

Sweetland Study Guide

Sweetland by Michael Crummey

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Plot Summary

Sweetland, by award-winning Canadian author Michael Crummey, was published in 2015. It is the tale of a small North Atlantic island in Newfoundland and an elderly man, both bearing the name of Sweetland. The government has offered a resettlement deal to the community, which is struggling after generations of industry loss and depopulation. It depicts the struggles of the community and Sweetland through this process.

The primary conflict in the first half of the novel involves Sweetland's near-solitary resistance to signing onto the resettlement package. Because the deal as offered is "all or nothing," all residents must sign or none of them will get the significant amount of money, more than many of them have ever seen in one go. As the remaining hold-outs sign on, the tension between the residents of Chance Cove and Sweetland increases. He receives anonymous threats, suffers vandalism and eventually arson. The pressure on him to sign on to the agreement is enormous.

The island's residents once relied upon cod fishing as their primary industry, but the fishing moratorium after the fishery was depleted has been in effect for two decades. After this moratorium, Sweetland was the lighthouse keeper. However, after the lighthouse became automated, he was forcibly retired.

Sweetland's relationship with his remaining relatives and other Chance Cove residents he's known his whole life are central to the action in the first half of the novel. He spends days with his autistic grand-nephew Jesse, sharing stories with him about his personal history, his long-dead family members and the island's history. He also worries about Jesse's future, should he be forced to live off the island. He serves as Jesse's closest friend and ally. These stories are deeply appreciated by Jesse, who begs for them to be told over and over.

Sweetland regularly visits with his life-long friend Duke Fewer and other friends at Duke's non-functioning barbershop, where they gossip and play chess. He keeps himself busy with the daily chores of maintaining his homestead. While Sweetland is on the outs with his fellow islanders, he plays a central role when a neighbor's cow is in a health crisis.

Eventually, Sweetland takes Jesse out for their once yearly allotted cod fishing trip, where he both confronts evidence of the community's wrath and Jesse helps him heal from the loss of his brother Hollis. After this experience, he agrees to sign the resettlement agreement, which results in Jesse's death.

The first six chapters are ended with a flashback to a time when a lifeboat full of Sri Lankan refugees were rescued by Sweetland and brought to the island. Each flashback furthers the story of this rescue, and how the community dealt with this event, which was significant in its history, bringing Sweetland into the media limelight for the first time. This flashback also addresses Sweetland's discovery that his sister has not been



faithful to her husband, and his guilt in realizing that he's pressured her into a loveless marriage.

The second half of the novel depicts what happens to Sweetland after he fakes his death and returns to the island to live a solitary life of resistance. He struggles with the effort required to feed and warm himself, despite the preparations he's made to survive. He suffers greatly the loss of his community, eventually witnessing ghostly presences, lights, and sounds. He finds himself uncertain of what is real and what is not. After some months, he finds a lost dog with whom he has a dependent companionship.

The first six chapters in Book II are ended by flashbacks revealing the source of Sweetland's terrible scars and how he came to be alone.

Gradually, the border between the natural world and the supernatural world blur, and Sweetland suffers physically, escaping death more than once. He is moved to acts of desperation, only to be stymied again and again. Finally, he must face up to his own end and that of the island.



Book I: Preface - Chapter 1

Summary

Sweetland, by Michael Crummey is the story of an old man, Moses Sweetland, and how he deals with the Canadian government-driven resettlement of the small and isolated North Atlantic island he and his fellow islanders have lived on for generations. The government has offered a generous amount of money to each islander, with the stipulation that it is an all-or-nothing deal. As the last hold-out refusing to accept the resettlement package, Moses Sweetland confronts covert hostility and anxiety from the rest of the islanders, who are mostly ready to move on. The novel is told entirely from Sweetland's point of view, and moves from his stubborn refusal to acceptance and then resistance in the face of extreme solitude.

Book I is titled "The King's Seat," under which is a quotation from the Biblical Book of Isaiah: "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name." It begins with an untitled preface, in which an unnamed man hears voices in the fog. He has been on a boat trip to the mainland to harvest firewood, and is now headed back home through the fog. The voices turn out to be those of several dark-skinned men in a lifeboat. The man tows the lifeboat in to shore.

As Chapter 1 begins, Moses Sweetland is at home in Chance Cove. A government agent comes to visit him, knocking at the front door. None of the residents of the island ever knock or use their front doors, so this is the act of a stranger. The agent asks if Sweetland will be coming to the community meeting. He informs Sweetland that he and Loveless are the only two hold-outs on the government offer for resettlement. This news comes as a surprise to Sweetland, who briefly excuses himself to take stock of what is happening.

The agent asks Sweetland about himself, but Sweetland gruffly informs him that he undoubtedly knows everything in his file. The agent then reads off some of Sweetland's personal details, including that he is nearing 70 years old, and has never married. He is a retired light-keeper who was laid off when the island's light was automated, and before that, he was a fisherman until the fishery moratorium of 1992. He has never lived off the island, except for a few visits to Toronto. Sweetland's face is badly scarred from a burn, the cause of which the agent seems aware. The agent wants to know why Sweetland won't take the generous government offer, amounting to \$100,000 plus relocation and job retraining. Sweetland responds that he is just "contrary." When the agent asks how long Sweetland's family has been on the island, Sweetland says it's probably been at least 200 years, and that his ancestors were the first settlers, which explains why the island is named Sweetland. The agent reminds him that the resettlement offer requires that all residents must sign on and agree to leave the island. Otherwise, the offer will be rescinded. No one must remain on the island, because there will be no ferry service, electricity, phone or internet. The agent pressures him, reminding him that the rest of the



residents are depending upon his compliance and that there is a deadline coming in September. The man leaves his card.

After the agent leaves, Sweetland talks to the photo of his Uncle Clar on the wall. Then he goes out to plant potatoes. Summer has begun.

Everyone else in Chance Cove is at the Fisherman's Hall for a town meeting. Sweetland knows that Reet Verge will be sent to talk to him after the meeting, so he avoids her by going for a ride on his quad (four-wheeler ATV) to the King's Seat, a landmark rock formation a good distance away from the village. He sets some rabbit snares, or "slips." When he returns later in the afternoon, he finds a threatening note in his cupboard. This note is only the latest of several, and he puts them in a drawer with the others. He doesn't take them seriously, but does keep them.

Early the next morning, Sweetland goes out on his ATV, making sure to be heard by the next door neighbor as he leaves, causing the neighbor boy Jesse to join him. They ride together up to the King's Seat, where Jesse, as is his habit, gets off and quotes his favorite film, "Titanic," yelling "I'm King of the World!" They ride on through Vatcher's Meadow, past the abandoned light keeper's house, and the helipad.

Sweetland wants to help Jesse, who is autistic. Jesse's condition makes him take things overly seriously, and so Sweetland teases him, hoping this will shake him from this habit. Though Jesse appears to accept Sweetland's mockery, it doesn't have any affect on Jesse's adherence to exactness. They drive up past the Fever Rocks, and then walk an overgrown path. As they walk, Jesse in front of Sweetland, Sweetland wants to touch the boy's head affectionately, but restrains himself because he knows Jesse dislikes being touched there.

They walk the snare line for a few hours, harvesting four rabbits. They eat lunch, and Jesse sings for awhile afterward. After Jesse is done singing, Sweetland gives him a tin of peaches, the only fruit Jesse will eat. Jesse then asks about the resettlement agreement—the first time he has ever brought it up. He says that his grandfather has told him Loveless and Sweetland are the only remaining hold-outs. He asks if he too will have to leave the island, and Sweetland tells him that he won't have to, as long as Sweetland is around. Sweetland then asks Jesse about his recent visit to a doctor in St. John's. Sweetland jokes about the doctor and what the doctor may have said about Jesse, but then apologizes for his teasing. Jesse doesn't appear to mind. Jesse then mentions that Sweetland's brother Hollis, who has been dead for 50 years, once went to St. John's to a doctor, and stayed for most of the winter one year. Jesse says that Hollis himself has told him this fact, which Sweetland finds unsettling. Instead of asking questions about this, however, Sweetland encourages Jesse to finish up so they can get back home.

Back at Sweetland's house, they clean the rabbits. When the phone rings, instead of answering it, Sweetland sends the boy home to his supper. Jesse asks about whether Sweetland will be going on a firewood retrieval errand the next day. Sweetland sends a rabbit home with Jesse.



After Jesse leaves, Sweetland goes for a walk. He goes to Duke Fewer's barbershop, which is located in an old shed next to Duke's house. It has an old barber chair, and though he is fully equipped to be a barber, Duke has never had a customer. Instead, Reet Verge has always cut the islanders' hair. Duke's place functions primarily as a place for the men to gather, gossip, and play chess, and has done so for about 20 years, since the fishery moratorium. Duke's wife left the island 25 years ago, and his children have all gone to the mainland for work.

Duke asks about Sweetland's rabbits and mentions that Pilgrim has told him Jesse's mother Clara isn't happy about his having taken Jesse on his errand. They look over the chessboard at the game in progress and talk about the community meeting. Duke mentions the fact that Loveless and Sweetland are the only two hold-outs. Duke is the only person on the island who has never tried to talk him into signing onto the deal, which is why Sweetland feels safe in going to the barbershop to pass time. Duke mentions that he's heard some talk about burning Sweetland's property if he continues to refuse to take the deal. Sweetland is somewhat shocked at this, but Duke reassures him that it is only a rumor. He does say, however, that \$100,000 is a lot of money. When Sweetland asks if he's telling him to take the deal, Duke responds that Sweetland ought to remember what happened the last time he offered his advice. Sweetland makes his move, and so does Duke. Sweetland is in check. He leaves without making an answering move, warning Duke not to let Loveless touch the board.

The end of the chapter contains a short, untitled flashback. Sweetland was towing the lifeboat in the fog, slowly finding his way to the harbor by instinct and skill. Finally, he heard the public address system from the steeple of the church playing a recorded hymn by Tennessee Ernie Ford. He used this sound to find his way back into Chance Cove. He fired his gun three times to let the villagers know they should come down to the dock, which they do.

Analysis

This first chapter introduces the reader to the main character, Moses Sweetland, a rather taciturn old-timer who has stubbornly insisted on being the last resettlement hold-out but one at Chance Cove, the only village on the island of Sweetland. The reader is immediately introduced to the rather serious stress that is working on the tiny community: they have all been offered \$100,000 plus other expenses to relocate off the island, essentially agreeing to dissolve the long-standing community forever. The other hold-out, Loveless, is not a respected figure on the island, and so it is Sweetland's refusal that is the community's focus during this time. A deadline draws near, and there is no sign that Sweetland will change his mind.

It is obviously significant that the island of Sweetland and Sweetland the man bear the same name. Sweetland's ancestors are the first settlers to the island, and have been there for so many generations it's unclear how far back their settlement goes. As the last of his line, Sweetland has a deep connection to the island and its landscape. The land is in his blood, and vice versa. This fact is emphasized through the fact that each and



every landmark has a name, and each of those landmarks is named to mark the passage of Sweetland on his errands: The King's Seat, Vatcher's Meadow, and the Fever Rocks.

Because of Sweetland's deep connection to the island, the reader can sympathize with his refusal to sign on to the resettlement agreement. In fact, Sweetland's holding out can be seen as noble on some scale. However, it is also clear that the community is not a wealthy one, and industry has long since left the island. Though the elders are holding on with a small number of the younger generations, the government has determined that their existence is unsustainable. It is significant that Sweetland's ancestor's photo is on the wall of his home, and that he takes a moment now and again to talk to it.

The theme of landscape and its connection to heritage is emphasized, as well as that of historical change and loss. The island community has been impacted heavily by historic changes: the fishery moratorium twenty years before the time of the novel has changed the island's lifestyle permanently. Then, the one job Sweetland is qualified for, being a light house keeper, is ended by the automation of the light. Time marches on, whether the community wants it to or not.

It is initially unclear what Sweetland's exact relationship is to Jesse, the neighbor boy. In any case, he behaves as an elder, taking the boy under his wing and attempting, in his gruff way, to help the boy with his disability. Jesse is functional, but is also clearly limited in some ways by his autism. He cannot bear to be touched on his head, for instance, and he fixates on certain facts and cultural touchstones, like the film, *The Titanic*. He also displays talents, like singing old ballads and acquiring detailed knowledge about animals. Sweetland is not knowledgeable about autism because of his limited experience, isolation, and age. However, he tries to understand the boy and what he can do to help him grow up happily. He indulges him by taking him along with him when he does errands and giving him his favorite food.

The King's Seat is a common English name for a type of rock formation, usually located at the high point of an area. The rocks look like a throne for a king. It could be said that Sweetland himself—as the last of the founders' line, and the last hold-out for the resettlement, operating from a deep moral stubbornness and connection to place that no one else seems to understand—is occupying the King's Seat symbolically. Jesse, however, is the one who shouts that he is "King of the World" ritually every time they pass the King's Seat. Their world, the island of Sweetland, is complete and enough for both of them.

The insularity of the community is emphasized by Duke Fewer's barber shop, which has, humorously, never actually operated as a barber shop. Instead, the pretense of hair cutting has given way to what true small-town barber shops always are: a place for men to congregate and gossip. The banal conversation, repetition of basic goings-on of various people—these are the currency of a small village. It is apparent that everyone knows everyone else's business in this place, and feels free to ask about and comment on it. Because of this, Sweetland's only escape from the village is to go out and hunt rabbits or go out to his boat. An evening walk and playing online poker are his only



frivolous indulgences, aside from the community touchstone of a slow-moving chess game with Duke. It is probably symbolic that Duke has him in check in their latest game.

This first chapter is book-ended by two flashbacks to a time when Sweetland rescued a lifeboat of foreigners. Little has come to light so far about what is going on here, and only hints so far have been given by the author. It is apparent, however, that this is a significant event in Sweetland's life and that of the isolated community.

Discussion Question 1

Though Sweetland doesn't explicitly say what his reasons are for refusing to sign the resettlement agreement, what do you think could be some reasons for his refusal?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the other Chance Cove residents have agreed to sign on to the resettlement agreement?

Discussion Question 3

What are some ways Sweetland might be considered the "king" of Sweetland?

Vocabulary

indistinct, auditory, cantilevered, deranged, moratorium, contrary, eponymous, certifiable, geriatric, configuration, emissary, sinister, sallow, cadaverous, fey, cairns, veracity, savant, lampoon, dispensation, higgledy, gannets, geriatrics, averted, imploring, entreaties



Book I: Chapter 2

Summary

Clara comes over to Sweetland's house to talk to him while he is playing online poker. She teases him that she hopes he isn't looking at online pornography, and returns the rabbit, in part because it has been poached and could get the Pilgrim family in trouble if it is found in their home. Sweetland informs her that the rabbits are at the height of their population and will likely have a die-off in the coming winter. She is also unhappy with Sweetland because Jesse missed school to spend the day with him, and he's already missed a week of school due to his mainland doctor's appointment.

Sweetland remembers when Clara first returned to the island with the infant Jesse after ten years away on the mainland. No one in the community knows the identity of Jesse's father. Clara and Sweetland are a bit estranged, because Sweetland disapproved of her leaving the island to go away to college, though he never explicitly shared his feelings. She left after her mother's—Sweetland's sister's—death, and Sweetland felt she was abandoning her father. He refused to see her off when she left, and she never contacted him when she was gone. But after she returned to Chance Cove, she came to see him every Sunday at the lighthouse with Jesse. These visits were an opportunity to clear the air between them, but they never did.

Now, Clara brings up her real issue: that Jesse has declared his intention to stay with Sweetland on the island when everyone else leaves. She asks if Sweetland has put this idea into Jesse's head. Instead of answering directly, Sweetland asks her if she has told him about Uncle Hollis having gone to St. John's to a hospital, and informing her about Jesse's belief that he talks to directly to Hollis. Clara blames Jesse's not wanting to leave on his dislike of change. She talks about what the doctor has informed her about Jesse's autism, the general diagnosis of which Sweetland dismisses as obvious. She wants to move to St. John's so that Jesse can get regular attention from the doctor and attend a special school program. Sweetland asserts that Jesse will only be happy on the island. He mentions that Jesse wants to go with him when he goes to get firewood the next day. When Clara is displeased, he overrules her by reminding her that it is not a school day. He offers her tea, but she leaves.

Sweetland goes for his customary evening walk. He can see a container ship off in the distance, and observes most of the island's children playing on the wharf. The entire child population of the island amounts to seven or eight kids. Jesse isn't among them, because he doesn't play sports. As he returns home, he sees Loveless's little black dog, who habitually refuses to come when called. Sweetland recalls when he helped Loveless go to the mainland to buy the dog, which cost a great deal of money.

Sweetland stops to see Queenie Coffin when she calls out to him from her window. She is in a robe and curlers and is smoking a cigarette. She reads a lot, mostly romances and mysteries, and is never without a book. Though the books are predictable, she



enjoys them as a way to pass the time. Sweetland and Queenie talk about their gardens, and when Sweetland offers to bring her a barrel of potatoes come fall, she says she won't be there. Sweetland reminds her that she's been saying the same thing for twenty years. She coughs a long time instead of responding., eventually saying that she needs to quit smoking.

Sweetland thinks about the fact that Queenie never leaves her house, and he hasn't seen her outside it since before her house got indoor plumbing around 1970. She is not anti-social, however, and is willing to talk to people from her doorway or window, and even take in guests. She took one of the lifeboat survivors into her home, for instance. But she didn't leave her home even when her children were getting married at the church. Her daughter disapproves of her taste in books, and often sends her novels of a more literary caliber, but Queenie only reads the ones set in Newfoundland. She often finds that she doesn't like them, however, because the writers don't appear to truly understand their setting. Queenie is one of the few people who have the patience to deal with Jesse's repetitious questions, and he visits with her often.

Queenie brings up the resettlement agreement, and how her husband Hayward has signed the papers. Sweetland tells her he is surprised she let her husband sign. She tells him their daughter persuaded him, and that the plan is that they will live in the daughter's downstairs apartment. Queenie is openly skeptical of this arrangement, however, and doesn't really want to move to Alberta. She says she was born upstairs in her home, birthed her children there, and will leave the house in her coffin.

The next day, Sweetland is up before dawn. He listens to the weather forecast and goes down to his boat. Pilgrim's dog Diesel announces his passing. The fishing shack, or "stagehead," next to his boat is over a hundred years old. It is where the community used to knit their cod traps and clean and salt their catch. But this communal activity hasn't been done there for twenty years, since the fishery moratorium. Despite the fact that the building isn't used for fishing anymore, Sweetland maintains it carefully.

Jesse, alerted to Sweetland's impending departure on the boat, arrives just in time to join him. When Sweetland asks if he's bringing anyone else, he says that Hollis will be coming too. Sweetland tells him that Hollis doesn't like the water, and refuses to take Jesse's imaginary friend along. After talking to Hollis, Jesse decides to go without him. They travel over the bay to a place on the mainland where they can tie up to get a full load of firewood.

On their way back, the wind comes up and they have to take shelter next to Little Sweetland, a smaller island. Jesse asks Sweetland to tell him the oft-told story about the buffaloes and the people who used to live on Little Sweetland, who were resettled in the 1960s. Sweetland tells the story about how he was with the crew bringing the bison to the little island at the behest of the government. The government originally planned to bring the bison to Newfoundland, but wanted to first make sure they were free of contagious disease, so decided to isolate them on Little Sweetland for a time. There were two dozen of them that were brought from Manitoba, but the plan to bring them to Newfoundland never came about. Many people came to watch the transfer of the



buffalo to Little Sweetland. The last cow drowned when it broke its crate in panic. Sweetland watched her sink into the sea. The buffalo survived on the island for 30 years, and no one knew what happened to them in the end.

When Jesse and Sweetland return to Chance Cove, they are met by Loveless and his little dog, now on a leash. Loveless doesn't help them unload the wood, but comments on how much wood he has laid by, and how they are the only two left who haven't signed on to the resettlement agreement. Sweetland suggests that Loveless should neuter his dog so that it doesn't wander so much, but Loveless disagrees with the idea. Sweetland asks after Loveless's cow, who is about to calve. They also talk about Loveless' dead sister, Sara. Sweetland accuses him of messing up his chess game with Duke, but Loveless tells him that Duke told him his move was a good one.

As Jesse and Sweetland return to Sweetland's house, Jesse asks if he can go with Sweetland to check his snares the next day. However, the next day will be Sunday. When Jesse asks about the day after that, Sweetland reminds him he has to go to school.

Sweetland has a lot of firewood laid by on his property. People have told him he will never live long enough to burn it all, but he keeps adding more. He sees the wood as "money in the bank."

At the end of the chapter, the author returns to the flashback about the lifeboat rescue. As Sweetland pulled up to the wharf, he tossed a line to Duke Fewer, and said to call the Coast Guard. Duke wondered where the lifeboat survivors came from, since no one's heard of a ship going down. The men on the lifeboat got out onto the dock. They were taken to the Fisherman's Hall to be fed and warmed. When two men were left on the lifeboat, Sweetland realized one of them was dead. He called for the Reverend, who talked with the remaining man quietly until he was ready to disembark. The dead boy was taken to the church, frozen into a sitting position. Ruthie, who was pregnant with Clara at the time and was the head church volunteer, found a cloth to cover the body. Ruthie suggested they pray, and shouldn't leave the dead boy alone. At first the Reverend seemed uncomfortable with the idea of a vigil, but then agreed.

Analysis

This chapter clarifies the nature of the relationship between Sweetland, Clara, Pilgrim and Jesse. Clara, whose mother is dead, is Sweetland's niece, which would make Pilgrim Jesse's grandfather and Sweetland his great-uncle. It also becomes quite clear that Sweetland, like many men of his era and perhaps also typical of his background, is a man of few words. He not only has difficulty expressing clearly his feelings and opinions to others, he also has a hard time articulating them to himself. He is intelligent, but also the sort of man they call "salt of the earth"--a person who isn't well educated in a formal sense and is even suspicious of the idea of formal schooling. To him, intelligence is knowing how to find your way home on your boat when a storm comes up, or how to catch rabbits, or how to fix things and plan for the future by putting fuel by.



He is a man of practicality and a master of the skills necessary to survive in his island world, skills which may not translate well to a different lifestyle. He is integral to the theme of Community.

Jesse, too, is uniquely benefited by island life as someone suffering from autism. While school is not easy or pleasurable for him, being out doing practical chores with Sweetland suits him quite well. In this way, Sweetland knows instinctively that Jesse's visit to the doctor and seeing his condition as a problem to be fixed by medical and school intervention won't necessarily make Jesse a happier person. Like Sweetland, Jesse is nurtured by the island as a necessary way of life. For him, part of this is the autistic aversion to change and desire for an uncomplicated routine, something that will be far more difficult to achieve in a modern, bustling world.

The vague parallel between the long dead Hollis and Jesse is drawn here again: both Jesse and Hollis made a rather momentous trip to the mainland to see "the doctor." Because the reader has been informed that Jesse is autistic, we know that they have probably gone to see a doctor not for an ordinary disease, but rather for something neurological or perhaps psychological. Hollis, in fact, spent a whole winter at the hospital there under care for his unknown condition. Whether Jesse has adopted Hollis as his imaginary friend or whether he is mystically in communication with Hollis' ghost is left as an open question, and Sweetland in particular seems to be uncertain which it is. On the one hand, he seems averse to any belief in the supernatural, but Jesse's ongoing conversation with Hollis still spooks him, enough so he refuses to take Hollis on their boat trip.

The theme of community and interdependence is again emphasized in this chapter. Though not everyone gets along in Chance Cove, they depend on one another for everything. Even though Sweetland doesn't particularly like Loveless, he has taken Loveless to the mainland to buy his ridiculously expensive little dog, an indulgence not often seen in more disconnected communities. The few children on the island, with the exception of Jesse, all play together, because they are all they have. There is one church, and one Fisherman's Hall, which is opened for town meetings, but also when the lifeboat survivors are cared for in their distress. As such, the church and the Fisherman's Hall are the twin hearts of the community.

By now the main characters' names begin to have an obvious sort of symbolism. Sweetland perceives the island of Sweetland as a sweet land, and may be seen as almost one and the same. Loveless is not loved by anyone on the island. Queenie Coffin smokes to her health's obvious detriment, and refuses to leave her home, declaring she won't ever leave until she actually is carried out "in a box," her coffin. If Sweetland is the king of Sweetland, then Queenie is perhaps the queen. However, she is a sickly queen, and not married to the king, though they appear to have some sort of connection. She is damaged, confined to her home by her own permanent decision.

The story of the buffalo sent to Little Sweetland is a poignant one, reflecting the idea that the government may not be the wisest arbiter of who or what belongs where. The buffalo are taken from where they belong and left to survive on a place they don't. They



survive in their strange new home for a time, but only for a little while. One of them becomes so frightened at what is happening to her, she ends up drowning in the sea. These buffalo replace the people who once lived on Little Sweetland, who were resettled, just like what is planned for Sweetland. The people are taken from where they belong and scattered to the four winds. The buffalo who replace them clearly don't belong there, and do not thrive.

Loveless and his relationship with his independent minded little dog emphasizes Loveless' lack of practical skills, and also expresses the theme of Love and Loss. He is driven by his emotions rather than practicalities, a nature that is blamed on the fact that he drank kerosene as an infant. However, despite the fact that Loveless is widely presumed to be mentally deficient in some way, he hasn't "messed up" the chess game between Duke and Sweetland as Sweetland accuses him of, but has actually made a move that's put Sweetland in check.

Discussion Question 1

Why are Clara and Sweetland somewhat estranged? What is she most upset about at present?

Discussion Question 2

What does Queenie do to pass the time? What does she never do? Why is she dissatisfied with literary fiction set in Newfoundland?

Discussion Question 3

What group of animals are taken to Little Sweetland? What has happened to Little Sweetland's human residents?

Vocabulary

itinerant, incinerator, voracious, monotonous, nattering, pristine, ochre, gunwhale, sedge, cinched, hypoallergenic, lee, aft, indignity, vestments, notion



Book I: Chapter 3

Summary

Sweetland watches the ferry arrive in the rain carrying the Priddle brothers, who have been away for several months working in Alberta. He plays online poker and is soon interrupted by Reet Verge at the door, whom he hasn't seen since his last haircut eight months previous. He has been avoiding her because she pushed him to take the resettlement package when he was sitting in her chair getting a haircut, and he thinks she took advantage of him.

When she comes in to see him at the computer, she teases him that she hopes he isn't watching pornography. He isn't sure how old she is, but remembers that she was old enough to hang out with the reporters who came to Sweetland to cover the Sri Lankan boat people incident. One reporter had gotten stranded on the island for three days due to bad weather. Sweetland thinks of Verge as a hard woman, but knows she's had to be, as a single mother after her husband left her behind on the island. She cuts hair, runs the island's museum, and has been their reluctant mayor for three years. All the negotiations about the resettlement have been under her leadership. Sweetland knows that she used his reluctance to accept the deal to get the government to double the amount of money offered. They do not discuss this fact.

She has come to talk to him about the resettlement on behalf of the community. She tells him she herself would rather stay on the island. She informs him that he's going to be the last holdout, since Loveless will eventually give in, and that Queenie's husband has signed the papers. She asks what amount would bring him on board. He responds that he has no price. She reminds him that there's too much at stake for people to let it drop, and that he has no choice but to face reality. He interprets her statements as veiled threats and walks out of the house to the shed until he thinks she's left.

He works in his shed and thinks about what she's said for hours. He felt under siege by the entire community except for Duke, because they all want him to explain his reasoning when he can't articulate it even to his own satisfaction.

He recalls that his sister Ruthie once said that if any woman ever married him, she'd end up shooting him for his "bullheaded" nature. The more strongly he feels about something, the more likely he is to dig in. He enjoys being the last holdout.

He goes to visit Duke at his barbershop. Wince Pilgrim is also there. Sweetland expects to see Jesse as well, but finds that Clara is keeping him home to do schoolwork, a gesture Sweetland interprets as her trying to break him of his island habits. The Reverend joins them. Sweetland puts on some tea and sits at the chessboard.

The Reverend is retired and has returned to the island after his wife's death. The community is puzzled by his return, which has now lasted seven years. In his first



months back, he spent much of his time hanging around Sweetland's shed. Sweetland eventually drove him out by keeping the place too warm for comfort. The Reverend occupies himself by volunteering at the school, especially working with Jesse. He is the one who connected Clara with the doctor in St. John's. He also has hired Clara to help him around the house. He still does some preaching duties on special occasions, but does not perform regular Sunday services. Now he suggests to Sweetland about intervening with Jesse to come over to his house for lessons over the summer. Sweetland is annoyed with everyone, and restrains himself from arguing, saying instead that he'll think about it.

The men talk about the Priddle brothers' arrival, sports and the weather. The Reverend leads and Pilgrim asks if Sweetland will do what he's asked before he too leaves. When they are alone, Duke criticizes the Reverend's interest in Jesse, which Sweetland mildly defends.

Later, back at his house, Sweetland has trouble concentrating on his online poker game. It storms. He expects the Priddle brothers to come by for a visit. He thinks about his history with the Priddles. Their mother died giving birth to the second son, Keith. Their father blamed them for their mother's early death and is estranged from them. They were left to raise themselves, and have always been wild. Sweetland is one of their only allies, and took them under his wing when they were teenagers. They sometimes have helped him with chores in exchange for home-brewed beer and pornography magazines. They have been working off-island for several years, and spend their pay on drugs. Because of their appetites for women and drugs, they now spend less time with Sweetland. The community is on edge when they are home, because they often cause damage. Sweetland finally realizes they aren't coming by, and goes to bed.

It is now Sunday. As is his weekly habit, Sweetland dresses in his best clothes, does no work, and watches televangelists on the TV. He remembers his mother, who used to write a check to them every week, trusting him to mail the checks for her. However, he always burned the checks in the stove, knowing she had no concept of her limited income. He doesn't pay much attention to the sermons on TV, but he likes the hymns. He eats lunch and plays online poker, for which he feels guilty. He remembers how Sundays before his mother's death were about enforced rest and contemplation, which he thought was torture as a youth. When he worked at the lighthouse, he always had necessary duties to accomplish on Sundays, but now that he's back in Chance Cove, he follows his mother's ways for the most part.

He goes for an evening walk, stopping by Loveless' place. He checks on the cow who is ready to birth a calf, and talks to Loveless. The cow is neglected and hungry, and Sweetland is concerned about this. Loveless denies there is any problem, mentioning that Glad Vatcher has offered to buy his cow and pushed him to accept the resettlement deal. Sweetland asks if he's received any threatening notes, but Loveless doesn't understand what he's talking about.



Later, back at his house, Sweetland plays online poker and Jesse Skypes him to chat. Though Sweetland dislikes Skype, he dislikes the phone even more. As they chat, Sweetland remembers when he got his used computer, five years previous, and how Jesse taught him to use it. He never expected a computer to be part of his life, and never used a telephone until 1962, on his first trip to the mainland. Electricity and phone service didn't arrive on the island until the 1970s. Jesse instructs Sweetland to check his Facebook account, also something Jesse has taught him to use, though Jesse is his only Facebook friend. Jesse has posted a Jesse Ventura wrestling video on his page.

Sweetland is amazed by the vastness of the Internet, and watches the video twice, thinking about how it is both choreographed and real at the same time.

The next day, Sweetland goes out to check his rabbit snares, despite the weather. He avoids looking toward the Pilgrims' place, not wanting to encourage Jesse to join him. He runs into the Priddle brothers. They tease him about his rabbit poaching and the resettlement package. Though there is some tension in their conversation, it ends with an expectation that the Priddles will stop by for a drink before they leave the island again.

Sweetland goes past the lighthouse, recalling that just before it was decommissioned, a great deal of government money was spent on renovations. After it was abandoned, much of these improvements were pillaged by the community. Sweetland didn't participate in this, concerned about losing his pension.

Most of the rabbit snares are empty. Then he finds three that have obviously been mutilated by human hands, one with its head nailed to a tree. He takes all the carcasses, and removes all his snares. Then he throws a bag full of the mutilated carcasses into the sea.

The Priddles come by on their last night on the island. Sweetland senses their resentment, and suspects they may be the ones who mutilated the rabbits. They are loud and high on drugs when they arrive. They insult his home-brewed beer. Then they talk about a scheme to buy up the island properties after everyone leaves and creating a tourist attraction. Sweetland is accustomed to their big talk, which they often do when they are high. Then they turn on Sweetland as the obstacle to their dreams, alluding to rumors of violence against him. But then Keith mocks Sweetland and says he could be preserved as a relic. Sweetland tries to get them to tell him who is making threats against him, but knows they won't answer directly. They then talk crudely about their sexual exploits in great detail. Eventually they leave, and Sweetland thinks about how it's a good thing their mother isn't alive to see what they've become.

At the end of the chapter, there is a flashback to the lifeboat incident. The lighthouse keeper came to look at the survivors, and declared they were suffering from exposure and dehydration, and instructed the community on how they should be fed. He announced that the Coast Guard would come the next day, and everyone who could took the survivors into their homes. Sweetland did not act as a host, since his mother had been dead for nine months and women were expected to do the care-taking.



Instead, Sweetland went to visit with Pilgrim, whose home was hosting two of the survivors. The community had always cared for Pilgrim, blind since birth. He had always been like a brother to Sweetland. The community tried to encourage Pilgrim to become a musician, but he wasn't skilled in that direction. Despite his lack of musicianship, he had a good memory for the old songs and would be called upon often to sing them.

Pilgrim and Sweetland talked about the boat people, wondering where they came from. Sweetland was surprised to hear they were speaking English, since he couldn't understand them. Then they heard one of the men vomiting upstairs. Sweetland went to retrieve Ruthie at the church to nurse the man. He was too nervous about the corpse in the church to walk past it or call out for her. Instead, he went around to the side door. There, he saw the Reverend come out, rushing in a way that made him look guilty. Sweetland didn't alert him to his presence, and knew that Ruthie was inside.

Analysis

In this chapter, it becomes clear that Sweetland can't even articulate his reasoning for refusing to sign the resettlement agreement to himself, much less to anyone else. This may indicate a near-mystical relationship between Sweetland and the island, which would explain why he can't put it into words that he feels confident enough to stand behind. Instead, he hides behind his naturally taciturn nature and his reputation for being "bullheaded." He is stubborn beyond reason, and therefore he needn't give his reasons for what he's doing. In fact, the more he is pushed, the more he resists. Also, the reader now learns that his stubbornness has actually led to an increase of the money offered by the government, though he doesn't use this fact to boost his position. However, it is also clear that he feels threatened by the covert actions that have been taken against him: the drawer-full of anonymous threats and the mutilated rabbits are unsettling to him. It is clear he has never been so alienated from a community he has known intimately for his entire life. The theme of community is emphasized here.

However, Sweetland isn't only the gruff old-timer with a bullheaded streak. Again, the reader finds that Sweetland has a soft heart for young people who need him. Without any other reason except it seemed right, he took the neglected Priddle brothers under his wing, despite their ill behavior. He also shows an exceptional interest in the well-being of Loveless' cow. The possibility that the Priddles could be the ones who have mutilated the rabbits seems almost too obvious, but would also reflect a lack of gratitude he would find particularly galling. Throwing the carcasses into the sea is an act of cleansing the island of their poisonous presence.

In addition, Sweetland, who has never married, clearly offers signs of being very attached to his now-dead mother. Though he blames his Sunday behavior on the expectations of the house, he spends the day honoring (mostly) his mother's religious sensibilities—ceasing all work, dressing in his Sunday best even while at home, and watching church on television. This expresses the theme of Spirituality and Faith.



When the Sri Lankans come to the island, they are taken and fed, and cared for by the intimate act of being invited into the community completely by being invited into individual homes instead of being kept at a distance. This traditional hospitality of aiding seafarers is an ancient custom, one long-standing and expected of seafaring communities. Even the way they are only invited into homes that have women who can care for them is an act of tradition, so much so that Sweetland and Pilgrim seem incongruously incompetent to deal with the vomiting guest. They are so entrenched in their traditional roles that instead of coming to the man's aid, Sweetland runs off to find his sister to take care of him. In this way, he discovers his sister's infidelity to her husband, a man Sweetland considers to be nearly kin himself. His shock at this discovery is such that he can barely think about it. This incident illustrates the theme of Love and Loss.

Discussion Question 1

How has Sweetland's stubbornness about the resettlement agreement actually benefited the community?

Discussion Question 2

What did Sweetland do to help the Priddle brothers when they were young?

Discussion Question 3

How does Sweetland spend his Sundays? Why?

Vocabulary

hawsers, berate, acclamation, recalcitrance, reticence, diffidence, obstinate, remedial, solitary, incongruously, compensated, sinister, sham, pilfering, decapitated, viscera, animosity, dories, aphrodisiacs, truncated, labia, dehydration, glean, beguiling, contraption, prodigious, labyrinthine, inexorable, skulked



Book I: Chapter 4

Summary

Sweetland is awakened by the sound of Loveless' cow in distress. He sees through his window that Loveless isn't helping her, so he goes to the barn himself. It is a stillbirth. He calls to Loveless to help save the cow's life. Loveless finally gets up, complaining to his dead sister about the cow. Sweetland wonders why Loveless has neglected the cow, probably causing the calf's death and perhaps even the cow's. Though Sweetland urges Loveless to call upon the experience of Glad Vatcher, Loveless doesn't want to. He begs Sweetland to help. Sweetland gets a cable to pull the corpse of the calf out of the cow. It takes a great deal of time and effort, but they are finally successful. Loveless wonders if the cow will recover, but Sweetland is openly skeptical. As he leaves, he sees Queenie smoking in her doorway, and stops to talk about Loveless having bred the cow and now possibly causing her death. Queenie says the cow's death might be a mercy, since she won't have to be taken off the island.

Sweetland is displeased at Queenie cynicism, and remembers her as a child, when her older sister got sick and her family was quarantined. The community came together to feed the family by taking them food. Sweetland remembers that this quarantine was the only time he ever knocked on a door in Chance Cove, because they had to leave the food on the doorstep. The community had to hold the girl's funeral on the family front stoop, because of this quarantine. The entire village gathered outside and sang hymns. Sweetland remembers watching Queenie inside the house during this time, as she tried to hide from everyone outside. Now, Queenie points out that that Priddles are leaving the island, and he thinks he might go down to see them off. Instead he goes in to strip off his filthy clothing, and falls asleep on the kitchen daybed.

When he wakes, it is evening and Jesse is there. The boy has lit a fire in the stove to warm the place. He has heard about the dead calf and shares the news that the cow is lying down and won't get up. Meanwhile, he plays a computer game.

Sweetland thinks about Jesse's odd way of expressing emotion, and how it is difficult to figure out what he is thinking and why. He remembers when Jesse was younger, and how Sweetland often spent time over at the Pilgrims' house after losing his lighthouse keeper job. He was often part of Jesse's bedtime routine, answering the boy's questions and telling him stories about the past. Sweetland recalls telling Jesse about how Hollis and he had to share their dead father's coat when they went out fishing. Sweetland was with his brother when Hollis drowned, a fact that Jesse says he's heard from Hollis himself. He remembers that Jesse once told him he had a secret to tell him, but never told him what it was. Sweetland still views this as a riddle left unanswered. Jesse wants Sweetland to take him to see the cow, but Sweetland says he has work to do instead. Jesse goes over on his own.



Glad Vatcher comes to see Sweetland in his shed. They talk about how Vatcher tried to buy the cow from Loveless, and how Loveless needs help to get the cow back on her feet. Sweetland tries to say no, but Vatcher persuades him by saying that Loveless and Jesse are too weak to help.

This is the first time that Vatcher and Sweetland have talked since Vatcher signed the resettlement agreement. Vatcher had previously declared his opposition to resettlement. Vatcher and his wife run the island's only store, and is Chance Cove's wealthiest resident. His having signed on swayed the community to take the deal. Sweetland blames him for his current position as community outsider.

The cow is very ill, and not able to get onto her feet. Many of the village's men have gathered, and they all pitch in to figure out a solution and lend a hand. After hours of work, they manage to get the cow into an improvised sling. Vatcher instructs Loveless to massage the cow's legs to get the blood circulating again.

Afterward, Sweetland invites Vatcher to his house for a beer, to which he agrees. Duke and Pilgrim and Jesse follow. Sweetland pours homebrewed beer for everyone, including Jesse. While the men talk, he gives Jesse his laptop to play with. They discuss what happened with the cow, and how out of practice they are at such a task, joking about how they could have looked it up on Google. This leads to Duke asking about when Vatcher will begin to move his livestock off the island and how much it will cost to do so. Vatcher mentions that it will be more than they can afford if the resettlement money doesn't come through, but that they plan to leave regardless. After Vatcher leaves, Pilgrim chastises Duke for asking such touchy questions. Pilgrim mentions how surprised he is that Vatcher signed the agreement. Sweetland makes a vulgar comment about Vatcher. Duke says it was Vatcher's wife who persuaded him, so Sweetland makes the same vulgar comment about his wife.

After everyone leaves for their homes, Sweetland is a bit drunk. He sits alone feeling sorry for himself. Then he looks up "cow-lifting" on Google, and sees that of all the millions of results, none of them would have worked for their particular, isolated situation.

He goes to visit Loveless in his barn, and finds him massaging the cow's legs. Loveless is worried about the cow, how he's failed his dead sister Sara, and how he feels helpless without her. Sweetland takes over for Loveless and sends him in for a lie-down. Before Loveless leaves, he tells Sweetland that he's going to sign the agreement. Sweetland tells him he's just tired and should go rest. Loveless responds that he's made up his mind.

Sweetland stays with the cow and massages her legs. He remembers Sara Loveless, who was simple-minded but very competent in handling her livestock, garden and household. She was tough, whereas her brother has always been somewhat useless. Sweetland sees that Sara was "built for the island," while her brother was not.



After a while, he goes in to wake Loveless to take over again, and goes to walk off his hangover. As he looks over the landmarks near the village, he feels sure he can do nothing to stop what is happening. When he gets to his stagehead, he finds one of the rabbit heads nailed above the doorway.

The flashback at the end of the chapter brings the reader back to Sweetland in the churchyard, wondering if what he had seen and believed about his sister and the Reverend were true. He began to head back, thinking he'd ask Ned Priddle's wife to look in on the sick man. Ruthie came out of the church and was surprised to see him. When he told her about the sick Sri Lankan man, she wonders why he couldn't have taken care of the man himself. Together they went back to the Pilgrim house and Sweetland helped gather cleaning supplies. He was troubled about what he'd seen, because he was so close to Pilgrim, Ruthie's husband. Sweetland recalled having been the one who encouraged Pilgrim to pursue his sister for marriage. Ruthie was reluctant and refused Pilgrim's attentions at first, but Sweetland's mother told Sweetland to persuade her, which he did. Ruthie so admired her brother that his opinion swayed her into marrying Pilgrim. Sweetland felt so guilty about what he'd seen, he couldn't look Pilgrim in the eye, despite the man's blindness.

Analysis

This chapter greatly expands upon the theme of community and tradition and its importance in Chance Cove. Gossip and news are exchanged and repeated throughout any given day, from one mouth to the other. They repeat facts and perspectives as a matter of course, and it greatly contributes to the community's cohesiveness. The incident with the cow and lifting it so that it doesn't die is full-on community event, where everyone does his best to help. All hands come forward, despite their individual differences with one another. When Vatcher comes by to retrieve Sweetland as a necessary component of the community in this effort, he is bringing Sweetland back into the community as a whole, redeeming Sweetland from his outsider status. This event also persuades Loveless to sign the agreement. But as Sweetland knows, Loveless has always been an outsider. It was his sister who was "built for the island," whereas he was never suited for island life. The dead Sara, as simple-minded as she may have been, was the true head of the Loveless family, and without her, Loveless has no ability to live the island life competently.

Also, when Sweetland remembers Queenie's family and their quarantine, he remembers another time that the community came together to help one of their own. They fed and cared for a family, and everyone was present for Queenie's sister's funeral. It is these sorts of occurrences that point to the traditional nature of how the village behaves during a crisis.

Jesse is a clear bridge to modernity on the island, and illustrates the theme of History and Time. He is the one who has introduced Sweetland to the Internet and all its infinite knowledge and entertainment. In fact, outside of his habitual chores and evening walks, it provides Sweetland with his primary entertainment, online poker. Jesse is fully



competent with technology, using social media and the most popular computer games. However, Jesse is also obsessed with the island's past, constantly requesting Sweetland's retelling of stories about his ancestors and island life. Perhaps because of his autism, he insists the tales be told in exactly the same words, over and over again. In this way, As Sweetland's last living descendent, Jesse is the receiver of the island's mythos, and Sweetland is the island's priest or shaman. When Jesse tells Sweetland he has a secret to share with him, Sweetland gives this idle statement mystical significance.

Through these stories, the reader becomes aware that Sweetland was present when his brother Hollis drowned, though the circumstances of that death have not yet been revealed. His death illustrates the theme of Love and Loss.

On the other hand, despite technology's reach, and its having brought some sense of the modern world to the island, Sweetland finds that it is useless in helping with the island's most practical, important community needs, like cow-lifting. Of the millions of hits for his Google search, none of them appear to have any relevance in their particular circumstances.

Discussion Question 1

Why and how does the Chance Cove community come together to help Loveless?

Discussion Question 2

How did the community come together when Queenie's sister was sick?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Sweetland feel guilty after he discovered Ruthie's infidelity?

Vocabulary

tentative, quarantined, doggedly, capelin, interrogation, meager, fulcrum, attenuated, myriad, discernible, truncated, archaic, obsolete, innocuous, besotted, hapless



Book I: Chapter 5

Summary

It is the first of July, and Hayward finds Queenie dead in her chair with a half-smoked cigarette and a book. Her children come back to the island for her funeral. Her body is cleaned by Clara and laid out on a table in her parlor. Queenie hasn't worn shoes for decades, and so she wears a dress and her slippers. The coffin, when it arrives, is too big for the door, and so a window must be taken out for it to be brought in and out. The community participates in these doings fully.

The Reverend opens the church for the funeral. During the funeral procession, Pilgrim suggests to Sweetland that she should have been buried under her house. In the church, Jesse insists on leaving space for Hollis to sit next to him, which Pilgrim abides. The congregation is quite out of practice in communal singing, because of the lack of weekly church services. Jesse, along among them, has perfect pitch. The poor singing of the community bothers him, and eventually he resorts to rocking back and forth with his hands over his ears, moaning. Queenie is buried in the "new cemetery," which has been in use for fifty years. Sweetland, Glad Vatcher and Queenie's son Hayward Jr. do the burying after the rest of the community goes to the funeral reception. They do so silently.

On the way back to the funeral, Hayward Jr. and Vatcher begin to discuss Hayward's job off-island and the ordeal with the cow, which has now recovered. Vatcher asks if Hayward will be staying on the island for a while, but he informs them he has to return to his job. Hayward left the island long before industry died on the island, and confesses to feeling confined on the island. Back at the house, the Reverend and Jesse sit together to watch *The Titanic* on an iPod. When Sweetland arrives, some of the mourners make a point of leaving. Sweetland ignores them.

Sandra, Queenie's daughter, talks to Sweetland about how her mother appears not to have read any of the better literature she sent her. Sandra is a bit drunk, which loosens her tongue. Sweetland assures her that Queenie read some of the books, and in fact was reading one of them when she died. She repeats her mother's oft-said declaration that she was born upstairs and would leave in a box, angered by her mother's stubbornness. She tells Sweetland that Queenie talked of him during their phone calls, and that her mother once told her she used to think that Sweetland and she would get married, back in the day. Sweetland is embarrassed by her statement, worried they will be overheard. They go outside to smoke the last of Queenie's cigarettes, though both of them no longer smoke. Sandra tells him she's heard about Sweetland's resolve to stay on the island, pointing out that Sweetland is in the "King's Seat," with everyone hung up on what he will do. She says she can't imagine how lonely this must be.

They talk about Clara and how her feelings toward Sweetland have changed. Sandra surprises Sweetland with the information that he is the reason Clara came back to the



island, wanting him to be involved in Jesse's life. She also tells him that Queenie thought his never marrying was a waste. She asks Sweetland about Effie Priddle, and that she heard they were once engaged—that he'd gone to Toronto to get enough money to buy her an engagement ring. She then asks it was the injuries to his face that caused this engagement to end, and that she knows there were other island women who would have accepted him. Finally, she asks if he is gay. Sweetland is shocked and bowled over by all these questions, and doesn't answer her. Sandra apologizes, and blames her forwardness on being drunk.

Sandra is the last of the Coffin children to leave the island after the funeral, and at the last moment, Queenie's husband Hayward decides to depart with her, leaving the house and all its contents behind. Sweetland sees this departure as another death. Instead of stopping by the house on his walks, he hangs out in his stagehead (fish house). He keeps expecting the other rabbit head to show up or further vandalism, but he has no idea who to blame because of the myriad possibilities.

Jesse is very troubled by the loss of the Coffins, and so Sweetland sees little of him, despite the fact that school is out. Jesse asks people again and again to explain why Hayward has left the island. He claims to have seen a light in the Coffins' living room, and finally Sweetland sits with him to look for it. When nothing happens, Jesse is offended by Sweetland's effort to prove it was his imagination. Jesse regresses in various behavioral ways, and can only be soothed by his various electronic devices.

The Priddle brothers return to the island, acting fairly subdued because of the community's loss. They don't drink as much as they usually do, and visit many people they haven't visited in a long time. They also pay their respects at the cemetery to Queenie and to their dead mother, which is emotional for Keith. Sweetland again wonders to himself if the Priddles aren't responsible for the rabbit mutilations and subsequent threatening gesture. He also wonders why they never ask him about their mother, but is also relieved they don't. Barry isn't very sympathetic to his brother's emotions, but they wait for Keith before leaving the cemetery.

Two weeks after Hayward left the island, Pilgrim and Jesse come to visit with Sweetland. Jesse spends the visit plugged into his iPod. The two men talk about Queenie's funeral, Hayward's departure and the Priddles. They mutually avoid the topic of the resettlement. The phone rings, and Sweetland doesn't answer it. Finally, Pilgrim does answer, saying he thinks it might be Clara calling. Instead, it is the government agent. Sweetland is reluctant to talk to the man, but Pilgrim forces the phone on him. Sweetland tells the caller he probably wishes Sweetland dead, like everyone else. The agent quickly offers his condolences for his loss, and mentions that Loveless has signed the agreement. Sweetland pretends not to know this. The agent asks if there have been any developments since their last meeting, and Sweetland thinks about all that has happened, including the threats, but instead of saying anything, answers in the negative. Then he hangs up on the agent.

He turns on Pilgrim, realizing that his presence was to insure that Sweetland answered the phone. Pilgrim responds that Sweetland should stop being so stubborn. Sweetland



asks him why he should. Pilgrim is frustrated and talks about how they are all old, and how Sweetland doesn't seem to be considering about what will be left for Jesse and Clara after they're gone. He tells Sweetland that she needs the money to create a new life on the mainland, and Sweetland is standing in the way. Sweetland forcibly pulls out Jesse's earbuds, and tells him that his grandfather thinks they should all leave the island, demanding his opinion. Pilgrim tries to intervene, and Jesse becomes very upset. Sweetland feels bad, but also that he's right. They can't console Jesse, and he begins to hit his head repeatedly against the floor. They are forced to call Clara. Clara yells at Sweetland and Jesse yells to stop the altercation. They finally have to call the Reverend to help Jesse stop hurting himself and to take him home. Clara is very angry at Sweetland.

Sweetland attempts to lose himself in his chores, cutting wood, but can't stop feeling ashamed of himself. Eventually he throws his axe over the roof in a rage. The Reverend comes by. Sweetland asks after Jesse, who is now asleep. The Reverend wants to know what happened, but Sweetland doesn't answer, instead going to look for the axe and then sharpening it. Sweetland finally responds that he knows Pilgrim has given the Reverend his version of events, and wasn't about to argue with a blind man. The Reverend presses him, saying he knows how Sweetland feels about Jesse, though Sweetland insults him for saying so. The Reverend tells Sweetland he does not believe Sweetland is acting in Jesse's best interest, and that he is being a "selfish son of a bitch." Sweetland is shocked at the Reverend's boldness. The Reverend points out that Jesse is the only card Sweetland has left to play, and he might win if he keeps using the boy. When Sweetland tells the Reverend to leave, the Reverend asks if Sweetland can handle the consequences of his actions. Sweetland pretends to ignore him and keeps grinding the axe.

Later, Sweetland goes in for lunch, but lack appetite. He goes to Duke's empty barbershop and stands at the chessboard, where he still in check. He looks over the old photos and news articles on the wall, noticing one of him and Duke when they were young, and Sweetland wasn't yet scarred. He remembers what it was like to go to the mainland with Duke for work, the weather, and how hard they worked. He remembers his homesickness and loneliness. Duke comes in and asks if Sweetland has a chess move in mind. Sweetland responds in the affirmative, that the chessboard should be burned in the stove, and that he is done playing. Duke sets the pieces back into starting positions and makes his usual opening move. He mentions that he's head about the ruckus with Jesse. Sweetland refuses to take a move, saying he doesn't want to play. Duke tells him he's sure Jesse will be fine.

Sweetland goes to bed, but can't sleep. He remembers that when Duke and he were children, they would chase and spy on the village's couples as they met for intimacy in the island's makeout spots. He also remembers spying on Queenie in her window with her knowledge during their family's quarantine. She would display her prepubescent naked body for him. He remembers their closeness then, and how they would talk at night through her window, and that he would bring her sweets. These episodes happened about half a dozen times, but after her sister's death, they became distant from one another. Then she ended up marrying Hayward.



Sweetland gets up and sees a fire down on the harbor. It is his stagehead burning, an arson. It burns to the ground. The community doesn't try to put out the fire because of its intensity, but does do what is necessary to keep the fire from spreading and stands witness. Sweetland knows that the arsonists must be among those standing there.

At the end of the chapter, the flashback to the Sri Lankan boat incident resumes. The island was visited by all kinds of government officials and investigators afterward. It turned out that the men on the lifeboat were Sri Lankans who paid to be smuggled to the United States. Their ship somehow ended up adrift in the North Atlantic, and then the smugglers set them out into the lifeboat without water or provisions. Two died before they even left the ship. They had no information about the nationalities of the ship or its operators or its name. Then the media descended upon the island, interviewing everyone. Sweetland was annoyed with all of it, and deliberately misspelled his name to the reporter who talk to him. He mocked the reporter, and sent them to talk to his sister, who he had barely spoken to since discovering her infidelity. While talking with the reporter, he remembered his closeness with Ruthie when they were children, and how he had acted as a replacement father to her after their father's death. He remembered when he killed a rooster that attacked her, enraged so much that he beat it beyond use as a meal. He felt his rage from both times was similar, but wasn't certain where to direct it this time. Finally, Sweetland answered the reporter's questions directly, feeling he was making a fool of himself.

Analysis

Queenie's death further displays the themes of community cohesion and a growing generation gap between those who have left the island to seek work and those who are still attached to the island. Most of the younger generation has been forced to go to the mainland due to the loss of the island's only industry: cod fishing. It has now been twenty years, a full generation, and the young have made lives elsewhere. However, most of the work they have found are the sorts of difficult industrial work that couldn't be more alien to the lives they would have lived on the island. They work on the tar sands, or in landscaping, or in steel mills. Only a few have gotten higher education, and those who do, like Sandra, bear an air of condescension toward the remaining islanders, including her own mother. Hayward Jr. even says his "skin crawls" at the claustrophobic nature of island life.

But Sweetland, when he recalls his own brief times off to the mainland for work, remembers only his homesickness, loneliness and disconnection. For Sweetland, being separate from the island is unthinkable.

Queenie's old fashioned funeral is a display of community cohesion. All her children return to see her buried, and by her death, she proves correct a predictions she's made for 20 years: that she was born in her house and would die there as well. Mrs. Coffin doesn't leave her house for decades, and only does so in a coffin. Her dignity is maintained scrupulously, even to the point of taking out a window to have her put into her coffin. The burying is traditional, even ritualistic, with Glad Vatcher, Sweetland and



Hayward Jr. doing the work. The men essentially represent three generations: Sweetland as the elder stubbornly attached to his home, Vatcher as a somewhat younger man willing to leave the island behind, and Hayward Jr. as the generation that finds island life unthinkable, even revolting.

The conversation Sweetland has with Sandra after the funeral is enlightening but also typical of the airing that sometimes happens after a person has died. Secrets that aren't typically spoken of on the island are brought into the open by a representative of the younger generation, one who doesn't have any particular stake in staying silent. Young Sandra feels freed by drink and grief to tell tales on the dead, but her information can also be seen as an effort to heal. Through her talk, the reader becomes better informed about Sweetland's two abortive romances: with Queenie and with Effie Priddle. The fact is that Queenie and Sweetland by all rights should have ended up married. It is the quarantine that brings Queenie and Sweetland together, but it is the tragedy of her sister's death that dooms their relationship to an abortive end. The fact that Effie Priddle was once an object of his affection now appears more than idle rumor, but rather a fact. It also now becomes evident that the mysterious accident that caused Sweetland's facial scarring is connected to his single status. This conversation between them illustrates the theme of Love and Loss.

Sandra as truth-teller also issues another direct observation: that Sweetland occupies the "King's Seat" in his refusal to sign the resettlement agreement, a position that is both attention seeking but also incredibly lonely. It expresses the theme of Community.

When the Priddles return, they display a side of themselves previously unseen. Instead of just being wild misbehaving criminal types, they show themselves to be very much a part of the community, reestablishing long lost connections. When they visit the cemetery, Keith's grief over his long-dead mother, who died giving birth to him, is touching, as is his brother Barry's deceptively grudging acceptance of that grief. Sweetland's connection to the Priddles becomes more clear: he feels responsible for them because of his previous connection to Effie, their mother.

Jesse's regression after the loss of the Coffins shows how deeply dependent he is on his world remaining unchanged. He retreats into his electronic devices as a way to cope, but this does not act in any true way to alleviate his pain. His world is falling apart, just as Sweetland's is. When Sweetland puts Jesse into the middle of his fight with Pilgrim, it is cruel, a fact that the Reverend makes explicit. The Reverend is correct in saying that Sweetland is using Jesse inappropriately to get his way, to in effect stop time in its tracks. Both he and Jesse have an interest in everything staying the same, forever. But Sweetland is nearly seventy years old, while Jesse has his whole life ahead of him. Jesse is in essence a boy with a foot in the world of modernity and technology and one firmly planted in the island's past. In this way he is trapped, or will be split asunder, whether Sweetland chooses to use him or not. The world is closing in on Sweetland, and his closest friends, those who respect him the most, are confronting him with the real consequences of his actions. Their struggle reflects the theme of History and Time.



All the while, Sweetland continues to accumulate and cut firewood, more than he could ever use in his lifetime. To him, the firewood is better than money: it is warmth and a proof that he will remain on the island. It is a symbol of his stubbornness, but also his commitment. When the Reverend confronts him about Jesse, he literally has an axe to grind throughout the conversation, but says nothing.

When Sweetland's old stagehead is burned, it is history burning—the end of an old way of life. Once, the stagehead was where the community would gather to fix their fishing equipment and to clean fish. It was the center of the island's industry. But now, it is ashes, never to be rebuilt. It is a symbol of the end.

Discussion Question 1

How do Queenie's predictions come true?

Discussion Question 2

How is Jesse affected by the loss of the Coffins? What happens when Sweetland puts Jesse in the middle of his argument with Pilgrim?

Discussion Question 3

How does Sweetland feel when he is interviewed by the reporters after the Sri Lankan lifeboat incident?

Vocabulary

tentative, quarantined, doggedly, capelin, interrogation, meager, fulcrum, attenuated, myriad, discernible, truncated, archaic, obsolete, innocuous, besotted, hapless



Book I: Chapter 6

Summary

The police come to ask Sweetland whom he suspects did the arson. Sweetland points out there are likely a dozen possible suspects, no one will come forward, and even if he knew who did it, he wouldn't tell the police, because he deserved it.

Sweetland goes to Duke's shop to check out the chess game he is no longer part of. Duke and Pilgrim have been interviewed by the police, and wonder who committed the crime. They note that he still has his boat. Pilgrim asks if he's going to go out fishing for their food allotment of cod, because Jesse has been asking about it. Sweetland thinks Clara would be against it, but Pilgrim thinks she's less angry with him because of the fire. He tells Sweetland to come over after Jesse's gone to bed.

Sweetland goes to the Pilgrims' house, where they are watching TV. He sits down to watch with them, and they talk. Finally, the resettlement agreement comes up, and Clara tells him that signing it is what he can do to make things right between them, wondering if it would be so terrible to live somewhere else. After watching more TV and before leaving for the night, Sweetland looks in on Jesse. On his way out, he offers to take Jesse with him when he goes fishing.

Two days later, Clara brings Jesse and Pilgrim down to the wharf where Sweetland is preparing the boat. As he boards the boat, Jesse hugs Sweetland for the first time in years. Jesse notes that Hollis is coming along, even though there is no life vest for him. Sweetland accepts this.

It is a good day for fishing, with clear skies and no wind. As they leave the cove, they can see the burnt remains of the stagehead, and Jesse asks many questions about it, and whether Sweetland will rebuild. Sweetland evades his questions. They see a porpoise on their way out into open seas. When they reach their fishing area, there are many boats out there with them. Sweetland feels nostalgic. Jesse prompts Sweetland to tell him an old story about a pig he and Hollis had as children. The tale is interrupted when Jesse catches what he thinks is a fish. Instead, it turns out to be the bag of rabbit carcasses Sweetland threw off the cliff two months previous. Sweetland is shocked and throws it back in without discussion or explanation. He resumes the tale about the pig. He remembers to himself that at the time of the incident with the pig, his mother was eight months pregnant with Ruthie, but they were never told about it until the morning she was born. Soon after, their father fell ill and died. He tells Jesse about his father's death for the first time, and Jesse asks questions about it. Sweetland was the only one present when his father died.

Pilgrim catches a fish, but it shakes itself off the line. It lies stunned on the surface of the water until Sweetland gaffs it onto the boat. It is a good catch. They go on to catch their quota, and Jesse takes the wheel while the men clean the fish. Sweetland notices that



Jesse is talking to Hollis while he drives the boat, but they can't hear what Jesse is saying. When he goes up to Jesse, Jesse tells him that they are where Hollis' accident happened. He says that Pilgrim once told him where it was, and that since only Hollis and Sweetland were present at the time, only Sweetland can tell the story. Sweetland asks him if Hollis can't tell it, but Jesse insists it is Sweetland's responsibility, and that Hollis has said Sweetland will tell the story when he's ready.

Sweetland agrees to tell the story this one time, and that Hollis can correct him if he gets anything wrong. Sweetland and Hollis had gone out to trawl for fish in October on a boat they had recently bought. The Sweetlands were the last family to get a motorized boat, and Vatcher had given them a good deal on it. Hollis pulled up their trawl line heavy with fish. A very big one, seventy to eighty pounds, came off its hook. So Sweetland reversed the boat suddenly to catch it with his gaff hook and pull it onboard. When the boat lurched suddenly, Hollis got caught on the trawl line as it went over the side, falling into the water. Jesse notes that Hollis couldn't swim, but Sweetland says it wouldn't have mattered, since he went down with the line as it sank. Sweetland cut the line, thinking it would get him free, but it was a mistake, since it meant he would sink with a full line of fish to the bottom of the sea. Sweetland watched his brother sink below the water. Hollis was 18 years old. Sweetland tells Jesse he would have done differently if he could. Jesse tells him that Hollis wants him to know he isn't angry. Sweetland feels deeply affected by this statement, but only says, "well then," and looks out at the ocean.

They return to Pilgrim's house with their catch, and Clara invites Sweetland to dinner, noting that he looks strange. Sweetland goes to his own house to clean his portion of the fish. He digs out the government agent's card out of a drawer and calls the phone number.

The next morning, Sweetland gets up early after a night of not sleeping. He takes gear to retrieve firewood, but his real purpose is to get away before the news of his submission reaches the other residents of the village. He takes out his boat, driving it around the island with no real destination in mind. He ends up on Little Sweetland, tying up at the abandoned harbor there where the village used to be. There, he has his tea and watches the sunrise. He walks through the abandoned village, where there is little trace to indicate it once existed. He thinks about the people he remembers who once lived there. He remembers the last time he came to the island, with Duke in 1966. The fishery was failing and the government had issued a call for people who had left Newfoundland to return home for their vacations from all the places they had gone to earn money. Sweetland found these returnees annoying.

He and Duke had fished that summer and fall, not catching much. They went hunting for moose, which was also a failure. On their way back to Sweetland, Duke announced that he planned to go to Toronto to earn money, and wanted Sweetland to go with him. Sweetland initially refused, but Duke wooed him with the idea of decent wages, since the fishing wasn't good. As they sailed past Little Sweetland, they saw the buffalo. They moored the boat at Little Sweetland, planning to do some poaching. After tracking the beasts, they came across an empty house that once belonged to a family they knew. Sweetland looked in and saw one of the buffalo inside the house. Sweetland shot it



dead, and because of its immense size, they had to butcher the animal inside the house. Sweetland made sure to get rid of all the evidence of their poaching, so the wildlife officials don't find it.

As they headed back home with the meat, Sweetland agreed to go to Toronto with Duke. Sweetland doesn't remember why he decided to go, and wonders how things might have been different if he didn't. He can't explain it, just like he can't explain why he agreed to resettlement.

The chapter ends with another flashback to the Sri Lankan boat incident. Three months after the Sri Lankans came through, the Reverend announced he was leaving the island. This upset the community. Sweetland noticed that Ruthie alone wasn't surprised at this news. Ruthie was three months pregnant, and people joked about it with her blind husband. These jokes upset Sweetland. In his farewell sermon, the Reverend talked about what it was like for the Sri Lankans, adrift on the sea, making an analogy to human uncertainty. Sweetland was annoyed with the Reverend and his metaphor. Ruthie left the church in the middle of the sermon, and everyone assumed it was because of morning sickness. The Reverend didn't appear to notice her leaving.

Analysis

The characters' intimacy with landscape—or their disconnection from it—is a common theme in the novel, and the fishing trip is a good example for how the residents of Sweetland have just as much intimacy with landmarks on the land as they do on the ocean. Every shoal and underwater ledge and rock has a name, just as they do on the island. Generations have left their names upon everything.

When Sweetland tells the story of the pig, it is mentioned that his mother was pregnant with Ruthie at the time, but the boys weren't notified of their sister's impending arrival until the morning she was born. This silence in regards to sexual matters and discomfort with the results were common during Sweetland's youth, but it is also particularly important to note in their family. They are a close family, but certain talk is taboo.

When Jesse fishes in the bag of rabbit heads, it's unclear whether this is an amazing and weird coincidence or whether there is something else at work. Is Sweetland hallucinating? Is he mistaken at what he sees? In any case, it is a sinister occurrence, bringing the ongoing threats against Sweetland into what otherwise is an idyllic day, when he is happy to be out on the water like the old days. It is an unpleasant reminder of the present.

Jesse's insistence that his imaginary friend (or ghost) Hollis accompany them brings the day to an emotional end, on the way back to port. For once, Sweetland tells a new story, possibly because he has also uncharacteristically added to the tale of the pig by talking of his father's death. Perhaps Jesse senses that Sweetland is ready to talk of Hollis' death, or perhaps it is just natural that Jesse brings it up as they cross over the piece of water where Hollis died. So a new story is told: the story of Hollis' tragic drowning at the



age of eighteen. There is a clear parallel to Sweetland's memory of the buffalo drowning, since he watched the buffalo sink into the water the very same way he watched Hollis sink away from him. In the buffalo's case, the drowning is caused by its own panic, whereas Sweetland says that Hollis drowned because of an accident and his own mistaken reaction to that accident.

When Jesse tells Sweetland that Hollis doesn't blame him, he can barely speak in response. Hollis speaks his forgiveness through Jesse, and Sweetland appears to take it deeply to heart. Whether Hollis is a ghost only Jesse can see or whether he is simply Jesse's imaginary friend becomes irrelevant, because it is a vehicle for healing.

The fact that Sweetland immediately upon his return agrees to sign the resettlement agreement is telling. Is it because he is tired, or because he wants to repay Jesse for Hollis' forgiveness? Is it that he wants to heal his relationship with Clara, or because he is tired of fighting with the community's residents?

When Sweetland leaves the island the next day to avoid having to deal with the reaction to his having given in, he goes to Little Sweetland, which is a view into Sweetland Island's future. The village that once stood there no longer exists, and even the buffalo, which never belonged there in the first place, have disappeared. Sweetland remembers all the names and locations of the village that once stood there, but he is one of the few who does. Soon there will be no one to remember what once was, and the same will be true down the road for Sweetland. This illustrates the theme of Landscape and Memory.

Discussion Question 1

Who goes out fishing for the food allotment?

Discussion Question 2

How does Sweetland say Hollis drowned?

Discussion Question 3

What are some possible reasons that Sweetland finally gives in about signing the resettlement agreement?

Vocabulary

cajoling, evasive, propriety, inquisitive, gaff, fastidious, ravenous, incongruous, jigger, vertigo, trawling, sculling, coalesce, diaspora, gorse, rheumy, gall, metaphor



Book I: Chapter 7

Summary

A week after he called the government agent, Sweetland receives the papers in the mail. He signs them, with Clara as witness. He tells her to make sure the papers get into the post. She begins to thank him, but he doesn't respond positively. He wonders if she's going to tell Jesse about his decision, since she hasn't yet. She tells him she wants to wait, knowing he won't react well. Sweetland offers to tell him, saying he thinks Jesse will blame him anyway. Clara wonders why Jesse would blame him, and Sweetland tells her that Jesse was counting on him holding out. She says she wants to tell Jesse herself. She asks where he plans to relocate, and offers a place for him with them in St. John's. Sweetland declines. She tells him to hang onto the relocation information, and that Jesse will come around.

In the first week of August, a town meeting is held with the government agent. Sweetland waits and watches everyone go to the Fisherman's Hall. Once he sees that everyone is inside, he takes his chainsaw and gas can and goes down to his boat. He is surprised by Loveless down on the wharf, who says he doesn't like sitting so long in meetings. He asks why Sweetland is going to get more wood so late in the day, when he'll end up having to leave it all behind. Sweetland doesn't welcome his words, thinking that if Loveless is being sensible, the world really is falling apart.

Instead of going for wood, Sweetland returns to Little Sweetland to wander around. He looks into the empty tourist cabins, sitting fully furnished but perpetually empty of people. He wonders about who owns them, because no one on Sweetland knows who does. Sweetland has an urge to burn them down, but doesn't.

He walks up the hill to where he and Sweetland had seen the buffalo long ago. The path is overgrown. He looks out over the water at Sweetland. He can see the light on Burnt Head even though the day is bright. It is late afternoon when he heads home, taking his time and going the long way around. As he goes past various landmarks, he names them in his head.

When he returns to the wharf, he is surprised to find the residents busy around the harbor. Loveless informs him that Jesse has gone missing. Jesse has been told about Sweetland's decision during the meeting. Jesse then left the meeting to talk to Sweetland. Sweetland asks them if they hadn't heard him leave on his boat. Pilgrim reassures Sweetland that Jesse wasn't acting upset, but rather calm.

Sweetland packs up some tins of peaches and water and goes to join the search. No one is very frantic, because Jesse has gone missing before. However, Sweetland is worried. He goes to the King's Seat, and then to the abandoned lighthouse. He meets the Priddles, who have found nothing. They say they expect Jesse would return after dark, but Sweetland isn't confident about this. He calls for him, again and again. The



Priddles tell him there will be another meeting at ten p.m. if Jesse isn't found. Sweetland searches everywhere he can think of, including places he knows have been searched by others. At the incinerator, he finds the corpse of the dead calf, which Loveless has failed to dispose of properly.

At ten o'clock, Sweetland goes to the Fisherman's Hall. The Coast Guard has been called, and the Priddles have gridded a map for likely search areas. The Priddles declare their intention to search all night, even though Duke cautions against it for safety's sake. Sweetland and the Priddles decide to light a bonfire near the lighthouse, and keep all the village's lights on. Sweetland suggests they try using the PA at the church, which has gone long unused. The Reverend goes to try it, and soon the community hears it playing a recording of "A Closer Walk With Thee," by Ray Price. At the bonfire, Sweetland and the Priddles wait and watch all night. Far off, they can hear the PA playing hymns.

Sweetland dozes off, and wakes after dreaming of Hollis' drowning. At dawn, Barry Priddle speculates that the boy is probably home, but Sweetland notes that if this were so, the music would have been turned off. As they prepare to return back to the cove, Barry spots Jesse's body in the sea below the cliffs. Sweetland decides to climb down the ladder to retrieve the body, fearing it will be swept out to sea and lost. The Priddles are concerned about Sweetland doing so, but agree to help him. They experience a difficult ordeal on the ladder in the cold surf, but Sweetland refuses to go up without Jesse's body. They manage to retrieve Jesse, and pull him part way up the ladder. However, they can't pull his weight up. The Priddles suggest tying the body to the ladder and coming around by boat, but Sweetland won't leave him, and in any case is now too weak to climb. They tie Sweetland and Jesse's body to the ladder and go for a boat, fully expecting that Sweetland won't survive the wait.

Analysis

Again, as Sweetland ostensibly prepares to leave his beloved island, he goes off to Little Sweetland, a place that predicts the fate of the island of Sweetland, and returns naming each of the familiar landmarks in his head, an act that will disappear with the resettlement of Sweetland's population. Like Little Sweetland, Sweetland is destined to disappear as a place with landmarks named by its residents. Without its residents, there will soon be no one to pass on the names of its places, and Sweetland knows it. This illustrates the theme of Landscape and Memory.

When the community meets to essentially sign off on the end of Sweetland as a community, both Loveless and Sweetland refuse to attend the meeting. Though Loveless declares his reasoning as a hatred of sitting still for a lengthy amount of time, Sweetland realizes that the both of them are opting out for deeper reasons that cannot be expressed in words, even perhaps to oneself. They don't want to watch as their world dies.



Because Sweetland is absent for Jesse's betrayal, Jesse dies. Whether it is an act of suicide or simply an accident caused by strong emotion is unknowable. However, it is implied that Sweetland knows the depth of Jesse's need to remain on the island for his emotional well-being, and can sense the depth of betrayal he would feel. While it is one of the Priddle brothers who spots Jesse in the surf below the lighthouse, it is Sweetland that is certain the object is Jesse. Only Sweetland, Jesse, Loveless and Queenie are certain that they have no life beyond the island, and Sweetland instinctively knows this. It is possible that, despite everyone's beliefs otherwise, that Sweetland has been right all along, that the most innocent of their number has been sacrificed so that time may march on. Like most tragedies, there is great space for questions about whether Jesse would have survived if Sweetland had been there to soothe him, or if he had been told in a more secure environment. To the reader, the outcome may seem to have been inevitable.

The PA, or public address system, of the church makes a second appearance, in that its recorded hymns have called Sweetland in with the Sri Lankans in tow and now is utilized to call Jesse in from wherever he has been lost. In this second case, its use is a lost cause. The theme of Spirituality and Faith is expressed here.

The Priddle brothers again depart from their early characterization as wild and unruly near-criminals. They along with Sweetland are most committed to finding and rescuing Jesse, making a grid on a map for his search and staying up all night at a bonfire to watch for his return. And when his body is spotted, they are right there alongside Sweetland, helping to retrieve Jesse's dead body from the sea.

Sweetland spends this stressful night waiting at the bonfire, but does doze off. In this space of unconsciousness, he dreams of Hollis' death, watching him disappear beneath the surface of the sea. It predicts Jesse's end, and his commitment to rescuing Jesse's body, even in death, is a form of making up for what he could not do for Hollis.

Significantly, this is the only chapter of Book I that doesn't include a flashback about the Sri Lankan lifeboat incident.

Discussion Question 1

What are some possible reasons for why both Sweetland and Loveless refuse to attend the final community meeting at the Fisherman's Hall?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sweetland have the urge to burn down the tourist cabins on Little Sweetland?



Discussion Question 3

What are some possible reasons Sweetland insists on retrieving Jesse's body at risk of his own life?

Vocabulary

perceptible, despondent, solitary, eccentrics, swale, intermittent, cistern, pestilential, incombustible, audible, grapple, sluicing



Book II: Chapter 1

Summary

Book II is titled "The Keeper's House" and like Book I is led by a quote from The Bible, this one from the Book of Revelations: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it..."

It is over a year after Jesse's death. Sweetland is sailing his boat around the island to an isolated alcove, the only spot aside from Chance Cove where one can disembark from a boat. He gets out of his boat and sets his boat, still running, purposely toward the open ocean. He isn't certain of his actions. He has a large food pack and other camping tools, intending to find a place to camp. He is near the Priddle brothers' cabin, and knows they are in residence until the final ferry leaves the island. He hacks his way through the bush and finds a hiding place, but falls and hits his head, briefly passing out. When he wakes, he feels stupid for his lack of forethought and care. He plans to camp for ten days, until the last of the island's residents leaves. Remaining in Chance Cove are only Loveless, Clara, Pilgrim, the Priddles and Rita Verge. Sweetland is injured and worried that he might accidentally kill himself and his body never found.

Sweetland had thought there would be a final gathering of the community at Fisherman's Hall, a sort of wake for the village before everyone left. Instead, people have left in a depressing trickle over the past year, including everyone with children. While the village slowly empties, Sweetland sometimes thinks he sees a light in Queenie's window, just like Jesse used to.

The Vatchers have left with all the livestock, including Loveless' cow. Because the Vatchers have left, there is now no store on the island. Loveless has stopped feeding his dog, who's gone feral. Sweetland leaves rabbit carcasses out for him, but doesn't know if the dog is eating them. As people leave, Sweetland doesn't go to see them off, but watches from his kitchen window. He waves, even though they cannot see him.

He builds a lean-to in his hiding place and tries to recover from his head injury. He sleeps and wakes late in the day. He thinks of his boat, remembering a time when a ghost boat came by the island and they retrieved it, never finding out what happened to its owner. Sweetland knows that no one watches from lighthouses anymore, and that when his boat is found, there won't be much of an organized search.

Sweetland can't remember when he decided to stay past the resettlement deadline. He kept planting his garden and started another at the lighthouse. Everyone simply interpreted his actions as illogical stubbornness.

By July, there were only about a dozen people still on Sweetland. Clara and Pilgrim's departure kept being delayed while Clara looked for an assisted living facility for Pilgrim.



Sweetland mocks Pilgrim for his agreeing to this fate. Clara plans to get a master's degree in a subject involving digging up the dead, which Sweetland thinks ridiculous.

Pilgrim is the only person Sweetland has told of his intentions to remain on the island. Pilgrim challenges him for having already accepted the money, but Sweetland says he'll give it back. He tells Pilgrim that there is no law saying he can't come back to the island after leaving on the last ferry, and he is simply planning to skip the leaving portion. Pilgrim cautions Sweetland that it can't be as simple as that, and Sweetland now agrees this is true.

After recovering some from his head injury, Sweetland goes to retrieve his food pack. After stowing it, he again falls asleep in his makeshift lean-to.

He is awakened by a Coast Guard helicopter that is obviously searching for him. This embarrasses Sweetland, who feels like he's made a spectacle of himself.

Sweetland has a flashback to the days after recovering Jesse's body from the sea. He was sick in bed for days. He remembers Clara being there to tell him of Jesse's burial, and that she said they wanted to wait for Sweetland's recovery but could not. They exchanged few words in their grief. Clara could only thank him for recovering Jesse's body and ask him if he wanted any of Jesse's possessions. Sweetland was too feverish to comprehend her question.

Sweetland withdrew several thousand dollars from his bank account, bit by bit in order to avoid questions. He told no one but Pilgrim of his intentions. He stored a boatload of dry goods, including batteries and large quantities of salt. He bought his provisions in cash, which drew the attention of the Quebec police, who confiscated his ammunition and took down his name, which he gave as "Jesse Ventura." They also write down his boat license number, which leads to a visit to his home from another policeman. The mountie asks Sweetland about his purchases, warning that the government is concerned about violators of the resettlement agreement. The mountie warns Sweetland that he will be on the last ferry out of Sweetland, and that if he is not on the boat, he will be arrested.

Sweetland did not say goodbye to anyone, not caring about possibly having hurt anyone's feelings. Before he boarded his boat for the last time, he stopped in to see Pilgrim and left the remainder of his cash on the counter for Clara. He told Pilgrim he was going to poach some cod. On his way to his boat, he ran into Loveless, who was looking for his little dog. Loveless asked him what the police wanted with Sweetland, who told him it was regarding the arson.

At the end of the chapter, there is a flashback to the time before Duke and Sweetland left for Toronto on their second money-making venture. Sweetland had borrowed the lighthouse keeper's horse and cart and taken Effie out. Effie was then the community's schoolteacher, but wasn't an island native. Sweetland was back on the island after his first stint in Toronto. He had heard through the grapevine about Effie being a strict teacher, and his mother often invited Effie over for dinner when Sweetland was home.



Effie never spoke about herself, but rather asked many questions about Sweetland's work. Her most prominent physical feature was that she had very small teeth, having never lost her baby teeth. As they rode on the cart, Effie touched Sweetland on the thigh and ended up fondling him until orgasm. Sweetland never stopped driving the cart during this incident, which embarrassed them both. They pretended nothing happened, and later he apologized to her, at which she silenced him.

Analysis

It is notable that both halves of the novel—both books—begin with a quote from a Biblical prophet, one from Isaiah and one from Revelations. The first Book begins with a quote from Isaiah: "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name..." The second Book begins with a quote from the Book of Revelations: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it..." This touches upon the theme of Spirituality and Faith.

Sweetland had, perhaps rightly, expected that the community would make their dissolution a formal one, deserving of a wake and funeral just like a person. Unfortunately, the islanders instead disappear in slow dribs and drabs in the wake of the Coffins' departure and death. The parents of the children rightly judge that starting a school year in their new community makes sense. The livestock have all been removed. There is no store on the island, and the Fisherman's Hall, which would have been a natural location for a final farewell, never gets used in this way. It is a lonely, depressing end for the community, a major theme.

Along with the slow emptying of life in the community, Sweetland how sees Queenie's ghost-light, just like Jesse used to. Whether this is real or Sweetland's imagination is an open question.

Sweetland certainly behaves from a point of instinct rather than reason, continuing to plant gardens while Pilgrim accepts the indignity of assisted living. It is of course ironic that Clara's declared reason for Pilgrim's housing is because she plans to resume her education in a field akin to archeology. Whatever her unspecified intended profession, all Sweetland understands is that she plans to dig up the dead and interpret what she finds. Clara moves off the island to pursue a profession in digging up the dead, while the dead on the island are left without anyone to tend their graves.

The reality of Sweetland's choice, however, lacks any sense of romantic resistance. He hurts himself rather severely almost immediately when he embarks upon his new solitary life. Not only is he injured, he again finds himself unexpectedly embarrassed by the idea that he is attracting undue attention by his actions. This parallels his act of saving the Sri Lankans, which granted him media attention. This time, he feels embarrassed for having got everyone out on the sea searching for his dead body.

He also is embarrassed by his lack of understanding that his large cash purchases might attract undue attention from the authorities. Though there is no way the Quebec



police could have known of his plans, buying large amounts of ammunition and provisions in cash are a red flag that stand out even to average folks in the modern world. Sweetland, having spent most of his life living on an island, has no idea that his actions will make him look like someone planning illegal actions.

Sweetland's flashback to his abortive romance with Effie is another indication of his detachment and embarrassment when it comes to sexual matters. Since the reader knows he doesn't end up marrying Effie, it would seem this incident is troubling to him. This explores the theme of Love and Loss.

Discussion Question 1

What are some possible reasons the author chose to begin the two halves of his novel with Biblical quotes? What are some ways these quotes can relate the the themes addressed in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Is Sweetland's act of resistance one that was inevitable, or one of impulse?

Discussion Question 3

What are some things Sweetland doesn't anticipate that are the consequences of his actions?

Vocabulary

swale, maudlin, morose, delusion, ludicrous, addled, harried, capstan, incongruity, inadvertent, mortified, ineffectually



Book II: Chapter 2

Summary

There is no electricity in Chance Cove after everyone else has left, but there is fresh water. Someone has cleaned out Sweetland's refrigerator and freezer, and cleaned up his kitchen after his faked death. The rest is as he left it. Even his laptop is still there, but there is no Internet. Sweetland remembers going to Jesse's Facebook page months after the boy's death. He found little but messages from island children saying they would miss him. He notices that the messages are addressed directly to Jesse, as if he can read them in the afterlife. Sweetland keeps checking Jesse's Facebook page for awhile, and then forces himself to stop.

Sweetland sits for a long time, looking out at all the abandoned buildings. When the sun sets, he tries to figure out what is so eerie about the silence in his house, and finally realizes it's the absence of the refrigerator's hum. He rises to start a fire, light a candle, and feed himself.

Sweetland's house is very small. He remembers what it was like to live there when his Uncle Clar, his mother and Hollis were all alive. He remembers his Uncle Clar's death at age 93. Uncle Clar's main occupation was building furniture and other things out of wood, because he was too disabled to fish. Sweetland's mother and Uncle Clar didn't get along well, and often bickered.

Sweetland had lived in the house alone after his mother's death, and then again after he lost his lighthouse keeper's job. Now he slept in his mother's bedroom, with the same furniture. He sleeps well.

When Sweetland wakes, he startles himself in the mirror, thinking he looks like a slasher-movie psycho. Just before Duke left the island, Sweetland went and persuaded Duke to cut his hair. Duke tried to beg off this task, but Sweetland insisted. Sweetland pulled out equipment that had been stored for decades and instructed Duke what to do, and Duke clipped Sweetland's hair short. At the end, they both stared into the mirror at the result. Sweetland told Duke he was a "natural," a compliment which Duke rejected.

After his solitary breakfast, Sweetland goes over to Duke's barbershop, now empty but unlocked. He looks over the photos and clippings, which remain untouched on the wall. Some of them show Sweetland himself, receiving a Coast Guard medal for having rescued the Sri Lankans. Sweetland remembers how Clara was a baby then, and how her birth healed some of the unspoken hurt between he and his sister Ruthie. Ruthie and he never talked about the night at the church with the Reverend.

Sweetland notices the chessboard, which is set with Duke's usual opening move. Sweetland makes his move. He salvages some straight razors and shaving soap from the barbershop. He then goes to the town's museum, and breaks in. He plays a record



on the phonograph, and then takes some archaic but now-useful supplies. Some of them are objects he himself donated to the museum.

He looks for a boat, and finds none until he remembers a dory Loveless once made to impress Reet Verge. He hauls the boat out of Loveless' barn to look it over. He remembers how Loveless was mocked for his crush on Verge, and how he hid himself away in his barn to build the boat. Sweetland repairs the boat as best he can for his use.

Sweetland harvests the garden he's planted at the lighthouse, and stores the food there, prying free the plywood the Coast Guard has placed over the lighthouse doors. He gets caught out there in a storm, and is forced to spend the night in the crawl space beneath the house. He spends the night listing all the things he should have brought with him, and will store there for future similar times. In the night, he dreams that Jesse is there with him, singing. When he wakes in the night, he has difficulty separating his dream from reality.

Sweetland listens to the radio and goes fishing if the weather is calm. Because the dory isn't very seaworthy, he never goes out of sight of land. He catches many cod fairly easily. He eats what he can and salts the rest, something he hasn't done since he was young. He also catches rabbits and cans the meat. Sometimes he finds a rabbit dead and gutted in his snare, and believes it's been killed by a fox. He has never seen this fox, but the evident presence of the animal cheers him up.

Each evening, Sweetland keeps up his routine of taking a walk. He feels his aloneness keenly and the absence of the community. He plunders empty houses of anything he can find that is useful. He worries about running out of toilet paper, and finally settles on Queenie's old paperbacks as a substitute. Of all the houses in the village, the Coffin home and the Pilgrim home are the only two he hasn't broken into. So he goes to the Coffin house, where the door is nailed shut. The evidence of Queenie's presence is everywhere inside.

He rations his use of the radio, so as not to use up all the batteries. He misses the company of its sound quite a lot, since he's spent years using the radio for company. The sound of the island's emptiness unnerves him.

He sometimes visits Duke's barbershop, but avoids looking in the mirror.

He keeps up his Sunday routine of not working. He walks out to the lighthouse, which he has broken into, and looks out onto the sea with binoculars. He feels very lonely, as if he might be the last person alive on earth.

He realizes that even though he once worked in solitude at the lighthouse, he has never understood the concept of true loneliness until now. He worries that he is not equal to the task he has set before himself.

He always stops at the King's Seat and thinks of Jesse and how he used to say, "I'm the King of the World!" But he never speaks the words out loud.



The only other building Sweetland has not entered except for Pilgrim's house is the church. He remembers when he boarded it up with the Reverend's help, walking through one final time. The Reverend thanked him for sending him the news after Ruthie died. At the time, Sweetland had felt afresh his feelings about their infidelity. He had notified the Reverend because Ruthie had asked him to before she died. In the church, the Reverend admitted that he knew about Ruthie's pregnancy, which was why he left, but also why he returned. He never told Clara that he was her birth father. Sweetland asked him if he had other affairs in other places he worked, but the Reverend avoided answering by saying Ruthie was better off without him. Sweetland refused to let the Reverend off the hook, and recalled the sermon he gave about the Sri Lankans. The Reverend didn't remember the sermon, and Sweetland told him he thought about the Sri Lankans sometimes and how odd it had been that they washed up in Sweetland. The Reverend recalled that Ruthie had talked to him about Hollis, and how he behaved oddly. Sweetland concurred that Hollis was moody and strange, sometimes not saying a word to anyone for weeks at a time and spent a lot of time in bed. The Reverend recalled that Ruthie never believed the story Sweetland told about Hollis' death, because she never saw a huge fish like the one Sweetland said caused him to reverse the boat. She told the Reverend that Hollis behaved differently the day of his death, happy and hugging his mother and sister, telling them he loved them. Ruthie was sure Hollis killed himself deliberately by cutting the trawl line, and Sweetland lied to spare the family's feelings.

In the church, Sweetland agreed that this was the truth, telling the Reverend that Hollis' suicide would have killed their mother. He also tried to spare Jesse's feelings when he told the story about Hollis' death. Sweetland always felt guilty for not having been nicer to Hollis. The Reverend reassured Sweetland that it wasn't his fault. Talking in the church, Sweetland got the feeling that he was surrounded by all his dead relatives, including Jesse. Sweetland said that the Reverend must miss Jesse greatly, and the Reverend agreed.

Now, Sweetland goes up to the cemetery with a scythe he took from the museum to cut the grass. He's had this responsibility for years, and now it's one of the many reasons in his mind that he has stayed behind. He hasn't gone to the cemetery since everyone left. He is shocked to find his own grave there, a new white wooden cross next to Jesse's grave marker. He finds this both funny and frightening. Because of this find, he leaves the graveyard half-mowed.

Later, he wakes up thinking about clinging to the cliff ladder with Jesse's body. He'd tried to call Barry back down to untie him from the corpse, but couldn't be heard over the roar of the sea. He tried to count and then to sing, trying desperately to keep himself from falling asleep into hypothermia. Now, he decides to remove his grave marker, thinking that leaving it there is like a lie. He goes up to the cemetery in the middle of the night and tries to remove it. However, it has been set in concrete, so he has to return the next day to cut it off at the base. He gets a fright when he sees an unknown animal while he is there. He brings his grave marker back down to his house, considers burning it, but then stores it in his shed. Then he goes back to the graveyard and finished mowing.



In late October, it snows. He plays solitaire and drinks tea. He knows he needs to find something to occupy his mind during the winter months, so goes and digs up Queenie's paperbacks. He has never been a reader, but rejects the romances out of hand in favor of the book she was reading just before she died, which is set in Newfoundland. He tries to read it for a few days, feeling like it is a terrible chore. He becomes offended by the lack of realism in the book, and understands Queenie's own struggle with it. Instead of using the book's pages as toilet paper, he throws the book into the sea. On the way back, he sees a light in Queenie's window. He looks away, and when he looks back, it's dark again.

The chapter ends with a flashback to the cart ride with Effie. They didn't speak the rest of the drive after their brief sexual encounter. They went to look out over the cliffs, and Effie talked about visiting her home town and her students. Sweetland stayed quiet and listened, reluctant to tell her about his leaving for Toronto again. At the time he was 26 years old and didn't know how to approach plans for his future. Effie previously made it clear that she would accept any marriage proposal, but Sweetland was too shy to speak of it. Effie was obviously expecting him to use this opportunity, but he didn't know how to interpret her silence after he finally divulged his plans for Toronto. He promised to be home before Christmas. On their way back, Effie was silent and somewhat cold toward him. He didn't understand her reaction.

Analysis

Sweetland has always been a quiet man, taciturn and used to being alone. After all, he has never married, lived alone for years, and worked as a lighthouse keeper. But being alone on the island is a whole new world of loneliness, a sort of loneliness he has never experienced before. All this time, he's tried to keep himself separate from the community, and now he finds just how much he has depended upon them. Though many fantasies have been written about being the "last man on earth," it turns out the truth of such an occurrence is nothing at all pleasant. As Sandra has once told him, being in the King's Seat or being "King of the World" is the loneliest place in the world. And now Sweetland is the King of his island with no subjects at all.

Now, Sweetland has only ghosts, the portrait of his Uncle Clar, and a cemetery full of people he once knew. He begins to be unsettled by the silence, and by the repetition of his sighting of the light in Queenie's window.

Nevertheless, there are some moments of lightness, like when he visits Duke's barbershop and talks to Duke about getting on with the chess game, the bittersweet last meeting he has with Duke, in being the man's first and last ever customer. He resurrects Loveless's Love Boat—the one fairly competent creation Loveless ever made, in the interest of ending his "lovelessness." This act of Loveless' gives Sweetland a tool he needs very much, a way to enter the sea in the absence of any other boats on the island. His experiences illustrate the theme of Community and its loss.



In this chapter, the true story of Hollis' death comes to light, through the last conversation Sweetland has with the Reverend as they close up the church for good. They clear the air as a final act of farewell, and Sweetland admits that Hollis did in fact kill himself. Whether Jesse committed suicide as well is unknowable, but it is certainly true that there are all too many parallels between Hollis and Jesse. However, Hollis seems to have wanted to leave the island for his education, while Jesse shows no such need. Hollis doesn't have a grave marker in the graveyard, but Jesse does, because his body was retrieved by Sweetland. Hollis' body remains forever missing, which certainly makes some indication of why Sweetland risked his own life so much to bring Jesse's body back to the island.

Perhaps this is why Sweetland has spent more time than anyone thinking about the Sri Lankans, remembering the Reverend's long-ago sermon long after even the Reverend himself has forgotten about it. Sweetland took to heart the idea that the Sri Lankans were buffeted by chance and fate, reflecting the uncertainties everyone faces. Sweetland himself can look back on his life and see how these twists of chance have impacted his own life. This reflects the theme of History and Time.

It is apparent through the flashback that, once again, Sweetland is stymied in love (just like the aptly named Loveless) by his inability to express his feelings or understand the nuances of romance. He misses his prime opportunity to propose to Effie, despite her explicit encouragement.

Discussion Question 1

What is it like on the island now that all its people are gone except for Sweetland?

Discussion Question 2

How did Hollis really die?

Discussion Question 3

What discovery shocks Sweetland when he goes to mow the grass at the graveyard? What does he do about it?

Vocabulary

voyeuristic, petrified, wizened, highboy, pristine, tremor, scrotal, gorse, rabid, scythe, derelict, infatuations, interminable, scarcity, impenetrable, metronome, seclusion, deconsecration, infinite, tourniquet, sacriligious, habitual



Book II: Chapter 3

Summary

As autumn comes to a close, Sweetland gathers scrap wood and some tractor tires for a big bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night. In his mind, this is for Jesse. He makes an effigy of Guy Fawkes using old clothes left behind in some of the houses. It has been decades since anyone on the island burned an effigy for what island folk called Bonfire Night. Sweetland hadn't even known who Guy Fawkes was until Jesse looked it up on the Internet and told him. He doesn't now remember much of what Jesse told him.

It is rainy, but Sweetland doesn't want to disappoint Jesse. So when the rain lets up, he uses kerosene to light the bonfire. He bakes potatoes and drinks home-brewed beer. The huge fire is bigger than any bonfire Jesse ever experienced, and Sweetland shouts when the effigy catches. He remembers what Bonfire Night was like when he was young, and how there would be fires all up and down the island. He remembers how people would burn outhouses and how Duke and he would jump over the fires as they died down. Though the holiday was much diminished when Jesse was alive, he loved it. He liked to hear Sweetland tell about what it was like when he was young.

Suddenly Sweetland sees Smut, Loveless' little dog. He wonders how the dog got left behind, and feeds him potato scraps. The dog is very wary, and stays away from him, though he takes the food. Sweetland now realizes that the fox that got into his rabbits was actually the dog, and notes that the creature he has been calling "Mr. Fox" sounds the same as "Mr. Fawkes." He wants to pet the dog, but it won't let him.

After this night, the dog follows him around expecting to be fed, but won't come inside the house. Sweetland drags a doghouse up from Pilgrim's house and sets it up for the dog. He is very happy to have the dog's company.

Sweetland goes out fishing when the weather is calm. The dog insists on going with him. He catches some cod and other fish fit for the dog. One day he goes out and it is very calm. He catches a huge cod and is caught in fog. He finds he has lost all sense of direction, even after using all his long experience and knowledge of the water. He rows, but then realizes he will have to wait. He sings songs, cleans the fish, and eats his lunch. He sleeps, with the dog on his chest.

He is awakened by the dog's growling. He can hear a sound he can't quite make out. He sings an old hymn and rows toward it. Eventually he realizes he's hearing Tennessee Ernie Ford, singing "The Old Rugged Cross." He knows that since the dog hears it, it isn't his imagination. He follows the sound until he comes into the Cove. When he gets there, there is no sound. He is so frightened and exhausted he doesn't secure the boat well, and the dog takes off up the hill.



He wakes later, lights a fire and calls for the dog, which doesn't respond. He goes to pull in the boat, now adrift. The fish are no longer edible, so he dumps them out on the beach and cleans the boat for storage. He calls for the dog again.

He looks up at the church and remembers that the Reverend took all the records from the room with the PA when they closed up the church. Sweetland goes up to the church and finds everything still locked up tight, just as he left it months before. The village is very quiet.

He calls the dog again, and stops into Duke's shop, sitting down in the barber chair in an attempt to calm himself. He imagines what Duke would say if he was there. Then he looks at the chess board and sees that the game has been continued through several moves. The black king is in check.

He stays in his house the rest of the day, drinking beer and playing solitaire. He leaves the radio on for comfort. He takes down his Uncle Clar's portrait and talks to it. He tells it about all the things that have happened recently, and in the telling realizes he didn't see the giant cod when he dumped out his rotten catch.

He goes down to look for the fish, whistling for the dog as he goes. He is a bit drunk. He finds the huge fish hidden under the rest, which have been pecked at by gulls. It is still in perfect condition, though inedible. He hauls it up to the house, yelling to his Uncle Clar to see how big it is. He puts it in the sink, drinks some more, and then cleans the fish. Inside its stomach, he finds a rabbit's head. When he talks to Uncle Clar, he uses the old pronoun, "thee."

He gets very drunk and goes to bed. He dreams of his mother, carrying her up the stairs as he often had to do in her final weeks. She died in the house, after being cared for by Moses and Ruthie. During this time, Sweetland left intimate acts of care to Ruthie. He overheard her tell the Reverend how disappointed she was that she never got grandchildren. As she got closer to death, she became demented, unable to identify her family. As her confusion became more frightening, she accused Sweetland of torturing Hollis and of hating her. In the end, Sweetland felt guilty that, despite his best efforts, his mother died among people she thought were strangers.

He wakes to the sound of the Coast Guard helicopter, going to the lighthouse for its yearly maintenance. He grabs the rabbit's head and tries to start his ATV, flooding the engine. He runs, trying to catch them before they leave, but soon realizes he will never get there in time. He tries to hail them as they take off, but isn't seen. As he watches the helicopter go, he realizes how crazy he must look, waving a rabbit's head and raving mad. He throw's the rabbit head into the ocean. He finds that the lighthouse and skirting where he stored some of his supplies have been sealed up, and the lighthouse door has been welded shut. He knows they will think the place has been vandalized by visitors.

He goes back home, checking his rabbit snares along the way, finding only one. The dog is in his dog house when he gets back. It still won't go inside the house, so Sweetland leaves his door open. He cleans up the butchered fish mess and the rest of



the kitchen. He finds the final threatening note he received and burns it in the fireplace. When he comes back upstairs after retrieving vegetables from the root cellar, he finds the dog inside. He feeds himself and the dog, and launders his filthy clothes. He nails Uncle Clar's portrait on the porch rather than its accustomed spot, where he can see it as he comes and goes.

The chapter ends with a flashback to when Duke and Sweetland were working construction outside Toronto. They worked hard all week, and spent Saturday nights at an expatriate bar in the city, full of other exiled Newfoundlanders. They missed their home, and felt like outsiders in Ontario. They drank and partied hard. Effie wrote him letters, but they became less frequent. Since Sweetland found writing letters difficult, he was relieved. In his letters, he always promised to be home for Christmas.

Analysis

This chapter can be interpreted as an exhibition of Sweetland's mental unraveling in the face of extreme isolation, or an increasing change on the island to one where the natural world and supernatural world are blending together. Either interpretation could be considered correct.

When Sweetland builds the bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night, he appears to treat it as something necessary for Jesse's pleasure, but it is unclear whether he is always certain that Jesse is actually dead. Smut, Loveless's mistreated dog, appears and brings solace to Sweetland in his isolation. The pleasure he's had before in feeling the presence of Mr. Fox turns out to be an old friend, though definitely one who is wary of Sweetland. Sweetland has taken to responding to weird occurrences with the phrase, "Well, Mr. Fox" and appears to have now given the dog this name.

When Sweetland and the dog are lost in the fog, it is the second real scare Sweetland gets that he might die because of carelessness, or not following his long-standing instinct. Humans tend to act in reckless ways because they feel the safety of numbers. Despite his isolation, Sweetland goes out on the water in a problematic boat, knowing that the calm portends fog. He could easily have died. However, he is saved by the ghostly sound of the PA, which calls him into safety. It is an expression of the theme of Community and its loss.

The church PA now has sounded to save the Sri Lankans (successfully), to call in Jesse (unsuccessfully) and for him in this instance. He believes the sound is real, because the dog too appears to hear it. But regardless of whether the sound is real and supernatural, it is actually something else and he imagines it is the PA, or all in his mind—Sweetland is losing his grip on his mental health. The choice he has made to stay on the island is clearly turning out to be a mistake, one that he will likely pay for with his miserable end.

The chess board and the game in progress is another sign of things going awry. The game, which he at least believes he hasn't touched, is now further along. The black king



is in check. This is a clear symbol that the "king," or Sweetland, is in a bad position and likely to be defeated. Has Sweetland been playing the game by himself and forgotten it? Are there ghosts playing the game in his absence? The question, again, is left to the reader to decide.

In the absence of another human to talk to, Sweetland resorts to talking to his Uncle Clar's portrait, a clear sign that he may be losing his grip on reality, or is at least attempting to keep himself sane. The fact that he uses "thee" when talking to the old man has earlier in the novel been attributed to the speech patterns of the very elderly. It is a sign that Sweetland is now clearly in the world of old men. This transition illustrates the theme of History and Time.

When he remembers his mother's death "among strangers," there is an element of irony in the memory. Sweetland has spent nearly his whole life surrounded by his community. His mother died surrounded by that community as well, but didn't know it. Sweetland has made great effort to stay on the island, where he is left only the company of ghosts and memories. He didn't want to go off the island among strangers, but now is relegated to extreme loneliness. The only other time in his life he has felt such loneliness—at least he thought—was when he went to Toronto to work with Duke.

Another indication of Sweetland's growing insanity or the influence of the supernatural is the rabbit head in the giant cod. Whereas the bag of rabbit carcasses getting snagged by Jesse over a year before seemed incredibly strange but at least theoretically possible, this time there is no question of impossibility. Just like there was no giant cod that caused Hollis' accidental death, it is possible there is no giant cod and no rabbit head. If there is, then the world is no longer operating naturally.

Discussion Question 1

What saves Sweetland from being lost in the fog?

Discussion Question 2

What does Sweetland find in Duke's barbershop?

Discussion Question 3

Is Sweetland going insane or are his experiences of a supernatural nature? Give reasons for your opinion.



Vocabulary

effigy, conflagration, vicarious, pyre, inferno, vestibule, bilge, solitaire, slurry, askance, viscera, offal, congestive, catheter, coherence, monotone, platitude, diversion, concocting, cairns, irrefutable, anachronistic, antediluvian

Book II: Chapter 4

Summary

It snows and the daylight gets short. Sweetland remembers what it was like when electricity first came to the island. He remembers when Loveless drank kerosene as a baby, which was supposed to explain his odd behavior. Sweetland keeps busy as best he can and tries to conserve his kerosene. He does various chores. His ATV is almost out of gasoline.

The dog keeps him company at night, but spends the days on his own. Since Sweetland goes to bed very early, he finds himself waking in the middle of the night. To pass time during his insomnia, he counts various things and traces family trees in his head. He also tries to remember details of information Jesse told him. When he thinks of Jesse, however, his grief makes him get out of bed to avoid the thoughts. Sometimes he goes over the map of the island in his head, naming all the landmarks from south to north.

Sweetland remembers that the Priddles' cabin probably has gasoline, and feels stupid at having forgotten about it. Though there is bad weather coming, he can't resist going out to the Priddle cabin the next day, using the ATV part of the way. He runs out of gas, and has to walk most of the distance, but plans to spend at least one night there. The dog disappears for a time, making Sweetland anxious. It reappears later. When he finally reaches the cabin, he finds it to be very cold, and with little in the way of food or fuel for the stove. As he looks around, he realizes he's wildly overblown his expectations. There is only a bit of gas, enough to get the ATV back home and for perhaps one other trip. He rolls a couple cigarettes out of some butts he finds. He thinks he may be losing his mind, but isn't certain.

He feels ill after smoking the cigarettes and drinking some vodka he finds, and remembers the night the Sri Lankans came, and how he smoked a lot to deal with his stress over Ruthie and the Reverend. He remembers sharing a cigarette with one of the Sri Lankans outside the church. He remembers obsessing over Ruthie and Pilgrim's wedding, which Ruthie went through with because Sweetland pushed her into it. He knows that Ruthie never loved Pilgrim, and feels guilty that he persuaded her into the marriage. He knew that even though she never complained, it wasn't any less bad. He feels now that he set his sister adrift on the ocean, just like one of the lifeboat survivors.

At the cabin, the weather worsens, and when Sweetland wakes it's very cold. He burns the little wood that is there, and then the firebox and the ladder to the loft. He stares at a commemorative map of Newfoundland on the wall, which is from the "Come Home Year." He is troubled that the island of Sweetland is not labeled on the map, and so ransacks the place looking for something to write with. He finds a bit of marijuana, which he smokes. He labels Sweetland and other places that have not been labeled on the map, and then adds islands and landmarks that are missing. Finally, he begins to add islands and landmarks that never existed, naming them after people from Chance Cove.



He crosses out "Come Home Year" and writes, "Stay Home Year." He realizes he is stoned.

When the weather finally lets up, Sweetland goes out into the storm with the reluctant dog. It is very windy and freezing wet. Sweetland tucks the dog inside his coat to keep him warm. When he finally reaches the ATV, he fills it with gasoline and they ride slowly home.

The chapter ends with a flashback to when Sweetland and Duke were working near Toronto. They were laid off from their construction jobs, and offered work at a steel mill. Sweetland was reluctant to take the job, but Duke needed the money. Sweetland made Duke promise they would still be home for Christmas. Duke reminded him that the money would mean a nice ring for Effie.

The steel mill was a terrible and dangerous job, the place full of heat and commotion. They worked seventy hours a week, and drank and smoked marijuana to tolerate the nightmare of it. They often smoked on the job, hiding themselves in out of the way spaces. One time, as they were leaving their hiding spot, Sweetland's clothes got caught on some machinery, and he is severely burned on his face and genital area.

Analysis

This chapter goes on to emphasize Sweetland's precarious position in life. A simple mistake could mean he freezes to death. He goes off to the Priddle cabin, having imagined all sorts of riches stored there, and finds nearly nothing useful. In fact, he risks his life on a fool's errand, leaving a place with more firewood than he could ever burn, for a place where he could have died for lack of it. Ironically, twice in this chapter he tells Mr. Fox that no one has it better than they do now.

His misery is only staved off by ritualistic naming of family trees and landmarks. It is as if he is the only person on earth, and the places and people in his mind are in danger of dying if he forgets them. This illustrates the theme of Landscape and Memory.

When he finds the "Come Home Year" map of Newfoundland, it is a physical artifact that represents this ritual. He finds that Sweetland and Little Sweetland are on the map, but aren't labeled. He corrects this, and then adds all the other landmarks he can think of. Eventually, either because of the marijuana or his madness, he adds imaginary places and gives them the names of Chance Cove's residents. He could either be doing this out of whimsy, or because he is ritualistically giving Chance Cove's former residents immortality on the map.

In the flashback, the reader is finally told the source of Sweetland's burned face. It is also revealed that the scarring doesn't only exist on his face, but also his genital area. So the fact that Sweetland never married has a more practical source than he "felt ugly" because of his face—something deeper is at work. The fact that this accident occurred because Sweetland followed Duke's advice might remind the reader that Duke refused to directly advise Sweetland about the resettlement package, recalling the "last time" he



gave Sweetland advice. The accident and Duke's sense of responsibility for it is why Duke never tried to persuade Sweetland to take the deal.

Discussion Question 1

What does Sweetland do when he can't sleep?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sweetland go to the Priddle cabin? What does he bring back from there?

Discussion Question 3

How was Sweetland burned?

Vocabulary

kerosene, ungulate, stoic, inane, farcical, fissure, diverting, augural, predominant, cornucopia, anemic, hybrid, conveyed, creosote, slag, unremitting



Book II: Chapter 5

Summary

Christmas comes. Sweetland retrieves the artificial Christmas tree from the shed on Christmas Eve.. He remembers that when his mother was alive, she always insisted on a real tree. He remembers how Jesse responded to this artificial one, which has the electric lights built in. He bought it because he didn't know how to decorate a tree properly. Jesse found it mesmerizing, but the rest of the island folk made fun of it. Without electricity, it doesn't look very festive, and Sweetland regrets unpacking it. He decides to throw it in the dump.

He remembers the Christmas before, when Clara came over after they'd both been grieving Jesse's death and avoiding one another. She remarked then that he hadn't put up his tree. Pilgrim and she insisted he go get it, which he did. They got drunk together, quietly. Finally, Sweetland recalled how Jesse described the softly pulsing lights as if they were breathing. Clara explained what Sweetland meant to the blind Pilgrim, and Pilgrim recalled how they used to use real candles. He also recalled how he got an orange for Christmas and it was a good gift, a story he's told a thousand times before. Pilgrim was too drunk to walk home, so they put him to bed in the kitchen daybed. Sweetland and Clara then drink more. Sweetland made a joke about Pilgrim and Clara defended him, pointing out that he'd been very good to her even though she was not his actual child. This comment sobered Sweetland unpleasantly. They talked further, and Clara told him that her parents had stopped having sex long before Ruthie got pregnant with Clara. Pilgrim told her this himself, after Ruthie died.

Sweetland realized that she was acting as if he too had known all along, as had Pilgrim. He stepped out into the hallway, and Clara asked him how Uncle Clar's portrait is. She suggested he should put the portrait in the porch so he wouldn't be so lonely. Sweetland asked if she knew who her real father was, but she answered that she didn't really know or care, laughing hysterically at the idea it might have been Loveless. She finally calmed down and said that she was sure Sweetland knew, but she didn't want to know. She did wonder how a town so small could keep a secret that well. Sweetland asked about Jesse's father, and Clara revealed that it was a one-night stand with a stranger. Her statement shocked Sweetland somewhat. She said she hated leaving Jesse on the island in his grave, with no one to cut the grass around his gravestone. Sweetland realized that this was why she had not yet left the island, despite already having the money. He wanted to ask if Clara really came back to the island for him, but is afraid of her answer. She left, saying she wouldn't remember the conversation because of her drunkenness.

They never talked about the conversation again, and Sweetland was relieved to pretend it didn't happen. He felt strange about Pilgrim after that. He remembered all the teasing Pilgrim had to take when Ruthie got pregnant, realizing that Pilgrim knew the truth about her pregnancy from the beginning.



Back in the present, the weather turns very cold and windy. Sweetland has to keep the faucets running so the pipes don't freeze, and has to sleep in the kitchen next to the stove. He pulls out a herring net from the shed, and retrieves tools to fix it from the museum. He also stops into Duke's barbershop to take the old magazines, but doesn't look at the chessboard. He strings up the net in the kitchen to work on it and reads old magazines. The radio keeps him aware of the passing time, but he has to keep it off most of the time to save batteries.

He gets drunk on New Year's Eve. At midnight he goes outside and shoots off his gun three times, a longstanding island tradition. He is shocked to hear what he thinks are more rifle shots out in the night. He runs out to look, but sees only darkness. He fires again and listens, but there is no sound. Finally, he goes inside and locks the door, putting out the lamp and sitting on the daybed with his gun across his lap.

He wakes and it is cold. He realizes he locked the dog outside accidentally, hours ago. He goes out and shouts for the dog, worried that it has frozen to death. He goes to look for the dog, following its tracks. He fires up the ATV, despite the fact that there is little gas. He brings his gun, because he is afraid about the gunshots he heard. He drives slowly and calls for the dog. Eventually he leaves the ATV, thinking it is scaring the dog.

He keeps thinking he hears the dog, but sees nothing. Toward the lighthouse, he sees a light and many dark figures walking toward it with slow purpose. He sneaks up to see them, and there are hundreds of figures standing on the headlands, close to the cliffs. None of them make a sound. They face the ocean where there is a light. They appear to be waiting for something. He sees a hunchbacked man close up and another woman with small teeth. None of them seems concerned with his presence. He keeps thinking they look familiar, but are still strangers.

He wakes up back on the daybed with the dog. He is wearing his coat and boots and the gun is beside him. He goes out to check the ATV, but finds that it looks like it hasn't been moved. He is disappointed that his vision appears to have been a dream. Then he looks at the gas cans and finds they are all empty. He lifts the tarp off the ATV and sees the things he had packed for his search for the dog. This discovery makes him feel dizzy. He looks up at his grave marker tucked in the rafters and nods a greeting to it.

The chapter ends with a flashback to the time after his accident at the steel mill. He was in the hospital, and Duke quit his job to be with him there all the time, even sleeping there. It was during this time that Duke learned to play chess, and then taught Sweetland. Sweetland tried to persuade Duke to return to the island without him, since he has a new child he has not yet seen. Finally, Sweetland told the hospital that Duke was living there, and Duke was evicted by security. He came back the next day, however, announcing that he was going back to the island. He came to ask if Sweetland had a message for Effie. Sweetland told him to tell her he wouldn't be home for Christmas.



Analysis

This chapter deals strongly with the theme of Love and Loss. Sweetland finds that Christmas without those you love is essentially meaningless for him, to the point that he throws out the Christmas tree he bought for Jesse. He remembers what the final Christmas together with family was like, and even then he found the only way to get through it was to get drunk, along with Clara and Pilgrim. They miss Jesse, and this is the only way they feel they can handle their grief.

Like at Queenie's funeral, alcohol loosens the usually closed communication pathways between he and people who have secrets to tell. Clara reveals that Sweetland's long term discomfort with his sister Ruthie's secret affair has not been a secret after all, and he needn't have felt his guilt so keenly for all this time. His discomfort with sexual matters is part of this, but also his sense that he has betrayed Pilgrim by his silence. In essence, he finds that his guilt and discomfort with the subject were wasted. Pilgrim and Ruthie were not nearly as unhappy as he has felt they were. Pilgrim accepted Clara as his own anyway.

Back when Sweetland was injured, Christmas also has significance in impacting his loss of Effie. While he's promised all this time that he would be home for Christmas, the fact that he won't is the closing of a figurative door. Though it is entirely possible that their relationship had already started to fail before he left, and along the way with their waning letters, his injury and missing Christmas means she is free to marry someone else. We know from previous parts of the novel that this is indeed what she did.

The reader also learns in this chapter that Sweetland belatedly moved Uncle Clar's portrait to the porch in part at the suggestion of Clara, who wants the portrait to be less lonely, and see more of Sweetland's comings and goings. It is only now, when he is so alone, that he follows this advice.

In this chapter, the reader understands more about Clara's delay in leaving the island: she doesn't want to leave Jesse behind. It had been said previously that caring for Jesse's grave was at least one of the self-articulated reasons that Sweetland has remained on the island, and now it comes out that this was Clara's concern. By remaining on the island, Sweetland is risking his life, once again, ostensibly to be near Jesse. He is the one responsible for having brought Jesse back to the island, and now he is the one responsible for maintaining his grave. He might also feel that it is his fault that Jesse became so attached to the island (if it is true that Clara came back to the island on Sweetland's account), and also that he subsequently died.

It is through this grave-tending, however, that Sweetland comes face-to-face with his own grave marker. After he realizes that his vision of the walkers is indeed something he saw in real life, he nods to his grave marker in greeting, as it sits stored above his head in the shed. While the walking figures are obviously the dead of the island, including his hunch-backed Uncle Clar and Effie, Sweetland doesn't recognize them. They are waiting, perhaps for Sweetland.



Discussion Question 1

What did Sweetland discover when he drank with Clara on the previous Christmas?

Discussion Question 2

What are some possible reasons that Sweetland has remained on the island?

Discussion Question 3

Where does Sweetland keep his grave marker?

Vocabulary

confection, gaudy, auroral, divulging, crystalline, taffy, intermittent, palpable, incongruity, trussed, crestfallen, porous, narcotic, convalescence



Book II: Chapter 6

Summary

The weather warms up some, but continues to be stormy and snowy. At one point in February, the snow piles up in drifts and it takes Sweetland days to dig out. Finally, there is a thaw. The radio forecasts, as usual, are not reflecting what he is experiencing. This disturbs him.

He is comforted by the presence of the dog. The dog is sometimes gone all day, but always comes home at night to sleep in the daybed with him. The only time he allows Sweetland to pet or groom his fur is in the early morning before they get up. Otherwise, the dog is not affectionate or cuddly. Sweetland thinks about how the intact dog is out every day, probably looking for a female companion that doesn't exist. This fact reminds Sweetland of how he used to worry about Jesse being lonely as he got older. He remembers that Jesse when through a period when he masturbated compulsively, sometimes even in public. This behavior earned him a derogatory nick-name for a time, but he eventually grew out of the habit. He had always felt sad for Jesse, knowing he'd probably never find a companion in life. Sweetland too is a virgin, though he doesn't think of himself in those terms.

Once back in Toronto with Duke, Duke set Sweetland up with an older woman, a part-time prostitute. He didn't want to have sex with her for many reasons, and tried to back out of the deal, but Duke insisted, saying it was already paid for. Duke advised him to ask for oral sex. Sweetland does so, but it isn't pleasurable for him. He still remembered the woman's name. This experience and the moment with Effie in the cart are the only two sexual experiences he's had in his life.

Sweetland walks out to the lighthouse on Sundays if the weather is good enough. He doesn't break into the sealed tower, but builds a small fire to have tea and look out from the Fever Rocks to look for ships. He never sees any. He never goes to the cliffs, since he saw the walking figures there. He still wavers on whether this vision was a result of insanity or supernatural reality. He still wonders who the people were.

He also visits the cemetery on Sundays, visiting the graves of people he knew. He remembers that going there was the one place he never liked to take Jesse, in part because he didn't want to have to answer Jesse's inevitable questions about Hollis' lack of a tombstone. Clara thought that Hollis' missing gravestone was why Jesse fixated on Hollis as an imaginary friend. Jesse once told Sweetland that it made Hollis sad not to have a grave marker.

Sweetland begins to lose too much weight, due to his sparse diet. The flour has gone bad and some of the fish he salted in the fall didn't cure properly. One day the dog comes home with a dead sea bird, and Sweetland goes down to the harbor to find hundreds of dead birds in the ocean, likely dead of starvation. Sweetland makes soup of



the ones he can scavenge and clean. He's never seen this kind of mass death before, thinking that it's probably related to climate change.

Days later, he again sees the light in Queenie's window. He tries to ignore it and avoid it. This avoidance seems to make it appear more. Finally he talks himself into going right past the window, but is afraid to look into it directly, because he sees someone standing in the window in his peripheral vision. This scares him and he runs home. When he shuts the door behind him, he laughs, which confuses the dog. When he looks again, the light is gone.

Each night, he returns to the window and tries to see who is standing there, and feels certain that the light is real. He resolves to stop there and look directly, to settle his questions. He looks and sees the light. There is no one there. He turns to go, and when he looks back, he sees Queenie at age 12, naked, just like she used to show herself to him when he was young. He also sees an older version of Queenie, sitting in her chair in her curlers, smoking and reading. This older Queenie is holding the girl's hand, but they appear oblivious to one another. He says her name out loud, but there is no acknowledgement. He stays and watches until he is too cold, and must go to get his coat. When he comes back, the light is out. He comes back every evening after that, but never sees the light or the figures again.

March comes, and the weather improves. His experience tells him not to trust this change. He cleans his chimney. The dog wanders around, further and further afield, but always returns and barks to be let in at night.

One morning he wakes, and realizes that the dog didn't come and bark to be let in. The weather is mild, so he knows the dog could have slept outdoors somewhere. However, he knows instinctively that the dog is dead.

He doesn't go looking, because he doesn't want to prove his feeling to be true. He works for awhile, and then whistles for the dog. There is no response. In the afternoon, he finally goes to search, and finds nothing. He whistles for the dog again and again.

Sweetland decides to go up on the mash to set snares, an excuse to go looking for the dog. He packs a lunch and other gear, and drives the ATV with the last of its fuel. He stops at the King's Seat and whistles. The ATV runs out of gas. He walks around the lighthouse. It starts raining. He sets off toward Priddles' cabin. His feet keep going through the rotten snow, and he worries about injuring himself. He puts on his snowshoes, and sets snares. He becomes angry and continues to look for the dog. He finally finds it, already gutted and picked over by scavengers. He wraps the carcass in his rain coat. As he heads back home, a rainstorm blows up and he gets very cold. When he gets to the house, he realizes he's been crying. He feels feverish. He changes clothes and takes the dog's body to the cemetery, and buries it on top of Jesse's grave. Since the ground is still frozen, he covers the shallow grave with beach stones. As he does so, he sings an old hymn. He goes back home, forgetting the storm lamp at the grave.



The chapter ends with a flashback to the time when Sweetland was in the hospital after his accident. He heard the doctor discussing the wounds to his genital region, and failed to understand most of what was said. He watched the one nurse in the room avoid looking at the wound. The doctor said he would recover normal sexual function, but would be infertile. In his first words to the doctor, Sweetland asked where the man was from. He then asked the nurse to leave the room so he could ask a question. When they were alone, Sweetland asked the doctor to explain what he had been saying previously. The doctor told him that he would be able to have sex once healed, but wouldn't be able to have children. Sweetland asked the doctor when he could leave the hospital, and refused any more surgeries. The doctor told him that the final surgery on his face would mostly be cosmetic, and having it done would be up to him. Sweetland could leave the hospital in a month. The doctor offered him a cigarette, and said he appeared to be anxious to get home to someone, a fact Sweetland denied.

Analysis

As Sweetland's only companion, the dog he used to call "Smut" and now calls "Mr. Fox" appears to be necessary for his well-being at this point. Their relationship is also illustrative of the theme of Love and Loss. First, Sweetland pities the dog for his intact testicles, which apparently makes him roam the island looking for a female companion he was destined never to find. Sweetland remembers his pity for Jesse because he anticipated Jesse too would suffer in this way. However, Sweetland appears to be somewhat unconscious that he himself suffered much longer because he's denied himself romantic love for his whole life. Whether this is due to his strictly religious upbringing, or suffers from chronic embarrassment and discomfort in a psychologically crippling way, or his injury simply felt like too much to overcome—he has suffered the lack of love in his life far more than the dog and Jesse did.

The dog has kept Sweetland sane, and has even helped him avoid starvation, in that he brought Sweetland's attention to the hundreds of dead sea birds in the ocean. When the dog dies, Sweetland feels the loss very keenly, and buries him in his family cemetery plot.

It is a notable fact that Hollis' tombstone is missing because his body was never found. Jesse says Hollis is sad at this omission—Hollis is missing the closure provided by a tombstone amongst his family. This in some ways explains why Sweetland made such great effort to recover Jesse's body. He is trying to make up for what he failed to do for Hollis. However, Sweetland's tombstone is missing as well, because Sweetland cut it down. What this may mean is yet to be answered.

By now the reader may be wondering about several eerie occurrences as they've piled up. The mass death of the birds, the ghosts, the fact that the weather reports never seem to reflect the actual weather—something that didn't used to happen when there was an actual village on the island, the fact that Sweetland never sees ships in the distance the way he used to. Also, the dog's carcass was remarkably decomposed for a



single day out on the island. It is as if the island has slipped over into another world or dimension.

When Sweetland finally has the courage to look directly into Queenie's window and the ghost-light, he finds Queenie there, both as she was when they had their budding relationship at age 12 and later as an old woman, when they were friends. It is only when Sweetland faces her that the light finally disappears for good. Sweetland is finally facing down his fear of death.

Discussion Question 1

What is strange about the weather forecasts Sweetland hears on the radio?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Hollis not have a tombstone?

Discussion Question 3

What did the doctor tell Sweetland about his injuries?

Vocabulary

treacherous, claustrophobia, trajectory, mauled, convulsion, fabrication, sloughing, brine, palatable, emaciated, tedious, stippled, calibrated, obsolete, proximity, chesterfield, inert, stripling, oblivious, charade, detritus, penile, avulsion



Book II: Chapter 7

Summary

Sweetland wakes during a storm, and worries about the dog until he remembers the dog is dead. He knows the tide is rising and goes down to rescue the boat. After a struggle, he manages to secure it out of the wind, weighing it down with several stones. He listens for a radio broadcast, but again it doesn't reflect what he sees. He watches as the breakwater starts coming apart in heavy seas. He realizes that the storm is so severe that his stagehead would have been destroyed had it still been standing.

He develops a fever and has to stay in the kitchen daybed for two days. When he recovers, he is very weak. He reads the old magazines to pass the time, and as he makes his way through them, he finds some with words and letters cut out. He realizes that it was Duke who sent the threatening notes to him. Sweetland doesn't know what to feel about this fact. He burns all the notes and magazines in the stove.

He looks out and sees the ruined breakwater and realizes that the government wharf too will soon be destroyed. Days later, he realizes he hasn't seen any living creatures since the storm, not even birds. Then he spots a seal down in the harbor. He goes to shoot it for food, but is still very weak from his illness. He shoots the seal, and goes out in the boat to retrieve it. When he pulls up the carcass, he pulls up Jesse's body. This frightens him so severely he vomits over the side of the boat. Screaming, he rows back to the beach and runs back into his house.

Inside, Sweetland nails the kitchen table across the door. He doesn't light a fire, but does listen to the radio in effort to calm himself. He makes a plan to leave the island, but is concerned about how well the boat can handle the journey. He stays away from the windows, occasionally peaking out from behind the curtain. He sees that the boat has gone adrift in the harbor. He watches it float around inside the ruined breakwater, trying to forget about Jesse's body. He packs up provisions. He listens to the weather forecast, but doesn't trust them.

Three nights later, there is a full moon. He sees that the boat is against the wharf. He quietly releases the door, and sneaks out with his pack, grabbing his rifle. He retrieves the boat and loads himself and his provisions into the boat. He rows out of the cove. It is so calm he suspects a storm is coming, but he heads out anyway.

A wind comes up. He has to bail the boat frequently, but keeps on, hoping to ride out the storm in the alcove where he released his old boat months before. He has to row for open ocean, however, because the waves are driving him into the Fever Rocks. He fails to keep the boat clear, and the boat tips over. The boat breaks apart and Sweetland is battered against the rocks. Eventually he catches a rung of the ladder and holds on, climbing up one rung at a time, between waves. He has a head injury, can't see out of



one eye, and one shoulder is injured. He's also lost a boot. He climbs up the ladder very slowly. Finally, he makes it to the top and pulls himself up, crawling to safety.

Sweetland knows he is likely to die, and even if he should live, he cannot leave the island. He tries to pry the wood off the windows of the lightkeeper's house with no success. He rummages through his pockets and finds the remaining marijuana joint and a lighter, still dry. He lights up the joint and smokes it, hoping it will help with his pain and fear. Eventually, he is able to get up and look for wood to make a small fire. However, most of the nearby wood has already been scavenged. He fails to keep his fire lit. He tries to walk back to the house, and then finds his ATV, thinking he can soak up the remaining gasoline as a fire lighter. He does as best he can with a wet shirt, and then returns to his little pile of wood. He moves the wood up against the skirting around the lightkeeper's house, and it finally burns. He is warmed by the heat of the burning house. He heads back to the cove, knowing that though the Priddles' cabin is closer, there is no fuel or food there. By now he is walking through a blizzard. After nearly getting lost, he finally finds his way back to his house.

Sweetland wakes in the daybed with no memory of getting inside and lying down. He is still wearing his coat and one boot. He is too injured even to get a drink of water from the sink. He has no idea how long he's been there.

He hears someone knock on the door. He calls for the visitor to come in, and that the door is open. The knocking continues until he manages to get up to open it. Before he opens the door, he stops at Uncle Clar's portrait. He sees himself reflected in the glass.

He hears the knock again, and so opens the door to find a man dressed in a jacket and tie, carrying a briefcase. He can't see the man's face because of his injured eye and the glare of the sunlight. It is the government agent. The man comes inside. Sweetland offers the man tea, who refuses. He still can't see the man's face. The man tells Sweetland to sit down, and offers his condolences for the death of Jesse and the dog. Sweetland asks if the man is paying a sympathy call, but he says he is strictly on government business, and there is paperwork to fill out. Sweetland asks the man if he can get him off the island, wondering if that's why he's there. The man responds that it is too late, and he is simply doing a "routine follow-up." The agent asks Sweetland to rate his living circumstances and mental status on a scale of one to five. Sweetland senses that something is wrong, but can't figure out what it is. Finally, he realizes that the agent came in the back door, and asks who told the agent about the dog. Sweetland tries to reach across the table to touch the man, and faints.

Sweetland wakes on the floor, unable to move. He sees a pair of boots under the kitchen table, dripping with sea water. He recognizes them, and asks if Jesse is with him, but there is no answer. He pushes himself back into his chair, and faces his dead brother Hollis. Sweetland is shaking uncontrollably. Hollis doesn't respond when Sweetland says his name. He feels more cold than he's ever felt in his life. When Sweetland wonders if Hollis isn't sick of the place by now, the dead man nods like he used to do in life, not really appearing to be present. Sweetland decides it's too late for apologies, and instead says it's good to see him. Hollis nods again. He asks Hollis to



greet Jesse and Ruthie for him. He wants to say more names, but finds it impossible to speak them.

Sweetland wakes on the daybed, thinking he hears a fly in the window, knowing it's too early in the season for flies. Then he realizes the sound is a boat motor approaching the harbor. He tries to place it, remembering that in the old days, everyone's motor had a distinctive sound.

He hears men's voices. He knows he should get up to find out who it is, but isn't able to. He hears them yelling back and forth. Finally, he is able to get up to look out the window, an expensive, brand new forty-footer. He thinks it might be the wealthy strangers from Little Sweetland. He hears them calling their uncertainty about what they are seeing, evidence of habitation. He realizes they probably have food with them, and isn't certain how many days it's been since he ate last. They finally come to the house and check the shed, noting aloud that a winter's worth of firewood is gone. The men finally come into the house, speaking to each other with a bit of fear in their voices. It is the Priddle brothers. Sweetland greets them and they are shocked, though Barry exclaims that he had told Keith his suspicions.

Keith goes to radio the Coast Guard from the boat, and doesn't succeed in connecting correctly. They decide to wait until morning to take Sweetland back to the mainland. They care for Sweetland by lighting a fire, giving him painkillers, and feeding him soup.

Barry tells Sweetland that Keith was the one who erected his grave marker. Keith chastises Sweetland for faking his death. Barry informs Sweetland that Keith looked for Sweetland's body out on the ocean for days, and that he wouldn't go along because he didn't believe Sweetland had drowned. He tells Sweetland that Loveless told everyone that Sweetland had left with a pack and big duffle bag. Neither of these items was found with the boat, so Barry didn't believe Sweetland was dead. They tell him Loveless was threatened with arrest when he wouldn't get on the ferry, because he was trying to find his dog. They ask Sweetland if he has seen the dog, and Sweetland says no.

They tell Sweetland they are back to the island for a vacation after six weeks' work. They bought the boat with their relocation money. They had planned to spend the night at their cabin. Sweetland informs them about his having burned their ladder, and the other things he took, which they accept. He also tells them he burned down the light-keeper's house, but they don't believe him, thinking he's out of it. Sweetland asks after the other former islanders. The Priddles decide to sleep upstairs, but Sweetland begs them not to leave him alone. Keith agrees to sit with him.

Finally, Sweetland asks if the brothers are real. Barry touches Sweetland and reassures him that they are. When Sweetland wakes later, Keith asks him about the fantastical additions he's made to the map he took from their cabin. Sweetland asks for more pain pills. He holds Keith's hand and thanks him for the grave marker. He is tempted to ask Keith about the mutilated rabbits and the arson, but doesn't. Finally, he feels better and sends Keith up to bed.



Sweetland wakes near dawn, feeling somewhat better. He gets up and looks over the map, shaking his head about his made up landmarks and agrees that it looks like he was stoned. Some of it he doesn't remember making. Then he notices that the islands of Little Sweetland and Sweetland have disappeared entirely from the map. He goes to the stairs, wanting to call the Priddles down to see it, and realizes that he is alone in the house.

He puts his hand to the stove, and sees it's been cold a long time. He folds up the map and burns it in the stove. He gets his coat and nods goodbye to Uncle Clar's portrait. He blows out the lamp and goes outside into the silence. He walks up past the cemetery.

At the King's Seat, Sweetland turns back and sees nothing but blackness, as if the ocean has risen behind him and erased Chance Cove. He keeps walking past the familiar landmarks, watching for the outline of figures. He sees them moving toward the light with purpose, and falls in with them. They don't acknowledge his presence or seem concerned.

There are many figures, all of them strangers to him. He follows them past the ruins of the keeper's house. He stops there, uncertain about what he's supposed to do. A boy's figure brushes past him, and he almost recognizes the boy, almost calling out. The urge to do so stops before he utters a sound. He is part of the group, facing the sea. He feels like singing.

Analysis

The quick decay and destruction of the island, of the speeded up passage of time without humans, is evident in this chapter. First the storm heavily damages the breakwater, which has protected the harbor. Sweetland knows that this means the rest of the harbor amenities will also soon be destroyed: the wharf and any other buildings near the water will soon be gone.

In this final chapter, Sweetland experiences a number of visions or supernatural occurrences, touching on the theme of Faith and Spirituality.

First Sweetland shoots a seal, only to find that it is Jesse's body. This terrifying experience sends him into a panic, first blockading himself into his home, and then resolving to finally attempt to leave the island.

The attempt to leave is folly from the beginning, because the Love Boat has never been very seaworthy. Also, Sweetland ignores his sea instincts and goes out when the wind is likely to swamp the boat. In any case, he fails. He barely survives losing the boat, having himself dashed against the Fever Rocks, a name that seems symbolic since he himself just suffered a terrible fever.

Then he contributes to the destruction of the island by burning down the light keeper's house to recover his warmth enough to walk home through a blizzard.



Before suffering from a series of hallucinations or ghostly visits, Sweetland sees himself reflected in Uncle Clar's portrait. In effect, he has become the patriarch, or is reflected behind the patriarch, illustrative of the theme of History and Time.

The imaginary government man asks him about his state of mind and living situation, and Sweetland breaks the hallucination by realizing that no government agent would come through the back door. He faints only to find himself visited by Hollis, who acts almost like he did in life, barely acknowledging the presence of others. This is another implication that perhaps Hollis suffered from some form of autism like Jesse.

Then the reader is led to believe that salvation has finally arrived in the form of the Priddles. Sweetland is cared for, fed, relieved of his pain, and promised a lift back to human life.

It is only when he sees that the islands of Little Sweetland and Sweetland have disappeared from the map that he realizes this salvation too is not real. The disappearance is symbolic of the erasing of Sweetland himself. The islands are now gone, and Sweetland himself must join the other dead islanders and "go toward the light."

There are two interpretations possible at the end of the novel. The novel can be interpreted in a realistic, literalist fashion, or it can be seen through the lens of the spiritual. Either Sweetland commits suicide by jumping off the cliff in an extended fit of insanity brought on by lack of food, head injury and despair, or he is already dead, and only now realizing it, ready to "go toward the light" after a time between worlds.

The former simply attributes Sweetland's experience as growing madness. If the latter interpretation is taken, many of the experiences Sweetland has had can be explained as illustrative of his "between worlds" status. He has been haunting the island without realizing he is dead—as if he's in a sort of purgatory. The mis-matched radio forecasts, the lack of human life, the ghosts—all of these can be pointed to as evidence that he's haunting the island himself. It also would explain how he was, as an elderly and frail man, able to survive such obviously deadly experiences as the blizzard, starvation, and being thrown upon the rocks and near-drowning.

The question the reader is left in this more spiritual interpretation is when Sweetland died. Was it in the beginning of Book II, and he actually did die during the faking of his death, or was it sometime during his occupation of the island in solitude?

Discussion Question 1

What leads Sweetland to barricade himself into his house? What does he then decide to do?



Discussion Question 2

What does Sweetland find when he looks at the map the morning after the Priddles arrive?

Discussion Question 3

What does Sweetland do after discovering that he has not been rescued?

Vocabulary

riming, tedium, sedentary, vigil, credence, gale, successive, purgatorial, improvisation, hypothermic, caul, facsimile, guttered, feral, welter, tentative, inaudible, linseed



Characters

Moses Sweetland

Moses Louis Sweetland is a resident of the island of Sweetland and the novel's main character. The entire story is told from his internal perspective, from a third person limited point of view. His thoughts, flashbacks and internal language drive the novel. He was born on November 14, 1942, and is 69 years old at the beginning of the novel. His parents and siblings are all dead. Clara is his niece, and Jesse is his great-nephew. He has never married, though as a youth, he had budding romances with Queenie Coffin and Effie Priddle. He was present at the deaths of his father, his mother and his brother.

Sweetland has spent his whole life living on the island, except for two stints working near Toronto. On the second of these employments off-island, he was seriously burned in an accident, and has severe scarring on one side of his face and his genital region. He spent most of his adulthood working as a cod fisherman, and when that line of work faded in the fishery moratorium of 1992, he became the island's lighthouse keeper. He was laid off and forcibly retired when the light was automated.

The island is named for Sweetland's ancestors, its first settlers. Sweetland is a quiet and stubborn man. He passes the time gathering more firewood than he will ever need, poaching rabbits out of season, and playing online poker. He always honors Sundays by not working and watching TV preachers. He also pays daily visits to Duke Fewer's barbershop, where he talks to the community's men and plays chess. He is a respected man in the community where he's spent his life, and has lifelong ties and relationships with everyone still living there. He lives in the same house he grew up in.

The first half of the novel revolves around Sweetland's refusal to sign a resettlement agreement that will bring every resident of Chance Cove a great deal of money. The entire remaining community, with only a few exceptions, pressures him to sign so that the community can be dissolved and they can move to the mainland. The second half of the novel depicts his effort to remain on the island after everyone has left.

Sweetland is intimately connected to the community members who remain in Chance Cove, and also to the physical landmarks around it on both land and sea. He can be likened to a high priest or a shaman whose intimacy with the land approaches spiritual dimensions. His three closest friends are Wince Pilgrim, Queenie Coffin and Duke Fewer. Pilgrim has been like his brother his whole life, and his sister Ruthie marries him. He visits with Queenie daily at her house. His only two off-island efforts to find work were in the company of his friend Duke Fewer, and he plays an ongoing chess game with Duke until Duke leaves the island. He also has a mentor-type relationship with the Priddle brothers. Sweetland's closest relationship is with Jesse, who is his youngest blood relative. One of the ostensible reasons he doesn't wish to leave the island is because of his concern for Jesse.



Jesse Pilgrim

Jesse Pilgrim is 12 years old. He is described as fairly delicate and pale, and is not athletic. His mother is Clara and his father is an unknown man Clara met when she was living on the mainland. He is Sweetland's youngest relative. Jesse has been diagnosed as being "on the spectrum," or autistic. He and his mother live with his grandfather Wince Pilgrim next door to Sweetland. He exhibits various quirks related to his autism, like being overly attached to an outgrown pair of pajamas, refusing to eat any other fruit than canned peaches, endlessly repeated questions, extreme dislike of change, and obsessions.

Jesse loves the film "The Titanic" and watches it over and over, quoting the film frequently. He is very Internet-savvy, and is very knowledgeable about nature around the island. He demands that Sweetland tell him the same stories over and over again about long-dead relatives, Sweetland's life experiences, and the history of the community of Chance Cove. Sweetland's dead brother Hollis is his imaginary friend, or alternatively, appears as a ghost to him only. Until the end of the first half of the novel, he is the only one who witnesses supernatural events on the island. He also has perfect pitch—the only talented singer who remembers the old ballads.

Jesse's favorite daily activity is to accompany Sweetland on his daily activities, whether it is hunting rabbits, going for firewood, or fishing. He also has introduced Sweetland to the Internet, Facebook, and online videos. When upset, Jesse retreats into his electronic devices as a method of self-soothing. He is intimately connected to the island as a refuge and has a deep desire to remain on it. When he feels betrayed by Sweetland's agreement to resettlement after promising not to, he runs away and either dies by accident or suicide.

In essence, if Sweetland is the "high priest" of the island, then Jesse is his apprentice, learning and mentally committing the stories and landmarks of the island to memory. In death, Jesse is a lost boy, and signifies the loss of the island's future.

Clara Pilgrim

Clara Pilgrim is Sweetland's niece, daughter of Ruthie and Wince Pilgrim. Her secret birth father is the Reverend, though neither she nor anyone else on the island is aware of the full truth of this fact. (She does know Pilgrim is not her real father.) She was born on the island and left for about ten years to go to college and live on the mainland. She returned to the island when Jesse was a baby. Some of Chance Cove's residents believe she returned in order to re-connect with Sweetland, whom she always respected a great deal. She and Sweetland have a difficult relationship, possibly because Sweetland disapproves of her having left the island, having born a child out of wedlock, or because she wishes him to sign the resettlement agreement. She often gets into conflict with him over Jesse, in particular because Jesse believes he can always stay on the island with Sweetland, even if the rest of the community leaves.



Clara believes strongly that Jesse needs to leave the island to get treatment for his autism, while Sweetland believes Jesse belongs on the island. When Sweetland agrees to sign the resettlement agreement, and she and the Reverend share that information with Jesse, Jesse runs off and dies. After her son's death, Clara stays on the island until the final ferry, not wanting to leave Jesse behind in his grave.

Wince Pilgrim

Wince Pilgrim was born blind, and is a lifelong friend, almost like a brother, to Sweetland. Pilgrim married Sweetland's sister Ruthie, after Sweetland persuaded her to accept his proposal. While his marriage with Ruthie was fairly uneventful, Ruthie did not love him in the romantic sense, and they never had children together. Despite his knowledge all along that Clara was not his blood child, he raised and accepted her as his own. For many years, Sweetland feels guilty about Ruthie's infidelity and the pressure he put on Ruthie to marry Pilgrim. It is not until the last Christmas before leaving the island that Sweetland finds out that Pilgrim has known about these secrets from the beginning.

Pilgrim is cared for by Chance Cove residents, but aside from not having a profession, he gets along very well on the island despite his blindness. As a youth, he was encouraged to be a musician, but showed no aptitude. He is, however, very good at remembering the old ballads, which he teaches to Jesse. He is a fairly even-keeled person who speaks the truth to Sweetland about his stubbornness and unrealistic expectations about the island and its future. After leaving the island for resettlement, he has agreed to live in an assisted living facility, which Sweetland mocks him for.

Duke Fewer

Duke Fewer is another lifelong resident of Chance Cove and lifelong friend of Moses Sweetland. When they were both young men, Duke persuades Sweetland to seek off-island employment. He arranged one of the two sexual experiences Sweetland has had in his life, with an older prostitute. He also persuades Sweetland to take the job at the steel mill where Sweetland is severely injured. Because his advice led to such a consequence, he never gives Sweetland advice again, and is the only island resident who doesn't try to persuade Sweetland to take the resettlement deal.

After the cod fishing industry ends on the island, Duke attempts to become a barber, but never acquires a single customer until just before resettlement, when Sweetland comes to him for a haircut. His barbershop is, however, a gathering place for him and his friends. He conducts an ongoing chess game with Sweetland, a game he learned and then taught to Sweetland during his convalescence.

Sweetland learns much later that Duke is the source of several threatening notes he receives when he is refusing to sign the resettlement agreement.



Loveless

Loveless, whose first name is never revealed, is a neighbor of Moses Sweetland. He is a strange man and somewhat dimwitted, with few talents or capacity for hard work. The other residents of Chance Cove do not respect or love him. These problems are attributed to the fact that he once drank kerosene as an infant. After his parents' death, Loveless lived with his sister Sara, who thought simple-minded and likewise odd, was competent and a good manager of their household. After her death, Loveless doesn't know how to take care of her cow, though he does make the effort to breed her. When the cow nearly dies in giving birth to her stillborn calf, it is Sweetland (along with other village men) who save her. Sweetland also helped Loveless acquire an expensive little dog which is ill-suited for island life. It doesn't bond with Loveless very well, and never comes when called. During the course of the first half of the novel, Loveless is the only other householder who refuses to sign the resettlement agreement. After the near-death of his cow, he agrees to sign.

Loveless' one fairly competent act is the building of a dory (a type of rowboat), which he built to impress Reet Verge. The islanders call it the Love Boat. After Sweetland returns to the island, it is the only boat available for his use.

Queenie Coffin

Queenie Coffin is a lifelong resident of Chance Cove, and contemporary of Sweetland and the other older residents. When she was young, her sister died of typhoid. During her family's quarantine over this illness, she communicated with and exhibited her naked body to Sweetland through her bedroom window. They were both pre-teens at the time. After her sister's death, their budding romance died. She is known to say often that she was born in her house, birthed all her children there, and wouldn't leave it except in her coffin. This prediction comes true. For at least three decades, since the arrival of indoor plumbing on the island, she has refused to leave her house for any reason, including the weddings of her children. She is a social person, however, and often talks to people, especially Sweetland, through her window or doorway. She is an avid reader of romances and mysteries, though she doesn't care for the "better" literature her daughter sends to her from the mainland. She also smokes a lot, which leads to ill health and probably her death. After she dies, Jesse and then Sweetland see a light shining in her abandoned house.

The Reverend

The Reverend (who is never otherwise named) is the only Chance Cove resident who is not native to the island. He was the village's preacher for several years until he impregnated Ruthie, Sweetland's married sister. He is Clara's father, though she doesn't know it. Sweetland witnessed evidence of their affair, but never tells anyone about it.



The Reverend returns to the island after his retirement and his wife's death, in order to be closer to Clara and Jesse. He volunteers at the school, and acts as Jesse's special education aide. It is his idea to inform Jesse that Sweetland has agreed to resettlement during the community meeting at the Fisherman's Hall. This unwelcome surprise leads to Jesse running away, and his subsequent death.

Barry and Keith Priddle

Barry and Keith Priddle are two brothers, very close in age. They are the only children of Ned and Effie Priddle. Their mother died giving birth to Keith. Sweetland took care of them when their father remarried, allowing them to spend a lot of time at his house during their teen years. He also provided them with beer and porn magazines. They are fairly wild, somewhat criminally-minded, and are fond of drinking and drugs. They have worked off-island in various roughneck jobs, but return on every vacation. They own a cabin in a remote part of the island. Keith is very attached to his dead mother, and feels like he caused her death. During one of their binges, Keith once shot off the tip of Barry's index finger. They are very involved and committed during the search for Jesse when he runs away. They also appear as Sweetland's saviors after Sweetland fails to escape the island and is severely injured.

Smut/Mr. Fox

Smut, or Mr. Fox, is Loveless's expensive toy dog. Both names are those given him by Sweetland. He runs feral on the island much of the time, which leads to him being left on the island when all the Chance Cove residents leave on the last ferry. Loveless tries to find him, but is threatened with arrest if he doesn't leave with everyone else. Sweetland is the only Chance Cove resident that the dog responds to.

When Sweetland lives alone on the island, the dog scavenges some of Sweetland's snared rabbits. Sweetland believes he is a resident fox. When Sweetland burns a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night, or Bonfire Night, the dog reappears. Sweetland feeds and finally befriends the dog, which becomes his only companion through the winter. In the spring, the dog goes missing and Sweetland finds his dead body. Sweetland buries him on top of Jesse's grave in the cemetery.

During his solitary time on the island, Sweetland often says, "Well, Mr. Fox" when he witnesses something strange.

Glad Vatcher

Glad Vatcher is the wealthiest Chance Cove resident. He is a successful farmer and livestock owner, and runs the only store on the island. It is through his father that the Sweetland boys, Moses and Hollis, finally acquire a motorized boat to fish in. Glad claims not to want to leave the island for resettlement, but it is his decision to sign the



agreement that sways the rest of the community to accept the change and sign on. Sweetland blames him for the resettlement movement.

Rita Verge

Rita "Reet" Verge is a large, tough 55-year-old woman who was a single mother of two for many years after her husband's departure for the mainland to look for work. She is the island's only active hairdresser, and was drafted to be mayor. It is under her political leadership that the resettlement package has been ushered through the community.

Effie Priddle

Effie Priddle originally came to the island as a young single woman to be the island's schoolteacher. Sweetland's mother pushes for them to get romantically involved, which is furthered during Sweetland's visits home after his first foray into mainland work. Effie is interested in Sweetland, and makes her interest explicit by saying so. They have a brief, one-sided sexual encounter during a romantic ride to the cliffs. However, when Sweetland doesn't take the opportunity to propose to her or at least declare his intentions, their romance dies out when he is on the mainland, where he is supposedly raising money to buy her an engagement ring. After his accident and injury, their budding romance ends and she marries Ned Priddle instead. She dies giving birth to her second son Ned. Her most prominent physical feature is that she has very small teeth.

Hollis Sweetland

Hollis Sweetland is Moses Sweetland's long dead brother. He had an unspecified behavioral disorder that led to depressive and non-communicative behavior, and once spent a winter visiting a hospital in St. John's for this. He deliberately drowned himself at the age of eighteen, as witnessed by his brother. Moses Sweetland has told everyone for years, however, that Hollis' death was an accident. He has no gravestone at the cemetery, because his body was never recovered. He is also Jesse's imaginary friend, or, alternatively, his ghost is seen and heard by only Jesse. On Moses Sweetland's final day alone on the island, Hollis appears to Sweetland in his kitchen, but doesn't speak.

Sandra Coffin

Sandra Coffin is Queenie's daughter. She sends her mother books she thinks are better reading than the romances and mysteries she likes to read. After Queenie dies, she returns for a time to the island. After Queenie's funeral, she gets drunk and talks openly to Sweetland about his past romances and his personal history. When she leaves the island, she unexpectedly takes her father with her, leaving Queenie's house boarded up and abandoned.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Landscape of the Island of Sweetland

The landscape of the isle of Sweetland stands as a major symbol throughout the novel. The island as a physical presence is walked and monitored by the main character, who himself is named Sweetland; in essence the man is a human manifestation of the island and vice versa.

Its various landmarks are named and named again as places where important events happen in both the present and the past. The isle of Sweetland's people have been there for many generations, probably two hundred years. The cliffs, the cairns, the meadows, the stones, the mash, the cove, the breakwater—these are all places of life and history for the island and its people. The cairns are to warn people of the cliffs, and the cove protected by its breakwater is the only reasonable landing spot on this Northern Atlantic island. The cliffs are where the dead go when they go toward the light to the afterlife. Without its people, the island disappears from the map and soon enough from memory. The main character desperately attempts to preserve these places by speaking them to the young (who dies), to himself, and by writing them on a map that he then burns before his own death.

In the end, when Sweetland is living alone on the island, the island stops being a friendly place and instead becomes a place of death, ghosts, cold and starvation. The island as a friendly place cannot survive without its residents, and Sweetland the man cannot survive without his community.

Buffaloes

The buffalo, or bison, were brought to Little Sweetland long ago by the Canadian government in a misguided effort that ends in nothing. These buffalo obviously are not native to Little Sweetland, but are brought there to wait out any disease before being relocated onto Newfoundland proper. This never happens, and within thirty years, they died out. In essence, the buffalo are a symbol of what will happen to the people of Sweetland when they are relocated to the mainland, a place they don't belong and which will disperse and destroy the community from which they came.

The fact that Sweetland himself participated in the bringing of the buffalo to Little Sweetland gives him an insight into the wrongness of the act. He watches one of the buffalo drown in the sea, just like he watches his brother drown. Then, when the cod are fished out and Sweetland and Duke have no success in finding meat, they are forced to poach the buffalo that have been abandoned on Little Sweetland. The buffalo—who don't belong—replace the people who once lived on Little Sweetland.

Whether the buffalo are killed by hungry islanders or simply die out in an environment they are not meant to be in is left unknown. In either case, they are a symbol of



government intervention gone wrong, the consequences being a waste of life and energy.

Rabbits

The rabbits in the novel begin as a typical way Sweetland finds fresh meat on the island, though he does have to poach them out of season. Because Sweetland is one with the island, he is well aware that leaving them alone only means they will die of starvation come winter. He knows the island and its wildlife intimately. However, the rabbits are also used as a way to threaten Sweetland into accepting the resettlement deal. They are mutilated by unknown human hands and then their severed heads are used as a threatening gesture both in the woods and at his stagehead, which is subsequently burned down. A natural act—hunting for meat—is disrupted with a sickening act. When Sweetland throws the bag of mutilated carcasses into the sea, he is attempting to rid the island of impurity. However, the bag reappears when Jesse fishes it out of the sea on their last perfect day of fishing. Later, Sweetland finds a pristine rabbit head inside the stomach of a giant cod. He is so disturbed by this he takes it with him to demonstrate the bizarre occurrences on the island when he tries to catch a ride off the island with the Coast Guard.

The Cow

Sweetland's neighbor Loveless has a cow that was once his sister Sara's. Loveless has never been very competent at living on the island, and his neglect of the cow is a symbol of his incompetence. When the cow is bred, all the other residents see this as an act of foolishness. However, when Sweetland and Loveless work together to save the cow when she's birthing, and then the community gets together to save the cow by lifting her onto her feet, the cow symbolizes Sweetland's centrality in the community, and a way for him to redeem himself in the community's eyes. He is not just a stubborn old coot who refuses to sign the resettlement agreement, but is also a hard worker who helps people out, even people he doesn't respect. It is after this experience, however, that Loveless is persuaded to sign the agreement, leaving Sweetland alone in his dissent. Later, when Sweetland finds the cow's stillborn calf's carcass rotting in the incinerator, unburned, it is again a symbol of Loveless's lack of true participation in the community's mores.

The Resettlement Package

The central conflict in the first half of the novel is the government's all-or-nothing offer to resettle the community. If everyone doesn't sign on to the agreement, then the community will die the slow death in the trajectory it is on currently, devoid of industry. However, some community members prefer to have the community die naturally in this way than to have it be subjected to government intervention, a bribe of \$100,000 plus retraining and relocation money. For most of the residents, this is more money than they



could ever get any other way. It is significant, and Sweetland and Loveless' refusal to take the deal symbolizes both Loveless' stupidity and Sweetland's stubborn attachment to the island.

The package itself symbolizes government intervention on the life of the island and its residents. It is the government telling the community that it shouldn't exist anymore, because it is no longer sustainable or viable. While in the grander scheme of things and strictly on the judgment of cost versus output, the government is logically correct. However, culturally speaking and for certain individuals on the island, this offer proves to be the early death of the community and the loss of one young member who dies as a direct result. It also means the death of Sweetland.

For those who choose to take the deal, it is a chance at a new life. However, this life is completely alien to the way of life they have been living, and it is unclear how well they will survive as "fish out of water," or like the buffalo on Little Sweetland. For sure, the package is the death of the community.

Firewood

Sweetland's firewood collecting is a symbol of his commitment to staying on the island. While Sweetland refuses to sign the deal, he also declares his intentions with his constant additions to his firewood stores. While the Priddles don't leave wood, clearly declaring their intentions to leave the island behind, Sweetland collects more than he could ever burn even in the rest of his lifetime. This is a physical representation of his stubbornness and a declaration of his refusal to leave the island. Even after signing the agreement, enabling the dissolution of the community, he continues to put wood by, a signal that he will not leave in the end. Though Sweetland doesn't have much in the way of money, he does consider his firewood his "money in the bank."

When the Priddles return to the island after resettlement, it is Sweetland's burnt wood that signals he has never left. It is also when returning to the island after retrieving firewood that Sweetland comes upon the Sri Lankan refugees. In essence, firewood is Sweetland's primary wealth. It keeps him warm and alive. When he is stuck at the Priddles' cabin and can find no firewood, he suffers greatly. The same goes for when he survives his attempt to leave the island and burns down the light keeper's cabin to stay alive.

Chessboard

The chessboard, located in Duke Fewer's barbershop, is a touchstone for the men, especially for Duke and Sweetland. Duke learned to play chess during Sweetland's convalescence after his life-changing accident. Duke learns to play while attending to Sweetland's recovery, and then teaches him to play. Duke, in fact, feels somewhat responsible for Sweetland's disfigurement, since it was at his suggestion that they were in the steel mill in the first place. They continue this game as a way to connect each day. Loveless—considered by the community to be the town fool—is the one who "messes



up" the board and puts Sweetland's king into check. This leads Sweetland to feel stymied, just like he does when Loveless agrees to sign onto the resettlement agreement. Then he suggests burning the board and refuses to play, right up until he finally agrees to sign the agreement.

When Sweetland is alone on the island, the chessboard remains, with the opening move Duke left. As his solitude continues, and he witnesses many supernatural or strange occurrences, Sweetland finds that the chess game has continued. Whether he himself has been playing without remembering (because he is losing his mind) or whether it is being played by ghostly hands is left to the reader to interpret. When he notices the continuation of the game, he sees that the king is again in check. Sweetland is the king, and he will not win—this is what the board symbolizes when Sweetland is alone on the island.

The Cemetery

The graveyard in the novel is the "new cemetery," which has been in use for fifty years. This is to signify the long-standing nature of the community, where what is new is already two generations old. All of the people Sweetland has known on the island who have died are buried in this cemetery. The only exception is his brother Hollis, whose body was never found after his suicide. It has always been Sweetland's accepted responsibilities to mow the grass in the cemetery, an act which keeps the stones visible and the community's history accessible. When Sweetland finds his own grave marker in the cemetery, he is deeply disturbed and frightened. He sees its presence as a lie, since he feels very much alive. So, he cuts down his marker, and puts it in the loft in his shed, and continues to mow the grass. It is in the cemetery that Sweetland first encounters the strange animal that turns out to be Loveless' little dog, left behind. It is also where he buries the dog after its death, on top of Jesse's grave.

The location of Sweetland's grave marker above his head in the shed during much of his solitary residence on the island in the second half of the novel may be taken as a symbol of his being actually dead, and unaware of it.

The Love Boat

After Sweetland returns to the island to live in solitude after the rest of the community has left, he has no way to either leave the island or fish. The only boat available is one built by Lovless, who is widely considered to be the town fool. Loveless built the boat years before in an effort to gain the affection of Reet Verge, who was only one of Loveless' romantic interests, never requited. The community gives the boat the name "the Love Boat" as a way to mock Loveless. However, it is also one of Loveless's only physical accomplishments, one that Sweetland comes to depend upon in his solitary existence. The boat allows Loveless to fish for cod. Eventually, it is also the vehicle by which Sweetland encounters Jesse's ghostly body in the harbor. As a result, he abandons it in the harbor, and it goes adrift for awhile. When he finally is able to retrieve



it, it is not seaworthy enough to get Sweetland off the island and breaks up on the Fever Rocks. The boat symbolizes Loveless's lack of respect by the community but also his effort to contribute. In the end, it is not enough to enable Sweetland's escape from the island or from death.

The Public Address System

The island's only church does not have bells in its steeple, but rather a public address system that plays records of popular hymns by major musical artists like Ray Price and Tennessee Ernie Ford. This PA plays after a church service and enables Sweetland, who is lost in the fog, to bring the Sri Lankan refugees to the island. It also is resurrected after long disuse to call Jesse back to the community when he runs away. The final time the PA appears is after Sweetland returns to the island alone, and is out fishing and lost in the fog. Sweetland has caught many fish, and is lost, and likely to die. The PA—now a ghost sound, since it is impossible for it to be real—symbolizes the island calling to Sweetland and enabling his safe return to the island. The dog hears it and so does Sweetland, though he doesn't at first recognize what it is. It is the voice of the island saving its most sacred resident, calling him home.

Uncle Clar's Portrait

Uncle Clar has died many years before the time of the novel. His portrait is the only family member whose representation hangs in Sweetland's house. In essence, Uncle Clar's portrait represents the past residents of Chance Cove, looking down upon Sweetland. Before Chance Cove as a community is dissolved, Clara suggests that her probable namesake's portrait should be placed in the porch, where he can observe the comings and goings of Sweetland and others who visit him. When Sweetland has returned to the island, he takes down and talks to Sweetland's portrait as a way to keep in touch with history and reality of what is happening to him. He eventually places the portrait on the porch, where he can watch over the entrance to the home. Just before his death, Sweetland sees himself reflected in the portrait, showing him to be part of the history of the island, now clearly a patriarch without descendants himself.

The Map

When Sweetland is temporarily marooned at the Priddles' cabin, he finds a map on the wall there that commemorates the "Come Home Year" for Newfoundland. The map symbolizes the government view of the Newfoundland, and doesn't even bother to label the island of Sweetland or Little Sweetland. This indicates the far remove the government has toward these islands. Government is rarely aware of the real people, real names and real communities that exist in its outposts. When Sweetland gets stoned on marijuana he finds in the Priddles' cabin, he labels all the parts of the map and landmarks that he knows the name of, because he, as opposed to the government, is intimately cognizant of these names. Sweetland then goes on to create fantasy



landmarks commemorating people from Chance Cove who should be commemorated for their existence. In a way, he is memorializing their existence in the face of annihilation. When Sweetland realizes that he has either hallucinated or been visited by ghosts, he sees that both Sweetland and Little Sweetland have utterly disappeared on the map, a signification of the deaths of both islands and Sweetland the man's death as well. In the end, the map represents Sweetland's effort to stop time and history from moving on, and he burns it in the stove before going to join the rest of the island's dead.

Cod

For the island of Sweetland, cod are its only and primary industry. When the cod fishery is stopped because of overfishing and population depletion, it is the beginning of the end for the island of Sweetland. When the fishing moratorium of 1992 is put into effect, Sweetland industry dies, and many of its residents have to move off-island to find work. It is when Sweetland and his brother Hollis go fishing for cod that Hollis commits suicide. Sweetland blames this death on his attempt to retrieve a giant codfish. When alone on the island, Sweetland catches a giant cod which contains the severed head of a rabbit. None of the cod he catches are edible, because he leaves them in his exhaustion after nearly dying on the sea. Before the island's residents are resettled, the community goes out to do their legally allotted subsistence fishing, and this is when the community has returned to its natural roots. Cod and the loss of the cod are the driving force in the death of Sweetland the community and the man.

Sri Lankan Refugees

When Sweetland rescues the Sri Lankan refugees, it is a major event in island history, a symbol of a changing world, where people are forced to risk their lives to find new places to survive. The Sri Lankans clearly don't belong on the island, and speak English that is not understood by its residents. However, they are welcomed and warmed and fed and their dead are treated as any shipwrecked sailor's would be. As any island community, they are ready to play host to the shipwrecked, but this is different than these sorts of events were previously. They are, in fact, not shipwrecked, but set adrift to die by the smugglers who they paid to bring them to new lives in the United States. This event, which happened decades before the resettlement, is a sign of the world changing, of the pressing transformations of world events that will eventually displace Sweetland's residents as well. The residents of Chance Cove too will be set adrift to find their way in a strange world.



Settings

Chance Cove

Chance Cove is the only harbor and community on the island of Sweetland. It is where all the characters in the novel are born and grew up, and where all their homes are during the novel, with the exception of the Priddles. After Sweetland's return to the island, its houses are abandoned and plundered for what they may yield for Sweetland's survival. After the community leaves, a storm destroys the breakwater that protects its harbor, portending the destruction of the cove and the disappearance of all evidence that it once existed.

The King's Seat

The King's Seat is a rock formation on a headland of the isle of Sweetland. It is a prominent landmark and a place where Sweetland often pauses on his way to the more wild parts of the island. Whenever they go out to poach rabbits, it is where Sweetland and Jesse stop to look back at Chance Cove, and where Jesse shouts out "I'm King of the World!"—a quote from his favorite movie. The King's Seat also represents Sweetland's symbolic position among the island's residents when he refuses to sign the resettlement agreement. It represents Sweetland's solitary existence, his position as leader, and his position as integrally connected to the island itself.

Burnt Head

Burnt Head is where the lighthouse is, where Sweetland was once employed as lighthouse keeper. It is now abandoned, and the light is automated. After Sweetland fails to escape the island, he burns the lighthouse keeper's boarded up house down in an effort to recover from his ordeal. It is also where Sweetland goes in death with the other dead residents of the island, gathering to face the light off in the ocean, toward the afterlife.

Fever Rocks

The Fever Rocks are beyond the lighthouse and below the cliffs. They are where Sweetland finds and retrieves Jesse's body. There are ladders bolted into the cliffs that go down to these rocks. For a long time, it is where the island's youth have gone to be daring, but it is also where Sweetland climbs down and risks his life, along with the Priddle brothers, to bring Jesse's body back to the island. After Sweetland experiences a terrible fever, he tries to escape the island, and ends up dashing his boat upon these rocks. He then must climb up the ladders above the Fever Rocks in order to come back to the island.



Little Sweetland

Little Sweetland is the smaller island near Sweetland. Its residents were resettled some decades before the resettlement agreement is offered to the residents of Sweetland. All evidence of the community that once lived there has disappeared. Once empty, the government populates it with bison, which it then abandons there. It is where Sweetland and Duke poach a bison when they can find no other meat. At the time of the novel, the only structures on the island are empty tourist cabins owned by people no one has ever met. After Sweetland agrees to sign the agreement, Sweetland spends time on Little Sweetland, anticipating the fate of his own island.

Duke's Barbershop

Duke Fewer's Barbershop is the gathering place for a subsection of Sweetland's male population. It is their social center, a place to gossip and play chess, but not a place where haircutting occurs, because Duke is not trusted by the community with haircuts. It is only when the community is about to dissolve that Sweetland goes to Duke for his one and only haircutting. It is decorated with photos and newspaper articles displaying the history of Sweetland's residents. After Sweetland is alone on the island, it is where he goes for solace in his loneliness, but also where he witnesses a ghostly chess game that has gone on without any conscious input from him. In the end, Sweetland finds through abandoned magazines in the barbershop, that his best friend was the source of the threatening notes he received, pushing him to accept the resettlement agreement.

Themes and Motifs

Community

A major theme in the novel is the meaning of community, how it is expressed, and how it is destroyed. The community of Chance Cove on the island of Sweetland has been unraveling slowly for decades at the time of the novel, because of the loss of the cod fishing industry. The Canadian government has offered the community members a significant amount of money to dissolve their community, abandoning it and dispersing themselves to other places around the country. The younger people have mostly left Chance Cove for work on the mainland in other industries. The older people who have been left behind have mostly been forced into idleness or subsistence living by gardening and collecting firewood.

However, though the community is suffering in the novel through the conflict over the resettlement agreement and some community member's refusal to sign on, there are still many signs that it is and has been a highly functional community.

During the Sri Lanka refugee incident, the community takes in the illegal immigrants as a matter of course, as they have rescued shipwrecked sailors for generations. Each family takes in as many of the starving men as they can. The community also uses the Fisherman's Hall as their community center any time there is a crisis, also utilizing it as a base for the search for Jesse when he goes missing. All people in the community are expected to participate in helping out any time they can, and they do so seemingly without reluctance. When Loveless' cow is in crisis, the community steps up to help, despite the fact that they widely consider Loveless to be a ne'er-do-well with little in the way of sense. Though Sweetland is temporarily an outsider due to his refusal to sign the resettlement papers, he is still an integral part of all major happenings in the village, and is a central helper whenever possible. Even Queenie, who never leaves her house, is still a social participant in the village. The few times that Sweetland has left the island, he has found himself more isolated and lonely than he has ever been in his life, though he is surrounded by people and even in company with fellow exiles.

When the community agrees to dissolve, Jesse ends up dead. Sweetland chooses to forgo the company of strangers or displacement to return to the island in the absence of his community. Because he's worked as a lighthouse keeper, he believes he can survive without community. In the end, he finds that he cannot.

History and Time

The theme of History and the Passage of Time is shown throughout the novel. The island of Sweetland has been settled for at least 200 years, and their descendants are still there. Sweetland himself bears the name of the island itself, and is, significantly, the last of his line. Jesse, as his grand-nephew, could be the transitional person from the



old to the new, but he is handicapped by his neurological differences, and Sweetland is aware that the boy is unlikely to be strong enough to bear the future of the island on his shoulders, and is also unlikely to find a partner to create an new generation. Nonetheless, Jesse is obsessed by the island's history and makes a great effort through his obsessions to memorize the names and stories of his elders. If the community was sustainable, his knowledge would be invaluable to the future generations. But that is not to be.

The islanders who resist moving on are facing down an impossibility, since the island's population is not going to sustain itself, and in fact the government is in a sense putting an end to the island's history, at least in any historically recorded sense. In fact, the decades-old "Come Home Year" map of Newfoundland has already nearly erased Sweetland and Little Sweetland from history by neglecting to label them and other landmarks in the region. The area has already been left behind, because its industry is gone. When the Priddle brothers start talking big about creating a tourist attraction, they are aware that what they plan is a false version of history, one that did not and cannot exist again. Time moves on, whether you will it or no.

Sweetland attempts to go back in time, when he returns to the island. He is trying to stop time from moving on. He even plunders the museum and attempts to return to the old way of life. However, he is not taking into account that the life of his ancestors was lived fully dependent on one another, and that he cannot survive by going backwards with a few accessories like a boat built by a non-boat builder and without hands to maintain all the ways the island has kept its humans alive, like the breakwater. When he feels himself losing his grip on reality, he recites to himself all the family histories he can recall. He is almost ritually attempting to keep history alive. It is an expression of the idea that people are not truly dead until no one remembers them. However sad the reality, these memories will likely die with him.

The breakwater fails in the first huge storm, Sweetland has forgotten how to salt fish to survive, and finally, the islands themselves disappear from the map. Sweetland joins the others who must go forward "into the light." Whether he is alive or dead in the second half of the novel is inconsequential to the fact that he is refusing to move on. Inevitably, he must.

Landscape and Memory

The landscape and the collective memory that holds that landscape together with names of its various attributes is a significant theme in the novel. From the beginning, each rock and cliff and cove has a name. This is even so for the underwater landscape, because the island of Sweetland is surrounded by the sea. The people of Sweetland have collectively named these things, and Sweetland himself appears as a sort of holder of these memories.

Sweetland, more than any other character, is intimately connected to the landscape of Sweetland, even bearing its name. In his mind, he names each and every landmark



when he encounters them. The King's Seat, the Fever Rocks, and Burnt Head area all names that acquire a secondary meaning during Sweetland's experiences in the course of the novel. When he encounters the map at the Priddles' cabin, which lacks labels for various landmarks, he labels them and even adds false and fantastical landmarks to commemorate the people of Sweetland. This is because landmark names are a way that people pass on or remember people long dead. A landmark name often outlasts its origin, but it is a marker, a way for the past to speak to the unborn.

When Sweetland finally realizes that he will die, and that he cannot exist on the island in solitude, the final message of this reality is given when he sees that the islands of Sweetland and Little Sweetland have utterly disappeared from the map.

Love and Loss

The theme of Love and the Loss of Love are addressed through Sweetland's lifelong experiences. Perhaps because of his upbringing, he is incapable of feeling free to engage in sex or romance with others. First, there are limited romantic options for Sweetland. First, there is Queenie. And if their budding relationship had not been poisoned by the death of Queenie's sister, this might have redeemed Sweetland in the love department. Then, he makes a strong effort to connect with Effie, an outsider who appears to have the constitution to live on the island—which is not easy to find. Effie does a great deal to make the way easier for Sweetland, but for whatever reason he can't move outside his own heart's breakwater. He is too uncomfortable with intimacy. His subsequent injury almost relieves him of having to take the trouble. Though the doctor is clear that he would be able to function normally in a sexual way, he would not be able to bear children. Perhaps this aspect is too tied in with Sweetland's understanding of what marriage is for, or perhaps he is truly too self-conscious of his injury to ever risk it being seen by another. In any case, Sweetland never experiences the fulfillment of romantic love.

Sweetland also has to deal with his guilt in pushing his sister Ruthie into a loveless marriage. Ruthie's infidelity is a very troubling incident for Sweetland, because of his moral code, but also because he feels that he's forced her into it, in a way. It is ironic that Ruthie and Pilgrim appear to handle the issues of their marriage and this infidelity better than Sweetland does.

The character of Loveless bears his loneliness in his name, being even more incompetent than Sweetland at finding love. However, while Sweetland takes the route of leaving the island to find money to impress his love, Loveless stays home and builds a boat. Loveless is mocked for this, but it is a sincere effort, and an object that is useful.

Both Jesse and Loveless' dog are doomed to be alone forever as well. The dog refuses to leave the island, and is intact (whereas Sweetland is not), so incessantly wanders the island looking for a companion that doesn't exist. Jesse too doesn't want to leave the island, and his autism may or may not doom him to lifelong solitude had he lived.



Spirituality and Faith

Sweetland and the other islanders are religious in a matter-of-fact sense. There is one church, and almost everyone attends it when it is open. However, as the island's community disintegrates, the church is closed up, only used for special occasions like weddings and funerals. Sweetland's religious sensibilities have been passed down on him by his mother, almost as a rule of occupation in her home, even after her death. These religious expressions are made in a fairly old-fashioned way, like not working on Sundays and dressing in ones best. After the church is closed, Sweetland watches church on TV.

The Reverend, as the head of the church, is not an immoral person in general, but it is implied that he is unfaithful to his wife, and not just with Ruthie. He doesn't seem to be particularly attached to his own sermons, finding them somewhat forgettable.

If the Reverend and Sweetland's long-dead mother are the holders of Christian faith on the island, then Sweetland goes for the most spiritual versions of connection to it. He is pastoral and simple in the deepest sense, not thinking much of most sermon-making, but loving hymns. In fact, it is the church and its broadcasted hymns that appear to be the voice of the island calling him home. Three times, this voice appears to Sweetland.

When the island is depopulated and Sweetland returns, his existence there can be interpreted as a sort of purgatory, in which he is either physically or spiritually not cognizant of how he must move on to the afterlife.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is told through the third person limited point of view, limited to the perspective of Moses Sweetland, the main character. This limited point of view doesn't allow the reader to know the thoughts and perspectives of other Chance Cove residents except through the filter of Moses Sweetland's consciousness. It also leaves open the question of whether Sweetland is experiencing supernatural occurrences in the second half of the novel, Sweetland is a ghost, or he is insane due to loneliness and injury. Sweetland's perspective and perceptions are in question throughout much of the novel, and occasionally get corrected by other characters who enlighten him.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is rich and poetic in exposition. The language of dialogue is colloquial and displays a regional use of language unique to Newfoundland, including language and slang quirks that place the novel clearly in its regional context. Examples include regional names for indigenous wildlife, regional syntax and archaic pronouns. Because the novel is set in the first decade of the 21st century, it also uses the names of products and trends that bring the novel clearly into the recent past.

Structure

The novel is divided into two equal halves, Books I and II, which bear the only titles in the novel's subsections. Book I is titled "The King's Seat" and Book II is titled "The Keeper's House." Each Book contains seven chapters. Each chapter except the last of each Book is ended with a flashback. In the first Book, the flashbacks encompass the episode of the Sri Lankan refugee rescue. In the second Book, the flashbacks encompass the time when Sweetland attempted to woo Effie and went to the mainland to earn money to buy her engagement ring.



Quotes

YOU GET OUT... OR YOU'LL BE SOME SORRY.

-- Anonymous/Duke Fewer (Book I: Ch. 1 paragraph 100)

Importance: This is the last of the threatening notes Sweetland receives, urging him to either leave Chance Cove or accept the resettlement agreement that has been offered by the Canadian government. He keeps the note among all the others, not knowing which Chance Cove resident sent them. He discovers during his winter of solitude on the island that in fact the sender of the notes was Duke Fewer, his lifelong friend. Duke is the only Chance Cove resident who never offers advice regarding Sweetland's effort to remain on the island. Sweetland finds the notes unnerving, since he has known everyone in Chance Cove his whole life. He is very clear, however, that the threat of not getting the government payout has brought a great deal of tension to the community, and is painfully aware that he is standing in the way. He has a difficult time articulating his reasons for not taking the deal, even to himself.

You remember what come of the last bit of advice I offered you.

-- Duke Fewer (Book I: Ch. 1 paragraph 202)

Importance: Duke offers this statement to Sweetland when Sweetland asks whether he has something to say about whether he should take the government deal. Duke is the friend Sweetland respects the most, and visits him every day. He is the only person who has not attempted to push Sweetland to sign on. In the end of the novel, it becomes clear that Duke adheres to a personal rule in his relationship with Sweetland, because he considers himself somewhat responsible for Sweetland's horrible scars. The last time Duke gave Sweetland advice, he went with him to the mainland for work, and ended up scarred for life, impacting his life severely. It is due to this accident in part that Sweetland never marries his sweetheart.

Jesse won't be happy nowhere else than here. I knows that for a fact.

-- Moses Sweetland (Book I: Ch. 2 paragraph 38)

Importance: Sweetland believes, with good reason, that his great-nephew Jesse, who is autistic and hates change, will not do well if he is forced to leave the island by his mother to live in St. John's. Sweetland and Clara are at odds throughout the first half of the novel because she wants to move him to the mainland, where he can get treatment for his neurological differences. Sweetland knows that Jesse, like himself, is integrally tied to the island and will be unable to live elsewhere.

I was born upstairs here. Five youngsters I had, in the same room I was born in.

Hayward can sign whatever he likes. I'll be leaving this house in a box.

-- Queenie Coffin (Book I: Ch. 2 paragraph 68)

Importance: Queenie is known to say this frequently, and has been saying it for twenty years. She is declaring her stand, in that she is not willing to leave the island. But more



than that, she doesn't even leave her own house, and has not for decades. She is also making a prediction that comes true, a statement of fact. She does indeed die in her house, and is taken out of it in a box, even though doing so means having to bring the coffin in to receive her body by removing a window.

You aren't watching porn over there, are you, Moses?
-- Reet Verge (Book I: Ch. 3 paragraph 6)

Importance: Sweetland spends a great deal of time on his computer, playing online poker. No one seems particularly aware of this pastime, however. When Reet Verge or his daughter Clara come to visit him, they express their hope that Sweetland isn't watching porn on his laptop when they arrive. Sweetland jokes back to them about it. There is a tender fact beneath this question, however, in that Sweetland has always been fairly non-sexual in his life, even before his accident. He isn't comfortable with sexuality at all, and doesn't have any interest in porn.

Paints the whole place with ochre and whitewash, puts out a couple of dories behind the breakwater. And we sells package tours to a vintage Newfoundland outpost. It'll be like one of them Pioneer Villages on the mainland. Only, you know—
-- Barry Priddle (Book I: Ch. 3 paragraph 228)

Importance: The Priddle brothers are always talking high about money-making schemes of varying realism. They come to see Sweetland while drunk and high and somewhat hostile to his stubborn refusal to sign the resettlement agreement, and put forth a bitter scheme to turn the island into a tourist attraction after it is abandoned. The emphasis is on how Sweetland and the island are relics from the past, and that the change is inevitable. Being reduced to a tourist attraction is the ultimate indignity to both Sweetland the man and Sweetland the island. Chance Cove has no chance, and will be reduced to nothing rather than be reduced to a cultural lie.

I have a secret to tell you.
-- Jesse Pilgrim (Book I: Ch. 4 paragraph 93)

Importance: Before Jesse goes to sleep one time, he tells Sweetland that he has a secret to tell him. Sweetland never finds out what this secret was, but puts great importance on waiting for Jesse to tell him what it is. The reality is that this secret may be nothing or it may be important. It may be what Jesse tells Sweetland later about Hollis forgiving him. Or it may be the more spiritual reality that Sweetland and the island are one. It maybe also be the simple fact that Jesse loves Sweetland. Sweetland keeps listening for the secret to be revealed.

Sitting in the king's seat on this whole business. Everyone hung up on your yea or nay. Can't imagine a lonelier spot.
-- Sandra Coffin (Book I: Ch. 5 paragraph 59)

Importance: As a Chance Cove former resident who has left the island behind and while mourning the loss of her mother, Sandra is empowered to be direct with



Sweetland in a way that no one else on the island can be. She also has a distance and perspective that none of the current Chance Cove residents may have. She can see that Sweetland is indeed in the King's Seat by withholding his consent, and also that he has dug into a very lonely position.

I imagine you wishes I was dead, like everyone else around here.
-- Moses Sweetland (Book I: Ch. 5 paragraph 112)

Importance: Sweetland is speaking here to the government agent on the telephone. He normally doesn't answer his telephone, but Pilgrim makes sure he answer it this time, to receive the agent's call. Sweetland knows that his obstinance over this refusal to sign onto the resettlement agreement has made everyone tense and feels put on the spot. He rejects the government agent's false courtesies, knowing full well that the agent has only one job—to get him to sign. He is under a great deal of stress after having found the mutilated rabbits and receiving threatening notes. This sentence is also ironic in the face of the second half of the novel, when Sweetland struggles against death.

You can muddy the waters if that makes you feel better. But it doesn't change what's going on here. The only card you have left in this game is Jesse. And you just might get what you want if you keep playing him.
-- The Reverend (Book I: Ch. 5 paragraph 168)

Importance: The Reverend confronts Sweetland after he forcibly pulls Jesse into his argument after being set up to receive the government agent's call against his will. Sweetland has caused Jesse to have a serious breakdown by including him in his debate over whether he must leave the island. He has projected his own emotional attachment to the island onto Jesse. While it is true that Jesse needs and wants to stay on the island, he is a child. Sweetland unfairly puts him into the middle of the conflict, which he is incapable of dealing with. The Reverend, who is very attached to Jesse, is correct in chastising Sweetland for doing this. However, the Reverend, as an outsider, also doesn't understand how, spiritually, Jesse and Sweetland cannot be separated from the island. The Reverend is warning Sweetland that Jesse might win him the battle, but he may lose Jesse in the war.

Hollis can come if he wants. But I got neither life jacket for him.
-- Moses Sweetland (Book I: Ch. 6 paragraph 63)

Importance: On their last fishing trip together, Sweetland accepts Jesse's wish to bring his imaginary friend (or ghost) onto the boat with him. This ostensibly would be the first time that Sweetland has been on a boat with his brother since his death. (Thought Hollis is invisible.) It is also ironic that Hollis drowned.

He says you'll tell the story when you're ready.
-- Jesse Pilgrim (Book I: Ch. 6 paragraph 127)

Importance: Here, Jesse is channeling Hollis, encouraging Sweetland to finally tell him the one story he's never told him, the one about the loss of his brother. As Sweetland



finally shares this story with Jesse, Jesse responds with Hollis' forgiveness, which leads to Sweetland finally accepting the government resettlement deal. Sweetland is not telling the full truth in this story, but sparing Jesse the reality that his dead Uncle Hollis—now his imaginary friend or personal ghost—committed suicide. It is unclear whether Jesse is truly talking to the ghost of Hollis, or whether he has imagined him.

I'm not leaving him there.

-- Moses Sweetland (Book I: Ch. 7 paragraph 106)

Importance: When Jesse's body is spotted below the cliffs, Sweetland insists on risking his life to retrieve him. He will not risk Jesse's body being swept out to sea and never found like Sweetland's brother Hollis. Sweetland must bring Jesse's body back to the island he loved, no matter what. As a result, Jesse is buried in the new cemetery with his ancestors.

I'm not getting on the ferry.

-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 1 paragraph 45)

Importance: Sweetland is sharing his plan with Wince Pilgrim. Pilgrim has accepted the idea of leaving the island, only to go live in assisted living. Sweetland refuses to be treated like he's unwanted or old or in the way, and plans to remain on the island after everyone else is gone. Loveless' experience with near-arrest when he can't find his dog means that if he hadn't faked his death, Sweetland might have suffered the same indignity. So Sweetland fakes his own death and returns to the island. His bravado in facing the island's decline alone leads to great suffering on his part.

Duke Fewer, I got half a mind to put you on a clock.

-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 2 paragraph 85)

Importance: When Sweetland is alone on the island, he sometimes visits Duke Fewer's abandoned barbershop. The chessboard has been left behind, with Duke's opening move. Sweetland makes his move, in Duke's absence. But Duke is long gone, and cannot make another move. He jokingly chastises the absent Duke for not getting on with the game. In their final real game together, Sweetland refused to accept his loss, because of Loveless' interference. Later, after Sweetland has witnessed several frightening supernatural events, Sweetland sees that the chess game has moved along without him, despite the fact that he is the only person left on the island. Sweetland's king is in check, a sign of his impending defeat.

I might marry you, if you asked me.

-- Effie Priddle (Book II: Ch. 2 paragraph 200)

Importance: Back when Sweetland was in his mid-twenties, his mother pushes him to marry the island's outsider schoolteacher, Effie, who seems suited to island life. Sweetland is unable to articulate his wishes, despite the fact that Effie essentially assures him she will say yes. Sweetland disappoints Effie when he doesn't propose at a natural time. Instead, he announces that he is returning to the mainland one more time



for work. Sweetland privately is aiming to earn money to buy her an engagement ring. He doesn't understand that she needs his commitment more than she needs a ring.

Now Uncle Clar, what would thee make of it?

-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 3 paragraph 71)

Importance: Sweetland has experienced some odd, frightening and possibly supernatural experiences while alone on the island. He has taken to talking to the portrait of his Uncle Clar for company and comfort. When he opens the belly of the giant cod, he finds a severed rabbit head. This terrifies him, and he says this to the portrait. He uses "thee," a pronoun that in Chance Cove is usually only used by the very old. In this way, Sweetland is yielding to old age.

Don't have me die among strangers, Moses.

-- Sweetland's mother (Book II: Ch. 3 paragraph 74)

Importance: Sweetland's beloved and very religious mother influences his life greatly. He tries very hard to please her. As she is dying, Sweetland does his best to keep her on the island, where she can die in her own house. As she gets sicker, she becomes demented, and doesn't recognize Sweetland or where she is. As a result, she dies among people she thinks are strangers. Sweetland's efforts not to die among strangers means he returns to the island to die alone. He joins all the island's dead, but cannot recognize them, thinking them to be strangers when they are not.

Now Mr. Fox, who's got it better than this?

-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 4 paragraph 25)

Importance: Sweetland is talking to Loveless's dog, which he has come to call "Mr. Fox" since he appeared on Guy Fawkes' Night. He is at the Priddles' cabin, freezing and finding none of the wonderful provisions he imagined he'd find there. He is, in fact, miserable. However, he finds a joint and smokes it, which leads him to say that they are living high. He says it again at the end of the chapter after reaching home alive through a blizzard.

I hates the thought of leaving Jesse up there. With no one even to cut the grass on his grave.

-- Clara Pilgrim (Book II: Ch. 5 paragraph 76)

Importance: On their last Christmas together, Clara and Sweetland finally talk about their grief, though they have to get drunk to do it. Clara has been putting off leaving the island because she doesn't want to leave Jesse's grave untended. One of Sweetland's self-articulated reasons for staying on the island alone is to tend to Jesse's grave. It is his effort to do so that brings him face-to-face with his own grave.

Tell her I won't likely be home for Christmas.

-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 5 paragraph 124)



Importance: This sentence closes the door on Sweetland's romance with Effie, and she goes on to marry someone else, only to die in childbirth. Sweetland is acknowledging that he will not marry, and cannot keep his one promise to Effie. It is an expression of defeat and a giving up on any path toward marital happiness. He tells it to Duke, as his only message to Effie when he is in hospital after his accident.

The night is dark and I am far from home.
-- Moses Sweetland (Book II: Ch. 6 paragraph 74)

Importance: After the dog dies, Sweetland buries his only remaining companion on top of Jesse's grave. Now, finally, Sweetland is truly alone and bereft of all hope. While he is "home" in a physical sense, he has lost his community and perhaps his sanity. He sings a hymn of mourning for both himself and the dog and the island itself.

He felt of a sudden like singing.
-- Narration (Book II: Ch. 7 paragraph 184)

Importance: This is the final sentence of the book, reflecting the release Sweetland feels when he accepts death and joins the other dead islanders in going toward the light. Sweetland has gone through immense suffering to reach this point. He has always enjoyed hymns more than any other part of church services, whether on television or real life. A major voice of the island has been over history the hymns broadcast out of the church steeple over the PA system. Twice in his life, he has been saved by these hymn broadcasts, and only Jesse fails to be saved by them. For Sweetland, they are the truest expression of his faith and connection to the island's heart.