

The Alaskan Laundry Study Guide

The Alaskan Laundry by Brendan Jones

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This guide refers to the Kindle Version of *The Alaskan Laundry* by Brendan Jones.

In *The Alaskan Laundry*, a novel by Brendan Jones, Tara Marconi and her father have a terrible fight after her mother's death. Tara flees to her boyfriend Connor's apartment. Though Connor tries to make Tara happy, she wakes up one morning feeling as if she cannot breathe. The sensation spurs her to talk to her cousin about getting her a job in a place he had once worked and told her stories about - an island in Alaska called The Rock. He warns her that life there shows men what they were made of and that there are bears. She still insists that this is where she wants to be. He gets a job for her, and she travels to the island.

During Tara's time on the ferry to the island, she begins to breathe easier. She meets a man who works on the island, and he gives her a preview of what to expect. When she arrives, Fritz, her new boss meets her. Fritz is tough, but he also has a soft spot. Even though Fritz says that Tara is there to work hard, he tells her as soon as they meet that if she wants to turn around and go home, he will understand. She stays. On the first day she is late, and she tries to give Fritz an attitude when he chides her. After her first day, she is never late again. Sometimes, Tara is early.

While working for Fritz, Tara makes a new friend, Newt. He has his own goal for the island. He wants to bring his girlfriend and her son to The Rock. He will buy a boat and fish for his family. He takes Tara under his wing and helps her get accustomed to her job.

Even though she has her work, Tara feels lonely and writes to her boyfriend, Connor. Around the same time, she becomes interested in a tugboat that she has seen.. She thinks that the tugboat could be an endeavor for her and Connor. However, Connor writes and tells her about how she hurts others because of whatever is causing her own pain.

Newt has already told her that people need a concrete goal in order to get past whatever is holding them back. He calls the goal a channel marker. He urges her to get a job to make more money so that she can buy the tug because it is her channel marker. She holds back, however, until she sees Connor moving forward with his life.

Making more money means leaving her job with Fritz and moving to other jobs - first at a processor and then on boats at sea. Her first boat is the same one that Newt had worked on after his job at the processor. Newt quit working on the boat after losing his eye. When Newt quits, Tara is hired . She is doing well there because she is a hard worker. She leaves, however, after the skipper, a woman named Jackie, makes a pass at her. She gets several other jobs that help her earn enough money to buy the tug. During this period of time, she finds the courage to face the pain of a rape that happened when she was younger. This allows her to build her relationship with Connor.

At the same time, she faces the pain of her mother's death. Facing that pain helps her start rebuilding her relationship with her father.

Once Tara buys the tugboat, she faces the challenge of getting the engine going so that she can move the boat. When the time comes, her new community and Connor come to her aid. They help her get the engine started. The boat sinks the next day, but Tara vows to bring it back to the surface. Tara is no longer lost. She has found her identity, and she goes home with Connor on the anniversary of her mother's death.



Section 1: Chapters 1 - 10

Summary

In Chapter 1, the ferry arrives on the island. Tara meets and talks to a man named Petree Bangheart. Fritz, Tara's new boss, picks her up. On their way to where Tara will be staying, she finds out that Fritz has a gun to protect himself from bears. She is also told that she will be killing, not hatching, fish. Fritz tells her that if she wants to go back, it would save both of them a lot of trouble if she leaves now. He does not need anyone slowing down the production. Tara thinks about going home. Then, she thinks of her father calling her a spoiled brat. She decides to stay.

Chapter 2 flashes back to Tara's past. Tara is not happy, even though Conner (her boyfriend) tries to help her. One day she wakes up with a panic attack and tracks down her cousin who worked at the hatchery in Alaska ten years ago. His tales about his time there had impressed her. For that reason, Alaska is the first place she thinks of when she realizes that she needs to leave. Conner tries to discourage her, but it does not work. She wants to be far away from her father. Conner gets a job for her, but he still warns her that it will not be easy. She tells Connor, whom she has known since third grade, that she is leaving. He does not say much. She knows what she has done is cruel, but she also knows that she must change her life.

Chapter 3 shifts back to the present. As he takes her to where she will be staying, Fritz helps Tara get acquainted with the island. He drops her off, gives her something to eat and leaves. She eats and decides to write Connor, telling him that she has arrived and about the trip. She is still happy that she made the journey.

In Chapter 4, Tara is late to work on her first day. She does not think that being late is a big deal, Fritz warns her not to be lazy. Fritz explains why he does not like people being late. Then he tells her he knows that she has had problems at home and emphasizes again his need to have good workers or else no one gets paid. Tara tries to give him an attitude, like her father would, but she ends up looking childish. She apologizes.

Next, Tara learns how to do her job. Her task is to put the fish eggs in the machine. She thinks that her job will be easier than her previous work and not much different than working at her father's bakery. After Fritz leaves, Tara vows to show them all. Tara learns about how to do her job.

In Chapter 6, Tara walks around and takes in the fresh air. She takes a look at the tugboat Fritz had shown her when she first arrived. She sees that it is for sale and wonders why someone would want to get rid of it. She calls Connor, finds out that he sent her a letter and then they are cut off. She gets the letter and reads it. In it he tells her that what she has done to him is not fair and it is only the memories of her softening towards her that keeps him from breaking it off with her. Tara gets mad at him



and calms herself. She thinks about the tugboat. She had thought it would be nice to share it with Connor. She thinks again about how happy she is to be where she is now and thinks that this is the place she it meant to be.

In Chapter 7, Tara goes to work. Newt notes that she is ten minutes early, but she is in a sour mood because she did not sleep well. Also, she is limping because she cut her foot. She gets in trouble with Fitz when she takes a long time to get some wood to fix a leak.

When she is alone she practices boxing and remembers the first time she was in the ring. She had not done well, but her coach had still continued to work with her. She had done better the next time she was in the ring. After throwing punches, she gets back to work.

She and Newt go to the harbor rocks and drink beer after work. He tells her that he has a girlfriend whom he would like to bring to the island. He says that each of them has a dream, but something is keeping each person from realizing the dream. They need to find their channel marker - something to aim for. He's been looking at the same boat that Tara has discovered.

In Chapter 8, Tara goes back to work cleaning the warehouse and hates it. Fritz tells her that she is too slow. She thinks back to happy days with Connor and her mother. Newt comes to help her stay out of trouble with Fritz. He asks her if she is okay once they get started on the project he is helping her with. She says she is.

In Chapter 9, Tara admits to herself that she is not okay. She misses Connor and she thinks about how the house that she grew up in had changed when her mother died. Then, she thinks about the tugboat and the fact that she is safe on the island.

Tara arrives to work early in Chapter 10 and does her duties now that she has finished cleaning the warehouse. Fritz inspects it, but gives a snide remark instead of complementing her work. She follows Newt's advice and keeps quite. She tries to think about what she has accomplished since being there and can only come up with organizing the warehouse. She thinks about her father and how he and her mother had gotten married. It was an arranged marriage, but everyone said that her father was in love as soon as he saw his wife.

Analysis

The first chapter sets the scene for where Tara is at this moment in her life, both literally and figuratively. The images give readers the sense that the place Tara has traveled to is not going to be an easy place in which to live. The place is called The Rock. The landscape is not at all what she had thought it would be. This foreshadows that there may be other things that she finds that are not as she had expected.

The chapter also serves to characterizes Tara. She is an idealistic city girl who does not have a real understanding of nature. She is keen on breeding fish, not killing them. Yet,



she has no empathy for animals. She instantly sees bears as something evil. She thinks that she must conquer them, instead of seeing their place in nature. Realistically, man has taken over their space, not the other way around.

In addition, Tara is someone who is trying to prove something. The emphasis on hard work aligns with her memory of her father calling her a spoiled brat. She wants to prove that she can work as hard as any man can.

Even though she thinks that she is tough, Tara is a picture of contrasts. She wants to prove that she is tough. However, she is a girl with a romantic view of Alaska and what it has to offer.

Tara has some growing up to do. Fritz seems to realize when he meets her. He tells her that it is okay for her to turn around and go home now if she is unsure that she will stay. Readers sense the same thing as the section continues. They know that she is eighteen because she was supposed to be going to college. The fact that she is getting in the car does not mean that she has conquered anything. It just signifies that she is willing to take the next step in her journey. She is supposed to be willing to work hard, yet she is late on her first day of work. Then, she acts just like the spoiled brat her father accuses her of being when Fritz talks to her about her behavior.

Fritz has people that depend on him for their jobs and wages. He is used to not letting people down. He tries to level with Tara by explaining why it is important that she work hard. She comes off like a spoiled child when he does, "She lifted her chin and tried to arrange her features in a way that would cut him off- some approximation of how her father stared down men. But she could already feel it backfiring into an insolent, childish expression" (26). Just like a spoiled child, she vows revenge when she does not get what she wants. She says that she will conquer and "show them all."

This section shows the contrast between Fritz and Tara. Fritz does not let people down. Tara uses people when she needs them and then throws them away. This flaw highlights a significant theme in the novel. Youth is bent on getting its way as it searches for its adult identity. Often this means that others are let down and caused pain in the process.

In Connor's letter to Tara, he alludes to what she needs to do to become an adult when he says, "You hurt people by not having the courage or even taking the time to figure out how you feel" (33). He emphasizes the point once again that she has to find the courage to face her pain and deal with it when he says "Maybe it will shake you free of whatever weight you carry (I wish I knew) that causes you to hurt others so badly."

Once again, she responds like a spoiled child. "'To hell with you,' she said, jabbing at the shower door with her toe..." (34) She is injuring herself both figuratively (by not taking the steps to grow) and literally (she gets a cut in the ball of her foot) when she does this.

This section also explores the theme of hard work being a gender equalizer. When Tara first hears about The Rock, she wants to know if girls are there, too. Afterwards, her



mother tells her that it is hard work that makes you strong. Later, readers see a reference to this when Tara notices the tattoo on Petree's knuckles and another one with Fritz's comment that he only wants people who work hard. Fritz does not make a gender distinction.

In spite of what she thinks, Tara is not there yet. She is not on the same footing as men. Thus, when she tries to cut Fritz down the way her father cuts down men, she just comes off as being a spoiled child.

At the moment, she is also living in the shadow of her idols, her mother and her Italian family. She wears a medallion as a symbol of this. Newt tells her that it is her own courage that will get her through. Her idols will not help. "Don't matter what saints you wear around your neck. Here it's just your head, and your hands - and your gut."

In addition to characterizing Tara, this section introduces and characterizes other figures in the novel as well. Fritz seems to be rough on the surface, but he is kind. He takes her to where she will be staying, gives her food on her first night, and deals with her attitude.

Connor is her rock. He is stable and calm and always by her side. However, he has his own coming of age issues that he must deal with as well. One issue is finding the courage to stand up to her because she is a source of pain to him.

Readers also meet Newt who is a hard worker and wise. He has moved past the point that Tara and Connor need to reach. He has found his channel marker, and he is strong enough to be her coach. He is a team player, as is Fritz.

Finally, the section introduces Tara's past and her future. Readers learn about her backstory and why she left her father and Connor. Tara's channel marker, the tugboat, is also discovered at this point.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that proving herself in Alaska is the answer to Tara's problems? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Tara leaves Connor, but she writes to him when she arrives in Alaska and continues to do so. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Is Tara spoiled? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

echoed, lashing, opponent, solarium, crescent, scabbed, envisioned, looming, grizzled, current, reanimate, orbit, medallion, condolence, spattered, jockeying, sifted, dozed, acclimated, sincerity, jangled, brawler, halo, dangled, elemental

Section 2: Chapters 11 - 20

Summary

In Chapter 11, Tara tells Fritz that one of the tanks is low. As Newt is not available to help, Fritz takes Tara with him to fix the leak. She suggests that there is a better way to do it than what he is doing and he lets her put her idea into action. They finish the job and he gives her a compliment by saying that they might make a worker out of her yet.

In Chapter 12, Tara is in her apartment as she assesses her physical appearance. When she is unable to sleep, she takes a walk and goes to the tugboat. If the For Sale sign had been on the outside, she would have taken it off. She goes back to her apartment and writes Connor a letter telling him that she is angry about what he wrote, but she is sorry for leaving him. She tells him that she is beginning to see how little she really knows.

She tells him that she is going to send the letter before she catches herself.

In Chapter 13, Tara practices how to do a bowline and succeeds. Doing so makes her feel a little less lost.

In Chapter 14, it is the Monday before Thanksgiving. Fritz tells Tara that the patch on the tank is holding. He invites her to have Thanksgiving dinner with him and his wife. Then, he tells her to take a walk, explore, and stop looking so sad. She goes off and thinks about a time when she was fourteen and she overheard her mother telling her father that it seemed as if Tara was moving away from her. Her mother did not know what to do. Tara starts shadow boxing and thinks that she can be good again if she can get a little faster.

In Chapter 15, Fritz gives everyone the Wednesday before Thanksgiving off. Tara feels a bit lost having nothing to do. She has not heard from Connor. She thinks that maybe something happened to her letter to him. She writes him another letter. She tells him that she is sorry for her past behavior and that she is not going to write again until she hears from him.

While she is thinking, she makes eye contact with a man in the library. Later, the man, whose name is Betteryear, introduces himself.

She adds in the letter to Connor for him to give her news about her father. She says that she feels empty, but not in a bad way. She mails the letter and goes back to her apartment where she starts baking. She fights back tears.

In Chapter 16, Tara goes to Fritz's for Thanksgiving dinner. They watch a football game together and she thinks of her father and doing so makes her feel warm. Then she impresses Fritz by showing him that she knows how to tie a bowline. He tells Tara that



she should talk to Laney, the woman who owns the tugboat, about it. She is at the party. The fact that Fritz knows about Tara's interest in the tug surprises Tara.

Later, Tara and Laney talk. Laney says that she will bring down the price for her and realizes that she is lonely. She invites her to come over for a glass of wine some evening. They all eat the pie that Tara made and think it is delicious.

In Chapter 17, Tara looks for a letter from Connor. She finally gets one that gives her a summary of what he is doing and tells her that he is glad that she is finding herself. She gets mad because it is so detached after she had poured her heart out in her letter to him. She vows to show him.

In Chapter 18, Tara and Newt are drinking together a week before December 23. He tells her how unhappy he is with the money that he is making and that he wants to pursue his dream of becoming a fisherman. He wants to get his girlfriend to join him. She tries to cheer him up. But, she is unsuccessful. They talk about the tugboat, and Newt tells her why he ended up hiding out there.

In Chapter 19, Fran and Fritz invite Tara to a solstice bonfire at their place. She wanders around instead of going straight there. She thinks of Laney getting ready to go to the celebration, but she does not stop when she passes her place. She thinks about her father preparing for Christmas on December 23, the anniversary of her mother's death. She remembers what happened that night. She had overslept. The sound of sirens had awakened her and Connor. She was late to the lighting of the maple tree. She knew her father would be mad. She ran home and found her mother had died. Her father blamed her because she had been out looking for her.

Back in the present, Tara decides to call her father. He yells at her for leaving, and she hangs up on him. She goes to the bonfire. Laney wants to know when she is going to drop by her house. Tara has too much to drink and ends up falling when she leaves. She thinks that this is not how she would like her mother to see her. Tara says that she misses her mother.

In Chapter 20, Tara gets better at work after New Year's. In March, she goes to look at the tug and finds Laney. Laney invites her on the boat and tells her that she and her husband are getting a divorce. A couple in San Francisco is interested in the tug, but she wants to know if Tara wants it. When Tara tells her that she does want the boat; however, she does not have the money. Laney says that if it is in her blood, then she will find a way and shows her around.

Analysis

Once again, there is a leak that Tara is there to help fix. This time, though, she is part of the solution instead of the problem and fixes the tank. Her work impresses Fritz so much that he gives her a compliment. His compliment shows that Tara is becoming part of the team.



Tara's new method also shows that progress is not always bad, which is one of the novel's topics. Sometimes there is a need to modernize, even though the old way still works.

Tara's contribution shows that she is beginning to change. When Tara looks at herself in the mirror she sees the change in her physical appearance. The hard work that she has done already makes her feel stronger. The way she feels is different from the way she felt at the bakery because this is the real thing. "As if the strength from punching the heavy bag were vitamin C and what she was doing here at the hatchery were the thing itself, an orange" (55).

In this chapter, the author uses an anecdote to show readers that Connor is really Tara's rock, but she is not ready to accept it. Her mother knew this, and she had told Tara.

Tara is beginning to let Connor in on her past, but she lacks the courage to tell him everything. She says that she is going to send the letter before she catches herself. This statement shows that it is not easy for her to open up. She is trying to face whatever it is that is causing her pain, which in turn causes Connor pain.

It seems that Alaska may indeed be the place Tara needs to be at the moment. The two things she needs to do to complete her journey are here. She needs to buy the tug because one needs a goal in life to make life meaningful. She also needs to find her adult identity. To do that, she will need to find the courage to open up and face whatever it is that is causing her, or someone she cares about, pain.

Tara achieves a short-term goal when she learns how to tie the knot. Afterwards, she feels a little less lost. This supports the theme that one needs a goal to make life meaningful.

She is still lost because she does not have a goal for her life. In addition, she has not heard from her rock, Connor. She still behaves like a spoiled brat. She gets mad at Connor when she finally hears from him and he does not come running to her aid as he normally does. She once again uses the phrase that she will show him, just as she always says that she will show people who do not accept her actions. She hangs up on her father who gets angry because she left, once again not caring about the feelings of others.

One of the most telling signs about Tara's search for her identity is her memory of her mother telling her father that she felt as if she was losing Tara and she did not know what to do. This is because Tara was rebelling and moving further and further away from them.

Tara manages to continue moving forward. Thanksgiving dinner at Fritz's shows that they are willing to include Tara in their community. She watches football with them and shares food with them. The bakery and food also tie her to her family. In terms of cooking, what she has learned at the bakery gives everyone nourishment and joy.



Newt gives Tara the path that she needs to follow in order to grow. He tells her about his dream to get his girlfriend to the island. His dream is not easy to achieve and Tara's will be difficult, too. Laney's words that if it is in one's heart, one will find a way to do it are true. One needs goals, but no one said they will be easy to achieve.

Tara reaches a low point when she realizes that she is not living up to the visions that she has idolized and that the way she is now is not the strong woman her mother would want her to be.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Tara's actions this time a leak needs to be fixed to her actions in the first section when Fritz needed her help. What do you think changed between now and then?

Discussion Question 2

What does Tara's ability to tie the knot signify? Why do you think that she never took any of these steps at home?

Discussion Question 3

Tara idolizes her mother's heritage, yet she pulls away from her mother. Why?

Vocabulary

scoffed, jockeying, cumbersome, lilted, radiators, twine, awkward, tepid, pulleys, squinted, raspy, jab, momentum, huddled, nostalgic, joints, kneaded, generous, lunatic, perched, enterprise, exhaling, detached, stern, transient, lurched



Section 3: Chapters 21 - 30

Summary

In Chapter 21, Fritz tells Tara how Betteryear killed two bears and warns her that he has a temper. Tara wonders if it is worth working so hard for the tugboat, but then she imagines it as her home. The work she has to do the next morning gives her a taste for what the Island is like. She vows that she can take it.

In Chapter 22, Tara gets a new responsibility.. She thinks about calling her father to apologize for hanging up on him, but decides against it. She writes Connor and mails the letter.

In Chapter 23, Connor writes back quickly. He tells her that she is falling in love with a thing instead of a person and that being in Alaska has softened her. Then, she and Newt go to look at the tug. He tells her that she has found her channel marker. He also tells her that she knows how the island punches and now it is time for her to punch back.

In Chapter 24, Tara goes to the harbor office to find out the status of the tug. The woman who works there gets mad at her because she thinks that she wants it for a houseboat. She does not like it sitting there.

In Chapter 25, Tara writes Connor and tells him about her life, how she is beginning to understand the island, and how she cannot stop thinking about the tug. She also shows signs of sentiment.

In Chapter 26, Newt tries to get Tara to get a job at the processor to make more money so that she can buy the tug. She talks to Laney, who lowers the price, but it is still high. Laney tells her that if she thinks she can make it work, call her. When she gets a letter from Connor, she takes Newt up on his offer to get her an interview at the processor. The news excites Newt.

In Chapter 27, Tara goes to the interview at the processor and gets the job. She tells Fritz that she is leaving. In his own way he says that he is proud of her for lasting as long as she has and that he is rooting for her.

In Chapter 28, Tara goes to work at the processing plant early. She tells her boss that she is working to save money for the tug boat. Bailey, another employee, gives her a tour. Tara finds out that Newt has a job on the water. This is what Newt has always wanted. That night the pay phone rings. The thought comes to her that it could be Conner, but she decides it is not and thinks about how different they are and that it is good to know now. She tries to sleep.

In Chapter 29, Trunk assigns Tara to the freezer. The next day he switches her to the to docks, but the quality of her work is not good enough for her to stay. So, she goes back



to work in the freezer. Being there makes her remember the time her father had put her in the freezer at the bakery for misbehaving. Later, when she was in the eleventh grade, she was in the freezer telling Little Vic about a guy at a club.

In Chapter 30, by Tara's third day at work, the job begins to get to her. She is in pain. Trunk gives her extra time at lunch, and Fran comes to offer her a place to live. It is the cabin of the neighbors who own the dog that Frtiz brought with him when he picked Tara up from the ferry. Tara is happy to take it. After work, she goes to the place and meets Fran there with the dog. Later that night, she insults the dog when it expels gas, but she realizes it and apologizes. The two make peace.

Analysis

This section focuses on two of the novel's major themes. The first theme is that for life to be meaningful, one must have a channel marker, which is a goal. However, just finding a channel marker is not enough. If the channel marker is truly the thing that will make its finder's life meaningful, then that person will have to fight to achieve it. The second theme in the section relates to man's relationship with nature. Man needs to see both the force and the beauty of nature. He needs to realize that animals have a right to their space. After all, it is man who took over the animals' territory, not the other way around.

Tara thinks that what she needs is to show people that she can work hard. What she really needs to do goes beyond that, however. She has worked hard in the bakery. Yet, her father still said that she was spoiled. In addition, she is still looking for meaning in her life. Both Newt and Connor realize that she needs a physical symbol to show her strength and abilities. The tug is this physical symbol. Being able to purchase it would prove that she can provide for herself. She would have her own roof to live under and not have to depend on others for a home.

In Chapter 23, it is clear when both Connor and Newt tell her essentially the same thing. When Connor tells her that she has perhaps fallen in love with a boat instead of a person, he is telling her that she has found something that gives her meaning in life and makes her feel whole. It is something to which she can give herself. The feeling is similar to what people experience, or at least would like to experience, when they fall in love with a person. Connor's words are romantic, but Newt, the pragmatist, says bluntly, "Well, looks like you got your channel marker" (95).

It is interesting to note that even though it is Newt who tells Tara that she needs to get a job at the processor to make more money to reach her goal, it is Connor who gives her the kick to do it when he tells her that he is making progress with his theater dreams. His father, who has money and has offered him a room in Lyon for the winter cannot even deter him. One could think that this news gives her a kick because she is in competition with Connor. In reality though, Connor is her guiding light. He is her rock, which is why she always goes back to him and continues to write him. Her mother was right when she told her that he is the type of man she needs. His actions, to have the courage to



reach his goal and make his life meaningful, gives her the courage to do the same for her life. He also sends her pajamas in the same letter that have blue anchors. This is a message from him that she should get on with achieving her goal instead of just talking about it. Tara realizes this and she goes to Newt right away. "Can you set me up an interview at the processor? I'm ready to make some money" (101). At the end of this chapter, she does not pout and vow to show anyone anything. She is ready to take the next step in her journey.

While Newt encourages her to go for getting her channel marker, he also warns that it will not be easy to do so. When he tells her that the tug is her channel marker he adds, "Took you almost a year to learn how the island punches. Now it's time to punch back" (95). This statement alludes to the fact that one has to fight to get anything worth achieving. When she tells him that she would like to get an interview at the processor, he says, "Looks like baby's ready to play baseball." This is another reference to having to fight to win the game. Nothing is given to you.

In addition to moving forward in regards to reaching her goal, Tara moves forward in learning that there is more than one way to conquer nature. She becomes friends with the dog that she did not like at the beginning of the novel. Part of her change in attitude is due to the fact that she is beginning to realize how her actions hurt others. It may also be due to her becoming more attuned with nature. When Fritz warns her to be wary of Betteryear, a man who is attuned with nature, she defends him by saying "he seems pretty chilled out" (88). Fritz refutes her words because, to Fritz, nature is something of which to be wary.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the tug attracts Tara?

Discussion Question 2

The harbor master thinks that Tara and Laney are alike. What do you think? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?

Discussion Question 3

How is Tara's attitude toward the dog different now from earlier in the novel. What does this difference signify?

Vocabulary

cursive, temper, hesitant, prominent, bashful, insulated, transient, dismissive, curtness, abnormalities, incredible



Section 4: Chapters 31 - 40

Summary

In Chapter 31, just as Tara feels as if her work is her punishment for leaving Connor and her father, Newt returns. She is mad at him and says that she is about to quit. He tells her that the tug is moving south. Tara calls Laney who says that she would have preferred to have sold the boat to Tara, but Tara did not have the money. The same people who left the dog are the ones who are going to start a music school on the tug. When Tara goes back to work, she has a new assignment. She is working with Newt, who did not like working in the water after all. Tara has problems at first, but she decides that she has no choice but to continue.

In Chapter 32, Tara's body is getting accustomed to her work. and she is working overtime. At night she wears the pajamas Connor sent. She has kept the tag on them. She has not yet written him to thank him for them. The couple's house sells and she has to go back to the bunkhouse. She tells the dog that she will come to Fran's to walk him. She cries because she misses him, but she feels as if he has already forgotten her.

In Chapter 33, Trunk gives Tara some time off and a raise after two months of employment. He does not want her to burn out. She goes to see Fritz, who asks if she wants her old job back. She says she came to take the dog with her to the lookout. The dog is happy to see her. His greeting impresses Fritz. They go for a walk. They are almost attacked by a bear. The dog saves Tara. When she gets back to town, she runs into Betteryear. He says that he will teach her some things so she can avoid having something similar happen in the future. Tara agrees to meet him for coffee. That night, she takes the dog into the bunkhouse even though dogs are not allowed and thanks him. He seems to respond that he will always be there for her.

In Chapter 34, Tara buys a rifle that is supposed to be good to use against bears. When Betteryear sees her, he tells her that it is better to learn how to gather first, and the two go out into the woods. Tara is nervous about being with him alone, but everything turns out fine. He teaches her about plants and says that he will show her how to shoot deer, something that Tara is not sure she wants to do. When they return to town, Tara checks to see if the tug is really gone, and it is.

In Chapter 35, work slows down at the processor, and Tara begins to feel antsy. Newt tells her about his idea of how they can save money by living in the woods. The group would consist of him, Tara, Bailey and a new guy, Thomas. Tara thinks the idea is crazy, but Newt tells her to think about it.

In Chapter 36, Tara knows her father is mad at her, but she does not contact him. Finally, she writes Connor to thank him for the pajamas and to show him where she lives.



In Chapter 37, Newt, Thomas, and Tara scout out the woods. They are thinking of living there. Tara is not crazy about having Thomas there. When Bailey sees Tara, he is not crazy about having her there. Bailey calls Newt "Re-Re," and Tara is puzzled by the name. However, Newt is too busy coming up with another idea to answer her question.

In Chapter 38, the group goes back into the woods again. Tara agrees that she will live there if Newt builds a satisfactory home. He does so.

In Chapter 39, Tara gets up the next morning and smells the fresh air. She gets a fire ready and when Newt gets up, the two go into town. She writes to her father apologizing for hanging up on him and saying that she does not know when she will return. Later that night, Thomas and Bailey hit on her, but Newt defends her and she appreciates what he has done for her.

In Chapter 30, Tara works fewer hours at the processor. Newt tells Tara that things will work out for both of them. Tara is getting used to her life, even though she does think about enjoying a night in in a more civilized setting. She thinks that that day will come, but for now she was doing what she needed to do.

Analysis

This section focuses on Newt's claim in Chapter 18 that "...we all pay for our sins here, one way or the other. No rest for the wicked" (76). It also shows the many barriers that one may face in trying to get their channel marker. Finally, the section shows man trying to be part of nature and gender bias.

There is no rest for the wicked, or Tara in this case, as she works at the processor. The narrator says that, "It felt like punishment, except this time for bigger thing. For leaving Connor. Her father. Philadelphia" (115). The fact that she thinks that leaving Connor, her father, and her home are sins shows that she is growing. Before, she felt as if she was doing the right thing by leaving them and that Alaska was her new home. Her father had been cruel to her and she and Connor did not belong together.

Tara is also learning that one has to keep their eye on the target even when it seems to be slipping away from you, or in the case of the tug, sailing away from you. Tara is working so hard that she is in physical pain. In describing the experience, she says, "This is fucking unreal" (115). Then Newt comes with the news that the boat is being towed south with a music school on her. When Tara calls Laney, she confirms the news and simply says, "Sorry" (116) After an interchange, she hangs up on Tara. Instead of quitting, which she does think of doing, Tara continues to work hard, so hard in fact that her boss offers to give her a raise so that she can take some time off. He worries that she is going to burn out. By the end of the section, Tara does think of how nice it would be to have some of the comforts of life that she now lacks, but she realizes that for now, this is what she needs to be doing. It is the journey to needs to continue on if she is going to find her adult identity and find meaning in her life.



Even though Tara is working hard, she still has not achieved a gender equalizing status. An encounter, plus Tara's own thoughts, prove this to be true. When she first starts working in at the processor she thinks, "Maybe people who made it in Alaska were just built of tougher stuff. Some Nordic ancestry better suited to the cold and wet and scream of machinery, Philly hadn't prepared her for this" (115).

Later, in Chapter 39 when Bailey finds out that Newt has included Tara in the group of people to live in the woods he says, "I thought we said man-town out here. That girl's a pain-in-the-ass bitch" (133). Once in a natural habitat, Thomas makes a pass at Tara, once again highlighting the fact that she is not equal to the boys. Newt comes to protect her.

This section gives Tara another lesson on the power of nature and man's place in it. She wanders in the woods, seeming to forget the warnings about bears. When one attacks, her dog saves her. This reinforces what she has already begun to see. Dogs are loyal animals that protect their masters. They are not dirty animals that chew through the plastic coverings of couches.

Betteryear gives her a further lesson in how to conquer nature when he takes her out and shows her how to benefit from what nature has to offer instead of thinking that it is a dangerous place. One can conquer it by learning to live off what it has to offer and using it for your own good.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Tara believes she should be punished for leaving Connor, her father, and Philadelphia?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Tara continue to work hard, even when Laney and the musicians have taken the tug?

Discussion Question 3

At this point, what does Tara need to do?

Vocabulary

circuit, revolving, reassessment, accelerated, proposition, veered, recognition, trauma, condescending

Section 5: Chapters 41 - 50

Summary

In Chapter 41, a group of people calling themselves the Alaskan Travelers show up. Thomas is smitten by a German woman named Frauke who has a dog. Newt is not impressed, and Bailey keeps his distance. However, Bailey makes friends with a lab owned by a girl from Oregon.

Frauke offers to read Tara's fortune. She tells Tara that if she does not try for something higher, she will always stay lower. Newt offers the dog some food, but Frauke says that it is fasting. The dog is still looking at the food. Frauke orders it away when Newt tells her that you cannot make a dog fast. He says that he hopes that the woods do not remind her of the dog's order on the food chain. Later that evening, Frauke's dog attacks the lab who has a deer bone. The lab dies. Tara tells Newt that if something like that happens again, she is leaving, but Newt is already asleep.

In Chapter 42, before Thanksgiving Tara goes with Betteryear to pick the last mushrooms of the season. He asks whether she would like to know how to cook them and she says that she would. They go to his house. He tells her about folklore figures including a curly-haired woman who gathers mussels and leaves them for the poor. She brings happiness and prosperity. Betteryear says that it is a sign that she was meant to be there at the cabin at that moment. Tara falls asleep.

In Chapter 43, Tara and Betteryear go out to listen to music. Tara notices that he is not comfortable in public. Afterwards, he says that he has some things to do in the cabin, and Tara offers to go along. She asks him what he is doing for Thanksgiving, and he says that he will probably go the Alaska Brotherhood potluck dinner like the rest of the island. When Tara has problems closing the door, she gets upset when Betteryear yells at her. He apologizes, but she tells him to take her to the woods. He does and leaves.

In Chapter 44, Tara sees Betteryear again at the Thanksgiving dinner. He is upset because they are building a road through their graveyard. Thomas notes that it is strange that he is there celebrating Thanksgiving with the white people who took his land. Newt and Thomas go back, but Tara stays. Newt warns her to be careful with Betteryear.

In Chapter 45, Trunk tells Tara that Newt has lost an eye due to an accident. Tara is in line for the spot as Bailey has a job on a herring crew. He tells her that she is good at her job and not to let Jackie tell her differently.

In Chapter 46, Tara goes to pick up Newt at the airport. He makes light of the accident. They go to the bar for a drink and even though a fisherman defends him, the owner still will not let him in for a drink. Tara tells him that she will be taking his place, not Bailey



because he has another job. Newt says it is ok. He then tells her that the tug is back. The news excites her.

In Chapter 47, Tara's father calls just as she is getting on the boat. He tells her to call when she returns. Jackie questions her when she first boards, but says she like the fire in her eyes and that she is tightly strung. But, it is better than having a hippie. As they pull out, Tara sees the tug and Laney. She asks if it is still for sale. Laney tells her that it is still on sale for \$25,000. Tara thinks that it is her boat, even if it does have problems.

In Chapter 48 Tara works and learns to admire Jackie. She wonders whether she can become like her one day.

When the boat returns to the port, in Chapter 49, Tara rushes to find out what is happening with the tug. Things did not work out with the musicians so the boat is still for sale. Laney tells her that she has to get the engine running or else the harbor master will sink it. Tara is working on it She goes to write Connor and Betteryear interrupts her. He questions her about who she is writing and she gives him vague answers. Finally, when he leaves, Tara tells Conner that she is lonely and that she loves him. She tears up the letter, however, and leaves without writing anything.

In Chapter 50, it is the 23rd of December. Tara picks up the dog to go with her to meet Newt. At first, the dog is distant. Finally, he comes around. Newt can tell that the dog watches out for Tara.

Tara confides in Newt about her father and the fact that he blames her for her mother's death. Newt has not heard from his girlfriend. He tells Tara that it is obvious that she is trying to get to the point that she can make peace with all that has happened to her and make new friends along the way.

Analysis

This section focuses on the theme that man should respect nature for what it has to give and its power. It does so by showing the consequences of not doing respecting nature. Once one understands the relationship between man and nature, the two can live together with man being thankful for what nature gives.

Newt is not the only one who has the idea to make nature his own. The group runs into another group of young people who do the same. One of the girls, Frauke, thinks that she is part of nature, but she is not. She tries to treat her dog like a human being by not feeding it meat. Newt realizes that treating a dog like a person is dangerous as it does not follow the laws of nature and says, "Woman seems to have forgotten where the dog is in the food chain. Let's hope the woods don't remind her" (144). Later, her dog kills another dog in order to get the deer bone that it has.

Betteryear continues to give Tara insight into another way to conquer nature. They get food from the land and eat it. Tara notices that Betteryear does not seem comfortable in public, while he seems to be okay when he is in nature. In public, people misunderstand



him, just as Tara misunderstood dogs before coming to Alaska. Newt even warns her to be careful around him. Yet, people are treating him like Frauke treats her dog. They are trying to make him into something that he is not. He has a natural relationship with the land, and they want to destroy it. He notes that they are building a road through the graveyard. This is sacred land and they are not giving it any respect. People cannot change Betteryear, just as Frauke could not change her dog's nature. It is unnatural to do so. The attempt changes the innate nature of the person or animal. That can be dangerous.

Newt has a setback in obtaining his dream, and Tara's dream gets closer. Newt loses an eye at work. It turns out that he has not heard from his girlfriend in some time. This opens a door for Tara to make more money by taking his job on the water.

Tara finds another idol in Jackie. She also begins to face her pain. She talks to Newt about her mother. Her father calls her because he has heard about the rape, and she knows it.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think Betteryear's intentions are toward Tara? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

How realistic is Newt's reaction to the loss of his eye? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Tara not send the letter to Connor that she was writing him when Betteryear interrupts her?

Vocabulary

aura, incredulously, assortment, prosperity, sustenance, unconscious, obnoxious, intimate, oblivious, philosophic



Section 6: Chapters 51 - 60

Summary

In Chapter 51 Betteryear takes Tara hunting. He can tell that she is distracted and says they will go again later. When she gets back, Frauke is sad because a bear killed her dog. Newt advises Tara to call her father. She decides that he is right and that she will do it the next day.

In Chapter 52, Tara calls her father the next day. He wants to know where she is, and she wants to know what he wanted to talk to her about. She realizes that he knows about the rape, but does not want to talk to him about it. He pleads for her not to leave him, but she hangs up anyway. She gets back to the camp in time to see Thomas accidentally set in on fire. She leaves and decides that it is Connor who needs to know the truth about the rape.

In Chapter 53, Tara writes Connor a long letter explaining the rape. After it happened, she changed and her father had taken her to learn to box.

In Chapter 54, Tara has been staying with Betteryear since the fire on the platform. It snows, and they go hunting for deer. She spots one, and he kills it. Later that evening, he cooks it. He thanks Tara for her good eyes and she savors the complement as she does the meat. She thanks him and remembers that she needs to mail Connor the letter she wrote.

In Chapter 55, Tara mails the letter to Connor. Then, she goes to pick up the rest of her belongings at the platform. She finds out that Newt has work on a boat. She goes to look at the tug and sees that someone is working on it. Then she goes back to Betteryear's. Later that evening, she finds him crouching by her cot as she sleeps. He says that he was checking to make sure she was safe.

In Chapter 56, Tara receives Conner's tender response to the letter she wrote to him..

In Chapter 57, Work picks up at the processor, and Tara works overtime. She has the rhythm of the place and has no problem with the work. Even though she prefers being out at sea, she does not know if she will get another chance at it. At the end of the season, she takes a look at herself in the mirror and notes that she has gotten tougher in looks. She wants more.

In Chapter 58, Tara goes out into the water with Betteryear. The two talk a bit about her mother and he talks about his ancestors as he passes down knowledge to her. He comments that it is nice to be able to do so. She is anxious to get back to land.

In Chapter 59, packing fish and sleeping is all Tara does until April when Trunk tells her that she will be going out on the Adriatic in May. She will work there until September. She figures that she will have the tug by the fall if all goes well. She runs into Thomas



who tells her that he and Frauke are going to California. She wishes them luck. Later when she goes to her locker, she discovers that they have stolen her money. Even though she can issue an arrest warrant she decides not to in favor of working harder.

In Chapter 60, Tara meets Jackie who was in Mexico for the winter. She has heard about the robbery, but Tara says she is just ready to work. Jackie tells her to settle in. She does, and they leave.

Analysis

Tara's growth in terms of finding her adult identity is the highlight of this section. She finally summons the courage to face the pain that causes her to treat others so badly.

She tells Connor about the rape. When she does, Connor's tone changes and he echoes Newt's words. Newt says, "So, we're all tumbling around in the Alaskan laundry, out here. If you do it right, you get all that dirt washed out, then turn around and start making peace with the other shit" (171) Connor says, "I hope that this rock of yours will have helped you get clean of this pain" (192).

Just as Newt says, Tara has been tumbling around and, with the help of the friends she has made, she has managed to get the dirt washed out. Finding her channel market has helped her do this as life now has meaning for her. She is not just floating from one place to another, one day after another. Now that she is getting clean of the pain, she is ready to take care of the "other shit," that being her relationship with Connor and her father. By telling Connor the entire story, she takes a big leap in moving forward in her relationship with Connor. Instead of talking about going in different directions as he had before, he implies that he will be writing again by signing "soon" (192), in his letter to her.

Tara has just broken the surface, though as exemplified by her relationship with her father. She contacts him and realizes that she causes him pain by hanging up when she does not want to talk to him. By doing so and not sharing with him, she is leaving him, as he says during one of their conversations, "Do not leave me, Tara" (177). He does not say, "Do not hang up on me." Instead, he pleads for her not to leave him. She still has to make peace with him and this will come as she continues to grow and find her own identity as an adult. and not her father's daughter.

It is interesting to note that as she grows and is able to deal with her relationship with Connor and her father she moves away from one of her idols, Betteryear. Both of her friends, Newt and Fritiz have warned her about Betteryear in the past. Then though, she always defended Betteryear, essentially saying that he did not seem so strange. She idolized him due to his knowledge of nature and the land. People looking for their identity tend to idolize others. Now that she is growing and defining her own identity, she begins to see Betteryear as strange. She thinks that he has ulterior motives when he sneaks up on her during the evening when she is sleeping and she feels uncomfortable when they are out on the water alone together.



Tara's growth, however, does not mean that it will be any easier for her to get her channel marker - the tug. In fact now she faces another barrier. People who she thought were her friends have stolen her money. To her credit though, and another sign of her growth, she does not go after the thieves. Instead, she vows to work harder.

Tara's own looks show how much she has changed since she arrived on the island. Readers got a glimpse of the beginning of her change at the beginning of the novel when she had looked in the mirror. Now she looks in the mirror again and notices that, "Her hair had grown coarser, the furrow over her nose deeper. A ruddiness to her skin that hadn't been there before. She splayed her palms in front of her chest, calluses dark with work." (193) The change does not make her unhappy. In fact, she is ready to go the distance. "Bring it, she thought. Bring on all of it" (193).

Discussion Question 1

Tara went to Alaska to get away from her father. Why do you think that she is now willing to talk to him when Newt advises her to call him back?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Tara feel as if she needs to tell Connor about the rape instead of telling her father about it first?

Discussion Question 3

Does Tara's reaction to the robbery surprise you? Why or why not? Why do you think she decided to work harder to make the money back, instead of trying to catch Thomas and Frauke?

Vocabulary

magnetism, incessant, sensation, predicted, gait, convulsing, maneuvered, unequivocally, accelerated



Section 7: Chapters 61 - 70

Summary

In Chapter 61, it is Tara's second day on the boat. Tara sees Jackie taking control as she yells at everyone and gives orders. She understands why Newt was so frantic before going out on the boat. While she feels that Jackie is in a constant state of frustration, she also admires her.

In Chapter 62 Tara is with Teague who warns her that unexpected problems will come about when she has a boat of her own. Later, a man loses the tip of his thumb. It is soaking in milk. Teague says that it needs to be in a steak. The skipper does not want to give up a steak for it, so Teague says use a bit. They unload, ready to do the same thing the next morning.

In Chapter 63, Tara finds out that a combination of Newt's and Jackie's drive caused Newt to lose his eye. Miles warns her to be on the lookout.

On July 4, Tara serves cannolis and impresses everyone in Chapter 64. Jackie calls her in and tells her that she is not a natural fisherman, but it is okay because she works so hard. She also tells her that her father has been calling the processor. She needs to call him when they set anchor. The news does not make Tara happy.

In Chapter 65, Teague is happy to see that all of the trees have been cut off of the hills. Tara is beginning to think that he is strange because of the way he looks at her. When they make port, she calls her father. She does not get to talk to him for long though because the men in line give her trouble for being on the phone for so long. After hanging up, she reflects on her father's tone which sounded apologetic. One man; Petree, gets on her nerves so much that she punches him. She had met him on the ferry. The other men and Jackie break up the oncoming fight. Jackie is proud of her and gives her a letter from Connor. He tells her what is happening at home and that he has moved to Kansas City. He ends the letter with the salutation "love."

After she reads the letter, she joins Miles and Teague who are also impressed by the fact that she punched Petree. She goes back to her berth and reads the letter again. She wishes she could see Connor's face to know whether "love" was reserved for her or if he was just signing all of his letters like that now.

In Chapter 66, the boat docks after completing its two week circuit. Tara is happy to be off of it and goes to a local bar. On the way there, She thinks about Connor's letter again and realizes that she is leading a good life there. She wants her own place, though before leaving, although now Philly seems closer. While she is at the bar, Petree comes in. He joins her and orders another round. He asks her a question in a flirty way and she puts her money on the table. Petree reminds her that he was paying and mentions that he knows that he has seen her before. Tara says that they met on the



ferry and leaves. She eats and burns her moth. Then she finds herself laughing but she does not know if it is because she is thinking of Connor acting in Kansas City or if it is due to the happiness she feels after receiving his letter.

After about two months on the boat, Jackie makes a pass at Tara. Tara punches her and packs her things (Chapter 67), and leaves the boat..

In Chapter 68, Tara sleeps in the library and the next morning she finds out that Petree is going back to the Port Anna. She agrees to help him get his boat there and the two set out.

Tara and Petree talk about the tug in Chapter 69. He thinks that Tara is crazy for wanting to buy it due to the state that it is in. He asks about what happened between her and Jackie, but Tara does not give any details. Along the way, they see Jackie's boat, but Tara cannot determine whether Jackie has a black eye or not. She asks him if he knows about any additional work for her, on the trolleys. He drinks beer because they are moored for the night, due to the weather. He surprises her by cooking moose quesadillas. She thinks of her father and notes that the boat is safe for the night.

In Chapter 70, Petree and Tara return. He tells her that he would not mind helping her with the tug's engine. She goes to the processor and finds out that Jackie has paid her all of her money as if she had been there for the entire time. Newt is still out working. Fran has left her a note saying that they have to give up Keta. Tara adopts him. They stay at Laney's and Tara vows to buy the boat. She also sees a job posted that looks perfect for her

Analysis

Hard work is a gender equalizer. That is the major message in this section. Readers see how "the other shit" is getting straightened out for Tara, but she still has some growing up to do. This section also highlights how food can bring people together and provide a sense of community. In addition, it touches on the issue of man versus nature and the way man tries to conquer it.

The tales of what goes on on the boat depict what a hard life it is. Men lose eyes and thumbs, but the work goes on. Tara is in the midst of it all, but the leader is Jackie, a woman who barked out orders that men followed. "The rest of the day was more of the same - Jackie bitching out skippers, sniping at Tara, giving a quick nod of the head when the catch was acceptable." (204) Tara understands why Newt was "frantic" when it was time to go on the boat. Tara thinks that Jackie functions "in a perpetual state of frustration," (204) but at the same time she has found a new idol. "...it made Tara proud to see this small woman take on the world" (204). Jackie is like a man and has earned that distinction because of her hard work.

For Tara, who is still searching for her identity, Jackie becomes another idol. Her idolization of Jackie ends though when Jackie makes a pass at her. While Tara makes it clear that she is not interested in a lesbian relationship by punching Jackie, coming to



terms with one's sexuality is part of the coming-of-age process and thus is part of her journey.

While she is on the boat, the narrator states that, "Unlike most Alaskans, she hadn't been raised with work - an understanding of how engines ran, how houses fit together, how food arrived on the table." (209) She is though, a good cook. Just as she won people over at Thanksgiving with her pie, she wins over the crew with her cannoli on Jackie's boat. This is a gift she has that brings people together as food, which provides nourishment, should do. Enjoying a good meal together brings about communication and a sense of community.

Tara's ability to bring people together with her food is in direct contrast with her temper which shows itself when she punches Petree. The fact that she handles his taunts this way is another sign that she still has some growing up to do. She punches without thinking of the ramifications. Everyone realizes that she is a hard worker though, and Petree later offers to help her if she helps him get his boat back to the island.

By the time they leave, Tara has made great strides in her growth. She talks to her father. She gets a letter from Connor signed "love". When she and Petree leave it feels "as if she were coming up from the underworld" (230). This is because she is. She has taken great strides in paying for her sins.

This section references how man tires to conquer nature in a couple of chapters. In Chapter 61, Tara notes that, "The men up here were funny. They seemed to pride themselves on not only surviving Alaska, but conquering it" (202). Later, Teague is happy to see that trees have been cut down.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Tara admires Jackie? Is she right to do so? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Tara has made strides in communicating with her father. Why do you think she is upset when she finds out that she needs to call him? Is her reaction appropriate? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Petree offer to help Tara, even though she punches him? Do his actions resemble those of any other people in the novel? If so, whose actions?

Vocabulary

perpetual, mulled, metric, confronted, bracing, insistence, apologetic, sponsoring, outhouse, reservoir



Section 8: Chapters 71 - 80

Summary

In Chapter 71, after being back for three days, Tara begins to get antsy. She looks for a letter from Connor, but there is none. She thinks about asking Trunk for her old job back, but really wants to be out at sea. She calculates how much money she needs to make. She decides to write Connor a letter. At the ends she tells him that she misses him and is thinking about coming back for Christmas. She mails it before she decides to delete the last thought.

In Chapter 72, Tara goes to the library and has a message form the person who posted the job pot. She responds. After agreeing to the terms, Betteryear appears. He wants to see her, but she does not want to see him, but agrees to go over on Sunday. She looks at the board again and sees that someone has written a time and place to meet. That night, she howls with her dog.

In Chapter 73, Tara goes to the meeting and manages to get the job, even though her employer knows that she lies about her qualifications. He allows her to bring the dog along.

In Chapter 74, Tara arrives early for the marine safety class her new employer told her to attend. When the instructor finds out who her boss is, he tells her that she is in good hands. Tara passes the survival test.

In Chapter 75, Tara goes to Betteryear's cabin as promised. He tries to convince her to live with him because she has no where else to go. When she leaves, Bailey tries to attack her. The dog comes to her defense. When she gets back, the dog stands guard at her door.

In Chapter 76, Tara goes on the boat to start working and finds Trunk helping get the boat ready to sail. He calls Tar "my lady" which makes her feel good. Once they get going, Zachary asks her about the fights she has been in and she explains, still being vague regarding her encounter with Jackie. Zachary accepts her explanations.

In Chapter 77, on the boat, Tara works hard and learns a lot. She spots a leak and survives almost drowning. Zachary thanks her for finding the leak.

In Chapter 78, when Tara returns to Port Anna, everyone is talking about the terrible storm that she has just survived. She checks and finds out that the tug is still for sale. Laney says that she is rooting for her. Petree thinks that she is crazy for wanting to buy the tug and offers his, but she says that a fishing boat is not a home.

When she gets called to work in the Alaskan Reiver, Zachary and his wife agree to look after the dog. She thinks about buying plane tickets to return home for Christmas. but the tug comes first. One day, she hears that Betteryear has died. She goes to his



funeral and realizes that there are things about the island that she does not have the right to understand.

In Chapter 79, Tara joins the crab boat. She is not happy with it, but she sticks with it for the sake of the tug.

In Chapter 80, Tara has problems on the crab boat because the guys do not like her. The owner tells her to bite her tongue when they insult her. At first, she does not want to just bite her tongue. Later, a crew member insults her, and she considers hitting him. Then, she gives some thought to what others on the boat would think about her actions. She feels like less of a person by not taking action, but she lets him win the match.

Analysis

Tara is getting close enough to completing her journey in this section that she realizes that the island is not her home and thinks of returning to the place that is her home. In fact, she thinks about it so much that she plans to buy tickets to return for Christmas.

The timing of her return is significant. She plans to return around the anniversary of her mother's death. She now has the courage to face this pain. Maybe, once she does, she will be able to make further progress in dealing with her relationship with her father just as finding the courage to deal with the pain caused by her rape has allowed her relationship with Connor to move forward.

At the same time she thinks of returning home, she realizes that where she is now is not her real home even though it had taught her a lot. This happens when she is at Betteryear's funeral. "He had taught her things, had been patient, and had persisted when she was difficult, hard to know. But some weight she could feel in the room stopped her. It was the first time on the island she sensed a darkness, the dimensions of which she couldn't fathom. She knew then, sitting in that room, she never would. She didn't have the rights to it" (277). One could say that this is his final lesson for her.

She still has some things to learn and achieve before she can leave. One of those things is to buy the tug because finding meaning in her life is essential. She also needs to learn that her actions cause reactions. She is mending her relationships with Connor and her father, but she still strikes out at the world.

Making money to buy the tug is causing Tara to face even harder challenges. While she has gotten accustomed to the challenges that she has had to face in the past, the current one, working on the crab boat is different. She does not like it and the crew does not embrace her. Here the narrator once again mentions her mother's medallion. Her mother's heritage is still something that she idolizes and now, in a place that she feels is out of her league where she does not have an identity, she returns to it for comfort.

The work is hard and Tara sticks with it. In doing so she is increasing her strength in the male dominated world. She also grows stronger as a person when she realizes that it is not always the best thing to fight back as she starts to realize that sometimes it is best



to choose which battle you want to fight. It is best to be patient for the greater good. At the first signs of problems on the crab boat she thinks of the tug and thinks, "Patience...You will not react with anger. Just let it slide." (286) Later, when she receives a blatant insult, she also decides to hold back as she also knows that her actions have ramifications, "Unlike with Jackie, she was confused as to whether she should hit the kid, how it would come to off to the rest of the boat." (295) She thinks that this is a low point, but in reality, she has learned an important lesson.

The fact that her gender makes her ripe for torment shows that she has not yet worked hard enough to prove her strength. She has not yet earned gender equality, and her world on the crab boat proves it.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think this rift has occurred between Betteryear and Tara?

Discussion Question 2

Is Tara right in thinking that there are things about the island that she is not meant to understand? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

If you were Tara, would you have stayed on the crab boat? Explain.

Vocabulary

detached, anticipation, bayed, stenciled, consideration, coordinates, stimulate, seclusion, decaying, swiveled



Section 9: Chapters 81 - 90

Summary

In Chapter 81 Tara finally ends up punching one of the crew members. Both of them are reprimanded by the captain. She leaves and goes to a bar. There she meets a man who advises her to not look back, whatever she does.

In Chapter 82 she thinks about going back to Port Anna, but stays because she like the idea of being out at sea. She gets a break right before a hard period of work and calls her father. During the conversation, he apologizes for locking her in the freezer when she was young and yelling at her before she left. He pleads for her to come home. Then she calls Connor. They end their conversation saying that hey are hopeful.

When they go out to sea in Chapter 83, Tara gets sea sick. One of the guys on the boat has remedies to help with the sickness,

In Chapter 84, Tara gets a chance to prove herself, but break a nail and is sidelined instead. Everyone wants to know if she is okay and she says that she is. King Bruce, the captain, is still not happy with having hired her. At the end of the 11th day she looks at herself in the mirror and sees that she is suffering. She says the chant the man at the bar taught her to protect herself.

After moving a pot to the bow in Chapter 85, Tara impresses the men.

The boat docks in Chapter 86. Jethro invites her to the bar, but she passes as she knows how the night will end. She goes to the airport. She knows that the guys will be going out again. She has not been invited but she does not care. She has done her job and has her check. King Bruce shows up at the restaurant she goes to while waiting to leave. He laments that she was a liability. Instead of telling him off, she thanks him for the job and wishes him good luck with his next run.

In Chapter 87, Tara gets back to Port Anna. Zachary picks her up. Everything is fine. The dog misses her and is happy to see her. Newt has gone to pick up his girlfriend. Tara has the money for the tug.

After buying the tug in Chapter 88, Tara finds out that she has until Thanksgiving to move it. It is not enough time and Laney had not told her about the deadline. After a phone call, she gets an extension until Christmas.

Tara is happy on her first night on the boat (Chapter 89). the next day, Newt comes by with his girlfriend and her child asking if she is renting space to stay. Then Petree comes by and she reminds him of his offer to help fix the engine. Newt's and Petree's wives discover the basil on the boat. She invites them all inside and decides that the letter she was writing Connor can wait.



In Chapter 90, Petree comes back to the boat the next morning. He and Newt have struck a deal. He will get the engine running and Newt will buy his boat so that he can fish for his family. Later that day, she calls her father. He is anxious for her to come back home.

Analysis

This section offers rewards for Tara. First, she must face the biggest barrier that she has encountered during her time in Alaska. On the boat, she gets sea sick. Her cooking does not melt the heart of the crew as it had done in the past. When she finally has a chance to prove herself, she does the ultimate girly thing. She breaks a nail. The guys continue to ask if she is okay and the captain's son develops a crush on her. She has yet to reach the gender equalizer point.

She looks at herself in the mirror during this trip and unlike the previous times in the novel when she has done so, she sees the the signs of her suffering. "That night before, their eleventh on the water, she stared back at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were sunken, and the edges of her lips downturned. The tip of the toothbrush poked between them like a thermometer" (314). Her response to her appearance is also different. Instead of saying bring it on as she has in the past, she uses the chant the man at the bar gave her to drive out evil spirits.

Even though life is hard for Tara, she does not look back. She continues and the next time she has a chance to prove herself, she does so - impressing her biggest detractor in the process and reaching the gender equalizer point due to her hard work. "Hale spit over the side, shaking his head, 'Sweet lord above. They ruined a hell of a man when they cut the balls off you" (318).

When they dock, she shows how much she has grown by making a point to say goodbye to Hale and simply thanking King Bruce for taking her on even though there were many other things (all negative) that she would rather have said. "She wanted to say that the world would be a much better place if he had stayed in that crab pot and sunk to the bottom of the ocean, but instead found herself reaching out" (320). She even hugs him. Her actions towards both men stun them. Hale looks confused when she says goodbye to him and King Bruce's body stiffens when she hugs him.

She has done the hard work and overcome the barriers and now has the money for the tug. She also now has the friends to help her. At the same time, readers discover that Newt has also reached his goal.

Tara still has a challenge though and that is to get the engine running. Only then will she be able to call the tug her home and prove that she can manage to get her own roof.



Discussion Question 1

Does Tara ever look back? Is it a good thing or a bad thing to never do so? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

How has her time on the crab boat changed Tara?

Discussion Question 3

What does the basil on the boat signify?

Vocabulary

seeped, shuffling, mediocre, obnoxious, glowered, affixed, ganging, heaved, stocky, habitat



Section 10: Chapter 91 - 100

Summary

In Chapter 91, Petree works hard on the boat. Fritz comes by and shows he has a sentimental side. He also lets her know that he did not believe that she would have accomplished all that she has.

Tara decides not to go to Fritz's and Fran's for Thanksgiving in Chapter 92. She stays on the boat with Newt and the two talk about how far she's come. Newt wants to make sure she is coming back after Christmas and she says she is.

In Chapter 93, Connor surprises Tara by coming to the boat. He comments that she did it and takes her up on her offer to help.

In Chapter 94 Petree and Miles meet Connor. She wants him to say the right things after the introductions and he does.

Tara and Connor bond in Chapter 95. She cannot believe that she thought they were going their separate ways. Connor kisses her and she tells the dog that it is okay. She tells the dog that she knows what she's doing when it tries to protect her.

In Chapter 96, Connor and Newt become friends. They plan to leave on the 23rd of December. Connor asks her if she is okay with that. She says that she thinks her mother would like it.

In Chapter 97 everyone's work has paid off. the engine is running. Tara asks Petree whether she can hug him. He says that he'll take that over a punch. Petree calls the harbor master and says that the engine is running. They will be driving by in the morning.

In Chapter 98 Connor and Tara sleep together. The dog, at Connor's suggestion, is with them too. Tara is happy and then she sees the northern lights. She wakes Connor up. She says what Betteryear had said about them. Connor is interested in hearing about him.

In Chapter 99 Tara wakes up and realizes that the boat is sinking. Everyone gets off and people attempt to save it. While all of this is going on, someone from the Coast Guard comes and tries to give Tara problems, but then Jackie shows up and defends her. In the end, the tug sinks.

In Chapter 100, Tara and Connor go to the airport. On the way, Newt asks when she is coming back. She says soon. She knows that it will not be easy to raise the tug, but she has to do it. If someone else does it first, the boat will be theirs. When the man sitting next to her on the plane asks her where she is going, Tara replies, " home."



Analysis

At the end of the novel, the main characters are able to come together and live in harmony in the home that Tara provides. This fact is important for two reasons. Newt, Petree, and Connor have all provided shelter for Tara in the past. Newt created the platform in the woods. Petree provided an escape roof after Tara's encounter with Jackie. He also kept them safe during a storm. Connor provided shelter for her during a storm as well. This was when she had the fight with her father. Now she is the one providing shelter. In doing so, she has surpassed her own goal which was merely to show that she could provide her own roof.

The second point of significance is that everyone is at peace as they have all completed their own journeys and achieved their respective channel markers. Connor has acted, Newt has gotten his girlfriend there and has found a boat for them, and Petree has found a buyer (Newt) for his boat.

It is ironic that after all that she has gone through to get the tug, and the threat that the harbormaster will sink it if she does not get the engine running, it finally does sink in the end partly due to her own error. "Right then she understood what had happened. The end of the hundred-foot hose they had used to pump out the bilge had been left in the ocean. After the bilge level dropped she had unplugged the pump. Overnight the hose had back-siphoned, gulping ocean, flooding her boat as they slept. (353)

Yet, it does not really matter as it does not really matter that newt lost his eye. She has already accomplished her goal. She has surpassed her original goal of proving that she can provide a roof for herself. She can now provide a roof and nourishment, from the basil, for others. The key point in her story is that she got her channel marker and she got the engine running and even though it was a short time, she provided a community for others instead of having to rely on them to provide a community for her.

In a way, the lost of the boat is something that has to happen so that she can complete her journey and go back home to deal with her relationship with her father. The harbormaster had already threatened to sink it, so except for the fact that whoever raises it will own it, no one is going to cause her problems because it is at the bottom of the ocean. Now, she simply has a new challenge.

In addition, when the boat sinks, so does the representation of her last idol - the medallion that her mother gave her and she always wore. It is fitting that she no longer has it, because she no longer needs it. She has her own identity now and she no longer needs to rely on trying to imitate idols.

Discussion Question 1

Tara realizes that Connor is the man for her, but still she wants him to get along with her friends in Alaska and to say the right thing. It is as if he has one last test to pass. Why is there one last test?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Tara feel comfortable saying that she is going home at the end of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think that Tara is going to go back to the island? Explain.

Vocabulary

dribbling, impress, crimson, amperes, accelerated, reflected, commotion, constricted, stationary, vibration



Characters

Tara Marconi

Tara is the novel's protagonist. Her father is Urbano. Her mother is Serena, and her boyfriend is Connor. Tara is eighteen when she goes to Alaska in search of her identity. Her mother has recently died, and her father believes that Tara is somehow responsible. More importantly, Tara believes that she is responsible, too. This leads to her Alaskan journey.

When Tara leaves for Alaska, she is carrying a secret with her that causes her to behave in ways that her now deceased mother did not understand. Tara's secret is that when she was sixteen, she had been raped. The rape heightened Tara's already rebellious, teenage nature and caused much of her behavior.

As Connor describes her, she is headstrong and independent. She is also spoiled, but not because she is not used to working hard. She is spoiled in the sense that she thinks that she can play with people's feelings and there will be no ramifications. Connor confronts her with this reality in one of his letters to her. She also learns this lesson when she looks for jobs. People hire her, but question her ability to work as a member of a team. The fact that she so quickly resorts to fighting to solve disputes makes her a liability.

Toward the end of the novel, however, she learns to appreciate others and how to work with people. She also learns to appreciate nature, thanks to her friendship with Betteryear who teaches her how to conquer nature in terms of living by its laws instead of trying to destroy it when it gets in one's way. She learns to value a dog that she disliked at the beginning of the novel and to be thankful for what nature offers man in terms of nourishment. She finds her identity and the meaning for her life.

Connor

Connor is Tara's boyfriend. The two have known each other since they were children, and Connor has always loved her. Tara, however, has drifted in and out of the relationship, and Connor has tolerated her behavior. Tara moves in with Connor when she has a fight with her father after her mother's death.

Connor is patient and keeps his emotions under check. When Tara leaves for Alaska after leading him on and then continues to play with his emotions, Connor stands up to her and tends to himself instead of catering to her whims. He goes on his own journey to find his own identity. Connor rejects his father's offer that would automatically make life easy for him. He rejects supporting Tara on her own terms. Instead, he works toward achieving his dream of becoming an actor. It is ironic that Tara's actions may have spurred him to take this step. In turn, his actions spur her to do what she must do to get the tug.



Even though Connor cuts Tara off for his own sake, he embraces Tara again once he understands why she has behaved the way she has during the last couple of years. He shows his true love for her by going to Alaska and being willing to follow her lead to see where they should start. When he asks her where they should start, he is literally asking about the work on the boat. However, his question also means where should they start in terms of their relationship. He is sensitive enough to her needs to make sure that she does not mind flying home on the anniversary of her mother's death.

Urbano Marconi

Urbano is Tara's father. At the beginning of the novel, readers realize that they do not have a good relationship with each other. He has called her a spoiled brat and blames her for her mother's death. He spurs her departure, first to Connor's place and then to Alaska.

He is tough, but he loved his wife and he loves Tara. Unaware of Tara being raped, he takes her to get boxing lessons. Once he finds out about the rape, he understands her actions and begs her to come back. He does not want to lose his daughter because he loves her.

Urbano is significant to the novel's themes as Tara rebels against him when she tries to find her own identity.

Newt

Tara meets Newt when she starts working for Fritz. Newt serves as her mentor. He says wise things, such as what everyone is trying to accomplish on the island. He supports Tara when she shows him the tug, telling her that it is her channel marker. As such, she must do whatever it takes to get it.

He "practices what he preaches" in working toward his own goal. He works hard, even after losing his eye, and finally gets the girl and the boat that was his channel marker. In getting his boat, though, he also makes sure that Tara reaches her dream. Newt negotiates with Petree to fix the engine on the tug. In return, Newt will buy Petree's boat.

Newt is both a team player and a leader.

Betteryear

Betteryear is a native American who represents the gentle, yet savage, mystery of nature.

When Tara first sees Betteryear in the library, she notices that he has a peaceful expression. When he starts talking to her, she remembers Newt saying that when it



comes to men in Alaska, “The odds are good, but the goods are odd” (63). Later, Fritz tells her about Betteryear's violent nature.

As Tara spends more time with Betteryear, she continues to observe him. When he sees that Tara has a gun to kill bears (her view of conquering nature), he shows her another use for the gun. It also involves killing, but it is killing in the natural hierarchy of nature. Instead of killing an animal when one has intruded on the animal's domain, one kills to obtain nourishment. He teaches Tara how to eat off the land and how to give thanks for what it provides.

While he teaches Tara how to be one with nature, Tara still has the image that he is odd in the back of her mind. She decides to cut ties with him. When he dies, his aura of mystery continues as one of his daughters mourns him and the other one cannot bring herself to say anything. It is at his funeral that Tara realizes that the island is really not her home. His memory reappears at the end of the novel when Tara and Connor see the northern lights while they are on the tug.

Fritz

Fritz is Tara's first boss when she arrives in Alaska. Her cousin worked for Fritz, so he is willing to give Tara a chance. However, when he first meets her, he doubts that she can pull her weight. Fritz tells Tara that he would understand if she turned around and got back on the ferry to go home. When she comes to work late on her first day, he lets her know that she has disappointed him. Nevertheless, he gives her another chance,

The incident on Tara's first day at work defines Fritz's character. He is tough but also caring. He picks Tara up from the ferry, gives her something to eat on her first night there, puts up with her attitude, and invites her to his house for holiday gatherings. He also does all he can do to help her when her boat sinks. He is one of the new friends she makes as she works through her issues.

Laney

Laney is the owner of the tugboat, Pacific Chief. Laney is carefree and in the midst of a divorce when Tara meets her. The divorce is the reason for Laney selling the tugboat.

Tara falls in love with the tugboat. Laney would like for Tara to have the boat. Thus, Laney reduces the price. However, while Laney roots for Tara, she does what is best for her. She must get the money she needs. So, when Tara does not have the money available to buy the boat, Laney tries to sell it to a group of musicians. Then, she offers it to Tara again when the sale falls through. When Tara buys the tugboat, Laney withholds the information that Tara has a short amount of time to get the boat moving.



Jackie

Jackie owns the first boat where Tara is a crew member. Newt had worked there before, but he had lost an eye trying to impress Jackie. She is tough and hard working. At first Tara idolizes Jackie, thinking that she would like to be like her. Tara envies that Jackie can get the men to do what she wants and they see her as the boss. Later, however, Jackie makes a sexual pass at Tara, and Tara punches her. Jackie does not hold Tara's actions against her - proof that she is a fair employer and respects Tara. She pays Tara her full wages, even though Tara leaves early. Jackie also comes to Tara's aid when the inspector tries to give her a hard time once when they try to get the tug to run.

Jackie is represented in several of the novel's themes. She serves as one of Tara's idols - a common component of a person's search for an adult identity. Jackie also shows how hard work merges genders. The men who work for her respect her. She is the only boss who makes a pass at Tara. The incident is interesting as one would more than likely expect a man to make a pass when working for long periods of time at sea with an attractive woman.

Petree

Tara meets Petree on the ferry when she first goes to the Rock.

She runs into him again on Jackie's boat and punches him because he gives her a hard time about the time she spends on the phone with her father. Later, after Jackie makes a pass at her, Tara leaves on his boat. Petree helps Tara get the engine started on the tug and sells his boat to Newt. Petree is tough and a hard worker. Tara gains his respect.

Acuzio

Acuzio is Tara's cousin. He is a significant, minor character. Without him, Tara would not have been employed at the hatchery. Acuzio supports his cousin when she needs help. He has worked in the hatchery ten years before Tara arrives, and Tara remembers him telling stories about the tough conditions. He gets her a job there when she asks him to do so. He also warns Frtiz that Tara has problems at home.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Ferry to the Island

Tara takes a ferry to the island. The ferry represents a journey, It is the vehicle that allows Tara to take her journey across life to explore and find what she needs to cross into adulthood.

Bears

The island is full of bears. These creatures represent several contrasting elements in the novel. Bears hibernate and then wake up, or come back to life. Rejuvenation takes place. This is what happens to Tara. She feels as if she cannot breathe when she decides to go to Alaska. The island rejuvenates her.

A bear also represents a warrior, which reflects Tara's boxing spirit. She fights to get what she wants.

Finally, the bear symbolizes the danger caused by the unconscious. Tara's bosses often refer to her as a liability. It is her unconsciousness that causes her to lash out. The same can be said for Conner's and Tara's fathers who are cruel and lash out at Tara due to the uncontrollable contents of their unconscious. They go berserk, a word that refers to a Nordic warrior who becomes like a bear.

The Island

Tara decides to go to an island. She is lonely and isolated there - elements symbolic of islands. However, it is here where she finds stability and undertakes the challenge of the undiscovered. It is here that she finds the ability to perceive the necessity of human connections. No one can live as an island, aloof and alone.

The Rock

The Rock is a nickname for the island. As a symbol, rocks are cold and hard. Symbolically, The Rock, or island, represents Tara's life prior to coming to Alaska. On a literal basis, Tara conquers her cold, hard life while in Alaska.

Rocks also represent permanence, stability, and reliability. These words do not describe Tara before her time on the island. She was so impulsive that she would go from place to place leaving people behind. She did not care about how her actions influenced them. After spending time on the Rock, she becomes more like a rock herself, stable and reliable.



The Medallion

The medallion that Tara wears is on a necklace. Necklaces are a binding symbol. The necklace with the medallion binds Tara to what she idolizes, her mother and her heritage. Once she comes into her own, the medallion sinks into the ocean.

Dogs

Dogs are symbols of loyalty and vigilance. Tara's dog acts as her protector, saving her from a bear and looking out for her when Connor comes to visit.

Tara's Hair

Hair symbolizes physical strength and vitality. When Tara looks at her hair after a few weeks on the islands, she notices that it has changed. It has grown coarser, representing her fertility.

The Book's Title

The book's title, *The Alaskan Laundry*, symbolizes washing away the dirty things that haunt people. This is analogous to washing dirty laundry. During the cycle people "come clean" meaning that they find the courage to face their problems or whatever it is that is holding them back.

Tara's Nylon Sleeping Bag on the Ferry

When Tara leaves for Alaska, she feels as if she is suffocating. On the ferry, the nylon walls of her sleeping bag expand around her. They symbolize lungs breathing new life into her.

The Forest

Tara and her friends try to live in the forest to save money. However the forest is dangerous. Outlaws live in the forest. It is also outside of civilization. The forest symbolizes something that is outside of reason and intellect. It proves to be overwhelming for Tara and her friends. Tara goes to stay with someone who understands and loves nature and has reason and intellect.



Settings

Connor's Room in Philadelphia

Connor's Room in Philadelphia is where Tara goes after the fight with her father. It is also the place she leaves after waking up one morning with the feeling that she cannot breathe. She decides to go. While staying with Connor, she has no goal to make life meaningful. One day is like the next, and she knows that she needs to change her life. She decides to go to Alaska.

The Hatchery

The hatchery is where Tara works when she first arrives in Alaska and where she first starts experiencing growth and finding her identity. It is where she meets and makes friends with Fritz and Newt.

The Processor

The processor is where Tara goes to make more money. The work is really hard, but it is from here that she gets her first job on the water when Newt suffers an eye injury.

Betteryear's House

Betteryear's house is the place where Tara learns, through Betteryear's lesson, how to turn what they get from nature into delicious food.

The Reiver

The Reiver is the crab boat where Tara does hard work. In turn, her hard work allows her to make enough money to buy the tugboat. Her work on The Reiver shows her strength and tenacity. For her, this is the gender-equalizing job.

The Tug

The tug is Tara's channel marker and proof that she can provide a roof for herself.



Themes and Motifs

Young adults who are searching for their identity are often rebellious.

An incident that generates a change in a young adult's perception of life as they know it often thrusts the individual into a search for an adult identity. Demonstrating the rebellion occurs in two ways. The young person rebels against authority figures, such as their parents, or they identify with idols. Tara does both of these things.

When readers first meet Tara, they realize that she is searching for her identity. She feels as if she is no one and is dying as the person she is or thought herself to be. One day, she wakes up feeling as if she is suffocating. "One day in early August, while Connor was at his job bricklaying, she woke up barely able to catch her breath" (9). This experience jumpstarts her journey. She has no identity when she is on the ferry. It is as if she is dead, only existing in the form of a ghost. "Since boarding the ferry she had spoken to no one, feeling like a ghost among the passengers" (2). She feels as if she does not have a home.

She hopes, however that her journey will give her the identity that she is searching for. "This year would be a fist to knock her open, a right cross to shake loose the grime and sadness" (2). This is her plan. She is "homeless with a plan" (2).

Her identity is something that she is going to have to fight for. The narrator says that "Standing in the middle of the room, listening to the rush of water, she decided her time on this Rock would be a boxing match" (27).

Even though readers know that she is searching for her identity, they do not know what has caused her perception of life as she once knew it to change. Later, in the novel, they discover that a boy raped her when she was 16 years old and that her mother, whom she was close to, has not only died, but that she feels as if she has contributed to her death, as does her father.

Tara manifests her search in two ways. One is by rebelling against authority. Both her mother and her father feel as if they are losing her. Tara overhears a conversation between her mother and father in which her mother says that she is feeling that she is losing her. When her father tries to find confirm what happened to Tara when she was sixteen, Tara will not tell him. He begs her not to leave him. Even before then, he had taken her to boxing lessons because he did not know what else to do with a teenager who would not talk. Tara's rebellion plays a role in her mother's death, as Tara sleeps instead of going to her parent's house. Her father says that Tara's mother was out looking for her when she died.



Tara's rebellious attitude continues on the island. She vows to prove all of her bosses wrong and acts as if she knows better than they. She physically fights with people, and she hangs up on her father.

Tara also has idols. Even though she does not get along with her father, she tries to imitate the way he stares people down to show that she is strong and in control. She often refers to her mother and her Italian heritage and is quick to tell people that she is Italian. She looks up to Jackie at the beginning of their trip. She also admires Laney.

As Tara gains her identity, she grows softer, as Connor tells her in a letter. She learns not to always fight, and gains friends. As Newt says, she like everyone else there is in the Alaskan laundry. "If you do it right, you get all that dirt washed out, then turn around and start making peace with the other shit. Maybe even make a few friends along the way" (171).

She also no longer needs her idols as she grows. She begins to see flaws in Jackie and Laney and the medallion that she held close to her that reminded her of her mother sinks. It is okay that this happens now, though. She does not have to get her sense of herself through others.

In order to grow, an individual needs the courage to confront the source of pain.

One of the major themes found in coming of age novels, such as *The Alaska Laundry*, is that personal growth requires courage to stand up to whatever causes pain to oneself or another. However, it is important to clearly define the source of pain before trying to confront it.

Tara goes to Alaska determined to show that she has the courage to face hard work and the tough environmental conditions on The Rock. She thinks that this is what she needs to do to show people that she is not spoiled. She also thinks that she needs to show people that she does not have to depend on other to have a roof over her head. "A year. Time enough to prove to her father, to anyone who doubted her, that she didn't need another person's roof" (19).

Tara works hard. She works hard in the bakery. She works hard to become a good boxer, and she works hard on the boats. However, she is spoiled because she thinks that she can do whatever she wants or treat people however she wants to treat them. She does not see that her behavior affects others. Connor tells her what she needs to do in one of his early letters to her.

"You hurt people by not having the courage or even taking the time to figure out how you feel. You're so fierce and impulsive and you expect the world to just heal itself behind you. But that's not how it works" (33).



Tara needs to find the courage to stand up to her pain so that she can have the courage to figure out how she feels and share it with those who love her. Connor addresses this as well. "...but in what he did thrusting you into the world. Maybe it will shake you free of whatever weight you carry (I wish I knew) that causes you to hurt others so badly" (33).

Once Tara admits that her pain is coming from being a sixteen-year-old victim of rape and she finds the courage to open up about it, she begins to move forward in her relationship with her father and with Connor. Her father is anxious to talk to her. He even tries to follow her location on the map. Connor writes her and signs the letter using the word "Love" in the closing.

Tara comes to terms confronts the source of her pain when she is on Jackie's boat. Afterward, the narrator states that, "It felt as if she were coming up from the underworld" (230). This feeling was not just due to her experience with Jackie or her work on the boat. It was because the dirt has been washed out, her facing her pain, and now she is beginning to make peace with "all the other shit" (171).

Setting goals and marking achievement make life meaningful.

Setting goals and marking achievement make life meaningful. Newt tells this to Tara when he says, "Each one of us here on this island, we got this one little thing holding us back from everything we ever wanted. And it's our job - and it ain't no small thing- to find our channel marker." (40) Readers see how achieving dreams makes the lives of Tara, Newt, and Connor meaningful.

Tara's dream is have her own place. She does not want to have to depend on others for a place to live. Even though she knows this when she first arrives in Alaska, she does not have a channel marker. A channel marker is something concrete to strive for that represents accomplishing a dream. Thus, when she first arrives, one day on the island is like the next. After her first three weeks, she tries to determine what she has accomplished while being on the island and concludes that she had only organized the warehouse. She was not even sleeping well.

Life begins to change for her when she decides that she wants the tugboat. The tug is her channel marker. Newt realizes that she has found her channel marker when she takes him to the tug and he sees her determination to buy it in spite of all of its problems. "Well, looks like you got your channel marker" (95). Once she has this, she moves forward with purpose and a plan to achieve it. She leaves the job that she has become comfortable with to work at the processor to make more money. She keeps tabs on the money she makes and does not give up when Faulke and Thomas steal her funds.

Tara needs to secure her own home to prove that she is "somebody." Even though she reconciles with her father and Connor, she cannot leave until she gets the tug running. If



she does not get the boat running, the harbormaster will sink it. She still will not have her own home.

It may seem ironic that it sinks right as she gets it running, but in reality it is not. By buying it and getting it running, she has reached her goal. Even though it was only for a short amount of time, she has lived under her own roof and even provided a roof for others. Reaching her goal allows her to feel as if she is “somebody” and now she can give herself to Connor and her father as a complete person. In essence, this was the last thing she needed to do, as she continued to say, before she could go home.

Newt has his own dream. “I got this true love named Plume...My future goal is to buy a boat for the two of us. Have her move up here with me” (40). He searches for the right boat. In the meantime he works to be able to buy a boat and to bring Plume over to Alaska.

Connor’s dream is to act. It is not until he finally takes a job in the theater that his life starts moving. He gets the lead role in a play. Once he has achieved his dream, he is able to give his fully embrace Tara and her dreams by going to Alaska to find and help her.

The novel also makes the point that it is not easy to achieve dreams. There will be barriers along the way. The barriers may be external. The barrier is financial in the case of both Tara’s and Newt’s. Newt also has the problem that his girlfriend is pregnant with another man’s child. They may be internal as in Conner’s case. Maybe it is one’s own self-confidence that gets in the way. However, as Laney says, “If it’s in your blood you’ll find a way” (83).

Man should respect nature for its power and its beauty.

Harsh natural environments have both physical and mental effects on mankind. In some places, like on The Rock, the humans who manage to survive it ultimately try to make their mark on it or control it in some way, even though they claim to love nature. Man’s dominance, though, is at times met by the strong force of nature showing man that nature has the ultimate power.

When Tara first hears about the island, stories about bear that try to “chew your brain” (pp.10) feature prominently in the description. When she arrives Fritz points out bear territory to her. He tells her that there, one finds “more bears than people” (5). He carries a gun for protection. Still, she later wanders in the woods without protection. Her dog saves her. This is the same animal that she does not respect for when she first sees it. “She had inherited her mother’s dislike of the creatures, and generally crossed to the other side of the street when she saw one approaching. They were dirty, chewed through plastic coverings on the couch, and kept people up with their barking” (14). It takes time for her to appreciate the dog’s value.



She is not the only one who does not understand animals. Frauke tries to treat her dog like a human being by not feeding it meat. Newt realizes the danger of treating a dog like a person and says, "Woman seems to have forgotten where the dog is in the food chain. Let's hope the woods don't remind her" (144). Later when another dog comes with a bone, Frauke's dog attacks it, killing it in the process. Even later, a bear kills her dog. This event is in contrast to Tara's dog, who people take care of, but still treat a dog. In nature, it does its job and protects Tara. Frauke has treated her dog like a person for too long. It has retained enough of its natural instincts to attack so that it can eat, but not enough to make the bear stand down.

Betteryear gives Tara an even better lesson of how man and nature should interact. Tara gets a gun to conquer nature by being ready to kill a bear if one attacks her. When he suggests using it to hunt deer she recoils. From her perspective, dogs are dirty, bears kill, and deer are cute. Betteryear shows her that deer provide man nourishment. That is their role in nature's hierarchy. When they eat it, they are receiving nourishment from the land, as it should be. He becomes her teacher, showing her that the way to conquer nature is to learn how to live with it, not destroy it. His views of what is happening on the Rock in the name of progress directly contrast Teague's views. The sight of the demolished trees hurts and disgusts Betteryear while it makes Teague happy.

Nature shows its force and its beauty several times throughout the novel. There is a terrible storm at sea. The ocean swallows the tug. Towards the end of the novel, Tara and Connor see the northern lights.

Hard work is a gender equalizer

Tara notes that the women that she has met since being in Alaska are different than those that she has known before. "Tending bar, slinging coffee, or gaffing fish, women in Alaska carried themselves differently from women down south. As if each one of them had passed through a ring of fire before coming out on the other side, flame-tested and hardened. The slag of the past burned off, cooling in the salt arid charting their own course" (168). Tara's observation supports her mother's words. When her cousin tells her that Alaska is a man's world, "shows you what you're made of" (9) her mother tells her the opposite. "Your cousin, he don't know nothing" (9). she says and then goes on to explain that it is the work, not your gender that makes you strong.

When Tara goes to Alaska, she knows that people will think that she cannot do the jobs at hand because she is a woman. In her case, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy at times because she is so defensive and so eager to prove herself. People begin to ask her questions when they take her on about her past performance, not because she is a woman, but because she has gotten into fights with people who intentionally goad her. In reality though, just like in any group, a new guy may have received the same type of treatment.



In addition, it is interesting that the only boss who really approaches her in a sexual manner is a woman - Jackie, thus showing that she can not only run the boat like man, but also commits sexual harassment - something usually associated with the way men treat women.

In the end, Tara tries to think more like an intelligent person who considers the ramifications of her actions and holds off on punching a crew member. She also does not insult her boss, even though she really wants to insult him.

Hard work is an equalizer because people respect you and you start thinking as a person, not specifically as a female or a male.



Styles

Point of View

The narrative is written from a limited, third-person point of view. Tara is the narrator, and readers learn about other characters through her opinions of them and through their own words through letters and dialogue.

Telling the story from Tara's limited point of view works and makes sense. This is the story of Tara's coming of age. In order for readers to see her progression from adolescent to adult, it is useful for readers to know her state of mind as she passes through different experiences. Tara's voice is strong and clear in the narration. It demonstrates her anger toward the world.

At times, however, the narrative presents a juxtaposition between what Tara thinks and what other characters say. The most interesting contrast appears in Connor's letters. It is through them that readers learn Tara's real character and how she has treated people in the past. His letters also document her growth. Other characters, such as Newt, guide her through their words.

The combination of the limited third-person point of view and the author's choice for characters to speak through letters and dialogue eliminates questions about unreliability as readers get a 360 degree view of Tara's character.

Language and Meaning

Life on the island is fishing and much of the vocabulary represents this reality. Specific words appear which represent what one would find in a hatchery, processor, or on a fishing boat. This choice is fitting as it adds an element of reality to the setting. None of the words, however, are so technical that readers have problems following the action.

Otherwise, the vocabulary is not complicated and focuses heavily on adjectives that depict the scene and emotion of the moment. This use of language also helps set the scenery both of the landscape and of Tara's emotions.

There are also a few words associated with the language of the island's native people. Once again, however, the narration uses them in a context that allows readers to understand the meaning of the words. Using these words reminds readers of the natural forces on the island.

Structure

Tara's current experiences dominate the majority of the novel. There are flashbacks, however, which help explain the pain she is going through and shows that there were elements of her life that she appreciated before leaving for Alaska.

In addition, the author divides the novel into many short chapters during which years pass. This represents the fleeting nature of time and shows that real relationships last. People will wait for people to do what they need to do to build a close relationship. It also shows that building new relationships also takes time.

A final point about the multiple chapters spanning years is that it may take time for people to find their channel marker or what makes life meaningful for them. It may also take time to achieve a goal. Nevertheless, if an individual's heart is in achieving a particular goal, they will never give up. Eventually, they will succeed.



Quotes

Since boarding the ferry she had spoken to no one, feeling like a ghost among the passengers

-- Narrator in the Head of Tara (chapter 2 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote shows that Tara does not feel as if she has an identity. She feels like a ghost who cannot be seen or heard. The quote supports the theme of searching for one's identity.

This year would be a fist to knock her open, a right cross to shake loose the grime and sadness.

-- Narrator in the Mind of Tara (chapter 1 paragraph 20)

Importance: This quote support the symbol of the Alaskan laundry and thus gives meaning to the title. Being there will shake loose the grime and the sadness just as washing machines shake away the grime from the laundry.

One day in early August, while Connor was at his job bricklaying, she woke up barely able to catch her breath.

-- Narrator in the Mind of Tara (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: This event causes her to take action. It symbolizes the fact that she is dying where she is now. She needs new life breathed into her and she needs to explore in order for this to happen. Her feeling here is in direct contrast to her feeling on the ferry where her sleeping bag breathes like a lung.

She had inherited her mother's dislike of the creatures, and generally crossed to the other side of the street when she saw one approaching. They were dirty, chewed through the plastic coverings of the couch, and kept people up with their barking.

-- Narrator in the Mind of Tara (chapter 3 paragraph 12)

Importance: This quote shows the extent of how disconnected Tara is with nature at the beginning of the novel. It is in direct contrast to how she views dogs as she grows. Later she experiences what they really are (loyal guardians) and learns to appreciate them so much that she adopts one.

Standing in the middle of the room, listening to the rush of water, she decided her time on this Rock would be a boxing match."

-- The narrator in the mind of Tara (chapter 5 paragraph 11)

Importance: Tara wants to conquer nature and prove that she can make it on her own. When she arrives on the island, this is what she sees as her fight. In reality, instead of fighting, she needs to summon the courage to face and deal with her pain. Ironically, doing this does not involve fighting. In fact, to do so, she needs to do the opposite. She



needs to let go and connect with others. When she does fight, the battle will be the one needed to obtain her channel marker.

She couldn't see it yet, but she could already feel it, the few times when she stopped fighting and allowed herself to be guided by this new force."

-- The Narrator in the mind of Tara (chapter 6 paragraph 56)

Importance: This quote supports the notion that Tara needs to start fighting the forces of nature, and everyone around her, in order to grow.

Each one of us here on this island, we got this one little thing holding us back from everything we ever wanted. And it's our job - and it ain't no small thing- to find our channel marker."

-- Newt (chapter 7 paragraph 42)

Importance: This quote supports the theme that one needs measurable goals to make life meaningful.

If it's in your blood you'll find a way."

-- Laney (chapter 16 paragraph 23)

Importance: This quote refers to obtaining one's channel marker. Discovering what it is does not mean that it will be easy to obtain. There may be barriers in your way, but if you are meant to have it, you will find a way to overcome them.

But basically it is that unless you try something higher, then you will always stay lower."

-- Frauke (chapter 41 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote supports the theme of the importance of having goals and suggests that these goals need to be high ones if one wants to move forward.

Woman seems to have forgotten where the dog is in the food chain. Let's hope the wood's don't remind her.

-- Newt (chapter 41)

Importance: This quote foreshadows that something is going to happen that reminds everyone of a dog's true nature. Soon afterwards, the dog kills another one that has a bone. It also highlights the theme that man should respect nature and that nature "bites back" when man pushes it too far,

As if each one of them had passed through a ring of fire before coming out on the other side, flame-tested and hardened. The stag of the past burned off, cooling in the salt and charting their own course.

-- The Narrator in the mind of Tars (chapter 48 paragraph 15)

Importance: According to Tara's mother, hard work makes one strong. Gender does not matter. This quote supports the theme that hard work is a gender equalizer. The women

in Alaska work hard and their hard work has made them strong and ready to go for their dreams.

So, we're all tumbling in the Alaskan laundry out here. If you do it right, you get all that dirt washed out, then turn around and start making peace with the other shit. Maybe even make a few friends along the way.

-- Newt (chapter 50 paragraph 24)

Importance: This quote serves to explain the novel's title and supports the theme that in order to grow, one must learn how to find the courage to stand up to what is causing them pain. Once they do that, they can deal with other issues in their life and move on.