

The Language of Flowers: A Novel Study Guide

The Language of Flowers: A Novel by Vanessa Diffenbaugh

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Plot Summary

"The Language of Flowers," a novel by Vanessa Diffenbaugh, is the New York Times Bestselling story about Victoria Jones, her passion for flowers and how her use of flowers helped her to communicate with others and helped her come into her own.

In the first main section of the book, the reader is introduced to Victoria. In the chapters written from the perspective of her childhood, the reader learns about several of the negative experiences Victoria had while living in foster care but is also introduced to a main caregiver in Victoria's life, Elizabeth. The reader learns that Victoria and Elizabeth had a close bond, and that Elizabeth instilled in Victoria the love of flowers and their meanings. However the reader also becomes aware of the fact that Victoria did not continue to live with Elizabeth due to something going terribly wrong. In the chapters written from the Victoria's current perspective, the reader learns that Victoria is 18 and aging out of the foster system. Even though she squanders her housing opportunity and ends up homeless, the one constant in her life is flowers. Her knowledge of flowers allows her to get a job at Bloom, a local flower shop. She also meets Grant, who turns out to be Elizabeth's nephew, when they bond over their shared knowledge of the meaning of flowers.

The second section of the book furthers the plot for Victoria as both a child and adult. Through her childhood perspective, Victoria and Elizabeth's bond deepens. Victoria also learns that Elizabeth and her sister, Catherine, have been estranged for many years. The lack of relationship with any of her family members causes Elizabeth to miss the court date where she was going to adopt Victoria, an event that began a downward spiral in Elizabeth's and Victoria's relationship. From her current perspective, Victoria becomes a permanent employee of Bloom and finds a residence. Victoria and Grant also develop a romantic relationship, but Victoria feels extremely uncomfortable with their level of intimacy and finds herself pulling away from him. When she learns that she is pregnant, Victoria feels sure that she will disappoint Grant and she decides to leave him without saying goodbye.

Victoria's life begins to unravel from both perspectives in the third section of the book. In her life with Elizabeth, Victoria learns that Catherine is ill and has made threats to burn down Elizabeth's vineyard. One night, Victoria decides that she has to prove to Elizabeth who Catherine really is so she decides to set Elizabeth's vineyard on fire. Feeling immediately guilty, Victoria uses the bruises and burns she received from the fire to lie about Elizabeth's treatment of her, causing Victoria's permanent removal from Elizabeth's house. In her adult life, Victoria begins her own business, Message and gives birth to a daughter, whom she doesn't name. However she soon finds herself overwhelmed by the constant needs of her daughter. Driven by her fear of inadequacy and her fear that she will never be able to give her daughter the life or love she deserves, Victoria leaves her daughter with Grant when Grant is not home.

In the fourth and last section of the book, Victoria's timelines merge and she is able to receive closure for childhood and current experiences. She is overcome with the urge to



apologize to Elizabeth and, in her effort to do so, she sees her daughter again and reconnects with Grant and Elizabeth. Victoria is surprised but grateful for the unconditional love and forgiveness of Grant, Elizabeth and her daughter, Hazel, and she makes a commitment to learn to how incorporate their love and relationships into her life. The story ends with Victoria making the decision to believe that she doesn't have to continue to be the hurt little girl she once was and that she just might have the capability to learn to love.



Part 1, Common Thistle, Chapters 1-7

Part 1, Common Thistle, Chapters 1-7 Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the main character of the story. She wakes up on her 18th birthday to find her mattress on fire. She knows the girls in her group home are responsible but she's leaving today so she doesn't bother with retaliating. Instead, she steps out on the streets of San Francisco looking for flowers, the items that have become her passion.

When she finds the flowers that send the right message, she goes back to the group home, distributes them, packs her small amount of things and waits for her social worker to take her to a transitional home. She says little to her social worker and thinks it odd when her social worker, who chose adoptive families that gave her back, tells her that no one is to blame for her life from this point forward.

In chapter 2 the main character, Victoria, remembers back to being 9 years old as Meredith drove her to the last chance at a foster home and adoption that she would have. In the car, Victoria was angry and threw several things at Meredith as Meredith explained that this was her last chance because the state would label her unadoptable as soon as she turns 10.

When they arrive to the house, Victoria runs and hides from her new foster mother, Elizabeth, because Elizabeth touched her and Victoria doesn't like to be touched. Despite Victoria's disrespectful behavior, Elizabeth makes it clear that she will not stop trying to connect with Victoria that easily.

As Meredith drives Victoria to the transitional home on her 18th birthday in chapter 3, Victoria remembers that they used to have a good relationship. But as foster homes began to return her, Meredith became less nurturing and more unsupportive, mean and judgmental. As Meredith reminds Victoria that she only has 12 weeks rent-free and then will be on the streets if she can't pay, Victoria relishes in the fact that she has her own bedroom for the first time.

Instead of finding a job, she spends her time growing flowers and planting them in the community. On the day of her eviction, Victoria finds herself anticipating getting exactly what she wants: to be alone among flowers. She avoids Meredith by sneaking out the back of the house and never sees her again.

In chapter 4, Victoria continues to live among the flowers she planted in the community. She watches from the edge of the forest as mothers spend time with their children at the playground before school, and Victoria wonders which child she would have been like.

As she adjusts to being homeless, Victoria quickly realizes that her hunger pains will keep her awake and she has to find ways of getting even a little bit of food. When two lovers spend the night in her flower bed, she realizes that she won't have the solitude



she's tried to create. She meets a florist in the city and is given five dollars to unload the florist's truck.

Chapter 5 is another flashback to Victoria's time with Elizabeth. On her first night, Victoria took a hot bath and dressed in the new clothes Elizabeth provided. As she bathed, she thought about the mean things that other foster moms had forced her to do and when she came to the dinner table and saw all of the food, she wondered what she would have to do in exchange for the food and the bath.

But Elizabeth was kind and only encouraged her to eat what she wanted. When Victoria accused Elizabeth of trying to poison her with the flowers on her plate, Elizabeth gave Victoria a tour of her gardens and explained the meaning of each flower.

Victoria is determined to get a job with the florist in the city in chapter 6 so she decides to prove her experience by making a wedding bouquet. When she takes it the florist, the florist tells her to be at the shop at 5am on Saturday and she introduces herself as Renata.

Even though she is trying to look her best, Victoria knows that she is starting to look and smell like someone who is homeless. When Renata arrives, she takes Victoria to the flower market to get flowers for the day's wedding. Victoria does what she can to keep up but she loses her temper when one of the vendor blatantly makes a pass at her and Renata tells her to wait by the truck.

In chapter 7, Victoria is at Elizabeth's house once again. Banished from the house until she returns the spoon she threw into the vineyard, Victoria becomes angry as she pricks her hands on thorns and searches through the dirt for the spoon, thinking about another foster family that made her sleep outside.

Finding it, she returns to the house and throws the spoon inside, breaking a blue vase that belonged to Elizabeth's mother. Elizabeth has an angry reaction and Victoria is sure that she will be moving out but Elizabeth tells Victoria how her mother treated her badly as well. She tells Victoria that her behavior is a choice and Victoria believes that Elizabeth is naïve.

Part 1, Common Thistle, Chapters 1-7 Analysis

Chapters 1-7 serve to introduce the reader to the main character, Victoria Jones. Through these chapters, the reader learns more about where Victoria is in her life now, as an 18 year old who's just been aged out of the foster care system. Also in these chapters, the reader begins to get a glimpse of what Victoria has experienced as a child who grew up in the foster care system.

Chapters 1-7 present Victoria as rough around the edges, angry, guarded against strangers and set on believing that she will only ever be bad, even from a young age, and it becomes clear that she has developed this hard shell in order to protect herself from the many foster home situations she encountered as a child. Unfortunately, it



seems that Victoria was unable to be successful in many of the foster homes because of this behavior.

Several of the chapters that flash back to Victoria's childhood take the reader back to when Victoria was almost 10 years old and just beginning to live with Elizabeth, a foster mother who lived in a farmhouse on a vineyard. Although all of the details have not been given, it is clear from the text that Victoria and Elizabeth had a special relationship, that Elizabeth instilled in Victoria the love of flowers she now has and that something went wrong to end their living arrangement.

As an 18 year old, Victoria finds herself wanting to be left alone and to make her own decisions. She fails to get a job and is evicted from the adult transitional home, causing her to be homeless. For a few days, Victoria enjoys being homeless because she is living amongst the garden of flowers she created in the woods. But when hunger sets in and she realizes that other people often visit her sanctuary, Victoria realizes she needs to get a job. She meets and impresses a florist in the city, Renata, and is given a chance to work.



Chapters 8-14

Chapters 8-14 Summary

In Chapter 8, Victoria continues to work in Bloom, Renata's flower shop. Victoria earns Renata's trust and is left in charge of the shop while Renata makes a wedding delivery. Alone in the shop, Victoria encounters one of Renata's somewhat grumpy customers, Earl.

Victoria picks flowers for his granddaughter and learns later that he was very pleased with the results. Earl's disposition improves and he continues to come in for Victoria's help. Due to Victoria's hard work and ability to read the customers and pick the right flowers, Renata offers Victoria a standing job. The chapter ends with Victoria receiving a flower message from the mysterious vendor that says he overcomes all obstacles.

Chapter 9 finds Victoria remembering back to living with Elizabeth. It is the morning after she searched the vineyard all night for the spoon she threw and she realizes that her hands have puncture wounds from the thorns in the vineyard.

Elizabeth cares for Victoria's hands and, in a stern but caring voice, tells Victoria that there is nothing she can do that will make Elizabeth stop loving her or send her away. Victoria doesn't trust Elizabeth but they spend the day together at the farmer's market. Elizabeth points out the nephew she's never met and tells Victoria about her sister. Elizabeth pulls Victoria closer to her, even though Victoria somewhat resists.

Victoria thinks about the mistletoe she received from the mysterious vendor in chapter 10. She wonders if he knows the true meaning of the plant or if he is trying to symbolize that he wants to kiss her. Victoria somehow knows that the vendor understands she would never allow a kiss so she decides to send him another flower message.

If he responds appropriately with another flower message, she will know that he understands what he's saying. Renata tells Victoria to make a delivery and, on the delivery, Victoria meets Natalya, someone who resembles Renata. Natalya offers Victoria a closet-sized room to rent and Victoria takes it.

Victoria and Elizabeth seem to be making progress on their bond in chapter 11 but Victoria notices that Elizabeth is unusually quiet one morning. After eating too much, Elizabeth gives Victoria a peppermint drink and they talk about the meaning of flowers being nonnegotiable. Elizabeth is surprised when Victoria shows that she's learned the meanings of different flowers because Elizabeth was told that Victoria can't learn.

Victoria remembers how her education was lost because of the focus on her negative behavior. Elizabeth wants Victoria and Perla to become friends but Victoria finds herself resenting Elizabeth's assumptions about her. She manipulates Perla into cutting down a cactus but Victoria only wanted the spines.



Chapter 12 reveals that Natalya is Renata's youngest sister. Victoria decides to give the vendor snapdragons, meaning presumption, and the next morning, the vendor answers Victoria with a white poplar tree drawn on old paper. The ribbon around the paper had an invitation for Victoria but she can't accept until she knows what white poplar means.

After hours at the library, Victoria learns that white poplar means time, an ambiguous message, but Victoria also learns from other books that Elizabeth was wrong about the language of flowers, just like she was wrong about her.

In chapter 13, Victoria returns from school to find Elizabeth soaking her foot on the front porch. Victoria remembers how Elizabeth screamed when she stepped on the cactus spines in her shoe that morning but Victoria was angry when Elizabeth responded with kindness.

After school, Elizabeth asks Victoria to take out all of the spines in her shoe, and when Victoria tells her that she wanted the cactus to mean hatred and dislike, Elizabeth tells Victoria about the common thistle, which means distrust and hatred of humankind. Victoria finds some with Elizabeth's help and gives it to her, along with a pat on the shoulder- the first human connection Victoria has ever initiated.

After spending hours in the library looking up meanings of flowers in chapter 14, Victoria sees the time and rushes to meet the vendor. When she arrives, she immediately questions him on the meanings of the flowers they exchanged. The vendor asks Victoria where she's been for eight years and Victoria realizes that the vendor is Grant, Elizabeth's nephew.

Victoria wants to run because she's tried to forget what she did and what she lost but she stays and sees that Grant doesn't seem to be angry with her. They spend the night comparing meanings of flowers and eating and, although Victoria felt forgiven while with him, she suddenly wants to be alone and leaves.

Chapters 8-14 Analysis

Chapters 8-14 continue to advance both the plot of Victoria's current life at 18 and Victoria's life with Elizabeth at the age of 9. In chapter 8, Victoria earns Renata's trust and is allowed to run Bloom while Renata is making deliveries. Due to her knowledge of flowers and ability to pick the right flowers for the right customers, Victoria earns a permanent job with Renata and realizes that being a florist is what she really wants to do.

In chapter 9, Elizabeth tells Victoria that she will love and keep her no matter what she does and, although Victoria doesn't quite believe her, she allows Elizabeth to get a little bit closer to her. Chapter 9 also reveals that Elizabeth has a sister she hasn't seen in 15 years and a nephew she's never met.

In chapter 10, Victoria wonders whether or not the mysterious vendor knows the messages he's sending with his choice of flowers or if it is just coincidence. She decides



to send him one more message as a test. Meanwhile, she meets Renata's youngest sister and begins to rent a small room from her.

Victoria and Elizabeth's bond seems to be growing in chapter 11. Elizabeth is impressed with Victoria's ability to learn and Victoria remembers how there was never a focus on her education because of her bad behavior. Despite their growing bond, however, Victoria seems to resent Elizabeth's assumptions that she can do and be better so she manipulates the neighbor's daughter, Perla, into cutting down a cactus so she can use the spines.

In chapter 12, Victoria and the vendor exchange flower messages again only this time the vendor gives her a drawing of a tree that she doesn't recognize, along with an invitation to dinner. Victoria spends hours in the library researching the tree but she comes to the horrible realization that Elizabeth was wrong about many of the meanings of flowers and Victoria feels sick about possibly sending people the wrong messages.

In chapter 13, the reader learns that Victoria put the cactus spines in Elizabeth's shoe but Elizabeth responds with kindness and a fair punishment. Elizabeth teaches Victoria about the flower she should use if she's trying to convey hate and Victoria decides that the common thistle best represents who she is. Despite this feeling, she initiates physical contact with Elizabeth, something she's never done with anyone else before.

In chapter 14, Victoria realizes that the mysterious vendor is Grant, Elizabeth's nephew. Even though they have a positive interaction, the text suggests that Grant was somehow involved in whatever took place at Elizabeth's that Victoria is trying to forget.



Part 2, A Heart Unacquainted, Chapters 1-7

Part 2, A Heart Unacquainted, Chapters 1-7 Summary

Chapter 1 begins with Victoria thinking about Grant and how she has a hard time remembering him, not just because of his personality but because of how seriousness he took the business of flowers and their meanings. Victoria spends the week after their meeting researching and comparing the meanings of flowers and, at the flower market with Renata that Saturday, she hands Grant a scroll with her research on flowers through the letter J.

Grant meets her outside of Bloom later that day and invites her to his flower farm to continue discussing meanings and Victoria agrees to go, although she isn't sure if she likes her growing feelings for him.

In chapter 2, Elizabeth gets on the school bus and is angry about Elizabeth forcing her to go to school. When the bus driver made her even angrier, Victoria hit him on the back of the head with her book bag and she was forced to go home. Elizabeth reacted with kindness, which dissolved Victoria's anger into shock because she now understood that she really couldn't do anything that would make Elizabeth send her back.

As Elizabeth validates Victoria's feelings and shares stories from her own childhood on the way to Elizabeth's sister's house, Victoria realizes that she and Elizabeth are similar and that she wants to stay with Elizabeth.

Grant takes Victoria to his flower farm in chapter 3 and Victoria collapses to the ground in joy at the sight of seemingly endless flowers. Grant has set up a table with chocolates and milk and they eat as they discuss the meanings of flowers. Grant provides Victoria with an old camera to begin taking her own photos of flowers and making her own dictionary.

But when she doesn't know how to use the camera and Grant gets close to her in order to help her, Victoria feels suddenly overwhelmed with feelings she doesn't understand and asks to go home. She spends the night shivering in her room and not sleeping.

In chapter 4, Elizabeth and Victoria begin to walk toward the house of Elizabeth's sister, Catherine. Victoria realizes that Elizabeth's and Catherine's property must be connected and when she sees the fields of flowers, Victoria knows that Catherine must have betrayed Elizabeth in the worst way for Elizabeth to give this up along with her sister.

Elizabeth tries to get Catherine's attention by knocking and throwing rocks gently at the upstairs window. When Victoria throws a rock and breaks the window, Elizabeth sees Catherine's hand close the blinds and she knows exactly how Catherine feels about their relationship.



In chapter 5, Victoria meets two women who ask specifically for her in Bloom and one wants flowers to address issues that Victoria has not thought about- intimacy, closeness and sexual pleasure. Victoria can't find the flowers she's looking for and thinks of lying about flower meanings in order to avoid asking Grant.

Unable to do so, she asks Grant. He answers her and they spend more time at his farm. They share dinner together and Victoria learns that Grant also likes to be alone. When Grant implies that they have a standing date every Saturday, this changes everything for Victoria.

Victoria asks Elizabeth why she has no friends at the beginning of chapter 6. Elizabeth asks Victoria the same question. Elizabeth states that she had everything she wanted at one time- work, her sister and her first love- but that she was suddenly left with just work and threw herself into it.

Victoria wonders if her being there reminds Elizabeth of the family she no longer has but when Victoria says she's happy to be with Elizabeth, Elizabeth says she's happy, too. Victoria tells Elizabeth that she hates school and gets picked on. Elizabeth agrees to withdraw Victoria from school and homeschool her, providing Victoria immense relief.

In chapter 7, Elizabeth gets her first film developed and is displeased with the results. The woman at the camera shop gives her some pointers on how to use the camera and when Renata gives Victoria two weeks off, Elizabeth spends her time taking pictures at Grant's farm.

Due to the rain one night, Victoria spends the night at Grant's house while he sleeps elsewhere. They go to a different farmer's market the next day and Victoria gets her new film printed. Out of many photos, she keeps only one- a perfectly clear picture of a white rose.

Part 2, A Heart Unacquainted, Chapters 1-7 Analysis

Chapters 1-7 in part two continue to develop the plot of Victoria's life at 18 and Victoria's life at 9. In chapter 1, Victoria has a hard time forgetting about Grant. While she is intrigued by their relationship, she is obviously uncomfortable with the fact that he makes her feel nervous and somewhat excited at times. In chapter 2, Victoria acts out by throwing a book at Elizabeth and hitting her bus driver on the head. But when Elizabeth reacts with kindness and understanding, Victoria realizes that Elizabeth meant it when she said that nothing Victoria ever did would make her send her back. Victoria realizes that she has a lot in common with Elizabeth and that she wants to stay with her.

Victoria and Grant's relationship continues to grow in chapter 3 as they spend more time together at Grant's flower farm. But when he gets physically closer to help her with the camera he's given her, Victoria feels overwhelmed and confused by her feelings, causing her to lose sleep that night and for the following week. Victoria and Elizabeth go to the home of Elizabeth's sister, Catherine, in chapter 4 and Victoria learns that Catherine betrayed Elizabeth in a major way, although no details are revealed. But



when Catherine ignores their presence at her home, Elizabeth realizes that her sister is not willing to reconcile at this time.

In chapter 5, Victoria gets a request from a customer to put together a bouquet signifying various forms of intimacy. In unfamiliar territory, Victoria considers lying about the meaning of random flowers in order to avoid asking Grant. But she is unable to do so and asks Grant for his help, which he gladly gives. She learns more about Grant in chapter 5 as well and feels she can identify with his need to be alone. Victoria feels her life is changed when Grant implies a standing date on Saturdays because she realizes she is no longer alone.

Victoria and Elizabeth grow closer in chapter 6 when Elizabeth explains how she let her work take over her life after losing the relationship with her sister and her first love. Victoria is overcome with happiness and relief when Elizabeth decides to homeschool Victoria after learning how Victoria is teased and hates school. In chapter 7, Victoria continues to learn more about photography and she and Grant grow closer. She spends the night at Grant's house while he sleeps elsewhere and at the end of chapter 7 Victoria finally takes the perfect picture of a white rose.



Chapters 8-14

Chapters 8-14 Summary

In chapter 8 Victoria discusses the homeschool regimen Elizabeth set up for them. Victoria found the schedule exhausting but it never changed or grew. Over 8 months Elizabeth and Victoria had grown closer and the day that Elizabeth would be able to adopt Victoria was marked brightly on her calendar and only 4 months away.

But when Victoria hears Elizabeth leaving Catherine a message saying that she's the only family Elizabeth has, Victoria feels rage. Entering the house and seeing Elizabeth, Victoria is ready to yell at her but begins crying instead. They cry together and the chapter ends with Elizabeth telling Victoria that she loves her.

At the beginning of chapter 9 the reader learns that Victoria continued to stay with Grant, although he continues to sleep somewhere else. One night Grant brings home a whole chicken and prepares a delicious meal for them. When Victoria catches him looking at her, she tells him that they will never be able to be together because she would ruin it.

Grant becomes angry and tells her not to lie to him, that she should admit she can't be with him because of what his mother did. Victoria realizes that he doesn't know the truth about what happened but she doesn't know what to say and he leaves angry.

Victoria and Elizabeth are at the farmer's market in chapter 10 looking for blackberries. When Elizabeth finds what she's looking for, she tells Victoria that they are not done and they head to a table with beautiful roses. Victoria tries to stop Elizabeth but Elizabeth begins a conversation with Grant, introducing herself.

When Grant refuses to sell flowers to her and ignores her, Elizabeth tells him she's been watching him grow up for years and has wanted to run to him so many times. Grant says that no one was stopping her and Elizabeth says he is wrong about that. She invites him over to eat some of Victoria's blackberry cobbler.

In chapter 11, Grant tells Victoria that he's taking her back to her own place. Victoria is familiar with people saying this to her and she is ready to go. Grant does not speak to her on the way back or when he drops her off. Victoria goes to Bloom and figures out when she will start working with Renata again.

Then she returns to her apartment, mounts her flower photos and puts a copy of each flower in a blue box and an orange box. Victoria puts the orange box outside of her room when she realizes that she bought it for Grant's place: she knows he's gone.

Elizabeth figures out a way to reach out to Catherine in chapter 12. She tells Victoria that her and Catherine's mother began intercepting the letters they wrote to each other so, one day, they began sending messages with flowers. Elizabeth shares with Victoria



that she feels sure Catherine will answer her in flowers because she'll remember that no one knew her better than Elizabeth.

While preparing a flower message for her sister, Elizabeth begins to teach Victoria the meaning of flowers, their different parts and how to research them with the field guide.

Victoria meets Renata and Natalya's mother, Mother Ruby, in chapter 13. Renata drags Victoria to her mother's Christmas party and, although she doesn't necessarily want to be there, Victoria enjoys the food and ends up spending the night. The next morning she and Renata eat breakfast and then head back to work.

After 2 weeks of weddings and no Grant, Victoria gets the week off and spends it in her room. But she gets showered and dressed when Renata calls and says she needs her. Victoria arrives at Bloom to see Grant, who's arrived with the jonquil he grew for her. Victoria ends up kissing Grant to show him how much she missed him.

In chapter 14, Elizabeth and Victoria finish the flower message for Catherine and leave it, along with a note, tied around her mailbox. Elizabeth then takes Victoria to a row of expensive shops in San Francisco because Victoria's court date is in three days and Elizabeth will be legally adopting her.

Having never been shopping for clothes before, Victoria feels this is the perfect start to being someone's daughter. While shopping, Victoria finds the perfect dress and sees the pride in Elizabeth's face, causing her to feel that her life is starting over.

Chapters 8-14 Analysis

In chapter 8, Victoria falls into an exhausting but unchanging routine while being homeschooled by Elizabeth. But just when she starts to feel like Elizabeth sees her as family, Victoria overhears Elizabeth leaving a message for her sister in which she says that her sister is the only family she has left. Outraged, Victoria is ready to scream at Elizabeth but they end up crying together and Elizabeth tells Victoria that she loves her.

Chapter 9 begins to reveal more of the back story for Grant and Victoria. Victoria sees Grant looking at her and can feel his feelings for her. When she tells him that they can never be together because she'd ruin it, Grant believes that she won't give him a chance because of what his mother did. Victoria is taken back by this because she realizes that Grant doesn't know the truth of what happened.

In chapter 10, Elizabeth takes Victoria to the farmer's market and introduces herself to Grant for the first time. When Grant ignores her, Elizabeth pleads with him to understand that she's been watching him grow up and wanted to run to him, to which he states that no one was stopping her. The text throughout this section suggests that there is more to their relationship but nothing else is revealed at this point.



Grant returns Victoria to her own place in chapter 11 but Victoria will not allow herself to miss him. But when she sees him again in chapter 13 after more than 2 weeks, she passionately kisses him to show him how much he's been missed.

In chapter 12, Elizabeth tells Victoria that her and Catherine used to communicate through flower messages and that this is likely the best hope of getting a response out of Catherine. When they finish the flower message for Catherine in chapter 14, Elizabeth takes Victoria shopping for her adoption dress and Victoria feels that her life is starting over with Elizabeth.



Chapters 15-21

Chapters 15-21 Summary

Victoria is hired at Bloom full time in chapter 15. She and Grant also continue their relationship by taking long walks so she can photograph flowers for her dictionary. After months of not sleeping in the water tower, Victoria finally allows Grant to spend the night there again but she sleeps on the couch. While listening to stories of wives disappointed with their marriages at work, Victoria wonders why they don't give up.

But then she realizes that she now craves human touch and connection with Grant, causing her to wonder if she is changing from when she was a child. In an effort to help her find an off-season cherry blossom to finish her dictionary, Grant takes her to his mother's old studio.

She photographs a drawing of a cherry blossom then begins photographing Grant. Although she initiates their making love for the first time, Victoria finds it difficult to focus on their intimacy and thinks of flowers instead, causing her to feel disappointed.

In chapter 16, Elizabeth and Victoria leave flower messages for Catherine for three days but Elizabeth receives no sign that Catherine received the messages.

Victoria slowly but surely moves into the water tower with Grant in chapter 17. Although her life with him is peaceful and predictable, she can't help but feel that it will all end at any moment. She contemplates telling him the truth about her past many times but she can't bring herself to do it because Grant loves her. Victoria feels that she doesn't deserve his love and, even though they were growing closer each day, Victoria feels part of herself detaching.

One night Sunday night, Grant makes dinner for Victoria as he always does. While it is delicious, Victoria finds herself vomiting in the bathroom for hours. She tells Grant that she's sick but they both know this isn't true. Victoria used to vomit when being touched or almost touched as a child and Grant's touching over the past several months has finally caught up with her.

In chapter 18 it is the morning of Victoria's adoption. She wakes up early and dresses herself to show Elizabeth that she is ready for the adoption to take place. Victoria is concerned when she sees the house is quiet and that Elizabeth slept in because Elizabeth has never slept in before.

After being awake an hour, Victoria goes to Elizabeth's room where she finds Elizabeth, lying on the bed with her eyes wide open. Victoria has to shake Elizabeth to get any response out of her but it's not the response she's hoping for. Elizabeth tells Victoria that she can't go through with the adoption because the two of them do not make a family.



Victoria continues to have nausea and vomiting in chapter 19 and she only finds reprieve in the coolness of the flower storage area. Renata confronts Victoria about being pregnant and about making her get health insurance. Overwhelmed, Victoria leaves and buys three pregnancy tests, all of which are positive.

She decides that she can never tell Grant because he would want the baby and for them to be a family, something she could never give him. Victoria decides that it's better that she leaves and that he never know how close they were to having what he wanted.

By four in the afternoon in chapter 20, Meredith arrives to the house and Victoria decides to hide from her. Meredith comes in the house and finds Elizabeth lying in bed and saying she needs to rest. This seems to annoy Meredith and finally she finds Victoria and begins accusing her of making Elizabeth not want to adopt her.

Elizabeth tells Meredith that Victoria didn't do anything wrong and Elizabeth and Victoria get into an argument. While she can't hear everything, Victoria hears Meredith telling Elizabeth that it's an excuse to say that she wants more for Victoria. Victoria waits in her room expecting Meredith to tell her that she has to leave.

In chapter 21 Victoria rushes through the water tower packing all of her belongings. She decides to leave the orange box of her flower dictionary with Grant so that she had an extra if anything happened to her copy. Victoria leaves the box in the middle of the room with a picture of a white rose and the saying "a rose is a rose is a rose." She knows that Grant will understand that this is the end.

Chapters 15-21 Analysis

Chapters 15-21 provide important plot developments in both Victoria's adulthood and childhood. In chapter 15, Victoria becomes a full-time employee at Bloom but she also begins spending more and more time with Grant. She initiates making love with him for the first time but quickly finds that she is overwhelmed by their intimacy and instead focuses on flowers.

Despite any awkwardness, she eventually moves in with Grant in chapter 17 and their relationship grows deeper. However Victoria notices that she feels herself detaching somewhat as well because she feels undeserving of his love. After months of being in a relationship, the intimacy finally catches up with Victoria when she begins to vomit from the touching, something she's done since being a child.

But in chapter 19, Victoria learns that it wasn't the intimacy causing her to vomit, it is a new pregnancy. Victoria finds herself completely overwhelmed not only by the coming changes in her life but by the thought that Grant will want the baby and for them to be a family. Knowing she could never give him the family he wants, Victoria decides that it's best if Grant never knows about the pregnancy or how close they came to being what he wanted. In chapter 21, Victoria packs up her belongings from the water tower and leaves.



Chapters 16, 18 and 20 develop the events in Victoria's childhood. In chapter 16, Victoria and Elizabeth continue to leave flower messages for Catherine during the three days leading up to Victoria's adoption hearing but Elizabeth receives no response.

When Victoria finds Elizabeth lying in bed, being nonresponsive and telling Victoria that she can't go through with the adoption because she can't provide Victoria with a family in chapter 18, the reader wonders if Catherine's lack of response may be the cause.

In chapter 20, Meredith comes to the house and is upset that Victoria and Elizabeth missed the court date. Meredith initially accuses Victoria for doing something wrong but Elizabeth tells Meredith that she didn't do anything wrong. As Meredith and Elizabeth argue, Victoria waits in her room to be told that she has to leave.



Part 3, Moss, Chapters 1-6

Part 3, Moss, Chapters 1-6 Summary

Victoria explains how she is continuing to hide from Grant in chapter 1. She has a plan to give birth in her blue room but she knows she can't be there now because she knows Grant is looking for her and will find her there. She moves back to her garden in the park and, even though she could sleep in her car, she chooses to sleep among the comforting soil.

Victoria runs to a neighboring building when Grant comes close to finding her in the park. Even though she misses him and her job at Bloom, she knows that they could never have the life he would want for them.

In chapter 2, Meredith sets Elizabeth and Victoria's next court date for six months away. Victoria finds ways to blame herself for Elizabeth not going through with the adoption—mostly believing that it was because she became too clingy. But when Victoria hears Elizabeth leaving Catherine a message, she realizes that if Catherine had responded to Elizabeth, Elizabeth would have adopted her.

After Victoria's angry outburst, Grant arrives unexpectedly and tells Elizabeth to stop calling Catherine and that Catherine isn't the person she once knew. He tells her that Catherine is making threats to burn down Elizabeth's vineyard but Elizabeth can't believe it.

Victoria decides that it's time to return to the blue room in chapter 3 and she has felt the baby start kicking by this time. Natalya confirms that Grant came looking for her there several weeks ago but he didn't get any other information. When Victoria learns that Renata told Natalya about the pregnancy, she is sure that Grant knows as well.

But when Victoria returns to Bloom, she finds out that Renata did not tell him. But Renata will not let Victoria work there because she isn't willing to lie to Grant when he comes by. Victoria gets a wedding invitation and realizes the bride wants her to be the florist. Victoria agrees and appears to start her own floral business. But she is not happy that her child has no father.

In chapter 4, Victoria names her business Message and creates unique business cards to take to her first wedding. Victoria realizes that she must buy her flowers at the market but she can't risk going in to the market because she will see Grant. She goes to the Gathering House, her old group home, and hires Marlina to buy her flowers.

Victoria is able to establish a growing business but on February 25th, she finds herself going into labor. Through the pain, she understands her mother's choice to leave her. But she also finds herself longing for Elizabeth.



Victoria calls for Elizabeth in chapter 5 and Elizabeth confirms that the grapes are ready to be harvested. Victoria asks Elizabeth if she's worried about Catherine following through on her threat to burn down the vineyard.

Elizabeth states that Catherine is not well, much like their mother, and that she feels the need to take care of her in the way she wishes she had for her mother. Elizabeth tells Victoria that they are moving into Catherine and Grant's home and Victoria says she doesn't want to go.

Chapter 6 finds Victoria in constant, unbearable pain as she continues to go through labor. She calls Renata, who comes over with her mother. Despite not liking to be touched, Victoria is willing to let Mother Ruby do anything to get the baby out of her.

Mother Ruby tells Victoria that she is the only one who can do this and Victoria realizes that she can't ignore this problem- she has to go through the pain. Victoria surrenders and gives birth.

Part 3, Moss, Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Chapters 1-6 bring many big changes in Victoria's life. Through chapter 1, the reader learns that Victoria has returned to homelessness because she is too scared to return to the blue room or to Bloom. She knows Grant is looking for her and she can't bring herself to see him. But when he comes to the park where she's been staying, she watches him through the window in a nearby building and realizes how much she misses him and her job. Victoria knows, though, that she can't give him the life he wants for them.

In chapter 3, Victoria returns to the blue room and to Bloom and, as she expected, Grant has been looking for her. Although Renata still cares for her, she can't allow Victoria to work at Bloom because she can't lie to Grant like Victoria wants her to. This sudden lack of income, as well as an invitation to be the florist for a Bloom customer's wedding, spurs Victoria into starting her own business, which she names Message in chapter 4.

Victoria finds herself quite busy but is unable to go to the flower market for fear of seeing Grant. She hires Marlana, a girl from her old group home, to buy the flowers for her and this seems to work. Just as she begins getting busy with work, Victoria goes into labor. The unbearable pain causes Victoria to have a moment of understanding for her own mother and why she may have abandoned her after birth.

But Victoria just wants to be with Elizabeth. In chapter 6, Victoria realizes that she can't ignore that she's bringing a baby into this world and that she has to go through the pain to get to the other side. Chapters 2 and 5 provide new information about Victoria's childhood with Elizabeth. The reader learns that Victoria continued to live with Elizabeth and that they were able to rebuild their bond after the adoption didn't go through.

But the reader also learns that Catherine is not well when Grant visits Elizabeth unexpectedly, which causes Elizabeth to decide that she and Victoria will move in with Catherine in order to care for her. Victoria does not want to do this.



Chapters 7-12

Chapters 7-12 Summary

Chapter 7 reveals that Victoria gives birth to a girl, although she doesn't name her throughout the chapter- which covers at least one week's time- because she is still getting to know her. Victoria is surprised at the strength of her maternal instinct and she delights in holding, feeding and watching her daughter. Mother Ruby helps Victoria the first week to make sure everything goes well with the baby and Renata and Marlana help Victoria as well.

But after the first week, Mother Ruby leaves because she tells Victoria that she is a mother and doesn't need her anymore. These words, however, cause a familiar feeling of panic within Victoria and it won't go away no matter how hard she tries.

In chapter 8, Victoria gives Elizabeth an ultimatum to choose between her or her sister. While Victoria regrets this because Elizabeth makes it clear that she will take care of her sister, Victoria hatches a plan to expose Catherine for who she really is.

Although her plan is not revealed, the reader learns that Victoria will wait in the ditch by the flower farm and wait for Grant to leave so that she can sneak in to get what she needed.

Victoria spends a full day with the baby alone in chapter 9. After spending what feels like the whole day in the blue room, she emerges to find that it's only 10am. She attempts to take a shower but is interrupted when the baby cries and needs to nurse. Victoria spends the next 36 hours nursing her daughter, as the baby cries whenever she is not nursing.

Without having eaten for 36 hours and feeling as though she has nothing left to give, she decides to leave the baby to go the market for formula and food for herself. While out in the city, she realizes that the patterns of the world continue no matter what and she realizes how easy it was to create a separation between her and her baby. But when she returns home and sees the relief in her daughter's eyes, rather than the anger she expected, Victoria decides that she will never leave her again.

In chapter 10, Victoria returns home at dark and she assumes Elizabeth will be worried since she missed dinner. But Elizabeth simply checks to make sure it's Victoria walking through the door.

When Mother Ruby visits Victoria and the baby in chapter 11, Victoria feels ashamed of leaving the baby and can't bring herself to take Mother Ruby's help. Although she wants to tell Mother Ruby what she did so that she can be talked out of doing it again, Victoria can't bring herself to talk about it. Victoria continues to struggle with breast feeding because her baby seems to want to breastfeed constantly.



Victoria tries to give the baby a bottle but she won't take it. Victoria refuses to breastfeed anymore and leaves the baby in the other room to cry as she sleeps in the blue room. When she wakes up, Victoria feels worried that something happened to the baby and she is relieved but disappointed that the baby is ok and crying again to eat.

Victoria leaves the baby in the apartment again to get a better bottle but ends up running to her garden in the park, where she falls asleep among her flowers to try and rejuvenate.

In chapter 12, Elizabeth tells Victoria that Catherine stole her only love away from her and had a child with him, Grant. Elizabeth tells Victoria that Catherine gave her the chance to forgive her and have a relationship again but that Elizabeth couldn't bring herself to at the time, something she regrets.

Victoria sneaks out of the house that night and takes the lighter fluid from Catherine's jam jars and dumps it around the vineyard. She follows through with her plan to set fire to the vineyard and her and Elizabeth watch as the vineyard burns.

Chapters 7-12 Analysis

In chapters 7, 9 and 11 the reader learns and experiences Victoria's struggles to be a good mother. She initially starts out feeling an intensely strong connection with her daughter, who remains unnamed throughout these chapters, but after the first week of being a mother, Victoria begins to feel her fear and anxiety about intimacy creeping back into her life.

In chapter 9, Victoria begins to struggle with her daughter's seemingly constant need to breastfeed and this seems to be a struggle not only with the physical pain exhaustion associated with this need but also the never-ending intimacy and touching this brings as well. Victoria decides to leave her daughter in the apartment while she leaves to get food and formula. When she returns and sees that her daughter is nothing but relieved, she decides never to leave her again.

But Victoria finds herself again overwhelmed by her daughter's constant need to breastfeed in chapter 11 and, after leaving her daughter in the other room so she can sleep, she needs more alone time and again leaves her daughter in the apartment to go to the market. But she ends up going to her garden in the park instead, where she falls asleep in the comfort of her flowers. Chapter 10 is short but shows that Victoria returns home to Elizabeth.

In chapter 12, the reader learns that Catherine stole Elizabeth's love interest from her and had a child, Grant, with him. Elizabeth regrets not making up with Catherine when Catherine gave her the chance but Victoria is convinced that the only thing to do now is show Elizabeth who Catherine really is. She follows through with her plan to set the vineyard on fire, a threat Catherine made.



Chapters 13-17

Chapters 13-17 Summary

In chapter 13, Victoria wakes up in her old forest home after spending the night there, leaving her daughter alone in their apartment. Victoria sees a young girl getting off the city bus and wishes she could go back to being a child.

She wishes she could warn her younger self of this day so that she could have made different decisions and not ended up here. Victoria wishes she could start her life over and apologize to Elizabeth. But instead, she knows that she's failed her daughter several times and that the cycle will continue.

Victoria spends chapter 14 trying to put out the fire that she started in Elizabeth's vineyard. She attempts to use water and her nightgown to make the flames stopped but nothing worked. When she sees the devastation on Elizabeth's face, Victoria knows that she's made a huge mistake.

Elizabeth screams at Victoria to get away from the fire and pulls and fights with her to make her listen. Even telling Victoria that she doesn't want to lose her daughter and vineyard on the same night doesn't make Victoria back away from the fire. Finally Elizabeth leaves Victoria alone.

In chapter 15, Victoria returns to the apartment to find her baby awake in her basket. Throughout the rest of the night, the baby didn't cry and she learned to eat from the bottle. Her daughter's unconditional love and forgiveness causes Victoria to realize that she can't give the baby the life she deserves and she is certain that she will end up hurting her like she's hurt everyone else.

The next day, Victoria takes her daughter to Grant's house and leaves her there with moss (maternal love). By the time Victoria arrives back at the blue room, she runs into Natalya and it's clear that Victoria is sick. She wakes up to the sounds of sirens and feet on the staircase.

Victoria wakes up in an ambulance in chapter 16 and Elizabeth is forced to report the incident. Upon arrival at the hospital, Meredith keeps Elizabeth away from Victoria and reports the bruises and burns Victoria received from Elizabeth's attempts to keep her away from the fire.

Victoria knows that no one would ever believe that Elizabeth was trying to save Victoria from the fire and she knows that her injuries are a way to escape the pain and guilt she feels for starting the fire. Victoria tells Meredith that Elizabeth beat her and she knows that she will never have to see Elizabeth again.

Chapter 17 begins with Victoria having been in the hospital for three days with mastitis, a common infection for breastfeeding mothers, although Victoria's case was worse than



doctors had ever seen. She leaves the hospital before being discharged after her fever breaks to avoid being questioned about the baby.

But she is unable to avoid Marlana when she returns for work and she tells Marlana everything, asking to never speak of it again. The next day, Renata comes to her apartment and tells her that she saw the baby with Grant. Victoria begs her to never give her updates and closes the door. Renata leaves, defeated.

Chapters 13-17 Analysis

Many big changes take place in chapters 13-17. The section begins with Victoria waking up in her old forest home after leaving her baby alone in their apartment. Looking around the city, she realizes that all of her decisions have led her to this place and she desperately wants to start over but can't.

When she returns to her baby in chapter 15, she sees that her daughter is ok however they coexist in silence. Seeing her daughter's unconditional forgiveness and love, however, makes it clear to Victoria that she will never be able to give her daughter the life she deserves. Her previous life experiences and fear of her own inadequacies to love drive her to the decision to leave her daughter with Grant, which she does in chapter 15.

In chapter 17, after recovering from a severe case of mastitis, Victoria tells Marlana about her decision and Renata figures it out when she sees Grant with the baby. Victoria begs Renata not to give her updates on the baby, as it is too painful.

In chapters 14 and 16, the reader learns the rest of the story of what happened between Victoria and Elizabeth. After setting fire to Elizabeth's vineyard in an attempt to stay with her, Victoria realizes she made a huge mistake and fights Elizabeth's attempts to keep her away from the fire.

In the hospital with bruises and burns, Victoria knows that she can never face Elizabeth again and feels consumed with guilt. In order to avoid Elizabeth forever, Victoria lies and says that Elizabeth beat her.



Part 4, New Beginnings, Chapters 1-4

Part 4, New Beginnings, Chapters 1-4 Summary

Victoria's business, Message, continues to grow in chapter 1 and Victoria only hopes that her business is starting to change the way people look at flowers- causing them to choose flowers based on positive meanings rather than looks. But she doesn't stop thinking about her daughter and, eventually, her busy schedule and ever-growing ache to be with her daughter consumes her.

When Marlana suggests taking a drive to see "her," Victoria firsts thinks of Elizabeth and then can't get the idea of apologizing to Elizabeth out of her head. Victoria writes her a simple letter and mails it before she can change her mind.

In chapter 2, Victoria is waiting for a couple to arrive and, while drinking her tea, she sees the bride arrive but can tell that the groom won't be coming. As she's walking to meet the bride, she sees Elizabeth pass by her apartment twice before going out of sight. Victoria turns the bride away and meets Renata on the street.

Renata has a letter from Elizabeth and they talk about who Elizabeth is and what happened. Renata tells Victoria she's not the only one who's been hurt and she talks about how she sees a different person in Victoria when she's working with flowers. Victoria wonders if that different girl, whom she had seen before, was still in her somewhere.

Victoria is in court with Elizabeth in chapter 3, although she had refused to testify against Elizabeth. Although Elizabeth asked for Victoria to be returned to her, the judge ordered that Victoria be placed in a group home when a placement becomes available.

Victoria thinks it is laughable that the adults feel Elizabeth is dangerous but she knows she can't laugh because then she'll cry. When asked if she has anything to say, Victoria lays red carnations on the table (my heart is breaking), shares a moment of quiet understanding with Elizabeth and runs out of the court room.

Chapter 4 begins with Victoria reading Elizabeth's letter and realizing that Elizabeth still wants her to come home. Rereading it often, Victoria knows that she will go to Elizabeth but is scared of losing the thought that Elizabeth wants her to the reality of how Elizabeth might act. But while consulting with a couple, she gets a sudden urge to go to Elizabeth.

Although she tries to avoid seeing Grant or her daughter, when Victoria begins observing Elizabeth from a distance, she sees a child sitting with her and knows it's her daughter. Victoria leaves the property when she and the child make eye contact.



Part 4, New Beginnings, Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Victoria finds that her business is growing in chapter 1 but she soon becomes overwhelmed by her busy schedule and by her growing need to see her daughter. Victoria also begins thinking about Elizabeth and, after she's unable to get the idea of apologizing to Elizabeth out of her head, she writes a short, simple letter and mails it to Elizabeth.

In chapter 2, Victoria sees Elizabeth drive by her apartment twice and she soon meets up with Renata, who has a letter from Elizabeth. Victoria shares her story with Renata and Renata reassures her that she's not the only one who's ever been broken and hurt. Renata tells Victoria that she sees a different girl in her when she's working with flowers and Victoria remembers seeing that different girl in herself after living with Elizabeth. She wonders if that person is still within her.

Chapter 3 provides closure to what happened between Victoria and Elizabeth, as there is a court hearing that decides Victoria is to be placed in a group home. In chapter 4, Victoria learns from Elizabeth's letter that Elizabeth still wants her and she decides she will see Elizabeth.

Victoria struggles with the fear of facing reality but she eventually goes to Elizabeth's house. But while she's observing Elizabeth, she notices that her daughter is sitting with Elizabeth. Making eye contact with her daughter proves too much and Victoria leaves before Elizabeth notices her presence.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary

In chapter 5, Grant and Victoria see and speak to each other again for the first time in over a year. They talk about their daughter and how she is beautiful however Victoria learns that taking care of their daughter, whom Grant named Hazel, was also too big of a responsibility for him. Grant tells Victoria that Hazel lives with Elizabeth, although he visits her, and that she's truly happy.

Victoria sees that Grant redid the water tower and he tells her that he was hoping they would live there together one day. Victoria realizes how much she meant to Grant. Grant shares with Victoria that he now knows the truth of her setting the fire and he talks about the last year of his mother's life and how they had a good year.

Victoria realizes that Grant's mother, as ill as she was, was able to give him what neither of them could give Hazel: a parent to raise her. Victoria declines Grant's offer to stay with him but she realizes that she doesn't want to be alone.

Not wanting to be alone, Victoria goes to Elizabeth's house in chapter 6. Elizabeth greets her with open arms at the door and invites her in for dinner and ice cream. As they sit and catch up Victoria's life, Victoria reconnects with Hazel slowly but, soon, Hazel is reaching for Victoria and Victoria begins to hold her.

Both Elizabeth and Victoria agree that losing each other all those years ago was worse than what happened to the vineyard or to Victoria's living situation. Along with Hazel, Victoria and Elizabeth go into the vineyard to once again check the ripeness of the grapes together.

In chapter 7 the reader learns that Victoria is moving out of her apartment. Victoria allows two more girls from the Gathering House to live in her old apartment rent-free in exchange for being floral assistants. While she loves Message and plans to return, Victoria knows that she cannot transition to being a working mother immediately.

She is committed to taking her time, not allowing herself to become overwhelmed and not ever leaving Grant, Hazel or Elizabeth again. Victoria plans to move into the water tower alone, then move into the main house with Grant and then bring Hazel to live with them over time.

Victoria remembers how Grant told her that moss (maternal love) grows without roots and she feels, for the first time, that maybe she does have the ability to love and care for her daughter.



Chapters 5-7 Analysis

Chapters 5-7 bring a close to the story. In chapter 5, Victoria finds herself back on Grant's flower farm after being shocked at seeing her daughter with Elizabeth. Grant approaches her and they see each other and speak for the first time in over a year. Victoria learns that Grant is not angry with her and sees that he doesn't have the heart to tell her how he felt angry when he found their daughter, whom he named Hazel.

While discussing Hazel's love for flowers, Grant shares that moss grows without root. This is a particularly moving statement for Victoria, and it affects her deeply from that point forward. Victoria reconnects with Elizabeth and Hazel in chapter 6 and Elizabeth's, as well as Hazel's, unconditional love for her is confirmed.

In chapter 7, Victoria commits to reconnecting with her family and to never leaving them again. She leaves Message in the hands of Marlena for a short time while she does this. Victoria thinks about what she learned about moss (maternal love) and she wonders, for the first time, if she has the ability to love her daughter after all.

Characters

Victoria Jones

Victoria Jones is the main character of the book. Throughout the novel, the chapters alternate between Victoria's current perspective and her perspective as a child. This allows the reader to see how her childhood experiences influence her physical, cognitive and emotional experiences as an adult.

As a child who has grown up in and is jaded by the foster system, the reader can see that Victoria has been hurt and has a hard time trusting people and communicating with them. The reader also learns that Victoria struggles with physical and/or emotional intimacy so she avoids being touched at all costs. However Victoria does not present as a sympathetic child in many of the memories she shares with the reader. She presents as difficult, sarcastic, stubborn, manipulative and guarded.

It is clear, though, that Victoria has developed these behaviors as a way to survive in a world where she feels she must take care of herself. Victoria's bond with Elizabeth, however, brings out a different, more trusting and innocent side to her and the reader suspects that Victoria would have continued to flourish until Elizabeth doesn't follow through with adopting Victoria as planned. This begins an unraveling of their relationship and ultimately brings an end to Victoria living with Elizabeth.

Victoria spends from 10 to 18 living in various group homes and, by the time she ages out of the foster system at 18, she is again guarded, sarcastic and accustomed to being on her own. She carries these traits with her, as well as her love of flowers and their meanings, through transitional housing and homelessness. When she gets a job at Bloom, a local flower shop, she begins developing relationships with others again, although she continues to get overwhelmed easily by any form of intimacy and keeps her distance from her friends.

Despite keeping her distance, Victoria enters into a romantic relationship and tries to overcome her fear of intimacy. But when she learns that she is pregnant, she feels sure she will disappoint the child's father and decides to leave him. The same fear of inadequacy and of the inability to love cause her to leave her daughter with her father when taking care of her daughter proves too overwhelming. In the end, however, Victoria realizes that she needs her daughter in her life and the unconditional love and forgiveness of those she loves brings her to believe that she may have the ability to love after all.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was Victoria's foster mother when Victoria was 9-10 years old and she plays an important role in the story because she was the closest person to a mother Victoria had. From the moment the reader meets Elizabeth, it is clear that she is committed to



making the living arrangement with Victoria work and that she is a loving, firm and consistent woman. Elizabeth is respectful of Victoria's issues and boundaries, but also enforces her own rules and boundaries while working to earn Victoria's trust.

Elizabeth appears to see and appreciate the potential in Victoria and she works to be an advocate for Victoria so that she can reach that potential. Elizabeth is successful in building a close bond with Victoria and they live with each other successfully for about one year. But while they are building their own relationship, the reader learns that Elizabeth had a difficult relationship with her own mother, that she is estranged from her sister and that her sister repeatedly refuses to respond to her attempts to reconnect. The lack of relationships with any of her family members ultimately leads to Elizabeth to fail to adopt Victoria as she had been promising.

This event leads to the unraveling of her relationship with Victoria and Victoria is soon removed from her home. As the story continues, however, the reader sees that Elizabeth has never stopped loving Victoria and that she regrets not adopting her. When Victoria reaches out to reconnect with Elizabeth, Elizabeth greets her with open arms and with unconditional love and forgiveness. This love, in part, is what helps Victoria to finally be able to see the ability to love within herself.

Grant

Grant is Victoria's romantic partner in the story but he is also Elizabeth's nephew. Grant and Victoria first meet when Victoria is 10 and living with Elizabeth but, because of Elizabeth's strained relationship with her sister, Grant and Elizabeth have little to no relationship. Victoria meets Grant again as an adult when she begins going to the flower market where Grant sells the flowers from his farm. Grant and Victoria have a strong common bond over their love of flowers and their meanings and begin a friendship that soon turns into a romantic relationship.

Although Grant seems to want to take their relationship to the next level in every way, he is respectful of Victoria's fear of intimacy and need to be alone. Because he is willing to have a relationship on Victoria's terms, he earns her trust. Unbeknownst to Grant, however, Victoria is continuing to struggle with the high level of intimacy in their relationship. Also unbeknownst to Grant, he and Victoria conceive a child and, due to her fear of intimacy and her fear that she will disappoint Grant by not being able to give him the family he wants, Victoria leaves him without telling about the pregnancy and without saying goodbye.

It is clear that Grant cares for Victoria deeply because he searches for her and seems able to forgive her anything. He is even able to forgive her when she leaves their daughter at his house when he's not there and disappears again for a long period of time. When Victoria reconnects with Grant, they learn that they both felt overwhelmed by caring for their daughter alone and that Grant's mother, although severely ill, was able to give Grant the one thing neither of them could give their daughter: stability. But



Grant's unconditional love and forgiveness for Victoria also played a large part in Victoria realizing that she may have the capability to love after all.

Renata

Renata is the florist that owns Bloom, a local flower shop. She has a no-nonsense, hardworking but caring and understanding personality. Renata sees the potential and the goodness within Victoria and gives Victoria a job when Victoria comes to her, hungry and homeless. She becomes another major caregiver for Victoria because she helps her to find a home, she connects Victoria with her mother-an experienced midwife-, and she seems to accept Victoria for who she is while encouraging her to grow at the same time.

Natalya

Natalya is Renata's sister. Victoria eventually rents a small, blue room in Natalya's apartment, which takes her off the streets. Natalya also seems to care about Victoria's well-being but she is often absent because she is in a popular underground band.

Hazel

Although not a main character of the story in her own right, she is the daughter of Victoria and Grant and she serves a main purpose in developing Victoria's character by forcing Victoria to face many of the difficult emotions and life experiences that she tries so hard to ignore.

Meredith Combs

Meredith is Victoria's social worker and she has been working with Victoria her whole life. Based on Meredith's words and actions, it is clear that she is burnt out at her job and particularly with Victoria's case, as Victoria is often transitioning between homes. Victoria clearly doesn't respect Meredith much and it seems the feeling is mutual in many of their interactions. Victoria runs away from Meredith when she is 18 and never sees her again.

Catherine

Catherine is Elizabeth's sister and Grant's mother. Although not many details are given about Catherine, the reader knows that Catherine stole Elizabeth's true love and had a child with him, Grant. The reader also knows that Catherine becomes ill- either a severe mental illness or something similar to Alzheimer's (the text is not clear)- and appears to refuse Elizabeth's attempts to reconnect. At the end of the story, however, the reader learns that, in the last year of her life, Catherine attempted to draw a hyacinth, meaning



"please forgive me," for Elizabeth but never gave one of the art pieces to her because of feeling that none of them were good enough.

Marlena

Marlena was Victoria's assistant in Victoria's business, Message. Victoria hired Marlena from the Gathering House, the same transitional house where she once lived. Marlena appears to be responsible and caring and takes over the business for an indefinite period of time when Victoria reconnects with Grant, Hazel and Elizabeth.

Bethany

Bethany was originally a customer at Bloom and she credits Victoria's knowledge of flowers for the beginning of her successful marriage. Bethany hired Victoria to do the flowers for her wedding and ultimately played a large part in the success and growth of Victoria's business.

Marta Rubina

Mother Ruby is the mother of Renata and Natalya. She is a loving, family-oriented woman who is also an experienced midwife. She is Victoria's midwife during the birth of Victoria's daughter and plays a crucial role because she points out that Victoria cannot ignore the challenges and fears she's having about birth and becoming a mother but that she, literally, has to push through it.

Carlos

Carlos lived on Elizabeth's farm in a trailer and helped tend the vineyards.

Perla

Carlos' daughter.



Objects/Places

San Francisco

Main city in which the story takes place.

Elizabeth's Farmhouse/Vineyard

A place of many childhood memories for Victoria and referenced often in the book,

The Flower Farm

Location of Catherine's home and of Grant's business.

The Water Tower

Where Grant, and eventually Victoria, lives.

Bloom

Renata's flower shop.

Message

Victoria's floral business.

The Blue Room

Victoria's small room inside of Natalya's apartment.

The Gathering House

Transitional living home for girls aging out of the foster system and former home of Victoria and Marlana.

The Blue Box

Where Victoria kept her flower dictionary.



The Orange Box

Where Grant kept his duplicate of Victoria's flower dictionary.

McKinley Square

Location of Victoria's forest garden where she lived when homeless and when taking a break from her newborn child.

The Language of Flowers

Used throughout the story by Victoria and, at times, others, to communicate and process thoughts and feelings, as well as to interpret the thoughts and feelings of others.



Themes

Mother-Daughter Relationship

Victoria, the main character, was abandoned by her mother at birth, and her father is never mentioned. The way the story is structured, it's clear that the abandonment led to serious emotional abandonment issues that pervade Victoria's character in the book. The most important effect of Victoria's abandonment is the complications it produces in her relationship with Grant, her romantic partner, and her own daughter, Hazel. But there is also a complex mother-daughter relationship between Victoria and Elizabeth, her foster mother (between ages 9 and 10), that is a source of complexity in the book.

Victoria and Elizabeth's relationship began with the terms set by Elizabeth. Elizabeth clearly loved Victoria and wanted their relationship to work. While not always perfect, she did the best she knew how to do so. She focused attention on Victoria and advocated for her. She respected Victoria's boundaries but worked to develop a relationship between the two of them. One of the most important events of the book leads to the breaking of their relationship. Catherine, Elizabeth's sister, was distant from her and Elizabeth tried to reestablish a connection, but this was difficult. Catherine would also not help Elizabeth adopt Victoria. Victoria came to believe that Catherine was bad and set the vineyard on fire in order to expose her as bad. Victoria quickly felt bad, but she did not confess until she was an adult.

But the more complex relationship arises when Grant and Victoria have a baby, who she does not name. Due to her own issues with Grant, takes her baby and leaves Grant behind before he can realize. Her own inadequacies led her to hide their relationship. However, she eventually leaves her daughter with Grant, and leaves, coming back much later and reestablishing their relationship with her daughter, Hazel.

Emotional Distance as Defense Mechanism

Victoria's life began with abandonment. Her mother left her in the foster care system and she never knew her father. Her foster care experiences were poor ones and she was left jaded and emotionally harmed, perhaps even damaged, by the experiences that she had. As a result, she develops a rough outer psychological "shell" in order to protect herself from being emotionally hurt. In Victoria's own recounting of her childhood, the reader does not see through this shell, but instead is presented with an image of herself as difficult, stubborn and mean. Further, she does not like to be touched and avoids emotional connection insofar as she can.

When Elizabeth takes Victoria in, things do improve, as Victoria recognizes that her life is much better this way. Consequently, she develops a positive, if weak emotional connection with Elizabeth. Elizabeth does what she can to respect Victoria's boundaries and Victoria is willing to have Elizabeth adopt her, though the adoption ultimately falls



through due to Elizabeth's sister, Catherine. The conflict that develops between them leads Victoria to withdraw from Elizabeth, with her disappearing after burning the vineyard.

Victoria has a similar complex, weak, but positive emotional connection with Grant, her significant other for a portion of the book. When she conceives a child, however, she hides the baby from him and when the baby is born, Victoria does not even name her. Ultimately she is so overwhelmed by the demands of her baby that she leaves the baby with Grant. Only by the end of the book is she prepared to reestablish her relationships.

Facing Your Fears

Given Victoria's fragile emotional state due to her experience in the foster care system, she develops a wide variety of fears associated with the few personal relationships that she is able to have in her life. In general, she is afraid of emotional intimacy because she is afraid of being hurt by those she loves. Victoria never feels emotionally safe enough to fully connect to those who actually care for her. Perhaps the most prominent and lengthy example of this is Victoria's relationship with her foster mother, Elizabeth. But there are other cases as well. Her relationship with Grant is built gradually, but when she became pregnant, she never told Grant. Instead, she ran off and had the baby without him even knowing the baby existed. Further, she had so many fears about her inadequacies as a mother, that she never named her child and ultimately followed in her mother's footsteps and left her with Grant without informing him ahead of time.

Victoria, however, ultimately decides that she has to face her fears of emotional intimacy. One of the biggest breakthroughs was the birth of her daughter, where she analogizes the physical act of pushing her daughter out of her with pushing through her emotional barriers. Another important time when Victoria faces her fears is when she writes Elizabeth a letter confessing that she set the vineyard on fire. But the most important and deep time when Victoria faces her fears is when she returns from running away and decides to make a concerted effort to reconnect with Elizabeth, Grant and her daughter Hazel all at the same time.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of "The Language of Flowers" is first-personal, with Victoria's perspective being the sole point of view from which the story is told. With few exceptions, each part has a dual perspective, which alternates between Victoria's childhood perspective and her perspective as an adult. What is significant about this is that the story is layered together in a somewhat non-linear or at least non-chronological fashion, leaving the reader to piece together the details gradually, as light dawns gradually over the whole tapestry of Victoria's key life events. But each chapter alternates between Victoria's perspectives, where one chapter is from her childhood and the next is from her adulthood.

Each story is not described from a third-person point of view. That is, each chapter is narrated from a present point of view but in some chapters the perspective sounds like an adult. That is, when Victoria narrates a "child" chapter, it is not from her perspective as an adult, but rather her perspective as a child, with describes of her experiences from a child's point of view though not always with a child's more limited conceptual apparatus and vocabulary.

By and large, however, the perspectives of child and adult are not as strikingly distinct as one might expect. Instead, the reader is left to largely detect whether the perspective is that of the child Victoria or the adult Victoria by the setting described in the book, and less so by an explicit linguistic difference.

Setting

"The Language of Flowers" is set in late 20th century in San Francisco, California. Victoria spends the large majority of her time in several different small areas in the city. The first of these settings is Bloom, the flower shop where Victoria is first hired when she is an adult and out on her own. It's owned by Renata, and is a small shop that stocks a lot of weddings. It has a cool area where the flowers are kept where she likes to spend some of her time. Another setting is McKinley Square, a place in the city that has a park, with a wooded forest area. Victoria finds a place there where she can plant flowers and start her own garden, but she later ends up living there when she is homeless and when she wants to escape her baby.

The Blue Room is a third setting, a room where Victoria lives. The room is small, closet-sized, in Natalya's apartment. Victoria retreats there a lot to be by herself. Sometimes she stays there for days at a time. It is also the place where she gives birth to her daughter. She also escapes there when she drops of her (then nameless) baby to Grant's place. There are several times in her adult life when she goes there. A fourth setting is the water tower, which is where Grant lives, located one his family's flower



farm. Grant lived there when his mother was alive, and Victoria lived there with him for awhile and she left her baby there. She ended up living there again at the end of the book. A fifth important setting is the vineyard, which is where Elizabeth's house was located, so it is mentioned often.

Language and Meaning

The language of the book reflects its main theme, a lack of emotional intimacy. Sometimes intimate events like sex are mentioned, but nothing detailed or lengthy. The prose, consequently, reflects significant emotional distance, where few emotional terms are deployed by the author. There are certain curse words, which count as mild exceptions, but they are infrequent.

The language alternates between dialogue and Victoria's thoughts. There is quite a lot of dialogue, but the majority of the book is Victoria's own internal dialogue, with about a 60-40 split between thought and open discussion.

The language nonetheless manages to be vivid, making it to emotionally connect to the various characters of the book and so to imagine their emotional lives, somewhat ironic and subtle for a book narrated from the perspective of a person with significant emotional intimacy challenges.

Throughout the book, there is a lot of discussion of flowers, including their scientific names. Flowers are a constant symbol throughout the book and many of the words may be unfamiliar, such as misanthropy which is the meaning of the common thistle. Victoria uses the "language of flowers" to express her emotions. She cannot express herself very well, so she expresses herself by, say, exchanging flowers with Grant. She would leave flowers with people and when she left her baby with Grant, she left her on moss, which symbolizes maternal love.

Structure

"The Language of Flowers" is divided into four parts, with each part full of chapters (that start over numerically from part to part of the book). Part One, "Common Thistle," has fourteen chapters. We are introduced to the story with Elizabeth but it also includes many other events, such as getting the blue room, meeting Grant, having a relationship with Grant, getting a job, and so on. The parts are not about anything specific, but instead gradually draw together the story. As stated earlier in the guide, the parts include chapters that alternate between Victoria's perspective as an adult and her perspective as a child. This is why each part seems to lack the internal unity that allows them to be easily summarized.

Most important to the book is Part Four, New Beginnings. Here the childhood and adult chapters merge into a single narrative, representing emotional unification in Victoria's personality. It is here that Victoria renews her relationship with Elizabeth, with Grant and with her daughter, now named Hazel. Victoria reestablishes her relationship with



Elizabeth by confessing that she set the vineyard on fire. And she reestablishes her connection with Grant when she goes to his flower farm and sits in the field as he watches. Grant and Victoria are basically able to pick up where they left off. So Part Four's structure represents the new emotional unity in Victoria's character brought about when she finally decides to overcome her fears and recreate her emotional and familiar environment.



Quotes

"If you want to work next Saturday, be here by five a.m. If you're even a minute late, I'll leave you behind." (Part 1, chapter 6, pg 32)

"I believe you can prove everyone wrong, too, Victoria. Your behavior is a choice; it isn't who you are." (Pt 1, chp 7, pg 41)

"I'm not going to let you get away with anything here. But if you couldn't find the spoon after a true attempt, I would have accepted a genuine apology." (Pt 1, chp 9, pg 55)

"The flower you're looking for is clearly the common thistle, which symbolizes misanthropy. Misanthropy means hatred or mistrust of humankind." (pt 1, chp 13, pg 77)

"She planted the yellow roses." (pt 2, chp 2, pg 100)

"It's kind of ironic, don't you think? Here you are, obsessed with a romantic language- a language invented for expression between lovers-and you use it to spread animosity." (pt 2, chp 3, pg 104)

"I love you." (pt 2, chp 8, pg 134)

"Don't lie. Tell me you'll never forgive me for what my mother did, or tell me every time you look at me you feel sick. But don't sit here and lie to me, talking about how it's your fault we can never be together." (pt 2, chp 9, pg 138)

"This isn't a family. Just me and you alone in this house. It isn't a family. I can't do this to you." (pt 2, chp 18, pg 180)

"You think I don't know you're pregnant?" (pt 2, chp 19, pg 181)

"The baby's coming. You're bringing her here. Only you can do it." (pt 3, chp 6, pg 220)

"Do you really think you're the only human being alive who is unforgivably flawed? Who's been hurt almost to the point of breaking?" (pt 4, chp 2, pg 279)

"What's she like? (pt 4, chp 5, pg 291)

"How could you have not known the truth?" (pt 4, chp 5, pg 296)

"Victoria. I've missed you." (pt 4, chp 6, pg 300)



Topics for Discussion

Victoria has a complicated character, damaged in various ways. How do other characters find unity and beauty in her otherwise fragmented and hurt personality? Give two examples.

What is "the language of flowers"? How does Victoria use flower imagery to express her emotions?

Victoria has a complicated relationship with her foster mother and her daughter. What are her fears about these relationships? How does she damage them? And how does she restore them?

Explain why Victoria does not tell Grant about her daughter, and why she ultimately abandons her daughter to Grant. What makes Victoria return?

Victoria receives forgiveness from Grant and Elizabeth. In your opinion, does she deserve it? Why or why not?

Explain the significance of dividing the chapters between Victoria's adult and childhood perspectives. Explain the significance of their unification in part four.

How did Victoria develop abandonment issues? How does she ultimately resolve or address them?