her past life. At the moment that Detective Mills calls Alice to tell her Jenna's body had been found the club fell from the wall and broke into two pieces.



Settings

Hartwick House

Hartwick House is the name of the psychiatric facility where Jenna's father lives. It is at the Hartwick House that Virgil, Serenity and Jenna visit Thomas in hopes they could get some information from Thomas about Alice's disappearance.

New England Elephant Sanctuary

The New England Elephant Sanctuary is the area in Boone, New Hampshire owned by Thomas Metcalf where several elephants were kept. It was at this sanctuary that the central event of the novel, the murder of Nevvie, happened. Jenna spent the first three years of her life at this sanctuary. Most of the memories she had of her mother had this sanctuary as a backdrop.

Stark Nature Preserve

The Stark Nature Preserve is the name given to part of the land that was formerly the New England Elephant Sanctuary after the sanctuary closed.

Botswana

Botswana is the place where Alice's mother was researching and observing elephants when she met Jenna's father. It is the place where Jenna was conceived.

Virgil's Office

When Virgil would not talk to Jenna on the phone, she found him at his office to try to hire him as a private investigator to help her locate her mother.

Serenity's Apartment

It is in Serenity's apartment that Jenna first approaches Serenity about trying to locate her mother. After Serenity has a dream about Jenna's mother and her scarf while lying on the couch in her apartment, she agrees to help Jenna.

Genzymatron Labs

Genzymatron Labs is the place where Virgil took the specimens from Jenna's mother's case in hopes that his old friend Tallulah could help him with getting test results. It is at



this same lab the Jenna's memory is sparked when she realizes that the tooth Serenity found in the sanctuary is Jenna's baby tooth.

Gordon's Wholesale Produce Market

Gordon's Wholesale Produce Market is the grocery store where the Elephant Sanctuary workers got the produce for their elephants. Virgil and Serenity visited this grocery while they were investigating Alice's investigation to see if they could get information about the location of Gideon.

The Elephant Sanctuary

The Elephant Sanctuary, located in Hohenwald, Tennessee is where the elephants from the New England Elephant Sanctuary were taken after the Metcalfs' sanctuary was closed. Jenna snuck off to this sanctuary to try to meet Gideon when she realized Gideon and her mother were having an affair.

Greenleaf Street

Jenna gave Serenity an address on Greenleaf Street as her home address. The woman who opens the door there says she didn't know Jenna. When Serenity talks to the little boy after she realizes that Jenna was actually a ghost, he says that he sees the ghost of a grandmother and her granddaughter in their house.

Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College is the place to which Alice went to try to find help for her husband once he started showing signs of having a mental illness.

Brentwood

It is in Brentwood, Tennessee that Virgil and Serenity visit a house they believe is inhabited by a member of Gideon Cartwright's family. At the house, which is decrepit and condemned, they believe they have a conversation with Nevvie who tells them that Grace will be coming home soon. They are surrounded by water and run from the house when Virgil mentions Alice's name.

The Attic of the African Barn

It was in the attic of the African barn that Thomas envisioned creating a space that could be used for public gatherings. When Alice snuck up to the attic one night she saw that Thomas had covered the walls of the attic with the letters that represented chemical



compounds. It was in this same attic that Grace caught her husband, Gideon, having an affair with Alice.

Phalaborwa, South Africa

Phalaborwa, South Africa is the name of the town where Alice set up her elephant orphanage after Jenna's death.

Msali

Comprised of the name the natives call her, Msali (Ms. Ali.) is the name of the Elephant Orphanage in South Africa where Jenna's mother is working when she receives the news that her daughter's body has been located. Alice founded the orphanage when she returned to Africa after Jenna's death.



Themes and Motifs

Grief/Abandonment

Grief and Abandonment is a major theme in the novel as the author gives her reader a look at the process of grief resulting either from abandonment by death or physical separation from a variety of different standpoints. Alice tells her story from the point of view of a daughter who has lost her mother as well as a mother who has lost her children. Jenna also struggles with her sense of grief and abandonment as she believes first her mother abandoned her and then that her father killed her mother. Even Serenity struggles with abandonment as she loses two friends to whom she had grown very close. Also discussed in the novel is the way different characters deal with their grief.

Although the reader isn't aware of her loss at the time it was mentioned in the novel, Alice was dealing with her own grief from the loss of her mother when she returned to Botswana after her leave of absence. She observed her elephants to see how they dealt with the loss of a loved one so she could take cues from them on how she should behave. At one point, Alice told the daughter of a dead matriarch that they had to move on when she noticed that elephant kept returning to the spot where its mother's body was. Alice wondered to herself why she had not been more open with her mother when she was still alive. She wished she told her mother how much she'd patterned her own independent life after her mother's. Instead, she felt she had just pushed her mother away.

On the other side of the spectrum, Alice also dealt with the death of two babies. Jenna was three but Gideon's baby had not yet been born when it died. Remember that some of Alice's entries have detailed the difference in grieving when a loved one died naturally and when one died in a tragedy. Alice also remarks that an elephant must take a different route to deal with its grief when it has seen its family members killed in front of it. Both of these comments could refer to Alice's own feelings after Jenna's cruel death.

Of course it is Jenna's grief and her fear that her mother abandoned her that is central to the plot of the novel. At the conclusion of the story, Jenna learns that her mother didn't abandon her but that Jenna was killed. Through the course of the novel, Jenna goes through the emotions of one desperate to find out why her mother left her as well as a child trying to grasp the idea that her mother is dead and isn't coming back for her. The happy reunion between Jenna and her mother makes up for all the grief that Jenna did suffer through the course of the novel.

One character whom the reader might not immediately recognize is dealing with her own feelings of grief and abandonment at the end of the novel is Serenity. She seems happy once she sees that Jenna and Virgil have settled in on the other side, but consider that Serenity lost two friends with whom she'd become very close. At one point in the novel Serenity had even considered that she, Virgil and Jenna could have been a family, filling in the missing holes in each other's lives.



Another facet of grief described in the novel is the reactions that different people have to tragedy. When Alice lost her mother, and then again when she lost Jenna and her unborn baby, Alice threw herself into her work in order to escape the pain she felt. When Thomas encountered a situation that made him feel grief, such as the death of Maura's calf, he retreated into his mental illness. Nevvie, however, had another take on grief. Nevvie sought retribution for Grace's death. Because she felt Alice and Gideon's affair was the cause of Grace's suicide, Nevvie killed Jenna, believing Alice needed to know the pain losing a child would bring.

Self-Doubt/Reparation

The theme of Self-Doubt and the desire to make Reparation for what one has done wrong is important as it relates to Serenity and Virgil. After losing respect for her spirit guides and botching a prediction about a senator's kidnapped son, Serenity no longer hears the spirit voices as she once did. Virgil, on the other hand, feels as if he didn't do the case of the murder at the New England Elephant Sanctuary justice when he helped to investigate it ten years before. Jenna's call for Serenity and Virgil's help in finding her mother not only unlocks Jenna's past, but also frees Serenity and Virgil from the situations that had been holding them back.

In Serenity's case, her journey with Jenna is all about overcoming her self-doubt. After she helps Jenna to remember what happened the night of Nevvie's death at the elephant sanctuary, Lucinda begins talking to Serenity again. Lucinda tells Serenity the whole point of the lack of communication from Lucinda and Desmond was that they wanted her to learn to trust herself again. In Serenity's case, there was nothing that she could do to make reparation to the senator and his family. She had given them false hope when she'd said their son was still alive. Those hopes had been tragically and publicly dashed when Serenity tried to locate the boy on public television and found that he was dead. Even though Serenity knew there was nothing she could do for that family, she didn't ever want to give anyone else false hope about a loved one again. She shied away from working with Jenna but was convinced the girl needed her. In the end, she is able to reconnect Jenna and her mother as Jenna learns that her mother never abandoned her as she had feared.

In Virgil's case, when he agrees to work with Jenna he has a direct chance to rework a case that he felt he botched badly years before. Instead of listening to his instincts when he was a young cop Virgil allowed himself to be convinced it would be in his best interests if he did not continue his investigation into Nevvie's death. Virgil had felt so badly about the job he did in the case that instead of attending the ceremony in which he was to be named a detective, he drove his car off a cliff, killing himself. Even though he was a ghost and Alice Metcalf was still alive, Virgil felt as if he were haunted by Alice. He had seen signs Thomas was mentally ill even before Thomas was institutionalized. He'd seen signs that Thomas was abusing Alice. He also had seen evidence that there was perhaps more to Nevvie's death than just a trampling by an elephant. When the real story is told, it is learned that Alice felt she had to run from the sanctuary because she was afraid she'd be punished for Nevvie's death. She has seen Jenna and knew



she was dead, but in the time that Alice had passed out during her struggle with Nevvie, Jenna's body had been moved. When Jenna reaches out to him, Virgil is able to work on the case and get new insights into it. For Jenna he has made reparation, as she now knows that her mother never left her. For Alice, he has made reparation because she is able to put her child's remains to rest. She also has proof to the police that Nevvie had killed Jenna, prompting Alice's attack on her.

The Paranormal

The Paranormal is a major theme in the novel as it is the platform from which Serenity offers her services. Serenity discusses a variety of different aspects of the paranormal like the difference between spirits and ghosts, and the definition of a poltergeist. Her role in the novel is also to balance out Virgil's search for hard clues and evidence, very little of which is left in a ten year old case. Serenity additionally draws a parallel between the mentally ill and those who have the Gift.

One of the things that Serenity discusses in her sections of the novel is the difference between spirits and ghosts. She explains that some ghosts live in an altered reality, almost as if they live in a different layer of reality. They can see and hear the people who are alive but can't necessarily interact with them. In this understanding, Serenity explains that some ghosts, such as Virgil and Jenna as it turned out, were not aware that they were even dead. She also seemed to indicate that spirits were people who were dead and would come back to Earth for a short while. Ghosts, however, were spirits who were bound to Earth because of some unfinished business. In the course of the novel, Serenity believed she and Virgil encountered the ghost of Grace in the form of a water poltergeist. She told Virgil these poltergeists were different from spirits or ghosts as they had never gotten the chance to get revenge for some wrong done to them during their lives. She said the poltergeists were basically noisy ghosts who tried to call attention to the wrong that had been done to them.

Also in the context of this novel specifically, Serenity's belief in the paranormal balances out both Virgil's need for hard and fast evidence, and Alice's need for scientific proof in her own experiments. When Virgil and Serenity first meet, Virgil is highly skeptical of Serenity's abilities. He believes she, and all who claim to have her abilities, are shams. Interestingly, it is only after Serenity is able to open up to Virgil and tell him about her failed prediction and her inability to hear spirits that Virgil begins to realize how much they have in common. By the time he realizes he is a ghost, Virgil has come to the realization that Serenity is the best psychic he has ever met.

Serenity also explains the idea of mental illness in the terms of the paranormal. She believes that people who are termed "mentally ill" are really just those who have the Gift of the paranormal but don't know how to properly use their Gift. She argues that just because these people appear to be talking to someone who isn't there doesn't mean they aren't talking to someone. Just because a person can't see or hear the other side of the conversation doesn't mean it isn't taking place, Serenity argues.



Mental Illness

Mental Illness is a minor theme in the novel. Serenity and Thomas, one of whom has dealt with people with mental illnesses and one who has a mental illness, give two different views of these types of disorders. In an ironic flip, Serenity actually experiences some of the treatment those who suffer with mental illnesses receive when she deals with Virgil and Jenna.

It is clear that Thomas suffers with some sort of mental illness though the diagnosis is never clearly defined. The doctor to whom Alice went for help suspected Thomas had bipolar disorder, an illness that would cause him to have manic states of high mental and physical energy and depressive states where he was almost catatonic. Alice's main complaint about Thomas seems to be that he never told her how bad his disorder actually was. He'd mentioned that he had a spell of depression when his father died, but depression after a loved one's death isn't unusual. When Alice does finally ask Grace about Thomas' unusual behavior, Grace says he's been that way since she's known him but has always snapped out of his behavior before. Although it was probably Thomas' manic behavior that drove Alice away from him and destroyed their relationship, Alice later thinks Thomas is lucky because his diseased mind has given him a place to hide from the pain of Jenna's death.

During the course of the novel, Serenity admits that she is jealous of the people that some professionals term as mentally ill. She recognizes that these people have the same Gift that she has, the ability to sense, see and talk to spirits, but that they have never been taught how to properly use this Gift. Serenity is jealous of them because they are able to communicate so easily with the spirit world, an ease of communication that Serenity wishes she still had. In that frame of thinking, Serenity argues that the mentally ill aren't really ill at all. Just because someone is talking to air doesn't mean that person can't see someone on the other end of his conversation. It is ironic that Serenity makes this statement as she realizes at the end of the novel that many times people have been looking at her strangely it has been because she has appeared to be talking to air even though she was talking to Virgil and Jenna. When Serenity returns to question the waitress in the diner who practically told her to leave, the woman is still distrustful of Serenity and her intentions. She tells Serenity there are places that can help her but the diner isn't one of them.

Motif of the Dead

Once the reader learns what really happened the night of Nevvie's death he also realizes that Serenity has been dealing with two ghosts throughout the course of the novel. Some observant readers may have picked up on clues that Jenna and Virgil were not actually among the living during the time they worked with Serenity but the author does an excellent job of making it seem as if Jenna and Virgil are just as alive as the other characters in the novel. Many scenes in the novel in which Virgil, Jenna and Serenity interacted with other people make more sense knowing that Virgil and Jenna



were ghosts and could not be seen by the other people. Upon a first read, however, these scenes seemed to work even without giving away that Virgil and Jenna were ghosts.

Jenna believes people ignore her just because she is a kid. In reality, people ignore her because they can't see her. The only "living" person with whom she interacts is Serenity. In Virgil's case, he believes he has survived a car wreck in which he intended to kill himself. He's changed his name and started a business as a private investigator in order to reinvent himself. He doesn't seem to notice or care that people ignore him, but that could be because he spends so much of his time inebriated. Even though she is a psychic Serenity doesn't even pick up on the signs that Jenna and Virgil are the spirits of dead people who have contacted her. She notices that people look at her strangely when she is dealing with Virgil and Jenna, but believes it is because people recognize her as the disgraced psychic.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the first person point of view of a variety of different characters. The characters who give their points of view in the novel include Alice, Jenna, Virgil, and Serenity. Each of these characters' points of view is important to the novel as each character has his own insights to add to the story. There are things about each of these characters and their development into what they have become that can only be shared by that particular character. Since Alice was the only person around when Nevvie was killed, she is the only one who can completely tell the story of what happened at the sanctuary the day of Nevvie's death and leading up to that day. Virgil is the only one who knows first hand the details of the original police investigation and why there was never a missing person report filed or a murder investigation begun. Serenity is the only one who believes she is no longer hearing from her spirit guides. Even though she has dealt with spirits and ghosts for years, it is only Serenity who can properly describe her disbelief in realizing how closely she has been working with two ghosts without even realizing it. Jenna, meanwhile, is central to the story as she is the one who contacts Serenity and Virgil asking for their help in finding her mother.

Language and Meaning

The most significant feature of the language in this novel is the scientific language used to describe memory and habits of the elephants. Most of this language is found in Alice's sections of the novel as she describes her work and research on the animals. Although Alice does describe the habits of the elephants in proper terminology, her sections are in no way stiff or textbookish. Her goal seems to be to understand the reasoning behind the way the elephants behave, how they raise their young and how they are affected by grief as a way to help herself learn how to do these same things. Although some of Alice's elephant research seems out of place at the beginning of the novel, the reasons why her observations are included in the novel are made more clear as the novel draws to a close.

Structure

This novel is divided into two different parts, the two parts divide the book almost evenly in half with 195 pages in the first part and 211 pages in the second part. The longest chapter in the novel is 31 pages with the shortest being only one page. The first part of the book contains information about Alice's research and the beginnings of Jenna's search for her mother. The first part of the book closes when Jenna, Serenity and Virgil realize that Alice was having an affair with Gideon. At the end of the first part of the novel Alice's story has come to the part of her story where she realizes she is pregnant. It is in the second part of the novel that Serenity, Virgil and Jenna begin getting mixed

messages and conflicting information about what happened at the sanctuary the night of Nevvie's death. This part of the novel climaxes until Jenna finally remembers what really happened that night. Alice fills in the gaps in Jenna's memory as her story reaches the point of Nevvie's death at about the same spot in the novel that Jenna's memory comes back.

While Jenna, Serenity and Virgil's parts of the novel all take place in the present, Alice's parts of the novel appear to have been written in the past with the exception of the very last chapters of the novel. In the middle of Chapter 38 Alice's perspective moves from the past to the present as her story catches up with Jenna's. The stories told by all of these characters are chronological but Alice's took place much earlier than the stories told by Jenna, Serenity and Virgil. Alice's narratives begin before Jenna was born when she was working as a researcher in Botswana. She details the events of her life up to the point that Nevvie killed Jenna. The stories merge in Chapter 40 when Alice gets the news from Detective Mills that Jenna's remains had been located.



Quotes

Or maybe the reason I have this random memory is as a trade-off my brain made — because I can't remember what I desperately wish I could: details of the night my mother disappeared.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 1; Jenna paragraph 4)

Importance: Jenna can remember her mother giving her a taste of cotton candy and calling her sweetheart in Xhosa when she was only nine months old. She can't remember, however, the memory of her mother that she wished she remembered the most, which was what happened the night her mother disappeared.

She taught me, even in absentia, that all good science starts with a hypothesis, which is just a hunch dressed up in fancy vocabulary. And my hunch is this: She would never have left me behind, not willingly.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 1; Jenna paragraph 12)

Importance: As Jenna began her search for her mother, her hypothesis is that her mother loved her enough that she would not have left her willingly.

However, her failed prediction about the kidnapped son of Senator John McCoy was widely reported in the media and led the family to press charges. Jones has not been in the public eye since 2007.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 1; Jenna paragraph 154)

Importance: Because Serenity told a high profile senator and his wife that their kidnapped son was alive when he was really dead, she lost credibility. When Jenna researches the psychic, she learns that Serenity had not made any correct predictions since that time.

Then, maybe, there would be a missing persons case to reopen. Then I wouldn't have to start from scratch, trying to get the police to investigate a disappearance that they didn't even know was a disappearance ten years ago, when it happened.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 5; Jenna paragraph 131)

Importance: Because there was never a missing person report opened for her mother, Jenna feels like she would be starting from scratch asking the police to start an investigation that should have taken place ten years prior.

My ghost is named Alice Metcalf. She didn't die, like Amanda, as far as I know. She just disappeared, along with the truth about what happened ten years ago.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 7)

Importance: Virgil is haunted by the memory of Alice Metcalf. He feels like he did not properly handle the case in which she went missing.



No, because of Thomas. When the sanctuary started hemorrhaging money, he changed. His mood swings, they're wild. He's been spending all his time locked in his study, and last night, he really scared Alice."

-- Gideon (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 94)

Importance: In this quote, Gideon explains to Virgil and Donny why Alice told him she wanted to take Jenna and go somewhere safe. He shares with them that Alice was scared of Thomas and his downwardly spiraling mental state.

I may not have been to a lot of crime scenes at that point in my career, but I still thought it was strange that a guy whose wife and kid were missing seemed to care less about them than about some pieces of paper.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 114)

Importance: Even Virgil knew something was wrong when Thomas was more concerned about his missing research notes than his missing wife and daughter. It is one of the first signs to the police that Thomas does not have a stable mental state.

There was something I could not put my finger on — not just a complexity, or a connection, but an equality, as if we both knew we were on the same side here.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 148)

Importance: When Virgil first meets an elephant at the sanctuary, he realizes that the creatures are indeed highly intelligent. After the elephant led him to the spot where Alice was, Virgil felt the elephant knew that they were both on the same side in that investigation.

Sometime between midnight and 6:00 A.M., Alice signed herself out of Mercy hospital and disappeared off the face of the earth.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 173)

Importance: It appears that no one, including Jenna, knows where Alice Metcalf is because she checked herself out of the hospital before she could talk to the investigators. No one has seen her since that time. Although Virgil wanted to do so, Donny would not let him open a missing person's case.

But nobody ever did. And when I tried to, I was stonewalled by Donny, who told me that if I knew what was good for me, I'd just let this one go.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 183)

Importance: Because Donny was being pressured by the government, he encouraged Virgil not to open a missing person's file on Alice. No one else ever opened a missing person's file on her either.

What if Alice had been the one to kill Nevvie, had stashed her own wallet in the tree to make it look like she was the victim of foul play — and then run away before she could be named as a suspect?



-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7; Virgil paragraph 261)

Importance: As Virgil puts together what he'd learned when he originally investigated Nevvie's death and the new information he learns from Jenna that Alice did not take her daughter with her, Virgil wonders if Alice was responsible for killing Nevvie and ran away because she did not want to be convicted.

Although she'd had no direct contact with people in twelve years, she remembered not only this individual man as her trainer but all the commands he had taught her."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 8; Alice paragraph 18)

Importance: Alice's primary focus in elephant research was on memory. She was amazed when an elephant released into the wild to be a matriarch to a group of elephants recognized a man who had trained him twelve years before. The elephant followed the man's instructions as he had trained her so that a vet could treat the elephant.

When he says he'll take the job, I don't quite trust him. It's hard to believe a guy who is so hungover that he looks like he's having a stroke when he tries to put on his jacket."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna paragraph 21)

Importance: Even though Virgil has told Jenna he would take her case, Jenna worries about his ability to do the job because he is so drunk he can hardly put on his jacket.

When you're a cop, you don't try to make messes. You just clean up the spills."

-- Virgil (Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna paragraph 40)

Importance: Virgil tells Jenna that it was not the responsibility of the police to dig up trouble but instead to fix the problems that were brought to them.

But I couldn't bring myself to go inside. I was afraid to hear what the police might find.' She looks at me. 'I don't know what would have been worse. Learning Alice was dead and couldn't come home, or learning she was alive and didn't want to.

-- Jenna's Grandmother (Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna paragraph 114)

Importance: Jenna's grandmother tells Jenna that she didn't report Alice as a missing person because she was afraid of what she might find if she did learn the truth about Alice.

What she didn't write was that this was the day she narrowed her study on trauma and elephants to the effects of grief instead."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna paragraph 149)

Importance: It was on the day that Kenosi had to be killed that Alice decided to narrow her focus to the effects of grief on elephants. Jenna knows this even though her mother did not write it in her journal.



After all, the last thing Kenosi saw, before he closed his eyes forever, was his mother coming back to him.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 9; Jenna paragraph 151)

Importance: Jenna explains why she did not think that Kenosi's death was as tragic as her mother did. Jenna believes Kenosi died happy because he saw his mother coming back to him, the same thing that Jenna wishes that she could see.

"In the middle of the string of hearts is the only recognizable word on the page: JENNA.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 11; Serenity paragraph 42)

Importance: As Serenity watches while the printer at the Mac store prints the pages she had in que a page comes out with Jenna's name on it. Serenity took that as a sign that she still had work to do on Jenna's case.

In the past, Desmond or Lucinda or both of my spirit guides would have helped me interpret how the name of that kid glitching up my computer is connected to the spirit world.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 11; Serenity paragraph 45)

Importance: Although in the past Serenity had always been helped by Desmond or Lucinda to determine what the spirits were trying to tell her when they messed with her computer system as Jenna had, Serenity realizes she is on her own in dealing with Jenna's case.

Someone on the other side seems to think I'm not done helping you."

-- Serenity (Part 1: Chapter 11; Serenity paragraph 53)

Importance: Serenity explains why she has come back to Jenna even though she indicated she could not help her earlier. She tells Jenna there is some spirit who has let her know that there is still more she needs to do to help Jenna.

I tell you this story by way of explanation: The people we define as crazy just might be more sane than you and me.

-- Serenity (Part 1: Chapter 11; Serenity paragraph 78)

Importance: Serenity indicates that those people who are defined as crazy might just have a psychic ability but an inability to properly use their gift.

Virgil looks up at me. 'I think Thomas Metcalf might have been abusing his wife.'"

-- Virgil (Part 1: Chapter 11: Serenity paragraph 88)

Importance: Even before Serenity, Virgil and Jenna visit Thomas at the psychiatric hospital and see his reaction to the necklace that had belonged to Alice, Virgil believes that Thomas had been abusing Alice.



It was almost as if he were implying that elephants had the capacity to think, to feel, to hold a grudge, to forgive. All of which came dangerously close to my beliefs — the same beliefs that I was ridiculed for, here.

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 12; Alice paragraph 86)

Importance: Alice is attracted to Thomas because he believes, like she, that elephants have the ability to think and have emotions, just like people.

My happy little family unit was either wishful thinking or the uncanny observation of a three-year-old who saw more than anyone expected.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 17; Jenna paragraph 47)

Importance: Even as a toddler, Jenna recognized the significant relationship between her mother and Gideon.

I just don't believe the death was a trampling, even if I signed off on that ten years ago. But if I'm going to figure out who the murderer is, first I need proof that this was a murder.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 19; Virgil paragraph 8)

Importance: Ever since he'd originally investigated Newvie's death, he'd had the feeling that her death was not accidental. However, his commanding officer ordered him not to dig into the death or open a murder case because he was getting pressure from the government to hush up the case.

I hoped that maybe I was the necessary ingredient in that equation, that my presence was enough to keep his depression from returning in the future.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 24; Alice paragraph 8)

Importance: Alice hoped that her relationship with her husband would be enough to keep him from getting sucked into his mental illness.

The answer is: I have no idea. I'm having a conversation with a woman I saw zipped into a body bag, who now apparently lives with her daughter — a girl who allegedly committed suicide. And I'm pretending to be her former boss, who may have gone crazy ten years ago and attacked her.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 25; Virgil paragraph 51)

Importance: Virgil believes he is going crazy when the woman who meets them at the door of the house in Brentwood introduces herself as Nevvie. He had believed it was Nevvie who was killed ten years ago at the sanctuary. If he believes what this woman is telling him, the woman he found unconscious was Nevvie, leaving the dead person incorrectly identified.

When I had reached the scene, Gideon was cradling the victim in his lap. I remember the skull split like a melon, the hair shampooed with blood. But I don't know if I ever actually got close enough to see the face. Even if I had, I wouldn't have been able to



say it was Nevvie Ruehl, since I'd never even seen a picture of her; I trusted Thomas when he named the victim, because he would have recognized his own employee.
-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 25; Virgil paragraph 61)

Importance: Virgil describes what he saw when he went to the murder scene at the elephant sanctuary. After questions about the dead person's identity surface, Virgil is angry with himself because he never really looked closely at the dead woman's face though he doubted he would have recognized her because of her injuries.

I wanted the bond between them to be so strong that I could not, even accidentally, find a chink in the wall of their marriage through which I could peek.
-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 26; Alice paragraph 81)

Importance: Even though Alice knew she was attracted to Gideon she tried to encourage Grace to be honest with him about her infertility. Alice believed this would strengthen that couple's relationship so that Alice would not have a chance to be able to pull them apart.

With a little imagination, I can make out a U and an S. That knot waves the wood grain like a W. On the other side of the log, a semicircle is caught in between two long scrapes: I-D-I.
-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 27; Jenna paragraph 48)

Importance: Maura carves a log for Jenna during Jenna's visit to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. Jenna believes she can make out the Xhosa word for "sweetheart" in the gouges on the log.

She drowned herself because her husband was cheating on her. If anyone's going to come back and haunt as a water poltergeist, it would be her."
-- Serenity (Part 2: Chapter 29; Serenity paragraph 6)

Importance: Although both she and Virgil are shocked by what they encountered in the house that supposedly belonged to Grace Cartwright in Brentwood, Serenity tries to explain why they experienced what they did.

Instead of a nap, Jenna called it the Leaving Time. She was certain that if she closed her eyes, I would not be here again when she opened them, and no matter what I did or said to convince her otherwise, she sobbed and fought her exhaustion until her body triumphed over her will.
-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 30; Alice paragraph 18)

Importance: It is from this quote that the title of the novel "Leaving Time" comes. As a toddler, Jenna had been afraid if she closed her eyes to sleep, her mother wouldn't be there when she woke up.

The last thought I have before I am gone completely is that in spite of what Serenity's said — in spite of what I had believed — she's not a lousy psychic. She's a fucking



great one.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 39; Virgil paragraph 20)

Importance: Virgil completely recants his disbelief in Serenity's abilities as a psychic as he realizes that all the time he was working with her, he was a ghost yet she was able to communicate and see him even though other humans were not.

I lost two babies, you know. One whom I knew and loved, and one I never met. I knew before I ran from the hospital that I had miscarried.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 40; Alice paragraph 1)

Importance: Alice actually lost both her children on the night that Newvie killed Jenna. During the traumatic events of that evening, she also miscarried Gideon's baby.

I'd always thought there was a great divide between a spirit and a ghost — I just didn't realize how small the gap was between the dead and the living.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 41; Serenity paragraph 43)

Importance: Even though she pitches herself as a psychic, Serenity is surprised at how seamlessly she was able to interact with Virgil and Jenna even though they were dead. It was not until Jenna realized what had happened to her the night of Newvie's death that Serenity had any idea that she was dealing with two ghosts.

Lucinda reminds me that the reason my spirit guides had been silent for seven years was because part of my journey was to believe in myself again.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 41; Serenity paragraph 87)

Importance: The novel ends well as Jenna learns why she has been separated from her mother for ten years, Virgil gets another chance at solving Newvie's murder, and Serenity gets a chance to rebuild her belief in herself and her natural talent.

I do recognize the elephant standing beside him, however. Jenna stops in front of Maura, who wraps her trunk around my baby, giving her the embrace I can't, before they all turn and walk away.

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 42; Alice paragraph 317)

Importance: The last Alice sees of her daughter, she is wrapped in the trunk of Maura, Alice's favorite elephant from the New England sanctuary.