

# **Maya's Notebook Study Guide**

## **Maya's Notebook by Isabel Allende**

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# Plot Summary

Maya Vidal's story is told both in the present and through a series of flashbacks, moving back and forth in time, but her story begins with the flight of Maya's grandmother, Nidia Vidal, and her son Andres in 1974 from Chile, following the death of Nidia's husband Felipe and a military coup that led the country into dictatorship. Nidia and her son Andres wind up in Toronto, Canada, where Nidia meets Paul Ditson II, an African American astronomy professor from Berkley, California. Nidia and Paul marry and the family settles in Berkley.

In the late 1980s, Andres, a pilot, impregnates and marries a Danish flight attendant named Marta Otter, who promptly abandons her baby, Maya, to her in-laws. Andres is frequently away for work, so Nidia and Paul (Maya's Nini and Popo) raise Maya in a bohemian way. Maya loves her grandparents and has a happy childhood until her Popo dies of pancreatic cancer in 2005 when Maya is 15. Nidia falls into a deep depression, leaving Maya to go off the rails on her own, spiraling into drugs and alcohol and cutting school. Eventually she is caught and sent to a rehabilitation academy in Oregon. Maya strains to act normal at rehab, but eventually runs away, winding up in Las Vegas.

A low-level drug dealer named Brandon Leeman picks Maya up and uses her as a delivery girl within the Vegas casinos, exchanging drugs for cash. Brandon's brother Adam is a counterfeiter, and when Brandon uses some of the fake cash to try to kill off two bodyguards, Brandon winds up dead instead. Fearing for her life, Maya ends up on the street, where she finally succumbs to crack and cocaine. A policeman named Officer Arana tries to get more information about the counterfeit money from Maya, but the bodyguards abduct her. With the help of a fellow addict friend named Freddy and a nurse named Olympia with a big Christian heart, Maya is reunited with her grandmother and father in San Francisco.

Maya's father pays for her to go to another rehab, where she finally gets clean and starts taking responsibility for her actions. Maya's grandmother and longtime friend Mike O'Kelly, burn the counterfeit money before leaving Las Vegas, and everyone is worried the thugs and/or FBI might be after Maya, so her grandmother shuttles her onto a plane to Chiloé, an archipelago in Chile, where Maya (now nineteen) will act as a research assistant to Nidia's old friend Manuel Arias.

Maya spends a year in Chiloé, and life on the island is good for her. She adjusts to the slow pace and isolation, gradually bonding with the curmudgeonly Manuel and the de facto town leader Blanca Schnake. Maya helps Manuel with his book on mythology but wants to help him open up, believing he is carrying a burden of memories from the time of the military coup. After months on the island, Maya falls in love with an American backpacker named Daniel Goodrich, who swings through for a brief visit, but Daniel, though affectionate, never reciprocates the fiery passion Maya feels. Daniel returns to Seattle but briefly visits Nidia and Mike O'Kelly in Berkley. Maya researches Manuel's time in detention during the military dictatorship, and helps him release his demons,



discovering in the process that this is her real grandfather (though he cannot replace her Popo).

Shortly after Daniel's visit (and the end of his romantic relationship with Maya), Officer Arana from Las Vegas visits Nidia, claiming to want to protect Maya from impending danger, despite the fact that Adam Trevor (the counterfeiter) was arrested. Maya is not surprised when Arana appears in Chiloé, demanding to know where the fake money and counterfeiting templates are. He and Maya scuffle, and fall over a cliff, leaving Arana dead and Maya with a serious concussion. With two prepubescent witnesses and a desire not to make trouble, Arana's death is chalked up as the accidental death of a tourist, and Maya is free from the fear she has lived in for a year. Nidia and Andres come to Chiloé for Christmas, their first visit back since fleeing. The family is reunited and Maya, surrounded by people she loves, can let go of the suffering caused by the death of her Popo.



# Summer: January, February, March

## Summary

The novel starts in medias res in 2009, as Maya Vidal, age 19, is shipped from San Francisco to Chiloé, an archipelago in Chile, by her grandmother Nidia. Maya has been in some undisclosed trouble, and is possibly being hunted by the FBI, Interpol, and Las Vegas drug dealers. Maya was raised by her Chilean grandmother (Nini) and African American grandfather (her Popo, Nini's second husband). Maya's pilot father Andres (also known as Andy) was always away working and her Danish mother abandoned her soon after her birth. Nidia and Andres immigrated to Canada after the Chilean military coup in 1974. Nidia soon met and married Paul Ditson II (Popo), an astronomy professor who took her home to Berkley, California. Nidia has arranged for Maya to disappear in Chiloé, where Nidia's old friend Manuel Arias has agreed to let Maya stay for a while, acting as a writer's assistant while he works on his book about Chilote mythology.

Maya's trip to Chiloé isn't easy. Her wallet is stolen when she reaches Ancud, the second largest city in the Chiloé archipelago. A group of kindly Chilean ladies take Maya in and organize a ride for her to the town where she meets Manuel. Maya acquires a stray dog, Fahkeen, in transit to Manuel; Fahkeen simply refuses to leave her side. Manuel and Maya take a boat to the desolate island where Manuel lives in a small but comfortable house with no doors and limited amenities. Maya meets Blanca Schnake, the village's school principal, who takes a friendly interest in Maya. Maya gradually acclimates to the customs of island life, where people borrow things without asking but always return them, and favors are repaid with food or services rather than money. Maya must also get used to the food, which makes her ill for her first several days in Chiloé as her stomach adapts to the local ingredients.

Maya befriends a 10-year-old boy named Juanito Corrales who sits and reads with her, as well as Juanito's grandmother, Eduvigis, who does light housekeeping for Manuel. Most of the town's young and middle-aged adults live elsewhere, working on salmon farms and sending the money they earn home. Manuel, like Maya herself, has a shadowy past. He and Maya clash because her relaxed habits don't match his fastidious lifestyle, but she enjoys typing and transcribing his research notes, delving into local mythology. Nini gave Maya a notebook at the airport suggesting she return to writing diaries as she had from the ages of 8-15. Maya is uninterested at first, but finds life on the tiny island so dull that she has nothing better to do to entertain herself.

## Analysis

The novel's title is the book itself: Maya is writing her life story in a notebook given to her by her grandmother as she leaves for Chiloé. The novel is essentially a diary, told in the first person, switching tenses between past and present as Maya relates her life in



Chiloé with flashbacks to her childhood and teenage years. Maya acknowledges the limitations of working from memory, writing, “It’s complicated to write about my life, because I don’t know how much I actually remember and how much is a product of my imagination; the bare truth can be tedious and so, without even noticing, I change or exaggerate it, but I intend to correct this defect and lie as little as possible in the future” (Page 4). Readers are immediately put on their guard about whether Maya will be a reliable narrator, although it seems that she intends to be. Maya also prepares the reader for a less than straightforward narrative, acknowledging that working from memory means anecdotes may pop up out of chronological order because “My memory goes in circles, spirals, and somersaults” (Page 4). Maya creates a sense of mystery surrounding her departure from America to Chile, alluding to her urgent need to leave the country as well as the pursuit of the FBI and Interpol, yet the circuitous nature of her memory and narrative style leaves readers in suspense about what kind of trouble she is in. Is this a trick of a jumbled mind trying to tease out the details of a complicated past, or a specific, manipulative choice of a writer who wants to keep her audience hanging? Maya is indeed suspect as a reliable narrator.

It is fitting that Manuel is writing a book about Chilote mythology because a sense of the divine/otherworldly pervades the text. Maya writes, “I’m not superstitious, like my Nini, but I accept that the world is a mysterious place and anything’s possible” (Page 36). Dogs like Fahkeen have survived through previous lives (Page 16), houses have souls, memories, and feelings (Page 26), and brujos, Chilote witches and sorcerers, can cast spells that might kill someone. The world in which humans live is only the visible realm of a much bigger, more complicated universe – something Nini and Popo agree on, although Nini approaches it through astrology and Popo through astronomy. Nidia (Maya’s Nini) tells Maya “there are moments when a person has no control over their own life” (Page 7) – both Nidia and Maya have a tendency to believe in “Fate,” some sort of higher power that is manipulating the path of their lives. Nidia thinks meeting Paul was “written in the stars” (Page 10). Readers may wonder if Maya will use this slavery to the forces of fate as an excuse for her personal troubles, or if she will take responsibility for whatever choices may have put her in the position of needing to flee.

Maya tells the story of her grandparents’ meeting with the authority of someone who witnessed the event; of course she didn’t but she has heard the story so frequently that it has become part of her personal mythology, as is the story that she was orphaned by a Laplander princess. Maya seems to have a flare for the dramatic, wanting her life to be part of something bigger and more epic than what most people experience. The journey across continents to an obscure Chilean archipelago to hide from governmental forces certainly has the makings of another grandiose self-mythologizing tale.

## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Maya’s grandparents’ attitudes and approaches to stars. How are their approaches similar? How are they different? Do you think their differing attitudes contribute to the strength of their marriage? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Maya's attitude about being an orphan. Why does she tell people she is the daughter of a Laplander princess? What can you extrapolate about Maya's personality from this detail? What kind of person do you think it shows her as?

## Discussion Question 3

Maya tells readers she is prone to lies and exaggeration, though she promises she is trying to correct this habit. Do you think Maya will be a reliable narrator? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

## Vocabulary

tedious, tangent, depraved, renounce, indigenous, venerable, revere, elusive, eminence, firmament, respective, recluse, cataclysm, celestial, vagary, somnambulist, rudimentary, luminous, protocol, diminutive, austere, inexplicable, endemic, prudent, taciturn, gullible, implacable



# Summer: Pages 39 – 73

## Summary

Manuel receives a cryptic message from Mike O'Kelly, Nidia Vidal's close friend, because Maya is not supposed to have any direct contact with the outside world, which would allow people to trace her. Maya interprets the message to mean things are quiet in Berkley, and Maya's hunters are inactive for the moment. Mike O'Kelly is an Irishman who shares a passion for murder mysteries and social justice with Nidia. Mike is in a wheelchair, having been shot in the back while protecting a juvenile delinquent he wanted to rehabilitate.

After a month on the island, Maya has settled into a routine, though there is little to do. She doesn't miss the drugs, alcohol, and wild ways of her former life as much as she thought she would. She finds the island's absurd reliance on superstition irritating, but she likes watching the locals play cards in the bar, and walking to a grotto that is reputedly the mythological kingdom of the patroness of fishermen, La Pincoya. Maya travels with Manuel to interview people about Chiloé's mythology, staying in the archipelago's main city, Castro, which has heavy German influences (Blanca Schnake's family is descended from German immigrants and her father, Don Lionel Schnake still lives in Castro).

Maya learns a bit about Manuel's past when he takes her to meet an elderly priest, Father Luciano Lyon, who had been imprisoned under Pinochet's dictatorship. Both the priest and Manuel were persecuted by the dictatorship, and Manuel was banished to Chiloé, far from his professorship, because the military government thought he was a communist. Maya attends a curanto, a community feast prepared by burying food on the beach with scorching rocks; the meal has become little more than cultural experience for boats of ecotourists. Though Maya's grandparents frequently took her traveling as a child, she knows little about Chile and its history, and she absorbs Manuel's past with interest.

Maya tells Manuel all about her Popo, who died after a 6 month battle with pancreatic cancer 3 years previously (2005, a year she has tattooed on her wrist). Her Popo was a gentle, quiet man, the opposite of her Nini's passionate, near violent nature. He came to all her soccer matches and taught her about the universe. He urged her to question established authorities as all the great scientists had. Throughout her youth, Maya slept in a sleeping bag on the floor of her grandparents' room, unable to overcome her nighttime fears and insomnia. Even after her father remarried when she was 10, Maya felt more at home at her grandparents' house. Maya eventually learned to like Susan, her stepmother, but couldn't sleep in her new house until Susan let her sleep with the police dogs Susan trained.

Popo's death diminished both Maya and Nidia. Maya's stepmother went to Iraq and her father still spent all his time flying, so Maya was left alone, her grandmother too





enshrouded in grief to be much good to her. Maya saw therapists who tried to force her to face her grief, but in the end they just gave her anti-depressants. Maya became defiant and resentful of her grandmother. Nidia gradually came out of her grief with the help of Mike O'Kelly, but Nidia found she could no longer boss around Maya, who was caught in the web of adolescence and grief. Nidia returned to work and her social causes and started meditating, but Maya couldn't quiet her mind as easily. In the present, Manuel reminds Maya of her grandmother when he stands in Chiloé watching the sunset, just breathing. She tries to just breathe with him, as a way of inviting her grandfather into her space.

## Analysis

Maya tells Manuel not to “underestimate my enemies” (Page 42), yet the narrative style of the novel does little to instill a sense of fear or urgency into Maya's situation. Manuel receives a coded message from Mike O'Kelly – the sort of thing that reinforces the idea that Nidia and Mike love detective stories and are taking Maya's exile seriously. Maya doesn't immediately admit what the message says, building up suspense for several pages, yet the revelation is anti-climatic: readers don't get to see the code itself and Maya briefly paraphrases Mike's message to mean everything is fine at home. It might be hard to believe Maya is actually in danger, especially given the structure of the novel. Maya recounts the events of her life in long, gentle and articulate paragraphs, rarely broken up by dialogue or short sentences. The lyrical style of the writing lulls the reader into a sense of safety and nostalgia rather than urgency and confusion. Maya seems at peace with herself and her situation. Even though she writes frequently about the present moment, she already seems to have come to terms with whatever brought her to Chiloé, giving readers little impetus to keep turning pages to find out what happens next – or even what happened in the past to forced her to go to Chile.

Chiloé is isolated, quiet, and slow. Maya complains a little about the pace of life and her boredom, yet she also seems to like Chiloé. There is a much used philosophical trope at play in the novel – city life versus country life. When Juanito “borrows” Maya's iPod, she is literally and metaphorically forced to unplug from the last vestiges of the modern world at her disposal, which opens her up to hear the island's voice. She is reconnecting with nature, and the novel makes an implicit argument that this unhurried, undistracted lifestyle is better than what Maya left behind. Readers learn Maya had trouble with drugs and alcohol, but she no longer craves such substances. The island's peacefulness makes Maya's internal life more peaceful. Manuel's very presence in Chiloé is an argument in its favor, as he lived in Australia and could have returned to Santiago after the end of Pinochet's dictatorship, yet he chose to settle in Chiloé. Readers should consider whether there is authorial bias in how island life is presented compared to city life, as Maya continues to reveal her past in bits and pieces.

Maya claims not to be superstitious, but she does believe in fate, and possibly in some other higher power. For example, she prayed for divine intervention to cure her dying grandfather. Death complicates her natural skepticism. Popo himself was an agnostic and remained so in the face of his own mortality, but Maya couldn't believe he would



simply stop existing, and now, she comforts herself with the idea that matter cannot be destroyed (human life is recycled star material). Although she knows people can't control their fates, she is resentful that her Popo was taken from her. Her descent into the trouble that brought her to Chiloé seems to be a direct result of her grandfather's death, demonstrating a soul at odds with fate – she does not accept it, yet at the same time she believes in its power. This adversarial spirit is part of Maya's nature, and creates her problems. In some ways, she brings her suffering on herself. Her flaws make her human and relatable.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe two of the superstitions or myths of the Chilote people. Maya claims not to be superstitious. Do you believe her? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

## Discussion Question 2

Maya lived in cities like Berkeley and Las Vegas before moving to the small island in Chiloé. Compare and contrast city life and rural life. What are the advantages of each? The disadvantages? Predict whether Maya will prefer Chiloé to Berkeley at the end of the novel, supporting your choice with examples from the text.

## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast how Nini and Popo treated Maya as she grew up. How are they the same? How are they different? Do you think Maya would have been as upset if her grandmother had died instead of her grandfather? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

barbarous, immutable, bucolic, formidable, iridescent, relegation, inculcate, insolence, diaphanous, docile, erratic, interminable, visceral, charlatan, lucid, cadence, trite, platitude, stoic, solace, disperse, repentant



# Summer: Pages 74 – 108

## Summary

In the past, Maya attended Berkley High School, the well-respected, multicultural school from which her Popo graduated. After Popo's death, Maya started cutting class, hanging out with her best friends Sarah and Debbie, calling themselves the "vampires." Sarah, a bulimic, made up a psychopathic stepfather, while Debbie came from a genuinely abusive home where she was sexually assaulted. The girls dressed like goths, shoplifted, and experimented with drugs, ranging from marijuana to ecstasy to cocaine. Maya stopped playing soccer after her coach groped her. Determined to lose her virginity, she chose a wannabe thug named Rick Laredo to deflower her, only to have him follow her around like a lovesick puppy. With Rick's help, she, Debbie, and Sarah extorted money from pedophiles by answering their online ads and then accusing them of attempted rape.

Nidia finally emerged from her grief and anti-depressants to notice Maya's behavior. Like the detective she longed to be, Nidia searched Maya's room for clues. She found and took two ecstasy pills to understand what Maya was up to. Nidia and Mike O'Kelly recruited a computer hacker named Norman to dig up more information on Maya's behavior, discovering the full range of her illicit and illegal activities. Nidia didn't know how to handle Maya's behavior. O'Kelly urged her to let Maya's rebellion run its course as all teenage rebellions do. Nidia debated whether to tell Maya's father. In November 2006, Maya snuck out to go to a rave and was hit by a car on the way home, high on a drug cocktail. Nidia nursed her back to health, but chided her for her behavior, shocked at how Maya had turned out. Maya was genuinely sorry for her actions, but as punishment for the accident, a judge sent Maya to a rehabilitation center for teenagers in Oregon. Maya went to the home kicking and screaming, determined to break out the first chance she got, but the vibe of the facility was much more hippie than military. The director Angie and therapist Steve both genuinely seemed interested in helping Maya.

In the present, Maya continues to get used to her new routine with Manuel, who treats her respectfully though he seems afraid of her. She antagonizes him by borrowing his underwear, but ends up more upset than he is, missing the gentle comfort her Popo would have given her. Maya tries to psychoanalyze Manuel and his obsessively ordered habits, but he shuts down when she presses him to tell her what his nighttime moaning means. Despite the fact that Manuel is 72, Maya finds him attractive. Maya jogs to keep herself busy and reads Harry Potter with Juanito Corrales. The villagers are friendly with her, inviting her into their homes to drink mate (a bitter green tea) and to gossip. On an island with only 300 residents, everyone knows everyone else's business. Maya spends time with the two police officers (carabineros) Laurencio Carcamo and Humilde Garay, trying to train their dog Livingston to sniff out bodies. Garay has a strange gift for sensing the location of things as varied as lost hikers and underground water reserves, which he can mark accurately on a map.



Maya spends a lot of time with Blanca Schnake, the authoritative principal. Blanca worked in Santiago, but asked to be transferred to a school in Castro to be close to her father Don Lionel, though she ended up on this tiny island instead. Her father, a well off businessman, survived the socialist Allende years and the dictatorship, and now runs a seafood distribution company. Blanca takes advantage of his wealth and generosity, and with Maya's help, she convinces her father to buy cleats for boys' and girls' soccer teams on the island.

## Analysis

Maya's life may have taken some extraordinary turns, but she is still a typical teenager, stating, "The year I turned sixteen I felt different from the rest, tormented, rebellious, and furious at the world. It was no longer a matter of losing myself in the flock but of standing out; I didn't want to be accepted, just feared" (Page 76 – 77). This attitude is common among teens, although Popo's death seems to have exacerbated Maya's feelings. Readers may note, however, that Maya's writing style is more "tell" than "show." Rather than trusting the readers to understand her rebellious attitude simply by relating her actions, she includes sentences like the above, spelling out what the reader could figure out for himself. This writing style once again negates the urgency of Maya's story. If she is in any serious danger, the narrative is not building tension and by now readers may have forgotten she is even in Chiloé to escape some vague ongoing threat. The first section of the novel ends with past-Maya entering the rehab facility in Oregon, which seems like an end to her wild teenage rebellion, yet readers can foreshadow that she must experience a relapse, given the FBI and Las Vegas thugs have yet to enter the story.

Maya prides herself on being a good writer – better even than Manuel who has had several books published. She occasionally slips in a simile, such as, "The changes in my body and personality were as sudden as slipping on ice, and I didn't have time to notice I was going to crack my head open" (Page 78) or "Age, like the clouds, is imprecise and changeable" (Page 84). Her poetic language aspires to profundity, yet amounts to little more than clichés, failing to illuminate the human experience of puberty or aging with any new ideas. At nineteen, Maya has an enormous vocabulary, using words like "inculcate" and "surreptitious," but her language doesn't automatically extend to wisdom. For all her varied life experiences, Maya isn't much smarter than the average teenager.

Maya's sexual experiences are not healthy, yet she glosses over them as if they are typical. She is "groped" by her soccer coach while naked in the shower at age sixteen, though she tells no one and the coach goes unpunished. She manipulates a local thug into taking her virginity, yet she has no feelings for him and simply wants to get it over with. Meanwhile, she and her two best friends use sex and threats of claiming rape to extort money out of perverts they meet online. One of those friends pretends she was raped in the past, while the other actually was but won't talk about it. Though Maya spends a great deal of time analyzing most of her experiences, things related to sex barely merit comment, all mentioned casually, implying they have not left Maya with any



sort of psychological trauma, despite their disturbing nature. Readers should stay aware of Maya's relationship with sex, and what message the novel sends about the women and sexuality.

Maya also casually inserts that she is sometimes visited by her Popo (Page 85), demonstrating her belief in ghosts and an afterlife. Though Popo's presence is a comfort to Maya, upholding his promise to always be with her, it is also a metaphor for holding onto the past. Maya's notebook is her attempt to make sense and let go of the past so that she can move confidently into the future.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways is Maya a typical teenager? In what ways is she atypical? Can you empathize with her experiences? Is she a relatable teenage protagonist? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Maya's relationship with Manuel. How are they alike? Different? Do you think Manuel would miss Maya if she returned to the U.S.? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the narrative structure within which Maya tells her story. What are the advantages of telling events out of chronological order? What are the disadvantages? Do you think there would be more suspense if Maya told the story in a linear structure? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

ostracism, obese, pathological, aptitude, dubious, compulsive, morbid, languid, reproach, expend, capricious, virility, agrarian, expropriate, reciprocity, nonentity, feign, preamble, novice, frenetic, surreptitious, proclivity, extort, tranquility, fetid, dissipate, intercede



# Autumn: April, May

## Summary

Back in 2007, Maya's life at the academy in Oregon fell into a routine of therapy and extracurriculars. The staff put her in charge of two pet vicunas, and the responsibility forced her to settle down, though she still fantasized about escape. She didn't make any friends, but also barely missed Debbie and Sarah. Maya simply tried to seem normal and stay off the staff's radar, manipulating the therapists by figuring out what they wanted to hear. Her father and grandmother visited her after 3 months, and Maya was resentful that Nidia seemed at peace with Popo's death. But when Nidia visited two months after that, she believed Maya was finally returning to her pre-rebellion state.

But Maya wasn't at peace at the academy. In June 2008, when she was set to "graduate," she couldn't wait to regain her freedom – until Angie, the director, asked her to stay on for the summer to coach soccer and help with art classes before going to college in the fall. Maya realized her father, far away flying planes in the Middle East, had engineered this extension to keep Maya under tabs. She knew that if she refused it would be viewed as further rebellion, so she accepted. Soon after, she took advantage of a fire in the academy's gym to run away, taking the bare minimum of possessions. She accepted a ride from a trucker named Roy Fedgewick who was headed to Las Vegas. Roy, a Bible-quoting Christian, took Maya to a motel and drugged and raped her. He handcuffed Maya to the bed so that she couldn't escape. In the middle of the night, she found Roy's pistol under his pillow, but she couldn't bring herself to shoot him. Maya assumed Roy would kill her to make sure she didn't have him arrested, but in the morning Roy was cheerful, telling Maya the gun wasn't loaded. He bought Maya breakfast and urged her to continue with him to Vegas, as she already paid the toll. Maya prayed to her Popo to protect her.

In the present, life continues quietly on the island. The local school is repaired, and when it opens for term time in March 2009, Maya teaches English and coaches soccer in a complex trading system of reciprocity as payment to Manuel for her room and board. The weather turns colder and the locals provide her with home knit clothes to keep her warm. She continues to help Manuel with his book, growing fonder of his brusque kindness each day.

One night Eduvigis' daughter Azucena appears in the middle of a terrible rainstorm, needing help for her ill father Caremelo, an alcoholic and diabetic who recently had a leg amputated. Manuel and Maya trudge through the storm to help as much as they can, and eventually Carmelo stabilizes. Back in Manuel's house, Maya's fear induced insomnia hits her hard. She hears Manuel having a nightmare and wonders again what happened in his past that still incessantly troubles him. She wonders how Manuel met her grandmother's first husband, Felipe Vidal, a globetrotting journalist who disappeared after the military coup. On this particular night, Maya goes to Manuel's room (a sacred space she has never entered, despite the lack of doors) intending to wake him from his





nightmare, but instead she climbs into bed with him. She is not attracted to him, she just finds him comforting. Manuel wakes up and Maya tells him she just wants to breathe with him. She has the best night's sleep she has had in months, but in the morning Manuel, not unkindly, tells her she can never get into his bed again. Despite the continued insomnia, Maya is generally happy on the island, and can't imagine what prompted her troubled, wild previous life. She doesn't let her past behavior bother her, simply living in the moment she has.

## Analysis

Manuel was banished by the military government under Pinochet to live in Chiloé, just as Maya has been banished from Berkeley for her own safety. Neither had a choice about their exile, though Maya is more accountable for hers than Manuel, who was not the dreaded communist that the military believed him to be. Yet banishment seems to agree with both. Manuel eventually chose to settle in Chiloé of his own volition, and Maya barely misses her old life in California. There is something about stepping away from the distractions of the modern world and slowing down the pace of life that satisfies, though again, readers should be wary of the idealization of pastoral existence and be on the lookout for cracks in the natural veneer. One such crack is Maya's casual reference to the domestic abuse Eduvigis Corrales experiences at the hands of her husband. Everyone in the community knows where she gets her black eyes, but no one will intervene on her behalf. Knowing everyone's personal business creates a moral quagmire, with blurred lines regarding how responsible one must be for their neighbors.

Maya claims to suffer from insomnia, a chronic problem dating back to her childhood. Yet again, Maya has to tell readers about this condition because there is nothing in her narrative voice or style to indicate a restless psyche plagued by chronic fatigue. Maya always writes lucidly and with a clear analytic understanding of the events of her life, contrasting sharply with the image of someone who spends each night tossing and turning. If Maya is haunted by fear and personal demons at night, she is far too good at hiding them during the day, particularly in a medium, the diary, that should represent the place she is her rawest and most honest. Maya is not the most believable protagonist, speaking with the wisdom of age achieved by her creator, Isabel Allende, rather than of her own supposed experiences.

In this section, Maya herself is the victim of rape, following the inappropriate touching of her soccer coach and the cold, loveless deflowering by a low level Berkeley thug. Yet there is something strangely detached about Maya's description of the event. It is not that she is numb to it or hasn't dealt with it, it is that she is resigned to having somehow brought it on herself. She writes, "There was no one to turn to. What could I say? That I'd asked for a lift and he'd charged me for the favor in a motel, that I was stupid and deserved my fate" (Page 145). There is nothing in the text to indicate that Maya ever moved on from this attitude of believing she deserved it, a dangerous message for Allende to be projecting: women who put themselves in certain situations deserve what they get. Similarly, Maya seems to suffer no long-term post-traumatic consequences of being raped, which does not seem realistic. Perhaps her peculiar attraction to Manuel, a



grandfatherly figure (and therefore harmless), is Maya's subconscious way of dealing with her assault. But Maya makes no such connection, and she is so explicit about analyzing her past and her feelings that this does not seem like it could be Allende's intention. Maya simply treats her rape like it wasn't a particularly big deal.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the balance Maya and the other teen residents at the rehab academy must maintain to appear normal. Do you think Maya's thoughts and behaviors are those of a "normal" teenager? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Maya's thought process upon finding Roy Fedgewick's gun. Why doesn't she use it? Do you think she would have been justified if she had killed Roy? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbiotic relationship between Juanito Corrales and Pedro Pelanchugay. How is this friendship a microcosm of Chilote reciprocity? Do you think the islanders form of trade and repayment is better than a cash based system? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

incessant, emaciated, abate, protuberance, irrefutable, subversive, discern, irreparable, respite, impertinence, complicity, introspection, apathy, proximity, ephemeral, repugnant, infallible, edify, indelible, exude, sordid, inert, arduous, rancid





# Autumn: Pages 145 – 184

## Summary

In the present, Blanca reveals to Maya that Manuel was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm ten years ago, and that he could die at any moment. Manuel lives so close to death that he has made peace with it, allowing him to live tranquilly in the present. Maya believes Manuel and Blanca love each other, having had a one-night stand in the 1970s when Blanca's father took Manuel in after the government banished him to Chiloé. Maya wonders why they don't simply admit their feelings and use whatever time they have to be happy together (Blanca is in remission from breast cancer, but could also get sick again very suddenly).

Maya realizes Manuel allows her to live with him and disrupt his calm lifestyle as a Chilote way of paying forward the favor Don Lionel Schnake did him decades earlier. Since the night she slept in his bed, Maya has been more physically affectionate with Manuel, who tolerates it, and she realizes she would be as devastated by his death as she was by her grandfather's. Maya studies Chilean history, particularly the years of socialism and military dictatorship that still hang heavily over the country, despite being over for twenty years. She and Liliana Trivino, the district nurse, decide they will visit the ancient priest Father Luciano Lyon to try and better understand Manuel's past. The only time Manuel loses his temper with Maya is when she goes out to help some fishermen and gets caught on the sea in a storm. He worries about her safety and Maya knows he cares about her in his own way.

Maya spends a great deal of time with Manuel and Blanca talking about magic because of Manuel's book and her grandmother's influence. Maya readily accepts Blanca's invitation to attend a meeting of the coven Blanca belongs to in Castro. The coven meets on the night of the full moon in an underground cave called a ruca in one witch's backyard. The women sit around naked or in their underwear, sharing what is happening in their lives and offering thanks for the ancestors who endowed them with some special gift. Maya names her Popo, and cries for the first time since he died. The witches invite Maya to become a permanent member of their coven, and she gratefully accepts. Maya is shocked at how easily she fits in in Chiloé, and how little she misses her old, wild life.

Back in June 2008, Roy Fedgewick dropped Maya off in Las Vegas with a pat on the head and a \$10 tip. She dozed in a bus shelter, unsure where to go and unable to reach her grandmother on the phone. Maya got picked up by a drug dealer and addict named Brandon Leeman, a 38-year-old frail but powerful low-level criminal. Leeman lured her with the promise of McDonald's, then took her back to his squalid apartment, offering her work delivering drugs to high end casino guests. Maya knew it is dangerous work, but felt she had no choice, with no money to get herself back to California. Leeman let her stay in his apartment, but never came on to her. Maya befriended Freddy, a 12-year-old associate of Leeman who was already addicted to crack.



Leeman set Maya up with a fake ID (Laura Barron) and a gym membership to fill her days before her nights in the casinos. He made her go to the salon to undo the rainbow dye job of her hair, and took her shopping for expensive but not flashy clothes and accessories – customers recognized her by her high end handbag. Maya stayed on the pretense (to both herself and Leeman) that she had to leave in a few months for college. She found the actual work of meeting clients much easier than expected, receiving payments of \$4,000 in a single night. Leeman, his mind fried by years of heroin use, relied on Maya to remember names and amounts owed. He refused to let Maya try heroin herself, though he gives her other drugs. Maya implicitly trusted Leeman more than his thug associates, Joe Martin and Chino, because he didn't look like a criminal the way they did. Maya, while living in squalor in Leeman's dark, dirty apartment, had money and drugs at her disposal, and no interest in sex after her experiences as a teenager and with Roy. She settled into Leeman's life all too easily.

One evening, Maya ran into a police officer named Arana that Leeman had introduced her to on her first night in Las Vegas. Officer Arana didn't seem suspicious of Maya's loitering around a casino, and Maya wondered if he was legitimately as kind as he seemed to be.

## Analysis

The theme of letting go of the past continues in this section. One facet of letting go is squaring the past, either by righting past wrongs or repaying old debts. Maya gives Manuel the chance to pay forward Don Lionel Schnake's favor of giving safe haven to the persecuted by taking her in. Although his brain aneurysm has forced Manuel to come to terms with his mortality and live fully in the present moment, he still holds on to the pain of his past as becomes evident in his recurring nightmares. He also punishes himself by holding back from all of life's pleasures, keeping Blanca at bay despite their obvious feelings for each other.

Maya is irritated with Manuel and Blanca for not living their lives to the fullest and for wasting time that could be spent happily together. Time itself is a theme of the novel, and Maya has discovered its malleability since arriving on the island – the villagers have a much more laid back approach to clocks, schedules, and punctuality, and this seems to extend to Manuel and Blanca's relationship, which Maya, in her youthful impatience, is tempted to step in and orchestrate. Yet Maya is hypocritical in this way; by tattooing the year of her Popo's death on her wrist (2005), she has given that painful moment in her life a lasting power. She may have done it as homage, but it has simply stretched the memory and kept it raw, rather than allowing the wound to heal.

Isolated from her "real" life, Maya uses distance as a means for coming to terms with her past, while Manuel seems to use his isolation to avoid facing his. He refuses to speak about the trauma he experienced at the hands of the military government, despite its obvious continued effects on his sleep. Maya writes that he "keeps his memories buried in a cave, and if he's not careful, they attack him at night like rabid dogs" (Page 184).



Chile itself is a mirrored reflection for the journey of the novel's main characters: a nation with a troubled history, still trying to come to terms with its past and move forward. Chile has generally prospered in the twenty years since the end of the dictatorship, but as Manuel can attest, the country's psychological scars still exist beneath the surface. The theme of letting go of the past and moving forward arises for most of the novel's characters, and it is clear that Allende thinks dwelling in the past can only do damage to a person's psyche. As Maya says, "The stupid things I did are already in the tapestry, indelible, but I'm not going to be weighed down by them till I die. What's done is done; I have to look ahead" (Pages 126 – 127).

The novel continues to treat the issue of rape as an inconvenience rather than a traumatizing experience as Maya, who tells Manuel everything about her past, admits she hasn't told him about Roy Fedgewick because "I don't feel guilty about that, the guilt belongs to the rapist, but I am embarrassed" (Page 161). This detached response is almost mechanical in its understatement. On one hand it alludes to the sense of shame and responsibility many rape victims feel, but Maya's "embarrassment" at being raped does not resonate with emotional truth. Readers may wonder if this is one of the times Maya is not a reliable narrator, unwilling to delve into the darkest parts of her history. This is possible, but the way rape is boiled down to a single mild feeling ("embarrassment") points to a deeper, authorial misunderstanding of the experience. Even if Maya can't tell Manuel about it, the feminine world of the coven seems like the ideal place for Maya to open up, yet it doesn't even cross her mind in that environment. Allende seems to use rape as a deterrent device, warning her readers: don't do drugs or this "bad" thing might happen to you.

One final note about the novel's structure: after her induction into the coven, Maya feels completely free of all her past mistakes. She writes, "Last year I led an undermined existence, thinking my life was over and my body irremediably stained. Now I'm whole, and I feel a respect for my body that I never had before, when I used to spend my time examining myself in the mirror to count up all my defects" (Page 184). This revelation comes halfway through the novel but feels like the conclusion Maya is striving for. Maya has achieved her goal after less than six months in Chiloé, leaving the reader to wonder why the novel is continuing. This message of self love seems like the most important thing Maya could learn, and perhaps would have been better left until later in the narrative, as there is little tension surrounding the potential appearance of Maya's supposed predators, and now there is no tension about whether she will overcome her past and heal herself.

## Discussion Question 1

Maya writes, "On this blessed island nothing feeds my bad memories" (Page 184), which leads her to feel at peace, healing all her old psychic wounds. Do you think Maya thrives in Chiloé because there is so little to tempt her? Is she simply escaping from reality or is she genuinely overcoming her addictions? Support your argument with examples from the text.



## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Maya and Manuel's attitudes towards the past. Are they more alike or more different? How does Maya's personal history reflect Chile's national history? Do you think it is possible to let go of past pain? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Compare "island" time to Maya's real life sense of time. What are the advantages of the way islanders view time? The disadvantages? Do you think Chilotes live more or less in the present moment than the rest of the world? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

itinerant, indifferent, pernicious, opulence, inquisitive, stringent, disconcerting, imprudent, deplorable, impunity, inexorable, vestige, rebuke, garish, effusive, aperture



# Autumn, Pages 184 – 218

## Summary

In summer 2008, Brandon Leeman started reminding Maya constantly how lucky she was to be with him (he only hit her once, when she talked to a stranger at the gym too long), foreshadowing his unwillingness to let her leave. Maya still vaguely intended to return to California, but her life was so submerged in drugs and alcohol that she floated along, not consciously making any decisions. She was also peripherally aware that Leeman was involved in worse things than drug dealing and car theft, such as facilitating the sale of young girls into sex slavery. Leeman suggested they should deepen their working relationship, and Maya knew she was in danger, but was too incoherent to take steps to save herself.

Freddy went missing. Leeman and Maya run into Officer Arana, who told them Freddy wandered into a neighboring gang's territory and was so badly beaten he ended up in the hospital. Maya visited Freddy frequently, meeting a kind nurse named Olympia Pettiford who was genuinely invested in helping Freddy. Freddy's withdrawal symptoms were so bad that Leeman instructed Maya to inject Freddy with heroin when no one was looking. Maya learned Freddy had been abandoned as a baby and spent his childhood in foster homes. Rather than letting him return to state custody, Maya and Leeman snuck him out of the hospital, and the teenager recovered quickly back at the apartment. Freddy's beating made Maya feel trapped and fearful, yet she was still too resentful of her father and grandmother to contact them for help.

By September, Leeman's health deteriorated and Maya noticed that Joe Martin and Chino, the bodyguards, started to steal from Leeman. Leeman took Maya to a storage unit outside Vegas. Leeman knew his "associates" were double crossing him but Maya asserted her loyalty as Leeman threatened to get rid of his thugs. He worried about a cop who was demanding a greater kickback. Leeman showed Maya what he was leaving in the storage unit: a duffel bag of money. He told her the money was for his brother Adam, and forced her to promise to tell Adam where the "El Paso TX" bag (a marking on its outside) was if anything happened to him.

A couple days later, Leeman took Maya back to the storage unit with another bag of money, leaving half a million in the unit. He was planning to take her, Adam, and Adam's family to Brazil where they could live off the money without fearing the police. Maya tried to reiterate her plan to return to California, but backpedaled when Leeman got angry. Maya went to the gym to clear her head. She started to plan her escape in earnest, knowing she must keep Leeman happy in the meantime.

In the present, Maya has fallen in love. She travels with Manuel and Blanca to Isla Grande for a "tiadura de una casa," an old Chilote tradition of pulling a house with oxen and boats, now done mainly for tourists. One of the tourists is an American in his mid-twenties named Daniel Goodrich. Maya instantly falls in love with him, and he quickly



befriends her, although his feelings are more ambiguous. Daniel had been backpacking through South America before settling in Seattle as a clinical psychiatrist. Blanca invites him to stay at her house so he can experience the curanto. Daniel accepts, and Maya hopes she is part of his reason for sticking around Chiloé. Maya is shocked when Daniel offers a joint to Manuel and Blanca. They accept. Maya is able to smoke without it stirring up any cravings, but she still abstains from alcohol.

Manuel urges Maya to be cautious with her feelings since Daniel has given little indication that he feels anything more than friendship towards her. Blanca maneuvers Daniel into Manuel's house, and he and Maya spend some time together. She shows him her favorite spots on the island, particularly the grotto of La Pincoya, and the female sea lion that has befriended her. He tells her about all his adventures in South America, straddling the social strata from the rich to pimps and drug smugglers, while retaining an innocence that Maya envies. She worries her past is too complicated for him to accept. She tells him about her childhood and Oregon but not about Las Vegas. The whole town is invested in seeing Maya and Daniel get together, having accepted the stranger as one of their own more quickly than usual.

Blanca urges Maya to make the first move, something Blanca herself refuses to do with Manuel, but Maya fears rejection. Blanca invites Daniel to stay another week. He proves himself by helping when Azucena Corrales is found hemorrhaging. Daniel quickly determines she is miscarrying a baby, though she is only 13. No one knows if the miscarriage was an abortion, nor who the father is, but Azucena's father Carmelo had raped his other daughter, Juanito's mother, making him Juanito's father and grandfather. Despite everyone's gratitude, Daniel leaves on May 29, 2009, devastating Maya. She is sure he will return to Seattle and psychoanalyze all her neuroses, settling down with a pretty, uncomplicated American girl.

## Analysis

Maya describes how Brandon Leeman wanted her to look "innocent" (Page 184), an apt description because the way he dictates what she wears and styles her hair makes Maya into little more than a doll. Because of her dependence on drugs and her festering resentment of her family, Maya passes along all control of her life to Leeman. Maya may frequently attribute the events of her life to fate, but her unwillingness to make a decision is in itself a decision. When Maya vaguely mentions her plans to return to California, Leeman immediately degrades her by calling her a "fucking slut" (Page 199), inadvertently offering a glimpse of the gender politics of Maya's world: a woman who deigns to have any sort of personal agency is automatically a "slut," whether she is sexually active or not (as Maya isn't at this period of her life). Though she is taller and stronger than Leeman, her dependence on him makes Maya feel weak, which reinforces a stereotypical gender dynamic where women must live in fear of men.

Leeman forces Maya to fake an innocence her painful life experiences have stripped from her, and Azucena Corrales is similarly robbed of a childhood by her own father, who commits incest, raping and impregnating Azucena, who is only 13. Azucena is still





actually a child, with much less personal power than Maya has at eighteen. Everyone in the village knows Juanito Corrales is also the product of an incestuous relationship between Carmelo Corrales and Azucena's older sister, yet the fact that it is happening again indicates that no one has intervened. Maya learns that "Alcoholism, domestic violence, and incest are the curses of Chiloé, especially in the most isolated communities, and according to Manuel the myth of El Trauco (a mythological dwarf who impregnates virgins) originated to cover up the pregnancies of girls raped by their fathers or brothers" (Page 218). Just like the curanto or the tiadura, rape is a Chilote tradition. Myths like El Trauco were created to cover up such indiscretions, placing the blame elsewhere rather than facing the issue and changing negative patterns. The novel is reinforcing an idea that women are subject to the whims of men, with no right to expect anything better than to be raped or abused as men see fit.

Maya adds another description of the malleability of time to those already presented: the time of a drug addict: "Time. Where did the hours hide away? They slipped through my fingers like salt. I was living in a holding pattern, but there was nothing to wait for, just another day exactly like the previous one, stretched out lethargically in front of the TV with Freddy" (Page 188). She measures days in pills and shots of alcohol, numbing herself to living. Having wasted so much time herself, it is no wonder she is desperate for Manuel and Blanca, so much older than she is, to succumb to their feelings and start the epic romance she believes everyone deserves.

The love Maya's grandparents shared has taken on mythological proportions, as readers noted in the first section of the novel, and Maya believes true love must look exactly like that. She falls immediately for Daniel Goodrich, trying to mirror the experience of her Nini and Popo, who met and fell in love in a place that was foreign to both of them, just as Chiloé is foreign to both Maya and Daniel. Yet Maya dives headfirst into her love for Daniel without checking that Daniel feels the same; all her time watching favors being made and repaid through an intricate system of Chilote reciprocity, and Maya has not learned to seek reciprocity for herself.

It is interesting to note how many characters in the novel are some sort of orphan: Maya's mother abandoned her outright and her father did by default, leaving her to her grandparents to raise. Juanito Corrales' mother leaves him with his grandmother as well so she can earn money for the family elsewhere. Freddy was abandoned as a baby and grew up in foster homes. Daniel Goodrich was adopted by a loving couple that raised him as their own. The novel implies that family is based on love, not bloodlines, and children who are loved are more likely to thrive than those who aren't (Freddy is convicted of armed robbery by age 9 and is a drug addict by 14). This message is hardly a revelation, but it does make up a core principle of the novel.

Daniel Goodrich leaves at the end of May, mirroring the start of winter: Maya loses the warm glow of her first love just as the world itself turns cold and gray around her.



## Discussion Question 1

Describe the myth of El Trauco and how it is used to explain what happens to Azucena Corrales. Why do the Chilote people rely on myths? Is this reliance dangerous? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast the childhoods of Maya, Azucena, and Freddy. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you think Maya's problems are as legitimate as Azucena's or Freddy's? Is her flight from the rehab in Oregon justifiable or self-indulgent? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Describe Brandon Leeman's character. Does his fierce loyalty to his brother and to Freddy make him likable or redeemable? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

tacit, insatiable, guttural, indispensable, gaunt, lapidary, incandescent, enigma, clandestine, malady, unilateral, tenacious, furtive, ominous, ambivalence





# Winter: June, July, August

## Summary

In the present, Maya considers the nine days she spends with Daniel the happiest in her life. Manuel tactfully goes on a three-day trip to Santiago, leaving Maya and Daniel to make love in front of the woodstove. It is the first time Maya has been properly kissed and physically loved by a man. Maya's trust in Daniel grows and she finally tells Daniel about her addictions, her rape, and her enslavement to Brandon Leeman.

Back in autumn 2008, after Leeman had dropped her off at the gym, Maya sat in the sauna and contemplated her options: she had saved no money and didn't have a way home to California. She feared calling her grandmother and dragging Nidia into the potential danger she was in. Freddy abruptly appeared at the gym with news that Joe Martin and Chino killed Leeman in the garage as he emerged from his car. They had discovered that Leeman had hired someone to kill them. Freddy knew they were planning it, but had no way of warning Leeman. Joe and Chino intended to kill Maya too, believing she knew too much. Maya and Freddy fled to a dive motel on the outskirts of Vegas, and Maya dyed her hair black as a disguise. Rather than creating a strategy for escape, they got drunk and passed out.

The next morning, Freddy was gone and Maya had a massive hangover. Freddy had left her some crack, which Maya had never tried. Smoking it brought Maya to a new level of addiction; the high was so good but lasted only a brief time, and became something she needed to continually chase. Maya spent two days in a drug and alcohol haze until she got kicked out of the motel which took her expensive handbag as payment for the money she owed. Throwing caution to the wind in her desperation for a fix, May returned to the gym to see if she had left any drugs or money in her locker. She found her other handbag, desperately trying to sell it to a fellow gym member. Maya spotted Joe and Chino's car in the gym parking lot and hid in a massage room until she could sneak out through the staff areas. On her way out she propositioned a few men to buy her a drink, knowing it would lead to sex and the drugs she craved.

Maya's life as a prostitute didn't last long, as she felt too degraded. She moved up to heroin, getting more desperate for cash and a fix. She never called Adam Leeman, despite her promise to Brandon. She watched other women get raped without intervening. She kept herself fairly visible, begging near churches and malls, because it was safer than dark alleys. She stopped eating and washed in dangerous public toilets. She stole bits of food or cigarettes to trade for drugs, but never mastered pick pocketing the way Freddy had. She got cystitis, a urinary tract infection, but had no recourse to visit a doctor and get a prescription.

Occasionally Maya went to a women's shelter or soup kitchen for food, and when the weather got too cold she slept at a homeless shelter, where she was amazed how most of the homeless kept positive attitudes and sought better lives rather than wasting away



through drugs. A counselor offered to help Maya, but Maya still refused to contact her grandmother, unwilling to give up the rare highs of her drug-fueled life. Maya's lowest point occurred when she stole \$5 from the purse of a fellow homeless woman at the shelter, the mother of two small children.

Maya's grandfather appeared to her only once during her time on the streets, after she took a hit of bad heroin in a public toilet. She believed she was dying and was ready to welcome oblivion. But before she lost consciousness completely, she heard a voice telling her to breathe, and saw her Popo's shoes (English moccasins) nearby on the bathroom floor. This vision saved her life and forced her to keep fighting.

Maya spent all of October and November 2008 living on the streets. She tells all of this to Daniel in the present (May 2009) but wonders if her chaotic past cools his feelings for her. Daniels goes into psychiatrist mode and tells her she needs to deal with her parents' abandonment. He thinks she can only heal by talking things through in a real therapy session. But unlike most therapists, he takes the story of her Popo at face value, believing it is natural that her grandfather would appear to save her.

## Analysis

The novel continues to espouse a sort of resignedly fearful attitude that women must adopt towards men. Maya tells Daniel "about how much more dangerous the world was for women, how we should cross the street if a man's coming toward us and there's nobody else around and avoid them completely if they're in a group, watch our backs, look to both sides, turn invisible" (Page 228). She witnesses as least two rapes while living on the streets, and turns away rather than intervening in either one. In Maya's worldview, rape is simply a fact of life. Female agency, particularly sexual agency is practically non-existent, despite the strong female role model Nidia presented to Maya.

On the flip side, despite all her negative sexual experiences – with Rick Laredo, with Roy Fedgewick, and as a Las Vegas prostitute, Maya blossoms like a flower with Daniel, having an orgasm the very first time he touches her. Not only does Maya carry no psychological scars from her sexually traumatic past, there is no awkwardness the first time she genuinely makes love to a man. The novel implicitly makes the argument that sex with someone you love will be simple, and glorious. Sex can never be pleasurable if it is not accompanied by a deep emotional connection; yet this connection is only necessary for women. Daniel, whose feelings for Maya remain ambiguous, still manages to enjoy sleeping with Maya as much as possible before he returns to the U.S. Once again female sexual agency is dependent on men, making it tantamount to powerlessness. Maya tries to claim a shred of self-respect and agency by quickly giving up her life as a prostitute, finding the work too degrading to sustain. Yet this little attempt at "girl power" is hardly believable. If Maya were as desperate for drugs as she claimed, why would she draw the line here, with her brain already so addled by drug use? Would she realistically have this level of self-awareness if she were truly that far gone?



This imbalance in gender relationships is also reinforced through a comparison of Brandon Leeman's treatment of Freddy and Maya. When Maya speaks to an acquaintance at the gym, Brandon hits her. When Freddy steals from Brandon, Brandon simply tells him to ask for what he needs and Brandon will provide it. This anecdote may be useful in providing a complexity of character to Brandon's low-level criminality, but the misogyny he exhibits towards Maya automatically negates Brandon's supposed "good qualities."

In this section, over halfway through the book, readers start to see a small fragment of the reason Maya is on the run in the first place. Structurally this late placement of certain key facts makes sense as Maya (or Allende) tries to delay the pay off and build dramatic tension. However, Maya's life on the island has been so idyllic that readers might have forgotten her time there is an enforced exile. Maya's desire to live in Chiloé for the rest of her life negates any tension because she herself experiences no conflict about being in Chile. Maya writes, "In Las Vegas I believed myself condemned to irremediable solitude, which began with the death of my grandpa. How was I to imagine back then that one day I would be here, on this island in Chiloé, incommunicado, hidden away, among strangers, and very far from everything familiar, without feeling lonely" (Pages 248 – 249). Simply by coming to the island Maya has somehow redeemed herself. She has created a new family and sense of belonging for herself, which unfortunately diminishes the conflict and drama of the story. It also reinforces the pastoral perfection of rural life, completely overlooking the problematic history of incest and rape in these isolated communities. Maya can redeem herself in Chiloé, but Azucena leaves, going to work (at age 13) on a distant island, a victim who would be shamed by returning to her home village. Nature is peculiarly selective in whom it edifies and restores.

## Discussion Question 1

In this section, readers finally glimpse some of the potential threat against Maya's present life through the revelation that Joe Martin and Chino wanted to kill her. Describe Joe and Chino in as much detail as the text gives. Are they a threat that feels legitimate? Do you think there is any chance they will chase Maya down to Chiloé? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Maya writes, "My Popo said love makes us good. It doesn't matter who we love, nor does it matter whether our love is reciprocated or not or if the relationship lasts. Just the experience of loving is enough, that's what transforms us" (Page 223). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Which characters in the novel support this theory? Do any negate it?



## Discussion Question 3

When Maya is living on the streets of Vegas, she curses her fate (Page 244). How much of Maya's situation is ascribable to fate, and how much to her own choices? Do you think that present day Maya, living on Chiloé, has taken more responsibility for her actions than her former self did? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

## Vocabulary

digression, vicissitude, deferential, herculean, vertiginous



## Winter: Pages 252 – 283

### Summary

Continuing in the present. Daniel shares his life story with Maya in return: born to a mixed race couple, Daniel was adopted as a baby by titled Englishman and famed psychiatrist Robert Goodrich, and a concert violinist named Alice Wilkins. The couple adopted because they were unable to conceive, but were surprised when Daniel's sister Frances was born four years later. Daniel has always been close to her. Eventually Robert moved out to live with Alice's fellow concert musician, a pianist named Alfons Zaleski. Robert's sexuality was never discussed among the family, but Daniel and Frances grew up in two loving homes, and their parents never technically divorced, amicably sharing custody of the children. Despite the unconventionality of their childhood, Daniel always felt loved by all his parent figures.

Alfons Zaleski in particular loved and shaped Daniel and Frances. After high school, Alfons suggested that Daniel gain some life experience before college, so Daniel spent nine months living with an indigenous family in Guatemala. Alfons single-handedly saved Frances' life. After Frances fell during a family mountain climbing expedition in 2000, her body was badly broken and she was in a coma. The family grappled with the idea of taking her off life support but Alfons staunchly refused to let them do it. Frances woke up three weeks later, and Daniel, who was with her at the time, saw in her eyes how happy she was to be alive. After her fall, Frances was creative and intuitive rather than logical and scientific. She encouraged Daniel to study psychiatry, to better understand the human mind. Despite years of physical rehab and being confined to a wheelchair, Frances was nearly finished with a college degree in art history and had a wide circle of friends via social media.

Daniel's formative years were different from Maya's, who by November 2008 had taken to dressing like a man to survive on the streets of Las Vegas. Desperate for a fix, she entered an electronics store to steal something she could barter for heroin. She set off the alarms as she fled with a single video game. Her poor physical condition meant she was barely able to escape, and she suddenly found herself in the grip of Officer Arana, who was off-duty but recognized her despite her changed appearance. Arana took Maya to a Mexican restaurant, giving her a small hit of powder to clear her mind so he could talk to her about Brandon Leeman. Arana had been looking for her to gather information about Leeman's (whose real name was Hank Trevor) stash of counterfeit money, the product of his gifted and FBI-wanted brother Adam. Leeman had naively put some of the fake cash in circulation in Vegas where it was easily discovered. Arana had hoped to use Leeman to get to Adam, but Leeman's murder put a dent in that plan. Arana wanted to know if Maya knew anything about the money, but Maya played dumb, not wanting to further embroil herself in Leeman's mess.

Arana let Maya go, giving her \$10, which she immediately spent on drugs. Almost immediately Maya was abducted by Joe Martin and Chino. They took her back to



Leeman's apartment, threatening her with bodily harm unless she revealed the whereabouts of Leeman's money. They were still lackeys, taking orders from someone via cell phone, and left Maya tied up and gagged until her withdrawal made her vomit. They left Maya in the apartment, and Maya lost track of time as her drug cravings drove her mad. Eventually Freddy appeared and freed her. He gave her a hit of crack to give her the strength to escape and took her to the only safe place he knew: the home of Olympia Pettiford, the nurse who had cared for him in the hospital. Olympia, who ran a church group called Widows for Jesus, saw the state of Maya and immediately took her in. With the help of the other "widows," good Christians all, Olympia nursed Maya through the worst of her withdrawal symptoms, getting her medicine for her cystitis, and cleaning her up physically. When Maya started to get better, Olympia took her to the church, leading the service with her husband Jeremiah, and thanking Jesus for bringing Maya back from the brink.

Maya finally had the courage to ask Olympia to call her grandmother, and Nidia and Mike O'Kelly showed up in a red van eleven hours later, relieved to know Maya was alive. After the initial reunion, Maya told her grandmother and Mike most of what she had been caught up in for the past six months. Maya thought she should call Officer Anana and confess, but Nidia and Mike, full of their crime novel fantasies, devised a plan to get rid of the counterfeit money without leaving any trace of "Laura Barron" in Nevada, before driving Maya back across the border to California and rehab. Though Olympia had been determined not to learn any of Maya's personal details for the sake of everyone's safety, she took Mike's business card, in case Freddy resurfaced and she could bring him to Mike's rehabilitation program.

Maya directed her grandmother and Mike to the storage unit in Beatty. They used their amateur detective skills to decode that the message Maya was to give Adam about the "El Paso, TX" bags, a simple telephone dial combination of numbers. They easily obtained the bags of fake money and swept the unit clean of identifying evidence. They headed for California but stopped in the desert to dig a pit and burn the money. Nidia wanted to keep some of the cash, knowing some real money was probably mixed in with the counterfeit, but Mike and Maya vetoed the idea. They also found the printing plates Adam used to make the money, which Nidia later threw into the San Francisco Bay.

In the present, two months after Daniel leaves Chiloé (late July 2009), Maya worries that she has been too honest with Daniel, but she knows a solid relationship can't begin with dishonesty. She tells him her fears about being the link between Joe Martin and Chino, the FBI, and Adam Trevor, but Daniel thinks Laura Barron is the real link, and she doesn't exist. Once he leaves, Maya and Daniel start a veiled email correspondence (Maya uses Juanito Corrales' name to set up her new email account) avoiding too many of Maya's personal details. But Maya worries that Daniel's emails aren't ardent enough, and she wonders if he even shares her passionate feelings. She worries that they don't have enough shared history to keep up a long distance relationship. Manuel thinks she worries too much about love with a boy a continent away, and that the email correspondence isn't safe. Maya fantasizes about a life with Daniel in Chiloé, uninterested in returning to the U.S.





## Analysis

Maya thinks Daniel is “innocent,” and cannot handle the rough texture of her chaotic life, but readers will note his life has not been easy: his birth parents gave him up for adoption, his parents got divorced and his father became a practicing homosexual (though it was never openly discussed), his sister had a crippling fall and near death experience. By contrast, Maya’s grandfather died, and she made choices that amounted to handling that badly. Daniel accepted his fate, never even bothering to seek his birth parents, while Maya fought hers, even though death is the more universal and least controllable aspect of human life.

Maya spends several pages justifying how the “Forces of Destiny” (Page 264) colluded to get her into the jam that forced her into exile. She ascribes equal weight to destiny and genetics, saying, “Both, destiny and genes, determine what we are, and cannot be changed; if the combination is virulent, we’re fucked, but if not, we can exercise a certain amount of control over our own existence, as long as our astrological chart is favorable” (Page 264). Maya is still laying blame elsewhere, unwilling to acknowledge the power freewill might have to overcome destiny and genetics. She calls meeting Brandon Leeman a “dirty trick” of destiny, but fails to admit she could have said no to his offer of employment and continued to use her quarters to try to call her grandmother. There is a lack of personal accountability that pervades Maya’s attitude, and she easily forgives herself for all her past regressions (because of the telling rather than showing style of the narrative, readers know Maya has forgiven herself, but don’t get to see if she struggles with this self-forgiveness, or if she ever truly felt any guilt at all.)

Maya is fortunate (perhaps fated?) to fall into the hands of Olympia Pettiford, who takes charge of the initial stages of her addiction recovery. Olympia also believes in forgiveness – that of Jesus, and her reliance on a higher power mirrors the Chilotes superstitious mythology and Nidia’s belief in astrology, though Olympia’s faith is much more traditionally rooted in Christianity. The novel’s pervasive supernatural element implies that everyone has to have faith in something in order to survive the chaos and uncertainty of the world. Faith can be a powerful tool to overcoming the obstacles life throws at you.

Maya briefly dresses as a man to survive life on the streets of Vegas; it simplifies things and enables her to live with less fear. Despite all her professed wisdom beyond her years, Maya has a very facile idea about gender, and even her concept of a male ideal is juvenile: she is disgusted by the teenage boys she encounters, who are “clumsy, smelly, hairy, and covered in acne” (Page 281). If women are put in a precarious position with little control over their sexual destinies in Maya’s worldview, men don’t fare much better, being reduced to physical components rather than the content of their characters. Maya likes Michelangelo’s statue of David except that “he has quite a small penis for his size” (Page 281). Her “love” for Daniel seems to be based mostly on a physical lustiness. She worries that they didn’t have time to build up enough of a shared history to sustain a long distance relationship, and she is right, especially considering she is objectifying Daniel as badly as any male in the novel objectifies women.



Maya claims, “My past is not long and should be clear in my head, but I don’t trust my capricious memory. I should write it down before I begin to change or censor it” (Page 284). This is another example of Maya telling the reader something rather than showing it. Her writing remains confident throughout, and there aren’t any particular moments that she points to as particularly hazy in her memory, nor that she admits to censoring. She plunges forward with the arrogance of youth, undermining the idea that her life experiences have given her wisdom beyond her brief years. Maya calls into question her own reliability as a narrator but gives the reader little opportunity to engage with the text and try to determine for him or herself where the intersection of truth and memory lies. Maya’s narrative style takes all the “work” out of it for the reader, but this makes the writing lifeless and difficult to feel emotionally involved with. Maya sometimes seems like she is preaching to an audience rather than working through her complicated life with the reader as companion.

## Discussion Question 1

Earlier, Maya described Daniel’s travels in this way: “He’s floated from one adventure to another with his innocence intact. I, however, have been scarred, scraped, and bruised by all that I’ve lived through” (Page 211). Now that you know more about Daniel’s childhood, do you think it is fair to assess him as “innocent”? Compare and contrast how Maya and Daniel have handled the challenges life has given them.

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Nidia, Olympia, and Manuel’s ideas about divinity. How are they similar? How are they different? Does the novel mark one path of faith as better than the others? Support your argument with examples from the text.

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Maya’s ideas about masculinity. Does she stereotype what a man should be? Does she have unrealistic expectations? How do her attitudes towards men compare to the novel’s presentation of female gender stereotypes? Do you think the novel is presenting a fully nuanced portrait of gender? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with examples from the text.

## Vocabulary

ostentatious, irrevocable, cerebral, sedentary, sangfroid, virulent, intercede, litany, insurgent, phlegmatic, veneer, omnipresent, incorporeal





# Winter: Pages 284 – 314

## Summary

Maya sees her Popo by the cave of La Pincoya, though she is afraid to tell anyone about it. Though inexplicable, she feels almost closer to her grandfather in death than she had in life. It has been two months since Daniel left, and despite their four intimate nights together, Maya feels distant from him. She talks about Daniel and love obsessively to Manuel, who barely tolerates her tirades. Maya wishes Manuel had a love in his life like she does, but she still can't find a way to match-make him with Blanca, recognizing an old man's fears of giving his heart away. Maya must distract herself from lovelorn thoughts. The death of Michael Jackson makes her wonder about Freddy, who idolized the pop star, and where Freddy might be.

Maya also keeps herself busy by helping Manuel rewrite his book: he tells her his ideas and she puts them into readable language. Manuel has decided to reconceive his book with interpretation of the myths he is describing, discussing how the myths represent parts of the human psyche or symbolize universal human experiences. Maya visits Eduvigis, who has stopped cleaning Manuel's house since Azucena's abortion, ashamed of all the rumors floating around the island. Maya realizes she may have judged Eduvigis too harshly for not stopping her husband, only beginning to understand the repressive culture against women on the islands. Maya has learned enough to not directly address the issue and apologize to Eduvigis, but her presence in the old woman's house is apology enough, and she circuitously asks Eduvigis to come back to work. Azucena leaves to live with her older sister (Juanito's mother) in Quellion, and Carmelo Corrales is not punished for his actions, though ultimately his other foot turns gangrenous and needs amputation, prompting him to suicide.

Winter progresses with leaky roofs and quiet nights, collectively watching a soap opera at the tavern. The tourist season is still months away and the boys' soccer team practices for their championship match in September. Dona Lucinda, the island's oldest resident at 110, starts to wind down and stops dying wool, and the police dog Maya trained is grown and working at full capacity. Maya misses two coven meetings because of Daniel and bad weather, and she misses the cozy, safe feminine environment. She feels like she belongs in this community.

Maya and Manuel attend a religious festival called Feast of the Nazarene on an island called Caguach, which attracts thousands of pilgrims to pay homage and repay debts to an effigy of Santo Christo. The penitents crawl on their knees, asking forgiveness for their sins. Maya, though a skeptic, is swept up in the religious zeal, thankful for good news from her grandmother: Nidia has regained Maya's childhood house and is fixing it up, and Olympia Pettiford has brought Freddy to Mike O'Kelly's rehabilitation clinic.

Manuel gets locked in a portable toilet during the festival, which sends him into a panic attack that Maya cannot understand. She renews her interest in uncovering Manuel's



traumatic past. Maya and Liliana Trevino finally visit Father Luciano Lyon, who urges Maya to respect Manuel's privacy. Maya is determined to help Manuel's sick soul, repaying the favor he did her when she first arrived. Father Lyon tells her Manuel himself might not remember what happened to him, having repressed those memories in order to stay sane. Father Lyon gives her some contacts in Santiago who might know the details of what happened to Manuel. Maya immediately tells Manuel she intends to accompany him to the city when he goes for a visit to the neurologist about his aneurysm and migraines.

In December 2008, Maya returned to Berkeley and was shocked to find her father waiting. His tender emotional outpouring at having her back was more affection than he'd ever shown her. Mike O'Kelly forced Maya's family to face Maya's addiction. They debated sending her to Mike's homespun rehab or to a more upscale facility that charged \$1,000 a day. Maya's father, determined to help his daughter, opted to cash in his pension to pay for the 28-day program. Maya's first week at the clinic was hard because she didn't want to admit she belonged there, but she also didn't want to disappoint her father, who had finally sacrificed something for her. Despite the luxurious setting, real pain weighed down the clinic's residents. On weekends, families came for group therapies, and Maya's grandmother, father, and Mike O'Kelly all came to talk through Maya's experiences. Mike asked the therapist to put an empty chair in the center of the circle where they sat telling the group what had happened to their family. During the session, Maya saw her grandfather walk in and sit in the empty chair and she broke down, begging his forgiveness and accepting responsibility for her actions, rather than blaming everything on fate. Drained, Maya slept the best she ever had in her life that night. Afterward she dedicated herself fully to fighting her demons and addictions and getting better.

Two days before the end of her treatment, Maya left the clinic with her grandmother, who took her to the airport, having arranged her trip to stay with Manuel in Chiloé. Besides the notebook, her Nini gave her another picture of her Popo, to replace the one she had lost on the street.

## Analysis

Before Maya's grandfather even got sick, he promised her he'd "always be with [her]" (Page 43). Popo's phantom appearances on the island as well as in Maya's stint in rehab demonstrate he is keeping his promise. Though Maya does not reveal the visits to anyone, she also does not question her sanity, nor is the reader led to question it. Ghosts are a natural part of this world where the natural and supernatural so frequently touch and overlap. Author Isabel Allende is known for her works of magical realism. Although Maya's Notebook is a fairly straightforward and realistic novel, there are touches of magic and divinity throughout that heighten the narrative and link it to Allende's body of work.

Because of Maya's circuitous narrative style, the novel seems to arrive at a conclusion many times before it ends. Previously, readers would have noted her positive feelings in



the ruca with the coven, feeling fully at peace with her life and her body. Now, as Maya describes the events of her rehabilitation, six months before she attended her first coven meeting, Maya sees her Popo during family therapy and breaks down, “and accepted the absolute truth that no one could save me but me, that I am the only person responsible for my life” (Page 291). This is the first time Maya has expressed accountability for her own actions, rather than laying everything at the hands of fate. Yet the time shift makes this moment almost anticlimactic, as readers have already seen Maya’s peace and contentment in Chiloé. Readers knew she had arrived at this place so to finally see it has less meaning than if there was still tension surrounding Maya’s conflict with herself. In addition, this moment occurs with approximately one hundred pages left to the novel, and readers wonder what experiences Maya could possibly have left to tell that will have relevance to the narrative.

Indeed, it seems like Maya might be running out of narrative steam, inserting a strange flashback from the age of seven (though most of her memories have moved forward in chronological order) when she witnessed Popo being the victim of racism. This interlude ends with a trite message, spoken by Daniel Goodrich but paraphrased by Maya: “That was my first lesson on racial differences, which I’d never noticed before and which, according to Daniel Goodrich, should always be kept in mind” (Page 297). Maya is imparting all the most basic “wisdom” she can cram but little of it is revelatory or fresh, and she only succeeds in further slowing down her narrative pace.

Maya once again paraphrases Daniel (rather than directly creating the dialogue in which he said this) on the topic of mythology. According to Daniel, “gods represent different aspects of the psyche, and myths are generally stories about creation and nature or about fundamental human dramas, and normally connected to reality” (Page 298). Perhaps Maya’s notebook is her attempt to self-mythologize: her use of vague summaries and generic preachy wisdom is a way of trying to make her story universal: difficult origin, reasonably happy childhood, experience of loss, descent into addiction (i.e., suffering), epic struggle to climb back to normalcy, forgiveness and redemption. Unfortunately it is often the specificity of details in storytelling that allows readers to find universal meaning and the way Maya has managed to crowbar in every terrible experience a person can go through in her short lifespan makes her life more a soap opera than a resonant story of emotional truth.

Maya revisits the rape of Azucena Corrales in this section, offering commentary on the less quaint aspects of island life, where girls are blamed for being raped because they must have “tempt[ed] their father, who was drunk and didn’t know what he was doing” or blamed the mother for allowing her husband to behave in such a way (Page 299). Maya feels guilty for judging Eduvigis for her complicity in her husband’s crime, though she is not nearly as critical of the whole village, which also knows what really happened yet says nothing. Maya’s method of apologizing to Eduvigis is to invite her back to cleaning Manuel’s house, which she gave up in her shame. Once again, the novel does not strive to demonstrate how a culture of rape can be overcome, rather shaking a collective head resignedly at how men have always and will always treat women. Maya doesn’t seem too bothered by this attitude, overlooking it just as the villagers themselves overlook rape and incest. Despite his crimes, the islanders even let Carmelo Corrales get away



with suicide, pretending he died naturally so that he can have a proper Christian burial. Chile may have modernized and adapted after the military dictatorship, but they are still a country in the thrall of the Catholic Church, and women generally bear the brunt of their continued backward attitudes. It is telling that Nidia, when telling Maya about her native land, focused mainly on the beautiful (and neutral) landscape rather than grappling with the complicated and difficult people who inhabit the nation or its troubled history.

## Discussion Question 1

A therapist at Maya's rehabilitation clinic calls Maya's constant dying of her hair in rainbow colors as an act of "self-aggression." Explain what the therapist means by this. Do you agree or disagree. Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Maya's feelings of group therapy at the rehabilitation clinic to her experience with the witches' coven in Castro. How are they the same? How are they different? Which does Maya prefer, and why?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Corrales' diabetes, amputations, and eventual suicide is karmic retribution for his assaults against his daughters? Would the novel be stronger if the community addressed his sins more directly? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

reiterate, astute, aplomb, macabre, disarm, succinct, clandestine, intransigent, peripatetic, amorous, dormant, telluric



# Spring: September, October, November, and a Dramatic December,

## Summary

In September, Chile celebrates a national holiday called Fiestas Patrias, similar to an American Independence Day, and families reunite from great distances. Juanito's mother Lucia visits, the first time he has ever seen her. Maya and Juanito bond over being raised by grandparents. Spring begins to make its presence felt, as does Maya's Popo, whom she often spots in ghostly form near La Pincoya's cave. When the boys' soccer team, Calueche, loses in the school championship match, Maya honors her promise to Don Lionel Schnake and shaves her head.

Maya travels with Manuel to Santiago for his neurology appointment. Her trip is financed by Don Lionel Schnake, who also gives her a letter to secretly pass to the doctor, arranging for Manuel to have a special surgery for his aneurysm. Manuel is not to know Don Lionel is paying for it. Maya and the doctor easily pull off the ruse. Maya poses as Manuel's granddaughter to accompany him to the doctor, much to Manuel's surprise. While Manuel recuperates from the successful surgery, Maya carries out her investigations, though she does not reveal her findings until after they return to Chiloé, a week later. Manuel's relationship with Blanca seems to blossom as she helps him convalesce; they are more in sync and physical in their affection.

Maya and Blanca sit Manuel down to share what Maya has discovered, wanting to unlock the demons that still haunt Manuel in his sleep. In 1974, when Pinochet's military coup occurred, Manuel was arrested as a suspected communist. His wife, who belonged to a revolutionary organization, fled the country. Eventually Manuel was taken to Villa Grimaldi, the headquarters for the Chilean secret police, where he met Felipe Vidal, Maya's grandfather. Manuel only vaguely remembers this period, but with some gentle prodding, he breaks down, recalling how he was locked in a tiny cell with many other men on top of each other, with no air, no light, and no toilet. Manuel's confession is something of a release for him. When the torturers realized Manuel had nothing to tell them, he went to join his wife in Australia, but was soon divorced, and a second marriage suffered because of his sustained PTSD symptoms. With the help of a psychiatrist he was able to get himself under control, but only now, with Blanca and Maya, is he finally letting go of those terrible months.

Blanca is devastated by the story, knowing her rich, right wing family turned a blind eye to the oppression, but Manuel absolves her of any responsibility. He then drops a bomb: he actually is Maya's grandfather, something he assumed she already knew. Manuel reveals he and Nidia were in love as teenagers and had a brief affair while working for the same professor in Santiago in 1964, while Nidia was married to Felipe. Felipe was a journalist who reported on communist revolutions, making him an automatic enemy of the new military government in 1973. Felipe never knew that Andres wasn't his son. He



and Manuel met by chance while imprisoned at the Villa Grimauldi, and Manuel made sure Nidia knew when Felipe died of a heart attack brought on by torture. Maya briefly resents the deception, as well as the admission of adultery, but soon moves forward. She staunchly adheres to the idea that Popo is her grandfather, but her love for Manuel gives him a place in her heart as well.

Maya decodes messages from Nidia, learning that it was sheer luck that brought a homeless and unconscious Freddy back to Olympia Pettiford's hospital and then onward to Mike O'Kelly in California. Officer Arana visited Freddy in the hospital, still looking for information on "Laura Barron." Olympia told him that Laura stayed with her briefly before some relatives took her away. Olympia was vague about the details, and refused to let Arana speak to a fragile Freddy.

At the same time, Daniel Goodrich attends a psychiatric conference in San Francisco, and goes to visit Nidia, Andres, and Mike, taking news and pictures of Maya with him. Daniel even meets Freddy, who seems depressed despite being clean. Maya invites Daniel to Chiloé for Christmas.

## Analysis

September is Chile's month, and it is fitting that Maya's birthday falls within September, again underscoring the metaphor of Chile for Maya, or vice versa, both with demon-filled pasts that must be overcome to move cleanly into the future. The nation has made great strides in modernizing, even democratically electing a female president, Michelle Bachelet. Yet besides the pervasive culture of rape, even something as simple as hair is gendered into an unhealthy, almost fetishized stereotype. When Maya's soccer team loses, she honors a bet to shave her head. The Chileans are appalled because "In this country, hair is the symbol of femininity and beauty; young women wear their hair long and care for it like a treasure" (Page 321). Chile is not quite as progressive as it may seem. It is a flawed nation, just as Maya is a flawed human. Perhaps the repetition of her coming to terms with her past over several previous sections is a symbol of the difficulty in truly moving forward despite one's best intentions. The important thing is to keep trying, even when one stumbles. Her bald head is a symbol of rebirth, recalling the bald head of a baby, but also ridding her of years and layers of dye that were destroying her hair. Maya can now metaphorically come to terms with who she really is, and accept herself as such.

Maya attempts to use other literary devices including foreshadowing, writing, "with what I now know, I can never be annoyed with Manuel for banning doors from his house" (Page 324), but this reference to a legitimate reason for Manuel's claustrophobia comes too little, too late: Maya reveals the details of his imprisonment under Pinochet less than 20 pages later. Once again, Maya fails to grasp the importance of suspense in grabbing and holding a reader's attention, barely letting any tension grow before the air goes out of it like a deflated balloon. Similarly, Maya is enraged for approximately one minute over Nidia and Manuel's long-term lying about her real grandfather's identity – and only a few sentences later Maya gets over it and forgives them. Why even mention such





anger if it is going to be so easily resolved, without a moment of real conflict whether within or between characters? Readers may consider how a different structure might have compelled readers forward more than Maya's haphazard style.

Even the big revelation of Manuel's experience of torture fails to shock the reader. Though terrible, it was not nearly as bad as what others experienced, including Maya's (supposed) grandfather, Felipe Vidal. Readers may have been waiting the whole novel to get to the root of Manuel's nightmares, but the payoff is minimal, and once articulated, Manuel immediately gets over them. The novel tends to oversimplify the idea of letting go of the past, though it forcefully advocates for doing so. It presents the challenge in an unrealistic way.

Maya's experience in Santiago reinforces her bias over the pastoral perfection of rural life over the chaos of the city, and she writes that she couldn't "wait to get back to our island, where life flows like a gentle river, and there is pure air, silence, and time to finish your thoughts" (Page 325). Maya idealizes island life despite what she knows about the villagers' criminal silence in the time of a neighbor's need. Rural life is somehow equated with moral rectitude, despite all evidence to the contrary.

## Discussion Question 1

Maya relentlessly pursues learning about Manuel's past even when he requests that she respect his privacy. Do you think Maya's actions are justified? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Maya's trip to Santiago reinforces her ideas about life in Chiloé. Why does Maya prefer life on the island to life in the city? Do you think her attitude is realistic? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Chile's conflicting attitudes towards women. In what ways is Chile progressive about gender? In what ways is it backwards? Do you think the gender biases in Chile are unique to that country or are they emblematic of a more global problem? Support your argument.

## Vocabulary

malicious, wary, conflagration, discordant, impede, explicit, infallible, odious, gestate, illusory, strident, divest, innocuous, octogenarian, lugubrious, moribund



# Spring and Final Pages, Pages 350 - 387

## Summary

Maya receives a package from Daniel, including a dispassionate letter, pictures of Nidia in Berkeley, and an article about Adam Trevor, who was arrested and jailed for counterfeiting. Adam blames his downfall on his brother, who circulated the money in Las Vegas, using it to bribe cops, which brought it to the attention of the FBI. The article ends claiming that the counterfeiting plates were never recovered, and if they get into the wrong hands, they could have a disastrous effect on the economy. Maya frets that this means the FBI is looking for her.

Maya doesn't worry for long because at the end of November Daniel breaks off their romance and Maya spirals into despair. She gets drunk and destroys many of Manuel's possessions, including his computer. Maya is full of self-loathing, blaming herself for Daniel's lack of feelings, as well as for so easily giving up her sobriety. Manuel and Blanca put up with Maya's histrionics with good humor, and remind her to keep things in perspective. Maya realizes that she has experienced worse pain, like the death of her Popo, and worse rejection, recounting a brief and disastrous visit to meet her mother when she was eight. After that particular disappointment Mike bought Maya a puppy named Daisy, which was soon killed by a car. Maya remembers all these events and knows the anguish of losing Daniel is far from the worst she has endured.

Maya's broken heart is compounded by fear when Nidia sends the message that Officer Arana visited her in Berkeley looking for Maya, claiming she was still in danger over the counterfeiting case. Arana tracked Maya by reviewing photos of missing teenage girls along the west coast. Nidia invites Arana to dinner, where Maya's father accidentally reveals the family's Chilean background. Nidia describes Maya's unfortunate past to Arana, but only up to her escape from the San Francisco rehab clinic. Nidia claims they haven't seen Maya since. Arana urges them to be in touch if they hear from Maya.

Nidia tells Mike this news, which is a shock to Freddy, who is still staying with Mike. He reveals that after he helped Maya escape via Olympia Pettiford, he lived on the streets, where he soon discovered that Joe Martin and Chino had been murdered in a police vendetta, as the Las Vegas police department was under investigation for corruption and colluding with criminals. Joe Martin and Chino's deaths were a warning to criminals not to talk to the FBI. Freddy thinks Leeman had hired a cop to kill Joe and Chino in the first place, but when the cop realized Leeman paid him with counterfeit money, he reversed the hit. Nidia, Mike, and Freddy all wonder if Arana could be one of the bribe-taking cops, despite his kind veneer.

Life goes on in Chiloé, though Maya has more fear and sadness than she had previously. Manuel and Blanca travel to Santiago for another doctor's appointment, leaving Maya alone. Juanito keeps Maya company, and they go to visit Dona Lucinda, the island's oldest resident at 110, but only discover her dead body. Dona Lucinda died





wool and grew marijuana, and was beloved by the entire island. Her funeral is a massive affair, attended by everyone. Dona Lucinda's death gets Maya thinking about her Popo, and she hopes Nidia will let her bury his ashes on Chiloé. She goes to the spot where she always sees him, on the cliff overlooking the cave of La Pincoya, but she doesn't sense his presence. Instead she is surprised by the sudden appearance of Officer Arana, though in some ways she was expecting it. Arana broke into Nidia's house and found pictures of Maya and Daniel at the tiadura, and Googled the strange ritual to trace her to Chiloé.

Arana pretends he is still on Maya's side, wanting to protect her from the criminals and FBI. Maya connects some dots and realizes Leeman must have bribed Arana to kill his bodyguards. Then Arana discovered the counterfeit money and reversed the hit. Arana had been fired for corruption months ago. He finally demands to know where counterfeiting plates and the money are, but he won't believe the truth Maya tells him. Fahkeen, Maya's faithful dog, tries to intervene, but Arana kicks him. He and Maya tussle and she thinks Arana punches her in the face. She wakes up in a hospital bed in Castro and asks what happened: Juanito and his friend Pedro saw Maya and Arana (as far as they knew, an American tourist who had just arrived on the island with a picture of Maya; Juanito told him where to find her and then followed the stranger) slip and fall over the edge of the cliff. It didn't look suspicious and they rushed to the bottom of the cliff to make sure they were okay. Maya was unconscious but had landed on sand; Arana was dead on the rocks. Pedro went for help and in the frenzy no one paid attention to the tourist's body, which drifted out with the tide. The carabineros rescued Maya via lifeboat and wrote a dry report leaving out most of the details about the stranger, including only a cursory formality about his possible identity. They omitted the fact that the stranger was seeking Maya and had her photograph. They eventually linked him to a tourist who disappeared from a local hotel on another island, and didn't question the strange nature of his two day planned trip to a remote part of the world. As usual in Chiloé, people obscure the truth that they don't want to deal with, rather than facing it directly.

Maya obsesses about what really happened on the cliff because she cannot remember all the details, but Manuel urges her to simply believe her Popo, whom she had a vision of, saved her from death. With the death of Arana and no one interested in investigating the details of his identity, Maya is finally free to move forward. No one can connect her to Laura Barron and the counterfeiting anymore. Maya spends time recuperating in Castro but as Christmas arrives, she returns to Manuel's, where Nidia and Andres join them. Maya realizes that though she lost her Popo, her family has grown exponentially and she is surrounded by love and support. Finally, Maya is unsurprised to learn that her grandmother never threw away the counterfeiting plates, and still has them. Maya will inherit them along with her Popo's pipe.

## Analysis

Maya has prided herself on how island life has healed her, helping her rise above her addictions. Yet as soon as something painful happens (Daniel dumping her) she



relapses into drinking. Maya is not quite as mature and ready to move forward as she thinks. She imparts the bland platitude, “Addiction is always lying in wait, looking for its chance” (Page 356). Perhaps this is part of Maya’s self-mythologizing, presenting her life as a cautionary tale for others. Maya’s disappointment over her failed love affair seems more embarrassment over her inability to live up to the myth of her grandparents’ love rather than a genuine sense of loss over Daniel, whom she barely knew. The story of Maya’s trip to visit the mother she desperately wanted to get to know is an exemplary case of “be careful what you wish for.” Perhaps the same would have been true of her relationship with Daniel, had it continued.

Once again Maya fails to arouse suspense with her use of foreshadowing. On page 370, she has an “ominous premonition” – and the fog of the island mirrors her internal state of mind in a clunky and explicitly stated metaphor. Officer Arana appears one page later. A few pages after that, he is dead. All the hypothetical tension regarding whether Maya is actually being chased is for nothing as the conflict resolves itself with the intervention of *deus ex machina* (the ghost of Popo). Nidia and Mike are obsessed with crime fiction, yet the novel fails to follow the conventions of the genre; there are no range of suspects who might be chasing Maya, nor any chances for the reader to engage with and solve a mystery. Arana abruptly shows up and just as abruptly departs. The climax is underwhelming, befitting a novel that has resolved Maya’s internal conflict several times before the narrative reached its end.

There is one final incident of a strangely gendered and hyper sexualized bias against women. As Arana tries to force Maya to reveal what he wants to know about the counterfeit money, he calls her a “fucking slut” (Page 375) even though their relationship has never been even remotely sexual. Women are simply there to be degraded, and their sexuality is the easiest way to dishonor them. The world at the end of the novel is the same as the world at the beginning: Maya is still resigned to a certain expectation of how men will eternally treat women, and no one will ever bother to point out that it is wrong. Just as the Chilotes close the case on the mysterious tourist without questioning it too closely because they don’t want any trouble on the island, so too are gender dynamics so embedded that they are not worth questioning lest they stir up a hornet’s nest. It is a bleak portrayal of gender relationships.

Maya’s story has a happy ending surrounded by a “tribe” of people to replace her lost Popo. But the denouement is so anticlimactic it hardly seemed worth it for the reader to make the entire journey. Love and forgiveness and family prevail, just as one could have predicted they would from the beginning. Nothing new is revealed, and Maya’s self-mythologizing fails to reach the epic scale to which she aspires.

## Discussion Question 1

Does the narrative structure support the sudden appearance of Officer Arana in Chiloé? Has the novel been moving toward this confrontation since Maya and Arana’s first meeting, or is it a complete surprise? Do you find the resolution to Maya’s exile satisfying? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

Is Maya as healed as she professed to be? What does her relapse into alcohol say about her? Is it a momentary slip over an overly dramatic teenager, or an indication of a mind not fully at peace with itself?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Maya will be happy if she stays in Chiloé forever? Do you think she'll ever pine for a more varied existence? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

atrophy, permeable, recrimination, histrionic, profusion, agile, palpable, translucent, precipice, elucidate, insalubrious, affinity



# Characters

## Maya Vidal

Maya Vidal is a nineteen-year-old American girl, half Chilean and half Danish – though physically she takes only after Danish mother who abandoned her: tall, blonde, pale, and athletic. Maya has a loving childhood being raised by her grandparents, an open-minded mixed race couple, though she suffers unspecified nighttime fears (possibly simply of being alone) that give her chronic insomnia. These fears likely stem from her deep-rooted issues with abandonment after her mother's early departure and her father's absenteeism as a pilot. Maya falls apart completely after her grandfather's death when she is 15, left alone to manage her grief when her grandmother shuts down.

Maya is a typical teenager, wanting both to fit in and stand out from the crowd, but her addictive personality means that her typical teenage experimentation with drugs leads her down a rabbit whole into full fledged street life as an addict. Maya is passionate and strong-willed, prone to self-mythologizing, as well as holding onto resentments and wanting to punish those she feels have betrayed her. She believes in the supernatural, frequently glimpsing the ghost of her grandfather after his death. Maya tends to shirk responsibility, blaming fate for her misfortunes, but once she starts to sober up and goes into exile in the isolated archipelago of Chiloé, she is forced to confront her own demons and make herself accountable for her actions. The quiet life appeals to Maya, giving her the space to quiet her own mind, though one wonders how genuine her recovery is, and if she would quickly fall into her old habits if she were surrounded by temptations.

## Nidia Vidal

Nidia Vidal is Maya's 66-year-old grandmother, also known as "Nini." Nidia is fiery and stubborn, raising her granddaughter without sentimentality but with a firm, loving hand – her nickname is "Don Corleone" after the character in "The Godfather." Nidia has a strong will to survive, escaping Chile during the military dictatorship after she loses her husband, and supporting her young son on her own. Nidia lets fate and astrology guide her life, believing her epic romance with Paul Ditson was "written in the stars," a romantic idea for such a practical woman who loves the nuts and bolts logic of solving detective stories. Despite her tough love style, Nidia is fiercely loyal, never turning her back on Maya even when Maya puts her through hell by disappearing for six months. Nidia has a mischievous, outlaw side, typified by the fact that she holds onto a set of counterfeiting plates rather than getting rid of them as evidence.

## Paul Ditson II

Paul Ditson II is Maya's Popo, her grandmother's second husband. Paul is African American, a well-respected astronomy professor in the 1970s at a time when racial



tensions in the United States still ran high. Though Paul is a scientist and infinitely more logical than Nidia, he is much softer in his treatment of Maya: his love is unconditional, and as he teaches her about the universe he also teaches her about the mysteries of the human heart, encouraging her to question authority and think independently. Paul dies in his 60's of pancreatic cancer, going from diagnosis to coffin in six months, and his death is the inciting incident of Maya's life going off the rails, as she cannot cope with her grief.

## **Andres Vidal**

Andres Vidal is Maya's father, also known as Andy once he moves to North America. An airline pilot and ladies' man, Andres is an absentee father, leaving the responsibility for his daughter in the hands of his mother and stepfather. Like his daughter, Andres eventually takes responsibility for his actions and helps put Maya through recovery. Though he loves her, there isn't much relationship between father and daughter.

## **Mike O'Kelly**

Mike O'Kelly is Nidia Vidal's best friend, a fellow social justice advocate and lover of murder mysteries. Mike's nickname is Snow White, due to his dark hair and pale skin. He is 12 years younger than Nidia and half in love with her. Mike is in a wheelchair, having been shot in an act of gang violence trying to save a wayward kid, which is his life's main passion. Mike is generous and loyal to the Vidal women, helping Maya get rid of the evidence that might connect her to the counterfeiting and returning a favor to the woman who helped Maya get off the streets by taking another of her charges into his rehabilitation program.

## **Marta Otter**

Marta Otter is Maya's mother, whose influence is felt due to her striking absence. She abandons Maya almost as soon as she is born, and shows little interest in maintaining any relationship with her daughter. Marta is aloof and reserved, and Maya prefers to pretend she was orphaned by a Laplander princess than her actual Danish mother.

## **Manuel Arias**

Manuel Arias is a 72-year-old Chilean who takes Maya in when she is on the run, and it is later revealed that he is Maya's biological grandfather. Manuel is fit for his age, and maintains a serenity that Maya compares to that of Buddha, though Maya disrupts his calm lifestyle. Manuel suffers from a brain aneurysm that could kill him at any moment, forcing to come to terms with his mortality and live life in the present. Manuel is fastidious and orderly, and suffers from claustrophobia and nightmares, holdovers from his imprisonment by the military dictatorship in the 1970s. He provides Maya with a home and love and she returns the favor by forcing him to open up his past, finally



letting go of the pain of his imprisonment to be as calm internally as he pretends to be externally.

## **Blanca Schnake**

Blanca Schnake is the principal of the village school on the island where Maya lives with Manuel. She is in her 50s, divorced, and a survivor of breast cancer, who harbors deep feelings for Manuel, whom she had a brief affair with in the 1970s. Blanca comes from a right wing family that typifies a certain Chilean attitude of looking the other way rather than facing unpleasant truths. Her family prospered under the dictatorship that oppressed so many others. Blanca takes Maya under her wing and treats Maya like a daughter, kindly listening to all of Maya's troubles. She is a strong woman who gets things done, taking advantage of her father's wealth, but she is still willing to turn a blind eye to events she feels helpless to change, such as the rape of Azucena Corrales.

## **Don Lionel Schnake**

Don Lionel Schnake is Blanca's father who lives in Castro, the capital of Chiloé. Don Lionel took full advantage of the dictatorship to help his family prosper, but he maintained a sense of integrity and neighborly spirit, taking Manuel in when he was banished for allegedly being a Communist. He good-naturedly uses his fortune for the betterment of the community, forking over cash for all of Blanca's whims, and paying for Manuel's experimental surgery to fix his brain aneurysm. Don Lionel is a complex character, coming from a conservative, self-preserving background but unconditionally helping those in need.

## **Father Luciano Lyon**

Father Luciano Lyon is an elderly priest who was imprisoned for standing up to the military dictatorship. He is a close friend of Manuel's who helps Maya find the information she needs to understand Manuel's past.

## **Daniel Goodrich**

Daniel Goodrich is an American backpacker in his mid 20s whom Maya meets in Chiloé and falls instantly in love with. Despite an upbringing to match Maya's in its abnormality – a product of a mixed race union, he was adopted by an upper class white couple and raised among his mother, father and his father's gay lover – Daniel is remarkably well adjusted, having gracefully played the cards life dealt him. He is a psychiatrist with a deep interest in the human mind, explaining his sympathetic ability to mix with all strata of society. His feelings for Maya are less ardent than hers. He embraces the moment he has with her to learn about her and Chile, but then moves on from it once he is gone, keeping it as a lovely memory.



## Brandon Leeman

Brandon Leeman is the 38-year-old drug dealer and heroin addict working the periphery of Las Vegas' criminal scene that takes Maya in and uses her as a drug mule. Brandon is lost to drugs, the only thing he truly loves, and he treats Maya as an object. He occasionally shows glimmers of humanity, as when talking about his counterfeiter brother Adam, or the way he cares for Freddy, a young addict he takes in, but overall Brandon is a low life, two-bit criminal who dies violently after trying to hoard too much power and money for himself.

## Freddy

Freddy is a fourteen-year-old drug addict who befriends Maya when she begins to work for Leeman. Half Latino and half African American, Freddy doesn't quite fit in anywhere, and was abandoned to foster homes as a child, where a lack of love led him to a life of drugs and crime. Freddy has a genuine good heart, twice risking his own life to save Maya from death, but his own future is ambivalent, as a life without drugs does not seem to interest him.

## Joe Martin

Joe Martin is one of the two bodyguards working for Brandon Leeman who kills him and wants to kill Maya for her insider knowledge of his illegal activities.

## Chino

Chino is a Filipino, one of the two bodyguards working for Brandon Leeman who kills him and wants to kill Maya for her insider knowledge of his illegal activities.

## Officer Arana

Officer Arana is a Las Vegas cop who treats Maya kindly upon her arrival in the city, maintaining an ambivalent presence in her life and offering to protect her from the serious crimes of counterfeiting and drug dealing in which she has become ensnared. But his gentle exterior is a veneer, glossing over a corrupt cop who orders Brandon Leeman's death when Leeman tries to rip him off with counterfeit bribe money. Arana is obsessed with the counterfeiting and tracks Maya all the way to Chiloé, willing to kill her to get the information he wants to make himself rich. His greed leads to his early death, which no one on the island is interested in looking too closely at, out of loyalty to Maya.





## **Olympia Pettiford**

Olympia Pettiford is an African American nurse who saves both Maya and Freddy from a life on the street. She is motivated by a deep rooted faith in Jesus, whom she has devoted her life to, running a church group called Widows for Jesus. Olympia believes in second chances and the power of redemption.

## **Roy Fedgewick**

Roy Fedgewick is a Bible thumping Christian truck driver who drugs and rapes Maya when she accepts a ride in his truck. He does not seem to notice his own moral hypocrisy, and laughs off the incident, taking Maya to Las Vegas after the incident without fear of repercussions for his actions.

## **Juanito Corrales**

Juanito Corrales is an eleven-year-old boy who befriends Maya on Chiloé, reading with her. He is ostracized from the community because he is quiet and people think he is slow, but Maya knows he is a gentle, sweet kid, the product of an incestuous rape between his mother and grandfather.

## **Eduvigis Corrales**

Eduvigis Corrales is a local Chilota who cleans Manuel's house and raises her daughter Azucena and grandson Juanito. Eduvigis is burdened with a great deal of family shame, being married to an alcoholic diabetic who rapes their daughters and beats Eduvigis. She is the emblem of Chiloé's shameful history towards its women, and Maya must learn not to indict the kind woman for allowing her husband to commit such crimes.

## **Azucena Corrales**

Azucena Corrales is a thirteen-year-old girl who was raped and impregnated by her father. She was a good student before her pregnancy, but after a possible self-induced abortion, she flees the island in shame, unable to stay near her cruel father. She gets work as a cleaner in a guesthouse on another island, limiting her options by dropping out of school.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Maya's Notebook

Maya's Notebook is her main possession, a diary she is keeping to document all the events that led to her ending up in Chiloé living with Manuel Arias, as well as the day-to-day life of the island. Maya had previously kept a diary for years, but stopped around the time her grandfather died, when she started to slide into trouble with drugs and alcohol. Her grandmother gives her the notebook at the airport before Maya leaves for Chiloé, rekindling her love of writing and giving her an outlet to process all the events of the past few years of her life.

## Manuel's Book

Manuel's Book is the project that Maya is in Chiloé to help Manuel with. The book is about Chilote mythology, which Maya finds fascinating having grown up with a superstitious grandmother. The Chilotes still ascribe a great deal of what they can't (or don't want to) understand to mythological creatures as a way of making sense and order of the world.

## Drugs

Drugs are what Maya turns to in the wake of her grandfather's death, when her father remains absent because of his piloting job and her grandmother shuts down because of her grief. Maya starts off with alcohol and marijuana, but moves on to ecstasy, cocaine, crack, and even heroin.

## The Telescope

The Telescope is Popo's prize possession, kept in the tower room of the family house in Berkeley, which he only shares with Maya, teaching her about the universe in both real and metaphorical terms.

## Fahkeen

Fahkeen is the dog that adopts Maya as she is in transit to Chiloé and Manuel Arias. He is a stray who latches on to Maya in Ancud and despite his rough and mangy appearance, has the air of a posh lapdog. He loyally keeps her company, sleeps with her, and tries to protect her even from Officer Arana at the end of the novel.



## **Tiradura De Una Casa**

Tiradura De Una Casa is a traditional house pulling event in Chiloé, in which a resident of the archipelago can rely on neighbors, boats, and oxen to pull their fully functional house from one location to another. Though little used in modern times, the event is performed for tourists who visit Chiloé, and Maya meets Daniel Goodrich at this event.

## **The Curanto**

The Curanto is a Chilote communal ceremony in which hot stones and ingredients are buried on the beach to cook a feast. In modern times, the ritual is mainly performed for ecotourists looking for “authentic” local experiences.

## **Counterfeit Plates/Money**

The Counterfeit Plates/Money are the reason Maya is being chased by the FBI and Las Vegas gangsters. Brandon Leeman showed Maya the hiding place of his brother Adam’s counterfeit money (though Maya did not know it was counterfeit at the time), which included the plates Adam used to print the fake cash. The FBI wants the plates to ensure counterfeit money doesn’t flood the market and ruin the world economy, but Brandon’s associates want them as a get rich quick scheme. Officer Arana tracks Maya all the way to Chiloé to try to secure the plates, which Nidia has kept as a souvenir.

## **The Cahuilla**

The Cahuilla is Manuel’s boat, which allows both him and Maya to navigate around the archipelago easily, doing their shopping in Castro, attending the Feast of the Nazrene on Caguach, and interviewing elderly residents on remote islands about Chilote myths. The boat is named after a mythological dolphin that accompanies a Chilote ghost ship called “Calueche.”

## **Roy Fedgewick’s Gun**

Roy Fedgewick’s Gun is a weapon Roy uses to sexually violate Maya. She finds it under his pillow in the middle of the night, and contemplates using it to kill Roy and free herself from him, but discovers she could not live with herself if she did. No matter how far off the rails Maya has gone, her moral compass has not spun completely out of control.

## **Salmon**

Salmon is one of the main exports of the Chiloé archipelago, though recently a virus nearly destroyed the entire industry of farming the fish. Because the islands are small

and lack opportunities, many young adults travel to other parts of the archipelago for work on salmon farms, dividing families like that of the Corraleses.



# Settings

## Berkeley, California

Berkeley, California is Maya's hometown where her grandparents raise her. Berkeley is a notoriously liberal and hippie community, which metaphorically resonates with the fact that Maya is raised by her Chilean immigrant grandmother and African-American grandfather and educated in alternative learning environments with little structure and individual learning paces. Growing up in a city makes Maya more independent than she would be in smaller community, and allows her the anonymity she needs to cut class and succumb to drinking and drug use without any authority figures noticing. It is the fast-paced, noisy and stressful counterpoint to Maya's exile in Chiloé.

## Chiloé

Chiloé is an archipelago along the coast of Chile, where Maya goes to escape the authorities and gangsters who might be hunting her because of her knowledge about Brandon Leeman's counterfeiting brother. Maya lives in a small village with Manuel Arias, where everyone knows everyone else's business though people are loathe to interfere with the private affairs of others. Life in Chiloé is slow paced and old-fashioned, lived more communally and within nature, where neighbors help each other out and trade favors to get things accomplished. In Chiloé, Maya is able to cut out the distractions and get back in touch with herself and the world, rather than living numbed by drugs, avoiding the grief over her grandfather's death.

## The Academy in Oregon

The Academy in Oregon is a rehabilitation clinic Maya is forced to attend after she causes a car accident due to her drug use. The academy is for teenagers, a joint school and therapy environment, which Maya longs to escape from. The clinic's therapy techniques are harshly immersive, and Maya tries to survive by simply appearing "normal" and cooperative, while revealing as little about herself as possible. Maya stays at the clinic out of sense of loyalty and responsibility for the pet vicuña's the staff puts her in charge of, but when they try to force her to stay longer than the time prescribed, she finally escapes.

## Las Vegas

Las Vegas is where Maya escapes to after her stint in an Oregon rehab facility. She winds up there by chance rather than choice, but it is an apt city for her life to go off the rails: the city's permissive, "anything goes" reputation mirrors Maya's spiral into working as a drug mule and then prostitute, feeding her addiction to increasingly harmful drugs. In a city where fortune (or fate) can make a person wildly rich or completely bankrupt,



Maya's personal fate leads her astray, involving her unintentionally with the federal crime of counterfeiting, forcing her into exile in Chile.

## **The Rehabilitation Clinic**

The Rehabilitation Clinic in San Francisco is where Maya finally sobers up for good after her life devolves to homelessness in Las Vegas. At this expensive treatment facility paid for by her worried and guilt-ridden father, Maya finally takes personal responsibility for the ways her life has spiraled out of control, making herself accountable for her actions to her grandfather who loved her unconditionally and whose memory she has not honored through her behavior. Maya spends 26 days at the rehab clinic, leaving two days before the end of the program to go to Chile, hoping to surreptitiously elude any enemies who may be tracking her whereabouts.

## **Castro**

Castro is the capital city of Chiloé, where Manuel and Maya go for all the needs that can't be met by village life, like doctors, bookshops, and research for Manuel's book. It is the most cosmopolitan place within reach, which Maya compares to New York in relation to Manuel's (unnamed) Chilote island. It is also the home of Don Lionel Schnake, Blanca's father, who is something of a patron to the village life, sponsoring the children's soccer teams and paying for Manuel's brain surgery without his knowledge.

## **La Pincoya's Cave**

La Pincoya's Cave is a Chilote tourist attraction on the island where Manuel Arias lives. It is a grotto that islanders claim as the mythological home kingdom of a goddess (La Pincoya) who is the patroness of fishermen. La Pincoya can bestow high yielding catches or empty nets depending on her mood. Maya often visits the cliff overlooking the cave because she sees her Popo's ghost there. That cliff near La Pincoya's cave is also the site of Maya's final confrontation with Officer Arana.



# Themes and Motifs

## Mythology/Superstition

Manuel is writing a book about Chilote mythology, including creatures like the Millalobo, a half man, half seal who abducts swimmers at high tide; brujos, witches and sorcerers who have the power to kill with their minds; and El Trauco, a dwarf who chases and impregnates virgins. Some islanders blame El Trauco for Azucena Corrales' pregnancy, demonstrating that even in the year 2009, some people in this isolated part of the world still believe in these myths. Their lives are full of superstition to help them make sense of a chaotic world. It isn't too different from the way Maya's grandmother uses astrology for guidance about people she encounters and decisions she has to make. Daniel Goodrich believes mythology is deeply psychological, saying "gods represent different aspects of the psyche, and myths are generally stories about creation and nature or about fundamental human dramas" (Page 298). Mythology helps people explain the inexplicable, giving them comfort in the face of fate, before which they are powerless.

Maya believes strongly in fate and is frequently passive, letting "fate" take her where it pleases. By writing in her notebook, Maya is creating her own personal mythology. Her childhood fantasies of being the orphaned daughter of a Laplander princess help give a familiar narrative structure (the beginnings of a fairy tale) to her unusual and haphazardly structured family. It makes her feel special and unique, within an entirely archetypal framework. Maya tells the story of her grandparents' meeting as if she were actually there, though her father was only ten-years-old when the events took place. The story of their indomitable love is part of her family mythology, and the story is so epic that Maya craves it for herself, imposing an obsessive love on Daniel Goodrich to replicate her grandparents' relationship.

Maya's writing is codifying her life – setting in "stone" the details of a life that memory will inevitably erase. What isn't written will be lost – in this way Maya takes back some control from fate. She has the power to leave out details she doesn't want anyone to know about. But as the villagers use El Trauco to write off Azucena's rape, there is a danger in relying on mythology and superstition without critical thinking. Mythology can perpetuate cycles of behavior that are unhealthy. Maya glosses over the grittier details of her story, focusing on the way she has overcome rather than the way she struggled. She may have hit rock bottom but her self-mythologizing makes her rise back to normalcy seem all too easy. Though the novel ends on an optimistic note, Maya's brief but immediate return to alcohol after Daniel breaks up with her may demonstrate that life is not as set in stone as she might like, and her cycle of going off the rails may well repeat itself.





## Rape/Female Sexual Agency

Maya accepts a ride from a trucker named Roy Fedgewick and winds up in a motel room drugged and brutally raped. She blames herself, writing, “There was no one to turn to. What could I say? That I’d asked for a lift and he’d charged me for the favor in a motel, that I was stupid and deserved my fate” (Page 145). Despite internalizing the blame for this trauma, Maya seems to move past the experience with relative ease. Granted, she buries her emotional life in a fog of drug and alcohol consumption, but even when Maya sobers up through rehab, readers never see Maya experience any negative repercussions from the sexual assault. She never revisits it, and it seems to have left little psychological trauma compared to most stories of women being raped. When she meets Daniel Goodrich, she easily experiences sexual pleasure with him, despite the assault and her brief, degrading stint as a prostitute. With the right man and real love, the novel seems to say, sex is easy.

While living on the streets of Las Vegas, Maya also witnesses the rape of other women, which she feels powerless to stop and thus runs away rather than intervening. This is a valid choice not to endanger herself further, but one that perpetuates a sense of helplessness simply about being a woman. Maya dresses as a man while she’s homeless in order to feel safer. Even in the calm, idyllic conditions of Chiloé, women are treated as powerless – Azucena Corrales is raped and impregnated by her own father (as her sister was before her) and the whole island knows it, but no one speaks up or intervenes. It would be too awkward or rude to comment to someone’s face about their bad behavior.

Maya describes her fears living on the street, claiming, “how much more dangerous the world was for women, how we should cross the street if a man’s coming toward us and there’s nobody else around and avoid them completely if they’re in a group, watch our backs, look to both sides, turn invisible” (Page 228). The novel sends a message that women are helpless, weaker than men, and subject to male whims. Readers should consider the validity of this message and the repercussions it might have on a young female reader. None of the women, even the strong and powerful Blanca Schnake, steps forward to act as a voice for those with less social status. Does Isabel Allende truly believe women will always be subjugated by men, and that there is no way to change this status quo? Allende may present a realistic portrait of the way men treat women, but the air of resignation surrounding her attitude toward sexual assault should be questioned. Is it all right that men brutally use women for their own purposes? Can this pattern be changed? Readers should examine the question more deeply than Allende does.

## Redemption

Maya does well in the San Francisco clinic where she goes to rehab after her months in Las Vegas. She finally “accepted the absolute truth that no one could save me but me, that I am the only person responsible for my life” (Page 291). But going to Chiloé more



firmly solidifies her sense of personal responsibility and her ability to redeem herself. Though she must rely on the kindness of strangers when she first arrives, Maya eventually learns the islanders' system of trading favors and paying favors forward and circularly, and uses the skills she has (her English language skills, her athleticism) to repay the generosity of those who have taken her in. Rather than passively letting fate guide her life, she actively takes responsibility for earning her keep in Chiloé. Her actions reflect a symbolic redemption – she cannot directly do anything about the women she saw raped in Las Vegas, or the mother she stole \$5 from at a women's shelter, but she is doing everything in her power to have accountability for herself, and show kindness where she can. In this way, Maya is on a journey of redemption.

Maya has been holding onto the death of her grandfather as an excuse for her downward spiral, almost blaming him for her actions. Daniel Goodrich suggests her issues go deeper, and that Maya is carrying a burden of resentment for her abandonment by her parents. When she runs away from the Oregon clinic, Maya has it in mind to punish her father, who is far away piloting planes in the Middle East rather than taking any responsibility for her. As Maya heals in Chiloé, she must learn to let go of the past, and in this way, she is a symbol of Chile itself. During the sixteen years of the country's military dictatorship, many people were oppressed, tortured, and killed, and many others looked the other way and thrived while this oppression took place. The nation as a whole must redeem itself for these ugly times, but also let go of them, rather than letting the national psyche stew in bitterness about its past. Chile is the perfect place for Maya to go on her healing journey, as Chile as a nation reflects her own personal arc.



# Styles

## Point of View

Maya's Notebook, as the title suggests, is written entirely from the perspective of Maya Vidal, the protagonist. The novel is a manifestation of Maya's diary, in which she writes her full life story, including her childhood but focusing mainly on the four years since the death of her grandfather. Thus the novel is told in the first person, and obviously her perspective is limited; though she recounts the meeting of her grandparents, that is because the story has been so often repeated it has become a personal fairy tale, rather than because Maya pretends she was actually there to witness it. She occasionally guesses at the inner thoughts of her grandparents, the two people she knew best in the world, but everyone else is opaque to her, much to her chagrin. In particular, Manuel and Daniel remain enigmas to Maya, and she is never quite sure what they are thinking.

Maya is writing in the present about her day-to-day life in Chiloé, but also about the past, and she slips in and out of both verb tenses in a way that might be jarring for readers. Even when dealing with the present day in Chiloé she will often speak in the past tense, so readers must read closely to follow the chronology of events. There is always a sense that Maya is recording events after the fact, and this point of view, combined with the idea that she has total control in shaping the story, sucks all the urgency out of the narrative. Maya is telling the story, but she is quite literally telling it – there is very little dialogue showing the point of view of others, and Maya spells out the meaning of events rather than giving the reader space to engage with the story.

Maya is a 19-year-old teenager, for whom events are still unfolding; until Officer Arana unexpectedly appears in Chiloé, her "fate" is very much up in the air, worrying when the law or underworld thugs will catch up with her. Yet overall her tone is calm, speaking with wisdom beyond her years. Maya hardly frets about what forces might be aligning against her back home in America, though she acts like a typical lovesick teen when Daniel breaks up with her. This zen attitude in one hand coupled with a raging immaturity on the other makes Maya's point of view a bit hard to believe. She seems to have wrapped up the events of her past with a bow, processing all the trauma and pain and spitting back out neat commentary that makes her emotional arc somewhat unrealistic. Either she is over-dramatizing her troubled years or she is so unself-aware that she doesn't realize she still has a long journey of recovery ahead of her.

## Language and Meaning

Maya brags to Manuel that she is a "human dictionary," (Page 25), and that she was always encouraged to read as a child (though her favorite stories were facile fairy tales). Her use of language does not seem to be that of a teenager as she uses words like "vertiginous" and "phlegmatic." This overuse of "SAT" words chafes, and might put off



teenager readers trying to relate to her. Maya has been through a lot in her short life, but the “wisdom beyond her years” air she adopts does not ring true. Her voice of experience lends a sense that her story is over rather than still unfolding, and this constricts and deadens the prose. If this novel is meant to be Maya’s diary, it is far too polished; there is no sense that she is figuring it out as she goes along, and the language is far too formal for a young girl journaling her daily existence and remembering stories from her past.

Similarly, because the story is meant to be a diary, Maya’s single-minded use of language becomes overbearing. She makes little effort to record the dialogue of others, to illuminate with local idioms and colloquialisms how the native Chilotes speak. The voice on display is solely hers, and this is problematic since that voice is unrealistic, as mentioned above. Though Maya goes into detail about local customs and history (in long, dry exposition paragraphs), in many ways the story could be set anywhere. There is no local flavor of language or speech patterns. Chiloé is simply a remote corner of the world on which Maya grafts herself, but always keeping herself in the foreground.

## Structure

The novel is divided into four sections: Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring. The first two are approximately 110 pages, the third is just under 100, and the last is 70. For most American readers, these seasons correspond with discordant months, as the novel takes place in the southern hemisphere. Summer is January, February, March and so on throughout the novel. It essentially covers one calendar year, 2009, the year Maya spends in Chiloé that changes and heals her. In this way, it structurally aligns with two metaphors for new beginnings: it ends just as 2010 is about to ring in, and it is spring, a traditional time of rebirth and renewal after the death of winter. With the death of Officer Arana, Maya is safe. She can put her past behind her, and start over as a new person, whomever she decides she wants to be.

As Maya marches through the year of 2009, she recounts the past in her diary, splicing flashbacks into her story of life on Chiloé. As she writes, “I’m trying to go in chronological order, since some sort of order is required and I thought that would make it easy, but I lose my thread, I go off on tangents or I remember something important several pages later and there’s no way to fit it in. My memory goes in circles, spirals, and somersaults” (Page 4). Maya jumps abruptly from an encounter with Manuel in the present to events that happened several years earlier, and readers must work out a mental timeline for themselves, as Maya rarely refers to a year or an age when she is talking about the past both past and present events move forward generally in chronological order but the interludes into the present can make it difficult to remember where the story left off in the past). The narrative floats back and forth in time, sometimes connecting an event in the present to a corollary in the past, but generally not. It is a haphazard way to structure a story, befitting a diary of personal thoughts, yet it doesn’t match the polished language and neat way each story is told. The structure belies a frenetic mind that the language negates.

The novel is written mainly in block narrative text, only rarely broken up by dialogue. This structural design, with long paragraphs followed by more long paragraphs may be fatiguing for readers, and slows down the narrative pace. Even the sentences are long, reflecting a contemplative, introspective tone. Short, clipped sentences would denote a restless mind, and that is not how Maya presents herself. The arrival of Officer Arana on the final pages is a complete surprise, as Allende fails to build any tension around his character. The structure of the novel does not feel like it is building toward anything, and when Arana conveniently dies a few pages later, the entire episode feels more authorial intervention of a plot than an organic part of the story she is building.



## Quotes

Look, kiddo, there are moments when a person has no control over their own life—things happen, that's all. This is one of those moments.

-- Nidia Vidal (Summer paragraph Page 4)

**Importance:** Nidia says this to Maya as she puts her on a plane to Chiloé, an exile that could potentially last for years. This quote reflects the novel's theme regarding fate versus free will. Maya frequently attributes her life's events to the hands of fate, rather than taking responsibility for the actions that put her in certain situations. But as Nidia points out, control is generally an illusion, and people simply have to deal with events as they come as best they can.

My grandmother would say I'm giving my soul time to catch up to me in Chiloé. She thinks jet travel is not advisable because the soul travels more slowly than the body, falls behind, and sometimes gets lost along the way.

-- Maya Vidal (Summer paragraph Page 28)

**Importance:** Nidia Vidal's paraphrased quote is referring to Maya traveling by plane from San Francisco to Chile, but has a metaphorical resonance for Maya's spiritual journey. Her body bears the brunt of her grief over her grandfather's death, as she fills it with drugs and alcohol. In rehab, her body detoxes off those drugs within 28 days. But her soul is always lagging behind, and healing her spirit – dealing with her grief, than moving forward from it, takes much longer.

As my Popo used to say, life is a tapestry we weave day by day with threads of different colors, some heavy and dark, others thin and bright, all the threads having their uses. The stupid things I did are already in the tapestry, indelible, but I'm not going to be weighed down by them till I die. What's done is done; I have to look ahead. In Chiloé there's no fuel for bonfires of despair. In this house of cypress the heart is calmed.

-- Maya Vidal (Autumn paragraph Pages 126 – 127)

**Importance:** Here, Maya sums up one of the main themes of the novel: letting go of the past. The physical distance of Maya in Chiloé from the western United States gives her the space to examine her emotional life and accept and forgive herself for her mistakes, while planning for a better future in which she takes the lessons from those mistakes.

Last year I led an undermined existence, thinking my life was over and my body irremediably stained. Now I'm whole, and I feel a respect for my body that I never had before, when I used to spend my time examining myself in the mirror to count up all my defects. I like myself as I am and don't want to change anything.

-- Maya Vidal (Autumn paragraph Page 184)

**Importance:** Here, Maya makes a connection between physical and mental health – both are equally important and they are related. Negative psychology can lead to physical abuse. Maya, just half way through the novel, states that she is healed, both in



mind and body. Her theoretical maturity to come to this realization somewhat stagnates the story, leading readers to question why they should keep reading, knowing Maya has essentially arrived at the end goal of her journey in Chiloé.

Alcoholism, domestic violence, and incest are the curses of Chiloé, especially in the most isolated communities, and according to Manuel the myth of El Trauco originated to cover up the pregnancies of girls raped by their fathers or brothers.

-- Maya Vidal (Autumn paragraph Page 218)

**Importance:** After pages of idyllic pastoral description of life on Chiloé, fueling a symbolic trope that rural life equates to moral rigor, whereas cities are dens of iniquity, Maya finally acknowledges a dark side to life on Chiloé. She also demonstrates how humans use mythology to explain both the inexplicable or realities they do not want to face.

My Popo said love makes us good. It doesn't matter who we love, nor does it matter whether our love is reciprocated or not or if the relationship lasts. Just the experience of loving is enough, that's what transforms us.

-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 223)

**Importance:** Here, Maya paraphrases (readers will note many of these quotes are paraphrased, as there is so little direct dialogue in the novel) a rather trite platitude about the redeeming power of love. The thought is not original, and equates love and goodness in a facile, unrealistic way (Brandon Leeman loved his brother Adam but that didn't make him redeemable). However this quote does demonstrate a pervasive idea in the book: Maya goes to Chiloé and learns to love the locals, and this helps her heal.

I told him about Roy Fedgewick and Brandon Leeman and the men who killed him, about distributing drugs and losing everything and ending up homeless, about how much more dangerous the world was for women, how we should cross the street if a man's coming toward us and there's nobody else around and avoid them completely if they're in a group, watch our backs, look to both sides, turn invisible.

-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 228)

**Importance:** In this quote, Maya demonstrates a persistent attitude of helplessness she attaches to the interactions between women and men. She is resigned to a world where women must live in fear, and should simply try to avoid men rather than addressing the problem or working for a better dynamic. Maya presents herself as a strong, independent woman yet she has a backward idea about the place of women in the world.

I thought I'd come to terms with my past, that I was even a little proud of them, because they'd made me stronger, but now that I've met Daniel, I wish I had a less interesting past so I could offer myself to him with dignity. That girl who intercepted an overweight man with varicose veins in the club parking lot was me...but now I'm someone else. Here in Chiloé I have a second opportunity, I have a thousand more opportunities, but sometimes I can't get the accusatory voice of my conscience to shut up.





-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 240)

**Importance:** This quote by Maya demonstrates an interesting structural point about the novel: she talks about one of the novel's themes, letting go of the past, but the way she introduces the idea of her nagging conscience is merely telling the reader about it, rather than showing it. She does not indicate in any way she has this conscience until she directly tells the reader she has one. This is an overall style of the novel, which relates thoughts and feelings through Maya's inner monologue rather than through action.

Half the world's problems would be solved if every one of us had an unconditional Popo instead of a demanding superego, because the best virtues thrive with affection.

-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 252)

**Importance:** Here, Maya is actually paraphrasing a thought that Daniel Goodrich shares with her. This quote makes an interesting argument for nature versus nurture, which is a facet of the battle between fate and free will. Daniel favors nurture in this case, believing circumstances can overcome genetics. There is an element of agency in nurture, keeping humans from being a victim of their genes, and thus it aligns with free will and personal responsibility, rather than similarly being a victim of fate.

Both, destiny and genes, determine what we are, and cannot be changed; if the combination is virulent, we're fucked, but if not, we can exercise a certain amount of control over our own existence, as long as our astrological chart is favorable. The way she explained it is that we come into the world with certain cards in our hand, and we play our game; with similar cards one person might lose everything and another excel.

-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 264)

**Importance:** Here, Maya is paraphrasing her grandmother, who also aligns fate and genetics, and takes a lot of free will and personal accountability out of the equation. The novel deals again and again with how much control humans have over their own lives. The narrative is peppered with illusions to higher powers and otherworldly forces, removing a great deal of the need for human responsibility. The novel therefore has a passive, rather than active, tone overall.

My past is not long and should be clear in my head, but I don't trust my capricious memory. I should write it down before I begin to change or censor it.

-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 284)

**Importance:** Maya alludes to her own trustworthiness as a narrator, which is something readers must constantly consider. Though she may not have power over fate, she has control of how she shapes the story of her life, and readers may question how she structures her story, and wonder what details she may be leaving out.

I sat on his lap and cried and cried, begged for forgiveness, and accepted the absolute truth that no one could save me but me, that I am the only person responsible for my life.



-- Maya Vidal (Winter paragraph Page 291)

**Importance:** Here, Maya is imagining her grandfather's presence during the time in rehab, and finally she recognizes she must be accountable for the choices she has made. Rather than blaming everyone else for her problems, as she has throughout the novel, Maya regains control by taking responsibility; this event takes place about eight or nine months before the moment it is revealed in the story.