

The Snow Child Study Guide

The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey

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Contents

The Snow Child Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Part 1: Chapters 1-2.....	5
Part 1: Chapters 3-4.....	8
Part 1: Chapters 5-7.....	11
Part 1: Chapters 8-11.....	15
Part 1: Chapters 12-13.....	18
Part 2: Chapters 14-18.....	20
Part 2: Chapters 19-22.....	24
Part 2: Chapters 23-24.....	27
Part 2: Chapters 25-28.....	30
Part 2: Chapters 29-32.....	33
Part 2: Chapters 33-35.....	36
Part 3: Chapters 36-41.....	38
Part 3: Chapters 42-46.....	41
Part 3: Chapters 47-51.....	44
Part 3: Chapters 52-53.....	47
Part 3: Chapter 54 and Epilogue.....	50
Characters.....	53
Symbols and Symbolism.....	58
Settings.....	60
Themes and Motifs.....	62
Styles.....	66
Quotes.....	68



Plot Summary

Mabel encouraged her husband, Jack, to take a chance and move to Alaska so she could get away from the sounds of children, which to her were reminders that she was childless, in the book "The Snow Child" by Eowyn Ivey. When they befriended a mysterious young girl, named Faina, who lived alone in the Alaskan wilderness, Jack and Mabel became surrogate parents for this child. Through their experiences with Faina and the work they dedicated to their new life in Alaska, Mabel and Jack grew closer to one another and their relationship matured. When they lost Faina the two were able to grieve together, something they had not been able to do when they lost their infant son years before.

Mabel was thinking about the death of her only baby when she considered killing herself. She hoped the ice on the river would give way under her weight and she would drown but her suicide attempt was not successful. She returned home, thinking of the way she had planned for she and Jack to work together on their homestead in Alaska. Instead she felt they had drifted further apart. Jack meanwhile dealt with his own problems as he struggled to tame fields for crops and feed himself and Mabel over the winter. He'd just about decided to work in the coal mines over the winter when a neighboring family befriended him and Mabel.

Mabel met Jack at the barn and they played together in the snow the first snowfall. Together they built a snowman that they dressed and decorated like a little girl. Jack got up that night and spotted a young girl in the woods. She had taken the gloves and scarf from the snowman he and Mabel had made. After Mabel saw the girl as well she began to associate the child with the heroine from the Russian fairy tale "The Snow Maiden" that her father had read to her when she was a child. The child, whom they learned was named Faina, refused to stay with Jack and Mabel permanently but visited regularly especially during the winter months. In the summer she went further up the mountains, in order to stay where it was cold. Her behavior so paralleled that of the girl in Mabel's fairy tale that she believed the child had actually come from the snowman until Jack told Mabel he knew Faina was not a snow fairy because he had helped to bury her father.

For years Mabel and Jack were the only ones who ever saw Faina. Although they had told their neighbor friends about her, the neighbors doubted her existence until they happened to visit the cabin one day while Faina was there. Their son, Garrett, fell in love with Faina. In the course of their relationship, Faina got pregnant. It was when Garrett went to Jack to ask for Faina's hand in marriage that Jack realized that he and Mabel had become Faina's parents. Unfortunately, Faina's childbirth was long and hard. She never fully recovered and soon became sick with a fever. She begged to be taken out in the snow so Garrett fixed her a bed of furs to lie on outside. While outside Faina disappeared. All that remained of her was her clothes still between the furs between which she had been laying. Although they had never been able to comfort each other after the loss of their own baby, Jack and Mabel had matured to the point that they grieved together over Faina's death.



Part 1: Chapters 1-2

Summary

In Chapter 1, Mabel had expected the silence in Alaska to be peaceful. She had hoped to get away from the sounds of children. She and Jack had a baby ten years before they'd come to Alaska. It was stillborn. She wished she had kissed the baby and found out if it was a girl or a boy even though it was born dead. Meanwhile in Alaska, it was November. Mabel feared the darkness of the coming winter. She tried to keep herself busy. Still she thought she couldn't survive the winter. She knew there were guns in the cabin but didn't want her husband, Jack, to feel guilty or be blamed for her death. She decided instead if she fell through the ice on the river and drowned, it would look like an accident. Even though she walked all the way to the shale cliff on the opposite side of the river, she didn't fall through. Mabel turned and went back home.

Back in the cabin Mabel prepared dinner. She mentioned to Jack that she'd walked to the river and that it was frozen all the way across. He gave no response. After she'd gone to the sink so Jack couldn't see she was crying, he told her that she should stay off the ice because it wasn't yet solid. She asked if she could help him in the fields but her offer was turned down. That night in bed Mabel asked Jack if they would survive the winter. He responded that they didn't have much choice.

In Chapter 2, Jack made a trip to Alpine, the closest village, to take Mabel's pies to the hotel restaurant. His nervous young horse worried him but he was more concerned because he felt he was too old to be trying to tame a homestead in Alaska. He didn't want his wife to have to sell baked goods to help them make ends meet. The horse continued to toss its head. Jack got the feeling he was being watched. He looked around but only saw a red fox among the trees. Their eyes met for a moment.

At the hotel Betty told him because her sister was coming to live with them, she would be taking over the baking in order to earn her keep so the hotel wouldn't need any more pies. Even though he usually didn't stop long at the hotel he did accept the offer of a cup of coffee. Betty told Jack help was needed at the mine, a job that might get them through the winter. He was considering mine work when George Benson came in and asked Jack if he needed help with his land. When he learned Jack was considering working at the mine he warned him against it. Before he left, George advised Jack to try to kill a moose as that would supply the family with meat for the winter. Jack thought to himself how the company of George's wife might be good for Mabel even though she told him she wanted to be alone. He thought of the way that Mabel had changed since she had lost the baby. She didn't like going to family gatherings and couldn't stand to be around children or pregnant women.



Analysis

In these opening two chapters the author lays down the foundational work for the story by telling the reader why Mabel and Jack were in Alaska. Mabel had a stillborn baby ten years before the beginning of the novel. She felt it would be best for her if she could get away from all reminders of her lost baby and her lack of children, but even with the silence that Alaska provided, Mabel was still depressed. Jack recognized her depression but was worried with his own problems.

Grief is a major theme in this novel. This feeling of grief is communicated to the reader through the tone of depression and failure that is prevalent in these first two chapters. Mabel was still grieving the loss of her baby from ten years prior. She believed she was a failure because she didn't have children. She still chided herself because she wasn't more involved with the baby and its burial. She hadn't even know it if was a boy or girl, or where it was buried. As she faced her second winter in Alaska Mabel didn't think she could stand the cold and dark again. She decided to kill herself but make it look accidental. Her plan to fall through the weak ice on the river, however, didn't work.

Jack also struggled with grief. His grief was different because he recognized his wife was hurting but didn't know what to do for her. He was also worried he would not be able to provide food for the two of them through the winter. He grieved he was not able to work like a young man and provide the life he wanted to provide for Mabel. Notice that Jack recognized he had not protected Mabel from the people back home as he should have. At a family gathering a girl had accidentally called Mabel her mother. Even though he saw what happened and saw that Mabel looked like she had been hit, he had done nothing to comfort her. He'd just continued talking and ignored her hurt. The memory of his lack of action brought him grief.

Life in Alaska is another theme in "The Snow Child." Mabel and Jack traveled to Alaska in 1919 as pioneers in a very sparsely populated area. The area is know not only for cold and snow but also unusually limited daylight hours in the winter. A section of Chapter 1 is dedicated to a description of Mabel's demeanor and deep depression during these winters days. Information in Chapter 1 indicates that beginning in December the sun would not come up until just about noon and would shine only a few hours before going back down. The dark days were so difficult for Mabel that she didn't believe she had the strength to survive another winter. Notice also how secluded Jack and Mabel were at their homestead. He had only one set of neighbors that he knew of. The town was little more than a village.

In a land as hard and rugged as Alaska, it was important to have good friends. When they met at the hotel restaurant in Alpine notice that George tried to forge a friendship with Jack. First, George advised Jack not to consider working at the mines. He also told him that if he needed help at his homestead, he and his boys would be happy to bring their draft horses and help plow. Jack refused the offer of help just as he refused his wife's offer of help. Finally, George advised Jack that he needed to try to kill a moose so that he and Mabel would have food for the winter.



Notice in this section Jack's concern with the horse he had bought. It was nervous and had already almost injured him once. His fear that it would badly injure him foreshadows a coming tragedy in the novel. Also remember the feeling Jack had that someone was watching him. He'd seen only a fox but had never had the feeling of being watched caused by an animal before. This fox will be important later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Mabel's depression. Why did the darkness make it worse? Do you think it was best for her just to run from her problems? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

In this time period, children were important not only because they carried on their family line. In what ways were Mabel and Jack at a disadvantage because they had no children?

Discussion Question 3

If you were Jack facing the fear of not having enough food for the winter would you accept help from your neighbors? Why or why not? Why do you think Jack didn't more readily accept George's offer to help?

Vocabulary

glacial, exhilarated, treacherous, pliant, resonant, imperceptible, mundane, consorting, savagery



Part 1: Chapters 3-4

Summary

In Chapter 3, Mabel was disappointed when Jack told her that her pies were no longer needed at the hotel restaurant. Baking day had been one to which she looked forward. He also told her that George Benson and two of his sons would be coming to help him that day. For that reason she needed to plan on three guests for dinner. Mabel was angered that Jack was allowing people whom she didn't know to help him. He told her that he needed the help.

Mabel cooked dinner for the men but didn't plan on making friends. She wondered if Jack hadn't understood she had intended for them to be alone. When the men laughed and talked at dinner Mabel was hurt because Jack barely spoke to her and didn't even smile anymore. Before he left, George suggested to Mabel that she come to visit Esther soon. Mabel gave no response. A few days later Jack told Mabel they were to be at the Benson's home about noon on Thanksgiving. He'd promised one of her pies. On the way to the Benson's Mabel was a bit excited to be out of the cabin. As they drove, Jack told her about the work he was doing and pointed out different locations where specific things he'd told her about had happened.

At the Benson's home Esther came out of the barn holding the dead but still flapping turkey. Mabel waited for her in the Benson's cluttered cabin. Mabel felt welcome in the noisy and cluttered but happy atmosphere. When it was her time to tell about herself she admitted it was she who had wanted to come to Alaska. In her mind she remembered the day she had gone to Jack with the advertisement she had found about Alaska. Even though they were nearly fifty, they decided to go. She had imagined helping Jack build the house and work the fields. Instead, he'd left her at the hotel while he built their cabin. Now they rarely spoke to one another.

Mabel perked up when she heard George and Jack talking about working in the coal mines. She was upset when she learned he'd been thinking about working in the mines and leaving her. George calmed them both telling them all they needed to do was to get a moose. The meat would last them all winter. The youngest Benson boy, Garrett, spoke up saying he doubted Jack would be able to get a moose as late as it was in the season. Before they left Esther gave Mabel a jar of sourdough starter. Although she had intended to lecture Jack on the way home about his plan to work in the mine she instead found herself laughing with Jack when she told him Esther's reaction when she'd said they didn't have any children. Esther had told Mabel that she and Jack were welcome to borrow their boys any time they wanted.

Chapter 4, it snowed the next evening. She met Jack's gaze as he walked back from the barn and felt the same feeling she had when she fell in love with him. She put on her boots and went out into the snow to meet him. He was surprised when she threw a snowball at him but soon joined the game. Before they went inside Mabel asked if they



could build a snowman, a little girl. Jack used his pocketknife to carve delicate features in its face. He then added yellow grass as hair. They dressed it with a pair of mittens and a red scarf Mabel's sister had knitted. Mabel used a cranberry to color the girl's lips. After they went inside to warm up, they had sex.

Analysis

Another theme in the novel is introduced in these chapters. That theme is that of women's roles. In the life from which Mabel had come there were only certain roles that were deemed appropriate for women. They were to cook, clean and take care of the children. When they got together these women talked about births and deaths, and made small talk that Mabel couldn't bear to be around. For that reason Jack's family had thought Mabel was stuck up. She was afraid Esther would judge her similarly but soon discovered Esther did not feel tied to the traditional roles assigned to women. Like Betty at the hotel restaurant, Esther wore men's pants and shirts. She killed turkeys and shot bears. She didn't try to make small talk with Mabel and didn't make her feel she was a failure because she didn't have children. "Mabel had never met a woman like her. She did not quietly take her leave or feign helplessness or cloak her opinions in niceties" (p. 39).

Notice that underneath her veneer as the daughter of a literature professor, Mabel seemed to want to be more independent, somewhat like Esther. When she'd come to Alaska with her husband she had planned on being able to help Jack build their home and prepare the land for crops. She'd been disappointed when he left her at the hotel when he built the cabin and refused any help she tried to give with the land. Even though Mabel had enjoyed the one task she had that actually helped bring money into the household, she felt helpless when Jack told her that her pies would no longer be needed at the hotel restaurant. Even though she had been the one to suggest they move to Alaska, she felt helpless and purposeless in her new surroundings.

Expanding on the idea of life in Alaska, notice the cold that is recorded. The temperatures are averaging around 25 degrees below zero. All Mabel and Jack had for shelter was a log cabin heated by a wood stove. Note also that the only mode of travel Mabel and Jack had was a horse and open wagon.

The theme of friendship is expanded in this section of the novel as Esther made a good impression on Mabel even though it seemed she had almost completely made up her mind not to be friends with anyone. Even though Esther was a completely different sort of woman from Mabel her personality seems to be exactly what Mabel needed to begin to come out of her shell. She felt comfortable in her Esther's house and even admitted to the members of the Benson family that it was her idea for them to move to Alaska. Notice also the relationship between Garrett and Jack at this point in the novel. The young boy was resentful of Jack and openly critical of him. This is significant as their relationship will change significantly through the course of the novel.



Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Mabel and Esther. Do you think Mabel wished she was more like Esther? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Garrett's attitude toward Jack in this section of the novel. Why do you think he is so critical of Jack?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the new closeness between Jack and Mabel. What do you think reinvigorated their love for one another?

Vocabulary

discern, solace, broached, excruciating, disembark, leached, austere, maimed, unspooling, feign, decorum, hypnotic, lobbed



Part 1: Chapters 5-7

Summary

In Chapter 5, Jack woke in the cold. As he was putting on his boots for more wood for the fire he thought he saw a figure, wearing a skirt, running through the woods. He believed he just hadn't had enough sleep. Outside he noticed the snow girl he and Mabel had made had been knocked down. The scarf and mittens were gone. He thought it might have been an animal that did the damage but he saw footsteps that looked like they might have belonged to a child going away from the snowman. The next morning Jack looked again at the tracks. There was a dead horseshoe hare next to the door that he threw into the woods. Back in the house, Mabel asked Jack if he'd seen the tracks. She was talking about animal tracks, she hadn't yet seen the snow girl. Jack believed the tracks Mabel saw had been made by a fox.

After breakfast Jack went out with his gun telling Mabel he was going after the fox. He had finally realized that the tracks from the snowman were bothering him badly because they led from the snowman to the woods but there were no tracks from the woods to the place where the snowman had been. As he followed the footprints he noticed they were interspersed with tracks from the fox. He was unable to locate the person who made the tracks. Back at the house he decided not to tell Mabel about the footprints. He thought it would only upset her.

In Chapter 6, Mabel noticed the snowman had been damaged when she went to the outhouse. When she asked, Jack told her he'd followed the tracks but hadn't been able to find anyone. A few days later, Mabel thought about the fairy tale she'd been told as a child. In the story a childless old man and woman had built a snowman that had turned into a little girl.

One morning when Jack had gone to hunt moose, Mabel saw a flash of the girl in a blue coat and a red fox in the woods. Mabel walked to the edge of the woods and saw the girl crouched with her back to her. The girl ran away when she heard Mabel. Mabel tried to follow her but a blizzard came up making her go back home. Jack seemed upset when Mabel told him that she'd seen the girl. She asked if he'd heard anything about a girl missing from her home. She also worried about the girl. Jack understood her worries. He told her that the Bensons would be coming for dinner that coming Sunday.

In Chapter 7, Jack had hunted for days but hadn't been successful in even seeing a moose. He had made up his mind to check out the mining job on Monday and spend one more day hunting. As he was hunting he'd almost given up when he got the feeling he was not alone. He looked up and saw the girl. She ran off but seemed to want him to follow her because she stopped often to look back at him. When he called out to her she shushed him. Suddenly she was gone but Jack saw instead a huge moose. Jack had never shot an animal before and was surprised when he hit the moose. He wanted to celebrate but at the same time had another emotion nagging at him. As he thought,



he realized it was the feeling of owing a debt to the moose and to the girl. Even though he had no idea how to go about gutting such a large animal, Jack had a start when he heard a horse. It was Garrett Benson. Garrett had heard the shots and come to help. He was impressed by the size of the moose. The boy helped Jack field dress the moose. Some of the meat was left hanging in the trees because they couldn't carry it all home. Garrett insisted they take the antlers with them to show off at dinner. When they got close to Jack and Mabel's homestead Garret ran on ahead bragging about the size of Jack's moose.

Analysis

Most significant in this chapter is that, by shooting the moose, Jack ensured that he would not have to go and work in the coal mines. The meat from the moose would provide he and Mabel with plenty of food over the course of the winter. Also significant was the boost in confidence Jack got from getting his moose. Just like Mabel had done when she felt so depressed in Chapter 1 that she wanted to die, Jack considered what would happen to him if he allowed himself to die in the wilderness. Just like Mabel chose not to use a gun on herself when she thought about the impact that might have had on Jack, it was his thoughts of Mabel trying to bring his body out of the woods that made Jack keep going. This desire to live for nothing other than to keep from hurting each other demonstrates the love that Jack and Mabel had for each other.

Shooting the moose was a big boost in confidence for Jack. Also boosting his confidence was the obvious envy and admiration Garrett showed when he saw how huge the moose actually was. In his first meeting with Garrett, Jack had noticed the boy was sulky and seemed to have no respect for Jack. His shooting of the moose was a turning point in the relationship between the two. Not only did Garrett think more of Jack, Jack's impression of Garrett improved as he realized how hard the boy was fighting with his own envy to congratulate Jack on his lucky shot. This is the beginning of a lasting friendship between Jack and the young boy.

Significant also in this section is the girl's role in the successful moose hunt. Jack had been hunting one of these animals for days but she was able to lead him right to one. It was as if she knew what he and Mabel needed and wanted to help provide for them. After Jack had killed the moose he finally identified his feelings as being one of debt, not only to the moose whose life he had taken in order to feed himself and Mabel, but also to the girl for helping him find the animal.

When Jack thought about the trouble he was having with his attempts to farm the land in Alaska, the reader gets a new appreciation of the difficulties the Alaskan pioneers faced. Jack had known life in Alaska would be hard but hadn't expected it to be as hard as it was. He'd been told of a land that was full of wildlife and fish just waiting for him to hunt it down. Instead, Jack found the land and the animals there to be hard and savage. Although he'd believed differently before he'd come there he'd come to realize that "Alaska gave up nothing easily" (p. 61).



Farming in Alaska was even different from farming on his family's land back home. There the fields had been used for planting for years. In Alaska, the land had never been touched by a plow. Jack had to clear trees that sometimes grew so close together that he couldn't walk between them. Then he had to clear tree roots and even boulders from the ground. He felt the wilderness was trying to prove that it was "older, fiercer, stronger" (p. 61) than he was.

It is in these chapters of the novel, Chapter 5 in particular, that the idea of fantasy is introduced into the novel. It is in this chapter that Jack first began to get glimpses of a young girl running through the woods. He looked for her but could not follow her footsteps to find her. The most mysterious feature of the girl is that she appeared for the first time the night that Jack and Mabel made their snow girl. A snippet of the story "Little Daughter of the Snow" included at the beginning of this first part of the story sets up the appearance of the girl into Mabel and Jack's lives. Did she come from the snow girl they'd made? The snow figure was busted and foot prints only led away from the remains of the snow girl, signs that indicated the snow girl might have somehow come to life. Remember, however, that Jack has seen her with a red fox. The day he was taking Mabel's pies to Alpine he felt he was being watched but saw nothing but the red fox. He'd never gotten that feeling from an animal before. It could be that the girl was watching him then but he just didn't see her. Also, when Jack thought about he way she'd led him to the moose he believed she knew the land well, a knowledge she wouldn't have had if she had just popped out of a snowman a week or so prior. Regardless, Mabel saw enough similarities between the girl's appearance and the fairy tale about the snow child that she had been read as a child that she began thinking about the book that belonged to her father from which the story had come. She drew similarities between their situation and the illustrations she remembered from the book.

Discussion Question 1

Why was it so significant that Jack was able to kill a moose? How did his kill help to build his confidence?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the appearance of the girl in the woods. Do you think she was a real girl or a fantasy character? Support your answer with examples from the book.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the changing dynamics in the relationship between Garrett and Jack. Why do you think Garrett did not like Jack at first? What do you think changed his opinion of Jack?

Vocabulary

oblong, transfixed, imposter, fallow, ineptness, engorged, ponderous, reposition, viscera, reverent



Part 1: Chapters 8-11

Summary

In Chapter 8, Esther and Mabel were in the cabin talking when George came in telling them they had to come and look at the moose that Jack had killed. Mabel expected to see a full animal in the barn instead of just the bloody pieces. In his excitement Jack picked Mabel up and swung her around. The men took swigs from a bottle of moonshine to celebrate Jack's kill. Esther persuaded Mabel to take a drink as well in honor of her husband. As they walked back to the cabin and Jack put his arm around her, Mabel wondered who this man was who shot moose and drank moonshine.

In the house Esther cut up the moose heart and cooked it for dinner. Everything was a blur to Mabel. It was not until they were nearly done with dinner that Mabel asked Esther if there were any families living near them who had a little blonde girl. Esther couldn't think of any one fitting that description but grew concerned when Mabel described how she and Jack had seen the girl running around. Esther thought maybe the darkness and solitude of the winter was getting to Mabel making her see things that weren't really there. Jack did not back Mabel up when she asked him to tell Esther he had seen the girl as well.

In Chapter 9, Jack began trying to bait the child using food but had no success. One night he left a miniature porcelain doll on a stump near the cabin. When he went back inside Mabel noticed the window had frosted up in delicate patterns. Mabel cleaned a spot and looked outside. She was surprised to see the girl looking back at her. The girl was gone by the time Jack went outside but the next morning he found a small basket of berries next to their door. Mabel worried about the child and was upset because Jack was not more worried about her but went on about his daily activities. Because he didn't want to see his wife cry, Jack left the cabin.

In Chapter 10, Mabel thought again about the fairy tale book her father had read her. More and more Mabel believed that she and Jack had created the child when they built the snow man. She believed they were neglecting her by not taking care of her. Mabel wrote to her sister asking her to look for the book she remembered. When she got up from the table to check the baking bread she saw the little girl standing near where Jack was working. He hadn't noticed her yet. When Jack did see the girl, he appeared to be talking to her. She backed away from him. When she did run away Mabel came out of the house telling Jack he should go after her. Jack did so. Mabel waited nervously at the house. When Jack finally returned home he was tired and cold. He told Mabel he'd found nothing and that he was too tired to talk.

In Chapter 11, Jack had been scared when he followed the girl into the mountains but he hadn't been sure of what he was scared. A mist had appeared when he tried to follow her but he continued to follow her footsteps until they disappeared into the side of a mountain. As he looked closer he saw a door in the hillside but couldn't bring himself to



knock or call out to her. He wasn't sure what he would find but didn't want to find something that would make him think he was going crazy.

For the next week, Jack stayed close to the house in case the girl came back. Instead of speaking to her, he continued his work. She watched him until it was time for supper. When he went in, he indicated she should follow him. Mabel was so surprised when she saw the girl that she dropped the pot of potatoes she was holding. The girl giggled. She handed Jack an ermine pelt as a gift.

Analysis

Mabel's reaction to her belief that there was a child being allowed to run free in the Alaskan wilderness was that since she and Jack knew about her they should do something to take care of her. She was grieved and angry with Jack because he wouldn't share his concern about the child with her. As he had done before when Mabel had needed his support, Jack left her alone. He didn't want to see Mabel cry. Even though he wouldn't share his concerns with Mabel Jack was more concerned about the child that he let her know. He didn't understand where she had come from or how she could live in the wilderness alone. He followed her tracks to what appeared to be a door in the side of a mountain but couldn't bring himself to go through the door because he was afraid of what he might find. If the door led to an empty room he would have to admit he was crazy or that the girl really was a fantasy. While Mabel saw the girl as a child who needed protection to Jack she was much more. The girl had led him to the moose whose meat would feed Mabel and Jack through the winter. He believed he was indebted to her but wasn't sure in what way he could repay her. She finally accepted a doll from him but wouldn't respond when he tried to talk to her. Notice that he realized the best way to interact with her was to pretend like she wasn't there. Still, he was surprised when she willingly followed him into the cabin when he said it was time for supper.

As Mabel thought more and more about the fairy tale she'd been told by her father she related it more and more to the girl. She decided to write to her sister and have the book containing the fairy tale sent to her so she could read it again. Notice the way that the author sets up the mystery that surrounds the girl. She is described in ways that leave the reader unsure if she is a real girl or a snow fairy. Of all the things that Jack offered her, the girl took the doll, a toy. When Mabel dropped the potatoes in surprise when she saw the girl in her home, the girl giggled, just like a real flesh and blood girl. Notice, however, that when Mabel tried to follow the girl's tracks those tracks disappeared because of a strange blizzard. When Esther suggested they follow the girl's tracks to see where they went Mabel explained the tracks had been covered by the blizzard. Esther said there had been no blizzard at their homestead which was just a short way away.

In the theme of women's roles, notice it is described in this section how Mabel and Esther viewed Mabel's cabin through completely different perspectives. Mabel had hoped that Esther would notice how clean the cabin was and the way it was decorated



with curtains and pictures. Instead the aspects of the cabin that caught Esther's attention were its tightness and usefulness for protection from the cold and snow. The only piece of furniture she commented on was that woodstove. She complimented Mabel on their sturdy woodstove which she said would make all the difference during the winter.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Esther's disbelief in the story Mabel told her about the girl. Why do you think Esther didn't believe Mabel? Would you have believed Mabel if you had been in Esther's shoes?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mabel's reaction to the changes in her husband after he'd shot the moose.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how the tone of the novel changed since Jack shot the moose. What was the tone before this incident? How has the tone changed?

Vocabulary

disembodied, raucous, alluring, melancholy, pilfered, whimsical, conjured, deftly, breach, imperceptibly



Part 1: Chapters 12-13

Summary

In Chapter 12, Mabel was surprised that the girl ate the moose steak and carrots that she was offered. Soon Mabel noticed the girl was sweating because of the heat but wouldn't allow Mabel to take her coat or hat. Jack propped the door open letting in the cold outside air. Mabel asked the girl about her name and her parents but the girl was silent. She quickly left the cabin but stopped once she was outside and thanked Jack and Mabel.

In Chapter 13, the girl continued to come and go with little warning. She sometimes ate with them but refused to spend the night. One day she approached Jack and asked if he would promise not to tell about what she was about to show him. She led him to a snow covered tarp. When she pulled the tarp back there was a dead man underneath. The voles had begun to eat him. The girl told him that the man was her father. She said she'd tried to make him warm but couldn't. He'd died the day the first snow had come. Jack told her that it would take several days for him to get her father buried. When he told her that she needed to stay with him and Mabel she refused.

In town Jack asked around and learned there had been a man of Russian or Swedish descent who had lived up in the mountains. The description he was given matched the dead man that the girl had showed him. It was said the man did a good deal of drinking with the Indians, but no one remembered him having a wife or daughter.

In order to bury the man Jack had to build a fire to thaw the ground until he was able to dig deep enough for a grave. He and the girl buried her papa and used their feet to pack the dirt down. When they were finished, she flung her arms into the air throwing snowflakes over the grave. She thanked Jack by hugging him around the waist.

Analysis

In this section of novel the reader learns why Mabel and Jack did not start seeing the little girl until the day of the first winter snow. The day they had built their snow girl had been the same day the girl's father had died. Jack had proof the girl had not sprung from their snow girl but he had promised he wouldn't tell anyone that her father was dead. Even though Jack had solid proof that the girl wasn't some fantasy figure, notice the author continued to attribute special powers to her especially when it came to snow and winter related things. For instance when she threw the snowflakes over her father's grave, Jack knew it was more snow than a child her size could have held in her arms. Also, notice how overheated the girl became while she was inside Jack and Mabel's cabin. When she began sweating, the reader could almost imagine a snowman melting. It is instances like these that keeps the girl's true nature a mystery.



Notice in this section of the novel how maturely the girl handled her grief after her father died. The busted snowman was perhaps a sign of the anger and sadness she felt because she had been left alone. She also felt guilty because she had not been able to do anything to keep her father warm or to convince him to go back to their home. It appeared he had gotten drunk and believed he was warm because of the liquor. In reality he was freezing to death. Also expanding the theme of grief, Jack was reminded of digging the grave for his own infant by himself. Helping to dig the grave for the girl's father reminded him of the pain he'd felt when his baby died.

This section highlights another challenge involved in living in Alaska. Because it got so cold and the ground froze so solidly, it would be difficult, especially in the early twentieth century to dig a grave during the winter time. Imagine the increased difficulty Jack faced because he worked alone. He had promised the girl, however, he would tell no one her father had died.

Discussion Question 1

If you had been Jack would you have felt bound to tell someone about the girl? Do you think his choice to keep his promise was the best one he could have made? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What does it signify about the girl's opinion of Jack that she trusted him enough to tell him that her father had died? What does it say about the girl's relationship with her father that she wanted to see him properly buried?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way Mabel approached the girl once she was in the cabin. Do you think it was Mabel's questions that made the girl leave so quickly? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

surreal, lichens, devour, unnerved, otherworldly, materialized, rouses, venture



Part 2: Chapters 14-18

Summary

In Chapter 14, Mabel began to look forward to the girl's visits. She learned to be patient with her and restrained her desires to clean her up and dress her up. She followed Jack's example and did not make a fuss when the girl came but instead continued her work. She involved the girl by describing what she was doing. One day during dinner Jack told the girl they couldn't keep on calling her "girl" forever. The girl was silent for a minute but then whispered her name "Faina." When Mabel asked her what it meant the girl told her it was something that she had to see to understand. Faina promised she would show them someday. One day Faina came to visit while Mabel was drawing. She asked Mabel to draw her. When the girl was surprised to see what she looked like, Mabel showed the girl her reflection in a mirror. That night as Mabel listened to the wolves baying and the wind howling she wondered aloud if Faina was all right.

In Chapter 15, the book Mabel had requested arrived from her sister. It was just as she remembered it but she had forgotten that it was written in Russian. She looked at all the illustrations, studying the ones she'd always loved closely. As she was throwing away the paper the book had been wrapped in she found a letter from her sister. In the letter Ada told her sister about a student who had been sorting through their father's books. It was because of his work that she'd been able to find the book so quickly. When she noticed it was written in Russian she asked the student what he knew about the story. The story is the one Mabel remembered with a childless elderly couple building a snow girl who turned into a real girl. Ada wrote that in the version of the story in their father's book the girl met a boy and chose mortal love. All other versions turned out badly with the girl coming to some demise whether it was melting or being eaten by a wild animal. In one version the girl got lost and a red fox led her to the house of the elderly couple. The fox asked for a chicken as his reward for returning the girl safely but the couple gave him a bag with their dog inside. The dog killed the fox. The girl left them because she believed they loved their chickens more than they loved her.

In Chapter 16, Jack and Mabel had gotten to the point they had to kill their chickens because they had no more feed for them. Mabel begged to keep just one but Jack couldn't allow it. He'd notice how much happier Mabel had been and knew it was because of Faina. He wondered if he should tell Mabel that the girl's father was dead but couldn't bring himself to break his promise. He still wondered if she had intended to hurt herself when she went out on the ice earlier that winter. Even though he hadn't planned on doing so Jack wound up helping with the plucking of the birds. As they talked Mabel reminded Jack the dead birds and their poor circumstances weren't all his fault. They were both to blame and she wanted them to bear their failures together. After they finished plucking all of the chickens Mabel set one aside for Faina's fox. Jack was first angry she was wasting a dinner but then wondered if she was being affected by the dark winter like Esther said she might be.



In Chapter 17, Jack was glad when Esther came to visit Mabel. Esther told him she'd instructed Mabel to get out of the cabin more. She was concerned since Mabel was talking about seeing a girl running around the woods. Mabel became upset when Esther indicated the girl wasn't real but Esther didn't seem to notice and kept talking. She told a story about a man who had painted his cabin orange believing it would cheer him up during the winter. The man died in a house fire. Esther wondered if it was intentional since the man was always complaining about being cold. Before she left, Esther told Mabel she had become her best friend. Out in the yard, she warned Jack to keep an eye on Mabel. When he came back in the house Mabel asked Jack why he never told Mabel he had also seen Faina. Jack said he thought perhaps it was because he wasn't as brave as Mabel. As she prepared potatoes Jack came up behind Mabel and asked her to dance with him. They did so and then he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.

In Chapter 18, Mabel was out picking wild cranberries when Faina and her fox appeared beside her. Faina told her how she had fed the fox when it was a baby. Sometimes it had even slept with her but now all they did was hunt together. Faina told Mabel where she could find more cranberries and then ran off toward the cabin. When she returned to the cabin she heard Faina and Jack laughing and shouting. They were making snow angels. Mabel hoped the snow angels would still be there when Esther paid her next visit. She believed it would be proof the girl really did exist. She remembered as a child she had always believed in fairies and one day believed she'd caught one. She called for her sister to show her the proof but it was only a bird she had caught. Mabel wondered how she could continue to believe if she couldn't convince anyone else of what she knew. When Esther finally came to visit the wind had begun blowing and had obliterated the snow angels. Even though Mabel took Esther out in the yard she couldn't see what Mabel was trying to show her.

Analysis

In this second part of the novel Faina's relationship with Mabel and Jack began to deepen. She would often come to hang about and watch what they were doing. It was with only a little prodding that they finally learned that her name was Faina. The problem in this section is that Esther didn't believe that Mabel and Jack had actually seen a child. She thought Mabel was hallucinating the child because she was becoming depressed because of the winter darkness. Jack did not help because he refused to tell Esther he had seen the child as well.

A good deal of expansion on the theme of fantasy takes place in this section of the novel. Mabel finally received in the mail the book that she'd asked her sister to send her. Notice the foreshadowing that Faina's story would not end well with Ada's comments about the various ending of the fairy tale in her letter. Mabel, who didn't know what Jack knew about Faina's father, still believed that Faina might have perhaps come from the snow figure like the girl in her beloved fairy tale. When she learned from her sister how in one version of the story the girl left the old man and woman because they wouldn't



give the girl's fox a chicken, Mabel made sure to leave one for Faina the day she and Jack killed and plucked their birds.

The fact that the fox was found in both Mabel's fairy tale and as a friend to the real-life snow child is another way the writer keeps the reader wondering if Faina was a real girl or a supernatural creature. In the fairy tale that Mabel liked so well the snow girl had a fox who was her friend. In real life, Faina had a red fox who was her friend. Faina told Mabel she'd fed the fox when he was a baby and that they'd even slept together but now they just hunted together. This fox is a link between Faina and the girl in the fairy tale.

Another aspect of fantasy discussed in this story is that of Mabel's childhood belief in fairies. Because she'd always been ridiculed as a child because she looked for fairies she was not unfamiliar with the feeling she got when she realized Esther didn't believe her when she talked about Faina. "Esther's disbelief was all too familiar. It brought to mind the many years Mabel had spent as a child, looking for fairies and witches and being teased by her older siblings" (p. 147). Because she could not prove to anyone else that fairies existed, Mabel eventually lost her own belief in them. She wondered how long she'd continue to be able to believe in Faina if she could not convince any one else that the child existed.

The roles of women is another theme that is expanded upon in this section of the novel. In this section even though Mabel faced a hard task when she had to pluck and prepare the chickens that had been her friends, she stood up to the challenge. In fact, Jack even though about how uncomplaining Mabel had been through their whole winter of eating nothing but moose meat and potatoes. He knew she wouldn't complain even when she had to prepare the chickens. Because Jack stepped in and helped Mabel with the chickens he learned that even though he felt he deserved it, she did not place upon him the sole responsibility for having to kill the chickens because they no longer had food for them. She explained to him that because it had been her idea to come to Alaska in the first place, she bore some of the blame. She tried to help him understand she wanted them to be able to share the burdens and the responsibilities of their life, not spend their time placing blame or dividing responsibilities based on typically accepted gender roles.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant at this point in the novel that Esther not know that Faina really exists? How might the story line be impacted if Esther had meet Faina at this point?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the changes in the relationship between Esther, Faina and Jack.



Discussion Question 3

What is the role of the fox in the novel? What did he represent? What had he been to Faina most of her life?

Vocabulary

emulated, stoic, query, doted, indecorously, tentatively, impassive, permeated, vindicated



Part 2: Chapters 19-22

Summary

In Chapter 19, Garrett rode up to Jack to show off a silver fox he'd killed. He mentioned one day he hoped to be able to kill a wolverine. Garrett admitted he liked hunting and trapping better than farming. When Jack told Mabel Garrett had showed him a fox he had killed she stopped for a minute until he told her it wasn't Faina's. Mabel asked him if they could ask Jack to stop trapping foxes. He was relieved when she finally sat down to read.

In Chapter 20, Mabel worried that if Garret killed Faina's fox she would leave them. She wanted to do everything she could to keep Faina from leaving her like her baby had left her. Mabel felt better when March came and Garrett pulled his traps. One day she'd invited him inside the cabin for a warm drink and snack. While he was there she'd asked him about his trapping. She tried to pass her questions off as concern about him.

Faina woke Mabel one day after Mabel had gone to sleep reading a book. The girl said she had something for Mabel and needed her to come quickly. Faina took her outside where it was snowing even though it was April. She wanted Mabel to draw a snowflake. Even though Mabel didn't think the drawing was any good Faina said it was perfect. Before she left she tugged Mabel down to her level and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

In Chapter 21, Jack was frustrated with himself because he had gotten so little done during the winter months. Even in May it was still too muddy to plow his fields. The stress grew because Jack knew his homestead had to support itself or they wouldn't be able to stay another winter. He planned to plant vegetables to sell to mining communities. Jack wanted to hire help for the fieldwork but they didn't have the money. Mabel argued she could help but Jack wouldn't let her.

Even though planting season was usually a happy time for Jack, he felt depressed. He knew it was because he and Mabel hadn't seen Faina for nearly three weeks. He knew Mabel was distressed about her absence as well. One day he thought he saw something move in the woods. Trying to follow it he walked until he reached the hillside he'd seen Faina go into once before. He dreaded finding her sick or injured but instead found only an empty cabin. Inside a wooden box under a bunk in the cabin was a pink baby blanket, a picture of Faina's parents on a dock, another photo showed Faina as an infant with her mother, a final was of Faina's father on snowshoes. He left Faina's home believing he would never see her again. His eyes filled with tears.

In Chapter 22, Mabel knew something was wrong when Jack didn't come home for dinner. She dressed, got the shotgun and went to look for him. She walked and called for Jack until she heard the horse and saw it standing, still harness to the plow which was overturned. She finally found Jack laying on his back. He said the horse had been startled by a bear and he'd been pulled along when he ran. Mabel followed Jack's



directions helping him stand and then get up on the horse to get back home. Once they reached the cabin Jack had to crawl to get inside while Mabel took the horse to the barn. She cleaned him up and helped put him to bed. There was a deep purple welt growing on his back. She'd never seen Jack in as much pain and knew it would only get worse. He was worse the following morning. He told her his feet were even numb. She decided she needed to go to town to get a doctor. Mr. Palmer, who ran the general store, told Mabel there was no doctor in their town but gave her some medicine he believed would help with the pain. He suggested she get some moonshine as well.

Analysis

Although the tone of the story had become lighter in previous chapters when Jack and Mabel were getting to know Faina, the tone of the novel returns to the depressed and stressed tone of the beginning of the book. After Jack's accident left him unable to do any work the situation for Jack and Mabel was perhaps even more desperate than it had been at the beginning of the novel. To make matters worse, Jack and Mabel have not seen Faina since the spring thaw began. Since Mabel still believed the girl was some sort of snow fairy, she wasn't terribly worried. Jack knew the truth and was sick with worry about the girl. He was afraid something had happened to her.

In this section the reader learns more information about life in Alaska. One of the drawbacks of which Mabel became aware was when she went to Alpine looking for help for Jack was that there was no doctor anywhere close. Because the land was so sparsely populated it did not pay a doctor to locate in the far reaches where Mabel and Jack lived. There was no way for Mabel to find out exactly what was wrong with Jack or get him any specific care. The best the owner of the general store could do was to offer her a bottle of laudanum for the pain.

One of the benefits of living in Alaska was that although the growing season was short, it was bountiful because of the extended hours of sunlight crops would get. Just as the sun rose late and set early in the daytime during the winter, it shone almost nonstop during the summer. Jack thought to himself "The only reason a man could farm here at all was because the sun lasted twenty hours a day during the height of summer, and vegetables grew overnight to enormous sizes" (p. 160).

The importance of belief plays an important role in the theme of Fantasy. Mabel remembered that while she was pregnant she didn't believe she would be a good mother. She wondered if she had lost the baby because of her lack of belief. In the present she tried to make up for that mistake by believing in all her power in Faina and the fantasy from which she believed that girl came. She worried that Garrett would kill Faina's fox and that would cause the girl to believe they didn't love her and she wouldn't come back. Mabel worried constantly about the fox. She thought her worst fears had been realized when Jack told her that Garrett had been showing off a fox he had caught to him. Notice he quickly told her that it wasn't Faina's fox that had been shot. Jack didn't want Garrett to shoot the fox because it was Faina's friend, Mabel didn't want the fox killed because she was afraid it would make Faina leave them. Even though Faina



had an affinity for the snow ever since she was introduced to the novel she seemed to have abilities other humans didn't. When she held the snowflake in her hand for Mabel to draw it, Mabel noticed the flake didn't melt as it would have in her hand.

In the theme of the roles of women Mabel showed her tougher side in this section of the book. Even though Jack had not allowed her to do much work around the farm and had insisted she take charge of the house Mabel took charge of the situation as best she could when Jack got hurt. Even though she was scared of the horse and had saddled a horse only a few times, she rode to Alpine to get help for her husband. Even though Mabel wasn't as tough a woman as Esther, she proved she could do what needed to be done to take care of her husband.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Mabel's fear that she wouldn't be a good mother had anything to do with the loss of her baby? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it significant that the snowflake didn't melt when Faina held it in her hand?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think has happened to Faina? Do you think she'll be back?

Vocabulary

kindling, scruff, assertion, symmetrical, imprecise, morose



Part 2: Chapters 23-24

Summary

In Chapter 23, Mabel's days became a mix of despair and work as she tried to care for Jack, the house and the horse. Her only hope was to get him well enough that they could travel back home. One day George came to check on Jack. He brought with him Mason jars of moonshine. She told him as soon as Jack was better they would be leaving. Later that afternoon a wagon bringing Esther came to the homestead. Mabel cried into her friend's shoulder. Esther brought Garrett with her along with supplies. She told Mabel they were moving in to help with Jack and the planting until the end of the season. Garrett even brought a horse trough into the house asking his mother what he was supposed to do with it. Esther instructed Mabel to show Garrett the plow and see what needed to be done to it. He seemed sulky. Back at the cabin Mabel discovered that Esther had given Jack a bath in the horse trough. She was preparing water for a bath for Mabel. After her bath, Mabel and Esther ate and then went to bed. Esther told Mabel they'd be able to take care of the farm and also asked if she had seen the girl again. Mabel said she had not. They were laughing over Esther having given Jack a bath when Garrett came in asking what was so funny. Meanwhile Jack felt completely useless and full of despair as he suffered through his pain.

In Chapter 24, Esther pushed Jack making him get up and walk. She slowly decreased his pain medicine. She forced him to take part in the working of the farm by helping to make decisions. Garrett and Mabel prepared potatoes for planting while Esther walked Jack around the fields. Mabel had noticed when she was alone with Garrett he was less sulky and was very patient with her. He didn't patronize her and assumed she could do the same work he was doing. That afternoon they planted the potatoes together. As she worked she remembered walking down to the orchard two days after her baby was born. She believed Jack would have buried their baby there but was unable to find a new grave. She thought she couldn't survive the grief she felt. She remembered going on with her life, getting up and cooking breakfast for Jack, and the putting away the things she had prepared for the baby. She worked even when she felt the grief wouldn't let her go on. She sat in what would have been the baby's room and cried. She didn't hear Jack come to the door but when she looked up at him he only walked away. She had never forgiven him for not comforting her.

When they returned to the cabin that night Jack was busy cooking supper. He said it was the least he could do. After doing farm work Mabel understood how Jack could go to sleep sitting in his chair after dinner. Soon they had all of the potatoes planted. Esther went home but left Garrett with Mabel and Jack. Mabel set Garrett up a place in the barn to sleep and even provided him with a book to read. Before she left him alone she asked if he had ever seen any strange tracks while he was in the woods. He guessed she was talking about the little girl and said he'd seen nothing of her.



Although Mabel had at first been afraid of being left alone with Jack the two reconnected quickly. She asked him if he thought they would be able to make it. When he didn't answer she ensured him they would be able to survive. She kissed him and held him while he cried.

Analysis

Grief is one of the major themes addressed in this section of the novel. Notice the tone has become one of despair as Mabel tried to care for Jack and Jack suffered with his feelings of failure and uselessness. Because he was unable to work and provide for his wife, Jack believed he had failed to do the duties a man was supposed to do. His grief is similar to the grief Mabel had felt for so many years because she had no children. She believed she was a failure as a woman. Jack's injury was allowing him to walk in Mabel's shoes as he dealt with his feelings of being a failure.

For Mabel Jack's injury was hard not only because it pained her to see him hurt but also because it brought back to her the grief she'd felt when she lost the baby. Planting in the fields reminded her of going to the orchard in search of the baby's grave. She was unable to find it but her milk came in as she was looking. Her body's natural processes hadn't stopped even though she'd lost the baby. Seeing the milk that should have fed her baby made Mabel even more certain she'd never survive her grief. Mabel did go on with her life but was deeply hurt when Jack found her in the baby's room crying as she tried to pack away its things. Instead of reaching out to her, he turned away. When Jack needed Mabel, Mabel was able to work beyond the hurt from that incident and her feeling that she couldn't forgive him to comfort him in his own grief. On the first night that she was alone with Jack after his accident Mabel asked if he thought they would be all right. He was not able to answer but she answered for him by comforting him and assuring him that they would survive.

The theme of the roles of a woman is also discussed in this section of the novel. Here it is the strength that women possess that is demonstrated. At one point Esther told Jack that they would be able to manage because Mabel was stronger than what she appeared to be. Notice that Esther was the first person to acknowledge to Mabel that Mabel had gone through and survived a long, hard childbirth even though that childbirth had resulted in a dead baby. Esther gave Mabel credit for what she had done instead of focusing on what she lacked.

Notice also the way that Garrett treated Mabel as they worked together. The only woman he'd probably been around during his life was his mother. Esther was a good deal less lady like than Mabel. Still, Garrett treated Mabel with respect and recognized she might not be able to work as hard as a man. When he noticed she was crying he stopped and made sure she was able to go on, even offering his shirt sleeve to dry her eyes. Meanwhile, Mabel indicated the boy was patient with her when he taught her how to do the planting. He didn't seem to think she was incapable of the work and gave her the courage to believe she could do what was ahead of her.



The beauty is friendship is also displayed in these chapters. When George and Esther learned how bad things were for Jack and Mabel they did everything they could to help their friends. People from surrounding farms got together to provide some extra supplies for Jack and Mabel. Esther and Garrett stayed with them until the potatoes were planted and Jack was getting around better. Even after that Garrett continued to stay with Jack and Mabel to help them out around the farm. Even though the boy was sulky when he was asked to work at his own farm, he gladly helped out his older neighbors.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism of Mabel's milk coming in while she was in the orchard looking for her baby's grave.

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that Mabel was able to hold and comfort Jack in his time of grief?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways were George and Esther good neighbors to Jack and Mabel?

Vocabulary

succumb, reproachful, submerged, opaque, gaunt, petulant, monotony



Part 2: Chapters 25-28

Summary

In Chapter 25, Jack marveled at the crops when he walked his land. He knew he owed Garrett and Esther for the work they'd done. He also knew Mabel was in part responsible for the flourishing crops. He hated the idea of her working as a farmhand but knew she felt like she was more involved in the homestead than she ever had been.

One day during a walk through the crops Jack thanked Garrett for what he'd done. Garrett had matured since he'd been with Jack and Mabel. Jack believed the boy had to get away from his brothers in order to really grow up. As they walked Garrett saw a fox. He loaded his gun and got ready to shoot it but Jack asked him not to do so. Garrett seemed irritated but didn't shoot the fox. Garrett warned him the fox would come back. Jack told him the fox had belonged to someone he knew and Garrett suspected he was talking about the girl. When Garrett asked Jack if there really was a girl Jack said there had been. Garrett doubted it, saying a girl would have been unable to live in the woods alone.

When Jack returned to the cabin he finally asked Mabel what it was that she was sewing. Mabel told him, with a bit of prodding, that she was making a new winter coat for Faina. He felt sickened because he believed Faina was gone. Mabel continued to talk telling him she hoped the coat would be ready for when Faina came back. Jack tried to tell Mabel that she wasn't coming back. She grew angry and told him she wouldn't let him tell her that Faina wouldn't return.

In Chapter 26, Mabel dreamed of Faina and snow. She still wondered where she came from and if she had really been formed from the snow girl like the fairy tale. Mabel noticed Jack seemed irritated with her and was spending less and less time in the cabin. Garrett left Jack and Mabel to spend the winter with his family. Before he left, Mabel let him choose a book to take with him.

In Chapter 27, Mabel wrote to her sister Ada telling her that she and Jack had decided they were in Alaska to stay. She sent her sister sketches as well as a pair of fur trimmed booties for her new grandbaby.

In Chapter 28, a snowstorm came the end of October. Jack and Mabel were listening to the wind when they heard knocking on their door. Jack opened the door to find Faina standing there. Mabel was calm and smiling but Jack staggered at the sight of the girl. Mabel helped her wash up and had her try on her new coat. Jack thought the girl looked beautiful in her coat but Faina seemed upset. She asked Mabel if she had really made it for her and then ran to hug Mabel. Jack saw true affection on Faina's face. Mabel told Faina she'd make a blanket out of her old coat.



Even though Faina became overheated in the cabin, Jack told her she had to stay with them that night. Faina insisted she be allowed to leave, even when Mabel told her she could sleep in the barn. Faina looked at Jack seeming to be trying to remind him of the promise he'd made to her not to make her stay. As Mabel buttoned Faina into her new coat Jack made Faina promise to him that she would always come back.

After Faina was gone Jack asked Mabel how she had known Faina would come back. She reminded him of the night of last year's first snow when they had thrown snowballs at each other and had built the snow girl. She showed him the book containing the story of "The Snow Maiden" in it. He was upset when he realized Mabel thought Faina was some sort of snow fairy. He admitted to her that he had buried the child's father and explained he had promised Faina he would tell no one about what had happened. Faina's mother was dead as well, he told her.

Mabel was angry with Jack when she realized he'd known all along that Faina had no mother or father but allowed her to live on her own anyway. Despite the snow Mabel dressed in her coat and boots and went outside. Jack didn't follow her believing she wouldn't go far. When Jack did finally decide to go after her it was snowing very hard. The tracks she'd made in the snow had been covered.

Analysis

Even as Mabel forced herself to believe that Faina was a real life child, Jack began to wonder if she wasn't really more than that. When Faina had not come to visit them all through the summer months Jack believed she was dead. He learned that in secret Mabel had begun making a new coat for the girl. She believed Faina would come back with the first snow of the winter, just as she had originally appeared the night of the first snow of the previous year's winter.

Notice the changing attitudes of Jack and Mabel during this section of the novel. While Mabel had not yet been given the proof that Faina was a real flesh and blood child she was content to let her come and go as she pleased. She didn't insist that Faina stay with them. She truly believed Faina was a snow fairy who was taken care of by some magical force. Jack, on the other hand, knew differently. He had buried her father and seen pictures of her mother. He had believed there was no hope that Faina would return and was overjoyed when she did. He immediately tried to make Faina stay with them. When he learned that his wife believed in the fantasy she had created based on the book "The Snow Maiden" Jack felt he had to tell Mabel the truth. Once she knew the truth she flipfopped in her belief and went after Faina.

Another significant change in attitude in this section of the novel is Garrett's change in attitude toward Jack when Jack asked him not to shoot the fox they both saw while they were checking the fields. While it may seem to the reader that Garrett was overreacting when he reverted to his reproachful attitude toward Jack, the boy actually had good reason to believe Jack was wrong in his decision not to get rid of the animal. Garrett had lived in Alaska long enough to know that a fox, or another predatory animal, near



livestock was a bad idea. He tried to explain to Jack that if he allowed the fox to live it would just keep visiting and be a nuisance. Garrett doesn't understand the significance of this particular fox. Even after Jack said he knew who it belonged to it didn't help to improve Garrett's attitude because he, like the rest of the family, thought Faina really didn't exist. In Garrett's mind Jack's request that the fox not be killed not only signified to him that Jack didn't really know what he was doing in Alaska but also that he had let the long winter and perhaps even his illness make him soft and let him believe the same fantasy that Mabel believed.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the different reactions Mabel and Jack had when Faina came back to them. Why are their reactions so different? Cite examples from the book to support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Garrett seemed to become disrespectful of Jack when Jack asked him not to shoot the fox?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Mabel run out into the snowstorm? Was it a good idea? How do you think her rash decision will affect her?

Vocabulary

enamored, meticulous, brusque, infinitesimal, hovel, implausible



Part 2: Chapters 29-32

Summary

In Chapter 29, Mabel ran toward what she thought was the mountain. She felt a moment of panic when she thought she might not be able to find her way out. She realized she was running in circles. She continued to walk, determined not to go back to the cabin yet but suddenly fell hard. Her lantern went out. The darkness was complete. She tried to find her tracks but instead located the underside of a tree that was still dry. She was soon so cold that her whole body was shaking. She called for Jack until she was hoarse and then went to sleep.

Mabel woke to a fire and the feeling of being bound. Jack asked her if she was awake. She remembered she had run away from home because of the girl. When she asked Jack he said he wasn't sure how he'd found her and wasn't sure where they were. After she'd begun to get warm she asked Jack how Faina survived in the cold. He tells her how worried he'd been when she didn't come back in the spring. He'd even gone to look for her. Mabel expressed her fear that if something did happen to Faina it would be their fault. She couldn't stand for something to happen to Faina especially after what happened to their baby. She finally admitted to Jack she wished she had at least had the courage to hold the baby. She begged him to tell her that he'd given the baby a proper funeral. He'd even named the baby Joseph Maurice after their two black sheep grandfathers.

In Chapter 30, realizing the Faina was not a fairy, Mabel began trying to tame her and making arrangements for her schooling. After Mabel tried to give her a bath Faina stayed away for several days. When she did return she was jumpy. Mabel one day told Faina she would live with them and go to school. Faina refused again and ran away from the cabin. Jack followed Faina to the door and watched as she ran to the woods. As she shook her hands out from her sides she created snow devils. He watched as the snow whirled higher coming toward the cabin until it created a full force storm. Unable to sleep that night Jack went to the kitchen and pulled out the fairy tale book that Mabel had shown him. Mabel came and sat on the chair across from him. He commented that it was strange the similarities between the snow girl they'd created that night and Faina. He said his mind was muddled so Mabel went back to bed. Jack continued to think about the girl and her strange affinity for the cold and snow.

In Chapter 31, Garret visited Mabel and Jack telling them about a trapping line he was taking over from a man who was moving away. He said he wasn't afraid out in the woods when Mabel asked him about his trapping and the nights he spent alone. He tried to explain it was more important to him to live instead of just being warm and safe. Garrett had brought Mabel a hat made from the pelt of the silver fox. Mabel sent Garrett home with several new books.



In Chapter 32, Faina told Mabel that she went to the mountains in the spring and summertime. When Mabel asked she said she'd go away the coming summer as well she said she would. The next day Faina took Mabel to show her her home. They walked through the mountains and checked Faina's traps. Mabel realized they were headed back to the homestead. She realized that Faina considered all of the mountains to be her home. She asked if they could stop. She had a strong urge to draw the mountain. As the sun set Faina pointed to the mountains set aglow in the sunlight. Faina pointed and told Mabel that light was what her name meant. She said her father had named her for the color the snow was turned by the setting sun.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Mabel and Jack finally admit to one another that they have been comparing their relationship with Faina to the one with their dead baby. They are both trying to compensate for the things they believed they had done wrong in their relationship with their baby in the way they handle their relationship with Faina. Mabel finally admitted to Jack that she wished she had done more to accept the baby and show it affection even though it was dead. She learned Jack had done much more than just say a prayer and bury it. He'd unwrapped it and looked at all of it, learning it was a boy. He even gave it a name before he buried it.

Jack had destroyed Mabel's belief that Faina was anything more than just a little girl, but in this section of chapters he began to second guess himself. He especially wondered about Faina after he saw what seemed to be her creating snow devils that turned into a full fledged snow storm with her hands after she'd gotten angry at him and Mabel. That night he sat by himself and looked at Mabel's book. It is indicated in the novel that when Mabel questioned him "He had said too much, but not as much as he could have" (p. 238) about Faina's strange abilities. He realized he'd let enough slip that Mabel knew he believed there was something otherworldly about Faina. The things he considered were the creation of the snow devils, the burst of snowfall she'd been able to create over her father's grave and the way that snowflakes didn't melt when they touched her skin.

The dangerousness of making stupid mistakes in Alaska is also described in this section of the novel. Had Jack not been able to find Mabel it was very likely that she would have frozen to death by herself outside. Even before her lantern went out it was highly unlikely that Mabel would have found her way back to the cabin. She had been running in circles and the snow had covered any trail she might have been able to follow. Choosing to be moved by her anger and run out into the snow after Faina was a very bad decision on Mabel's part.

How quickly Mabel got herself into trouble only made it that much more amazing that a young child like Faina could survive in the Alaskan wilderness. As Jack said about Faina "She might not be a snow fairy, but she knows this land. Knows it better than anyone I've ever met" (p. 230). Mabel cannot understand why Faina would prefer a life in the wilderness to the protection that she and Jack could give her. She questioned Garrett trying to get some insight into why someone might prefer to be in the wilderness alone



instead of a place where they had heat and protection. Garrett tried to explain that he felt he was truly alive only when he was out trapping animals, he preferred that feeling of living to the feeling of being protected.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Faina refused so strongly Jack and Mabel's requests that she live with them?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it important to Jack and Mabel's relationship that they were finally able to talk to each other about their stillborn baby? Does it surprise you that Jack named it and said a prayer for it when he buried it? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Does Garrett's response when Jack asked him why he preferred to be out trapping instead of inside where he was warm and protected make sense to you? Can you relate to Garrett's feelings of wanting to be where he felt most alive?

Vocabulary

disheveled, malice, contention, feral, sprite, bemused, writhing



Part 2: Chapters 33-35

Summary

In Chapter 33, in a letter Ada tells Mabel about the area interest there was in the letters and sketches she sent from Alaska. She also apologizes for making fun of Mabel and her stories about fairies. She has come to realize, she wrote, that there was no harm in the type of beliefs that Mabel had as a child.

In Chapter 34, Esther and George came to eat dinner with Mabel and Jack. Esther shared with Mabel her cranberry cordial. Mabel drank it before she realized it had alcohol in it. After dinner Esther told Mabel she was worried about her as she'd been hearing more stories about the girl. Mabel showed Esther the fairy tale book and told her the whole story of Faina. Mabel told Esther she knew she had no reason to believe her because she couldn't provide any evidence Faina existed. Esther told Mabel that she had at first thought Mabel was soft but had come to realize she was no fool. Even though Mabel felt Esther was humoring her, Esther said if Mabel said Faina existed then she existed.

In Chapter 35, Jack made a trip to the general store for supplies. While he was there he visited with George and learned there were wolves in the area. He also bought three pairs of ice skates. The next time Faina came Jack took her and Mabel skating on the frozen river.

Analysis

Mabel received two compliments for her belief in fantasy in this section of the novel. First, in a letter to her sister Ada apologized for making fun of Mabel so much when they were younger. She tells her in the letter that she has realized there is no danger in believing in things that don't exist. Even though Ada wasn't aware of Mabel's relationship with Faina and the girl's similarity to the girl in the fairy tale book that Mabel had asked be sent to her Ada has still acknowledged Mabel's belief in fantasy. Esther also told Mabel that she had decided to believe Mabel's insistence that there was a little girl in the woods.

Esther's acknowledgement of Mabel's belief that Faina existed shows what a strong bond the two women had developed. As Esther had gotten to know Mabel she had realized that Mabel was not the soft, simple woman that she had at first thought she might be. Esther recognized that Mabel had a mental and physically toughness that would keep her from getting caught up in a fantasy life because of cabin fever. Esther shows her friendship by being completely honest with Mabel even though Mabel believed her friend was just humoring her. Proving her friendship and trust in return, Mabel went on to share her fear with Esther that she and Jack might loose Faina forever one day.



Discussion Question 1

Do you believe there is any harm in believing in fantasy? Can one's belief in fantasy go too far?

Discussion Question 2

Why was it so important for Esther to tell Mabel she believed Faina existed even though Mabel believed she was saying so just to humor her?

Discussion Question 3

People who chose to live in Alaska had to deal with a variety of wildlife. Do you think Jack was making the best choice when he choose not to tell Mabel about the wolves in the area? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

equivalent, anatomy, snare, swashing, vouch



Part 3: Chapters 36-41

Summary

In Chapter 36, after living in Alaska eight years Mabel realized she was in love with the wildlife and the land. Faina had come and gone with each winter and spring. They had continued their friendship with George and Esther, and had grown accustomed to the Alaskan seasons. Mabel sketched Faina as she grew and changed each year. These sketches were tucked into the “Snow Maiden” book. She no longer tried to make her stay but let her come and go freely. Faina also remained unseen by anyone but Jack and Mabel.

In Chapter 37 Garrett had his gun sights set on a fox he believed might be the one that Jack had asked him many years ago not to shoot. Garrett had thought he’d missed his chance to shoot the animal but then realized it had stopped at the edge of the woods to look at him. Garrett shot and killed the fox. When he looked at it closer he knew it was the fox that Jack claimed belonged to a girl. Now that it was dead Garrett felt badly for killing it. The pelt was worth nothing because it was so old and scruffy. He finally laid it beside a tree and covered it with branches. Later, Mabel and Jack invited Garrett to their house to tell him they wanted him to make him a partner in the farm and also wanted to leave their land to him when they died.

In Chapter 38, Garrett went out with his heart set on trapping a wolverine. A sound like bellows made him stop. He crouched behind a log and watched as a swan beat its wings. He moved closer and saw the girl. She was wearing a blue coat embroidered with snowflakes and a marten fur hat. Garrett realized she had to be the girl Mabel and Jack always talked about. He wondered if she would kill the swan. For some reason he didn’t want her to even though he knew the bird’s meat could feed her for weeks. He watched as she did kill it and then gutted and dressed it. After she finished and had cleaned her hands and the knife, Garrett turned and ran down the hill.

In Chapter 39, Faina and Mabel were making Christmas decorations when the Bensons showed up unannounced. Esther was shocked when she saw the girl. Mabel calmed the girl, who had spooked when Esther came in, and introduced them. Mabel was both surprised and relieved that Faina adjusted well to the new people. She did notice that Garrett seemed almost offended by her. Mabel wondered why he acted so strangely.

In Chapter 40, Garrett was following a trail of the girl’s footprints. He felt guilty when he thought of the girl not only because he had shot her fox but also because he had spied on her when she killed the swan. He also felt a strange fascination with her. He suddenly saw her. She stood and waited while he rode up to her. She acknowledged him as being the person who had shot her fox. When he said he was looking for wolverine she told him there were none there. She pulled a dead wolverine from her pack. She was giving it to him so that he would leave. Garrett was angry at the way she was trying to give him her catch and telling him to leave. Garrett stopped to water his



horse. It had begun to snow. With all his experience in the woods Garrett had never seen a snowstorm come up as quickly as that one did. He soon became disoriented and found himself at a lake he'd never seen before. A voice behind him told him he was lost. The girl was there. She told him she would show him the way if he would follow her. She led him to where he could see Jack and Mabel's house through the woods. When he looked back, she was gone.

In Chapter 41, Faina brought Mabel and Jack a burbot she caught to fix for dinner. As they cleaned the fish together Faina asked Jack why Garrett came to the mountains. Jack told her he assumed it was because he was trapping animals. Jack told her that Garrett wouldn't hurt her and she didn't need to be afraid of him.

Analysis

A good deal changes in this third part of this novel. First, Faina was finally seen by Esther. Even though in an earlier part of the novel Esther had told Mabel that because she insisted Faina existed, Esther would believe that she did. It was made clear when Esther finally came face to face with Faina that she had not believed the girl existed at all because of how shocked she was when she found Faina in the cabin.

Garrett also saw Faina. He wandered upon her in the woods and watched in secret as she killed a swan. Before he'd actually seen her for the first time, he'd seen the fox that Jack said belonged to her. Garrett shot the fox. Immediately after he'd done so, he felt badly that he had killed it. He also felt bad because he watched her in secret while she killed the swan. Even though Garrett seemed suspicious of Faina and appeared not to like her, he continued to seek her out. Remember that for years Garrett had his sights on trapping a wolverine. "He hungered after its bold will, its ferocious and solitary manner" (p. 278). Notice that while Garrett was really going into the woods to look for Faina he told himself and his family that he was searching for wolverine. It appears that his hunt for Faina had taken the place of his hunt for the wolverine. After all, Faina shared many of the same qualities of this animal that Garrett wanted to conquer so badly. She had a bold will, had to be ferocious in order to survive in the wilderness by herself and definitely had a solitary manner.

Also in this section Faina's hunting fits into the theme of women's roles. Even though Garrett's mother was far from the typical house wife, after all she did kill the family's Thanksgiving turkey, she wasn't the type to go out and hunt. Garrett had lived all of his life believing that hunting, killing and trapping was man's work. To see a delicate, beautiful girl who was a better hunter than he must have seemed wrong to Garrett. It must also have been a blow to Garrett's self-respect. Notice also the differences between Garrett and Faina's hunting. While Faina hunted to fill her needs, Garrett hunted more as a sport.

Significant also in this section is the snowstorm in which Garrett became lost after he left Faina in anger when he refused to take the wolverine from her. Remember that once before Jack had seen snow devils come from Faina's hands when she left their cabin



one day because she was angry with them. These snow devils seemed to grow into a snowstorm. When Garrett left Faina, he believed he'd seen an angry set to her lips. When she met up with him to help him find his way home Faina said to Garrett "'I didn't mean for this to happen,' she said. 'Even though I was angry. I didn't mean for you to lose your way'" (p. 294). Garrett asked Faina why she thought it was her fault he'd gotten lost but she had only shrugged. Could it be that Faina does really have some sort of magical power over snow and can create snow and snowstorms?

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Garrett felt bad after he'd killed the fox that belonged to Faina? Why do you think he decided to shoot it at all since he'd left it alone for so long?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think there has been adequate proof given to be able to say that Faina can create snow and snowstorms? Cite examples from the book when defending your argument.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the wolverine. Why did Faina think it shouldn't matter to Garrett from where the wolverine came as long as he had one? Why did it matter so much to Garrett that he be able to say he'd killed his wolverine himself?

Vocabulary

eluded, serpentine, taut, barrage, intercede, affront, petulant, insubstantial, bestowed, veered



Part 3: Chapters 42-46

Summary

In Chapter 42, after she led him out of the snowstorm Garrett could not sleep well. He thought constantly about Faina. He continued to go into the woods pretending he was trapping but in reality looking for her. Finally he stood beside her tracks and called out to her saying he only wanted to talk. When she came out he apologized for shooting her fox. She showed him the entrance to a bear's cave. After they'd walked away from the cave she told him it was a mother bear and cubs who called the cave their home. Garrett was awe struck because he'd never been that close to a bear before.

In Chapter 43, Garrett arrived at Mabel's house with a puppy he'd bought for Faina. He asked if he could stay with the puppy in the barn until Faina's next visit. Mabel doubted Faina would come with Garrett there and wondered how long he would wait. When Jack came home he seemed to think the puppy was a good idea. Mabel decided not to share her concerns with him. Faina came that evening. She was happy with the gift. Mabel was still concerned as she watched Faina, Garrett and the puppy playing together outside. Garrett made a small sled and harness for the puppy and began training him to pull it. He and Faina planned a run up the river to continue the dog's training. Mabel fixed lunch for Faina, Garrett and the puppy for their trip. Before they left, she asked Garrett to promise not to build a fire or allow Faina to be around a fire. Garrett promised even though he didn't understand. He told Mabel he wouldn't let anything happen to Faina.

In Chapter 44, Garrett and Faina traveled that day past the point he'd ever gone upriver. Faina pulled Garrett into a stand of willow and kissed his lips. He pulled her against him. She began unbuttoning her coat. He felt what they were doing was wrong, but it was too late for him to stop himself.

In Chapter 45, Mabel finally tried to talk to Jack about her concerns about Garrett and Faina. She was worried the two would get into trouble as they were the age that other young people their age began courting. She believed, however, there was nothing they could do. Once the idea was placed in Jack's head, however, it began to worry him more and more. Finally one night Mabel announced that Faina would not be leaving that summer but would stay because Garrett was taking her salmon fishing and caribou hunting. The news made Jack uncomfortable but he couldn't say just why.

One spring day Jack set out to follow Garrett and Faina. His walk led him into a spruce forest. He could hear their voices. A found them laying beneath one of the evergreen trees. He watched long enough to know what they were doing and left, angered and shamed. Mabel worried about Jack until he finally came back to the homestead. He watched as he kicked at the barn door and finally settled in chopping wood, working off his anger. When Mabel stopped hearing the sounds of the ax she looked outside and



saw that Garret and Jack were talking. She watched as Jack punched Garrett in the jaw. Jack put his hand down but Garret refused the help getting up.

In Chapter 46, Garrett and Faina spent all their time together teaching each other the things they knew about the outdoors and making love. Garrett could not get enough of her.

Analysis

What began as dislike and distrust has turned into love for Faina and Garrett. Mabel sensed the coming attraction before Jack did. When Jack became aware of what was happening, he was angry with Garrett. After all, he had been the one who had told Faina that Garrett could be trusted, that he wouldn't hurt her. Jack lashed out at Garrett, just like a biological father might, when he learned that Garrett had taken advantage of Faina's situation. What Jack didn't know was that it was Faina who initiated the sexual relationship, not Garrett.

In the theme of fantasy notice that Faina's story parallels that of the story that her father read to her. The snow maiden (Faina) seems to be choosing mortal love. Although Jack had told Mabel that Faina had been born of mortal parents, Mabel still worried that the child would melt, just as the snow maiden had in the fairy tale. When Garrett and Faina went on their day trip down the river, she warned Garrett not to let Faina be around a fire.

Notice the foreshadowing in this section of the novel. When Mabel warned Garrett not to let Faina be around a fire, he told her that he would not do anything to hurt Faina. Mabel has the feeling that Garrett really meant it when he made the promise but the reader is left with the feeling that despite Garrett's best attempts, Faina will suffer.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways was Faina's story following the one in Mabel's fairy tale book?

Discussion Question 2

Are you surprised that Faina and Garrett fell in love with one another? In what ways are they suited for one another?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the role of the husky dog in this part of the novel.

Vocabulary

vague, emboldened, keen, dispersed, traverse, undulate, cavorting, improbability, mirage, conjuring, forbid, oblivious, temperament, defile, vindication, subdued, animatedly



Part 3: Chapters 47-51

Summary

In Chapter 47, Jack told Mabel he didn't believe Garrett would come back to help with the planting. Mabel bet that he would be back. One day Jack got up late to work in the fields. His horse was gone. He found Garrett working in one of the fields. Back at the house Jack gave Mabel a message to pass along to Garrett. She told him he'd have to start talking to Garrett again one day.

In Chapter 48, Mabel noticed Faina was nervous in the cabin so she took her for a walk hoping Faina would tell her what was wrong. Faina asked Mabel if she was dying. She described the symptoms of her menstrual cycle, which no one had told her about, but said it had stopped. Faina said when the bleeding stopped she thought she was getting better but now she was sick to her stomach all the time and didn't want to do anything but sleep. Mabel explained to her that she was carrying Garrett's baby.

Faina begged Mabel to take the baby when it was born and raise it. As much as Mabel wanted the chance to raise a child, she knew she couldn't take Faina's. Mabel knew Faina was poised to run. She told her she couldn't run from the baby and that she had to tell Garrett. Faina was afraid Garrett would be angry with her but Mabel persuaded her he would be afraid, but not angry. At dinner that night Mabel told Jack that Faina was pregnant. Jack choked on his food. Jack appeared disgusted and insisted that there would be a wedding. That night Mabel remembered the fairy tale book and looked at the illustration of the wedding between the snow maiden and her lover. The maiden wore a wreath of wildflowers on her head. A few pages later was the illustration Mabel dreaded; the same wreath of wildflowers growing from the ground like a grave marker.

In Chapter 49, Garrett came asking permission to marry Faina. Jack was surprised Garrett had come to him. He suddenly felt as if Faina was fully his daughter although their beginning hadn't started as most father-daughter relationships did. He could tell that Garrett did love Faina but still didn't quite trust him. That night he announced to Mabel that he wanted to build a cabin for Garrett and Faina on their property.

Jack talked to Faina, asking her if she wanted to be married to Garrett, explaining that if she was a mother and wife she couldn't disappear for weeks but had to stay at home. Even though Faina told Jack she knew that she and Garrett belonged together Jack knew that he would miss the little girl that Faina had been.

In Chapter 50, as the spring came that year Mabel thought to herself that she didn't completely believe her sister that a person could choose an ending of joy over sorrow, she did plan to enjoy the joy that was hers at the time. Faina approached her. She was tan and wearing only a light dress with no shoes. She told Mabel she was well.



In Chapter 51, Jack showed Garrett where they planned to build the cabin. The next day Jack saw Garrett sketching out the outline of the cabin. They worked on the cabin evenings when they were planting. When they finished the planting they worked on the cabin all day. Jack was concerned because Faina stayed away. Mabel tried to convince him she'd be okay, that she was taking advantage of the last few days of freedom she had.

One day in June Faina and the dog did come to visit the new cabin. Garrett showed her the work that had been done. When Faina ran away into the woods Garrett voiced his fear to Jack that married life wasn't the best for Faina. Jack told Garrett it was too late to change things now. He added that everything would change for them and that they would do the best they could.

Analysis

Most significant in this section of the novel is the revelation that Faina was pregnant. While pregnancy and a baby would have been a blessing to Mabel, to Faina it will be a burden. When Faina asked Mabel to take the baby and raise it Mabel was tempted to accept the offer. She knew it wouldn't be right and encouraged Faina to do the right thing and tell Garrett what had happened.

The tone of the novel becomes foreboding in this section of the novel. Faina and Garrett have gotten themselves into a situation where they have to get married. The reader has to wonder how Faina, who up to this point has refused to even spend the night with Mabel and Jack in their cabin, will transition to being a mother and wife. The foreboding tone is deepened by Mabel's check of the fairy tale "The Snow Maiden." She looked at the pictures of the wedding day in which the snow maiden was wearing a wreath of flowers in her hair. In the next scene the wreath was sprouting from the ground in front of a grave. She shut the book when she saw this image. As it will be indicated later, Mabel became superstitious of the wreath. She believed if Faina were to wear a wreath in her hair at her wedding it would result in her death.

Notice the changes in Faina in this section of the novel. Up to this point in the novel she has always been associated with snow and cold weather. Here she is pictured in the heat of summer. She is a different girl. Her trademark blue coat with embroidered snowflakes is no longer needed. She's even been out in the sun enough that she has developed a tan. Perhaps most significant is the way her feet sink into the dirt in the strawberry patch as she walked up to Mabel. At many different points in the novel it was described how Faina left tracks in the snow but didn't sink into the snow like the other characters in the novel. Here, in the summertime Faina's feet sink into the dirt just like everyone else's.

In this section of the novel notice also the changing relationship between Garrett and Jack. Jack believed Garrett would not be back to help him on the farm after he confronted him about his relationship with Faina. Even though Mabel believed Garrett would honor his obligations, Jack did not. He was surprised when Garrett came to begin



the planting and plowing even without being asked. Jack's faith in Garrett was renewed when Garrett came to ask Jack for his permission to marry Faina. This action shows Garrett's maturity because Jack was not legally Faina's father. Garrett, however, recognized the way that Jack felt about Faina and honored him with his request for permission. In return, Jack undertook helping Garrett build a cabin. Remember that once before in the novel Garrett had told Jack he wanted to build a cabin by the river. Jack was generous in his offer of land for a cabin on his property. The site was even near the river, where Garrett had imagined himself building. While the gift of land was generous, Jack also had in mind that the cabin would be close to the one in which he and Mabel lived. He wanted them close so Mabel could help Faina with the baby if needed.

Because Faina hasn't lived the life of a typical woman and hasn't had a permanent mother figure to demonstrate to her how a wife and mother should act, Esther, Jack, Mabel and Garrett all wonder how Faina will adapt to being a wife and mother. At Mabel's request Jack sat down with Faina to explain to her how she would have to make changes in her life in order to take care of the baby and be a wife to Garrett.

Discussion Question 1

How successful a wife and mother do you think that Faina will be? Defend your answer.

Discussion Question 2

How has the relationship between Jack and Garrett evolved through the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Jack had an ulterior motive for allowing Garrett to build a cabin on his property? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

creosote, obligations, permit, forlorn, ironic



Part 3: Chapters 52-53

Summary

In Chapter 52, when Esther looked at the cabin she told Mabel there was no way there would be a roof on it by the day of Garrett and Faina's wedding. Mabel said the wedding dress was finished but Faina had her own plans for it that she knew nothing about. Esther worried that Faina would not be a good mother once the baby was born. She was concerned the girl would spend her time running around the woods instead of taking care of her husband and baby. Mabel began having nightmares again. She dreamed Faina was drowning but there was nothing she could do to save her.

The day of the wedding arrived. Only family was invited. One of Garrett's brothers would officiate. Faina had not yet appeared at the cabin to prepare. She had the wedding dress with her. It had been made of raw silk left over from the wedding of Esther's oldest daughter-in-law. The dress Mabel designed was simple with long sleeves and an ankle length skirt. She used white silk thread to embroider vines, leaves, flowers and loops on the bodice and skirt. Mabel also hadn't seen Garrett the morning of the wedding. He had asked Mabel to make a wreath of flowers to bring to the wedding. Mabel had planned to refuse if the wreath was to be for Mabel's head. He'd told her it wouldn't be for Faina.

Mabel tried to concentrate on the work that needed to be done. She was relieved when she heard Faina calling for her from inside the cabin. Faina told Mabel she couldn't see the dress until the wedding, but asked her to braid her hair. When she finished, she clipped a bit of Faina's hair and tucked it away. Faina asked Mabel to help her put on her veil and then leave so she could put on the dress in privacy. She insisted on it not being seen. Before Mabel left the cabin, Faina told her she wanted to be the kind of mother to her child that Mabel had been to her.

When Faina first came out of the cabin for the wedding to begin Mabel couldn't see what was different about the dress. Then she saw there were white feathers sewn along the neckline and along the hem. At the back feathers cascaded down the back from smaller to larger. Garrett arrived galloping his horse with the dog panting alongside. He asked Mabel for the wreath which he put over the dog's neck.

Mabel felt as if she were floating and would faint during the wedding ceremony. There was surprise when Faina called the dog to her and Garrett took from a bag he'd tied to the wreath two gold rings. The couple kissed and Mabel felt as if the ground shifted. The next thing she knew Jack was helping her to a chair. She thought it was snowing but it was only cottonwood seed.

In Chapter 53 Faina and Garrett shared their wedding night together. After that she began roaming again sometimes not coming home at all. He questioned her, asking where she went and if she didn't want to stay with him. She spent that night with him but



during the harvest season she was gone so often he couldn't keep up with where she was. He and Jack worked several nights through cutting hay. He arrived home after eating breakfast with Mabel and Jack to find Faina at the cabin with a fire going. She showed him what she had been doing, collecting herbs and wild plants for the winter. He carried the baskets of food she had gathered into their storage area. She still went hunting during the days and brought back fish and meat to dry but stayed at home at night. He worked to grow accustomed to Faina's strange cooking. The night of the first snowfall Faina disappeared. He found her outside in the snow by the river. She went inside for him. Once inside she pressed his hand to her belly. He felt the baby moving.

Garrett was disturbed by the screaming and all the blood. Esther and Jack wouldn't let him see Faina. Garrett wondered how long Faina had been in labor. He dozed in a chair. When he woke there was no screaming but the baby had still not come. Hours later Garrett heard screaming again, then a bleat like a calf. Jack told him his baby was born. Both Faina and the baby were fine.

Analysis

The tone of this section of the novel holds promise but had an underlying feeling of foreboding. Mabel began having dreams of melting babies again. As Mabel went about helping to prepare for Garrett and Faina's wedding she had the feeling she was working toward the end of Faina's life. Remember that in the fairy tale Mabel's father had read to her that the snow maiden died soon after she gave in to mortal love. "She wanted to escape the sense that fate was rolling in over the mountains like thunder. She wanted to forget melting clumps of snow, flower crowns and fiery kisses, and fairy-tale endings" (p. 347).

Even as the wedding service was taking place Mabel heard bits of poetry including a bit from the Emily Dickinson poem. "Hope is the thing with feathers... perches in the soul," (p. 354) is significant because of the feathers Faina added to her wedding dress. Other poetry bits include a line about hurrying to the woods. This line is significant and probably came to Mabel's mind because it was in the woods that Faina lived and where she and Garrett had fallen in love. The words "no roses at my head" (p. 354) echo Mabel's fear that she will lose Faina. The words are significant not only because Faina did not wear a crown of flowers on her head but also because the poem from which the snippet was taken asked the reader not to plant flowers on her grave when she was dead.

Another challenge of life in Alaska is described in this section of the novel. Because Alaska was so far north there was little transportation to the area so supplies, particularly specialized supplies, were hard to get. One of Garrett's brothers had purchased a pick up truck, one of the first in the area. In order to get their car it had to be barged up from California and then shipped on a train.

Notice the symbolism of the feathers that Faina added to the dress Mabel made for her. The feathers came from the swan that Faina had been in the process of killing when



Garrett first saw her. He'd felt bad because he had secretly watched her kill the swan. At the same time he was attracted to her.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism of Mabel's dreams.

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that the cottonwood seeds fell down over Faina and Garret just after they were married?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Faina did not tell Garrett where she was spending all of her time until after she'd gathered all the supplies she felt they needed?

Vocabulary

prowess, demise, flail, remnants, translucent, cloche, plait, impulsively, luminosity, filaments, purlins, cache



Part 3: Chapter 54 and Epilogue

Summary

In Chapter 54, Mabel visited Faina and the baby each day bringing food and loads of clean diapers she had washed. One day Mabel saw Faina looking outside longingly. Mabel left her go outside but noticed Faina struggled to walk through the snow. Mabel knew it was too soon and Faina had not recovered from labor yet.

One night Garrett woke Mabel up from sleep. He told her and Jack that Faina was hurting and feverish. Jack mourned that they hadn't taken her to the hospital to have the baby. Mabel reminded him that Faina had wanted to have the baby at home. Jack made plans for them to get to a doctor the next day or at least send for advice from a doctor. At Faina and Garrett's cabin Mabel comforted Faina telling her she had an infection that was causing her pain and fever. Mabel used snow and water to cool Faina until she went to sleep. She woke fully after the baby was brought to her for feeding. She begged Mabel to take her outside. Although Jack thought it was a bad idea, Garrett asked Mabel to help Faina get dressed. Mabel told Faina she couldn't go wandering off, only sit in a chair outside for a few minutes. When Faina said it hurt too bad to sit Garrett made her a bed of furs on which to lay. Garrett sat with Faina for a while and then Mabel took his place. She asked Faina if she wanted to go inside but Faina wanted to stay out. She said she could breathe again outside.

Mabel woke when she heard the men's voices. She was covered in snow. They were asking where Faina was. Garrett went into the cabin calling for his wife. He brought out a lantern and called out for Faina in desperation. Mabel wondered how she could have been so negligent as she picked up the wedding quilt and saw Faina's mittens, moccasins, scarf and coat where she'd been laying. She and Jack found her white nightgown still buttoned up inside her coat. Jack took the clothes inside and told Mabel to watch the baby while he went for Garrett. Mabel asked him what the clothes meant. He said only that she was gone.

Jack came inside. He said he and Garrett hadn't even been able to find a set of tracks but Garrett was determined to find Faina. Mabel hugged Jack and asked if she was really gone. Jack only nodded his head. She cried until she was weak. She sat in a chair expecting Jack to leave but instead he came and put his head in her lap. They cried together. As she dozed by the baby's cradle that night Mabel heard lonely cries from outside. She knew it was Garrett calling for Faina.

In the Epilogue Jack visited Garrett's cabin. Garrett was not there but Jack saw reminders of Faina throughout the cabin. His grief sometimes took him by surprise. One day he'd pulled out the blue leather fairy tale book. He was surprised to see a cascade of pages fall out. There were pictures of Faina that Mabel had sketched. He noticed in his wife's sketches the tenderness that had developed in Faina during her days with her baby.



As Jack walked back to his cabin he heard Faina's boy calling him. The husky dog, now elderly, was running alongside him. He wanted to show off a fish he had caught. Jack followed him, walking to the place where Mabel was fishing. After Faina was gone Garrett had asked Jack if he could name the baby after Jack. Mabel called him Little Jack. At dinner that night Garrett told Jack he'd seen a wolverine. He also said it felt like snow. When they went outside to hitch up the wagon Mabel heard them yelling. Jack took the lantern outside and then drew Mabel's attention to the outside. It was snowing.

Analysis

Both grief and hope are combined in this section of the novel. Faina never really seemed to recover after she gave birth to her baby. She finally suffered an infection that caused her pain and fever. Plans were made to take her to the hospital in Anchorage for help but by the time the morning had come Faina was gone. Notice the author never indicated that Faina was dead, just that she was gone. Her clothes were still inside the furs which she had been sleeping among when she was last seen. It was as if she just disappeared. Garrett went searching for her. He apparently believed she'd just wandered off and could be found. Although Faina often went to the woods for comfort, she always remained clothed. It would have been unusual for her to leave her clothes behind and would have been particularly difficult for her to get out of her clothes with her nightgown still buttoned inside her coat.

Notice also that Mabel had slept through the snow. She'd been sitting outside with Faina when the snow began and did not wake until Garrett and Jack came to check on her. Mabel's ability to sleep in weather so cold was strange. The fact that she slept through several inches of snow falling almost seems almost unbelievable.

Significant is that Mabel and Jack were finally able to grieve together for Faina. This action showed the maturity they'd developed in their relationship since the death of their baby. Then the two blamed themselves and couldn't face their own, or each other's grief. It was only after they moved to Alaska and began to talk to each other about the baby that they realized they both wished they had done things differently where the baby was concerned. Mabel wished she had been with Jack when he buried it and gave the baby its name. Jack was finally able to tell Mabel that her baby was a boy and that he'd prayed for it before he buried it.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think happened to Faina?

Discussion Question 2

With both the dog and her son Faina seemed to hesitate about giving them names. She never named the dog and had not yet named her son when she disappeared. Why do you think Faina balked from naming her dog and son?



Discussion Question 3

Why was Jack so grieved when he walked into Garrett's cabin and seen Faina's few things on display?

Vocabulary

inexplicable, defiant, contrived, specters, negligent, cascaded, iridescent, admonished



Characters

Mabel

Mabel was the wife of Jack. She is one of the main characters in the novel. She and Jack came to Alaska to enjoy the peace and quiet and to reconnect with one another. Mabel had no children although she had wanted children desperately. She'd given birth to only one baby who had been stillborn. She'd not even held the baby or known what gender it was. Ten years after the baby was born she still felt guilty because she hadn't done so. It had been Mabel's idea to come to Alaska because she believed that being away from children and pregnant women would relieve her feelings of uselessness and failure. Instead, Mabel was depressed to the point of considering suicide when the novel opened.

Mabel's spirits began to lift when she made friends with Esther from a neighboring homestead. She was even happier after a girl named Faina began paying visits to the cabin in which she and Jack lived. Mabel feared if she did not treat Faina and her fox properly and continue to believe in Faina that the child would disappear. Soon Faina became like a daughter to Mabel.

Even though Mabel was the daughter of a literature professor and enjoyed drawing and reading she also had an independent streak. Her husband, Jack, did not want her to work in the field with him. When Jack hurt his back Mabel began working in the field with Garrett doing what she could to help keep their farm going. Even though she was afraid of the horse, she saddled him and rode to town the day after Jack was injured in order to get help for him. She cared for him by herself several days and was convinced they would have to go back east after Jack was well enough to travel. Instead, Mabel found herself helping with the planting when Esther and her youngest son, Garrett, came to help out.

Although Mabel at first fought against Faina's wild ways and wanted to tame her she eventually learned to accept that Faina would not allow herself to be tied down. Mabel mothered her in the ways Faina would allow her. She made her a blue coat with snowflakes embroidered on it. When Garrett met Faina and the two developed a friendship Mabel was worried about the direction in which their relationship was going. It was to Mabel that Faina went when she thought she had an illness. Mabel was the one who told Faina she was sick because she was pregnant.

Mabel was torn when Faina begged her to take her baby and raise it as her own. Even though she was past fifty Mabel still wanted a baby but knew it wasn't right to take Faina's. She was still upset when she considered what a burden the baby would be to Faina and her way of life. She thought it was ironic that she had wanted a baby so badly but had never been able to have one while Faina had not even thought of children and was already pregnant. Just like a mother would have been Mabel was with Faina during her wedding and her childbearing. Mabel was also with Faina the night she



disappeared. She knew Faina was gone for good. After Faina disappeared, Mabel and her husband, Jack, were finally able to grieve together over the loss of the girl they had considered their daughter.

Garrett Benson

Garrett Benson was the youngest son of Esther and George Benson. Although his father was a farmer Garrett preferred hunting and trapping. When Garrett first met Jack he seemed resentful of the older man and his desire to make a living in Alaska even though he didn't really know what he was doing. When Garrett discovered that George had shot a huge moose, he gained some respect. The two soon became friends and Garrett would often come to Mabel and Jack's homestead to show him what he had caught. When Jack injured his back Garrett came to their farm to help with the planting. He taught Mabel how to cut potato starters and plant them. He was patient with Mabel and was never overbearing. The two became friends with Mabel sharing her books with Garrett.

One day while they were working in Jack's fields Garrett and Jack spotted Faina's fox. Garrett wanted to shoot it but Jack asked him not to do so. Garrett didn't understand why Jack wanted the fox to stay alive. He believed it would just become a predator on the farm. Later when Garrett was alone and spotted the fox he did shoot it. Later, he felt bad when he saw how old it was. It was not until much later that he realized the fox had belonged to Faina. He bought her a Husky puppy to make up for shooting her pet.

After Garrett met Faina he became infatuated with her. She angered him because she could trap and kill animals so easily. He watched her kill a swan with her hands. After he got over his frustration Garrett realized he loved Faina. The two began having sex. Jack learned the two were having sexual relations and confronted Garrett about it. Mabel watched the confrontation and saw her husband hit Garrett. After they discovered Faina was pregnant Garrett came to Jack and asked for Faina's hand in marriage.

It was clear that Garrett loved Faina deeply even though he didn't understand her strange ways. He was hurt because she would spend days wandering in the wilderness instead of being at home with him. He despaired when he heard her screaming during childbirth but could do nothing to help ease her pain. When she disappeared, he vowed to find her.

Faina

Faina is another main character in the novel. She is a young girl whom Jack and Mabel learned was living alone in the wilderness. She told Jack her mother had died of what Jack believed was consumption in the hospital in Anchorage. Her father froze to death on the same night that the first snow came during Jack and Mabel's second year in Alaska. Faina's father had apparently taught her well about the outdoors because Faina was able to take care of herself though she did visit Jack and Mabel often. She did not want to live a life other than the one to which she was accustomed in the wilderness. It



was Faina who helped Jack to find a moose so that he and Mabel could have food to last their second winter in Alaska.

Faina is closely associated with snow. Before Mabel and Jack knew her real story Mabel believed that, like the girl in the fairy tale “The Snow Maiden”, Faina had sprung from the snow girl they had made. Both Jack and Mabel notice unusual incidents that happen dealing with snow when Faina was around. Both had noticed that when snow landed on Faina’s face, hands or eyelashes it didn’t melt. They also noticed how she managed to walk on top of the snow, not sinking deeply into it the way they did. One day when Mabel tried to follow Faina into the woods, a blizzard kept Mabel from following the child. The blizzard was unusual because Esther said there was no blizzard at their house on that same day. Jack noticed one day when Faina left their house in anger, it had appeared that snow devils had come from her hands from which a bigger snowstorm developed. He also saw the amount of snow that fell after Faina flung her arms over her father’s grave. He knew it was more snow that she could have held even in both her arms.

In the final section of the novel a different Faina was pictured. She stayed near Jack and Mabel for the summer to be close to Garret. In the heat Faina became tan and walked barefooted. Where the snow version of Faina had been able to traipse over the top of the snow Mabel notice that in the summer Faina’s feet sunk in the dirt just like everyone else’s. When the winter returned Faina seemed to be more in her element. In the pain of her childbirth she asked for snow. When she became sick after the baby was born she asked to be allowed to go outside. It was while she slept outside that she disappeared. Her clothes were still between the blankets where she was laying and her nightgown was still buttoned inside her coat as if she had simply melted away.

Jack

Jack was Mabel’s husband. He was also a major character in the novel. Just like Mabel grieved the loss of their baby, Jack grieved the baby’s death and the affect it had on his wife. It was not until nearly ten years after their baby had died that Jack was able to tell Mabel that the baby was a boy. He had even named the baby and buried him in the orchard where they had first kissed. Jack’s grief came from his belief he had not supported Mabel enough after their baby was stillborn and through the following years when people made her feel bad because she did not have children. He was also grieved because of his age and the way his age kept him from being able to work as hard as he needed to in Alaska to provide the type of home he felt Mabel deserved. Later after the farming accident during which Jack’s back was badly hurt Jack worried that he was a failure and would never be able to work again.

Even though he didn’t let on to Mabel, Jack was deeply attached to the little girl in the woods. He was the first to see her and the first person with whom she really tried to connect. She told him about the death of her father and made him promise he wouldn’t tell anyone. She believed she could trust him to help her without making her give up her life in the wilderness. The girl was also special to Jack because she was the one who



led him to the moose whose meat kept him and Mabel alive during their second winter in Alaska. Because of this he felt he owed the girl a debt of gratitude. Later in the novel when Jack learned that Faina and Garrett were sleeping together Jack confronted Garrett about what was happening as a father might do. It was only after Garrett came to Jack and asked for Faina's hand in marriage that Jack realized he had become a surrogate father to Faina.

Red Fox

This red fox was Faina's hunting companion from the time Jack and Mabel first met her until Garrett shot the fox nearly six years later. Faina had once told Jack how she and her father had raised the fox from a pup. When it was young it had sometimes even slept with her. The fox adds to the mystery that surrounds Faina because in Mabel's book "The Snow Maiden" that girl, to whom Mabel often compared Faina, had a red fox as a friend.

Esther Benson

Esther Benson was George Benson's wife and the mother of the three Benson boys; Garrett, Bill and Michael. She and Mabel became best friends. Mabel liked Esther because she was so unlike any of the women she had met before. Mabel was practical and good natured. She wore men's pants and shirts and was not concerned about housekeeping. When Mabel first began talking about Faina Esther worried about her friend because she thought Mabel was getting depressed because of the darkness and isolation of the Alaskan winters. When Jack was injured, Esther came to stay with Mabel to help with the farm work and nursing of Jack. She even brought a horse trough she filled with hot water so should could give Jack a bath and get his wounds good and clean.

George Benson

George Benson was the owner of the homestead closest to Jack and Mabel's. He was the husband of Esther Benson and father of Garrett, Bill and Michael. When George learned that Jack was considering working in the mine to get himself and Mabel through the winter George told Jack what a bad idea it was. He offered to help Jack on the farm. Jack eventually allowed George and his boys to help.

Husky Dog

Garrett gave Faina a Husky puppy as a gift to make up for having shot her fox. Faina never gave the dog a name. She called it with a special whistle. It was her constant companion until she died. At that point the dog attached itself to Little Jack, Faina and Garrett's son.



A Russian Man

Jack buried this Russian man who was Faina's father. Faina showed Jack where she had wrapped her father in a tarp and asked his help in burying him. Before Faina showed Jack her deceased father she had made him promise not to tell anyone what she was going to show him.

Joseph Maurice

Joseph Maurice was the name that Jack gave to the son that he and Mabel had. The baby was born dead. Mabel never saw him or even knew what sex he was. It was Jack who looked at the baby, dug his grave, gave him a name and said a prayer for him.

Betty

Betty was the woman who ran the hotel restaurant. Although her customers loved Mabel's pies Betty had to tell Jack they couldn't buy any more because her sister was coming to live with them and would be taking over the baking to earn her keep.

Joseph Palmer

Joseph Palmer was the owner of the general store in Alpine. He was the one who told Mabel there was no doctor in Alpine. He was only able to give her a bottle of laudanum to help her ease his pain.

Ada

Ada was Mabel's sister. She was the one who sent their father's book containing the copy of the fairy tale "The Snow Maiden" when Mabel asked for it.

Little Jack aka Jay

Little Jack, whom Jack called Jay, was the child born to Faina and Garrett.



Symbols and Symbolism

Alaskan Handbill

Mabel had shown Jack this advertisement seeking pioneers to go to Alaska to farm the land with the hopes that he would agree it would be a good idea for them to go to Alaska. She believed it would be good for her to get away from children and the memories of her dead baby. The handbill was a symbol of the hope of a happier life that Mabel believed they would find in Alaska.

Snow Girl

It was on the same night that Mabel and Jack built their snow girl that Faina's father died. Because Jack saw Faina the first time that night he briefly believed she might have come from that snowman. Mabel continued to believe Faina had come from the snow figure much longer. The snow girl was a symbol of the beginning of Mabel and Jack's relationship with Faina.

A Miniature Porcelain Doll

This miniature porcelain doll was the first gift that Jack left for Faina that she took. Faina's interest in the doll symbolized that she was still a child despite her strange maturity.

Small Basket

This small handmade basket full of wild blueberries was one of the gifts that Faina left for Mabel and Jack. It was a symbol of her appreciation for them.

A Blue Leather Book

This blue leather book contained the story of "The Snow Maiden." It was a Russian fairy tale that eerily paralleled Faina's story. The fairy tale had been a favorite of Mabel's when she was a child. She referred to the tale and the various versions of it to try to discover ways she could keep from losing Faina.

Snowflake Coat

Mabel made this coat covered with embroidered snowflakes for Faina. The coat represented Mabel's belief that Faina would return after she had been away from them all summer.



A White Swan

One of the first times that Garrett saw Faina in the woods he watched as she killed this swan that had gotten caught in a trap. Therefore, the swan was the beginning of their relationship. Faina later used the feathers she'd taken from the swan to embellish the neckline, hem and train of her wedding dress.

A Wreath

When Garrett first asked Mabel to make a wreath for she thought she would have to refuse if he told her that he wanted her to wear it on her head. An illustration in Mabel's fairy tale book showed the snow maiden wearing a wreath on her head for her wedding. The same wreath was later displayed on the maiden's grave. Mabel believed the wreath was a symbol of death for Faina. Garrett intended the wreath for the Husky dog as a way for him to carry their wedding rings.

Cottonwood Seed

After Mabel regained consciousness following her swoon at Faina and Garret's wedding she thought it was snowing. Jack told her it was just cottonwood seed filling the air. They agreed the seed did look like snow. The seed represents snow, a reminder of the way they met Faina, and the material they associated her with for so long.

A Red Scarf

The red scarf that Mabel put on Faina the night that she disappeared was the same one that she had put on the snow girl the night that Faina first appeared in Mabel and Jack's lives. The scarf had been made for Mabel by her sister Ada. Because of the unique pattern of the scarf Mabel knew it was the one that had come from the snow girl. The scarf represents both the beginning, and the end, of Faina's relationship with Jack and Mabel.



Settings

Alaska

Alaska is the land to which Mabel and Jack decided to move. Mabel wanted to go to Alaska because she wanted to be away from babies and the reminder of her lost child. The novel is set in this state of Alaska during the early twentieth century when pioneers were being recruited to go to Alaska.

Wolverine River

The Wolverine River was the name of the river close to Mabel and Jack's homestead. In the first chapters of the novel Mabel walked on this river though it wasn't completely frozen through hoping that she would fall through and die. Later in the novel, Mabel, Jack and Faina skated together on the frozen surface of the Wolverine River.

Cliff

When Mabel tried to kill herself she walked across the river all the way to the other side where it met the cliff. When she got there and realized she was still alive, she decided she didn't want to die after all.

Alpine

Alpine was the village closest to where Jack and Mabel's homestead was located. It contained little other than a general store and a small hotel and restaurant.

Mabel and Jack's Cabin

Mabel and Jack's cabin is where a good deal of the action of the novel takes place. It was in this cabin that Mabel and Jack first began getting to know Faina. It was also here that Esther and Garrett stayed to help Mabel take care of Jack after he hurt his back.

Esther and George's Cabin

Esther and George's cabin is where Mabel and Esther met each other for the first time.

Faina and Garrett's Cabin

Faina and Garrett's cabin is where Faina and Garrett got married. It was also in this cabin that Faina gave birth to her baby. When Faina became ill after the baby was born,

Garrett fixed Faina a bed outside the cabin so she could enjoy the snow and cold air. Faina was last seen lying on this bed before she disappeared.



Themes and Motifs

Grief

Grief is a major theme in this novel because Jack and Mabel are still struggling to come to terms with the loss of their baby who was stillborn ten years before they moved to Alaska. In fact, the two moved to Alaska because Mabel believed it would be good for her to get away from children and pregnant women. She felt these were constant reminders of her failure as a wife and mother.

In Alaska the couple faced new kinds of grief. Mabel was deeply depressed by the long cold winters. Jack was distressed because he worked hard on his land but was still struggling to survive. The couple hit a new level of sorrow when Jack hurt his back while farming and was unable to work. Mabel felt they had no choice but to move back East.

It was not until the two began to care for Faina that they really began to come together as a unit. The love they had for Faina led to new grief. Faina was sick after a long and difficult child birth. One night she disappeared. It was after the two realized Faina was gone for good that they were finally able to grieve together. Before this time Jack had left Mabel alone when he sensed she was about to cry. He'd even left her alone when he found her crying in their baby's nursery shortly after the child was born dead.

Through the trials of life the two had finally matured to the point that they could face each other's grief and comfort each other through it.

Life in Alaska

As the author tells Jack and Mabel's story she also describes the challenges and rewards of living in Alaska. One of the major points she makes is how savage and wild the land was. As Jack struggled to clear land for a crop he felt he was waging a war with the wilderness itself. Those who lived in Alaska were constantly on the lookout for wild animals that threatened them and their livestock. Despite the savagery, the author describes Alaska as a beautiful place. In the scene in which Mabel described the river otter she realized she'd fallen in love with the land. In another place in the novel, a bear was described as playing in the snow like a young child.

Because Alaska is located so far north, the winter is long and dark while the summer is short but the sun shines nearly all day long. In the winter the residents of Alaska struggled to take care of themselves and their livestock during the long periods of extreme cold, often with temperatures below zero, and heavy snow. Making matters worse there were few hours of daylight. People often succumbed to the darkness and became deeply depressed during the winters, just like Mabel was in the beginning of the book. In the summer, however, farmers were able to grow exceptional crops because the sun did shine for such long periods of time.



Another drawback to life in Alaska was the inaccessibility to medical help. There were three times in the novel that this was a problem for Jack and Mabel. Mabel had been unaware there was not a doctor close to them until Jack hurt his back and she went to Alpine hoping to get advice from the doctor. She was shocked to learn there was no doctor there. Another time when a nearby doctor would have been a benefit was when Faina had her baby and had such a difficult labor. Had a doctor been there to assist her she might not have had so much trouble and might not have become sick later. A final time Mabel and Jack wished a doctor was closer was when Faina began running a fever and complaining of severe pain after she had her baby. They planned to try to get her to Anchorage the following day but Faina was gone before they had the opportunity.

Fantasy

Fantasy and the power of belief are important in the novel. Early on in her relationship with Faina Mabel made up her mind that Faina had come from the snow girl that she and Jack had built. When Mabel was young her father had read to her the Russian fairy tale “Snegurochka” or “The Snow Maiden.” This fairy tale is a real story to which there are several variations, just like Mabel’s sister shares with her in her letter. Mabel drew a variety of parallels between the snow maiden and Faina. For instance, Faina appeared the night of the first snow when Mabel and Jack built a snow girl. For this reason Mabel believed Faina had come from the snow girl. Faina also wore a blue coat and was accompanied by a red fox, just like the girl in her fairy tale.

As time went on, Mabel used the fairy tale to lead her actions around Faina. Although Jack had lost faith that the girl would return after she had been away from them all summer Mabel had faith she would come back because the girl in the fairy tale had always come back with the first snow of the winter. When Mabel learned the girl in one version of the fairy tale had left the old man and woman who cared for her because they had mistreated her fox, Mabel was careful to set out an offering of a fresh chicken for the fox when they slaughtered their hens. She also tried to keep Garrett from shooting the fox. Mabel also made Faina a coat each year out of blue wool with embroidered snowflakes, dressing her like a snow maiden. Finally, Mabel looked at the fairy tale book before Faina and Garrett’s wedding. When she saw that the snow maiden had worn a flower wreath in her hair that later transformed into a funeral wreath Mabel decided she would not allow Faina to wear flowers in her hair. It was as if Mabel was superstitious and believed if she followed the proper protocol she could save Faina and make up for her own baby having been born dead.

Even though Jack knew long before Mabel did that Faina was a real flesh and blood girl, there were still some things that Faina did that he felt were otherworldly. Sometimes he would get up at night to look at Mabel’s fairy tale book and would be surprised by the similarities between Faina’s story and the story of the snow maiden. He had seen Faina fling snow over her father’s grave, much more snow than he believed a girl her age could hold in her hands. He noticed that when it did snow, the snowflakes that caught on Faina’s eyelashes and landed on his skin did not melt like they did when they landed on him. Most significant were the snow devils that Faina created with her hands when



she left the cabin one day because she was angry with Mabel and Jack. Jack had watched as these snow devils had grown into a full fledged snow storm that beat against the walls of the cabin.

At the end of the novel the reader is left wondering if Faina was really just a flesh and blood woman or if she had some sort of special powers. Just like Mabel had to choose whether to believe in Faina or not, the reader also has to make his own choice about Faina. Do we choose to believe in fantasy or do we sweep the supernatural under the rug? Just when the author had the reader convinced that Faina might be just a regular person, Faina disappeared in such a strange way at the end of the novel. The disappearance again gives the reader doubts about Faina and her abilities.

Women's Roles

The variety of roles of women is a sub-theme in this novel. Mabel had come to Alaska with her husband with the intention of helping him out on the farm. Jack, however, did not think farm work was the proper type of work for his wife. He preferred she take care of the house and leave the crops and livestock to his care.

However, Esther demonstrates a different outlook on women's roles. While Mabel felt most comfortable in dresses and took pride in her clean neatly decorated cabin, Esther wore man's clothes and saw her home based on its usefulness, not its attractiveness. Esther did not help in the fields, she had a husband and three sons to do that, but she did butcher the Thanksgiving turkey and even shot a bear that was threatening their barn. These were activities Mabel could not imagine herself doing.

Faina, meanwhile, demonstrated highly unconventional women's roles. She had been raised by her father and had learned how to hunt, trap and kill. This work was natural to her. Even though Garrett's mother was unconventional by Mabel's terms, Garrett had never dreamed he'd see a woman who could hunt better than he could. He was both disturbed by what Faina was doing when he first saw her killing a swan with her bare hands, and was in awe of her.

When Faina became pregnant and agreed to marry Garrett, it raised the question of whether how such an unconventional woman would do in the more conventional roles of wife and mother. Faina seemed to be physically affected negatively by having to stay indoors so much, and the sicker she became, the more she begged to be outside. Eventually, she disappeared, abandoning the traditional roles of mother and wife - although readers are left to their own conclusion as to what happened to Faina - whether she somehow ran away, died, or simply melted away.

Friendship

Friendship is an important sub-theme as it was important for Mabel and Jack to have good friends in Alaska. When Jack had injured himself and he and Mabel believed



they'd have to give up their homestead in Alaska it was the Bensons who helped them through their tough times and helped them stay on their land.

Jack's friendship with Faina resulted in her showing him to a moose large enough to feed him and Mabel through the winter. The moose meant Jack wouldn't have to go to work in the coal mines. Mabel's friendship with Faina resulted in raising Mabel's spirits because she looked forward to seeing the girl. Even though Mabel had to care for Faina on Faina's terms, Mabel finally felt she had the daughter she had always wanted.

The friendship between Jack and Garrett was also special. Garrett had three older brothers and felt lost in the shuffle at home. When he was with Jack, he commanded Jack's full attention. Jack had to prove himself to Garrett in order to win the boy's respect, but once he had, it seemed the boy would do whatever Jack needed. Garrett seemed sulky when he first helped him mother move into Jack and Mabel's cabin after Jack's accident but he worked hard in the fields. Jack was so impressed with Garrett's work that he eventually told the boy that he planned to make him a partner in his farm and leave him his property after he died. The friendship between Jack and Garrett was sullied only when Jack confronted Garrett about his relationship with Faina. The reader doesn't know what words passed between Jack and Garrett, only that Jack hit the boy. The relationship began to mend when Garrett continued to help on the farm despite his differences with Jack. Jack once again accepted Garrett after the boy honored him by asking him for Faina's hand in marriage.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the third person point of view of an omniscient narrator. The narrator focuses most closely on Mabel and Jack, the two main characters in the novel. Since this is a story about parenthood and becoming parents by strange devices, it makes sense that the narrator should follow these two characters. The use of the third person narrator makes sense because it would make the story one-sided if it were told from the perspective of either just Mabel or just Jack. A first person narration might also have shifted the focus from the developing relationship between Mabel, Jack and Faina and place more emphasis on one character's role in the relationship.

The narrator knows and tells about not only the actions and conversations of Mabel and Jack but also describes their thoughts and emotions. In some places the narrator shares the thoughts and emotions of Garrett. Never are the thoughts and emotions of Faina shared. It is almost as if the author wanted the reader to remain slightly detached from Faina. Although most of the story focuses on Faina, she is presented only through the thoughts and emotions of other characters.

Language and Meaning

There is nothing particularly out of the ordinary in the language of this novel. The author chooses to let the beauty of Alaska speak for itself and does not do much in the way of ornamenting her writing. All the characters, even the unschooled Faina, speak basically the same way. There are few speech or dialogue nuances used to distinguish one character from the other.

There are some literary devices used in the novel. Personification is common. One example is in the sentence: "The leaden sky seemed to hold its breath" (p. 22). Personification is also used to describe the secret that Faina had asked Jack to keep as follows: "The secret clung to Jack in the scent of black woodsmoke and melting snow" (p. 110). There are also a few instances where the author uses simile, a comparison using like or as, to illustrate her work. "Words lay like granite boulders in her lap and when at last she spoke, each one was heavy and burdensome and all she could manage" (pp. 9-10).

Structure

This 386-page novel is divided into three main parts plus an epilogue. Each part is preceded by a quote from a version of the fairy tale "The Snow Maiden" that relates to that particular part of the novel. The first part of the novel, which is the shortest, begins with Mabel's attempt to kill herself and ends with Jack and Faina working together to bury Faina's father. The second part of the novel begins with a description of the way



Mabel's outlook on life had improved because she looked forward to Faina's visits. It ends with the night that Mabel, Jack and Faina skated together on the frozen river. The third part of the novel focuses on Faina's relationship with Garrett. It begins with Mabel's discovery that she had come to love Alaska and ends with Jack and Mabel mourning together over Faina. Each part of the novel is divided into chapters with each chapter given a number as an identifier. Notice that in each chapter breaks in the story are notated with a single snowflake between the lines of text.

The story is told in a basically linear format. There are a few places where Mabel or Jack thought back over past circumstances in their lives. These scenes in which one of the two remembered something from their past helps to fill the reader in on the couple's background. For instance, it is through these scenes that the reader learns about Mabel's baby who was born dead, her own reaction to the baby and Jack's response to her grief. There is no time gap between Parts One and Two of the novel. Part Two basically picks up where Part One left off. There is a space of six years between Part Two and Part Three of the novel. Likewise, there is a span of several years between Part Three of the novel and the Epilogue. The author does not specify how many years passed between these parts of the book but it was enough time for Faina's baby to grow into a young boy.



Quotes

She should have cupped the baby's head in the palm of her hand and snipped a few of its tiny hairs to keep in a locket at her throat. She should have looked into its small face and known if it was a boy or a girl, and then stood beside Jack as he buried it in the Pennsylvania winter ground. She should have marked its grave. She should have allowed herself that grief."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: Even years after her baby had been stillborn Mabel still regretted her decision not to hold the baby or even find out what sex it was.

And there lay the real problem. Not the nervous horse, but the tired old man. The truth squirmed in the pit of his stomach like a thing done wrong. This was too much work for a man of his age."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 2 paragraph 6)

Importance: Despite the many problems that Jack had working against him as he farmed his claim in Alaska, he believed his biggest challenge was his age.

He knew now what unsettled him about the tracks. The trail began at the heap of snow and led in only one direction — away and into the woods. There were no prints coming into the yard."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 5 paragraph 37)

Importance: One mystery surrounding Faina was the single direction her footprints in the snow the night she was first spotted by Jack. Faina's footprints led away from the remains of the snow girl but there were none that led from the woods to the snow girl. It was this lack of footprints leading to the snow girl that made Mabel and Jack believe at one point that Faina might have come from the snow girl.

In one picture, she recalled, a child reached with her mittened hands down to the old man and woman who knelt before her, the old man and woman who had formed her from snow."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 6 paragraph 19)

Importance: Mabel remembered an illustration in the book "The Snow Maiden" that showed a girl formed from a snow man. She believed this was the way that Faina had been created.

This was different, though. This wasn't sport or boyhood adventure. This was livelihood, and yet he was so ill prepared."

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7 paragraph 24)

Importance: As Jack faced his second winter in Alaska and considered working for at



the coal mine he worried about his abilities to survive in the wild country because he was so badly prepared.

At last he knew — it was the sense of a debt owed.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 7 paragraph 30)

Importance: When Jack killed his first moose he got a feeling that he didn't understand at first. He eventually realized it was the feeling that he owed a debt to the moose because its death meant he and Mabel could survive.

Suddenly she was married to a northern hunter, a woodsman who gutted moose and toasted moonshine in a barn. Everything was topsy-turvy and unfamiliar.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 8 paragraph 34)

Importance: After Jack got his moose he celebrated with George and Garrett. It was a side of him that Mabel had not seen before.

You get down in the dumps, everything's off kilter and sometimes your mind starts playing tricks on you.' Esther reached across the table and put a hand over Mabel's. 'You start seeing things that you're afraid of... or things you've always wished for.'”

-- Esther (Part 1: Chapter 8 paragraph 57)

Importance: Esther told Mabel she believed that Mabel was concocting the girl from her own mind because she wanted a daughter so badly. Esther also blamed the long dark winters of Alaska for affecting people's minds and causing hallucinations.

He thought Mabel would cry, and he wanted to be anywhere else. It was wrong and cowardly, and he'd done it before — when Mabel lost the baby and shook with grief, when the relatives whispered harsh words, when the Bensons asked about the child in the woods. But it was like the need to take a breath. The urge was too strong, and without saying another word, Jack left the cabin.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 9 paragraph 55)

Importance: Even though he knew he was being cowardly, Jack walked out on Mabel when he sensed she was about to cry. He was especially angry with himself because he had left her alone in other situations when she'd needed him to support and console her.

Not only was the child a miracle, but she was their creation. One does not create a life and then abandon it to the wilderness.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 10 paragraph 5)

Importance: Although she hadn't given birth to the strange girl in the woods Mabel felt responsible for her. The idea that she and Jack were allowing the girl to live alone in the wilderness made Mabel feel guilty.



It didn't make sense, yet that is what he saw — her trail didn't continue up the hill or along the creek; it ran into the side of the mountain.”

-- Narrator (Part 1: Chapter 11 paragraph 6)

Importance: Before Jack realized there was a door hidden in the side of the mountain he believed that Faina had walked right into the side of the hill and disappeared.

I am sorry to say no matter which version, the story ends badly.”

-- Ada (Part 2: Chapter 15 paragraph 18)

Importance: This quote, included in one of Ada's letters to her sister, foreshadows that Faina would not be with Jack and Mabel forever.

He'd wondered more than once if she had ventured onto the river ice in November knowing full well the danger.”

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 16 paragraph 14)

Importance: Although Jack had never discussed his concern with Mabel, he wondered to himself if Mabel had gone out on the not completely frozen river hoping that she would fall through and die.

If she couldn't convince anyone else, how could she go on believing?”

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 18 paragraph 57)

Importance: It was important to Mabel that she be able to believe in Faina, but she was having trouble continuing to believe because no one supported her belief.

We'll be planting those fields, Garrett and me. You can either help or get out of the way, but we'll be doing it.”

-- Esther (Part 2: Chapter 23 paragraph 56)

Importance: Esther showed her determination to help her friends by telling Mabel that she and Garrett were going to help on the farm regardless of what Mabel said or did.

I've always regretted that I didn't do more,' she said. 'Not that we could have saved that one. But that I didn't do more. That I didn't have courage enough to hold our baby and see it for what it was.'”

-- Mabel (Part 2: Chapter 29 paragraph 51)

Importance: It was when Mabel almost died after she ran into the snowstorm that she finally told Jack how much she regretted not having held their baby when she had the opportunity.

So that was it. Beneath her irritation and desire to control was love and hurt.”

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 30 paragraph 29)

Importance: Jack was worried that Mabel might scare Faina away with her desire for



the girl to stay with them. He came to realize, however, that Mabel was treating Faina the way she was because she loved the girl and was hurt by the child's refusal to accept their offer of shelter.

He had said too much, but not as much as he could have. He hadn't told Mabel about the snow devils, or about how Faina had scattered a snowfall like ashes on her father's grave."

-- Narrator (Part 2: Chapter 30 paragraph 59)

Importance: Jack realized that even though he had told Mabel that Faina was not a snow fairy, he had begun doubting his own certainty. He'd seen what he appeared to be Faina creating a snow storm using her hands as well as other snow related phenomena that he could not explain.

I don't know,' he said with a shrug. 'I guess maybe I don't want to be warm and safe. I want to live.'"

-- Garrett (Part 2: Chapter 31 paragraph 30)

Importance: Jack asked Garrett why he preferred to be outside trapping and riding in the woods instead of staying inside where he was warm and protected. Garrett said he preferred the feeling of being alive to mere protection and warmth.

But now that he had killed it, he regretted it. He was honor bound."

-- Narrator (Part 3: Chapter 37 paragraph 9)

Importance: Even though Garrett had promised Jack he wouldn't shoot Faina's fox he did anyway. After he'd done so he was bothered by his broken promise to Jack. He regretted his action and wished there was some way he could make up for it.

My God, Esther said. She is real. Your girl is flesh and blood."

-- Esther (Part 3: Chapter 39 paragraph 10)

Importance: After years of hearing Mabel talk about Faina and doubting that she was real Esther was surprised when she walked into the cabin one day to find the girl there.

Garrett had never been so mad in his life. To think of the years he had tried to find a wolverine to trap, and here was this girl throwing one at his feet like a discarded carcass."

-- Narrator (Part 3: Chapter 40 paragraph 35)

Importance: Faina's ability to trap and kill angered Garrett at first. He was particularly angry because he had wanted to trap a wolverine so badly but had never even seen one. The girl, however, had killed one just because it was a nuisance to her.

You will have a baby, you and Garrett. You are carrying his child."

-- Mabel (Part 3: Chapter 48 paragraph 8)



Importance: When Faina finally talked to Mabel about the physical symptoms she was experiencing Mabel recognized that the girl was pregnant.

Faina, a frightened wisp of a thing, disappeared into the forest, and Mabel was angry at the injustice of it — that she should have wanted a baby so dearly and be denied one, and that this young girl should be cursed with one as a burden she might not have the strength to bear.”

-- Narrator (Part 3: Chapter 48 paragraph 27)

Importance: The irony of life hit Mabel in its fullness when she realized what a burden Faina thought the baby would be to her. Mabel, however, had wanted so badly to have a baby but had not been able to do so.

It hadn't happened instantly, the way he had always imagined, with a gush of blood and a piercing wail, but instead fatherhood had arrived quietly, gradually, over the course of years, and he had been blind to it.”

-- Narrator (Part 3: Chapter 49 paragraph 6)

Importance: It was not until Garrett asked Jack for Faina's hand in marriage that Jack realized he had become a father to Faina.

I wish to be the mother you are to me, she said so softly Mabel doubted her own ears. But those were the words she spoke, and Mabel took them into her heart and held them there forever.”

-- Faina (Part 3: Chapter 52 paragraph 86)

Importance: Faina's desire to be as good a mother to her baby as Mabel had been to her was a compliment Mabel treasured.

There, still buttoned inside the coat, was Faina's white nightgown. ‘What does this mean?’”

-- Mabel (Part 3: Chapter 54 paragraph 109)

Importance: When Jack and Mabel pulled back the quilt and furs under which Faina had been laying they found all her clothes, even her nightgown still buttoned inside her coat. It was as if Faina had simply melted away.

But he knelt at her feet, put his head in her lap, and they held each other and shared the sorrow of an old man and an old woman who have lost their only child.”

-- Narrator (Part 3: Chapter 54 paragraph 128)

Importance: It was not until this point in their lives, after they had lost Faina, that Jack and Mabel were able to comfort each other. In mourning the loss of Faina together they were making up for the mistakes they believed they had made when they lost their own baby.