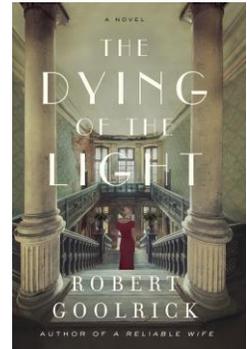


The Dying of the Light

Harper

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1. In the Prologue, the narrator claims that, “Nobody cares about history now.” What might this mean? In what ways is it true or not? What are the potential costs of a person or culture neglecting history? In what scenarios might ignoring one’s history be helpful or necessary?
2. What is important and powerful in the history of the Cooke family? In what particular ways is this history a benefit or burden to Diana Cooke?
3. What is important and powerful about the Cooke family home and estate, Saratoga? What forces—environmental, economic, cultural, etc.—have led to its fall from greatness? What is the nature of Diana’s relationship with such a grand home?
4. Diana Cooke “was born with the century...into the memory of two wars...her whole childhood...touched by the present evil of war.” How did growing up at such a time influence her?
5. What is Diana like as a girl? What did she love and value? What does it mean that “she was a child of the river”? Why was there “a gladness in her heart” the day she was allowed to get her hair “cut like a boy’s”?
6. In what important and profound ways is Diana forced to change as she grows up? What forces compel this? How does she negotiate the difference between her more authentic self and who she is required to become?
7. When Diana first meets Copperton, “her heart suddenly beat faster. She was Red Riding Hood, and she had met the Wolf.” What does this mean? Why might she have been attracted to danger? In what ways is “her desire for this vulgarian” healthy or not?
8. What is Copperton like? What does he value? What might explain his cruelty to someone he supposedly loves? What does the marriage to Diana provide for him?
9. On her wedding day, Diana says to her mother, “I am making the worst mistake of my life.” What does she mean? What are all the reasons she goes through with it? Why does even her mother resign herself to the necessity of such a sacrifice?
10. What’s important about Priscilla and Clarence? How are they essential to the Saratoga estate? What does their relationship demonstrate that many others do not?

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11. How does the history of slavery alter the grandness of Saratoga? How is it that seemingly decent people like the Cookes justify its place in their history and success? What is Diana's attitude toward slavery and the families of those that worked Saratoga? What is the importance of and perhaps limit to the gesture of her burning the Confederate flag?
 12. What is important for Diana about her Arabian horse, Phaeton? Why is the day that Copperton takes the horse for a race "the moment that changed everything"?
 13. What is the complex nature of Diana's relationship with her son Ashton when he is a baby and young boy? How does this change as he grows?
 14. Why does Ashton leave Yale? What is he like when he returns, a grown man? How does he understand his family history, including his long-deceased father? What is his relationship with his mother and the Saratoga estate? What might it mean that, "he lacked the sadness that turns a boy into a man"?
 15. What is attractive to Diana about Gibby? What is genuine and healthy about their relationship? What might explain why she would risk the profound relationship with her own son to be with Gibby?
 16. What is significant—literally and symbolically—about the flooding of the family library? What do the various literary allusions bring to the novel?
 17. What does Lucius Walter's tragic presence bring to the novel? How are the challenges presented by his sexuality similar to or different from Ashton's? What does Priscilla know of Lucius that others don't?
 18. What does Rose de Lisle bring to Saratoga? How does such a sharp and critical person still cultivate genuine relationships with Priscilla and Diana? Is the immense task of restoring Saratoga an act of progress or a desperate attempt to regain what is forever lost?
 19. Rose's knowledge of both men and women in the world evokes a haunting idea: "So many people in so many prisons." What does this mean? In what way is it relevant to the various characters in the novel?
 20. Struggling to decide what to do about their secret love, Gibby shouts to Diana that, "There is always hope. Life is change." Diana, anchored to the Cooke family legacy and Saratoga, responds, "You're an idiot! You don't understand anything!" To what extent is life about change or tradition? What is a healthy balance of the two?
 21. What many forces collide to cause the tragic death and destruction at Saratoga? In what ways is it the unavoidable march of cultural progress or the mishandling of powerful personal relationships? What is the significance of Little Saratoga?