

A Ring of Endless Light Study Guide

A Ring of Endless Light by Madeleine L'Engle

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Plot Summary

A Ring of Endless Light by Madeleine L'Engle is the story of almost-sixteen-year-old Vicky who comes to Seven Bay Island for her annual summer visit. This time, instead of spending two weeks like usual, her family is staying for much longer since her grandfather is dying. With three different young men interested in her, Vicky is thrown into a whirlwind of emotion as she deals with relationships, life, and death.

The summer begins with tragedy as a dear family friend, the father of Vicky's friend Leo, dies trying to rescue a rich young man who is drowning. Vicky has her suspicions about this rich young man, and they are confirmed when Zachary, a young man who met her the previous summer, tells her that he was the rescued individual. He hadn't been drowning, though. He been trying to commit suicide. He tells Vicky that she is the only good thing his life, and she feels that it's important that he has a second chance.

Meanwhile, Leo talks to her about his father's death and his future plans. She feels that it's very important to be there for him as a friend. He wants to have more than friendship, but she's not ready to offer anything more.

Grandfather is very ill, but he isn't too ill to talk with his granddaughter. Vicky reads with him and tells him about her relationship with the young men, and he offers insight. He appreciates his granddaughter's gift for writing, and he cultivates it. He encourages her to write and meditate when she is confused.

The third young man in Vicky's life that summer is Adam. He is a friend of her brother, John, and he is a scientist who studies dolphins. Adam invites Vicky to work and introduces her to dolphins in the pen as well as dolphins in the wild. They are both delighted to discover that she has a special affinity with dolphins and can communicate with them easily, even without words.

Grandfather takes a downward turn and needs to have blood for transfusions. Vicky and Leo go to the mainland to get blood for him. While they are there, Vicky has her first experience with the emergency room. It horrifies her, especially when she sees a young girl that she thinks is going to die. The girl reminds her of her little brother.

Grandfather regains his strength after the transfusions, and Vicky finds out that the little girl lived through that night in the emergency room. She has a disease, but is released from the hospital in good spirits. The summer is filled with dates with a three young men, playing with the dolphins, and reading to and talking with Grandfather. All seems be going well then life takes a quick downward turn. Stress, illness, and death surround Vicky, plunging her into an impenetrable darkness. Thanks to her family's love, Adam's caring, and lessons from the dolphins, Vicky learns to see the light again.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

A Ring of Endless Light by Madeleine L'Engle is the story of almost-sixteen-year-old Vicky who comes to Seven Bay Island for her annual summer visit. This time, instead of spending two weeks like usual, her family is staying for much longer since her grandfather is dying. With three different young men interested in her, Vicky is thrown into a whirlwind of emotion as she deals with relationships, life, and death.

Chapter 1. Vicky attends the funeral of a family friend. Commander Rodney died of a heart attack while trying to save a rich, young boy from drowning. Her grandfather officiates the funeral, since he is standing in for the regular minister who is on vacation. Vicky observes the joy in her grandfather as he talks about life after death. He pushes aside the plastic grass and other fake elements of the death and deals with it as a reality. Someone questions who would be the next to go, and Vicky realizes it would probably be her grandfather, who had leukemia. A butterfly catches her eye at the funeral. It's a beautiful sign of life and hope among the graves.

Vicky observes the others standing around the grave and focuses on Leo, the son of the deceased. They leave the grave site and go to the house where they comfort each other and where Vicky met Adam Eddington, a young man who works at the Marine Biology Station with her brother John. Adam asks her if she would be interested in meeting some dolphins. When she and her family arrive back at the house after their time with the family of the deceased, Zachary Gray is in her yard. He was the young man who had given her her first real kiss the year before. He did not keep in touch with her over the winter, and her family did not appreciate him. He invites Vicky out the next day and then leaves so the family can rest.

John wonders aloud when Zachary had arrived, and Vicky confronts him on leaping to conclusions, although he is only giving voice to her own thoughts. They wonder whether Zachary was the young man that Commander Rodney was trying to save. Grandfather's house is a renovated stable. He has bookcases built into most of the stalls where he keeps his collection of thousands of books. Vicky has hard time falling asleep that night, but finally falls asleep to the sound of her mother singing downstairs as she sleeps in the loft.

Vicky wakes up during the night and notices that her seven-year-old brother, Rob, is missing. She isn't worried, however, because she knows the dog is very protective of her brother. Rob comes up the ladder and tells her that he has been talking to Grandfather about death. Over breakfast the next morning, the family members read the newspaper and discuss some of the harsh realities of life. Vicky is used to working during the summer, but this year her father had asked her not to so that she could be around for her mother and grandfather. She did not tell her siblings this.



Leo stops by to see if they can take a walk, and she goes with him. Previously, she had considered him a slob, but this time they connect. She realizes that they could be friends. They grieve together on the beach and talk about the future of Leo's family without his father. Leo tells her that he was close to her grandfather and that he knew Grandfather was sick. He asked where Grandfather had been before he came to the island, and she told him about her grandfather's life as a minister who left a thriving congregation to work in Alaska. He had also lived with a small, ancient tribe in Africa, documenting its history.

Chapter 2. Vicky heads out for an afternoon of horseback riding with Zachary. Before they leave, she invites him into the house, which was designed by her grandmother. He greets the family, and Vicky compares Zachary to Leo. They are direct opposites. Through conversation, Vicky finds out that Zachary's mother had been killed in a car accident in California, near their home. He didn't seem very grieved by it.

Vicky remembered when they had met the year before. Both their families were camping, although his family had the newest and best of everything. Zachary explains to them that his family believed in cryogenics and belonged to the crew called the Immortalists. They froze his mother's body so that she might be able to be revived in the future when science was ready for that. This unnerves Vicky, who doesn't think that it seems very natural. Grandfather comments that resurrection had always been costly for some, it only took thirty pieces of silver.

Zachary and Vicky leave the house to go horseback riding. He drives very fast, and she protests. They discuss things that have happened over the past year, and Zachary makes excuses for not staying in touch with her, saying he was busy getting ready for college. While they are out riding, he tells her that he had tried to kill himself. He was the rich young man that Commander Rodney had been trying to save, but it hadn't been an accident. At first he hadn't known about the commander's death because he was in the intensive care unit and his father wouldn't let anyone tell him. Zachary has a heart condition, and his dad thought he wouldn't be able to handle it. When he got out of the hospital and learned about the funeral, things didn't add up, so he asked some questions. Vicky feels sorry for him, and doesn't really know how to help. He asks about her relationship with Leo, and she says they are friends. Zachary says he really needs her then leaves.

Vicky goes inside and her grandfather calls her in to talk. They talk about the events of the day, and she shares the story and her confusion. Grandfather points out to her how much stress she has been under with all the changes in her life. He shares some seventeenth century poetry with her and tells her to go write something. She writes several poems that she doesn't like then settles down to write a rondel based on the poem that he read to her. She prints a copy for him.

Chapter 3. Adam and John come home from work together, and Adam stays for dinner with the family. Vicky observes him as he and John go swimming together and notices that Adam looks like a statue of a Greek charioteer that she had seen in an art book. She, Robert, and her sister Suzy work together to put dinner on the table. It is a relaxing



evening and quite late when they all sit down. Leo shows up unexpectedly at their house, and they welcome him in. He is out of breath and acting unusual. He sits down and tells them that Zachary had come to his house to explain his role in the commander's death.

Suzy and John are still antagonistic toward Zachary, and Leo tells them that he appreciates the fact that Zachary has come to talk with them. Vicky thinks maybe Zachary has grown up during the past year and feels that they should give him another chance. They talk a bit about the future of the Rodney family. Leo has his mother's support to go to college in Columbia, which is right near the area where Adam lives. Leo's mother has decided to go back to nursing. Leo asks Vicky if she wants to go out with him on Monday and alludes to their relationship getting more serious.

The family discusses the events of the night after Leo leaves, and Vicky suggests that they give Zachary a chance, but her siblings are against it. Suzy is especially quick to place the blame on Zachary for Commander Rodney's death. Adam jumps in and states that it isn't fair to put guilt on a person like that. Grandfather goes to get a book that will help diffuse the situation. It is the book *Messengers of God*, and it leads to a lively debate about Christianity. It also talks about the good in life that comes along with the pain.

After dinner, Vicky considers families and their influences. Adam begins talking about his project of working with dolphins during the summer. Suzy is concerned about the experiments they would do with the dolphins, and he explains that they only work with dolphins in a positive way. The scientists are studying communication. Suzy asks if she can go visit the dolphins, and Adam agrees, but states that Vicky will come to see them first.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Chapter 1. The reader gets to meet Vicky and her family. They are close to each other and enjoy spending time with each other. As the chapter begins, they are attending the funeral of a close friend who died suddenly. It's especially unnerving to them because they have come to the island this summer to spend more time than usual with Grandfather, who is dying from leukemia. Vicky grew up in the country, but just spent a year with her family living in New York City. She enjoyed living there, but it also opened her eyes to the fact that life is sometimes harsh.

In this chapter, she contemplates life, death, and human emotion. She is sad and angry about death, but sees the way her grandfather reacts to it. He is the one who is dying, but he is not scared of it, and looks forward to to life after death. Vicky herself is more drawn to the printed word. Her grandfather has a great love of literature, and she is inspired by things he reads and poetry he highlights.

Three specific boys come into the picture during this chapter. They are all very different from each other. Vicky spends a morning with Leo because she feels sorry for him since



his father died. They connect in a way that surprises her, and she realizes they can become good friends. The other two boys set up times to be with her.

Chapter 2. Chapter 2 offers more insight into Vicky's family. They are very close to each other and enjoy spending time with each other. Even the pets help take care of the family members. This is in stark contrast to Zachary and his family. He deals with his mother's death pragmatically, showing more enthusiasm over this science of cryogenics than he showed emotion over the fact that his mother had been killed.

Chapter 1 opened with the funeral, and Chapter 2 demonstrates a different angle on death. While Vicky is mourning the impending death of her grandfather, Zachary flirts with death, and is upset that his attempt to meet death failed.

Chapter 2 shows the special bond between Vicky and her grandfather as they share literature together. He reads her a poem from a seventeenth century poet and expresses delight in her own writing. She writes something special for him based on the poem, and this becomes the title of this novel. She printed the poem out carefully to share with her grandfather, solidifying their bond.

Chapter 3. Once again the writer highlights the cohesiveness of Vicky's family as they prepare a meal together. This time Adam joins them. Leo also comes in with some startling news. Zachary had come to his house to explain what had happened on the night of his father's death. This gives insight into Vicky's character. She hadn't talked to anyone about the story except for her grandfather, and he, too, had kept it private.

Vicky thought that Zachary deserved another chance. Her siblings felt otherwise. Adam interjected, cautioning them to be careful with their accusations. This makes the reader wonder what happened in his past that made him understand the situation from both sides. Grandfather is the mediator and goes to his precious books to find answers that will satisfy everyone. He highlights the thought that where there is laughter, there is heaven.

As the chapter closes, Adam talks about his summer job with the dolphins, and Suzy expresses an interest in visiting the dolphins. Vicky is used to this, and she feels that her sister is more scientific and smarter than she is. She is pleased when Adam sticks up for her and tells Suzy that she can go see the dolphins, but Vicky gets a turn first. They close the evening with singing, and Vicky's mother talks about choices. They all reflect on how life changes.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Chapter 4. Vicky went to work with John because it was her day to visit the dolphins. She wishes she were more scientific than poetic and realizes that she doesn't know anything about dolphins. She's really looking forward to spending a day with Adam, and compared that to how she felt about spending a day with Zachary. It feels completely different. With Zachary, she feels as if she is acting, even though she is excited and nervous. With Adam, it is different. It is even different from spending time with Leo, who is turning out to be a good friend. She reflects that when she went out with Leo, she didn't even really consider it a date.

Vicky is drawn to a light that she feels inside Adam. The light particularly shows when he talks about his dolphins. John works with starfish, and Adam and Vicky spend some time talking about regeneration and how it could help mankind to learn how to regenerate in human beings. They talk about the importance of science, especially when it relates to nature.

Going outside, Vicky meets Jeb, the scientist who works with the dolphins and is Adam's boss. She also gets to meet Una and Nini, the two dolphins in captivity. They marvel at the dolphins, and Adam explains that it is scientifically impossible for a dolphin to swim as fast as it does. He teaches her some more facts about the dolphins and encourages her to feed them. She has never done it before, and she doesn't like holding the fish, but she hides her reaction and enjoys the rest of the act of feeding the dolphins.

After feeding Una and Nini, Adam takes her to a different pen where she meets another dolphin named Ynid, who is about to give birth soon. There are two other dolphins swimming with her. They are the midwives, since dolphins don't give birth alone. Adam and Vicky talk a bit more about the dolphins and their history.

While they are talking, Adam diverts the conversation and asks about her connection to Leo. She points out that they are very definitely friends and nothing more. He asks about Zachary, and she expresses that she is trying to give him another chance. Adam asks if she wants to meet Basil, a dolphin he is studying in the sea. Although she is nervous about it, she decides to go out. Basil comes to greet Adam then swims over to her. She connects with him immediately and senses that he is communicating with her. It wasn't through sounds, but rather just an emotion. Adam is pleased with their bond. After playing for a while, Basil swims back to his pod. Adam is so happy with the connection that he is doing cartwheels on the beach when she swims in. They discuss what happened, and she realizes that he had asked John's permission to take her out. It was okay for her to talk with John about her sea experience with the dolphins, but no one else. Adam told her that Basil didn't usually connect with people that fast, and assured her that she had a special connection with the dolphins.



Vicky thinks about how much Suzy would have enjoyed the experience, yet she cannot share it with her. She's a bit jealous of Suzy, but Adam says that while Suzy is special, Vicky is even more special to him. Her gifts just weren't as obvious as Suzy's. Later, in a conversation with John, John expresses his appreciation of her, also. He appreciates how she helps the family, especially Grandfather.

Chapter 5. As Vicky rides her bicycle home, she reflects on the morning. Meeting Basil has changed the way she views things, and it even changes the way she feels about Adam. When she gets to the house, she checks the swallows that are in a nest above the front door. Everything is peaceful in the house, except Grandfather isn't in his normal spot. She finds her brother in the loft, and he has been crying.

Rob explains to her that Grandfather had a nosebleed that wouldn't stop. The parents called in the Coast Guard and took Grandfather to the hospital on the mainland so he could get his blood transfusion. Suzy was off at work, and Rob was the only one home. He stayed so he could tell what happened. Vicky tries to reassure him. To distract him, she tells him about the dolphins in captivity, but she doesn't tell him about Basil. He calms down and goes to sleep.

Going downstairs to make dinner, Vicky thinks about dolphins in general. She reflects that dolphins are communal creatures, and she knows that they can't give birth alone. Dying is a different matter, and she doesn't know how dolphins react to death. Grandfather and her parents come home, and they try to get back to life as normal. However, the day has taken its toll on Mother.

Grandfather wonders if he would be better off in the hospital so everyone didn't have to see what was happening to him. They say they want to be around for him, even though it does hurt sometimes. Grandfather starts to call Vicky by the name of Victoria and comments that she looks a lot like her mother when her mother was her age. Zachary calls and is upset at Vicky for not calling him back. She explains what has happened that day. She tells him that her grandfather has leukemia, and after he gets the facts, he invites her out on a date on the mainland at the country club.

The next day, Vicky's father brings a hospital bed into the house for Grandfather and makes some phone calls to say that Grandfather won't be preaching anymore. Mother comments that it is a good thing that Father has planned on writing a book that summer so they are able to be with Grandfather. Vicky's parents once again express how much they appreciate the fact that Vicky gave up her job to help them. They comment that they wish she had some sort of project, though. She tells them that she is helping Adam with a dolphin project.

Later that day, Mrs. Rodney comes to visit them. She comments that the swallows have made their nest too shallow. She thinks perhaps the fledglings will fall out of the nest before they learn to fly. Mrs. Rodney wants to practice her nursing skills and help Grandfather. She can do transfusions so he won't have to go to the mainland. That night after dinner, Vicky's father suggests that they read aloud in the evenings. Grandfather helps choose a book, and Vicky enjoys lying on the floor listening to her mother read.



Chapter 6. Vicky and her siblings are concerned about the swallows and their too shallow nest. Grandfather states that the ones that lived there the previous year had died. They decide to put a cushion under the nest. Vicky heads down to the lab and makes plans to go out and swim with Basil again on Wednesday. When she goes home, she gets ready for her date with Zachary. He makes derogatory remarks about the swallows, then he and Vicky head out so that they can take a ferry to the mainland. At the country club on the mainland, Vicky enjoys swimming, but Zachary doesn't want to go into the water. They have dinner together in a fancy restaurant, and she appreciates the ambiance. She feels awkward and nervous but enjoys the food.

On their way to a concert after dinner, Vicky comments that she has never been in an airplane, and Zachary offers to take her up the next time he goes flying. They make a date for Saturday, a week later. Vicky loses herself in the music at the concert. When it is time to go, she discovers that Zachary didn't enjoy it as much as she did. He took her to the concert because he knew she would like it.

Vicky settles into a routine with her grandfather, reading to him every morning when he is most alert. He asks her to read the works of scientists, and she talks about the books with her brother John over dinner.

On Monday, she gets together with Leo as planned. They spend talk about death in relation to the universe. He tries to kiss her, but she won't let him. He feels more like a brother to her.

On Wednesday, she goes out with Adam to see Basil. She grabs his dorsal fin, and he takes her for a ride. She feels that the dolphin is communicating with her and telling her that something is wrong, but he is trying to make her laugh to cheer her up. She doesn't know what is wrong, and asks Adam about it. She finds out that Ynid's baby dolphin is going to die. Something is wrong with his heart.

When they get back to the pens, the dolphin's mother is carrying her dead baby on her back. She suddenly starts beating her body against the tank wall, but Jeb calms her down. He is grieving with her.

When she gets home that evening, Vicky's grandfather does not come for dinner. She goes to talk with him and finds out he is meditating. She tries to understand the concept of meditation. After dinner, Adam takes Vicky for a walk, and he discusses the dolphins. He tell her that Jeb lost his wife and baby in a car accident a few years before. He felt that the man and the dolphin were comforting each other. As Vicky and Adam talk about death, she feels very close to him. She thinks he is going to kiss her, but he doesn't.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Chapter 4. The reader learns more about Vicky in this chapter. Her family is very scientific, and she is dismayed about the fact that she doesn't think she's a scientist. However, she is obviously listening to her siblings and father because she seems to know quite a bit about the animals and scientific methods that she observes in the lab.



Not one prone to drama, Vicky plunges right in and grabs a hold of the fish to feed the dolphins when Adam asked her to. She doesn't like the feel of the fish, and she's a bit nervous about feeding the dolphins, but she never lets it show. Even after she has done the task, she keeps her feelings to herself.

As Vicky thinks about the dolphins, she immediately relates them to humans. She considers evolution and what it must have been like for the dolphins to give up their hands by conscious choice. She talks about dolphins with Adam, and they get on the topic of oral tradition. Vicky understands how important Grandfather's work was. She appreciates the written word in a whole new way - not only the poetry, but the way her grandfather's documentation in Africa linked stories and traditions of people groups through the centuries.

When Adam suggests that she might want to go out to meet the dolphin he is working within the wild, she is excited, but nervous. She has the same feeling she had while feeding the dolphins. She doesn't let Adam know how she feels, and when Basil came to her, there is an immediate connection. Adam is blown away by her connection to the animal, but shows strengths of character as the reader realizes that he appreciates her talent, but isn't envious. As the chapter ends, they discuss death and separation. Vicky knows she is going to face her grandfather's death, and Adam is sad about leaving the dolphins, but they also realize that death is a part of life.

Chapter 5. This chapter shows a shift in the story. Up to this point, the reader is getting to know the main characters and understands the basic context of the story. As chapter four ended, the reader was lulled into a peaceful world where everything seems to be going right. Chapter five begins the same way, then there is a dramatic shift. Vicky is confronted with the seriousness of her grandfather's illness and the reality of the wake it is leaving in its path - not only for her grandfather but for the other members of her family. Still, the family rallies together and faces death and its path head-on, as a solid unit. The chapter ends peacefully.

Chapter 6. This chapter opens with a fear of death. Vicky is concerned about the swallows and whether or not the fledglings will survive. Zachary comes over for his date with her, and she finds it awkward because Leo is running the ferry that they are taking to the mainland. She has a wonderful day with Zachary but feels out of her element in the fancy surroundings of the country club. Zachary confuses her. He's exciting, and at times caring, but she isn't totally comfortable around him. She does feel as if he needs a chance from those surrounding him, however. When she goes out with Leo, she knows that he wants a romantic connection, but she feels as if he is just a good friend. She doesn't let him kiss her.

On Wednesday, she heads to the lab to celebrate life with the dolphins and Adam. As she relishes the freedom of swimming around with Basil, she feels that he is trying to tell her that something went wrong but it will be okay. He brings another member of his pod over to meet Adam and Vicky. When discussing the events with Adam, he tells her that Basil was correct and wonders how he knew. Things were not okay back in the pens. Ynid's baby was not going to make it. Vicky confronts death head on when they get



back to the pens and she watches Jeb trying to comfort Ynid for her loss. He is grieving with her. After dinner, Adam and Vicky talk about the dolphins and death. She's attracted to Adam on many levels, But he doesn't kiss her.



Summary for Chapters 7-9

Summary for Chapters 7-9 Summary

Chapter 7. Vicky gets out of bed the next morning and writes a poem for Ynid. It is very early, and Adam calls to see if she can meet him for breakfast. Over breakfast, they discuss dolphins and language. Adam thinks there might be other ways that the dolphins communicate. He wants to know what she thinks, not as a scientist, but as a poet. He says that Basil might have connected to her quicker because wild dolphins are more apt to make friends with children. She protests that she isn't a child. The two decide to name the new dolphin Norberta. After breakfast, they go to check on the dolphins and are happy to see that Ynid is eating. They realize that she did this to please Jeb.

Adam asks Vicky to call to Basil using nonverbal communication. She pictures Basil and Norberta swimming together. In the image, she calls to them, and they do come. Norberta brings her baby. They play with each other and communicate with each other. Adam is very pleased with the turn of events.

When they get back to the beach after playing with the dolphins, Adam is abrupt with her. Vicky thought they were getting close, but he won't even come over for dinner. She doesn't appreciate how he treats her like a child. When she gets back to the house, she talks with her grandfather. The next day, Adam takes Suzy to see the dolphins in the pens.

Grandfather is getting weaker, and Mrs. Rodney comes on a daily basis to help them. Vicky continues reading to Grandfather, and talks with him about her relationships with Adam and Zachary. She tells him that Zachary is going to take her flying when he has lessons. She thoroughly enjoys flying and feels that it is like playing with Basil. After they fly, they go to the country club, and Vicky has a good time even though she doesn't feel completely natural out on the dance floor. Vicky feels the physical chemistry between them, but Zachary tries to get too close. She tells him she isn't ready. He backs off and reminds her that she is his sanity. He offers to take her flying again and says that next time they will go out for dinner at a French restaurant.

Chapter 8. Vicky's family goes down to the cove to have a picnic. Everyone goes except Grandfather. Vicky thinks about the young men in her life, and Suzy is teasing her about her relationship with Zachary. After dinner, the parents and Rob go back to the house and Suzy stays to talk, but thinks that John and Vicky were both too quiet since they just want to watch the stars come out. She leaves, also.

After watching the stars silently for a while, John and Vicky begin discussing scientific concepts. John changes subject and asks her if she and Adam had a falling out. Vicky relates the events of the previous day and her confusion over them. John explains to her that Adam probably felt too attracted to her. He told her that Adam had a bad



experience in his past. He asks about her relationship with Leo, and Vicky tells him that she thinks Leo is a nice guy. He asks about Zachary, and she says that she doesn't think that Zachary is poison like the rest of the family does. John says he doesn't think Zachary is poison, but he is just worried about his sister. She tells him that she knows what she is doing. They talk about the future and dating. The two continue watching the stars for a while. Adam calls early the next morning and invites Vicky to meet him. They go out to play with Basil, and Adam asks Vicky to ask Basil to do something. She asks him to do a cart wheel, and he does it.

Vicky goes back to the house after swimming with Basil and goes in to talk with her grandfather. They discuss meditation. Grandfather points out that she enjoys going to the coast by herself and sitting on the rock looking out at the sea. Through his explanation, she realizes that she meditates regularly. As they talk, Grandfather gets another nose bleed. It is nerve wracking, but they get it under control. Leo comes over to spend some time with Vicky, and they ask if they can donate blood for Grandfather. They discuss the horrors of cancer. The two decide to go over to the mainland to pick up some blood for Grandfather, and Vicky gets to meet Cornelius Codd, Leo's elderly friend who play chess with them.

When they get to the hospital, they go to the emergency room. Vicky is horrified by what she sees there. Leo comforts her by saying that his mother had told him that a nurse is trained to look at people and to assess who needs help first. The two donate blood, then go back to the island. They go for a swim after they give the blood to Leo's mother. When they are swimming, Vicky goes out farther than she realizes, and she catches a glimpse of Norberta and the baby, but they don't approach her like they do when she is with Adam.

Leo and Vicky go out to eat. Vicky insists on paying for her own lunch. They make arrangements to go to the movies that night, and Leo insists on paying that time. While she is home between lunch and dinner, Adam calls. He wonders if she can come over on Wednesday, but she already has plans with Zachary. He asks if he could come over that evening, but she tells him that she is going out with Leo. They agree to meet the next morning to have breakfast together. Vicky goes to her rock to meditate. When she is at the movies with Leo, Vicky compares it to her date with Zachary. They converse easily, and she enjoys the ambiance even though it is very different from the country club. Once again the conversation turns to death, and they discuss religion and cryogenics.

Chapter 9. It rained all night, and Vicky feels the mood of the weather. The next morning, the world looks washed. She meets Adam for breakfast and tells him about her experience at the hospital and how she was swimming to forget what she had seen in the emergency room. She tells him she'd been crying out for the dolphins subconsciously, and they appeared to reassure her. She tells him about the poem she had written for Jed and Ynid. He reads the poem and really appreciates it. Adam tells Vicky never to change, then they talk more about dolphins.



After breakfast, they go to visit Jeb. Adam asks if Vicky could listen to some of his dolphin tapes. She can't understand anything that she hears. It doesn't speak to her the way she communicates when she is out in the water with the dolphins. When they leave Jeb's office, they go out to swim. Adam asks her to try to call Basil, and he comes. They play together and communicate through thoughts. She communicates with Basil about Ynid's baby. She also asks him if her grandfather is all right. He begins singing, and it reminds her of the service at Commander Rodney's grave when her grandfather was full of joy, saying, "Alleluia."

Vicky and Adam swim in to shore. He tells her that he thinks she is very special, but it is too soon. He explains that he is confused. He asks if she would be willing to write about the dolphins, and she tells him that she has already been doing that. She tells him she is willing to share her journal with him. He asks if it is okay to show her sonnet to Jeb, and she agrees.

When Vicky gets home, her grandfather's eyes are sparkling, as if he has a fever. He tells her that he just had a cold, and she starts reading to him. He bursts out with a quotation from Teresa of Avila. It frightens Vicky, and she asks him what was wrong. He is upset about news that he read in the newspaper where people were showing disrespect for each other. Grandfather calls her Caro, and she comments that she hates it when he calls her by her grandmother's name. She gets her father, who comes in and gives Grandfather some penicillin because he did have a fever after all. While her mother and Mrs. Rodney run into town to get some supplies for Grandfather, Vicky takes Rob to the beach to build a sand castle together.

Summary for Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Chapter 7. Vicky has a lot going through her head at the beginning of this chapter. She is grieving for Ynid and decides to write a poem for her. Her poem writes itself, and as she reads it, she learns from it. Vicky gains more insight into friendship, love, and trust in this chapter, also. Ynid resumes eating out of love for Jeb, even though she is craving. Norberta trusts Vicky and Adam enough to show them her baby. Vicky also learns about some of the negative sides of emotion when Adam cuts her off after she thinks they were getting along so well. Although her grandfather is ill and dying, he is the one that she goes to for comfort regarding the situation. He helps her feel better.

In this chapter, Vicky finds a connection with Zachary. She finds out that he really does have a true interest, and that it's flying. She compares his love of flying to her love of swimming with the dolphins. They go on a date, and Zachary wants to go physically further than she wants to. Although she is attracted him, she pulls away. She is in control of her own situation.

Chapter 8. This chapter begins with another example of the family bonding as they all picnic together in the cove. This time, after dinner, the group splits, and the reader gets to see the special bond between John and Vicky. They enjoy spending time quietly absorbing nature and discussing the science of what they see. They are also close



enough to talk about relationships in the future. John helps her understand what might be going on with Adam.

The next day, Vicky has a wonderful time with the dolphins again. She goes home and talks to her grandfather and learns about meditation. He helps her realize that she does it instinctively whenever she sits on the rock and stares out over the water. It rejuvenates her.

The chapter takes an abrupt turn while she is talking with her grandfather. He gets another nosebleed, reminding everyone that all is not normal. Leo and Vicky go to the emergency room of a hospital on the mainland to pick up more blood for Grandfather. Vicky is horrified by what she sees. This foreshadows what is yet to come as Vicky's tender poet's soul is forced to face the harsh realities of life. She calls to nature to help her heal, and the dolphins respond to her offering her hope. She goes on a date with Leo and is reminded of how opposite Zachary he is.

Chapter 9. This chapter centers around communication. There is the obvious verbal communication scientists used to study the ocean, and there is also nonverbal communication. Vicky has used this to mentally call to the dolphins in the past. During this chapter, she uses the mental connection to really converse with them, asking them questions and asking them to do things. They respond to her and also reach out to help her with her troubles. She asks Basil if her grandfather is going to be all right, and he sings her song that reminds her of how her grandfather feels that heaven. There is an elemental connection between man and animal and the afterlife.

When she goes home, the reader sees another side of Grandfather. He is angry after reading the newspaper. Vicky sees the harsh side of life. Grandfather is sinking deeper into his illness and is beginning to lose his grip on reality. This is shown when he calls her Caro. Vicky doesn't like being called by her grandmother's name. This episode is followed by a simple, pleasant time with her younger brother near the water. This chapter takes the reader on a ride with the small, yet significant ups and downs of a roller coaster.



Summary for Chapters 10-12

Summary for Chapters 10-12 Summary

Chapter 10. As chapter nine ends, Vicky is helping Rob complete a sandcastle. At the beginning of chapter ten, she is still with him. He takes a nap after lunch, and she promises that she will stay with him until he falls asleep. Vicky looks at his sleeping form and realizes that he is growing up. While he is sleeping, she writes a story, and it puts her in a better mood. After dinner that night, the family reads and sings together. Grandfather is back in his bed, and everything seems right with the world.

The next day, Suzy is sick. The parents want her to stay away from Grandfather because his resistance is low. Vicky is planning to go flying with Zachary in the afternoon. As they complete some chores in the morning, Suzy tells Vicky that they haven't talked all summer. Vicky wonders if she is jealous of her sister, and apologizes for not talking to her. Suzy questions her on her relationship with each of the boys interested in Vicky. Suzy starts crying and states that she is miserable. She wanted to be a doctor but feels that she is helpless with her grandfather's illness. All she wants to do is get away. She says she hates Vicky. Vicky is surprised and feels badly that her sister feels this way. She defends her, saying that no doctor should work on someone that they are closely related to.

Grandfather asks for Vicky to read to him. They read the book of Jonah and realize that the story was very funny. They laugh together. Vicky tells Grandfather about her plans for the day, and he questions whether Zachary is still laying his burdens on her. Vicky states that he just needs someone to believe in him.

Zachary drives her to the airport and is driving way too fast. She is angry at him and yell at him to slow down. He also makes a game of almost hitting an old woman who is crossing the road. Vicky does not appreciate it. This time, when they go up in the plane, Zachary is at the controls. Vicky is relieved to note that the instructor can still override the controls at any point. She doesn't enjoy this ride as much as the first one. They go to a French restaurant after flying, and she enjoys the food. Looking over the events of the afternoon, Vicky realizes that she had started out by being afraid of Zachary, but the day ended pleasantly. When they drive back, he doesn't speed. Back to the house, Vicky finds a note from Suzy that says that she didn't hate her. It means a lot to Vicky.

Chapter 11. Vicky goes to the lab with Adam on Friday, and they swim out to the dolphins. Without really meaning to, Vicky gives a mental instruction to Adam. She starts mentally telling him her feelings, and he asks her what she is doing. She realizes that she is invading his privacy, and it isn't right. They swim back to shore and he questions her about her abilities. They talk about trust, and Vicky is happy that Adam is talking to her like a colleague again.



On Saturday, she goes flying with Zachary again. It is a good experience, and she enjoys talking with the flight instructor about his war experiences. Both of them are very against war. On Sunday, Adam comes over to eat, then invites Vicky for a swim. He tells her that he was responsible for someone's death. He was in charge of some important research papers and thought he could trust the beautiful girl that was in his life at that time. She was after the papers, and someone died trying to save the papers.

As they talk, he calls her "sweetie." They go to swim with the dolphins, and Vicky calls for the baby, Njord. He comes, along with his mother, who splashes Vicky as if scolding her for calling the baby without calling her. This makes Vicky laugh, and she shares the moment with Adam. Vicky asks Norberta some serious questions. She asks the dolphins whether they live in the now, or if they project into the future. The baby doesn't understand, and she feels that Norberta thinks she won't understand the response. The dolphin swims next to Vicky so they are touching and offers beautiful insight into her world through images. The dolphin is trying to teach her about nonlinear time. When she is done sharing, Norberta and Njord begin to make strange, singing sounds that remind her of Basil's alleluias. When the experience is over, Vicky holds Adam's hand and concentrates on the images shared by Norberta, and he can see them. He tells Vicky that her experiences with the dolphins are completely throwing off his project.

When she gets back to the house, Vicky takes some iced tea to her grandfather. He called her Carol, and she tries to explain that she is Vicky. He asks a favor of her. Grandfather knows his disease is affecting his mind, and he wants her health. He wants Vicky to tell him when he should let go of life. He says he isn't afraid of dying. She doesn't think she is up to the task, and wants to share her feelings about the request with someone. Adam is the only one she feels she can share it with.

He comes for dinner, and she doesn't have time to be alone with him. When the family is singing, she mentally calls out to him. As he goes to leave that night, he asks if Vicky will go out with him. He has gotten her mental message. They agree to meet the next morning to talk. The next day she tells him what happened and also says that she doesn't feel that she is capable of doing that. He encourages her.

Later that day, Leo and Vicky go to the mainland to pick up blood for Grandfather. She sits in the lobby and recognizes the child who had been in the emergency room. Vicky had been worried that the child wasn't going to live, but now she is witnessing the child who is getting discharged from hospital. She introduces herself to the child who sits next to her while waiting for her mother. The girl's name is Robin. This makes Vicky think of her brother, who the family called Robin when he was little. She thought that Robin was probably around the same age as Rob. Robin shares the fact that something is wrong with her blood, but her father doesn't want her taking medicine because it is against his religion. Her mother sneaked the medication.

When Leo comes out to join her, he tells her that they have almost run out of blood in the hospital. They don't have any for her grandfather since he isn't an emergency case. If Grandfather hemorrhaged again, they will have to bring him to the mainland. Leo and



Vicky go to an island on the way back home. Leo tries to kiss her, but she says that she just wants to be friends.

On Tuesday, Zachary calls to tell her about his first solo flight. He asks if she wants to go flying again on Saturday. She agrees. On Wednesday morning, Vicky and Adam go swimming with the wild dolphins once again. Norberta shares more images with her. Vicky is overwhelmed with the beauty of the universe that the dolphin shares with her. After swimming, they have lunch with Jeb, who thanks her for her poem. He comments on her amazing rapport with the dolphins and encourages her to work in marine biology.

On Friday night, Adam calls with bad news. He says that Jeb is in the hospital after getting hit by a motorcycle. He has a fractured skull and is unconscious. This leads to a family discussion on prayer and whether or not they believe in it. Mother states that she does believe in it because it is an act of love. The next day Jeb stabilizes somewhat, but still hasn't regained consciousness. Ynid stops eating, which Adam and Vicky know is a sign that Jeb is not doing all right.

After breakfast, Vicky goes to read to Grandfather. He is confused again and thinks that she is her grandmother. That afternoon, Zachary comes to take her flying. On her way out the door, she checks on the swallows. They are still alive. Zachary scares her with his driving again, and she tells him that if he keeps acting like that she will leave. He says that he won't try to run people down anymore. The flying lesson starts off like their other ones. Zachary is at the wheel, and Vicky feels comfortable and relaxed. The atmosphere changes as he purposely gets very close to a jet. The instructor is angry with him and asks what was going on. Zachary says he is just trying to have a little fun. The instructor takes over the controls. When they get to the ground, he tells Zachary that he won't give Zachary lessons any longer. Vicky doesn't want to get in the car with him. He apologizes to her, and she realizes that she is stranded at the field since everyone else has gone, so she goes with him.

Zachary reminds Vicky once again that she is the best thing that ever happened to him. He takes her to a Polynesian restaurant and settles into his most charming behavior. When they get to the dock, Cor is waiting for them instead of Leo. Vicky finds out that her grandfather hemorrhaged and needed blood. The family went the hospital on the mainland. Zachary drives her there, and when he speeds this time, she doesn't complain.

The enter the emergency room that distressed her so much in the past. There is a whirlwind of activity, and the lights of the ambulances are flashing, contributing to the chaos. She tries to find out where her grandfather is and also asks about Jeb. The nurse tells her to sit down. Zachary can't handle the situation and leaves her. While she is sitting there, Robin's mother came in carrying Robin. The girl is unconscious, and her mother explains that she always passes out after a seizure. She wants to make sure she doesn't have to wait so she runs over to the nurse's desk. Before she does that, she tells Vicky to hold Robin for her and dumps the girl in her lap. Vicky notices that it is like holding her brother, Rob.



The girl in her arms starts to make strange sounds and flails about. Vicky knows that she is having convulsions and knows she has to take quick action so that the girl won't swallow her tongue. She puts a shawl in her mouth and holds her until the seizure is over. As she is holding the girl, Vicky's parents come into the room. She hears her mother saying that she doesn't want her father to stay in the hospital. Vicky looks down at Robin as the girl's mother and a nurse come hurrying over to her. She explains how she put the shawl on Robin's mouth to keep her from swallowing her tongue, and they assure her that she had done the right thing. While they are talking, the girl sighs and her body becomes very heavy. Her mother starts screaming, Vicky realizes that the girl is dead. She, too, starts screaming, but it's internal and no sound comes out.

Chapter 12. Vicky is shut away in a dark world. She hears someone say that Robin had died from a weakened heart, not the seizure. She thinks she saw Leo, but is confusing him with Zachary. Her family reaches out to help her, but she doesn't want them near her until she washes death off of her. She doesn't want to leave the hospital without Grandfather, and they reassure her, saying that Grandfather is all right now. He will go home after his transfusion. All the evils of the world flood through Vicky's mind. She can't focus, even when she feels her father shaking her. They ask where Zachary is, and she informs them that he left. She feels someone grab her hands and realizes it is Adam. He said that she had called him. He had heard the call while he was sleeping and thought it was Jeb, but then realized it was Vicky calling him. She is dragged back into the darkness. After this, she isn't cognizant of anything.

Her family keeps trying to communicate with her, but she doesn't respond. The next morning, even though it's sunny, she can't find any light. Her memory blanked out what had happened, but she knows something terrible happened. She is worried that something happened to her brother, Robert. She feels sick and falls back asleep. She wakes to see her brother, Rob, smiling at her. Her memories flood back. Vicky is trying to figure out how she got home, and Rob is excited about something. He is telling her about the swallows. She knows they were dead. But they aren't. Rob is trying to tell her that they all flew, and they will be all right. She realizes that this is a gift. It isn't enough, though. She is slipping into despair.

Grandfather asks to talk to her, but she just lies back down. John and Suzy are getting cross with her, but she can't react. Rob tells her that Grandfather wants to see her, and she can't resist him. She gets dressed and goes over to Grandfather. He asks her what is wrong. He tells her that he has a clear mind this morning, and he realizes that he had been wrong to ask her to tell him when it was time to leave for the next life. He says he is so close to the next life that there was almost no barrier between that life and the one he is living. He said Caro tell him when it was time. He instructs Vicky to allow herself to let him go when he is on the other side.

She tries to join the family and drink some coffee, but it makes her ill. She can't respond when they talk to her. Vicky feels the darkness overwhelm her. She can't even respond when Adam shows up and comments on the swallows. When John asks, Adam says that Jeb has opened his eyes and is doing better. Vicky still can't respond. She vaguely hears everyone talking around her. She catches words, but not meanings. There is no



meaning in life for her. They bring her out of the house, and Adam helps her into the water. He helps her swim out, and she finds herself surrounded by the wild dolphins. They are trying to bring her from the darkness to the light, but the darkness is too heavy. She feels them leaving her - all of them except Norberta. Norberta smacks her flipper on Vicky's backside, and Vicky submerges, choking on seawater. As she surfaces, Njord comes near, nudging her and laughing. Light starts trickling in. She grabs Njord's fin and the two begin to play.

The pod begins to sing the same alleluias that she heard in the past, and the sunlight drives out the darkness in her. Vicky swims to shore and joins Adam. She comments that she had called him, and he responded by coming.

Summary for Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Chapter 10. The roller coaster ride is picking up speed in this chapter. As this chapter begins, Vicky is enjoying special time with her family, and everything seems right. The next day she finds out her sister is very upset with her for not spending time with her. For all the times that she has said she was envious of her sister, now she finds out her sister is very jealous of her. Vicky tries to comfort Suzy then leaves the stressful situation to read to her grandfather, and they are able to laugh together as she reads. An already emotional day continues as Vicky goes on a date with Zachary.

In the book, Zachary has already proven himself to be emotionally unstable. He is suicidal, clinging, brash, suave, and arrogant depending on the moment. During this day, he's determined to live life on the edge. He shows disregard for other people's comfort zones, and Vicky is upset. He quickly turns around to comfort her and make her feel relaxed. The day ends on a good note with everything peaceful once again. Suzy has apologized to her, and Zachary had been a courteous gentleman for the rest of the day, treating her like a queen.

Chapter 11. Vicky's nonverbal communication skills are broadening. Without much conscious thought, she connects mentally with Adam. It works, but is an invasion of privacy. All summer Vicky has been confused about the three young men in her life. Adam is the only one that she can connect with mentally. He opened up to her and tells her that they got past. This connects them even more. Vicky communicates with the dolphin, and they give her a glimpse into their world. It's a timeless world filled with beauty, and it helps her come to terms with her grandfather's impending death.

The mood of this chapter shifts as Vicky leaves the beauty of the sea and heads home to be with Grandfather. He asks her to help him realize when it's time for him to let go of this world. She doesn't think she can handle the pressure. She mentally reaches out for help from Adam, and he is there for her.

The world is starting to look like a better place as Vicky goes to the hospital to pick up blood for Grandfather. She's excited to see the little girl that she thought was going to



die. The girl is very much alive. She is reminded once again of how much the little girl reminds her of her little brother.

Chapter 11 is very long, and it's a chapter focused on transition. By the middle of the chapter, the reader is lulled into a sense of well-being. Things are wrong in the world, but it is under control. This changes towards the end of the chapter. Jeb is sent to the hospital after an accident, and Zachary's flirtation with death puts them all in danger during his flying lesson. Vicky is completely shaken and angry, but feels that she has to remain with him for her own safety since no one else is around. In this state, she is summoned to the hospital because her grandfather was taken there. Already traumatized, she has to wait in the emergency room, and the little girl who reminded her of her brother dies in her arms. It's too much for Vicky to handle.

Chapter 12. Darkness is all around, and the reader can feel the weight that has crushed Vicky into oblivion. The confusion of her relationships, this year of the danger she faced during Zachary's flying lesson, the abandonment she felt when Zachary left her, Jeb's accident, Robin's death, and her grandfather's situation have taken their toll on her, and she can't see the light in the darkness. In chapter eleven, she had subconsciously called out to Adam. Even in her despair, she does this again in chapter twelve, and once again he is there for her. Her entire family is there for her. She sees signs of hope and begins to see the light, but is once again crushed by the darkness. Her family wraps her in their love, and Adam takes her out to the dolphins who know the perfect way to heal her. The book ends with Vicky opening her eyes to see the pure and endless light.



Characters

Vicky Austin

Vicky Austin is an almost-sixteen-year-old girl with a poet's heart. She is close to her grandfather and shares a love of literature with him. Vicky is also very close to her other family members, particularly her brother John. He is interested in science, and her younger sister wants to be a doctor. Vicky sometimes envies them with their scientific knowledge. While she is staying on the island with her family, there are three boys in her life. They're very different, and she is drawn to them for different reasons.

Vicky knows her grandfather is dying, and she is able to talk with him about death and relationships bluntly. She has the tenacity to stick by him even when times get tough. She also has a unique affinity with dolphins. She is able to communicate with them non-verbally. When life gets too tough for her to bear, they are the only ones who can heal her.

Grandfather

The Austin family comes to the island for a few weeks each summer. This year, they are there for an undetermined time frame because Grandfather is dying of leukemia. They're there to help make his life comfortable. He is a quiet, gentle man who cares more about the comfort and reactions of others than he does for his own comfort. He has an intense love of literature and a close relationship with his children and grandchildren. He enjoys sharing literature with the family, even uses it to solve disputes. He is a mentor for Vicky and encourages her in her writing. Grandfather has a steady belief in God and heaven, and he is ready to embrace death. He was a preacher who also spent part of his life writing down the history of a remote tribe in Africa. He begins to lose his grip on reality as the book progresses, and the disease takes over his body.

John

John is Vicky's older brother. He has a keen interest in the science of the universe and also studies regeneration.

Commander Jack Rodney

Commander Rodney is Leo's father. He died of heart failure while trying to rescue a rich young man who was drowning.



Rob

Rob is Vicky's little brother. She helped take care of him and can't believe how quickly he is growing.

Suzy

Suzy is Vicky's little sister. She appears to have everything going for her with her good books and her scientific brain.

Zachary Gray

Zachary is one of the three young men in Vicky's life. He is a rich boy with mercurial mood swings. While Vicky is attracted to him, she never totally feels comfortable around him.

Leo Rodney

Leo Rodney is one of the three young men in Vicky's life. She views him as more of a friend than a boyfriend.

Adam

Adam works down at the lab with John, except he works primarily with dolphins. He is one of the three young men in Vicky's life. She has a special connection with him and the dolphins that he teaches her about.

Nancy Rodney

Nancy Bartley is Leo's mother. She is training to become a nurse and helps take care Grandfather.

Robin

Robin is a little girl that Vicky sees in the emergency room. She reminds Vicky of her little brother, Rob.

Mrs. Austin

Mrs. Austin is Vicky's mother. She has a beautiful singing and reading voice.



Dr. Austin

Dr. Austin is Vicky's father. He loves to research, and he appreciates all his daughter is doing for Grandfather.

Jeb Nuttely

Jeb Nuttely is Adams boss. He is a widower who works with dolphins.

Basil

Basil is the dolphin that Vicky first meets in the wild.

Norberta

Norberta was another wild dolphin that Vicky got to know. She was a member of Basil's pod.

Njord

Njord was Norberta's baby. He liked to play with Vicky.

Ynid

Ynid was a dolphin in captivity who was pregnant.

Una

Una was one of the dolphins in captivity that Vicky met.

Nini

Nini was one of the dolphins in captivity that Vicky met.



Objects/Places

Seven Bay Island

Seven Bay Island was the place where Grandfather lived. The Austin family came there for a couple few weeks every summer.

The Mainland

Leo chartered boats to and from the mainland. This is where people had to go to get to a decent hospital.

Marine Biology Station

Adam and John did their scientific research at the Marine Biology Station.

New York

The Austin family came to the island after spending a year living in New York.

Thornhill

The Austin family normally lived in Thornhill.

Boston

Grandfather was once the pastor of a large church in Boston.

Alaska

Grandfather had left his large church in Boston to go work at a tiny mission church in Alaska.

Africa

Grandfather had lived with a small tribe in a remote part of Africa for a while. While he was there, he helped them write down their history.



California

Zachary was from California, and this was where his mother was frozen after she died.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was where Vicky's family had been camping when they originally met Zachary and his family.

Emergency Room

Vicky first went to the emergency room when they were picking up blood for her grandfather.

The Cove

Vicky would go to the cove when she wanted to think and meditate.

The Sea

The sea is where Vicky felt free, and it's where she met the wild dolphins.

Airplane

Vicky joined Zachary for several of his flying lessons.

Grandfather's House

Grandfather's house was a renovated barn, complete with stalls. It overlooked the water, and was filled with thousands of books.



Themes

Death

Death is the most predominant theme in this novel. Vicky and her family come to the island during the summer, planning to spend as much time as it takes to stay with Grandfather until he dies from the leukemia that is taking over his body. At the very beginning of chapter one, the family is attending the funeral of a friend who died trying to save someone else's life. Vicky has to come to terms with the impending death of her grandfather as well as the sudden death of her friend. While she is battling this, she finds out that one of the young men who is interested in her is actually suicidal. Not only that, but he is part of the group that calls themselves the Immortalists. They believe strongly in cryogenics. In fact, his own mother had died in a car accident the previous year, and the family had her body frozen.

Throughout the novel, Vicky questions death and the meaning of life. She knows that she doesn't believe that cryogenics is the correct answer. Her grandfather firmly believes in God in heaven and is ready to go on to the next world, but wants to make sure it's at the right time. The dolphins help Vicky realize that death is not necessarily a terrible thing. When Vicky has a child die in her arms, a tipping point after a series of traumatic events plunges her into darkness, the dolphins come to her rescue. She finds hope amidst the darkness.

Literature

Literature plays a major role in this book. Vicky, herself, has a propensity for writing. She is well-read in many subjects, and literature is very obviously highly valued in the household. Her grandfather's house is filled with thousands of books, arranged in sections and categories. It even includes books for young children.

Some of Vicky's most peaceful moments come when her family is gathered together. Her mother reads a book that is appropriate for everyone present, choosing titles that will span the ages. Even as his body gets weaker, Grandfather still wants someone to read to him. He reads books on science and religion. Vicky writes her own material, sometimes inspired by literature she read or hears.

The title of this novel, *A Ring of Endless Light*, comes from a seventeenth century poem that Grandfather reads to Vicky. He encourages her to write and tells her how much he enjoys the poetry that she writes. Vicky writes poetry to express her deepest feelings and uses a poem to express her sadness when the dolphin baby dies.

Poetry is interspersed throughout the novel, as are references and quotations from books. When the family is having a dispute, Grandfather goes to his books to provide a solution. In the final pages, the climax of the book, the author captures the tension of the moment and the seriousness of the situation by writing sentences shaped in poetry.



Science

Science is another regular theme in this novel. Vicky's father and brother are scientists, and her sister is interested in science, also. Grandfather loves to read books on science. Vicky states several times that she wishes she had a more scientific inclination, but she just isn't a natural at it like her family members. Adam points out to her that there are different ways of dealing with science. Her natural connection to the dolphins is a science in its own right. Perhaps because she is so well-read, and because she is so close to her family and listens to them, Vicky demonstrates not only an understanding of science, but also a deep connection to it.

She easily holds her own in conversations about regeneration, and there are several pages in the book where she has a deep discussion with her brother about science and the universe. They discuss dwarf stars as well as Einstein's theories. Showing that she is still a writer amidst all the science, Vicky points out that the degenerate white dwarf would be a good title for a science fiction story.

Science regarding death is also discussed in the story. It's mixed in with religion and personal beliefs. Zachary's mother died and was frozen since the family belongs to a group that believes in cryogenics. Vicky isn't comfortable with that idea. Science is also brought up in regards to blood transfusions and medicine. Vicky is very bothered by the fact that Robin's father doesn't want her taking the medications necessary to keep her alive.

Style

Point of View

The point-of-view of the novel is first person. This is important because it is such an emotional novel, and seeing the situation through Vicky's eyes helps the reader connect to everything that's happening. Vicky is a writer and poet. The rest of her family is more focused on science. Because the family is so close, Vicky talks with them and listens to their scientific conversations. While she is not innately drawn to science, she understands it. She is very observant and helps the reader understand situations, settings, and allowances through language.

The author highlights not only the Vicky's dialogue, but also her introspective thoughts. Through this, the reader understands that she might be a poet who has a love for literature and sees the world in a unique way, but she is also well grounded. She has a strong sense of self, and shows enough negative traits to be perceived as human rather than some paragon that turns the reader off. This is shown when she reacts with mild resentment to the fact that she wasn't allowed to work during the summer because she had to stay and care for her grandfather even though her younger sister was able to work.

By the end of the novel, the reader is completely connected to Vicky due to the first-person writing approach. The connection is so solid that when Vicky is barely able to express herself, the reader can feel her emotions. It's almost as if the reader feels some of the nonverbal communication that occurs when Vicky is swimming with the dolphins.

Setting

The bulk of the story takes place on Seven Bay Island. On this island, Grandfather and his wife created a haven out of an old stable. This is where the family spends the summer, taking care of Grandfather. There is a view of the water right from the kitchen, and the stalls are converted to bedrooms, living rooms, and bases for holding thousands and thousands of books. There is a cove that is in walking distance from the house. This is a place for the family goes together to have picnics and play in the sand. It's also a place where Vicky goes to have time by herself, sitting on a rock, meditating, and writing.

The Marine Biology Station is within biking distance. This is important because they can easily travel there to spend time with Adam and the dolphins. It's from here that she swims out into the sea to meet up and play with Basil, Norberta, and Njord.

Parts of the story take place on the mainland. The Islanders get to the mainland by taking a ferry, chartering a boat, or using the coast guard in an emergency. Zachary takes Vicky out for dates on the mainland, taking her to fancy restaurants, flying lessons, and to the country club for special dinners followed by concerts. The mainland



is also the place where Islanders go when they need a hospital. It's where Leo and Vicky go to donate blood and to pick up blood for Grandfather's transfusions.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relaxed, yet it never speaks down to the reader. It's filled with references to classic novels and highlights quotes and poetry pertinent to the story. Those who love literature will embrace the language, while those who don't have the passion for literature might find themselves intrigued, wanting to delve into older tomes. Heavy scientific concepts are written down in layman's terms so the reader is never lost, and difficult vocabulary occurs frequently, but within context so the meanings are easy to grasp, expanding the reader's vocabulary.

The author has a brilliant way of taking phrases and concepts and making them an integral part of the story later on in the book. However, the reader doesn't have to worry about remembering every little detail because the author has a gentle way of linking the concepts, nudging the reader to see how they connect. Like a movie screenplay, every word in every sentence written seems pivotal to the story, but it's never overwhelming.

The language adds to the beauty of the book. The poetry cited is rich and exquisite, as are the descriptive paragraphs. The images the dolphins share with Vicky are particularly poignant. When a reader reads these passages, it feels like touching heaven, and it's easy to see how Vicky is coming to a terms with death.

Structure

At first glance, the structure of the novel is fairly straightforward. There are twelve chapters of varying lengths, most averaging thirty to forty pages. The chapters are labeled by number rather than titles.

While reading the book, the reader becomes aware of the fact that it appears the author has put a lot of thought into the structure of the novel. Grandfather's health gradually declined over the course of the book in a very realistic manner. There are times when he appears to be better, but overall he is failing. Meanwhile, Vicky is juggling the young men in her life. The author is very good at pointing out different times of the day and different days of the week, so the reader is clear on the passage of time and doesn't get lost amid all the meetings and dates.

The pacing of the novel ebbs and flows just like the sea surrounding the island. Things will get tense and the darkness edges in. The darkness is replaced with light and peace, rolling the reader into a sense of normalcy right before it changes course and another plot point captures the reader's attention. The last half of the book is a steady crescendo of emotion, peaking at the end of the second to last chapter. The emotions portrayed and the realistic turn of events lead the reader exhausted. At the last chapter closes, the light overcomes the darkness, and the reader feels restful hope.



Quotes

"This wasn't the first time that I've come close to death, but it was the first time that I'd been involved in this part of it, this strange, terrible saying goodbye to someone you've loved."

Chap. 1, p. 1

"Grandfather had said quietly-not rebukingly, just quietly—'As St. Augustine says: if you think you understand, it is in God.' "

Chap. 1, p. 12

"Only a year ago, Leo knew what God thought, and what he and everybody else ought to do on every occasion, and I liked him much better this way, though life used to be easier for him when he knew all the answers."

Chap. 1, p. 35

"And I discovered that there is something almost more intimate about crying that way with someone than there is about kissing, and I knew that I'd never again be able to think of Leo as nothing but a slob."

Chap. 1, . 37

"Resurrection has always been costly, though not in terms of money. It took only thirty pieces of silver."

Chap. 2, p. 49

"When one tries to avoid death, it's impossible to affirm life."

Chap. 2, p. 50

"I saw Eternity the other night, Like a great ring of pure and endless light..."

Chap. 2, p. 69

"A poet friend of mine told me that his poems know far more than he does, and if he listens to them, they teach him."

Chap. 2, p. 70

"It is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter."

Chap. 3, p. 82

"Sand shifting down through the hourglass of life, time irrevocably passing, passing swiftly, too swiftly..."

Chap. 6, p. 165

"That every life is noted and is cherished, And nothing love is ever lost or perished."

Chap. 7, p. 172



"I couldn't tell him that I might not have been up in the plane but I had flown a dolphin."
Chap. 7, p. 190

"But you're a poet, and poets are born knowing the language of angels."
Chap. 8, p. 210

"Maybe you have to know the darkness before you can appreciate the light."
Chap. 8, p. 225

"Because this is how dolphins are, all the time. They are able to live with this kind of intimacy and not be destroyed by it."
Chap. 11, p. 266

"Adam said, 'See, sweetie, if we think too much about what happens when we die, we'll stop being able to live, to live right now and in the very minute.'"
Chap. 11, p. 274

"And joy, Grandfather would remind me, joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God."
Chap. 11, p. 179

"Somewhere deep in me I knew that he was giving me life, and that was Rob's gift, just as it was Grandfathers."
Chap. 12, p. 323

"The pod began to sing, the same alleluias as I had heard first from Basil, then from Norberta and Njord, and the sound wove into the sunlight and into the sparkles of the tiny wavelets and into the darkest depths of the sea."
Chap. 12, p. 331



Topics for Discussion

What was different about this summer's trip to visit Grandfather and Seven Bay island?

Explain the differences between the three young men who are interested in Vicki and define how she relates to each one of them according to the book.

How does Grandfather feel about his impending death?

How does Vicki feel about Grandfather's impending death?

What unique talent does Vicki have when it comes to the dolphins, and how does she feel about it?

What did the swallows symbolize in the book?

How did Vicki relate to the different members of her family?

How did the dolphins end up saving Vicki?