

Crow Lake Study Guide

Crow Lake by Mary Lawson

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Plot Summary

Crow Lake is a novel by Canadian writer Mary Lawson. This novel is about the disappointments between siblings that can result in lifelong misunderstandings. Kate Morrison is only seven years old when her parents are killed in a car accident and her older brother Luke decides to take custody of the younger girls so that his brother, Matt, can attend university. Matt is the first in their family to go to college. However, a one-time mistake leads to circumstances that end Matt's hopes of higher education. Crow Lake is a novel of catastrophe overshadowed by tragedy that changes destiny. It is a novel of sibling love that overshadows even reality.

Kate Morrison recalls the last family dinner she had with her parents. Her brother Luke has just been accepted to teacher's college and is the first Morrison in the family to ever go to college. Kate's parents decide that he will need a suitcase. The following day, as soon as the boys get off work at a nearby farm, the parents go into town to buy the suitcase. The kids spend the day at the lake behind their house. On their way back to the house, the kids find the local sheriff, preacher, and doctor waiting for them. A truck had lost its brakes and killed their parents.

The first few days the children manage with the help of neighbors who bring meals and things they think the kids will need. After the funeral, their father's sister comes to stay until permanent plans can be made for the children. After meeting with the family lawyer, the aunt makes the decision to use what is left of the family money to send Luke to teacher's college. The other children will be divided up among family farms. Katie takes this news hard, afraid that she will never see her beloved brother, Matt, again.

During the long summer that the children spend waiting for the time to leave, the local teacher comes to see their aunt. Katie overhears the teacher asking the aunt if it would be possible to allow Matt to finish his education. Matt is highly intelligent and could probably get scholarships to go to university. The aunt refuses however, claiming there is not enough money to send both Luke and Matt to school. That night, Katie tells Matt and Luke what she heard. Matt tells her not to worry about it and that everything will be fine.

The following morning Luke is gone before everyone wakes. Luke is gone all day, missing work and caring for baby Bo. When he finally returns home, Matt is angry with Luke. This anger only increases when Matt learns that Luke has decided that instead of going to teacher's college, he will remain at home to care for the girls. This will allow Matt to finish his thirteenth year and go to university. The aunt and Matt both object but Luke sticks to his guns and insists that this is the only solution that makes sense.

The aunt leaves a month or so later. The children struggle on their own. At first Luke is able to get a job in the afternoons that allow him to be home for Bo and Katie. However, this job ends when the vindictive daughter of his bosses spreads false rumors about Luke. The family struggles for a time as the money becomes scarce and there are no



prospects for a new job. Luke works temporary jobs and finally allows neighbors to sit with the girls, slowly finding a way to survive.

Matt continues to work on a neighbor's farm during the summer, fall, and spring months. One afternoon, the neighbor's son walks away after a fight with his father and disappears. No one in the area is too concerned however, because this family has a history of children running away. This situation causes Matt to be thrown together with the farmer's daughter, Marie. That summer Katie overhears a fight between Matt and Marie. Katie learns that Marie is pregnant and terrified of what her father will do about it.

That same night, Katie comes to the Morrison house hysterical. Marie believes her father has learned about her pregnancy and that he will kill her just like he killed her brother. Luke and Matt call the police. Marie tells the police how she saw her father kill her brother. The police go to arrest Marie's father, but he commits suicide before they can.

Matt marries Marie and together they take over Marie's family farm. Katie grows up to go to university and live the life that she believes Matt should have lived. This leaves Katie filled with guilt that nearly ruins her relationship not only with Matt but also with her new lover. Katie goes home for her nephew's eighteenth birthday party and is confronted by Marie. Marie wants Katie to know that the only person who regrets Matt's past is Katie. Katie finally understands that Matt made the decisions that were ultimately right for his life.



Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2

Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Summary

Mary Lawson is a Canadian living in England. Ms. Lawson brings a unique perspective of the wilds of Canada to her writing, creating a setting that is unusual and so vividly drawn that the setting almost becomes another character in the novel.

In the prologue, Katie tells the reader about her Grandmother Morrison who had a book rest fixed to her spinning wheel so she could read as she worked. It was Grandmother Morrison who recognized the importance of education and she urged each one of her children to finish school. Based on a portrait that always hung in her parents' bedroom, Katie believes that Matt is the one who most resembles Grandmother Morrison of herself and three siblings.

In Chapter 1, Katie recalls the last dinner her entire family spent together. Luke announces that he was accepted to teacher's college even though he is the least scholarly of Katie's two elder brothers. Luke would be the first of the Morrison family members to go to college. Katie recalls how happy her parents were even though they did not demonstrate this emotion. The Morrises had an unwritten rule restricting the display of emotions. They began immediately to discuss practical things such as what Luke would need for school even though there were several months before he would be leaving. The parents decide that Luke will need a suitcase and so they go into the city the following day. After Luke and Matt come home from working on the Pye farm, their parents leave seven-year-old Katie and eighteen-month-old Bo with them. They spend the afternoon swimming at the lake. On their way back to the house they find the sheriff, the preacher, and the local doctor waiting for them.

In Chapter 2, Katie finds herself thinking about the past after opening an invitation to her nephew Simon's eighteenth birthday party. Matt added a message at the bottom, urging her to come and bring a friend. When Katie sees this, she immediately thinks about her current boyfriend Daniel. Katie has shared very little of her family history with Daniel and it has caused some friction between them. Katie thinks again about her grandmother, blaming her for the things that happened between her and Matt and that caused her to be so afraid to share her family history with a man she loves. Katie reflects on the days following her parents' death. The community comes together to take care of them, bringing them food and other things they feel that they need. Phone calls come from the Morrison family members still in Gaspé, but it is obvious that they are uncomfortable with the situation. The funeral takes place in the church yard with all the kids dressed in black even though the clothing is heavy, small, and uncomfortable. The children stoically accept condolences from everyone in the community, showing brave faces in their new reality.



Part 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The early pages of this novel set up the conflict that will drive the story. There are several conflicts driving the plot, one more obvious than the others. The most obvious conflict in this novel is the death of Katie's parents. Katie's parents leave behind two nearly grown sons and two young daughters. After their death, the older boys quickly step up to care for the girls but the reader wonders how long this will last. The boys are not prepared to be thrust into the role of parent at such a young age. Therefore it seems logical that someone will most likely step in to take charge.

The second conflict introduced in these chapters is a little more subtle than the death of Katie's parents. This conflict begins with the description of Grandmother Morrison's desire that all her children be educated. This information seems noble, but incidental at this point in the novel. However, as Kate flashes back from the present to the past, this desire grows in value as the reader realizes that there is tension between Katie and Matt for some unknown reason.

The final conflict in this novel is not fully introduced in these chapters but is hinted at. The third conflict has to do with the neighboring family, the Pyes. The Pyes own a farm near the Morrison home. The Morrison boys work on this farm during the summer. This is introduced as an incidental bit of information in these chapters, but will develop into a life-changing climax as the novel continues to progress.



Part 1: Chapters 3-7

Part 1: Chapters 3-7 Summary

In Chapter 3, Katie recalls meeting Daniel and the many times he asked about her family. Katie finds herself telling Daniel the history of the area and of the three families who first settled around Crow Lake, rather than her own history. They were Frank Janie, Stanley Vernon, and Jackson Pye. As she tells Daniel the story of the area, Katie recalls a story that Miss Vernon, the daughter of one of the original founding families, had told her about how one of the sons of Jackson Pye running away after falling in the frozen lake out of fear of his father's punishment.

In Chapter 4, Mr. Morrison's sister Annie comes to stay with the children. Annie is unmarried and lives with her father and brothers, caring for them so they can run the family farm. When Annie arrives, she is thrilled to meet her four nieces and nephews. At first it is nice for Katie to have Aunt Annie around, to care for them, and cook their food. However, Katie is aware of the tension Annie's presence causes Luke and Matt. One afternoon Matt takes Katie and Bo to the ponds where he has often taken Katie to watch the wildlife. On their way home, they run into Marie Pye, the daughter of the neighboring farmer. Katie becomes annoyed when Matt spends more time than she thinks is proper talking to Marie. When they get back to the house, Aunt Annie and Luke have returned from talking to the family lawyer. There is less money than they thought there would be and they decided that Luke will go to teacher's college with the remaining money, Matt will go to work on a family farm, and the girls will go to a separate farm.

In Chapter 5, Matt tries to reassure Katie by showing her how close the farm he will be on is only a hundred miles from the farm where she will live. Katie is not reassured however. A few days later, Miss Carrington, the teacher at the local school, comes by to speak to Aunt Annie. Katie is dispatched into the house to get tea for the guest. As Katie is returning, she overhears Matt's name. Katie is then sent down to the lake to finish trimming beans for supper. Katie drops a knife and while she is looking for it, she overhears Miss Carrington ask her aunt to allow Matt to remain in school. Matt is extremely intelligent and should be able to get scholarships for the university. However, Aunt Annie refuses because of the lack of money.

In Chapter 6, Katie tells Matt and Luke about the conversation she overheard between Aunt Annie and Miss Carrington. They both appear upset but not for reasons Katie can understand. The following day Luke disappears and misses work. Matt has to go to work at the Pye farm alone the following day.

In Chapter 7, Luke finally returns. Matt attacks Luke, accusing him of skipping out on all the work, leaving him to take up the slack. Luke sits down to supper and calmly explains that he has gone to see the family lawyer. Luke has decided that instead of going to teacher's college, he will remain in Crow Lake to care for the girls so that Matt can go to



university. Aunt Annie and Matt both argue, but then Katie begins to scream, begging them to allow Luke his decision.

Part 1: Chapters 3-7 Analysis

In these chapters the saga of the Morrison children continues. An aunt comes and makes arrangements for the money left from the family bank account will be used to send Luke to school. The other children will be separated. This is a sad situation but a necessary one. The Morrison family is poor and has no means to care for their own children, let alone the four orphaned children of a brother who left home and never returned. The reader learns at this point that Mr. Morrison was sending money home to the family to help, which is why he leaves his children with so little. Mr. Morrison was clearly a responsible and caring man. It remains to be seen the character his children will show.

The author has introduced Marie Pye into the story at this point. Marie is the daughter of the neighboring farmer for whom Matt and Luke work. This introduction and Katie's hostility toward her suggests that she is someone of importance to Matt. Katie is very close to Matt at this point in her life and is jealous of anyone who takes his attention away. However, there seems to be extra hostility toward Marie even in the tone of the elder Katie who is telling this story, suggesting that Marie posed more of a threat to her relationship than the reader knows at this point. Also important to note at this point is the hint of domestic violence in the Pye family that Katie relates through the story Miss Vernon told her about one of Jackson Pye's sons.

Finally of importance in this set of chapters is Miss Carrington's request that Matt be allowed to finish school. This again touches on the education conflict introduced with the discussion of Grandmother Morrison and expands it into the developing plot, perhaps hinting at the nature of Katie's falling out with her brother in the future. After all, it is Katie who tells Luke about Miss Carrington's discussion with Aunt Annie and Katie who begs Aunt Annie and Matt to allow Luke to have his way. This is a lot of decision and guilt to place on one child.



Part 2: Chapters 8-10

Part 2: Chapters 8-10 Summary

In Chapter 8, Katie has trouble sleeping after receiving Simon's invitation. The following day, Katie is working on grading lab reports when Daniel arrives for a planned outing. Daniel finds the picture of Simon that came with the invitation, leaving Katie to wonder all day if he found the invitation as well. Daniel had introduced Katie to his family from the beginning of their relationship, always open with her about everything even though his parents are often difficult to get along with. Katie recalls an argument that she and Daniel had in which he accused her of not being serious about their relationship because of her reluctance to share her past with him.

In Chapter 9, Aunt Annie remains with the children until the middle of September, leaving them with a well-scrubbed house. That night as Matt and Katie are doing the dishes, Luke puts Bo to bed. Matt notices Laurie Pye watching them outside the house. Laurie, Calvin Pye's only son, runs away when Matt goes to the door and calls out to him. They think nothing of the event at that time, but in hindsight Katie wonders if Laurie was trying to ask for help and if they should have taken the episode more seriously. A short time later Luke begins looking for work. Luke only wants to work late in the afternoon so that he can remain with the girls during the day, but this sets up a unique situation that makes finding a job even harder. Eventually Luke gets a job in the afternoons at the local store and continues to work weekends at the Pye farm.

In Chapter 10, Katie relates the story of the Pyes as she learned it while weeding Miss Vernon's garden in high school. Miss Vernon told Katie how each of Jackson Pye's sons left, one at a time, until finally only Henry and Art were left. Miss Vernon and her sister had their hearts set on marrying Henry and Art, of making a life together in the Pye farmhouse but that was not meant to be. When Henry proposed to Miss Vernon's sister, their father refused to allow her to marry him. Instead, Henry became fed up with his father's temper and left, leaving Art alone with the old man and his temper. Art would repeat the same mistakes that his father made, making them with his own sons until only Calvin was left. Art and Calvin would live alone together for nearly a dozen years, never talking to one another before Art finally passed away. Calvin married and now has three children, Marie, Laurie, and Rosie.

Part 2: Chapters 8-10 Analysis

In Chapter 8, Katie is worried that her boyfriend Daniel has found the invitation to Simon's birthday party. It is at this point in the novel that the reader learns how big an issue Katie's refusal to talk about her family and her past is between her and Daniel. The reader however, still does not understand what happened that would cause Katie to be so ashamed of the past.



When Katie returns to her narration about the past, she shares with the reader the story of how Luke struggled to find work because he felt it was important to be with the girls during the day. This shows the reader how noble and strong in character Luke was despite his previous typical teenage behavior. The reader worries that Luke does not fully understand what he has in store for his future but sees that he is fighting hard to be a good guardian to his younger sisters.

The story about the Pyes reveals some truths that the town of Crow Lake has clearly turned a blind eye to for many years. The Pye men have been abusive and so abusive that they have sent their children running for the hills. Calvin Pye lived with an abusive father for many years in order to inherit the farm on which he now lives with his three children. This story leaves the reader concerned for the Pye children and how this abuse might affect the struggling Morrison children.



Part 2: Chapters 11-12

Part 2: Chapters 11-12 Summary

In Chapter 11, adult Katie looks back on the past and wonders how things might have turned out differently if someone had done something about Calvin Pye. This takes Katie back into the past and she recalls a day in October when Miss Carrington walked home with her to speak with Luke. By then the house is a mess with Luke barely keeping up with the basic chores. Katie takes Bo into the house and feeds her a snack while the adults talk. Matt comes home shortly as Miss Carrington is leaving. Matt wants to know what she wanted and learns that she is worried about Katie's lack of participation in class. Matt insists there is nothing wrong with quiet women. Katie recalls a fight later that same year between Laurie Pye and a school bully. Katie remembers that Laurie beat the bully badly but seemed emotionally detached. Katie also recalls seeing odd marks on Laurie's body that day, something she never told anyone but now wonders if she should have.

In Chapter 12, Katie recalls the letters she often wrote to her Aunt Annie. As a child, she saw little of substance in these letters but as an adult, she sees that they must have been reassuring to her aunt. The Morrison family still accepts food and other items from neighbors. Matt begins to wonder what will happen when this stops and if they will be able to survive. Later Matt suggests to Katie that the neighbors keep bringing the food because Luke is good-looking. At this point Katie recalls one afternoon when Sally McLean, the daughter of Luke's bosses, comes by for a visit. Katie is sent inside with Bo, but she slips back outside and witnesses a scene between Luke and Sally that she did not understand at the time. Now Katie realizes it was Luke refusing Sally's sexual advances, leaving him in fear for his job.

Part 2: Chapters 11-12 Analysis

The community is still openly concerned for the Morrison children but Matt is tired of the charity. Matt suggests they learn to stand on their own but Luke finds the charity helpful and considerate. This argument illuminates two things in the Morrison household. First is the struggle for control between Matt and Luke. Only one family member can be in charge, but Matt continually argues with Luke's decisions. This suggests a conflict looming in the near future. The second is the budding sexuality of both Luke and Matt. Matt teases Luke but Luke has already found himself in one compromising position that could threaten his job. This foreshadows not only trouble for Luke, but the possibility of a similar fate for Matt.

Laurie Pye is in a fight at school. Laurie's behavior during and after the fight, plus bruises on his back, all point to trouble in Laurie's life. However, lost in the chaos of the moment, no one but Katie notices. Once again, adult Katie wonders what might have

been different had she told others what she noticed but she did not therefore the future continues to develop in a direction that is unavoidable.



Part 3: Chapters 13-15

Part 3: Chapters 13-15 Summary

In Chapter 13, Luke loses his job because of lies Sally tells her parents. This leaves the Morrison children with no income except what is left of their father's money. Back in the present, Katie spends the afternoon with Daniel, as well as dinner with him and his parents. Katie can see from Daniel's attitude that he has seen the invitation. Unwilling to lose her lover over something so trivial, Katie decides to invite him to the party with her.

In Chapter 14, Matt becomes deeply concerned about the lack of money in the household. One night shortly before Christmas, Matt and Luke argue about gifts they should buy for neighbors who have invited them to Christmas dinner. This argument reveals Matt's deep fears of the future. However, as hard as things are for the Morrison family that winter, Matt becomes convinced that things are even worse for the Pye children. Matt tells Luke that he believes Calvin beats his son and that someone should do something, but no one knows who that someone is.

In chapter 15, Luke has a meltdown after months of unemployment and difficulty potty training Bo. A short time later Matt and Luke begin to argue about money. Matt is concerned that Luke has not gotten a job yet and worried about the medical bills associated with a bout of the measles Bo recently suffered. During this fight, Matt announces that he has quit school and gotten a job in the city. Luke becomes enraged and the two boys begin to fight. The fight becomes physical and Luke throws Matt against the wall. Matt's shoulder is dislocated, requiring a visit from the doctor.

Part 3: Chapters 13-15 Analysis

In the present, Katie decides to invite Daniel to go to Simon's party with her out of a fear of losing the relationship. However, Katie is not happy with the decision and feels she was forced into it. At the same time, Katie struggles with turmoil in her present life just as she recalls struggles in her childhood where Luke loses his job and the family is left depending on the small amount of money their father left them. This causes tensions that already exist between Luke and Matt to explode. Matt is injured in a fight that seems to parallel the domestic violence going on in the Pye household. Matt is fine and Luke is sufficiently apologetic but the damage is already done. This leaves the reader fearful of what the future might hold for the Morrison family.



Part 4: Chapters 16-19

Part 4: Chapters 16-19 Summary

In Chapter 16, Katie recalls her first few years at university. Katie is unable to go home often because of money issues, so she pushes thoughts of her siblings to the back of her mind. Katie focuses on her studies, choosing to become an invertebrate ecologist studying the effects of pollution on the population of freshwater ponds. Katie gives Matt partial credit for this decision because of all those trips to the ponds he took her on. However, Katie thinks she left her family behind her until she met Daniel and he began asking her about the past. Now, in the present, Katie struggles to find the perfect present for Simon, leading once again to tension between her and Daniel when Daniel fails to understand the importance of this gift. Katie finally decides to give Simon, a future physics student at the university, an open account at the university bookstore and a small gyroscope. Later that week, as though revealing Katie's failure as a professor, she stops in the middle of a lecture when a strong memory of Matt pops into her mind. Rather than continue, Katie walks out of the classroom, convinced that Matt would be better suited to this profession than she.

In Chapter 17, Matt returns to school, working hard to do well on his testing to get the scholarships he needs to go to university. Luke gets a job as a janitor at the school house, as well as working with a local farmer clearing some land. Luke also has finally allowed the girls to spend time with a neighbor twice a week while he works. Luke and Matt are getting along better since Dr. Christopherson came over and warned them not to allow their tempers to lead to physical violence again if they wanted to continue caring for the girls on their own.

In Chapter 18, Matt comes home one afternoon in April after working at the Pyes and announces that Laurie has run away. Matt says that Laurie and Calvin Pye argued and Laurie just walked away. Everyone assumes Laurie will come back when he realizes he has nowhere to go but no one looks for him when he does not because everyone in town is used to the Pye boys disappearing.

In Chapter 19, spring comes to Crow Lake. Katie looks back and thinks of how that was her last spring with Matt, although she did not know it at the time. Matt still works at the Pyes and as a result of Laurie's disappearance is spending a lot of time with Marie Pye. Rosie Pye returns to school, quiet and sullen as always. Katie turns eight. On her birthday Luke and Matt are horrified to realize they have forgotten Bo's birthday so Mrs. Stanovich makes them both a cake. Summer arrives and Katie asks Matt to take her to the ponds, but he is often too busy. Then Katie realizes he is leaving for university soon. Matt has a plan. Matt tells Katie that when he graduates from university and starts making a lot of money, he will send Luke and Katie to school. Then Katie will send Bo to school.



Part 4: Chapters 16-19 Analysis

In this part of the novel, Katie begins to focus on Simon's upcoming party causes her to begin having trouble not only in her private life, but in her professional life as well. Katie's meltdown in the classroom finally begins to reveal to the reader what happened between Katie and Matt. For some reason, still unknown to the reader, Matt was unable to attend university and become the zoologist he always wanted to be. However, Katie is living his dreams. This causes Katie to suffer under a great deal of guilt and pressure in her professional life.

In the past, things began to come together for the Morrison siblings. Luke finds a job and Matt passes his exams, allowing him the scholarships he needs to go to school. Matt also has a plan that will allow all the Morrison siblings to go to university someday. It is an optimistic time for this family who has suffered so much tragedy and struggle. However, there is trouble brewing on the Pye farm, giving a contrast to the happiness in the Morrison house. This trouble at the Pye farm is overshadowing the Morrises and threatens their success. However, the reader is unsure how the Pyes will affect the Morrises except in the hinted at relationship between Matt and Marie.



Part 5: Chapters 20-22

Part 5: Chapters 20-22 Summary

In Chapter 20, Daniel and Katie are on the road, heading toward Crow Lake. Daniel insists that he is excited to see the deep country, but the deeper they go, the more nervous he becomes. On the drive, Katie thinks back to the previous Tuesday as she sat alone in her office and was visited by a student. The student lived on a farm like Katie and has decided to quit school because her family feels she is pulling away and her boyfriend is threatening to end their relationship if she did not come home. Katie feels for her, in fact can easily identify with her, but feels it is not her place to encourage her to stay. Instead, Katie asks her to talk to the school counselors before making a decision. Katie thinks of Matt when the student leaves, wondering how things had become so unbridgeable between them.

In Chapter 21, Daniel asks Katie about her family. Katie tells him that Bo is a cook in Struan, having chosen not to go to school. Luke still lives in the family house, making furniture and continuing to work as a janitor at the schoolhouse. Talking about Luke makes Katie think of the rumors that had been spread when she was still little. Rumors floated that Luke was homosexual. Katie believes that a bitter Sally McLean began the rumors. Daniel reflects on Luke's choice to remain single and wonders aloud if it has something to do with the self-denial he was forced to embrace for Katie and Bo's sake. As Daniel thinks of Luke's monkish lifestyle, Katie reflects on Matt's choices, particularly his decision to offer Marie Pye comfort in a time of escalating abuse.

In Chapter 22, Katie recalls her anger with Matt for not spending time with her that final summer. As a result of this anger, Katie takes herself to the ponds one afternoon. While walking among the deep ponds, Katie stumbles on Matt and Marie having an argument. When Marie notices Katie, she panics. Matt makes Katie promise she will not tell anyone about seeing him and Marie together that day. In September, a few weeks before Matt is due to leave for university, Marie shows up at the Morrison house, hysterical. Marie claims her father has learned she is pregnant and he will kill her, just like he did Laurie.

Part 5: Chapters 20-22 Analysis

As Katie and Daniel drive toward Crow Lake, Katie finds herself reflecting more and more on the past. An episode with a student before they left highlights for Katie how she and Matt grew apart. Katie blames this on her ability to go to university while Matt missed out. Once again the reader becomes aware of Katie's deep sense of guilt in this, as well as her embarrassment for Matt, for the fact that he remains uneducated. It also becomes clear that Matt's plan to provide an education for everyone in the family did not come true. In fact, Katie is the only one to have an education. Now the weight of Katie's guilt is even clearer. Luke apparently missed out on school, because of Katie's



insistence that he give up school to allow the family to remain together. Now the reader knows that Matt and Bo missed out too, adding to Katie's sense of guilt.

Luke and Bo still live together and both seem content in their lives. Katie seems to accept this. However, Katie cannot accept where Matt's life takes him. The reader does not know what happened in this circumstance, but Marie's appearance at the Morrison house on that long ago night in September leads the reader into believing that Marie was pregnant with Matt's baby and this child, Simon, changed Matt's plans. There is also the looming dangers on the Pye farm, Laurie's disappearance and now Marie's claims that Laurie was murdered, hanging over the story. The reader wonders what Matt did that night that changed his life, anxious to continue reading to find out.



Part 6: Chapters 23-24

Part 6: Chapters 23-24 Summary

In Chapter 23, Katie and Daniel arrive at Matt's home. Matt now lives on the Pye farm with his wife, Marie, and son, Simon. Matt welcomes Katie to his home with warmth, dragging her into the house for dinner. The meal is a warm, if a little tense, affair. The atmosphere lightens up when Luke and Bo arrive bearing dessert. As dinner wraps up, Katie recalls how Luke and Matt called the police the night Marie showed up at their house. Marie explains how she saw her father kill Laurie. The police go to the Pye farm to arrest Calvin, but he kills himself before they can arrest him. After Laurie's body is found, Mrs. Pye is taken to a mental hospital where she eventually dies and Rosie is sent to live with relatives. Matt takes over the farm, burning down the shed where Laurie was killed and fills in the pond where Laurie's body was found.

In Chapter 24, Katie wakes to the sounds of Matt and Simon working on the farm. Katie is saddened by the sound. Daniel and Katie go downstairs. Daniel joins Matt and Simon while Katie tries to help Marie in the kitchen. When Katie goes out to get the men for breakfast, she overhears them talking about the purchase of a tractor. Matt asks Katie about her work but she is reluctant to talk to him because she is afraid she will have to talk down to him. This man who was her first teacher may not be able to grasp the more technical aspects of her work. After breakfast, everyone begins to prepare for the party. Katie remains in the kitchen to help Marie. As they work, Marie confronts Katie about her relationship with Matt. Marie tells Katie that Matt is happy in his life, in his choices, and it is only Katie who is disappointed in him. Katie becomes angry. When Katie tells Daniel what Marie has said, he agrees with Marie causing Katie to become enraged. However, as the party begins, Katie finds herself really seeing Matt for the first time in years. Katie realizes that Matt is living the life he wanted and just in a different way than he had intended originally.

Part 6: Chapters 23-24 Analysis

Katie and Daniel arrive at the Pye farm, which is now Matt and Marie's farm. The tension is immediately evident even though there is clearly love between Matt and Katie. It is clear to the reader that Katie feels pity for Matt because he is uneducated. It is also clear to the reader that Matt is content in his life. Katie does not see this until Marie confronts her and forces her to see her brother for who he really is. As the reader observes Matt, the reader begins to wonder if school was ever Matt's dream or if it was the dream of all those around him. Matt did not ask Luke to give up teacher's college to allow Matt the opportunity to finish school. In fact, Matt argued against it. Later, Matt quit school to get a job and work to help the family. Luke forced him to go back to school. To the reader, it appears that Matt never really wanted to go to school, but he did want the opportunity to be there for his siblings. In this perspective, Katie's success and Simon's opportunities are what Matt wanted. Matt is content and now Katie can see that, thanks

to Marie's well-intentioned interference. Perhaps now Matt and Katie can find that close relationship they once shared.



Characters

Katie Morrison

Katie Morrison is a twenty-seven-year-old invertebrate ecologist working in a university in Canada. Katie has recently received an invitation to the eighteenth birthday of her nephew, Simon. This invitation causes Katie to begin thinking about the past as well as forced to decide if she can allow her new lover into her past. Ever since she left the small town of Crow Lake for university, Katie has separated herself from her siblings, refusing to invite them into her present life. Daniel, her lover, knows very little about her siblings and this has caused a great deal of trouble for Katie in this relationship. In fact, Katie knows that if she does not invite Daniel to this party that it could mean the end of their relationship.

Katie was only seven when her parents were killed in a car accident and her older brother Luke took custody of herself and her two other siblings. Katie was always close to her brother Matt and she credits him with being her first teacher in all things zoological. For this reason, Katie hides Matt in her past because she is afraid that her education and Daniel's education will make Matt feel stupid and remind him of all that he lost when he made the decision not to attend university himself. However, Katie's attitude toward Matt has caused a rift in their relationship and makes her visits stressful to him. Marie, Matt's wife, confronts Katie and forces her to acknowledge that it is her own disappointment that is coloring their relationship and not Matt's disappointment in himself.

Matt Morrison

Matt Morrison is only seventeen when his parents are killed in a car accident. Matt is hit hard by the deaths. In the months that follow the funeral, Matt finds himself content in the idea that he and his siblings will be separated. When the local teacher comes and asks that Matt be allowed to continue his studies because of the intelligence he has shown in his schoolwork up to this point, Matt learns of the visit from Kate. Matt becomes agitated by this visit for reasons Kate does not fully understand. In fact, Kate believes that Matt has become angry because he does not want to miss out in his education. However, when Luke decides to skip teacher's college and take custody of his siblings so that Matt can go to school, Matt becomes even more angry.

In time, Matt falls in love with the neighbor's daughter and causes her to become pregnant. This pregnancy and other events at the neighbor's house causes Matt to decide not to go to school. Katie spends many years regretting Matt's decision, allowing it to come between them. However, the reader is left with the impression that Matt was never really interested in going to school and he has become content in living a simple life on his farm.



Luke Morrison

Luke Morrison is the eldest of the Morrison children. The day before his parents are killed in a car accident, Luke learns that he has been accepted into teacher's college. This acceptance makes Luke the first of the Morrison family to ever go to college. However, Luke has never been a good student and he seems only lukewarm about the idea of attending. In the end, Luke gives up teacher's college so that he can take custody of his siblings and allow Matt to go to university instead.

Luke is a strong and motivated young man who has a laid-back approach to life. This approach causes trouble between Luke and Matt when Matt becomes concerned about the lack of money in the household. A fight breaks out in which Luke accidentally dislocates Matt's shoulder. This accident results in a truce, ending the fight and allows the two brothers to avoid making further mistakes. Luke dedicates his life to raising Katie and Bo, ending up as a small business owner with no family of his own. However, Luke has lived his life his own way and is still young enough to have a family of his own when Bo comes of age.

Bo Morrison

Bo is only a baby when her parents are killed. Bo is eighteen months and quickly becomes attached to Luke in the days after the car accident. When Aunt Annie comes to stay with the Morrison children and makes plans to separate them, she tries to separate Bo from Luke, telling Luke that her dependence on him is not going to help her when it is time to leave. However, Luke cannot stand to listen to his sister cry for him. This situation appears to be part of Luke's motivation in deciding to take custody of his siblings instead of going to teacher's college.

Calvin Pye

Calvin Pye is the farmer who lives next door to the Morrises. Calvin is the third in a long line of Pye men who have been verbally and physically abusive to his sons. In fact, Calvin lived with his own father alone for nearly twenty years, taking his abuse silently, without fighting back. When Calvin's own son begins to fight back, Calvin reacts with more abuse, eventually killing his only son. Calvin kills himself when the police come to arrest him for the crime.

Laurie Pye

Laurie Pye is Calvin Pye's fourteen-year-old son. In public, Laurie is a quiet and almost shy young man who suddenly explodes on the schoolyard one day and beats the school bully. This event seems to be a catalyst that shows Laurie that he does not have to sit back and take the abuse at home. One Saturday, Laurie finally has enough of his home



life and walks away, but he has nowhere to go. Laurie returns home, only to be confronted by his father and killed for his pains.

Marie Pye Morrison

Marie Pye is Laurie's oldest sister. Marie is a shy and quiet young woman who is infatuated with Matt Morrison. Katie recalls Marie coming by the house many times after their parents' funeral to speak to Matt. After Laurie's death, Marie takes up the slack on the farm and begins working in the fields beside her father. This leads to Marie and Matt being thrown together quite often as Matt works on the farm as a hired worker. In the end, Marie and Matt become lovers, resulting in a surprise pregnancy. When Calvin learns Marie is pregnant, she runs to Matt and tells him how her father killed Laurie and she is afraid he will kill her too.

Marie and Matt marry after Calvin's suicide, taking over the farm together. They stay married for more than eighteen years. When Katie comes to their home for Simon's birthday party, Marie confronts Katie. Marie accuses Katie of causing tension in her relationship with Matt because of her disappointment in his decision to not go to university. Katie is angry at first, but soon comes to recognize that Marie is right.

Miss Carrington

Miss Carrington is the local school teacher who teaches in the small schoolhouse that houses all the younger grades. Miss Carrington comes to the Morrison house frequently after the death of Katie's parents. Miss Carrington's first visit is one that results in Luke's decision to take custody of his siblings. Miss Carrington believes that Matt should go to university and Luke decides to give his brother this chance by taking custody of the girls instead of spending the last of the money on his own education. Later, Miss Carrington comes by supposedly to talk about Katie, but the reader never really hears the conversation. When Katie suggests later in the novel that Luke and Miss Carrington are having an affair, the reader wonders if it began much sooner than Katie suggests.

Aunt Annie

Aunt Annie is Mr. Morrison's single sister. Annie lives with her father and cares for him while he works the farm. Aunt Annie is the one who comes to stay with the children after their parents' deaths because she is the only one who is free enough to go. Aunt Annie takes charge of the household and arranges for the children to be sent to separate family farms so that Luke might go to teacher's college, but is overruled when Luke decides to take custody of the children. Aunt Annie cares deeply for the children and worries about their welfare but is forced to leave them in Luke's custody. Katie writes to Annie until her death, keeping her informed of their progress.



Sally McLean

Sally McLean is the daughter of the local grocers. Sally has a crush on Luke but Luke refuses to become involved with her because he works for her parents and does not want to lose his job. However, Sally tells her parents lies about Luke and causes him to lose his job anyway. It is later implied that Sally tells lies that Luke is a homosexual. Katie reveals that Sally became pregnant by another local boy a short time after this and married him, only to get a quick divorce soon after.



Objects/Places

Suitcase

Mr. and Mrs. Morrison go into town to get a suitcase for Luke and are killed by a truck that has lost its brakes.

Portrait of Great-Grandmother Morrison

There is a portrait of Grandmother Morrison, Katie's great-grandmother, who is known for wanting all her children to have an education beyond the farm. Katie takes this portrait with her when she goes to university.

Diapers

Luke struggles to keep up with the washing of Bo's cloth diapers after taking custody of his siblings.

Map

Matt uses a map to show Katie how close he will be to her when the children are sent to separate Morrison family farms in Gaspé.

Belt

Matt witnesses Calvin Pye threatening to beat his son, Laurie, with a belt. Before this, Katie sees marks on Laurie's back that resemble the small letter c, which are possibly marks from a belt buckle.

Exams

Matt must take the grade thirteen syllabus exams in order to pass lower school and to get scholarships to university.

Ponds

There are a grouping of ponds near Crow Lake where Matt often took Katie to watch the wildlife. It is also in one of these ponds that Laurie's body is hidden. After Matt takes over the Pye farm, he has that pond filled in.



Schoolhouse

Crow Lake has a single schoolhouse in which all the children in the lowest grades are educated together. Miss Carrington teaches here and Luke becomes the janitor.

Pye Farm

The Pyes, direct descendants of Jackson Pye, own the farm next door to the Morrison house. Matt and Luke work on the Pye farm as teens and Matt eventually takes over the farm with his wife, Marie.

Morrison House

Mr. Morrison built a house at Crow Lake after settling there as a banker, the first of his family to finish lower school. The children keep the house after their parents' death and Luke lives there all his life.

University

No one in the Morrison family, generations of farmers, has ever gone to university. Matt appears to be the first one with the opportunity, but the honor falls to Katie, leaving her guilt-ridden.

Crow Lake

Crow Lake is a small town in the wilderness of Ontario where the Morrison children are born and raised. Crow Lake was settled by three men, Stanley Vernon, Jackson Pye, and Frank Janie.



Themes

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is abuse perpetrated on family members by another family member. In this novel, domestic abuse is perpetrated on the Pye children over three generations by their fathers. It begins with Jackson Pye, one of the founding fathers of Crow Lake. Pye has come to Crow Lake to build a farm for himself and a future family. Jackson designs and builds not only his own grand house, but a house for one of the other founding fathers of the town as well. Jackson is clearly an intelligent man. However, Jackson has a terrible temper that drives his sons away until he is left with only two. In the end, one of these sons leaves as well, leaving only Arthur Pye to suffer his father's frequent verbal and physical abuse. Jackson eventually dies, leaving Art the farm. However, the reader soon learns at what cost Art inherits the family property.

Art marries and has three sons of his own. Two of those sons leave, just like Art's brothers had done before them. Art is left with Calvin, a quiet young man who refuses to fight back. For nearly twenty years, Calvin remains alone on that farm with his father. When Art finally dies, Calvin inherits the farm. Calvin marries and has three children that include two girls and a boy. Matt and Luke Morrison work on the Pye farm as teenagers and see how Calvin treats his children. Calvin is a dark, angry man who works his son harder than any man should work, let alone a child of fourteen. Laurie is not like his father, however. Laurie fights back. It is this fight that leads to Laurie's death. Calvin argues with Laurie one night, forcing him to run away. However, Laurie comes back in the night and once again argues with his father. Calvin hits Laurie, causing him to fall and hit his head, killing him.

The domestic abuse in the Pye family is clearly the result of generations of abuse. No one in Crow Lake wants to do anything about this abuse however, and the cycle is repeated over and over until finally there are no more sons to grow into adulthood and abuse their own sons. It is a difficult situation that contrasts with the tragedy in the Morrison family and leaves the characters and readers aware of patterns that are all too often repeated. For these reasons, domestic abuse is a theme of the novel.

Sibling Relationship

The Morrison children have a typical relationship at the beginning of the novel. The older boys are rivals, often arguing and attempting to outdo one another. The youngest siblings look up to these boys, admiring them and trying to emulate them. Upon the deaths of their parents, these relationships change in meaning if not in dynamic. Katie continues to look up to her brothers, especially Matt and the boys continue to fight with one another. However, when Luke takes custody of his siblings the struggle between he and Matt changes. Their rivalry is no longer over who does better in school or who can



lift the most hay bales, but about a source of income and the best way to care for the household chores.

In contrast with the relationships between the Morrison children is the relationships between the Pye children. Rosie and Laurie attend the same school as Katie. This allows Katie to view their relationship. However, there does not appear to be a relationship between these siblings. Neither child ever speaks in class and never shows any interest in what is going on. When Laurie gets into a fight with the school bully, Rosie becomes withdrawn but does nothing to defend or condemn her brother. When Laurie disappears, Rosie stops going to school. However, the reader wonders if this has more to do with her father's behavior than with Laurie's situation.

Sibling relationships is a vital theme in this novel because the novel is based on the relationships of the main characters, the Morrison children, as well as the impact on their lives by the Pye family, the children in particular. In fact, the main theme of the novel appears to be the relationship between Katie and Matt Morrison and Katie's overwhelming sense of both guilt and disappointment that her brother, Matt, was not able to go to university but she was. This causes a great deal of strain not only on Katie's relationship with her brother, but also in her private life. For this reason, and those mentioned above, sibling relationships is a theme of this novel.

Guilt

There is a great deal of guilt in this novel. The first appearance of guilt in the novel is Katie's frequent discussions of the odd behaviors of the Pye children. She mentions how things might have turned out differently if someone had talked to them and done something about the abuse heaped on them by their father. Katie seems to feel that she and many of her neighbors in the Crow Lake community bear some responsibility for the death of Laurie Pye.

The second appearance of guilt in this novel comes when Aunt Annie comes to Crow Lake. Aunt Annie feels a sense of responsibility for the Morrison children because her brother, their father, sent money home to her and her father to help during troubled times on the farm. Aunt Annie feels she owes her brother's children more than she can offer and this causes her a great deal of guilt. In the end, when Luke decides to take custody of the children, Aunt Annie again suffers guilt because she does not have the money necessary to help the children as they begin life on their own.

Finally, guilt plays a role in Matt's higher education. When Luke learns that Miss Carrington has begged Aunt Annie to allow Matt to continue his education, Luke decides to take custody of the children. This decision is also colored by Luke's sense of responsibility to Bo and Katie, but his main motivator seems to be Matt. Later, when Matt is forced to skip school because of a pregnant girlfriend, Katie is wracked with guilt when she is able to go to school herself. Katie feels that Matt has missed out on his dream and he has wasted his intelligence. This guilt causes Katie to cut herself off from

her past, refusing to speak to her new lover about her brothers and sister because of this. However, Katie eventually discovers that the guilt is of her own making.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the first person seen through the eyes of Katie Morrison. Katie tells the story in the present tense, looking back on her childhood through the eyes of an adult who has finally seen the reality of decisions made not only by herself, but by her older brothers as well. This point of view gives the reader unique insight into Katie's struggle to reconcile within herself the events of her past that had little to do with her but caused her to grow up and struggle under a great deal of guilt.

The point of view of this novel is a common one that is often utilized in modern bestselling novels. This point of view of the first person is limited to one character, causing tunnel vision to some degree. The reader is not allowed to see or hear the thoughts and emotions of other characters, but is restricted to learning their motivations through the first-person narrator's understanding of those motivations. However, this novel is one of personal struggle and therefore it is important that the reader sees all the action of the novel through her eyes exclusively. For this reason, the first-person point of view works best in this novel.

Setting

The novel is set in two main locations. The first and most important setting of the novel is Crow Lake, a small farming town in the wilds of upper Ontario. This small town is so tiny that the children in the lowest grades are all taught in a one-room schoolhouse similar to the schools that populated the western frontier of 1800s America. Despite this, the town seems to have many modern conveniences such as electricity, but is still remote and filled with dangers that are unique to this area. It is an unlikely place for four children to grow up but it is where the Morrison children are born and raised. The second setting of the novel is a large city in Canada where Katie Morrison attends university and becomes an assistant professor in zoology.

The setting of this novel is unique because it describes an area of the world that is both modern and rustic. It is an area that has both modern convenience and rural restrictions. It is a wilderness that would most likely seem to foster struggle and ignorance but in fact produces highly intelligent and successful people. The setting of this novel is a contrast to the story that takes place and yet offers some of the same darkness and danger that continues to exist in human nature. By placing her novel in this setting, the author seems to be suggesting to the reader that domestic abuse is a darkness from a rustic past that continues to exist despite modern convenience. It is an interesting setting that is so well drawn and contrasts so well with the plot that it almost becomes a character on its own.



Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is simple English. The novel includes some slang, but it is slang that is universally recognized, therefore causes no difficulty for the reader. There are no foreign phrases in the novel but there is some scientific language based on Katie's career as an invertebrate ecologist. This language is not difficult however and does not create any trouble for the reader.

The language of this novel is simple and akin to reading the diary of close and dear friend. The language includes some terminology that the reader might not be familiar with, especially when the author talks about the education system in Canada, but the reader will not be easily confused by this language. The novel is simple, well-crafted, and filled with a language that is not only easy to follow but almost lyrical in its design. This novel is short, well-written, and appropriate for readers spanning young adults and older audiences.

Structure

The novel is divided into six parts with twenty-four chapters and a prologue. The chapters are basically short with multiple breaks between changes in scene. The novel is written as though the main character is looking back in time. For this reason, the novel shifts from past to present over and over throughout the novel. One chapter might begin in the past and end up in the present, while the next chapter might take place completely in the present. For this reason, the author often makes comments about the events taking place in the novel, adding commentary that shows the reader that the author, who is in the present, is reflecting on the past and wondering how things might have turned out differently.

The novel contains three main plots that are interwoven within one another. The first plot concerns the Morrison children whose parents have died and left them alone. The oldest boy, Luke, decides to take custody of his siblings so that they can stay together and Matt, the second oldest child, can attend university. The second plot is that of Katie, the oldest girl, who is now an adult and living in the big city where she is an assistant professor in zoology at the same university. The third plot is a little more subtle than the others, but it follows the story of the Pye family, neighbors to the Morrison family, who have struggled with domestic violence for three generations in Crow Lake. All three plots interact with one another, directly impacting each of the plots, and come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"What took place between Matt and me can't be explained without reference to Great-Grandmother" (Part 1: Prologue, pg. 3.)

"It was the Eleventh Commandment, carved on its own tablet of stone and presented specifically to those of Presbyterian persuasion: Thou Shalt Not Emote" (Part 1: Chapter 1, pg. 9.)

"Memories. I'm not in favor of them, by and large" (Part 1: Chapter 2, pg. 20.)

"It was a long time before I told Daniel much about my family" (Part 1: Chapter 3, pg. 35.)

"Had he seen the invitation or not?" (Part 2: Chapter 8, pg. 85.)

"No doubt she knew Luke well enough by then to know that this was the last contact with soap and water many of the items would ever have, but I imagine in her concern over us she was also making a bargain with God: if she did everything in her power to get us off to a good start, He would be obliged to do everything in His to make sure we came to no harm. A bargain is a bargain" (Part 2: Chapter 9, pg. 96.)

"Because Sally McLean wasn't just any girl, she was the daughter of his employers, and Luke was scared" (Part 2: Chapter 12, pg. 145.)

"I don't understand people. I don't mean that in an arrogant sense-I'm not saying people are incomprehensible because they don't act as I do. I mean it as a statement of fact" (Part 3: Chapter 13, pg. 149.)

"As for me, I sat beside them and waited to be told Matt was dead" (Part 3: Chapter 15, pg. 183.)

"And then Something Else Turned Up" (Part 4, Chapter 17, pg. 209.)

"Laurie Pye left home on a Saturday afternoon in April" (Part 4, Chapter 18, pg. 214.)

"The other ponds, our pond included, are just as they have always been" (Part 6: Chapter 24, pg. 291.)



Topics for Discussion

Who is Luke Morrison? What school is he planning to attend? What happens to his parents? Why does Luke decide to take custody of his siblings? Is Luke a good guardian to his siblings? Why does Luke fight with Matt so much? Is Luke right when he continuously says that something will turn up? Should Matt have worried so much? Why does Luke lose his first job? Why do rumors begin about Luke's sexuality? Who does Katie believe Luke is having an affair with?

Who is Matt Morrison? What is his gift that no one in Crow Lake wants him to throw away? For whom does Matt work for? Why does he believe something should be done about things happening in this work place? Who does Matt begin a relationship with? Why does Katie believe this relationship arose out of pity? Is this true? How does this relationship change the course of Matt's life? Do you believe Matt wanted to go to university? Why or why not?

Who is Katie? What has Katie become as an adult? Is she confident in her career choice? Explain. Why does Katie shut herself off from her past? Why does Katie refuse to tell Daniel about her family, especially Matt? Is Katie ashamed of Matt's lack of education? Why does Katie refuse to share with Matt her work? What does Marie tell Katie about Matt? How does this help Katie see how happy her brother truly is?

What is domestic abuse? What causes a person to be violent against the people he is supposed to love and care for? Who might be responsible for this violence? What does this say about the circle of life? Are all people doomed to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors? Does this include the Morrison children? What are they doomed to repeat from the past?

What is sexuality? Why does Kate discuss the sexuality of her brothers in this novel? Does Katie understand what happened between Luke and Sally or Matt and Marie? What did happen between Luke and Sally? How did this lead to Luke losing his job? Why does Kate believe Luke pulled away from Sally? Why did he? What does this say about Luke? Why does Kate believe Matt became involved with Marie? Is this accurate? Do you believe Matt was not aware of the dangers of this relationship? Do you believe their marriage would last if Matt did not care about Marie?

Discuss Laurie Pye. Why did Laurie run away from home? Why was Laurie always fighting back? How might things have been different if Laurie had not fought back? What is significant about the fight with the schoolhouse bully Laurie got into? How did this impact Laurie's relationship with his father? Why did Laurie return home the night after he ran away? Why did no one in town worry about Laurie's disappearance? Should they have? How did the town of Crow Lake let all the Pyes down?



Discuss Kate's relationship with Daniel. What caused Katie to invite Daniel to Simon's birthday party? Why was Daniel always asking about Katie's childhood? Why does Daniel want to know about Katie's siblings? Why does Daniel threaten to end their relationship if Katie does not open up to him better? What does Kate's reluctance to talk about her family say to Daniel? To the reader? Why does Katie hide her past? Is Katie ashamed of her family?