

The Tiger's Wife Study Guide

The Tiger's Wife by Téa Obreht

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Plot Summary

The multi-textured narrative of this complex novel interweaves three related plots. A young doctor investigates the circumstances of her grandfather's mysterious death, recounts what she discovered while researching his childhood in a small town, and passes on stories he himself told her about his encounters, when an adult, with a mysterious "Deathless Man." Throughout all three narrative lines, the work explores the nature of death, death's relationship to the struggle to live, and the relationship between truth, secrets and lies.

In a brief prologue, the narrator (Natalia, a doctor in her early thirties) narrates her earliest memory - of accompanying her grandfather on one of several shared visits to the tiger's cage at the zoo. During that visit, she witnessed a tiger attacking an attendant, and in narration comments on her belief that her grandfather made sure she watched it.

The novel proper begins with a description of the immediate aftermath of Natalia's grandfather's mysterious death in a town he had no real business being in, and of her grandmother's concern about her inability to observe the proper rituals, given that Natalia's grandfather's personal effects have gone missing. During narration, Natalia reveals that she knew her grandfather had cancer, but nobody else in her family did. Meanwhile, Natalia and her friend Zora, a fellow doctor, travel to an abandoned monastery now home to children orphaned during the decade-long civil war in this Eastern European region. They arrive at their destination, are welcomed by the parents of the monk who heads the orphanage, and become aware that there are other guests on the land as well - a group of diggers who, the narrative eventually reveals, are searching for a body abandoned in a nearby vineyard in the early days of the war.

As Natalia and Zora start their treatment of the orphans, and as Natalia draws closer to learning the truth of her grandfather's death, the narrative moves back and forth between the present and two different timelines in the past. In the first, Natalia describes the relationship between her younger self and her grandfather which, over the course of several years and in spite of several conflicts, was very close. She pays particular attention to retelling her grandfather's stories about a mysterious "Deathless Man" whom, according to her grandfather, he encountered several times under strange circumstances and who, at one point, suggested he might be the nephew of Death. In the second narrative line, Natalia recounts stories about her grandfather's childhood - specifically, about the small mountain town (Galina) in which he grew up, about the tiger who came to live in the mountains, and about the much whispered-of relationship between the tiger and the unnamed wife of abusive butcher Luka.

Eventually, Natalia discovers the truth about where her grandfather died - in a small nearby town. At the same time, the diggers discover the body they had been searching for, and engage in a ritual designed to release his soul to eternity into the company of a "mora", who collects both the departing soul and gifts left for it by its loved ones. Natalia volunteers to be the non-family member whose involvement is necessary for completion



of the ritual. She has come to believe that her grandfather's soul was taken by the Deathless Man, that the Deathless Man collects souls such as that recently released in the digger's ritual, and that if she participates in the ritual she will meet the Deathless Man and learn more about her grandfather's final moments. She does what the ritual demands, and eventually discovers that the local "mora" is a man, unnamed in the narrative, who has recently lost his son.

The narrator concludes with an epilogue describing how, even in death, Natalia's grandfather is spoken of with admiration, and how the spirit of the village tiger remains long after it too has died.



Prologue, Chapter 1

Prologue, Chapter 1 Summary

The multi-textured narrative of this complex novel interweaves three related plots. A young doctor investigates the circumstances of her grandfather's mysterious death, recounts what she discovered while researching his childhood in a small town, and passes on stories he himself told her about his encounters, when an adult, with a mysterious "Deathless Man." Throughout all three narrative lines, the work explores the nature of death, death's relationship to the struggle to live, and the relationship between truth, secrets and lies.

"Prologue"

Narrator Natalia recalls, in vivid detail and in present tense, her "earliest memory" - of being taken to the zoo by her grandfather, and passing all the other animals on their way to their primary destination, the tiger's cage (see "Quotes," p. 5). She describes seeing a careless keeper being attacked by a tiger, being helped by bystanders, being let go by the tiger, and being called a fool by her grandfather. She also recalls being aware that her grandfather watched the whole thing, and that he didn't keep her from seeing it. "Later," she comments, "there is the fact that he wants me to have seen."

"The Coast"

The chapter begins with a description of a forty day long local ritual designed to keep the soul from leaving the place where it's died before the family has a chance to mourn it properly, and with Natalia's comment that in the case of her grandfather's death, her grandmother felt robbed of the first few days of that ritual. As the grandmother accuses her of lying about what she knew about her grandfather, Natalia reveals in narration that her grandfather died in an unmapped small town (Zdrevkov), and that he had confessed to her that he was suffering from an unnamed form of cancer. After briefly discussing arrangements for the funeral with her grandmother, Natalia returns to the car she's been driving with her childhood friend and now adult colleague Zora, revealing in narration that they're both doctors en route to a mercy mission in Brejevina, where they will inoculate several orphan children being cared for by the monk Fra Antun. Natalia describes in narration how the outspoken Zora is in the middle of a lawsuit involving a well-respected daughter, how Natalia was put on suspension for supporting a nurses' strike, and how she used the sudden influx of free time to nurse her grandfather. After crossing the border and while they're stopped for food, Natalia again speaks to her grandmother, this time being told that all her grandfather's belongings have disappeared. As she promises to visit Zdrevkov to investigate, if she can find it and it's on her way home, Natalia is unable to obey her grandmother's request that she swear that she didn't know her grandfather was ill (see "Quotes," p. 20). A few hours later, Zora and Natalia arrive at Brejevina and the home of Fra Antun's parents, Barba Ivan and Nada. They welcome them into their home that is decorated with numerous home



paintings of a dog, feed them a locally caught and grown dinner, and listen to the sounds, coming from the family vineyard, from a group of hired diggers. During dinner, one of the diggers' children, watchful and quiet, comes in, triggering complaints from Nada about how sick the diggers all are and from Barba Ivan about what the doctors are making him do in order to stay healthy. After dinner, Zora ignores calls on her pager from the lawyers associated with the lawsuit, saying she won't say anything until she has a chance to talk to Natalia's grandfather. Zora and Natalia go to bed, listening to Barba Ivan's parrot. "Wash the bones, bring the body, leave the heart behind."

Prologue, Chapter 1 Analysis

Everything in this novel is important - at least, it seems that's what the author wants the reader to think. And in many cases, given its complex interweaving of plot and character, of theme and symbol, of past and present, almost everything is important. Characters, situations and incidents often seem, in the moment, to be narrative diversions, and in some cases, they are. Yet, at times the narrative takes frequent and lengthy detours into the life histories of peripheral characters, and incorporates overly detailed but undeniably atmospheric descriptions of setting and event. All this tends to veer dangerously towards the self indulgent. It's important to remember, however, that in each case, beneath all the words and images and layers of implied relevance, there is a kernel of meaning and truth - specifically, a manifestation of the book's central theme, which is the struggle to live against forces determined to instigate death (see "Themes - The Struggle to Live"). Grandfather's visits to the tiger in his old age, for example, like his obsession with the tiger in his childhood (the circumstances of which define one of the book's three narrative lines), manifest his desire to connect with the tiger's will to live, the tiger being, for him, a powerful symbol of how that will can triumph against all odds. This, in turn, may well be the reason why he makes Natalia watch the attack on the keeper; the tiger, although caged, is manifesting his identity, and the grandfather thinks it's important for Natalia to get that message so that she will learn to do the same. Also at this point, it's interesting to note the contrast between grandfather and grandmother, the former a force of life, the latter obsessed with death.

Caught in the middle is Natalia, a more than slightly enigmatic character driven by two main motivations - her love for her grandfather, and her determination to do well by the children who trust her to take care of them. That determination manifests in this chapter in her undertaking the perilous journey to Brejevina, and in her immediate concern for the digger child, which foreshadows events in Chapter 8 in which she forces an elder in the digger community to authorize medical treatment for the girl and for all the other digger children. Other important foreshadowings include the references to the paintings of the dog in the home of Barba Ivan and Nada, which foreshadows the eventual revelation about the dog's owner (Chapter 5), the relationship of the owner to Ivan and Nada (Chapter 10) and, perhaps most importantly, the hinted-at secret activity of a man who might be Ivan in Chapter 13. This layering of meaning, of what one aspect of one character's life means in relation to another character's life, is characteristic of the novel, and is one of its more intriguing elements.



One other important point to note about this opening section is its introduction of an important mystery that threads its way throughout the book - specifically, the mystery of what happened to Natalia's grandfather. While it must also be noted that the book is far from a so-called "genre" mystery (meaning that the book is not about the mystery), having the mystery in place is an important, if occasionally tenuous, narrative thread linking the three apparently wandering narrative lines together. Also, the work is far more interested in the repercussions and implications of that death than it is in creating and/or exploring any sense of mystery.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

"The War - Gavran Gaile"

Natalia comments in narration that "everything necessary to understand my grandfather lies between two stories: the story of the tiger's wife, and the story of the Deathless Man" (see "Quotes," p. 32). She then describes how the war in her part of Eastern Europe had been building for years, how she and her grandfather had continued their ritual of visiting the tigers long after she grew into adolescence and became bored with it, and how the zoo with the tiger exhibit was closed shortly after the war started. She also comments on how, as the result of the growing distance between her and her grandfather, she didn't understand how deeply the loss of opportunity to visit the tigers affected him, who remained convinced the war would not last (see "Quotes," p.42).

Natalia then describes how, during the war, her grandfather was visited by a man whom Natalia, who was living with her grandparents at the time, refers to as "the hat." The younger Natalia thinks the visitor is a patient, but he turns out to be a government inspector. His questions are, at first, about the number of people who live in the house, but when his answers to questions turn to the birthplace and nationality of Natalia's grandmother, Grandfather loses his temper and he throws the inspector out. Shortly afterwards, he and several other physicians lose their right to practice but that, Natalia comments, didn't stop her grandfather from making seemingly endless house calls and taking care of patients that way. Meanwhile, he and Natalia grow further and further apart (see "Quotes," p. 50-51).

One night, however, when Natalia is sixteen, her grandfather takes her on a mysterious midnight walk during which, when he talks about how special and quiet it is at that time, she realizes he's welcoming her back into his life. Then he shows her an elephant, rescued from an abandoned circus and on its way to the zoo (the reopening of which, Natalia adds in narration, was being used by the government as a manifestation of its propagandistic determination that the war would end soon). As Natalia watches the elephant, she comments that she can't wait to tell her friends. Her grandfather comments that there are experiences she should keep secret, partly because they live in a time when saying the wrong thing to the wrong person could bring trouble, partly because some experiences should stay special and private (see "Quotes," p. 56). She asks whether he has any such experiences. He then tells her of his first encounter with the Deathless Man.

Narration then shifts to the first person, present tense perspective of Natalia's grandfather as he tells of how, when he was a young doctor, he was called to a troubled village ostensibly to help the villagers cope with an illness, but in reality to cope with a man who, in spite of being drowned, was still alive. Grandfather arrives in the town, where he hears the details of the story from some of its nervous inhabitants, who take



him to the church where the body of the man is being kept; after rising from his coffin just prior to being buried, he was shot in the head. Grandfather and the villagers are shocked to hear noises coming from the coffin, and are even more shocked when the coffin is opened and the man inside sits up, asking for water. Grandfather dismisses everyone and is left alone with the man, Gavran Gaile, who insists that he cannot die; his uncle, whom he refuses to identify, will not permit it. After considerable discussion, Grandfather agrees to let Gavran prove it. They go out to a nearby lake, where Gavran bets, wagering a cup given to him by his uncle, that he will not die. In return, he gets Grandfather to bet, wagering his treasured copy of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (see "Objects/Places") that Gavran will at least begin to drown, the men having arranged for Gavran to signal when he's running out of oxygen and then be pulled to the surface. Gavran jumps in the water. Grandfather watches for him ... waits ... and then finally, hours later, as Grandfather is worrying about the criminal charges that he faces, Gavran surfaces on the other side of the lake. He smiles, reminds Grandfather of his pledge, and disappears into the woods.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Natalia's comment at the beginning of this chapter about how her grandfather's life was shaped by his experiences with the tiger's wife and with the Deathless Man essentially defines the book's two secondary plot lines, the first beginning in the latter third of this chapter. The first to come into play is the narrative of the relationship between the grandfather and the Deathless Man. This narrative, like that of the tiger's wife, has a feeling of the folk tale about it, of what in contemporary literary terms is often referred to as "magic realism" - an interjection or an interweaving of the fantastic or paranormal with firmly grounded, perhaps even gritty, portrayals of all too human experiences. The point must be made while the book's narrative style is far more poetic than gritty, there is still the sense that its events, characters and relationships are all grounded, at least to some degree, in a painful actuality. In any case, the narrative of the Deathless Man intertwines and incorporates two of the work's key themes, the struggle to live and the nature of death.

That actuality is hinted at in comments throughout the book that refer to a civil war, to a conflict that ultimately boils down to tensions between different ethnicities rather than a conflict over ideologies or politics. Here it's important to note that while the narrative never places its action in a specific country or territory, it clearly suggests, here and throughout the book, that the action is set in an Eastern European country, in what is commonly called the Balkans - someplace like the former Yugoslavia, for example. For more on this aspect of the book, see "Style - Setting."

In purely storytelling terms, important points to note, aside from the story of the grandfather's first encounter with the Deathless Man, include the reference to *The Jungle Book* (see "Objects/Places"), which is portrayed as something of a talisman, or lucky charm, for Natalia's grandfather. While the narrative never explicitly explains why he looks at the book in this way, there is the sense that it has something to do with the fact that one of its characters (Shere Khan) is a powerful tiger. That character, in spite of



his ultimate death at the hands of the book's protagonist, is nevertheless a singular evocation of the life force of tigers in general to which the grandfather experiences a lifelong attraction. Other important points include grandfather's reference to keeping things private and secret, an evocation of another of the narrative's central themes (see "Themes - Truth, Secrets and Lies") and a foreshadowing of Natalia's comment at the end of the novel (Chapter 13). For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - What are your experiences of secrets?"



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

"The Diggers"

Back in the present, Natalia sleeps for a short while and then wakes, partly because of the intense heat and partly because of the steady, loud coughing of the digger child downstairs. Natalia again tries to telephone the Zdrevkov clinic where her grandfather died, but gets no answer. She then looks in on the child, who is awake and looks at her with calm unconcern. Unable to sleep, unable to face once again calling the clinic and getting no answer, Natalia goes to the vineyard where the diggers are working. She slips and falls into an open hole, her unexpected emergence startling one of the diggers into yelling and causing several others to come running. Natalia explains and apologizes, and the diggers all go back to work - all but one, Dure, whom she follows as he goes back to work. She tells him the child at the house needs medical treatment, and that all the children in the digger community probably also need treatment, but he pays no attention to her repeated arguments, finally telling her to leave him and the rest of the diggers alone. The whole while, Natalia is mentally comparing her actions to those of her grandfather, realizing that the conversation would have quickly gotten much more violent if he'd been there. Finally, Dure confesses that he and the other diggers are looking for a body. "Buried twelve years. During the war ... doesn't like it here, and he's making us sick. When we find him we'll be on our way."

"The Tiger"

Natalia describes how, in 1941 and as the Germans bombed the city where his zoo was located, the tiger that eventually became The Galina Tiger escaped from its cage and, over the course of weeks and months, eventually made its way to the forested ridge above the isolated northern town of Galina. She then describes the route to Galina, comparing its ruggedness to the smoother route taken by her and Zora to Brejevina, referencing the watchful presence, when a visitor comes to town, of a white haired man named Marko Parovic who, she adds, the reader will hear more of later. She also describes how her grandfather, who grew up in Galina, was taken in by Mother Vera, Galina's midwife, who raised him in her home following the deaths of his parents and siblings. Grandfather developed a close relationship with the town apothecary, who gave him his precious copy of *The Jungle Book* (see also "Quotes," p. 104).

It was *The Jungle Book*, Natalia says, that helped Grandfather identify the tiger, which had been spotted by an uneducated visitor and described as a "devil." Natalia also describes how the tiger became drawn to Galina by the smells of the food being cooked there, and how one evening he found a young woman sitting in a smokehouse, surrounded by hanging meat. At the same time, Natalia also describes how the people of Galina stuck to their daily routines, how Grandfather became attracted to a deaf-mute girl who was both the wife of the town butcher (Luka) and the woman in the



smokehouse, and how he encountered the tiger one night as it left the smokehouse (see "Quotes," p. 116). The next day, Natalia writes, the only gun in town was used in a hunt for the tiger undertaken by Luka, a man named Jovo, and the gun's owner, the town blacksmith. Her grandfather, she says, hated Luka and didn't want the hunt to succeed. The three men and their two dogs eventually track the tiger to the side of a small pond. Natalia reveals that Luka and Jovo told stories of the blacksmith's heroism and the tiger's death for years after they got back into town, but in narration describes what actually happened - the blacksmith's first shot missed, and he accidentally shot himself while reloading his gun. Luka and Jovo run and hide (see "Quotes," p. 124).

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

A very reasonable question that could very well come up in the minds of many readers, particularly when it comes to the narratives focusing on the tiger, is how Natalia knows about all the things she describes. Some things, she clearly states in narration, she was told by her grandfather - the stories of the Deathless Man, for example. There are suggestions that other aspects of her narrative (the stories of Galina, of her grandfather's childhood, and of the tiger's wife) were told to her by Marko, the elderly citizen of Galina to whom she first refers in the next section and again refers to later in the narrative as having told her several stories. But several of the book's stories - those of the apothecary (Chapter 12), Darisa the Bear (Chapter 9) and Luka the Butcher (Chapter 7) - contain details that Marko, as knowledgeable as he is, is unlikely to know, especially since the above characters were/are determined to keep their true identities, feelings and purposes secret, at least to some degree. Is it Natalia's imagination? Maybe, particularly in the case of the tiger and his travels, but here the problem is that the information she conveys is presented as fact. It's an example of how the writing of the book, as good and evocative as it is, undermines the effectiveness of its storytelling.

In any case, narratively relevant points to note in this section include developments in the main, Natalia-centered narrative line, as she discovers the truth about what the diggers are doing in the vineyard. That truth, as the narrative eventually reveals, plays a fundamental role in defining the relationship between Natalia's past (or rather, the truth about her grandfather's past) and her present (or rather, what she believes to be the truth of what happened to her grandfather). The other main point to note about this section is that it contains the first actual appearance of the tiger's wife who is, by the way, never given a name (see "Topics for Discussion - Why do you think so many important characters...") Meanwhile, the reference to how Luka and Jovo concealed the truth of what happened to the blacksmith can be seen as another manifestation, albeit a somewhat darker one, of the narrative's thematic interest in the relationship between truth, lies, and secrets.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

"The Orphanage"

Natalia helps Barba Ivan set out to see for his daily fishing expedition. Meanwhile, he offers the opinion that the body the diggers are looking for is probably long gone, scavenged by dogs or washed out in a flood. When Natalia returns to the house, she discovers that Zora has already had a couple of confrontational phone calls with lawyers about the lawsuit. They take their supplies to the monastery, where they are met by Fra Antun, young-looking, smiling and friendly.

As she and Natalia prepare to give the injections, Zora gives in to an impulse to hand out the candy they brought with them, candy they had previously agreed would be used to calm children nervous about being injected. While the children eat, Natalia looks at some of their paintings, many of which are of Barba Ivan's dog. One, though, is a little different, and one of the boys says, "It's Arlo's dog," without saying who Arlo is. Being around all the children makes Natalia remember how two of her grandparents' children had died in infancy, and wonders how they survived it (see "Quotes," p. 131-2).

As the vaccinations begin, and without the calming effect of candy, the children erupt in noisy, screaming fear, their shouting eventually interrupted by the arrival of a young woman with news that the diggers have found the body they're looking for. On a lunch break, Natalia talks with Fra Antun, who says that there's a ghost (*mora*) at the orphanage, and that the diggers are worried that the soul of the dead man will itself turn into a ghost, adding that now the body is found, there will be ceremonies that evening to send its soul on its way. He goes on to say that the whole area has a history of troubling accidents due to the planting of land mines, referring to a pair of boys killed just the week before in Zdrevkov. It takes Natalia a moment, but she realizes that Zdrevkov is the name of the place her grandfather died. She asks for directions, and immediately takes off, telling Zora she's going to buy candy.

As she drives, Natalia theorizes that her grandfather really had been coming to see her, for some reason having to stop at Zdrevkov. When she gets there, she realizes it's just a shantytown, a collection of run-down shacks. She goes into the bar and asks for access to the clinic, explaining that she's a doctor and that she's not interested in the two boys killed by landmines. The barman gets in touch with a disinterested administrator who, even when Natalia explains that all she wants is her grandfather's belongings, refuses to help her. Natalia insists, and the administrator eventually tells the barman to let Natalia into the clinic. He shows her in and leaves her waiting while he goes into another room, remembering the last time she saw her grandfather and coming to a sudden realization that, in his final hours, he met the Deathless Man (see "Quotes," p. 147). The barman returns with a sealed envelope. He tells Natalia that her grandfather simply collapsed, and that's all he knows. She asks whether her grandfather was alone,



adding that he might have been with a young man. The barman says he couldn't tell her, adding that it would not be a good idea for her to go around the town asking questions, because her accent gives her away as from being on the opposite side of the still-running war.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Important elements in this section include the reference to Arlo and his dog, the second in a somewhat mysterious chain of circumstances (the first being the reference to all the pictures of the dog in Ivan and Nada's home - Chapter 1) that eventually culminate in Chapter 13's implied revelation of the identity of the mysterious man at the crossroads. Then there is Fra Antun's reference to the mora, which also relates to the events of Chapter 13 which, in turn, can be seen as a manifestation of the work's core thematic interest in the nature of death. That interest is also manifest in the discussion here about death rituals, which echoes the reference in Chapter 1 to the rituals that Natalia's grandmother wants to pursue in relation to Natalia's grandfather's death, but can't.

Meanwhile, the mystery around that death, around what happened to Natalia's grandfather and why, deepens with her visit to Zdevkov. Important points to note here are Natalia's intuitive leap to the idea that there, her grandfather again encountered the Deathless Man. This leap seems to have little or no logic to it, the strange powers of instinct and intuition notwithstanding. To this point, the author has not revealed that Natalia has enough information about her grandfather's relationship with the Deathless Man to make such a leap. Such a degree of information is forthcoming, but at this point in the narrative, the intuitive leap comes across as more of a jumping to conclusions than anything else, and as such runs the risk of taking the reader out of the narrative. In any case, Natalia's question about whether her grandfather was seen with a young man just before he died can be seen as a reference to the possibility that he was with the Deathless Man.

Also in this section, there are comments about Zora's lawsuit, a narrative thread which doesn't really seem to go anywhere. Granted, a reference in the Epilogue to her having gotten a prestigious job suggests that her concerns about being professionally damaged by testifying indicate that the whole situation ended positively, although whether that ending came about as a result of her testifying or not is never clear. Another unsatisfactorily resolved aspect of Zora's presence in the novel shows up in Chapter 8, when she doesn't really react to either Natalia's lengthy, unexplained absence or the fact that Natalia never told her about her grandfather's death, even though Zora was desperate for her advice. All this, it could be argued, is another example of how the author's apparent focus on evocative writing has taken her attention away from careful, complete storytelling.

One final note about this section - the barman's reference to Natalia's accent can be seen as another reference to the reality upon which this narrative is evidently based - specifically, the ethnic conflict in the Balkan region of Eastern Europe, where the language one spoke was as much a reason to kill or be killed as anything else.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

"The Fire - Gavran Gaile"

Natalia describes her grandfather's participation in regular luncheon meetings of retired doctors, meetings that continued even during the war (see "Quotes," p. 149-50). She also describes her early years at medical school, and how she and Zora, as both young and female, struggled for respect. She narrates a trip to illegally purchase skulls for research, how the two of them were nearly arrested at the border, and how a phone call to her grandmother revealed that her grandfather was visiting the tigers at the reopened zoo. Her grandfather, she says, eventually arrived and had to bribe a customs official in order to gain their release. Meanwhile, she says, learning he was at the zoo without her devastated her. She also describes her decision to major in children's medicine which led her grandfather to give her an important lesson in how to deal with children (see "Quotes," p. 154).

Natalia then describes how, after the war ended, her grandfather had to reinvent his life, given that as the result of newly redrawn borders, his ethnicity was much more of an issue than it was before. Part of that reinvention, she says, was a reconnecting with rituals of the past - the visits to the tigers, but also regular visits to the family's summer home in Verimovo. She describes how, the first summer after the war, she and her grandfather went to inspect and tidy the house, how she didn't share her grandfather's optimism about the kind of shape it was in, how the house proved to be in better shape than they feared, and how, on the night they arrived, it was threatened by a brushfire. Natalia writes of staying with the house, hosing it down and eventually fighting off the encroaching flames while her father went out and fought with the local fire department. She comments in narration on how, in the years after the fire, neighbors joked about the animals that had burned to death without referring to how they had had enough time to save them (see "Quotes," p. 170). Finally, she describes how, the morning after the fire had been fought back, her grandfather came home and, as they ate breakfast, he told her more about the Deathless Man.

Once again in first person narration, the grandfather describes how a place of pilgrimage came into being around a spot by the sea where a group of children claim to have seen the Virgin Mary. He says dozens of the ill came in hopes of being cured, adding that at one point he, as a doctor, was sent with a medical team to take care of them all while they were waiting to be cured. He also describes how a community of hangers-on, including a group of drunken travelers, accompanied the pilgrims, and how the priests at the nearby church locked the drunks in a crypt overnight until they sobered up. One night, he says, he heard a voice calling from the crypt, and discovered the Deathless Man, who reminds him of the pledge he made (Chapter 2) and, at his insistence, reveals his story. The Deathless Man suggests that he is the nephew of Death, who granted him one desire - to be a great physician, which Death enabled by



giving the Deathless Man the ability to know whether a person was going to live or die. The Deathless Man describes how, while practicing this ability, he became renowned as a healer and a guide to a peaceful passing, until one day he fell in love with a woman he was asked to diagnose and who he knew was going to die, but who he helped escape death - not once, but twice. Death, he says, forgave him the first time, but the second time cursed him to be immortal. Since then, the Deathless Man says, he has done everything he can to win back his uncle's affection - spending time with the dying in the hopes of seeing him again, gathering dead souls at various crossroads (see "Quotes," p. 186) so they can join death more easily and peacefully. Still, he says, his uncle keeps away from the Deathless Man, in spite of his respect for the dead (see "Quotes," p. 188). He then asks the grandfather to let him out, which the grandfather can't do. As the grandfather leaves, the Deathless Man again reminds him of the bet that the grandfather lost - in other words, that grandfather still owes him *The Jungle Book*. The next morning, the Deathless Man is gone, and the three visitors to the shrine whom he had predicted would die have indeed passed on.

Chapter 6 Analysis

One of the more interesting elements of this chapter is a comment made by Natalia, almost in passing, on how learning that her grandfather visited the tigers without her was, in her word, devastating. This is an indication of just how much she loved her grandfather in spite of their differences, how much she valued their time together, and how she respected the importance of the tigers to him. Meanwhile, the extended narrative of the trip to Verimovo can be seen as another manifestation of the narrative's thematic explorations of the various ways people struggle to live fully in the face of trouble and suffering. This thematic focus is also evident in what at first seems like an extended narrative diversion into the struggles of Natalia and Zora in their days at medical school, the risks and chances they take clearly portraying them as bound and determined to live their lives on their terms.

By far the most important element of this section is the return to the narrative of the Deathless Man. It's very possible that an astute reader may have already guessed that the uncle he referred to in his first appearance (Chapter 2) is Death, but even if that's the case, the details and complications of that relationship are an intriguing revelation. Interesting points to note about this story include the juxtaposition between the determination to live, as manifest in the references to those seeking the intervention of the Virgin Mary in the process of healing, and the Deathless Man's implacable, inevitable knowledge of death. Life vs. death, a manifestation of two of the narrative's central themes. Another key point is the reference to a crossroads as a collection point for the souls of the dead. This foreshadows references in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 to the role of the crossroads in local rituals associated with release of the dead, and to Natalia's enacting one of those rituals (Chapter 13) in the hopes of encountering the Deathless Man herself. Meanwhile, the Deathless Man's reference to a woman he loved foreshadows his later reference (Chapter 11) to the woman having been a street musician which, in turn, suggests that she was, in fact, the beloved of Luka, the butcher from Galina, whose story is told in the following section.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

"The Butcher"

Natalia describes how, in the days following Luka and Jovo's return from their tiger hunting expedition (Chapter 4), her grandfather wondered about Luka's wife and why she was in the smokehouse. She also describes what neither he nor the town knew - that in those same days, Luka assaulted his wife so hurtfully that she could not appear in public. Natalia then describes how Luka came to be the man he is.

"Because I am trying to understand now what my grandfather did not know then," she says, "it's ... important to be able to say 'Luka was a batterer, and here is why.'"

Natalia writes of Luka's childhood, during which he endured an abusive home life by dreaming of being a musician, and by enjoying (perhaps a little too much) the company of other young men as they bathed together. He left home when he was sixteen in an attempt to make a life for himself as a musician in the port town of Sarobor, eventually working his way into a relatively insignificant part of the town's long-standing musical traditions and making a passable living for ten years. Then he met a merchant's daughter named Amana, a sworn virgin who loved and appreciated his music. Over time, they developed a loving friendship, this woman who had sworn off men and this man who, by this time, had accepted that he couldn't love a woman in the way he was expected to love them. One day, a traveling music scholar visits Sorobor and Luka is intrigued, but is warned against too much involvement with him because the man has proven to be a song thief. Nevertheless, Luka allows him to listen to his music.

At about that time, Luka receives a letter from his sister, saying that his brothers are, for various reasons, gone from home, that their mother is dead, and their father needs him to take care of him and the business. Luka realizes that with his father's eventual, inevitable, death, he has the opportunity to inherit some money that could further his musical career. So he proposes marriage to Amana, and together they make plans to recreate their lives together. At first Amana agrees, but then realizes how thoroughly she, who values her freedom so much, would be trapped in a small town marriage. Her worry makes her fall seriously ill, to the point where her rich father calls in an expensive "miracle worker" with whom Amana falls in love and elopes. Her father, without Luka knowing, puts his other daughter, a deaf-mute girl "he thought he would be saddled with forever," into Amana's wedding dress and veil, and marries her to Luka. Luka, for his part, doesn't know about the substitution until, at the end of the ceremony and after the vows have been made, he lifts the veil. Humiliated and ashamed, he returns home to Galina, where he discovers that he can actually tolerate his wife, and that his father intends to rape her. He stays home in order to protect her, becoming increasingly resentful of the trapped life he is being forced to live. When he hears one of his songs on the radio, presumably stolen by the traveling student, he loses his temper and takes



it out on his wife, the first of several assaults he makes on her (see "Quotes," p. 212). Meanwhile, rumors fly through town about the relationship, about Luka's reasons for entering into it at all, and what exactly his wife is like, rumors that continue and develop a new focus when, shortly after his encounter with the tiger, Luka disappears. The people of the town soon become convinced that Luka's wife killed him and has become the tiger's wife.

During the long, hard winter that followed, the grandfather continued to find the tiger's wife fascinating and visited her frequently, in the hopes of seeing the tiger since, Natalia suggests, he "knew" the tiger was visiting Luka's wife, purely for company, in the evenings. He drew narrative pictures of *The Jungle Book*, took gift baskets from the defiant Mother Vera, and assumed that her expanding belly was the sign of a pregnancy resulting from the rape of another villager, not, as much of the town assumes, from the girl's relationship with the tiger. He also, Natalia comments, was never able to reveal the end of *The Jungle Book* - Mowgli's killing of Shere Khan. The chapter concludes with Natalia's speculations on how much the tiger's wife knew of what her grandfather was doing, and why (see "Quotes," p. 227-8) but understood enough to know that he was passionate about the tiger, and one day gave him a bag with some of its hairs.

Chapter 7 Analysis

This chapter is one of many examples in the novel of how a lengthy, very detailed narrative about a peripheral character and situation can at first glance seem to be an unnecessary interruption of the book's overall narrative flow, but upon further consideration can be seen as quite thematically relevant, if still a bit overwritten. The story of Luka and his struggle to live life on his terms in the face of opposition from a number of quarters (his father, his town, the community of musicians he tries to enter, his would-be bride's father, all the rest) is one of increasing desperation, frustration, and violence. The story of Amana, included in that of Luka, is a similar one - independent minded and also determined to live her life as she wants. Her struggle is somewhat more successful than Luka's, if she is in fact the beloved of the Deathless Man, which the circumstantial evidence of Chapter 11 seems to suggest. If that is indeed the case, the remainder of her short life was enriched by the sort of loving fulfillment that Luka once dreamed of but was forced to relinquish as the result of the treachery of his father-in-law. Finally, there is the story of Luka's wife, the woman who becomes the legendary tiger's wife. She too struggles to live life on her own terms, but interestingly, that struggle doesn't effectively begin until the tiger comes into her life, at which time she quietly, but defiantly, takes pleasure and comfort where and how she can.

This is a good point to reintroduce the subject of the narrative's resemblances to, and/or integrations of, folk tales. As was the case with the story of the Deathless Man, there is the sense that the story of the tiger's wife, and more specifically about the suspected origins of her pregnancy, have their roots in folk tales and legends, and manifest here as magic realism (see "Chapter 2 Analysis"). Can a tiger truly impregnate a human being? Probably not. Is it likely that people in the 20th Century, even in a small remote village like Galina, could seriously believe, as some of them apparently do, that such an



impregnation is possible? Not really. But that's what happens here, one of several circumstances throughout the novel that, in terms of the somewhat fantastic ideas discussed, jam up somewhat uneasily against the reality-based circumstances of Natalia's story and mission. The blend of realism and magic doesn't always work and doesn't always make for successful storytelling, but does make for engaging reading.

Other important elements in this section: the reference, one of several in the book, to *The Jungle Book* and Shere Khan (see "Topics for Discussion - Obtain and read ...") which, in turn, is a manifestation of the book's thematically relevant interest in tigers (see "Themes - The Struggle to Live"), and the description of the gift of the tiger's wife. This last is particularly important, in that it foreshadows the discovery, at the end of the narrative, of identically described hairs found by Natalia in the bag of possessions left behind by her grandfather (see "Epilogue"), again a manifestation of the narrative's thematic interest in tigers.



Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

"The Heart"

In the middle of her drive back to Brejevina, Natalia stops at a payphone and calls her grandmother, saying she has retrieved the grandfather's belongings and asking whether she should open the bag into which they've been placed. The grandmother loses her temper, saying that opening the bag is part of the family ritual, and that in no circumstances should Natalia open it. When she gets back to the orphanage, Natalia discovers that the diggers are ready to perform their ritual on the recently discovered body which, it turns out, was dismembered and buried in a suitcase. As it unfolds, Zora passes on a reminder from the grandmother that Natalia is not to open the bag, to which Natalia says that her grandfather would have told Zora to testify in the lawsuit. Zora says by the time they got back, it would be too late. She then holds Natalia's hand, watching as Dure wraps a cleaning rag around his hand and calls it the heart. At the conclusion of the ritual, Fra Antun reveals that the cremated ashes of the body need to be taken, by someone outside the family, to the crossroads to be buried, so that the mora ("the spirit who comes to gather the dead") can find it. Natalia volunteers, saying she'll do it if Dure takes his family to the doctor the next day.

"The Bear"

Darisa the Bear, Natalia comments in narration, was a legendary hunter who traveled from village to village, bringing with him animal pelts and incredible skills as a tracker and killer of animals. She comments that usually her grandfather, like the rest of the village, looked forward to his visits. But during the winter he was involved with the tiger's wife, he forgot that Darisa was coming until he was actually there, and too late realized that with Darisa came trouble for the tiger. Natalia then describes, at length and in detail, how Darisa came to be who he was - an orphan, loving caretaker to his epileptic older sister until her sudden death, apprenticed first to a taxidermist and then to a succession of hunters, solitary and quiet and powerful. Returning to the narrative of Darisa's time in Galina, Natalia describes how people in the town think he fell a little in love with the tiger's wife the moment he met her, how the apothecary convinced him to stay and hunt the tiger, and how his traps closed without any sign the tiger had been near them. Mother Vera suggests that the grandfather had set them off, but he denies it, Natalia commenting in narration that her grandfather did, however, attempt to distract Darisa from his purpose as much as possible. Natalia then shifts her narrative perspective to that of the tiger, describing its essential disregard for Darisa and its attack on a team of oxen. Natalia shifts focus one more time, returning to the perspective of her grandfather who, on the night Darisa was to leave, sees him assault the tiger's wife. The grandfather fights him off and then, knowing they're both in trouble, runs off with the tiger's wife.



Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

The importance of, and need for, rituals around death (see "Topics for Discussion - Research and discuss rituals around death ...") is the central narrative motif, or idea, of Chapter 8, and also a manifestation of one of the book's central themes (see "Themes - The Nature of Death"). This motif manifests in the wishes of Natalia's grandmother, the enacting of rituals around the body found in the vineyard, and the reference to offering the ashes of the deceased to the "mora" (see "Objects/Places"). Natalia's reaction to both sets of circumstances, her grandmother's wishes and the graveyard ritual, play an important role in triggering events in future chapters.

Meanwhile, Chapter 9 is another one of those on-first-glance diversionary chapters (others include Luka's story in Chapter 7 and the story of the apothecary in Chapter 12). As is the case with both those stories, there is a kernel of thematic truth hidden beneath the dense interplay of word and image that makes up Darisa's story, and like those two stories, that kernel of truth is essentially the same - the struggle of the individual to survive and build a life against hostile opposition. Darisa's story is exactly that, a narrative portraying one man's struggle to define himself, to live according to that definition, and to resist outside influences so the integrity of that identity remains intact. Once again, the reader might be justified in asking just how it's possible for Natalia to know all this, since it's unlikely that Darisa told even Marko, the town repository of information (a polite term for gossip) all the facts of his life. The question again comes into play during consideration of Natalia's narrative of the tiger and its attack on the oxcart, and might also come into play when the confrontations in the final part of the chapter are discussed. Would the grandfather, even if he was as close to his granddaughter as he seems to have been, recount his story in such detail to her?



Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary

"The Crossroads"

Dure is at first reluctant to hand over the rag heart to Natalia for burial at the crossroads, but realizes he has no other choice. Natalia goes up to the crossroads in the company of Fra Antun, their conversation revealing that Arlo (Chapter 5) was his brother, and was apparently killed after running off to fight in the war. When they arrive at the crossroads, Antun is surprised and angered by Natalia's determination to stay, but he eventually gives in. For her part Natalia, in narration, lists the various things she expects might happen while she's keeping vigil over the "heart" - among them, what she seems to want most - an appearance by the Deathless Man (see "Quotes," p. 268). She keeps watch until three fifteen, when a fox runs by and startles her into full wakefulness. She then sees someone digging the "heart" out of its burial place at the crossroads. Unable to speak, she follows the man into the hills.

"The Bombing - Gavran Gaile"

Natalia describes the activities of the city during intense bombing raids near the end of the war, how its citizens, including her grandfather, continued with their daily routines in an effort to preserve some kind of normality, and how the animals of the zoo, including the tiger, systematically destroyed themselves, their offspring, and each other. She and Zora, meanwhile, worked at a clinic, helping the wounded and struggling, but most of the time failing, to identify the bodies or fragments of bodies killed in the bombing. One night, she says, she came home from the clinic to find her grandfather preparing to go out and waiting for her to come with him. Together they made their way to the closed zoo, where they sat and kept vigil. Natalia comments in narration that it was a year before her grandfather's diagnosis, but that his body must have known what was coming when he turned to her and spoke "for the last time about the Deathless Man."

In the grandfather's first person voice, he describes how, after treating some wounded soldiers in Marhan, a suburb of Sarobor, he walked into Sarobor in blazing heat, remembering his honeymoon there, thinking of having raised his daughter, Natalia's mother, there. He goes to the restaurant where he and his wife had their honeymoon dinner and is seated on the balcony, where he can both see and hear the bombs exploding nearby. As the elderly waiter takes his order, he becomes aware of another man, also on the balcony, and eventually realizes that it is the Deathless Man, who recognizes him and joins his table. The two men order and eat a sumptuous meal, both of them aware that the next day, the town and the restaurant will be bombed. Conversation reveals that the woman loved by the Deathless Man (Chapter 6) used to be a street musician, playing on the bridges of Sarobor (Chapter 7). The Deathless Man also reveals that, again by the next day, the waiter will be dead. The grandfather wonders why the Deathless Man has not told the waiter what is coming, and the



Deathless Man says in remaining ignorant, the waiter will be free from the suffering that comes from worrying - freedom that comes with "suddenness" of death. As the grandfather wipes tears from his eyes, he worries that the Deathless Man has come for him too, but the Deathless Man, while commenting on the huge risk the grandfather is taking, assures him that's not the case, and lets him go.

In Natalia's narration, she comments on how, even after the bombing ended, the animals, including the tiger's mate, kept consuming themselves and their offspring (see "Quotes," p. 302). Some of them, she says, had to be euthanized by their keepers.

Chapters 10 and 11 Analysis

The idea of a crossroads serving as an important place of transition manifests in several ways in this chapter - among them, as a goal for Natalia in her quest to know more about her grandfather's death and about the Deathless Man, and as a key component of the Deathless Man's identity and his explanation of that identity to Natalia's grandfather. The concept also manifests in a more metaphorical way in the grandfather's essential situation; both he and the town he is visiting (Sarobor) are at a crossroads, a point at which their journeys turn off in a different direction. In many cultures, death is a similar point of turning, a similar point of transition from one stage of a journey (i.e. of the soul) to another (i.e. the soul's journey from life in the physical world to death, or life in the spiritual world).

Another important point to note is Fra Antun's revelation about Aldo, which combines with the references to the paintings of Aldo's dog (Chapter 1) and the ownership of the dog himself (Chapter 5) to make up a series of fairly substantial clues that suggest the identity of the mysterious man whom Natalia follows from the crossroads in Chapter 13. Then there is the apparent linking of the story of the Deathless Man with the grandfather's perspective on the tigers. As previously discussed, the latter seems to be defined, in a significant way, by the grandfather's respect for the tiger's power and his will to live. In juxtaposing the image of the grandfather keeping vigil at the tiger's cage with his telling Natalia about another encounter with the Deathless Man, the author seems to suggest that the Deathless Man is so important to the grandfather because the Deathless Man is himself struggling to live life on his own terms in the same way as the tiger.

Further important points include the Deathless Man's description of his beloved, which suggests very strongly that she was also Luka's beloved as portrayed in Chapter 7, and Natalia's description of the desperate behavior of the animals after the bombing ended. This can be seen as commentary on the pressures war can, and does, put not only on animals, but on living beings in general.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

"The Apothecary"

Natalia begins her narration of this chapter with her second reference to Marko (the first was a passing reference in Chapter 4) who, she says, discovered the death of Darisa the Bear. The legend is that after being confronted by the grandfather (Chapter 9), Darisa woke to see his heart being devoured by the tiger. He transformed into a bear and he and the tiger fought, the tiger peeling him out of his skin and then disappearing. It was that skin which Marko found, and that skin which led the villagers to believe that the tiger's wife was at least partly responsible for Darisa's death. Narration then turns to the other events of that night - how the grandfather led the tiger's wife home and took care of her. Narration then shifts again, to a narrative of the life of the apothecary - orphaned, adopter of a series of false names, captive/assistant to a squad of soldiers, left alone with a man named Blind Orlo when the soldiers were all slaughtered by rivals. The apothecary and Blind Orlo made their living by pretending to be fortune tellers, with the young apothecary giving Orlo enough information to make accurate comments. In the meantime, the apothecary was developing a reputation for being a healer. They were successful in their business until a major mistake led to Orlo being killed by a dissatisfied client who also wanted to kill the apothecary, who left before that could happen. He then found his way to Galina, where he quickly became a successful, respected member of the community. One day, during this time, after Luka gave his wife (the tiger's wife) a particularly bad beating, the apothecary nursed her back to health, and then threatened to run Luka out of town if he did it again. Shortly afterwards, an epidemic decimated the town in spite of the apothecary's best efforts, and all the respect he had once enjoyed disappeared. For that reason, Natalia says, he didn't help the tiger's wife after Darisa's death, until the pleadings of the grandfather convinced him to do so, at which time the apothecary prepared a special drink for the tiger's wife, now pregnant with a child that many thought was the tiger's baby, and took it to her. She, apparently remembering his failure to defend her against Luka, furiously threw him out. The apothecary then gave the grandfather the drink, who took it to the tiger's wife. "It didn't take very long after that," Natalia comments in narration.

Natalia then describes a tree just outside Galina (see "Quotes," p. 321) where the apothecary was hung, not because he had been responsible for the death of the tiger's wife but because he was of the wrong ethnicity. She also describes how Mother Vera insisted that the grandfather not worry any more about the tiger's wife, promising that the two of them would move to a new life together. Marko, she says, didn't remember the grandfather being at the execution, but did describe the quietness of the apothecary's death (see "Quotes," p. 323), adding that he wasn't properly buried until after the war.



When Natalia asks what happened to the tiger's wife, Marko asks what that "has to do with anything."

Chapter 12 Analysis

As is the case with many other apparent narrative diversions in the piece, the story of the apothecary is a thematically central story of survival against challenging odds. The ending of his story, however, is indicative of the long-lasting nature of the ethnicity-based tensions that simmer just below the narrative's surface (see "Style - Setting") which, in their turn, motivate and define the war that took place in the narrative's past but which continues to define its present.

Meanwhile, two aspects of this chapter can be seen as fitting in with the book's previously discussed "folk tale" sensibility (see "Analysis, Chapter 2 and Chapter 7). The first is the reference to the tiger's peeling away the skin of Darisa the Bear, while the second is the reference to the possible parenthood of the tiger's wife's baby. Both narrative elements are clearly fantastic, functioning in the realm of "magic realism" (again, see Chapters 2 and 7) with nothing genuinely realistic about it, unless, of course, one considers humanity's emotional capacities that give rise to such speculations. These might be described as horror in the case of the former, disgust and curiosity in the case of the latter, a hunger for the sensational in the case of both.

Finally, one of the book's repeated motifs (visual or verbal images) again appears in this section. This is the idea of important characters without names which manifests here in the character of the apothecary. Yes, the narrative does include a reference to the name he was born with, and to several names that he adopted over the course of his youth and young adulthood. It's important to note, however, that in spite of these references he, like the butcher, the tiger's wife and, perhaps most importantly, the grandfather, is always referred to by what he is known to be, rather than by his name. For further consideration of this aspect of the book see "Topics for Discussion - Why do you think so many important characters...".



Chapter 13, Epilogue

Chapter 13, Epilogue Summary

"The River"

Natalia follows the man from the crossroads down a hill, through a nearly dried up river valley, under a fence marking a minefield, through the minefield itself, through a small village's worth of ruined houses, and into a small stone house, the only one still with a door. The whole while, she believes she is following the Deathless Man. She follows the man into the house, where she finds he is waiting for her by a fire. He invites her to sit near the fire, their conversation revealing that the man has been collecting flowers, pictures, coins, and other memorials from the crossroads. Natalia asks if the man is the mora, but he says the mora was a superstition that died out because of the war. Further conversation reveals that the man clears away the memorials from his own son's grave, adding that others who leave memorials are like him, taking comfort from taking care of their loved ones. He then asks Natalia to keep his secret. He didn't have to ask, Natalia comments in narration. "I had been taught long ago that there are some stories you keep to yourself."

"Epilogue"

Natalia describes how people talking about her grandfather's death, including the regular attendees at the doctors' luncheon (Chapter 6) refer to the remarkable heroism of his having traveled to Zdrekov to save the lives of the two young land mine victims (Chapter 5), commenting that nobody mentions the fact that the boys died anyway. She also describes how, after the prescribed mourning period of forty days, the grandmother opened the bag of belongings which, Natalia confesses, she herself opened that night in the house by the river (Chapter 13). There is no Jungle Book there, only its last page, folded around some thick coarse hairs and hidden in the pocket of his white doctor's coat. Also on that page - "Galina", written in her grandfather's handwriting, and "a child's drawing of the tiger, who is curved like the blade of a scimitar across the page".

Natalia muses on what happened between the tiger and the tiger's wife, theorizing that during his time in the zoo, the tiger had become used to being cared for by human beings and let the tiger's wife take care of him in the way to which he had become accustomed. She also suggests that the girl was just very lucky. This sort of tame tiger, Natalia comments, was not the tiger her grandfather loved and kept with him in the form of The Jungle Book. She also theorizes that Luka was killed by his wife, and that the people of Galina focused as much as they did on creating myths about her so they could ignore what was coming - German invasions and trains passing in the night. She concludes that myths about the tiger remain - the possibility that he's still alive, the rules that have arisen to keep the people of Galina out of its clutches, the hope that he's dead.



Natalia also comments, however, that for her, her grandfather's tiger is still alive, "in a glade where the winter does not go away" (see "Quotes," p. 338).

Chapter 13, Epilogue Analysis

The most important element to note about Chapter 13 is the question of the identity of the man whom Natalia follows. He is never named, but there are clear indications he is Barba Ivan. These indications include his reference to clearing his son's grave (Ivan's son Arlo is referred to as having been killed in the war) and his reference to drawings being placed on his son's grave (drawings of Arlo's dog Bis figure prominently in Ivan's home and at the orphan's school taught by Arlo's brother Fra Antun). There are two other clues. One clue is the man's frequent references to his wife Nada, references that include the man asking Natalia to not tell her, which suggests that the man knows that his wife and Natalia have some kind of relationship. The final clue is the fact that Natalia knows the man has another son, a living son; Natalia knows Fra Antun, and doesn't know, at least according to what's in the narrative, any other families in similar circumstances. Meanwhile, the chapter concludes with another important element - Natalia's reference to keeping secrets secret, a clear and deliberate echo of the moment in Chapter 2 when the grandfather tells Natalia of the importance of keeping secrets (see also "Quotes," p. 56).

In the Epilogue, important points to note include the reference to how the memory of the grandfather continues to live on in the minds of people other than Natalia, and to how those memories, as discussed, don't refer to the negative aspects of the memorable moment. Here again, the narrative incorporates the motif of stories that keep secrets.

Then there is Natalia's examination of her grandfather's effects, which clearly goes against her grandmother's will and which reveals, to both Natalia and the reader, that at least some of the elements of her grandfather's stories (i.e. the relationship between the tiger and the tiger's wife) actually happened. In other words, the worlds of magic realism/folk tale and reality seem to intersect for just a moment.

Finally, there are the references to tigers - to the Galina tiger (and to Natalia's perversely paradoxical hope that he is both alive and dead) and to tigers in general, perhaps even to the concept of "tiger," found in Natalia's final comments. These comments can be seen as relating to and/or inspired by all the various tigers that appear throughout the story (see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the quote from the book's final paragraph ...").



Characters

Natalia

Natalia is the book's narrator, and the protagonist in the most present day of its three plot lines. While her age is never explicitly defined, there is the sense that she is in her early to mid thirties. She is strong willed and determined, compassionate and outspoken, and particularly interested in the welfare of children. She also has the idiosyncratic habit of wearing her white doctor's coat at all times, its suggestion of both identity and status apparently important to her. She is devoted to her grandfather in both life and death, in spite of their relationship having several significant downs as well as many, equally significant, ups. Most of these ups, the narrative indicates, involve the sharing of important intimacies - specifically, her grandfather's sharing of intimacies with her, stories and secrets that, it seems, he has shared with no-one else, not even his wife. The sharing of these intimacies, particularly those having to do with the Deathless Man, are important for two reasons; as mentioned, they define the relationship, but at the same time they provide the motivation for Natalia's search for her grandfather, in that she comes to believe that her grandfather was taken from this world by the Deathless Man. Finally, and again without explicitly saying so, the narrative suggests that Natalia and her grandfather are kindred spirits. Both are independent minded, both are compassionate about people and their physical well being, both are intolerant of what they perceive as foolishness, and both, in their own way, are convinced that death is more than an experience of simply no longer being alive.

Natalia's Grandfather (Dr. Leandro)

As suggested during consideration of the character of Natalia above, the grandfather is portrayed as strong willed, independent, determined, and a fighter. He wants to live, and he wants other people to live, and apparently fights until his very last moments to ensure this happens. Each of the book's three main narrative lines chronicles and explores aspects of his life during a different phase of that life (each, by the way, anchored to one degree or another by his determination to live himself and help others to do so). The present day Zdrevkov plot is anchored by Natalia's search for what happened during his last days and at the moment of his death which took place, as she discovers, while he was fighting to save the lives of two young boys injured by land mines. The stories of his encounters with the Deathless Man are narrated in his own voice and take place at three different stages of his middle-to-late adulthood, each encounter with the Deathless Man taking place in the context of the grandfather's efforts to treat the ill or wounded. The third narrative line, the story of the tiger's wife and her relationships with the village of Galina and its various inhabitants, is set during his childhood, during which time he was determined to help the tiger's wife to a good life.

There are several points to note about this character, one of them being the fact that, like the tiger's wife and the blacksmith, he is never given a first name (his family name,



or last name, Leandro, is given only once). For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Why do you think so many important characters..." Other points to note include the fact that he is one of three important male characters who are orphaned at an early age, the other two being the apothecary and Darisa the bear (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss the parallels, in both childhood and adulthood ..."). Also, and perhaps most importantly, there is his obsession with tigers (see "Topics for Discussion - What did tigers represent ...").

The Tiger's Wife

The unnamed tiger's wife (see "Topics for Discussion - Why do you think so many important characters...") appears in the second of the book's three narrative lines, the story of Natalia's grandfather's childhood. She is actually the wife of Luka the Butcher (see below), married to him without his knowing (the story of how that happened is in Chapter 7). Mysterious and very much an enigma, she is deaf and mute, a mystery to anyone and everyone who knows her. As such, she is easily and frequently manipulated, hurt, gossiped about, and abused. The father of her baby is never identified, and her relationship with the tiger is never clearly explained. She seems, in many ways, to be a figure of local myth and/or legend, an idea rather than a living person - a character in a sort of strange fairy tale - at least, that's what she seems to be to the young grandfather and, eventually, to Natalia.

The Deathless Man (Gavran Gaile)

The "Deathless Man" appears in stories told to Natalia by her grandfather, stories he seems to indicate are important for her to keep to herself (see "Themes - The Importance of Secrets"). The Deathless Man never ages, claims to be the nephew of Death (which makes his father and mother who, exactly?), and claims to have been given the ability, following a complex ritual involving coffee drinking and the reading of its dregs, to know when/whether people are going to die. He is portrayed as matter-of-fact compassionate, wise, patient, and tortured. He has been cursed, by his uncle, to remain alive forever. In an effort to appease his uncle, the Deathless Man has, in effect, become his messenger.

Zora

Zora is Natalia's best friend and traveling companion. Even more outspoken than Natalia, Zora's attitude, as portrayed in narration, has gotten her into trouble many times, including a confrontation, in the present day timeline, with an influential physician whom she sees as abusive. Her sharp temper can be seen as a telling contrast to the slightly calmer, slightly less volatile Natalia.



Natalia's Grandmother

Natalia's tradition-bound grandmother is determined to observe the traditional rituals following the death of her husband, Natalia's grandfather. Short tempered and sharp tongued, she is apparently jealous of the closeness between her husband and her granddaughter, and had been for years before her husband's death.

Fra Antun, Aldo

Fra Antun is the young, agile, outspoken, compassionate Christian monk who runs an orphanage in an abandoned monastery. Natalia and Zora work with him to inoculate the children there against disease. His comments about the death of his younger brother Aldo provide an important clue in the mystery surrounding the identity of the man at the crossroads in Chapters 10 and 13.

Barba Ivan (The Man from the Crossroads), Nada

Barba Ivan and Nada are Fra Antun's parents. Hospitable but opinionated, they welcome Natalia and Zora into their home, letting them stay there while they complete their mission to the children in their son's orphanage. They don't ever refer to the death of their other son, Aldo, but hand-drawn and/or painted pictures of Aldo's dog Bis hang all over their walls. They are, for the most part, peripheral to the main plot, unless the reader accepts the argument (see Chapter 13 - Analysis) that Barba Ivan is the mysterious man at the crossroads. If that is in fact the case, then he plays a significant role in the resolution of the book's main narrative line, sending Natalia in another direction in search of the answers about her grandfather's death.

Marko Parovic

First referred to in passing in Chapter 4, Marko is revealed in Chapter 12 to be the man from whom she got most of her information about the apothecary's life and death (again, see Chapter 12). Although the narrative never explicitly says so, there is also the possibility that he is a source of Natalia's information about her grandfather's childhood in Galina. Marko, apparently like most of the citizens of Galina, is not really interested in the truth about the tiger's wife, but more interested in legends and gossip.

Mother Vera

Mother Vera is Galina's midwife, the no-nonsense woman who takes the newly orphaned grandfather into her home and raises him as her own.



The Apothecary, Blind Orlo

Another inhabitant of Galina and another orphan (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss the parallels..."), the apothecary whose name, by the way, is given but never referred to again, is a friend to both Natalia's grandfather in his childhood and to the tiger's wife. Both a beneficiary and a victim of shifts in the public opinion of the town, the apothecary is essentially a kind soul, but is executed during the civil war for being of the wrong ethnicity. Blind Orlo was the man with whom the apothecary joined forces in order to survive when the apothecary was abandoned by the squad of soldiers he had served. Together they formed a mind-reading act that swindled the citizens of the small villages through which they passed.

The Blacksmith

The story of the town blacksmith, another of the book's unnamed characters, is told in Chapter 4. Possessor of the town's only gun, he was the natural choice to be sent into the mountains to hunt down the tiger. The true circumstances of his death are concealed by his companions on the hunt, Luka the butcher and one other. As such, they are manifestations of one of the book's secondary themes, the value of concealing the truth with lies.

Luka the Butcher, Amana

The story of Luka the Butcher is recounted in considerable detail in Chapter 7. An artist and apparently a homosexual in the days when being either, let alone both, was unheard of, he left Galina to pursue dreams of a freer, truer life in the big city of Sarobor. The anger and rage associated with the failure of those dreams, the narrative suggests, fueled his attacks on the woman he was tricked into marrying. The tiger's wife who, the narrative also suggests, killed him in revenge. Amana was the woman with whom Luka had resolved to spend his life and who disappeared on her wedding day in order to be with a man she truly loved, a man whom the narrative suggests was the Deathless Man (see above).

Darisa the Bear

Darisa the Bear, the third of the book's three orphans (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss the parallels..."), is a legendary hunter and taxidermist who, on his regular but infrequent visit to Galina, was drawn into the hunt for the tiger. His apparent death during a fight with the animal gave rise to the legend that he was, in fact, a magical bear himself, one who could transform into human form.



Objects/Places

Tigers

Several tigers play important roles in the narrative. The most important is the one that escapes from an urban zoo and makes its way to the forested hills above the town of Galina where Natalia's grandfather spends his childhood. Another important tiger is the one that makes its home in the zoo that Natalia and her grandfather visit when Natalia is a child. Another is the tiger ("the aging son of one of [Natalia's] childhood tigers") that gnaws its paws off in desperation during the bombing raids of the civil war. Still another is Shere Khan, the tiger character in *The Jungle Book* who is, for the young grandfather, the model / archetype of the idea of "tiger." For further consideration of the role of all these tigers in the narrative, see "Topics for Discussion - What characteristics of the various tigers ..."

The City

The unnamed major city in what appears to be an eastern European country like the former Yugoslavia is the setting for much of the narrative's action. It is there that Natalia and her grandparents make their home for some time, it is there that she and her grandfather first visit tigers, and it is there where, after the war is over, the zoo's remaining animals, including the tigers, attack themselves in frustration, rage, confusion and in some cases, a kind of madness.

Brejevina

The village of Brejevina is home to the monastery/orphanage to which Natalia and Zora travel on a mission of mercy to the area's children. It is also the home of Barba Ivan and Nada, where the two women stay while on that mission.

Barba Ivan and Nada's House, the Vineyard

The home of Barba Ivan and his wife Nada, where Natalia and Zora stay while they're in Brejevina, is welcoming and pleasant, decorated with pictures, hand drawn by a number of different hands, of their deceased son's dog. The vineyard on their property is the setting for a search, conducted by a group of "diggers," for a body left there several years ago. Later in the narrative, the vineyard is the setting for an ancient death ritual that, in turn, serves as the trigger for Natalia's journey into the countryside where she meets what she thinks is the "mora" (see below).



The Monastery / Orphanage

Natalia and Zora's work, vaccinating a group of children orphaned by the civil war against tuberculosis and other diseases, takes place in a monastery (home of an all-male religious order of monks) that has been converted into a children's home.

Zdrevkov

Zdrevkov is, initially, the mysterious town where Natalia's grandfather died, and where his personal effects (wallet, rings, etc.) are kept, much to the chagrin and annoyance of Natalia's grandmother. When Natalia discovers that it's within a short drive of Brejevina, she travels there to find those effects, and also discover more about the circumstances of her grandfather's death - specifically, whether she can determine if he spent his last hours in the company of the Deathless Man.

Galina

Galina is a small mountain village, the setting for one of the book's three narrative lines - specifically, the narrative of Natalia's grandfather's youth and childhood, and his encounter with both the tiger escaped from the zoo and the woman who came to be known as the tiger's wife.

Verimovo

This is the location of the summer home owned by Natalia's grandfather. Natalia and her grandfather fight hard to protect their house there against the destructive onslaught of a brush fire. Their efforts can be seen as manifesting the novel's thematic emphasis on the human struggle to survive and life in the face of suffering and difficulty.

Sarobor

This large urban center is the setting for much of the narrative recounting the life of Luka, Galina's butcher, an aspect of the narrative echoed later when the Deathless Man refers to loving a woman who, it seems, was once Luka's fiancé. Sarobor is also the setting for one of Natalia's grandfather's stories of the Deathless Man, the recounting of which also includes the Deathless Man's reference to the woman he loved. Finally, the grandfather's story begins with his recollections of living in Sarobor in the early days of his marriage. In short, Sarobor is a city of love and, as the grandfather's story suggests, a city of death and violence.



Natalia's White Coat

Natalia wears her white doctor's coat at all times. While the narrative never explicitly explains why, there is the sense that she uses it in part to protect herself from attacks both during and after the war, in part to ensure a sense of security in her own identity, and to proclaim her status and accomplishment.

Zoos

Various zoos figure importantly in the narrative, starting with the prologue. Natalia's visits to the zoo in "The City" are an essential part of the emotional closeness she shares with her grandfather, while the fact that so many animals remain trapped there during the bombings of the civil war drive them to distraction, to madness, and to self-cannibalism. Finally, the so-called Galina tiger escapes from a similarly bombed zoo and strikes out on his own, fleeing to an approximation of the natural world he is used to.

The Jungle Book

The Jungle Book is a novel written by British novelist Rudyard Kipling. It is the story of a young orphaned boy named Mowgli, abandoned in the jungle and raised by animals. His nemesis is the hungry tiger Shere Khan, whom Mowgli eventually kills. See also "Topics for Discussion - Obtain and read a copy of ..."

Crossroads

Throughout the narrative, a crossroads (a place where two roads meet) is portrayed as a place where the souls of the dead congregate. They sometimes make their own way there, other times they are led there by a collector of souls like the Deathless Man, other times they are drawn there by artifacts and mementoes left by their loved ones. The crossroads near Brejevina is the setting for Natalia's late-in-the-narrative attempt to meet the Deathless Man.

The Mora

The mora is the local name in Brejevina for a spirit who gathers the souls of the dead at the crossroads and takes them on to heaven. Natalia believes the man she follows from the crossroads is the mora, but he reveals that he is, in fact, simply a grieving father.



Themes

The Struggle to Live

There are two main aspects to the book's many manifestations of this theme. The first is literal, in that many of the characters (particularly those whose lengthy, detailed stories serve as narrative diversions from the main plot, i.e. the apothecary, Luka, Darisa the Bear, the Galina tiger) struggle simply to stay alive. Their determination to do so gets them through painful, difficult, extraordinarily challenging circumstances, said determination mirroring and/or complimenting that of Natalia and her grandfather, perhaps inspiring both. The second main aspect of the book's development of this theme has to do with the idea of living with integrity, with a sense of identity and / or purpose. Most if not all the characters encounter challenges to their individual sense of identity, who they are, what they do and why they do it. Again, some of the most vivid manifestations of this aspect of this theme show up in the lives of the secondary characters. Perhaps the most vivid is the story of Luka, who takes extreme steps to live according to who he is and what he wants to do with his life, and who reacts with such violence and anger when those desires are thwarted.

It's also important to note that for the human characters at least, struggles to live and to sustain identity extend to issues of ethnic identity. Granted, these sorts of struggles are not highlighted in the same way and / or with the same intensity, but questions of ethnic and/or racial identity are always present, sometimes more in the background, sometimes more in the foreground, but always there.

The Nature of Death

At the same time as so many of the characters are struggling simply to live, and while many are struggling to live according to the dictates and desires of their fundamental identity, the narrative is also thematically focused on aspects of death - how people view it, how people approach it, how people experience its aftermath. The primary manifestation of this theme is in the character of the Deathless Man, whose descriptions of the different ways in which different people experience death, and his explanations of why those different ways exist, in many ways provide a glimpse into what is arguably one of the two most universal human experiences, the second being birth. Interestingly, there are very few discussions of and/or references to the event itself, and when there are, the reference is either passing, tied into folklore, or both. There is much more narrative interest, it seems, in people's fear of death before it happens and in people's reactions to it after it happens to a loved one, not to themselves. Notable explorations of the former include the grandfather's confrontations of the Deathless Man on the subject (in particular, their conversation in Chapter 11 around the death of the waiter). Notable explorations of the latter include the grandmother's strident comments to Natalia on the necessity of observing the established rituals and Natalia's conversation with the man from the crossroads (Chapter 13). It's also interesting to note that Natalia herself doesn't



really offer any indications of what her personal feelings and/or ideas are on the subject (i.e. what's going to happen to her). It could be argued, though, that her obsession with finding out what happened to her grandfather and, later in the novel, with connecting with the Deathless Man are motivated at least by curiosity and at most by fear.

Truth, Lies and Secrets

Many, if not most, of the characters and/or narrative lines in this novel manifest a complex relationship between truth, secrets and lies. There are several motifs, or repeated (visual / verbal) images, through which this relationship is explored. The first is in the concealing of truth in stories. In the story of the fire (Chapter 6), the story of the butcher (Chapter 7), and in the stories told about the grandfather (Epilogue), darker and/or more discomfiting truths are suppressed in order to give the story a more positive and/or more dramatic impact. The second is the concealing of truth in action. Natalia conceals the truth about the grandfather's illness from her grandmother and from the rest of the family (Chapter 1) in the same way as her family has concealed truths about other family illnesses (also Chapter 1 - see "Quotes," p. 20). She also conceals the truth about opening the bag containing her grandfather's personal effects, and is asked by the man from the crossroads (Chapter 13) to conceal the truth about what he's doing from his wife. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, there is the idea of concealing truth in order to keep things precious. This manifests primarily in two places, early in the novel (Chapter 2 - see "Quotes," p. 56) and at its conclusion (the final lines of Chapter 13), creating a sense of the circular, of closer, of narrative unity; this is why the story is told, the reader thinks at this moment. This is why Natalia is telling this story. This is what the novel is primarily about; secrets are kept to aid in understanding the world and its ways, and to help those who survive that world and those ways to do so with their identity and purpose intact (see "The Struggle to Live" above).



Style

Point of View

For the most part, the novel is narrated from the first person past tense point of view - specifically, from the perspective of Natalia, its central character and protagonist who, it seems, is exploring all these stories and all these events, playing out on multiple time lines, in an effort to understand both herself and her grandfather. That said, there are some inconsistencies about Natalia and her narration that are worth noting. While there are clear suggestions throughout the narrative that after the truth of her grandfather's death was revealed to her, and presumably after her conversation with the dead boy's father in Chapter 13, she went to Galina to learn as much as she could about her grandfather's life. Fair enough. But what the narrative doesn't explain is how she came to know as much about the early lives of people like Luka and the apothecary as she clearly does. In short, while the narrative clearly establishes that Natalia's perspective is limited (i.e. first person), and while it creates circumstances in which that perspective can be expanded (i.e. the stories of Marko and her grandfather), there are times when the narrative voice slips into something approaching more of a third person omniscient (i.e. all knowing) narrator. While this may be a further development of the book's exploration of folk tale and/or magic realism, it might also, and quite easily, lead to a degree of confusion.

It must also be noted that there are also places in the narrative in which the point of view shifts to the first person narrative perspective of the grandfather. This happens only when Natalia is describing her stories about her grandfather's encounters with the Deathless Man, the apparent intent being to draw the reader more immediately and/or thoroughly into the mystery of the grandfather's experience.

Setting

The setting of the narrative moves across both time (i.e. spanning several decades of the early 20th Century and into the more recent years of the 21st) and, to a lesser degree, across place (from village to city to countryside and back again). The most important thing to note about the book's setting, however, is the part of the world in which it takes place (i.e. the geo-political boundaries of the land in which all these villages and cities and countrysides are found). While it's important to note that the land in question is never specifically identified, there are very clear indications that the story, in all time periods, is set in the area of Eastern Europe known as The Balkans - the former Yugoslavia, the former Czechoslovakia. These indications include character names and place names as well as certain traditions and beliefs. The most important such indication, however, is in the frequent references to the real-life, years-long war that took place in that part of the world.



In the later decades of the 20th Century, centuries old tensions between different spiritualities and ethnicities in The Balkans boiled over into all out genocide. References in *The Tiger's Wife* to redrawn borders, to violent resentment of people simply speaking the wrong language, all clearly and vividly evoke, but do not explicitly correspond to, the bloody conflict that raged for years between Serbs and Croats, Muslims and Christians, in that part of the world. A detailed analysis of what elements in the book (i.e. cities, borders) correspond to what real-world elements is the subject for another analysis. Suffice it to say that the author has apparently used a deeply troubling, deeply inhumane experience of war as a springboard for an intriguing, compassionate contemplation of universal experiences of such conflict - the individual's struggle to live and simultaneous struggle to understand and/or accept death (see "Themes").

Language and Meaning

The most evident, and in many ways the most engaging, element of the entire book is its use of language. Mostly poetic, deeply detailed, and powerfully evocative, the book's language brings a wide range of characters, situations, periods and places, belief systems and feelings to vivid life. The word tapestry woven by the writer is multi-textured and complex, colorful and dynamic, with the reader never really knowing what narrative direction the author is going to take next. But here the book runs into difficulties, and its strength becomes a weakness.

As previously discussed (Chapter 4 - Analysis), the writing sometimes gets in the way of the storytelling. The writer spends a great deal of time exploring the details of her characters' lives and experiences and background (although, interestingly, she does so much more with secondary characters rather than her protagonist), so much so that while each such exploration is almost exquisitely detailed, there is some question as to why its there. Many details, even with significant consideration, add relatively little to the book's plot, themes or relationship. Information is important, absolutely. But detailing each piece of information, each delicate filigree of circumstance, tends to become a distraction from event, character, narrative and theme. It's a fine line between complex and cluttered, between insightful and indulgent. There is the sense throughout the book that, at times, the author crosses both lines, to the ultimate detriment of the work as a whole.

Structure

The book's structure is quite complex, as multi-layered as its language and its themes. There is, in fact, a significant interplay between all three. For the most part, that interplay strikes a careful, engaging balance between the sophisticated and the self-conscious, the author at times creating the sense that there is, at least to some degree, a connection between events in the past and events in the present. At other times, and partly because of the frequent (and overly detailed) attention paid to narrative diversions, the novel's chapter-by-chapter flipping back and forth in time undermines its sense of narrative momentum, of the cumulative power of cause and effect. It could be



argued that the novel's structure has, in terms that reference visual art, more of the sense of collage about it than anything else, that meaning emerges from the juxtaposition of event, image and character rather than from a more traditional, more linear sense of cause-and-effect based structure. It could also be argued, in fact, that the work has elements of both, with the detailed stories of, for example, Luka the Butcher, the apothecary, and Darisa the bear being "collaged" onto the more traditionally structured narrative line anchored by Natalia's search for the truth about her grandfather. There is certainly value in such a multi-faceted structure but, as noted above, and indeed throughout this analysis, the depth, intensity, and length of the so-called "collage" sections tends to undermine the structural and/or emotional power of the main narrative line. In other words, the book's main plot becomes overwhelmed, the narrative as a whole becomes overcrowded, and the impact of the book as a whole becomes somewhat underwhelming. Beautifully written, but not so beautifully shaped.



Quotes

"... my grandfather might say 'I once knew a girl who loved tigers so much she almost became one herself.' Because I am little, and my love of tigers comes directly from him, I believe he is talking about me, offering me a fairy tale in which I can imagine myself - and will, for years and years." Prologue, p. 4

"He had been counting on the pattern into which we had fallen as a family over the years, the tendency to lie about each other's physical conditions and whereabouts to spare one another's feelings and fears ..." Chapter 1, p. 20

"These stories run like secret rivers through all the other stories of his life - of my grandfather's days in the army; his great love for my grandmother; the years he spent as a surgeon and a tyrant of the university. One, which I learned after his death, is the story of how my grandfather became a man; the other, which he told to me, is of how he became a child again." Chapter 2, p. 32

"I know now that the loss of the tigers was a considerable blow to him, but I wonder whether his optimism didn't have as much to do with my behavior, with his refusal to accept that, for a while at least, he had lost me." Ibid, p. 42

"This was, perhaps, a kind of punishment, and back then I thought it was for allowing myself to slip, or for letting the hat into our apartment. Now I realize that it was punishment for giving up so easily on the tigers." Ibid, p. 51

"The story of this war - dates, names, who started it, why - that belongs to everyone. Not just the people involved in it, but the people who write newspapers, politicians thousands of miles away, people who've never even been here or heard of it before. But something like this - this is yours. It belongs only to you. And me. Only to us." Ibid, p. 56
- Grandfather

"Suddenly they want to fight for things, ask questions. They want to throw hot water in your face, or beat you senseless with an umbrella, or hit you in the head with a rock. Suddenly they remember things they have to do, people they have forgotten. All that refusal, all that resistance. Such a luxury." Ibid, p. 71 - Gavo

"...he was alone and hungry, and that hunger, coupled with the thunderous noise of bombardment, had burned in him a kind of awareness of his own death, an imminent and innate knowledge he could neither dismiss nor succumb to. He did not know what to do with it." Chapter 4, p. 93.

"The tiger had no destination, only the constant tug of self preservation in the pit of his stomach, some vague, inborn sense of what he was looking for, which carried him onward." Ibid, p. 96



"The ritual rhythms of this life were built into Mother Vera's nature, an asset she hoped would adhere to my grandfather, too: the logical and straightforward process of moving from season to season, from birth to death, without unnecessary sentiment." Ibid, p. 102

"...the apothecary - tooth puller, dream interpreter, measurer of medicine, keeper of the magnificent scarlet ibis - was the reliable magician, the only kind of magician my grandfather could ever admire. Which is why, in a way, this story starts and ends with him." Ibid, p. 104

"My grandfather's chest was jolting, and he could already picture the tiger bearing down on him, but he thought of The Jungle Book - the way Mowgli had taunted Shere Khan ... and he put his hand out through the tarp and touched the coarse hairs passing by him." Ibid, p. 116

"No one would guess that they did not even bury the unlucky blacksmith, whose brain was eventually picked over by crows, and to whose carcass the tiger would return again and again, until he had learned something about the taste of man, about the freshness of human meat, which was different now, in snow, than it had been in the heat of summer." Ibid, p. 124

"It was another thing they never talked about, a fact I knew somehow without knowing how I'd ever heard about it, something buried so long ago, in such absolute silence, that I could go for years without remembering it. When I did, I was always stunned by the fact that they had survived it, this thing that sat between them, barricaded from everyone else, despite which they had been able to cling together, and raise my mother, and take trips, and laugh, and raise me." Chapter 5, p. 131-32

"There was something familiar about the room and the village, a crowded feeling of sadness that crawled into my gut ... I don't know how long I stood there before I thought of the Deathless Man. When I did, I knew immediately that it was the Deathless Man, and not me, my grandfather had come looking for. And I wondered how much of our hiding his illness had been intended to afford my grandfather the secrecy he would need to go looking for him." Ibid, p. 147

"He had not founded a cancer clinic or won a national research prize but a great doctor in his own right, he was known for turning out flawless diagnosticians and surgeons during his time at the university; for advocating the medical rights of poverty stricken villagers, and above all, for the privilege of having saved the Marshall's life - which, for better or worse, was an honor he shared only with certain surgeons in Zurich." Chapter 6, p. 149 - 50.

"When men die, they die in fear ... they take everything they need from you, and as a doctor it is your job to give it, to comfort them, to hold their hand. But children die how they have been living - in hope. They don't know what's happening, so they expect nothing, they don't ask you to hold their hand - but you end up needing them to hold yours." Ibid, p. 154



"Nobody ever mentions that, at the time, they were so absolutely certain of more war that it was easier for them to let the livestock burn where they stood than to save them, only to have our soldiers return and take it all from them again." Ibid, p. 170

"Crossroads are where the paths of life meet, where life changes. In their case, it changes to death. That is where my uncle meets them once the forty days have passed." Ibid, p. 186 - The Deathless Man

"The dead are celebrated. The dead are loved. They give something to the living. Once you put something into the ground, Doctor, you always know where to find it." Ibid, p. 188 - The Deathless Man

"Hitting her ... made him feel like he was doing something, interrupting her judgment at the very least. The injustice of it, the judgment he knew was there but couldn't force out. He couldn't force her to voice it, and he couldn't force her to put it away." Chapter 7, p. 212

"I felt I'd waited years for the body to be found, though I'd only heard about it that morning - somehow being in Zdrevkov had changed everything, and I didn't know what I was waiting for anymore. My backpack was on my knees, my grandfather's belongings folded up inside. I wondered what they would look like without him: his watch, his wallet, his hat reduced by his absence to objects you could find at a flea market, in somebody's attic." Chapter 8, p. 234

"Or it would be the Deathless Man, tall and wearing his coat, coming down through the fields of long grass above the town... and then I would sit, without breathing, in some bush or under some tree while he dug up the jar, probably whistling to himself, and when he had it in his hand, I would come out and ask him about my grandfather." Chapter 10, p. 268

"In the end, all you want is someone to long for you when it comes time to put you in the ground." Chapter 11, p. 285 - Grandfather

"They say the tiger's mate killed and ate one of her cubs the following spring. To the tigress, the season meant red light and heat, a sound that rises and falls like a scream; so the keepers took the remaining cubs away from her, raised them in their own houses, with their own pets and children. Houses without electricity, with no running water for weeks on end. Houses with tigers." Ibid, p 302

"...real power, he came to understand, lay in the definite and the concrete, in predictions backed by evidence, in the continued life of a man you claimed you could save, and the death of a man you pronounced was certain to die." Chapter 12, p. 313

"The tree stands near the fence where the braided cornfields begin, and Marko Parovic tells me the people of Galina avoid it at all costs; its branches, he says, cast a net in which souls are caught as they rise to heaven, and the ravens that roost there pick the souls out of the bark like worms." Ibid, p. 321



"But Marko does remember the intense stillness of the apothecary before the recruit kicked his legs off the fence, the apothecary's eyes steady and resigned, all the fight pulled out of him by something no one present completely understood, but everyone would later relegate to responsibility, to the grace of self-sacrifice." Ibid, p. 323

"My grandfather is in his best suit, and the Deathless Man has taken him out, not for a cup of coffee, but for a beer, a long laugh before they take their journey to the crossroads together ... they have the comfortable demeanor of old friends, of two people between whom a lifetime has passed." Epilogue, p. 335

"... the tiger is always there, in their movements, in their speech, in the preventive gestures that have become a part of their everyday lives." Ibid, p. 337

"He is the hunter of stag and boar, a fighter of bears ... he has forgotten the citadel, the nights of fire, his long and difficult journey to the mountain. Everything lies dead in his memory, except for the tiger's wife, for whom, on certain nights, he goes calling, making that tight note that falls and falls. The sound is lonely, and low, and no-one hears it any more." Ibid, p. 338



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the parallels between the narrative's three male orphans - Natalia's grandfather, the apothecary, and Darisa the Bear. Consider and comment on the similarities in their childhood circumstances, their interests and values, their adult experiences, and the circumstances and meanings of their deaths. Is there any relationship, do you think, between their being orphaned and the fact that Natalia takes care of orphans?

What did tigers represent for Natalia's grandfather? What do they mean to him? Relate that meaning to the experiences, beliefs and values of the other characters - in other words, what is the metaphoric connection between the grandfather's obsession with / experience of tigers and, for example, Natalia's experiences with her grandfather, or with the mora? What about the grandfather's experiences with the Deathless Man?

Why do you think so many important characters (i.e. Natalia's grandfather, the tiger's wife, the blacksmith) are not given first names? Consider also the apothecary, whose name the narrative does include but which is never used again.

Obtain and read a copy of *The Jungle Book*, by Rudyard Kipling. Discuss the parallels between that story and this one. What, do you think, are the metaphoric and symbolic links between the two books - specifically, the links between that story and the various stories of, and told by, Natalia's grandfather? Why do you think the book was so important to him?

Which characteristics of the various tigers portrayed in the narrative (see "Objects/Places - Tigers") do you think relate to the stories of the various human characters - Natalia ... her grandfather ... the tiger's wife ... the Deathless Man. Consider the book's final quote, from p. 338, in your discussions. Consider also your own images and feelings about tigers.

What are your experiences of secrets? Are there stories of events, people and situations that are so special you can't, or feel you shouldn't, share them with someone else? Experiences so awful they can't be shared? What does it feel like to keep those kinds of secrets? What are your feelings about secrets and confidences in general? Should keeping a secret be absolute? Why or why not?

Research and discuss rituals around death in your culture. What is their intention? What are they meant to do for the dead person? For those left behind? What personal experiences do you have with such rituals? What effect did they have on you? Those around you?

Consider the quote from the book's final paragraph (see "Quotes," p. 338). In what ways does its symbolic/metaphoric meaning refer to the various tigers that appear in the narrative? In what ways does that meaning also refer to the various characters and their lives, particularly their thematically central (and linked) struggles to live their own lives?

Consider particularly the tiger's wife and the grandfather, but also Natalia and the other characters whose stories are narrated in such detail.