BookGist Summary

Little Ships: A Novel

by Sandra Scofield

Key Takeaways

• Grief does not unfold on a schedule: Juni withdraws and resists school, Tilde finds connection through math and running, and Nick retreats into drugs and isolation.

• A family can mistake silence for stability. Nick and Karin's secrecy kept their relatives from seeing how much the girls needed support, while the adults' assumptions delayed difficult conversations.

• Children need both patience and dependable structure. The grandparents' routines, school enrollment, meals, and ordinary shared activities give Tilde and Juni a foothold after their mother's death.

• Caregiving is not the same as control. Eleanor must learn to support her granddaughters without trying to manage every feeling, while Helve must balance her fierce attachment to Juni with the child's wider family ties.

• The truth can be painful but necessary. Karin blamed Juni for her baby brother Peter's accidental death, and Nick's eventual revelation makes clear how that lie burdened his daughter for years.

• Family loyalty can conceal neglect. Nick loved Karin deeply, but his devotion and passivity left him unable to protect or consistently care for his daughters.

• Loss and upheaval can prompt people to reclaim lives they had set aside. Eleanor decides to return to college, while Helve chooses to move back to Sweden and reconnect with the family she left behind.

• Relationships can recover through practical cooperation as well as emotional honesty. Eleanor and Walter begin repairing their marriage by sharing responsibilities, discussing money, and making room for each other's ambitions.

• Belonging takes many forms: biological family, chosen community, friendship, school, and a welcoming town all help the characters imagine a future after disruption.

Who Should Read This Book

GO FURTHER DOWN! will appeal to readers of character-driven family fiction who are interested in grief, caregiving, intergenerational conflict, and the ways private choices shape children's lives. Readers who appreciate nuanced portrayals of imperfect parents and grandparents will find particular depth in Eleanor and Helve: both love the girls, but each must examine how fear, pride, and old wounds can turn care into control. The book also offers strong material for book clubs, especially around the ethics of truth-telling, parental responsibility, and the possibility of beginning again later in life. Rather than building toward a single dramatic resolution, the novel moves through daily routines, setbacks, and gradual changes in several connected households. Its broad family-saga scope is balanced by close attention to ordinary acts—making meals, driving to school, sitting with someone who cannot talk—that become forms of resilience. Readers seeking a fast-paced plot may find its patient, reflective approach less compelling; readers who value emotionally layered domestic fiction will find a compassionate portrait of how a family can keep going without pretending that love erases harm.

Chapter Summaries

Bloom: Nick and Karin

Nick Becker begins his career as a pharmacist in Frost, Oregon, content with a modest, independent life and no grand ambitions. At the store he meets Karin Sundersson, a private young woman from a Swedish-American farming family who has recently begun suffering from insomnia. When she asks him for help, Nick invites her out and teaches her how to smoke marijuana, presenting their first evening together as an intimate solution to her sleeplessness. Their connection feels immediate and absorbing: both find a refuge in one another that is stronger than reflection or plans. The opening establishes the attraction and the pattern that will shape their marriage. Karin's close bond with her mother, Helve, and her sister Elin's permanent move to Sweden contrast with Karin's decision to remain near home. Nick, meanwhile, is capable and accomplished but drawn to a private, inward life. Their love is real, yet the couple's early retreat from the outside world foreshadows how secrecy and

isolation will later affect their children.

A Family in Decline

Years later, Nick, Karin, and their daughters, Tilde and Juni, live in a cramped apartment south of Portland after Nick loses his pharmacy job and takes work installing software for a drugstore chain. The girls are homeschooled in name, but the state materials and internet access go unused; they have no friends, little freedom, and increasingly fend for themselves. Karin spends her days sleeping, watching television, and ordering jewelry, while Nick works, travels, and withdraws into marijuana. The girls' journals and private games reveal their imaginations, but they do not write about the troubled life around them. Karin becomes gravely ill and dies suddenly after an infection. Nick is away overnight and returns to find the girls alone and his wife gone. Their distress is filtered through a childlike routine: they eat what they can find, draw pretend credit cards, and turn their bedroom into a glittering jewelry shop with their mother's purchases. Nick's mother, Eleanor, and Karin's mother, Helve, arrive to take over practical arrangements. Their first shared task is to make sure the girls understand that their mother is dead, while each grandmother begins to imagine what the children will need next.

Burial and Return to Lupine

Eleanor and Helve arrange a simple burial beside Karin's father and infant son, Peter. At the graveside, the girls place wildflowers on the plain pine casket, while the extended family and a few old friends remember Karin as a child and young woman. Afterward, Juni's grief erupts in the house; Nick holds her, while Tilde seeks comfort from Helve. The family's quiet rituals cannot undo the shock, but they give everyone a first way to stay together through the day. Nick's parents bring him and the girls back to Lupine, clear the family's squalid apartment, and make room in Eleanor and Walter's home. Nick is listless and bereft, and Eleanor fears he cannot function without Karin. Walter, meanwhile, has been living apart from Eleanor after a marital quarrel connected to his friendship with a widow. The crisis brings the family under one roof, but it does not immediately resolve the old resentments or the new questions about who will care for the girls.

Eleanor and Walter Begin Again

As the family settles into an uneasy new arrangement, Eleanor reflects on her own childhood: her mother died when she was eleven, and years in foster care taught her self-reliance, routine, and the pain of being moved between homes. Those memories make her especially sensitive to the girls' needs, but they also fuel her urge to take charge. Her marriage to Walter is strained by his unexplained absence and her suspicions about his time helping Celeste, even as both of them are grieving and trying to support Nick. A blunt exchange finally brings their problems into view. Walter reveals that his hardware business is failing and that he has concealed his embarrassment; Eleanor admits that she needs him to communicate rather

than disappear. Their attempted intimacy is awkward, but they begin to talk more honestly about money, work, and what they want from the future. At the same time, Eleanor's daughter Alison faces conflict with her ex-husband Ben over custody of Fiona, adding another family struggle to Eleanor's already crowded responsibilities.

New Home, New School

Nick brings Tilde and Juni to live in Lupine. Walter tries to welcome them with town walks and basketball, while Eleanor arranges bedrooms, supplies, school enrollment, and meals. The girls are polite but guarded, and Juni says she would rather live with Helve. Their first days at Lupine Middle School reveal how different their needs are: Tilde discovers a natural aptitude for advanced mathematics and begins to make friends, while Juni feels exposed, behind in class, and out of place among her peers. Juni's grief surfaces in small crises. She struggles with school rules, is distressed by a classroom novel about a girl whose mother and baby die, and calls Helve for comfort. Helve begins visiting her at lunchtime, sharing stories about family and Sweden, while Eleanor and Helve slowly negotiate a routine that gives Juni contact with her grandmother without removing her from her father and sister. Tilde, meanwhile, finds community in the school's math group and through running, illustrating that the sisters can respond to the same loss in very different ways.

The Grandmothers and the Hidden Past

Eleanor and Helve try to manage their competing worries without turning the girls into a tug-of-war. Eleanor wants the children to establish a home with Nick and the Beckers; Helve recognizes that Juni is fragile and needs familiar comfort. Their arguments begin to soften as they speak directly about what Juni needs, and the school agrees to accommodate Helve's weekly visits and let Juni read something other than the book that overwhelmed her. The turning point comes when Helve tells Eleanor the history she has kept largely to herself. After Juni's birth, Karin suffered severe postpartum depression and rejected the baby; Helve cared for Juni for months, and later repeatedly stepped in as Nick and Karin struggled. After Peter died, Karin was hospitalized, and Helve helped care for the girls. She describes a family life marked by isolation, instability, and long periods when she feared for the children. Eleanor realizes that she had blamed Helve for being too close to the girls without understanding how often she had been their safety net.

Separate Struggles

Nick's grief and physical decline deepen. He is underweight, in pain, and spending much of his time alone, eventually asking a lawyer to arrange for Eleanor to become his daughters' guardian. Eleanor resists the idea that he can simply hand off fatherhood, but she agrees to handle school and medical matters while insisting that he see a doctor. He is diagnosed with broken-heart syndrome and referred to a cardiologist, yet he continues to use marijuana and withdraw from family life. Helve, meanwhile, confronts her brother-in-law Karl about the farm.

She discovers that Henry and Karl's joint-tenancy deed left the farm solely to Karl when Henry died, despite Helve's belief that her investment made her an owner. She negotiates a limited settlement and begins preparing to sell her house and return to Sweden. Elsewhere, Eleanor starts to notice how much of her life has been spent monitoring and caring for others, a realization that will soon lead her to reconsider her own future.

A Turning Point in May

Nick finds work on the overnight shift at the local hospital, a schedule that suits his habits and gives him a sense of purpose. Tilde thrives in school, math, and track, while Juni remains isolated and fiercely protective of Karin's jewelry. When classmates come to the house to see the collection, Eleanor worries that the pieces make Juni a target and puts them in the family safe. Juni experiences the action as another loss of control and shuts Eleanor out, leaving the two of them with little trust between them. Eleanor reaches a different conclusion about her own life after speaking with a counselor about Juni. She realizes she wants to finish the college degree she abandoned when she married and became a mother. Walter supports her, and the two also begin making practical changes: he renovates the vacant bungalow as a rental, and they refresh their home. Their marriage grows warmer through shared work and small gestures, though the family remains unsettled by Alison's new marriage to Steve and by the complications of blending their households.

Crisis, Confessions, and New Responsibilities

Juni finds a tentative connection with Brian, Steve's older son, but the children's fragile relationships are complicated by school harassment and family conflict. Juni and her friend Safi are targeted with racist and body-shaming images in the locker room; the school suspends the students responsible, though Juni does not want the incident made into a spectacle. Later, Juni goes to an unsupervised pool gathering where older boys arrive, and she calls Brian to take her home. Their truck crashes while swerving to avoid a dog. Juni is physically unharmed but emotionally shut down; Brian is injured, and Nick is hospitalized with septic pneumonia. While Helve stays with Juni during the aftermath, Eleanor and Helve become more candid and collaborative. Nick recovers and moves into the bungalow, where he can be near his daughters without living in the main house. He then tells Eleanor that Karin repeatedly blamed Juni for Peter's death—but that Karin had actually been the one who accidentally suffocated the baby while impaired, then placed the child beside Juni and concealed the truth. Nick knew the truth for years and did not correct the lie. Eleanor insists that he, as Juni's father, must take responsibility for what she should know; his confession exposes the depth of his and Karin's failures as parents.

Summer Departures and New Beginnings

Helve decides to take Juni to Sweden for the summer, where the girl can meet her relatives and experience the country her grandmother left as a young woman. Eleanor provides the

travel documents and recognizes that Juni's bond with Helve is important, even if she does not know where the girl will ultimately choose to live. Helve plans to tell Juni the truth about Peter, believing that she should not continue carrying guilt for an accident she did not cause. Tilde stays in Lupine for a summer math program and forms close ties with her classmates and their families. Other family members also begin to make new arrangements. Walter helps Alison navigate her separation from Steve and a custody dispute with Ben; she moves to Wellen to share custody of Fiona, with her parents' financial support. The Beckers welcome two visiting students for the math camp, and the town receives Syrian refugees through its resettlement program. When Helve and Juni leave, Tilde calls her grandparents by their first names rather than traditional titles, signaling a relationship developing on her own terms. She says she is happy, while Eleanor and Walter face a future that includes renewed marriage, education, community, and the possibility of change.

Notable Quotes

> *"“Some things are outside of thought.”"*

> *"“You don't snap out of losing your mother.”"*

> *"“Truth is better than deception.”"*

Full Summary

Nick Becker was a young pharmacist in Frost, Oregon, when Karin Sundersson came into the grocery store after closing, carrying a heap of remedies because she could no longer sleep. He offered to explain sleep hygiene if she would go out with him. Instead, over beer and fried sweet potatoes, they began to know each other; back at his apartment, he taught her to roll and smoke a joint. Karin had grown up on her parents' berry farm, close to her mother, Helve, and had rarely dated. Nick, who had earned his pharmacy degree without debt and preferred a quiet evening with familiar music, had never felt that his former girlfriend was the one. With Karin, he felt content before he could explain why. They married, and for a time their shared habits and private world seemed to be a form of happiness.

Years later, the Beckers—Nick and Karin, with daughters Tilde and Juni—were living in a cramped apartment south of Portland. Nick traveled around Oregon installing pharmacy software, sometimes sleeping away from home. Karin rarely left the apartment. The girls, who should have been in seventh and eighth grade, were technically homeschooled, but the state's books and laptop were mostly unused; Karin had stopped keeping up with lessons, and the internet had been cut off. Tilde worked through the math books, including Juni's, while Juni read, wrote poems, and filled her journal with imagined places and drawings. Neither wrote about the family's life. The sisters had no friends and little sense of the world beyond

the freeway, the mall, and a small park where homeless people camped. They sometimes crossed the freeway to beg for money, then returned to the apartment without telling their parents.

Nick brought home groceries, usually the simple staples of a weekend cabin trip. Karin watched television, played solitaire, colored in the girls' journals, and slept. Nick ate, sometimes played cards or Scrabble with his daughters, and then withdrew to smoke. He had lost a more stable job in Salem, and the family's life had narrowed without anyone naming how far it had deteriorated. The girls loved their parents and believed the family was a unit: Karin called Tilde her ruby ring and Juni her opal brooch; Nick told them they were his heart.

One night, while Nick was away in Bend, Karin was chilled and in pain, her leg swollen and her toe bruised. She bought matching jewelry for herself and the girls on television, then went to bed. Before dawn, the sisters woke to their mother howling. They begged her to stop, but eventually she fell quiet and they could not wake her. When Nick returned, he called an ambulance and went with Karin to the hospital, leaving the girls behind. They watched television, ate what they could find, and, waiting without knowing what to do, transformed their room into a glittering pretend store, opening the jewelry boxes and wearing as many pieces as they could. When Nick came back, he sat among them, crying without sound. He told them he had brought pizza, then left again.

The next day, the girls reached Eleanor, Nick's mother, at her high school job. The call came while she was speaking to a chronic truant about the help available to him; suddenly her own granddaughters needed her. Eleanor drove to Frost Valley to tell Helve that Karin had died. Helve struck Eleanor's face, then shut her eyes, put her hands on her head, and begged forgiveness. Together they made the funeral arrangements. Helve wanted Karin buried beside her father and baby brother, Peter, in the family plot, and insisted on paying for the simple pine casket. Eleanor expected Nick to be unable to manage without Karin, though she knew he had always worked.

When the women reached the apartment, its unlocked door opened onto dirty dishes, heaps of clothing, an untended television, and the sour, ashy smell of marijuana. Nick lay asleep in his closed bedroom; the girls slept tangled together on the couch. Helve dropped to her knees, and Eleanor knelt beside her. The girls woke and watched, quiet witnesses to the end of the life they knew. They called Helve "Mormor," grandmother, and leaned against her. Eleanor woke Nick and insisted that he tell them plainly that their mother had died. He tried to explain that an infection had taken her, like lightning, but broke down. At last he said the words: their mother was dead. The girls clung to him.

The adults set out the next steps: the girls would go with Helve to Frost Valley, while Nick and Eleanor dealt with the apartment and returned to Lupine. The girls chose their mother's nearly new flannel pajamas, printed with stars and crescent moons, for her burial clothes. Eleanor

helped them pack and took them to Dairy Queen, where they ate fries and chocolate sundaes. That night the sisters slept together in Helve's motel room. Tilde told Eleanor she had called her instead of Helve because she did not want Mormor to know yet, a small act of care that made Eleanor realize how little she understood her granddaughters' private loyalties.

On Saturday, the family gathered at the Sundersson burial plot. Karin's casket was plain; there was no church service, no songs, and no eulogy. The minister spoke of baptism and eternal life. Tilde and Juni, dressed in modest dresses borrowed from the family house, laid wildflowers on the bare wood. Helve removed the cloth covering the casket and folded it neatly away. As the men lowered Karin into the ground, Juni reached toward the flowers, but Nick touched her elbow and guided her back. He put an arm around each daughter and turned them away from the grave.

After the burial, the family shared sandwiches, pastries, and coffee at Helve's house. When Juni collapsed onto the rug, pounding the floor in grief, Nick gathered her up; Tilde went to Helve and leaned against her. Later, Nick took the girls out for miniature golf, basketball, hamburgers, and a quiet stop beside the Frost River. The three fell asleep in the car, exhausted. Before dawn, Nick woke on the couch, went outside, and smoked alone in his car. Helve asked him to leave the girls with her for a few days while he prepared for the next move. He agreed, though on the drive away he angrily called her a "bitch" and began imagining a lawyer, startled by his own fear that she might take his daughters.

Eleanor meanwhile prepared a room at the Becker home and worried about Nick's condition. The next day he appeared at her house, slept on the bed while she changed the sheets, and then, after hours of clearing the apartment together, rode back to Lupine asleep in the car. Walter was waiting at home. He put his arms around his son, who could only say, "I can't." After Nick showered, the family's return to ordinary life began in the spare room, with the girls still away in Frost Valley and the adults facing what would have to happen next.

Walter returned, and grief briefly brought the Beckers together, though it did not mend the marriage. He and Eleanor worked around each other's hurt, finding practical ways to make room for Nick and the girls. Eleanor was still furious that Walter had spent so much time helping Celeste, a friend's widow, and he remained reluctant to explain himself. When she tried to welcome him back, their first attempt at intimacy ended in embarrassment and painful remarks. Only later did he admit that the hardware store was failing and he felt ashamed to have let his father's business collapse. Eleanor told him the store mattered less than their family, but their old habit of keeping feelings to themselves remained. She began to see that her life had narrowed to caring for others, while Walter had kept his own interests and friendships.

Eleanor's own early history made the girls' upheaval especially difficult to watch. Her mother had died when Eleanor was eleven, and foster homes had taught her to rely on routine and

expect little. The Wisdom family had finally given her security, but when she turned eighteen, she had to leave for a boardinghouse and make her own way. She had once attended college, earning more than sixty credits before marriage and pregnancy redirected her life. Now, with the family gathered again under one roof, she tried to give the girls the dependable structure she had needed: beds, meals, clean clothes, and clear plans. Walter helped too, taking the girls on walks around Lupine and showing them the library, park, shops, and bus stop. He did not press them to talk about their feelings; he hoped familiarity would make the town feel like theirs.

Nick’s parents made space for the family, and Nick began arranging for the girls to attend Lupine Middle School. They had been away from formal schooling for years, and their mother’s home-schooling had dwindled into occasional reading and workbook exercises. At the school, the bright halls, busy classrooms, and unfamiliar routines overwhelmed them. The sisters were placed in different grades and schedules, and each had to find her way alone. Tilde adapted more readily. She soon discovered that she was far ahead in math and was invited into a small advanced group, where she found companions and a sense of belonging. She also took to running, learning Lupine’s paths and parks with Jamila and growing stronger as she trained. Juni, by contrast, dreaded school and tried to remain unnoticed. She struggled with math, resented being singled out for help, and kept her distance from classmates.

The differences between the sisters became another source of pain. Tilde’s new friendships and activities gave her somewhere to turn, while Juni felt increasingly isolated. When her language-arts class began reading a novel about a girl whose mother and baby brother die, Juni broke down in front of everyone. She left the room shaking and sobbing, ashamed of the attention and furious that adults thought talking would fix her. She called Helve, who came to sit with her and reminded her that grief did not disappear on command. Helve also told Juni plainly that she had not caused Peter’s death. Juni replied that her mother had blamed her. Helve said Karin had been overwhelmed by grief and later knew better, but the reassurance could not undo the years of guilt Juni had carried.

Eleanor and Helve, meanwhile, were learning how to share the work of caring for the girls. Helve’s closeness with Juni could comfort the child, but it also made Eleanor fear that Juni would never feel at home with her father’s family. Helve began visiting Juni at school once a week, bringing lunch and talking about relatives and life in Sweden. Eleanor eventually accepted a routine that let the visits continue, while insisting that Juni still needed a dependable home with Nick, Tilde, and the Beckers. Their own relationship grew less guarded as they spoke more honestly, though neither woman could erase the years of mistrust between the families.

Helve explained why she felt so fiercely protective of Juni. When Karin first gave birth, she suffered severe postpartum depression. Helve found her exhausted and distressed, unable to

care for the baby, while Nick, overwhelmed and still trying to work, did little to intervene. Helve took over much of Juni's care and, for a time, the infant lived with her. When Karin reclaimed her, Helve continued to visit, often taking the baby out because her daughter seemed indifferent. After Tilde was born, Helve again helped for an extended period. She had believed the family was managing, even as she worried about their isolation and suspected that Nick and Karin used marijuana constantly. She and Eleanor had both been shut out, and neither had understood how much the girls were left to fend for themselves.

Then came Peter's death. When he was six weeks old, Juni, five, had been sleeping beside him and accidentally suffocated him. Karin struck Juni and pulled her hair. Nick called Eleanor, and Karin was hospitalized after a psychotic break. No one explained the tragedy to Juni; Nick believed she would forget. Karin, however, repeatedly reminded her of what she had done, sometimes embracing her afterward and saying she loved her anyway. Eleanor had known the official account, but hearing Helve describe the years of quiet damage made her see the girls' silence differently. She also saw how Nick's loyalty to Karin and his passivity had left both children without consistent protection.

Nick's own grief kept him withdrawn. He spent long hours in bed, smoking and reading, and became so depleted that he suffered a panic attack on the way to Portland. Later he admitted that he felt responsible for Karin's death because he had spent the night in a motel instead of coming home sooner. He even asked a lawyer to make Eleanor the girls' guardian, saying he could not manage their needs. Eleanor refused to let him disappear from their lives, though she agreed to take on practical responsibilities and insisted that he see a doctor. She worried as well about Juni's attachment to Karin's jewelry. When the girls began wearing it and classmates grew curious, Eleanor feared it would make them targets. But Nick would not set limits, and Juni regarded the jewelry as a last tangible connection to her mother. Neither child's grief could be directed neatly, and the adults' attempts to protect them often risked feeling like another form of control.

In May, Nick finally found work at Lupine Community Hospital, taking a full-time weekend shift from seven at night until seven in the morning. The schedule suited him: he could work largely alone, sleep during the day, and avoid the demands of ordinary social life. For the first time since Karin's death, he sounded hopeful. He promised to give Eleanor money from his first paycheck, and she wept with relief, though a job did not mean he was ready to resume caring for his daughters.

Juni remained withdrawn, seeking privacy in her room and at Alison's house. Her mother's jewelry had become a source of painful conflict: when Eleanor put the collection away for safekeeping, Juni felt that another piece of Karin had been taken from her. At school, Juni's friendship with Safi offered a rare point of connection, but it also drew the attention of girls who resented their athletic ability. They taped cruel, altered pictures of giraffes to the girls'

lockers, mocking Juni's body and Safi's race. The school suspended the three girls responsible and required them to seek counseling or meet with the school counselor and write apologies. Juni did not want the incident made into a spectacle. Amanda, who had not taken part, came to the Becker house with a note of apology, but Juni gave no sign of what she thought of it.

At Alison's house, Juni met Brian, Steve's older son, newly arrived from Texas after trouble at school. He treated her kindly and seemed to recognize her loneliness. The two exchanged phone numbers and began talking, though Alison soon told Juni she could not be alone with him in the house. Then, on an early-dismissal afternoon, Juni went with Amanda to a swimming gathering she had not really been invited to. Amanda's brother offered them marijuana, and Juni smoked and drank beer. When older boys turned up, frightened and uncomfortable, she called Brian to take her home. On the drive, Brian swerved to avoid a dog, crashed into a ditch, and dislocated his knee and fractured his arm. Juni, though apparently uninjured, was taken to the emergency room, where tests revealed cannabis in her system. She withdrew into silence, while Eleanor tried to decide whether she needed psychiatric care. Helve argued that Juni needed safety and familiar company, not a hospital ward. She came to Lupine and stayed beside the girl, reading to her and helping her settle.

The crisis deepened when Nick, who had been ill but had not sought help, developed a high fever and became violently chilled. His parents brought him into the house and stayed with him through the night. He was soon diagnosed with septic pneumonia and admitted to intensive care. The doctors treated him with strong antibiotics, fluids, and oxygen, and his condition gradually improved. While he was away, Helve cared for Juni, and the two grandmothers found a way to sit together without competing for the child. Their conversations shifted from practical arrangements to the losses and lives they had each carried. Helve revealed that she had sold her house and settled her dispute with Karl, who had inherited the farm through a joint-tenancy deed that left her without the ownership she had believed was hers. She had recovered her initial investment and secured twenty-five thousand dollars from him, then arranged to sell her home to her nephew Collin and his fiancée, Lily.

As Nick recovered, he told Eleanor the truth he had kept hidden for years. Karin had repeatedly made Juni believe that she was responsible for baby Peter's accidental death, sometimes reminding her obliquely that she had caused it and then assuring her that she was loved "anyway." In fact, Karin had taken Peter into bed while under the influence of marijuana, fallen asleep, and rolled over him. Afraid to confess what she had done, she had moved the baby beside Juni and let the blame fall on her daughter. Nick had eventually learned the truth, but he stayed silent, frightened of Karin's collapse and unwilling to confront her. Eleanor was horrified by the lie and by his failure to protect Juni. She told him he must tell his daughter himself; she would not decide for him what Juni should know. Nick moved into the renovated bungalow, paying rent, but his move also made plain how readily he accepted his mother's

care without taking up the full work of fatherhood. Eleanor began to see that supporting him could not mean managing his life for him.

The family's upheavals also brought old choices into focus. Eleanor, nearing sixty, decided to return to college and finish the history degree she had abandoned when she married and became a mother. Helve, after a lifetime of decisions shaped by men and family duty, chose to return to Sweden and reconnect with her daughter Elin, her sister, and the relatives she had left behind. She planned to take Juni for the summer, while Eleanor and Tilde would join them in August. Tilde, meanwhile, was flourishing in mathematics and had the chance to attend a summer camp for gifted students, where she would learn alongside peers and build friendships. Eleanor agreed to host two visiting students for the program. Tilde could attend the camp, then travel to Sweden later in the summer.

Alison's marriage to Steve ended almost as soon as it had begun. Strained by the arrival of Brian and the prospect of Steve seeking custody of another son, she decided she could not take on the burdens of being a wife and stepmother. She filed for divorce and moved with Fiona to Wellen, where Walter helped her buy a modest house close to Ben. Rather than risk a costly custody fight, Alison agreed to share custody with her former husband, giving Fiona a stable home near both parents.

Helve and Juni left in July. At the airport, Juni and Tilde hugged and swayed together, then separated without a final look back. Eleanor and Tilde wept and laughed as they watched them go. Nearby, the first Syrian refugee families arrived in Lupine, met by townspeople offering quiet applause and welcome. Back home, Tilde told Eleanor and Walter that she had realized she did not want to call them Grandma and Grandpa; she wanted to use their first names. They agreed, and she said she was already happy.

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