

My Family and Other Animals



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GERALD DURRELL

Gerald Durrell was the fifth and final child of the Durrell family (an older sister died in infancy). His father was an engineer in India, and both his parents were born there. The family moved to London not long before Gerald Durrell's father died. After his death, Mrs. Durrell moved Gerald, his sister Margo, and brother Leslie to the Greek island of Corfu to join her eldest son, Lawrence (Larry in the novel), who already lived there with his wife. Though *My Family and Other Animals* is semi-autobiographical and many of the characters were real people, it does leave out important facts (such as Larry's marriage and the fact that Theodore Stephanides was also married with a daughter, whom the families hoped would actually marry Gerald). The Durrell family left Corfu as World War Two began, and in 1943, Durrell served the war effort by working on a farm. In 1947, he began conducting wildlife collecting expeditions. His collection practices differed significantly from common practices of the time: he never over-collected and didn't cater to animal collectors. After marrying Jacquie Sonia Wolfenden in 1951, both began writing books to fund Durrell's expeditions and his conservation efforts. In the mid-fifties, as Durrell became increasingly disenchanted with the way zoos were run, he began planning to open his own zoo and finally did in 1959 in Jersey. The zoo became a leading force in captive breeding of endangered species. Durrell and Wolfenden divorced in 1979 and soon after, Durrell married his second wife, Lee McGeorge Durrell. They launched several conservation groups over the next decade, the most famous of which is now known as the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. Durrell died in 1995 after his health began deteriorating after a trip to Madagascar.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Corfu's history goes back thousands of years: it was possibly described in Homer's *Odyssey* as the island Scheria where the Phaeacians lived, though there's no conclusive evidence for or against this. Corfu didn't come to be considered a part of Greece in the modern world until 1864, when the Treaty of London united the Ionian Islands with Greece. The Durrells left the island on the eve of World War Two and during the war, the island was occupied by Italian forces and then, from 1943 until the end of the war, by the Nazis. Many of the people Gerald Durrell describes in his novel were real people: his brother, Lawrence Durrell, was considered one of the most important British writers of the twentieth century, and Dr. Theodore Stephanides was a renowned scientist, writer, and poet. One of

Stephanides' books on aquatic life was still a leading and guiding piece of research as of the early 21st century. It's easy to see how Gerald Durrell's time on Corfu influenced his later efforts in zoo keeping. He revolutionized how animals were kept in captivity, specifically promoting habitats for captive animals that mimic their natural habitats as closely as possible, something that occupies much of Gerry's time throughout the novel and is now an extremely common zoo practice.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

My Family and Other Animals is part of what's known as the Corfu trilogy, all of which are about Durrell's early experiences keeping animals and his family's time on the island. The other two in the trilogy are *Birds, Beasts, and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods*. All three, as well as many of Durrell's other books, were written as fundraising efforts for his zoo in Jersey and his conservation work. Other children's books written with a similar purpose include Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and Margaret Marshall Saunders' novel *Beautiful Joe*, though both novels take issue specifically with the mistreatment of domesticated animals rather than the care and keeping of wild ones. *My Family and Other Animals* is often grouped with books such as *Dr. Doolittle* and *Swiss Family Robinson* in their treatment of animals and traveling families. Durrell's brother Lawrence, who was actually a writer, also wrote about the family's time on Corfu in his novel *Prospero's Cell*. Finally, Durrell's novel can also be seen as sharing broad thematic similarities with Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, as all promote a sense of reverence and respect for the natural world.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** My Family and Other Animals
- **When Written:** 1956
- **Where Written:** Bournemouth, England
- **When Published:** 1956
- **Literary Period:** Modern
- **Genre:** Semi-autobiographical fiction
- **Setting:** The Greek island of Corfu; 1935-37
- **Climax:** The Durrells' Christmas party
- **Antagonist:** Larry is the character who is the most negative about Gerry's love of animals, although he isn't quite an antagonist
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Should've Sent Him Away. Gerald Durrell's brother, Lawrence

Durrell, a well-known author in his own right, has been quoted as saying that his brother's books are proof that children should be sent away to boarding school and not allowed to sit in on adult conversations and goings-on.

Naming Honors. Gerald Durrell and his second wife, Lee, have had a number of recently discovered animal species named in their honor. These include *Ceylonthelphysa durrelli*, or Durrell's freshwater crab, *Benthophilus durrelli*, or Durrell's tadpole goby, and *Kotchevnik durrelli*, a species of Russian moth.



PLOT SUMMARY

One drizzly and dark day in Bournemouth, England, the Durrells sit in their living room, fighting their usual ailments brought on by the weather. Larry, the eldest son, is irritated and suggests that they escape the weather by moving to Corfu, Greece. Though Mother says the idea is ridiculous, she agrees. The family packs their most precious belongings—Gerry brings his scientific equipment and the family dog, Roger; Margo brings her acne potions; Leslie brings his guns; and Larry brings books—and they arrive in Greece not long after. The family is a sight to behold during the cab ride to the hotel, as Roger barks viciously at strays on the street and tries to jump out. Mother and Margo are immediately disgusted and worried about disease when they discover that there are funerals galore that day and that Grecian bathroom practices are less sanitary than English ones, so Mother sets out to find a villa immediately. Her first guide, Mr. Beeler, isn't helpful, as he doesn't understand why she wants a bathroom in the house. On the second day the family meets Spiro, a Greek man who speaks English. He shows them what becomes their new home, a pink villa on a hill.

Gerry and Roger spend their time in the garden, where Gerry closely observes the bugs in the flowers. He soon learns Greek and makes friends with the locals. The shepherd Yani tells Gerry folktales about cypress trees, and the peculiar Rose-Beetle Man sells Gerry several pets. Gerry acquires the tortoise Achilles first, who is warmly accepted into the family. He dies not long after when he falls into a well. Gerry purchases a dove named Quasimodo next. Though Quasimodo is a fun pet for a time, Gerry soon discovers that Quasimodo is actually female. She becomes very wild after she lays eggs.

Mother soon decides that it's time for Gerry to be educated. Larry suggests that his friend George tutor Gerry. George is a fine tutor according to Gerry; he sprinkles in zoological "facts" of questionable truth and, most importantly, teaches Gerry how to properly observe animals and record his findings. One afternoon, Gerry goes out with Roger to explore and swim. They stop and see Yani and on their way back home, Gerry discovers strange nests. He seeks out George to explain the nests and discovers that George is visiting with the esteemed scientist, Dr. Theodore Stephanides. Theodore treats Gerry

like he is a knowledgeable adult and explains that the nests belong to trapdoor spiders. Several days later, Theodore sends a gift of a pocket microscope to Gerry and invites him for tea. Gerry begins spending every Thursday afternoon at Theodore's house, poring over microscope slides and consulting books.

When spring arrives, Mother's cooking causes Larry to develop indigestion, and Margo begins secretly swimming with a Turk. Spiro is distraught. When Margo introduces the Turk to the family, they find him condescending and smug. Mother insists on accompanying Margo and the Turk to the cinema the next night, after which the relationship ends due to the Turk's horribly strong perfume. As summer approaches, Larry writes to a number of friends inviting them to stay. Mother insists that they cannot host anyone given the small size of their villa, but Larry believes the obvious solution is to move to a bigger one. Despite Mother's protests, the family does just that. The new villa is yellow and is surrounded by many trees. Mother hires a woman named Lugaretzia to help with the house, though Lugaretzia turns out to be difficult to work with and a hypochondriac. The furniture in the yellow villa is in bad shape, so Mother asks Spiro to take her, Gerry, and Margo into town to buy new pieces. In town, they get swept up in a procession heading for the church to kiss the feet of Saint Spiridion, the patron saint of the island. Despite Mother's attempts to tell Margo not to, Margo kisses the saint's feet and comes down with the flu immediately. Gerry occupies his time watching swallows build nests in the eaves of the house.

With summer comes the tortoises. Gerry watches their mating rituals on the hill behind the villa and even collects an egg from his favorite tortoise, Madame Cyclops. Larry's friends arrive in waves. The poet Zatopec arrives first, followed by the three young artists Jonquil, Durant, and Michael. Though they all want to work, none of them make any art during their stay. Larry also invites a countess named Melanie, who suffers from a skin infection. Mother mistakenly believes that Melanie has a venereal disease and calls Theodore to assess the situation, and she's mortified to discover her mistake. At dinner that night, Theodore tells the table about a theatre production gone wrong. When Larry insists that such a thing couldn't have happened, Theodore explains that anything can happen in Corfu.

Gerry greatly enjoys watching scorpions in the wall behind the house. One day, he finds a mother scorpion covered in babies, captures her in a matchbox, and brings her inside. Poor Larry opens the matchbox when he tries to light a cigarette and pandemonium ensues. After this, Mother decides that Gerry needs to resume his education, so she sends him to the Belgian consul to learn French. Gerry doesn't learn much, but the Belgian consul spends a fair amount of time shooting sickly stray cats out his window, which teaches Gerry that death can be humane when an animal is suffering.

Theodore comes on Thursdays so he can watch the weekly **seaplane** land from the Durrells' attic, and he teaches Gerry a great deal about science and aquatic life. The following summer, Mother hires Peter to tutor Gerry. Gerry also receives his own room in the house to keep his specimens and animals. One afternoon, Gerry discovers a baby owl in a tree and brings it home. The family names him Ulysses. Though he is initially extremely aggressive, he soon mellows and even decides that Roger is a fine companion. The Durrell children and Peter begin swimming at night to escape the heat, and Gerry is thrilled when porpoises visit. Eventually, Mother purchases a horrendous and outdated swimming costume so she can join, and the family plans a moonlit picnic for her first swim. Theodore joins and they all watch a magnificent show as the fireflies dance and the porpoises swim in the phosphorescence.

Gerry discovers a small archipelago after the family invests in an outboard engine for their boat the *Sea Cow*, though they forbid him from taking it out himself. Gerry asks Leslie to build him a boat for his birthday. Two weeks later, Leslie unveils the boat. It's round and strange, but Gerry loves it. He names it the **Bootle-Bumtrinket**. Its launch is eventful when Peter gets dumped into the water. The party that night is amazing, and Gerry receives two puppies that Larry names Widdle and Puke. Not long after, the family decides that Margo and Peter have become too fond of each other, so Mother fires Peter. Margo cries and pouts dramatically for weeks. Leslie rigs up a complicated system of guns when he notices items missing from the *Sea Cow* but doesn't share this with the family. When he shoots at the thieves, Mother fears Margo committed suicide. Though this event causes Margo to stop pouting, she does take the *Bootle-Bumtrinket* out to a small island to pout in peace and receives a very painful sunburn on her eyelids.

As winter comes, Leslie begins hunting boar on the mainland. Larry maddeningly insists that hunting is easy, even after Leslie performs an especially difficult maneuver. Leslie invites Larry to come out to show everyone how it's done. Larry not only misses the birds, but falls into the deep mud and can barely get out. Angry, he takes three bottles of brandy to bed, drinks two, and falls asleep. A coal falls out of his fireplace and sets a supporting beam on fire, which sends the family into a tizzy when they discover it. Larry, unconcerned, instructs his family on how to put it out from bed. When spring arrives again, Mother receives a letter from Great-Aunt Hermione asking to visit. Nobody likes Hermione, so Larry insists they need to move to a smaller house so she can't come.

The next villa is white and is also the home of massive praying mantises and geckos. A gecko Gerry calls Geronimo hunts in his room every night and is very aggressive. One afternoon, Gerry catches a female mantis he believes is going to lay eggs. He names her Cicely and she soon escapes. That night, she resurfaces and she and Geronimo fight to the death, with Geronimo emerging victorious. Gerry also finds two toads that

are so big, one eats a gecko. Mother soon hires a man named Kralesky to tutor Gerry, insisting that he's a bird lover. Gerry is skeptical but at his first lesson, he finds that Mother was right: Kralesky is an aviculturist and breeds birds. Despite this wonderful hobby, Kralesky is a difficult tutor. He also strangely visits his mother often, which Gerry believes is Kralesky's way of talking about the bathroom. After several weeks, Gerry discovers that Kralesky does actually care for his mother in the house. Mrs. Kralesky tells Gerry that her advanced age means that she can hear flowers speak.

One afternoon, Gerry takes two magpie babies out of a nest and brings them home. The birds are soon christened the Magenpies. Though Larry is initially afraid they'll steal, he forgets about their criminal tendencies until one day they raid his room and destroy his manuscript. He insists that Gerry lock them up, so Gerry asks Kralesky to help him build a cage and at the same time, teach him to wrestle. Gerry believes that Kralesky can wrestle because in comparison to Kralesky's other stories, his one about wrestling seems plausible. However, Gerry seriously injures Kralesky when Kralesky tries to teach him some "tricks." Not long after, Mother brings home a female dog named Dodo. Dodo proves difficult, as she goes into season regularly and won't let Mother out of her sight. She has one puppy with Puke. During an excursion to a beautiful lake, Theodore regales them with a tale of an opera performance that went very wrong. Several weeks later, Gerry attempts to capture a terrapin named Old Plop and instead, captures two water snakes. He also meets a convict named Kosty, who gives Gerry a cantankerous gull named Alecko. Larry fears that Alecko is an albatross, while Mother is more concerned that Gerry is spending time with murderers.

In September, the Durrells throw a Christmas party. Things go wrong from the start: the now-captive Old Plop and the snakes eat Gerry's goldfish; the snakes get heatstroke and need to cool down in the bathtub; and the Magenpies and Alecko escape and wreak havoc. Leslie is terrified to discover the snakes in the bathtub, though the guests wonder if he's sane. Dodo is in season and a dogfight erupts in the middle of cocktail hour, and Larry regales everyone with tales of how dangerous the house is. Soon after, Kralesky insists he has nothing more to teach Gerry, so the Durrells prepare to return to England so Gerry can finish his education. As they pass through Switzerland, Mother is incensed when an immigration official writes that the Durrells are a "traveling circus and staff."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Gerry Durrell – Gerry is the narrator of the novel; he's ten years old when his family moves to Corfu, a Greek island. Gerry's youth means that he's the first member of the family to

learn Greek, and he adapts to many of the local customs, such as bathing in the sea instead of in indoor bathrooms. Because he's the youngest Durrell child by almost a decade, he occupies a liminal space between child and adult, and his primary interests are biology, botany, and the care of animals. To this end, he spends most of his time in Corfu observing the plant and animal life in his family's gardens and around the island, and he spends a great deal of his narration detailing his discoveries for the reader. Gerry has a distinctly negative view of education; he sees educational pursuits that have little or nothing to do with science as boring and unproductive.

However, his tutors recognize that Gerry latches onto subjects when they insert a zoological flair to the lesson. Gerry spends most of the novel acquiring exotic pets, either by capturing them himself or purchasing them from the Rose-Beetle Man. He regularly anthropomorphizes the animals he observes and spends time with. For example, Roger, the family dog, is often described as being almost human, and Gerry goes to great lengths to describe animals' personalities, tics, and preferences. Gerry's love of the natural world is trying for the rest of his family, and Larry in particular takes issue with Gerry's passion and does his best to try to introduce Gerry to great literature, though he experiences little success. One of Gerry's greatest friends on the island is Theodore, an esteemed scientist who treats Gerry as though he's an adult and knowledgeable in his own right. He provides Gerry with a number of books and tools (microscopes, slides, chemicals for preserving specimens) that help Gerry learn more about the natural world. As Gerry's menagerie becomes more and more exotic, he goes to great pains to construct enclosures for his animals that mimic the animals' natural habitat as closely as possible. He also spends much of his time cleaning and caring for his animals, as he recognizes he's the only family member willing and able to do so.

Dr. Theodore Stephanides – Theodore is a freshwater biologist and general biology enthusiast whom Gerry meets through George. He's always impeccably dressed and has an impressive beard (which Gerry believes is compelling evidence that he's an esteemed scientist). Theodore quickly becomes one of Gerry's best friends and fascinates him endlessly, as he's one of the few non-family adults who treats Gerry like an adult and also shares his love and curiosity for the natural world. Theodore teaches Gerry in a way that makes Gerry feel as though Theodore isn't actually teaching, but rather is reminding Gerry of things he already knew and forgot about. In some ways, Gerry perceives Theodore as being relatively childish: he loves to watch **seaplanes** land and is unbelievably awkward when it comes to greetings and small talk. He has an extensive library filled with books on "sensible" subjects, such as biology, botany, and folklore, as well as a collection of mystery and crime novels that he shares with Mother. He's also a trained doctor and has access to an X-ray machine, so he is often called upon to diagnose various injuries. During the Durrells' time in Corfu,

Theodore and Gerry meet weekly on Thursday afternoons to either look at microscope slides in Theodore's study or wander around outside and collect specimens in nature. Theodore delights in telling stories about the absurd culture of Corfu, and he also has a vast repertoire of bad jokes and puns that he deploys whenever possible. He laughs at himself and at his jokes and never seems to take himself particularly seriously. Theodore soon becomes a dear friend of all the Durrells and is the only non-family person Mother allows to see her in her bathing costume.

Larry Durrell – Larry is Gerry's oldest brother; he's 23 at the start of the novel. He's a writer and brings so many books with him to Corfu that he has to engage local workmen to use a pulley system to get his trunks into his room through the window. Like Mother, Larry is obsessed with looking the part of well-to-do English people. This means that he's often exasperated with or disappointed by his family, as they often do things that, in Larry's mind, shatter this image. Larry has a very strong sense that his way of doing things is the only right way, though he also refuses to take responsibility when his suggestions go south. He often suggests things that Mother in particular finds absurd, such as moving to Corfu in the first place and then moving villas to accommodate friends he invited to visit over the summer. He believes that moving in both cases is an obvious solution to the family's problems and insists that Mother is the strange one for wanting to remain in one place. Larry also takes it upon himself to convince his family members to read "proper" literature, not the mystery novels that the rest of his family enjoys. Larry is one of the most vocal adversaries of Gerry's love of the natural world, mostly because he constantly discovers animals captured in matchboxes. After discovering a scorpion in one, he becomes especially wary of Gerry and of matchboxes and makes sure to wrap his hand in a handkerchief before opening them. He also takes major offense to Gerry's pet birds, especially the Magenpies, as they trash his room and destroy his beloved manuscript.

Mother – Mother is the widowed head of the Durrell family. Her primary interests are cooking rich, exotic foods and gardening. She does her best to support her children in their respective interests and endeavors and steer the family on a reasonable path, though Gerry notes that this support is often mocked by his siblings. She's extremely concerned with keeping up appearances, such as when she purchases an extremely out of date swimming costume (as "women her age" can't be seen in modern swimsuits) and refuses to move villas on account of what people might think. However, despite this, she's also the only family member who truly encourages Gerry in his interest in the natural world. She generally accepts his pets and insists her other children do the same, though she does side with the rest of the family when the pets in question are dangerous. She treats all her children with an air of nonchalance and humors them good-naturedly, even when their interests or suggestions

border on the absurd. She's extremely offended when a travel official refers to her family as a "circus and staff" during their return to England.

Spiro Hakiopoulos – Spiro is a hulking and hairy Greek man who takes the Durrell family under his wing. Prior to the start of the novel he spent eight years in Chicago, which is where he learned English. This, according to him, makes him a favorite guide of all English-speaking tourists. He takes it upon himself to make sure the Durrells don't get swindled and fights with the local customs agent on several occasions to move the Durrells' belongings through without too much issue. Gerry notes that Spiro acts as though he owns the island, though Spiro regularly badmouths others that he believes act as though they own the island. Gerry refers to Spiro as the family's guardian angel; he becomes a friend and mentor during the family's time in Corfu. Spiro adores Mother and regularly reports to her when he sees the Durrell children doing anything potentially unsafe or of interest. He endears himself to Gerry especially when Gerry asks for help obtaining goldfish for his pond. Gerry discovers that Spiro stole the goldfish out of the palace where royalty and foreign dignitaries stay when they visit the island.

Leslie Durrell – Leslie is Gerry's second brother. He's 19 at the start of the novel and his primary interests are guns and hunting. He purchases a number of firearms over the course of the novel and takes part in hunting expeditions both on Corfu and on the Greek mainland. Gerry occasionally joins him on these expeditions. Leslie is of the mind that if one can hunt and sail, one can get by in life just fine. Gerry uses this belief to his advantage when he convinces Leslie to build him a boat for his birthday. Leslie is often at odds with Larry, given that Leslie has practical skills while Larry is irritatingly convinced that one can do anything, assuming one has the brain to think it through logically. This leads to a number of shenanigans as Larry either suggests or attempts to perform feats with guns or hunting that do actually require practice. Leslie loves regaling the family with tales of his hunting adventures, though nobody is particularly interested in listening. He is also terrified of snakes.

Margo Durrell – Margo is Gerry's only sister; she's 18 at the beginning of the novel. Her primary goal in life is to cure her acne, and she uses a number of lotions and potions to attempt this feat. Her other interests include sunbathing, wearing diaphanous, flowing clothing, and experimenting with a variety of ridiculous diets. She often joins Mother in advocating for Gerry's less contentious pets, though she's disgusted by his interest in bugs and insects. The dove Quasimodo takes a liking to Margo and even sleeps in her room for a while. She has several romantic relationships over the course of the novel, though none are longstanding. When the family orchestrates her breakup with Peter, Margo dramatically spends a week locked in the attic to weep and read poetry.

Kralefsky – Kralefsky is Gerry's final tutor on Corfu. Gerry initially thinks that Kralefsky is more gnome than human, as

he's bald and has a hunchback. Though he is an exacting tutor in all subjects, he also recognizes that he has more luck teaching Gerry when the subject matter appeals to his interests. To this end, Gerry learns French by reading a French bird guide. Kralefsky is an aviculturist (one who keeps and breeds birds), and the entire top floor of his mansion is lined with cages containing all manner of birds. He has a deep love of storytelling, though a number of his stories are presumably not true: Gerry discovers that he can surreptitiously plant an idea one day and the next day, Kralefsky has a story prepared involving "a Lady" and whatever situation Gerry might have suggested. However, Gerry doesn't always recognize that Kralefsky's stories are entirely fantasy: he takes Kralefsky at his word when Kralefsky regales him with a tale about wrestling a famous wrestler in Paris and begs for a wrestling lesson, during which he ends up seriously hurting Kralefsky.

Roger – Roger is the Durrell family dog and Gerry's constant companion. He's large and black, with a curly coat and a stumpy tail. He's extremely loyal to his family and on multiple occasions attacks things or people he believes are threats, including Lugaretzia and Mother's ruffled swimsuit. His years of friendship with Gerry taught Roger that it's in his best interest to try to make friends with whatever creatures Gerry instructs him to, and he generally accepts Gerry's other pets as part of the family. Roger accompanies Gerry everywhere, from his indoor tutoring sessions to his afternoon romps around the island. He has a running rivalry with all the stray dogs in Corfu and tries to fight them any chance he gets, especially once Mother brings Dodo home.

George – George is one of Larry's friends and is the person responsible for inspiring the Durrells' move to Corfu in the first place. After the Durrells are settled, he tutors Gerry until he leaves the island a year later. He does his best to appeal to Gerry's interests, which means that George ends up sprinkling a number of zoological facts and other "facts" into his lessons, such as the names of Hannibal's elephants. Most importantly, George teaches Gerry how to keep a diary of his observations of the natural world, which focuses Gerry's interests and helps him learn more.

The Belgian Consul – During an interim in Gerry's education, Mother engages the Belgian consul to teach Gerry French. The Belgian consul is always dressed as though he's preparing for an important meeting with someone, and his living room where he conducts Gerry's lessons is decorated in red brocade and photos of himself in Napoleonic poses. He's a great cat lover and keeps three cats of his own. He also takes it upon himself to attempt to control the stray cat population in Corfu, which is overwhelmingly sickly and undernourished. He and Gerry observe moments of silence after the consul shoots stray cats out the window, an event that happens multiple times each day.

Peter – Peter is a young man whom Mother engages to tutor Gerry. Though he's exacting at first, the culture of the island

soon takes effect and he becomes much more reasonable and pleasant. Gerry observes that both Peter and Margo become suddenly and inexplicably interested in botany as evidenced by their walks in the garden together, but it soon becomes clear that Peter and Margo are involved romantically. When the rest of the family decides that they don't want to be related to Peter by marriage, Mother fires him.

Dodo – Dodo is a female Dandy Dinmont Terrier whom Mother brings home as a companion. True to her breed's characteristics, Dodo is exceptionally loyal to her mistress—often loyal to a fault. She shadows Mother everywhere and refuses to even allow Mother to be in the bathroom alone. As the only female dog in the Durrell household, Dodo is an object of interest for Roger, Widdle, and Puke every time she goes into season, though Gerry doesn't think she's particularly intelligent and she's not sure what all the fuss is about. Puke is the only dog who is successful in wooing her, and Dodo has one puppy with him. Dodo also has a bad hip that pops out of its socket at the slightest provocation.

The Turk – The Turk is a young Turkish man that Margo begins a romantic relationship with at the strawberry-pink villa. Margo initially tries to keep their relationship secret, but Spiro informs Mother of the Turk's presence, telling her that Turks as a rule are violent, dangerous, and not to be trusted. Though the Turk never seems violent, he is condescending and self-important. His relationship with Margo ends after a disastrous night out at the cinema.

Jonquil, Durant, and Michael – Jonquil, Durant, and Michael are friends of Larry's and a group of artists that visit at the daffodil-yellow villa. Though they all insist they want to get work done during their stay in Corfu, none of them do: Michael suffers an allergic reaction that leaves him unwell for his entire stay, Jonquil sunbathes the entire time, and Durant is in the process of "recovering his nerve" after a painting fiasco that happened two years ago.

Yani – Yani is a local shepherd in Corfu and one of Gerry's best friends. Yani is always ready to share local folklore with Gerry and offer him information to keep him safe. He shows Gerry how to create scorpion anti-venom and cautions him to not sleep under cypress trees, as the trees steal people's brains.

The Rose-Beetle Man – The Rose-Beetle Man is a strange local fixture in Corfu. He dresses eccentrically and never speaks, though he plays the flute and sings in a strange, nasal voice. He sells a variety of animals as pets including rose beetles, doves, tortoises, and chickens. Gerry purchases both Achilles and Quasimodo from him.

Alecko – Alecko is a large and cantankerous black-backed gull whom Gerry acquires from the convict Kosti. Kosti found Alecko in Albania, and, as a prisoner, he struggles to feed him properly. Despite Gerry's admiration for the bird, nobody else in the family shares his positive feelings: Larry believes the bird

is an albatross and therefore unlucky, while Alecko doesn't help matters by biting anyone who gets too close.

Achilles – Achilles is a small, young tortoise that Gerry purchases from the Rose-Beetle Man. He very quickly becomes tame enough to be given the run of the garden at the strawberry-pink villa. He adores both strawberries and grapes, and if he finds someone sunbathing outside, he tries to climb them. Achilles dies when he escapes the garden and falls into a disused well.

Kosti – Kosti is a convict that Gerry meets while swimming in the ocean one day. In Greece, convicts are allowed to leave the prison, something that doesn't strike Gerry as strange at all. Kosti gives Gerry the gull Alecko, which earns him Gerry's unwavering admiration. Mother, however, is much less impressed, especially when she learns that Kosti is in jail for killing his wife.

Lugaretzia – Lugaretzia is the gardener's wife at the daffodil-yellow villa, and Mother engages her to work in the villa. Though Mother insists they need the help, Lugaretzia proves trying to have around: she's a hypochondriac and greatly enjoys telling anyone who will listen about her latest affliction in painstaking, gory detail.

Widdle and Puke – Widdle and Puke are two puppies that a friend gives the Durrells on the occasion of Gerry's birthday. Because they're a gift, Mother is forced to accept them. They receive their names after being locked in a room at the birthday party, where they promptly urinate and vomit everywhere. As they grow up they become companions to Gerry and Roger. Puke later fathers a puppy with Dodo.

Geronimo – Geronimo is a large gecko who lives under a rock in the garden right below Gerry's window at the white villa. He hunts insects in Gerry's room at night and gets into a violent battle with Cicely, a praying mantis that Gerry captured. Geronimo emerges victorious, though not without injuries.

The Magenpies – The Magenpies are a pair of magpie birds that Gerry takes from a nest when they're babies. They're curious and social birds, and are also exceptionally smart—they know what rooms of the house they can enter, which they can't, and which are most interesting. Larry insists that the Magenpies be locked up after they tear his room apart.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Melanie – Melanie is a countess that Larry invites to visit at the daffodil-yellow villa. Gerry and Larry find her fascinating and delightful, but Mother mishears Melanie when she mentions an affliction she recently recovered from and comes to believe that Melanie has an unladylike venereal disease.

Quasimodo – Quasimodo is a dove that Gerry purchases from the Rose-Beetle Man. Because he's raised from a tiny baby by the Durrell family, he never learns to fly or truly act like a bird.

He loves human companionship and music, especially waltzes and military marches.

Madame Cyclops – Madame Cyclops is a very large tortoise with only one eye. Though Gerry never tries to capture and domesticate her, she does become relatively tame and learns that Gerry is a wonderful source of food. Gerry witnesses her laying eggs and takes one for his collection.

Mrs. Kralfesky – Mrs. Kralfesky is Kralfesky's elderly mother. She lives in Kralfesky's mansion and spends much of her time in bed, listening to the flowers talk. Gerry is entranced by her hair, which is extremely long and still auburn, even in her old age.

Dr. Androuchelli – The resident doctor on Corfu; he has a delightful bedside manner and makes strange noises when attending to patients. He also has six children, which Spiro teases him mercilessly about.

Zatopec – Zatopec is one of Larry's friends that Larry invites to stay at the daffodil-yellow villa. He's a heavy drinker and pesters all the local girls and women, including Lugaretzia.

Great-Aunt Hermione – Great-Aunt Hermione only appears in the novel through her letters to Mother, which are met by Gerry, Margo, Larry, and Leslie with derision and disgust. Larry insists that Hermione is a hypochondriac and awful to be around.

Cicely – Cicely is a huge praying mantis that Gerry captures when he realizes she's full of eggs. He hopes that he'll be able to observe her egg-laying habits, but this hope is dashed when she escapes, gets into a fight with Geronimo the gecko, and dies.

Ulysses – Ulysses is a Scops owl that Gerry collects when he's a baby. Though he's initially aggressive, especially towards Roger, he eventually decides that Roger is an acceptable form of transportation. He lives in Gerry's study in the daffodil-yellow villa.

Mr. Beeler – A hotel guide who shows the Durrells villas. He's distraught when Mother asks for one with a bathroom.

Sophia – Sophia is the maid's youngest daughter at the snow-white villa. Mother engages her to carry Dodo's puppy around on a pillow.

The Snakes – The snakes are two nonpoisonous water snakes that Gerry captures in the ocean with the help of Roger, Widdle, and Puke.

Old Plop – Old Plop is a very large and very old terrapin. Gerry finally manages to capture him after months of attempts and installs him in a pond with the snakes.

Agathi – Agathi is an old woman who teaches Gerry Greek folk songs and corrects his Greek pronunciation when the Durrells first move to Corfu.

Aphrodite – Aphrodite is Yani's wife.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE NATURAL WORLD

My Family and Other Animals follows the English Durrell family as they make their home on the Greek island of Corfu, beginning when the narrator,

Gerry, is ten years old. Gerry is extremely interested in the natural world and treats Corfu as both a playground in which he can conduct his observations of plants and animals, as well as almost a character in its own right. In this way, the novel positions the Durrell family's existence in Corfu as being intrinsically tied up with nature, suggesting that the natural world is an inescapable part of life—and, further, that coexisting within the natural world means that one must not try too hard to tame it, instead accepting the natural world for what it is.

Much of Gerry's narration centers on his descriptions of what he observes in his garden or in the course of his adventures around Corfu, from the life cycles of earwigs and mantises to the mating habits of tortoises. Many chapters also open with a lengthy description of the changing seasons, which in most cases appear to dictate the course of human life on the island to a much greater degree than human-centric events like holidays. This intense focus on the natural world—both as something that Gerry happily immerses himself in and as something that affects everyone else, regardless of their feelings about it—situates the natural world as something intrinsically connected to the people that inhabit it. It's worth noting that this interconnectedness between the natural world and the manmade world is something that, for the most part, only Gerry and a select few others find charming. Others, and particularly his oldest brother, Larry, strive to keep the Durrell house slightly more tame with varying degrees of success and a great deal of hilarity.

Mother and Margo are generally either supportive or nonchalant about Gerry's insistence on bringing various animals into the Durrell household, while Larry and Gerry's other older brother, Leslie, more often find Gerry's hobby anywhere from obnoxious to dangerous, depending on the animals in question. Some of Gerry's more exotic pets, such as Achilles the tortoise and Quasimodo the dove, become beloved members of the Durrell household. The family's general acceptance of these pets reinforces Gerry's belief that the natural world is wonderful and capable of providing both companionship and interest to the lives of humans, as well as reinforces his belief that humans should endeavor to live

harmoniously in and amongst nature. However, it's also important to recognize that tortoises and doves are relatively easy animals to live with, especially compared to some of the other animals Gerry brings into the house. At one point, Leslie has the intense misfortune of unwittingly opening a matchbox only to discover a captured (and then forgotten) mother scorpion and her babies, while the pair of magpies known affectionately as the Magenpies promptly destroys, among other things, Larry's room and his beloved manuscript.

The destructive (and in some cases dangerous) natures of some of Gerry's pets, as well as his family's disinterest in living closely with them, does several things. First, it differentiates Gerry from the rest of his family, as he's the only one who is truly interested in living with and understanding both his pets and the natural world. Though the rest of his family certainly enjoys the natural world, they overwhelmingly present an example of humans either dominating over nature (as in the case of Leslie, who loves to hunt) or enjoying the splendor of Corfu when the mood strikes (as Margo does with her sunbathing habit). This suggests that though there are a number of ways to exist within the natural world, Gerry's is the only one that seeks to discover a true sense of understanding with the natural world. In addition, the personalities and habits of some of Gerry's pets suggest that their tameness is debatable, which in turn shows that the natural world, as interesting and delightful as it may be, isn't something that humans can fully control and domesticate. The Durrells take many of Gerry's pets, including the exotic ones, back to England with them at the end of the novel. This decision suggests that the animals are considered to be a part of the family, even if they're still undeniably wild animals. On the train back to England, Mother's offense and annoyance when an official in Switzerland notes on her travel form that she's traveling with a "circus and staff" suggests that, annoyance with Gerry aside, the natural world is very much a part of the Durrell family—and that the human members of the family must endeavor to live alongside and support the natural world.



ABSURDITY AND STORYTELLING

My Family and Other Animals often relays stories that exist fully in the realm of absurdity. In particular, the stories that Theodore tells often position the absurdity as being something inherent to Corfu—he proposes, essentially, that Corfu is a locale in which anything can happen, and if there's a way for something to go hilariously wrong, it will. This nonsensical quality of the island is something the novel attributes to the outlook shared by the locals, which suggests overwhelmingly that there's a great deal to gain from accepting the strange twists and turns of life in stride, viewing "absurdity" as normal, and thinking of it as a way to live a life that's far richer than anything one might otherwise consider normal.

Much of the absurdity and humor, in the first half of the novel especially, arises from the cultural and language differences between the Durrell family, who are English, and the local Greek population. Within hours of arriving on the island, the Durrells discover that by choosing to live on the island, they'll need to adapt to a way of life they find absurd. The driver that Mother hires to show the family villas, for example, is aghast that Mother wants a villa with a bathroom. In genuine horror and confusion, he asks Mother why she'd want a bathroom when she has the sea—a statement that causes Mother to respond with a similar combination of horror and confusion. This exchange, as well as the many other bathroom-related conflicts and misunderstandings that pepper the novel, suggest that the "absurdity" the Durrells observe is merely a matter of perspective and of cultural norms, reinforcing the idea that what's considered absurd or normal is highly subjective. This sense of individuality in regards to what's considered absurd does break down along generational lines, as do the degrees to which members of the Durrell family adapt to the "absurd" customs of the island. Mother never learns more than a few Greek words and phrases, which limits the extent to which she can integrate on the island, and she continues to use the in-house bathroom in all three of the family's villas. Gerry, however, is young enough to learn the language, and there's no evidence that Gerry ever uses indoor bathrooms: he spends much of his time in the sea and often bathes there, which suggests he took on the Greek custom.

Though the Greek culture on the island is considered absurd almost exclusively by the island's non-Greek residents, Theodore's stories about the island's numerous mishaps suggest that life on the island actually is colored by a local acceptance that life, people, and relationships are inherently absurd in their own right. At one point, Theodore recounts the town of Corfu's decision to upgrade their horse-drawn fire truck to an actual engine. The fire chief insisted that the engine be the best and biggest available, not taking into account the fact that the streets of Corfu aren't wide enough to accommodate the biggest engine. This, of course, results in disaster the first time the engine is called out. Among other mishaps, the engine must take the wider roads on the outskirts of town to reach the fire, and it arrives too late (and to a crowd of hilariously unconcerned onlookers, including off-duty firemen) to do much good. Even when the mishaps have objectively serious consequences, as in the case of the fire engine, Theodore overwhelmingly presents the trials and tribulations of Corfu as being considered delightfully unserious by the locals. This suggests that as absurd as the non-Greek residents find life on Corfu, there's immense value in accepting that life is wonderfully strange—and, indeed, that one can live a much more fulfilling life by accepting absurdity as normal and viewing it as a way to add richness to one's life.



CHILDHOOD, ADULTHOOD, AND EDUCATION

As the youngest Durrell child by nearly a decade, ten-year-old Gerry has both a unique perspective on life compared to the rest of his family and unique opportunities that arise because of his age. He sees the world around him through a distinctly childish lens—he's curious, often a little naïve, and often absorbed in his own world—though he also craves acceptance and friendship with the adults around him. Particularly as Mother makes attempts to hire tutors to educate Gerry, Gerry begins to parse out what it means to be a child versus an adult, and how one goes about making that change in a fulfilling way.

Although the novel largely focuses on the differences between adults and children, Gerry doesn't truly come of age over the course of the novel; he remains a child in his own eyes and in the eyes of his family members throughout. Further, the reason that Gerry isn't considered to have come of age yet by the end of the novel mostly has to do with the fact that he hasn't yet completed his education: as his final tutor, Kralfesky, states, Gerry must go to Europe to finish his education. This shows that, per the Durrells' understanding of the differences between adulthood and childhood, the most important signifier of maturity is education. Gerry himself solidifies this idea when he suggests to Mother that he simply *not* complete his education. He proposes that doing so would allow him to maintain a sense of curiosity about all things that, in his understanding, adults grow out of when they complete their education and graduate into adulthood. Gerry, essentially, associates unbridled curiosity exclusively with childhood and considers traditional education a threat to such childlike wonder.

However, this youthful view fails to consider the multiple adults in Gerry's life who maintain a sense of wonder and curiosity, mostly because they practice science—something that requires curiosity coupled with a thorough background in research, record keeping, and other guiding tenets of science, which Gerry associates with adulthood and are the product of education. The scientist Dr. Theodore Stephanides becomes one of Gerry's closest friends and mentors during the Durrells' time in Corfu. Gerry finds Theodore fascinating as he is undeniably an adult, but he also treats Gerry as a full person in his own right and behaves in ways that Gerry identifies as being somewhat childish or mischievous. Kralfesky also leads a similarly fascinating life as an aviculturist, even as he performs distinctly adult tasks, such as caring for his aging mother and drilling Gerry on his French. Theodore in particular functions as proof that one doesn't have to become boring when one grows up, as Gerry seems to believe is the case: Theodore seems to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it, and most of what he does is scientific in nature—and therefore, something that Gerry deems interesting.

Ultimately, *My Family and Other Animals* makes the case that by discovering one's passion and following it, one never has to truly grow up. Similarly, even though the book is a highly exaggerated account of the time the Durrells actually did spend in Corfu, the fact that Gerry grew up to be a renowned zookeeper, scientist, and conservationist suggests that he does eventually follow the examples of his mentors and combine childish curiosity, adult knowledge, and education to fulfill his childhood dreams and achieve a happy adulthood.



FRIENDSHIP AND THE CARE OF ANIMALS

For Gerry, the only things in life that are more important than his scientific pursuits are his relationships with his friends, especially his non-human friends. He carefully anthropomorphizes all the animals he observes, giving them names and figuring out their personalities and quirks. As he acquires a number of more exotic pets throughout the novel, Gerry becomes increasingly interested in providing them the best care possible given his knowledge. In this way, the novel ultimately suggests that animals are just as capable as being close friends with humans as other humans are, while also making the case that it's the human's responsibility to provide care for those animal friends and do what's best for them.

Gerry's best friend and constant companion throughout the novel is the Durrell family dog, Roger. Particularly in the first half of the book, Roger accompanies Gerry everywhere he goes, offering his opinions on Gerry's plant and animal findings, moving Gerry along when things get boring, and dutifully making friends with other creatures when Gerry asks him to. In this way, Roger embodies all the qualities of a good friend: he chooses to spend his time with Gerry, even when Gerry is shut inside with a tutor, and Gerry's narration indicates that the two even have meaningful "conversations" about all manner of things. Gerry also thinks of Roger as the ultimate friend because of the way that Roger is willing to form relationships with Gerry's other pets. Most notable of these is the relationship Roger forms with the owl Ulysses, who is initially uninterested in being friends with a dog but eventually decides that Roger is an acceptable form of transportation. The relationship between Gerry and Roger stands as proof that animals can be close, intimate friends with humans, just as humans can be with each other. Their relationship also provides the foundation for the belief that Gerry develops over the course of the novel that recognizes all life as worthy of consideration, appropriate care, and ultimately, friendship or companionship.

It's important to recognize that many of the ways that Gerry goes about acquiring nonliving specimens (eggs, shells, insects for study) and exotic pets would be considered inhumane today—he regularly pulls baby birds out of their nests and

other established animals out of their natural habitats. However, after he acquires these living animals, he does everything he possibly can to ensure that the animals receive an unrivaled quality of care. This is why, for example, the Magenpies are initially allowed the run of the Durrells' villa. Gerry recognizes that, as members of the crow family, magpies are naturally social and curious birds and it would be extremely cruel to lock the birds up. Indeed, when Larry finally insists that the birds be caged after they trash his bedroom, Gerry dedicates himself to building the birds the largest and most naturalistic enclosure he possibly can for them. Further, especially after the Magenpies are caged and he acquires the cantankerous gull Alecko, Gerry spends much of his time cleaning the cages and providing the birds with attention and stimulation. He understands that as the birds' caretaker, it's his sole responsibility to make sure they're properly cared for.

Despite Gerry's best efforts, he's not always successful in constructing the best environments for his pets, as is the case with his pond for his turtles, snakes, and goldfish. In his excitement to make the pond look attractive and mimic the turtles' and snakes' natural habitat, Gerry forgets that turtles and snakes will sometimes eat goldfish. His discovery of half-eaten goldfish and the ensuing dismantling of the pond leads to a number of shenanigans, not least of which is the snakes' hours-long soak in the family bathtub to cool down after someone unwittingly moves their temporary enclosure into the sun. As frustrating as the snakes' soak is for Leslie in particular, who desperately wants a bath, Gerry takes it upon himself to advocate for his pets' health and fair treatment with the rest of the family. Again, he understands that he's the only family member truly willing and able to care for the menagerie, and that it's his responsibility to do so to the best of his ability.

As a whole, Gerry's love for all animals shines through the narrative, and his relationships with the animals comprise some of the most heartwarming passages of the novel. His focus on the friendships he forms with the animals, coupled with the ways in which he anthropomorphizes all the animals he encounters, shows the reader that animals are just as worthy of consideration as humans, and that by choosing to keep animals as pets, one accepts full responsibility to appropriately care for that animal to the best of one's ability.



SYMBOLS

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



THE BOOTLE-BUMTRINKET

Gerry receives the *Bootle-Bumtrinket*, a strangely shaped boat crafted by Leslie, for his birthday. It allows him a sense of freedom and mastery over the aquatic

world that had previously been unavailable to him without adult assistance. Especially because Gerry does receive it for a birthday, the boat then becomes symbolic of Gerry's growing maturity and independence. However, the ridiculous name he gives the boat is also indicative of the fact that Gerry is absolutely not mature. The nature of the boat, combined with its name, then casts the boat as a symbol of Gerry's existence in a liminal space between child and adult.



THE SEAPLANE

After the family moves to the daffodil-yellow villa, Theodore begins joining the Durrells on Thursdays for tea. This is partially so that he can watch the weekly seaplane land in the bay from their attic windows, a sight that delights Theodore to no end. In this way, the seaplanes come to represent the fact that, though Theodore is an adult for all intents and purposes, he has still managed to maintain a sense of childish wonder well into adulthood. Theodore has found a middle ground between stodgy, boring maturity and the unfettered curiosity that Gerry associates with childhood, turning Theodore himself into an example of someone who redefines maturity and adulthood to fit his own needs and desires.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *My Family and Other Animals* published in 1956.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

●● "Didn't you notice?" she asked. "None of them had a bathroom."

Mr. Beeler stared at Mother with bulging eyes.

"But Madame," he wailed in genuine anguish, "what for you want a bathroom? Have you not got the sea?"

Related Characters: Mr. Beeler, Mother (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis



After Mother rejects the dozen villas that Mr. Beeler shows her, they find themselves at an impasse: Mother is wholly unwilling to adapt to the Greek habit of bathing in the sea, while Mr. Beeler can't understand why Mother would ever want to use indoor bathrooms. Misunderstandings about

the way that bathrooms function in Corfu provide many of the initial venues for the novel to explore the cultural differences between the Durrells and the Greek people on Corfu. Though Mother thinks that bathrooms are necessary and that a house isn't complete without one, Mr. Beeler's reaction shows clearly that this is a matter of cultural difference, not a widely accepted fact. Essentially, though Mother sees the lack of bathrooms in most of the villas as being proof that Corfu is inherently ridiculous and strange, she only feels that way because she's so entrenched in the culture she was raised in.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ The notice read: "BEWAR—EARWIG NEST—QUIAT PLESE." It was only remarkable in that the two correctly spelled words were biological ones.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker)

Related Themes:  



Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry describes a sign he created to warn his family to not disturb a nest of earwigs he found in the garden. The fact that he spells only the "biological words" correctly provides the reader a starting point from which to track Gerry's educational progress going forward. It shows that, at this point, his only interest is in biology, and those words that support that interest are the only ones he's interested in spelling correctly. This also lays the groundwork for the lengths that Gerry's tutors go to in order to teach him subjects that have little to do with natural sciences: they must make everything relate to the natural sciences somehow in order to capture his attention.

☞ As the days passed, I came gradually to understand them. What had at first been a confused babble became a series of recognizable separate sounds. Then, suddenly, these took on meaning, and slowly and haltingly I started to use them myself; then I took my newly acquired words and strung them into ungrammatical and stumbling sentences. Our neighbors were delighted, as though I had conferred some delicate compliment by trying to learn their language.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry explains how he came to learn Greek in the first few months of living on Corfu. Though none of the characters in the novel recognize this as a notable feat or proof that Gerry is indeed capable of learning things that don't necessarily have to do with biology, it's important to recognize that learning the language allows Gerry primarily to connect with locals on the island. Though he often speaks with his local friends about zoology, this isn't always the case. Most importantly, learning the language allows Gerry to more fully integrate and immerse himself in life on the island exactly because knowing Greek allows him to form friendships with all manner of people. Mother, on the other hand, never learns more than a few words of Greek, which relegates her to using Gerry as a translator at times or only conversing intimately with those who speak English. As such, Mother never fully feels at home on the island like Gerry does.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ "He appears to have only one interest," said Larry bitterly, "and that's this awful urge to fill things with animal life. I don't think he ought to be encouraged in that. Life is fraught with danger as it is. I went to light a cigarette only this morning and a damn great bumblebee flew out of the box."

Related Characters: Larry Durrell (speaker), Leslie Durrell, Margo Durrell, Mother, Gerry Durrell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41


Explanation and Analysis

When Mother decides it's time for Gerry to receive education, the entire family suggests ideas regarding how to go about educating him. Larry's suggestion is primarily that Gerry should learn absolutely anything but the natural sciences. Larry's bitterness illustrates the way that he feels about the natural world: he finds it inherently dangerous and entirely at odds with his civilized, man-made world. Larry then comes to encapsulate how many people view the natural world as something to be tamed or avoided, not understood and respected like Gerry insists it should be. This also sets up the precedent that Larry will be Gerry's

most strident adversary as Gerry goes about his study of the natural world.

☞ From my point of view, however, the most important thing was that we devoted some of our time to natural history, and George meticulously and carefully taught me how to observe and how to note down observations in a diary. At once my enthusiastic but haphazard interest in nature became focused, for I found that by writing things down I could learn and remember much more.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), George

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 43



Explanation and Analysis

Gerry explains the one element of the education he receives from George that he finds especially useful. The fact that Gerry is able to extract some useful and compelling elements from his education suggests for the reader (though not necessarily to Gerry) that not all education is bad in the way that Gerry insists it is. He primarily conceptualizes education as boring and the way that one becomes an adult—and by extension, becomes a more boring and less curious person. However, moments like these allow Gerry to see that education doesn't have to work in that way; it is, in fact, capable of making his interests even more accessible and heightening his love for and understanding of the natural world.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ First, since he was obviously a scientist of considerable repute (and I could have told this by his beard), he was to me a person of great importance. In fact he was the only person I had met until now who seemed to share my enthusiasm for zoology. Secondly, I was extremely flattered to find that he treated me and talked to me exactly as though I were his own age.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Dr. Theodore Stephanides

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis


After meeting Theodore for the first time, Gerry lists the reasons why Theodore both intrigues and perplexes him. Gerry's shock at discovering an adult who loves zoology seemingly as much as he does suggests that, up to this point, he's had few or no examples of adults who embody a version of adulthood that he'd one day like to emulate. This then represents a turning point in Gerry's understanding of adulthood, as Theodore is living proof that one doesn't have to grow up to be boring and stodgy. Despite this revelation, however, this passage does make the fact that Gerry is still very young and naïve very clear, given that he believes Theodore is an esteemed scientist based only on his possession of a beard.

Part 1: Conversation Quotes

☞ "Don't be ridiculous. Whoever heard of moving into a larger house because you've invited some friends to stay?"

"What's the matter with the idea? It seems a perfectly sensible solution to me; after all, if you say there's no room here, the obvious thing to do is to move."

Related Characters: Larry Durrell, Mother (speaker), Leslie Durrell, Margo Durrell, Gerry Durrell

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis



As Mother and Larry argue over what to do about all the friends that Larry invited to stay (who cannot fit in their villa, which can barely accommodate the family), they disagree on what the obvious solution to the problem is. Larry's assertion that the clear solution is to move shows how much Larry tends towards the absurd in his thoughts and actions. Even as he reprimands others for actions or beliefs he deems absurd, his own conduct more often than not leans towards eccentricity that fits right in on the island of Corfu. Mother, on the other hand, shows here that she's very caught up in looking the part of proper English people and takes issue with Larry's nonchalance about the whole thing. This is one of the reasons she has a hard time making a home for herself on the island, especially given that Gerry never suggests that anyone gives them a hard time for moving. This suggests that even as the reader is guided towards thinking of Larry as absurd and ridiculous, it's actually Mother's focus on propriety that's misguided and out of place within the world of the novel.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "A most insanitary procedure," said Mother, "more likely to spread disease than cure it. I dread to think what would have caught if we'd really kissed his feet."

"But I kissed his feet," said Margo, surprised.

Related Characters: Margo Durrell, Mother (speaker), Gerry Durrell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

After Mother, Gerry, and Margo get swept up in a procession in town and end up kissing the mummified Saint Spiridion's feet, Mother and Margo find themselves at odds—Mother (unsuccessfully) told her children to kiss the air, and Margo actually kissed the saint's feet. This misunderstanding (and, in particular, Mother's interpretation of the ritual) illustrates several of the reasons that Mother struggles to feel at home on the island. It's a fairly expected reaction for her at this point to think little of local custom, which in turn alienates her from it. Margo, on the other hand, has no issue following the local custom, especially since she hopes that this one will allow her to cure her acne. This shows that one of the factors in whether or not a person is able to successfully adapt to a new home is youth, as Margo's youth means she's not as entrenched in her ways as Mother is.

☞ I toyed with the idea that it may have found itself without a pair of clean wing-cases to put on that morning and had to borrow its younger brother's pair, but I eventually decided that this idea, however enchanting, could not be described as scientific.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Roger

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

When Gerry finds an oil beetle one morning, he wonders what fantastical reason might be behind its strange looking wings. Though Gerry does abandon his charming story about the beetle, the fact that he spends so much time considering it illustrates, first of all, how young Gerry is. This kind of curiosity and wandering, limitless imagination is

something that Gerry associates exclusively with childhood and a lack of education. However, when he does reject the idea, it shows too that he's beginning to grow up and in some ways, abandon these childish ideas even though he finds the alternative of adulthood far less palatable. The story Gerry thinks up also shows how much Gerry enjoys anthropomorphizing the animals he observes. By doing this, he can engage with them on a more personal level and think of them as being just as interesting as any human, if only because Gerry attributes human-like characteristics to them.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ The label, which was a nice blend of scientific and sentimental, read: Egg of Greek tortoise (*Testudo graeca*). Laid by Madame Cyclops.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Madame Cyclops

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry describes the label he makes for the turtle egg he collects from Madame Cyclops. The "blend of scientific and sentimental" speaks primarily to Gerry's habit of anthropomorphizing the animals he observes. For Gerry, the animals aren't just animals. They're beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and habits, and those thoughts and feelings are just as important as Gerry's own. This way of thinking about animals is one of the reasons that Gerry is able to tame so many wild animals, and it's also one of the things that contributes to the close friendships he forms with animals. However, it's worth noting that Gerry tends to think of animals in human terms, rather than engaging with creatures in ways that would mimic how the animals think and communicate with each other, this habit nonetheless allows him to understand that animals are just as alive and worthy of consideration as he is.

☞ "It sounds the most unlikely story."

"Here in Corfu," said Theodore, his eyes twinkling with pride, "anything can happen."



Related Characters: Dr. Theodore Stephanides, Larry Durrell (speaker)

Related Themes: **Page Number:** 109**Explanation and Analysis**

After regaling the Durrells with an entirely true story of a theatre performance gone awry in Corfu, Theodore insists that Corfu is a place that's inherently absurd where even the most unlikely things can happen. Larry's skepticism shows that though Gerry casts him as a naturally ridiculous character, he struggles to accept that other people and places can be just as ridiculous. Theodore, on the other hand, not only accepts the absurdity of Corfu, but sees it as an asset. This begins to get at the general cultural beliefs of the island, as according to Theodore's stories, the locals overwhelmingly accept absurdity as a normal fact of life that tends to make life more interesting. While Larry sees the absurdity as strange and unwanted, the locals understand that meeting the absurdity with flexibility and humor makes life both easier and far more enjoyable.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

☝ I grew very fond of these scorpions. I found them to be pleasant, unassuming creatures with, on the whole, the most charming habits.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker)**Related Themes:**  **Page Number:** 111**Explanation and Analysis**


Gerry tells the reader about the scorpions he observes living underneath the plaster in a brick wall that surrounds the garden. It's worth noting that Gerry's interpretation of the scorpions isn't one that's shared by most people—in general, scorpions are considered dangerous and a nuisance. The fact that Gerry can think of the scorpions in this way shows clearly that his respect for animals is what allows him to first anthropomorphize them and then treat them kindly and think of their habits, needs, and desires as normal and understandable. Essentially, because he respects the scorpions' desire to not be touched and recognizes that touching them would have dire consequences, he's able to meet them on their terms and engage with them in such a way as to remain safe himself and allow the scorpions to dictate their interactions.

☝ Since no one had bothered to explain things to him, Roger was under the mistaken impression that the family were being attacked, and that it was his duty to defend them. As Lugaretzia was the only stranger in the room, he came to the logical conclusion that she must be the responsible party, so he bit her in the ankle.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Larry Durrell, Lugaretzia, Roger**Related Themes:**  **Page Number:** 114**Explanation and Analysis**

When the lunch table erupts in an uproar after Larry unwittingly opens a matchbox containing a mother scorpion and babies, Roger takes his duties as the family protector very seriously. Though it's absolutely horrible that Roger bites anyone, Gerry uses the facts surrounding Lugaretzia to cast Roger's actions in a light that makes him seem especially loyal to his family. This shows that Roger isn't just close friends with Gerry. He loves and wants to protect everyone he considers family from any possible threat. Then, the way that Gerry describes the incident and Roger's thought process about it shows again how Gerry so fully anthropomorphizes all his animals. Doing so in this situation allows Gerry to more easily understand Roger's actions and excuse his bad behavior, which shows that his habit of anthropomorphizing animals leads directly to a deeper and more nuanced sense of understanding between humans and animals.

☝ He was, in fact, performing a very necessary and humane service, as anyone who had seen the cats would agree. So my lessons in French were being continuously interrupted while the consul leaped to the window to send yet another cat to a happier hunting ground.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), The Belgian Consul**Related Themes:**  **Page Number:** 117**Explanation and Analysis**


Gerry explains why the Belgian consul shoots stray cats out his window. Notably, Gerry conceptualizes the consul's actions as being humane, which suggests that even though Gerry is seeing the Belgian consul to learn French, he's

actually learning far more useful lessons in how to properly care for animals. Though Gerry is never faced with having to put down any of his own animals to relieve them from suffering over the course of the novel, this lesson here certainly makes it clear to Gerry that his responsibilities towards his animals extend to ensuring that his animals experience deaths that are as humane as possible when necessary. Again, though Gerry doesn't necessarily make the leap himself, this shows once again that it's the responsibility of humans to make sure that animals live happy and comfortable lives. These cats cannot help themselves; it falls to the humans around them to attend to their problems to the best of their abilities.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ With the summer came Peter to tutor me, a tall, handsome young man, fresh from Oxford, with decided ideas on education which I found rather trying to begin with. But gradually the atmosphere of the island worked its way insidiously under his skin, and he relaxed and became quite human.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Peter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry describes the young man that Mother hires to tutor him after George departs the island. Most importantly, Gerry insists here that the general feel and culture of the island isn't something that someone can escape; it affects everyone and draws them into the relaxed culture of ridiculousness and absurdity. Notably, the fact that Gerry identifies this shift in Peter suggests that Gerry himself has, by this point, fully accepted the atmosphere of Corfu as right, normal, and the way things are. When Gerry finds Peter uptight and difficult at first, it shows that Gerry finds English culture in general to be uptight and undesirable when compared to the culture of Corfu. This suggests as well that when the family does finally return to England at the end of the novel, Gerry will possibly have a harder time adjusting to life there than he did adjusting to life in Corfu.

☝☝ While I was at work on my masterpiece...Peter and Margo would take a stroll in the sunken garden to look at the flowers. To my surprise, they had both suddenly become very botanically minded.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Margo Durrell, Peter

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis


Peter allows Gerry to write a book in order to learn English and he begins taking walks with Margo while Gerry writes. Gerry's narration in this passage makes it very clear just how young, naïve, and interested in the natural sciences he is. It seems to not occur to him that Peter and Margo may have other reasons for walking in the garden aside from studying the flowers. The fact that Peter and Margo's relationship is fairly clearly a romantic one, and that this appears to go right over Gerry's head, shows too that he has not yet come of age at all in a sexual way. Similarly, when Gerry implies that the natural world is far more interesting than another person ever could be, it reinforces again that for him, the natural world is absolutely the most interesting thing in his world.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ A pot of black paint was produced and laboriously, in rather tricky capitals, I traced her name along the side: THE BOOTLE-BUMTRINKET. There it was; not only an unusual name, but an aristocratically hyphenated one as well. In order to ease Mother's mind I had to promise that I would refer to the boat only as the Bootle in conversation with strangers.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Larry Durrell, Mother, Leslie Durrell

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry is absolutely thrilled to receive a boat from Leslie for his birthday, and promptly names his boat something absurd, ridiculous, but nonetheless, a name that Gerry finds both sophisticated and interesting. The boat itself acts as a symbol for Gerry's growing maturity over the course of the novel. With it, he's able to explore the islands around Corfu by himself and achieve a sense of independence he'd only dreamed of up to this point. However, in giving the boat such a ridiculous name, Gerry shows that he's still fairly



immature, even if he does have a boat.

Mother's reservations show again that she's still very concerned with acting the part of well-to-do English people and in her understanding, that kind of person doesn't name their boat something so rude (though Gerry doesn't explain the meaning of either Bootle or Bumtrinket, bumtrinket has historically been used to refer to genitalia or to call someone an idiot). As in other cases when Mother is so concerned with keeping up appearances, Gerry never offers any indication that anyone else cares about the family's numerous eccentricities. This in turn suggests that Mother is the one who needs to adapt and change her ways, not her family.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ For a week or so the wind played with the island, patting it, stroking it, humming to itself among the bare branches. Then there was a lull, a few days' strange calm; suddenly, when you least expected it, the wind would be back. But it was a changed wind, a mad, hooting, bellowing wind that leaped down on the island and tried to blow it into the sea.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry describes how the winter weather arrives on Corfu and gradually takes hold of the island. The way that Gerry describes both the wind and the island casts them as very nearly their own characters. This encapsulates the way that Gerry tends to think of the natural world as a whole. When he does this both with weather and with animals, Gerry is able to more easily understand and accept the actions and habits of the natural world as understandable and, in cases like this, very human.

Further, Gerry describes weather in this manner often and in great detail throughout the novel, though he devotes comparatively little time to describing human events on the island. This suggests that as far as Gerry is concerned, the natural world dictates the course of human life on Corfu to a much greater degree than festivals or holidays that are created by people. In turn, this creates the sense that the natural world is something that, whether people like it or not, they must learn to live with and adapt to, as there's no escaping the weather.

Part 3, Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ I was not, however, the least impressed by this last bit of information; I had met a number of people who professed to be interested in birds, and who had turned out (after careful questioning) to be charlatans who did not know what a hoopoe looked like...

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Kralfesky, Mother

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry's family believes he'll be thrilled to hear that his new tutor, Kralfesky, is an ornithologist, but Gerry is skeptical of whether they're actually telling the truth. Gerry's language here, especially his use of "charlatan," suggests that he thinks little of people who don't share his love of science and the natural world or those who are merely interested in it in passing. Though this situates Gerry as absolutely a member of his family (all of his family members, Larry in particular, feel the exact same way about their respective interests), this is a naïve and somewhat childish point of view. Gerry's habit of thinking this way shows that he still has a long way to go as he grows up, while the fact that other adult members of his family think in much the same way offers another example to support the idea that adults don't necessarily have to give up all of their childish whims and beliefs when they pass into adulthood.

☞ "Most people say that as one gets older one believes nothing and is surprised at nothing, so that one becomes more receptive to ideas. Nonsense! All the old people I know have had their minds locked up like grey, scaly oysters since they were in their teens."

Related Characters: Mrs. Kralfesky (speaker), Gerry Durrell

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis



As Gerry sits and listens to Mrs. Kralfesky talk about how in her old age, she can hear flowers chatter, she insists that most people don't properly engage with the world in their old age. In this way, Mrs. Kralfesky becomes yet another

example for Gerry of an individual who doesn't treat adulthood and education as a death sentence. Mrs. Kralfesky has very clearly been able to preserve her sense of childish wonder into extreme old age, which acts as proof that "childish" wonder isn't actually something unique to children. However, Mrs. Kralfesky does imply that maintaining that sense of wonder is something that someone has to work hard to cultivate; it won't happen naturally. This in turn suggests that certain types of education that encourage individuals to remain curious and open to the world absolutely have their place, even if Gerry tends to think poorly of education as a whole that doesn't focus on the natural sciences.

Part 3, Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ The Magenpies, obviously suspecting Larry of being a dope smuggler, had fought valiantly with the tin of bicarbonate of soda, and had scattered its contents along a line of books, so that they looked like a snow-covered mountain range.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), The Magenpies, Larry Durrell

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry describes the carnage that the Magenpies wrought on Larry's room when they finally managed to sneak in. It's important to recognize that Gerry's tone when describing what the Magenpies did isn't at all accusatory; he recognizes that the Magenpies are naturally curious and inclined to rifle through and destroy things that interest them. This shows the results of the way that Gerry engages with his animals by attempting to understand them to the best of his ability. Doing so allows him to humanize and anthropomorphize them, as when he suggests that the Magenpies thought Larry might be a dope smuggler. The Magenpies certainly have no idea what dope is or what possessing it might say about Larry; for them, the baking soda is likely just something that captured their interest. However, attributing these human qualities to the Magenpies adds a sense of absurdity to the entire situation and allows the reader to better empathize with the birds.

Part 3, Chapter 17 Quotes

☛☛ Once the thing was explained, of course, it was simple. It never even occurred to me that the procedure was unusual. I knew one wasn't allowed home for weekends from an English prison, but this was Corfu, and in Corfu anything could happen.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Alecko, Kosti

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

After the convict Kosti explains to Gerry that he's allowed to visit home on the weekends because he's a trusted prisoner, Gerry accepts this explanation without question. When Gerry explains his acceptance by insisting that anything can happen in Corfu, it shows that Gerry has fully come to accept the culture of Corfu as normal and interesting. Further, when he notes that he's aware that such a thing wouldn't be allowed to happen in an English prison, Gerry demonstrates that he understands that while there are clear cultural differences between England and Greece, neither one is necessarily better—they're just different. This recognition is one of the primary reasons that Gerry is able to feel so comfortable in Corfu, especially compared to Mother. When Mother later finds out about Kosti, she's shocked and disturbed that a prisoner would be let out on weekends. Other snap judgments like this are what contribute to Mother's inability to fully integrate on the island and feel at home.

☛☛ Mother had, after considerable mental effort, managed to commit to memory two or three Greek words. This lack of vocabulary had a restrictive effect on her conversation at the best of times, but when she was faced with the ordeal of exchanging small talk with a murderer she promptly forgot all the Greek she knew.

Related Characters: Gerry Durrell (speaker), Kosti, Mother

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

Gerry explains how Mother tends to forget all the Greek she knows when she's faced with uncomfortable situations. Both Mother's lack of the Greek language and difficulty in accepting the cultural differences between Corfu and

England contribute to her inability to fully accept the culture of Corfu. While Gerry has no issue accepting Kosti as a valid friend and individual in his own right, Mother remains far too caught up in trying to promote the image of her family as upstanding English citizens. This means that she's simply not in a state of mind to recognize that there's value in engaging with the Greek way of life as something that's valid and wonderful in its own right, albeit different from what she's used to.

Part 3, Chapter 18 Quotes

☛ "I assure you the house is a death-trap. Every conceivable nook and cranny is stuffed with malignant faunae waiting to pounce...A simple, innocuous action like lighting a cigarette is fraught with danger. Even the sanctity of my bedroom is not respected. First, I was attacked by a scorpion...Now we have snakes in the bath and huge flocks of albatrosses flapping around the house, making noises like defective plumbing."

Related Characters: Larry Durrell (speaker), The Magenpies, Alecko, The Snakes, Leslie Durrell, Gerry Durrell

Related Themes:



Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

After the Magenpies and Alecko escape and Leslie finds Gerry's water snakes in the bathtub, Larry regales the guests at the Durrells' Christmas party with complaints about the animals that fill the house. Notice that Larry characterizes the animals as a whole as being "malignant" and bad. This shows Larry cherry picking the animals to talk about, especially since he generally seems fine with the Durrells' dogs and presumably enjoyed Achilles' presence when he was still alive. Though this does show that Larry is simply a dramatic person by nature, it also illustrates how Larry thinks of the natural world as a whole. He sees it as something to avoid and, when that proves impossible, something to tame and make more palatable for civilized individuals such as himself. Gerry overwhelmingly implies that this is a misguided and futile belief; he positions the natural world as something that humans must learn to live with, as it has the power to influence human life in a number of ways that cannot be fully mitigated.



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.

PART 1: THE MIGRATION

On a drizzly, gray day in August, the Durrell family sits in their living room in Bournemouth, England. The weather has brought on all their usual ills: Gerry is extremely congested; Margo's acne is worse than usual; Leslie is battling ear infections; Mother has a cold. Larry is the only one well, though he's irritated beyond belief. Gerry notes that Larry was destined to go through life proposing grand ideas and then refusing to take any blame for the consequences, and Larry is the one to suggest "it."

Larry turns on Mother, asking why the family puts up with this horrible climate. He lists the family's ailments and tells Mother she's becoming more "hagridden" by the day. Mother merely glares at him over the top of her cookbook and ignores him. Larry declares that they need sunshine, as he can't possibly be expected to write in this climate. Mother noncommittally agrees that sunshine would be nice, and doesn't think when she agrees with Larry's suggestion that they move to Corfu, Greece, where his friend George currently lives.

Mother suggests he go ahead to set things up, and then the rest of the family will follow. Larry whines that when she suggested he do that in Seville, the family never actually followed. He tells Mother to sell the house, even though she just bought it, an idea she deems ridiculous. Nonetheless, Mother sells the house and the family departs for Corfu.

Gerry explains that each member of the family "travels light" and brings only the bare necessities. Margo packs flowing garments and acne remedies; Leslie brings guns; Larry packs trunks of books; Mother brings cooking and gardening books; and Gerry brings books on natural history, a butterfly net, the family dog, Roger, and a jar of caterpillars. They travel through Europe, and in Italy they board a ship bound for Greece. When they wake near Greece and observe their surroundings, the sea is bright blue and mist floats around a slip of island. They can see olive groves and colorful rocks that hiss as the water hits them. The cicadas are audible even from the ship.

In England, the weather clearly has very noticeable effects on the various members of the Durrell family. This sets the stage and creates the precedent that the natural world is tied up intrinsically with "civilized" human life, and humans can only try their best to coexist with the natural world.



The way that Larry speaks to his mother begins to show that the family dynamics at play here are already somewhat absurd (though note that while Mother glares at Larry, she doesn't seem too terribly offended by his insult). This shows the reader that what's considered absurd or normal varies from place to place and family to family, an idea that will be even more apparent in Corfu.



It's also important to recognize that though Larry is 23, he acts like a spoiled child: he can suggest absurd things like moving to Greece on a whim, and his family inevitably gives in. This begins to complicate the definition of adulthood.



Even from a ship a ways away, the island of Corfu and the surrounding sea already seem to have personalities of their own. This positions the natural landscape as its own character for Gerry as the narrator to anthropomorphize. This in turn shows that Gerry views the natural world as something living and breathing, just as real and alive as his family. The fact that there's such a distinct change from Italy to Greece also situates Corfu as being its own mini world, with its own unique sense of logic.



PART 1, CHAPTER 1: THE UNSUSPECTED ISLE

After the family makes it through customs, they wind their way through the quay. Larry walks quickly and with a disdainful expression on his face, followed by Gerry, Leslie, Margo, and Mother, who looks harried and annoyed. Roger (the dog) drags Mother to a lamppost to relieve himself as Larry loads the luggage into one horse-drawn cab and engages a second to carry the family. Larry grouses that Roger is a nuisance. Finally, Roger finishes and the family lifts him clumsily into the cab.

As the cab moves through town, Roger lets his head hang out of the window. The cab goes past an alley where four local dogs are lying in the sun, and Roger barks loudly at them. The street dogs immediately race after the cab and bark back, and Leslie struggles to keep Roger from leaping out. Soon, two-dozen dogs are chasing the cab, and Larry yells angrily that the family looks ridiculous. Leslie suggests that Larry help, so Larry grabs the driver's whip and cracks it at the dogs. He hits Leslie and then Mother's hat, and Mother tells Larry to be careful.

Finally, the cab reaches the hotel. Larry seems to enjoy himself as he waves the whip at the street dogs while Mother, Leslie, Gerry, and Margo haul Roger, still snarling, into the hotel. When they're all inside, Mother turns to the manager and informs him of who they are as though nothing is amiss.

The family all take naps and then congregate downstairs for dinner a while later. Larry is thrilled with Corfu thus far, but Mother tries to seem noncommittal. Leslie is annoyed, as the manager couldn't bring him toilet paper. Margo pipes up helpfully that the toilets all have boxes full of paper. Larry snorts and informs her that the paper in the box is used. Horrified, Margo races back to her room and douses herself in sanitizer, while Mother insists that they must find a house before they all get typhoid.

It doesn't help Mother's peace of mind that all afternoon, the family can watch funeral processions to the nearby cemetery out their windows. The processions are ornate, and Gerry decides that this is the best way to die: colorful decorations and satisfyingly upset relatives crying openly. Gerry watches them all afternoon as Mother worries that there's an epidemic in town. This sends Margo into hysterics, and Mother declares that they must find a house in the country immediately.

Larry's grumbling about Roger suggests that he doesn't think particularly highly of animals in general, even domesticated ones like dogs. However, it's important to recognize that Roger needing to relieve himself is perfectly normal after such a journey, and the fact that Mother is willing to allow him to do so shows that she believes animals should be cared for.



Roger's personality begins to come through here: he's intensely loyal to his family and will defend them from anything and anyone, even if the interlopers in question aren't actually threats. Mother's tone of voice when she reprimands Larry again suggests that this kind of thing is normal, even though it seems wild to the reader.



Again, the fact that Mother is able to so quickly compose herself and ignore the ridiculous sight of her family suggests that it's not necessarily ridiculous to her—it's a normal occurrence.



The misunderstanding here highlights the differences between the English life the Durrells are used to and how life proceeds on Corfu. Again, this illustrates that Corfu is its own world with its own sense of logic. The logic of Corfu, incidentally, seems ridiculous and absurd to the Durrells, which sets them up to either adapt or not.



Gerry's thoughts on the funerals suggest that he'll be more likely to adapt to life on Corfu, given that he already finds the culture interesting. Mother, on the other hand, shows that she's afraid of the culture and has little interest in either understanding it or immersing herself in it, which indicates that she'll have a harder time integrating on the island.



Mr. Beeler, the hotel guide, drives Mother and the Durrell children around the island the next day to look at multiple villas. Mother rejects them all and Mr. Beeler finally asks what's wrong with all the villas. Mother, astonished, says that they don't have bathrooms. Distraught, Mr. Beeler asks why she wants a bathroom when the sea is right there. The next day, Mother decides to hire a car and hunt for a villa with a bathroom herself. Leslie, Larry, Margo, and Gerry are unconvinced they'll find such a thing.

In the town square, the taxi drivers converge on the Durrells and loudly fight for their business. Gerry explains that it was terrifying, but the drivers' altercation was actually mild by Greek standards. As Mother becomes more flustered and Leslie angrier, a loud voice, speaking English, booms over the crowd. It belongs to a short, hammy man in an old Dodge who introduces himself as Spiro. He explains that he knows of a villa with a bathroom, and the family climbs into the Dodge.

As Spiro drives, he tells the Durrells that the English always want bathrooms. He also tells them that he used to live in Chicago, where he learned English. He insists if he weren't Greek, he'd be English. He drives past olive groves and, finally, stops at the top of a hill. Spiro points to a pink villa overlooking the sea.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2: THE STRAWBERRY-PINK VILLA

The villa is small and square, surrounded on all sides by complicated gardens filled with all manner of flowers and humming insects. The Durrells love it as soon as they see it, and Spiro jumps into action. He explains that it's better if he takes care of the arrangements so that nobody cheats them. To this end, he takes the family shopping and fronts them money when he learns that their money hasn't come from England yet. He knows everyone on the island, and everyone respects how honest and belligerent he is.

Spiro is especially adept at dealing with government officials. When he learns that Mother's boxes of linen and other things were confiscated at customs, he angrily promises to "fix them" tomorrow. The next day, he and Mother approach the customs official as the rest of the family watches. Spiro growls at the man to give Mother her boxes. When the man attempts to inspect one of the heavy trunks, Spiro slams the lid down on the man's fingers, insults him, and as he leaves, reminding the man of a crime he committed (blowing up fish) as a warning to behave.

Again, the difference in how the local population and the Durrells think about bathrooms highlights the fact that Corfu isn't just an idyllic version of England. Further, the fact that the Grecian population bathe in the sea suggests that they are culturally more connected to the natural world than the English are.



When Gerry explains and shows through his narration that he eventually understood what was going on in the town square, it proves that he did eventually adapt to life on the island. However, understanding in hindsight doesn't take away from the terror they feel in the present, which shows that these different cultural customs can be very difficult to deal with.



Spiro manages to bridge the gap between Greek and English culture simply by virtue of speaking English. This shows that language is one of the most effective ways of assimilating into a culture.



When Gerry describes the natural world surrounding the villa before anything else, it makes it clear to the reader that his true focus is on the natural world rather than the humans that inhabit it. When Spiro steps in to take care of the Durrells, it shows that he understands how difficult such a move can be and that they'll need assistance adjusting.



It will come up later on that the punishment for blowing up fish is harsher than the punishment for murder, which again shows that Greek people value the natural world even in the laws of the island. The law of Corfu, then, presents people living in tandem with nature and creates a social structure that prioritizes preserving nature more than preserving human relations.



Spiro comments on the way home that the customs officials believe they own the islands, and Gerry notes that Spiro was entirely unaware that he acted as if he owned the islands. He becomes an integral part of the family, arranging outings, helping Mother barter, and reporting to her if he sees anything amiss with her children. Mother adores him, and Spiro adores her—Leslie and Larry often pester Spiro by jokingly insulting Mother's parenting abilities. Gerry refers to him as a "great, brown, ugly angel."

Margo begins wearing a tiny bathing suit and sunbathing often, which earns her a following of local boys. She brushes Mother off when Mother tries to point out that this might become a problem. Larry, meanwhile, installs himself in his room, surrounded by books, tapping away on his typewriter. One morning, Larry is irritated beyond belief by a donkey that brays at regular intervals, but refuses to move the animal himself. The rest of the family refuses to move it, as it's not bothering them, and Larry accuses Mother of raising selfish children. Finally, Gerry and Mother move the donkey.

Leslie spends his days practicing shooting his revolvers at tin cans from his bedroom window, though Larry and Mother eventually convince him to move this practice away from the house. Mother settles in, makes herself at home in her kitchen, and putters in the garden.

Gerry and Roger spend their time in the garden. Gerry observes tiny spiders, ladybugs, and carpenter bees in the roses. Gerry shares all that he learns with the family, much to their bewilderment. He finds the discovery of an earwig's nest the most exciting, and he makes a sign warning everyone to not disturb the mother earwig and checks her hourly. The earwig's babies hatch during the night, which is a major disappointment. Weeks later he sees an adolescent earwig elsewhere in the garden, and Gerry excuses it for not recognizing him.

Gerry also makes friends with the local Greek girls. They ride by on donkeys and offer gifts of grapes or figs. Eventually, Gerry is able to pick out words from the babble and finally, begins to use the words himself. The neighbors are delighted and take it upon themselves to both coach Gerry in his Greek and offer him food when he and Roger pass by. Gradually, the magic of the island takes over the entire family.

Spiro himself is an absurd character, particularly the way that Gerry describes him. This suggests that all of Corfu is somewhat absurd, from the laws to the people and their bathroom habits. When Leslie and Larry pester Spiro, it again shows that even though they're both technically adults, they don't always act particularly grown up.



The donkey reminds Larry that on Corfu, an island that in 1935 isn't particularly modern (houses don't have electricity, for example), animals that are still used for work are ubiquitous—and being animals, they make noise and behave like animals. The fact that this is so offensive for Larry suggests that he prefers a world that's more walled off and separate from the natural world.



Again, the fact that Mother is an avid gardener suggests that as a whole, she'll be more open and accepting of Gerry's love of animals, given that she spends her time in nature, albeit cultivated nature.



As Gerry begins exploring the garden, the novel begins to set him apart from his family by contrasting his enthusiasm with their apparent lack of desire to know anything about the non-human residents of the island. The fact that Gerry anthropomorphizes even the tiny earwigs shows that he truly believes that they're worthy of consideration and have personalities of their own.



It's generally accepted that children have an easier time learning languages than adults do, which suggests here that Gerry's youth isn't a bad thing in the least. His youth means that he'll have an easier time adapting to life on Corfu and immersing himself in the local community.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3: THE ROSE-BEETLE MAN

In the mornings, the family eats breakfast outside under the tangerine trees. By the end of the meal Mother, Larry, Leslie, and Margo begin arguing about what each is going to do that day. Gerry wolfs his food down and stays out of the conversation, as he doesn't want any input. When breakfast is over, Gerry joins an excited Roger at the garden gate. Gerry teases Roger that maybe they won't go out today but finally, he opens the gate and away they go.

Roger spends all his time with Gerry. They explore the island, Roger looking out for Gerry when he slips or trips and waiting patiently when Gerry finds some animal to watch. They meet many people in the countryside, and Gerry often stops at the old lady Agathi's house. Agathi teaches Gerry folk songs about the river and about love gone both right and wrong.

Gerry also enjoys visiting the shepherd Yani. Gerry meets Yani for the first time under cypress trees, where he and Roger fling themselves down to escape the heat. As Gerry was beginning to drift off, the sound of Yani's goats' bells woke him. Yani warned Gerry not to fall asleep under cypress trees, since the roots grow into the brains of sleeping people and steal them, and when you wake, you're mad. Yani shot a fierce look at the trees and herded his goats along. After that, Yani often gives Gerry advice to keep him safe in his wanderings.

The most fascinating person Gerry meets is known as the Rose-Beetle Man. Gerry meets him for the first time as the man is leaving a party and walking on a road, playing a shepherd's pipe. The Rose-Beetle Man's eyes are vacant and he dresses eccentrically: his hat is shapeless but filled with feathers, and his pockets are filled with all manner of oddities. He carries bamboo cages filled with pigeons and chickens, a mysterious sack, and in one hand holds strings securing a number of rose-beetles that buzz around his hat.

When the Rose-Beetle Man sees Gerry and Roger, he bows and Roger barks. Gerry asks questions and the man mimes his answers: the beetles are meant as pets, and he whirls the beetles into a buzzing frenzy. The man sings for a moment and then dumps out the contents of his sack, which turns out to be tortoises. Gerry is taken with one tortoise the size of a teacup, and he reasons that the family would gladly embrace such a pet. They barter and when the man accepts Gerry's price, Gerry instructs him to come by the villa the next day for payment. Gerry notes that this doesn't seem strange to him at all.

When Gerry teases Roger, it again shows Gerry treating Roger as a being with feelings and desires all his own. It's convenient for them both that they both love being outside wandering the island, as it allows the two to deepen their friendship and loyalty to each other as they associate with the natural world.



Here, Roger's behavior towards Gerry shows that he thinks of Gerry similarly to how Gerry thinks of Roger: they're both beings that need to be properly cared for and looked after. This also reinforces how loyal Roger is.



Yani's story casts the cypress trees as living, sentient beings in their own right, which again shows that the local population is far more connected to nature than even the nature-loving Gerry is. Though Gerry certainly thinks the trees are interesting, he tends to draw a line at anthropomorphizing trees. This shows that while Gerry may have more in common with the Greeks than with his family, there are still major differences.



Though Gerry never notes how the other locals feel about the Rose-Beetle Man, the fact that he came from a party suggests that he's an accepted part of local culture. His eccentricities again suggest that the culture on Corfu naturally tends towards the more absurd, making a place for eccentric individuals like the Rose-Beetle Man.



Here, the fact that it's apparently no big deal for the Rose-Beetle Man to come to the villa for payment illustrates just how different the culture is on Corfu than it is elsewhere. It's worth noting that because Gerry is a child, he may have fewer experiences in more conventional purchasing habits but regardless, the fact that he's so young means that he's far more easily able to accept that this is a perfectly normal way of doing things.



Thrilled with his purchase, Gerry races home. The family quickly names the tortoise Achilles, and Achilles turns out to be intelligent and lovable. As he grows tamer, Achilles learns his name and has the run of the villa. He and Roger both love grapes and they vie for the attention of whomever has grapes, though Achilles's favorite food is strawberries. He becomes nearly hysterical when he sees them and begs shamelessly. Achilles also loves people: he sits with whoever is outside reading, and if someone decides to sunbathe on a rug, he takes it upon himself to climb onto the sunbather's stomach. Eventually, the family complains enough that Gerry has to lock Achilles up when someone sunbathes.

One day, Achilles discovers the garden gate is open and wanders out. The entire family embarks on a search and they find him dead at the bottom of an old, disused well. They bury him under a strawberry plant. Larry gives a funeral address, and Gerry is annoyed that Roger wags his tail throughout the service.

Not long after, Gerry acquires a young dove from the Rose-Beetle Man. They name him Quasimodo. Because Quasimodo is raised by humans, he believes he's not a bird and flat-out refuses to fly. He coos for people to lift him up onto tables or chairs, and tries to join the family in all their activities. They eventually have to stop allowing him to join them for walks, as allowing him to walk behind annoys him greatly when he inevitably can't keep up. He insists on sleeping with Margo, and they discover that he loves music. He's especially partial to waltzes and military marches, and will "dance" appropriately to each. One day, Gerry discovers that Quasimodo isn't male at all: he finds eggs under her. Parenthood makes her wild, and she refuses to enter the house ever again.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4: A BUSHEL OF LEARNING

Not long after the family moves into the pink villa, Mother decides it's time for Gerry to receive education. The entire family offers opinions as to what should be done: Leslie offers to teach Gerry to shoot and sail; Margo insists that Gerry must learn to dance; and Larry declares that Gerry must receive a good grounding in literature. Mother urges her children to accept that Gerry needs someone who will encourage his interests, but Larry bitterly mentions that a bee flew out of a matchbox at him that morning and Gerry's "interest" in bugs is just a revolting phase.

As one of the first more exotic pets, Achilles shows the other Durrells that having wildlife around doesn't have to be terrible: nature and wild animals can be enriching and are just as capable of enjoying human companionship as more "normal" pets like Roger. Further, the way that Gerry anthropomorphizes Achilles shows that Gerry definitely spent time with him observing him and learning what makes him happy. This illustrates Gerry's commitment to providing his animals the best care possible.



It's worth noting that Achilles' death could've absolutely been prevented. This impresses upon Gerry that it is truly his responsibility to look out for the safety of his pets; they rely on him.



Here, it's important to recognize that there's no real way to know what exactly Quasimodo thought of himself: Gerry's anthropomorphism provides one possible explanation for his habits, but it may not tell the whole truth. This illustrates that people can absolutely do their best to listen to their animals and interpret what they're trying to say, but it's definitely not an exact science. To this end, it's worth keeping in mind that pet birds overwhelmingly enjoy music and human companionship, even if they don't fly.



The suggestions of Gerry's siblings show that they all have fairly skewed ideas of what makes a well-rounded and successful adult, but notice too that they all insist that Gerry needs some kind of education. This positions education as being one way that someone truly comes of age and becomes an adult.



Larry suggests that one of his friends, George, should teach Gerry, and this idea delights Mother. Gerry decides to head outside to escape the "imminent danger of being educated," though he meets George for the first time days later. George teaches Gerry French, math, and English, though his favorite subject is natural history. George teaches Gerry to record observations in a diary, which Gerry discovers focuses his love of the natural world and makes it easier to understand.

George and Gerry spend their days shut inside. George gives Gerry math problems and practices his fencing steps while Gerry struggles. Gerry never does learn much math, as George is far too distracting. They have better luck with geography, as George explains what animals come from different parts of the world. They create luxurious maps sprinkled with animal life. History only becomes a successful subject when George discovers that by sprinkling in irrelevant zoological details, Gerry becomes interested. Gerry learns about Hannibal's trek over the Alps only because he also learns the name of every war elephant.

Roger finds the whole business of education boring, but he spends his mornings under the table nonetheless. Quasimodo tries to join in for a while, but she is eventually banished. Some mornings, George conducts his lessons outside. They swim in the sea while George points out interesting fauna. George and Gerry devise a game with sea slugs and then they sit in the shallows while George tells Gerry about various historical happenings, all of which have a distinctly zoological flair to them.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5: A TREASURE OF SPIDERS

One hot afternoon, Roger and Gerry set out to see how far they can hike before dark. They hike up the hills but because of the intense heat, Gerry decides to swim instead. Gerry swims and digs up rocks and shells, which he offers to Roger. Roger takes them and then surreptitiously drops them back in the water.

Gerry wonders where he can get something to eat. He remembers that Yani lives over the hill and will certainly feed him. Gerry and Roger set off and when they're close, Gerry devises a plan to wake Yani from his afternoon nap: work Roger into a barking frenzy by beginning a game of fetch and then refusing to finish the game. Gerry lets Roger bark for five minutes before approaching the cottage and to his disappointment, Yani is still asleep under his grape vine. As Gerry deliberates as to what to do, Roger spots a cat under Yani's chair and lunges at it. His barks wake Yani.

Here, it's important to keep in mind that even if Gerry does hold more conventional education in low regard, he doesn't dislike all education: marrying it with his interests in the natural world allows him to better engage with nature. This is early evidence that adulthood doesn't have to be stodgy and boring.



George is clearly doing whatever he can to keep Gerry even nominally engaged, as evidenced by the irrelevant zoological details. The names of Hannibal's elephants aren't something historians know much about, which suggests that George made all the names up in an effort to capture Gerry's attention. The fact that this is successful, however, points to how young and gullible Gerry still is.



Again, the fact that Roger is successful in keeping Gerry company (while Quasimodo makes valiant attempts) shows that the animals are just as loyal to Gerry as he is to them. With Roger in particular, he's clearly choosing to give up his outside romps in favor of spending time with Gerry, reinforcing the strength of their friendship.



Again, the way that Roger so clearly wants to please Gerry by accepting his gifts is evidence of how close and strong their relationship is, even though Roger isn't human.



As human as Roger seems at times, the trick Gerry plays emphasizes Roger's canine tendencies and limited understanding of human affairs. This shows that Gerry knows he can use Roger's nature as an animal to his advantage. Particularly when Roger chases the cat and frees Gerry from having to wake Yani himself, it shows that a dog's nature doesn't have to be in contrast to human desires either.



Yani grins at Gerry and calls for his wife, Aphrodite, to bring out food and drink. He explains that instead of taking his goats out earlier, he tasted a friend's wine. He sighs happily and rolls a cigarette before offering Gerry a small bottle. In the bottle, suspended in oil, is a small dead scorpion. Yani points to the shadow in the oil, explaining that it's the scorpion's poison. He gleefully tells Gerry that if you catch a scorpion alive and kill it in oil, then the oil becomes an antidote against scorpion stings.

Yani surely knows that the scorpion will thrill Gerry, though the truthfulness of his explanation seems questionable. Depending on the oil in question it may provide some relief from pain, but it's certainly not an antidote. Yani's tale then becomes part of the eccentric culture of Corfu, given that others presumably believe this as well.



Aphrodite arrives with food and Yani tells Gerry about a man who fell asleep and was stung in the ear by a scorpion. The man fell down dead. After a while, Gerry excuses himself and accepts Yani's parting gift of grapes. Gerry and Roger eat the grapes in a cool olive grove and when they're finished, Gerry examines the mossy bank behind him. He notices faint circles on the bank and when he pokes at a circle with some grass, he's thrilled when the circle lifts like a trapdoor. Gerry has no idea what made the trapdoor, and decides to call on George immediately to ask.

When Gerry shares his grapes with Roger, it's again indicative of their close and loving relationship with each other. Similarly, the fact that Gerry thinks to run to George with his query shows that George is also becoming a trusted friend and authority on matters like this, which shows that Gerry is finding a sense of community on the island.



Gerry races to George's villa, knocks on the door quickly, and lets himself in. He realizes that George has company; a bearded and immaculately dressed man sits with him. George greets Gerry and Gerry explains the nests he found. George turns to his guest, introduces him as Dr. Theodore Stephanides and an expert on everything, and asks Theodore to take over Gerry's query. Theodore shocks Gerry by shaking his hand and then slowly and seriously suggests the nests might belong to trapdoor spiders. He suggests they go look at them if they're not too far and follows Gerry up the hill.

When Theodore shakes Gerry's hand, it suggests that Theodore will treat Gerry as though they're equals, not an esteemed scientist and a young child. Then, by suggesting that they go look at the nests, it presents the possibility that Theodore is just as curious about the natural world as Gerry is. This will then turn Theodore into an example of what adulthood can be, and specifically show that it doesn't need to be boring.



As Theodore and Gerry walk, Theodore stops to look into a ditch of stagnant water and laments he didn't bring a collecting bag. He follows Gerry without protest up the steep track and when they reach the bank, Theodore confirms that the nests belong to trapdoor spiders. He explains that he's always been curious about how the female spiders know when the male spiders are approaching and don't mistake the males for prey. Gerry and Theodore head back down the hill and awkwardly part ways.

Theodore's lament suggests that he is in many ways an adult version of Gerry: he wishes to spend as much time as possible in nature, learning everything he can about the natural world and the creatures in it. When he mentions that he's curious about how things sound to a spider, it also shows that Theodore has maintained a sense of childlike curiosity.



Gerry is both amazed and confused by Theodore. He knows that Theodore is an esteemed scientist and clearly shares his love of the natural world, but he also treats Gerry like an adult, not a child. Gerry puzzles over Theodore's musings about what trapdoor spiders hear and thinks about what different insects must sound like when they walk over one's roof. He hopes to see Theodore again and is thrilled when two days later, Leslie arrives with a parcel for Gerry. It's from Theodore and contains a pocket microscope and an invitation to tea the following Thursday.

Just as Gerry's friendship with Roger shows that friendship can absolutely grow between species, Gerry's budding friendship with Theodore shows that it can also occur between people of vastly different ages (though Gerry never gives Theodore's age, the real Theodore would've been in his mid-thirties when the Durrells were in Corfu). This suggests that in many ways, age is arbitrary.



PART 1, CHAPTER 6: THE SWEET SPRING

Over the end of summer and all of winter, Spiro drives Gerry into town to see Theodore every Thursday. Theodore welcomes Gerry into his study, which is lined with books on "sensible subjects" like biology, astronomy, and folklore, with ghost and crime stories as well. After exchanging pleasantries, Theodore begins showing Gerry slides on his microscopes, and they spend hours poring over slides and consulting books. As they have tea, Theodore talks enthusiastically about all manner of subjects, all of which fascinate Gerry. Finally, Gerry rejoins Spiro in the car, dreaming of the coming spring when he and Theodore will be able to capture creatures.

Finally, as March arrives, spring comes too. Flowers burst into bloom and the cypress trees sprout new leaves. Frogs sing in ditches and Gerry thinks that even the wine in the village seems redder. Larry buys himself a guitar and a barrel of wine, and spends his evenings singing love songs and drinking. One evening, Mother and Larry spend the evening home together and when Gerry, Margo, and Leslie return, they find both of them in a fit of drunken depression.

Mother spends most of her time cultivating vegetables and cooking delightful meals, and Larry develops indigestion. He refuses to do anything about it but take baking soda, even though Margo suggests various diets to combat the indigestion and Larry's weight gain. Margo begins spending time at the sea, swimming with a young Turk. She neglects to tell anyone about her rendezvous with the Turk, but Spiro eventually shares the news with Mother. Spiro believes the Turk will certainly slit Margo's throat.

When Mother approaches Margo about the Turk and suggests he come for tea, Margo is delighted. Mother bakes a cake and warns everyone to be on their best behavior, which proves difficult: the Turk turns out to be condescending and smug. Mother overdoes the charm while Larry and Leslie nastily engage the Turk in conversation. The Turk appears oblivious, and the next day invites Margo to the cinema. Mother decides to go as a chaperone despite Margo's protests.

Leslie, Larry, and Gerry wait up for Margo and Mother's return long past when they expected them to return. They finally return at 1:30am and explain that they had an awful evening: the Turk wore horrendous perfume, Mother got a flea in her corset, and among other mishaps, the Turk insisted they take a cab home instead of a car. He sang the entire way and even tried to walk them up the hill to the house. Mother turns to Margo and tells her to choose boyfriends more carefully in the future.

Gerry's insistence that Theodore's books are all on sensible subjects suggests again that Gerry isn't against all education, just education that he doesn't find interesting. This shows that at least for Gerry, he's not necessarily opposed to growing up and being educated; he just wants to pick and choose what kind of education he gets and, by extension, what kind of adult he grows into.



Again, the focus on the changes in nature positions the natural world as a being something that changes and grows alongside the human characters. Further, the changing seasons also have an effect on the human characters, as evidenced by Larry's decision to buy wine and a guitar.



It's worth noting that at various points throughout the novel, romance causes Margo to spend more time in nature. This suggests that her happiness and her relationships make her more receptive to the beauty and other pleasant qualities of the natural world, offering a way for others besides Gerry to enjoy nature.



Though Gerry narrates this series of events, he doesn't mention that he participates much at all. This could suggest that the Turk treats him like a child, or simply that he's less interested in joining in on these human interactions in favor of the animal ones he narrates so carefully.



The fact that Larry, Leslie, and Gerry wait up to hear the news suggests that the absurdity of the Turk is grand entertainment for them, which in turn indicates that they're becoming acclimated to the overall absurdity of the island as a whole. Regular mishaps like this become far more interesting when even the mundane is treated as such.



Leslie purchases a double-barreled shotgun to shoot turtledoves and wood pigeons and invites Gerry to come along one morning. He shoots five doves and as they head back to the villa, they wave at Yani and his goats. Gerry wonders how anyone could be anything but happy during such a beautiful season.

Passages like these evoke a sense of community and tie it specifically to the beauty of the outdoors. Just as Margo finds happiness in nature with her boyfriends, everyone else similarly can't help experiencing joy on Corfu.



PART 1: CONVERSATION

Larry writes to all his friends inviting them to visit as soon as the family is fully settled. Gerry notes that it seems to have not occurred to him that the villa is barely big enough for the family. Mother is worried about having "highbrow" guests around, and suggests that Larry inform the local hotel of the coming friends. Larry and Mother argue about whether the villa is big enough to accommodate all of Larry's friends. Mother crossly maintains that it isn't, and Larry matter-of-factly says the solution is obvious: they need to move to a bigger villa. Mother counters that the obvious solution is to not invite people.

As much as Larry finds the animal absurdity ridiculous, he fully ignores the fact that he himself is just as absurd and ridiculous. This suggests that as much as Larry complains about his family's absurdity throughout the novel, he's the one most responsible for manufacturing and encouraging these kinds of shenanigans—essentially, he fits right in on Corfu.



Larry and Mother continue their argument, which intensifies when Larry admits that they may end up hosting seven or eight people at once. He maintains that they must move and says that when this round of guests leaves, they'll just need to invite more people to fill the extra space. Mother angrily arranges flowers and mutters that she refuses to move.

Larry also shows here that he's very selfish and doesn't consider the needs and desires of others, a quality that's often associated with childishness. This shows again that there are many ways to be an adult, not all of which are particularly mature.



PART 2, CHAPTER 7: THE DAFFODIL-YELLOW VILLA

The new villa is tall, square, and yellow, and the house and grounds are unkempt and decaying. It overlooks the sea and is surrounded by groves of olive, lemon, and orange trees. Mother soon hires the gardener's wife, Lugaretzia, to help at the villa. Lugaretzia proves to be oversensitive to criticism and an over-sharer about her many ailments—her descriptions of her indigestion become legendary, and Larry grouses about getting rid of her despite Mother's insistence that they need help.

While Larry is perfectly fine complaining about his own indigestion, the fact that he takes issue when someone else is just as open with their ailments again shows that Larry is self-centered. Larry's self-centeredness is one of the reasons he has such a hard time with Gerry's animals: he struggles to accept that animals are just as interesting as he is.



The furniture that came with the villa is old and promptly begins falling apart. Finally, Mother decides that they need to buy new furniture to prepare for Larry's guests. The next morning, Spiro drives Mother, Margo, and Gerry into town to buy furniture. The town is crowded and boisterous, and after they buy furniture, they get swept up in the crowd heading away from the car. An elderly woman explains to Gerry that everyone is heading to the church to kiss the feet of Saint Spiridion, the patron saint of the island whose mummified body is brought out once per year. Everyone on the island worships him, and every second son is named Spiro in his honor. Today is extra special, as anyone can kiss the saint's feet and make requests.

Mother, Margo, and Gerry are soon caught up in the crowd, unable to escape. Margo ends up entering the church first of the three, and Gerry observes the priest waving people into a line in front of the coffin. Gerry realizes they're all going to kiss the saint's feet, regardless of their feelings on the matter. He looks back to see Mother gesturing wildly, and she finally hisses at Gerry to tell Margo to not *actually* kiss the saint's feet. When Gerry turns forward to Margo, it's too late: she's already bent over the saint's feet. Gerry kisses the air, and Mother does the same.

When they finally meet outside the church, Mother exclaims over how unsanitary it is for everyone in the village to kiss the same thing, and she's distraught to learn that Margo actually kissed the saint's feet. Margo explains she hoped the saint could cure her acne. The next day, Margo comes down with the flu and Spiro fetches Dr. Androuchelli. He visits every few days for the next three weeks as the rest of the Durrells settle into the villa.

Because George left the island, Gerry spends his days exploring the 15 acres of gardens that came with the villa. He discovers scorpions that live on the crumbling walls, as well as pairs of swallows building mud nests. Gerry observes their nest building closely, particularly since the two male birds seem unable to take their task of fetching nesting material seriously. After the babies hatch, one male begins bringing ridiculously unsuitable creatures back to try to feed to his young. Gerry is thrilled, as he is able to collect most of the large beetles, butterflies, and dragonflies that the bird eventually rejects for his own collection.

This mention of celebrations in honor of Saint Spiridion is, notably, the first time Gerry mentions any events that center on humans instead of nature. In this way, Gerry's narration (what he chooses to tell the reader) reinforces his belief that the natural world is far more important than anything humans might think of to guide their lives—and further, that nature has a much more noticeable effect on people's lives than human activity. However, just as the seasons dictate what people do, Gerry and his family are equally at the mercy of this human event and can't opt out.



Mother's insistence that they not follow the local custom to the letter shows again that she's much less willing to integrate into the local community than her children are—she thinks that her beliefs and her customs are far superior to the locals', and she therefore has a much harder time adjusting to life on Corfu. Gerry's willingness to obey Mother suggests he wants to please her more than he wants to fit in.



Here, the fact that Margo apparently thinks it's worth trying out local customs to accomplish her goals shows that she's perfectly happy to take on local customs where it suits her. When she becomes sick, however, it suggests that she is still a foreigner, especially since Gerry never mentions if any locals also became ill.



Here, Gerry assigns the birds personalities and reasoning for their actions so that he can form a bond and a friendship of sorts with them, even though they're never real pets. This shows that Gerry isn't just interested in bringing the natural world in; he's just as interested in engaging with nature out and about with the sole purpose of understanding it better.



Gerry checks under the nests twice per day for new specimens and, one day, finds a very large and strange-looking beetle. The beetle leaves an oily and smelly residue on Gerry's fingers and the scent makes Roger sneeze. The following Thursday, Theodore comes for tea and identifies the insect as a flightless female oil beetle. He happily explains that the beetles' larvae are parasitic to a certain species of bee.

The very clear excitement and interest that Theodore shows in regards to the natural world illustrates again that being an adult doesn't have to mean giving up on one's sense of childhood curiosity and wonder, especially since Theodore seems just as entranced as Gerry does.



At this, Theodore launches into a story about a white horse he had the misfortune of riding in a Greek parade during the First World War. The horse behaved itself until someone threw eau-de-Cologne at it—which is customary—but the scent splashed into the poor animal's eye. The horse was so upset, Theodore had to withdraw from the parade and ride the horse along back streets, stinking of the scent.

This story shows that as charming and idiosyncratic as many of the Greek customs are, they don't all yield positive results. This in turn suggests that the absurdity of Corfu isn't always a good thing, though per Theodore's understanding, it still makes for a compelling story.



PART 2, CHAPTER 8: THE TORTOISE HILLS

Gerry's favorite part of the new villa is the hilly area above the olive groves. There, he can observe ant lions, caterpillars, mantises, and birds. He soon discovers that tortoises also live there. On the first truly hot day of the year, Gerry watches, fascinated, as a tortoise heaves itself out of its hibernation hole in the ground. Soon, the hills are teeming with them. Days later, the males begin to court females. They give out strange cries and when more than one converge on a female, the males prepare to fight.

Again, the fact that so much of Gerry's narration focuses specifically on the wildlife on the hill makes it abundantly clear that the wildlife and their habits are extremely interesting to Gerry and occupy most of his time. The tortoises' presence also dictates where Gerry spends his time, showing again that the natural world guides life on Corfu far more than human events.



The tortoises' battles are fascinating to watch, not least because the females *don't* watch. In their frenzy, the males occasionally attack the females, and sometimes, the females end up going off with a male who didn't even fight for them. Gerry and Roger watch the fights and make bets, though Roger proves inept at choosing winners. When a battle ends, Gerry and Roger follow the new couple into the bushes to watch their uninspiring and painfully awkward flirtation.

When Gerry mentions the bets that he and Roger makes, it shows him anthropomorphizing Roger—though in this case, he does it in such a way as to make himself look better. This suggests that Gerry still feels a sense of superiority and power over animals, given that they can't actually speak.



Gerry comes to recognize many of the tortoises by sight, particularly one he names Madame Cyclops. She's large and has only one eye, and soon begins accepting Gerry's offers of treats without fear. Though Gerry misses Madame Cyclops' "wedding," he does witness her laying her eggs. He watches her painstakingly dig a hole, lower herself into it, and lay nine eggs. Then, she covers them. Gerry waits until she leaves the area before digging up one egg and carefully reburying the others. He puts it in a glass box by itself and labels it with both Madame Cyclops' name and the tortoise's Latin name.

Gerry's label for the egg illustrates clearly how important it is to him to ascribe names, personalities, and human traits to the animals, even as he tries to be overwhelmingly scientific about them. The label does, however, show that one doesn't need to choose either emotion or science; it's perfectly reasonable to engage with nature in a way that does both.



Over the summer, a string of Larry's friends visit. One of the first is the Armenian poet Zatopec, who talks the entire visit and drinks huge quantities of wine. He pursues the local girls and Lugaretzia with abandon. Finally, he leaves and three artists, Jonquil, Durant, and Michael take his place. Jonquil promptly informs Mother that she's come to work, not have a holiday, and spends the entire visit sleeping in the sun in a bathing suit. Durant, a painter, hopes to find his nerve: he had just begun his masterpiece, an almond orchard in bloom, when on his second day of work, he discovered that a storm blew off all the blossoms. This happened two years ago, but his eyes fill with tears as he tells the tale.

Poor Michael wants to paint the island, but it turns out he suffers from asthma and a horse allergy. Not knowing this, Lugaretzia puts a blanket in his room that Gerry used for horseback riding. On Michael's first night, the family wakes to the strange sound of his wheezing. Mother tenderly covers Michael in the horse blanket. He gets worse as Mother, Margo, and Larry argue about what's wrong, and Michael chokes out that he's allergic to cats, lilacs, and horses. Mother finally notices that the blanket is a horse blanket. Michael spends the entire summer recovering with Durant in the sun and never paints at all.

A woman named Melanie also visits. Within five minutes of her arrival she takes her wig off to gain some relief from the heat, much to Gerry's delight. She explains to Mother that she just recovered from erysipelas (a bacterial skin infection) and lost all her hair. However, because Melanie's false teeth fit poorly, she mumbles through her explanation, leading Mother to believe she has a venereal disease. Mother corners Larry about this, insisting that Melanie must go. She finally agrees to have Theodore out to evaluate the situation.

Theodore arrives the next day with Zatopec, who drunkenly got on the wrong boat, missed his appointment in Bosnia, and came right back to Corfu. When Melanie is introduced to Theodore, she asks for his advice on her disease. The two discuss treatment options, which incenses Mother—she believes such conversation isn't appropriate for teatime. Later, Theodore explains Melanie's affliction. Mother guiltily is very kind to Melanie for the rest of her stay.

The behaviors and stories of all four of Larry's friends suggest that the novel's sense of absurdity isn't necessarily something unique to the island. Unlike locals like Theodore, however, Larry's friends seem fully unaware of the fact that they're being absurd (in much the same way that Larry is unaware), which again suggests that being able to recognize absurdity for what it is is a cultural standard that seems to exist less frequently in the rest of Europe.



For Michael, the natural world is actually very dangerous. In this case, the fact that he has to actively avoid horses, cats, and lilacs actually reinforces that humans are very much at the mercy of the natural world and must learn to exist within it rather than tame it. In this way, though he engages with nature in a way that's almost opposite from the way that Gerry does, the two have the same kind of respect for the power of the natural world.



Mother's insistence that Melanie actually be forced to leave because of having an STD shows that Mother is still very much operating within the upper-class logic of England, not the more freewheeling culture at work in Greece. Having Theodore out for this reason indicates that he's a doctor (which he was), showing that adults also don't have to limit their interests to one thing.



As was the case with the Turk, Gerry's lack of engagement with these events suggests that, though they're interesting to a degree, they're not interesting enough for Gerry to truly engage with and be a part of.



Dinner that night is an extraordinary affair. Gerry listens in on all the conversations about art, literature, and poetry. After dinner, Larry plays the guitar and sings, and Theodore tells another anecdote about Corfu. He explains that once, when the Greek king visited, he was treated to a play. The climax of the play included a battle scene. The actors playing the parts of the losing army were disgruntled at having to "lose" in front of the king, and a real fight broke out onstage. The king later said he was impressed with the realism of the battle scene. When Larry insists the story cannot possibly be true, Theodore proudly says that anything can happen in Corfu.

Though Gerry never says, Theodore was actually Greek. Theodore's pride then can be seen as a kind of local pride in his home culture, as well as a recognition that these kinds of occurrences add richness to life at the time and every time after that when he tells the story. Similarly, the fact that the king apparently accepted the mishap as planned and still found it charming suggests that this is something widespread in Greece, not just confined to Corfu.



PART 2, CHAPTER 9: THE WORLD IN A WALL

One of Gerry's favorite places is the crumbling wall that surrounds the garden. It's plastered brick, though the plaster is cracked and moss grows over the whole thing. He spends hours watching the different creatures that stalk along the wall. Gerry is especially entranced by the scorpions that live under the loose plaster. He finds them charming, unassuming, and mostly safe, assuming he doesn't touch them. He even observes bits of their courtship rituals, which they undertake at night. The family forbids Gerry from keeping a colony in the house much to his displeasure, as that would allow him to see all of their courtship.

In comparison to Gerry's other animal interests (doves, tortoises, dogs), scorpions are much scarier and working with them poses risks far greater than any of his other pets thus far. Despite this, Gerry's interest in them and the way he characterizes them as charming and unassuming shows that Gerry understands that creatures like scorpions aren't dangerous assuming one deals with them respectfully and properly.



One day, Gerry finds a female scorpion covered in a mass of tiny babies. He decides he must capture her so he can watch the babies grow up, so he traps her in a matchbox and heads for the villa. He arrives at lunchtime, places the box on the mantel, and goes to lunch, his new catch entirely forgotten. When Larry is finished eating, he goes in search of cigarettes and matches and returns to the table. He puts a cigarette in his mouth and unsuspectingly opens the matchbox. The annoyed scorpion darts onto his hand, and things go downhill from there. Larry screams and flings the scorpion onto the table, scattering babies everywhere. Roger begins barking wildly and bites Lugaretzia, while Leslie and Margo scream. The scorpions hide under plates and cutlery.

Gerry's forgetfulness here points to the fact that as mature as he seems at times, he's still a child. Forgetting the scorpion in a matchbox also reminds the reader that Gerry has a lot to learn about animal husbandry, as that's objectively not a great place to keep animals long-term. All in all, this incident makes it very clear that as good as Gerry's intentions are, he has a long way to go—and further, that his family will suffer the consequences of these mistakes as he learns.



Gerry convinces his family to not kill the scorpions and spends the next half hour collecting the babies. He reluctantly carries the mother back outside and releases her onto the wall. Larry is terrified of matchboxes after this, and Mother decides that it's time for Gerry to receive more education. She engages the Belgian consul to tutor Gerry in French.

The kneejerk reactions of Gerry's family members clearly show that even though Mother is possibly more willing to humor Gerry, he has no allies when it comes to animals the others consider dangerous.



For their first lesson, the Belgian consul asks Gerry to read from a French book. After Gerry reads a few words, the Belgian consul stiffens, exclaims something, and pulls out an air rifle. Gerry watches, perplexed and a little afraid, as the consul loads the rifle, crouches by the window, and fires at something. After the consul shoots, Gerry notices tears in his eyes, but he asks Gerry to finish his reading.

It takes Gerry a week to discover that the Belgian consul is shooting the starving and sickly cats that breed unchecked in his neighborhood. He's a great cat lover and can't stand to see the strays looking so poorly. Gerry recognizes he's doing a great service for the cats and after each shot, he and the consul observe a moment of silence.

The Belgian consul believes that Mother speaks French and tries to engage her in conversation whenever he sees her. She does her best to avoid him, and Gerry believes that the consul never discovers that Mother's only word of French is "oui." The "conversations" are nerve-wracking for her, and Gerry, Larry, Leslie, and Margo sometimes whisper to her that the consul is coming just to watch her tear off down the street.

Theodore comes every Thursday afternoon and stays until evening. Theodore's choice to come on Thursdays is purposeful: the **seaplane** from Athens lands on Thursdays in a bay not far from the Durrells' villa, and watching it land is something that Theodore greatly enjoys. When they hear it coming, Mother tortures Theodore for a few minutes before inviting him to the attic to watch.

On these Thursday afternoons, Theodore and Gerry go out with Roger to collect specimens. Theodore seems to know everything, but he teaches Gerry in such a way as to make Gerry feel as though he's simply being reminded of facts he forgot. Theodore is especially knowledgeable about aquatic life and tells Gerry about caddis fly larvae, which build shells out of whatever they can find as they wander along the bottom of ponds. On the subject of building, Theodore tells Gerry about a friend who decided to add another story to his house and threw a party once the construction was over. At the party, he discovered he neglected to add stairs—he and the workmen had been exclusively using the scaffolding and never noticed.

The fact that the Belgian consul seems even more eccentric than the locals again shows that absurdity and eccentricity aren't unique to Corfu; instead, the way that the locals handle absurdity and eccentricity is what's unique to Corfu. The fact that Gerry accepts the consul's strangeness shows he's becoming more like a local.



By putting the cats out of their misery, the Belgian consul teaches Gerry an important lesson about how to care for animals responsibly: namely, that it can be a kindness to kill them when they're suffering.



When Mother tries to avoid the consul, it suggests that though she finds education and French specifically important, both are nevertheless things that make her uncomfortable. Though Gerry positions Mother as absolutely an adult, this opens up the possibility that Mother herself isn't as well-educated as she wants her children to be.



Theodore's obsession with the seaplane is something that concretely shows that he has certainly maintained a childish sense of wonder and curiosity well into adulthood, showing again that adulthood doesn't have to mean forsaking positive qualities associated with childhood.



Though Theodore is never an official tutor for Gerry, the things that Gerry learns from him become some of the most important and useful things Gerry learns throughout his entire stay on Corfu. This shows that education doesn't always need to take the form of official tutors like George or the Belgian consul; learning can happen organically and spontaneously as it does here. Regardless, it still points Gerry towards maturity.



PART 2, CHAPTER 10: THE PAGEANT OF FIREFLIES

Summer soon arrives. The olive trees grow heavy with fruit, butterflies lay eggs, and tree frogs sing as evening falls. A man named Peter arrives to tutor Gerry. He's difficult at first but after a few weeks, the island calms him and he becomes more forgiving. He agrees to teach Gerry English by letting him write a book, so Gerry spends an hour every morning working on a narrative about the family traveling around the world to capture animals. Peter and Margo both become suddenly interested in botany, so they take walks in the garden while Gerry writes.

After the scorpion debacle, the family gives Gerry a room to house his animals. Gerry calls it his study and he keeps his collections of eggs, insects, and other preserved specimens, such as a four-legged chicken, in it. When Gerry finds a bat, he takes it upon himself to stuff it and hang it on the wall. He's very proud of it, but the bat soon seems to feel the heat of summer. It sags and begins to smell. Gerry is very annoyed when the family finally figures out the smell is coming from the bat and makes him get rid of it.

Peter offers to show Gerry how to properly preserve animals if he can find another specimen, so Gerry begins trying to hunt bats with a bamboo stick at night. He's unsuccessful in his quest but sees a number of other interesting night creatures while he hunts. Gerry vows to capture squirrel dormice and so spends his days thrusting his hands into hollow trunks to search for sleeping ones. One day, he pulls out a bewildered Scops owl and carries him home. The family has no objections to keeping the owl, and they decide to name him Ulysses. Even though he's tiny, Ulysses is fearless and will attack anything.

Gerry sets Ulysses up in the drawing room and decides that he and Roger should be introduced. He puts Ulysses on the floor and instructs Roger to make friends. Roger seems nonplussed when Ulysses turns his head all the way around. Finally, Roger belly crawls to Ulysses and pokes him with his nose, which turns out to be a mistake. Ulysses digs his claws into Roger's nose, and Roger refuses to come out from under the table until Ulysses is back in his basket.

As he grows, Ulysses takes up residence in Gerry's study. He spends the day sleeping and when night falls, he wakes up, regurgitates his daily pellet, and sits with Gerry for a moment before asking for the shutters to be opened. Then, Ulysses flies out to hunt. He and Roger become friendly with each other and occasionally, Ulysses will ride on Roger's back down to the sea for an evening swim.

Note here that the assertion that Peter and Margo become interested in botany is entirely Gerry's belief—one that betrays the fact that he's a child who believes that there's nothing more interesting than the natural world and therefore ignores the truth that Peter and Margo are romantically involved. This also shows that Gerry's first inclination is to believe that others think about the natural world the way he does.



The bat becomes a symbol for Gerry's incomplete education and bursting enthusiasm regardless. Just as with Gerry's misinterpretation of Margo and Peter's motives, his annoyance at his family shows that he finds it ridiculous that they're not willing to put up with the natural world and the natural process of decomposition.



Though owls are dangerous in very different ways than scorpions are, they're still fairly dangerous animals. The family's willingness to keep Ulysses then shows that deciding whether an animal is dangerous or not is often a matter of perception—the family has possibly not been around owls or has simply heard or experienced more when it comes to the danger of scorpions.



Though Roger certainly appears curious, it's important to keep in mind that he approaches Ulysses primarily because Gerry asked him to and he wants to please Gerry. This shows again how close of a friendship Gerry and Roger have. When Roger gets hurt, it impresses upon Gerry and the reader that Gerry has all the responsibility to keep Roger safe.



The strange understanding that Ulysses and Roger come to shows that when humans orchestrate such a relationship, entirely unrelated animals can become friends and form relationships just like humans can.



Larry, Peter, Margo, Leslie, Gerry, and Roger begin taking the family boat, the *Sea Cow*, down to a small bay nightly to swim, sit on the warm rocks, and escape the sun. One night, as Gerry floats, he feels ripples and hears a sigh. He notices that he's far away from shore and is afraid of what's in the water, but he realizes it's a porpoise. Eight porpoises surround him and swim with him before heading out to open water. After this, the porpoises visit regularly. The family also discovers that the sea is full of phosphorescent (glowing) life during the hot months, and to add to the effect, fireflies dance around the bay too.

Mother envies her children their swims, though she insists she's too old when they invite her along. Finally, she purchases a strange, heavy, frilled bathing costume. When she tries it on, she calls everyone upstairs to see it. Roger is the first to enter her room and he races right back out, barking at the costume. Nobody likes it. Mother refuses to find another suit, so the family plans a picnic and invites Theodore.

On the day of the picnic, Theodore points out that there will be no moon. After arguing, everyone decides to go anyway, so they load into the *Sea Cow* and head down to the bay. When they reach the bay, Mother wades into the water. As she does, Roger becomes excited and attacks her costume by grabbing hold of one of the ruffles. He pulls, pulling Mother down into the water. The ruffle comes loose, which excites Roger further. As the rest of the family laugh uproariously on the shore, Mother tries to beat Roger off and keep some of her costume intact. Finally, Theodore rescues her.

The phosphorescence is magnificent that night. After swimming, everyone congregates on the shore to eat. Then, as if on cue, the fireflies begin to dance and the porpoises appear, looking as though they're on fire as they swim through the phosphorescence. Gerry can even see the trails of phosphorescence underwater where the porpoises swam. This goes on for an hour until the porpoises head back out to sea.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11: THE ENCHANTED ARCHIPELAGO

The family decides that summer to invest in an outboard engine for the *Sea Cow*, which opens up opportunities to explore much more of the coast. Gerry is entranced when they discover an archipelago of small islands that are home to a number of strange and wonderful sea creatures. Though the family agrees to several trips out, these eventually stop as the family becomes bored. Eventually, Gerry decides to use his upcoming birthday to his advantage by asking for a boat and a bunch of other scientific equipment.

This evening bathing suggests that the Durrell children at least are adapting to the local customs of Corfu, given that they aren't bathing in the in-house bathroom. The phosphorescence in particular shows that even for those less convinced (such as Larry), the natural world can still be a spectacular place that is capable of providing a great deal of entertainment.



Gerry's decision to include far more of Roger's thoughts on the suit than his siblings' thoughts shows again how much he prioritizes his animals over people. Further, it shows that he does his best to listen to and interpret what his animals say in order to better understand them.



Mother's willingness to join her children for their swim suggests that she's trying to take on and accept some of the island's local customs, especially if it means she gets to spend more time with her children. Roger's actions here show that he has no time for human customs that he deems ridiculous, showing again that individuals' responses to absurd happenings are what sets people apart.



Gerry's description of the show again shows that the natural world can be seen as amazing by everyone, assuming they want to see it as such. This is surely a proud moment for Gerry, as it suggests that his family is, at times, just as entranced by nature as he is.



Gerry's desire to be able to travel by himself shows that he is growing up; this desire for independence is part of becoming mature. Therefore, asking for a boat situates the boat itself as what will, per Gerry's understanding, allow him to become appropriately mature and achieve a more adult sense of independence.



Gerry creates a list for each family member that caters to their interests—Margo's list consists of fabric and pins, while Gerry asks Larry for books. Gerry waits for the right moment to ask Leslie for a boat. After helping him with a ballistic experiment, Gerry manages to back Leslie into a corner, question his boat-building abilities, and extract a promise to build him a boat. While Leslie builds and curses on the back veranda, Gerry happily sets to work digging ponds to house his new creatures and lining them with pink cement.

The day before Gerry's birthday, everyone goes into town to buy presents, take Lugaretzia to the dentist, and stock the cupboards. Though they all agreed they didn't want a crowd at Gerry's birthday party, they ended up inviting 46 people due to a lack of communication. After her dentist's appointment Lugaretzia is in no state to help with party preparations, so Spiro steps in to help.

The day of the party, Gerry inspects all his gifts and then Leslie leads him outside to show him the boat. It's the most beautiful thing Gerry has ever seen, even though it's almost circular and has a flat bottom. As a final touch Leslie pulls out the mast, which needs to be fitted after it's launched. Gerry suggests launching immediately, but Leslie insists that the boat needs a name first. Gerry decides to call it *Bootle* just when Larry suggests *Bumtrinket*. Thus, much to Mother's dismay, the boat becomes the **Bootle-Bumtrinket**.

Margo, Peter, Larry, and Leslie carry the **Bootle-Bumtrinket** to the jetty, where Gerry and Mother open a bottle of wine in celebration. Finally, the boat bearers toss the boat into the water. Peter gets in to fit the mast as Larry points out the issues that might arise by fitting a 20-foot mast into a craft so small, but Leslie doesn't listen. As Peter fits the mast, the boat promptly overturns and dumps Peter into the water. Larry and Leslie begin yelling at each other about who's the cleverest until finally, Peter emerges. Leslie, extremely angry with Larry, changes to a swimsuit and takes his yacht manual down to the boat. The mast ends up being three feet tall.

Spiro arrives with help and takes over the kitchen not long after, drinking and singing loudly as he cooks. Theodore is the first guest to arrive. He gives Gerry a book on freshwater biology. Gerry finds that most other gifts are useless, though he's thrilled to receive a pair of puppies. He locks them in the drawing room with Roger, but this proves a poor choice: when the family opens the doors to allow guests in, they discover the puppies made quite the mess. Larry suggests the puppies be named Widdle and Puke and though Mother protests, the names stick.

The care that Gerry takes in constructing his ponds shows that he's beginning to develop an interest not just in having animals, but in keeping them in enclosures that are sturdy and mimic their natural habitats. In this way, Gerry works to engage with animals on their own terms and not try to domesticate them in the conventional sense but rather, he wants to make domestication mimic the wild.



The fact that the way the Durrells communicate with each other fits into the general sense of absurdity on the island again suggests that Corfu is a place where such things are simply bound to happen, if only because people tend to accept the absurdity as normal.



Gerry's description of the boat as a whole suggests that it's not actually a particularly fantastic boat; rather, it seems beautiful because of the feelings of independence that Gerry has attached to it. Though that sense of independence is a mark of growing maturity, the name Gerry gives the boat isn't: it's silly, nonsensical, and makes it clear that Gerry is a child.



When Larry and Leslie turn to arguing with each other rather than thinking about Peter's safety, it reinforces both how cocky and self-important Larry is, as well as how self-conscious Leslie is about his boat building. Though Leslie insists he is indeed educated, the particulars of the boat suggest that he might not be as adept at understanding the concepts presented in the yacht manual as he'd like everyone to think.



As with the Bootle-Bumtrinket, Mother's concern over what people might think of the names Widdle and Puke shows that she wants to fully embody the image of upstanding English people. Deciding on such silly names is proof that all of her children have more or less adapted to the relaxed and unconcerned way of life on Corfu, as they think little about what others might think.



The party rages on and several guests, including Leslie and Spiro, begin a traditional Greek dance in the living room. Dr. Androuchelli arrives late after delivering his wife's baby. Spiro gives the doctor a hard time for having six children, which he deems ridiculous. The party goes until dawn, and Gerry thinks it was an exceptional birthday.

When Spiro teases Dr. Androuchelli, it shows that even the locals aren't always fully behind the culture of the island. However, it's also worth remembering that Spiro spent eight years in America, which may have colored how he views life on Corfu.



The next morning, Gerry takes Roger, Widdle, and Puke out on the **Bootle-Bumtrinket's** maiden voyage. The sea seems bluer and more beautiful than usual. Gerry observes the clams, the feathery sea creatures, and the pouting fish that live in the reefs. He even finds a baby octopus. Finally, when the sun begins to set, Gerry heads home, the bottom of the boat filled with tubes and jars of sea creatures. Roger, a "marine enthusiast," studies the jars intently.

When Gerry attributes Roger's interest in the jars and tubes as being indicative of his enthusiasm for marine biology, it shows that Gerry is also willing to anthropomorphize Roger in such a way as to make it seem like they have more in common. By doing so, Gerry can feel even closer to Roger.



PART 2, CHAPTER 12: THE WOODCOCK WINTER

When fall arrives, Gerry is delighted that Peter isn't doing much tutoring. Mother insists that Peter and Margo are much too fond of each other. The family agrees that they don't want Margo and Peter to marry, so Mother fires Peter. Margo is distraught and "plays the part" perfectly, while Leslie takes on the role of the outraged brother and threatens to shoot Peter should he return to Corfu. Spiro enjoys all of this and cries with Margo in sympathy. Just as Margo seems to be recovering, she receives a note from Peter promising to come back for her. She shows the note to Mother, and everyone doubles down on their efforts to keep Peter away. Larry at one point insults Margo, which leads Margo to lock herself in the attic.

Notice that Gerry interprets what happens after Mother fires Peter as being, essentially, the family latching onto this ready-made opportunity for drama and milking it for all it's worth. This again shows that adults can be just as dramatic and silly as children, while Spiro's thrilled involvement suggests that practices like this fit in with the overall culture of Corfu.



After discovering several items missing from the *Sea Cow*, Leslie arranges a series of guns in his window that he can fire with the pull of a string. He neglects to tell the family about this. One night, the guns go off. Mother fears that Margo committed suicide, while Margo believes that Leslie is murdering Peter. In the ensuing melee, Widdle and Puke tug on Mother's nightgown, Larry yells about being disturbed, while Margo tries to let herself out of the locked attic without success. Finally, Mother and Margo get the attic door open and discover what exactly happened. Leslie is perturbed when the family asks that he warn them before shooting at burglars, but the debacle does get Margo out of the attic.

When Leslie decides to not tell anyone about his guns, it again suggests that both he and Larry tend to think of themselves before they even consider thinking about others. In this way, both behave childishly—especially when Larry's first complaint about the whole thing is that he's being disturbed, not concern for someone's wellbeing. The way that Widdle and Puke engage with the situation as though it's all a grand romp shows that they, like Gerry, are still very young.



Margo still wants to nurse her broken heart in private so one day, she loads Roger, Widdle, and Puke into the **Bootle-Bumtrinket** and takes it out to a small island to lie in the sun. Gerry is annoyed beyond belief that Margo took his boat and tells Mother about it. A storm begins to blow in, and Mother and Lugaretzia hang out of the attic windows with binoculars watching Margo. Lugaretzia tells Mother a tragic story about an uncle that drowned in a storm like this, but Mother fortunately can't understand.

Finally, Margo decides it's time to head home. However, she walks strangely and acts as though she's lost the boat. Widdle and Puke put up a fight about getting in the boat in inclement weather but finally, she gets all the dogs in. Margo's steering is peculiar as well and once she's close, the rest of the family goes down to the shore to hail her. When she finally reaches shore, they realize that she fell asleep in the sun and her eyes suffered a sunburn that left them puffy and hard to see out of.

Winter comes slowly and gently to Corfu. The wind picks up slowly and then, suddenly, the mountains are covered in snow. The sky turns gray and the wind and rain whistle through the dry trees. Leslie loves the winter, as it's shooting season. He takes several trips to the mainland to hunt boar, ducks, and rabbits. He regales the family with tales of the hunt upon his return, though they take little notice until Mother decides to inspect a boar one day.

Mother is concerned about how large the boar is, though Leslie assures her there's little danger unless a boar bursts out of the underbrush right underfoot. Larry imperiously insists that *that* isn't dangerous, as a hunter could just leap over the boar. When Leslie explains why that's impossible, Larry accuses "hunting blokes" of having no imagination, but refuses to come hunting and try out his idea himself. Gerry explains that this is normal for Larry; he believes if one uses their brain, they can do anything.

One evening, Leslie returns from a trip and explains in detail how he pulled off his first "left-and-right," which entails shooting two birds in quick succession. Larry doesn't understand why this is such an accomplishment. Annoyed, Leslie invites Larry to go hunting to show everyone how easy it is, and Margo agrees that it's time for Larry to show them that he's actually capable of carrying out his suggestions.

Mother's inability to understand Lugaretzia's story shows that there are some upsides to not learning the language—here, it saves Mother from worrying even more as Lugaretzia dramatizes the situation. Gerry, like Larry and Leslie, thinks only of himself and not of Margo's safety, suggesting that he's still very self-centered and immature.



Margo's sunburn shows that even though Margo respects the natural world in a way that's generally more positive than the way that Larry or Leslie do, she's still at the mercy of its dangers. This shows that nature always has the power to dictate how one interacts with it and can be very dangerous when not treated with caution.



Leslie's hunting habit is, notably, a way for Leslie to interact with nature, though hunting is a way for humans to exert control over the natural world and try to tame it. Though Gerry never passes judgment on Leslie's hunting, the novel overwhelmingly suggests that Gerry's way of dealing with nature is superior.



Larry shows here that he believes the natural world is something that one can simply outsmart. This shows that Larry absolutely places humans and human civilization far above the natural world and in doing so, likely underestimates the power of the natural world.



By now, the reader understands that Larry is being set up for failure here—his assertions are ridiculous and his inflated sense of self is misguided. Taken together, this tells the reader that the natural world is finally going to be able to get back at Larry for being so derisive.



Margo and Gerry follow Larry and Leslie down to the swampy valley where the birds congregate. Larry complains the whole way, especially when they reach the muddy ditches that must be crossed using narrow bridges. While Larry is standing on one of these bridges, two birds fly up from the grass. Larry fires, misses the birds, and tumbles into the ditch. The mud is close to ten feet deep and despite Leslie's yells of anguish, Larry tries to use the gun to push himself out. Finally, they manage to pull him out.

By the time Larry limps home, he's convinced the family plotted to embarrass or kill him. He snaps at Mother when she asks if he fell in, and he takes a bottle of brandy upstairs and asks Lugaretzia to build a huge fire in his bedroom. Two bottles and several hours later, Mother sends Margo to check on Larry. She finds Larry drunk and delirious, and Mother decides they should just build up the fire and leave him be. The next morning, however, Margo discovers that a coal from the fire slipped through the floor and set a supporting beam on fire. She dramatically yells for everyone to get out. Mother tries to put her corset on and screams that Larry is on fire.

Gerry and Leslie race to Larry's room, which is full of smoke. Larry is fast asleep. Margo follows Leslie's instructions to pour something on the fire by pouring the leftover bottle of brandy on it. Leslie hauls all of Larry's blankets off the bed to smother the fire, which angers Larry. From bed, Larry indignantly directs his family in putting out the fire and once it's out, claims responsibility for saving the family from burning.

PART 2: CONVERSATION

Spring arrives with lambs, tortoises, and butterflies. The family spends one day every week on the veranda together, poring over their mail. Everyone receives correspondence and catalogues according to their interests. One day, Mother reads a letter from Great-Aunt Hermione out loud. It tells of her medical woes and Larry laments that she's never going to die. The entire family is distraught when Mother reads that Hermione wants to come visit. Larry in particular is beside himself and calls Hermione an "evil old camel!"

Larry, Mother, Leslie, and Margo argue over what to do about Hermione's request. They suggest outlandish ideas such as writing to say that Mother is ill or claiming that Margo's acne is actually smallpox, all of which Mother shoots down. Finally, Larry insists there's only one thing to do: move to a smaller villa so they won't be able to accommodate her. Mother insists that moving again would be eccentric but nonetheless, the family moves.

Again, when Leslie is far more upset about getting mud in the gun than the fact that Larry might be in serious trouble of sinking into the mud, it shows that Leslie and Larry aren't so different: both believe wholeheartedly that their interests outweigh the health and safety of others. The mud here also shows that nature is capable of acting as a very powerful force, regardless of how Larry thinks of it.



When Larry refuses to take any responsibility for what happened, it suggests that he'll never come around and develop a sense of respect for either the natural world or others' hobbies that require more than logical thought. Mother's strange insistence on getting her corset on before leaving the house illustrates again how much she relies on looking the part and seeming as though her family isn't eccentric.



By allowing Larry this one victory, Gerry allows that Larry's way of thinking about the world isn't always wrong or bad. It has its place and its uses, though it's important to recognize that it's successful in the manmade house, not in the uncontrollable natural world.



The way that Larry talks about Great-Aunt Hermione is, incidentally, very similar to the way he talks about Lugaretzia. Both are hypochondriacs, and Larry has little time to spare for other people's ailments. This shows again that just because someone is technically an adult, they don't necessarily have to give up on childish beliefs or thought patterns such as this.



When the children override Mother's desire to stay, it indicates that they have a very different idea of what constitutes eccentricity than Mother does. This suggests too that they all are far more adjusted to life on Corfu, if only because they don't care much at all about what others will think.



PART 3, CHAPTER 13: THE SNOW-WHITE VILLA

The new villa is perched on a hill, surrounded by olive groves, orchards, and vineyards. It has a small fenced garden and looks very elegant. Gerry soon becomes interested in the praying mantises, many of which are huge. They fly in the house at night and are very aggressive and entirely fearless. The house is also populated by geckos that hunt in the house at night.

One gecko that Gerry calls Geronimo hunts often in Gerry's bedroom. He's aggressive and won't let any other gecko in the bedroom. When he attacks other geckos, he goes straight for their tails, which drop off as a defense mechanism. Every night he scuttles up the wall from his home in the flower bed, enters Gerry's room, and enthusiastically settles himself in his favorite corner to wait for his dinner to arrive. He hunts lacewing flies, beetles, and moths, and does so ferociously. He is also able to scare off the mantises until the night of the "great fight."

Gerry is very interested in the breeding habits of the mantises and is thrilled to discover a very large female with a distended belly on a walk one day. When he catches her, she closes an arm around Gerry's thumb and makes him bleed. Gerry carefully catches her again so she can't hurt him, carries her home, and installs her in a cage in his room. He names her Cicely. When her belly is huge, she somehow escapes. Gerry notices her flying around one night and watches a look of fury come over Geronimo's face as Cicely lands near him.

Geronimo begins angrily stalking towards Cicely. Cicely spreads her wings and turns to face him, which confuses Geronimo for a moment, but he finally decides to fight. He lunges at her and bites her thorax, she grabs his hind legs in her claws, and they stagger on the wall. Gerry considers interfering, but the fight is very interesting. After struggling for a few minutes, Cicely jumps off the ceiling but doesn't plan for Geronimo's weight. They fall onto the bed, and Gerry hops off. Cicely finally makes her fatal mistake: she grabs his tail, which Geronimo promptly drops. Geronimo takes the chance to chomp on Cicely's head, and she soon dies. Geronimo allows Gerry to clean his wounds and then heads for his garden bed.

Again, it's telling that Gerry spends so much of his narration describing the animals and natural environment surrounding the house, while he simply neglects to describe how his family settles in. This reinforces where his interests lie.



Geronimo exists alongside Madame Cyclops in that while Gerry forms an emotional attachment to him and observes him closely, he never feels the need to actually attempt to tame him. This shows that Gerry understands that it's perfectly reasonable to simply observe the natural world; it's not strictly necessary to bring it into his own human world.



Gerry's descriptions of Geronimo's emotional turmoil throughout the ensuing fight show the extent to which Gerry ascribes human characteristics to his beloved animals. Doing so allows him to easily dramatize the event, as well as encourage the reader to think of both Geronimo and Cicely as being almost human opponents in the fight of their lives.



Given Gerry's love for all his animals, it seems out of character that he doesn't immediately attempt to separate Geronimo and Cicely. The fact that he doesn't separate them, however, suggests that Gerry understands that he cannot completely control what happens in nature. This again situates nature as something that influences humans, not the other way around, and something that humans must then just learn to coexist with.



A couple weeks later, Geronimo allows another small gecko to join him in Gerry's room. One afternoon not long after, Gerry discovers two massive toads. Delighted by them, he races back to the villa with one in each hand and shows them to Mother and Spiro. Spiro promptly turns green and vomits outside, while Mother assures Gerry that the toads are lovely but not everyone agrees. The rest of the family has reactions similar to Spiro's, so Gerry cages the beasts in his room. That night, he lets the toads out to hunt for insects. Gerry throws a magazine at a large moth that landed next to Geronimo's friend, knocking the gecko off the ceiling. One of the toads snaps up the gecko, and Gerry feels horrible.

Gerry shows the toads to Theodore on Thursday. Theodore proposes that the toads may be between 12 and 20 years old, given their size. He feeds one a worm and watches it shove the wriggling worm in its mouth with its thumbs, explaining that he loves watching toads eat worms—it reminds him of conjurers that pull ribbons out of their mouths. He wonders if he could teach toads to swallow blunt swords.

PART 3, CHAPTER 14: THE TALKING FLOWERS

Gerry learns that Mother found another tutor, a man named Kralfesky. She informs Gerry that Kralfesky loves birds, which doesn't impress Gerry: he's found that most "bird enthusiasts" know nothing about birds. He sets off for his first lesson at Kralfesky's mansion in a dark mood. Gerry is shocked when Kralfesky opens the door, as he looks like a gnome. Kralfesky leads Gerry to a room where they'll work and declares that they must become friends. Gerry tries hard not to smile, and Kralfesky explains he's an aviculturist. He invites Gerry to see his birds before they begin work.

Kralfesky leads Gerry upstairs. Behind a locked door, Gerry sees dozens of birdcages lining the walls of the bright attic. He inspects the cages and discovers two large aviaries on a balcony containing larger birds. After Gerry looks at them, he helps Kralfesky fill water dishes for the birds. Kralfesky talks to both Gerry and the birds as he works. Finally, an alarm sounds and Kralfesky, disgusted, discovers that it's already noon and Gerry is set to leave in a half hour. They pick flowers for the birds until it's time for Gerry to leave. Gerry later informs his family that he like Kralfesky very much.

Mother's levelheaded explanation shows that she tries to bridge the gaps in interest between her children and friends and conceptualizes herself mostly as a peacekeeper. When Gerry is sad about the fate of Geronimo's gecko friend, it again seems somewhat incongruous given that he described Cicely's death with little emotion. Taken together, this indicates that Gerry is still a child who is both curious and emotional, which colors how he engages with his animals.



Theodore's glee about the toads and his wonderful musings about teaching them to swallow swords show again that, though Theodore is an adult and moves through the world as such, he absolutely still has a grasp on his childhood sense of wonder and fun.



Gerry's reasoning about Kralfesky suggests not just that others aren't real ornithologists; it also shows that his family members are also ill informed about birds, and thus he's less willing to trust what they have to say about supposed bird lovers. Again, the way that Gerry describes Kralfesky suggests that Kralfesky's appearance fits right in with the general absurdity of Corfu.



This initial meeting suggests that Kralfesky might eventually occupy a similar place in Gerry's heart that Theodore does, given that he clearly is a real aviculturist. Kralfesky also stands as another example of what an adult can be. Though he does go on to tutor Gerry, he also continues to pursue his love of birds and other animals in a manner that Gerry has thus far considered unique to children and youth.



Despite their unorthodox first "lesson," Kralfesky proves to be a stickler when it comes to tutoring. He drills Gerry on history and the primary exports of English counties. Gerry retains none of it. They spend one morning per week reading out of a French bird book, though Kralfesky can barely stand listening to Gerry struggle so they go for walks to practice conversational French. Inevitably they wind up in Corfu's bird market, forget all about French, and Kralfesky purchases birds until his alarm goes off at noon.

At odd intervals during the morning, Kralfesky excuses himself to see his mother. Gerry believes that Kralfesky is far too old to have a living mother, so he decides it must be Kralfesky's way of referring to the bathroom. One morning, Gerry needs to use the bathroom himself and decides to adopt Kralfesky's term for the bathroom. Kralfesky is confused when Gerry asks to visit his mother, but he goes to check to make sure "she" is accepting visitors. Gerry assures him that he doesn't mind, as his "mother" is often a mess. This garners a strange look.

Kralfesky leads Gerry down a hallway and into a bedroom filled to the brim with flowers. A tiny old figure lies in the bed. She has rich auburn hair that cascades halfway down the bed. Gerry is shocked as Kralfesky introduces him to his mother, Mrs. Kralfesky. She explains that her hair is her one remaining vanity and says she believes that her hair is self-sufficient and almost separate from her.

Kralfesky excuses himself to go check on some eggs that are due to hatch, leaving Gerry with Mrs. Kralfesky. She tells Gerry that she believes that when one gets old, the world slows down to meet you. This allows her to see all manner of delightful things, most notably that flowers talk. She assures Gerry that flowers have conversations among themselves, but then sharply asks if Gerry finds her strange. He assures her truthfully that he doesn't and explains that he can hear bat squeaks, which elderly people cannot hear. This delights Mrs. Kralfesky.

Mrs. Kralfesky says that flowers also have personalities. She gestures at a gorgeous dark red rose in a vase and explains that she's had "him" for two weeks and when he arrived, he was nearly dead in a vase with daisies. Daisies are cruel and once the rose was removed to his own vase, he flourished. She smiles and says that flowers are just like people: mixing certain kinds creates class struggle. At this, Kralfesky returns, gleeful at his new hatch of baby birds. He leads Gerry back to continue their work.

Even as Kralfesky seems charmingly absurd, his very particular interest in teaching Gerry about England suggests that like Mother, Kralfesky holds English culture above all others. This opens up the possibility that Kralfesky might not be as much a part of Corfu as his other mannerisms might lead Gerry to believe.



Gerry's reasoning here shows one consequence of youth: Gerry is unable to reasonably evaluate how old Kralfesky is. This may be because of his own mother's age relative to the other Durrell children, but more than anything it reminds the reader that Gerry is still very young. However, his willingness to adapt to Kralfesky's "way of doing things" shows that his youth also makes him more adaptable.



Though Mrs. Kralfesky is otherwise described as being quite old, her hair color suggests that she's not what Gerry presumably thinks of when he thinks of elderly people. In this way, Mrs. Kralfesky becomes yet another example of adulthood taking many different unexpected forms.



It's worth noting that in the case of Mrs. Kralfesky, she mentions a greater sense of connectedness to the natural world as being a consequence of age. This is surely a delightful thing for Gerry to hear, as it shows him that there's no reason for being elderly to mean that the natural world is less important.



Mrs. Kralfesky's decision to call the flower "him" instead of "it" shows that like Gerry, she also anthropomorphizes the natural world so that she can better understand it. Again, this shows Gerry that there are adults in the world who feel just as warmly about nature as he does, and they seek to respect and properly care for it in a variety of ways.



PART 3, CHAPTER 15: THE CYCLAMEN WOODS

One of Gerry's favorite places is a large hill with three olive groves on it. He calls the groves the Cyclamen Woods, as cyclamen flowers grow there prolifically. One afternoon, as he rests there with Roger, Widdle, and Puke, he watches a mother magpie carry worms to a nearby olive tree. When the mother flies away, Gerry climbs up to the nest. He reaches a hand in and draws out a revolting-looking baby bird. He decides to take two. After introducing them to the dogs, he carries his new pets home.

When Gerry arrives home, the family is in no mood to help him name the new additions. Margo and Mother are curious, while Leslie, Larry, and Spiro declare that the babies are disgusting. Leslie cautions Gerry to not allow the birds to steal, which sends Larry into a tizzy. He waves a 100-dachma note over the babies and when they reach for the money, he declares that they have criminal instincts. Gerry explains that the mother would reject them if he put them back, and Mother and Margo insist they can't let them starve. Spiro distastefully asks what Gerry intends to do with the bastards and Mother slowly tells him they're magpies. He says the word "magenpies," and with that, the magpies become known as the Magenpies.

Larry seems to forget about the Magenpies' criminal instincts as the birds grow. They have the run of the villa and know which rooms are most interesting and which rooms are uninteresting to visit, like Mother and Margo's. They're fascinated by Larry's bedroom because he forbids them from entering. Because of this, Gerry believes the Magenpies decide that Larry has something to hide, and they carefully plan a raid on his room.

One afternoon, when Larry unthinkingly leaves his window open and goes for a swim, the Magenpies silently raid his room. Larry notices one on his windowsill when he returns and he grabs Gerry as he races upstairs. They open the door to find Larry's manuscript spread everywhere, the typewriter disemboweled, and the baking soda tin opened and flung around. The Magenpies topped the whole thing off by opening bottles of ink and then leaving inky bird prints over the entire room. Gerry tells Larry that the Magenpies aren't to blame; they're naturally curious birds and didn't mean any harm, but Larry angrily tells Gerry to lock the birds up.

When Gerry can describe the baby magpies as revolting and then decide to take one anyway, it shows that regardless of his feelings on the matter, he still believes that all animals and plants are deserving of care and consideration, regardless of what they look like.



When Leslie is the one to bring up magpies' natural tendency to go for shiny or interesting items, it shows that he's possibly more entrenched in nature than Gerry gives him credit for. Even if he does spend time in the woods primarily to hunt, being there still allows him to learn a great deal about the world around him and in turn, use what he knows to help Gerry prepare the best way to care for the Magenpies.



Here, Gerry merges the Magenpies' natural curiosity with his own anthropomorphism when he states that they planned the raid on his bedroom. It's worth noting that the birds are still wild animals even if they are tame, and the raid shows that as parts of nature, Larry is still at their mercy.



Larry views his bedroom as a sanctuary in which the natural world should have little or no sway over what goes on. The Magenpies' raid shows him that, as comforting as his idea is, it's not actually true; the birds' curious natures are more powerful than his power to keep them out. When Larry insists that the birds need to be locked up, it shows that he'd much rather dominate over nature than coexist with it.



The rest of the family appears in the doorway to survey the damage. Larry angrily yells at all of them. He's especially incensed when Mother reminds him that the birds don't understand they did anything wrong, a suggestion he sees as proof that his family will side with the animals over him any day. Gerry locks the Magenpies in his room and decides to ask Kralfesky to help him build a large cage. Gerry reasons that afterwards, Kralfesky can teach Gerry to wrestle, which is one of Kralfesky's many hidden skills.

Gerry soon discovers that Kralfesky loves telling stories that involve himself as a hero and a woman known as a Lady. When Kralfesky realizes that Gerry seems to believe his stories, they become fantastic. He first regales Gerry with a tale of rescuing a Lady from a "treacherous" bull terrier by choking the dog with its own tongue. From there, Kralfesky talks about surviving a shipwreck with a Lady, saving a Lady from bandits in the Syrian desert, and serving in the Secret Service during the First World War with, unsurprisingly, a Lady spy.

Unfortunately for Kralfesky, Gerry also tends to believe stories that seem even faintly possible. This is the case when Kralfesky tells Gerry about saving a Lady from a brute in Paris who turns out to be a champion wrestler. The wrestler challenged Kralfesky to a match, and Kralfesky proved himself a reasonable match and won. Intrigued, Gerry asks Kralfesky to teach him to wrestle, and Kralfesky reluctantly agrees to do so at some point in the future. The day he comes to help Gerry with the Magenpies' cage, Gerry reminds Kralfesky of his promise. Kralfesky is very displeased, but finally agrees to show Gerry some tricks in the secluded drawing room.

In the drawing room, Kralfesky demonstrates how to throw one's opponent off balance by gently tossing Gerry onto a sofa. He instructs Gerry to attempt to do the same to him, and Gerry enthusiastically does so. Kralfesky hits the floor with a thud and a yell that brings the rest of the family running. They all tell Gerry he was silly, though Gerry insists he just followed instructions.

As Kralfesky's eyes widen, Larry regales the room with tales of various individuals who broke their backs, many of whom died. Kralfesky asks that Spiro take him to see a doctor, and Mother agrees to fetch Theodore to take an X-ray. Later, Spiro returns with a note from Theodore explaining that Kralfesky cracked two ribs, with a postscript asking about some misplaced mosquito specimens.

Mother's attempt to soothe Larry and defend the Magenpies shows that while she generally tends to side with the rest of the family when it comes to Gerry's more difficult pets, she does understand that the animals are, first and foremost, wild animals—simply taming them doesn't deprive them of their natures. This suggests she has more in common with Gerry's way of seeing the natural world.



It's somewhat unclear here whether Kralfesky actually believes that Gerry thinks his stories are true, or is just thrilled to have a captive and happy audience. If the first is true, it does suggest that despite all of Kralfesky's admirable qualities, he also thinks that Gerry is more gullible than he actually is on account of his youth.



Gerry's critical thinking skills do have a limit; to the reader it's likely clear that the wrestling story is just as outlandish and untrue as any of the others—especially given Kralfesky's unwillingness to share his skills with Gerry—while Gerry feels he's being kind by giving Kralfesky an opportunity to teach something that he's good at. Just like Gerry does with his animals, he's trying to engage with Kralfesky in a way that allows Kralfesky to shine.



In this case, Kralfesky underestimates Gerry's maturity rather than his youth. This is proof that Gerry is growing up and becoming more mature, at least physically.



Theodore's note adds to the absurdity of the entire situation, as it's clear that Kralfesky's welfare isn't the only thing on his mind. Like Gerry, Theodore places just as much emphasis on his specimens and his study of the natural world, regardless of what's going on in the human world.



PART 3, CHAPTER 16: THE LAKE OF LILIES

After the Magenpies are confined, they take it upon themselves to learn English and Greek. They learn to call every member of the family by name and torture Spiro by yelling for him after he drives away. They also learn to call the dogs and confuse them to no end, and most unfortunately, they learn to mimic the sound the maid makes when she calls the chickens for food. This drives the poor hens nearly mad. The Magenpies often converse with Roger and play tricks on Widdle and Puke. They're perplexed, however, when Mother comes home with a strange looking dog.

The new dog, Dodo, is a female Dandy Dinmont terrier. She vomits in the car the entire way home and when she arrives, everyone insults her strange appearance, name, and sex. Larry is especially vicious, but Mother decides to keep Dodo anyway. The family soon discovers that Dodo's hip dislocates with little or no provocation at the most inopportune times. When this happens, Dodo shrieks in pain until someone manages to put her hip back in, after which she falls asleep.

Dodo also proves fairly unintelligent. She becomes extremely possessive of Mother, even following Mother across the room to fetch a book or a cigarette. She won't allow Mother in the bathroom unattended and if Mother locks her out, Dodo howls and throws herself at the door. Roger, Widdle, and Puke initially just tolerate Dodo, as she's too small to play with them. However, they soon discover that she comes into season regularly, which makes her immensely popular with the Durrells' dogs as well as the local strays. Dodo is afraid of all her suitors. At one point, Mother inadvertently locks Dodo up with Puke, and Dodo gives birth to a single puppy.

The puppy proves a problem for Dodo, as she's torn between sitting with it and following Mother. Dodo tries to carry her puppy everywhere and, finally, Mother engages the maid's daughter Sophia to carry the puppy around on a pillow. Every evening, Mother takes the dogs for a walk and the rest of the family finds this quite amusing. They watch her walk off with Roger, Widdle, and Puke ahead, followed by Dodo, Sophia, and the puppy. Larry teases Mother incessantly about looking like a circus.

Here, the Magenpies show that even if they are wild animals, they're more than capable of integrating into the human world now that they're unable to satisfy their natural curiosity. Though Larry certainly wouldn't admit it, this suggests that there are consequences to bringing such intelligent animals into a home and not allowing them to behave like wild animals.



It's worth noting that Dodo, a purebred dog whose breed was carefully created by humans, proves to be the most trying of all the Durrells' animals. Dodo then stands as a cautionary tale for what can happen when humans have such a hand in shaping the natural world, given that Gerry implies that many of Dodo's faults are associated with her breed.



Notice that Mother is the only person thus far who Gerry notes uses the indoor bathrooms with any regularity. This suggests that even if her children have begun following the Greek custom of using the sea, Mother has yet to decide to drop her English customs. Further, Dodo's horror that Mother wants to lock herself in the bathroom does suggest that there may be something to gain by abandoning the custom, even if it's only just Dodo's peace of mind.



The way that Mother problem-solves Dodo's dilemma shows that, like Gerry, she cares deeply for the animals in her care and wants them to be as comfortable as possible. Further, she's willing to go to ridiculous lengths when it's for the sake of the animals. Again, though Gerry's interests tend to be more exotic than Mother's, this suggests they're not so different.



There's a lake in northern Corfu where the Durrells spend time often. They plan on heading up when the lilies are in bloom, and Mother insists they must go by boat so that Dodo doesn't vomit in the car. Leslie asks why Dodo won't be sick in the boat, to which Mother explains that people who are carsick never get seasick. Larry consults Theodore on the matter, but all Theodore can say is that he's never carsick but is *always* seasick. Regardless, a landslide means that they must all go by boat.

The family attaches the **Bootle-Bumtrinket** to the *Sea Cow* to tow it, and Mother, Theodore, Sophia, and the dogs ride behind. This, however, is horrible for those passengers: the wake from the *Sea Cow* makes the *Bootle-Bumtrinket* extremely rough. When those in the *Sea Cow* finally hear the cries from behind, everyone in the *Bootle-Bumtrinket* is sick. They trade out places and finally reach the lake.

At the lake, Leslie, Gerry, and Theodore divide the lake in half so Gerry and Theodore can collect specimens without fear of being shot by Leslie. Everyone returns to the lake for lunch, which is a lavish affair. A robin entertains the family by singing and puffing out his chest, which Mother finds extremely charming. Theodore suggests the robin looked like an opera singer and begins a story about the last opera performed in Corfu. In the final act, the heroine was supposed to throw herself off a balcony. On the first night, the stagehands neglected to give her a soft landing and on the second, they gave her so many mattresses, she bounced several times. The audience was perplexed.

After tea, Theodore and Gerry return to the water until night falls. Spiro cooks fish and finally, when the moon is high, everyone piles back into the boats to head home. Mother declares that the lake is so beautiful, she'd like to be buried there.

PART 3, CHAPTER 17: THE CHESSBOARD FIELDS

On the bay near the villa is an area known as the Chessboard Fields. Gerry enjoys hunting for aquatic life there, especially because his friends own the surrounding fields and he's always guaranteed food and gossip. One afternoon, Gerry takes the dogs to the Chessboard Fields to try to capture Old Plop, an old terrapin who has eluded him for a month.

Again, Mother's insistence on doing what's best for Dodo (even at the risk of doing something that's decidedly not great for Theodore) shows that she takes her responsibility to care for her animals very seriously. The fact that the family decides to visit the lake to see the lilies shows that they do enjoy the natural world for its splendor, just not the more difficult parts.



The fate of those in the Bootle-Bumtrinket shows that the natural world can be especially destructive when combined with manmade elements, such as a boat. This suggests that one isn't necessarily better or worse than the other; nature and the manmade world can work together in unexpected ways.



As with Theodore's other stories, he positions this anecdote as being entirely true and entirely contingent on the culture of Corfu to happen in the first place. Though the audience is perplexed, Theodore evidently takes great joy in relaying the story. This again shows that in Corfu, people generally believe that instances like this add color and flavor to life and should be thought of as meaningful additions to the world, rather than errant coincidences to be avoided.



Mother's desire to be buried here shows that she does feel a connection to the natural world. This again suggests that Mother's thoughts on the natural world align more with Gerry's than he gives her credit for.



When Gerry continues to bring up new places around the island to explore, it illustrates how, when one looks at the world the way that he does, the wonder is simply never-ending. Because he finds all of the island enchanting, he never runs out of things to look at.



Just as Gerry reaches Old Plop's favorite place at the water's edge, Roger, Widdle, and Puke take off after a lizard. Old Plop isn't there, so Gerry waits for the dogs until he hears them barking like they found something. Gerry pursues them and finds them gathered around a pair of big water snakes coiled in the grass. This is a thrilling find. One snake races into the water, and Gerry notes that it seems as though the snake buried itself in the mud. He captures the one in front of him easily and then decides to wade into the mud, feel for the snake, and pounce when he finds it.

Gerry wades into the mud towards where he saw the snake disappear. Suddenly, he feels the snake underfoot and grabs for it. The snake resurfaces a yard away, and Gerry leaps and manages to snag it. When he turns back to shore, Gerry realizes there's a man (Kosti) watching him with the dogs. Gerry assumes he's a fisherman from down the coast and greets him politely before wrangling the snake into the basket.

Gerry pulls out his grapes and shares them with Kosti. They eat silently and only then does Kosti ask about Gerry's family. Instead of the usual line of interrogation, he just asks if Gerry is a foreigner. Gerry gathers his things and politely asks Kosti where he's headed. Kosti is headed to the sea as well, so they walk together. Gerry asks Kosti where he's from and is perplexed when Kosti says he lives on Vido, the island where convicts live. Kosti confirms he's a convict and explains that trustworthy prisoners are allowed to sail home on weekends. Gerry doesn't find this strange at all, as anything can happen in Corfu.

At the coast, Gerry sees a huge gull tied to Kosti's boat. Entranced, Gerry reaches out to pet the bird, and it indignantly allows Gerry to touch him. Kosti is surprised; he explains the bird usually bites when touched. Gerry buries his fingers in the gull's feathers and scratches it, and the bird looks dreamy. Kosti explains he found the gull on the Albanian coast the year before. The bird was cute then, but is a "great duck" that bites now.

Kosti and Gerry eat cockles in the boat and Gerry asks if Kosti could get him a baby gull the following spring. Kosti is surprised and offers Gerry his own gull. Gerry is shocked that Kosti would give away such a magnificent bird, but Kosti explains he can't feed him well enough and nobody likes him. Gerry hastily prepares to leave before Kosti can change his mind. As Kosti tucks the bird under Gerry's arm, he says that the bird's name is Alecko. Before Gerry leaves, he asks why Kosti is in jail. Kosti answers that he killed his wife.

Though Gerry doesn't say so until later, it's worth noting that these snakes are nonpoisonous. Again, the fact that Gerry knows this for sure and is able to tailor his attack accordingly shows that he uses what he knows about animals and how they move through the world to his advantage when he goes about capturing them. This also means that once he has the snakes, he'll have more tools to care for them.



Gerry's assumption about Kosti suggests that Gerry is very used to encountering fishermen interested in what he's doing; again, this is something that illustrates how integrated Gerry is on the island, as this isn't something that surprises him.



Here, when Gerry accepts Kosti's explanation without finding it strange in the least, it shows again that Gerry now behaves very much like a local and accepts these absurd practices as normal. Further, this only makes Kosti more interesting, which adds more credence to the novel's implication that accepting absurdity as a good and normal thing makes life more fun and fulfilling.



The discrepancies between how the gull acts with Gerry and how Kosti describes it suggest that possibly, Kosti doesn't care for the bird in a way that encourages him to be accepting of human contact. This is especially likely since the bird clearly seems to enjoy the attention.



Gerry's youth shines through in this exchange—Gerry's awe at Alecko completely overshadows everything Kosti says about Alecko that suggests he won't be a nice or easy pet. This suggests that in some cases, Gerry may have an overblown sense of his own ability to form friendships and good relationships with animals.



Though Alecko feels light at first, he soon becomes dead weight. Gerry rests under a fig tree and then tries to pick Alecko up to resume their journey. Alecko has no interest in moving and when Gerry persists, Alecko bites him, drawing blood. Gerry angrily throws his butterfly net over Alecko, ties his beak shut, and wraps him in his shirt. Gerry is thoroughly angry by the time he gets home.

Gerry puts Alecko on the floor of the living room and is annoyed when Mother and Margo think that Alecko is an eagle. Alecko ferociously makes noise as Gerry tries to untie his beak, which brings Leslie and Larry downstairs. Leslie is intrigued, but Larry is terrified and believes Alecko is an unlucky albatross. As Alecko looks at Larry, Larry yelps that Alecko is attacking him. He refuses to listen to anyone's reassurances that Alecko isn't doing anything, and he and Mother argue about which bird species are unlucky. Mother insists Alecko seems very tame.

Dodo finally notices Alecko and curiously approaches him. It's sheer luck that she turns her head, as Alecko snaps at her and narrowly misses her nose. He does hit the side of her head, which causes Dodo's hip to pop out. She begins screaming and Alecko screams with her. When everyone finally calms down, Gerry tethers Alecko on the veranda and sets about dividing the Magenpies' cage.

At dinner that night, Larry again insists that Alecko is an albatross, is bad luck, and will bring the family to ruin. Gerry explains how he got Alecko and leaves out that he also captured snakes, as Leslie hates snakes. Mother is aghast that Kostis is a convict and killed his wife, but Leslie explains that in Greece, there is no death penalty: a murderer gets three years in prison, while someone caught blowing up fish serves five years. Finally, Gerry convinces Mother to allow him to go fishing with Kostis, provided Leslie meets him.

Gerry invites Kostis for tea, and Mother forgets the few Greek words she knows in his presence. Gerry translates for them as they sit on the veranda and when Kostis leaves, Mother remarks that he didn't seem at all like a murderer. Larry insists Kostis totally acts like a murderer, since he gave Gerry an albatross.

When Alecko finally proves that he's not exactly a nice bird, it confirms that Gerry may have acted too quickly and too emotionally when he accepted Alecko. Now, Gerry will have to figure out how to deal with a critter so uninterested in being cared for, which will put Gerry's animal keeping skills to the test.



Larry's unwillingness to listen to the family's resident bird expert shows just how highly he values his own intellect and, on the other hand, how little he thinks of Gerry's hard-earned knowledge. This falls in line with Larry's general belief that the outdoors are out to get him and destroy his life as he knows it, a belief that stems from his desire to control the natural world and consume it when it suits him.



This altercation indicates that the entire family will have to work much harder to properly care for their animals now that Alecko is part of the family, given that he's willing to bite both humans and other animals.



As dramatic as Larry is here, the events of the next chapter reveal that he's also not entirely wrong. This shows that even though Gerry would like to think that the natural world is his for the taking and for the exploring, there are indeed consequences to trying to bring wild animals into his family's home. They are still wild animals, even if they're caged.



The fact that, after nearly five years, Mother knows only a few words of Greek sheds a light on how isolated Mother might feel on Corfu. This shows that learning the language is one of the most effective ways to feel at home.



PART 3, CHAPTER 18: AN ENTERTAINMENT WITH ANIMALS

In September, the family decides to throw a Christmas party. They invite everyone they know for lunch, tea, and dinner. Larry sleeps as everyone else prepares, and Gerry, Roger, Widdle, and Puke help where they can. Gerry explains that it's fortunate that his family was used to their parties going awry, as this party ends up being taken over by animals.

It begins with goldfish. Gerry finally catches Old Plop and sets about creating a fantastic tank for him, the other terrapins, and the water snakes. Gerry decides, however, that he needs goldfish as a final touch. Gerry painstakingly describes what goldfish are to Spiro, and finally, the day before the party, Spiro conspiratorially tells Gerry to come with when he takes Mother to the hairdresser's and to bring a container. That night, Spiro drops off Mother and drives across town to a set of huge gates. He takes Gerry's cans, follows a man inside, and returns with five goldfish. He refuses to tell Gerry who owns the house, but Theodore later explains that the "house" is actually the palace where royalty stay when they visit.

On the morning of the party, Mother is annoyed to discover that Dodo is in season. She hires a peasant girl to beat off the canine suitors. As Gerry walks past his pond, he discovers two of the goldfish are dead and half-eaten. Distraught, he remembers that both terrapins and snakes will eat goldfish on occasion. He moves the reptiles into cans and cleans the Magenpies' and Alecko's cage while he tries to come up with a solution before guests arrive.

When Gerry returns to his pond he finds that someone moved the tin containing the snakes into the sun. They look almost dead. He races to Mother and asks to put the snakes in the bathtub, and she agrees as long as he disinfects it. The snakes perk up after being immersed, so Gerry leaves them.

When Gerry goes to look at the lunch table, he discovers the Magenpies escaped. The table is covered in butter, and the Magenpies also got into a bottle of beer. They act drunk and unbalanced as Gerry catches them. Mother walks in as Gerry stands with the birds, but she only tells Gerry to be careful of the cage door. She reasons that the Magenpies weren't really responsible since they were drunk.

The statement that the party is taken over by animals brings the novel's assertion that the natural world is all-powerful full circle. Now, this suggests that by bringing animals into the home, the Durrell house and their events are unable to compete with the natural world.



Spiro's willingness to steal from the local palace only adds to the absurdity of the novel. Though Spiro is clearly concerned that he might be caught, he also doesn't seem to have an issue with the fish being on view at the party, which suggests that this theft may be greeted in a similar way as all the rest of Corfu's absurdity. To that end, it's also telling that the final touch Gerry desires comes from this place of absurdity, as it shows that the island truly does add necessary interest to life.



This tragic mistake shows that even Gerry can get caught up in the aesthetics of nature and, in doing so, forget what's actually best for his animals. However, the mistake also ensures that Gerry will probably never make this mistake again, especially since he seems to put so much thought into figuring out how to fix the problem.



Here, Gerry's first and only thought is for the care of his animals, which shows how seriously takes his responsibility of caring for them. Leaving the snakes shows that Gerry trusts them to behave, and others to not take issue.



Mother's willingness to empathize with the Magenpies again shows that she has a soft spot for animals and the natural world. Unlike Larry, she understands that the Magenpies are naturally inclined to get into things like this and the fact that they did so, given the chance, isn't their fault.



Gerry puts the Magenpies in their cage and finds that Alecko took the opportunity to escape. Gerry searches for him but can't find him, so he joins the arriving guests. Leslie appears out of the olive groves, carrying a bag full of game. He goes into the house to bathe and Mother and Dodo come out to socialize. Mother waves a stick at the male dogs assembled in the front yard and when fights break out, the family yells at the dogs and scares the guests.

Suddenly, everyone hears a bellow from in the house. Leslie promptly appears, wrapped in a tiny towel, yelling about Gerry and snakes in the bathtub. The guests who know the Durrells follow the exchange with interest; the others aren't sure what to do. Mother soothes Leslie and explains the snakes had sunstroke, and Larry makes sure to insert himself in the argument. Finally, Gerry borrows a saucepan and takes his fully revived snakes outside. He returns to the party to hear Larry explaining to guests that the house is a death trap, filled with all manner of hideous and evil beasts. Mother hurriedly invites the guests to sit for lunch to change the subject.

Moments after everyone is seated, two guests leap up, yelling in pain. Theodore looks under the table and with interest, explains there's a big bird under there. Larry exclaims that it's an albatross, but Theodore says he thinks it's a gull. Larry tells everyone to sit calmly so they don't get bitten, but this only makes everyone get up, terrified. Kralfesky offers to help Gerry capture Alecko and seems relieved when Gerry turns down his offer. Finally, Gerry catches the gull as Theodore drops several puns on the groaning guests.

At lunch, Kralfesky tells a story about a friend who was attacked by a gull, and Theodore makes an absurd gull pun. Larry tells the guests about an incident involving an aunt who was a beekeeper, and Theodore tells the table about the modernization of the Corfu Fire Brigade. First, the fire chief decided they needed a pole to slide down, but he forgot to install the pole and two firemen broke legs jumping through the hole. Then, the fire engine they purchased was the biggest and best, but too large to fit through the streets of Corfu.

The chief also sent away for an alarm and installed it on the fire station, but was annoyed when someone set off the single-use alarm after only a week. When the engine finally arrived at the fire, the brigade looked impressive until the firefighters realized that Yani, who was off duty, had the key to unlock the hose. They finally found him in the gathered crowd of rapt onlookers, the key in his pocket. By this time, there was nothing left to put out.

Gerry's tone when he describes the family yelling at the dogs suggests that this is a normal occurrence, even though it seems weird and strange for the guests. This suggests that in many ways, the Durrells have now become the absurd ones on the island—a sign that they've finally taken the atmosphere of the island to heart.



Larry's passionate monologue about the evil creatures in the Durrell house shows once again that he finds nature as a whole to be totally in opposition to civilized human life. When Mother then tries to change the subject, it suggests, for one, that she doesn't feel the same and further, that she recognizes that guests might also not share Larry's distaste for the natural world. This leaves it open to the possibility that more people agree with Gerry than he realizes.



The fact that even Kralfesky is unwilling to really interact with Alecko provides more evidence for the fact that Alecko is a difficult and maybe even downright dangerous animal to live with. Gerry's willingness to work with him is a testament to how much Gerry respects the natural world and wants the chance to engage with it on his terms.



This particular story of Theodore's suggests that some of Corfu's inherent absurdity comes from its liminal state between being undeveloped and modern. This mimics Gerry's liminal state between being a child an adult, as well as Mother being in-between existing within and outside of Greek culture. Taken together, this suggests that these in-between states bring about absurdity.



With this story, the hilarity and absurdity comes from the fact that the trappings of modernity aren't yet normal on the island. Eventually, the island will have electricity and a better-organized fire brigade, which shows that the absurdity Theodore talks about isn't just specific to Corfu; it's specific to this point in history.



After lunch, some guests have Spiro drive them down to the sea to swim, and everyone reconvenes later for tea. Several hours later, Spiro drives up the driveway, blaring the car horn. He trundles out of the car holding a huge and heavy package. Larry dramatically laments that his manuscript has been returned, but Spiro explains that the packages contain turkeys for dinner.

Again, Larry believes that everything revolves around him and his writing. At this point in the novel, this shows that Larry hasn't changed much if at all over the course of the novel and will continue to go through life acting as though he's the star of every show.



Dodo decides to step outside and comes face to face with a terrifying, belligerent pack of male dogs. She races back inside, screaming in fear, and the pack pursues her. The noise brings Roger, Puke, and Widdle racing out of the kitchen, and they throw themselves on Dodo's suitors. Theodore and Kralfesky offer suggestions as to how to break up the roiling dogfight, and Spiro finally steps in with a tub of water. He throws it over the dogs and they all race outside in terror and surprise. Mother waves everyone outside for dinner and the party continues.

Though the dogfight isn't normal at all, Mother's ability to move the guests outside and continue the party regardless shows that she's finally come to a point where she too can handle the ridiculousness and absurdity of Corfu. Now she can roll with the punches and Gerry, in telling the story, is able to step into Theodore's role of the storyteller to relate this to the reader, where it now seems even more absurd.



PART 3: THE RETURN

Soon after, Kralfesky informs Mother that he can't teach Gerry anything else, so Gerry will need to continue his studies in England or Switzerland. Though Gerry tells Mother that he likes being half-educated, she insists they move so Gerry can continue his studies. Gerry constructs cages for his menagerie and not long after, the family leaves the villa for the customs shed at the quay. Theodore and Kralfesky come to see the family off, and Mother and the customs officer quickly get into an argument. Spiro arrives in time to angrily berate the customs agent and move the luggage away before he can do anything.

Gerry's insistence that he doesn't want to be educated is another way of him saying that he's not particularly keen on growing up. Though it's understandable why he's sad to leave Corfu, this specific sentiment suggests that Gerry still hasn't fully realized that growing up and receiving education aren't as awful as he thinks. By doing so, he could grow up to be like Theodore or like Kralfesky, who maintain their childish curiosity while moving through the world as adults.



Kralfesky, Theodore, and Spiro bid the family goodbye, and Spiro bursts into heaving sobs. Finally, the family boards the boat and wave at their friends. They feel depressed all the way back to England. In Switzerland, an unsmiling official checks passports and hands Mother a slip of paper. Mother is indignant: the form asked for a description of passengers, and the man had written "one traveling circus and staff." Mother angrily declares that some people are peculiar.

Mother's final assessment of this official shows that she has truly taken the magic of Corfu to heart and now embraces her family's eccentricities. This suggests that Mother will now be able to move through life seeing mishaps and ridiculous situations as positive and humorous, rather than disastrous.





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