

My Family and Other Animals Study Guide

My Family and Other Animals by Gerald Durrell

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Plot Summary

My Family and Other Animals is an attempt at zoological dissertation on the island of Corfu, Greece. The novel succeeds in being a creative mixture of natural history study and autobiographical account of the Durrell family as they live on Corfu for five years. The first in a trilogy of books on the island, *My Family and Other Animals* is a creative introduction to Gerald Durrell, child animal collector, and his eccentric family. The novel is a humorous study on human and animal behavior by a best-selling author and zoologist.

August has brought dreary, raining weather with it. Each family member suffers a physical ailment due, in Larry's opinion, to the dank climate. Finally having enough brooding at the window, Larry demands the family move to Corfu. Mrs. Durrell insists the option is impossible, as they have just bought their home. Despite Mrs. Durrell's protest, the family sets sail for Corfu with only their essentials, which for each member is an assortment of equipment dedicated to their hobby. Gerald's necessities include a butterfly net, books on natural history, and his dog, Roger. Gerald and his family watch with great expectation as the boat approaches the island.

Gerald's family spends a day house hunting with their hotel manager but does not succeed in finding a villa with a bathroom. The family sets out the next day determined to find a villa with a bathroom. The unsuspecting group is surrounded by cab drivers all determined to get their fare, individually or torn to pieces. They are saved from the mob by Spiro, an English-speaking driver who quickly becomes the family's close friend and advocate.

After a long drive of twists, turns, and relaying of Spiro's history, the cab driver comes to a halt in front of a strawberry-pink villa. The family instantly feels they are at home in the small villa surrounded by cypresses. Gerald encounters many unique people in his rambles around the olive groves. The most interesting is the Rose-Beetle Man, a mute peddler who sells Gerald a young tortoise on their first meeting. The two become fast, if silent, friends. Soon, Gerald's morning excursions are grounded when his mother decides Larry's friend George will be his tutor. George realizes Gerald cannot be deterred from his interest in insects and animals and decides to integrate zoology into their lessons.

Larry informs his mother he has invited a few guests to stay for an indeterminate amount of time. When Mrs. Durrell insists there is no room at the villa Larry counters that the best option is to move to a bigger home. Mrs. Durrell is adamant they are not moving again. Mrs. Durrell capitulates and soon Spiro finds the family the daffodil-yellow villa. The house offers Gerald the opportunity to dedicate more time and space to his hobby. George has left the island leaving Gerald with complete freedom to explore his new surroundings. As Gerald explores, Larry's guests begin to arrive in a seemingly endless stream. As conversations float over her head, Mrs. Durrell flutters around nervously as her fears that the guests will be highbrow is infinitely realized.



A mishap with a matchbox of scorpions leads to Gerald being sentenced to a French tutor, the Belgian consul. With the summer comes another tutor, Peter who is on break from Oxford. Peter is strict at first but as he becomes interested in Margo, he eases up on Gerald. Before the summer's end, Mrs. Durrell believes Peter and Margo have become too close. Peter is gotten rid of amidst high drama in the Durrell household. Margo drifts around the villa and then locks herself in the attic, while Leslie threatens to kill Peter if he steps foot on the island again.

It is spring again in Corfu when Great-Aunt Hermione writes that she is thinking of visiting, as she believes the weather will aide in improving her health. Mrs. Durrell and her children balk at the idea of their relative staying with them, but Mrs. Durrell sees no way around it, since she has extolled the virtues of Corfu and informed her aunt they have moved to a large villa. Larry finally decides the best thing to do is to move to a smaller villa. Margo and Leslie agree and soon the Durrells are making their third and final move on the island.

Gerald and his family immediately like the old, elegant snow-white villa. The small villa is perched atop a small hill Gerald finds is home of hundreds of mantises of all sizes. Gerald temporarily captures an extremely large pregnant mantis he names Cecily. One evening Gerald watches in excitement as a Gecko he has named Geronimo and Cecily engage in battle. Gerald's happiness at his loss of another tutor is short-lived when he is informed he has been found a new tutor who shares a common interest in birds. During Gerald's first meeting with the man, he is introduced to Mr. Kralefsky's extremely large bird collection. The entire first day is spent feeding and talking about birds. Soon, Gerald inadvertently meets Mr. Kralefsky's mother. The ailing woman lies in bed in a room as filled with flowers as her son's room and balcony are with birds. Although Mrs. Kralefsky thinks Gerald will believe her ideas strange, Gerald accepts her views that flowers have a language all their own.

Before long Mr. Kralefsky informs Mrs. Durrell it is time for Gerald to enter formal schooling. Mrs. Durrell announces to her children they are returning to England. Gerald insists he is comfortable with his level of knowledge. His siblings are no happier to be leaving Corfu. Their mother's suggestion they look at it, as a holiday does nothing to lighten anyone's moods.

Unlike their meager luggage on arrival to Corfu, the Durrells are returning to England with a multitude of trunks and animal cages. The family bid farewell to Theodore and Mr. Kralefsky, and attempt to comfort a sobbing Spiro before their ship leaves the island. The family's moods are not improved when Mrs. Durrell learns the Swiss official has classified her family as a traveling circus and staff. Larry coolly admonishes it is only their recompense for leaving Corfu.



The Speech for the Defense

The Speech for the Defense Summary and Analysis

My Family and Other Animals is an attempt at zoological dissertation on the island of Corfu, Greece. The novel succeeds in being a creative mixture of natural history study and autobiographical account of the Durrell family as they live on Corfu for five years. The first in a trilogy of books on the island, My Family and Other Animals is a creative introduction to Gerald Durrell, child animal collector, and his eccentric family. The novel is a humorous study on human and animal behavior by a best-selling author and zoologist.

Gerald Durrell attempts to explain why the story is mainly about his family though it was not his original intention. As his introduction of his family in the introduction warrants some explanation, Gerald continues to write about his family until they all but consume the story though he is able to dedicate pages to his intended exposition on the island's many animals and insects. The story is unembellished truth, but Gerald still feels he has been forced to compress five years of his family's lives in a way that has resulted in a disjointed sequence of events.

Gerald thanks those who have assisted in getting his story told, but also points them out as the individuals to blame if anyone should find issue. Gerald speaks lovingly of his mother who after a life of living with her children takes it all in stride. Mrs. Durrell is a woman who would accept a strange delivery of animals and feed a penguin a tin of sardines in her garage.



Part I: Prologue, The Migration

Part I: Prologue, The Migration Summary and Analysis

August has brought with it horrible weather. Gerald and his family have each succumbed to the ill weather in their own way. From Gerald's catarrh to Leslie's ear bleeds, they each suffer a strange ailment due to the wet conditions. Margo, who already suffers from acne scarring, has come down with new case acne. Larry, instead of suffering physically, suffers with his heart and soul, as an artist does.

Finally having enough of brooding, Larry scorns their living situation aloud and demands they move to a better climate. Larry tells of George's beautiful descriptions of the island of Corfu and says that should be their new home. Mrs. Durrell attempts to placate Larry by telling him to go on ahead and set things up. Larry reminds his mother of the last time she played that trick and sent him to Spain. He insists the family is going together. Mrs. Durrell tells him it is impossible for them to move as they have just bought their house.

The family packs their essentials and boards a ship for Greece. Everyone carries only what is important, which for each member is a unique assortment of items related to their hobby. Gerald's essentials are only a jar of caterpillars, books on natural history, a butterfly net and his dog, Roger. Gerald is taken by the scenery as the ship approaches the island of Corfu. As he watches the island come into view, the landscape becomes more defined revealing multicolored houses along the hills and a beautiful shoreline.

Gerald describes the weather in a fashion that transports one into the dark and rain. This description foreshadows chapter six when good weather has an entirely different affect on the family's constitutions. Larry, the eldest of the siblings and apparently the most vocal of his family decides something must be done about their situation immediately. As Mrs. Durrell protests the move, the reader should take note of the discourse between her and Larry. As Mrs. Durrell gives a perfectly sound reason why the move cannot be made and is adamant that Larry's idea is crazy, her words fall on deaf ears. The family soon sells their home and leaves for Greece carrying only their essentials.

Gerald describes all that he sees as they travel through Europe. Gerald describes the countries they quickly pass, the colors and movement of the sea, and the approaching landscape of Corfu with such creative detail that an imaginative reader can nearly feel the ebb and flow of waves and see the blue of the sea. Gerald describes the shutters on houses as the spread wings of butterflies foreshadowing for the reader his deep love of insects and how he will compare the beauty his finds in anything to the beauty found in the world of insects.



Part I: Chapter 1, The Unsuspected Isle

Part I: Chapter 1, The Unsuspected Isle Summary and Analysis

Gerald's family arrives on the island of Corfu unceremoniously despite Larry's attempts at "gracious majesty." Roger drags Mrs. Durrell off the boat and to the nearest lamppost. Roger will not be induced to leave until he is relieved despite Larry's insistence he be pulled away claiming the dog has been a problem since the beginning of the trip. Margo suggests Roger is suffering the same stomach ailment Larry suffered in Naples.

When Roger is finished, a disheveled Mrs. Durrell walks him to the carriage but cannot induce him to get in. The entire family gets involved pushing and pulling the animal into the cab. The dog scares the horses who then bolt a few feet tossing everyone into the cab in a pile. Gerald's family attempt to right themselves and portray the image Larry expects until Roger spots dogs in an alley and starts barking. The dogs begin to chase the carriage. The further along they travel, the more dogs are added to the angry pack foaming to get to Roger. The family arrives at their hotel followed by two dozen dogs barking and drooling to get a chance at Roger. Larry insists somebody do something even as Leslie is struggling to restrain Roger. Margo admonishes Larry for doing nothing and he responds by taking the horsewhip and flailing it wildly. Larry succeeds in hitting Leslie and knocking Mrs. Durrell's hat until she tells him to stop before he hurts someone. Finally, the concierge steps in and helps them usher Roger into hotel under heavy protection and force the door shut on the hounds.

The family finds out like most places on the island, the hotel does not have plumbing facilities. Margo further appalled to find she has cleaned herself with used toilet paper. When the family retires to their rooms, they realize the windows face a nearby cemetery. Throughout the afternoon, the funeral processions increase in frequency and elaborateness. Margo constantly checks herself and scrubs her skin in fear she has contracted something and Mrs. Durrell fears an epidemic has arisen due to the lack of plumbing. Mrs. Durrell decides they are finding a home with a bathroom immediately. After a tour of bathroom-less villas by the hotel guide, Gerald's family sets out the next morning to find a villa on their own.

The family is bombarded by a flock of cab drivers yelling Greek at them and tugging them apart. Gerald's family is rescued by Spiro, a burly English-speaking cab driver idling apart from the hoard. His voice booms through the crowd as he asks them if they want a driver who speaks English. Spiro knows exactly where to take Gerald's family once Mrs. Durrell tells him they are looking for a villa with a bathroom.

The family endures a frightening ride of twists and turns during which Mrs. Durrell keeps her eyes shut. Spiro intermittently turns to face them as he tells the family about himself, his love for the English, and his popularity on the island. The cab comes to a halt in front of a small, strawberry-pink villa surrounded by cypress trees.



Gerald's family arrives on Corfu in a flurry of excitement despite Larry's goal of austere dignity. Larry attempts his role as patriarch of his family, but his siblings do not take him seriously. Larry appears to be more of a talker than a doer as he stands by during the melee between the dogs barking orders until Margo says something. Even then, Larry's actions seem more intended to reprimand his family as the swings of his whip land on them instead of near the pack of dogs.

One gets more insight into the personalities of Gerald's family as they settle into the hotel and seek housing on the island. During a mediocre meal on their arrival at the hotel, Larry attempts to extol the virtues of the hotel manager but is contradicted by Leslie. Margo then attempts to show Larry up but is embarrassed by Larry and repulsed when she learns she has cleaned herself with used tissue. When Mrs. Durrell witnesses the constant funeral processions out their window, she instantly attributes it to the lack of plumbing.

When Spiro arrives on the scene during the cab driver melee, the reader should take note. The burly man first demands from a short distance away the family needs a driver who speaks English, and then insists on handling the drivers who are tearing them apart. When Spiro tells Mrs. Durrell he knows just the villa to take her family to this foreshadows Spiro's take-charge behavior in all the family's affairs.



Part I: Chapter 2, The Strawberry-Pink Villa

Part I: Chapter 2, The Strawberry-Pink Villa Summary and Analysis

The family settles in well in their small pink villa. The small garden is an oasis for Mrs. Durrell who spends her tending to it when she is not poring over recipes and cooking. The garden also serves as Gerald's first look into the insect-life of the island and the reader's first true insight to Gerald's love of entomology. As Gerald goes from an over-excited wonderment to scientific study, he describes the garden and its living things in such colorful detail. Gerald succeeds in giving one the feeling they are crouching alongside him on his garden journey watching the curious chameleon-like spiders and other insects. Gerald is especially fascinated with an earwig he finds burrowed in the soil. He watches as the insect lays her eggs and checks on her daily anxiously waiting the eggs to hatch. Gerald befriends the peasant girls who pass their garden every day. The girls give Gerald gifts of fruit and figs every evening on their way home. Gerald gives them the gift of learning their language. Gerald eventually learns where they live and visits their family on his walks with Roger.

Spiro installs himself into the Durrell's lives proving to them his love for the English and his popularity on the island. Spiro handles all the family's affairs, even reclaiming their luggage seized at customs. When he finds out there has been a delay in receiving money from England Spiro pays their bills and purchases groceries for them. Spiro adores Mrs. Durrell and compliments her so much that Leslie and Larry disparage their mother just to hear Spiro's shocked responses. Spiro's affinity for Mrs. Durrell should also be noted by the reader, which may also explain the enthusiasm in which Spiro handles the family's personal affairs.

Larry's personality is illustrated as the family settles into the Strawberry Pink Villa. Determined to write a masterpiece, Larry immediately unpacks and spends his days shut writing away in his room. When Larry is disturbed by a donkey tied outside his window, he responds with what is becoming usual behavior when encountering a situation to his disliking; Larry insists someone else remedy the problem. He declares people will be robbed of his great work if the donkey is not moved by someone. When Larry's siblings refuse to do anything about it, Larry blames Mrs. Durrell for raising them to be selfish. To appease him, Gerald and Mrs. Durrell go outside and move the animal. Larry's behavior in this chapter foreshadows Larry's conversation about impending guests with his mother at the end of Part One.



Part I: Chapter 3, The Rose-Beetle Man

Part I: Chapter 3, The Rose-Beetle Man Summary and Analysis

After breakfast under a tangerine tree in the garden with his family, Gerald joins Roger at the gate for their daily exploration. Gerald goes through his usual banter with the dog pretending they will not be leaving the yard. Roger finally puts his paw on the gate and gives Gerald the lopsided grin his owner is waiting for and the two are off.

Gerald and Roger meet many interesting people on their excursions, but none is more colorful than the Rose-Beetle Man. Gerald describes the peasants of Corfu with the same creative description he gives the plants and insects he encounters. When Gerald describes The Rose-Beetle Man, one can understand the awe in which the child holds for the man. An imaginative reader can evoke a vision of beetles fluttering above a hat of amazing plumage. The Rose-Beetle Man cannot speak so pantomimes his answers to Gerald's questions, including why he carries a swarm of Rose-Beetles individually attached to string. The Rose-Beetle Man pantomimes that little boys use them as airplanes. On Gerald's first meeting with the Rose-Beetle Man, the man seems to read Gerald and figure out exactly which of his variety of wares would suit the young boy. The Rose-Beetle Man produces and sets down on the path a small troop of tortoises. Gerald falls for the most unique of the polished bunch and haggles the Rose-Beetle Man for its price.

The tortoise, named Achilles, becomes a part of the family. Achilles develops his own personality and tastes including his affinity for wild strawberries and love for human company. Achilles inadvertently leaves the garden one day and is found dead at the bottom of a dry well. His funeral under a strawberry tree is a somber event replete with a eulogy by Larry. Roger's constant tail wagging is the only mar on the occasion.

Gerald's next purchase from the Rose-Beetle man is a baby pigeon Larry names Quasimodo. Raised without pigeon parents Quasimodo never flies, instead he prefers to waddle closely behind as the family takes walks. Larry discovers Quasimodo is a musical bird with discerning tastes. Gerald and his family watch with pleasure as Quasimodo stamps to marching songs and dances to the waltz. The family loses the bird to nature one morning when Quasimodo reveals he is a she that has laid an egg overnight. The pigeon lays another and becomes fiercely territorial so they are forced to set her free.

The Rose-Beetle Man's appearance in Gerald's life serves as Gerald's introduction to the collecting of living things outside of insects. Gerald expresses the different personalities of his pets Achilles and Quasimodo in the same vein he would describe a person he has met on the road. The tortoise and pigeon have distinct traits and are treated more like family members than pets. This is especially apparent in the case of Quasimodo, whose natural bird instincts don't take effect until she lays eggs.



The Rose-Beetle Man leaves Gerald's life just as abruptly and disappointingly as Gerald's first pets. After a regular succession of visits including the sale of various pets, The Rose-Beetle Man disappears just as he appeared in Gerald's life. The Rose-Beetle Man is playing his pipe on his way home from a festival apparently drunk. When he waves at Gerald without turning, an astute reader will note the undercurrent of sadness in Gerald's description of the events. Even without Gerald's mention at the start of the paragraph, it is the last time he sees The Rose-Beetle Man, when the man rounds the corner in a flutter of Rose-Beetles one can feel the finality of The Rose-Beetle Man's departure.

Gerald and his mother receive many visits from the Rose-Beetle man and purchase various pets. One day they purchase all the Rose-Beetles and set them free in their garden. One evening, the Rose-Beetle man strolls down the road drunkenly playing his pipe. Gerald shouts his greeting and receives a wave in return. The Rose-Beetle man rounds the bend and disappears in the evening light, his pipe music trailing behind. It is the last time Gerald sees the Rose-Beetle man.



Part I: Chapter 4, A Bushel of Learning

Part I: Chapter 4, A Bushel of Learning Summary and Analysis

It is decided Gerald needs a more well-rounded education than his hobby of observing and collecting small creatures. What cannot be decided is what else Gerald should be learning. Larry believes Gerald needs to read more literature while his mother and Margo believe Larry's literature too riddled with sex. Leslie insists Gerald needs to learn the finer points of shooting, fishing and hunting, and Margo contends that if Gerald does not know how to dance, he will be unable to get a date. Mrs. Durrell inquires on George, Larry's friend whose letters brought the family to Corfu. It is decided George will instruct Gerald every weekday morning from nine until twelve.

When the subject of Gerald's education arises, it becomes appears the family must be involved in decision making though, no one ever seems to agree. Each sibling contends that their hobby should be Gerald's avenue of education. As is becoming characteristic of Mrs. Durrell, she hangs back as the children argue; only stepping in when one or the other becomes too unreasonable or insulting. One should also note that the decision of how Gerald will be educated is still Mrs. Durrell's as she is usually the most levelheaded of her family.

George takes his tutor of Gerald as seriously as he can with the materials and student he is provided. George shows his creativity and determination to teach Gerald by involving Gerald's interests into their lessons. George embellishes his history lessons with stories of an animal's role in a battle or expedition. George's geography lessons were intertwined with art zoology, topography, and meteorology. As Gerald describes the geography maps he creates with George, one nearly forgets the maps are not three dimensional as the animals and flora grow and crawl across the pages. Math however is not Gerald's strong suit as George practices his dancing or fencing around the room as Gerald attempts to work out his problems. The reader should take note of George's attitude toward teaching Gerald math. Gerald believes it is a tribute to the fact he will never get the hang of the problems, however, there may be another underlying reason. As it is apparent George is a writer, aspiring dances and artist, he may not hold math at the same level of importance as Gerald's other subjects.

Gerald still craves the outdoors therefore George decides to take their lessons to a small beach. George teaches history as he and Gerald search for underwater foliage and animals. When they become too engrossed by their discoveries and games of water slugs, George reins Gerald back to shore and the war between the French and British.



Part I: Chapter 5, A Treasure of Spiders

Part I: Chapter 5, A Treasure of Spiders Summary and Analysis

Gerald and Roger set out in the morning on a quest to climb the hills by sunset. By midday, Gerald and Roger are hot and tired. They come upon a small clear bay with a strip of white sand beach and Gerald decides to cool off. Soon enough, Gerald is hungry and leaves the beach with Roger in search of food. Gerald pauses and contemplates whom he should visit as it is siesta time and some may not be available. Gerald decides on Yani, who may be sleeping, but if he wakes will happily invite Gerald for lunch. Gerald devises a ploy to awaken Yani and fails, but a cat on the porch provides a plan B when Roger chases it up a tree.

Yani shows Gerald a scorpion he caught that morning and placed in a jar of oil. Yani explains to Gerald it is a way of extracting the scorpion's poison to be used as anti-venom should one ever be bitten by a scorpion. Yani appears so knowledgeable about the scorpion, one wonders if there is some truth to his story of the cypress trees. After lunch Yani's wife, Aphrodite, sends Gerald on his way with a pocket full of grapes. On Gerald's way home, he stops in a grove to share his grapes with Roger who loves them so much he swallows them whole. Not before long, Gerald has found a stick and is poking around looking for new forms of life in the undergrowth. Gerald makes his most exciting discovery to date; tiny crescents in the soil Gerald at first believes are prints left behind but instead discovers are tiny trapdoors with silken hinges. Roger wonders and waits to see what insect created the intricate little openings in the ground. When no insect reveals itself, Gerald rushes to George's house in hopes he can solve the mystery.

Gerald bursts in on George while he is entertaining. George introduces Gerald to his friend Dr. Theodore Stephanides. Theodore, said to be an expert on all by George, offers his insight but suggests they take a look to confirm. They arrive at Gerald's spot and Theodore confirms the holds are the creation of female trapdoor spiders. Theodore tells Gerald about the spiders and how they listen from inside their burrows for their intended target before leaping out and snatching them below. Gerald is happy to find someone who is as interested in insects as he is and who does not talk down to him. Gerald values adults who don't treat him as a child since he is not spoken to as a child at home. Gerald ardently hopes to see Theodore again. Gerald receives his wish when Leslie returns from town one day with a package from Theodore containing a small microscope and a note inviting Gerald to tea the following Thursday.

Gerald's discovery of the trapdoor spiders is the beginning of a very important time in Gerald's life. Gerald's finding leads to him meeting a fellow insect enthusiast, the awkward Dr. Theodore Stephanides. Theodore not only solves the insect riddle for Gerald, but also gains Gerald's respect for Theodore's addressing him as a

knowledgeable peer. Theodore invites Gerald to tea, proving he not only views Gerald as a peer, but also looks forward to meeting with someone who shares his interests.



Part I: Chapter 6, The Sweet Spring

Part I: Chapter 6, The Sweet Spring Summary and Analysis

The small hills behind the villa hold the most interest for Gerald. Gerald and Roger explore and study the affect of spring on the insects and animals around them. One day while lying in wait for a swallow-tail butterfly, Gerald discovers a turtle leaving its underground hibernation habitat to bask in the new spring sun. A succession of turtles follow suit. Soon the hills are swarming with tortoises. They are so plentiful one day Gerald captures and releases thirty-five specimens. Gerald begins to track a very large female he calls Madame Cyclops due to her missing eye. One day Gerald watches curiously as she digs a hole. To Gerald's delight, once her feat is completed, Madame Cyclops commences to lay nine eggs in her ditch. She then covers them with soil and stamps down the earth. When Madame leaves for a snack, Gerald removes one to add to his collection.

The daffodil-yellow villa and its grounds are filled with Larry's guests. Their arrivals and departures are unpredictable and as such, there are often too many guests in the mansion. Mrs. Durrell's fears of hosting the highbrow is realized as Larry's guests are such intellectual elitists they often find it difficult to communicate. One of Larry's guests, Countess de Torro, especially repulses Mrs. Durrell when the Countess announces she has suffered from erysipelas and lost her hair. Mrs. Durrell believes the woman is unsanitary and contagious. Mrs. Durrell informs Larry his friend must leave. Larry informs his mother The Countess is not a friend but an interesting subject of study. Larry decides to invite Theodore for a visit and his opinion.

Theodore is engaged with the Countess in a riveting conversation about her disease and its remedies consternating Mrs. Durrell. Theodore explains to Mrs. Durrell in private what exactly the Countess is suffering from; Mrs. Durrell is embarrassed by her presumptions and is overly gracious with The Countess.

Dinner is lively with conversation. Heaping, hot plates of food are passed around along with the topic for conversation. Gerald has a difficult time deciding which conversation to listen in on. Margo discusses art with Michael the asthmatic painter, Mrs. Durrell listens with sympathy to Durant's traumatic orchard experience, and Jonquil and Theodore discuss Latvian peasant behaviors. Gerald's attention flutters excitedly from one discourse to another. Theodore commands everyone's attention with an awkwardly told yet funny tale about a stage show held for the Greek King when he visited Corfu.

It appears life at the daffodil-yellow villa will prove to be an interesting experience. Gerald's discovery of the tortoise hills is a tale out of national geographic. Green hills are covered in tortoises of all shapes, sizes, and colors; one can only imagine an intelligent child's excitement in this discovery. Gerald always behaves with mixture of adult scientist and child. This is proven his capture and release of tortoises to examine

their similarities and differences, as well as in the way Gerald identifies the tortoise egg he preserves for his natural history collection.

Larry has created a chaotic situation with his guests at the villa. As Larry's guests arrive and depart (and sometimes arrive again), in an endless procession, one realizes Larry may not know many of these individuals. Larry at least proves as much in the case of The Countess, whom Larry dislikes and does not know well. Though the villa is brimming with the highbrow, the family still seems to enjoy themselves. This appears to especially be the case when Theodore arrives. His anecdotes and excitement for seaplanes evoke good-hearted laughter from all.



Part I: Conversation

Part I: Conversation Summary and Analysis

Larry has written to his friends inviting them to stay at the small, tightly filled villa. Mrs. Durrell insists the house cannot host anymore than the people already in it. Larry explains there would be room for his guests if his siblings would only sleep on the veranda. Mrs. Durrell responds that the nights are too chilly for them to sleep outdoors and insist Larry tell his friends to stay at a hotel or put them off. Larry tells her it is impossible. Larry cannot stand to be inhospitable and says the only solution is to a bigger house. He explains to his mother that he invited the guests for her, as she needs to socialize. Mrs. Durrell questions how many people Larry has invited. He responds two or three but tells her she should prepare for up to eight since he does not know who is coming or when they will arrive. Mrs. Durrell is horrified at the idea of so many people attempting to stay at the villa and reiterates accommodations must be made at the Pension Suisse. Larry tells his mother she is being unreasonable and can offer her no more suggestions as he has done all he can do. Mrs. Durrell explains the reasons they cannot move to another villa including the ability to continue Gerald's lessons. Mrs. Durrell affirms defiantly they will not move to a larger villa and heads to the kitchen.

Larry continues to illustrate his self-centered and unreasonable behavior when he informs his mother they are expecting an unknown number of guests. One is driven to stunned laughter as Larry insists he is the only one attempting to come up with a solution to the situation. Mrs. Durrell does appear resolute as she insists there is no space at the villa and no way will they purchase a new one. However, the reader will take note of how often Mrs. Durrell has said no to Larry and been able to remain loyal to her decisions.



Part II: Chapter 7, The Daffodil-Yellow Villa

Part II: Chapter 7, The Daffodil-Yellow Villa Summary and Analysis

Spiro finds the family a larger villa and organizes the move. Within four days Gerald and his family is ensconced in the old daffodil-yellow villa, with its acre of overgrown and dying garden. The daffodil-yellow villa does not hold the same charm as the strawberry-pink villa. The mansion is dark and old with deteriorating furniture. Despite the on-site gardener, the acre of land is overgrown and rotting. One must remember that in the first chapter Mrs. Durrell was told by the hotel manager villas with bathrooms are not easy to find on Corfu.

The yellow villa's garden offers an acre of wonderment for Gerald to explore. Gerald has added bird watching to his repertoire. As he identifies and describes a pair of swallow couples he encounters, Gerald compares and contrasts their behavior as a psychologist would human behavior. It becomes apparent the birds indeed have distinct mannerisms closely mirror that of an expectant human father.

The house comes with an elderly couple and even older furniture. The elderly couple resides in a cottage at the edge of the property and the husband serves as the gardener. Mrs. Durrell believes she is doing Lugaretzia a favor by hiring her as a maid. Everyone quickly regrets the decision as the old woman is an emotional hypochondriac. Instead of showing gratitude, one should take note that the old woman complains daily of her aches and pains and cries at any criticism. It could very well be Lugaretzia's not-so-subtle way of showing Mrs. Durrell she is well past retirement age.

The house's old Victorian furniture begins to disintegrate before their eyes. Larry sits in a chair and its back vanishes in a puff of dust. Mrs. Durrell opens a wardrobe and the door breaks away. Mrs. Durrell decides it is time to purchase new furniture and declares Larry's friends will be the family's most expensive guests. Gerald accompanies his mother and Margo on their shopping excursion. On their way back to Spiro's car, they are caught in a huge celebration to the Saint Spiridion. Surges of the devout are making their way to the church to kiss the feet of the mummified saint. Gerald, Margo and their mother are caught up in the moving body of people and into the church. Mrs. Durrell attempts to caution her children against kissing the mummy but fails to get the message to Margo who ardently kisses the corpse's feet. As Mrs. Durrell predicts, Margo becomes ill the next day. Margo has the flu and is admonished by her physician, Dr. Androuchelli, for kissing the saint's feet. Dr. Androuchelli insists if Margo commits the same foolish act again, he will not save her.

Margo's behavior in the church reveals her susceptibility to suggestion. Margo truly goes along with the crowd in believing in the mummified saint's powers to heal. She



kisses the mummy's feet with the passion of the devout wishing for the end of her acne. Margo falls ill with the flu the following day. Dr Androuchelli appears to be having a little fun at Margo's expense as he tells Margo he will not cure her if she kisses another saint. Margo spends three weeks bed-ridden while the rest of the family seizes parts of the house as their own. Mrs. Durrell has the use of a cavernous kitchen, while Larry has an attic Library built and Leslie builds a gun range on the veranda. Gerald's place at the yellow villa is of course the outdoors. He has an acre of garden to explore. Without George off the island, Gerald has all day to get re-acquainted with the insects he has discovered before and to find entirely new species of insects including a bed of scorpions.

Gerald becomes a bird watcher at the daffodil-yellow villa. He becomes especially interested in a pair of swallow couples building nests on a nearby tree. Gerald gains a good vantage point and examines the behaviors of the two swallow females and their mates. One male swallow cannot seem to locate the proper nest materials, and eventually a mound of refuse builds beneath their nesting branch. Once the eggs are hatched, the other male swallow has his turn at bringing home the wrong goods, as his meals of bugs are not usually fit for the stomachs of his young. The mound of refuse continues to build and one day as Gerald sifts through it on his daily perusal, he finds a large strange beetle he has never seen before. Gerald carefully captures and stores the insect alive to be identified by Theodore who now visits him every Thursday.

Theodore identifies the large beetle with too-small wings as an oil-beetle and tells Gerald fascinating facts about the insect. He tells Gerald how the larvae transport themselves on select type of bee and subsist on that bee's eggs until adulthood. Theodore goes on to compare the way of the larvae to backing a horse in a race; the odds of getting the right bee are just as unpredictable as the horse is to win. Theodore awkwardly transitions to a tale of how he was to ride a white horse in front of his brigade of troops after the First World War. Unfortunately, the horse was sprayed in the eye with eau de cologne and began bucking in pain. Rider and horse were forced to ride through a back alley while the parade went on without them. Theodore finishes by explaining he no longer likes riding horses.



Part II: Chapter 8, The Tortoise Hills

Part II: Chapter 8, The Tortoise Hills Summary and Analysis

It appears life at the daffodil-yellow villa will prove to be an interesting experience. Gerald and Roger explore and study the affect of spring on the insects and animals around them. Gerald's discovery of the tortoise hills is a tale out of national geographic. Green hills are covered in tortoises of all shapes, sizes, and colors. One day while lying in wait for a swallow-tail butterfly, Gerald discovers a turtle leaving its underground hibernation habitat to bask in the new spring sun. A succession of turtles follow suit. Soon the hills are swarming with tortoises. One can only imagine an intelligent child's excitement in this discovery. They are so plentiful one day Gerald captures and releases thirty-five specimens. Gerald behaves with mixture of adult scientist and child. This is proven his capture and release of the tortoises to examine their similarities and differences, particularly when Gerald begins to track a very large female he calls Madame Cyclops due to a missing eye. One day Gerald watches curiously, as she digs a hole. To Gerald's delight, once her feat is completed, Madame Cyclops commences to lay nine eggs in her ditch. She then covers them with soil and stamps down the earth. When Madame leaves for a snack, Gerald removes one to add to his collection. Gerald again belies his age in the way he labels the prized tortoise egg he preserves for his natural history collection.

The daffodil-yellow villa and its grounds are filled with Larry's guests. Their arrivals and departures are unpredictable and as such, there are often too many guests in the mansion. Mrs. Durrell's fears of hosting the highbrow is realized as Larry's guests are such intellectual elitists they often find it difficult to communicate. One of Larry's guests, Countess de Torro, especially repulses Mrs. Durrell when the Countess announces she has suffered from erysipelas and lost her hair. Mrs. Durrell believes the woman is unsanitary and contagious. Mrs. Durrell informs Larry his friend must leave. Larry informs his mother The Countess is not a friend but an interesting subject of study. Larry decides to invite Theodore for a visit and his opinion.

Theodore is engaged with the Countess in a riveting conversation about her disease and its remedies consternating Mrs. Durrell. Theodore explains to Mrs. Durrell in private what exactly the Countess is suffering from; Mrs. Durrell is embarrassed by her presumptions and is overly gracious with The Countess.

Dinner is lively with conversation. Heaping, hot plates of food are passed around along with the topic for conversation. Gerald has a difficult time deciding which conversation to listen in on. Margo discusses art with Michael the asthmatic painter, Mrs. Durrell listens with sympathy to Durant's traumatic orchard experience, and Jonquil and Theodore discuss Latvian peasant behaviors. Gerald's attention flutters excitedly from one discourse to another. Theodore commands everyone's attention with an awkwardly told yet funny tale about a stage show held for the Greek King when he visited Corfu.

Larry has created a chaotic situation with his guests at the villa. As Larry's guests arrive and depart (and sometimes arrive again), in an endless procession, one realizes Larry may not know many of these individuals. Larry at least proves as much in the case of The Countess, whom Larry says he dislikes, does not know well, and has only invited The Countess to observe her. Though the villa is brimming with the highbrow, the family still seems to enjoy themselves. This appears to especially be the case when Theodore arrives. His anecdotes and excitement for seaplanes evoke good-hearted laughter from all.



Part II: Chapter 9, A World in a Wall

Part II: Chapter 9, A World in a Wall Summary and Analysis

Gerald explores a crumbling wall that lines the property. Brick-laid and coated in peeling plaster houses an assortment of life. Geckos share space with beetles and glowworms. Gerald's favorite inhabitants of the wall are the scorpions. Gerald admires their black shiny bodies as they hunt and perform mating rituals. One day Gerald finds a mother scorpion with a carpet of tiny babies clinging to her form. Unable to leave her, Gerald carefully captures the scorpion and her brood and takes them home.

Gerald places the scorpion in a matchbox on the mantelpiece then forgets about them during the rambunctious meal. Larry discovers the scorpions when he attempts to light his cigarette. A shrieking melee ensues as Larry shakes the scorpions off his arm and onto the dining table. As everyone tries to capture or kill the scorpions scattered across the table, Larry laments Gerald's is going to kill them all. Finally, the scorpion is caught and Gerald appeals to his family to allow him to retrieve the babies and set them all free.

Mrs. Durrell decides it is time for Gerald to get continue his education. Gerald's scientific nature sometimes becomes his downfall as it is combined with the natural behaviors of a young boy. Such is the case with the scorpions in the matchbox. A child's forgetfulness amidst the excitement in his home results in Larry discovery of the insects. The ensuing chaos is creatively detailed and comedic in a skin-shuddering way. Gerald's actions remind the family he is a child in need of structure. The man who is chosen to provide that structure is another curious addition to the characters of Gerald's life. Gerald neglects to mention how they have come to know The Consul. However, it is likely Spiro has made the connection as he is popular on the island and arranges everything for the family.

Every morning Spiro drives Gerald to the poor Jewish neighborhood where Gerald's new French tutor resides. In the midst of a lesson out Le Petit Larousse, the Consul suddenly leaves the window he is gazing out of grabs an air rifle and hastily loads it. The Consul crouches at the window, aims, and fires. In Gerald's imagination, the Consul is in the middle of a feud or other dangerous affair. The Consul explains it is his effort at controlling the cat population, which is out of control, and leaving most cats starving and diseased. The Consul is a lover of cats and sheds tears every time he euthanizes one that is a frequency during Gerald's lessons.

The Consul is under the impression Mrs. Durrell speaks French. Whenever he sees her, he arrests her in conversation. A flustered Mrs. Durrell feigns understanding, responding "Oui, oui," whenever she believes it is appropriate. The family finds humor in Mrs. Durrell's behavior as at the mention of the Consul or the sight of him at a distance she walks away as quickly as she can and hides in a store.

Theodore visits every Thursday and stays late into the night. Theodore loves to watch seaplanes land. He is fascinated by their beauty as they make contact with the water's surface. Every Thursday evening, Theodore listens to the approaching humming and asks if anyone supposes it is a plane. As the sound gets louder, Theodore asks if he can go and view it until the plane is nearly gone and the entire family bounds up to the attic with him to view the event. Gerald and Theodore spend their afternoons exploring the worlds alive in the garden and olive groves beyond. Theodore discovers a caddis larvae caught from a pool of water and explains to Gerald the curious way in which they build their beautiful homes. Theodore remembers a tale about another architect. It seems a friend of Theodore's decided to build another level on his home. The new addition was designed and built beautifully. Only when it was completed did everyone realize the man neglected to include a staircase in the design and construction.



Part II: Chapter 10, The Pageant of Fireflies

Part II: Chapter 10, The Pageant of Fireflies Summary and Analysis

It is summer and Gerald has another tutor, this time a student from Oxford, Peter. Peter is strict with his lessons until the effects of summer and Margo take hold. Eventually Peter stops teaching Gerald math and allows Gerald to write a book instead of a diary to practice English. Gerald is given a large room to dedicate to his hobby. In his study, Gerald displays specimens from his nature excursions. From his tortoise's egg, to a bird's egg, to a bat Gerald has stuffed himself, the room is a museum of nature. One day a stench permeates the house. After a thorough searching of the house, the origin of the smell is traced to Gerald's bat and it is thrown away. Peter explains to a disappointed Gerald the bat was not cured properly and promises Gerald how to stuff a bat the right way.

Gerald tries hard but is unable to catch another bat. He decides instead to try his luck at catching dormice. Since the animals sleep during the day, Gerald chooses that time for his hunt. He fruitlessly thrusts his hand into the hollows of trees to find them empty. Gerald tries once more and catches hold of a baby owl. Gerald races home with his prize and timidly shows the yellow-tufted owl to his family. They agree the owl can stay and decide to name him Ulysses. The tiny bird is a fighter and thwarts Roger's initial attempts at friendship by attacking the dog's nose. Eventually the owl becomes a part of the family, riding on Roger's back when Gerald takes them on his excursions.

Life at the villa is filled with discoveries and first times. Gerald's new tutor is strict until Margo begins to hold his interest. This foreshadows of Peter's early departure from the villa. Peter realizes Gerald cannot be deterred from his interest in natural science. Peter, like George before him, decides to allow Gerald to use his interests to aide in learning other subjects. Gerald's interest in natural science can be deterred nor restrained by anyone or thing. When his bat is thrown away, Gerald is determined to find a replacement and does in the form of a live pet instead.

The family begins taking swims at night, as the summer gets hotter. One night Gerald swims out and lies drifting in the water. Suddenly he feels a movement in the water hears a sigh and small splash. Gerald is startled, frightened now that he realizes how far he is from the sea cow and the shore. Gerald treads water and watches. Gerald is delighted to find he is surrounded by porpoises. The group dance and roll around Gerald as he swims with them. Soon, the porpoises are ready to head back out to sea. They form a line and swim to open water.

After sometime of watching her children swim with envy, Mrs. Durrell finally decides her age shouldn't prevent her from enjoying the water. Mrs. Durrell arrives at the villa after a



day of shopping to show off her new purchase of a frilly, voluminous, black bathing suit. Her children insist she cannot wear the suit. Larry suggests the plethora of material will cause his mother to drown. Roger has the biggest problem with the bathing suit and views it as a threatening creature. Mrs. Durrell's determination to keep her bathing suit despite her children's opinions that it is hideous, is a testament to her will when making a decision for herself. It will become more apparent to the reader that though it appears Larry controls his mother, in the end she will not do anything she does not believe is the best thing for herself or her children.

The Durrell children plan an outing to celebrate their mother's first swim. They pack a picnic and invite Theodore who informs them the night will be without a moon. Upset no one bothered to check the moon's progression, but still determined, they pack up The Sea Cow, and head to the small private bay. The boat is first steered by Mrs. Durrell who nearly steers them to Albania. Margo takes over and nearly crashes the boat into the rocks. The group finally arrives at the bay and set up their rugs on the white sand.

Mrs. Durrell is beginning to come out of her skin, though she receives no assistance from Roger. The wet bathing suit billows around her as she moves further out. Perceiving the suit to be a monster, Roger runs into the water to protect his fair mistress. The dog clamps down on a frill and starts tugging. Mrs. Durrell is pulled down to her bottom and dragged to the shallow water by her rescuer. Roger succeeds in tearing off a frill and sets back to work attacking Mrs. Durrell's assailant while her children roll around the beach in hysterics. Theodore finally comes to Mrs. Durrell's aide, separating her from Roger. Mrs. Durrell spends the rest of the night watching the children swim from her safe place in the shallows. The moonless night shows off the phosphorescence in the water, showing off a green light on its surface as Gerald and his siblings swim around.

When the swimmers grow tired everyone retires to the rugs for rest and dinner. After a satisfying meal, the wine is opened. Soon the fireflies begin twinkling in the olive groves. To inaugurate Mrs. Durrell's first night swim, nature puts on a show for the family and Theodore. An experience they would not have enjoyed if not for moving to the mansion by the Albanian sea.

Gradually their numbers increase and the glowing insects leave the woods for the shore in a blanket of light. As the fireflies circled over the bay, the porpoises arrived in a line from the sea.



Part II: Chapter 11, The Enchanted Archipelago

Part II: Chapter 11, The Enchanted Archipelago Summary and Analysis

The family decides it is time to get a motor for The Sea Cow since the summer heat is making it too difficult to row. The family discovers a small line of islands where Gerald enjoys spending his time searching for new sea life. The rest of Gerald's family loses interest in the islands as it is difficult to swim and too hot to lie around while Gerald explores. Not ready to lose his newly found archaeological treasure, Gerald asks if he can use the boat once a week for his excursions. Not to be deterred, Gerald uses his upcoming birthday as a chance to realize his dreams of becoming a serious scientist with a boat of his own.

Gerald asks if he can make a list of the things he wants from each family member and they agree. Gerald considers each person's personality when creating his lists. Gerald asks his mother for all his scientific necessities, sends Margo to the fabric shops, and Larry to the bookstores for natural science books. Gerald has a special request for Leslie and finds the right moment and words to use to cajole Leslie into building him a boat. While Leslie spends the next two weeks cursing and building in the shed, Gerald spends the time happily making fresh-water ponds out of left over cement.

Gerald's birthday party promised to be small as the entire family agrees to only inviting ten guests whom they all like the most. Unfortunately, the family does not create a list together, instead each invites ten people apiece. The only saving grace is everyone invites Theodore so Mrs. Durrell only has to prepare dinner for forty-six. As Mrs. Durrell and Lugaretzia, who is recovering from having every tooth removed by Dr. Androuchelli the day before, prepare in the kitchen, Gerald is led outside for his final gift.

Leslie unveils the unusually round, flat-bottomed boat and Gerald thinks it is the best boat he has ever seen. Gerald accepts Leslie's every explanation of the boat's imperfections with a nod of understanding. He cannot wait to launch his boat but is informed by Leslie it must be named first. Gerald calls his family out to help him christen the boat. He turns down everyone's decision and after short thought arrives at the name Bottle. Larry suggests BumTrinket. Believing both names to be fitting, Gerald names the boat The Bottle-BumTrinket. Inscribed and ready to launch, Gerald's siblings and Peter carry the boat down to the bay while Gerald and his mother take up the rear with the mast. Leslie hands out instructions and everyone gets into position to hoist the mast. Larry comments that it appears too large for the boat. When Peter drives the bamboo pole into its socket on the boat, the craft abruptly tips over tossing Peter into the water proving Larry to be right. Margo takes Peter to the house to attempt to dry his best suit before the party. After some arguing, Leslie returns to the bay to repair the boat's mast.



Spiro arrives with the Greek Kings ex-butler and kicks everyone out of the kitchen while he and the butler prepare the meal. He guests arrive and permeate every room of the first floor before spilling out the French windows. Gerald receives many gifts, the best of which are a book on freshwater life from Theodore and two puppies from a peasant family. Larry names the puppies Widdle and Puke, which insults Mrs. Durrell, but her children like the names. The party ends as the sun begins to paint the sky pink and a satisfied Gerald falls asleep with his dog, puppies, and owl around him. The following morning Gerald and his dogs are up early and out on The Bottle-BumTrinket heading for the archipelago. His first day out on his own boat, Gerald is more taken by the world around him. Gerald meets a variety of crustaceans, sea anemones, and even a baby octopus that squirts a small plume of ink as it swims away.

As Gerald's birthday arrives, it has become clear he is budding into a true natural scientist. He requests nothing resembling what the usual boy turning eleven would, except perhaps the boat. The reader should take note of the manner in which Gerald dissects his birthday list. Gerald assesses each of his siblings and his mother perfectly resulting in all his wishes being fulfilled. Gerald again reveals his nature when he receives his many gifts from their assorted guests and regards them as useless with the exceptions of two puppies.

The party occurs much in the manner of Larry's houseguests at the daffodil-yellow villa. It is beginning to become apparent this relatively small family cannot pull off an occasion without an inordinate amount of chaos. Spiro proves his connections run far and wide and feelings for the family run deep when he arrives with the king's ex-butler and helps the old man in the kitchen.



Part II: Chapter 12, The Woodcock Winter

Part II: Chapter 12, The Woodcock Winter Summary and Analysis

Mrs. Durrell discovers to her dismay that Margo and Peter have become too close. Larry and Leslie each have their own solution to the problem, which for Leslie is shooting the young suitor. Mrs. Durrell, receiving nothing in the form of good advice from her sons, eventually fires Peter who leaves in a hurry. Gerald is happy to see his tutor go, no matter the reason, but Margo is dramatically broken-hearted and roams the house in her most flowing garments sobbing. The family joins Margo's drama, as Leslie struts around the house threatening to kill Peter if he returns, Larry lectures on love, and Spiro cries with Margo, while he posts his people at the docks to prevent Peter's entry. As the drama of the situation begins to ebb, Margo receives a letter from Peter promising to return for her. The family regains their luster as Leslie erects a cardboard cutout and begins shooting practice, while Larry insists Margo run away with Peter or get over it. Margo locks herself in the attic only allowing Gerald entrance to listen to her lamenting and bring her meals.

Leslie finds out someone is stealing items from the Sea Cow. He sets up a three-gun burglar alarm at his window. Leslie ties a string to each trigger allowing him to shoot from his bed if he hears anyone moving close to the jetty. In the middle of the night, three blasts shock the family awake. Mrs. Durrell believes Margo has shot herself, Margo believes Leslie has shot Peter. Margo struggles to unlock herself from the attic yelling insults at her family for hurting Peter, while Larry angrily complains about the family trying to drive him crazy. Leslie steps into the hall explaining it was burglars, only to be lectured by Larry and Mrs. Durrell on his methods. The only saving grace is that Margo has finally left the attic.

Still saddened by the loss of Peter Margo spends much of her time walking alone with the dogs. One day, heedless of the siroccos of August, Margo takes the dogs into Te Bottle-Bumtrinket and heads for a small island to sunbathe. Gerald realizes Margo has taken his boat and complains to his mother. They both climb the stairs to the attic to search the water for Margo. Mrs. Durrell and Lugaretzia worry and the winds increase Margo will not make it home safely. Finally, they watch as Margo clumsily makes her way off her sunbathing rock and down to the boat. Margo gets lost and is led to the boat by Roger's barks. Margo then struggles to get the frightened puppies into the boat before slowly making her way through the choppy waters. She seems to lose direction a few times before approaching the shore. Gerald and his mother race to the jetty to help Margo with the boat. When they see her, they are shocked to find Margo's eyes are swollen near-shut. Mrs. Durrell is exasperated to hear that Margo had fallen asleep on the rock and as the winds picked up awoke in her condition.



Winter arrives calmly on Corfu. The skies are blue and the wind gusts in gently and warmly, rustling leaves and birds' feathers. Soon, the blue skies turn grey and the warm rains arrive. The sea swells and the colors become darker, and white-capped waves attack the shore. The season brings new wildlife for Gerald to study and Leslie to hunt. It is prime shooting season as wild ducks, woodcocks, and roe deer begin to make their presences known.

One day Leslie brings home a particularly large catch in the form of a wild boar. Mrs. Durrell is concerned Leslie may be in danger when he is hunting. Leslie explains he is very safe unless the animal is right under his feet. Larry poses that even then Leslie should not be in danger as he can jump or vault over the boar. Leslie tries explaining it is impossible to do so, but Larry is adamant that it is possible if only Leslie attempted it to find out. On another occasion, Leslie returns home jubilant to have just succeeded a left-right kill. After explaining the technicalities of the shot, Leslie goes on to tell the story of his hunt repeatedly. On Leslie's fourth time, Larry finally points out the left-right does not appear to be very difficult. After an argument in which Leslie and Margo agree Larry believes he knows it all but does nothing, Larry takes Leslie up on his challenge to attempt his own left-right shot.

The following morning the four siblings head out to the swamp. Larry complains the entire way about the weight of his gun, the slippery ground, and why Leslie could not take his word for it. The swamp is actually a valley full of irrigation ditches that is left to run wild during the winter. Most of the ditches are covered with narrow planks on which to cross. As they hunt woodcocks the troupe navigate over the maze of planks listening to Larry's continued complaints. Three snipe alight as the group disturbs them from their hiding place. Larry lifts, aims and shoots, but has neglected to put bullets in his weapon. Larry reloads but now he is bothered by a pair of noisy magpies flying ahead. Leslie assures him they will not scare the snipe. Larry's next attempt lands him on his back in a muddy ditch. Larry attempts using the rifle as leverage yelling for help, only to sink deeper. Leslie angrily states Larry has flooded the guns barrels and demands Larry pass the gun to him so he can pull Larry out. With Margo, Gerald and Leslie tugging together, the oily mud finally belches Larry out.

Larry is angrily nursing his bruised ego. When the siblings arrive at the villa, Mrs. Durrell is in shock when she sees Larry. Her questions of concern are answered shortly by Larry who also turns down any overtures of assistance. Lugaretzia lights Larry a fire in the attic where he retires, brandy in hand. Margo goes to check on Larry only to find he is drunk and behaving wildly. The entire family assembles in the room as Margo and Mrs. Durrell attempt to get Larry to drink Epsom salts. Larry insults his mother before passing out.

At dawn, Margo finds out that Larry's room is on fire. Everyone again rushes to Larry's room and make every attempt to wake him. Larry continues to sleep deeply as everyone decides they will have better luck putting the fire out. Margo feeds the fire with Larry's brandy. Leslie pulls Larry's sheets off the bed and uses them to stamp out the flames. Larry wakes and demands to know what the chaos is about. Mrs. Durrell responds that his room is on fire. Larry says he still does not know why his family is

behaving in such a disorganized manner. Larry in line with his know-all, bossy personality doles responsibilities as he reclines in bed. When his family finishes their toils Larry requests someone bring him a cup of tea for the headache he has gotten from being frightened awake and then having to control the mayhem.



Part II: Conversation

Part II: Conversation Summary and Analysis

Baby animals and blooming flowers welcome the spring season. Gerald's family welcomes the season by spending most of their days and nights on the veranda. On one such day, Mrs. Durrell and her children are each looking through their weekly correspondence. When Mrs. Durrell arrives at the weekly letter from Great-Aunt Hermione, everyone settles in to listen to the dreaded details of the old woman's illness and concerns.

Mrs. Durrell skims through the letter as she reads aloud to her children. Suddenly Mrs. Durrell gasps and tells them Great-Aunt Hermione has decided to visit. Larry instantly refuses to accept it. Larry and his siblings devise ideas on how to thwart the old woman the least of which is saying their mother is ill and near death's door. Larry jumps at this last idea, offering to write the letter himself. Mrs. Durrell turns down the idea saying Hermione would only rush over to take care of her. Larry laments why Mrs. Durrell keeps in touch with their relatives who are all crazy. Mrs. Durrell defends that they are old, not crazy, and then adds they are not crazy enough for commitment.

The Durrell family only can deal with the eccentric that are not relatives. All the eldest children are horrified at the idea of their great-aunt visiting. Gerald apparently has no opinion and, in this chapter, is just relaying events. Larry's response to the intended visit is as usual the most comedic. As he threatens to shoot their great-aunt should she arrive the Mrs. Durrell quietly reprimands him, reminding Larry as well as the reader of the presence of a child. One often forgets Gerald is a child amidst young adults until he creates a disturbance. Larry decides the best decision is to move to a smaller villa. Mrs. Durrell replies they will look crazy themselves for moving so often. Leslie in rare form agrees with Larry, claiming they are acting in self-defense. Margo agrees that change is good. The Durrell family is again on the move.

It appears the decision to move is a rare moment when all Gerald's siblings agree. The Durrell family argue through most of their decisions, no matter how large or small. It is a change the reader should note that all three elder siblings agree instead of bickering. Mrs. Durrell cannot usually stand up to Larry in decision making of this magnitude. With Margo and Leslie on his side, Mrs. Durrell does not even pretend she is not going along.



Part III: Chapter 13, The Snow-White Villa

Part III: Chapter 13, The Snow-White Villa Summary and Analysis

The family likes the elegant, old Victorian villa on sight. Gerald soon discovers the hills surrounding the villa are owned by the mantis and geckos. Gerald becomes familiar with a particular gecko that has staked Gerald's bedroom as his territory. Gerald names his roommate Geronimo. Gerald enjoys watching Geronimo's unique behavior. Geronimo protects his claim on Gerald's room by attacking any gecko that arrives on the windowsill. Geronimo lands on their back and grabs the other lizard's tail. When Geronimo's opponent drops his tail and escapes, Geronimo underlines his victory by eating the tail.

One day Gerald has the luck of finding the largest mantis he has ever seen. He is jubilant to find she is also pregnant. Gerald catches her and puts her in a cage in his room. The mantis, named Cicely, accepts her capture for a short while as Gerald keeps her well supplied with butterflies. However, when Cicely is ready to give birth she escapes her cage. When Cecily returns she confronts Geronimo and a battle ensues. The insect and lizard ferociously entangle and fight across the ceiling and up and down a wall. Cecily secures a good hold on Geronimo and attempts to take flight. For a moment, she is successful until the gecko's weight can be maintained no longer and they both fall to Gerald's bed. Geronimo and Cecily regain their faculties and continue their now bloody brawl. Geronimo grabs Cecily's arm in his mouth, Cecily clamps down on Geronimo's tail. Geronimo gives a good shake, and animal and insect each come away with the other's appendage. Cecily becomes distracted with Geronimo's frantic tail in her claw. Geronimo spits out Cecily's arm and mouth agape, lunges for her devouring her head. Gerald rewards the battered and bloody gecko with a few flies and dabs of alcohol on his wounds. Rested and full, Geronimo leaves the room for his home beneath the plaster of the garden wall to mend his wounds.

Gerald finds common toads that are exceptionally huge and curiously blemished with albino spots. Gerald takes one in each hand and runs home to show them to his family. Spiro runs out of the house and vomits outside before returning to admonish Gerald about showing him such things.



Part III: Chapter 14, The Talking Flowers

Part III: Chapter 14, The Talking Flowers Summary and Analysis

Gerald arrives at his new tutor's home under a heavy cloud. The reports that this man is a lover of birds has little effect on Gerald's opinion of him as his solemnly rings the doorbell of the apartment at the top floor of the mansion. Mr. Kralefsky opens the door and Gerald is reminded of a gnome from a fantasy novel. A hunched backed and well-dressed Mr. Kralefsky welcomes Gerald into his home. At once Mr. Kralefsky informs Gerald they must become friends and requests Gerald's agreement they will.

Mr. Kralefsky informs Gerald it is time to water his pets and requests Gerald's company. Gerald learns quickly that saying Mr. Kralefsky loves birds is putting it minimally as he is led into a large bright room lined with birdcages. Gerald is overcome with the number and variety of birds Mr. Kralefsky cares for. Gerald's tutor talks to Gerald and the birds interchangeably as Gerald assists in refilling the many water bowls. Mr. Kralefsky's lessons are boring but for Gerald it is compensated for by spending time with his tutor's large bird collection.

Mr. Kralefsky intermittently excuses himself during lessons explaining to Gerald that he has to check on his mother. Gerald believes Mr. Kralefsky lives alone and in his creative child's mind he determines this is Mr. Kralefsky's polite way of saying he is going to the bathroom. One day Gerald needs to use the bathroom, and asks to see Mr. Kralefsky's mother. Surprised by the request, Mr. Kralefsky tells Gerald he will ask her if it is okay. Gerald believes Mr. Kralefsky needs to go and tidy the room. Gerald is shocked when he is lead into a large bedroom chamber that was more a garden than a room. The elderly woman is small and frail with long, beautiful, heavy auburn hair.

Following introductions, Mr. Kralefsky apologetically leaves the room to check on a bird's eggs that are due to hatch. Left alone with Mrs. Kralefsky's mother, the woman tells him about her theories on flowers. Mrs. Kralefsky believes they can talk, though she doesn't understand what they say. She tells Gerald a story about the rose she has sitting solitary in a silver bowl. She explains to Gerald the rose arrived in the center of a bouquet of daffodils. According to Mrs. Kralefsky, the daffodils seized upon the rose with such venom the rose was wilting. She removed the flower, treated it with half aspirin and set it in its own bowl of water with a handful of soil. In two weeks since the rose has thrived to become a magnificent beauty. Mrs. Kralefsky goes on to say she understands most people would believe she is touched, but she has studied flowers enough to know they have personalities like people. Mr. Kralefsky returns to the bedroom to announce that all of his eggs have hatched. Gerald leaves with his tutor promising to visit the queen and her court of whispering flowers again.

In Gerald's opinion, tutors are an inconvenience he would choose to avoid. When he is informed he has been found yet another not even hearing the man likes birds lightens



Gerald's mood. At eleven-years-old, Gerald has already acquired a level of highbrow. Gerald perceives most bird enthusiasts as mere admirers without true knowledge of them. Gerald is pleasantly surprised by Mr. Kralefsky who is not only an enthusiast but also a dedicated collector and caregiver. The dark, rundown apartment that Mr. Kralefsky lives in belies the large, sun-filled rooms of birds and flowers, it is obvious where he and his mother devote most of their time and effort.

It appears the Durrell family attracts people with eccentricities similar to their own. Mr. Kralefsky, like many member of Gerald's family immerses himself into his interests to a point which brinks on obsession. Gerald's mother is also deeply involved in her hobby of caring for flowers that she appears flower-like herself. Her lustrous hair is like a beautiful plant thriving in otherwise barren soil delighting all who have the fortune to see it with its vibrant color and hardy stalk. Like the Durrell family, their acquaintances thrive in their obsessions; imparting their knowledge about the subjects they love brings flushed faces and bright eyes. Mrs. Kralefsky seems to be kept alive by her loving care of flowers.



Part III: Chapter 15, The Cyclamen Woods

Part III: Chapter 15, The Cyclamen Woods Summary and Analysis

Out exploring, Gerald hears a strange sound in the trees. Looking up Gerald spots a magpie fly to an olive tree with what looks like food and then fly away shortly after. Gerald climbs the tree and finds a sturdily built roofed nest. Sticking his hand inside and feeling around, Gerald finds there are four baby magpies in the nest. Gerald removes the smallest and largest birds and immediately runs home to ask the family to help him name them. The Durrell's are in no mood for Gerald's new pets. Leslie informs everyone magpies are thieves. Larry latches on to the idea immediately and does not want the birds in the house. Gerald has said they are not attractive creatures, but is irritated by his brothers' and Spiro's responses. Gerald tells his family all his wants is help with naming them. Spiro cannot get the name of the birds and calls them magenpies. Mrs. Durrell corrects him, and Spiro restates "magenpies." The Magenpies become the collective name of he birds.

The Magenpies gain their wings and Leslie's prophecy is fulfilled. Larry keeps the attic locked but The Magenpies learn their way around the rest of the villa. Their favorite rooms are the kitchen, which they admire from the doorway and Margo's room. The Magenpies become ever more curious about Larry's room. One day when Larry leaves the house, the Magenpies seize their opportunity. The birds tear Larry's room apart as each one takes turns watching for Larry at the window. When Larry returns and sees the disaster that is his study and bedroom, he threatens to kill the birds if he sees them again.

Gerald decides to build the magpies a cage and enlists the assistance of Mr. Kralefsky. Gerald is excited at the opportunity to also ask Mr. Kralefsky to teach him a few wrestling moves. Mr. Kralefsky has a habit of telling Gerald stories of his brave acts in saving fair ladies from harm. One particular story Mr. Kralefsky has told Gerald of how he saved a Lady by beating a wrestling champ has made an unshakable impression. Since then Gerald has waited for the opportunity to learn a few moves from his tutor. Gerald coerces Mr. Kralefsky into a private wrestling lesson in the drawing room. Mr. Kralefsky shows Gerald a throwing move. Mr. Kralefsky learns the error in telling tall tales when Gerald injures him in attempt to repeat the move. Mr. Kralefsky is taken to the hospital and beseeches the family not to blame Gerald. Theodore later sends a letter informing them Mr. Kralefsky has broken two ribs.



Part III: Chapter 16, The Lake of Lilies

Part III: Chapter 16, The Lake of Lilies Summary and Analysis

The magpies do not appreciate their confinement. As they learn to imitate speech and sounds, The Magenpies become relentless pranksters. They call the chickens in for food at odd times, and often when Spiro is driving away, one or other magpie would screech Spiro's name until he makes an abrupt turn and speeds back to the villa. The only animal the magpies don't bother is Roger. The Magenpies seem to have developed camaraderie with Roger and often call him to their cage for conversation.

One day, an animal arrives to the villa that repulses most of the family. For once, it is not an animal found by Gerald, but rather an effort at helping friends by Mrs. Durrell. Apparently, friends of Mrs. Durrell's own a pair of Dandy Dinmonts gave birth to a litter of puppies. Mrs. Durrell decides to take one off their hands and carries the sausage shaped puppy home. Mrs. Durrell announces the puppy is named Dodo and is a female. Larry has a list of issues with the animal beginning with the fact she is a female in a house of male dogs. Leslie believes Dodo looks like a sea slug, but Mrs. Durrell insists it is her dog and she's keeping it.

Dodo suffers an abandonment scare one day when Mrs. Durrell leaves home and goes shopping and from that day on the animal refuses to leave Mrs. Durrell's side. Mrs. Durrell even has to take Dodo into the bathroom or the dog will hysterically throw herself at the door. Mostly ignored by the other dogs, when Dodo is in season she becomes the center of attention. Puke gets lucky one day in the drawing room and soon Dodo gives birth to a funny looking puppy with Puke's ginger eyes and liver spots. Dodo becomes torn between master and offspring. Not wanting to be away from either one, Dodo carries her puppy by the head as she follows Mrs. Durrell around the villa.

The family decides something must be done about Dodo before the dog damages her puppy. Mrs. Durrell finds the perfect solution. She hires Lugaretzia's youngest daughter to carry the puppy around. Wherever Mrs. Durrell goes, she is followed by a procession of Dodo and Sophia who carries the small puppy on its cushion. When Mrs. Durrell takes her evening walks, the sight is even more outlandish as Roger, Widdle and Puke lead her parade. Amidst jokes from Larry and the amused looks from the rest of her children, Mrs. Durrell dons her large straw hat and leaves the villa with her entourage every evening at five o'clock.

It is the season of the lilies, which is the best time of year for the Durrell family to visit one of their favorite lakes, Antiniotissa. This trip promises to be an event with the new addition of pets to the household. Dodo suffers carsickness as it was disgustingly found out by Mrs. Durrell when she carried Dodo home for the first time. Mrs. Durrell is knitting and absentmindedly suggests taking the boat. Larry refuses to take The Sea Cow complaining it will take twice as long traveling by boat. Mrs. Durrell attempts to continue



counting for her knitting as Larry goes on to tell her she must hire a special car for the animal. As the family continues to debate the situation, they find that Theodore gets seasick. The decision is made to split up and take car and boat to accommodate Theodore and Dodo. Unfortunately, a blocked road forces everyone to take both boats to the lake.

After a choppy ride that leads to more people than just Theodore and Dodo becoming ill, the family arrives at Lake Antiniotissa. Once both boats are unpacked Spiro, Larry and Margo take to the water. Spiro is hunting fish with his trident while Larry and Margo doze in the shallows. Mrs. Durrell heads off with the dogs to look for plants. To prevent themselves from being shot, Theodore and Gerald split the land in half with Leslie who is heavily armed and ready to hunt.

At lunchtime, everyone converges on the picnic area. After a good meal, Theodore tells the story of a roving opera. Apparently, the buxom heroine meets a surprising fate below each time she plays out a scene where she throws herself from the balcony. Amidst laughter, Mrs. Durrell insists Theodore makes up his stories, but he insists they are true. After a long relaxing afternoon and dinner of fresh fish caught and cooked by Spiro, the group packs their boats and head home. As they turn to look back at the lake, Theodore comments on its beauty. As they watch the white field of lilies and fireflies alight over the black olive groves, Mrs. Durrell agrees adding she would like to be buried at the lake.



Part III: Chapter 17, The Chessboard Fields

Part III: Chapter 17, The Chessboard Fields Summary and Analysis

At the edge of the sea are The Chessboard Fields. Plots of maize, potatoes, figs, and grape are planted in the box-pattern of a chessboard. Easy to get lost in, it is one of Gerald's favorite hunting places. One afternoon Gerald decides to try once again to catch an old terrapin he names Old Plop. As Gerald approaches the terrapin's home, the dogs spot a lizard and run after it scaring Old Plop into the water. When the dogs don't return, Gerald follows their barking to see what they have found. Gerald is thrilled to find two water snakes basking on the bank. One snake senses Gerald's presence and slithers into the water and under the mud. Gerald catches the one on the bank easily and enters the water for its mate. As the snake leaves the mud and slithers across the water, Gerald jumps for it and they both sink below. When Gerald surfaces with his catch, he finds that he has attracted a human addition to his audience. The man greets Gerald and after putting away his second snake, Gerald shares his grapes with the stranger.

Gerald and the man walk to the sea together. Though the man does not question Gerald in the usual peasant form, Gerald feels prodded to ask questions and offer information. Gerald asks the man where he is from and learns the man is a convict who is released from the Vido island prison every weekend. Upon reaching the man's boat Gerald is awed to find a black-backed gull at the mast of the boat. The man attempts to warn Gerald that the Gull has ferocious behavior. However when Gerald pets the bird, the gull does not bite him surprising its owner. The man offers the gull to Gerald explaining the mean bird is not liked by anyone at the prison, but refuses to be set free. After a quick wash in the sea, Gerald tucks the large, yet light bird under his arm begins heading for home. Gerald promises to meet the stranger the following day to fish for Alecko the gull, and learns the man's name is Kosti and is in prison for murdering his wife.

Halfway home the bird has become a dead weight. Gerald pauses under a tree to rest himself, the dogs and the gull who had been intermittently protesting his position wedged under Gerald's arm. When Gerald is ready to leave, Alecko is not and proves his reputation by biting Gerald on the arm when the boy tries to pick him up. Bird and boy struggle for a moment before Gerald succeeds in tying the bird's beak shut and wrapping his shirt around Alecko's body. Thus, trussed Alecko is carried back to the villa. By the time the group arrive home Alecko and Gerald are both thoroughly angry.

Gerald and the gull's commotion bring first Mrs. Durrell, Margo, then Larry, and Leslie into the drawing room. Leslie is the only family member who knows what type of bird is stalking around the room. Larry insists the bird is an albatross hence unlucky and likely to bring catastrophe to their home. As Gerald attempts to continue freeing the bird, Mrs.

Durrell insists it is peacocks that are bad luck - not albatrosses. Gerald and Leslie continue to inform the family the bird is indeed a black-backed gull.

Gerald decides to divide the magpies' cage to accommodate Alecko. Until he completes this task settles on securing the gull on the veranda. At dinner, the family questions Gerald about his curious acquisition. Everyone finds it strange a man would just give the bird away. Mrs. Durrell is uncertain Gerald should go fishing with Kosti hearing the man is a convict who killed his wife.

Leslie accompanies Gerald the following morning to meet Kosti. Gerald invites his new friend to the villa to meet his mother. Knowing only a few Greek words which she for the moment has completely forgotten, Mrs. Durrell behaves with her usual smiling nervousness as Gerald translates the conversation between she and Kosti. Mrs. Durrell comments later that Kosti does not appear to be murderous. Larry replies that he could see from the start Kosti was a murderer because only a murderer would give a person an albatross as a gift.



Part III: Chapter 18, An Entertainment With Animals; Epilogue, The Return

Part III: Chapter 18, An Entertainment With Animals; Epilogue, The Return Summary and Analysis

The Durrell's are having a party. They have all decided they will invite everyone they know regardless of level of affection. Everyone rushes around the villa in one level of preparation or other except for Larry who is sleeping.

Gerald is preparing his larger terrapin pond to honor the capture of Old Plop aided by Kosti. The cage is nearly complete except for goldfishes Gerald believes would make the perfect final touch to the scene. Gerald beseeches Spiro to help him find some. Once Spiro understands what "golden fishes" are, he declares the task impossible. Soon enough however, Spiro takes Gerald on a mission to spirit away five fat goldfish from the king's palace.

Gerald happily adds the goldfish to his new terrapin pond and believes the pond is now fit to be admired by company. When Gerald checks on the animals, he is upset to find two of his goldfish have been partially eaten by terrapin, snakes or both. Gerald decides to remove the snakes and terrapin until a more permanent solution can be found. As Gerald feeds the birds, he contemplates a solution to his pond problem. Gerald returns to the amphibians only to find the snakes have been moved into the sun and are heat-stricken.

A harried and hot Mrs. Durrell grants Gerald permission to put the snake in the bathtub to cool down when he barges into the kitchen with the bucket of half dead reptiles. Gerald returns to the veranda after leaving the snakes to their bath to find the magpies have gotten loose and have destroyed the dining table. Upon a closer look at the birds' behavior Gerald realizes they are drunk. He attempts to escape unseen but is caught by his mother. Mrs. Durrell is sympathetic when she learns the birds are drunk but cautions Gerald to be more careful securing the birds. Gerald finds the gull has also escaped but believes Alecko is probably at the shore and best left there for the moment.

The first guests have arrived as it is nearing lunch Leslie comes home from hunting showing off his may prizes before heading up to get dressed for lunch. Leslie soon returns angry and naked except for a small towel around his waist. Gerald is reminded with a roar that he has left his snakes in the bathtub. Larry begins his dramatics appealing to the guests that Gerald is trying to kill the family with his animals. Larry goes on to embellish the number and ferocity of the beasts until Leslie tells him to be quiet. As they are sitting for lunch, two of the guests cry out as they are pinched. A look under the table reveals Alecko as the attacker. Gerald tries to remove the bird which Theodore tells Larry is not an albatross but a gull, from under the table. Theodore entertains the guests with Gull inspired puns as Gerald struggles with the bird.



Animals continue to be the topic of conversation over lunch. Mrs. Durrell tells the guests of a family member who had an obsession for bee keeping. Larry informs the company that the same relative burned her cottage down trying to smoke bees from the chimney. The mention of fire puts a twinkle in Theodore's eye and a story comes to mind. Theodore tells the unbelieving assemblage a tale of Corfu's first modern fire truck and the problems it caused. It all started with the too large dreams of a fire chief that resulted in the too large fire truck being purchased, and ended with a warehouse nearly burning to the ground as the firefighters scrambled to figure out who had the key to the truck's hose.

The guests and hosts spend a lazy afternoon digesting their food and stories. In the evening, the party begins to liven up again. Dodo adds her own brand of excitement to the party when she is chased into villa chased by male dogs. Roger, Puke, and Widdle quickly pounce on the intruders. Chaos ensues as Larry insists the dogs are wolves and many attempt to find a piece of furniture to stand on while they shouted a variety of instructions from everyone. Finally, Theodore advises trying water to which Spiro responds by nearly drowning everyone with a large bucket and succeeds in scaring away the dogs. Once the excitement is over the guest are escorted to the veranda by Mrs. Durrell who nervously apologizes. Dinner is served without further animal affair. Gerald gazes around at the family and guests in various stages of eating and then out onto the beautiful black and silver night.

Mr. Kralfsky informs Mrs. Durrell it is time for Gerald to enter into formal schooling and suggests it is time to return to England. Mrs. Durrell consoles her children by saying they are only taking a vacation and will return to Corfu. The family is a spectacle of trunks and animals as they board the ship for England. After the customs man questions Mrs. Durrell a few times in heavily accented Greek, he demands to know if she speaks English. Spiro appears and gets the luggage onto the boat without much affair. Spiro stands by Theodore and Mr. Kralfsky who have come to see the Durrell family off.

Each of the Durrell's friends say goodbye in their own way. Theodore is awkward and formal while Mr. Kralfsky tries to buoy the family's spirits in telling them they will have a great holiday. Spiro begins to cry and apologizes telling them he feels he is losing his own people. The tender waits as they comfort Spiro before the ship finally leaves the dock. As the Durrell's wave to their friends Corfu fades in the distance and England lies ahead. A depression settles unto the family. As they continue their trip on the train, the family boards and travels in silence. As the Switzerland border, their passports are disdainfully verified and stamped. Once they are seated, Mrs. Durrell looks at the form the man has given her. She is upset to find he classified her family as a traveling circus and staff. Larry responds it is what they get for leaving Corfu.



Characters

Gerald Durrell

Author and narrator of the story, Gerald Durrell is ten-years-old at the time of his family's move to the Corfu. Gerald is the youngest of his siblings by many years. This disparity in age and the lack of formal education on the island gives Gerald a freedom many children do not enjoy. Gerald dedicates his free time to learning about the natural history of Corfu. Until he is gifted a microscope by Dr. Stephanides, Gerald spends much of his time nose-to-nose with the insect world. Gerald acquires a range of different pets while on the island. Like his family, Gerald's pets have distinct personality traits and idiosyncrasies. Gerald is either allowed freedom or simply forgotten until his insects or animals cause some type of chaos. It is at these times Mrs. Durrell realizes her youngest son is in need of education and structure.

Gerald's interest and research in nature deepen as the family moves about the island. His days are his own unless he is inconvenienced by a tutor. When Gerald is not returning home with an interesting tidbit about an animal or insect he has seen, he is bringing home a unique creature he has found on his excursions. By the time his family returns to England at the advice of Gerald's final tutor, Gerald has cages for magpies and a sea gull, along with a variety of other animals and specimens.

Dr. Theodore Sephanides

Gerald meets Theodore one day when Gerald rushes into George's home with a question about an insect habitat he has discovered. Theodore is a nature-lover like Gerald and introduced by George as an expert on everything. Theodore suffers acute awkwardness whenever greeting or saying goodbye to a person and usually stands quietly shifting in place until throwing his hand out to give or receive a handshake. He seems awkward in conversation as well, seeming unsure if the recipient of his words wants to hear what he has to say.

Theodore begins to spend one day a week visiting Gerald and his family and becomes a favorite of them all. Theodore is full of scientific facts and anecdotes about the unique island. Theodore's stories are funny and at times unbelievable. Gerald frequently retells a tale told by Theodore during a dinner or group gathering.

Larry Durrell

Larry is Gerald's eldest brother and 23-years-old at time of the move to Corfu. A writer and lover of literature, Larry hopes to publish the next best selling novel. Larry is the propellant of the family's many moves. It is Larry who initiates the family's initial move to Corfu, complaining that England's weather is the cause of everyone's varied sicknesses. It is early apparent that Larry believes himself to be the sole authority on



many issues. As such, Larry is often barking orders to his family, or informing them of a better way of doing things. One day Leslie has had enough of Larry's know-it-all attitude and challenges Larry to accomplish a hunting task Larry deems simple. Larry fails horribly and returns to the villa to drown his embarrassment in brandy.

Mrs. Durrell

Mrs. Durrell is the widowed mother of four and a woman of indeterminate age as she has forgotten when she was born. Mrs. Durrell's only concerns are her children and her recipes. When she is not with her children or watching over them Mrs. Durrell is pruning and planting in the garden, poring over recipe books, or cooking savory meals in the kitchen. Mrs. Durrell appears to fight against Larry's decisions to move, but it is obvious when it comes to her children, Mrs. Durrell will do nearly anything to please them. Mrs. Durrell does not exercise unyielding will unless she is faced with opposition to a decision she makes for herself. Mrs. Durrell seems determined not to leave the strawberry-pink villa, but what she is more determined about is the bathing suit she purchases once the family moves to the new villa. Despite her children's and dog's appeals to exchange her suit for something more flattering Mrs. Durrell is adamant she is keeping the voluminous suit.

Leslie Durrell

Gerald's second eldest brother at 19-years-old, Leslie's main interests are guns and hunting. When the family moves into the daffodil-yellow villa, Leslie takes advantage of the extra space by building a shooting gallery on a veranda. Leslie reveals he relishes his role as the man of the family. When Margo's new suitor who is also Gerald's tutor is removed from the villa, Leslie struts around the house armed threatening to kill Peter if he returns. Leslie's bravado is also behind the craftsmanship of The Bottle-Bum Trinket. Leslie would rather stumble through building the boat than admit to his younger brother he does not have the skill.

Margo Durrell

At eighteen, Margo's sole interests are in maintaining her appearance which includes attempting nearly any diet to free herself of acne. Margo goes as far as to kiss the feet of a saintly corpse said to grant wishes in hopes he will cure her condition.

Apparently highly susceptible to germs or persuasion, the following day, Margo falls ill with the flu and is confined to bed for three weeks. Margo has two boyfriends while on the island of Corfu. The first, The Young Turk, immediately meets Spiro's disapproval. The second gentleman is Gerald's tutor. For reasons not let on in the novel, Margo's mother and brothers do not approve of the couple, and Peter is banished from the house by the family and the island by Spiro.



Spiro

Spiro is a Greek cab driver who becomes the family's voice, sponsor and friend. Spiro admires Mrs. Durrell so much so he compliments her often to the point of her embarrassment and to the amusement of her children. Spiro becomes a constant person in the Durrell household. He fades into the background of the story until he is needed to drive Mrs. Durrell into town, or help a member of the family with an issue only Spiro can solve. One day, Gerald approaches Spiro with one such problem. Gerald needs goldfish to complete the look of a terrapin pond he has made. After professing the impossibility of the task, Spiro finds a way to secure five goldfish from the king's palace.

The Rose-Beetle Man

The Rose-Beetle Man is a man Gerald meets while on one of his excursions with Roger. The Rose-Beetle Man is a unique sight. In addition to the cages of birds he carries on his back, and his strange hat with an assortment of bird's feathers, The Rose-Beetle Man also carries a swarm of rose-beetles individually attached to lengths of string. As The Rose-Beetle Man moves the insects buzz around his head. The Rose-Beetle Man is alternately playing his flute and singing as he travels his way from a festival. Mute, The Rose-Beetle Man pantomimes to speak to Gerald, but his sings to the music he plays in utterances so heartfelt, it appears it his own language. The Rose-Beetle Man sells various wares including all kinds of small animals. After taking a moment to read Gerald, the man produces a bag of tortoises. Gerald and The Rose-Beetle Man haggle for the price and Gerald gets his tortoise and promises to bring the man the money the following day. Gerald and The Rose-Beetle become fast friends from that day.

George

George is a friend of Larry's who is also a writer. George's letters about Corfu's beauty lead to Larry's insistence his family move there. George becomes Gerald's private tutor. George shows his creativity by developing new ways to entertain and instruct Gerald while catering to Gerald's hobbies, as well.

Mr. Kralesky

Mr. Kralesky is Gerald's fourth and final tutor on the island. Gerald is informed that Mr. Kralesky is bird enthusiast. Gerald is not impressed since in his opinion many bird lovers do not have knowledge of birds. Mr. Kralesky is a small hunched back man with a round face that is constantly turned skyward. To Gerald the tutor is a gnome disguised in old yet elegant human attire. Gerald is excited to learn Mr. Kralesky is not only a lover of birds, but has dedicated a large area of his home to a variety of them. Mr. Kralesky creates tales of his many acts of bravery in saving various ladies in distress. Gerald believes these tales particularly a story of Mr. Kralesky besting a world



champion wrestler who manhandled a lady. Mr. Kralesky is pushed to prove himself when one day he can no longer avoid Gerald's requests for wrestling lessons. Mr. Kralesky's attempt to teach Gerald a throwing move results in Gerald tossing and injuring the man. Gerald's attempt to deposit the man on the chair fails and Mr. Kralesky hits the floor forcefully, cracking two ribs.

Mrs. Kralesky

Entering a room Gerald believes is the bathroom, Gerald is instead greeted by a bedroom filled with flowers. At its center is a large bed housing Mr. Kralesky's ailing mother. The woman is diminutive in size and pale in color, yet her hair is a lustrous auburn that heavily courses down half the length of the bed. Mrs. Kralesky shares a private moment with Gerald as she tells him about her flowers, how she cares for them, and her beliefs about them. The elderly woman accepts that people may view her as peculiar or eccentric due to her belief that flowers can talk. However, in Gerald, she has found a kindred spirit and believer.

The Belgian Consul

The Belgian Consul was Gerald's French tutor once the family moves to the daffodil-yellow villa. The Consul dresses everyday as if he is going to an important meeting. From the Consul's top hat to his spats and polished shoes, he is a unique sight in the poor neighborhood in which he lives. The Consul intermittently interrupts his lesson with Gerald to shoot emaciated cats outside his window. After each euthanizing, the Consul pauses for a moment of silence before wiping away his tears and continuing.

Peter

Peter is Gerald's summer tutor. Peter spends the summer from Oxford with the Durrell's in exchange for tutoring Gerald. Peter is very strict about his responsibility until he becomes affected by the Corfu summer and Margo's attentions.



Objects/Places

England

Gerald's family has lived in England for six years and has recently moved onto the Continent when Larry, Mrs. Durrell's eldest child, insists the family must leave the country. It is the month of August, and England is cursing the Durrell family with her usual weather of dark rain. England's weather causes each member to suffer a curious physical ailment. Larry, who sits morosely at the window, is only affected emotionally. He glares out at the weather at length before finally asking any and everyone why they continue to deal with the horrible climate. When Gerald's family returns to England five years later, it is under a cloud of depression that begins to settle in as soon as their ship sets sail.

Corfu

George writes letters to Larry extolling the beauty of Corfu. Larry is convinced the Greek island should be the family's new home. As their ship enters Greek waters in the early dawn, an immediate change comes over the family. They watch the approach to the island in happy anticipation. Corfu is a beautiful island full of opportunity for the Durrell's to cater to their various interests. Flora, fauna and beautiful weather are in abundance. What appeared at the start of this story to be a sickly group of people, suddenly flourish in their surroundings. Gerald, who has had an interest in zoology since a toddler, finds a plethora of insect and animal life to study. Leslie, who is the outdoorsman of the family, is in his hunting element. Larry is in the perfect surroundings to inspire his next great body of work. Corfu offers Mrs. Durrell the opportunity to delve deeper into her love of gardening and cooking, while the near-endless sunshine gives Margo the freedom to cater to her appearance and relax.

Corfu is an island where anything can happen. Proving its reputation, Gerald's family meets with many strange people and circumstances. Gerald also acquires the most unusual pets including an owl and a black-backed gull. The friends and acquaintances the Durrell's acquire are just as unique as the animals that begin to populate the villas.

The Strawberry-Pink Villa

The Durrells spend a day searching for a home with their hotel manager before they are informed homes don't carry bathrooms. Spiro finds the family the perfect home in the strawberry villa. Though small, the family feels immediately at home. The small garden is an oasis for Mrs. Durrell and Gerald. Mrs. Durrell dedicates herself to pruning and planting while Gerald dedicates himself to the insects that have created worlds in the garden and the olive groves beyond.



The Daffodil-Yellow Villa

The daffodil-yellow villa is Larry's answer to the many guests he has invited to stay. His first idea of letting his siblings sleep outside to accommodate the guests is vehemently turned down by Mrs. Durrell. Though she also says they will not move, the family is soon moving into another villa found by Spiro. The daffodil-yellow villa is not only larger, but older than the pink villa. The furniture is worn and disintegrating. After purchasing new furniture, the family settles in comfortably in the large, old home. The enormous space affords each Durrell the opportunity to delve deeper into their interests.

The Snow-White Villa

The move to the snow-white villa is a preemptive strike by the Durrells to escape their family's threat of visiting. Although the family can accept the idiosyncrasies of near-strangers, Mrs. Durrell's children, especially Larry, cannot accept being invaded by their family. The snow-white villa is the Durrell family's final home on the island of Corfu.

Mr. Kralesky's Home

Mr. Kralesky's home would be nondescript if not for the huge room and balcony dedicated to a variety of birds. Mr. Kralesky prides himself on his collection of birds and speaks to and treats them nearly human. Another room in the house is as enchanting if not more so than Mr. Kralesky's assortment of birds. When Gerald is led to a room he believes is the bathroom, he is surprised to find Mr. Kralesky's mother in a large bedroom that is more like a greenhouse. The frail woman lies in bed in apparently swindling health. However, the life around her (including her beautiful hair), continues to thrive under her love and care.

Lake Antionissa

The lake is a favorite of the Durrell family. It is also the scene of Mrs. Durrell's inaugural swim on Corfu. The night Gerald's mother dons an ugly bathing suit of her choosing and attempts a night swim, the fireflies and porpoises seem to pay a tribute to her as they put on a dancing light-show in the phosphorescent bay.

The Archipelago

The Durrell family discover the archipelago once they install a motor on the Sea Cow. The collection of small islands quickly loses the interest of all the family but Gerald who is enchanted with the array of sea life he finds in the small pools of water. As his family's visits to the islands dwindle, the archipelago becomes Gerald's motivation to attain his own boat.



The Bottle-Bumtrinket

Gerald convinces Leslie to build him a boat for his birthday. When Gerald sets his eyes on the unusually round boat, he loves it instantly. Gerald requests the assistance of his family in naming the boat as he does when he brings home an animal. When no one comes up with a satisfactory name, Gerald takes in the boat's beetle-like figure and comes up with the name Bottle. Larry, who has a way with words and has named many of the animals, tells Gerald the word BumTrinket comes to mind. Their mother is offended by Larry's language, but Gerald likes it and gives the boat the hyphenated name, The Bottle-BumTrinket.

The Pension Suisse

The Durrell family arrive at the Pension Suisse chased by a pack of dogs. Once ensconced in the hotel, they find out the hotel does not have indoor plumbing. Margo is further humiliated to find she has wiped herself with used tissues. The family's stay only worsens when they find their room faces a cemetery which is unfortunately hosting a parade of funeral processions. Mrs. Durrell decides they must find a home with plumbing immediately before someone catches the plague she believes has seized the island.



Themes

The Study of Zoology

Gerald has had an affinity for nature and its creatures, reportedly since the age two. It is due to this fascination that Gerald Durrell has written an account of his findings in nature while living on the island of Corfu with his mother and elder siblings. Corfu is abundant with life for Gerald to explore. From scorpions to Mantises four and a half inches long, Gerald receives hands-on learning of natural history he would not have experienced had the family stayed in England.

The author's goal is to give the reader insight to the thriving worlds of insects and animals that exist in Corfu. Although exposition of his findings is frequently interrupted by a visit to or from an acquaintance, a squabble between family, or Gerald's tutelage, Gerald succeeds in giving one in-depth insight to the behaviors of insects, and animals. Before meeting Dr. Stephanides, Gerald spends much of his time nose to ground studying insects without aid of scientific equipment. Still, Gerald describes the behavior of a lacewing fly laying eggs in a manner that grants one a microscopic perspective on the tiny creature and many others.

Eccentricities

The Durrell family is at home on the island of Corfu, which is a beautiful yet eccentric place unto itself. Theodore professes that anything can happen in Corfu and usually does. This prophecy is realized in spades with the Durrell family. Gerald and his family encounter very unusual individuals from the moment they arrive on the island from the hotel manager who is shocked the family wants a home with a bathroom, to the Rose-Beetle Man who tethers rose-beetles by strings and sells them as toy airplanes.

The Durrell family realizes they may be viewed as eccentric, and at times even believe they are too strange. However, the cause for any member feeling this sentiment at any one time or other is directly related to the behavior of another family member instead of themselves. This is especially evident when the unsuspecting family is startled awake one night by Leslie's three-rifle alarm system. While Margo believes someone has killed her estranged lover, Larry rants that from insects and animals roaming free, to gunshots in the dark, madness has taken over their home.

When Larry suggest the family move to a smaller villa it is too avoid a branch of the Durrell family so eccentric the children deem them committable. Mrs. Durrell is concerned she and her children will appear even crazier if they keep moving around the island. Larry defends it is better in comparison to how they will look if their Great-aunt comes to stay. The Durrell family who has moved from a small villa they loved to accommodate Larry's guests will now return to a small villa to avoid entertaining extended family.



Weather

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Style

Perspective

My Family and Other Animals is a non-fiction story told from the perspective of Gerald Durrell. This point of view is limited as one is only privy to the mind of the main character who also narrates the novel. This perspective is important to the story, as the primary goal of the work is to convey Gerald Durrell's account of the abundant natural wonders on the island of Corfu. At times, the narrator takes on an omnipresent point of view as he recounts incidents that he was not present to witness. When Spiro informs Mrs. Durrell of Margo's rendezvous, it is obvious Gerald is not in the room. However, he retells the incident as though he has experienced it word for word.

The author utilizes narrative exposition to guide the reader through many sections of the story since Gerald spends many of his days alone with his dog, Roger exploring. Gerald describes his surroundings and the insects, animals, and peasants he encounters with great detail. Gerald transitions from relaying conversations between family to describing the behaviors of the animals and the sights and scents of scenery in a captivating way. One feels transported within the Durrell's midst, sitting on their veranda enjoying a party or following Gerald on one of his excursions.

Tone

The tone of the story is at times scientific, at times whimsical, and often humorous as Gerald describes his family's and animal's antics. The language is informal, even when the topic is Gerald's research expeditions. The Durrell family may appear formal to an American reader as the English have a more reserved and at times more precise way of speaking. This is especially the case as it is the 1930's. However, the dialog is easily readable and brings the characters to life. The formality of words does not disguise the humor behind the discourse and arguments shared by the family and their various friends and guests.

The tone of the novel captures the essence of the varied individuals introduced throughout the story. Each creature and person is described in creative detail. Though Gerald is translating his conversations with the Corfu peasants, he still manages to remain true to each individual's characteristic nuances. The language is very descriptive, making the antics of insects, animals, and humans a pleasurable read.

Structure

The story is written in an informal informational manner. There are three parts to the story, each containing seven chapters. In each part, the first six chapters are titled and numbered in the contents. In Parts One and Two, the unnumbered final chapters are both titled conversation, and in Part Three the final chapter is titled *The Return*. The title



of each chapter explains the setting and foreshadows the events of the chapter. The chapters average thirteen pages in length with the exception of *The Return*, which is only three pages long.

The plot of the story is intended to be straightforward but does not remain so. The story is an attempt by Gerald Durrell to recount the natural history he has encountered and studied during his five years on the island of Corfu. Instead, the story includes the historical and at times comical account of Gerald Durrell's family and friends, as well.

The pace of the novel is moved along by the descriptions of arriving seasons and the family's moves at the end of each section of the story. One does not have a clear idea of time and pace until mention of Gerald's birthday and even then does not learn how old Gerald is going to be. One only knows that when Gerald is ten the Durrell family arrives on Corfu and five years later, they return to England. The time in between is an assemblage of events that may or may not be relayed chronologically.



Quotes

"I'm glad you've come, dear," she panted; "This pelican is a little difficult to handle." Pp xiii

"Well of course I knew they were yours, dear; Who else would send pelicans to me?" Pp xiii

"what for you want a bathroom? Have you not got the sea?" Pp 13

"Honest to Gods if I wasn't Greek, I'd likes to be English." Pp 16

"I'm far and away the most reasonable member of the family." Pp 41

"I wouldn't mind being attacked by bumble-bees, if it led anywhere." Pp 41

"You see," he went on in case we had missed the point, "you see, I am not a fearful man." Pp 72

"I could have cheerfully hit him. I thought we were never going to get back." Pp 73

"Nothing short of a bayonet would do her stomach any good," Larry said caustically. Pp 85

"Animals and explosions all day, and then bloody great twelve gun salutes in the middle of the night...It's carrying eccentricity too far." Pp 155

"Do be sensible Mother," said Margo; "after all, change is as good as a feast." Pp 174

Topics for Discussion

Does the author succeed in capturing the essence of Corfu's varied animal and insect life? Discuss.

Mrs. Durrell and Larry argue more than any other family members. Why do you believe they share this type of relationship? Discuss.

Mrs. Durrell appears adamant first not to leave England, and then to remain at the strawberry-pink villa. What about Mrs. Durrell's personality suggests why she capitulates to Larry's demands?

When Gerald relays the story of the scorpions in the matchbox, he professes forgetfulness in leaving the box on the mantle to be picked up by an unwitting Larry. Is Gerald as innocent as he claims, or can this be the impish behavior of a child? Discuss.

Compare and contrast Larry and Leslie. How do they appear similar? How do they differ?

Discuss the importance of the seasons. How does the author use the seasons in the novel? Why is this important?

Although Gerald has a love and interest for zoology, he does not have a problem with Leslie's hunting. What does this say about Gerald's attitude toward nature?

At ten-years-old, Gerald can retain scientific terms, however he finds it tedious and difficult to learn simple math and other subjects. What does this say about one's capacity to learn?