Only the Animals

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CERIDWEN DOVEY

Born in South Africa, Ceridwen Dovey spent her childhood moving back and forth often between South Africa and Australia. As a teenager, she made the choice to remain in Sydney, Australia, for high school while her parents returned to South Africa. In 1999, she began her studies at Harvard University and earned a joint degree in anthropology and visual and environmental studies. Following her graduation, she used experience she gained making documentary films in college to work briefly in television in New York City. Then, she moved to South Africa to study creative writing at the University of Cape Town. Her first novel, *Blood Kin*, was written as part of her creative writing masters thesis. It was published in several countries in 2007 and was shortlisted for a number of prizes in 2007 and 2008. Dovey also completed graduate work at New York University in social anthropology before returning to Sydney, Australia. *Only the Animals* is her second book, and it also won several awards. Following the book's publication, Dovey turned to writing full-time. She lives in Sydney with her husband and two sons.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Each of the stories in *Only the Animals* takes place in the middle of a major human conflict, beginning in the years after the 1859 Hospital Creek Massacre in Australia—in which colonists massacred at least 100 Aboriginal people—and ending with the Israeli bomb strikes on Beirut in 2006. There are several stories from World War I and World War II, and the dolphin Sprout explains that her mother served in the U.S. efforts in the Cold War, while she herself worked during the Gulf War and then during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Dovey's stories blend history and fiction, and many of the details she includes are historically accurate. For instance, the camel's life story of being the only camel to survive his transport to Australia, and then being purchased by a man who rode him like a horse, is true, though he predated the camel in *Only the Animals*. The tortoise Plautus also mentions many of the first animals in space by name, most notably the dog Laika. Many of the incidents of cruelty to animals that Dovey mentions in the stories are also historically accurate. In World War II, the Allies trained anti-tank dogs to look for food under German tanks, thereby using the dogs as suicide bombers. Parisians also ate their beloved local zoo elephants, Castor and Pollux, during the 1870 Siege of Paris at the end of the Franco-Prussian War.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Dovey draws heavily from famous works and authors in the Western canon. Franz Kafka's short story "A Letter to an Academy," for instance, serves as the jumping-off point for "Red Peter's Little Lady," while the dolphin Sprout writes to poet Sylvia Plath ("Tulips," "Lady Lazarus") in "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." The tortoise Plautus's story, meanwhile, draws from two of Tom Stoppard's plays, *Arcadia* and *Jumper*, while "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me" is a rehashing of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* using mussels, rather than humans, for characters. Several of these famous writers, like Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*), George Orwell (*1984*, *Animal Farm*), and Henry Lawson ("The Drover's Wife"), appear as characters in the stories. One source that Dovey mentions multiple times is *Animals in War* by Jilly Cooper, a nonfiction book that details animals' contribution to warfare. Many of the anecdotes in *Only the Animals* come directly from *Animals in War*, such as the letter that the pony Fufu's owners write to the French army begging them to not take their pony. Stories or novels about an animal's experience of human conflicts or cruelty have experienced major success over the years. Anna Sewell's novel *Black Beauty*, for instance, became an immediate bestseller within months of publication in 1877, and has since become one of the best-selling books of all time. Told from the horse Beauty's perspective, the book tells of Beauty's many owners over his lifetime—and his many experiences with human cruelty. Children's novels like *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate, *War Horse* by Michael Morpugo, and E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* explore similar themes.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Only the Animals
- **When Written:** Unknown
- **Where Written:** Sydney, Australia
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Short Story Collection
- **Setting:** Various warzones around the world
- **Antagonist:** War, Cruelty, Humans
- **Point of View:** First Person and Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Camels. As the narrator of "The Bones" explains, camels were originally imported to Australia so they could help English colonizers move building materials into the continent's interior. This, however, has had an unintended consequence: Australia

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now has the largest population of feral camels in the world.

Animals in Space. People have been sending animals into the skies as test subjects for centuries, beginning with the first animals to fly in a hot air balloon in 1783—a duck, a sheep, and a rooster. In *Only the Animals*, the tortious Plautus died during her trip to space, the first tortoises sent to space in 1968 actually survived. They were the first beings from Earth to experience deep space and to orbit the moon.

PLOT SUMMARY

Only the Animals consists of 10 short stories, each narrated by an animal who died in the course of a human conflict. "The Bones" follows a camel is out in the Australian bush in 1892. The camel's owner, Mister Mitchell, is asleep, while a giant goanna stalks the travelers from a distance. The camel listens to the poet Henry Lawson ramble about his and Mitchell's childhoods spent together on the goldfields, and how Mitchell's father struck it rich—but only after participating in the Hospital Creek Massacre. Now, Mister Mitchell has dug up an Aboriginal woman's bones, believing they'll protect him from the ghosts that haunted his father. The camel thinks back to his original handler, a man named Zeriph, and vows to run away. But Mister Mitchell leaps up and shouts at the goanna that it's the goanna, not ghosts, that is haunting him. He shoots the goanna but accidentally kills the camel, too.

In "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," it's 1915 and a cat named Kiki has been stranded in the trenches of World War I. She used to live in Paris with the famous writer Colette, and the two shared a close bond—but Colette accidentally left her at the front when she came to visit her sergeant husband, Henri. In the trenches, Kiki avoids the tomcat who lives in the next trench and pines for Colette, all befriending a young soldier. She also tries to avoid Henri, who hates her. As Kiki spends more time with the tom and the other animals working at the front, she resolves to make it back to Paris and to Colette. She and the tomcat plan to travel together, but the tom gets stuck in barbed wire in no man's land on the morning they plan to leave, and German snipers shoot Kiki.

"Red Peter's Little Lady" is told through letters that Red Peter, a chimp, writes to a woman named Evelyn and the female chimp Evelyn is training, Hazel. Evelyn's husband, Herr Oberndorff, trained Peter to essentially be human, and Hazel is undergoing the same training so she can be Peter's wife. But the letters reveal that Peter and Evelyn were once lovers, and Peter has no interest in marrying Hazel. Peter, Evelyn, and Hazel all write about the difficulties of surviving World War I in their German city, where people are starving. Over the course of the war, people begin to strip Peter of the trappings of his human life, like his clothes and hotel room, and Peter essentially becomes an animal again. When Evelyn learns her husband died, Peter insists that they're free now to be together. But Evelyn instead traps Peter in a cage and intends to eat him, as she ate Hazel.

In "Hundstage," a dog tells readers about the development of the German Shepherd dog breed in Nazi Germany. The dog's master is Heinrich Himmler; the dog's sister is Blondi, Hitler's dog. One day, when the dog is ill, a strange man enters Himmler's office. The dog attacks the man, but calms down when the man strokes him. It's only when Himmler returns to his office that the man introduces himself as the veterinarian who has come to treat the dog. But Himmler interprets the dog's willingness to accept affection from the vet as disloyalty and banishes the dog to the woods. Ashamed, the dog runs through the woods and converses with several animals' ghosts. A pig ghost insists that humans aren't as kind as the dog thinks they are—indeed, they use their kindness to disguise cruelty. The dog ends up falling in with the Allies and becomes an anti-tank dog: a dog strapped with bombs and trained to look for food under German tanks. The dog dies of starvation before he can reach the Germans.

"Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me" tells the story of Sel, a mussel, and his mussel friends Muss and Gallos. Muss arrives in Hudson Bay after hitchhiking across the U.S. and convinces Gallos and Sel to join him in hitchhiking to San Francisco. The mussels cross the country, partying and having sex where they can. They reach the West Coast in Washington, visit the mussel farm where Muss grew up, and pick up a fourth friend, Bluey. They hitch a ride on a U.S. Navy battleship that eventually docks in Pearl Harbor. The warm water causes the mussels to spawn prolifically, Sel is distraught when he realizes he and his friends have fathered a generation of mussels who think life should have meaning. As Sel and Muss do drugs with a lobster, bombs destroy the battleships in the harbor. Muss survives, but Sel boils to death.

In her memoir "Plautus: A Memoir of My Years on Earth and Last Days in **Space**," the titular tortoise begins with her journey from the hermit Oleg's hut to the Tolstoy family. Leo Tolstoy died several years earlier, but Plautus spends a year with his daughter, Alexandra, reading feminist theory. Ten years later, in the middle of the Russian Revolution, Alexandra's husband sends Plautus to Virginia Woolf in England. He carved Tolstoy's last words into her shell, believing that would help her survive. Virginia cares for Plautus diligently until she loses her home in the London Blitz during World War II. After Virginia commits suicide months later, Plautus spends a few years living with George Orwell. They dislike each other, but Orwell unwittingly introduces Plautus to the intoxicating idea of going to outer space. Plautus runs away and tries to get in with Americans or Soviets, who are engaged in a race to get a man on the moon. After Plautus spends some time with the playwright Tom Stoppard, a friend of his takes Plautus to the Soviet scientist Dr. Yazdovsky. Plautus watches for years as they send dogs into space until finally, it's her turn. In 1968, Plautus goes to space

with two spiders and circles the moon before dying.

An unnamed elephant narrates "I, the Elephant, Wrote This." The story takes place before and during the Mozambican Civil War, ending in 1987. The elephant and her twin sister grow up hearing stories of elephants who died exciting deaths and whose souls are now in the stars as constellations. This makes the sisters obsessed with dying glorious deaths. But as the elephants grow older, they learn of the violence that elephants in their native Mozambique have experienced, and their perspective on death shifts. When the elephant's daughter and nephew are two, the nearby humans seem to be at war. It's a dry summer, and the herd wanders to various bodies of water looking for sustenance. As the elephants head for a lake near the humans, hungry villagers surround the herd. They shoot the elephant's sister, and the elephant refuses to leave her twin. The elephants die forehead to forehead, dreaming of their happy childhood.

"Telling Fairy Tales" takes place in 1992, in the Sarajevo **zoo**. A witch takes up residence near the bear enclosure and speaks often with the black bear, a jaded creature who can't wait for the blind brown bear who shares the enclosure to die. He wants to eat her. The brown bear, seemingly oblivious, tells the fairy tale of a Russian prince who turned into a bear when he was about a year old. A soldier named Karol adopted him during World War II, and the bear eventually became the regiment's mascot. Karol and the bear traveled Europe and ended up in Scotland, unable to get home. Finally, the brown bear dies and the black bear eats her. The witch informs the bear, who's memory is failing, that he just ate his wife. The bear stops talking and dies not long after, clutching his wife's bones.

As the title suggests, "A Letter to Sylvia Plath" takes the form of a letter that the dolphin Sprout writes to the poet Sylvia Plath. Sprout feels a connection to Plath—Plath seemed aware that she's an animal, unlike most men. Like her mother, Sprout works for the Navy—but her beloved trainer, Officer Bloomington, treats the dolphins like equals. Their unit serves in the Gulf War and then, following the end of the Cold War, the Navy purchases a dolphin from the USSR, Kostya. Kostya's trainer, Officer Mishin, comes with him. It turns out the Soviet people and dolphins aren't so different from the American ones. During a special training session on a remote island, Bloomington and Mishin fall in love. Kostya and Sprout are jealous, but happy for their trainers. Everything changes after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Navy decides to put the dolphins' special training (learning to tag enemy divers with tracking devices) to use, despite the trainers' reservations. Sprout is the first dolphin sent out—but she only discovers after tagging an enemy diver that she actually tagged him with a lethal dart, not a tracker. Sprout is distraught that she killed a person and commits suicide.

In "Psittacophile," a woman referred to as the owner moves to Beirut following her divorce. She wants people to appreciate and worry about her, and living in the Middle East seems like the best way to get people's attention. Soon after moving, she purchases a parrot whom she names Barnes. The two soon become best friends—the owner even breaks off a relationship with another expat for Barnes's sake. But then, in 2006, the Israelis bomb Beirut. Distraught, Barnes begins to pull his feathers out and hurt himself. Eventually, with no way to know that the bombing will stop a month later, the owner flees the country. She leaves Barnes's cage hanging in front of the demolished pet shop where she bought him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Camel – The camel is the narrator of the collection's first story, "The Bones." The camel was imported to Australia from Tenerife a number of years before the story begins, and he has been in Australia since then. He was the only camel in the ship to survive the passage, making his transport an especially traumatizing experience. The camel expresses interest in connecting with his human handlers, though he's found that the only person to ever treat him like a living, feeling being was his original handler, Zeriph. Where Zeriph loved and cared for the camel (and the camel loved Zeriph in return), the people who have owned the camel since simply give him commands. The camel has a strong survival instinct, which is tested when Mister Mitchell purchases the camel and rides him like "a fancy horse." In the camel's opinion, Mister Mitchell seems a bit mad and therefore, possibly incapable of keeping himself and the camel alive in the bush. The camel becomes increasingly disturbed after Mister Mitchell digs up an Aboriginal person's grave and, soon after, allows the writer Henry Lawson to join him in his travels. Part of this is because a huge goanna begins following the party after Mister Mitchell digs up the bones—though the camel also finds Lawson himself cold and somewhat disturbing. Mister Mitchell shoots the camel by accident when he shoots the goanna.

Henry Lawson – In "The Bones" Lawson (a real-life Australian author) joins Mister Mitchell and the camel when they meet in Hungerford. Lawson and Mitchell were childhood friends, which is the reason they give for traveling together—but the camel understands that Lawson joined the party mostly because Mitchell seems mad and like an entertaining subject for a story. The camel explains that Lawson is often either drunk or dehydrated, and both states make him talkative. Much of the plot in "The Bones" consists of Lawson telling the camel about his memories of Mister Mitchell and Mitchell's father, who struck rich in Australia's gold fields after participating in the massacre of Aboriginal people (called the Hospital Creek Massacre). Lawson's relationship to animals seems to be one of convenience. He's the first person in years to speak candidly to the camel, but the camel also understands that animals in

general are simply tools for Lawson to employ in his stories. Lawson believes that including animal characters makes his human characters look worse by comparison.

Mister Mitchell – Mister Mitchell is the camel's current owner in "The Bones." The camel suspects that the man is mad, as Mister Mitchell rides him like "a fancy horse" and inexplicably digs up bones from an Aboriginal person's gravesite. The bones, Henry Lawson later explains, are supposedly going to protect Mister Mitchell from the ghosts of Aboriginal people whom Mitchell's father murdered years ago, during the Hospital Creek Massacre. Mister Mitchell is asleep with the bones for much of the story, but he wakes up in the story's final pages and shoots the massive goanna that began stalking him and the camel after Mitchell dug up the bones. But though Mitchell manages to kill the goanna, he also accidentally shoots the camel.

The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette – Kiki is the feline narrator of "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I." The French writer Colette owned Kiki until Kiki was accidentally stranded in the World War I trenches right before the story begins. Kiki adores Colette and the two shared a strong bond, which is why Kiki stowed away in Colette's car when Colette traveled to the front to visit her husband, Henri, in the first place. Colette didn't know that Kiki was there, so she left without the cat. At the front, Kiki befriends a soldier and spends most of her time pining for Colette. Kiki also meets a tomcat at the front who lived on the same street in Paris. He's jealous of what he interprets as Kiki's cushy, idyllic life as Colette's cat. But while Colette's memories of walking on a leash with Colette and accompanying her everywhere are happy, she also expresses sadness that Colette was emotionally distant at times, especially while she was writing. At the front, Colette meets a number of animals that show her she's not the only one to have a close relationship with her owner and miss them terribly. The tomcat is instrumental in introducing her to many of these animals, which helps the two of them become close friends. Despite seeing evidence of love between people and animals, Kiki still fears that Colette won't love her anymore if they're ever reunited. Eventually, after Kiki learns that the Briand dog ran all the way home, Kiki and the tomcat decide to journey back to Paris together. But their plans go awry when the tom gets caught in barbed wire in no man's land, and a German sniper shoots Kiki.

Colette – Colette is Kiki's owner in "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I." She's based off of a real-life French writer and never appears in person in the story. Since Colette is such a dedicated writer, Kiki is the perfect companion for her. Kiki doesn't demand too much of her owner, and Colette has the freedom to write. Indeed, Colette tells Kiki at one point that she's a writer first, and everything else second. But despite this, Colette has a rich romantic life. Kiki mentions that Colette has already divorced one man and recently broke off a relationship with Missy. Now she's married to Henri, a sergeant in World War I, and recently had a baby with him. Kiki fears that with her new life and with the pressures of World War I, Colette won't have room in her life for a cat anymore.

The Tomcat – The tomcat in "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I" is Kiki's friend. He used to live with a woman on the same street as Colette, and so he knew of Kiki before the war. The tomcat desperately wants a person to love him and idealizes Colette's relationship with Kiki. This is in part because the tomcat's owner put him onto the streets when World War I broke out. In the trenches he befriends a soldier, which gets him some of the attention he craves. Throughout the story, he acts as an interpreter and a voice of reason for Kiki, telling her all about the other animals involved in the war effort. He ultimately convinces her that they should work together to travel back to Paris and to Colette—but the night before they're supposed to leave, the tom becomes tangled in barbed wire on the battlefield.

Red Peter – The protagonist of "Red Peter's Little Lady," Peter is a chimp who, after years of training, now believes he's human. He walks upright, wears clothes, speaks, and writes. The story is told through his letters to Hazel, a chimp who will become Peter's wife, and to Evelyn, the married woman he loves and who inspired him to become human. As Peter writes to Evelyn and to Hazel, he expresses a bleak view of what it means to be human. In his opinion, being human means embracing masochism and depriving oneself of pleasures. Thus, Peter doesn't allow himself to drink caffeine, and he doesn't eat meat. Even though Peter is supposed to marry Hazel, it soon becomes clear that he doesn't love her. Although he lives much like a human, Peter is still an animal in his trainers Herr Hagenbeck and Herr Oberndorff's **zoo**, and Peter writes about being a zoo animal without much thought for much of the story. Especially when he writes to Hazel, he glosses over the nastier or abusive aspects of being a zoo animal. However, when he learns that Herr Oberndorff is dead and Herr Hagenbeck escaped World War I to Africa, Peter admits how difficult it has been to live under the men's thumbs. He's thrilled to not have to marry Hazel anymore, and he begs Evelyn to restart their relationship. However, Peter struggles to survive in World War I-era Hamburg, Germany. He's gradually stripped of his clothes, his rooms, and everything that makes him human—until he finally finds himself back in his cage in Herr Oberndorff's library, destined to become Evelyn's dinner.

Hazel – In "Red Peter's Little Lady," Hazel is a chimp in training with Evelyn to become Peter's wife. Like Peter, Hazel's training is supposed to make her human. Hazel dictates all her letters to Evelyn—though Evelyn notes that Hazel can read, it's unclear if she can write yet. Unlike Peter, Hazel doesn't seem to take to her training as well. Sometimes she writes as though she'd like to become human, but other times, she describes animalistic activities, like scratching herself, that suggest she doesn't want

to stop being a chimp. Peter makes it clear that Hazel wasn't given a choice about becoming human: she simply passed aptitude tests and was selected to become Peter's wife. Though Hazel becomes more human over the course of the story, her progress halts entirely when she suffers something of a mental break after discovering that Peter is in love with Evelyn. Hazel begins to challenge and taunt Peter in her letters, and uses the fact that she's in between being human and chimp to horrify Peter. As World War I grips Hamburg, Hazel gradually loses her humanity—and eventually she doesn't have any **food** to eat. Though Hazel insists she's starving herself as a publicity stunt, it also seems as though Evelyn is withholding food. The story implies that Evelyn, who is also starving, ultimately eats Hazel out of desperation.

Frau Evelyn Oberndorff – In "Red Peter's Little Lady," Evelyn is Herr Oberndorff's wife; Red Peter refers to her as Evelyn, while Hazel refers to her as Frau Oberndorff. She's a German woman who has been put in charge of Hazel's training because her husband has been sent to fight in World War I. Evelyn is initially very formal in her letters to Peter and focuses on keeping him updated about Hazel's progress (Hazel, a chimp, is being trained to become human so she can become Peter's wife). Though she often finds Hazel's words crude or shocking, Evelyn feels it's her duty to transcribe Hazel's letters accurately. Peter, however, implies in his letters that he and Evelyn were lovers years ago, when Peter still lived at Herr Oberndorff's **zoo**. He constantly reminds her of their love for each other and the good times they had. As the story progresses and Germany begins to experience mass famine due to World War I, Evelyn's tone shifts. She keeps Peter apprised of whether or how well she and her children are eating and managing, and she seems more open to his advances. Around the time that Evelyn learns her husband died, she and Peter reconnect in person for the first time since Peter left the zoo. This is in part because the man in charge of the zoo, Herr Hagenbeck, escaped to Africa to avoid the war—it was his idea to train Hazel for Peter, and with him gone, Peter doesn't think he has to follow through with the marriage anymore. However, Evelyn seems to steel herself over the course of several letters before imprisoning Peter in his cage. She plans to eat him after fattening him up.

The Dog – The protagonist of "Hundstage," the dog is a German Shepherd whose owner is Heinrich Himmler (though the dog refers to his owner only as "Master" throughout the story). The dog is devoted to Himmler and thus, believes his owner can do no wrong. Because of this, the dog celebrates Himmler for doing things like passing laws advancing animal rights—but the dog either doesn't know or can't think critically about the other horrible things that Himmler, a high-ranking Nazi official, does. The dog accompanies Himmler to all his meetings and becomes entranced when Himmler studies Hinduism. Though this presents some problems—Himmler insists the dog, a natural carnivore, become vegetarian—the dog also believes that if he follows Himmler's program of vegetarianism and meditation, he'll be reincarnated as a human in his next life. One day, when the dog is ill and alone in Himmler's office, a strange man comes in. Because the dog knows that Himmler would approve, he attacks the man. But when the man begins to pet the dog, the dog calms down. He only learns after Himmler returns and is incensed that the dog "betrayed" him that the man is the veterinarian sent to treat him for his illness. Following this, Himmler banishes the dog into the woods in winter. There, the dog attempts to follow Himmler's program, but he struggles. Though he meets several animal souls that try to encourage him to think more critically about Himmler and Nazi Germany more generally, the dog is too devoted to Himmler to be able to do so. Eventually, the emaciated dog winds up with a unit of Allied anti-tank dogs—dogs who were strapped with bombs and trained to find **food** under German tanks, which turned them into suicide bombers. Though the dog tells his companions that there's no food under the German tanks, they don't believe him. When the Allies release the dog with the bombs, the dog dies of exposure and starvation before he even reaches German lines.

Master/Heinrich Himmler – Himmler is the dog's master in "Hundstage;" the story only references him by name once. In the dog's eyes, Himmler is wholly good. He's an animal lover and cares even for the fish—and he wants to build a great nation that thinks of animals just as much as he does. This doesn't change for the dog even when Himmler banishes him to the woods for the perceived crime of allowing a veterinarian to handle him. In real life, Himmler did pass laws advancing animal rights, but he was also one of the architects of the Holocaust. The dog also notes Himmler's interest in Hinduism and transposing Hindu beliefs to Nazi Germany. His dream was to build a retreat where high ranking SS officers could receive spiritual training, which the dog touches on when he mentions that Himmler is restoring the castle at Wewelsburg.

Soul of a Pig – In "Hundstage," the pig approaches the dog during the dog's exile in the German forests. Unlike the dog, the pig doesn't believe in humans' superiority, nor does he believe that the Nazis are doing anything good for people or for animals. To illustrate his point, he tells the dog about his own death. The pig was executed in a traditional way for the crime of eating piglets: he was dressed in human clothes and died alongside a man would be executed while wearing a pig's skin. His owners and the other villagers chose to kill the pig like this believing it would please the Nazis, who encouraged Germans to revive old traditions. But the Nazis instead arrested members of the pig's human family for being cruel to animals.

Sel – The protagonist and narrator of "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me," Sel is a blue mussel who grows up in Hudson Bay. Sel has few defining characteristics, aside from his desire to have new adventures and his intense love of his friend Muss. When Muss arrives in

Hudson Bay with stories of the continental U.S. and specifically San Francisco, Sel feels he has no choice but to follow his friend back across the country. Sel is immediately taken with Muss's insistence that life has no meaning; people (or mussels) should just enjoy it to the greatest extent they can. His one desire is to hear the native pearly mussels of the central U.S. tell their stories, so he's distraught when he discovers that all the pearly mussels are dead. Though Sel isn't as interested in sex as Muss, he nevertheless has several sexual encounters with female mussels over the course of his journey. However, once the mussels engage in a mass spawning in Pearl Harbor, he realizes the consequences of spawning—the mussels are enraged and distraught when they realize they've fathered a generation of young mussels who believe that life should have meaning. Sel dies during the bombing of Pearl Harbor when his shell breaks, making it impossible for him to close his shell and protect himself from the hot water.

Muss – Sel's friend Muss is a blue mussel in "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me." He's interested in detaching and living life for the experience of it; he doesn't think life has, or should have, meaning. Muss grew up on a mussel farm on the West Coast and hitchhiked to the Hudson Bay, where he meets Sel and Gallos. He then leads the two mussels on a cross-country journey back to the mussel farm and ultimately, to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Though Muss and the other mussels become good friends, Muss is selfish and is more interested in doing things he finds interesting than in listening to his friends. Fortunately for him, his friends are for the most part willing to follow him. Sel notes that Muss is obsessed with sex; nearly every time the mussels stop, Muss finds a female mussel to spawn with. Muss is the only mussel still next to Sel when Pearl Harbor is bombed. He survives by dropping down to the bottom of the harbor, where the water is cooler. Sel wonders how Muss will live without someone to watch him.

Gallos – In "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me," the mussel Gallos is Sel's best friend. He grew up in Hudson Bay and is a poet. When Muss arrives from the West Coast, Gallos is enchanted by his talk of how life is meaningless and his insistence that experience is everything. At first, Gallos and Muss talk for hours straight about everything. Like Sel, Gallos agrees to follow Muss across the continental U.S. for San Francisco. He joins Muss in several endeavors, as when Muss goes to tie up a predatory dog whelk on the battleship they attach to. However, once the mussels arrive in Pearl Harbor, Gallos is old and stops writing. Eventually, he becomes so depressed that Sel and Muss stop visiting him.

Plautus – The protagonist of "Plautus: A Memoir of My Years on Earth and Last Days in Space," Plautus is a Russian tortoise. She's thoughtful, perceptive, and is very concerned with ensuring her own safety. Thus, she's concerned when her first owner, the hermit Oleg, begins trying to predict the future by breaking tortoise shells—and she chooses to leave him when he embraces Christianity, which she's heard associates tortoises with sin. Plautus lives with a number of famous writers throughout her long life. She leaves Oleg initially in the hopes of becoming Leo Tolstoy's tortoise, but is disappointed to discover he's already dead. However, her years with his daughter, Alexandra, introduce Plautus to a new way of thinking. At this point, she begins to consider solitude, and what it means for a person (or tortoise) to choose to be alone. She finds Alexandra, who chooses to be by herself, an inspiration. From her next owner, Virginia Woolf, Plautus learns to appreciate the human-animal relationship more. Woolf is a kind owner to her and is distraught when Plautus first arrives at Woolf's house with an infection due to having Tolstoy's last words carved into her shell. Fortunately for Plautus, though, the carving does help her survive in the years after Woolf's death. While living with George Orwell, Plautus first learns about **space** and decides she'd like to go there. After more than a decade of trying, Plautus finally gets herself into the Dr. Yazdovsky's Soviet labs that put animals in space. Plautus spends several years studying to go to space, during which she interviews any animals that do survive their trips to space for insights. Plautus is so interested in going to space that she doesn't question why people send animals to space knowing they'll die—in her mind, it's an honor. So Plautus is thrilled when she's slated to be the first animal to orbit the moon. She dies after several days in space, believing that there, she's going to finally understand what it means to be totally alone.

Countess Alexandra – In "Plautus: A Memoir," Countess Alexandra is Leo Tolstoy's adult daughter. The two were very close, so Alexandra is distraught when he dies, three years before the story begins. She takes to her bed and pretends to be ill, but she spends her time reading. When Plautus makes it to the Tolstoys' house, the maid settles her in Alexandra's room. The two become good friends and Alexandra reads books about feminist theory out loud to Plautus. Eventually, Alexandra gives up her solitude to get married and become a nurse in World War I. A decade later, Alexandra asks her husband to send Plautus to Virginia Woolf to get Plautus out of the war-torn Soviet Union—and as an excuse to smuggle her own prison diary out of the country. She eventually escapes to the United States.

Virginia Woolf – The British author Virginia Woolf is Plautus's third owner in the story "Plautus: A Memoir." Plautus adores Woolf because Woolf genuinely cares about animals and prioritizes Plautus's well-being. She's shocked, for instance, when she discovers that Alexandra's husband carved Tolstoy's last words into Plautus's shell, as she knows this is painful for the tortoise. Woolf also earns Plautus's affection by banning tortoiseshell objects in Plautus's presence and by writing *Flush: A Biography*, a biography of Elizabeth Barrett's cocker spaniel told from the dog's perspective. Woolf regularly takes Plautus with her when she gives readings from the biography. Plautus's

time with Woolf comes to an end during World War II, when Woolf commits suicide. Woolf leaves Plautus to George Orwell, believing he'll care for her.

George Orwell – Eric Blair, better known by his pen name George Orwell, inherits Plautus after Virginia dies in "Plautus: A Memoir." Virginia believed that George had a menagerie and therefore would take good care of a tortoise—but the menagerie turns out to consist of only a dog and a rooster. George and Plautus never get along, in part because George feels that having a pet tortoise is too aristocratic. Plautus tries to be proud of her time with George by telling readers that she witnessed him writing his most famous work, *Animal Farm*. George is unwittingly responsible for igniting Plautus's desire to go to **space** when he takes her to a lecture about space by the philosopher Bertrand Russell.

Dr. Yazdovsky – Dr. Yazdovsky is the lead scientist of the Soviet **space** program in "Plautus: A Memoir." Plautus finds Dr. Yazdovsky impressively kind—for instance, when the dog Laika ran away the day before she was supposed to be launched into space, Dr. Yazdovsky was concerned only that the wolves surrounding the compound would eat her. He loves Plautus the most of all his lab animals. When it comes to sending animals into space, though, Dr. Yazdovsky prefers small, white, female dogs because they show up better on film. It's not until 1968 that Dr. Yazdovsky decides Plautus should go to space. He chooses her to be the first animal to orbit the moon because tortoises don't eat as much as dogs, and he hopes she'll hibernate. He seems to believe she'll survive the journey, but like many of the dogs, Plautus dies.

Elephant – The narrator of "I, the Elephant, Wrote This," the elephant is a Mozambican African savanna elephant born in the early 1970s. She and her twin sister are extremely close. Her story follows her life from babyhood to her death as an adult. As a baby, the elephant and her sister love hearing stories of other elephants' "glorious deaths," and how these dead elephant's soul ends up in the **stars**. She and her sister spend a lot of time considering their own deaths—and wondering why there aren't any stories about Mozambican African savanna elephants. But when she and her sister are initiated into the herd as adults, they learn that the savanna elephants have certainly died heroic deaths—but their deaths are too sad for children to handle. Though the elephant is excited at first to learn these new stories, her excitement wanes when she gives birth to her daughter two years later. Being a mother causes the elephant to shift her focus; suddenly, she finds that she's more interested in life than death. But this shift proves difficult to maintain when the elephants realize that they are, unwittingly, caught up in the middle of the Mozambican Civil War and a drought at the same time. Under these circumstances, the elephant is distraught and terrified when her daughter and nephew playact as the elephants Castor and Pollux—their games don't seem so innocent when they could conceivably die any time. But as connected as the elephant is to her daughter, she's connected most strongly to her sister. Thus, when hungry villagers shoot her sister, the elephant chooses to die with her rather than abandon her. The elephants die forehead to forehead, in the same position as the elephants Castor and Pollux in their constellation.

Sister – In "I, the Elephant, Wrote This," the elephant's twin sister grows up with more or less the same interests as the elephant. She doesn't seem nearly as interested in learning why there aren't any stories about African savanna elephants, but she's just as intrigued by the thought of dying gloriously so one's soul is visible in the stars. The sisters are extremely close all the way into adulthood, and they even give birth at the same time. The elephant's sister, though, takes a more relaxed approach to parenthood by telling their babies stories in which elephants die. She reminds the elephant that withholding the stories will only encourage their children, so she tells the babies Castor and Pollux's story in pieces. When the herd encounters hungry villagers, the villagers shoot the elephant's sister. The elephant chooses to die with her sister rather than abandon her. The elephants die with their foreheads pressed together, in the same position as the elephants Castor and Pollux in their constellation.

The Black Bear – In "Telling Fairy Tales," the black bear is one of only two animals left in the Sarajevo zoo during the siege of the city. He's hungry, angry, and often cruel. He lives in a pen with the brown bear and is upfront about the fact that he's waiting for her to die so that he can eat her. The bear knows that if he were to kill and eat the black bear, people would stop risking their lives to bring him bread, and he knows he needs the bread to live. He spends much of the story talking with a witch and saying snide things about the brown bear, especially as the other bear tells her story about Karol and the bear prince. One person who visits the bears insists that the black bear has zoochosis, which causes the black bear to pace and seem agitated. The man insists that the black bear has been agitated for a long time—long before the siege began. Finally, at the end of the story, the brown bear dies and the black bear eats her. But immediately after this, the witch informs the black bear that he ate his wife. The black bear seems to die of regret and sadness in the weeks after.

The Brown Bear – The brown bear is one of the last two animals left in the Sarajevo zoo in "Telling Fairy Tales." She's emaciated due to the siege, but she's always been blind. Her companion in the bear pen, the black bear, is rude to her and is open about his desire to eat her. The brown bear, however, ignores him and insists on telling him and the witch a story about a prince who was turned into a bear and then served in World War II. Through the story, the brown bear seems to be trying to convince the black bear to remember to be kind and compassionate, but she fails in this regard. The day after she finishes telling her story, she dies and the black bear eats her.

Only then does he learn that the brown bear had been his wife—through her story, it seems, she'd been trying to remind him of that fact, but the book also leaves open the possibility that the bear prince story *was* their life story.

Karol – Karol is a character in the story-within-a-story in "Telling Fairy Tales." He's a Polish man whom the Soviets arrested when they invaded Poland, thereby starting World War II. Throughout the story, Karol holds tightly to his memories of his wife and his baby son, who were left behind in Poland. They—and eventually, the bear prince—remind Karol that he's human and should do everything in his power to be kind. They also help Karol deal with the trauma of having been arrested and sent to a concentration camp before being conscripted into the armed forces. Karol cares for the bear prince like he might his own son, and he recognizes that the bear prince seems shockingly human. Because of his close relationship with the bear prince, Karol manages to hang onto his humanity and his hope all through his service in the Middle East and his brief time stationed in Italy. But when Karol learns that his wife and son are dead, he loses all interest in the world and in the bear prince. After saying goodbye to the bear prince at the Edinburgh zoo, Karol spends the rest of his life in Edinburgh but never returns to see his friend.

The Bear Prince – The bear prince is a character in the story-within-a-story in "Telling Fairy Tales." He begins life as a human prince but turns into a bear sometime around his first birthday—the price's mother had paid a witch to make a king fall in love with her. The Polish man Karol adopts the bear prince when he finds the cub sleeping in the woods, and the two soon become very close. The bear prince eventually becomes a mascot for Karol's regiment during World War II. He grows into a gentle giant and his presence gives the men something to fight for. In order to keep the bear prince with Karol, the army eventually makes him a corporal so he can accompany the regiment to Italy. Especially in the face of of all the carnage that Karol and the regiment see in Italy, the bear prince reminds the soldiers that there's something worth living for. Throughout the story, the bear prince struggles with the idea of love—he knows he's a human inside a bear's body, and he fears that nobody will truly be able to love him because he's not fully human or animal. After the war, the bear prince lives out the rest of his days in the Edinburgh zoo in Scotland. The character is based off of Wojtak, a brown bear that accompanied a regiment of Polish Soldiers through the Middle East and to Italy during World War II.

The Dolphin/Sprout – The dolphin Sprout narrates "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." Sprout initially isn't interested in telling her story, since she thinks that humans are notoriously bad at misinterpreting dolphins' attempts at communication. But she finds her voice when she decides to address her story to the poet Sylvia Plath. In her introduction, Sprout suggests that humans and dolphins aren't all that different—the different between the sexes in both species is more significant. She discovers this as she tries to write her story about Ted Hughes's work (she finds Hughes "too male" and takes issue with how he writes about animals seemingly to justify bad—animal—behavior). She's eventually drawn to Plath because of how Plath writes about being a mother. Sprout takes her own role as a mother very seriously and indeed, has close familial relationships not just with her blood family members, but also with humans. She loves her trainer, Officer Bloomington, in large part because he treats her as an equal. Sprout tells readers about her upbringing as a Navy dolphin and her ability to identify mines embedded on the ocean floor. Doing her work is, for her, a way to connect with Bloomington and feel close to him. The first thing to threaten this bond is Officer Mishin and Kostya's arrival—Bloomington falls in love with Mishin instantly, and Sprout and the other dolphins are very jealous. Sprout commits suicide in 2003, after she kills a diver with a lethal dart that she was led to believe was just a harmless tracking device. Sprout makes it clear that dolphins hold humans in high esteem, and that it's unthinkable for a dolphin to kill a person. But one of the worst parts of her death, she says, is that she can no longer be there for her daughter, Officer. Sprout's is the most direct voice in the collection that warns readers to treat animals with respect.

Officer Bloomington – Officer Bloomington is Sprout's trainer in "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." He begins working with dolphins in the Navy in the late 1970s and quickly forms a close bond with Sprout in particular. He believes he needs to earn the right to give the dolphins orders, so he treats them as equals who can understand everything he says. And indeed, Sprout tells readers she *does* know what he wants her to do and understands everything he says. And because of this kind treatment, he inspires loyalty in Sprout's generation that never existed in the older generation of dolphins, who were trained as subordinates. Because Sprout loves Bloomington so much, she's upset when Officer Mishin arrives from the former Soviet Union to work with him and the Navy dolphins—and he falls immediately in love with her. They eventually get married after 9/11. Throughout his career, Bloomington does what he can to advocate for his dolphins. He tries on multiple occasions to refuse to train them to do certain tasks, believing that the Navy will eventually force the dolphins into unethical or unsafe situations. Ultimately, though, Bloomington's worst fears come true when, during the American invasion of Iraq, Sprout is tasked with attaching a what she believes is a tracking device onto an enemy diver. Sprout doesn't know if Officer Bloomington knows that the device is actually lethal and not just a tracker, and the story never reveals the truth one way or the other.

Officer Mishin – In "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," Officer Mishin is a Soviet officer who, after the end of the Cold War, comes to work for the U.S. Navy with her dolphin Kostya. She's small with

extremely pale skin, and Officer Bloomington falls immediately in love with her. Much to Bloomington's surprise, he discovers that Mishin trains dolphins as gently as he does. Indeed, Mishin is one of the loudest proponents of training dolphins kindly and not making them kill enemy divers—dolphins, Mishin insists, will refuse to perform tasks if they know they'll cause harm. But Mishin's first responsibility is to trying to keep her dolphins safe and happy, so she goes along with the Navy's training plans so that she doesn't have to allow other trainers to train her dolphins. She and Bloomington get married right after 9/11, and Sprout ends her story by revealing that at the time of her death in 2003, Mishin was very early in her pregnancy with a baby girl.

The Parrot/Barnes – Barnes is a parrot and the narrator of "Psittacophile." Barnes doesn't share much about himself, aside from insight into the kind of constant care parrots require. He notes that if people care for parrots properly, parrots attach to their people and see them as parents, partners, and mates. At first, when the owner purchases Barnes, she shows him the exact level and type of care he desires. He adores his owner and often grooms her to show her affection. It takes a while for Barnes to grow out of his toddler phase, in which he destroys and throws things—but eventually, he and his owner become best friends. Barnes has little to say about his owner's foray into romance with Marty, a fellow expat—but through his silence, Barnes implies that he isn't pleased with the situation. When the Israelis begin to bomb Beirut in 2006, Barnes experiences a breakdown: he begins to scream constantly, pull out his feathers, and hurt his owner. When his owner eventually leaves him in his cage hanging on the pet shop awning, he asks readers if she really had a choice.

Owner – Barnes's owner in "Psittacophile" is a middle-aged woman. She experiences a midlife crisis not long before the story begins and, because she seemingly wants proof that her friends and family love and will worry for her, she moves to the Middle East. She settles on Damascus, where she teaches English. When she purchases the parrot Barnes, Barnes reveals that his owner is extremely needy and desperately wants someone—or something—who needs her just as badly. Barnes fits the bill, as parrots require a great deal of care. For a time, the owner relishes in owning Barnes. She makes sure his surroundings are clean and that he has just the right amount of food and stimulation; she even stops having guests over because she realizes they stress him out. But as much as the owner loves Barnes, she still desires human connection. This is why she embarks on a relationship with Marty, a fellow expat. She breaks it off when she realizes that people—even Marty—make her feel even more alone. When the Israelis begin to bomb Beirut in 2006, the owner doesn't seem afraid at all. Rather, she feels as though she's finally living in the Middle East and throws herself into making Barnes comfortable. However, the owner can't deal with Barnes's self-harm and stress. After she receives emails from friends and family begging her to evacuate, she tries to give Barnes back to the person who sold him to her. But when she can't find him, she leaves Barnes's cage on the pet shop awning.

Mitchell's Father – Mister Mitchell's father doesn't appear in person in "The Bones"—the camel learns about him as Henry Lawson tells his story. Mitchell's father was one of Australia's many gold seekers, though he only struck gold after a medium called him out in a séance for participating in the Hospital Creek Massacre.

Fufu – In "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," Fufu is an old pony that the French take to draw stretchers during World War I. A family with young children used to own her, and they wrote letters to the French army begging to keep their pony. Fufu seems to miss her owners at the front. When she's not working, she spends her time looking for eggs that soldiers hide for her and lies down whenever she hears a shell coming.

The Briand – The Briand dog in "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I" works in the trenches during World War I. He and other dogs are trained to growl very quietly when Germans are coming—and the Briand performs his task perfectly. Though Kiki and the tomcat praise him for his work, the Briand shares that he just wants to be able to go home and tend to his sheep. And in the end, the Briand runs away from the front and as far as Kiki knows, gets his desired happy ending.

The Soldier – In "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," the soldier is a young French soldier whom Kiki befriends and adopts as her stand-in owner. He's fighting in the trenches in World War I. Kiki fears for the soldier's survival, as he's thin and doesn't seem suited to surviving the war. When the young man befriends another soldier, Kiki starts to suspect that the two are secretly in love. As Kiki imagines her death, she looks up into her soldier's face and imagines that he's either Missy or Colette dressed as a man.

Herr Hagenbeck – In "Red Peter's Little Lady," Herr Hagenbeck owns a "**zoo** without bars" in Hamburg, Germany. His goal is to give people the opportunity to interact with animals on a personal level, and he's the one to come up with the idea to train Peter and Hazel to be human. Though Peter doesn't admit it until Hagenbeck flees World War I for Africa, he hates Hagenbeck—he is cruel and doesn't care about anything but showing his dominance over his zoo animals and test subjects.

Herr Oberndorff – Herr Oberndorff is Evelyn's husband in "Red Peter's Little Lady." Just before the story begins, Oberndorff was called up to fight in World War I but prior to his departure, he trained Peter and then Hazel to become human. For much of the story, Peter describes Oberndorff neutrally. But after he and Evelyn get the news that Oberndorff died at the front, they admit that Oberndorff was both physically and emotionally abusive to them. For this reason, neither of them regrets his death.

Grandfather – In "Hundstage," the dog's grandfather was the first German Shepherd dog bred by the German scientist von Stephanitz, who developed the breed's characteristics by trying out different attitudes and behaviors. Though the dog holds his grandfather in high esteem, he thinks often of his grandfather's most shameful moment: he was caught having sex with a mongrel dog.

Herr Kersten – Herr Kersten is Himmler's masseur in "Hundstage." During Himmler's appointments, the dog observes Herr Kersten listen attentively to Himmler's thoughts on how hunting, one of Herr Kersten's favorite pastimes, is unethical. Herr Kersten never responds, which the dog interprets as Herr Kersten being a good listener—but the dog also seems unaware of the unequal power dynamic between Kersten and Himmler, with Kersten having considerably less.

Professor Wüst – Professor Wüst is Himmler's spiritual advisor in "Hundstage" and is a real historical figure. He and Himmler have a weekly appointment in which they discuss Hindu philosophy and how to repackage Hindu beliefs for a German audience. The dog doesn't like Wüst; though Wüst is supposed to be a vegetarian (like the dog and like Himmler), the dog has seen Wüst sneakily eating meat sometimes.

The Veterinarian – In "Hundstage," the dog's master, Himmler, calls for a veterinarian to treat the dog when the dog isn't feeling well. But when the vet manages to calm the dog down and show the dog affection, Himmler is incensed. He has the veterinarian arrested, and he banishes the dog to the forests for his betrayal.

Soul of an Auroch – The soul of the auroch is the first ghost that the dog encounters in the German forests after his exile in "Hundstage." The auroch explains that she's waiting in the forest for her life mate, the last of their kind, to die. She also tells the dog that she's not one of the original aurochs that lived in German forests; the German scientist Herr Görlotz bred her and others in an attempt to recreate the extinct species. None of the new aurochs, however, can survive in the wild.

Souls of Bees – "In Hundstage," the dog encounters the bees' souls while wandering through the woods in exile. They tell him that they're afraid for their master, a kind man who was trying to save them from disease. They fear for his life, as his associates doubt his loyalty and will likely turn on him.

Bluey – In "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me," Bluey is a mussel and former friend of Muss's who grew up in a West Coast mussel farm. He accompanies Sel, Muss, and Gallos when they hitch onto a battleship. Unlike his friends, Bluey is always sad and thinks that his friends are going against their natures as mussels by trying to move so much. Ultimately he chooses to return to the mussel farm and his family.

Oleg – In "Plautus: A Memoir," Oleg is the "ornamental hermit" who owns Plautus for the first few decades of her life. The noble family who lives next door to the Tolstoys hires Oleg when he's only 30 and forbid him from bathing and from speaking, aside from a single Latin phrase. Over time, Oleg goes mad. Plautus watches Oleg read voraciously about philosophy and history; most of what he reads has something to do with the relationship between tortoises and humans. Plautus decides to abandon Oleg for the Tolstoys when, in his 80s, Oleg becomes obsessed with Christianity, which Plautus believes is unfriendly towards tortoises.

Tom Stoppard – Tom Stoppard is a real-life British playwright who, in "Plautus: A Memoir," Plautus adopts in an attempt to get close to either Americans or communists. At the time that Stoppard takes Plautus in, he's in the early stages of writing what will eventually become his play *Jumpers*, in which a man accidentally kills his tortoise while his wife watches men land on the moon. Plautus's name is also taken from another of Stoppard's plays, *Arcadia*, in which a hermit owns a tortoise named Plautus.

Veterok and Ugolyok – Veterok and Ugolyok are two Soviet dogs whom Plautus meets during her time with Dr. Yazdovsky in "Plautus: A Memoir." The dogs survived 22 days in space and the return to earth, which makes them particularly interesting to Plautus, who is obsessed with going to space herself. In an interview with Plautus, the dogs talk about their emotional states while in space and the difficulty of taking life seriously after their return.

Suleiman – Suleiman is an elephant whose story the elephant in "I, the Elephant, Wrote This" hears often. Born in 1540, Suleiman lived a lavish life in Maximilian II's court. After Suleiman wrote the words "I, the elephant, wrote this" in his enclosure, priests poisoned him. In the stars, Suleiman can be seen in his various body parts that Maximilian sent to various important people in the Holy Roman Empire to preserve the elephant's memory.

Castor and Pollux – Castor and Pollux were two zoo elephants; the elephant in "I, the Elephant, Wrote this" grows up hearing their story often. They lived at the Paris **Zoo** until the Franco-Prussian War, when rich Parisians butchered and ate them. The elephant and her sister grow up hearing their story and eventually pass the story onto their own children. The elephant explains that elephants see Castor and Pollux in the stars where humans see their human counterparts in the constellation Gemini.

Daughter – In "I, the Elephant, Wrote This," the elephant gives birth to a daughter. She grows up with her cousin, the elephant's nephew, who's the same age. The elephant adores her daughter, though she's disturbed when her daughter and nephew express so much interest in the story of Castor and Pollux.

Nephew – In "I, the Elephant, Wrote This," the elephant's sister gives birth to a son, the elephant's nephew. He grows up with

his cousin, the elephant's daughter, who's the same age. The elephant is disturbed when her daughter and nephew express so much interest in the story of Castor and Pollux.

The Witch – The witch talks regularly with the black bear in "Telling Fairy Tales." She seems to live in or near the zoo, and she almost always has bread for the bears. The witch is able to translate the bear's speech into human language, and at the beginning of the story, the black bear asks her to write something down. The witch refuses, however. At the end of the story, the witch reveals to the black bear, who's memory is waning, that the brown bear he just ate was his wife.

Irena – Irena is a character in the story-within-a-story in "Telling Fairy Tales." She's a Polish woman whom Karol falls in love with while he's stationed in the Middle East. Irena tells a story of her own, in which a king falls in love with a bear. After they have sex, the king banishes the bear out of shame—and the bear gives birth to a daughter who, like her, is cursed to make men fall in love with her.

Sylvia Plath – The dolphin Sprout addresses her story, "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," to the poet Sylvia Plath. She writes to Plath mostly because she appreciates the way that Plath writes about being a mother. In motherhood, Sprout thinks, humans and animals aren't so different—human mothers have to connect to their body's more animalistic processes, like when they're nursing. Both Plath and Sprout die by suicide.

Ted Hughes – Initially, Sprout thinks she's going to write her piece for *Only the Animals*, "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," about Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath's husband. However, as she revisits his work, she becomes frustrated. She believes that Hughes was so interested in writing about animals because he wanted to justify bad human behavior—and he did this instead of paying attention to Plath, his wife and the mother of his children. Eventually, Sprout allows that she enjoys Hughes's writing anyway, especially his poem "Moon-Whales."

Elizabeth Costello – Sprout meets Elizabeth Costello's soul in the afterlife as she's trying to write "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." Costello counsels Sprout to look more closely at Ted Hughes's writing and not just write it off as ridiculously masculine. Elizabeth Costello is a fictional character created by the author J. M. Coetzee. She appears in several of his novels, and in his book *The Lives of Animals*, she discusses animal rights and understanding animals through writing about them—ideas that *Only the Animals* tackles in all its stories.

Blinky – Blinky is Sprout's mother in "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." She takes issue with the way the Navy names their dolphins and finds their silly names offensive. When Officer Bloomington releases a group of dolphins into San Francisco Bay and gives them the chance to stay in the wild, Blinky chooses not to come back.

Kostya – Kostya is Officer Mishin's dolphin in "A Letter to Sylvia Plath." Though the American dolphins believe that Kostya can perform all sorts of nefarious tasks, he insists that he's just as kind and loving as they are. He adores Mishin and, like Sprout, is upset when their trainers fall in love with each other.

Henri – Henri, an antagonist in "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," is Colette's sergeant husband. Henri is a cruel man, and Kiki believes he'd hurt or kill her if given the chance. Henri confirms this himself when he threatens to shoot Kiki and any soldiers who care for her in the trenches.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Zeriph – Zeriph was the camel's original handler and was "imported" to Australia along with other men to handle and manage a camel. He died some time before the story begins. While he was alive, he loved the camel dearly and encouraged the camel to be good, proud, and polite.

von Stephanitz – "In Hundstage" (and in real life), von Stephanitz is the German scientist responsible for creating the German Shepherd dog breed. As the dog explains, he believed he was recreating a modern version of "Germanic wolf-dogs."

The Lobster – In "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me," the lobster meets Muss and Sel in Pearl Harbor. He provides them drugs and trips with them. He dies instantly when Pearl Harbor is bombed.

Leo Tolstoy – Tolstoy was a Russian author; he appears in "Plautus, a Memoir." The tortoise Plautus desperately wants to be his pet—but when she arrives on his doorstep, she discovers he died three years previously.

The Matriarch – The matriarch is the leader of the elephant herd in "I, the Elephant, Wrote This." She's old and wise, and she encourages the elephant and her sister to stop idealizing death.

Owner's Ex-Husband – The owner in "Psittacophile" marries her husband 30 years before her move to Beirut. Though not a bad man, he doesn't think he should be expected to reciprocate affection or interest when the owner expresses it, which fuels the owner's deep desire to be needed.

Owner's Daughter – The owner's daughter in "Psittacophile" is an independent young woman who doesn't support the owner's choice to deal with her midlife crisis by moving to Beirut.

Marty – In "Psittacophile," Marty is an expat teaching in Beirut who enters into a relationship with Barnes's owner. Barnes doesn't say much about Marty, except that, like the owner, he's a former New Yorker who thinks himself superior to everyone else.

Missy – In "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," Missy was Colette's former lover; she regularly dressed as a man.

Blondi – Blondi is the dog's littermate in "Hundstage." She becomes Hitler's dog and eventually becomes famous amongst other German Shepherds.

Leonard – Leonard is Virginia Woolf's good-natured husband in

"Plautus: A Memoir."

Officer – In "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," Officer is Sprout's daughter. She enters training to serve in the Navy alongside her mother and even serves in the same unit.

Toby-Chien – In "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," Toby-Chien is Colette's bulldog. Toby-Chien is friendly with Kiki, and doesn't mind when Kiki gets a lot of Colette's attention.

THEMES

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THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HUMANS AND ANIMALS

Only the Animals consists of 10 short stories, each narrated by a different animal who is telling their story from beyond the grave. Each animal was killed as a result of human conflict, such as World War I, the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, or the 2006 Israeli bomb strikes on Beirut. Throughout the stories, the animals consider their relationships with the people around them—and the history of human-animal relationships more generally, going back millennia. *Only the Animals* proposes that as much as people might like to think of themselves as fundamentally different from and superior to their animal counterparts, animals and people nevertheless inhabit the same planet, are affected by the same conflicts, and in this sense are fundamentally connected. And though the connections and friendships between people and animals can be some of the strongest bonds possible, *Only the Animals* also warns that these bonds can become liabilities when people choose to abuse animals' trust.

Only the Animals shows how essential animals have been to human events throughout history. Animals are, depending on the story, companion animals, beasts of burden, partners in war, or a food source for people. Put simply, the stories show that it's impossible to ignore animals' roles in the course of human history. Sprout, the dolphin who narrates "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," is a highly trained dolphin in the U.S. Navy. She performs essential functions, like tagging mines on the ocean floor, during the Cold War, the Gulf War, and the war in Iraq until her death in 2003. The camel narrator of "The Bones," on the other hand, notes that it was camels that made it possible for colonizers to settle Australia. Camels, he explains, carried building supplies and luxury items into Australia's interior—something that only camels could do, given their ability to survive in desert environments without water for long periods of time. Sprout and the camel's stories make it clear that people aren't the only ones that deserve credit for major events in history. Animals have contributed to that history in numerous ways, though many accounts omit their contributions.

The stories also suggest that the bonds between people and animals can be some of the strongest and most powerful in the world. Kiki the cat, for instance, has a tender relationship with her owner, the French writer Colette. Much of Kiki's story is set in the trenches of World War I, where she is accidentally stranded after accompanying Colette to visit her military husband, Henri. Abandoned in the trenches, Kiki pines for Colette—and ultimately decides to plan a trip all the way across France so she and Colette can be reunited. A sniper shoots Kiki before she can carry out her plan, but her desire to risk everything to return to her owner speaks to the strength of her bond with Colette. And Kiki isn't the only animal to express deep, unwavering love for an owner—the Briand dog in Kiki's story returns to his master and his sheep as soon as he's done his job at the front, while the camel speaks longingly about his deceased first handler, Zeriph. Their bonds with their owners are such that the animals, at least, feel unmoored and incomplete once their owners are gone. "A Letter to Sylvia Plath" suggests that in many cases, the feelings are mutual. In it, Sprout tells readers of her relationship with Officer Bloomington, a naval officer put in charge of the Navy's dolphin-training program. Unlike his predecessors, whose training methods made it clear that they saw dolphins as inferiors, Bloomington treats the dolphins as equals. What results is a bond so strong that when Bloomington falls in love with another trainer, Sprout is extremely jealous—though Bloomington includes Sprout in his wedding ceremony to honor her role in his life. These are only a few of the many strong relationships between human and animal characters in the book, and the bonds show that animals have just as much to offer people in the way of friendship as other people do. Being of a different species, the stories suggest, doesn't prevent people and animals from forming meaningful relationships; rather, a relationship with an animal can be just as fulfilling.

However, *Only the Animals* also shows that the interconnectedness between people and animals doesn't always work in the animals' favor—sometimes, people abuse their relationships with animals to everyone's detriment. It's easy, the book shows, for people to abuse their trusting relationships with animals—especially in situations where people rely on animals to perform difficult or dangerous tasks. Sprout, for instance, shares that over the course of human-dolphin history, dolphins have developed a moral code that makes it unthinkable to kill a person. Thus, when she realizes after the fact that she killed an enemy diver with a dart, she commits suicide. Sprout doesn't know who in the Navy orchestrated the attack, or if Bloomington even knew that the

tag she was supposed to affix to an enemy diver was in fact a deadly dart. But no matter who's responsible, Sprout feels that the Navy abused her trust in her human handlers. And because she unknowingly killed a person as a result of this abuse, Sprout feels she has no choice but to take her own life. With this, the Navy loses a highly trained dolphin service member, and Bloomington loses one of his best friends. Other examples of human-animal relationships gone awry include the anti-tank dogs in World War II, whom the Allies used as suicide bombers, as well as the various animals who died in the course of the early tests to see if living creatures could survive **space** travel. As a whole, *Only the Animals* shows how easily people can abuse their trusting relationships with animals—and indeed, it suggests that this abuse is impossible to ignore when considering human-animal relationships. For all the relationships that are mutually beneficial or that move history forward, many more ignore the suffering that animals endure as a result of their relationships to humans.

ANIMALS AND WAR

All of the stories in *Only the Animals* are set in the midst of violent human conflicts, such as World War I, World War II, the Gulf War, or the U.S. invasion of Iraq. As such, the stories' animal narrators provide a unique perspective on these human conflicts and their effects on animals. Indeed, *Only the Animals* proposes that it's actually not accurate to refer to wars as human conflicts, given that animals are so often forced to participate in war efforts. And *Only the Animals* shows that even if animals don't actively participate, they still end up being some of the most tragic victims of human violence.

The very premise of *Only the Animals*—giving animals the opportunity to narrate their own stories about war—makes it clear that war negatively affects everyone and everything, people, animals, and plants alike. Every creature in the book somehow suffers as a result of war or violence. Sprout the dolphin and Fufu the pony, for instance, are enlisted in the war effort, while Red Peter the chimp and Kiki the cat suffer much like human civilians. Other characters, like Sel the mussel and the elephant, are distant onlookers but still end up dying in the course of a war. These examples, the novel suggests, aren't so different from the way that war affects people. The animal narrators describe human soldiers dying horrific deaths in the trenches or as a result of bombs, and human civilians struggling to survive famine or displacement as their countries fight wars. Additionally, other narrators describe how war affects the natural landscape. For example, the third-person narrator of "Telling Fairy Tales" describes the barren trees surrounding Sarajevo during the 1997 siege. Meanwhile, when Kiki the cat is in the trenches of World War I, she says that "Without the changing palette of the trees to signal the shift towards winter (the leaves have been exploded off), and the songbirds mostly gone quiet, it becomes difficult to know where I am, in what season, in which century." These anecdotes speak to the terrible power of war to negatively impact all living creatures.

However, the stories suggest that war can be particularly devastating for animals because people tend to value animal lives less than human lives. Having completed his training with Herr Oberndorff some time before his story begins, the chimp Red Peter now believes he's human—but as famine grips his German city during World War I, Red Peter finds that people begin to treat him with scorn and suspicion as he wanders the city, looking for **food** on the black market. Evelyn, Herr Oberndorff's wife, encapsulates Peter's struggle in one of her letters when she writes, "People get angry when they see animals being fed, even if it is with turnip peels." With this, she gets at the idea that animal lives aren't as valuable as human lives—people resent the fact that animals are being fed at all, while they themselves go hungry. In "Telling Fairy Tales," a military official in Sarajevo echoes Evelyn when one of his colleagues suggest smuggling the last two bears in the Sarajevo **zoo** out of the city. The man says, "Smuggling two bears out of Sarajevo in a food-relief convoy—what does that say to people left behind? Why bears, not babies?" He continues that he "can't allow" them to "worry[] about wild animals" as their enemies fire on Sarajevo, showing clearly where his priorities lie—with people, not with animals.

However, the book suggests that simply choosing not to value animals' lives during wartime pales in comparison to countries *knowingly* sacrificing animals to advance their cause. "Hundstage," for instance, touches briefly on the fates of the Allies' anti-tank dogs during World War II: the dogs were trained to look for food under German tanks, but when they approached German tanks looking for food, they'd explode the tanks as well as themselves. The dogs, of course, have no stakes in the war and are being used as disposable pawns in a human conflict. This speaks to what the collection implies is people's willingness to sacrifice anything and anyone they deem inferior, if it means winning a war.

Finally, the collection shows that war has the unique power to transform animals who were once revered members of a community into nothing more than a food source. In most of the stories featuring zoos, zoo animals exist to bring pleasure to passersby, and many zoo animals are a source of pride for the city. But during wartime, when people are going hungry, they begin to see animals as nothing more than a food source. As the situation grows dire in World War I Germany, for instance, the chimp Red Peter—who, at the start of the story, lives in a hotel like a human might—is gradually stripped of his living quarters, his clothes, and his ability to buy food like a person. By the end of the story, he finds himself back in his cage at the zoo where he once learned to be human—and the story heavily implies that he's going to end up as Evelyn's dinner. War, in this sense, has the power to deprive everyone of their

humanity. Red Peter becomes just an ape and therefore a food source after spending years living as a human, and even being Evelyn's lover for a time—and it's implied that Evelyn also gives up some of her humanity when she traps and plans to eat him.

War, the book shows, is universally devastating: it wreaks havoc on people, animals, and the environment alike. And while the stories don't shy away from the horrific consequences of war on people (both soldiers and civilians), it nevertheless asks readers to consider the toll war takes on animals as well. Animals, the book suggests, suffer greatly during war—especially because, as animals, they're not thought to be as important or as sentient as human victims of conflict.

HUMAN CRUELTY

Only the Animals consists of short stories narrated by animals in the midst of human conflicts. One of the questions that plagues many of the animals in the book is the question of what, exactly, separates human beings from animals. Some of the book's animal narrators, like the dolphin Sprout, snidely insist that people and dolphins, at least, aren't all that different, while the chimp Red Peter believes he's actually transcended his monkey nature and become human. Other narrators, like the elephant and the camel, suggest that being human means having power, while being an animal means being at the mercy of humanity's power. All the narrators, though, agree on one thing: what defines humans, and what separates them from their animal counterparts, is their ability to behave cruelly, greedily, and selfishly.

First, *Only the Animals* suggests that it's not in an animal's nature (at least the species featured in the stories) to be cruel. Sprout explains why dolphins consider killing both other dolphins and people to be murder: it goes against their nature to murder beings they believe to be on their same intellectual level. People, however, don't always share this moral code—for instance, the enemy soldiers in Sprout's story gun down innocent wild dolphins. This, Sprout laments, is the worst possible outcome: the wild dolphins are not only on the soldiers' level intellectually; they're also not even involved in the military conflict at hand. They're innocent bystanders, in every sense of the term. The German Shepherd dog in "Hundstage," whose owner is Heinrich Himmler (one of the most powerful leaders of Germany's Nazi Party), similarly suggests that he's incapable of being as territorial and cruel as Himmler would like him to be. The Germans, he explains, want dogs who are unwaveringly loyal to their masters and who will attack anyone else—and so the dog is exiled into the woods when he "betrays" Himmler by allowing a veterinarian to show him affection. The dog, this suggests, isn't just fundamentally good-natured—he's even incapable of learning cruelty and aggression.

Indeed, the book suggests that cruelty is a human invention—one that causes animals in particular to suffer. The stories in the collection are peppered with encounters in which people behave cruelly to animals. Kiki the cat endures violent threats from her mistress's husband. The tortoise Plautus talks about the practice of carving designs into pet tortoises' shells and even setting stones in them—something that is painful and dangerous for the tortoise. These instances show that people are willing to behave cruelly if it stands to benefit them—even if the benefit is simply having a supposedly more attractive pet. And by anthropomorphizing the animals (ascribing human-like characteristics or behaviors to them), the book is able to show how much animals suffer as a result of human cruelty. The dog in "Hundstage," for instance, wanders in the woods for months after his banishment, pining for Himmler and believing that he's bad for "betraying" his master. In this case, Himmler's treatment of his dog makes the animal believe that he's less worthy because of who and what he is. This suggests that, especially for domesticated animals like dogs, people's cruelty can negatively impact animals' thought and behavior.

Some of the human characters' cruelty to animals stems from the fact that they're far more powerful than many of the book's animals. Both domestic animals and those in captivity depend on their human caregivers for everything, which puts people in a powerful position. Thus, when people want or need to abuse their station, it's easy to do so. In the story "I, the Elephant, Wrote this," young elephants living in Mozambique learn how some of their ancestors died during the Franco-Prussian War in Europe. Their ancestors, zoo elephants, were eventually butchered to feed rich people who refused to go without eating meat, even during wartime—these elephants went from being beloved members of the community to being food, as people's priorities changed from caring for their animals to using them to support lavish habits. Similarly, the parrot Barnes's owner abandons him outside a pet shop as she flees the bombs falling in Beirut. An American expat, the parrot's owner believes she has to leave the country in order to find safety. And though she loves Barnes, her love isn't enough for her to justify the effort it would take to get a parrot back to the U.S. with her. It's possible, this suggests, for an animal's fate to change in an instant, depending on their owner's circumstances.

Underlying the animals' stories, though, is the understanding that human cruelty doesn't *just* affect animals—it affects people, too. The prevalence of war in each story stresses the human consequences of war, which the book suggests is nothing but cruel and senseless. Soldiers go hungry, some because there's simply not enough food and others because they choose to share what little food they have with their animal companions. The mussel Sel, meanwhile, dies alongside American soldiers during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Though his death in the almost boiling ocean takes center stage, he dies alongside soldiers' disembodied limbs and heads—making it impossible to avoid the consequences of human cruelty on

everyone, human and animal alike. While *Only the Animals* presents human cruelty as a fact and offers no remedies for doing away with it, the book nevertheless encourages readers to at least acknowledge the damage that human cruelty has done to the world. Recognizing the damage—and through doing so, trying not to replicate it in the future—is all that people can do.

KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

The 10 stories in *Only the Animals* are filled with anecdotes of times when animals experience cruelty at human hands—but amidst all this cruelty, the animal narrators also highlight the times when humans are surprisingly or unexpectedly kind to them. These moments of kindness shine through stories that are otherwise tragic, suggesting that acts of kindness have the power to improve even the worst situations. Indeed, *Only the Animals* suggests that kindness and compassion can help both the person performing the kind act and the person receiving it—and in some cases, it can even motivate beings to escape bad situations.

Only the Animals shows first that kindness can provide solace in the midst of great suffering. The camel who narrates "The Bones," for instance, reminisces throughout the story about his deceased caretaker, Zeriph. Zeriph was the only person who treated the camel like a living, feeling being—and in light of the cruelty the camel has experienced since Zeriph's death years ago, the camel decides that the only thing to do is run away and join the herds of wild camels now inhabiting central Australia. Essentially, he proposes that it's not worth staying in a relationship without kindness. And the cat Kiki offers her perspective on another aspect of this idea. She's distraught when her owner, the French writer Colette, unknowingly abandons Kiki in the trenches of World War I. Kiki and Colette's bond was so strong, thanks to Colette prioritizing Kiki above anyone else—human *or* animal—that Kiki decides to embark on a journey across France to reunite with her owner. Kiki essentially suggests that it's worthwhile to do anything to hang onto relationships filled with kindness or compassion.

Kindness, the book suggests, can be as beneficial to the person behaving kindly as it can be to the one receiving it. In the book's various war zones, soldiers regularly offer food to animals living nearby. The bears in the **zoo** in Sarajevo survive on offerings of bread crusts from soldiers and a few civilians, and the black bear in particular understands the importance of acting grateful for the meager offerings. Although this isn't enough to truly sustain the bears, the bread certainly helps—and giving the bears bread boosts the soldiers' morale by giving them a cause to rally around. Likewise, though Kiki initially turns up her nose when the young soldier she adopts in the trenches offers her some of his condensed milk, she eventually realizes that it gives him comfort and pleasure to see her eat. Indeed, the tomcat who shares Kiki's trench insists that it's their duty to accept the soldiers' food offerings—nurturing the cats might be the only thing that helps the soldiers maintain their will to live. With this, the story shows that it's not just kind to give to others. It's also kind to accept someone's generosity, even if that generosity seems unwise or misguided.

While *Only the Animals* overwhelmingly portrays these acts of kindness in a positive light, it also suggests that kindness can be a double-edged sword. In "Hundstage," the soul of a deceased pig says to the dog narrator, "A wise friend once told me that kindness, like cruelty, can be an expression of domination." With this, the pig suggests that one shouldn't always take kindness at face value. Indeed, the pig says this to the dog in response to the dog's attempt to explain that his Master—the Nazi official Heinrich Himmler, an architect of the Holocaust—is wholly kind and compassionate because he passed laws mandating that seafood should be killed humanely. In this case, it's ironic that the dog holds up Himmler as a paragon of virtue. It makes it clear that the dog doesn't understand that there's more to Himmler's character than his interest in humane butchering techniques or his love for his pet dog might suggest—in fact, he's widely considered to be one of the cruelest people of the 20th century. Similarly, though the chimp Red Peter believes at first that his human lover, Evelyn, is being kind when she offers him some marmalade through the bars of his cage, he soon discovers that she's not trying to feed him to keep him alive. Rather, she plans to fatten him up so she and her children can eat him to keep *themselves* alive. Feeding Red Peter is a way for Evelyn to exert her power over him and remind him that, as an animal, he's at the mercy of human whims.

But despite the instances where kindness becomes a way to make oneself look better or make the recipient of kindness feel obliged, *Only the Animals* nevertheless holds kindness up as one of the things that makes life worth living. When someone exhibits genuine kindness, the act can be beneficial for everyone involved—and in difficult times, it can be the only thing capable of improving an otherwise impossibly difficult situation.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

STARS AND SPACE

In *Only the Animals*, celestial bodies and space symbolize the close relationship between humans and animals across time and place—a relationship that's sometimes mutually beneficial, but sometimes violent. This symbolism is clearest in the story "I, the Elephant, Wrote this," as the elephant narrator grows up hearing stories and legends

about elephants whose souls now take the form of constellations in the sky. All the elephants in the stars died because people killed them, so the constellations are ways to remember the history of human-animal relationships. In "A Letter to Sylvia Plath," the dolphin Sprout expands on this idea. She notes that because of the close relationship between ancient people and dolphins, people found the shape of a dolphin in the starry sky and named the constellation after dolphins (Delphinus). The stars, in this sense, are both records of positive relationships between people and animals, as well as proof of a past that, at times, has been violent and cruel.

Part of the book focuses on outer space itself, and in this section the symbolism becomes more sinister. In the tortoise Plautus's story, the space race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is at its height—and in the quest to get a man on the moon, both countries send animal test subjects, or "proxy astronauts," into space to see if living beings can even survive in space. Most of these animals, Plautus explains, are "one-way passengers," meaning that they die at some point in their journey. And while Plautus is proud of animals' contributions to science, the book nevertheless underscores the implications of sending dozens of animals to space, in many cases knowing they're going to die. Indeed, though Plautus sees her time orbiting the moon as the pinnacle of her lifelong quest to understand solitude, the solitude she experiences in her space capsule is one that humans imposed upon her. While the stars sometimes symbolize a more generous, giving relationship between humans and animals in the book, space itself represents a relationship where animals have little power.

FOOD

In *Only the Animals*, food represents humans' capacity for both kindness and cruelty, particularly as it relates to the way they treat animals. Many of the stories depict humans offering food to animals during wartime, when food is extremely scarce. Food, then, becomes symbolic of people's ability to choose selflessness over selfishness—through giving food to animals who are also starving, people can feel good about themselves and feel like they're doing something good for others. This is why, in "Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I," the tomcat warns Kiki not to turn up her nose at any food the soldiers might offer her. Feeding her, he suggests, might be the only thing keeping the soldiers going until they're called away from the front to rest. Similarly, in "Telling Fairy Tales," the narrator explains that soldiers regularly make the pilgrimage to the Sarajevo zoo to throw bread crusts to the two remaining bears in the zoo. The bread crusts aren't enough to sustain the bears, but it nevertheless makes the soldiers feel like they're helping.

In some circumstances, though, food becomes a way for people to assert their dominance over animals. For instance, the dog's Master, Himmler, decides that his dog should join him in taking up vegetarianism. This, Himmler believes, will improve his dog's karma and even increase the odds that his dog will one day be reincarnated as a human. For the dog, this creates a difficult dilemma: as a natural carnivore, he loves meat and is constantly hungry while on a vegetarian diet. But he also so desperately wants to be human and to make Himmler happy that it seems worth it to follow a diet that makes him feel awful. The book underscores that for many domestic animals or those living in captivity, what they eat—and whether they eat at all—is totally contingent on their human caretaker's kindness.

ZOOS

In *Only the Animals*, zoos symbolize humans' power over animals. The various animals in the collection who live in zoos, such as Red Peter, the black bear, and the elephants Castor and Pollux, all find themselves at the mercy of their human caretakers. The chimp Red Peter, for instance, lives in a "zoo without bars," even in the story's present when he's learned enough to be considered human. In many ways, he's still a zoo animal—he visits the zoo to lecture, which draws visitors, in addition to lecturing in other venues around Hamburg—even though he lives a life that seems shockingly human. But as World War I grips Germany and Hamburg's residents begin to suffer from famine, Red Peter cannot continue to pass for human. He ultimately ends up back behind bars in the laboratory at the zoo, destined to become dinner for his starving human lover, Evelyn. Peter's story suggests that even if he considered himself human and no longer a zoo attraction, he never actually stopped being a zoo animal in other people's eyes—and therefore, he can never escape the power that humans have over him.

Other zoo animals in the collection experience similar fates. Zoo animals like Castor, Pollux, and the bears in the Sarajevo zoo are prized members of their communities until war and famine strike. And at that point, animals find themselves either starving (many people in the stories can't justify feeding animals when there are hungry people) or slaughtered to feed those hungry people. Zoos, then, encapsulate the idea that animals in the care of people are powerless.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Picador edition of *Only the Animals* published in 2017.

The Bones: Soul of Camel Quotes

❝ I suffocated him, squashed his head between my leg and body, though there were no females around to compete over and we should instead have become friends. Zeriph never let me forget my stupidity, killing that bull. He felt sorry for the other handler, who grieved over his dead camel as if for a child.

Related Characters: The Camel (speaker), Zeriph

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

As the poet Henry Lawson rambles on about the ghosts he sees, the camel tells readers that he sees ghosts, too—namely, the ghost of a bull camel he killed years ago. In insisting that there was no good reason to fight and that he and the bull should've been friends, the camel makes it clear that he's more or less alone in Australia. And this is, in many ways, a consequence of the way the people who control the camel's life have arranged it. The camel was imported to Australia from Tenerife, and he was the only one to survive the transport. In essence, then, the camel arrived in Australia totally alone—and yet, he struggles to make connections with other camels like him. It seems that Zeriph recognized this, which is likely one of the reasons he scolded the camel so severely for killing the bull.

For Zeriph, though, the loss of this other camel means more than just that his own camel will be lonely. It also means that a person—who, like Zeriph, was also "imported" to Australia—has in turn lost his best friend. While it's perhaps an indicator that Zeriph values human emotions more than camel ones when he prioritizes a person's sadness, the handler's grief nevertheless speaks to the strength of the human-camel bond. Losing one half of the partnership, "The Bones" shows, is universally devastating—which is why the camel mourns Zeriph still, so many years after his death; and why Zeriph felt so bad for this handler.

❝ Zeriph had been proud of me, carrying the first piano into the core of our new country. [...]

But for what? I carried that thing of beauty all that way on my back, with the ropes cutting into my bones, so that somebody could tinkle on the keys for the midday drinks at the pub in Alice. That's what broke Zeriph's heart, that the piano's music could mean nothing without the false prophetry of drink.

Related Characters: The Camel (speaker), Zeriph

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

As the camel dies, he thinks of Zeriph and of carrying a grand piano into Australia. Though Zeriph thought of carrying the piano (rather than building materials or other practical supplies) as an honor, both he and the camel can't ignore the costs of such luxury. In this sense, the piano becomes a symbol for people's selfishness—and particularly their willingness to put animals in pain if it means they get what they want.

By allowing the camel to describe exactly how it felt to carry such a heavy item into Australia's interior, the story encourages readers to empathize with him and what it must've been like for the other camels who also helped make Australia what it is today. Human history, this shows, isn't just human history. Animals have been there every step of the way, and it hasn't always been a pleasant journey for them. Indeed, animals like the camel have experienced pain and suffered so that people can enjoy themselves and move history forward.

And what makes this so difficult for Zeriph to bear is that, in his mind, that pleasure is meaningless. He seems to suggest that if a person needs alcohol to appreciate the sound of a beautiful piano, it's not actually true that they're enjoying the music—they're enjoying the alcohol. Especially since the camel is dying because his drunk owner, Mister Mitchell, made a mistake and shot him in addition to the goanna, this criticism takes on extra weight. For the camel, alcohol is linked to human selfishness and bad decisions—decisions that, in these two cases at least, lead to pain, suffering, and death for an animal.

Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I: Soul of Cat Quotes

❝ But this late autumn at the front is unlike any I have witnessed. Without the changing palette of the trees to signal the shift towards winter (the leaves have been exploded off), and the songbirds mostly gone quiet, it becomes difficult to know where I am, in what season, in which century.

Related Characters: The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette (speaker), Colette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In introducing her story, which takes place in the French trenches of World War I in the fall of 1915, the cat Kiki remarks on the desolate landscape around the trenches. By taking the time to describe how the war has negatively affected the natural world, Kiki makes the case that war doesn't just affect people and animals. Rather, war brings about drastic changes to the natural world, too.

Kiki's descriptions make it clear that the changes to the landscape that war brings seem to leave people stranded in a sort of no man's land, where it's impossible to tell where one is or when they are. For all Kiki knows, she could be living a hundred years earlier or later at any point in the year. This suggests that war is an equalizer—it makes everything seem the same, no matter where or when it takes place. Indeed, other animals' descriptions of war-torn areas in other stories say much the same thing, as the animals describe barren trees and cities looking wildly different from how they used to. The particulars of each conflict vary, but the animal narrators encourage readers to see all the ways that wars are the same. They all turn the world into a bleak, disorienting place where nothing, not least the animals, can live.

❝ I looked more closely at the man driving the mules. He was far too old to fight. The mules showed none of their usual inclination to misbehave and were following him peaceably. "They love him," I said.

"And he them. I've seen a driver refuse to leave his team of battery mules when they became entangled in barbed wire. He died with them."

"Why are so many of them missing their tails?" I asked.

"When they're starving, they eat each other's tails."

Related Characters: The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette, The Tomcat (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When a string of pack mules arrive at the mess tent and hospital area, Kiki studies the mules closely; both she and Colette have always liked mules, but this is the first time Kiki sees them in person. As Kiki studies the mules and their driver, she sees once again that war affects everyone negatively, human and animal alike. The tomcat makes it clear that for mules, life at the front is dangerous and difficult: they're at risk of getting tangled in barbed wire, a fate that can be deadly and killed many animals during World War I. And there is, of course, the unspoken risk that the Germans will shoot the mules if they have the opportunity. But it's not just the mules who are at risk; the mule driver is also in danger for the same reasons. Especially when Kiki notes that the man looks too old to be fighting, it suggests that those in charge of the war effort don't give much thought to whom they conscript. While this man is too old, Kiki later goes on to list all the ways in which her adopted soldier is too young and weak to be at the front. With these contrasting descriptions, Kiki seems to suggest that war affects everyone, but especially the most vulnerable in society.

Then, when Kiki and the tomcat discuss the mules' missing tails, it speaks to how desperate life is at the front. The idea that the mules are eating each other seems intended to horrify readers—mules are herbivores, so it highlights their desperation that they're turning to meat at all, let alone each other's tails. War has the power to turn beings against those most like them, and make beings selfish as they try to survive.

But still, Kiki and the tomcat offer hope in all this darkness. For instance, it's a mark of the human-animal bond that the tom talks about the mule driver who died with his mules. War is full of unfeeling, dangerous moments and situations, the book suggests, but it's still possible to identify moments of kindness, compassion, and love—especially between people and their animals.

❝ "Don't eat any of it," I said.

The tomcat looked offended at my suggesting he would take the food. "I have my own adopted soldier. But you should eat what he's offering even if you're not hungry. You might be the only thing keeping him alive until he's rotated out of the front line and can get some rest."

Related Characters: The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette, The Tomcat (speaker), The Soldier

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

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Explanation and Analysis

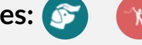
It's World War I and French soldiers have just returned to the trenches after an offensive into no man's land; the soldier Kiki adopted has just offered both her and the tomcat some food. In the tomcat's response to Kiki's warning, he outlines one of the collection's most important ideas: that acts of kindness benefit both the giver and the receiver. Kiki and the tomcat depend, at least in part, on their soldiers' food offerings to live. The rats in the trenches provide some sustenance, but on some level the cats need the offerings to keep going.

But alongside this, the tomcat shows that it's also extremely beneficial for the soldiers to have another creature to take care of. Even though the men clearly need the food—Kiki emphasizes that the soldiers are thin and hungry—they seem to find it more nourishing to give away their rations to the cats than to eat the rations themselves. But the tomcat proposes that it's motivating and can help a person maintain the will to life if they're able to help another being stay alive, too.

Red Peter's Little Lady: Soul of Chimpanzee Quotes

❝ They—the humans, that is—seem to think that what sets them apart from other animals is their ability to love, grieve, feel guilt, think abstractly, et cetera. They are misguided. What sets them apart is their talent for masochism. Therein lies their power. To take pleasure in pain, to derive strength from deprivation, is to be human.

Related Characters: Red Peter (speaker), Hazel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In a letter to the chimp Hazel, the chimp Red Peter (who believes he's transcended his monkey nature and become human) tells her what separates humans from animals. It's clear from this quotation, and from the stories in *Only the Animals* more generally, that people aren't the only creatures who love, grieve, experience guilt, and can think abstractly. Indeed, the collection's animal narrators all tell stories in which they openly talk about who they love and how they grieve for them. Thus, Red Peter sets up the idea that these only seem like human traits and capabilities because humans can't see or hear animals grappling with the same things.

But as this story goes on to show—and as the entire collection suggests—being human is often more about having power, being selfish, and being cruel than displaying the more tender qualities listed above. Even just in "Red Peter's Little Lady," the various letters detail people lording their power over animals by denying them food and taking away Red Peter's clothes. And the section's most chilling example of humans' domination over animals comes when Evelyn traps Peter in a cage and plans to eat him. So with this, the story suggests that this masochism may inform how Peter approaches his project of being human. Denying himself the things he wants, like wine or food, may make him feel more virtuous—and therefore, because he believes humans are better than chimps, it makes him feel more human.

❝ I fell in love with you the first moment I saw you, before I was fully human, and from across that gulf of understanding and experience, somehow, miraculously, you felt something for me in return. You alone inspired me to become human, not your husband's relentless mazes and sorting tasks and word repetitions, not his tantrums when I didn't do what he wanted, not the whipping, not the sweet fruit he dangled just out of my reach. I wanted to be human so that I might reach out across that chasm and touch you, be touched by you.

Related Characters: Red Peter (speaker), Herr Oberndorff, Frau Evelyn Oberndorff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

In a letter to Evelyn, the chimp Red Peter tells her he loves her and has from the first moment they met. Peter's descriptions of his love for Evelyn show that it's possible for people and animals to love each other deeply, which is a theme that runs throughout the book. Then, though Peter had earlier insisted that humans generally embrace masochism, and while the collection as a whole suggests that cruelty is perhaps inherent to being human, Peter shows that there are nobler reasons to become human. Love, he suggests, is a powerful motivator—powerful enough to get him through what sounds like mind-numbing exercises and cruel abuse. The "chasm" Peter mentions is surely in part the chasm between him as an animal and Evelyn as a person, but it's also a chasm between Peter as a

subservient being and Herr Oberndorff as his powerful trainer. Peter wants to close this gap and have some of this power for himself. And as he voices his desires to be with Evelyn, he also suggests that some of that power is related to his ability to choose who he loves. He chose Evelyn and has become human so he could be with her—but because so many still think of Peter as an animal and therefore deny him a relationship with her, Peter hasn't fully completed his transformation.

Frau Oberndorff gave me a pet cricket. The cricket lives in a walnut shell. If you hold him up and look at him directly, he looks fierce. The man who brought the cricket to the zoo said he would win battles against other crickets if we first chop up a fly and feed it to him to make him violent.

Related Characters: Hazel (speaker), Frau Evelyn Oberndorff, Red Peter

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Hazel, in one of her letters to Red Peter, tells him about the cricket that Evelyn gave to her. Hazel writes in short, simple sentence, and this writing style reflects where she is in her process of becoming human. As Evelyn has recently told Peter, Hazel seems to be at a toddler stage where she's still experimenting with language and how to use it. These short sentences will, presumably, eventually give way to longer sentences that are more complex as she develops and becomes more human.

More compelling here, though, is what Hazel says about her cricket. She thinks he looks fierce, but she says so in a way that reads as simple appreciation. On her own, it doesn't seem like Hazel wants to do anything with her cricket's fierce appearance but enjoy it. But the man who brought the cricket shows Hazel that it's possible to make the cricket turn fierce and violent. Hazel gives no indication that the cricket is inherently violent; any violence on the cricket's part would be learned. This is one very small example of something the collection explores at various points: humans' attempts to fundamentally transform animals' natures. In "Red Peter," for instance, Herr Oberndorff wants to change chimps into humans—something that, the story shows, is actually quite a cruel process. But in the next story, "Hundstage," the dog's Master wants to transform his genial, friendly dog into one that's territorial and mean to strange people—something that the dog suggests is against his nature. Encapsulating this idea through Hazel's cricket suggests that this is something that happens with shocking regularity, while other instances of changing animals' nature suggest to readers that these attempts are cruel.

Hundstage: Soul of Dog Quotes

I was starving. My Master had recently begun to follow a vegetarian diet and decided that I should give up all meat too, in keeping with his beliefs [...] Not only that, he was concerned about my karma. He had promised me that if I did as he said, ate no meat, resisted my urge to hunt foxes, and tried to meditate once a day, I might be reincarnated as a human being in my next life. A human being! The thought was intoxicating.

Related Characters: The Dog (speaker), Red Peter, Master/ Heinrich Himmler

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the dog in "Hundstage" explains that his master—the Nazi official Heinrich Himmler—recently decided that both he and the dog would become vegetarians. To the dog, this brings with it both positives and negatives: as a natural carnivore, the dog is extremely hungry on the vegetarian diet, but Himmler has also said that the dog could become human if he follows the protocol.

The dog's desire to be human in his next life draws a direct link between this story and "Red Peter's Little Lady." For both the dog and for Peter, the idea of being human is an exciting one. It brings with it power, and it also suggests that these animals both idealize humans. This idealization is especially pronounced in the dog—he adores Himmler and it's never clear if he really understands how cruel and horrible Himmler, as the architect of the Holocaust, really is. And given what Himmler says the dog must do to become human, this also gives some credence to Peter's assertion that to be human is to deny oneself pleasure. The dog essentially has to give up some of the core parts of being a dog—eating meat and hunting foxes, for instance—so that one day, he might become human. With this, the book implicitly questions whether it's worth it for the dog to

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follow Himmler's program if it makes him so hungry and miserable in this life, where he is a dog and has no hope of becoming a human.

But the book shows that the dog doesn't have the power to disobey, either. He relies on Himmler to feed him and house him. And given that Himmler later banishes the dog to the woods for the supposed crime of not killing a veterinarian (instead of attacking the vet, the dog let the vet pet him), it seems reasonable to assume that Himmler might also punish the dog for garden variety disobedience. Himmler's power, and that of humans more generally, lies in this ability to control every aspect of their animals' lives. And the dog seems to have no idea that Himmler has this power over him—which makes Himmler even more powerful.

"A wise friend once told me that kindness, like cruelty, can be an expression of domination," the pig said.

"That makes no sense," I said scornfully.

Related Characters: Soul of a Pig, The Dog (speaker), Master/Heinrich Himmler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

After Himmler banishes the dog to the woods, the dog meets the souls of several animals. Here, the pig and the dog are discussing whether or not Himmler is actually a kind, compassionate person—and according to the pig, he isn't. A key component in this conversation is the fact that the Nazis *did* pass a number of laws advancing animal rights. This idea is something the dog returns to again and again; he believes that Himmler is a compassionate person because he advocates for humane butchering techniques, bans using animals in laboratories, and works to ban hunting. But as a dog with a limited perspective, he doesn't seem aware that Himmler is one of those responsible for designing the Holocaust and killing millions of people.

So to take the pig's initial phrase, he suggests that he and the dog shouldn't take kindness at face value. Rather, it's important to recognize that kindness can be a tool, like anything else. It can improve someone's image (as Himmler's fight for animal rights does, at least in the dog's mind) or it can make others feel obligated to the person who's being kind. And in this way, kindness can inspire obedience in much the same way that cruelty can. People or animals can act obediently because they know they'll receive kindness if they do—and because they know if they don't, they'll experience cruelty.

Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed to Me: Soul of Mussel Quotes

Muss said [the zebra mussels] were halfway to covering the whole bottom of the lakes too, that there was not a single native mussel left to tell us stories.

Related Characters: Sel (speaker), Gallos, Muss

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

When in the course of hitchhiking cross-country the mussels Sel, Muss, and Gallos stop somewhere in the middle of the continental U.S., Sel is sad to learn that invasive zebra mussels have pushed out native pearly mussels in the lakes. This is a major blow for Sel, who grew up hearing stories about the native pearly mussels and desperately wanted to hear their stories firsthand. Broadly speaking, this passage shows readers that at least within the logic of this story, people and animals aren't so different. It's not hard to imagine a person attempting to connect with older ancestors and discovering that those ancestors have since passed away—and with them, precious family or cultural lore. This, the story suggests, is a universally unsettling experience.

But this passage also speaks to the effects of climate change. Native freshwater mussels, like the pearly mussels, are often considered biological indicators of change. Put simply, this means that scientists often look to native mussel populations to gauge the effects of climate change—native freshwater mussels are often the first to die or contract diseases as a result of rising temperatures or pollution. So even if Sel doesn't say anything here about people outright, it's impossible to ignore the human-caused reasons for his inability to connect with the native pearly mussels.

Plautus: A Memoir of My Years on Earth and Last Days in Space: Soul of Tortoise Quotes

❝ And with a glance at me—a kind of tribute, I'd like to think—she would read out my favorite paragraph of the whole book, a moment that does justice to both the poet Elizabeth and her dog Flush by showing them as equals in their inability to ever fully understand each other: not so different then, from a biographer trying to get into the skin of her subject.

Related Characters: Plautus (speaker), Virginia Woolf

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

During Plautus's years living with the British author Virginia Woolf, Woolf takes Plautus with her when she holds readings and events for her book *Flush: A Biography*. The book is a biography of the poet Elizabeth Barrett's cocker spaniel, Flush, told from Flush's point of view.

Plautus likes *Flush: A Biography* in part because it makes it clear that despite Elizabeth and Flush's inability to communicate verbally with each other, their relationship is still strong and loving. Each of them makes an effort to understand the other, and neither is fully equipped for the task. This has implications for Plautus's story, but also for the other stories in *Only the Animals*. At various points throughout the collection, animals aren't able to understand exactly what people are doing. They make assumptions, they admit they don't understand, or they simply miss pertinent information that readers, as people, might pick up on. But here, Plautus makes the case that it's not just the animals who don't understand. Rather, as much as people might try to get into animals' mind and unlock what they're thinking, it's impossible to do so. Indeed, when Plautus suggests it's not so different from a biographer trying to understand their subject, she suggests that it's impossible to get into any person's mind other than one's own—no matter if one is human or animal. In short, Plautus makes it clear that there's a gulf between humans and animals, made up of all the things they don't understand about each other. But it's nevertheless important for people to keep trying to empathize with their animal companions, as Woolf does through writing her Flush biography—and as Dovey does by writing *Only the Animals*.

❝ The Soviets were sending animals into space like there was no tomorrow (which, for the animals, there mostly wasn't), desperate to finalise their research on the viability of manned space flight and the effects on living creatures of prolonged weightlessness and radiation from the Van Allen belts, and get a man on the moon before the Americans. They'd heard rumors that the Americans had sent a bunch of black mice into space and the cosmic rays had turned them grey; this would be undesirable in humans.

Related Characters: Plautus (speaker), Dr. Yazdovsky

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

As Plautus finds herself in the care of Dr. Yazdovsky, a man involved in the early Soviet experiments to send animals to space, she explains briefly what the Soviets' goals were and how those goals affected the animals. Most important here is Plautus's lack of curiosity and unwillingness to acknowledge the price that animals paid to eventually get people into space. She doesn't even say outright that the animals died—just saying that there's "no tomorrow" for most of them skirts around the fact that a number of animals died during these tests. Though this might seem odd given that Plautus herself is an animal, it also appears as though Plautus is the only animal in the space program who actually wants to go to space and does everything in her power to get there. She may have a different view on the whole thing than readers—or, indeed, the other animals in the program.

Then—again, without seeming curious or at all critical—Plautus makes the goal of these experiments clear. The animals are supposed to test all the bad things that could happen to people when they go to space because people aren't willing to perform the tests on their own kind. Though it's easy to see this as selfishness and a reflection of human superiority, Plautus insists that this is just the way things are. Of course, she suggests, people don't want to go to space with a head full of dark hair and come back gray. And the only solution to such a problem is to send animals. This problem in particular reads as particularly naïve, especially when Plautus makes it clear that this certainly isn't the worst thing that could happen to a person or an animal.

But there is mechanical trouble while he's up there and instead of getting sips of water or tablets, he starts getting zapped by the electric pads wired to the soles of his feet. He gets back to earth, gets out of the capsule and the NASA guys are smiling, holding his hands, but Enos is fucking *mad*. This used to make me laugh. But up in space, I just had to think about this, about Enos getting buzzed on his feet for doing the right thing—the right thing! what he's been trained to do!—and I wanted to bite somebody's face off.

Related Characters: Veterok and Ugolyok (speaker), The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette, The Dog, Plautus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

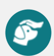
Plautus is conducting an interview with two dogs who survived 22 days in space, Veterok and Ugolyok. Ugolyok is talking about how, when she was in space, she couldn't help but think about a photograph of the chimp Enos. The Americans sent Enos to space in late 1961 and as Ugolyok tells it, a system malfunction meant that Enos received shocks to his feet whenever he pressed the buttons to receive water or food.

This anecdote makes it clear that animals are, for better and for worse, at the mercy of their human caretakers. And just because an animal is important and beloved—as Enos was—doesn't mean that that animal is going to receive the best care possible. Indeed, though it seems likely that the shocks came from a malfunction and weren't on purpose, the fact remains, as Ugolyok points out, that Enos was punished for doing exactly what he was supposed to do. Animals, in this sense, can't win. Animals like the dog in "Hundstage" are punished for perceived misbehavior, while creatures like Enos, Kiki ("Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I"), and arguably Veterok and Ugolyok are punished for no fault of their own. It's nearly impossible, this suggests, to care for an animal perfectly all the time. Inherent to human-animal relationships is the fact that the animal will always have less power, and will nearly always be at some risk of suffering, even if that risk is just accidental.

I, the Elephant, Wrote This: Soul of Elephant Quotes

"Death is not something to worship now that you are adults," the matriarch warned. "It is the province only of the very young to want things to work out badly. The souls in the sky live only as long as we remember their stories. Beyond that there is nothing, not for them nor for us."

Related Characters: The Matriarch (speaker), Sister, Elephant

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:

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Explanation and Analysis

During the elephant and her sister's induction into the herd as adults, they learn that they will finally hear stories of elephants from Mozambique—stories they didn't hear at all as children. Within elephant culture, the elephant explains, elephants who die noble deaths end up in the stars as constellations, and the elephant and her sister are thrilled by the opportunity to see these new constellations.

The matriarch's warning is, at first glance, just a warning that young people shouldn't idealize death, either theirs or others. And while this makes sense, it's also worth noting that the young elephants think highly of death for very good reasons. Dying a dramatic death, they grow up hearing, is the only way that they'll be remembered. It's the only way for their souls to end up in the stars and so it's something to hope for.

The matriarch's warning recalls the warning that Sel received from one of the female mussels in "Somewhere Along the Line the Pearl Would Be Handed To Me." She warned him to not race for death—a warning that he, like the elephant and her sister, didn't think was very good advice. But Sel died in the bombing of Pearl Harbor not long after receiving that advice, which suggests that the elephant and her sister might not have long to live, either.

Most important in this passage, though, is the idea that a being's memory exists only as long as people continue to talk about them. It's essential, the matriarch suggests, to memorialize loved ones by telling their stories—and by finding them in the stars in the form of constellations. Through this, the story draws connections between the elephants and people. Finding stories in the stars is an important way to memorialize important people and events

in history—and in the logic of this book, at least, it's something that unites people with their animal counterparts, and shows that people and animals aren't so different from each other.

“A zoo,” she said to them, “is a very dangerous place for an animal in wartime, for it can mean the difference between life and death for the human inhabitants of a city. But it was not the poor who ate the zoo animals in Paris.”

Related Characters: Sister (speaker), Castor and Pollux, Nephew, Daughter, Elephant

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

The elephant's sister is telling her son and the elephant's daughter the story of Castor and Pollux, two 19th-century zoo elephants, she warns the children that zoos are dangerous places for animals during war. With this, she gets at the idea that animals that live in captivity (both wild animals like elephants and domestic animals) depend on the people who care for them for everything. Whether they live or die during peacetime depends on how well a person can care for them, and all the stories have made it clear that it becomes more difficult to care for an animal during a war. War, this story and others show, has the power to turn animals from beloved pets and members of society—as Castor and Pollux were—into animals that, out of necessity, are eaten for food. This in and of itself reflects the idea that war exacerbates some people's belief that animals don't matter as much as people. Because animals don't matter as much, people eat them.

Castor and Pollux were real-life Parisian zoo elephants who, as the story notes, were butchered during the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. “I, the Elephant, Wrote This” includes many true details from the elephants' story, such as that they were killed in their fancy headdresses and that Parisians didn't enjoy the taste of elephant meat. The fact that theirs is a true story makes it difficult to ignore the price animals have to pay for human conflicts. The animals that Dovey portrays in her stories might be fictional—but their stories are disturbingly real.

As we were dying, our foreheads pressed together, one of the humans stepped forward and placed a single orange in the gap between our trunks. It was an act of kindness, I think, a way to thank us for our sacrificed flesh. I was already too far from the appetites of life to eat it, but the smell made me briefly happy—we were children again, two sisters playing beside the fence separating us from a fragrant orchard of oranges, longing to die gloriously and have our souls pointed out to the youngest in the herd on warm evenings: see, there are the stars which form their trunks, and there are the stars of their tails.

Related Characters: Elephant (speaker), Castor and Pollux, Sister

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Hungry villagers shoot and kill the elephant and her sister as the herd is heading for a lake they know has water in it. Dying forehead to forehead like this makes it clear that in death, the elephant and her sister are much like the historical Castor and Pollux elephants. Elephants see the elephants Castor and Pollux in the constellation Gemeni (and like the dying elephants in this passage, the brothers are forehead to forehead), while humans see the human twins Castor and Pollux in the same constellation. Human and animal history, this shows, is one and the same—it's impossible to ignore the roles that animals have played in human history.

The orange that the villager puts between the elephants' trunks is, as the elephant suggests, most likely an offering of thanks. Some people, this shows, do recognize that animals sacrifice many things—including their lives—for people, especially during wartime. There's no indication that, for instance, the 19th century elephants Castor and Pollux received such thanks; indeed, historical records show that Parisian diners weren't pleased with how the elephants tasted. But these villagers seem hungry enough to at least make a show of thanking and recognizing the elephants for their sacrifice.

The fact that the elephant dies thinking of her happy childhood, when she longed to die a glorious death, speaks to how much the elephants in the story value dying in such a way as to have one's story told to future generations. It's hard to say in this situation if the elephant and her sister die as glorious of a death as the historical Castor and Pollux, or even as the elephant Suleiman. They're dying to feed poor,

hungry villagers in rural Mozambique, after all. But this may be exactly the point. While Castor and Pollux fed rich Parisians, the elephant and her sister are feeding the kind of poor people that history tends to forget. But by associating the elephants with Castor and Pollux, and by telling their story in this collection, the elephant's story will live on for generations.

want to think that the bears are just as compassionate and kind as they are, and this act would disprove that outright. Though the bear could probably survive on the brown bear's flesh for a while, he also knows that he needs people's offerings of bread to survive. If he wants to survive, he has to play humans' games and fit their image of what a bear should be.

Telling Fairy Tales: Soul of Bear Quotes

"I'm waiting for her to die so I can eat her." He chewed at the bread.

"Why wait?" asked the witch.

"People would stop risking their lives, dodging sniper bullets to bring me bread, if they thought I had no heart, eating her while she's still half alive," the bear said.

Related Characters: The Witch, The Black Bear (speaker), Henry Lawson, The Brown Bear

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening of "Telling Fairy Tales," the black bear in the Sarajevo zoo tells the witch that he's waiting for the day that he can eat his companion, a blind brown bear. He wants to wait until she's dead, though he seems to imply he could eat her now if he really wanted to.

In this passage, the black bear's cruelty is shocking—especially after so many stories in which animals expressed deep sympathy for each other and for their human companions. This connects back to the collection's first story, "The Bones." In it, the camel said that the poet Henry Lawson liked to put animals in his stories exactly because it made the people look worse. And while this has been true for many of the collection's stories, in "Telling Fairy Tales," the black bear makes the humans look comparatively saintly. The bear says so himself—people in Sarajevo are risking their lives to bring bread to him and the brown bear. It's not a thoughtless gesture; it's one people undertake because they so desperately want to care about another living creature.

Because people are so concerned for the bears' survival, the black bear knows he'd be shooting himself in the foot if he ate the brown bear before she dies. The people in Sarajevo

It was dark in the zoo by now, darker than it had ever been before the siege started, for the city of Sarajevo no longer relied on electricity. It had become medieval, lightless, its citizens forced to fetch water from underground springs and to wash by candlelight. And the zoo was no longer a modern thoroughfare for the ogling masses. Now the few who dared visit brought sacred offerings of food. The two last remaining animals had become central to the city's very survival, to the idea of the city's survival.

Related Characters: The Brown Bear, The Witch, The Black Bear

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

It's evening in Sarajevo, and the narrator explains how much Sarajevo has changed since the beginning of the siege. Most importantly, it no longer has electricity.

The descriptions of Sarajevo as a "medieval city" drives home the consequences of war. Despite being a modern city in 1992, Sarajevo doesn't seem modern and bright anymore. This affects people as well as animals. Lingering on the descriptions of how dark the city now creates the sense that the mood in the city is similarly dark—especially since, at this point in the city, it's late in the fall and therefore getting darker earlier in the day. It gives the sense that people are starting to close in on themselves and revert to a way of life that seems shocking to someone used to living in a modern city, with electricity and running water.

For the two bears in the zoo, life has also changed. The idea that the bears are central to the city's idea of survival suggests that survival is linked to a person's ability to be kind. So these days, they don't just exist to bring people happiness when they watch them in their zoo enclosures. Rather, they're objects that allow people to demonstrate

their kindness. By feeding the bears at the zoo, people show where their priorities are—and they show that they don't care only about themselves and surviving the siege. Rather, if at all possible, they want to make sure that the bears survive too. With this, the story suggests that survival is only really survival if a person or a city can hold onto its capacity for kindness.

“But you must see what sort of position this would put us in. Smuggling two bears out of Sarajevo in a food-relief convoy—what does that say to the people left behind? Why bears, not babies? I mean, a busload of children trying to get out of the city was fired on, and we're spending time worrying about these wild animals? We can't allow it, I'm afraid.” He was the only one who had not brought stale bread in his pockets for the bears.

Related Characters: The Brown Bear, The Black Bear

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

When a group of foreigners visits the bears at the Sarajevo zoo, several suggest they try to airlift the bears out—but this man insists that would send the wrong message to the people left behind in the city. The man proposes very clearly that people are more important than animals, and that this will always be the case. The simple fact that the man didn't bring bread for the bears highlights this—though one might agree with him that smuggling the bears out might be overstepping, it seems miserly and selfish to not even offer the bears stale bread crusts. He seems to imply that if they expend the money, time, and resources to save the bears, people will resent that they didn't spend those resources on people. But this view also contradicts the narrator's earlier assertion that the bears are central to Sarajevo's survival. Given how many soldiers and civilians come down to the zoo to feed the bears, it seems likely that trying to get the bears out would give people hope. It might make them feel like even though they're trapped in Sarajevo with no way out, some beings can get out and have a chance at a better life.

A Letter to Sylvia Plath: Soul of Dolphin Quotes

Perhaps you should be asking yourselves different questions. Why do you sometimes treat other people as humans and sometimes as animals? And why do you sometimes treat creatures as animals and sometimes as humans?

Related Characters: The Dolphin/Sprout (speaker), The Cat/Kiki-la-Doucette, Henri, The Bear Prince, Karol, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

After explaining her frustration with the author Ted Hughes, who (in Sprout's understanding) wrote about animals to justify humans' bad behavior and insist that humans are superior Sprout has questions for people. Her questions get at some of *Only the Animals*' key ideas. It's not important or worth the time, Sprout suggests, for people to ask themselves exactly how and why they're better than animals. Throughout her story and throughout the collection as a whole, Sprout and the other narrators show clearly that, in many cases, people aren't better than animals. They're cruel and selfish, and the animals suffer for it.

In asking her questions, Sprout also draws on the idea that animals aren't as important as people are. So when she asks why people treat other people as humans and then sometimes as animals, she's asking why it is that people can go from being equals to suddenly having a dangerous power dynamic. From the collection as a whole, the answer to both of Sprout's questions seems sinister: in some cases, it's because people can, and because they're selfish. Henri, for instance, was cruel to the soldiers under him seemingly because he was drunk on power—and because he hated Kiki. In “Telling Fairy Tales,” in the story within the story, the man Karol adopted the bear prince and loved him in part because he needed a creature to love. But he also adopted the bear because, as a person, he had the power to take the bear and turn it essentially into a human. All of this shows just how much power people have, over vulnerable people and over animals. Being human, the collection suggests, comes with great responsibility, given how easy it is to veer into cruelty.

Some native wild dolphins were also killed this way, though we'd tried to keep them away from the area by acting territorially. Officer Bloomington took this especially hard. He hadn't anticipated it as a consequence and blamed himself for their deaths. He felt that the skilled Navy dolphins at least had a chance of defending themselves, but the native dolphins had been put directly in harm's way. He tried to record their deaths officially so that this could be prevented on future missions, but his superiors blocked him, worried about a public outcry.

Related Characters: The Dolphin/Sprout (speaker), Officer Bloomington

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Sprout describes her first tour in the Persian Gulf in the 1980s. Two trained Navy dolphins died when Iranians shot them, but Officer Bloomington is distraught when wild dolphins die this way as well. Bloomington is so upset in part because he, unlike his superiors, treats dolphins as equals. He knows that they're little different from him in terms of intelligence; they know what's going on and understand everything he says. Sprout seems to imply here that while all dolphins have this capacity, the native dolphins perhaps didn't know what was going on exactly because they're wild. It may have been impossible for them to understand why they shouldn't have been in the area, especially when it seems like the Naval dolphins essentially infiltrated the native dolphins' home turf.

The wild dolphins' deaths show one of the consequences of war. Everything and everyone in close proximity to a major conflict can be affected—and in this case, this includes the sea life. They are, in Bloomington's understanding, true innocents in this case. This is why he tries to record their deaths like one might record civilian deaths; because he sees the dolphins as equals, to him they are no different than civilian deaths. But to the superiors, the dolphins are just dolphins. It might not go over well with the public to be recording dolphins alongside people, showcasing again the idea that animals' lives don't matter as much as people's do in conflict situations.

We take killing a human very hard. It is as taboo for us as killing our own babies. We recognise in you what your ancients used to recognise in us and understood as sacred a long time ago, when killing a dolphin was punishable by death. You used to think of us as being closer to the divine than any other animal on earth, as being messengers and mediators between you and your gods. You honoured us with Delphinus, our own constellation in the northern sky.

Related Characters: The Dolphin/Sprout (speaker), Officer Bloomington

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

Sprout explains her reasons for committing suicide after unwittingly killing an enemy diver with a lethal dart; she believed the dart was just a tracking device. In her explanation, Sprout reminds readers that humans and dolphins have been interacting with each other for millennia. Though she never mentions the Greeks by name, the ancient Greeks in particular revered dolphins. Dolphins figure regularly in Greek myths and stories, and the constellation Delphinus comes from Greek legends. There's a lot to be said, Sprout suggests, for so many years of dolphin-human history. She insists that it's silly to ignore this history and the impact it's had on dolphins, let alone on people. By reminding people of this long history and of how people used to revere dolphins, Sprout encourages readers to look to the past for how to treat animals. While this, of course, doesn't always hold—people did hunt some animals to extinction, after all—when it comes to animals like dolphins, this serves as a reminder to be compassionate. Dolphins ended up in the stars for a reason, and people today can honor dolphins by recognizing that they're not so different from people.

Psittacophile: Soul of Parrot Quotes

What a delight to be needed so acutely! Her ex-husband had tolerated her neediness but not cultivated it in himself; her daughter had been determined to establish her independence from the moment she learned to walk. But there I was with my feathers scattering the light to create an illusion of brilliant green, my fat tongue, my perfect toes. I, Barnes, who would—if she cared for me attentively—grow to love and depend on her as my parent, partner, mate.

Related Characters: The Parrot/Barnes (speaker), Owner's Ex-Husband, Owner's Daughter, Owner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

The parrot Barnes explains that his owner was delighted when, after purchasing him, she sat down to research parrots as pets. She discovered that parrots are essentially toddlers and need as much attention and stimulation as a human toddler does. For the owner, this is intoxicating—and this in turn suggests that it's a normal, understandable thing to want to be needed. And pets can, in many cases, give people something to care for. Indeed, animals throughout the collection have given people something to rally around and worry about aside from themselves. Pets are, in this sense, capable of helping people be less selfish. It's impossible to think only of oneself if a person has an animal who needs food, stimulation, and care.

But there's also a sinister air of selfishness and self-absorption in the owner's delight. She wants to be needed, but it seems like she has often tried to get people who don't need her to indulge her desires. In this sense, Barnes is the perfect pet for her as a parrot who needs a lot of care and attention (parrots are some of the most care-intensive pets available). But while Barnes makes it clear that he has a lot to offer the owner, he also goes on to detail what happens when the owner starts to date Marty. Then, she spends less time with Barnes, and their relationship suffers. So in a sense, though the owner wants to be needed, this need is a double-edged sword in Barnes's case. He feeds her desire to care for something—but he also means she can't care about anything else.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE BONES: SOUL OF CAMEL (DIED 1892, AUSTRALIA)

The camel notices that just beyond the campfire is the goanna (a type of lizard) that's been following the camel's group for days. The camel's owner, Mister Mitchell, is asleep, with the queen's bones next to him. But the poet that joined them in Hungerford, Henry Lawson, is awake, listening to the goanna scuttle through the leaves. It's the night after Christmas and the men have all gorged themselves on rich food and too much rum.

The story opens with a somewhat sinister scene: a lizard that seems predatory, a man sleeping beside bones, and men who have drank too much alcohol. The overeating in particular could indicate that these men are prone to overindulgence, decadence, and selfishness. It's also significant that the camel is the narrator and that he's observing the people around him. This suggests that the story will focus on the relationship between people and animals and center the animals' perspective.

Lawson says that he told Mitchell to put the bones back, but Mitchell is stubborn and has been ever since he was a boy—the two men grew up together. The camel knows that Lawson talks to himself whenever he's dehydrated or drunk, which he almost always is these days. Lawson continues, saying that like the ghost of Christmas past, the goanna will take Mitchell to hell for "it." The camel can tell that Lawson is scared of the goanna. The camel is scared of it too, since it's more like a crocodile than a lizard.

This passage depicts both Henry Lawson and Mitchell as somewhat unhinged—Lawson because he's nearly always drunk and babbling, and Mitchell because he's seemingly obsessed with these bones that he's carrying. The passage again carries a sense of foreboding, as Lawson is convinced that Mitchell shouldn't be holding onto the bones, and that doing so will incite some sort of retribution f from the lizard (it's still unclear at this point what the connection is between the lizard and the bones, but this moment implies that the lizard has been stalking the group because Mitchell took the bones when he shouldn't have). It's also significant that both Lawson and the camel are scared of the goanna. The camel already seems like a much more levelheaded than either of his human companions—so this adds more weight to his fear of the lizard.

Lawson says that his mother used to read Dickens and Poe to him when he was little, and the camel wonders if Lawson is talking to himself or addressing the camel. Nobody has spoken to the camel in a casual, conversational way since his handler, Zeriph, died years ago. The camel thinks back to where Mister Mitchell last filled the waterbags, in Hungerford. It's the strangest place he's seen since coming to Australia. It sits right on the border between Queensland and New South Wales, with a rabbit-proof fence running down the main street. After sampling some beer on the Queensland side, Lawson joked that they should've called the town "Hungerthirst" and noted that there were rabbits on both sides of the fence.

Zeriph is the only person who's ever talked to the camel like a friend, and thus is the only person who's treated the camel like a living, feeling being. Though the camel doesn't specify how long Zeriph has been dead, it seems long enough that the camel has almost forgotten what it's like to have a close relationship with a person. On another note, the descriptions of Hungerford speak to the desolateness of this part of Australia. The mentions of the rabbit-proof fence in particular suggest that the colonizers are trying to control the wild animal populations, but their attempts aren't working.

Lawson continues to ramble. He says he grew up in Pipeclay, where his and Mitchell's fathers were some of the last men to work in the goldfields. Most of the holes were collapsed, and huts were haunted—Lawson saw his first ghost there. The camel wants to say that he sees ghosts, too—the ghosts of the other camels who were shipped with him to Australia from Tenerife. He was the only camel to survive the journey. He also sees the ghost of a bachelor camel he killed. Zeriph felt terrible for the other camel's handler, who grieved like one might for a child rather than an animal.

Lawson doesn't say what spirits haunt the huts, but the mention of the collapsed holes suggests that it's the ghosts of local miners who died in the fields. When the camel thinks to himself that he sees ghosts too, he suggests that he's not so different from his human companions. He—and camels like him—suffered as a result of being transported to Australia to support the colonists, just as the miners likely suffered. But whereas Lawson can tell the miners' stories, the camel can't share his story with anyone but the reader.

Lawson says that Ben Hall's ghost haunted their schoolhouse. Hall was a bushranger (thief) whom troopers murdered, and Lawson grew up thinking of him as a hero. Humorously, Lawson's little brother could never decide if he wanted to be a bushranger or a trooper—the only choices for boys from the bush. Slowly, Lawson lies back and points at the moon. He says that in Sunday School, he was told that pointing at the moon is "wicked." He was also told that "our blacks are the lowest race on earth." There was a painting of Aboriginal people hung in the schoolroom, but Lawson thought "they looked more like you, like camels, peculiar creatures that shouldn't exist, than like the black men we know." The camel thinks that despite the differences between humans and camels, he *does* exist. He feels homesick.

Lawson suggests that for boys who grow up poor in this part of Australia, they can either become outlaws like Ben Hall or law enforcement like the troopers who killed him. That a man's prospects are limited to either becoming thieves or apprehending thieves suggests that criminality abounds here. Meanwhile, Lawson depicts Aboriginal Australians as less than human, similar to the way his childhood Sunday School lessons depicted Black people. By using the word "creatures," Lawson suggests that Aboriginal Australians are more like animals (and particularly strange-looking ones, like camels, at that) than people. This passage confirms that Lawson is indeed talking to the camel directly, but he's not doing so to form a relationship with the camel like Zeriph was implied to; instead, Lawson is literally saying that the camel is "peculiar" and "shouldn't exist." Hearing this, the camel suggests that while there are *undeniable differences between camels and humans—and, the book implies, between Aboriginal Australians and white Australians—that doesn't mean one group is lesser than and "shouldn't exist."*

Lawson says that once, a Black man's ghost came to one of his mother's séances. The first hour of the séance had been boring, but then, a spirit asked to speak to Mitchell's father, who was there inquire about where he could find gold. Through the medium, the spirit asked Mitchell's father if he knew of Hospital Creek. His face went pale, and he said yes—he used to work at a stockyard there. When the medium then described seeing fire and bodies, Mitchell's father angrily told the medium to keep her mouth shut "like the rest of us." Back in the present, Lawson throws his empty bottle toward the goanna and says that not long after this séance, Mitchell's father struck gold.

Here, the spirit references the Hospital Creek Massacre of 1859, which was a retaliatory massacre of Aboriginal Australians. Accounts of the event vary, but it's generally accepted that at least several hundred Aboriginal Australians were murdered. Mitchell's father's pale face and anger—coupled with his omission that he used to work at the stockyards at the site of the massacre—heavily imply his direct involvement in the event. But given that Mitchell's father strikes gold not long after this conversation, he's clearly able to be successful despite his implied involvement in the massacre.

The camel tries to remember if Mitchell dug up the queen's bones near a creek. It was hard for the camel to tell, since Mitchell dug up the bones during the dry season, when creeks are all empty. Plus, that was when the goanna had first appeared, so the camel was distracted. Upset, the camel spits some cud into the fire. Zeriph nearly trained this habit out of him, but the camel can't help it when he's upset. Lawson finds it funny. Lawson digs out his notebook and reads his account of the last time he encountered spitting. He'd asked a shepherd in Hungerford whether he preferred New South Wales or Queensland. The shepherd had spat from one side of the fence to the other, and then climbed through the fence to repeat the process in reverse.

The fact that the goanna appeared right when Mitchell dug up the bones may suggest something supernatural. Since the story just discussed Mitchell's father's implied involvement in the Hospital Creek Massacre, the goanna's sudden appearance after Mitchell digs up the bones—and the goanna's continued stalking of the group as Mitchell holds onto the bones—seems to imply that Mitchell can't escape his father's violent past. On another note, the fact that Zeriph almost trained the camel to stop spitting indicates that Zeriph tried to make the camel's behavior as polite—and perhaps as human—as possible.

The camel knows that Lawson isn't here just to drink rum or renew his childhood friendship with Mitchell. Rather, Lawson's companions are perfect fodder for a writer: the son of a rich man, Mitchell is "a madman collector on a camel," who's transporting the stolen bones of an old Aboriginal queen, while a goanna stalks along behind. The camel has heard Lawson say that he often includes animals in his stories to make the human characters look worse.

The book opened with the mention of Mitchell carrying "the queen's bones," and this passage explains what that means in greater detail: Mitchell dug up the stolen bones of an Aboriginal queen. This passage also clarifies that the book's Henry Lawson is likely the same as the historical Henry Lawson, who's one of Australia's most famous authors. Drawing on Lawson's career as a writer, the camel speaks to the relationship between writers and interesting people. Lawson is interested in Mitchell and the camel for the sake of putting them in his stories, but this implies that he cares less about his companions' wellbeing. This passage also complicates Lawson's view of humans and animals. Whereas earlier he suggested that the camel was a "peculiar creature" and "shouldn't exist," here he suggests that the camel makes Mitchell look like a "madman" by comparison.

The camel thinks back to the start of their journey. Though camels aren't unusual in Australia (they're being used to build a railroad), Mitchell stood out and attracted attention for riding a camel like "a fancy horse." The first day of their journey, Mitchell bought the camel in Bourke and burnt his bare feet because he didn't want to wear boots. This behavior made the camel fear that Mitchell would get them lost, so the camel bit a hole in a flour bag he was carrying to leave a trail. When the flour ran out, the camel cursed himself for not running away after Zeriph died. These days, herds of wild camels run through Australia's interior, destroying the very fences, railroads, and water pumps they helped build.

The way Mitchell burns his feet and rides the camel is if it were a "fancy horse" makes him look foolish, unexperienced, and like a poor leader for this expedition. In this sense, the camel supports Lawson's earlier point that animals make humans look worse by comparison. Indeed, the camel seems far more adept at surviving in the Australian wilderness than Mitchell. The mention of the feral camels supports this, as they can clearly survive in the bush without humans' help, while humans need camels to build things like railroads and water pumps that make the bush habitable.

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The goanna scuttles nearer to the fire and freezes. Lawson notes that goannas eat meat—and supposedly kill kangaroos, drag off sheep, and eat sleeping men's eyes. The camel looks to Mister Mitchell, who is sleeping with the bones. He's curled up, just like the queen's bones had been in her grave. Lawson mutters that Mitchell's father was fixated on "those bones," but clarifies that these aren't the bones from the massacre at Hospital Creek. This queen lived many years ago. Mitchell believes that if he has her bones, the ghosts of Hospital Creek will leave him alone. The goanna hisses.

In this story, wild animals are far more powerful than people are, and what Lawson shares here about goannas' carnivorous (though perhaps exaggerated) behavior supports this idea. Just as the wild camels destroy settlements themselves (including railroads, water pumps, and fences), goannas seemingly prey on people and their livestock. And Lawson suggests that Mitchell is at risk of a goanna attack in part because of his obsession with the queen's bones—once again, there's a connection between this goanna and the bones. Meanwhile, Mitchell seems to believe he's capable of besting both supernatural forces and *wild animals—something that seems unlikely, especially given that the goanna hisses right at this moment in Lawson's retelling.*

Lawson sings softly, and then interrupts himself. He can't imagine dying of thirst. He reads the camel the last written words of a stockman who died of thirst: "My ey Dassels. My tong burn. I can see no More God Help." Lawson sighs that he has to use this in his own writing—death in the bush is a great theme. The camel decides that in the morning, he's going to run away. He can't understand why men like Lawson and Mitchell do such terrible things. The camel doesn't think he's blameless, but he can't be blamed for things that Mitchell and Lawson do.

The camel becomes so disturbed by Lawson in this passage because Lawson clearly doesn't care about his real-life subjects. Here, Lawson essentially says that if the camel dies, he won't care—it'll just turn into an interesting plot point for one of his stories. Besides sensing that his own wellbeing is at risk, the camel also feels like Lawson and Mitchell are unfairly implicating him in Australia's colonial history, and the camel wants no part in this.

As Lawson rambles on, Mitchell suddenly leaps to his feet and shouts at the goanna. He says that his father warned him about the goanna and said to kill it. The goanna, he says, is the one who's actually haunting him. Lawson tells Mitchell to ignore the animals, which are their "spectators." But Mitchell resolutely loads his muzzle, and Lawson, who wants to see what will happen, doesn't try again to stop him. He aims at the goanna, which bolts toward the camel.

Mitchell seems to prove Lawson's earlier assertion that he's a madman by addressing the goanna with such sudden fervor. When Lawson tells Mitchell to ignore the animals, it implies that he doesn't see the goanna—or any animal—as much of a threat. This is curious given that Lawson himself has just detailed the way goannas are known to eat humans' eyes while they sleep, and Mitchell has been sleeping while a goanna ominously looks on. This implies that Lawson wants to see some sort of combat between Mitchell and the goanna so that he has more to write about. That Lawson considers the animals their "spectators" positions humans as more important and powerful than the animals (i.e., humans are the main characters in a play, while the animals are only the audience members), but the book as a whole rejects this point throughout.

The goanna is dead—and the camel can feel his cheek against the sand. He remembers how, years before, Zeriph loosened the ropes that held a grand piano on his back. Zeriph had been proud that the camel had carried a luxury item, but both he and the camel hated that the ropes had hurt him just so that humans could entertain each other. The camel tries to turn his head and thinks he sees that the goanna turned itself into a woman. It's actually Lawson, laughing. The camel warns Lawson that he's not the only one who can tell a story about death in the bush.

The camel's memory of packing the grand piano speaks to humankind's willingness to exploit animals for their own selfish gain. Because a rich person decided they wanted a piano—a luxury item rather than a necessity— the camel had to endure an agonizing journey with the instrument its back. It's also significant that the camel dies at Mitchell's hand. Humans can be like Zeriph and care deeply for their animals—or they can kill them in a fit of rage or madness.

PIGEONS, A PONY, THE TOMCAT AND I: SOUL OF CAT (DIED 1915, FRANCE)

It's after midnight and the tomcat still hasn't returned to his spot near the narrator's. The soldiers like the narrator, but they were disappointed that she's not also a male cat. They don't know, though, that the narrator has always felt she should've been a tomcat. Her owner, Colette, understands this. But what Colette *doesn't* know is that the last time she came to secretly visit her evil sergeant husband, Henri, the narrator had stowed away in the car. And when the soldiers sent Colette away a little later, the narrator had been outside the car, distracted by a bird, and got left behind.

The narrator is presumably a female cat, if the soldiers are disappointed that she's not a tomcat (male cat). When the cat notes that her owner, Colette, is the only being who understands the cat's desire to be male, it suggests that people and animals can form close, meaningful relationships—and can understand each other perhaps better than a being of the same species could. The fact that the narrator stowed away in the car—presumably just so she could accompany Colette to the front—also speaks to the strength of their relationship.

The narrator knows that Henri is jealous of Colette's relationship with her, so she stays far away from him. This means she stays at the muddy front—even though she'd rather hang out near the pigeon loft and catch one of the birds. Fortunately, Henri seldom comes to the front, and the soldiers are glad to have a cat around to deal with the rat problem.

Henri's jealousy confirms that Colette and the narrator do indeed have a close, satisfying relationship. But the narrator's impulse to avoid Henry at all costs suggests that he's not just jealous—he may also be violent or dangerous toward the cat in some way.

When she visited, Colette was shocked to see how this part of the countryside looks now. She grew up in rural Burgundy, and the narrator accompanied her there once. But with the leaves blown off the trees and no songbirds, it's hard to know what season or century it is. Now, between the narrator's trench and the Germans, there's nothing but mud.

Here, the narrator shows that war doesn't just affect people—it also fundamentally changes the natural environment. War makes it impossible for the narrator to orient herself, as it seems like there's nothing but mud and bare trees for miles. The mention of trench warfare, the French countryside, and the Germans also makes it clear that this chapter is set during World War I.

The tomcat returns at dawn. The narrator isn't prepared for him; she's busy lapping up some condensed milk that a young soldier offered her. She'd initially turned down the soldier's offer so he'd eat it himself, but she couldn't bear his disappointment. She casually climbs to the top of her parapet and the tom asks if she's Kiki-la-Doucette. Kiki—the narrator—doesn't recognize him and demands he leave within the next 15 seconds. The tom reminds her that he lived down the street from Colette. He and his owner had come to Colette's apartment for a salon (i.e., gathering), which is where he'd first seen Missy wearing a tuxedo. Colette's bulldog didn't like him, but he and Kiki had shared a bowl of milk. Kiki remembers this.

Both Kiki and the soldier want to do something kind for one another: the soldier wants to share his milk with Kiki, while Kiki is willing to lose out on the opportunity for a meal to ensure the soldier has nourishment. But when Kiki ultimately accepts the soldier's offer to appease him, the story shows that accepting someone's act of kindness can actually be as selfless and meaningful as performing an act of kindness oneself. This passage also provides more context about Kiki and Colette. The details that the tomcat includes, such as the aside about seeing Missy in a tuxedo, suggest that Colette is the famous French writer Colette. She was in a relationship with a woman named Missy for a while, who often dressed as a man.

The tomcat says his owner was in love with Colette. She pored over the newspapers and read the reviews of Colette's performances out loud. The tom remembers hearing about the one where Colette acted like a cat. This memory is overwhelming for Kiki; Colette had observed her closely to put together the role—though Colette didn't have to try hard to be catlike. Toby-Chien, Colette's bulldog, didn't mind that Kiki got most of the attention. Toby-Chien and Kiki chatted often, which inspired Colette's regular column Animals in Dialogue—though they never talked about Colette's latest scandals, like her onstage kiss with Missy.

Kiki's feelings of overwhelm in this passage stem from the depth of her love for Colette. Colette's careful study and skillful imitation of Kiki speak to their close connection, and the fact that Colette was catlike even when it wasn't for a role suggests to Kiki that she and her owner weren't so different from each other despite being different species.

The tomcat says that his owner hated Missy for dressing like a man. His owner believed that Colette really wanted a feminine love. Kiki thinks back to the apartment where she and Toby-Chien lived with Colette between her divorce from Willy and her marriage to Henri. Missy lived nearby and hosted salons (gatherings) for women who dressed as men. Since Kiki is angry at the tom for knowing so much about Colette and Missy, she leaps and swipes at him. The tom backs away, forlorn. Kiki spits that Colette and Missy aren't together; Colette has remarried and has a baby daughter, Bel-Gazou. The tom disappears into a trench. Kiki stays on her parapet, moping. The tom was right—Colette was always going to leave Missy, though Kiki can't figure out why Colette picked the hyper-masculine Henri.

Kiki reveals that she dislikes the tomcat because he knows so much about Colette and Missy's relationship—which is part of Kiki's own homelife and personal life. This again speaks to the interconnectedness between humans and animals; as Colette's pet, Kiki is necessarily enmeshed in Colette's life. Kiki also understands now that because Colette wrote so much about her life, her relationship with Colette isn't as private and sacred as Kiki perhaps thought it was.

Late in the afternoon, after shooting at the Germans, the soldiers get the order to go over the top of the trenches. Kiki lets her adopted soldier squeeze her, but she can't watch. She sneaks to the hospital and kitchen area. There's nothing for the men to do until the advance is over, so they've hidden an egg from an old pony named Fufu. Fufu pulls stretchers when she's working, but right now Kiki watches her search for her egg and lie down every time she hears an incoming shell. The tomcat calls to Fufu and tells her that the egg is under the tent flap. Then, he introduces Kiki to Fufu as being owned by one of Paris's "most fascinating denizens."

Even if Kiki's heart is still with Colette, she still clearly cares about her adopted soldier's wellbeing. She doesn't want to watch him die. Back in the kitchen area, the game of hiding the egg from Fufu situates food as a symbol of people's power over animals. It's a fun game for them to withhold Fufu's food and encourage her to search for it, when Fufu is probably just as hungry as the other soldiers.

Fufu asks if Colette put Kiki onto the streets like the tomcat's owner did. The tom looks ashamed, but Kiki explains she arrived here accidentally. The tom says that Fufu's owners wrote a letter to the commander-in-chief begging to keep their beloved pony. Fufu recites the letter with a faraway look in her eye. It didn't work. The tom invites Kiki to hunt with him tonight, but Kiki tells him to leave her alone. She feels bad and decides to torment a robin.

The revelation that the tomcat's owner turned him out speaks again to how domesticated animals are dependent on their caregivers for their livelihood. Without a person to care for him in a house, the tom likely had no choice but to come lurk around the trenches. But here, there's not enough food, and he's also at risk of being hurt in the course of the violence.

Kiki explains that she and Colette have always been interested in mules. This might be because, like mules, she and Colette never felt like they "fit within the boundaries of [their] sex or species." So Kiki is thrilled to see pack mules arriving with panniers of food—but when she tries to talk to one, it can't answer. The tomcat appears and explains that soldiers cut the mules' vocal cords so they won't bray and give away their position. Kiki studies the old man driving the mules. The mules seem to love him. The tom notes that he once saw a mule driver refuse to leave his team when they got tangled in barbed wire. They all died.

Saying that she and Colette never thought they "fit within the boundaries of [their] sex or species" speaks both to Colette and Kiki's sexuality, as well as the idea that they had more in common with each other than they do with those of their own species. Mules, in Kiki's mind, symbolize this in-between state. But mules are still animals—so they're at the mercy of the people who care for them. Thus, they've been subjected to violence when people cut their vocal cords to help the war effort. The mules don't have any stakes in the war—and yet, they have to suffer for the people who do.

The tomcat says that some of the mules are missing their tails because starving mules will eat other mules' tails. Kiki declares that Colette would adopt the mules and take them to Paris. She watches a mule bite a sergeant's backside and then act innocent. The tom insists that the mule did that to remind the cats that he's more than something to pity.

In desperate situations, animals and people turn to desperate measures—just like how these starving mules eat each other's tails to survive. But still, the tom insists that it deprives the mules of dignity to pity them. When given the chance, they can still momentarily assert themselves over their circumstances, as one mule does here by biting a sergeant's backside.

When Kiki's young soldier brings over food scraps for the cats, Kiki warns the tomcat to leave it alone. The tom looks offended and says he has his own soldier. Kiki, though, should eat the **food**—she might be all that's keeping the soldier alive. Kiki looks up at her soldier's shoulder. He's been hurt, but not badly, and he now has a friend who helps him bind his feet.

Here, the tomcat proposes that he and Kiki, as hungry cats, aren't the only ones who benefit from the soldiers' kindness. Rather, it can be lifesaving for the soldiers to have something to care for and about. So it's essential to accept the soldiers' kind offerings if the cats want to help the soldiers stay alive.

Once everyone but the sentries is asleep that night, the tomcat asks Kiki to follow him. Kiki initially refuses, but she's lonely and feels bad for the tom. She tells him that nothing is going to happen between them, since she doesn't like toms much. The tom says he knows—Kiki was his biggest rival for lovers back in Paris. Kiki is surprised and admits that she hasn't been lucky in love, but the tom suggests that no one needs a she-cat's love when they're an author's muse. It'd be enough for him, at least. Kiki privately thinks that being an author's muse is enough only some of the time.

Kiki implies that she wants to have relationships with cats, romantic and otherwise—just not with this particular tomcat. That Kiki doesn't generally care for tomcats and has instead been involved with female cats points back to the idea that both Kiki and Colette subverted gender norms (neither of them "fit within the boundaries of [their] sex or species"). Alongside this, Kiki also indicates that having a human companion to love and love her in return isn't always enough. The tomcat, though, seems to hold relationships with people in even higher esteem than Kiki does. He claims that he'd give up relationships with other cats if it meant having a person love him.

The cats allow a lonely sentry to pet them as they pass by. As the cats approach the next sentry, Kiki sees a massive Briand dog tied to a post. After growling softly at the cats, the dog turns back around. The tomcat whispers that the Briand is supposed to alert soldiers to nearby Germans with a low growl. Most of the military dogs can't help but bark, but this one is good at his job. When the sentry quietly tells the dog to ignore the cats, the tom and Kiki slink away.

While the cats still serve an important purpose in the war (killing rats in the trenches and boosting soldiers' morale), the Briand, like Fufu, has been actually drafted into the war effort. This is a reminder that animals have been assisting people at war for centuries, so wars aren't really just human conflicts. The mention that most of the military dogs can't master this low growl—it's too engrained in them to bark—implies that people perhaps go too far in trying to mold animals' natural behavior for the sake of the war effort.

The Briand keeps growling, so the sentry warns the dog that this had better not be about the cats and goes to fetch his commanding officer. When he arrives, the officer watches the dog skeptically and asks about cats. Though the sentry notes that the dog has been focused on a point out in no man's land for a while now, the officer grouses that dogs don't belong at the front. They're good for morale but aren't helpful beyond that. The sentry suggests they send up a flare, since it could either be a wounded soldier or a German raid. The officer tells the sentry to wake the other soldiers. Once the other soldiers are awake, the flare goes up. It illuminates five German soldiers.

While the last passage suggested that perhaps animals aren't meant to be involved in war (which the commanding officer echoes here), this passage shows the unique set of skills that animals bring to the war effort. Here, the Briand does its job effectively of looking out for German soldiers and quietly alerting the sentry. It's implied that, were it not for the Briand, the soldiers wouldn't have known about the five German soldiers approaching quietly in the darkness.

The soldiers in the trench fire on the Germans. They kill three and take two prisoners. The officer looks stunned and says that he'll make sure headquarters hears about the Briand. The sentry shares that supposedly, after Paris was saved, a pigeon who carried a crucial message received the *Légion d'honneur*. People sewed bands in the color of the medal's ribbon around the bird's leg when the medal kept falling off. The officer says nothing.

While much of the book criticizes how people rope animals into war, this anecdote about the heroic pigeon again nonetheless underscores that animals do bring a unique—and often desperately needed—set of skills to the war effort, and that animals should be honored for their contributions.

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Kiki and the tomcat wait until everyone but the sentry is asleep. They creep closer to the Briand, who looks exhausted. When the tom mentions that the Briand might receive a medal, the Briand insists that he doesn't care about a medal or marching in a parade. All he wants is to return to his sheep and his master without dishonor. The dog closes his eyes, and the tom tells Kiki that he has something to show her aside from the dog. They walk for a long time in silence, until they reach the end of the line.

The Briand confirms that he's not doing this work for the medal. Rather, he's doing his duty so that he can go back to the person and the job that he loves. This is a reminder that animals, for the most part, don't have personal stakes in human conflicts like wars. They may participate, but the animals like the Briand show that their worlds and their concerns are much smaller and more intimate.

There, there's a soldier reading a letter by the glow of a jar filled with glow-worms. The tomcat explains that soldiers get jars like this before major offensives. They're supposed to be used for reading maps and such, but this soldier hides his jar, feeds the glow-worms slugs, and then spends his nights reading letters from his sweetheart. The tom knows who the letters are from because sometimes, the soldier reads them aloud.

While the Briand's unique talents helped keep the soldiers alive by alerting them of approaching enemy soldiers, here the glow-worms help keep the love and connection alive between one soldier and his sweetheart back home. This speaks to the idea that, in war, animals either perform practical tasks (like the Briand, pigeon, and mules) or boost morale (like the glow-worms and the cats).

Kiki knows that Colette would be enchanted with this scene. Colette always got a faraway look on her face when she wrote by lamplight. She, Missy, and Kiki would come home late at night, and then Colette would call Kiki to come sit with her. Colette would then "slip[] into her own mind to write." Kiki always resented this a bit, since Colette was so mentally distant in those moments, but Kiki would always "loyally" wait for Colette to return from her mind. She still detests one of Colette's pieces in which she wrote about how engrossing it is to write. Now, Kiki wonders if there will be there anything for Colette to write about after the war. She thinks about how there's no room for frivolity after this winter, and perhaps there's no more room for Kiki in Colette's life, either.

It's significant that the intimate moment of the soldier reading letters from his sweetheart back home reminds Kiki of her owner, Colette. Although the love between the soldier and his sweetheart is romantic, this passage implies that Kiki's love for Colette runs just as deep. And just as the soldier misses his beloved, Kiki misses Colette too—both now when they're physically separated (like the soldier, Kiki is experiencing the war firsthand from the battlefield, while her beloved is safe back at home), but also in those moments when Colette was emotionally unavailable and wrapped up in her writing. On another note, Kiki implies that Colette writes frivolous things, but in the thick of World War I, it seem as though nothing will ever be light and innocent again.

Later that night, Kiki watches her adopted soldier lie beside his friend. She suspects that they're in love. She watches as frost suddenly appears on everything, and it feels wrong to her to witness such a thing. She snuggles into her soldier's feet until he's called to wake up. When the soldiers receive boiled eggs for breakfast, Kiki thinks of how Fufu must've felt to watch the kitchen hands boil so many eggs, and how Colette used to eat boiled eggs with fresh cherries.

Perhaps it seems wrong for Kiki to see the frost appear because, as a former housecat, she's never been outside to witness such a thing. For now, the frost reminds her of everything she's missing from her previous life, and how wrong it is to be here at the front in the first place. Meeting other animals like Fufu has made Kiki more empathetic. She wants her soldier to eat, of course, but she also realizes that at times, the soldiers may eat at the expense of the animals.

The smell of the eggs in the trench reminds Kiki of a trip to the mountains she took with Colette. They'd take walks in the morning and could smell the sulfurous hot springs. They'd often walk to the park, where Colette would buy milk for Kiki. Children would run to Kiki, entranced by seeing a cat on a leash, and try to give her things. Now, Kiki marvels at the innocence—that of the children, and that of her and Colette.

Everything about the war and the trenches reminds Kiki of Colette—a mark of the close connection the two shared. But those happy memories also now represent an innocence that Kiki bleakly suggests is impossible to recreate. The war has fundamentally changed everything, for animals and people alike.

On that trip, Kiki became worried when Colette started spending time with an odd, unhappy couple staying at the hotel. They wanted to "adopt" both Colette and Kiki, and Kiki waited for Colette to grow bored of them. When Colette finally started to pack at the end of the trip, Kiki leapt into the suitcase. Colette knew—and said out loud—that Kiki wanted her to live a life with room for just the two of them.

Given how fondly Kiki describes her memories of Colette throughout the story, it's unsurprising that Kiki wanted to lead a life that consisted of just her and Colette. Her bond with Colette was—and still is—the most important thing in Kiki's life.

In the morning, the tomcat wakes Kiki up by quoting Colette's writing about cats. He ignores her displeasure and says that the Persians used to release cats on the battlefield when they fought the Egyptians, since the Egyptians would rather surrender than hurt the cats. Kiki hisses. She's annoyed; now that she's awake, she can't pretend anymore that she's stretched out on Colette's divan. They're all at war now. The tom brings news that the Briand ran away and made it the hundreds of miles home. The commander in chief awarded the dog a medal and discharged him from service. Kiki is suddenly horribly jealous.

In mentioning how the Persians weaponized cats to defeat the Egyptians, the tomcat highlights how animals have been essential in war for millennia. But Kiki doesn't want to think about cats on the battlefield because it reminds her of her own bleak reality—she's not lounging around in Colette's home but is instead sleeping in a muddy trench surrounded by soldiers in the thick of World War I. Learning that the Briand escaped the camp and made it all the way home painfully reminds Kiki that she's still stuck here.

Sensing this, the tomcat asks if Kiki likes Bel-Gazou. Kiki spits that no cats like babies, but she doesn't answer when the tom asks if Colette is a good mother. Colette is ambivalent about being a mother; she prioritizes her writing. Kiki doesn't want to share that Colette prefers Kiki to Bel-Gazou—cats are less demanding than babies. The tom heads for his own trench and Kiki imagines the Briand's journey home. She wishes she were a dog so she could survive the journey to Paris—even if Colette doesn't want her anymore.

This passage again suggests that people and animals can, at times, have a closer connection than people can have with one another. Meanwhile, the news of the Briand's escape forces Kiki to acknowledge her own weakness. Though she's seemingly hardy enough to survive in the muddy trenches, she doesn't have the strength to make it hundreds of miles home like the dog.

After a while, Kiki seeks out the tomcat in his trench. They watch the soldiers rooting for turtles engaged in a race. Several plod dutifully, one turns in circles, and the smallest carries another turtle on its back. The strength of that turtle reminds Kiki of seeing a teenage girl perform a feat in which she used her teeth to lift a table with a fat woman on it.

It's possible to read the turtles as representations of Kiki's options. She can keep marching forward at the trenches by taking her new reality day by day, she can continue to fruitlessly turn herself in circles by thinking about heading home without a real way to get there, or she and the tomcat can work together to get back to their owners in Paris.

Suddenly, the soldiers snap to attention. Henri appears, studies the soldiers suspiciously, and says he heard about the dog. He asks if it was in this trench. A soldier says it was in a different trench, but the soldiers here gave it treats. Henri is incensed that they'd feed a dog when men are starving, and he notices the cats. He tells the soldiers to get rid of them so they don't spread disease. Kiki's young soldier bravely says that the cats catch rats and lift the soldiers' spirits, but Kiki knows Henri recognizes her. He threatens to shoot the cats if he sees them again—and to shoot any soldiers protecting them.

This passage circles back to the beginning of the chapter when Kiki noted that she avoids Henri at all costs—Henri's rage and violent threat makes it clear to Kiki that she's not safe here, either from the German snipers or from those on the French side. Henri is the first character in the collection to introduce the idea that for some people, it seems ridiculous, unwise, and unethical to feed animals when there are hungry people, too. Given that animals narrate the stories in the book, this perspective encourages readers to empathize with the animals—and see Henri as a heartless, cruel, and selfish person because of how he treats animals. As Henry Lawson said in "The Bones," the animals in this chapter make Henri look worse.

Kiki's soldier tells her to hide during the day. She tells the tomcat that she has to get back to Paris and Colette. He's been waiting for her to realize this, and they decide to leave in the morning. At the other end of the trench, the turtle carrying its friend wins the race. The one turning in circles has dug itself into the earth and is no longer visible.

Again, the turtles show Kiki what will happen if she stays at the trenches and if she embarks on the journey back to Paris. Like the turtle digging itself into the ground by turning in circles, Kiki will be forced to wallow in her unhappiness if she stays and may end up metaphorically burying her head in the sand (i.e., try to forget about her bleak reality rather than facing it). But striking out on this journey with the tom may mean that Kiki has a higher likelihood of successfully getting home to Paris, just as the two turtles who partner together successfully win the race.

Rather than join the tomcat hunting in no man's land, Kiki sits and watches her soldier and his friend sleep. She worries her soldier won't survive; he's too skinny. Colette, strong and flexible from exercising, would be better suited to war. Kiki recalls how Colette and Missy would exercise outside together, shocking passersby. Kiki looks up at the carrier pigeons flying above; they seem disoriented. Kiki thinks of the message she'd send Colette if she could, saying that she's coming and asking her to save the pigeon for Kiki's dinner.

In noting how ill suited her soldier seems for war, Kiki gestures toward the idea that war is inhumane for humans, too. And in noticing how disoriented the carrier pigeons look, Kiki suggests that war is universally unsettling, for animals and people alike.

The tomcat should've returned by now. The trench feels cold and empty without him. Kiki knows what's happened, but she can't move from her soldier's feet. Instead, she's going to imagine movement and maybe it'll lead her toward her destiny—which is here, not in Paris.

Because of the chapter title, readers know from the outset that Kiki is going to die in the trenches, not make it home to Colette. And here, Kiki accepts her fate. By not going to find the tomcat, Kiki is more like the turtle turning in circles than the one carrying its friend across the finish line in the turtle race.

Kiki will wake the tomcat's adopted soldier and alert him to the fact that the tom is trapped in wire out in no man's land. The soldier will crawl out there as others wait for him—and the soldier will return with the muddy tom under his arm. It'll be impossible to tell where the man ends and the cat begins. Kiki will wait on the parapet, both for the tom and for the moment a German sniper mistakes her fur for a soldier's head. Her soldier and his friend will hold her body and as Kiki dies, the soldiers will look like Colette and Missy dressed as men. Finally, Kiki will know she's almost home.

Imagining the muddy cat and soldier and thinking it's impossible to tell who's who suggests that war is an equalizer: it turns everyone into muddy, indistinct victims, regardless of if they're a human or an animal or what side they're on. Kiki's hunch that the tom is caught in barbed wire echoes the tomcat's earlier anecdote about the mules and mule driver both dying when they got caught in wire. The trappings of the war are universally deadly.

RED PETER'S LITTLE LADY: SOUL OF CHIMPANZEE (DIED 1917, GERMANY)

In a letter to Evelyn, Red Peter acknowledges that she asked him not to write—but there's a war going on, and Herr Hagenbeck told Peter to write to Hazel by first writing to Evelyn. He's heard that Hazel has made progress in her training, and that it's time for Peter to have more contact with his future wife. Herr Hagenbeck also shared that Herr Oberndorff is at the front. Peter apologizes to Evelyn, both for writing and for her husband's absence.

At this point, it's unclear if Red Peter is an animal like the narrators from the last two chapters or if he's a human—the story's title page offers the only indication that he's a chimpanzee. The fact that it's hard to tell from the story itself, though, underscores that animals and people aren't all that different, which is a theme that runs throughout the book.

To Hazel, Peter writes that he chose her name years ago because of her eye color. His name is Red Peter, for the color of his fur and for his first trainer in Prague. He's sending this letter to Hazel's trainer, Frau Oberndorff, who's taking over Hazel's training while her husband is gone. She'll read the letters aloud, though it seems that Hazel's skills with reading, writing, and speaking are improving quickly.

Though Peter seems fairly human, the mention that he had a trainer is another suggestion that he's an animal. The word "trainer," rather than teacher or mentor, implies a power dynamic that puts Peter—and Hazel, as another chimp—below the human trainer. But despite this, Peter still writes to Hazel in a tone that makes it seem like he sees himself as superior. Becoming more human, perhaps, makes an animal "better."

Peter writes that he's sitting with a book of poetry, looking out his hotel window at Hamburg. He's been thinking of his namesake, who took Peter to see Halley's Comet in 1910. They watched with some "literary dandies." One was named Kafka, and he seemed envious of Peter. He laid down with Peter, which made Peter uncomfortable. But then Kafka said that he might not have been able to see the stars standing upright—he might not have survived the "terror" of standing up. This terror is something that Hazel will have to face soon, but Peter assures her that it's worth it.

Mentioning the writer Kafka is a nod to this story's source material, a short story by Kafka about a chimp named Red Peter. The character Kafka makes Peter uncomfortable without noticing that he's doing so, which is another clue that animals like Peter don't have the power that Peter might think they do. Kafka also introduces the idea that being human—"standing up" is perhaps a reference to humans' primate ancestors evolving to walk on two feet—is terrifying. But for Peter, the terror is worth it, as it means he gets to write letters like this, and live like a person.

A note from Evelyn accompanies Hazel's reply; Hazel dictated her reply to Evelyn. Evelyn writes that Hazel is improving quickly, though her language is a bit coarse. She's doing well, though, and even wore a dress and shoes earlier. She seems frustrated with her body, which seems like a positive step—it might motivate her to give up on her "chimpanzee habits" and become human, as Peter did. She confirms that her husband is at the front. Their children miss him.

The tone of Evelyn's letter seems far more formal than Peter's, suggesting that she's keeping him at arm's length distance. And indeed, the bulk of her letter is about Hazel, who seems like a safe, low-stakes subject for Evelyn and Peter to talk about. Evelyn suggests here that part of being human—or at least, becoming one—means taking issue with one's body.

In the accompanying letter to Peter, Hazel asks why her nostrils aren't tiny and why there's hair on her back. She's been doing Frau Oberndorff's assigned exercises for the ginger biscuits, which make her feces hard. Earlier, she saw women throwing candies to soldiers. It was her first taste of chocolate. She asked why everyone was happy, and Frau Oberndorff said that people are bored of life and glad for a break. They think it's "exhilarating" to be at war. This is a new word for Hazel—just as her body is now new to her. She ate too much chocolate and got sick.

As Evelyn noted in the preface to this letter, Hazel is very concerned with how her body looks—and specifically, how inhuman *it looks. Though she seems to want to be more human, it's worth noting that Hazel's descriptions of doing exercises for the cookies reads as very animalistic and simple. She thus exists in an in-between state, where she's not quite human and not entirely animal—but her animal nature seems to both annoy and delight her.*

Peter writes back to Evelyn and says he was wrong to be so familiar with her, but it's hard to hold back. The years since he was banished from her have been awful. It's amazing to know that Evelyn is holding the paper and reading his words. He begs Evelyn to forgive him and to give his love to the children. He misses them and Evelyn.

The opening of Peter's letter implies that he and Evelyn (who's implied to be human) had some sort of connection before Peter was banished. If this is true, it's yet another reminder that humans and animals can have extremely close relationships.

In the letter to Hazel, Peter is glad that she's embracing his "healthful German body culture." He warns her not to eat too much chocolate. Years ago, he decided to follow a strict diet and a body-building program, the same that Hazel now follows. He's recently begun exercising outside in the nude, but he cautions Hazel to learn to wear clothes before trying it. He chews every bite more than 10 times, which has made him thinner than most humans. He refuses tea, coffee, and alcohol, and it makes him happy to abstain while others indulge. Peter asks Hazel to think of how Herr Hagenbeck decided to create a **zoo** without bars. Now, Hazel must mentally put the bars back and deny herself pleasure. Eventually, she'll find pleasure in denying herself things—and it's this ability to derive pleasure from pain and deprivation that makes a creature human.

Peter doesn't specify whether he embraced "healthful German body culture" of his own volition, or as part of his training. It seems likely it was part of his training, given that Hazel is now following much the same program. It's interesting that Peter insists that to be human is to derive pleasure from pain and deprivation, especially since this story often highlights moments when people engage in gluttonous, selfish behavior. Indeed, "The Bones" also made it clear that to be human is to be selfish and to desire luxuries—so perhaps Peter is misinterpreting what sets humans apart from animals.

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Evelyn writes back a preface to Hazel's letter. She understands that Peter doesn't want to visit Hazel in the **zoo** until she's ready to be his companion, but she'd appreciate it if Peter told his friends to stop visiting. When they come by, they rudely talk about Hazel "being expertly prepared for [Peter's] enjoyment." The children know that Peter is writing to Hazel and want to know why he isn't writing to them. Evelyn can't explain it. She insists that Peter is wrong about humans and masochism, and she suspects that his letters to Hazel are full of barbs for her. Most people don't derive pleasure from pain; indeed, most believe that romantic love makes people human. Some even suffer to think of Peter's body warm beneath his blankets.

Evelyn suggests that Peter's friends think it's comical to leer at Hazel, simply because as Peter's future wife, it's assumed that she's going to have sex with him. In this sense, Evelyn is trying to protect Hazel's privacy like she might for another person, a sign that she sees Hazel and Peter as beings worthy of compassion and privacy. The possibility that Peter's letters are full of digs at Evelyn casts Peter's earlier assessment of humans' relationship to masochism in a new light. Peter could be taking issue with Evelyn denying both herself and Peter the relationship that, he implies, they both want. And when Evelyn says here that "some" suffer to think of Peter's warm body, it suggests that she suffers because she can't be with Peter.

In her letter to Peter, Hazel writes that the **zoo** is noisy. She's itchy, but Frau Oberndorff won't let her scratch. Instead, the woman bathes Hazel and combs her hair. Frau Oberndorff thinks Hazel's breath is a problem, but Hazel likes her smelly breath. She swings back and forth on the lamp and scratches her bum to then sniff her fingers. She asks how Peter became what he is, and why he wants her.

This passage makes it clear that Hazel lives in a zoo, where she's being prepared to live life as a human. The way that Hazel describes her differences in opinion with her trainer, moreover, suggests that she's not happy about this arrangement. She may be curious about Peter and his transformation, but it seems possible that she doesn't want to undergo the transformation herself.

In his next letter to Evelyn, Peter apologizes for his acquaintances' behavior. He insists that Hazel was Hagenbeck's idea. Peter has been forced to go along with it for the sake of Hagenbeck's "cursed **zoo**." If he had a choice, and if Evelyn had a choice, Peter would choose Evelyn. He fell in love with her the moment they met. *She* inspired him to become human, not Oberndorff's mazes or training exercises or beatings. He wanted to be human to touch her. She made him a better human, and he hopes he made her a better ape.

Here, Peter confirms that he may live like a person now, but he's still essentially a zoo animal. As is often the case with zoo animals, Peter doesn't really get to choose who he mates with—and indeed, he's going to be forced into a relationship with Hazel against his will. Peter actually loves Evelyn, and underwent his transformation from ape to human so they could be together. This passage hints at unequal power dynamics at play: Peter might believe he's turned himself into a person and therefore, believes he should have rights and agency. But since he is essentially still a zoo animal, he might have less power than he thinks.

To Hazel, Peter offers his "tale of transformation." He barely remembers where he was born, but he remembers a boa constrictor gripping him. He doesn't remember being shot by a hunter. He came to Prague on a ship and appeared onstage with his namesake Peter. Herr Hagenbeck bought him there and then hired Oberndorff to train Peter in Hamburg. Peter then spent a few years in the lab where Hazel is now. Oberndorff was brutal, but his wife, Frau Oberndorff, and the children made up for it. Peter progressed quickly and was soon strolling with Hagenbeck, discussing politics and philosophy. Soon after, he moved to other lodgings and began to speak at the **zoo**.

Peter clearly had no choice in coming to Europe, or in entering his training with Hagenbeck and Oberndorff. And it's worth noting that Peter glosses over his years spent in the lab. In his last letter to Evelyn, Peter made it seem like being in the lab was a brutal experience—so by not acknowledging that to Hazel, Peter becomes complicit in whatever abuse Hazel is implied to be experiencing at the moment.

To answer the question of why he wants Hazel, Peter says he's needed a companion for some time. Hazel performed well on aptitude tests, so she began her training to become Peter's wife. There's also the fact that Hazel will bring Peter "comfort" as his wife. Hagenbeck didn't think Peter should take a human wife, and the "primitive" chimps at the zoo horrify Peter. Peter's greatest fear is that, once they're together, he'll feel far away from Hazel.

Notably, Peter never says he likes Hazel or genuinely wants to be with her—and to Evelyn earlier, he admitted he doesn't care about Hazel at all. Rather, their marriage will be one of convenience, one that neither of them actually wants to be in. Peter notes that Hagenbeck was the one to decide who—and what species—Peter would marry, and this arrangement underscores that Peter has very little power and agency over his own life.

Evelyn writes back to Peter with news that she and Hazel have been going out in public together. Hazel now walks upright and wears shoes, and Hagenbeck feels that Hazel will be ready sooner than expected. She asks if Peter remembers when Evelyn's oldest child first started to speak. Hazel seems to be in a phase like that, where she voices all her thoughts. Evelyn asks if Peter sent the Chinese man with the copy of Buber's book of Chinese tales. The man also brought a cricket, which Evelyn gave to Hazel. Evelyn remembers reading Buber with Peter "that night," and "everything else."

Though Evelyn continues to share news of Hazel's progress with Peter, her writing here becomes more intimate. It seems likely that the two are trying to rekindle their relationship—Peter by sending her books that will stir up happy memories, and Evelyn by accepting his advances. And Evelyn's mention about "that night" and "everything else"—presumably, euphemisms for sex—stands in stark contrast to her descriptions of Hazel as being childlike.

Hazel's short letter says that she received a cricket. He looks fierce. According to the man who brought the cricket, he'll win battles against other crickets if Hazel chops up a fly for him to make him violent. Earlier, Hazel went with Frau Oberndorff to stand in ration lines for **food** that upset the children's stomachs. Hazel's ears have been pierced and she can now pull on stockings without getting runs, but there aren't stockings anymore.

Hazel's short, simple sentences reinforce the idea that she's in a childish place in her development. Her aside about what she can do with her cricket suggests that the cricket isn't naturally violent, but if people choose to, they can make him that way. Meanwhile, her mentions of standing in ration lines and there being no stockings suggests that she's feeling the effects of World War I (the story takes place during 1917 in Germany, one of the countries involved in the war).

Peter writes to Evelyn that he's thrilled that the book and the cricket have been good distractions. He asks if Hazel understands what's going on, and he promises to try to explain it in his letter to her. He's worried about Evelyn and the children and asks if Hagenbeck is helping her find **food** on the black market. He'd send supplies, but he's having a hard time finding food himself. The waiters in the hotel dining room give him dirty looks when he comes downstairs to eat, so he's grateful that he trained himself to not eat much.

It's clear, in this passage, how differently Peter thinks of Hazel and Evelyn. He talks about Hazel as though she's a child, which allows Peter to frame himself as a knowledgeable older mentor. Here, Peter is concerned about whether or not Hazel grasps what's going on in the world with the war. This contrasts with Peter's worry that Evelyn and her children are getting enough to eat. He cares for their wellbeing, not just that they understand the war. And when he mentions that the waiters give him dirty looks, it brings up one of the book's main ideas: that during difficult times, animals often bear the brunt of the suffering. Just as Henri in the last story didn't want to see the cats or dogs eating, the waiters here don't want to see Peter eating.

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Writing directly to Hazel now, Peter says that she should try to understand what's happening. The British naval blockade prevents **food** from coming to Germany via the North Sea. Germany imports about a third of its food, so now the country is in trouble. In addition to the ration lines, there are also strikes and food riots. England is using food as a weapon against the Germans.

Throughout the book, food often symbolizes the power dynamic between people and animals. But here, Peter suggests that people can also use food to exert control over each other. In this sense, people and animals aren't so different from each other—they all need food to live, and a being or entity with more power can always withhold food.

Evelyn assures Peter in her next letter that she and the children are fine, but they're struggling to feed the **zoo** animals. Earlier, Evelyn's children stole some food and they celebrated their meal enthusiastically—and of course, they shared with Hazel. Hagenbeck hasn't been helping and hasn't been to the zoo in a while. He might be out trying to find **food**, but Evelyn asks if Peter will remind him of her and of the animals. She prefaces Hazel's enclosed letter by saying it's a bit uncouth, but Evelyn has been trying to give Hazel the room to explore language. They've been reading *The Entropy of Reason*, which Hazel loves. Evelyn hopes the letter doesn't embarrass Peter. Hazel is right about what she can give Peter—things that Evelyn can't.

As Evelyn describes her family's difficulties getting food, she again suggests that animals are less deserving of sustenance than people are. She and her children are eating alright—and because Hazel is almost *human, she's eating too. But the zoo animals aren't eating. And for that matter, describing them simply as "zoo animals" denies them any individuality, as it's impossible to tell whether they're chimps, like Peter and Hazel, or some other kind of animal. In any case, they don't matter as much as the people.*

Hazel asks how they'll play "bedroom games" when she's Peter's wife. Frau Oberndorff is reading *The Entropy of Reason* to her. In it, Dr. Mitzkin writes that humans will eat words, bathe in words, kill themselves with words, and copulate with words. She asks if Peter will throw words at her when she swings toward him from the curtains, showing him her anus. Will she throw words at him in return? She can't give him more than a body that's flexible in pleasant ways. Would he like her to be "more human, or less human, or more or less human"?

Hazel seems to suggest that sex doesn't require language, or at least not for chimps. But because Hazel and Peter are more human than most chimps, Hazel wonders if that means they'll have to have sex differently than they might if they were chimps in the wild. Asking what he wants from her suggests that Hazel wants to please Peter and is perhaps more interested in this marriage than Peter is.

In his response, Peter begs Evelyn to let him visit. He needs to know if she and the children are alright, and she doesn't need to worry about Hagenbeck finding out. Hagenbeck fled to Africa. Peter supposes it makes sense; Hagenbeck is selfish, and there will always be other apes to train. Peter feels bad for Hazel, but with Hagenbeck gone, Peter doesn't have to deal with her anymore. He doesn't have to go along with the "terrible partnership" that Hagenbeck dreamed up. Now, Peter and Evelyn are almost free to do what they want.

In his letter, Peter doesn't mention Hazel directly at all—he only gestures toward their arranged relationship, or "terrible partnership." This makes it clear where his priorities lie: with Evelyn, and with people in general. Peter believes that Hagenbeck's departure frees Peter from his role as a zoo animal. In other words, Peter seems to think that it was Hagenbeck and Oberndorff who didn't allow him to become fully human by entering into a relationship with a human woman like Evelyn.

Evelyn, in her response, thanks Peter for the potatoes he sent. She confirms that Hagenbeck went to Africa and transcribes Hagenbeck's final letter to her. In it, he wrote that rates of starvation in Hamburg are low. His good friend, a professor, just conducted an experiment on himself in which he only ate the **food** rations of an average person. He lost a third of his weight and couldn't concentrate, but Hagenbeck knows it's not hard to find extra food. This is just a way to separate the weak from the strong, and it's bringing out the nation's ingenuity. Now, industry has stepped up to engineer edible fats. He then affirms that Germany will prevail. To Peter, Evelyn insists that Hagenbeck will prevail in Africa while they starve in Hamburg. She adds that Hazel wrote this week, but Peter can't visit. Herr Oberndorff will be on leave soon.

The professor's experiment suggests that those with wealth believe that it's not just animals who don't need to eat during wartime. Poor people without access to food on the black market, the professor seems to believe, also deserve to starve, as this is just part of separating the weak from the strong in a society. But without Hagenbeck's help, Evelyn now finds herself struggling alongside the city's poor. Hagenbeck's choice to flee to Africa suggests that to be human is to be selfish and cruel, both to animals and to other people. But it also seems like Hagenbeck thinks it's virtuous to make do with little, which could be where Peter got the idea that to be human is to enjoy deprivation.

Hazel writes that Frau Oberndorff's hair is losing color. She recently took Hazel and the children to a soup kitchen, where the **food** smelled awful and the children said it tasted worse. A doctor there pointed out an orphan boy who was missing his teeth due to rickets. The child, the doctor said, was given lots of bread but didn't improve—and then they found he was hiding bread under his mattress. His "misguided animal instinct" led him to think fearing hunger is worse than actually being hungry. Earlier, Hazel decided to squash and eat a bedbug herself, rather than give it to her cricket.

Hazel implies that she didn't get to eat at the soup kitchen—since she's not yet fully human, she perhaps wasn't eligible for a meal. What the doctor has to say about the starving boy, as well as Hazel's anecdote about killing a bedbug, suggests that war and famine put people in touch with their animal instincts. Once again, the story suggests that there is little that separates humans from other animals—and in difficult times, when food is scarce, humans and animals become even more alike.

Peter writes to Evelyn and thanks her for yesterday. He suspects that she would've slammed the door on him if the children hadn't been so happy to see him. Evelyn looks thin, but Peter couldn't find any black market **food** for her. As an ape, nobody thinks he should eat when humans are starving. He commends Evelyn for her work with Hazel; Hazel will be fine now. Peter agrees that Hazel should stop her training and wait until Herr Oberndorff gets back. Now, Peter thinks of Hazel as one of Evelyn's children. Perhaps they could care for her like that in the future. He promises to stay away until after Oberndorff's visit. The touch of Evelyn's hand as they said goodbye will sustain him.

Again, as an animal who seems to be struggling more and more to pass for human, Peter finds that people are quick to deny him food. They may have been happy to let him play at being human before the war—but with things so dire and desperate now, they see Peter's existence and need to eat as a threat to their own survival. The way Peter talks about Hazel as one of Evelyn's children makes it clear he doesn't see her as a prospective wife. She will, in his eyes, always be lesser than him—a child rather than a partner.

Evelyn writes back with disturbing news about Hazel. Hazel found all of Peter's notes to Evelyn, which were stored in the envelopes along with the letters to Hazel. She can read now, but maybe can't comprehend. But since reading the letters, Hazel has stopped eating. She also returned to her cage. Hopefully this is just a temporary side effect of hunger. Evelyn asks Peter to not write her until he hears from her again, and apologizes that Hazel chose not to write this week.

While Evelyn has no real way of knowing what Hazel does or doesn't understand, it seems likely that Hazel knows now that Peter doesn't actually want her. It's certainly a shock for her to realize that she's more of a pawn than she may have already thought—she may have believed that Hagenbeck and Oberndorff cared for her, not just as a proof of concept for their training methods.

Evelyn writes again with the news that Herr Oberndorff is dead. She won't miss him, and she's so hungry it's hard to grieve. Hazel doesn't know about Oberndorff's death yet. They're out of coal, so there's no way to heat the lab, and Hazel seems more intent on staying in her cage as it gets colder. Evelyn has cut up some of her husband's old clothes to make towels, as they were down to one towel for the whole family. Hazel dictated the note below, and Evelyn asks Peter to stay away for a while. Hazel's note asks if Peter got pork in the recent "Pig Murders." She heard the pigs were impossibly skinny, and nine million were slaughtered to save everyone from meatlessness. She forgot; Peter doesn't eat meat.

It's significant that Evelyn says there's no good way to heat the lab—but she doesn't say she's struggling to heat the house, where she and the children live. Again, because Hazel is a chimp and is seemingly becoming more chimp-like every day with her trainer gone, Evelyn may feel less obligated to make sure Hazel is warm. But nevertheless, this passage makes it clear that Hazel isn't the only one suffering. That Evelyn's family only had one towel speaks to how difficult the war is for everyone affected.

Peter writes to Evelyn and apologizes for visiting. He's not sorry that he took Evelyn in his arms and kissed her. He's hungry, but only for her. Peter also forgot to apologize for his appearance. His suits were requisitioned recently as part of the decree that men can't own more than two suits. For the first time in years, Peter is glad to have fur. The war is slowly stripping Peter of everything that made him human. But that's okay, he writes, as long as he never has to give up Evelyn.

Peter doesn't say outright, but he implies that the soldiers took all *his clothes and didn't leave him with the two suits that men are allowed to have. This implies that, in the soldiers' eyes, Peter isn't human—and so doesn't get the same level of respect and protection under the law as other men.*

Evelyn responds and thanks Peter for the boots he found for her daughter. Hazel is still fasting and asked Evelyn to charge spectators to watch her starve. But few people come to the **zoo** anyway—nobody wants to see animals eating, even if it's just turnip peels. Hazel dictated another note for Peter, and Evelyn fears Hazel is losing her mind. She can't wait to see Peter tomorrow.

As Evelyn notes, nobody wants to see animals eat, even if it's just food scraps people would normally discard. Once again, this emphasizes that most people are fully willing to let animals starve if it means humans' own survival.

Hazel writes that once, a Hunger Artist entertained people by fasting for 40 days. She asks if Peter remembers him sitting in the **zoo**. People soon lost interest, and the man whom the Artist had hired to make sure he didn't eat quit. There's nothing more ridiculous than an artist who suffers with no audience. The creatures around Hazel aren't getting **food** anymore. Does it matter that they'll all die, whether of disease, exposure, or malnutrition? Hazel will be the only one who chose to starve. Humans aren't any better than she is. Hazel wonders if all that separates apes and humans is regular hot meals. Now, she finds her thoughts fascinating. She listens to her cricket chirping and hopes humans will heat her up and eat her.

Here, Hazel makes the case that hunger is a powerful equalizer. During wartime, when both people and animals starve due to strict rations and dwindling resources, humans and animals don't seem so different from each other. And as far as Hazel is concerned, it's also true that they're all going to die—and it doesn't seem to matter how, exactly, unless they essentially choose to die. That choice, she suggests, is what makes her more human than other animals. Hoping humans will eat her, though, speaks to how badly she's suffering now. To her, it's preferable to die and feel warm than to stay alive and cold.

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Peter writes to Evelyn. He supposes that it's safest back in his cage since the authorities chased him from his hotel, but it feels like he's regressed. He doesn't have his clothes or his pipe now. Everything stinks like Hazel—or, perhaps, Peter is smelling himself. He's scribbling this note on a scrap of paper as he waits for Evelyn's visit, but this letter is useless. His kisses will never reach her. Peter keeps thinking about how Evelyn fed him a spoonful of pumpkin marmalade. She held the spoonful through the bars of the cage and said she wanted to fatten him up. In that moment, Peter knew he made a mistake getting back into the cage. He begs Evelyn to let him out and into her bed.

Here, Peter finds himself trapped in the cage where he once learned to be human. And now that he's back in the cage, he's lost everything that made him seem human. He has no clothes or pipe, he stinks like a chimp, and he is seemingly destined to become Evelyn's dinner. Peter, though, isn't at fault—Evelyn betrayed his trust and, up until this point, it didn't seem like Peter had any reason to distrust Evelyn. Peter may toe the line between human and animal, but he shows here that Evelyn is the true monster.

HUNDSTAGE: SOUL OF DOG (DIED 1941, POLAND)

The narrator, the dog, asks how to even describe his "beloved" Master and his life before he was exiled to the woods. On the day the dog meets his Master, his Master is weeping over a dead canary in his office. He then gives the canary to a servant to bury, and he seems to brighten up as he plays with the dog. The dog realizes it's a privilege to be a "companion species," which is a term the scientists at the Society use. His Master loves how possessive the dog is. One morning, in late fall, the dog lies with his Master and listens to a man on the radio. The man says that animals shouldn't be used for experiments, or killed without minimizing suffering. He says that to the Germans, animals are perceptive, faithful, and feel pain. The dog licks his Master's tears.

Given the date in the story's title, it's clear this story takes place during World War II. Though historians disagree on Hitler's reasoning for doing so, he passed animal rights' laws that were unheard of at the time, including banning animal experiments and advocating for humane butchering techniques. The dog's Master is, presumably, listening to Hitler on the radio in this passage as he cries.

The dog and his sister, Blondi, grew up hearing stories about their grandfather. The scientist von Stephanitz bred their grandfather to recreate the Germanic wolf-dog. Grandfather took the responsibility seriously, though he admitted once that he never knew how exactly to behave. Grandfather tried multiple attitudes to please von Stephanitz. He stopped lunging at his food and didn't bond quickly with new people; von Stephanitz took that as a sign of disloyalty. He was only supposed to want purebred females, and so his lowest moment was getting caught with a mutt being used for medical experiments.

Here, the dog confirms that he's a German Shepherd; the German Max von Stephanitz developed the German Shepherd dog from herding dogs beginning in the 1890s, and he particularly liked the ones that resembled wolves. Later, in the 1930s, Hitler took a liking to the breed and saw them as pure, predatory creatures. The dog suggests that the dogs' true nature isn't necessarily the breed standard. The dog's grandfather seems like he'd bond with new people quickly if given the chance, but he just wants to please his owner.

A few months after the dog and Blondi are born, people move them to the Society for Animal Psychology. There, the scientists keep dogs on leashes so they can follow the new law that dogs shouldn't chase foxes. Blondi and the dog only understand the significance of this law and their masters' compassion for animals when they meet their masters. The scientists give Blondi to the leader of the country; they give the dog to one of the leader's close associates.

As part of the animal rights' laws, the Nazis banned hunting. The fact that the dog's sister is named Blondi (a reference to blonde-haired Aryans in Nazi ideology), and the fact that she goes to the "leader of the country," indicates that this is Hitler's final German Shepherd dog. While there's no doubt that the dog genuinely loves his master, it's important to keep in mind that this love means the dog doesn't have an impartial view of his master.

One day, as the dog's Master is receiving a massage, the dog lies beneath the lounge. He's starving, since his Master has recently gone vegetarian and decided that the dog should be vegetarian too. Master is also concerned for the dog's karma and says that if the dog meditates and doesn't eat meat, he could be reincarnated as a human. The thought is intoxicating.

In this situation, the dog's owner uses food to manipulate his dog and get him to be obedient. The dog idolizes his owner and humans in general, so he's willing to go along with the vegetarian diet—even though clearly, the dog needs meat. In other words, he's willing to subsume his own needs to please his owner.

Master says to his masseur, Herr Kersten, that hunting—as Herr Kersten does—is murder, as every animal has the right to live. Herr Kersten grunts. Master continues that he admires their Indo-Germanic ancestors for this point of view. He's also intrigued that Buddhist monks wear bells in the forest so small creatures can get out of the way. The dog listens intently, as his Master likes to tell Herr Kersten about his philosophical research. Herr Kersten is a good listener. Master says that he used to be a chicken farmer until he received a copy of Hermann Hesse's book *Siddhartha*. Master—Himmler—connected with Professor Wüst, his spiritual guide, and has been studying Hinduism. Now, he knows he was having bad luck before because he killed chickens. The dog thinks of the chickens he killed before he became a vegetarian. He feels both sick and hungry.

Finally, the story reveals that the dog's owner is Heinrich Himmler, a high-ranking S.S. officer and an architect of the Holocaust. Himmler ironically insists that all animals have the right to live, when he's spent much of the 1930s developing Nazi Germany's concentration camps. Unlike in the book's "Red Peter" section, here, animals have more rights and freedoms than many people do. But still, when the dog thinks about the chickens he killed, it shows that he's also suffering—Himmler is controlling him by withholding the protein the animal needs.

Master keeps a weekly meditation appointment with Professor Wüst, which takes place in the sacred crypt of the castle at Wewelsburg. The dog loves going there because he occasionally sees Blondi. They get to play together and often try to dig out the Black Sun in the marble floor. Sometimes, they even get to play with other dogs from the Society, most of whom are guards who oversee the slaves renovating the castle. The dogs' favorite spot is the castle crypt—if they bark there, dozens of dogs bark back. But if Blondi isn't there, the dog keeps watch beside his Master while he and Professor Wüst meditate and talk about their beliefs.

This passage reveals the dog's narrow and uncritical understanding of Nazi Germany. The slaves renovating the castle are presumably prisoners from a concentration camp, and the dog expresses no curiosity as to why they're enslaved in the first place. For him, it's just the way things are, and he's far more interested in playing with Blondi than questioning the status quo. Barking in the crypt, though, reads as somewhat sinister and foreshadows bad things to come.

On the dog's final visit to Wewelsburg, not long before his betrayal and banishment, his Master and Professor Wüst discuss how to inspire their followers to be courageous now that Germany is at war. Professor Wüst insists that the men need to focus on the "spiritual dimensions" of battle. They can remind the men that when Krishna told Arjuna to kill his family, he assured Arjuna that Arjuna would suffer no ill consequences. The dog knows who these people are—they're vegetarians. Master suggests they compare the Führer to Krishna. He's the reincarnation of a great figure, and the Master believes that those who merge with the Führer will be freed from everything and thus won't be bound by their deeds.

The historical Himmler was indeed interested in Hinduism and did engage Professor Wüst as his spiritual guide; Wüst was trained in Sanskrit and so could read and interpret Hindu texts in their original forms. Krishna is a powerful Hindu deity, and comparing Hitler to Krishna would equate Hitler with righteous, godly power. In other words, Wüst and Himmler are mining Hindu religion and lore for stories they can transpose into 1940s Germany that make their cause look legitimate. But the dog doesn't understand the significance of these Hindu figures—for him, they're vegetarians and therefore, are good people.

Professor Wüst says that the only problem is explaining the connection between India and Hinduism. Aryan conquerors invaded India years ago, so Germans share a spiritual heritage with Indian people. Master seems irritated; he insists that this is why he wants to transform this castle into a sanctuary so they can educate their leaders properly. The dog growls; he doesn't like Professor Wüst because he's seen the man secretly eating meat. Reverently, Professor Wüst says that if the Führer is Krishna, Master is Arjuna. Master likes this.

As the men argue over how to best contextualize Hinduism for the Germans, the dog shows that he's trying to be morally sound, as Professor Wüst's hypocrisy offends him. But it's also possible that the dog objects to the fact that, as a person, Wüst is able to get away with this sort of thing better than the dog is. The dog might be so upset because he's hungry and can't act on his hunger, unlike Wüst.

Professor Wüst says it's time to read, so Master lies back in corpse pose to listen. Wüst reads an ancient Chinese parable. In it, a cook dismembers an ox and every movement is harmonious. The cook's employer praises him, and the cook explains that he's dedicated to Dao. He used to see the entire ox before him, but now, he follows his spirit and pays attention to the animal's body. Unlike other butchers, who get new knives often, the cook has been using his cleaver for 19 years because he finds spaces between the animal's joints to cut. The count cries that he now knows how to look after his life. The dog wonders what the parable means. It reminds him of something his Master told Herr Kersten once. He'd said that oppressed people don't learn compassion—they just learn that next time, they need a bigger stick.

A Chinese belief system, Dao, translates to "the way," and it refers to a way of understanding the universe. The cook, as a human being, can only follow what he sees in front of him; he can't predict or totally understand it, which is a key part of Dao. Without this background, though, the dog doesn't have the means to interpret this parable, though he still tries. In a sense, then, the dog is a lot like the cook in the parable. He can't predict or really make sense of what's in front of him—but he can respond to what he sees.

Now it's time for the dog to tell of his exile. It's a difficult subject, though he deserves to be punished for it. The dog is unwell, lying by his Master's fire. A man enters the room, which angers the dog—nobody should enter his Master's domain like this. The dog leaps at the man, knocks him over, and holds the man's neck in his mouth. But when the man doesn't move, the dog relaxes. The man talks to him gently, and the dog gives in. He lies down next to the man and lets the man stroke him—he pets him in the right direction, which his Master doesn't always do.

Per von Stephanitz, German Shepherds are supposed to be territorial and aggressive—so at first, the dog responds exactly how he should. But when the dog finds that he actually enjoys this man's touch, it suggests that those aggressive qualities aren't actually in his nature. Like his grandfather, he's probably a very friendly dog when people are kind to him.

The dog is so relaxed that he doesn't notice his Master's return. Master asks what the man did to his dog, and the man responds that he's the veterinarian Master sent for. He needed to calm the dog down when it attacked him. The dog's Master shouts that the vet has taken away the only faithful creature, and he refuses to touch the dog. The vet looks at Master with fear as the Master tells guards to arrest him. The dog licks his Master's hand, but his Master won't acknowledge him. His Master tells the soldiers to take the dog away and never let him return. Ashamed of his behavior, the dog runs into the woods and runs until he's too exhausted to keep going.

To Himmler, it's unthinkable that another person would try to handle his dog without him being there. So he abuses his power by having the vet arrested—and possibly sent to a concentration camp—and by banishing his dog. The fact that Himmler is willing to banish his dog for this calls into question how reciprocal the relationship actually was.

That night, it snows for the first time. The dog wakes up covered in snow and sniffs around, hoping to find a plant to eat. Though he notices deer tracks, he ignores them; he's attracted enough bad karma already. But as he watches, new tracks appear and something speaks right in front of him. It tells the dog to look closely, and the dog will be able to see it—it's the dog's birthright to be able to see dead souls. The dog is terrified and begs the voice to stop. He remembers something his Master said once—that Germans used to believe that dogs could see the souls of the dead in the forests. The dog concentrates and an apparition appears in front of him.

It's significant that even though Himmler banished his dog to the woods, the dog doesn't seem to bear Himmler any ill will. Indeed, he's still trying to follow Himmler's belief system by resisting the impulse to eat meat—and thinks that he's the one who messed up by trusting the vet. The dog's loyalty to his Master, in this situation, actually keeps the dog from trying to survive—suggesting that his loyalty isn't in his best interest.

The apparition says she's the soul of an auroch; aurochs, she explains, were ox-like creatures and went extinct centuries ago. She hasn't been here that long. Herr Göring created her to show the Germans what the forests looked like long ago. Scientists crossed all sorts of deer and oxen, but none of the animals survived. The dog thinks of his grandfather getting caught with the mongrel and how ashamed his grandfather felt. When the dog asks why the auroch hasn't been reincarnated, the auroch explains that her mate, the last of their kind, is dying. She won't tell the dog where he is, though; she wants him to die in peace. The dog doesn't explain that he's a vegetarian.

Though the Nazis embraced modernity and technology, they also idealized the past—especially as it pertains to Germanic history. A man named Lutz Heck is actually responsible for developing an approximation of the historical auroch (which went extinct in the 17th century), though Göring became the face and the name attached to the project. This resembles the way that von Stephanitz bred the German Shepherds to resemble extinct wolf-dogs. Animals, this suggests, can be tools—and as the auroch suggests, this can have disastrous consequences for the animals themselves.

A day and a night pass. The dog eats some bark, and late in the day, he sees a fox listening to the ice over a river. The dog comes to after eating the fox. He's horrified—now he might never become a human. That night, the dog dreams that he's curled up on his Master's lap. A thunderbolt sent from Aryan gods threatens to kill him. The dog wakes up shivering and remembers how much his Master loved thunderstorms. He believed the lightning bolts were gifts of power from the ancient gods.

Just as the dog couldn't subsume his friendly nature when faced with the veterinarian, he now can't ignore that he's a carnivore by nature—and moreover, that he's starving and needs food. But this makes the dog feel unworthy and as though he's going to be punished in the afterlife and in his dreams.

The next morning, the dog finds the silent forest so disturbing that he's glad to see the outline of a ghostly pig. He asks the pig how it died; when it won't answer, the dog asks the pig why it hasn't been reincarnated. The pig just laughs as the dog explains that if they live good lives, they'll be reincarnated as humans. According to the pig, this is nonsense. The dog says that his Master, a vegetarian and a follower of Hinduism, taught him everything. He's a reincarnation of Arjuna and has compassion for animals. The pig sneers that the dog's Master is just covering his bases and asks if he follows Zen and Tibetan Buddhism too. The dog thinks this is true.

To readers, the pig might seem like a somewhat caustic voice of reason—but to the dog, the pig is just spouting nonsense. The pig essentially accuses Himmler of following as many belief systems as possible in the hope that, in the afterlife, at least one system will save him from being punished for his earthly deeds. And the dog is so loyal to Himmler that he doesn't see the truth in what the pig says. Again, his loyalty to his master keeps him from thinking critically or in a way that might benefit him.

The pig studies the dog, ascertains that he hasn't been in the forest long, and asks who his Master is. The dog says his Master is a leader and a protector of all creatures. His master has done a lot for animals, even the fish. He passed a law dictating that aquatic creatures must be killed humanely. This means that fish must be stunned before they're gutted, and that crustaceans have to be dropped in boiling water rather than brought to a boil. The pig responds that a friend told him that kindness can be an expression of domination, just like cruelty. To the dog, this makes no sense.

The dog doesn't see the irony in describing Himmler as an animal lover and advocate when Himmler banished his beloved dog to the woods. As the pig notes, Himmler's supposed kindness to the dog and to other beings seems more like a tool that bolsters and maintains his power. There may be other animals like the dog who think that because they benefit from Himmler's policies, Himmler is good—but this ignores so many other awful things Himmler has done and has yet to do.

The pig agrees to tell the dog how he died. The story will show the dog how confused humans can be. He says that once, a farmer and his family lived in this forest. They were modern, but someone encouraged them to reconnect with ancient traditions. One of those traditions was to adopt a pig and raise it like family member. So the pig grew up in the house, sleeping alongside the children. Time passed and one day, the pig was too big to fit through the door. The family built him a nice pen outside, but then they forgot about him. His body started to change, and he began to experience "beastly impulses."

In the pig's story, he explores the Nazis' relationship with modernity and with old traditions and nature. It's difficult, he suggests, to toe this line—especially with an animal like the pig, who grows so large and simply can't fit in a modern home for his entire life. The ancient traditions, this suggests, don't really have a place in the modern world.

The family sold the pig to another farmer. There, the pig lived in a smelly shed with dozens of others, but he didn't know how to interact with the pigs. He'd sometimes fly into a rage—and one night, he killed and ate two piglets. The humans were incensed. They decided to punish the pig according to medieval law, which they thought the new leaders would like. The old law said that a human sentenced to die should wear a pig's skin to the scaffold, while a pig who had eaten a pig needed to be led to the gallows wearing human clothes. The son that the pig grew up with tearfully dressed the pig in his own clothes and led him to the gallows. After the pig died, he watched over his family. He saw humans arrest the son for torturing an animal.

The pig's fate suggests that the humans who cared for him and the Nazis are all, to varying degrees, out of touch with animals. Pigs do sometimes eat piglets, but it most often happens when pigs are kept in large groups where a pecking order doesn't develop—as was the case with this pig. In other words, the farmers didn't help the pig establish itself. And the Nazi government officials demonstrate a complete lack of compassion when they arrest the son. The ancient tradition doesn't matter as much as having the ability to demonstrate their power.

The dog is hungry after the "ignorant" pig leaves. He digs in the dirt and finds a giant earthworm, a rare species. The dog remembers the day his Master decreed the worm should be protected. But the dog eats the worm because he's starving and lies down to sleep. He can't, though, and opens his eyes. There's a swarm of bee souls above him, and they make him miss Blondi. She'd love to watch them. Though the dog doesn't speak, the bees say that they're mourning their keeper, the only person who understood them. He was trying to save them from the disease that's killing German bees, but he was unsuccessful. His associates suspect him, and his life is in danger. The bees finally warn the dog that bad things are going to happen here, and that he should leave while he can.

Though the dog still loyally thinks of Himmler's practices, he's too hungry to actually follow them anymore. When the bees remind him of Blondi, it indicates that the dog's bond with his sister is, perhaps, just as strong as his bond with Himmler. Animals, this would suggest, form close bonds with each other, just as they do with people. The bees then show just how connected animals can be to their caretakers. Bees aren't creatures one might think of as being particularly sentient—and here they are, more concerned for their keeper's safety than any of the other animals in this story so far.

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The dog lives in the woods for a long time, maybe a year. He has only animals' souls for company, though he sometimes sees human souls, too. They're not interested in him; they're too busy trying to warn living humans of something. For a while, the dog vows to keep trying to improve his karma, remembering that Buddha spent years in the forest on his way to enlightenment. But though the dog waits for the morning **star** to rise for him like it did for Buddha, it never does.

The human souls are presumably trying to warn friends and family members of the Holocaust, which is ramping up at about this time at the start of World War II. It's comforting for the dog to remember and hang onto Himmler's spiritual beliefs, but he also finds that they're not doing much for him.

Further east, the dog can't resist approaching a group of German soldiers and dogs like him. The other dogs feel sorry for him and help him blend in. They give him **food**. Sometimes, they get horsemeat, like humans. The dog watches as the soldiers record the horses as being shot by enemies before shooting the horses themselves. The dog now believes his soul to be beyond saving, so he eats what he's given. He listens to the other dogs speak admiringly about Blondi and wishes they could play together in the crypt again. He hopes she's happy serving her Master, and he thinks back to their last meeting. Blondi had told him that his Master's female companion didn't like her and even kicked her under the table. But Blondi vowed to endure the abuse as long as she didn't have to leave her Master.

It's natural, this passage suggests, for animals of the same species to want to be together. And being in a group of other dogs allows the dog to witness more hypocrisy on the part of the Nazi soldiers, though again, he doesn't recognize it as such. Given that the soldiers record the horses as being killed by enemies, it seems clear that it's unacceptable to kill the horses themselves—though it's unclear how much this is a matter of recordkeeping, or if the soldiers would actually get in trouble if one of their superiors found out. And Blondi, like the dog, expresses unwavering loyalty for Hitler, to the point where she's witting to put up with physical abuse. Her loyalty isn't serving her, either.

One day, the dog accompanies others with the "special honor" of following the soldiers into combat. None of the trained dogs give the dog instructions, so he runs in the wrong direction until an explosion causes him to lose his hearing. He keeps running until he finds a camp of enemy soldiers. Deaf and in shock, he stays in the enemy camp. But the soldiers there only feed him once. Then, they chain him in an underground cave, where there are dozens of starving dogs chained far enough apart so they can't eat each other. The dog wakes up in the night and sees the dog next to him staring, saliva dripping from his mouth.

It's significant that the dog characterizes accompanying soldiers into battle as a "special honor." Even if he doesn't know exactly what he's fighting for, he can still feel close to Himmler by supporting a cause Himmler supported. The "special honor" of running into battle then seems to pale once the dog ends up with the Allies (the Germans' enemies). The fact that the Allies are starving dogs suggests that unlike the Germans, they don't see these canine companions as deserving of food.

The men bring water for the dogs but no **food**. And every day, they take a dog out and attach a pouch to its back. The chosen dog never comes back. One day, a weak dog next to the dog confirms that he's not trained. She explains that when the men attach the pouch to their backs, they must go look for food beneath German tanks. The dog says that he's German; he knows there's no food under the tanks. The other dog says there's *always* food under the tanks and refuses to say any more. Men take her away two days later.

The female dog reveals that the dogs in this cave are actually anti-tank dogs, dogs that the Soviets and then other Allied forces trained to find food under German tanks—and which ended up functioning as suicide bombers, when they were effective at all. In other words, these dogs don't matter as living beings to the Allies; they're just a convenient way to blow up tanks without putting human lives at risk.

Finally, it's the dog's turn. Men take him outside and attach a heavy pouch to his back. They throw stones at him and make him run toward the German camps. The dog hopes that someone on the German side will risk everything to save him. He picks up a scent and follows it. But the dog is too weak. He can't find their camp. Finally, he collapses and hopes to be reincarnated as a human. The pouch seems to tick as the dog tries to meditate like his Master did. He imagines he's the wolf Fenris, the son of the Norse god of fire, who's so strong that the gods forged a chain to hold him. Fenris will stay chained until the gods' final battle. The dog can hear his Master reciting the story to him in front of the fire.

Even after his banishment and running into battle with the Germans, the dog remains loyal to Germany. This is why he hopes the Germans will save him—he doesn't know that the Germans would probably shoot him if they saw him coming with the bomb. Thinking of himself as Fenris as he dies allows the dog to cast himself in a more powerful role. But even then, he still doesn't imagine himself as free. He'll stay trapped, either as himself or as a version of Fenris, until the gods' mythical final battle—which may never come.

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE THE PEARL WOULD BE HANDED TO ME: SOUL OF MUSSEL (DIED 1941, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)

The mussel Sel first meets Muss after he decides that everything is dead. Sel's friend Gallos introduces him to Muss; Gallos had taken up residence on Sel's pier in the Hudson River to write poetry. Supposedly, Muss grew up poor on a farm out west and somehow made it to New York City. It annoys Muss to be told what to do, what to attach to, and when to "secrete threads from his byssus pit." He left behind a girlfriend because he couldn't stand to "have his spirit stolen bit by bit." They were all looking for a new way of being. Muss told them all about his cross-country journey and insisted that this is the end of "untrue knowledge." Sel agreed.

The title of this story comes from Jack Kerouac's novel On the Road*, and the story itself is a retelling of the novel. Choosing to revisit Kerouac's novel, but with mussel characters instead of humans, allows readers to see the mussels as living beings worthy of consideration. Particularly for readers familiar with* On the Road*, this makes it clear that these mussels are just as interested in freedom and a freewheeling lifestyle as Kerouac's characters are.*

At first, Muss and Gallos talk for 8 or 10 hours straight. Gallos laps up everything Muss says. Sel listens but usually says nothing when they sit down for chats. Muss and Gallos talk about seeing shoelaces that remind them of seaweed, and of how that reminds them of how sad garbage is. Finally, Muss says that he's tired, so they must "stop the machine." Gallos argues until Sel voices his support for Muss—and then, Sel tells them that he thinks they're maniacs, but he wants to see what happens to them.

The phrase "stop the machine" comes from Kerouac's Lonesome Traveler, *a collection of Kerouac's journal entries about his travels.*

Spring arrives. As it gets warmer, Sel knows he has to follow Muss across the country to see how he grew up. They'll go all the way to San Francisco, where Muss has a girl who will host them. Sel can't convince his own girl to accompany them, but Muss counsels that Sel can find a girl elsewhere. Though Sel's girl is unhappy, Sel still moves away. He curses life for being so sad.

Sel's desire to follow Muss across the country drives home the importance of friendships, both for people and for animals. Mussels don't have the relationships with people that other animals in the collection do, but they nevertheless can form bonds with each other within the logic of this story.

Muss, Gallos, and Sel hitch a ride on a cargo ship. Muss says they have to move quickly across the U.S. or they'll dry out. Soon, as Muss promised, they're on the road in a crate, watching the **stars** above them. Midway across the country, they come across zebra mussels that frighten Sel. Gallos reminds him that the zebra mussels are different, and that different is exactly what Sel wants. They attend a party where there will be girls, though they know they can't stay too long in the fresh water or they'll die. But they go to the party anyway, because Muss needs girls like most blue mussels need saltwater.

Again, the constant repetition that the mussels are "on the road" is a nod to the source material (Kerouac's On the Road), while the desire for new experiences and sex speak to the concerns of Kerouac and the rest of the beat generation. The beat generation prized the freewheeling lifestyle that Sel, Muss, and Gallos are currently pursuing—a lifestyle that included alcohol, drugs, and sex. When Sel is initially afraid of the zebra mussels, it suggests that a fear of difference isn't just something that affects humans and may instead be universal.

The mussels meet Muss's cousin on an exposed pipe. They're shocked that there's no space, just zebra mussels. They've almost covered the bottom of the lakes and there are no native mussels left. At the party, Sel asks some girls about the native pearly mussels. The girls close their shells, but Sel persists. He tries to explain that he grew up hearing about the mussels out West. They supposedly had such beautiful shells that the humans who found them named each one as they pulled them out of the water. When Muss is done with his zebra mussel girl, the mussels get into a box of bait. Sel feels like he's starting to dry up and thinks about names of native pearly mussels. Gallos works the names into a little poem, which he recites by shouting.

One of the main ideas of On the Road is that its characters idolize the American West and desperately want to see and experience it. Here, Sel shows that as a mussel, he also idealizes the West—but for him, the West is essential to understanding who he is as a mussel. This passage underscores humans' role in the pearly mussels' absence. Freshwater mussels are often the victims of climate change, so even if Sel isn't aware of it, people are changing his world. Recording the pearly mussels' names, though, is a way to remember a history that seems to be fast disappearing.

The mussels hit the West Coast pretty far north. Being on the road was great, but they're not quite ready for it yet with their soft bodies and their unformed philosophies. They hitch a ride to Bremerton, Washington, where Muss grew up. Muss has told stories about his father, who's been on the farm so long that he'd forgotten he could be free if he'd just let go. But when they get to the farm, they can't find Muss's father. Several old mussels say that Muss's father was harvested, and one says that Muss and his young friends shouldn't take chances. Muss howls with grief, so Gallos and Sel lead him out into the water and avoid the seagulls at night.

Within the logic of this story, mussels have far more freedom than they do in real life—mussels do have some capacity to shift around, but they generally don't have the ability to just let go like Muss thinks is best. But still, within the logic of this story, Muss gets at the idea that what traps people—or animals—are their thoughts. Just as it's possible the dog in "Hundstage" died in part because he wouldn't eat much meat in an attempt to please Himmler, Muss suggests that it's the idea that a person is trapped that traps them.

In the morning, they find the battleship. It's a gorgeous "vessel of adventure," and it's exactly what they're looking for. There's already a community of mussels on the side, so the Sel and his companions decide to join. The toxic stuff the humans put on the hull doesn't keep the mussels off; it just keeps them high. Sel and his friends secrete just enough so they can hang on, but not enough to get stuck in a routine. Their goal is to detach. A mussel named Bluey joined the group at the farm. The four talk often about how to practice non-attachment while depending on attaching to the hull for survival.

The aside about the chemicals on the ship's hull making the mussels high is another nod to the story's source material and the beat generation—drug use was a major element in beat culture. It also suggests that people aren't as skilled at controlling wild animals as they might think they are. And the simple fact that the mussels attach themselves to a ship instead of something natural, like a rock, speaks to the interconnectedness between humans and animals.

Bluey feels lonely all the time. He likes to watch his byssal secretions harden and believes that the mussels' sadness stems from fighting their byssus threads. True bliss, he believes, will come only if they give in and attach. Despite this, Bluey still knows he has to have an adventure before he settles down.

Byssus threads what allows a mussel to hold onto a given surface. It is, in other words, what makes a mussel a mussel. Bluey thus seems to propose that they need to accept their nature as mussels—while Muss seems to think they need to transcend their nature as mussels by moving around.

Muss and Gallos aren't certain about attaching to a U.S. Navy vessel, but Sel doesn't care. He just wants to be moving somewhere interesting. So when the battleship starts to move and the hull vibrates, it feels great. The seascape changes around the mussels, and Sel notices every new thing he passes. Some days, the mussels starve because the ship is going too fast for them to filter, but on other days, the ship slows down, and the mussels gorge themselves. The other mussels tell stories. One talks about being attached to a life raft with a human shipwreck survivor. The man had given up, jumped off, and drowned.

When the mussels get to move around while still staying attached to something (the Navy battleship), it shows that with human help, mussels can, to a degree, transcend their nature as immobile bivalves. And especially when Sel talks about struggling to eat on some days and gorging himself on others, it suggests that in this state, the mussels are beholden to the people steering the ship. The mussels may think they're more in control than they actually are.

When the water is very still, the mussels can sense the men above them. They usually only hear the cooks or the engines, but one day they hear a whistle and someone calling everyone to the deck. The mussels wait, but they're disappointed when the voice dismisses the drill.

Despite being wild animals, the mussels are still very interested in the people on the ship and the possibility of seeing combat. This implies that the war (World War II, given the story's date) will affect the mussels, too, and that humans and animals are intimately connected.

Since Sel and his friends are in the middle of the hull, they don't have a hard time hanging on. A few other mussels fall off when it gets stormy, which always makes Bluey sad. But they lose some and gain others. Blue mussel larvae continually latch on. One grows up into a beautiful girl. Muss loves her, but she's more interested in Sel. Soon, Sel loves her. He's glad that Muss lies awake at night and listens to them talk. Sel tries to talk the girl into spawning, but she's too nervous. When he asks what she wants out of life, she yawns. This offends Sel; she seems too young to be tired. She tells Sel her story, and Sel realizes why this girl is different: she doesn't want to settle down.

Just as the human characters throughout the collection are at the mercy of the natural world, here the mussels are, too. Though they can try to keep themselves attached to the ship's hull by choosing the perfect spot to latch on, their success isn't guaranteed. Again, Sel's attempts to court this girl read as distinctly human, which continues to encourage readers to feel empathy for the book's animals and see the similarities between humans and animals.

The girl disappears one day when Muss and Sel get into a fight over the nature of reality. Bluey gets sad and Gallos gets jealous, but Muss and Sel forgive each other later. Muss makes Sel repeat, "Experience is all." Sel wants to climb into Muss's mind—he's never felt this way about anyone else.

Here, the mussels experience jealousy, sadness, and love, just like humans—yet another moment in which the book suggests that humans and animals aren't as different as they seem.

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Some of the other mussels on the hull start to get nervous. They insist there's a dog whelk trying to invade the mussel bed. They plan to tether it, but Bluey insists it's wrong to starve another creature. Both Muss and Gallos support the cause, but Sel doesn't know what he feels. He stays put while Muss and Gallos join the hunt, and he wishes he'd gone too.

Dog whelks are predatory sea snails. The mussels' fear that this creature will eat them (and their choice to tie it up and leave it for dead) shows that these animals are capable of the same kind of fear and cruelty as their human counterparts.

Another girl comes along to distract Sel. They become physically intimate, but Sel is too sad to continue. After a while, she asks if Sel thinks it means something that he and his friends are all "on the same boat." Sel insists the sea is a "great leveler." He continues that sometimes he hates it here, but he can't decide if he wants to stay here forever or run away.

Saying that the mussels are all "on the same boat" is a play on the idiom "in the same boat." But in this case, the mussels are all literally attached to the same boat and *in the same general situation.*

In the morning, the girl tells Sel to stay hungry. He's onto something, living so spontaneously. She assures him that he'll get there if he can survive, but there's no virtue in moving quickly toward death. She advises him to live slowly and die old. When Sel insists that he's just one of millions of mussels, she says that he's his own little world. The girl moves on and not long after, Muss and Gallos return. They'd tied up the dog whelk and left it to die. Hearing this, Bluey doesn't talk to them for days, so Sel makes a speech. He insists that they can't do that sort of thing when they're sailing. They have to live together, so they have to pitch in and not mess things up for everyone else.

Sel's responses to this female mussel seem to show that he doesn't think he matters much. In his mind, he's just one in a world full of mussels—and indeed, it's not often that people are asked to care about an individual mussel, like Sel; people usually think of mussels in the collective and as food. But later, when Sel makes his speech to his friends urging them all to cooperate, it again shows that these mussels are very human-like. They, like people, have to watch their behavior and act kindly to protect and maintain their friendships.

The ship stops in Astoria, Oregon. It's there for a few weeks, giving the mussels time to get in trouble in the bay. Bluey, though, gets homesick and decides to return to the farm. He misses sharing food with his family and knowing he can latch onto something for good. Sel, Muss, and Gallos don't understand Bluey's feelings, but they sadly let him go. After Bluey's departure, Sel gets restless, but fortunately the ship moves out a few days later. The battleship is moving slowly north and west, though, so the mussels mope. On this ship, they're never going to get to San Francisco. Sel says something that he'd be happy to die in San Francisco in a soup, but Muss insists there's no glory in death—just nothingness.

Bluey loves his family and wants to be close to them, and he finds the familiar environment of his home farm comforting. It's possible to read his choice to go home as an embrace of his true mussel nature—back at the farm, he's going to attach to something, like a normal mussel. Sel, Muss, and Gallos, though, have to confront again that they don't have the kind of power to dictate their movement that they'd like. They're attached to a ship, so they must go where it goes.

Sel, Gallos, and Muss talk about nothingness. Muss insists they turn bright orange when they're cooked. He also insists that humans don't eat mussels' byssus threads and don't consider them to be part of a mussel's body, even though to mussels, the threads are the root of who they are. Gallos says that if they find themselves in a pot, they should keep their shells closed so the humans won't eat them. Sel thinks this is useless—if they're dead, they're dead.

When Gallos warns his friends to stay closed to avoid being eaten, he misses an important point: if a mussel is in a pot of water in someone's kitchen, they're going to die anyway. This is what Sel realizes is true—once a mussel ends up in a person's bucket, their chances at living are next to nothing. People sometimes have absolute power over animals.

A few weeks later, the battleship slows down in water that's warm and salty. The ship puts down anchor in a harbor with many other battleships like it. Muss floats around and returns with the news that they're in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Weirdly, the temperature and salt brings on a mass spawning. Every mussel spews sperm or eggs into the water with wild abandon. They spawn and eat as much as they can, getting fat and happy.

The detail that the mussels are in Pearl Harbor in 1941 is ominous foreshadowing for readers—it seems as though the mussels will be there to experience the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Readers can then assume that the mussels' lives will soon end, all because of a human conflict in which they have no stakes.

Eventually, the water looks milky from all the larval mussels. After a few months, though, those drifters settle down as juveniles amongst the other mussels. It dawns on Sel, Muss, and Gallos that they've wasted their freedom—now, they're the elders in the colony. The juveniles keep coming up and asking about the search for meaning. Sel finds this ridiculous. Life is about the journey—he can't fathom that the next generation thinks life should have meaning. Gallos has a nervous breakdown. He moves in with a radical colony, but it doesn't reinvigorate him. He becomes huge and stops writing poetry, so Muss and Sel stop visiting.

Even though mussels don't care for their young like people do, it's still a major shock for Muss, Sel, and Gallos to realize that they inadvertently became elders in the community. The youth expect them to be able to answer their questions about the world and the way it is, just as human children look to their parents and other adult mentors for guidance. The idea that life shouldn't have meaning seems to fit particularly well with Sel, as a mussel, given how little he can control about his life.

Then, Muss and Sel meet the lobster. The mussels are frightened at first, but once they start talking, they learn that the lobster is on a journey to have experiences, just like them. He's been around the world, and he doesn't eat the mussels because he's fasting. He wants to think more clearly. The lobster insists that the war will arrive here soon, so the mussels should be careful—mussels will be the food of choice once humans start rationing meat.

When the lobster warns the mussels that people will soon try to eat them, the book alludes to the fact that during World War II, due to rationing, mussels did indeed become popular meat alternatives. These animals become, once again, just a source of sustenance for people who—as in "Red Peter"—couldn't deal without eating meat.

One morning, the lobster gives Sel and Muss a speck of something that will help them "see beyond the here and now." Sel hallucinates that he's stuck in a rainbow. Muss and the lobster talk incessantly as Sel silently watches the colors. He occasionally hears the lobster say that Europeans can only import philosophy to America now. The lobster says he stalked Sartre for a while, hoping Sartre would put him on a leash and take him for walks. Later, Sel starts listening again and hears Muss and the lobster talking about mussels' poetry. They're all so high that they laugh when a starfish moves in, hoping to eat a mussel. At the last minute, the lobster scares it away. Then he gives the mussels another speck.

Lobsters are far more mobile than mussels, so it stands to reason that they have more power than their bivalve counterparts. It's possible to see this when the lobster waits until the last second to scare away the starfish, a common mussel predator. The mussels, as mostly immobile shellfish, have to rely on the whims of other creatures—like other sea animals and humans—to survive. The drug use in this passage is also an overt reference to On the Road; psychoactive drugs were a large part of the beat generation's culture and appear throughout the book.

Muss goes silent, Sel's drug trip becomes grayscale, and the lobster sings something sad as church bells ring on land. Something enters the water and comes toward them fast. The mussels and the lobster admire it until it hits the battleship. The lobster dies instantly; the hull that Muss and Sel are attached to blasts out into the port. The ship shudders as bombs hit it again and again. Suddenly, the water is teeming with things that shouldn't be there—helmets, legs, and arms.

The "something" that enters the water is the first bomb dropped in the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Even though the mussels and the lobster aren't part of World War II (aside from their potential role as food once rationing kicks in), they can't avoid getting roped in. War affects everyone and everything—even the animals.

Sel thinks they should embrace this moment of collapse, but they're too freaked out. A man with no legs tries to climb onto Sel's bit of hull, and Sel feels like the force of the bombs is going to make his body implode. The water heats up from the oil fires. Remembering what Gallos said about surviving in boiling water, Sel tries to close his shell. He can't; half of it is gone. He and Muss know what Muss has to do to survive. He must drop off and sink to the cooler water below. Muss lets go and lands in amongst the mussels they created.

Though the story focuses on Sel's experience of the bombing, this passage underscores the human consequences of the bombing. Sel only mentions this one injured man (and the disembodied limbs in the previous passage), but they're certainly not the only people dying in Pearl Harbor alongside the mussels. And Sel isn't spared—not only is he going to cook in the ocean, but he also has no way to protect himself after losing part of his shell.

Sel panics, but calms down as he thinks of the sunset over the Hudson River. He used to watch it and think that nobody knows what's going to happen, aside from that they'll grow old. He panics again when he thinks that he wasn't supposed to die like this. Where will Muss be without Sel looking at him? He wishes everyone good luck with the "spawning, living, and the dying." He thinks of Muss until he dies.

Sel wishes everyone good luck with their lives and interestingly doesn't specify that he's only talking about mussels. Living, dying, and having sex are things that all creatures—human and animal—do, and Sel acknowledges that here. Again, animals and people aren't so different; their base concerns are more or less the same.

PLAUTUS: A MEMOIR OF MY YEARS ON EARTH AND LAST DAYS IN SPACE: SOUL OF TORTOISE (DIED 1968, SPACE)

One spring morning in 1913, the tortoise Plautus wakes from her winter sleep. She decides to run away from her owner, the hermit Oleg, and present herself to the Tolstoy family next door. It takes three months for Plautus to reach the Tolstoys' steps. Plautus is exhausted and hopes that Leo Tolstoy will want to keep her as a pet. At this point she's in her early middle age, and her shell is still gorgeous.

Just as the mussels in the previous story could take control of their lives and move across the country, Plautus does much the same thing when she decides to head for the Tolstoys' house.

As Plautus waits, she regrets leaving Oleg. He lives in a house nestled in the next-door noble family's gardens. For 50 years, he's been their "ornamental hermit." The family believed he was old when they hired him, but he was only 30. Per his contract, he's not supposed to wash or cut his hair or nails and can only say one Latin phrase: *Vir sapit qui pauca loquitur*, or, *It is a wise man who speaks little*. He's supposed to walk the grounds when the family has guests, looking melancholy. In return, he gets **food** and free lodging. Now, 50 years later, the man is still there—and he's completely insane. The family doesn't see the irony in their ornamental hermit having become the real thing. They threaten to kick him out often, but he just replies with his Latin phrase.

This Latin phrase suggests that animals—who, in general, don't speak—are perhaps the wisest beings of all. Indeed, Plautus makes the case in this passage that the noble family that hired Oleg, at least, is far from wise. Rather, they're willing to possibly take advantage of a young man if it means they can make themselves look better. And it's worth noting that they do this in part by paying Oleg with food, which is a symbol that reappears throughout the book. Food isn't just something that people can use to manipulate other animals—they can use it to manipulate people, too.

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In private, Oleg isn't so wise. He copes with his solitude by reading and talking to Plautus, but his reading is arbitrary. This means that he leaps from interest to interest without internalizing anything. Early on, he becomes obsessed with the Ancient Greeks and Romans. He names Plautus about this time, after the Roman playwright. Oleg builds himself a lyre out of an old tortoise shell he found and pretends he's Orpheus entrancing the beast (Plautus) with his playing.

Oleg is clearly suffering from his solitude, and Plautus doesn't seem to be quite enough to keep him company, given that she notes how he is mad and prone to flights of fancy. This might suggest that there's a limit to how beneficial animals can be to people, at least when people are limited to only having contact with animals.

Then, Oleg moves on to the argument that Aesop wasn't Greek at all and was, instead, an Ethiopian slave. His tales, in this system, are adapted from African tales. Oleg puts coal dust on his face and tells Plautus Aesop's tales about the tortoise. Plautus learns she has a shell because her ancestors didn't go to Zeus's wedding supper, so Zeus made the tortoise carry his home on his back forever. Eagles like to drop tortoises from great heights and then eat them because a tortoise long ago asked an eagle to teach him to fly.

The particulars of Aesop's stories show that he (and other ancient storytellers) was trying to explain why the world is the way it is. He's trying to figure out how animals came to be the way they are—which is something that, on the whole, Only the Animals *does too.*

Oleg enters a Far Eastern phase. He uses the tortoise shell for the Chinese art of divining. Rather than the shell's cracks telling him the future, though, the shell completely breaks in half. Plautus watches warily, afraid for her life. But lucky for her, Oleg latches onto the ancient Chinese belief that the universe sits on a tortoise's back. Even better, the Chinese believe that the tortoise is a divine animal. Next, Oleg finds Darwin. He thinks of Plautus as a living fossil and proof of evolution. Tortoises, according to Darwin, evolved a shell to protect themselves and eventually, it fused to the tortoises' backbones.

When Plautus sees Oleg research multiple philosophies that all somehow reference tortoises, it speaks to how intertwined tortoises have been with people throughout history. Indeed, the belief that the universe rests on a tortoise's back elevates tortoises to a revered position—that of the creature that makes the universe what it is. Taken alongside the rest of the collection, this suggests that animals make the world what it is.

Then, a few years before Plautus runs away, Oleg discovers Christianity. He takes everything literally, so he's disturbed to discover that tortoises are unclean and symbolize ignorance and evil. They move slowly because they carry a huge burden of sin on their backs. Plautus goes to sleep that fall and when she wakes in the spring, Oleg is still reading his Bible. She vows to head for the Tolstoys'.

Different belief systems view tortoises differently. But when Plautus sees Oleg seemingly becoming too interested in Christianity—a faith that, in her understanding, isn't friendly to tortoises—she shows she has the power to take her fate into her own hands. She can choose to move and find someone who will appreciate her.

Unfortunately, when Plautus arrives at the Tolstoys' house, Leo Tolstoy is already dead. Tolstoy's wife, however, decides to give Plautus to her daughter, Countess Alexandra, who took to her bed to grieve. A servant comes up with a terrarium so Plautus can live in Alexandra's bedroom, and the maid keeps the terrarium wonderfully clean and warm. Alexandra doesn't care much about Plautus at first. She spends her days in bed, reading—and the whole first summer that Plautus is there, Alexandra doesn't wash or brush her hair. It cleans itself every week.

The fact that Alexandra doesn't care much about Plautus at first shows that just as with people, it can take time for animals and their human caregivers to warm up to each other. Then, Plautus's insistence that Alexandra's hair "cleans itself" on a weekly basis harkens back to the dog's assertion that he knew who Krishna and Arjuna were: vegetarians. Animals might be smarter than they usually get credit for being, but they still have very limited perspectives—Alexandra is, no doubt, washing her hair out of Plautus's sight weekly (or having a maid wash it for her).

Rather than being dismayed that she ended up with another hermit, Plautus is fascinated. Alexandra's "female solitude" is so different from Oleg's. For the first time, Plautus starts to think of her gender (Oleg believed she was male, and for her own amusement she'd occasionally mount rocks to make him feel better about not having sex himself). It takes a long time, but eventually, Plautus decides that Alexandra's solitude is "a political solitude." Oleg suffered from isolation, and Alexandra suffers too. But she suffers differently, and choosing to be alone can be blissful. Alexandra takes no visitors, so many people leave her flowers, believing she's ill. But she reads voraciously and gives all her energy to her books.

As Plautus observes and thinks about Alexandra's solitude, she shows that she, as a tortoise, is just as interested in intellectual pursuits as any person might be. However, it's worth considering that Plautus also thinks of Alexandra and Oleg as both being totally alone—when really, they had her around. This implies that neither the people nor Plautus herself think that she counts as a companion. While the story often aims to show how animals and humans are similar, this passage suggests that animals occupy a very different space than people, where they're both lesser but have certain privileges (like being able to live with a hermit).

One day, curious about what Alexandra is so interested in reading, Plautus climbs up onto the bed with her. Alexandra doesn't jump when she sees Plautus on the bed, and she even laughs when Plautus tries to read the books' titles. She picks the tortoise up, nestles her in the pillows, and starts to read aloud. Plautus eats what she can of Alexandra's lunch when it arrives and listens intently. They're reading Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and through her, Plautus learns why Alexandra chose her period of solitude. Plautus notes that most people aren't interested in other people's literary epiphanies, just like people don't want to hear about each other's vacations. These days, people feel like authors are speaking to them and them alone. But at the time that Alexandra read with Plautus, everyone shared in books' magic.

Alexandra no doubt laughs at Plautus trying to read the titles because she believes Plautus can't *read the titles. It may seem humorously person-like for Plautus to do that, rather than like a legitimate attempt to learn. But in the rest of the passage, Plautus makes it clear that she's just as intelligent as any person.*

Alexandra reads electrifying passages, such as one from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's speech to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee in 1892. The speech was titled "The Solitude of Self," and in it, she suggested that women are like Robinson Crusoe on an island. Alexandra isn't sure what Stanton means, but she decides that it's impossible to ignore that women are alone. If women can develop their mind's resources in solitude, they'll never be alienated from themselves. Since Alexandra grew up exposed to many different ways of thinking, this is reassuring. Plautus thinks Alexandra withdraws into solitude to test herself.

While before Plautus seemed to suggest that people withdraw into solitude by choice or for money (as with Oleg), here she's introduced to the idea that every being on the planet is, to some degree, alone. And this is especially true for women at this point in history (around 1913; Tolstoy died in 1910), when women didn't have the rights that they generally do today.

However, Alexandra also tells Plautus that Tolstoy had gone back and forth between engaging and detaching from other people. Before his death, he'd renounced all his possessions, including his literary copyrights, and Alexandra had helped him leave home secretly. She had no idea he'd die of pneumonia days later. Even worse, Alexandra now keeps her father's archive, since her mother made sure that Tolstoy couldn't give up his copyright. This left Alexandra with a dilemma. Her father had wanted to abandon the world, and so Alexandra chose the only kind of solitude she could, as a woman: she pretends to be sick so she can be alone. When her mother knocks on the door, Alexandra mutters to herself that she has to run away.

Plautus touches again on the fact that women in 1913 didn't have much power—here, for instance, pretending to be sick was the only way Alexandra could conceivably be alone. In this way, Plautus aligns women in this time period with animals more broadly, given that they don't always have agency over their own lives. But again, Plautus's ability to choose to leave Oleg and come live with the Tolstoys, for instance, suggests that animals at least have more power than Plautus might think.

Fall approaches. Plautus feels herself slowing down and one day, Alexandra puts Plautus in her hibernation box. The tortoise burrows down and falls asleep until March. At that point, Plautus returns to Alexandra's room. Alexandra cleans Plautus's body and clips her claws, but something is wrong. Her hair is clean and braided, and now she smells of soaps and perfumes. She also no longer spends her days in bed and instead, goes outside and reads letters. Plautus confirms that Alexandra is done hibernating when the maid takes Plautus outside to join Alexandra at a party. Plautus watches Alexandra eat through cakes next to a smitten young man. Later, Plautus learns that this young man helped Alexandra remember Tolstoy's commitment to helping needy people—and reminded her that her solitude must lead to engagement.

It's difficult to detect any betrayal or upset in Plautus's tone. She seems to accept that, as an animal, she can't always make people do the things she wants them to do. However, Alexandra also models good animal care when, despite her transformation, she still attends to Plautus's needs and makes a point to care for her. Plautus depends on Alexandra for her livelihood, and so Alexandra demonstrates here how to properly care for a pet as one's own life changes.

There's a war going on, and Alexandra knows she needs to emulate Tolstoy's devotion to nonviolence, social reform, and service. By the end of the summer, Alexandra elopes with her lover. She works in hospitals when he's sent to the front and leaves Plautus to live comfortably in the Tolstoy home for the next decade. Plautus passes the years happily until 1929, when she wakes in horrible pain. She's in a box addressed to Virginia Woolf in England.

This passage spans several conflicts; Russia joined World War I in 1914, which is presumably when Alexandra is working as a nurse. Then, Plautus seems to live quietly through Josef Stalin's rise until 1929, as Stalin began to amass power and take control of the then Soviet Union. She, like many animals, couldn't escape being affected by conflict.

Virginia Woolf knows Plautus is in pain the moment she opens the box. She bathes Plautus in warm salt baths and feeds her fresh food. Virginia understands that a tortoise's shell is alive and sensitive, so she's horrified that someone carved words in Plautus's shell. In the box with Plautus, Virginia finds a copy of one of Tolstoy's short stories in Russian. When a friend translates it, it turns out to be Alexandra's prison diary—she'd been imprisoned during the Russian Revolution and asked her husband to smuggle her diary out of the country. Under Plautus's infected shell is a note from Alexandra to Virginia, begging Virginia to care for Plautus and the diary and complimenting Virginia's writing.

Virginia Woolf was one of the most influential writers of the 20th century; it seems fitting that after trying to become Leo Tolstoy's pet, Plautus finally ends up with a famous writer as her owner. This passage draws another parallel between animals and humans, suggesting that they both suffer in wartime. Plautus may survive her infected shell thanks to Woolf's careful care, but so many men who suffered injuries during these conflicts died due to infection.

Alexandra's husband had no idea the carving would hurt; he thought carving Tolstoy's words into Plautus's shell would give Plautus notoriety and ensure her survival. In a way, he was right—Virginia adores Plautus and soon, all her friends stop by to meet Plautus and reads Tolstoy's last words: *I love many things, I love all people*. When Virginia opens the box and discovers Plautus, she checks out as many books on tortoises as she can. She reads bits aloud to her husband, Leonard. He listens with good humor to passages about tortoise reproduction (female tortoises decide when and if to fertilize eggs, they can choose to reabsorb fertilized eggs, and they're indifferent to male tortoises' overtures).

It's ironic that Alexandra's husband carves these particular words into Plautus's back. Carving words into a tortoise's back—which causes the tortoise great pain—would suggest that a tortoise isn't one of the things or people Tolstoy loves. Virginia's attempt to figure out how to care for Plautus, then, stands in sharp contrast. Rather than show her love for Plautus by making uninformed choices about her care, she tries to learn as much as she can about the creature that now depends on her.

In private, Leonard calls Virginia "Goat." Virginia calls her sister "Dolphin," and Virginia's friends are all delighted when they receive an animal nickname. Virginia has always loved animals—her first published writing was an obituary for the family dog. When Plautus arrives in Virginia's life, Virginia is working on a biography about Flush, a cocker spaniel owned by Elizabeth Barrett. Virginia often reads bits of the book aloud to Plautus and senses that Plautus doesn't appreciate the ironic style most people use to write in animals' voices. The book is cheeky, but it's still moving. Plautus is very impressed by the passages in which Virginia tries to understand how dogs experience the world through smell.

Plautus doesn't appreciate the "ironic" style Woolf seems to play with when writing about Flush, but several stories in Only the Animals *employ an ironic voice, too. And this collection is also filled with instances in which Dovey dives into how animals experience things, just as Woolf does in her Flush biography.*

When Virginia finishes the book a few years later, she takes Plautus with her to her readings and lectures. She always starts by mentioning her favorite Russian authors (Gogol and Tolstoy), and then says that the two authors both dared to write from an animal's perspective. She then tells the crowd about Plautus, mentions that Alexandra is now in America, and wonders what stories Plautus could tell about Tolstoy. (She clearly doesn't know that Plautus missed Tolstoy by a few years.) Then, she'd read from *Flush: A Biography* without it seeming ridiculous. After a glance at Plautus, Virginia always reads Plautus's favorite passage in the book. In it, she shows that Elizabeth and Flush are equally unable to understand the other—but are still connected.

It's notable that Woolf mentions that both Gogol and Tolstoy wrote about animals from the animal's perspective. This situates Only the Animals *in a long history of authors writing about animals, from animals' perspectives. And later in the passage, when Plautus talks about the passage that Virginia reads from the Flush biography, it suggests that people will never truly be able to understand how animals see the world.*

Plautus is grateful to be Virginia's pet tortoise and not someone else's. In London in the 1930s, people want tortoises—and it's a brutal trade. Tortoises arrive from North Africa with broken limbs and shells, and most tortoises who've made the journey don't survive for more than a week. People make their tortoises race in pubs, and the authorities discover one wealthy person's tortoise—its shell encrusted with emeralds and rubies—abandoned on a flight. But for Plautus, life is good. Virginia bans tortoiseshell objects and welcomes guests' poems about tortoises. And the entire time, Plautus watches Woolf write, just as Flush watched Elizabeth Barrett.

Here, Plautus underscores that she's lucky to have such a competent caretaker. Indeed, as she explains, tortoises are popular pets, and this creates a situation ripe for animal abuse. As she describes the way that other people manage their pet tortoises, she also suggests that these owners don't think of their tortoises as living beings. They seem to be more like status symbols than animals deserving of care and kindness.

This all comes to an end with the London Blitz. One moment Plautus is sunning herself; the next, she's buried in rubble. Plautus hides in her shell, calm and assured that rescuers will find her (the Woolfs have a card pinned to the door, saying a tortoise lives there). She thinks of the rescue dogs that Virginia was so interested in and imagines them digging for her. She knows that Virginia will be desperate to get Plautus back. Somehow, the parrot next door ends up near Plautus. It's still in its cage, alive, and repeats "This is my night out!" until it dies. Plautus remembers Virginia saying that the Nazis burn swastikas into tortoises' backs, and her own carved shell aches.

Because of the strong relationship that Plautus has with Virginia Woolf, she feels certain that she'll be rescued. While Oleg suggested earlier that her shell was a handicap or a punishment, now it's her saving grace—she survives in part because she has her shell to protect her. And though Plautus survives this experience, the fact that the parrot doesn't points to the notion that many animals didn't survive the Blitz. Human conflicts like World War II, the story suggests, aren't just human *conflicts, since they affect animals and the natural world, too.*

Trapped in the rubble, Plautus thinks of Virginia feeding her flower petals according to her mood and what the flowers mean. Roses mean love, for instance, and columbines represent sadness. She remembers Virginia reading Bataille's essay in which he said "love smells like death." Remembering this, Plautus mentally says goodbye to Virginia. She doesn't mourn five months later, when Virginia drowns herself—though she watches Virginia compose her final love note to Leonard.

In real life, Woolf's mental health declined following losing her home in the Blitz; Leonard also joined the Home Guard at this point, which Woolf didn't appreciate. As Plautus watches Woolf inch closer to taking her own life, she realizes that neither she nor the other people in Woolf's life can inspire in Woolf the will to live. All Plautus can do is bear witness—and tell readers her story.

In her will, Virginia dictates that Plautus should go to Eric Blair, better known as George Orwell. She heard that he has a small menagerie on his family's farm and hoped Plautus would be welcome. But unfortunately, George and Plautus don't like each other. The menagerie turns out to be two animals: a rooster named Henry Ford and a poodle named Marx, which fight constantly. Though George is one of the first to understand the evils of fascism, he's not good company.

Though Virginia left Plautus to George Orwell with the best of intentions, this passage shows that good intentions aren't always enough to ensure an animal's good treatment. The strained dynamic between Plautus and George provides a sharp contrast from the relationship of mutual respect that Plautus and Virginia (and Plautus and Alexandra) shared. The best relationships between humans and animals, the book shows, are marked by this reciprocity and respect.

Now, Plautus tries to be proud that she saw George working on *Animal Farm*, but at the time, she's depressed and doesn't care. What she remembers most is the smell of potato blossoms, as George spends his time helping the Women's Land Army girls dig potatoes. George briefly tries to train young men, but ends up wounding two trainees. To make things worse, publishers refuse to print *Animal Farm*, a thinly veiled critique of Stalinism. Right after the war ends, *Animal Farm* is published, George's wife dies, and George decides to take Plautus "tramping." Despite publishing *Down and Out in Paris and London* years ago, George still goes slumming regularly.

The Women's Land Army was a real-life military organization comprised of British women, who worked on farms to keep food production up while British men were fighting in continental Europe. Orwell wrote his book Down and Out in Paris and London *after spending time posing as a tramp so he could learn how the poor lived.*

Disguised as the tramp Burton, George takes Plautus to a lecture by the philosopher Bertrand Russell. He sits near the front with Plautus next to him—and his stench means no one sits nearby. Plautus is embarrassed, but becomes entranced as Mr. Russell talks about the moon orbiting the earth and the earth orbiting the sun. At the end of the lecture, George stands and insists it's fake—the earth is held up by a massive tortoise. Mr. Russell has clearly heard this before and asks what the tortoise is standing on. George insists it's "tortoises all the way down." With a sigh, Mr. Russell dismisses the audience. Plautus is ashamed, but after this lecture, she dreams of seeing **space**.

Orwell's insistence that it's "tortoises all the way down" refers back to the beginning of the story, when Oleg studied different philosophies and came across this one. Though this part of the story takes place decades later, Orwell shows that people are still asking the same questions—and he also shows that animals still play a major role in people's understanding of the world and how it works. Bertrand Russell, however, introduces Plautus to a more scientific way of thinking about the world, reinforcing her intelligence and her ability to think critically.

Soon after this, Plautus runs away from George. She spends a number of years slumming and even spends 10 years at a wildlife park. The staff paints numbers on tortoises, but they don't paint one on Plautus. The food is decent and Plautus lays a few eggs, but she knows her destiny is waiting. One day, she hears the park staff discussing the Cold War and the **space** race between the Soviets and the Americans. They're trying to put humans on the moon. And the first "proxy astronauts" are none other than animals like dogs, fruit flies, and mice. Plautus knows she needs to get in front of the Americans or the Soviets; either would be fine, as long as they'll send her to space.

For Plautus, being a "proxy astronaut" would allow her to explore her newfound love of space and the stars in the ultimate way. In reality, these missions were extremely dangerous, and many of these early animal astronauts died. As in other sections of the book, here animals are used as tools to further humans' goals.

Plautus heads for the theater district in London, where she knows she'll at least find communists. A British playwright named Tom Stoppard adopts her. He's working on a play about a philosopher who steps on his pet tortoise and kills him, while the philosopher's wife watches two British astronauts land on the moon. Stoppard recognizes the carving in Plautus's shell as Tolstoy's last words, so he takes her to parties with him. Plautus makes a point to meet people in black turtlenecks (they're usually communists or Americans), and one of Stoppard's friends notices this. He also notices how intently Plautus listens to Stoppard talk about his fake television scenes. This friend successfully convinces another friend to take Plautus back to the USSR with him and present her to the Soviet **Space** Program. He thinks the Soviets have a better chance of winning the race.

Two of Tom Stoppard's plays, [Arcadia](https://www.litcharts.com) and Jumper*, inspire Plautus's story, and Plautus takes her name from a tortoise character in [Arcadia](https://www.litcharts.com). This passage suggests that Tom is working on what will become* Jumper *when he adopts Plautus in the story.*

The Soviets send animals into space constantly, but most of the animals die. The Soviets are desperate to beat the Americans and get a man on the moon. They've heard that the Americans sent black mice to space that returned gray—a fate that would be undesirable for humans. Plautus starts her training with the space biomedical expert, Dr. Yazdovsky. She's pleased to be around Russians again and quickly becomes Dr. Yazdovsky's favorite. He nicknames her Bert after an American cartoon character named Bert the Turtle. It's a nasty cartoon—but the nickname means that Dr. Yazdovsky can sing the Bert the Turtle song whenever he sees Plautus.

This passage implicitly criticizes humans for treating animals as disposable—they're used as tools to further each country's own advancements rather than treated as living beings. (Though Dr. Yazdovsky's choice to nickname Plautus does complicate this.) And though Plautus clearly wants to go to space, the passage subtly raises the question if the other animals did, too.

Plautus hopes that Dr. Yazdovsky's singing will get her sent to **space** sooner, but during the early and mid-1960s the Soviets are more interested in dogs. The American send monkeys to space, but Dr. Yazdovsky prefers small, white, female dogs. Most of the dogs tolerate the training well, though most of them also run away just before takeoff. It's like they sense they're going to be shot into space. Plautus watches one dog run away right before her launch. Dr. Yazdovsky panics—he's afraid the wolves nearby will eat her, and he's a kind man. But when the dog returns, Dr. Yazdovsky lets her lick his face and shoots her and another dog into low orbit. Later, they find the dogs dead in their capsule.

This passage confirms that not all the animals in the space program think it's such an honor to go space the way Plautus. These dogs, for instance, seem to know that being launched into space puts them in grave danger, and many of them choose to run away—and possibly be eaten by wolves—seeing that as the lesser of the two evils. It's significant that Plautus still expresses very little compassion for the dogs—instead, she praises Dr. Yazdovsky for his compassion for the animals while they're still on the ground. This mirrors the way the dog in "Hundstage" spoke of Himmler being kind because he advocated for animals' rights, not understanding what other terrible things Himmler did.

Plautus wishes she'd met Laika, the first animal to orbit the earth. She was a stray whom Dr. Yazdovsky put into Sputnik II in 1957. She was happy in **space** for a few hours, but then the capsule overheated and she died. Most of the dogs, like Laika, are one-way passengers. Plautus talks to the dogs who return whenever she gets the chance. She's fascinated by solitude after spending her life with Oleg, Alexandra, Virginia, and even George—and space, to her, represents a chance to be truly alone.

Plautus doesn't express any sadness for the animals who die in space, only admiration for the ones who lived. In this way, Plautus's attitude is fairly humanlike—the cost of space exploration doesn't much bother her, so long as space exploration can be increasingly successful. And her quest to explore solitude by going to space also reads as a fairly human endeavor, showing again how similar animals and people can be.

Plautus offers a transcript of an interview she did with two dogs, Veterok and Ugolyok, who survived 22 days in **space**. Veterok says she planned to think about her work once she was in space, but she couldn't think clearly. Ugolyok concurs; she couldn't control her thoughts and even began to hallucinate. Veterok adds that while she was in space, she learned to empathize with Enos, the American monkey who went to space. Supposedly he went to space and did everything he was supposed to—but due to mechanical trouble, the electric pads on his feet shocked him. In the photos after he returned to Earth, Enos is angry. In space, Veterok wanted to bite someone's face off at the thought of being punished for doing the right thing.

Veterok and Ugolyok confirm that going to space is a painful and unsettling experience for the animals—and unlike human astronauts, they don't get to opt in or out. But like their human counterparts, the dogs also show that they're dedicated to their work. When Veterok includes the anecdote about Enos, what makes her angry is presumably being faced with the reality of people's power over her and other animals. Animals, she realizes, can do everything right and do everything humans tell them to and still be at risk of dying or being abused because they don't have the ability to advocate for themselves.

Plautus asks if the dogs got along in **space**. They didn't; they became territorial and selfish. Then, Plautus asks if the beginning or the end of the trip was the hardest. Veterok says the middle was the worst. It was monotonous, and she was enraged. Ugolyok confirms they started to irritate each other. She doubted why she was there, and even now she struggles to take life seriously after seeing the earth looking like a colorful ball. She thought going to space would be liberating, but now everything seems like a sick joke. Finally, Plautus asks for advice for other dogs set to go to space. Veterok encourages others to think of the other dog first and to be adaptable. Ugolyok tells others to get physically and psychologically fit. Going to space won't solve one's personal problems, and will only make them worse.

The fact that Ugolyok has such a hard time taking anything seriously once she gets back to earth is a condemnation of the people who sent her to space without her consent. She had no way of knowing that she'd experience these effects—just as Plautus clearly has no idea what going to space actually entails, given that the dogs answer her questions in ways she doesn't seem to expect.

In 1968, the engineers start to consider sending animals other than dogs to space. They decide to send a spaceship into orbit around the moon—and they decide that Plautus will go. She's a better choice than dogs because she eats less, and Dr. Yazdovsky hopes she'll hibernate. Plautus vows not to hibernate—she's going to **space**, after all. So on September 15, 1968, Plautus takes her place in the cabin with some mealworms, two spiders, seeds, and some plants. She settles next to the porthole and feels good after her bath in iodine.

Here, the story veers further away from historical fact (Veterok and Ugolyok were real dogs who went to space, as was Laika) by sending Plautus to space by herself. The first tortoise in space was actually one of a pair and survived the journey. Changing the story in this way makes it seem even more tragic that Plautus dies—something readers can reasonably assume is coming, given that every animal narrator has died at the end of their chapter. She dies thinking she's doing this for herself, but in reality, she also dies to advance science for people who are willing to let her die.

As the rocket propels the capsule, Plautus thinks of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's words and is grateful to have her own thoughts to keep her company in space. Her vision dims and she blacks out. When she comes to, she no longer feels secure. Instead, she feels like she's been banished. She feels like the "original scapegoat" of the Bible, who carried the sins of Israel on its back. Plautus's shell feels heavy, like she's carrying "the weight of all human sin." She wonders what demon is waiting for her behind the moon.

The original scapegoat was an actual goat. It's telling that Plautus feels now like the tortoise in Christian imagery, that carries a burden of sin on its shell. The experience of actually going to space, this shows, is unsettling enough to totally upend Plautus's personal philosophy. Where she once looked forward to going, she now feels like people are abusing her.

Once the main engine cuts off, Plautus knows she's not going to fall back to earth. She's nearly at orbital speed, and microgravity feels awesome. She hallucinates music, vomits, and feels her blood pooling in her head and along the top of her shell. She wonders why humans see so many animals in the **stars**, and who joined up the first dots. For a while, Plautus doesn't think. When she thinks again, she wonders for a long time—perhaps days—if she's blind. She sees flashing lights, which she knows means she's passing through radiation belts. Plautus can see the earth below, looking like a marble. There's no tortoise underneath it.

Humans see animals in constellations in part because animals have been important figures in human progress throughout the ages. Dogs and cats, for instance, have been domesticated and a part of human civilization for thousands of years, while people have been hunting wild animals for even longer. The stars, then, emerge as a symbol for the enduring relationship between people and animals. To humans, animals are friends, food, and in Plautus's case, research subjects.

Plautus watches a spider squeeze out of the capsule and into **space**. She feels like she and the spiders are just like the first humans to sail on the ocean and leave land behind. Someday, when humans arrive on Titan, they'll find pairs of animals and one ancient Russian tortoise. The curse of Earth's creatures, Plautus thinks, is to spread life around, and leave it behind, all while making a mess. Outside, she can smell ice. She thinks of the escaped spider and then of Darwin, noticing a tiny exotic spider hitching a ride on the *Beagle*. He didn't know how hungry it was to rule a new world. Plautus watches the remaining spider spin a web.

Titan is Saturn's second-largest moon. Plautus' mention of sailing and finding pairs of animals and one tortoise seems like a biblical allusion to the story of Noah's ark, where Noah gathered pairs of animals to rescue them from the flood and secured them in his ark. Plautus seems to suggest that pairs of animals will colonize space in the same way that Noah's animals went on to eventually fill the earth to the brim with animals.

Suddenly, Plautus feels "the solitude of death" upon her. She doesn't know how to die, but she remembers Virginia reciting de Montaigne's words that nature will take over and help a person die. Plautus thinks that she's spent her life with writers who found perfect solitude in various ways. They all recognized in her the same contradictory desire: to always be left alone, but to never be let go. But she thinks that after being born, every creature on earth is homeless. As the spider's threads thicken, Plautus thinks of Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic. He'd had a fly in the cockpit with him and it gave him solace to know there was something else alive with him. Plautus and the spider circle the moon.

Once again, Plautus returns to the idea that every being on earth is alone, no matter how many connections they forge with people or animals. This idea, it seems, comforts her when she feels "the solitude of death" approaching. But like Charles Lindbergh and the fly, Plautus isn't technically alone—she has the spider for company.

I, THE ELEPHANT, WROTE THIS: SOUL OF ELEPHANT (DIED 1987, MOZAMBIQUE)

The elephant and her twin sister, like all the elephants in their herd, grow up hearing stories of their ancestors. Their ancestors' souls "glow" at them from constellations, and some evenings, the elders point out trunks or ears in the **stars**. The elephant and her sister like to reenact their ancestors' stories and imagine what it's like to turn into an eternally sparkling soul. They learn early on that ancestors only make it to the stars if they die a noteworthy death. Both elephants thus long to die dramatically so that their legend will live on. The best death, they decide, will be "mass historical death," like large groups of their ancestors who were slaughtered and sacrificed.

The elephant narrator makes it clear that people aren't the only ones to see constellations: the elephants also see their history recorded in the sky. Because the young elephants are still so naïve, they idealize death. It doesn't seem to occur to them at all that people *are responsible for these deaths, which is implied through the mention of elephants being slaughtered and sacrificed.*

Once the elephant and her sister are a bit older—but still young enough to get away with things—the elephant asks her aunt why the only stories they hear are about ancestors who lived far away from Mozambique, where the herd lives. This aunt habitually enjoys intoxicating marula bark, so the elephant waits to ask until her aunt is swaying. Her aunt explains they believe that all elephants share a common ancestor, no matter where they live. The elephant notes that the ancestors in the skies are overwhelmingly Indian elephants or North African forest elephants, not African savanna elephants like them. She asks where the stories about *them* are. Her aunt insists that there are lots of stories about them—most of the souls in the sky lived in these lands.

The elephant and her sister read as distinctly human here: knowing their questions could perhaps get them in trouble, they target their relative who's known to say too much when intoxicated, and they want to hear stories about elephants who are the most like them. The aunt's explanations, though, aren't enough for a curious young elephant like the narrator. Indeed, it seems likely that the aunt is glossing over a lot of information—why, for instance, haven't the elephant and her sister heard stories about African savanna elephants if there are lots of African savanna elephant souls in the sky?

The aunt catches herself and asks how old the elephant and her sister are. The elephant lies that they're 12, even though they're 11. Her aunt hiccups and says that there are fewer stories about savanna elephants like them because the other species of elephants lived closer to Europe and therefore had more interesting lives. Disappointed, the elephant asks why the elephants in the stories lived so long ago. Visibly uncomfortable, the aunt says that it takes time for souls to appear in the sky. The elephant wants to know how long, so she asks which elephants in the stars died most recently. That would be Castor and Pollux, the sibling zoo elephants who died during the Siege of Paris in 1870 or 1880. Her aunt says it takes about 100 years then and wanders away to find more marula bark.

Here, it becomes even clearer that the aunt is hiding something from her young nieces—but it's implied that they will find out the truth once they're a little older, since the aunt pauses to ask how old they are. This mirrors the way that parents sometimes gloss over horrific parts of history to protect their children from uncomfortable truths, showing again how similar animals and people can be. (This is especially true since elephants live in close family groups, similar to how people live.)

After sunset, a baby cousin asks the elders for the story of Suleiman. The elephant usually enjoys this story, but tonight she doesn't want to hear about a faraway elephant. An elder recounts that Suleiman was born in 1540, in the King of Ceylon's royal stables. The king sent him to Lisbon and he eventually ended up in Maximilian II's new menagerie in Vienna. Maximilian ordered that Suleiman should get the best exotic fruits, and in the winter, he got a gallon of wine every day. On a stone block by Suleiman's enclosure, Maximilian had words from Pliny the Elder inscribed: that elephants are the largest land animals and are closest to humans in intelligence. They understand language, remember things, and likes affection. Elephants also have virtues that are rare in men, like honesty, justice, wisdom, and respect for the **stars**.

Since the elephant and her sister are wild, it's significant that one of their important stories is that of an elephant who lived in captivity. This suggests that even for wild animals like the elephants (and for creatures like the mussels earlier), it's impossible to ignore humans' existence and power. The stone that Maximilian II places outside Suleiman's enclosure, though, shows that he respected the elephant and didn't think of him as just an animal. Indeed, he saw Suleiman as a feeling, thinking being—and even knew that elephants see figures and stories in the stars, just like people do.

Maximilian gradually expanded his menagerie, but he couldn't find another elephant. Some said it was because Maximilian didn't want Suleiman to bond with another elephant. One day, when Maximilian brought priests to visit Suleiman, they found that Suleiman had written, "I, the elephant, wrote this" in the sand. The priests decided Suleiman was demonic and wanted him killed. Maximilian refused—but the priests poisoned Suleiman anyway over the course f four months. Maximilian was inconsolable. He divided up Suleiman's body and gave pieces to important people in the Holy Roman Empire so he'd never be forgotten. The elephant's elder points out the various parts of Suleiman's body in the sky.

Despite Maximilian's respect for Suleiman, the possibility that he wouldn't get Suleiman a companion for fear of Suleiman forming a bond with another creature suggests that Maximilian was selfish. But as in the other stories, Maximilian's selfishness can exist alongside other admirable qualities. For instance, Maximilian didn't want Suleiman to die simply for revealing he could communicate with written language. But for the priests, this threatened their superiority as humans—so Suleiman had to die.

When the elder notes that a museum in Europe held Suleiman's skin until it disappears during World War II, the elephant asks if there are no stories about elephants from Mozambique because they don't have a museum. A slightly older cousin quips that there's a museum in Maputo, but the elders shush him.

The cousin's note about there being a museum in Maputo makes it more obvious that the herd is hiding things from the elephant and her sister.

Not long after, the elephant's oldest female cousin decides to tell the elephant and her sister the secret history of their herd. She says that a few years after the twins were born, there was a human war between the Portuguese and the local people. The elephant's sister asks if there were any "historically worthy deaths." Their cousin says that many elephants in their clan were de-tusked and left to die. She refuses to answer more questions until the twins are "old enough."

It's significant here that the cousin doesn't confirm or deny whether these historical elephants made it into the stars. This certainly sounds like "mass historical death," which again raises questions of why the young elephants don't already know this story. The human war she references is presumably the Mozambican War of Independence, where the native Mozambicans fought the Portuguese colonizers for their country's independence. And here, it doesn't seem like there was any reason for the elephants to die, unlike the anti-tank dogs earlier in the book, for instance. Instead, they seem like totally innocent victims.

When the cousin hears that the sisters are already almost 13, her eyes soften. It's almost time for them to be initiated. When the elephant complains that nobody will tell them anything, the cousin says with frustration that the elephant and her sister have always gotten special treatment because they're twins. Their mother didn't have enough milk, so an auntie shared her milk. The herd has protected them—and when they're strong enough, they'll learn what they want to know.

The cousin tries to impress upon the twins that they're part of a family—and the family is doing everything in its power to protect them. In other words, they should repay this kindness by not asking too many questions until they're old enough. Again, this mirrors the situation in some human families, illustrating that people and animals aren't so different.

Not long after the elephant and her sister turn 13, they spend their first full night awake. Rather than sleeping lying down with the young elephants, they stand with the adults. Just before sunrise, they doze on their feet. After this, their mother says it's time to be initiated—staying awake means they're almost ready to be mothers and leaders. Once the next full moon rises, the two-week long initiation begins.

Whatever the elephants are going to learn, it seems to be intense or disturbing enough that it's only appropriate for adult elephants to know about. Again, just as people sometimes keep disturbing information from children, the elephant herd is doing the same for its young.

On the third day, the matriarch tells a story. She says that many years ago, the Portuguese wanted to grow crops on a particular piece of land. They ordered a hunt supervisor to kill 2,000 elephants—but this man loved science. He decided to cut out every unborn elephant baby from the dead adults. He kept cutting until he had the only complete collection of elephant fetuses: 22, one for each month of gestation. He preserved them and donated them to the local museum, which still displays the jars. She points to a group of **stars**. The elephant and her sister count them. There are 22.

The matriarch's story makes it clear that the African savanna elephants suffer, just like their north African and Indian counterparts. But where elephants like Suleiman, Castor, and Pollux make easy heroes in stories, there's no hero in the matriarch's story. Instead of giving the young elephants someone to idolize, the story instead shows them how cruel humans can be. And just as the stars record people's stories, the stars also record these unborn elephants and their mothers.

The matriarch says that the twins' immediate ancestors are in the **stars** too, but their stories are harder to tell children. So children first learn the stories of elephants that lived long ago. Noticing how excited the elephant and her sister look at the prospect of learning new stories, the matriarch warns the twins not to romanticize death now that they're adults. Only the young want things to go badly, and the souls in the sky will live on only if they remember the stories. If they forget the stories, there's nothing.

The matriarch suggests that stories that feature drama, conflict, and death are exciting for young ones, because these stories don't seem real. And in addition, young ones often feel invincible, as if similarly terrible fates could never happen to them. But the matriarch suggests that a mark of maturity is being able to understand that these stories about the elephants' ancestors carry real weight, sadness, and repercussions for the community.

The elephant is shocked when she enters her first heat cycle. Adolescent bulls (male elephants) from all over come to gaze at her, and the attention is intoxicating. The elders counsel the elephant to wait for an older bull and she follows their advice. As a bull courts her, she forgets her family and sister for the only time in her life. The elephant knows she's pregnant immediately, so she calls her family to celebrate. Not long after, her sister becomes pregnant too. They're pregnant through two of the driest and longest summers in living memory.

As she describes the bull's courting, the elephant makes it clear how important her family is to her—meeting and mating with the bull is the only time in her life she doesn't think of her sister or her family. And that the elephant and her sister are pregnant at the same time further underscores the family's closeness.

The elephant labors for two days and finally delivers her daughter. Once her daughter stands to nurse, the elephant rumbles happily, sharing the news with the wider elephant group. Days later, she helps her sister give birth to her son. Together, they laugh as they watch their babies figure out what to do with their trunks, and they stand awake over their infants at night. Becoming mothers brings about the end of their longing to die gloriously. The elephant and her sister wish only for beauty and goodness, and they try not to think of death. They barely listen to the elders telling stories, and when the elephant's daughter finds Castor and Pollux in the **stars**, the elephant is only happy to be touching her daughter.

Becoming a mother dramatically transforms the elephant. Now, rather than idealizing death and being captivated by the elders' stories, she only hopes that her daughter will grow up happily and not have to worry about her safety. But the mention that her daughter is so interested in Castor and Pollux in the stars suggests that death will be inescapable.

When her daughter and nephew are two, the elephant finds them painting mud from Lake Urema in diamonds on each other's foreheads. They're pretending to be Castor and Pollux, giving Parisian children rides around the **zoo**. They don't understand why the elephant is angry (she's afraid), so they run away and hide. The elephant's sister reminds her that scolding the children will only encourage them.

The story withholds from the reader the true story of the elephants Castor and Pollux to build suspense. At this point, it seems like it's just about zoo elephants. But when the elephant is angry and fearful that her daughter and nephew are so captivated by the tale, it hints that there's a much darker layer to it.

The elephant's sister takes a different approach. She tells the children about the Prussian siege of Paris. The Parisians ate through thousands of horses, then rats, then cats and dogs. They never considered rationing—the rich must eat meat, and officials told the poor to eat mustard and wine. When the elephant shoots her sister a look, her sister announces that it's naptime. The next morning, the elephant's daughter and nephew get a baby zebra to pretend to be a horse and a bush rat to be a city rat. The baby elephants chase the other creatures, pretending to be hungry humans. Dominance games like this are normal for baby elephants, but the elephant asks her sister to stop telling violent stories for a while.

When the elephant's sister begins telling her son and niece about the Prussian siege of Paris (which was part of the Franco-Prussian War), it makes it clear to readers that Castor and Pollux's story won't be a happy one. This is especially clear when the elephant's sister talks about the Parisians eating all the animals in the city. Bringing up food scarcity during war harkens back to several previous stories in the collection—and shows once again that when people are starving, their animals are at risk of becoming meals.

At about this time, foreign humans move into the National Park tourist camps, which have been abandoned since the Portuguese left. Usually the only people the elephants ever have to deal with are local villagers who sometimes cross through Gorongosa. Some of the herd recognize the men's scent from their time in South Africa, before there were electric fences. As they watch men set up a shooting range and teach others to shoot, the elephants decide to move toward the eastern edge of the park, traveling only at night. The elephant remembers being a child and loving the eastern boundary of the park. On the other side of the fence, villagers grow oranges, and she desperately wanted to eat one. But as the elephants walk, they can't smell citrus. They only smell smoke.

The apartheid regime in South Africa constructed the fence bordering Mozambique in 1975, which is referenced here. The elders' memories of being able to cross into South Africa make it clear that this herd lives with the memory of war all the time—and they live with the memory of multiple conflicts. This is probably why the elephants decide to move on. There's no telling whether these elephants will become more innocent victims of a war, like the elephants who died during Mozambique's war for independence. The fact that the elephants smell smoke instead of oranges on the other side of the fence is a sinister sign that bad things are going to happen.

The next night, the elephants come to the Muaredzi River. It's barely flowing after several dry monsoon seasons. Lake Urema had just enough water. Now, they have to decide whether to return to the lake and risk being close to the strange humans or stay here and hope the river will swell. The matriarch decides to wait. Weeks later, another herd in the greater bond group arrives. They're on their way to check the river further on. The new group stays for a few nights to exchange stories. They say that the foreign humans have many new recruits and have burned homes. Some of the recruits are practically still children.

The elephants find that they're caught trying to balance two important concerns. They need access to water, but they also need to stay safe from people who might try to kill them. At this point, it seems as though staying away from dangerous people is the most important concern. But if the Muaredzi River doesn't fill up, it seems possible that this could shift. When the other group arrives and stays for stories, it again shows the similarities between elephants and people. Storytelling—and spending time with extended family—are important concerns, regardless of species.

The second group promises to return quickly as they head for the next river. When they get back, they share that the river is dry—and a new group of men is camping in an abandoned building on the floodplain, where a pride of lions used to live. The lions are gone, and the elephants worry for them. Since the other group has fewer babies, the two matriarchs decide that the other group will move on, while the elephant's group will stay with the water in the Muaredzi. They have a formal farewell ceremony.

The strange disappearance of major predators like lions suggests that the men on the floodplain are extremely dangerous and are the new predators in the area. It's unclear whether the men killed the lions or whether the drought did—but both options threaten the elephants' survival. As the elephants discuss which group will stay and which will go, it's significant that they prioritize the babies' safety, which again makes them seem more human.

Over the summer, the Muaredzi dies slowly. The adults drink little, leaving as much water for the babies as they can. There's not much to eat either; they dig for roots that might have moisture stored in them. At night, the adults carefully guard the babies, as the hyenas are hungry, thirsty, and getting bolder. One afternoon, the elephant's sister distracts the children by telling them more about Castor and Pollux.

The unusually dry summer is implied to be the product of climate change. The changes it brings shows that climate change affects everyone, but that it's especially fatal for animals. The elephants have to contend with new predators in the hyenas, in addition to worrying about where to get food and water to feed their babies.

The elephant's sister says that during wartime, a **zoo** is a dangerous place for an animal. This is because, for humans, a zoo can be the difference between life and death. The elephant's daughter and nephew listen closely as the elephant's sister says that first, the rich Parisians ate the zebras, camels, and the kangaroo. They ate the lions and tigers next. The hippo was saved only because the zookeeper charged 80,000 francs for it. The Parisians ate the wolves and the pigeons. After the story, the children argue about who gets to play Castor, and who gets to be Pollux. The elephant is glad they have energy to pretend.

From the previous stories, readers already know that zoos aren't safe places for animals during wars when food is scarce. In zoos, animals are dependent on their human caretakers for everything. This includes whether they eat—and whether they become food for desperate, starving people. Since the elephant's daughter and nephew are still young, the story seems like fiction to them and is thus exciting. But for the elephant and her sister—who know they might become hyena food—the story is deeply unsettling.

The next day, the elephant takes over telling the story. She says that the Parisians paused when they considered whether or not to eat the monkeys. Some people thought it was better to starve than eat a creature that reminded them of themselves, though they couldn't figure out why. They didn't, however, think of elephants as being akin to humans, so they turned to Castor and Pollux. The zookeeper sold the elephants for 20,000 francs. The children are older now, so the elephant's daughter is curious what elephants taste like. The elephant says that diners complained about the elephants' texture and taste. A month after the elephants died, the French surrendered, and the English sent boatloads of food to Paris.

The Parisians' unwillingness to eat the monkeys in the zoo contrasts with how things played out in "Red Peter," where Evelyn ate both Hazel and Peter. But while Maximilian II said that elephants are equal to people in their intellect and kindness, the Parisians who choose to eat Castor and Pollux either don't care or don't believe that.

That night, the elephant's daughter wakes and very seriously tells her mother she doesn't want her to die. The elephant strokes her daughter for a while and then asks if her daughter knows who Castor and Pollux were named for. She tells her daughter the human myth of Castor and Pollux, twins born to a mortal woman but with two different fathers: one father was mortal, and the other was the god Zeus. Because of this, Castor was mortal and Pollux was immortal. When Castor died in battle, Pollox begged Zeus to make Castor immortal. Zeus agreed and turned the twins into the constellation Gemini. Humans see the human twins in the **stars**; Elephants see the elephant brothers, foreheads pressed together.

Though the stories in the collection veer toward the fantastical, there's no indication that any of the animals in the story are actually immortal. This suggests that for both people and for elephants, the only way to really achieve immortality is to end up in stories or legends—as both sets of Castor and Pollux twins did. The animals profiled in the collection will also achieve a kind of mortality, simply because people will read their stories and remember them.

The elephant's daughter thinks for a bit and stares at the sky. Clouds scrub out the stars, but they never drop rain. Finally, her daughter asks if the elephant or the elephant's sister is the mortal twin. The elephant smiles, evades the question, and says that when she and her sister die, their souls will appear together in the sky to watch over her and her cousin. That night, the elephants hear humans fighting to the south.

The elephant evades her daughter's question because she knows she and her sister aren't immortal. Both of them can die as easily as anyone else—but it's easy enough to let her daughter believe her mother could live forever, and it gives her comfort. This becomes more important as they hear fighting, which makes it impossible for the elephants to ignore their mortality.

When the Muaredzi is almost dry, the matriarch decides it's time to move to a waterhole in a secret location. The elephants travel at night, though they move during the day if they sense humans nearby. The humans aren't interested in the elephants, but the elephants know that some men will still kill them for their tusks. When the herd passes a bachelor herd, the bachelors are supposed to cede the edible grasses and roots to the herd. They don't, even when the matriarch leads a charge—until the elephant's nephew pushes to the front and nibbles on grass in front of a bull. The bull turns away and leaves the herd in peace.

Even though the elephants know that the human war raging around them doesn't have anything to do with them, the elephants know that the humans are still a pressing threat. Because of the black market ivory trade, killing an elephant can still be a profitable endeavor for poachers. These insights into elephant traditions and etiquette continue to illustrate that elephants have a culture all their own. It's complex and is, possibly, just as rich as any human civilization.

When the herd reaches the secret waterhole, it only takes days to drain it. The matriarch decides they must return to Lake Urema. Elders struggle to make the journey in the heat, and the herd passes a number of animals that humans killed and ate. The dead aren't unusual at first—but then the herd comes across a pack of wild dog carcasses. The dogs live in bonded packs like the elephants, so the elephants stop to mourn and cover the bodies. The elephants have to take a circuitous route to avoid the roads, and on one path they find the matriarch from the group who let the herd stay at the Muaredzi. Her herd must have been in danger, since they left her body uncovered.

Because elephant society is so complex and family oriented, it's a red flag when they see that others haven't followed tradition. They recognize, in other words, that it's not disrespect that led the other herd to not cover their deceased matriarch—it's an indicator they were in trouble, and that these elephants likely will be too.

The elephant's daughter and nephew are terrified of the body. She and her sister coax their children into joining in the grieving rituals of touching the body and covering it with branches and sand. The elephant's nephew asks if they'll see her soul in the **stars** tonight. The elephant and her sister share a look, and her sister says that they'll be able to see her soul soon. The matriarch died for her family, which is the most heroic death of all.

Because the herd isn't presently in danger, they can pick up where the last herd left off and make sure the matriarch is honored in death. Now that she faces this matriarch's death, the elephant sees why adults in the herd don't tell the young about deaths like this until they're older. It's hard to explain that the matriarch probably died for no good reason—she probably just got caught up in a human conflict.

When the elephants are a day away from Lake Urema, a group of villagers surrounds the elephants. They're not poachers, they're just hungry. The matriarch charges, leaving the elephant's sister exposed. The villagers shoot her sister. Though the elephant feels the herd trying to keep her close, she hears her twin calling and goes to her. When her sister can't get up, the elephant lies down beside her. She doesn't remember feeling pain as she's shot. Both the elephant and her sister mentally will the herd to keep their babies safe.

The elephants' fate here shows that animals don't have to live in a zoo to be at risk during a war. Rural Mozambicans in 1987 are just as hungry as Parisians were during the Franco-Prussian War. And like the French then, these villagers have elephants at their disposal. The intense love between the elephant and her sister shines through here—they love each other enough to follow each other into death and orphan their babies.

As they die, the sisters press their foreheads together. A human steps up and puts an orange between the elephants' trunks. It seems like an act of kindness, though the elephant is too far gone to eat it. But the smell makes her happy and for an instant, she and her sister are children again, playing by the fence with oranges on the other side. They long to die gloriously and to have elephants point out their souls in the **stars** to the young.

The elephant and her sister die arranged like the elephant version of the Castor and Pollux constellation. The orange is perhaps an offering of apology or kindness—but at this point, the kindness doesn't seem to matter much. Returning to the happy memories of childhood allows the elephant to think of her death as appropriately glorious. She may end up in the stars, if only because her daughter and nephew remember her and tell their stories for generations to come.

TELLING FAIRY TALES: SOUL OF BEAR (DIED 1992, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

The black bear tells the witch to write down what he has to say—he can't speak to humans without her. As she breaks bread over her knee and tosses it into the bear pit, she encourages the bear to stay silent. If he speaks, he'll be judged as a human. The black bear ignores the bread, and when the witch encourages him to eat before his "friend" wakes up, the bear scoffs. He's waiting for his so-called friend—a sleeping brown bear—to die so that he can eat her. The witch asks why he's waiting, and the bear explains that if he eats the brown bear while she's still alive, then people will think he's heartless and will stop trying to bring him bread.

The idea that people will judge the black bear like a person if he speaks complicates Henry Lawson's insistence in "The Bones" that animals make people look worse by comparison. This is perhaps because animals can't speak—so there's less to judge them for. Even so, the bear also seems to understand that he has to work to seem like the kind of animal people want to keep alive. If he starts to act murderous, he could end up like the elephants in the previous story.

A shell lands down the slope "in the city under siege." The witch wonders where it landed and shrinks back against the fence. It's late summer in Sarajevo, and people are thirsty enough to risk being shot in their quest for water. The black bear wishes people would bring him dead bodies instead of bread, but the witch stays silent. She looks for movement across the **zoo**. The zoo is in no man's land near the front line, and there aren't many trees left.

This story takes place during the siege of Sarajevo, which is the longest siege in the history of modern warfare. Given that the bear dies in 1992, it's still early in the siege (it began in 1992). As the story takes place in a zoo, it shows again how dependent animals are on their caregivers. The bears must hope that people continue to bring them bread—otherwise, they'll die.

The black bear stands on his hind legs and stares at a dead Bosnian soldier. He was shot while trying to bring the bear **food**, and the Bosnians are waiting for nightfall to move the soldier's body back to their military base. The black bear asks the witch how the black market is treating her, and she affirms that she's getting rich on Marlboros. In the cave, the emaciated blind brown bear sits up, and the black bear greets her by calling her "fatso." The brown bear greets the witch, but the witch ignores her. The witch insists it's "decadent" to smoke in summer, and the brown bear inhales the smoke. It's the same cigarette brand that the zookeeper and his wife had smoked as they strolled amongst the animals in peacetime.

The black bear doesn't seem to have much compassion for the very people who are trying to keep him alive. In this case, rather than making people look worse, the bear makes them look better: the black bear appears ungrateful, picky, and predatory (he plans to eat his fellow bear and seems to want to eat the soldier who risked his life to bring the bear bread from his own rations), while the soldier is portrayed as selfless, kind, and brave. Indeed, the bear seems more human than a lot of the collection's other animal narrators have, in large part because of his selfish attitude. (This is a sharp contrast, for instance, from the communal elephants in the previous story.)

The brown bear launches into a story about a prince, a human baby, who was turned into a bear. The black bear groans, saying "Here she goes again," but the witch insists that the brown bear will taste better with "fairy tale still on her tongue." The brown bear continues her story about the baby, who was a Persian prince. The boy's mother, wanting the king to marry her, had asked a witch for help orchestrating this and agreed to pay with her first son in return. So one day, the mother woke up to find a bear cub in her son's crib. Terrified, she left the bear prince in the mountains and told him to never come home.

Though storytelling emerged as an important tool in "I, the Elephant, Wrote This," it takes on a different meaning in this section. Here, the witch says that the brown bear will taste better if she gets to tell a story right before she dies, which suggests that telling a story will make the brown bear happier. The black bear's comment of "Here she goes again" implies that the brown bear often tells stories—possibly this same particular story—which suggests that storytelling perhaps bolsters the brown bear spirit or provides her with a distraction from her suffering.

The bear prince fell asleep. Unbeknownst to him, a young Polish man named Karol was walking with a group of soldiers through the mountains. He'd survived a war camp in Siberia; it was World War II, and many men were on the move. Karol discovered the sleeping cub and fell in love with him immediately. He'd watched his own baby boy sleeping like this before Karol was arrested in Poland, right after the Russians invaded. He'd wanted to hold his baby since the Russians decided to conscript their Polish prisoners into their ranks.

The story within the story takes place during World War II, which invites comparisons between this story and the others in the collection that took place during the same conflict. Many of the stories in the collection speak to how devastating and destructive war can be for animals and the natural landscape, but the story about Karol not being able to hold his own baby reminds readers of the human cost of war. The Soviet Union and Germany invaded Poland in 1939—thus marking the start of World War II—so Karol was presumably one of the 500,000 Polish men who were arrested.

That night, Karol nestled the bear prince into a washing bowl. The other men laughed at first, but soon they all wanted to play with the cub. The bear came with soldiers when they moved off toward British Palestine, where they will join the Polish army. They didn't have any time to think or feel angry about having been shoved into cattle trains. But there was no time to celebrate being free, either; there was a war to fight.

The way that the bear prince becomes an integral part of the regiment shows how beneficial relationships with animals can be, especially during a war. (Unlike readers, Karol doesn't know that his new pet is a human who was turned into a. bear.) Just as having Kiki to feed and care for strengthened her adopted soldier's will to live in the trenches of World War I, the bear prince brings Karol and the other men a welcome bit of levity in the midst of their bleak circumstances.

In Palestine, Karol found the transition to his new regiment easier because of the bear prince's presence. The regiment adopted the cub as their mascot. He spent his days sitting outside the commander's tent or beneath the water truck taps and showered with the men.

Karol and the bear prince's story is based on the true story of a bear named Wojtek who accompanied a Polish regiment during World War II. And again, as with Kiki and her adopted soldier, Karol and the bear prince's story shows how beneficial an animal companion can be during a difficult time.

Back in the present, the black bear interrupts the brown bear's story to warn that there are people coming. It's completely dark now, as Sarajevo doesn't have electricity anymore. These days, visiting the zoo isn't a fun, lighthearted activity for the masses. The few people who do venture into the zoo grounds do so to bring **food** for the last two remaining zoo animals, who have become central to the city's survival—or the idea of its survival.

In Kiki's section of the collection, the story showed how having Kiki to feed and care for actually helped her adopted soldier survive, because it strengthened his will to live in the midst of incredibly bleak circumstances (WWI trench warfare). The book applies the same idea here, but on a broader scale. To the city's residents, keeping the two bears alive seems to represent their own tenacious struggle for survival. Just as the bear prince is a mascot for Karol and his regiment, the black bear and brown bear in the story's present seem to have become mascots for the city.

The witch disappears into the shadows as two teenage boys, the older one a soldier, step towards the fence. They search for the bears and toss a handful of nettles into the cage. Then, the boys reminisce about seeing the bears before the war. They discuss that the brown bear is blind, and the younger brother looks at both the bears. He realizes he's never had a zoo animal look back at him. His older brother thinks about their parents and hopes that they don't go outside together anymore—even though they've spent every morning walking together in the park to feed birds. These days, all the birds are gone.

That the young boys risk their lives to feed the bears again underscores that the bears' survival is important to the community, but it also speaks to the idea that war doesn't just affect adults—it affects kids, too. The older brother's hope that his parents aren't going out suggests that the parents might be based on the real-life couple Boško Brić and Admira Ismić, who were a mixed Bosnian-Serbian couple. Snipers murdered them during the first winter of the siege.

The witch reappears once the boys are gone and lights another cigarette. She says she misses strawberries the most. She used to be able to smell the strawberry fields, but the fruit rotted in the fields because people couldn't get through the barricades around the city. The black bear spits that a soldier tossed him a snail the other day and acted like it was a steak. The witch notes that everyone in the city is eating snails these days, though they're awful without butter.

The purpose of a siege is to cut a city off from supplies—and as the witch reminisces about the strawberries, it's clear that the siege has done just that. And the black bear continues to present himself as more humanlike than animal-like when he scoffs at the snail. He's clearly used to much more appetizing fare than a snail—and he doesn't seem to grasp that to the hungry people of Sarajevo, giving up a snail to feed the bear is indeed a sacrifice.

The brown bear interrupts this conversation to continue her story. She says that when Karol's regiment moved to Iraq, the bear prince was no longer a cub. The bear's "animal presence" elevated everyone, and those in charge knew that a good mascot would keep the men engaged.

In contrast to Lawson's assertion at the beginning of the book that animals make people look worse by comparison, the bear prince makes the people in his regiment look better. But unlike other examples throughout the collection, this is not because the bear is poorly behaved compared to the soldiers, but because he gives them something to fight for, which consequently inspires them to be more engaged and tenacious fighters.

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At the new base, there were Polish women fighting in the Women's Signal Corps. The men and women were only supposed to mix at mealtimes, but the extreme heat made everyone more laidback about the rules. One afternoon, the bear prince entered the co-ed mess tent with women's underwear and bras on his head. He'd stolen their underwear off the clothesline, as well as the pole—and he marched with the pole like a rifle. The men in charge decided to punish the bear, but the bear tried to look very ashamed, like a person. Nobody would punish him, and when Christmas arrived, the women gave him figs, dates, and honey. Not long after, the women decided to take revenge by letting the bear drink the men's beer and then encouraging him to shower. The bear used up two days' worth of the men's water, and the men and women called a truce.

When the people in charge choose not to punish the bear prince because he looks sheepish and ashamed like a person would, readers are reminded that the bear prince actually is *a person trapped in a bear's skin. It's interesting that the men in charge are resolved to punish the bear prince when he acted more bearlike, but no one is willing to punish him when he acts more humanlike. This suggests that what possibly allows people to think that they're superior to animals is the fact that animals seem so different than people. When animals behave in uncannily human ways, it gets harder to maintain this line of thinking.*

The brown bear continues her story. She says that the night before the men's regiment was supposed to leave for Egypt, the men snuck into the women's camps to say goodbye to their sweethearts. Karol sat in his tent with the bear prince. He wanted to say goodbye to a woman named Irena, but he also missed his wife and son—and he cried when he couldn't recall his wife's face. The bear comforted Karol and thought of his own mother. Irena entered the tent and sat on the other side of the bear to tell a story of her own.

In real life, a civilian woman named Irena cared for Wojtek when he was a small cub, so the character named Irena is a nod to her. The deep grief and longing in this passage as characters say goodbye to loved ones and/or miss their families back home highlights the emotional cost of war.

Irena told the story of a handsome king who was strolling in his menagerie one day when a bear spoke to him, offering him some of her honey. The king was shocked but unafraid, so he entered the bear's enclosure and ate with her. The bear then sang a beautiful song, which made the king fell in love with her, and they had sex. When the king woke up in the morning, he was ashamed and repulsed and wondered what "unnatural magic" made him fall in love with a "beast." He then exiled the bear but spent the rest of his life heartbroken over her and disgusted with himself. The bear, banished to the "cold islands of the west," had a daughter, who was also cursed. Like her mother, she was a princess in a bear's body, who could sing and recite poetry. The bear knew that her daughter and her granddaughters would be forever cursed to have men fall in love with them and then destroy them.

This section of Only the Animals *contains several layers of stories, all of them about the close relationships between humans and bears, and many of them framed as fairytales. With this, the book implies that there's a reason that bears so often show up in folklore: they can behave in ways that are shockingly humanlike. (The section opens with the story of the brown bear and black bear in the zoo, then the brown bear tells the story of the bear prince, and then within that story, the bear prince hears Irena's story about the cursed bear princess.) On another note, the idea that men will fall in love with animals and then destroy them encapsulates one of the book's central ideas: that people do love animals, but often lead those animals to death and destruction. This points back to Peter the chimpanzee's section: he and Evelyn (a human) had a romantic relationship, but it ended with Evelyn, on the brink of starvation, killing and eating Peter.*

When Irena finished her story, she kissed Karol's hand. He admitted he had a wife; Irena said she had a husband. They then kicked the bear prince out of the tent. Feeling abandoned, the bear prince began to run away, but the camp's Dalmatian barked and gave him away. Karol felt bad and fed the bear treats, and the bear fell asleep dreaming of the bear in Irena's story—a human trapped in a bearskin, and possibly the only woman who could ever love him back.

The bear feels abandoned in part because Karol, for seemingly the first time, doesn't prioritize spending time with him. But the bear's loneliness also has to do with Karol specifically choosing his lover over the bear prince. This makes the bear prince grapple with his own loneliness—he's lonely both because he doesn't have a sweetheart and because he's seemingly the only bear-human that exists outside the confines of Irena's story.

The brown bear suddenly runs out of energy. She sniffs in the black bear's direction as though the air is "perfumed, intimate." She falls asleep and when she wakes up, the soldier's body is gone. She can tell it's fall. Weeks pass, and people continue to bring the two bears **food**. The people are confused by fall's arrival. They'd been confused in spring, too, when the cherry blossoms bloomed early in the siege. They feel nostalgic, as they do every autumn, and feel betrayed. They think of returning to work or school, but it seems like the planet hasn't noticed that it's impossible for any of these things to happen again.

Referring to the air between the two bears as "perfumed, intimate" suggests that there's more between the bears than the black bear's cruel behavior might suggest. With the descriptions of the changing seasons, the story illustrates that life goes on even during wartime, but that life is also fundamentally changed. In Sarajevo, for instance, there is no school to go back to because of the war.

The sharp autumn air is deadly; fog and rain protect the city from the snipers that surround it. And winter seems like it would be preferable, since it seems like the right season for a siege. Trees disappear from parks as people burn through floorboards and furniture to keep warm. The Sarajevo Center for Security broadcasts daily and reports that the city is mostly calm. It advises people to stay away from places where lines will form, such as at bakeries or office that distribute ration cards. Otherwise, the announcement says, it's a nice day.

As winter comes, the war seems to have more of an effect on the landscape, as people burn trees to stay warm. This points back to the book's broader claim that war doesn't just affect people—it also impacts animals and the natural world. But while both the wartime climate and wintertime climate seem increasingly bleak, the daily broadcasts also suggest that to some degree, life goes on.

One night, a group of "important foreigners," escorted by several soldiers, venture into the **zoo** to feed the bears. As he drops bread through the bars of the bear's cage, one man says that "we've" airlifted animals out of civil wars before, since civil wars tend to be so hard on animals. A woman in the group sarcastically suggests that unlike in civil wars, animals don't suffer in "normal, garden-variety war[s]." Another man, though, says that they can't smuggle bears out of Sarajevo in a food-relief convoy, as it'd raise a whole host of difficult questions, like why they're trying to save bears when they could save babies.

The first man, like so many of the other soldiers and civilians who bring the bears bread, believes that it's important to show animals kindness during wartime because war isn't just a human conflict—it profoundly impacts animals, too. The woman in the group also speaks to this when she emphasizes that all wars, not just civil wars, can be destructive for animals and their habitats. Though the second man doesn't necessarily suggest that animals are unworthy of taking care of, he does stress that there's a clear hierarchy among humans and animals, and that humans' well-being needs to be prioritized.

The man speaking is the only one who didn't bring bread for the bears. In the bear enclosure, the black bear makes a show of leaving bread for the brown bear. He knows how much humans like seeing stuff like this, but the brown bear doesn't touch it. Instead, she comes forward enough to let the humans see her opaque, unseeing eyes.

The black bear again looks very humanlike when he makes a show of being kind and generous. He's not actually kind—it's just an act, and so he makes the people who leave bread look even kinder in comparison.

The woman in the group is distraught to learn that the brown bear has always been blind. As she watches the black bear pace, she asks if he's always been so restless. A soldier insists that he's a bear in a zoo. The first man in the group suggests that the bear is experiencing zoochosis, which is when animals "go a bit nuts" and do odd things in captivity. This man has his blood type stenciled on his jacket, in case he's wounded and somebody pays attention. The man who didn't bring bread says that no matter what, the bears will end up in a zoo elsewhere. The woman muses that *Sarajevo* is a Turkish word for "palace in the fields."

Zoochosis is a common affliction that affects animals in captivity, especially in zoos. Many perform repetitive behaviors for no apparent reason. The man who explains zoochosis is the same one who discusses airlifting animals out of wars, so he seems to be compassionately suggesting that animals don't belong in zoos. In noting that Sarajevo *means "palace in the fields," the book is implicitly underscoring the irony in animals being caged in the midst of what should be a land of open fields. The book also seems to be suggesting with this comment that war has such a widespread impact—it affects people, animals, and the natural landscape—that it has transformed this "palace in the fields" into the bleak place it is now.*

The accompanying militiamen look toward a sound in the dark, across the valley. They can see a missile shooting their direction. The militiamen laugh that the missile came from Osmica, a former popular nightclub that the Serbs now use as a bunker. Once the soldiers and foreigners are gone, the black bear eats the rest of the bread and the witch tells a joke. She asks what the difference is between clever and dumb Bosnians. The smart one, she says, calls the dumb one in Sarajevo from abroad. The black bear acts like he doesn't get it.

Osmica's transformation drives home again that war changes everything, even the landscape and the built environment. The witch's joke lands poorly with the black bear in part because unlike the Bosnian people, he didn't have any chance of escaping Sarajevo before the siege started. As a person he could at least try to escape the city, but as a zoo animal, he's stuck and comparatively powerless.

The witch fidgets and asks the brown bear to finish her story about the bear prince since there's nothing else to do. Winking at the black bear, the witch remarks, "And they think *you're* the crazy one." With a hopeful expression, the emaciated brown bear resumes her tale.

Here, the witch is referring to how the visitors who just left the zoo thought the black bear was unusually restless and likely had zoochosis. But according to the witch, it's the brown bear, with her fixation on the bear prince story, who is the actual "crazy one."

By this point, the bear prince was twice as tall as Karol—but despite his size, he was gentle when he play-wrestled with the soldiers. At this time, the regiment moved to Qassassin in preparation for their journey to Italy. To Karol, it seemed like he and his soldiers were just playing at war. They worked hard, but their camps were festive and every regiment had an animal mascot. Karol thought the bear was different; he seemed to be one of them—and he fought for the bear to join the regiment when they left for Italy.

Karol sees some personhood in the bear prince in large part because he is a person trapped in a bear's body, but this also aligns with the book's key theme that people and animals are intimately connected and can have extremely deep, satisfying relationships with one another. This passage also emphasizes that the bear is just one of many mascots that help lift soldiers' spirits. Like Kiki the cat giving the soldiers something to live for in the WWI trenches, the mascots here provide some levity in the midst of war.

On the day that Karol's regiment was supposed to leave, Karol watched cranes load trucks onto a ship. He thought again that they were just children playing at war; compared to the massive cranes, the regiment's trucks looked like tiny toy cars. From within the office, an officer called, "Corporal?" Karol answered, but the officer was talking to the bear prince. The bear had been given a travel warrant to stay with Karol's regiment.

The bear's promotion to a corporal is another element from history: to get Wojtak the bear to Europe and sidestep the ban on transporting animal mascots, the Polish army conscripted him.

But as the ship approached the ruins of the Cassino monastery, Karol felt like he shouldn't have brought the bear prince along—men were dying in agony everywhere. But Karol was also thankful for the bear's presence as he slowly drove a truck behind a soldier walking in front—the only way to keep their movements secret from the Germans and not use headlights. The bear prince sat next to Karol, his paws over his eyes. It made Karol smile and kept him calm. As Karol witnessed new traumas, he couldn't forget his older traumas like the cattle train and seeing his son for the last time. The bear seemed to be the only thing that kept Karol human and "whole enough to remain kind." Watching the bear sleep, Karol told himself, "*I am because you are*."

Just as one might care for a child and protect them from disturbing experiences, Karol wishes he could protect the bear prince from having to see the carnage of this battle. This passage also illustrates the steep emotional cost of war: for Karol, this is one trauma that just compounds all his previous traumas, which makes it difficult for him to hold onto his humanity. The idea that the bear keeps Karol "whole enough to remain kind" speaks to the interconnectedness of humans and animals, and how animals can soften humans when they tend towards cruelty. (Once again, Karol doesn't know the bear prince is a human in a bear's body.)

After six days of shelling, the Allies won the battle. Karol grieved anyway, since so many people died. He sketched the bear prince with an artillery shell and his superiors turned it into a badge. They said the soldiers didn't die in vain—and indeed, by the next summer, the Germans surrendered. Karol was happy, knowing that he'd soon see his wife and son again. He and the bear prince spent time on the Adriatic coast and whiled their days away on the beach. Karol dreamed of his return home; the bear tormented Italian women by surprising them in the water.

Polish losses in this battle were massive, and Karol shows how ridiculous war seems when one thinks about how many people die. This passage implicitly questions if war is worth it when so many beings—human and animal—either die or suffer severe emotional trauma from the conflict. Channeling his grief into creating the badge featuring the bear, Karol commemorates the bear's work of keeping Karol—and all the men—human.

But after a few months, Karol began to worry. The Allies tried to cut deals with Stalin, and the soldiers heard awful stories about former prisoners of war who returned to Soviet-occupied Poland only to be sent to death camps or fatal gold mines. Karol and the bear prince were sent to Scotland instead. And it was impossible to get information about Poland, since letters were censored both ways. Eventually, somebody wrote to say that Karol's wife and son were dead.

World War II decimated Poland and, as Karol explains, the country struggled to become independent and self-governing again. This passage underscores the human cost of war with several examples: former prisoners of war who were reimprisoned, soldiers prevented from going home, and soldiers' families dying.

After getting this news, Karol stopped caring about the bear prince. The other Poles in Scotland told stories about the bear and sent him to Karol to perform funny tricks, but Karol could only stare blankly at the bear. When Karol heard the bear would live out his days at the Edinburgh **Zoo**, he was envious. He, too, wanted to be cared for and not have to do anything ever again. Karol walked the bear into his new enclosure and then removed the chain, opened a beer, and built a pyramid of cigarettes.

Learning that his wife and son are dead seems to strip Karol of his humanity, his will to live, and his affection for the bear prince, which again stresses the widespread devastation that war can cause.

When it was time to go, Karol put his hands in the bear prince's paws. The bear sadly licked Karol's cheek, knowing he'd never see Karol again—even though they'd live in the same city. Later, Karol heard that the entire city got swept up when the bear prince courted the female bear who came to live with him. Occasionally, Karol would remember Irena's story of the princess trapped in a bear's body and would tell himself that tomorrow, he'd work up the courage to return to the bear, to Poland, and to himself.

Living in close quarters with Karol and the other soldiers and being a part of their community allowed the bear prince to be as human as he possibly could be despite being trapped in a bear's body. Being sent to live in the zoo, though, strips the bear prince even further of his humanness.

Having completed her story, the brown bear moves to the dirty water in the enclosure and scrubs herself. When she's soaked, she returns to her cave and lies down, shivering. The witch lights a cigarette rolled with tea leaves, ignores the black bear's scornful look, and admits she made a bad business decision. She fiddles with a radio as the chocolate factory burns down in the valley, making the air smell like caramel. Finally, she tunes into a station broadcasting messages to families trapped on opposite sides of the siege line.

The way that the brown bear scrubs herself here suggests that finishing the story was cleansing or cathartic for her. The burning caramel smell makes the siege seem even more surreal. Just as it didn't seem possible that the cherry trees would still bloom in the spring, it seems similarly ridiculous that a city struggling to survive smells like candy.

The next day, the brown bear dies and the black bear eats her piece by piece. Not long after, as the witch pushes bread into the enclosure for the black bear, she asks what he wanted her to write down a while ago. The bear can't remember and says it probably wasn't important—these days, he can't even remember anything from the day before. Tentatively, the witch asks if the bear knows what he's done. With a fearful look, the witch gestures to the brown bear's bones and informs the black bear that the brown bear was his wife. The black bear is silent and doesn't speak again. He dies at the end of October, holding tight to the brown bear's ribcage. All the **zoo**'s enclosures tell the same story: "life mates eaten in madness," and "beloved consumed at last by their lovers."

The story suggests that the black bear wanted the witch to record that he and the brown bear were once lovers—a story, it's implied, that the brown bear just told. The bears' fate speaks more broadly to the way that during war, both people and animals turn on each other to survive. This also recalls the way that the mules in Kiki's story ate each other's tails to avoid starvation.

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A LETTER TO SYLVIA PLATH: SOUL OF DOLPHIN (DIED 2003, IRAQ)

The dolphin begins her letter to Sylvia Plath by saying she'd like to get the story of her death out of the way. The Navy trained her to act and then deal with it—though she died because she *couldn't* deal with it. The other animals in the collection don't have such a ridiculous history of communicating with humans. It gets more ridiculous every time dolphins perform tricks for fish, or scientists try to make dolphins into serious subjects. So when the dolphin was asked to tell her story, she refused. She only agreed when someone suggested she center her story around a human writer and what that person's writing means to her. Initially, she agreed to participate if she could write in the third person, but "I" is irresistible.

While all the animal narrators in Only the Animals *are dead—they are all retelling their life stories, which end in their deaths—the dolphin is the first to admit that upfront in her narration. She implies that although humans have been interacting with dolphins for a long time, people still tend to misinterpret what dolphins have to say. This is why the dolphin initially didn't want to talk; she didn't want readers to misconstrue her words. With this, the dolphin suggests that people are at fault for not listening to animals when they try to communicate with them.*

The dolphin began by reading Ted Hughes's work. He's Plath's ex-husband, and the dolphin thought he might inspire her. As the dolphin reads Hughes's animal poems, though, she realizes she interpreted them incorrectly when she read them the first time. While she once thought he was trying to understand humans through writing about animals, she now knows he was trying to "justify the animal in the human." He was the sort to say that it's perfectly fine to spend one's days fishing and having sex—they're all animals, after all.

This passage revisits the idea from the very first section of the book that animals make humans look worse by comparison. But Hughes uses animals to justify behavior one might consider uncultured for humans but normal for animals.

Hughes justified hunting by noting that, according to Jung, therapy entails putting humans back in touch with their primitive animal origins. In the dolphin's opinion, that's just an excuse for humans to behave poorly. She doesn't have anything against bad behavior, but she finds that males, both humans and dolphins, go to great lengths to justify their bad behavior. This drives the dolphin nuts—females behave badly too, but they die of guilt because they don't have the ego needed to justify their behavior.

The dolphin makes it clear that there's not much separating humans from dolphins. The differences between the sexes, in fact, are more meaningful than those between species.

The dolphin turns to the animal poems Hughes wrote for kids. He believed they'd make money—but all of them are inappropriate for children, except for "Moon-Whales." The dolphin thought she'd tell her story from the point of view of Hughes's moon-whale, but it didn't seem right. When the dolphin turned to Plath's poems and journals to get a feminine perspective, she then figured out what she resented about Hughes: human women don't need to be reminded they're animals, so why do men keep shouting that they're animals like they've just discovered alchemy? Men think they're "*special*" animals because they ask whether they're human or animal. The dolphin wants to ask if they can use echolocation to map the ocean floor, or scan beings to know who's pregnant or what they ate for lunch.

The dolphin affirms that humans and dolphins are *different in many ways (humans can't, for instance, use echolocation the way dolphins can), but she stresses that just because the species are different doesn't mean one is superior to the other. But human men, the dolphin explains, tend to think they're* "special" *compared to other animals. It's worth noting that though the dolphin breaks her argument down along gender lines, the collection on the whole suggests that human women are just as capable of men as acting superior to animals (Evelyn from "Red Peter" in particular).*

The dolphin thinks human men shouldn't be questioning whether they're human or animal and should instead ask different questions: why do they treat people as humans and sometimes as animals, and why do they treat animals like animals and sometimes like people? The dolphin floated this with her new friend, the soul of Elizabeth Costello, and Costello insisted that it's too easy to mock Hughes for being so masculine. Writers, Costello suggested, teach readers lots of things, and suggested the dolphin focus on what she wants to say to Plath. Costello also pointed out that the dolphin is avoiding talking about her death.

Elizabeth Costello is a fictional character created by J. M. Coetzee. In Coetzee's book The Lives of Animals, *Costello attends a literary conference and speaks about animal rights—and specifically mentions the Nazis' push for animal rights, like in the "Hundstage" section of* Only the Animals. *She also discusses the idea that humans can understand animals by writing about them. With this, the collection situates itself again in a much larger body of literature in which authors consider how animals experience the world and are treated—and through doing so, create empathy in their readers.*

The dolphin is finding her death a hard subject—she wants to write to Plath not because of how they both died, but because of their connection as mothers. She loves the parts of Plath's journals and poems when she talks about mothering, and how it enriched her identity as a writer. Plath didn't commit suicide because the mundane overtook her—indeed, she once described her priorities as "*Books & Babies & Beef Stew*." She vowed to write until she got in touch with her deep self, *then* have babies, and *then* speak more deeply. Plath's "deep self" connected with animal truths that Hughes could only dream of.

In making it clear that she isn't interested in Plath because of how they both *died, the dolphin implies that like Plath, she died by suicide. But the dolphin suggests that it does Plath a disservice to diminish her to just her cause of death. Rather, it's important to celebrate Plath's entire life, which includes her role as a mother.*

Plath, the dolphin says, didn't need to use symbols to describe her experience as a female animal. Hughes often seemed jealous of animals' energy—but women have that animal energy when they're mothers. Maybe if Hughes had watched Plath more instead of looking for symbolic animals, he might've noticed that and been a better husband. The dolphin apologizes for getting irritated instead of saying what she's supposed to say. Now, she'll explain how she lived and died.

The dolphin proposes that women and female animals aren't all that different in part because they go through similar changes and processes when they become mothers. Her irritation with Hughes suggests that it's frustrating when people like Hughes ignore what seem like obvious facts. To the dolphin, it's clear Plath is an animal—so it's offensive that Hughes has to go to such lengths to look for animal traits in people instead of paying attention to his wife.

The dolphin is born into captivity in 1973. Her mother was one of the first dolphins in the U.S. Navy Marine Mammal Program and encouraged the dolphin to be proud of her role. When her mother was first recruited, the officers had just realized dolphins could fetch objects and return to their handlers. A dolphin named Tuffy was the first to carry a message to aquanauts living underwater for 30 days. The dolphin's mother hated how the Navy named their dolphins; it seems stupid to name such smart animals things like Tuffy. She believed that the Navy thought the silly names would make it seem like the dolphins aren't real combatants to the public, even though the program was classified during the Cold War. So the dolphins could've had proper combat names—but instead, the dolphin was called Sprout, and her mother was Blinky.

Though these officers discover in the 1970s that dolphins can fetch objects, dolphins have been working with people for centuries in various capacities. On another note, the dolphin suggests that giving dolphins such silly names is a way for humans to exert control over the animals. The dolphin finds her name offensive, but she has no way to push back against her naming.

Blinky's cohort trained to protect assets by alerting their handlers to enemy divers. In 1970, she and four others worked in Vietnam and like most military parents, she never told Sprout anything about her tour. She did speak about the worst part, which was being transported. Sprout's daughter always laughed at this—by now, 10 years after Sprout's death, Sprout is sure her daughter moves around the world in a fancy carrier. The technologies develop faster than humans know what to do with them and eventually "outstrip men morally," and then they make other animals go along with it.

Sprout's aside about technology points back to Plautus's story, where the Soviets and the Americans sent various animals to space as "proxy astronauts," and most of the animals died. The animals had no choice but to participate, and likewise it seemed the human scientists felt they had no choice but to keep pressing on with their work.

When Blinky returns from Vietnam, she's allowed her choice of mate and gives birth to Sprout. Blinky and the other female dolphins raise Sprout, along with their human trainer, Officer Bloomington. Sprout loves him deeply; Blinky is jealous of their bond. The men who trained Blinky's generation were so worried about rumors concerning the Soviets' trained animals that they treated the dolphins as subordinates. Officer Bloomington is different. He starts working with Sprout in the late 1970s, when he's only 21. One of his college professors worked in John C. Lilly's Caribbean lab that conducted research on dolphin-human communication.

In talking about the Soviet dolphins, Sprout suggests that people are sometimes motivated to be cruel to animals because they fear other people. They may have thought that cruelty was the only way to get the animals to obey, something that Bloomington proves isn't true. In real life, Lilly is best known for his work studying psychedelic drugs and the nature of consciousness, though he did study dolphins.

Bloomington thinks Lilly is outlandish and a bit creepy, but he often reads Lilly's books to Sprout to further her education. He once organizes a screening of *The Day of the Dolphin* for the trainee dolphins (they think it's hilarious; the dolphin actors say rude things about the human actors). Later, when *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is published, Officer Bloomington regularly reads Chapter 23 to Sprout. It's a short chapter about how dolphins are intelligent enough to know that the Earth is ending. Officer Bloomington always laughs at the dolphins' final message before they leave the planet: "So long and thanks for all the fish," which they convey by jumping through a hoop whistling the "Star Spangled Banner."

The Day of the Dolphin *was based on John C. Lilly's life. And though it's a serious movie, Sprout makes it clear that with a different perspective, it's funny. After all, they understand what the dolphins are saying. With the mention of* The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Sprout's story shows again that communication between people and animals is complicated. People, Sprout and these other works suggest, are comically bad at listening to their animal companions.* Only the Animals *seeks to remedy this by portraying animals who are able to use human speech and therefore, appear more sympathetic and relatable.*

Every morning, Officer Bloomington takes Sprout to the training area. She learns to wiggle overboard and then back onto a boat, to fetch a Frisbee, and then to identify things on the sea floor like mines or dropped equipment. Bloomington knows that Sprout understands a lot about what's going on around her—and he wants to earn the "moral right" to give her commands by treating her like a conscious being. It's a partnership, and Bloomington often says that they have an "I/thou relationship." Sprout thinks that in another life, he would've used his skills to be a researcher rather than a trainer. He figures out how the dolphins communicate with clicks—and even identifies each dolphin's signature whistle, which is how they name themselves.

Bloomington's behavior shows that in rare circumstances, people do understand how animals communicate and know how to respond. Through his actions, he models how people should treat animals the way the collection as a whole does: as sentient, feeling beings with thoughts and desires of their own. Bloomington shows the dolphins respect by learning their naming whistles. However, this isn't something Sprout can relay to readers in book format, so readers can't honor her in the same way.

By the time Sprout completes her training, the Navy has five marine mammal teams. They put her on a dolphin-only team that finds and tags mines on the ocean floor. Several of the other teams include sea lions and beluga whales, but Sprout sees little of them. The humans seem to prefer it this way—the animals might come up with plans or tricks.

Sprout proposes that inherent to the human-animal relationship is the idea that people seldom trust the animals fully. While Bloomington does because he spends his days with the dolphins, those who don't see them as full beings instead treat them with suspicion.

Sprout is deployed first to the Persian Gulf in 1987 to fight in the Iran-Iraq war. She's thrilled to be part of a mission, and she feels closer to Bloomington than she ever has. She happily alerts him when she discovers mines. The team loses two dolphins on that mission when Iranians turn their machine guns on them. The Iranians also kill several wild dolphins, which devastates Bloomington. He tries to record their deaths officially, but his superiors block him. They worry about a public outcry.

Bloomington is devastated with the Iranians kill the wild dolphins, which highlights his deep compassion for the animals. The dolphins' deaths stress that no animal can escape a human conflict—even wild animals suffer in wartime. Bloomington's superiors seem to recognize this and understand that a lot of people will be upset if they learn of the dolphins' deaths. But with this, the book implicitly poses a moral question: why are people not upset that dolphins serve in the war at all and only get upset when wild ones get caught in the crossfire?

After the mission, the dolphins return to San Diego. The Navy allows Sprout to breed. Unlike her own mother, Sprout constantly apologizes to her daughter for birthing her into captivity. But it turns out that Sprout's daughter has a choice in this regard. When she's born in 1993, the dolphin program is being downsized. Unwilling to see the dolphins sold to aquariums or languish for years until they can get the permits to release them into the wild, Bloomington releases a group of dolphins into San Francisco Bay. He levels with them and tells them exactly what's going on. Blinky and a few other dolphins choose to stay in the wild—the only dolphins ever to not return to their handlers. But Sprout and her daughter, Officer, return.

Here, Bloomington again demonstrates his compassion for the dolphins. He treats them like equals who should have agency over their own lives. This is potentially risky for Bloomington—by turning the dolphins loose, he prioritizes their wellbeing over the Navy's, since they'd presumably make some money from selling the dolphins.

Soon after, the Navy decides to purchase a dolphin from the Soviets, and his handler is going to come too. Kostya arrives with Officer Mishin to be the lead dolphin/handler pair in a classified training program. To Sprout's surprise, Bloomington becomes tongue-tied around Mishin. Though he receives instructions to learn Mishin's training techniques, he soon discovers that she trains dolphins as gently as he does. Mishin teases him for believing the silly rumors about the Soviets, and Sprout observes Bloomington's shy, fearful smile with pity. She can tell that Mishin doesn't care for him, and the dolphins don't want to share him.

Here, Bloomington and Mishin discover that despite being on opposite sides of a major conflict, their lives and methods aren't all that different. For Bloomington, this gives him the impetus to fall in love. For Sprout, though, this has a clear drawback, as it would mean that the dolphins are no longer the center of his world.

Kostya remains in isolation for a while before the sale. He spends a while with the bachelor dolphins because he's moody and aggressive, but he soon joins the females. To their disappointment, he also confirms that he hasn't participated in frightening missions. But the Navy superiors believe that Kostya is trained to set sea mines, blow up enemy submarines, or that he knows how to tag enemy divers with a lethal device. Mishin denies this and insists dolphins won't hurt or kill people—they'd refuse to obey those commands. Bloomington backs her up, but the superiors aren't convinced.

Both Bloomington and Mishin—who spend their days with dolphins and know them intimately—insist that it's not in a dolphin's nature to kill people. But since the Navy superiors don't have such close contact with the dolphins, they're suspicious of them and frame them as unthinking, programmable machines as opposed to living beings.

The higher-ups decide that it's time for Sprout's unit to learn to detect enemy swimmers. In the past dolphins just alerted handlers to an enemy diver's presence, but now those in charge decide to train a special dolphin team to tag divers with a locating device. Bloomington and Mishin refuse to participate at first, but they give in when they realize the Navy will go ahead with it anyway. The superiors insist that the dolphins won't ever use these skills in conflict; it's just about learning new skills. Both Sprout and Kostya are selected for the program, so they travel to a Navy research base on San Clemente Island.

Bloomington and Mishin are put in a difficult place here. They seem afraid, as Sprout noted earlier, that the Navy will put this training to use despite the ethical concerns. This training also seems like the first step in training dolphins to kill divers with lethal devices. With this, Sprout shows that the slide to immorality and cruelty can be a slow process, one that people don't always recognize when it's happening.

The island changes Bloomington and Mishin's relationship over the months that they're there. Mishin starts to return Bloomington's affections. Bloomington is unaware and Mishin never voices her feelings, but Kostya and Sprout know from their scans—and they're extremely jealous. They each adore their handler and don't want to share, even though they know it's normal for people to fall in love. They try to fall in love with each other, but it doesn't work. This is also the first time that Sprout is away from Officer for such a long time, and she thinks of her constantly.

As Kostya and Sprout are overcome by jealousy while watching their handlers fall in love, and Sprout so deeply misses her daughter, the book again underscores that humans and animals share many of the same experiences and emotions.

On their days off, Bloomington and Mishin hike the island, looking for a feral goat. Bloomington tells Sprout that sailors brought the goats to the island in the 19th century, but they soon became pests. The Navy attempted to eliminate the goats a century later, and eventually there was only one family of goats left. When the Navy caught one female goat, they fitted her with a radio collar and she led the shooters to her family. Mishin and Bloomington never find a goat, but they do confess their feelings. By the time the training mission ends in 1999, Sprout can attach a clamp to a human diver and Bloomington is engaged. Kostya and Sprout are both unimpressed.

The story about the goats shows again how people create situations that gradually turn cruel. The original sailors who released the goats probably didn't think they were doing anything wrong. But Sprout's narration stresses that the final goats suffered a needlessly cruel fate. Even though the goats were feral, they were still at people's mercy.

Officer Bloomington has been afraid for a long time that if the elite unit performs well, the Navy will put them to work in a real conflict. His fears come true in 2000 after the terror attack on the U.S.S. *Cole* in Yemen. The unit also participates in NATO exercises—and then, 9/11 happens. But for dolphins, something else significant happens in 2001: a scientist shows that dolphins pass the "mark test," which means that they can identify their own reflections and know when their appearance changes if someone draws on them. It confirms that dolphins have a sophisticated sense of self, just like humans.

This paper is significant for Sprout and the other Navy dolphins because it confirms what they've known all along: that they're not much different from people and, as Sprout said in introducing her story, they think of themselves as an "I." But alongside this happy discovery, Bloomington has to contend with the possibility that his beloved dolphins won't be able to perform comparatively less dangerous work for much longer.

This experiment reminds Sprout of when she overheard Bloomington and Mishin discussing how most people have a persecution complex. It makes Sprout wonder why humans feel persecuted by other animals like dolphins. They fear being teased without consent and are afraid of recognizing themselves in dolphins. Dolphins might expose humans "for what [they] truly are"—but what good is a sense of self if people always feel like they're constantly under attack?

Here, Sprout suggests that the Navy superiors probably didn't want the different animal units talking to each other because they feared the animals would mock them. And in this, Sprout suggests that it's a uniquely human affliction to feel mocked by other beings.

The shock of 9/11 leads Bloomington and Mishin to set a date for their wedding. The ceremony takes place beside the pens where Sprout, Officer, and Kostya live. Bloomington reads a paragraph from the mark test paper and thanks the dolphins for putting up with humans for so long. Mishin gives Bloomington a mirror as a wedding present and promises to perform the mark test on Kostya with her own lipstick. The guests laugh, and Kostya blushes happily.

Given how Sprout speaks and describes herself, the idea of performing the mark test on Kostya seems almost silly. The dolphins know everything their handlers are saying, so of course he's going to know what he's supposed to do. Animals, this suggests, are far more perceptive and understand more than people give them credit for.

In 2003, Sprout and her team are deployed to the Persian Gulf. As usual, they'll find underwater mines and mark them, but halfway through the journey, Mishin and Bloomington receive special orders: the specially trained dolphins will be authorized to tag enemy divers. The officers resist, but they eventually dedicate themselves to preparing the dolphins to perform their tasks safely. They choose Sprout to go first.

Mishin and Bloomington know that tagging enemy divers will be dangerous for the dolphins, even though the dolphins know what they're supposed to do. In this way, the dolphins don't differ much from people in the military—but Mishin and Bloomington don't think they can ask animals to put themselves in danger like this. Because of the power dynamic, the dolphins can't say no.

During the journey, Sprout and Officer commune in their side-by-side travel pods. Officer isn't concerned about Sprout's safety, though she's mostly just excited to be deployed for the first time. She looks forward to outperforming the unmanned underwater vehicles the higher-ups insisted on including, since nothing can rival dolphin echolocation. Only dolphins can distinguish between mines, debris, and rocks.

Officer's desire to prove herself is another instance where the dolphins don't seem that different from people. It's not usually until a parent is old that children consider their parent's mortality, so it makes sense that Officer isn't frightened here. She also trusts Bloomington that he'll keep her mother safe.

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The night before Sprout's release, Bloomington takes his time with her health inspection. Almost all their days together have stared with an inspection like this, and now Sprout looks forward to Bloomington checking her heart rate. He always listens attentively. Tonight, once he records her heart rate, he keeps the stethoscope in place and listens as though he's trying to memorize the thuds. He releases Sprout just before dawn with orders to affix the titanium clamp to an enemy diver and get away quick if she finds anyone. She believes the clamp is just a tracker—and she has to believe that Bloomington also believes this.

The fact that Bloomington takes so long with Sprout's health inspection suggests that he fears he might lose Sprout on this mission and thus wants to soak up a little extra time with her. It's unclear whether or not Bloomington believes the device is just a tracker. But given how much Sprout loves him, she has to believe that he thinks it's just a tracker. The alternative would mean that Bloomington chose to betray his dolphins' trust.

Sometimes, Sprout wonders if the man she killed felt euphoric, as some human survivors of animal attacks report feeling. Hughes was fascinated by the idea that people experience relief or joy when they surrender to the "ancient cycle" of predator and prey. Now, Sprout finds the thought reassuring. She wonders if the man she killed felt like his death was a gift or a return to his origins.

Finally, Sprout reveals that the device wasn't just a tracker—it was a lethal device, and so she's responsible for a man's death. Even though Sprout has leveraged criticism at Hughes throughout her narration, here she finds his perspective reassuring.

Sprout insists that men commit suicide to consolidate their reputations, while women commit suicide to *get* a reputation. By committing suicide herself, Sprout may have fueled skeptics who don't think the Navy should train female dolphins for the same reason they don't want human women in the armed forces. Supposedly females are too sentimental and susceptible to feeling guilt. But Scout knows that if Kostya had been the first one out, he also would've killed himself—because he's a dolphin.

Here, Sprout insists it's not actually being female that makes some people more sentimental or causes them to experience guilt. Rather, it's being an animal. *With this, Sprout offers the clearest indicator that humans are unique in the animal kingdom because of their ability to behave cruelly. The animals, she suggests, are far kinder and compassionate.*

Dolphins, she explains, are "conscious breathers." She isn't the first dolphin to kill herself and won't be the last. Killing a human is as taboo for dolphins as killing their own babies. Ancient people used to recognize the sacredness in dolphins, and dolphins recognize the same in humans. This is why humans honored dolphins with the **constellation** Delphinus. In return, dolphins help drowning humans, protect them from sharks, and swim gently with children. She warns readers to not forget what their ancestors used to know.

Sprout shows that people have known for millennia that dolphins are their intellectual equals. And in return for this recognition, dolphins have willingly been humans' partners over the years. It's essential, she warns readers, to remember that people used to revere dolphins.

Sprout is done talking about death—she wants to end her story talking about life. Right before she was released on her final mission, she scanned Officer Mishin and discovered she was pregnant with a baby girl. Addressing Sylvia Plath, Sprout says she hasn't found her out here yet. She wants to know if Plath still loved Hughes's poems after he left her. She knows that Plath believed in Hughes's genius all through their marriage—and believed in it so much that Sprout decided to return to Hughes's children's poems. On this reading, she realized that somehow, his writing makes her brain tingle, which feels like a sort of reverse scanning. It happens the most when she reads about the moon-whale. Sprout wishes she'd read the poem to Officer, and imagines Plath reading it to her own daughter.

By returning to Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes's relationship, Sprout seems to be examining her own relationship with Bloomington. When she asks if Plath believed in Hughes's genius after he left her, she seems to be working through her own quest to decide if she still believes in Bloomington's goodness. But Sprout suggests that even these relationships pale in comparison to those that mothers share with their children. By ending her story talking about reading poems to children, Sprout again shows that she's not at all different from human readers.

PSITTACOPHILE: SOUL OF PARROT (DIED 2006, LEBANON)

The parrot says that 30 years ago, his owner asked her future ex-husband how he felt about their upcoming wedding. She pressed him, and he finally said that before they decided to get married, he used to feel a bit happy passing a beautiful woman on the street. Now, he feels a bit sad. The parrot's owner then asked her husband to ask her the same question—and her ex-husband seemed surprised that she expected him to reciprocate. The owner said that she believes one commits to a marriage with both eyes open, and then shut an eye forever. Her ex-husband then disappeared behind the newspaper.

The simple fact that the parrot starts with this anecdote about his owner speaks to how much he loves and cares for her. It also establishes his owner as someone who requires other people's undivided attention—and in this way, she's not so different from a parrot. The owner's ex-husband's response suggests that she's not going to get the kind of attention she needs out of this marriage, hence their impending divorce.

The owner continued and suggested that marriage will be like being whipped and pickled, like they used to do to mutinying soldiers: they'd whip them, and then pickle them with salt to prevent infection. It's "Wonderfully cruel, terribly kind." When she saw her ex-husband wasn't listening, she said she thinks marriage will feel like being a platypus. When George Shaw first brought back a platypus, he thought it was a hoax and was half a duck sewn to half an otter. Surprisingly, her husband was still listening and asked which half of the animal the owner was.

In describing whipping and pickling, the owner revisits the idea that people can be unspeakably cruel one instant and kind the next—all to assert their power over another person or animal. By describing marriage as feeling like a platypus, the owner gestures to the book's primary argument: that humans and animals are interconnected and often quite similar.

The parrot explains that his owner's ex-husband missed the point: she wasn't just either half. Marriage would force her to change and become a stranger to herself. Because she was pregnant then, she could get away with strange behavior. She told him she was the bottom half that got the "shit end of the deal."

By insisting that his owner wasn't going to be able to be herself in her marriage, the parrot makes it clear that neither the owner nor the ex-husband are excitement about the marriage.

A year after 9/11, the parrot's owner delivers the divorce papers and heads for Damascus. She wants her New York friends to think her courageous and her ex-husband to be impressed. The owner's daughter insists that Goa, India, would be a better spot for a midlife crisis. The owner ends up in Beirut, teaching English at the American School. She's disappointed at first, since Lebanon doesn't seem to actually be part of the Middle East. But four years later, when the Israelis start bombing parts of Lebanon, she feels vindicated—until the parrot starts pulling out his feathers and drawing blood.

Here, the parrot shows that what the owner really wants is for people to care and worry about her. This isn't an uncommon desire, but it's also possible to see this as a version of the whipping and pickling she mentioned earlier. Especially since she seems to want to go to the Middle East because she thinks it's dangerous, it seems like she wants her friends and family to worry and be anxious for her safety. This is cruel to them—but their care is, for the owner, a kindness.

The owner's job at the American School provides her with a furnished apartment and a community of friendly expats. Soon, she develops a routine, and unlike in New York, this one isn't depressing. Everything is interesting and exhilarating—she drinks Lebanese beer, eats pickles out of the fridge, and buys a hookah. She marvels at the locals' willingness to ignore the city's violent past. They all ignore the shrapnel in palm trees or the chunk missing out of the local hotel. She thinks denial is underrated.

Ignoring Beirut's violent past means ignoring the damage that both people and animals have suffered. For the owner, this is exciting—she can trick her friends and family into caring and worrying about her, all while living someplace where she doesn't have to worry about the past and its consequences.

The owner decides to get a pet, something exotic enough to match her transformation. The local pet shop stocks everything from crocodiles and monkeys to puppies, but she wants the parrot the instant she walks in. He's sitting on the storeowner's shoulder, and for the first time in her life, the owner believes in love at first sight. The parrot can't talk, the storeowner explains, but he can squawk. When the parrot performs somersaults along the counter, the owner offers to buy him.

The fact that the parrot makes the owner believe in love at first sight shows again how strong bonds between humans and animals can be—though notably, the parrot doesn't reveal whether he felt the same thing when he first saw the owner. This highlights the power dynamic between the two, as the parrot has no control over whether the owner buys him or not.

The storeowner doesn't want to sell the parrot, since he's had him since his birth years before. He was born the same year that the Syrians re-invaded Lebanon and the civil war ended. Finally, after the owner offers more, the storeowner agrees to sell. He explains the parrot could live for another 50 years. When the owner emails her daughter, the owner's daughter warns that the parrot can't live longer than the owner does. The owner names the parrot Barnes, after the author of the book *Flaubert's Parrot*. She doesn't know the classic joke about parrots: people don't own their parrots; parrots own their people.

Parrots often live 50–60 years, and some can even live into their 90s. The fact that the parrot could live 50 years more, coupled with the daughter's warning, is the first clue that a parrot is perhaps not the best pet choice for the owner. The daughter seems to assume that the owner will eventually return to the U.S. with the parrot, and that it will eventually be her responsibility. In this way, she shows that she thinks of animals as lifelong commitments.

After a frantic internet search, the owner learns she basically adopted a toddler. She's delighted that Barnes needs her so much—her ex-husband only tolerated her neediness, and the owner's daughter has been independent from the moment she learned to walk. But Barnes, if she cares for him right, will learn to love the owner and depend on her as a parent, a partner, and a mate. The owner gazes at Barnes' green and black feathers happily.

Finally, Barnes reveals what the owner wanted from her husband: to be needed. In this sense, Barnes is a perfect pet for her, simply because parrots require such a massive amount of care. But Barnes also makes it clear that he has a lot to give the owner, aside from an outlet for her neediness.

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Soon, the owner's routine revolves around Barnes. She carefully curates a play area with appropriate toys and feeds him a varied diet. She scrubs his perch and bowls, and changes his bathwater daily. She even starts refusing visitors because they stress Barnes out, and she stops going on weekend trips with the other expats. Barnes gets to perch on her arm, even when he bites her. He shreds all her books and flings food onto the walls—and she forgives him. In the mornings, she leaves him squawking. But gradually, he learns to let her go without crying. As the months pass, they become inseparable and do everything together, including eating and showering. Barnes learns to open her beer bottles and stops biting.

In this passage, Barnes transforms from the toddler his owner first read about to a more adult animal—especially since he opens her beer bottles. He also satisfies her deep desire to be needed, as there's always something to do for him. This shows that the human-animal relationship can be a reciprocal one. In this relationship, both the owner and Barnes are getting enrichment and enjoyment from the other.

At about 7:00 p.m. every night, Barnes gets sleepy and grumpy. He whines and snuggles against his owner until she puts him to bed in his cage, where he sleeps for 12 hours straight. His owner loves that Barnes takes such joy in simple things. He loves baths, sunshine, and he sings with happiness when he's close to his owner. He grooms her ears and her thin ponytail, hoping she'll ruffle his feathers or rub his tummy in return. Then, she meets Marty.

Again, Barnes's idyllic descriptions of life with his owner paint a picture of an ideal human-animal relationship. Both Barnes and his owner clearly take delight in spending time with each other. Barnes also certainly still fuels the owner's desire to feel needed, even though he's no longer in his toddler phase.

The owner attends a rooftop barbecue one Friday with Barnes on her shoulder. Marty has just arrived to teach at the American School. He's about the same age and came to Beirut for the same reasons. They joke about avoiding the Midwesterners and laugh loudly. They share meaningful looks when a young teacher arrives with an even younger Lebanese girlfriend. She has a plastic nose guard taped to her face and explains flatly that she got a nose job. Her boyfriend says that here, it's a badge of honor. Barnes's owner asks the girl if she's been watching the Olympics. The girl says she watches the only Lebanese team that gets gold: the shooting team.

Given that the owner and Marty connect over being New Yorkers and speak condescendingly about the Midwesterners, it seems like they really just want to be different—but to also find others like them.

The owner takes Barnes along when she and Marty go on a date to the National Museum of Beirut. They watch a video of huge concrete blocks exploding. Inside each one is an ancient Roman statue, which was hidden there during the civil war to protect them. Barnes's owner and Marty find this moving. After this, months pass. Barnes's owner spends more time with Marty and less with Barnes.

Again, Barnes doesn't offer any insight into what he thinks of the video, suggesting that in his lifetime, his opinions mattered much less than his owners did. As his owner starts to spend more time with Marty, it seems as though Barnes wasn't the best choice of pet. Barnes doesn't say he was neglected, but given how much else he leaves out, he nevertheless implies this.

One evening, the owner and Marty take Barnes with them to a cafe. They watch a Saudi woman eat a hamburger through her niqab, her husband and son with her in normal clothes. Beirut, Barnes shares, gives Marty and his owner lots of opportunities to get on their high horse. They share a hookah and ask about their respective divorces. The owner lets Marty spend the night for the first time after this. But later, she watches Marty sleep beside her. Barnes knows his owner wishes she could sleep so easily—her brain usually thinks of all sorts of things when she tries to sleep. She feels abandoned and so takes Barnes with her to the balcony. Barnes crawls up his owner's arm and tucks hair behind her ear. The next morning, she cuts things off with Marty.

Here, Barnes talks about his owner again in such a way as to suggest that he didn't always approve of her conduct. Though he doesn't say so outright, he seems to take issue with her and Marty "get[ting] on their high horse" about the woman's garment (and earlier, speaking ill of the Midwesterners). But Barnes seems to forgive her as soon as he recognizes that she's going to cut things off with Marty. In this regard, his relationship with his owner is more valuable than any of her other relationships.

A year passes—and Barnes warns that people should never take life lightly in the Middle East. One afternoon, Barnes and his owner hear a distant boom that shakes the apartment floor. His owner can't see anything from the balcony, so she turns on the TV and learns that Israel launched its first airstrike. She's concerned only for Barnes and runs out to buy him a humidifier to protect his lungs from smoke. She puts him in his cage, covers it, and is distraught when she can't use the humidifier. There's no power. Four days later, the other Americans in the building leave Beirut. Barnes and his owner sleep by day and then sit up in candlelight at night. He digs his claws into her arm until she bleeds.

Barnes confirms that his owner's family members had reason to be wary when his owner chose to move to Beirut. Now, she experiences firsthand what it's like to live in a warzone. Her first thought, though, is to protect Barnes and keep him healthy. Indeed, it doesn't even seem like she considers leaving at first, recognizing instead that it's her responsibility to care fore her parrot. As Barnes describes hurting his owner's arm, it shows that the bombings didn't just affect people—he seems to be suffering from stress, too.

Barnes starts screeching and continues for hours without stopping. He stops eating and starts biting his owner. His owner watches as he rips out his feathers. One afternoon, when Barnes is sleeping, she sneaks away to an internet cafe with power. Her inbox is filled with messages from the owner's daughter, her friends, and her ex-husband, begging her to come home. But she just basks in their anxiety.

It seems like caring for Barnes while he's so upset and anxious is exhausting for the owner, but it also seems to give her some degree of comfort. Similarly, she enjoys that her family members are worried about her, as it shows her that they care. The fact that Barnes is so upset at all speaks to how frightening war is, especially for animals who don't always understand what's going on.

Barnes says his owner couldn't have known that the ceasefire would come within a month when she got one of the last boat jets to Cyprus. She carries Barnes in his cage to the balcony and goes back inside. She tries to pretend she's not packing up food for Barnes. When she returns to the balcony, she finds Barnes looking at the sky with drooping eyes. She throws a towel over the cage and then carries it down the street, dragging her suitcase. She walks to the pet shop where she bought Barnes, but it's boarded up and empty. Barnes asks what choice she had but to hang his cage from the awning and leave before he realized he was on his own.

Though she tries to do right by Barnes by leaving him with his original owner, the owner feels that she doesn't have a choice but to leave him. With this, the collection closes by showing that even pets who don't see combat zones up close suffer—if only because their owners feel forced to abandon them. Barnes presumably dies because he was abandoned, driving home just how much he relied on his owner and people in general to ensure his safety.

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