

# **The Light Between Oceans: A Novel Study Guide**

**The Light Between Oceans: A Novel by M.L. Stedman**

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# Plot Summary

"The Light Between Oceans" tells the tragic story of lighthouse keeper Tom Sherbourne and his wife Isabel who, after discovering a baby in a shipwrecked boat, must face the terrible consequences of their decision to raise the child as their own.

At the opening of the novel, Tom has just left service in WWI and has signed on a lighthouse keeper with the Australian harbormaster. He is sent as a temporary keeper to Janus Rock, a tiny island off Point Partageuse, after the previous keeper went insane. On his way to the mainland the first time, Tom rides in the bottom of a large ship, surrounded by fellow ex-soldiers whom he feels camaraderie toward. During the trip, Tom witnesses one of the ex-soldiers attacking a rich, female passenger, and he stops the soldier from harming the woman. When he lands on Point Partageuse, Tom meets a beautiful young woman named Isabel Graysmark, and the two fall in love. A year after Tom moves to Janus Rock, he and Isabel are married, and he takes her to live with him in the lighthouse.

Tom and Isabel adore their isolated life together on the island, but their honeymoon comes crashing to a halt when Isabel miscarries three consecutive pregnancies. Depressed that she cannot fulfill her role as a woman and a wife, Isabel retreats into a dark depression that permeates the island. One afternoon, Tom is startled to discover a shipwrecked boat on the beach. Aboard, are a dead man and a squalling infant. Tom quickly takes the baby girl inside and passes her to Isabel, who takes over as the infant's mother as if she had given birth to her herself. Although Tom wants to report the shipwrecked boat, Isabel convinces him that God has sent them the child as a gift after snatching so many of their pregnancies away from them. Because Isabel has only just miscarried her last pregnancy two weeks ago, she still has milk and is able to breastfeed the child. Against his better judgment, Tom agrees, buries the dead man's body, and takes up the charade that Isabel has given birth to a healthy baby girl, whom they name Lucy.

All is well on Janus Rock as the little family enjoys their life together. Lucy grows into a precocious, loving child, and back on the mainland, Isabel's family are excited to see their beautiful granddaughter during the couple's rare shore leaves. During the family's first leave from Janus Rock two years after Lucy's arrival, however, Tom discovers that a local woman, Hannah Roennfeldt, still mourns the mysterious loss of her husband Frank and their two-month old daughter, Grace, after Frank was forced to flee the town during an attack two years ago. When he hears the story, Tom has no doubt that Frank Roennfeldt was the dead man in the shipwrecked boat, and that Lucy is Hannah's long-lost daughter, Grace. He wants to tell Hannah Roennfeldt the truth. Isabel, on the other hand, is outraged by Tom's idea, arguing that far too much time has passed to simply apologize. Returning Lucy to her birthmother will surely cause more harm than good, and once again, she convinces Tom to keep quiet.

Two more years pass and Lucy is now four-years-old. Once again, the Sherbourne family returns to the mainland, and this time, they come face-to-face with the tormented



Hannah Roennfeldt. Unable to keep silent any longer, Tom leaves Hannah an anonymous note saying that her daughter is alive. This note sparks a massive search effort culminating with a deckhand, Bluey, admitting that he saw Grace Roennfeldt's one-of-a-kind silver rattle on Janus Rock. It doesn't take long for police to figure out what Lucy Sherbourne is actually Grace Roennfeldt, and they quickly remove her from the island. Isabel is beside herself with grief and anger as Lucy is snatched away from her, and most of that anger is aimed toward Tom, whose guilty conscience lead to Lucy's return to the mainland. Rather than hurt Isabel any further, Tom lies to the police saying that stealing Lucy had been entirely his idea, and that Isabel had nothing to do with it. Tom is placed in jail awaiting trial while Isabel is set free. Even though Isabel knows that Tom will likely be hung for his admitted crimes, her anger is so great that she does nothing to help save him, and even suggests to the police that Frank Roennfeldt was alive when he landed on the island.

Meanwhile, Hannah Roennfeldt is beside herself with happiness when news is released that her daughter is alive. When she is reunited with little Grace, however, she is shocked by how angry and frightened the child is. She had hoped there would be an invisible bond between herself and the child, and is unable to cope when Grace cries all day, everyday, begging to be returned to Isabel. Even though she knows her daughter belongs with her, Hannah wonders if it would be in everyone's best interest if she returned Grace to Isabel. In a moment of weakness, Hannah tells Isabel that if Tom is telling the truth, that stealing Grace had been his idea alone, and if Isabel will testify to that in court (ensuring that Tom is either imprisoned for life or executed), she will give Grace back to her. Isabel is floored by the offer, but ultimately decides that she cannot betray Tom so brutally, no matter how angry she is. She tells the police the truth, and Tom is sent to prison for six months and she is given a suspended sentence to recuperate in the local mental hospital.

The novel ends twenty years after Grace's return to Hannah. Tom and Isabel have moved 400 miles away to the tiny seaside town, Hopetoun, and Lucy-Grace, as she has come to be called, has grown up in Perth with her mother, Hannah. In the novel's final chapter, Isabel dies after a long battle with cancer, and a few days after the funeral, Lucy-Grace arrives to express her condolences to Tom, whom she once called "Papa." Although Lucy-Grace has few memories of Tom and Isabel, she knows that they loved her. She has forgiven the couple for their crimes, and seeks to make peace with Tom. The novel ends quietly, with Lucy-Grace hoping to come back to visit Tom again someday, and Tom staring sadly at the horizon, watching the ocean give way to the night.



# Part One: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2

## Part One: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2 Summary

The prologue begins on the 27 April 1926. Tom and Isabel Sherbourne live in a lighthouse on Janice Rock in Australia. On this particular day, the "day of the miracle," Isabel has followed the sound of an infant crying to discover a shipwrecked boat on her shore. She calls for her husband Tom, the lighthouse keeper, and they help pull the boat further ashore. Aboard is a wailing infant, wrapped in its mother's cardigan, and a dead man. Isabel quickly takes the baby inside, bathes her, and gives her a bottle of milk. Even though Tom wants to alert the mainland immediately, Isabel convinces him that the baby has been through enough today, and he should wait a few hours before snatching her from safety again. As Tom leaves the room, he hears his wife singing lullabies to the baby, and it breaks his heart.

Chapter One jumps back in time to 16 December 1918. Tom Sherbourne has just left the army after World War One, and signs on to work at a lighthouse on Byron Bay. The man at the desk warns Tom that lighthouse work is extremely difficult, but Tom shrugs it off, saying that nothing is as difficult as the Western Front. Tom undergoes his training on Byron Bay, oftentimes thinking about the dead, mangled men he saw in the trenches. Even though he has escaped from the War physically unharmed, he "carries that other shadow, which is cast inward" (Page 16). When Tom finishes his training, he receives word that he is to take over a permanent post on Janus Rock, as the last lighthouse keeper went insane. Janus rock is the most remote lighthouse and faces the harshest weather, but Tom is up for the challenge.

When Tom arrives at Point Partageuse, the mainland Janus Rock Island is linked to, he sees a beautiful young woman feeding pigeons. When the woman sees Tom smiling at her, she offers him some bread and they laugh together as the birds fly around them. Before Tom sails out to the island, the Harbormaster and his wife invite him, as well as a few of their friends, over for dinner. Tom is somewhat uncomfortable at social gatherings but muddles along. He is shocked when the Harbormaster's friends, the Graysmarks, arrive with their teenage daughter, Isabel, the girl Tom had fed pigeons with in the park that afternoon. The two pass a pleasant evening with innocent flirtation, but Tom leaves shortly after dinner knowing that he will sail out early the next morning to his post. He doesn't think he'll ever see or hear from Isabel again.

## Part One: Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2 Analysis

"The Light Between Oceans" opens on the most powerful scene in the novel: the moment Tom and Isabel discover the baby. This scene highlights the couple's ultimate choice: return the baby to the mainland or keep her and raise her as their own. Even though the reader already knows that the couple decides to keep the baby, this scene is important because it sets the rest of the novel into motion as Tom and Isabel are forced



to reconcile the repercussions with their fateful decision. The reader doesn't yet know the sad timing of the baby's discovery - Isabel miscarried her third consecutive pregnancy two weeks before the shipwreck - but it's clear that the couple is suffering tremendously and that having a baby would soothe many of their emotional wounds. It is important to note that from the beginning, Tom wanted to alert the proper authorities of the baby's appearance on the island. As the novel progresses, motivation and honesty become two important characteristics in the couple's relationship, and it is only Tom's love for Isabel that prevents him from immediately phoning the police.

The first few chapters of the novel give the reader background into Tom's character. He has recently returned from WWI and suffers with the terrible guilt of being alive while so many of his men died around him. It is sheer luck that Tom should come healthy and alive when so many men weren't as lucky. As a result, he carries a shadow over his soul and emotional scars, just as deep as the physical scars of his comrades, that no one can see. While on the ship to Point Partaguense, Tom easily falls into the company of fellow ex-soldiers coming home from the war. Some of the men suggest a game in which they scale the sides of the boat to peek into the bedchambers of the wealthy women aboard. Tom recognizes that these men need the rush of adrenaline so commonplace during the war, but does not participate. One night, however, he happens upon one of the men breaking into the room of a rich woman. He stops the attack and saves the terrified woman from an unfortunate fate. When Tom tries to explain the attack to the frightened woman, he says, "Being over there changes a man. Right and wrong don't look so different any more to some" (Page 21). This is an interesting sentiment, particularly because it will ring true for Tom himself in just a few short months.

From the onset, Tom seems like a controlled, albeit somewhat sad, character who likes to follow the rules, do his job, and keep his head down. When he meets Isabel Graysmark, something shifts inside him, as if he can finally see the world in color again rather than just black-and-white. Isabel represents the innocence Tom lost during the war, and she will prove to be a complicated counterpart to his rigid sense of order and control.



## Part One: Chapters 3 - 6

### Part One: Chapters 3 - 6 Summary

The next morning, Tom sets off on a captained boat to Janus Rock. He inspects the round lighthouse, and though isolated, finds it cozy. Remnants of the past keeper and his deceased wife litter the house - a rocking chair by the window and knitting overlooking the sea. When Captain Ralph leaves, Tom is overwhelmed by the quiet. He fights against the thoughts of war that flood his mind and threaten to pull him into madness, and focuses on the vastness of the sea.

Months pass as Tom gets used to his daily routine. Although he is completely isolated from humanity, Tom never feels lonely: there is always an odd job or chore around the lighthouse that needs tending to. Plus, he is always thinking about the light, and in a way, she becomes his mistress. Three months after arriving on Janus Rock, Ralph returns from the mainland with Tom's mail. Enclosed is a handwritten letter from Isabel Graysmark sweetly checking to make sure he hasn't been washed away by the sea. Hurriedly, Tom pens a quick reply and sends it back to the mainland with Ralph.

Six months later, Tom learns that his post on Janus Rock has become permanent. During his two-week leave to Portuguese, Tom once again visits the Graysmark family for dinner. Isabel is delighted to see him, and begins planning how they'll spend the next few weeks together. The next day, they spend a lovely day by the pier sharing a picnic lunch, with Isabel telling Tom all about her life growing up as the daughter of the headmistress, and Tom barely saying a word about himself. They flirt throughout the lunch and for the rest of their two weeks together. Before Tom leaves back to Janus Rock, Isabel makes her position quite clear: she would like to marry Tom and move out to the lighthouse with him. Although he doesn't answer her right away, it's clear that Tom is falling in love with Isabel, too. When he returns to the lighthouse, he and Isabel write each other whenever the boat comes in, and a year later, are married when he returns to the mainland.

### Part One: Chapters 3 - 6 Analysis

It is interesting to note that the last keeper, Mr. Trimble, was removed from his post after going insane. His wife had recently passed away and the isolation of Janus Rock clearly got to him. Initially, Tom felt that Janus Rock would be the perfect place for him - alone in the world, which is how he truly feels after being abandoned by his family and witnessing the traumas of the First World War. When Tom is finally alone on the island, after Captain Ralph and his first mate Bluey, have returned to the mainland, Tom struggles to find his breath. Although it feels as if a heavy weight has lifted from him, being away from general population, he is flooded with memories of the war: "He must turn to something solid, because if he didn't, who knew where his mind or his soul could blow way to, like a balloon without a ballast" (Page 40). A few pages earlier, Bluey had



asked to shake Tom's hand because he wanted to shake the hand of a war hero. Tom refused saying, "A bit of brass doesn't make anyone a hero" (Page 36). This unexpected reaction gives the reader deeper insight into Tom's character and his struggle to come to grips with the fact that he is alive while so many other soldiers are dead. This misplaced guilt has made Tom a martyr, and is the reason why he doesn't feel comfortable interacting with other people: they assume he is a war hero, and even though he has saved many men's lives, Tom feels that all the true heroes gave up the lives for the cause. If he's alive, he can't be a true hero. This distinction is important to understanding Tom's character later in the novel. He doesn't believe himself worthy of happiness, which is why he continually puts other people's needs in front of his own, particularly in his relationship with Isabel.

During Tom's courting of Isabel, it should come as no surprise to the reader that Isabel is the determined force in their relationship, not Tom. Isabel is young and naïve. She thinks she will be the key to unlock Tom's emotional mysteries, and life as the only inhabitants of a lighthouse island will be nothing short than romantic. Although Tom tries to resist her, he falls in love with her, perhaps because she represents the love, innocence, and happiness lost to him during the war. He marries Isabel as a way of reclaiming some of those lost emotions, even though he knows, deep down, that they cannot last.

Names play an important role in the novel, and one of the first names to be defined for the reader is Point Partaguese. The French had "chosen that name for this spot between oceans because it meant 'good at sharing' as well as 'dividing'" (Page 56). This name provides subtle foreshadowing to the novel's great debate: whether the infant baby would be better off with her birthmother on Point Partaguese, or on Janus Rock with Tom and Isabel. There is also foreshadowing that there will be a great divide due to this decision. The innocent love between the newlyweds will soon fracture.





# Part One: Chapters 7 - 9

## Part One: Chapters 7 - 9 Summary

After the wedding, Isabel moves in with Tom in the lighthouse. She is thrilled by the possibilities of the place, and intoxicated with the isolation, which is just as well because the newlyweds will have to wait three years before their next shore leave. As time passes, Isabel makes her way around the small island, naming places of interest only notated by symbols on the government maps. She and Tom bathe in the clear pools, hike around the caves, tend to their flock of sheep, and fall desperately in love with each other. One afternoon, Isabel presents Tom with her new map of the island, a government map newly adorned with all of Isabel's handwritten names, hikes, and added information. Tom is a bit concerned with her defacement of government property, but kisses her with appreciation anyway.

A few months later, it's Tom's birthday, and he and Isabel eagerly await the birth of their first child. With Isabel pregnant, memories of his own childhood pool into Tom's head, no matter how desperately he tries to keep them at bay. His mind conjures up lullabies he imagines his mother once sang to him, or the sensation of being rocked in a rocking chair. He recalls finally trying to track his mother down at the age of twenty-one and discovering that she had died only a few weeks before he began his search. The narration jumps between the past and present as Tom recalls the emotion he felt surrounding his mother's death, the death of the men he saw killed during the war, and the miscarriage of the baby Isabel had been carrying. He wonders where the souls are now, and where his own soul will end up someday.

A few months later, Isabel is pregnant again. Tom sits in the lighthouse going over his finances, figuring out how he'll be able to afford the new baby on a lighthouse worker's salary. As he works, his mind drifts back to his own parents, and he's so lost in thought that he doesn't hear Isabel's cries for help from the house. By the time Tom reaches her, it's too late. She is covered in blood as she miscarries the pregnancy yet again. All she can do is cry and apologize to Tom for failing him. As the days pass, Isabel begins drifting into a cloud of depression. All she sees is dust settling in the house. The land surrounding the lighthouse suddenly feels isolating and frightening. She no longer gets joy from the old piano, and refuses to play it until it's been properly tuned. The next time Captain Ralph and Bluey come to deliver the mail, Isabel is shocked to see another man, a stranger, with them. Sure that Tom has called for the doctor since her last miscarriage, Isabel shouts furiously at him and then stomps away. Hours later, when she thinks the mail boat has left again, Isabel returns to find the stranger carefully tuning her beloved piano. Embarrassed, Isabel embraces Tom, Captain Ralph, and even Bluey, kissing them each on the cheek in apology.



## Part One: Chapters 7 - 9 Analysis

Isabel's adornment of the government map is a crucial scene when understanding her relationship with Tom. In this scene, Isabel creates a cute gift for her new husband, but he's mainly concerned with the fact that she's defaced government property. Tom is described as a straightedge, rule following citizen who doesn't like to bend even the smallest rule for his own pleasure. Isabel, on the other hand, does what feels good to her, and doesn't understand Tom's discomfort in breaking the rules. There are other small scenes that depict this balance: Isabel trying to seduce Tom into making love to her inside the lighthouse (a government building), which he refuses, and Isabel serving Tom his lunch in the nude (which Tom views to be a breach of conduct on government land). What makes this scene interesting, however, is that Tom accepts Isabel's map without pointing out the rules she's broken, something he's never done before. In this way, Isabel is slowly beginning to influence Tom's strict code of conduct, setting readers up to accept his weakness later in the novel.

This section is also important because it shows the change overwhelming Isabel in the wake of her multiple miscarriages. When she first moved to Janus Rock, Isabel was over-the-moon with happiness, undertaking creative projects, loving her husband, and brimming over with excitement at the thought of becoming a mother. As the miscarriages occur, Isabel slips further and further into depression. She no longer smiles or laughs with Tom. The nature surrounding Janus Rock suddenly feels isolating and terrifying to her. She misses home yet doesn't want to return as broken wife and failed mother, so she stays with Tom on the island.

During the second miscarriage, Isabel apologizes over and over to Tom. This shows the reader that Isabel views the miscarriages as her fault, something worthy of an apology. It is also interesting to note Isabel's reaction when she (mistakenly) thinks a doctor has come to the island to check up on her. Isabel didn't want anyone to know about her most recent miscarriage, and she clearly cares a great deal what people think of her: she doesn't want word spreading around the mainland that she cannot hold a pregnancy. She lashes out at Tom and doesn't want to hear his explanation. This scene foreshadows the way Isabel will lash out at Tom later in the novel, and it showcases her somewhat selfish mindset and inability to listen to Tom's feelings. This scene also informs the reader of Isabel's extreme self-consciousness. She is very concerned by what others think of her and, as the rest of the novel proves, will stop at nothing to maintain the image of a happy, healthy family. In a way, this false image is as important for Isabel's personal view as for the views of others. Isabel can't bear the thought of her neighbors looking down on her, but what's even worse is the thought of Tom looking down on her. Clearly, Isabel internalizes all her fears and lashes out at those around her as a means of self-protection.



## Part Two: Chapters 10 - 12

### Part Two: Chapters 10 - 12 Summary

In the wake of yet another miscarriage, Isabel is particularly depressed, sitting alone near the cliffs or keeping watch over the tiny grave. When she hears the sounds of a baby crying in the wind, she is sure that it's her imagination. It isn't until Tom shouts for her, shouts that there's a baby in a boat, that Isabel snaps back to reality. She snatches the baby from Tom, rushes it inside, bathes it, and wraps it in a blanket. Isabel is overwhelmed with emotion seeing the tiny baby nestled in her arms, just two weeks after her most recent miscarriage. While Isabel bathes and cuddles the baby, Tom sits in the lighthouse wondering how to phrase the incident in his logbook. The baby had been found, wrapped in a woman's cardigan, in a boat with a dead man. Certainly the man's family would want to know that his body had been found, and the baby's mother would be thrilled to hear that her child had been found.

As he thinks about that mother's loss, he remembers the terrible incident two weeks earlier, when Isabel had gone into labor during her third pregnancy. The baby came two months early, and was stillborn. She went into labor in the kitchen, with Tom standing helplessly next to her as blood seeped into her dress and on the floor. When the baby came, Isabel screamed to hold the little boy even though he was already dead. She refused to be parted from the baby and insisted on bathing him before his burial. Tom watched, brokenhearted, as Isabel lovingly washed the body of their child, their son. When he was clean, she wrapped him in a blanket and rocked him. Tom gave her morphine for the pain, and as she slept, prayed over the child's body before burying him. The next day, he insisted that Isabel write her parents to tell them the news, but Isabel refused. She would wait a few weeks, to give her parents a bit more happiness before breaking their hearts all over again. This was the first time Tom omitted anything from the logbook, but he dismissed the guilt as it was a personal, private matter.

With the arrival of the new baby, Tom struggles with omitting the events from the logbook, but can't yet find a way to phrase them. He goes inside and is startled to see Isabel nursing the baby, her breast milk still flowing after the most recent miscarriage. Isabel's eyes are alight with life, and Tom cannot yet break the spell that this infant has placed over his wife. A sense of unease, foreboding, swells in his stomach as he sees the bliss on Isabel's face, and he gently suggests that she not get too attached to the child. The next day, Isabel is ready for a fight. Boldly, she suggests that they keep the child and raise her as their own. She believes the baby's mother is dead - no mother would let a tiny baby like this out of her sight - and that no one yet knows Isabel has miscarried. She suggests giving the dead man a proper burial, setting the empty boat back adrift, and writing home to say that Isabel delivered a baby girl a few weeks earlier than expected. Tom is flabbergasted. The suggestion is outrageous, ridiculous, they would never get away with it. But Isabel is determined: "How can you be so hard-hearted? All you care about is your rules and your ships and your bloody light" (Page 109). Isabel is so angry that Tom feels she is closer to the brink than ever before.



Tom tries to stay rational over the next few days, but Isabel seems to have an answer to each of his suggestions. Slowly, she convinces him that keeping the baby, creating a lie, is the only way she will ever be happy. With dread, Tom taps out the signal on the lantern: "Baby arrived early stop took us both by surprise stop Isabel recovering well stop no need for medical help stop little girl stop Lucy" (Page 114). Months pass with family and friends send congratulatory gifts to the lighthouse. Isabel is beside herself with happiness, and lavishes her love on Tom, who still can't shake his sense of foreboding. A few months later, Isabel is even more excited when she realizes that she has missed her period. Tom calls for the doctor who delivers the heartbreaking news that as a result of her many miscarriages Isabel is not pregnant but going through early menopause. Any chance of more children is impossible.

## Part Two: Chapters 10 - 12 Analysis

This section returns to the present-tense action of the novel's prologue. This section is the turning point in Isabel and Tom's lives, and the moment when Tom sends the false signal to the mainland is the critical moment: the point of no return. Although it would be difficult to image a rational, rule-following man like Tom to tell such a terrible lie, a lie of such impact, but Stedman does an impressive job depicting his conflict and taking his character on the emotional journey that ultimately leads to his decision to keep the baby. Both characters have interesting psychological make-ups in the wake of Isabel's most recent, and the most heart wrenching, miscarriage. She almost carried this third baby to term, and it was born perfectly formed but stillborn. Tom refers to the stillborn child as an "almost-baby" (Page 100) and recounts the particular sadness of burying the child on Page 103: "He had seen so many deaths. But there was something about the quietness of this one: as though, in the absence of the gunfire and the shouting, he were observing it un-obscured for the first time." In this moment, Tom sees death for what it truly is, and the horrific impact it has on those left behind. After the miscarriage, it is as if Tom places all the guilt, sadness, and condolences from the wartime deaths on Isabel. He sees Isabel as every mother who lost a son during the war, every family member that had a loved one ripped away, and it is more than he can bear. In this moment, Tom feels that he would do anything to take away Isabel's pain, and in a way, ease his own guilt about the war.

Isabel, on the other hand, believes the miraculous boat-child is an answer to her prayers: "I'm suggesting kindness. That's all. Love for a baby. I'm suggesting, sweetheart, that we accept this gift that's been sent to use. How long have we wanted a baby, prayed for a baby" (Page 108). Isabel has such tunnel vision with her desperate want of a child that she cannot see how her grief might impact the mother of this foundling. Because it's easier for her to assume the child's mother is dead, Isabel announces it as though it were gospel. She systematically answers each of Tom's questions in a way that makes it almost impossible for him to question her: if they send the motherless child back to the mainland, it will be sent to an orphanage. Why should they do that to a child they can love as their own? If they applied to adopt they child, they would be denied because no organization would send a child to live on a tiny island without access to doctors or schools. Isabel's arguments are so well crafted that from



whatever angle Tom addresses it, it seems it would be cruel to tell the truth. In moments of emotional chaos, Tom's resolve is weakened while Isabel's is strengthened. She is like a ferocious mother bear that refuses to be parted from her young. As the novel progresses, Tom will learn that Isabel will stop at nothing for the love of her child.

The setup of Tom and Isabel's life on the island is perfect for the lie they construct. Their contact with the outside world is so limited that no one has yet heard of Isabel's miscarriage even though it happened over two weeks ago. Because they live in such isolation, Tom and Isabel's story can't possibly be questioned until they come to the mainland. And even then, they can escape back to the island if any questions are raised. They don't receive the newspaper so they won't hear any news of a missing baby on the mainland, and they can continue life in blissful ignorance until reality is thrust upon them, as will inevitably happen later in the novel. Even though Isabel thinks their story is impossible to refute - the story is set well before the days of DNA testing, - as Tom is preparing the dead man's body for his funeral, he pries a beautiful silver rattle from the boat. The rattle is clearly expensive and handmade, and Tom keeps it as a memento for the baby. In this moment, there should be no doubt in the reader's mind that this rattle will come back to haunt the Sherbournes and their monumental decision.



## Part Two: Chapters 13 - 15

### Part Two: Chapters 13 - 15 Summary

Little Lucy is now a year old and growing like a weed. She is teething, has a sweet tooth, and loves to be read to. One afternoon, Tom takes Lucy up to the lighthouse and she toddles over with a book. Automatically, Tom flips through the book and starts reading to her without registering the words as he reads from the handbook "Instructions to Lightkeepers." He reads aloud rules of conduct and pledges to remain honest that hit a little too close to home. That night, Isabel is feeling a bit more romantic than usual. She thanks Tom for being such a loving husband and doting father. She thanks Tom for giving her Isabel, gratitude that stops Tom in his tracks. The dark sense of foreboding has never left his stomach, although he's been able to ignore it for longer periods of time.

Soon after, Tom is granted shore leave, and he takes his family to Point Partageuse to have Lucy baptized. Isabel seems nervous, although she doesn't admit it, but as soon as she lands on shore, her family's excitement erases any nerves. They shower Lucy in kisses, remarking on how she resembles this great aunt or that. The visit is not all joyful, however, as Isabel's mother, Violet, is still emotionally delicate after the death of her two sons during the war. Seeing Lucy has brought some life back into her eyes, and Isabel reflects on the terrible loss of one's child. While Isabel seems to breathe a sigh of relief that no one has questioned Lucy's parentage, Tom is on edge the entire trip. During a church function, a man walks around asking for volunteers to partake in the annual "Dad's Race." He sees Tom playing with Lucy in the park and asks, "That your baby?" Tom is so startled by the question that he's struck dumb. The man is simply searching out fathers for the race, but Tom receives the question like an accusation. After that, he finds it impossible to relax.

Lucy's christening is pushed back until the day before Tom and Isabel return to the lighthouse because their priest had been sick. As they walk through the church cemetery on the christening day, Isabel's friend Hilda points out the grave of Frank Johannes Roennfeldt and his daughter Grace Ellen. She tells Isabel the terrible story of how there was a misunderstanding between Frank and locals, so he jumped in a rowboat with his infant daughter to escape an angry crowd. There was a terrible storm that night and no one ever saw him again. Frank's heartbroken wife keeps a constant vigil over the grave and has never given up hope that they shipwrecked somewhere and may be alive. The way Hilda tells the story, she makes it sound like poor Mrs. Roennfeldt is crazy, but Isabel knows the truth: she is raising the Roennfeldt baby as her own, and Frank is buried under the lighthouse. Immediately, Tom pulls Isabel aside and angrily demands that they tell the truth. Now, Isabel is mortified at the idea of ruining Lucy's christening and pulls away from him. That night, Tom insists that the charade has gone on long enough. Isabel insists that he isn't thinking straight and that they shouldn't make any hasty decisions. Tom storms out of the house to take a walk,





and when he returns, he hears Isabel's parents discussing how happy they are to have a grandchild: a blessing after so many years of heartache.

## Part Two: Chapters 13 - 15 Analysis

In this section, Tom's character conflict begins to form. He loves Isabel and would do anything to see her happy. He also loves Lucy as if she were his own daughter, so he tries to fight the sense of dread in his heart whenever Lucy smiles at him, kisses him, or calls him Daddy. Stedman does an excellent job of repeatedly reminding the reader that Tom has gone against his basic morality in the pursuit of keeping Isabel happy. Not only does she provide internal dialogue of Tom's struggle (like the sense of foreboding Tom feels each time Lucy kisses him goodnight), she also provides ample external reminders, such as the lighthouse manual Tom inadvertently reads to Lucy one afternoon: "Misconduct, disposition to quarrel, insobriety, or immorality on the part of any keeper ... will render the offender liable to punishment or dismissed" (Pages 124 - 125). At the time, it appears that the worst thing that could happen to Tom would be for him to be relieved of his post, but Tom senses, and perhaps the reader does too, that his loss of position is not the worst threat to his conscience. It is interesting to note that whenever Tom feels pressure to tell the truth, something happens with Isabel that forces him to reconsider. In this chapter, Tom sees how happy Isabel is with her daughter and how that happiness has changed his marriage for the better. He simply cannot face the possibility of causing Isabel further pain after the devastation caused by her series of miscarriages.

When Tom arrives back on Point Partageuse, he realizes that Lucy's presence has healed other broken hearts, like Violet's. This begs the question, whose broken heart is most important? By keeping silent, Tom stands to directly better the lives of two important women in his life, Isabel and Violet, but at the expense of a stranger: Hannah Roennfeldt. This dynamic forms a common conundrum in morality and ethics classrooms: would you kill a complete stranger to save the life of your loved one? On some level, Tom is able to assuage his guilty conscience by convincing himself that Lucy's mother is dead. When he discovers that she is alive and haunted by her daughter's disappearance, something changes in him. He is no longer able to convince himself that his is a victimless crime. In this realization, a fissure forms in his relationship with Isabel. From this moment on, it's clear that Tom and Isabel are different sides of a war that will brew until the truth is finally revealed.



## Part Two: Chapters 16 - 18

### Part Two: Chapters 16 - 18 Summary

Back on Janus Rock, there is palpable tension between Tom and Isabel. Tom is furious with Isabel's stubborn refusal to tell the truth. Laying into Tom, Isabel unleashes a tirade of reasons why it would be futile to tell the truth now. She feels entitled to Lucy because they have gone through so much pain already. That night, she prays for God to grant peace to Hannah Roennfeldt so that she might be able to keep Lucy with a clear conscience. Meanwhile, Hannah Roennfeldt gets her mail the day after Lucy's christening and is shocked to find a handwritten letter, without a return address, that says, "Don't fret for her. The baby is safe. Loved and well cared for, and always will be. Your husband is at peace in God's hands. I hope this brings you comfort. Pray for me" (Page 151). Her mind floods with emotion as she tries to reconcile what she's read: could it be real or is it a cruel prank? Within an hour her father, Septimus Potts, has summoned Sergeant Knuckey, a senior policeman, to investigate. He concludes that the letter is probably a cruel prank and that Hannah shouldn't get her hopes up. To appease his daughter, Septimus issues a two thousand guinea reward for anyone who comes forward with more information.

Time passes and Hannah is unable to forget the note. She thinks back often on her relationship with Frank and how they got to this point: she had met Frank when he worked as a baker in town. They fell in love and wanted to get married, but Septimus refused to let her marry "a Hun" (a derogatory word for Germans). When Hannah refused to leave Frank and married him without her father's consent, Septimus cut her off financially. Septimus refused to attend Hannah's wedding and refused to visit them at their ramshackle cottage on the outskirts of town. Despite her father's disapproval, Hannah was happy, and when she gave birth to her daughter, Grace, she invited her father to the christening. Surprising everyone, Septimus showed up and immediately fell in love with Grace, his first grandchild. Their relationship began to mend and even though Hannah refused to accept her father's money herself, she allowed him to shower baby Grace with gifts. On the horrible day that she lost Frank and Grace, Hannah and her family had been walking down the street in town when a mob of drunken townsfolk turned on Frank for his German heritage. They chased him to the waters edge, and when Hannah fell down during the commotion, she urged him to save the baby. He jumped in a rowboat and frantically paddled into the ocean hoping for safety just long enough until the mob settled down. Hannah never saw her husband or daughter again.

Meanwhile, back on Janus Rock, the anger between Tom and Isabel slowly ebbs away as time passes. Lucy begins to walk, talk, and imagine beautiful stories about her life at the lighthouse. Tom continues to feel torn between his love for Lucy and the unease he feels about his family's delicate situation. He is also torn between the longing he feels for Isabel, and the invisible wedge between them.





## Part Two: Chapters 16 - 18 Analysis

In the wake of the realization that Hannah Roennfeldt is alive, Isabel's mode of manipulation changes from happiness to guilt: "Do you think it's fair that we lost three babies? Do you think it's fair that Alfie and Hugh are buried thousands of miles away and you're walking around without a scratch? Of course it's not fair, Tom, not fair at all! We just have to take what life dishes up" (Page 147). Previously, Tom didn't want to take away Isabel's happiness at being a mother, and when she sees that the truth trumps her happiness, Isabel must change her tactic. She targets the heart of Tom's guilty conscience: his guilt at surviving the war when so many good men did not, and manipulates that to her advantage. What she doesn't know is that Tom has already taken the first step toward relieving his guilt. He has contacted Hannah Roennfeldt to tell her that her daughter is alive. At the time, Tom might have thought that he was trying to give Hannah peace, but it's clear that subconsciously, he was opening the door for Lucy to be returned to her birthmother.

Immediately, Hannah's family bands together to search for more clues. Because the case is so unique, the police initially think that Tom's letter (although they don't know who penned it) is a cruel prank. Deep down, Hannah knows that her daughter is still alive, which is why she never gave up looking for her, and she will not stop searching until they are reunited. It is interesting to note that even though a year has passed, she still thinks of Grace as a newborn.



## Part Two: Chapters 19 - 21

### Part Two: Chapters 19 - 21 Summary

Captain Ralph and Bluey arrive on Janus Rock for their quarterly delivery of mail and supplies from the mainland. Bluey is full of questions for Tom about marriage, and it seems that he has met a girl he would like to propose to. Although Tom is happy for Bluey, he struggles to answer his questions. Later that afternoon, Tom's mind is flooded with the same dark emotions he has felt so many times since learning of Hannah Roennfeldt. Even though he wants to tell the truth, he knows he could never betray Isabel, not after she gave up everything to live in isolation with him. Later, when Tom opens his mail, he finds a handwritten letter from his father, Edward Sherbourne. He hasn't spoken to the man in years, and the sight of his father's handwriting startles Tom. The letter has been forwarded all over the continent in search of him, written after Tom enlisted for the war. Emotions of his childhood flood back to him as Tom remembers telling his father about the motorcar outside his house as a child, and the horrific result of his tale-telling. Enclosed in the letter is a locket that once belonged to Tom's mother - a sight that nearly brings Tom to tears.

Soon after, Tom takes Lucy for a walk around Janus Rock. When he isn't looking, Lucy scampers atop her father's grave. When Tom sees her, he shouts in shock, frightening the girl. In only took a moment, but Lucy had summoned up Frank Roennfeldt's ghost, so that every time Tom looked at his daughter, he saw Frank. Unable to shake the eeriness, Tom turns to his bible. Flipping through the pages, he reads a few verses aloud but finds no comfort there either. The next time Ralph and Bluey arrive, Tom attempts to talk to Ralph about his guilt but balks at the last moment. He says he feels guilty about all the men he killed during the war, another revelation that takes him by surprise. That night, he insists to Isabel yet again that they tell Hannah Roennfeldt the truth, and again to no avail.

A few months later, the Sherbourne family is invited to Point Partageuse to celebrate the 40-year anniversary of Janus Rock. Everyone who has helped build the lighthouse and its reputation is invited to a lavish party on the mainland, and the family happily agrees to attend. As soon as they arrive, a pale, gaunt woman approaches Tom and asks if she remembers him: many years ago, he saved her when she was attacked on a boat headed toward Point Partageuse. Tom is shocked to see the woman again, especially because she appears to have aged terribly: she looks miserable, as if the event had ruined her life. Tom nearly vomits when the woman extends her hand and introduces herself as Hannah Roennfeldt. At just that moment, Isabel and Lucy arrive and Tom watches in horror as Hannah makes eye contact with Lucy. There is no recognition in her eyes, just a wistful longing. Isabel flinches as Hannah reaches out her long fingers to stroke Lucy's face and for a moment, considers thrusting the child into Hannah's arms. She resists the urge to snatch Lucy and run, but quickly makes an excuse to leave, nausea churning her stomach. Before Isabel leaves, she asks Tom where he and Hannah had met, and Hannah retells the story of the attack and Tom's gallant rescue.



Quickly changing topics, Hannah asks Tom he's ever heard of ships rescuing stranded boats. Seeing the look on Isabel and Tom's faces, Hannah's sister, Gwen, makes an excuse for Hannah's awkward question, but it's clear that irrevocable damage has been done.

## Part Two: Chapters 19 - 21 Analysis

In this section, Tom is given some closure in his personal life. It is interesting to note the parallels in Tom and his father's lives, particularly when Tom questions his father's silence for so many years. Although never explicitly stated, it's suggested that Tom's mother had an affair and that Tom inadvertently informed his father of the affair as a child when he admitted to seeing another man's car at the home. Tom's father moved out shortly after and his relationship with Tom fell apart. Now as an adult looking back on his father's life, Tom sees how his father was wounded by the woman he loved and was never able to recover. There are two parallels being formed here. First, Tom is able to forgive his father because he recognizes the way marital problems can devastate a relationship. The second parallel is that he questions whether Isabel will ever be able to forgive him or recover from the wound should he tell the truth about Lucy's parentage. Despite his qualms about hurting Isabel, it's clear that Tom's guilt is intensifying and that his struggle to stay silent is intensifying.

In perhaps the most disturbing scene in the novel, Tom is forced to come face-to-face with Hannah Roennfeldt at the lighthouse celebration. When faced with the destruction they have helped cause in Hannah's life, both Isabel and Tom momentarily consider shouting out the truth. It's interesting to note that Hannah's appearance is described much like a ghost. She has pale skin, sunken eyes, and a gaunt figure. In a way, she is like the walking dead, and this recognition haunts Tom, particularly after "summoned" the ghost of Frank Roennfeldt earlier in the section. In the war, at least death was swift. In Hannah's case, Tom knows he is drawing out her pain and in this moment, he is watching her suffer. Had he been faced with such torment on the front, Tom would have dispatched the suffering soldier, but the only way Tom can relieve Hannah's pain, especially since he gave her the hope that Grace was still alive, will be to tell her the truth.

It is also interesting to know that Hannah immediately recognizes Tom as the man who saved her life on the ship all those years ago. Hannah looks at Tom as a hero, when in reality, she should probably have feared him more than her attacker that night. The devastation Tom has caused in her life is far greater than what he might have saved her from. Keen readers should recall Tom's many statements about why he isn't a hero ("A bit of brass doesn't make anyone a hero" Page 36). Tom's guilt is his motivating characteristic, and now that he's seen the pain he's caused, readers shouldn't doubt that whether Isabel agrees with his decision, Tom is going to tell Hannah the truth.



## Part Two: Chapters 22 - 24

### Part Two: Chapters 22 - 24 Summary

When they arrive home from the party, Tom explodes with anger demanding to know how much longer Isabel plans to torment poor Hannah Roennfeldt. Cornered, Isabel turns on Tom, suggesting that he had an affair with Hannah Roennfeldt, which is why he is so keen to send Lucy back, ruining Isabel's life. Tom will not be moved: "You saw what she's become. That's our doing ... I saw things in the war, Izz. Things I've never told you and never will ... I swore I'd never make anyone suffer after that, not if I could help it" (Page 209). Violet, Isabel's mother, interrupts the fight to say that Lucy is missing. Suddenly, all the energy in the room morphs into determination to find Lucy immediately: living on Janus Rock, she is unfamiliar with the dangers of the Australian outback. Everyone searches for an hour, but it is Tom who finally finds the girl playing with a nest of scorpions. After the rescue, all thoughts of Hannah Roennfeldt are erased from Isabel's mind and she icily refuses to engage in any further conversation with Tom about the topic.

The next night, as Hannah Roennfeldt lies in bed, she hears the metal scrape of her mailbox. She rushes from her bed hoping to see whomever places the note, but by the time she arrives, the sender has vanished. Inside the mailbox is another note asking for prayer and her daughter's silver rattle. Now, Hannah knows for certain that the letters are not a prank: her daughter is alive and she is hell bent on finding her. Immediately, Sergeant Knuckey distributes photographs of the rattle asking if anyone has ever seen it before. In his room, Bluey runs his fingers over the photograph knowing that he's seen it before. Three thousand guineas would certainly help him start a new life with Kitty Kelly, the girl he wants to marry, but he doesn't know whether he can betray Tom. In the next scene, Tom watches from Janus Rock as the police boats approach, and he immediately knows what's happening: a weight is being lifted off his chest.

The police separate Isabel and Tom for questioning. Isabel cannot comprehend how Hannah Roennfeldt got the rattle, and it is a sickening realization that Tom must have sent it. Hatred boils her blood and she struggles to comprehend Tom's heinous betrayal. Rushing out the police boat, pulling her hair, Isabel screams, "What in God's name have you done to us? What have you done to Lucy" (Page 226). The next morning, Tom says goodbye to the lighthouse and is loaded on the boat with Isabel and Lucy, headed back to shore to await his fate.

### Part Two: Chapters 22 - 24 Analysis

On some level, Isabel must recognize that Tom is tipping perilously toward the point of no return, which is why her emotional manipulations become more dangerous and wild. It's unclear whether Isabel truly believes that Tom has had an affair with Hannah (and wants to send Lucy back so he can raise the girl with Hannah) or if she is accusing Tom



as a way of keeping him silent. For a moment, it seems as if Tom has made headway with Isabel and that she is actually considering returning Lucy, but when the girl goes missing and Isabel must face the emotion of having her daughter ripped away from her, whatever progress that has been made vanishes. It is interesting to note that when Tom finds Lucy, she is playing with a nest of scorpions. This symbolizes the way Lucy's innocence, and in a way her life, are endangered by Tom and Isabel's decisions. The fact that she is unharmed, however, might be foreshadowing for Lucy's ultimate success at the end of the novel. Although the life she has always known is endangered, she will survive.

Perhaps directly because of Lucy's escape that night, Tom visits Hannah's mailbox once again, this time providing further proof that her daughter is alive. There should be no question that once Tom delivered the rattle, he knew that Lucy would be taken away. The rattle - a one-of-a-kind gift purchased by Septimus Potts - provides irrefutable proof that someone has held Grace since her disappearance. In this moment, Bluey's role in the novel becomes clear. It's certain that neither Tom or Isabel would turn themselves in (and they likely would never see the photographs of the rattle distributed throughout town) and Captain Ralph is likely too close of a friend to Tom to turn him in, so it must be Bluey: a young man with a desperate need for the reward who had access to Lucy's rattle and enough distance from Tom and Isabel to turn them in. Interestingly, it is Bluey's mother who persuades him to tell the truth, collect the money, marry his girlfriend, and move on with his life.

When the police arrive on Janus Rock, the fissure between Tom and Isabel bursts open. Tom feels relief and Isabel feels contempt. It is a sickening realization that Tom has betrayed her, and Isabel will not fully recover from this devastation for the rest of her life. It is highly symbolic that the police arrive during a terrible storm. The weather throughout the novel adds to the novel's dramatic tone. The Sherbournes must not only face the weather that threatens to destroy their lives, but the emotional "storm" that will ravage them in the wake of Tom's arrest.



## Part Three: Chapters 25 - 27

### Part Three: Chapters 25 - 27 Summary

As soon as the Sherbournes reach the mainland, Tom is officially arrested. Lucy, confused and frightened, begs Tom to pick her up. It is a heartbreaking scene and Isabel coldly snaps, "Is this what you wanted?" Tom is detained in the local jail while Isabel and Lucy are brought in for questioning. Isabel is outraged when one of the officers rips Lucy away from her for a doctor's examination despite the child's screams. In his cell, Tom hears all the anguish. After the examination, Lucy is brought back to Isabel just long enough for her to say goodbye, although it isn't much of a goodbye with all of Isabel's cries and protests. Once again, without any explanation to Lucy about what's going on, the officer pulls her away, marches down a hallway, and drops her in the room where an anxious Hannah Roennfeldt waits.

Meanwhile, another officer phones the Graysmark house and advises them to come down to the police station. Isabel's parents are flabbergasted to hear that Tom has been arrested and that Lucy has been taken away. They simply cannot fathom the truth: that Tom and Isabel stole a baby; that Lucy is not their true granddaughter. With nothing left to do, and since Isabel refuses to answer any of the police's questions, the Graysmarks take her home. Isabel's mind floats as she lies in her childhood bed, mind racing with memories. She has a sick feeling that Tom has been planning this betrayal all along, or that perhaps he plans to raise Lucy with Hannah Roennfeldt, a woman she assumes Tom is having an affair with: why else wouldn't he tell her about meeting Hannah all those years ago? She cannot fathom that Tom would betray her so cruelly, taking away the one thing she loves. With that, Isabel makes up her mind: "Tom deserved to suffer for what he had done. And he himself had handed her the weapons" (Page 243).

Point Partaguese hadn't seen this much scandal in years. Newspapers were abuzz with the story of the kidnapped baby and the murdered man. Meanwhile, at Hannah's house, Lucy hasn't stopped screaming for days. The whole house has been decked-out with child friendly furnishings, but Lucy won't partake in anything. She screams constantly for her Mama. She refuses to let Hannah comfort her and refuses to respond to her new name, Grace. Hannah is mortified that her daughter is so violently opposed to her, and ashamed that she cannot make the girl smile.

At the police station, Isabel is newly motivated. If she can't have Lucy back, at least she can ruin the life of the man who snatched her away, even if that man is her own husband. She sits down for questioning and this time, rather than playing mute, states that she can't be sure whether Frank Roennfeldt had been alive when his dinghy washed up on shore, and that she doesn't know what Tom is capable of. When word gets back to Tom that Isabel has suggested he might be a murdered, Tom is overwhelmed with emotion. Initially, he can't believe she would lie, but then he remembers the night when she stood on the edge of the cliff on Janus Rock, after the last miscarriage, threatening to throw herself off. He knows that Isabel is unpredictable



when faced with grief, and whatever punishment comes his way, whether by lie or truth, he pushed Isabel to.

Captain Ralph visits Tom in prison and demands to know what happened out on Janus Rock. He refuses to believe that Tom is truly the one to blame and that he pushed Isabel to keep the baby she wanted to return. Because Tom doesn't want to implicate Isabel in the crime, he simply says, "I owe her this," (Page 260). Ralph isn't the only one giving Tom a rough time about his story. His lawyer also wants Tom to fess up about Isabel's involvement because he thinks it would get Tom a lesser sentence. Interestingly, perjury holds the same punishment (seven years hard labor) as kidnapping.

## Part Three: Chapters 25 - 27 Analysis

This section sets up the emotional conclusion of the novel. Now that the external conflict (whether or not the Sherbournes would admit the truth of Lucy's parentage) has concluded, Stedman creates two strong emotional conflicts: Isabel versus Tom, and Hannah versus Lucy. These two relationships have been deeply wounded by the years of lies and deception. Before the novel can come to a close, both relationships will run the emotional gamut. Will Isabel be able to forgive Tom for his betrayal? Will Hannah be able to repair her relationship with her wounded daughter? It was previously noted that throughout their years of separation, Grace remained an infant in Hannah's mind, so when a five-year-old girl, whom Hannah barely recognizes as her own daughter, is returned to her, Hannah has absolutely no idea how to relate to her. Hannah never stopped loving her daughter, and on some level, she assumed that Grace would never stop loving her. She never considered the fact that Grace could have been forming bonds with other people, or calling another woman "Mama." As a result, she isn't expecting Grace to be afraid of her and certainly isn't prepared for the girl to hate her. Grace's constant emotional outbursts are an added injury to Hannah. Not only has she missed out on the first five years of her daughter's life, she has no idea how to make her child happy.

Since returning to Point Partageuse, Isabel thinks about Lucy constantly. She wonders where she is, what she's doing, whether Hannah knows the foods Lucy likes and the things that frighten her. She wonders what time the little girl is being put to bed, and what nursery rhymes help lull her to sleep. She replays memories of her daughter over and over while still refusing to speak to anyone about Tom. It's interesting to note that most of the characters involved in Tom's case, including Captain Ralph, refuse to believe that Tom is solely responsible for Lucy's kidnapping. Their insistence that Tom tell the truth highlights how far Tom is willing to go to protect Isabel, and hints to the reader that the truth will likely be revealed, whether Tom wants to admit it or not.





## Part Three: Chapters 27 - 29

### Part Three: Chapters 27 - 29 Summary

Hannah Roennfeldt continues to struggle to build a relationship with Grace (Lucy). She become accustomed to stares from strangers after Frank and the baby went missing, but now that Grace shrieks and screams constantly, the stares are endless. She brings the frightened girl to the doctor, who says that Hannah would be best to tell Grace that her parents (Tom and Isabel) had to go away. He feels certain that if enough time passes, Grace will forget about them altogether. Tensions escalate when Hannah overhears Grace playing with her dolls, named Daddy, Mummy, and Lucy running away from a mean witch. Losing her temper, Hannah snatches the dolls away, smacks Grace's hand, and tells her that, "That's enough of those silly games" (Page 278). Immediately overwhelmed with remorse, Hannah tries to apologize but it's no use. Painfully, Grace doesn't even cry after the spanking, she simply stares at Hannah with a blank expression.

Bluey visits Tom in prison, desperate for forgiveness. He feels terrible that Tom is imprisoned and that Lucy has been taken away, but he had to follow his heart. He has refused to accept the 3,000-guinea reward for turning Tom in, which Tom says is foolish. He forgives Bluey because contacting the police was the right thing to do. Tom takes responsibility for his mistakes and wouldn't want anyone else to become entangled in his crime. After his short meeting, Bluey visits Isabel to tell him what a terrible state Tom is in and to deliver his message: "I understand." Isabel won't listen to Bluey's pleas to visit Tom, and promptly shows him the door. Later, she replays more memories of Lucy playing on the island, and of her loving relationship with Tom. She bursts into tears and her mother, Violet, has a difficult time calming her.

As the painful days between Hannah and Lucy lengthen into weeks, Hannah's sister Grace suggests that Hannah take Grace to see Isabel Sherbourne, if only for a sense of closure. She understands Hannah's hatred toward Isabel, but also recognizes Grace's desperate need to see her "mother." Hannah is horrified by the idea, but as the night progresses, it sinks deeper into her thoughts. Everyone in her family has banded together to help Grace adjust. Even Septimus has begun taking Grace on special play dates, like exploring the woods around his mill. He tells Grace that one day, all this land will be Hannah's and after that, it will all be hers. This captures the little girl's imagination and for the first time in a long time, she smiles.

### Part Three: Chapters 27 - 29 Analysis

All the characters continue to struggle in the wake of Lucy (Grace's) return. By fully taking the blame for what happened on Janus Rock, Tom has found a new way of absolving his guilt. Whereas before, he maintained the lies to keep Isabel happy, now he lies to protect Isabel from further pain. Ever since leaving the war, Tom has felt





imprisoned by his guilt, which is one of the main reasons why he chose to start work as a lighthouse keeper isolated from the rest of the world. Living in a jail cell is just another form of isolation for Tom, which he welcomes if it offers Isabel a modicum of happiness. Tom is committed to Isabel no matter how violently she lashes out at him. Because of his participation on the front, Tom feels that he deserves whatever pain comes his way. It is a masochistic way of living: Tom doesn't feel that he deserved to live through the war and now he tortures himself to pay penance for his crimes. Throughout this ordeal, Tom has remained noble but not necessarily honorable, which makes him a wonderfully complex character, never fully good or fully bad. Most of the novel's characters exhibit this wonderful complexity, which is one of the main reasons why the novel has been so successful: the characters are relatable and believable.

Tom delivers his first emotional message to Isabel: "I understand." In a way, Tom is absolving Isabel for testifying against him as long as such lies bring her comfort. On the other hand, he must know that the message will affect Isabel on a deeper level - there is no doubt in anyone's mind that she once loved Tom - which leads the reader to question whether Tom is manipulating Isabel into telling the truth. Although Tom likely isn't intentionally emotionally blackmailing Isabel, those involved with Tom's case hope that hearing of Tom's miserable condition will be enough to persuade Isabel to take responsibility for her crimes. Although Isabel dismisses Bluey immediately, she later bursts into tears when thinking about Janus Rock. It's clear that Isabel is emotionally torn between Lucy and Tom, and eventually, she must make a decision between them.

Meanwhile, Grace's constant state of depression and gloom has started to affect the Potts family. Gwen suggest that Hannah allow Isabel back into Grace's life, a thought that horrifies Hannah. As the novel progresses, however, Hannah must come to terms with the fact that her love for Grace's memory is not enough to repair her relationship with the little girl. There may come a time when she is forced to ask Isabel for help, no matter how painful, because it will be in Grace's best interest. Grace's smile at the end of this section assures readers that the little girl is back where she belongs, with her loving birth family. If she is given enough time, eventually her wounds will heal.



## Part Three: Chapters 30 - 32

### Part Three: Chapters 30 - 32 Summary

Point Partageuse only has so many citizens, so it is only a matter of time before Isabel Sherbourne and Hannah Roennfeldt run into each other. One afternoon, the women both stop into Mouchmore's Haberdashery to purchase sewing supplies. As luck would have it, all the town gossips seem to be out as well, and they witness the monumentally awkward moment when Grace, seeing Isabel in the distance, screeches "Mama!" and throws herself into Isabel's arms. As Hannah tries to wrench Grace away from Isabel, Isabel shouts and hisses that Hannah is hurting the little girl. All the women, including Hannah's sister Gwen, are shaken by the encounter. When they get home, Hannah does her best to console Grace, but the little girl simply doesn't understand why she can't be with Isabel. Gwen sees the pain Grace is going through and vows to do something about it. The next afternoon, she sneaks Grace to the park where she knows Isabel whiles away her afternoons. She permits a short, emotional reunion and promises that as long as everyone keeps the secret hidden, she'll bring Grace back again. On the way back home, Gwen reminds Grace how terribly important it is to keep the meeting with Mama Isabel secret. Without speaking, the little girl nods her promise.

A few days later, Hannah overhears Grace playing with her dolls. One doll tells the other how important it is to keep a secret. She urges the little doll to "come with Auntie Gwen when Hannah is asleep." Horrified, Hannah realizes what has been going on, and she demands to hear the truth from Grace. She tricks Grace into revealing her secret and immediately confronts Gwen about her betrayal. Gwen is beside herself, half guilty for her lies and half heartbroken for her devastated niece. She does what she can to convince Hannah that allowing Grace and Isabel to see each other is for the best, but Hannah clings to the doctor's diagnosis, that in time, Grace will forget her first parents.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Spragg, a cold-hearted investigator hoping to use the Sherbourne case as cause for a promotion, questions Tom in his cell. He is aggressive and cruel, refusing to believe that Isabel had nothing to do with the plot to raise Lucy on the island, and through threats and intimidation, he aims to get the truth from Tom. He mocks Tom's heroics and likens him to a fallen hero, clearly letting him know that he had better be willing to sacrifice everything, even his life, for a woman who hates him: "It's hard to be a hero when you're swinging from the rope" (Page 296). When he learns that he is going to be sent away for his first hearing later that week, he sends a letter with Ralph to Isabel. Deep down, Isabel wants to tear the letter open and read Tom's words, but she won't allow herself to be swayed by his emotions. She hides the letter in her drawer and swears she will never open it. Days pass and Isabel spends every waking moment in the park hoping for another glimpse of Lucy. When Gwen doesn't reappear, Isabel's thoughts grow desperate. She considers the many opportunities for her to kidnap Lucy and run away with her.



Shortly after, Tom is surprised when Hannah Roennfeldt pays him a visit in the prison. First, Hannah demands to know whether Tom is telling the truth: is the only one to blame for Lucy/Grace's fate? Next, she wants to know whether Tom is sorry for his crime. Finally, without being able to look Tom in the eyes, Hannah shakily asks Tom whether he killed Frank. Tom swears that he is the only one to blame, that he is sorer than Hannah will ever know, and that Frank was dead when his boat washed up on shore. When Tom finishes talking, Hannah picks up her purse and leaves, leaving it unclear whether she is satisfied with his answers. When she gets home, Hannah makes the sickening realization that Grace is missing.

## Part Three: Chapters 30 - 32 Analysis

The scene in the haberdashery is reminiscent of the biblical King Solomon story, in which two women claim to be the mother of the same baby. Wise King Solomon suggests that the women each hold one of the baby's arms and pull. Whoever tears the baby from the other woman's arms will be named its mother. One woman readily agrees to the challenge but the other balks, saying she will give up the child before she hurts it. In this moment, King Solomon recognizes the baby's true mother as the woman that would protect the child rather than compete for it. When faced with each other, both Hannah and Isabel pull on Lucy, physically and emotionally. Both women, although neither would admit it, are more concerned with "winning" her than protecting her emotions. Isabel unleashes a violent tirade against Hannah's mothering skills while Hannah flatly refuses to let Isabel have any contact with the little girl.

The only person who seems to be thinking clearly about Grace's emotions is Gwen. When she sees how traumatized Grace is, she arranges a short meeting with Isabel just so Lucy can properly say goodbye. It's interesting to note the different methods of treatment for child trauma compared to modern methods. The doctor Hannah takes Grace to simply tells her to lie to the girl and eventually, Grace will completely forget Isabel and Tom Sherbourne. In today's society, almost all adoptions are open, which means that the child has access to their birthparents before they turn 18, and most children are given a transition time when being moved from home to home in an effort to create a less traumatic experience for the child. In a way, Gwen Potts is before her time and her effort to reunite Lucy and Isabel is admirable even if it comes to an emotionally devastating result (Hannah once again feels betrayed).

In an interesting turn, Hannah visits Tom in prison. It's clear that even though her daughter has been returned to her, she still has a sense of unease. She hopes that speaking to Tom will bring her closure, but when she confronts him for his crimes, she finds herself unable to hate him. Perhaps she thought that hating Tom would give her a sense of clarity or motivation in her life, but when she leaves, it appears that she feels more confused than ever. Perhaps Sergeant Knuckey's words have resonated with her and she is considering dropping the case against him.



## Part Three: Chapters 33 - 37

### Part Three: Chapters 33 - 37 Summary

For the first time in the novel, Chapter 33 follows Lucy as she runs away from Hannah's house in search of Mama and Daddy. She isn't sure how she will find them, but when she does, they will hug and kiss and jump on the first boat back to Janus Rock where they will keep her safe forever. The rest of the chapter stretches out the drama and tension as the entire town bands together to search for the missing girl. From his cell, Tom hears the cries for "Lucy!" and "Grace!" and feels utterly helpless. Hannah spends the entire search kneeling by her bed, praying for Grace's safe return. A new emotion begins to stir in her heart as she questions whether she can truly keep her daughter safe.

After Grace is found sleeping in a boat on the shore and safely returned to Hannah, Isabel requests a meeting with Captain Ralph. She admits her feelings of failure and her heartbreak over losing Lucy. Since leaving Janus Rock, Isabel has refused to share her thoughts with anyone, and now that she has decided to open up, everything comes pouring out. Ralph listens patiently to her emotional ramblings before finally offering his advice: "God knows what got into the pair of you out there. There's been lie upon lie, all with the best intentions. But it's gone far enough ... Tom's your husband. For better or worse, in sickness and in health ... I reckon this is your last chance" (Page 329 - 330). Ralph's words have a profound impact on Isabel and she leaves his house with a new sense of direction. Later that night, however, Hannah unexpectedly knocks on Isabel's door. It's clear that she's exhausted and emotional when she tells Isabel that, if she promises to testify against Tom and ensure the maximum penalty for his crimes, she will allow Grace to come back and live with Isabel. Isabel can't believe Hannah's offer, yet she knows, almost immediately, that the choice is too cruel to make: lose her husband or lose her daughter. She rushes to her bedroom and tears open Tom's letter, searching for a single word that will perpetuate her hatred toward him, but she finds none. Tom's letter is nothing but supportive and loving, a pardon for her condemnation and false testimony against him. With shaking hands and tears in her eyes, Hannah knows she has made her decision.

A storm ravages Point Partageuse springing leaks throughout the city, including the jail cell where Tom whiles away the hours waiting for his sentence. Sergeant Knuckey allows Tom to sit in the police waiting room rather than the cell in case the ceiling collapses. In the distance, Tom sees a solitary figure fighting against the storm, walking steadily, without an umbrella, toward the police station. Even from a distance and through the haze of a downpour, Tom recognizes Isabel and his heart nearly leaps from his chest. When she reaches the station, Isabel throws herself, weeping, into Tom's arms murmuring apologies. She turns to Sergeant Knuckey and emotionally confesses that she'd lied to him. Frank Roennfeldt was dead when his boat washed up on shore, and that everything that had happened afterward was her fault, not Tom's. When news of Isabel's confession reaches Hannah Roennfeldt later that afternoon, she is more



ashamed than angry: Isabel had been lying to her all along, and she believed her. When Sergeant Knuckey suggests that Tom and Isabel have paid dearly for their crimes (by losing Lucy) and that Tom doesn't deserve a full sentence, Hannah completely loses her temper: "I'm sick of this! I'm sick of being pushed around, of having my life ruined by the whims of other people" (Page 340). Despite her tantrum, Knuckey's words have clearly impacted Hannah, and after he leaves, she considers a conversation she once had with Frank in which he urged her that "We always have a choice. All of us" (Page 343).

Six months pass before Tom and Hannah are reunited. They have met up so Tom can thank Hannah for speaking up, keeping Isabel from being sent to prison. Tom spent six months in jail but was then released on clemency. After the trial, Isabel had gone to a hospital in Albany to recover and is now on complete bed rest. When Hannah goes home after her meeting with Tom, she is greeted by her happy, loving daughter, now called Lucy-Grace. Tom, on the other hand, travels to the nursing home to visit with Isabel. Although nearly a year has passed since Lucy was taken from them, Isabel has not recovered. She is depressed, vulnerable, and still angry with her husband. Despite her hostility, Tom honors his wedding vows and promises to love and support Isabel until the day she dies.

Chapter 37, the final chapter in the novel, takes place nearly twenty years after in Hopetoun, a port town 400 miles away from Partageuse. Isabel has just died and Tom prepares himself for a life apart from his wife. In the wake of her death, he recounts how their lives had changed since moving to Hopetoun in the hopes of moving on from their lives with Lucy in a city where few people know their history. Two days after the funeral, a young woman stops by the house with her three-month old baby. She introduces herself as Lucy-Grace Rutherford. Tom and Lucy-Grace spend a warm afternoon catching-up, and Lucy-Grace is sorry to hear that she hasn't come in time to reconnect with Isabel. Before she died, Isabel wrote a letter to Lucy asking for forgiveness and to let the girl know that she was always loved. She also left behind a few embroidered handkerchiefs, the girl's baptismal outfit, and the hand drawn map of Janus Rock. When Lucy-Grace leaves, she asks Tom to keep the keepsakes in his possession so she has a reason to come back and visit with him again. When she's gone, Tom stares off into the sunset and "watches the ocean surrender to night, knowing that the light will reappear" (Page 362).

## Part Three: Chapters 33 - 37 Analysis

In the wake of Grace's second attempt at running away from home, both Isabel and Hannah finally question the emotional impact their choices have had on the little girl's life, and both blame themselves for her apparent torment. When Grace is found trying to escape back to Janus Rock, the pain is too much for Hannah, who, like the mother in the biblical King Solomon story, relents possession of her daughter in order to protect her: Hannah would rather see Grace happy than keep her against her will. In the novel's final conflict, Hannah's selfless decision finally forces Isabel to make the ultimate decision: a life with Lucy or a life with Tom. If she keeps silent about her participation on Janus Rock, Tom will be put to death, Sergeant Spragg has seen to that, but if she tells



the truth, she will lose her daughter forever. It should come as no surprise that Isabel is finally roused from her daydreams long enough to come to Tom's defense, yet many readers will question whether her final sacrifice (giving up Lucy) is enough to redeem her for all the previous pain she caused.

When Lucy Grace visits Tom in the novel's final chapter, it's interesting to note how restrained she is around him. She greets him as she might a long lost acquaintance, with stiff yet kind formality. While she cries when she reads Isabel's letter, she remains composed signaling to the reader that she has had a happy life with Hannah and that she is not seeking love or acceptance from an outside source. Clearly, she does not view Isabel as her mother, so the letter must strike her as somewhat strange. In a way, this reaction also gives Tom hope. Although Isabel was ruined by her guilt, it did not affect the next generation. Only Tom and Isabel were left to suffer the damages of their choices. Lucy Grace was able to move on and live a happy life away from their decisions. It seems as if Lucy Grace has come to visit Tom out of a sense of obligation rather than personal curiosity. She does not take the keepsakes with her, which shows her desire to keep this life separate from her own.

In a way, it is fitting that Isabel should die from cancer at the end of the novel because the cancer, which is described as "nibbling the days from her" (Page 354) is highly symbolic of the guilt, lies, and even depression, that controlled her life. Although it is a sad end, Isabel has joined Tom in a life ravaged by guilt. Therefore, it is somewhat comforting for Tom to look out over the sunset on the novel's last page and know that the light will return. This final sentence symbolizes the way sun battles through any storm. Lucy Grace has found a way to live a happy life after fighting through the shadows of her dark childhood. A new life, baby Christopher, is born at the same time another life, Isabel's, is lost. It is also fitting that Tom and Isabel should move to a town named after Hope, although Isabel never fully recovered from her loss.





# Characters

## Tom Sherbourne

Tom Sherbourne is a World War One veteran who leaves the service and becomes a lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock in Australia. When Tom leaves the army, he is overwhelmed with guilt for being alive. So many of Tom's comrades died in battle that it doesn't make any sense that Tom should still be alive. Even though Tom is a war hero who saved many of his men, he refuses to talk about what he saw during the war and refuses to let himself feel happiness, martyring himself to their memories. When Tom leaves service, he thinks working as a lighthouse keeper will be the perfect job because it allows him to live in isolation, away from the general population and their praise for his war efforts. Before Tom assumes his post, however, he meets a beautiful young woman named Isabel Graysmark who changes everything. Isabel is so full of life and has such an innocent love for the world, that Tom cannot stop himself from falling in love with her. Despite his better judgment, Tom marries Isabel and takes her to live with him on Janus Rock. At first, the couple lives happily as newlyweds, but when Isabel miscarries three consecutive pregnancies, tensions grow between the couple. One fateful afternoon, the couple discovers a screaming baby aboard a shipwrecked boat. Tom insists that they call the police and report the missing child, Isabel convinces him to let her raise the baby as their own. For all of his life, Tom has been a law-abiding, rule-following citizen who follows orders and expectations for a living. For a moment, the guilt Tom feels for ripping Isabel away from her family, moving her to the isolate lighthouse, and failing to support her properly during her pregnancies gets the better of him, and he allows Isabel to keep the baby. This choice has an immediate impact on Tom who must lie in the official registry, saying that Isabel has given birth to a healthy daughter.

For many years, the guilt of the lie weights on Tom, but it is obscured by the love for his new daughter, Lucy. As the years pass, Tom struggles between wanting to hold Lucy at arms length and wanting to squeeze her tight and never let her go. Tom's conscience finally gets the better of him, however, when he discovers that Lucy's birthmother is not dead, as he had always assumed, but alive and heartbroken on Point Partaguense. Knowing that he could never keep the truth from Lucy, Tom goes behind Isabel's back and sends Lucy's birthmother, Hannah Roennfeldt, a letter letting her know that her daughter is alive. It doesn't take long for the police to track Tom down, arrest him, and return Lucy to her rightful family. Isabel is so outraged with Tom's actions that she vows to make him pay. Tom, on the other hand, is devastated that he has broken Isabel's heart, but knows it was the right thing to do. As way of apology, Tom takes full blame for Lucy and says that Isabel had nothing to do with the baby's disappearance. In this way, Tom is able to maintain control over an emotionally out of control situation. Once again, he martyrs himself to memory, choosing to remember Isabel as the naïve teenager with an insatiable love for life, rather than as the cold, vengeful woman who would rather let him rot in prison than tell the truth. At the end of the novel, the truth does come out and Tom is eventually released from prison. Eventually, he reconciles with Isabel and moves with her to a new beach town 400 miles away. Throughout the novel, from beginning to



end, Tom is a haunted man. He never fully comes to terms with the life he has led, but he comforts himself knowing that he's done the best he can.

## Isabel Graysmark Sherbourne

Isabel Graysmark Sherbourne starts out the novel as an innocent, naive teenager who loves life and loves her boyfriend, Tom Sherbourne. After convincing him to marry her and move her out onto Janus Rock with him, Isabel's innocent world begins to crumble. She miscarries three consecutive pregnancies and realizes that she will probably never carry a pregnancy to term. This realization leaves her feeling like a failure, a broken woman and a useless wife. She feels desperate, lonely, and grief-stricken. When the miraculous boat-child arrives, she believes it is an answer to her prayers: "I'm suggesting kindness. That's all. Love for a baby. I'm suggesting, sweetheart, that we accept this gift that's been sent to use. How long have we wanted a baby, prayed for a baby" (Page 108). Isabel has such tunnel vision with her desperate want of a child that she cannot see how her grief might impact the mother of this foundling. Because it's easier for her to assume the child's mother is dead, Isabel announces it as though it were gospel. She systematically answers each of Tom's questions in a way that makes it almost impossible for him to question her: if they send the motherless child back to the mainland, it will be sent to an orphanage. Why should they do that to a child they can love as their own? If they applied to adopt they child, they would be denied because no organization would send a child to live on a tiny island without access to doctors or schools. Isabel's arguments are so well crafted that from whatever angle Tom addresses it, it seems it would be cruel to tell the truth. In moments of emotional chaos, Tom's resolve is weakened while Isabel's is strengthened. She is like a ferocious mother bear that refuses to be parted from her young.

When Tom agrees to Isabel's plan and allows her to keep the infant, Isabel is overwhelmed with joy and, for the first time in months, feels genuinely happy. She embraces the infant as if it were her own, and showers her husband with affection. They live happily in their lie until they return to the mainland for the first time, two years after the baby's appearance. There, they learn their daughter's mother is not dead and has never given up searching for her lost child. Even then, Isabel refuses to back down. She will not tear her daughter away from the only parents she has ever known. To convince Tom, she manipulates his guilt about the war, bullying him into silence. Even when the truth is revealed and Lucy is taken away from her, Isabel cannot believe that what she did was wrong. She believes she has earned a child from all the heartbreak of her miscarriages, and until the bitter end, vows to stop at nothing to get Lucy back. At the end of the novel, Isabel is redeemed by coming to Tom's defense and finally telling the truth. Although the court pardons her for her crime, Isabel never emotionally recovers. Guilt and trauma fester in bones like cancer, and symbolically, cancer is the disease she dies from at the end of the novel.





## **Lucy Sherbourne / Grace Roennfeldt / Lucy Grace Rutherford**

Lucy Sherbourne / Grace Roennfeldt / Lucy Grace Rutherford is the baby at the center of the novel's conflict. As an infant, she washed up in a boat on the shores of Janus Rock and was raised as Lucy Sherbourne by Tom and Isabel, the lighthouse keepers that found her. At the age of five, her true parentage was revealed and Lucy was ripped from the only family she knew and returned to her birthmother, Hannah Roennfeldt. As an adult, Lucy-Grace searched out Tom Sherbourne to forgive him for tearing her family apart all those years ago.

## **Hannah Roennfeldt**

Hannah Roennfeldt is Lucy's birthmother. When her daughter was three months old, the family was attacked and Hannah's husband and daughter went missing. Although everyone told her they were dead, Hannah never gave up searching for her lost family, which nearly caused her to go insane. As a young woman, Hannah was nearly attacked on a ship traveling to Point Partageuse but was saved when Tom Sherbourne intervened. This interaction set Hannah up to become a forgiving woman who strove to do the right thing, regardless of how difficult the choice became. When Grace was eventually returned to her five years after her disappearance, Hannah struggled to reconnect with her daughter and even considered returning her to the woman who had kidnapped her. In the end, Hannah's love for Grace perseveres and she is able to reform a bond with her daughter and move on with their lives.

## **Frank Roennfeldt**

Frank Roennfeldt is Hannah's husband and Grace's father. He moved to Point Partageuse after the war to work in a bakery. Although he was Austrian by birth, he was tormented for being German by the townsfolk. When Grace was three months old, Frank and his family were attacked and he was forced to flee with the baby in a rowboat. He floated a bit too far from shore and was lost at sea during a storm. His heart gave out and he died, but the baby survived and was rescued by Isabel and Tom Sherbourne when the boat washed up on the shores of Janus Rock. Although Frank is dead for the entire novel, his spirit has a strong presence in the novel.

## **Violet Graysmark**

Violet Graysmark is Isabel's mother. She is a doting grandmother to Lucy and finds that having a child in her life helps ease the pain of having lost two sons during World War One. Violet's relationship with Lucy is one of the main reasons why Tom struggles to tell the truth about Lucy's true parentage.



## Septimus Potts

Septimus Potts is Hannah Roennfeldt's father. He is a very rich man who initially cuts ties with Hannah after she marries a German man, which Septimus finds unforgivable after the war. When Hannah gives birth to Grace, however, Septimus realizes how much he misses his daughter and uses Grace's christening as a way of returning to her life. When Grace and Frank go missing, Septimus sets up a reward for any information that leads to their return. When Grace is eventually returned five years later, Septimus is crucial in repairing her relationship with Grace, and is the first person that Grace bonds with after being taken from Janus Rock.

## Gwen Potts

Gwen Potts is Hannah Roennfeldt's older sister. When Grace is returned to Hannah, Gwen fears that cutting off all contact between the little girl and Isabel Sherbourne will irrevocably damage Grace's life. She sets up secret meetings between the little girl and her "Mama" in the park until Hannah discovers the horrifying secret.

## Harry Garstone

Harry Garstone is one of the police officers assigned to the Sherbourne-Roennfeldt case. He is nothing but nasty to Isabel and Tom, and cruelly rips Lucy away from her parents without explanation or delicacy.

## Ralph Adcock

Ralph Adcock is the captain of the *Windward Spirit*, the boat that delivers mail and purchases from Point Partageuse to Janus Rock. Throughout the course of Tom's six years on Janus Rock, he and Captain Adcock become close friends, and he is the one person Tom considers telling the truth about Lucy, although he balks at the last moment.

## Bluey

Bluey is the redheaded first mate of the *Windward Spirit*. After Lucy's rattle is discovered in Hannah Roennfeldt's mailbox, it is Bluey who turns Tom into the police, claiming the 3,000-guinea reward. Although he initially planned to use the reward money to start a life with his new girlfriend, Bluey is so overwhelmed with guilt about betraying Tom that he refuses to take the money until Tom gives his blessing.



## **Sergeant Knuckey**

Sergeant Knuckey is the chief of police on Point Partageuse. During Tom's arrest and trial, Sergeant Knuckey is considerably more diplomatic and caring toward all involved. He has a heart-to-heart talk with both Isabel Sherbourne and Hannah Roennfeldt to ensure that the truth about Tom's involvement in the kidnapping and murder charges are fully revealed.

## **Sergeant Spragg**

Sergeant Spragg is a senior policeman from Albany who comes down to Point Partageuse to help investigate the case against Tom Sherbourne. Spragg is an angry, pushy policeman who first threatens to bring murder charges up against Tom if he refuses to testify against Isabel. It's clear that Sergeant Spragg is more interested in earning a promotion for his involvement in Tom's case than actually discovering the truth of what happened on Janus Rock.



# Objects/Places

## Byron Bay

Byron Bay is where Tom takes his first assignment as a lighthouse keeper, and where he completes his training.

## World War One

World War One is the war Tom fought in before returning to Australia, an emotionally damaged man, and beginning work as a lighthouse keeper.

## Janus Rock

Janus Rock is where Tom and Isabel live, and where Tom works as a lighthouse keeper. Janus Rock is a small island linked to the mainland, and only visited by boat four times a year by the shopkeeper, who brings in grocery orders and mail. Because of Janus Rock's remote location and relative isolation, it was a difficult post to fill before Tom took it over. The lighthouse itself is a beautiful white obelisk, one hundred and thirty feet high, "near the cliff at the island's apex" (Page 37).

## The Windward Spirit

The Windward Spirit is the boat Old Ralph skippers. He comes in four times a year to bring Tom and Isabel groceries, newspapers, and mail from home.

## Point Partageuse

Point Partageuse is the mainland closest to Janus Rock, and where Tom and Isabel first meet. Isabel grew up on Point Partageuse and is always eager to return when Tom has shore leave. Point Partageuse is also where Hannah Roennfeldt lives, and where Lucy is taken after being removed from Janus Rock.

## Mouchemore's

Mouchmore's is the haberdashery on Point Partageuse where Isabel and Hannah accidentally run into each other for the first time since Lucy has been taken from Janus Rock. The meeting is monumentally awkward as Grace (Lucy) screeches Isabel's name and throws herself into her "Mama's" arms.



## The Silver Rattle

The Silver Rattle was a gift from Septimus Potts to his granddaughter Grace for her christening. He had the rattle special made so that it would be one-of-a-kind. When Grace was lost at sea, the rattle was found in her boat with her, and the Sherbournes kept it as a memento of where Lucy came from. When Tom contacts Hannah Roennfeldt, he uses the rattle as irrefutable evidence that Grace is still alive.

## The Lighthouse

The Lighthouse is where the Sherbournes live on Janus Rock, and is a symbol for truth telling throughout the novel. The lighthouse is a beacon of light during a storm for a lost sailor, so it is fitting that the novel should focus on themes of truths. Living in a lighthouse also provides opportunity for the Sherbournes to live in isolation, an element necessary for keeping up the rouse of Lucy's parentage.

## The Map

The Map is a handmade gift that Isabel makes for Tom during their first year of marriage on Janus Rock. While Isabel intends the gift to be a personal, heartfelt gift mapping out the places of interest on their personal island, Tom is disturbed that Isabel would mar government property by drawing on the map. This symbolizes the first instance of Tom and Isabel's conflict: Tom wants to follow the rules while Isabel has no problem bending them. At the end of the novel, Tom presents the map as a gift to Lucy Grace who declines to take it with her.

## Hopetoun

Hopetoun is where Tom and Isabel Sherbourne move after Tom is released from jail, and where Isabel dies. The town, 400 miles away from Point Partageuse, is named after hope, which the Sherbournes are constantly in search of after their time on Janus Rock.



# Themes

## Family

The most prevalent theme in "The Light Between Oceans" is that of family, as the basic plot surrounds one couple's desperate desire to become parents regardless of the consequences. When Tom and Isabel first meet, Isabel asks Tom about his family and he says, "I'll tell you if you really want. It's just I'd rather not. Sometimes it's good to leave the past in the past" (Page 53). Tom has chosen to remove all memory of his family from his mind because remembering them is simply too painful. His parents split up after his father discovered that his wife, Tom's mother, was having an affair. His relationship with Tom disintegrated when he discovered that Tom had known of the affair even though he was just a child. For the rest of his life, Tom lived as a motherless child, not unlike many of the other characters in the novel, most notably Hannah Roennfeldt. When Tom fell in love with Isabel, all he wanted was to keep her happy the way his father had failed to keep his mother happy, and he vows to do anything to give Isabel a happy life. Unfortunately, Isabel is unable to carry a pregnancy to term, and after a series of heartbreaking miscarriages, the couple must reconsider their dream of starting a family of their own. When the boat carrying a baby washes up on shore, it seems like an answer to Isabel's prayer: God knew how badly she wanted to be a mother and has gifted her with this child. The Sherbournes start a makeshift family with baby Lucy, closing their minds to the realization that their family is a fabrication. When the truth is revealed and Lucy is returned to her birthmother five years later, their family life is shattered.

For the years that the baby was missing, Hannah Roennfeldt maintained her own imaginations of what family life would be like if her daughter was ever returned. She too must face the realization that family life can often be more of a nightmare than a dream. When Grace (Lucy) flatly refuses to adapt to her life with Hannah, Hannah is forced to consider what is best for her family: keeping her at home but miserable, or allowing her happiness by returning her to Isabel. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that families are often forged through sacrifice, and as Hannah discovers by the end of the novel, true love and perseverance can overcome any obstacle. When Lucy Grace visits Tom in the final chapter, she greets him as she might a long lost acquaintance, with stiff yet kind formality. While she cries when she reads Isabel's letter, she remains composed signaling to the reader that she has had a happy life with Hannah and that she is not seeking love or acceptance from an outside source. Clearly, she does no longer views Isabel as her mother. She does not take the keepsakes with her, which shows her desire to keep past separate from her life with her real family.

## Isolation

Throughout the novel, Tom feels isolated by his choices. First, he feels isolated as a child when his innocent words cause his parents' marriage fall apart and loses his



relationship with both of them. As an adult, when he returns from World War One, he suffers with the terrible guilt of being alive while so many of his men died around him. It is sheer luck that Tom should come healthy and alive when so many men weren't as lucky. As a result, he carries a shadow over his soul and emotional scars, just as deep as the physical scars of his comrades, that no one can see. Tom feels that Janus Rock would be the perfect place for him - alone in the world, which is how he truly feels after being abandoned by his family and witnessing the traumas of war. When Tom is finally alone on the island, after Captain Ralph and his first mate Bluey, have returned to the mainland, Tom struggles to find his breath. Although it feels as if a heavy weight has lifted from him, being away from general population, he is flooded with memories of the war: "He must turn to something solid, because if he didn't, who knew where his mind or his soul could blow way to, like a balloon without a ballast" (Page 40).

The setup of Tom and Isabel's life on the island is perfect for the lie they construct. Their contact with the outside world is so limited that no one has yet heard of Isabel's miscarriage even though it happened over two weeks ago. Because they live in such isolation, Tom and Isabel's story can't possibly be questioned until they come to the mainland. And even then, they can escape back to the island if any questions are raised. They don't receive the newspaper so they won't hear any news of a missing baby on the mainland, and they can continue life in blissful ignorance. At the end of the novel, by fully taking the blame for what happened on Janus Rock, Tom has found a new way of absolving his guilt. Whereas before, he maintained the lies to keep Isabel happy, now he lies to protect Isabel from further pain. Ever since leaving the war, Tom has felt imprisoned by his guilt. Living in a jail cell is just another form of isolation for Tom, which he welcomes if it offers Isabel a modicum of happiness.

## Guilt

At the opening of the novel, Tom is ravaged by guilt after living through World War One when so many good men died. This misplaced guilt has made Tom a martyr, and is the reason why he doesn't feel comfortable interacting with other people: they assume he is a war hero, and even though he has saved many men's lives, Tom feels that all the true heroes gave up the lives for the cause. If he's alive, he can't be a true hero. He doesn't believe himself worthy of happiness, which is why he continually puts other people's needs in front of his own, particularly in his relationship with Isabel. After Isabel's second miscarriage, it is as if Tom places all the guilt, sadness, and condolences from the wartime deaths on Isabel. He sees Isabel as every mother who lost a son during the war, every family member that had a loved one ripped away, and it is more than he can bear. In this moment, Tom feels that he would do anything to take away Isabel's pain, and in a way, ease his own guilt about the war.

After being confronted with the truth about Hannah Roennfeldt, however, Tom realizes that Hannah embodies the mothers of lost sons, not Isabel, and he seeks to relieve his wartime guilt by bringing back Hannah's child. Previously, Tom didn't want to take away Isabel's happiness at being a mother, and when she sees that Tom's value of truth trumps her happiness, she changes her tactic. She targets the heart of Tom's guilty



conscience: his guilt at surviving the war when so many good men did not, and manipulates that to her advantage: "Do you think it's fair that we lost three babies? Do you think it's fair that Alfie and Hugh are buried thousands of miles away and you're walking around without a scratch? Of course it's not fair, Tom, not fair at all! We just have to take what life dishes up" (Page 147). Tom is committed to Isabel no matter how violently she lashes out at him. Because of his participation on the front, Tom feels that he deserves whatever pain comes his way. It is a masochistic way of living: Tom doesn't feel that he deserved to live through the war and now he tortures himself to pay penance for his crimes. Throughout this ordeal, Tom has remained noble but not necessarily honorable, which makes him a wonderfully complex character, never fully good or fully bad.

At the end of the novel, it is clear that both Tom and Isabel have been destroyed by guilt. In a way, it is fitting that Isabel should die from cancer because the disease, which is described as "nibbling the days from her" (Page 354) is highly symbolic of the guilt that controlled her life. Although Isabel was ruined by her guilt, it did not affect the next generation. Only Tom and Isabel were left to suffer the damages of their choices. Lucy Grace was able to move on and live a happy life away from their decisions.





# Style

## Point of View

"The Light Between Oceans" is told in third-person omniscient narrator's point-of-view which means that the unnamed narrator has access to all the character's thoughts and emotions. The narrator primarily follows Tom and Isabel's point of views, but occasionally dips into other characters' thoughts, including Lucy, Hannah, Septimus, Ralph, and Bluey. Because of the narrator's omniscient, the reader never questions the story's reliability, even though the characters lie incessantly to themselves and each other. The narrator's omniscience also creates an interesting effect on the reader. Despite the novel's clear theme of isolation, the reader feels entwined in the lives of all the characters, even the small secondary ones. Finally, the narrator's omniscience allows the reader to judge characters based on the true emotions of their hearts, the emotions they keep hidden from the rest of the world. The reader sees Hannah's broken heart even when she puts on a brave face for the community; they see Isabel questioning her decisions even though she refuses to outwardly admit any wrongdoing; they see Tom's painful struggle to choose between the woman he loves and honoring truth, a struggle he must keep absolutely hidden from his wife. This interesting style creates wonderfully complex characters, never fully good or fully bad, which is one of the main reasons why the novel has been so successful: the characters are relatable and believable.

## Setting

This novel is set in Australia shortly after the conclusion of World War One. The first two sections are set on Janus Rock, a small island between the wild Southern Ocean and the warmer Indian Ocean. The island is only visited by boat four times a year by Captain Ralph and Bluey who brings in grocery orders and mail. Because of Janus Rock's remote location and relative isolation, it was a difficult post to fill before Tom took it over. The lighthouse itself is a beautiful white obelisk, one hundred and thirty feet high, "near the cliff at the island's apex" (Page 37). The island itself represents many of the novel's themes including isolation, and light itself is metaphorically at the novel's core: light overcoming shadow, or truth overcoming lies. In this way, the lighthouse, which is a beacon of light during a storm, is a symbol for truth telling. Also due to the location, weather adds to the novel's dramatic tone. The Sherbournes must not only face the physical weather that threatens to destroy their lives, but the emotional "storm" that will ravage them in the wake of Tom's arrest. The rest of the novel takes place on Point Partageuse, the mainland that Janus Rock is affiliated with. The town itself is rather small, making it impossible for the Sherbournes and Roennfeldts to avoid each other long term. The town is full of gossips, which makes both the loss of Frank and Grace unbearable for Hannah, it also causes her great anxiety when Grace is finally returned. Finally, the time setting, after World War One, is important to note because it creates a feeling of relief among the survivors yet also a shadow of loss after so many men failed



to come home. The war has caused Isabel not to take anything for granted, and Tom to feel overwhelmed with guilt, important characteristic in the dynamic of their marriage.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in "The Light Between Oceans" creates evocative and artistic images throughout the novel, and most readers will admire her skill in creating deep, realistic characters that struggle to balance good and bad choices in their lives. Through Stedman's descriptive style, the reader is transported to the complex historical time of post World War One Australia -that wouldn't be as accessible without the rich layers of language used to create the landscape. Stedman assaults all five of the reader's senses in a way that transforms the setting into a character of its own. The novel's language, which is rich with similes, metaphors, and other examples of figurative language, is the portal through which the reader experiences life on Janus Rock. It's interesting to note that while life on the island is isolate, the novel's descriptive language creates a rich, warm world that inhabits the reader's soul long after the plot comes to a close. Stedman creates a huge world on Janus Rock with a variety of landmarks created solely as background for the Sherbournes' lives.

The novel is set during the early 1900's in Australia, and the novel's language reflects this setting. Many Australian slang phrases pepper the text, but they shouldn't be a hindrance to American readers. In fact, this language adds another layer of depth in Stedman's created world.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 37 chapters of roughly equal length, divided into three parts. Section One explores Tom and Isabel's lives before their marriage and cycles around their discovery of Frank Roennfeldt's boat. The novel opens en medias res as the Sherbournes' discover the boat. Although initially presented out of sequence, this scene is an important one to highlight because it sets the rest of the novel into motion as Tom and Isabel are forced to reconcile the repercussions with their fateful decision. Section Two focuses on the family's isolated life, and leads up to the moment that Tom is arrested. Section Three follows the family as they struggle to come to terms with the repercussions of their choices. The novel's two major events (discovering Lucy and revealing the truth) serve as narrative breaks, signaling to the reader that Tom and Isabel are undergoing a major life change. Although the novel isn't technically episodic, the narration of each chapter tends to focus on one major event. By focusing on one event a time, Stedman has the freedom to create long passages of vivid imagery, building a realistic family set in a historic time. However, the novel is composed almost entirely of exposition, which leaves some audiences feeling that it reads long. Almost the entire novel takes place in Isabel and Tom's heads while they're isolated on Janus Rock. Without other people to bounce thoughts off of, nature becomes a secondary character.



The novel's main plot is quite complicated as it deals with the inner workings and emotions of many characters. Despite the intertwining lives, Stedman does an excellent job of creating clear-cut motivations and morals for individual characters, so the reader never feels lost in the emotion. The plot of the novel is extremely complicated with many subplots and heavy reliance on flashbacks. Essentially, the main plot surrounds the Stedman's decision to raise a foundling on Janus Rock rather than alert the authorities to their discovery. Meanwhile, the girl's birthmother has never given up hope that she will be found alive. The central conflict of the novel, however, happens in Tom's mind as he struggles to come to grips with the mistakes he's made in his life and the negative ways those mistakes have affected those closest to him. The climax of the novel occurs when Tom is unable to hide his secrets any longer, and is arrested for kidnapping. The rest of the novel (Part Three) deals with the repercussions Tom's decisions have had on the rest of the character's lives as they come to grips with the new truth.



## Quotes

"A bit of brass doesn't make anyone a hero" (Page 36).

"He must turn to something solid, because if he didn't, who knew where his mind or his soul could blow way to, like a balloon without a ballast" (Page 40).

"If the war had taught her anything, it was to take nothing for granted: that it wasn't safe to put off what mattered. Life could snatch away the things you treasured, and there was no getting them back. She began to feel an urgency, a need to seize an opportunity. Before anyone else did" (Page 56).

"Such a mysterious business, motherhood. How brave a woman must be to endure it" (Page 75).

"If the war had taught her anything, it was to take nothing for granted: that it wasn't safe to put off what mattered. Life could snatch away the things you treasured, and there was no getting them back. She began to feel an urgency, a need to seize an opportunity. Before anyone else did" (Page 56).

"Looking into those eyes was like looking at the face of God. No mask or pretense: the baby's defenselessness was overwhelming. That this intricate creature, this exquisite crafting of blood and bones and skin, could have found its way to her, was humbling" (Page 96).

"You could kill a bloke with rules, Tom knew that. And yet sometimes they were what stood between man and savagery, between man and monsters. The rules said that you took a prisoner rather than killed a man" (Page 115).

"Do you think it's fair that we lost three babies? Do you think it's fair that Alfie and Hugh are buried thousands of miles away and you're walking around without a scratch? Of course it's not fair, Tom, not fair at all! We just have to take what life dishes up" (Page 147).

"History is what is agreed upon by mutual consent" (Page 166).

"Right and wrong can be like bloody snakes: so tangled up that you can't tell which is which until you've shot 'em both, and then it's too late" (Page 194).

"He struggles to make sense of it - all this love, so bend out of shape, refracted, like light through the lens" (Page 241).

"We live with the decisions we make, Bill. That's what bravery is. Standing by the consequences of your mistakes" (Page 274).

"I've had this coming a long time. Sins catch up with you in the end" (Page 282).



## Topics for Discussion

How does the setting reflect the themes present in "The Light Between Oceans"? Consider the microcosmic setting of life on Janus Rock as well as the macrocosmic setting of Australia in the wake of World War One. Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

In your opinion, what is the "light" referenced to in the novel and what are the "oceans"? How can the novel's title be explored both literally and figuratively? In your opinion, which exploration of the title is more powerful? Why? Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

When Isabel asks Tom about his family, he says, "I'll tell you if you really want. It's just I'd rather not. Sometimes it's good to leave the past in the past" (Pages 44-45). Is possible to truly leave your past behind you? What does this tell you about his character, particularly in regards to his relationship with Lucy? Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How did Tom's experiences on the front affect the choices that he made later in life? Consider Tom's decision to become a lighthouse keeper, marry Isabel, and eventually turn himself in as a kidnapper. How has guilt guided Tom's decisions, and in your opinion, does he "deserve" to feel haunted? Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Discuss the theme of opposites in "The Light Between Oceans" —darkness and light; safety and danger; land and water; truth and lies. How do these opposing forces shape the novel's main themes? Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Which character(s) in the novel earned your sympathy? When Lucy is returned to Point Partageuse, who did you feel the most sorry for? What are benefits of creating complex characters like Tom, Isabel, and Hannah, who are neither good nor bad? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

In chapter five, Tom says, "A kid needs its mum." How does the theme of motherlessness affect the characters in the novel? Consider Tom, Hannah, and Lucy. Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Letters are used prominently throughout the novel. Describe how the letters are used by their authors to confess, conceal, and condemn. Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What is the significance of the novel's final setting: Hopetoun? How have the main characters fared since Lucy was returned to Point Partageuse and Tom was released from jail? Which characters, if any, are hopeful (and for what) as the novel comes to a close? Be sure to use examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.