

Weathering: A Novel Study Guide

Weathering: A Novel by Lucy Wood

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Plot Summary

This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Wood, Lucy. *Weathering*. Bloomsbury. 2016.

Weathering is a novel about Ada, a 34-year-old woman, who returns home with her young daughter Pepper after her mother Pearl's death. Ada wants to repair Pearl's house and sell it and move on from the remote area that is at the mercy of the weather and the river that runs along the property.

While at home, she reconnects with people from her past. She ends up working part-time in a pub as a waitress and a cook. At home, she struggles with the repairs around the house. The electricity and gas both need work, the chimney is blocked with bird nests, and there is rarely hot water. She meets Tristan, a twenty-something man who begins to help her with projects around the house.

As Ada begins to sort through Pearl's belongings, she begins to see her mother's ghost and interact with her. But Ada is not the only one Pearl communicates with. As Pepper begins to explore the river and take pictures of birds like her grandmother did, Pearl appears to her as an old woman. She helps Pepper learn to use her old camera and later alerts Ada when Pepper gets hurt along the river.

As winter settles in and torrential rain turns to heavy snow, Ada insists that she and Pepper will not be staying long. A local man comes to look at the property, but assesses it as too much work to repair. Tristan continues to help Ada with repairs and they begin a relationship. Even though Ada begins to have feelings for Tristan, she reminds him that they do not have a future because she will be leaving.

Throughout the novel, Pearl's death is gradually revealed as she makes her way down the river, fighting the strong current sending her out to sea. Ada begins to understand her mother's connection to the property the longer she stays. While she continues to insist that she will not stay long at the house, she enrolls Pepper in school and shows an aptitude at the pub.

When a heavy snowstorm comes along, Ada treks to visit Luke, an older man who befriended her mother. She takes him food to help him weather the storm, but soon realizes that he is better equipped to handle the storm than she is. He sends her on her way with more supplies and a piece of a bread starter that Pearl had one given him.

After Ray reconsiders the house, he returns to make an offer. He tries to buy the house under asking price, but Ada holds her ground. When Ray finally offers her full price, she tells him that she has changed her mind and decided to stay.

As the snow begins to melt and the rains return, the house floods and Ada learns about how the river took her mother. As the novel concludes, Pearl's ghost leaves the house and she begins to taste the saltwater as the river sends her into the sea.



Chapters 1-8

Summary

Chapter 1 opens with Pearl in the river fighting the current. She tries to get her bearings, but cannot grab hold of anything. The wind is howling and the swift water is keeping her down. Underwater, all she can hear is the sound of the river.

Chapter 2 finds six-year-old Pepper near the river. She is with her mother Ada, who is staring at the water. It is late October and clouds are moving in. The area is desolate and Pepper asks where the moon is. Pepper stands close to her mother, bumping her head into Ada's hip. Pepper wants to know why they are standing by the river and her mother tells her that she already knows why.

Behind them is a house and their bags are sitting at the door. Pepper asks about the box Ada has that carries her mother's ashes. Pepper is curious about teeth and bones. They hear birds and the wind starts to howl with the river "muttering" (8) like a person. The rain pours.

In Chapter 3, Ada grabs Pepper by the hand and they run toward the decrepit house in the rain. Ada remembers how cold the house used to get in the winter, but she insists they will be gone before January. Ada thinks about arriving in town by bus and getting a ride with Luke to the house. During the drive, Luke commented on Pepper reminding him of Pearl. Luke told her she should use Pearl's car and Ada tells him they will not be around that long.

It has been 13 years since Ada has seen her mother. She considers how she never thought about her mother aging. Unable to find her keys, she wonders if she left them in Luke's care. Pepper asks about the noise and Ada reassures her that it is the river and the wind. Pepper tries to tell her mother that she saw something, but Ada focuses on finding the keys. Pepper asks what is written on the wooden box with the ashes. She looks closer and sees that it reads: "A Beloved Pet" (18). Ada thinks about her mother's small stature, but is not sure whether to laugh or cry at the box.

In Chapter 4, Pepper and Ada both sneeze from the dust in the house. The lights do not work and the house is quiet until a sudden noise. Pepper sees a cat run through the house and tries to get it to come back. They hear the river and Ada sees her mother by the river. The lights now work. Ada tells Pepper not to go into the room with lots of books and pictures. She tries to get Pepper to eat something, but she declines.

In Chapter 5, the house smells of gas. Ada manipulates the gas line and switches off the gas. The house brings up memories of cooking and kneading dough. Ada thinks about her past intentions for coming back. The pattern on a mixing bowl does not look the way she remembers it. Ada remembers her mother watching a heron. Ada fixes a bowl of cereal for her and Pepper and tells Pepper who Pearl was.



Outside, Ada looks around for wood to burn in the fireplace. She does not want Pepper to grow up in such an isolated place like she did. Pepper wants reassurance that they will not freeze. Ada offers it, but Pepper believes someone will freeze. Ada thinks of her daughter as “morbid and logical” (31). Ada tries to get the car started. She struggles at first, but is successful. They drive to a local shop owned by Mick and his wife. Ada makes small talk with Mick and fills a basket with food staples. Mick offers his condolences and explains that Pearl has an overdue bill for milk. Ada pays the bill and Mick tells her he will continue the milk service. He offers to see her firewood for cheap. At the house, Ada tries to start a fire, but the log just smokes.

Chapter 6 returns to Pearl in the river, admiring it and a feather floating on the surface. She thinks about being lonely with the river as a companion. The moon breaks from the clouds and she is overcome by a memory of a hallway and the smell of wet leaves.

In Chapter 7, Ada thinks about restless dreams and what she needs to do. She has a memory of her mother working on a clock. Pepper tells Ada there is something stuck in the chimney. Ada reaches in and remembers being five and watching a man assist a cow during birth. The chimney blocked, Ada goes outside to look further. Pepper offers to climb up and Ada tells her no. Ada climbs up, scared to look down. The ladder shaking, Ada hears a woman’s voice: Judy. Inside, Judy gives Ada some leftovers. They talk and Ada insists that she will not be staying long. Judy inspects the chimney and starts to pull down bird nests. She tells Ada that Mick sold her unseasoned wood and that she will have someone bring some proper wood over. Later, Pepper asks Ada about her father’s eye color and Ada’s memory of him is fading.

Chapter 8 begins with wood being delivered by a man with a dog named Shep. Ada is scared of dogs. Pepper goes into the study to look around and sees lots of pictures of birds, but no people. She takes a camera from a shelf. That night there is another rainstorm, with water seeping in under the front door. The next day, Pepper is told to stay inside, but goes out along the path with the camera. She tries taking pictures and Luke walks up behind her and informs she left the lens cap on. He asks if she is heading back to the house and she pretends to be interested in a tree. Luke continues on and Pepper lags behind. They come across another man and a boy close to Pepper’s age. Luke tells her his name is Petey. Pepper tells Luke about the pictures of the birds and he tells her that Pearl spent a lot of time wading into the river to take the photos.

Analysis

The theme of nature is introduced at the opening of the novel with the author putting Pearl in direct conflict with nature. She is struggling against the current and her situation is clearly dire. Almost immediately the reader is introduced to Ada and Pepper standing along the same river. They are reserved in sharp contrast to Pearl's struggle. Through a force of nature, three generations of women come together.



Pepper has been told why she and Ada have come to the house by the river, but at six, Pepper does not have a grasp on the concept of grief. Ada is mourning her mother, but Pepper has not met her grandmother. She is far more curious about the contents of the box containing her grandmother's ashes than she is grieving for her.

This lack of memory sits in contrast to the deluge of memories Ada experiences by returning to the house. The author personifies the river by suggesting that it can communicate. In this way, the river may be mourning Pearl as well. It could also be viewed as a conduit for Pearl to speak or interact with Ada and Pepper.

Ada has no intention of staying at the house longer than needed. She is disconnected from the memory of the place and does not want her daughter to be there. It is clear that Ada and Pepper do not stay in one place for too long. It is as though Ada concentrated on getting away from a place that she never figured out how to find a place to stay. It does not appear that Ada is trying to get away from anything other than not experiencing the life her mother led along the river.

Luke's comment about Pepper resembling Pearl must cause Ada to take notice that this may be where she belongs, foreshadowing a decision Ada will have to make in the coming chapters. But like her mother fighting the current in the opening chapter, Ada will have to struggle for her decision as well.

There is a sense of magic in the way the electricity fails when Ada and Pepper enter the house. Once Ada sees her mother along the river, the lights inexplicably begin to work. Yes, the house is old and likely has faulty wiring and other detriments, but a greater force seems to be at work. Ada does not create the image of her mother inside the house, but rather along the river. The river and Pearl work in tandem. Ada knows that Pearl died in the river, so it is natural to project the image of her mother there to start.

While Ada has likely been grieving for her mother for some time, she may now be having to confront the surfacing of her memories. There is a distance between Ada and Pepper. While Ada looks after Pepper, she is understandably distracted by her environment. She fixes Pepper the bowl of cereal because it is easy and is what is left in the house. She explains to Pepper about Pearl because she feels that Pepper needs to know, despite the fact that Ada struggles with what to tell her.

Throughout the novel, birds are used as symbols, most notably the heron that Pearl held dear. This memory surfaces and foreshadows the way in which she will later be able to remember her mother.

For Ada, it appears that nature is working against her, even when it is something as simple as trying to light a fire. She buys firewood and is unaware that it is not properly seasoned, leaving her with a smoking log. The log becomes a metaphor for the fog of memory that she is experiencing. She is not sure how to process the memories or trust what she what she remembers, as with the mixing bowls.



The theme of loneliness is introduced not only by Pearl alone in the river, but also by the way in which Ada remembers growing up. Part of her reluctance to stay at the house is rooted in her desire to keep Pepper from growing up feeling isolated.

Ada may be struggling with her own loneliness or perhaps the loneliness she assumes Pearl must have felt. In a way, Ada may feel responsible for part of Pearl's loneliness by leaving home and not coming back.

The reader gets insight into Pearl's perspective about loneliness as well. Pearl understands that she has been lonely for much of her life. She understands her isolation, but also recognizes the way in which she looked for companionship. While the reader is given indications that Pearl and Luke shared some type of companionship, the extent is not clear. Further, Pearl admits that she has looked to the river for companionship as well. It is ironic that as she is being swept away by the river to her death, it is as if the river is embracing her with its power current.

It is also fitting that Ada has the memory of watching a man help a cow during birth. Here Ada, like Pearl, is raising a child alone. The fathers are unaccounted for and Ada is remembering a man assisting during birth. His actions are needed, but his commitment is brief. The man will help the cow in that moment, but moves on. Meanwhile, Pepper is naturally curious about her father and asks Ada questions. Her memory of Pepper's father is fading. The reader never learns anything about him or where he ended up.

There is a decided lack of people in Ada and Pepper's life. Perhaps Ada is concerned about Pepper growing up lonely, but the isolation of the house is not what will cause Pepper's loneliness. Pepper already lacks a sense of community.

When Pepper looks through Pearl's photographs, she notes the absence of people. This may be why Pepper is drawn to the camera. She is able to recognize herself in her grandmother's photos and decides to view the world through her lens as well. She ignores Ada when she tells her to stay in, instead forging out into the natural world as a way to connect with the grandmother she never knew.

Discussion Question 1

What does Ada's views about her mother's aging reveal about their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Ada concerned with Pepper growing up in an isolated place?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Pepper go outside with the camera against her mother's wishes?



Vocabulary

sodden, skittered, abide, fetid, corrugated, motley, bunting, gales, moor, derelict, solicitors, mottling, billowed, draught, devious, pendulums, fug, rucked, hob, larder, treacle, festooned, morbid, smeeching, acrid, sealant, intolerable, bedraggled, kaleidoscope, cryptic, connoisseur, flue, swathe, russet, gaudy, squalid, dregs, lichen, shunting, rivulets, wigwam, torrent



Chapters 9-15

Summary

Chapter 9 finds Pearl caught in the rain and the river rising by a foot. She gets off the rock and staggers toward the river bank. She rests in the grass and sees the house through the mist. The river rages behind her and she sees a light. She tries to remember why she is at the house, remembering chopping wood and struggling with the axe. She thinks about the past few months feeling lost in the house and confused. She remembers being confused in the house, one time trying to use a chair as a jacket. She feels like she might be able to laugh at it now.

Chapter 10 returns to Ada trying to clean up the house. She strips wallpaper and fills cracks in the walls. In the hallway, Pepper plays with the camera and Ada takes it from her, reminding her that she told her daughter not to go into the study. Ada remembers her mother taking her out with her to photograph birds. She thinks about how the house suited her mother and her fondness for birds.

Days later, Ada encounters Judy at the shop. They talk and Judy invites her to dinner. Ada is vague in her response, and both women give the impression of being reluctant to the idea. Back at the house, Ada gets a call from Val, who runs a local pub. She asks her to come pick up a shift for extra money because they are shorthanded. Ada agrees and takes Pepper with her to the pub. Val tells Pepper she looks like her grandmother and Pepper replies that they put her in the river. Howard, who works at the pub, is introduced and he tells Val that he saw her brother. Ada goes to wait on a table and thinks she recognizes one of the men, finally remembering that his name is Jake and she had a crush on him when they were in school together. Jake invites her out to see his truck and she declines. When the shift is over, Val pays her and tells her that she will call again when needed.

Chapter 11 opens with Pepper figuring out how to use the lens on the camera. Ada is upstairs painting and hears thunder. She calls Pepper to come up and watch the storm come in. They end up playing hide and seek.

Chapter 12 opens with Ada jumping out at Pepper during the game of hide and seek. Ada remembers asking her mother to make a costume for her at school. Her mother improvised a costume, but Ada was embarrassed by it. She told her teacher that she forgot her costume. Water starts seeping onto the floor.

Chapter 13 returns to Pearl. She repairs jewelry and wears secondhand clothes. She works on repairing a watch and when the customer is not satisfied, they refuse payment. She thinks about the man she spends time with, but struggles to come up with his name. She finally recalls his name as Luke. Luke asks her if she heard about the fire at the shop and he keeps her posted on the news of the town. Later she works on resizing a wedding ring. She remembers going on a walk with Luke along the river and



Luke hurting his ankle. He told her to go get help, but she refused to leave him. She thinks about how Luke would go days without visiting her. One day Luke notices how much trouble Pearl is having with her hands and insists she see a doctor.

Chapter 14 resumes Ada and Pepper's storyline. Ada needs to get some paint. Howard has arranged for Ada to talk to Ray, a man who may be interested in buying the property. The car does not start and Ada and Pepper start walking. Along the path, Ada trips and falls as they cross the moor. She gets her bearings and thinks she knows where she is. They take shelter in a small hut and Pepper asks if Ada came to the hut when she was younger. Pepper remarks on all the rooks. She begins to list the other birds she saw and Ada asks when she saw them.

They get to the house and the dog Shep runs out to greet them. Ada remains skittish around dogs and Tristan comes around and Ada tells them they need to buy paint. He shows her the paint and then drives them to a café. They have coffee and the special and talk. Tristan tells Ada her house is tipping. He mentions his younger sister and Ada comments on her age. Tristan tells her he is 24 and Pepper tells him her mother is 30, but she corrects her that she is 34.

Chapter 15 opens in the shop. Mick watches Pepper look at stuff and asks her why she is not in school and if she got into fights. At the house, Ada cooks while Pepper is in the way. The next morning, Pepper goes out to the river and thinks she sees someone fishing. An old woman turns around and talks to Pepper. The woman tells Pepper how to keep lookout for the heron. The woman starts to make her way up the riverbank and Pepper follows her.

That afternoon, Pepper sees Clapper and Petey. Then she checks on the food she left out for the cat, but it does not look like the cat has been by. She sees the woman again and the woman asks what kind of film is in the camera. She realizes that Pepper did not know to put film in the camera.

In the evening, Luke stops by and Pepper checks the pots to see if there is enough food for company. Luke explains to Pepper that he is unable to taste after running into a glass door. Pepper comments on the dirt under Luke's nails and he tells her he has been digging around looking for something. After Luke leaves, Pepper sees Captain, the cat. She calls him, but he ignores her. Ada asks Pepper to repeat what she called the cat. Ada figures Captain must be close to 20 years old and the cat settles in under the table.

Analysis

Pearl remains alone in the river. It is clear that there is nothing to be done for Pearl. Whatever agency she has is limited to whatever physical strength she has to fight against the river. Her age and other deficits work against her chance of survival. In this moment in Chapter 9, however, Pearl appears able to rest at the side of the river. She is reflecting on her time in the house and the physical challenges she has experienced as



she ages. Based on what the reader knows about Pearl's experiences in the river thus far, it is reasonable to question the reality Pearl's situation presents. The reader knows that Pearl has died and that she was in great danger in the river. It is likely that Pearl's episode on the rock is actually her spirit. She is part of the water and is remembering. She remembers using a chair as a jacket. It is clear that Pearl was having issues with some type of dementia. In thinking she may be able to laugh at the experience shows Pearl indicates that she is in some kind of transitional place.

Continuing with the theme of loneliness, Pearl remembers Luke as well. Luke is her conduit to the outside world. He keeps her posted on what goes on in the town, and while she is appreciative of his doing so, Pearl does not show interest in going out among them. When Luke does not visit for awhile, she struggles with her loneliness. It is likely that his visits allow her to appreciate company, but once he leaves, she is left finding her place alone again. He appears to care for her and expresses loyalty and concern for her, as with insisting she go to the doctor. It is clear that she feels similarly by the way she remembers staying with him after he hurt his ankle.

Another way in which loneliness is examined is in Ada's interactions with Judy. The women have known each other for a long time, but because of Ada's absence, they do not have a solid connection between them. Judy's invitation comes off as a nicety rather than a genuine invitation. Ada appears to feel similarly. Their discussion about dinner is vague and directed more as something they would rather avoid.

This works to keep Ada focused on getting out of the town. She does not want to foster any connections that might keep her and Pepper there. While she is reluctant to accept Judy's offer, she does take up Val's offer to work a shift at the pub. This puts Ada among other people and exposes Pepper to the locals as well, but because she is working, it does not feel like a social commitment. She rejects Jake's advances and leaves as soon as her shift is over.

These experiences with Pearl help to reinforce the theme of memory as well. In contrast to Pearl's memories are Ada's. Instead of looking back on her life like Pearl, Ada is looking forward. She moves quickly to begin work on repairing the house, yet she is unable to escape thoughts of the past. While Ada does not comment on any of Pepper's traits reminding her of Pearl, Pepper does show an interest in Pearl's hobby. Seeing Pepper with the camera prompts Ada to remember seeing her mother take photos, but she does not want to make the connection between her daughter and her mother.

The memory of the costume demonstrates the distance Ada kept from her mother. Ada tries to be inclusive with Pepper, inviting her to watch the storm and playing hide and seek, whereas Ada's memories indicate a separation from her mother. Ada is embarrassed by the state of the costume, but she is likely embarrassed of her mother as well. She does not know how to connect with and understand her.

This also works to develop the theme of generations. It is unclear if Ada is able to recognize the similarities she shares with her mother or that Pepper shares with Pearl as well. Yet as Pepper becomes more and more familiar with her new environment, Ada



cannot help but notice how Pepper is interacting with her environment, such as when Ada asks about the birds Pepper noticed. Another connection between the generations is Captain. Pepper is curious about the cat and when Ada finally sees it, she recognizes him.

While it is not directly stated, it is easily inferred that the old woman who approaches Pepper at the river is Pearl's ghost. Pepper has no way of knowing who the woman is, but she readily accepts her. Perhaps this is because of her age, her desire to interact with others, or the woman's knowledge about the camera, but Pepper does not exhibit fear around the old woman.

Almost in parallel with Pearl and Luke's relationship, Ada begins to foster a connection with Tristan. As with Judy, Ada is not looking to foster any connections in the town, but there seems to be a connection between Ada and Tristan. He is able to help her with the house and even warns her about the fact that the house is tipping, but Ada sense something more. She is quick to point out the age difference between them as if that may be a deterrent for Tristan. Ada looks for ways to distance herself.

Discussion Question 1

What are the implications of Pearl's confusion in the house, including attempting to use a chair as a jacket?

Discussion Question 2

Why was Ada embarrassed of the costume her mother made her as a child?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pepper's reaction to the old woman reveal about her character?

Vocabulary

sallow, lacquered, pulpy, embers, desiccated, battlements, stilted, mullions, precarious, threadbare, petrified, harrowed, whorled, increment, embroiled, fete, soldering, filigree, conundrum, sloughed, tussocks, loured, spinster, decrepit, causeway, daubed, mirey, sachets, estuary, resemblance, solemn, aperture, rummaged



Chapters 16-22

Summary

Chapter 16 opens with Ada working another shift at the pub. One customer sends back his food, while Luke eats his dutifully. On her way home, Ada sees Tristan walking along the road and offers him a ride. She takes him home and then goes to Judy's to pick up Pepper. Pepper tells Ada that Robbie told her she could help check the animals on the farm. Judy and Ada talk about Jake and Judy asks if Jake asked her to go see his truck. Ada confirms and Judy tells her that that is his pickup line. The women have a drink and both are quickly woozy. At home, Pepper runs after Captain and Ada is relieved Pepper has grown bored of the cameras.

Days later, Ray arrives at the house to look at it. He looks around and comments on how high the insurance will be because of the flooding. Ada tells him she does not think the house has flooded. Ray goes from room to room and tells Ada it is not what he is looking for. Later, Ada takes a bath, listening to the pipes rattling in the house.

Chapter 17 returns to Pearl. She hears something upstairs and calls. She wonders why she got up early to go out to the river and set up her tripod. She hears a man and a dog behind her. In the house, she hears footsteps and she walks around the house. She sees Ada at the fireplace and asks if she has come back. Ada tells her she is leaving for a job for six months and that Judy is coming to pick her up. Ada tells her she made something for her to eat and that it is in the oven. Pearl watches Ada leave when the car pulls up.

Chapter 18 returns to Ada. She hears her mother behind her, telling her that the fire is going out. Pearl looks around the house and comments about thinking she would never have to see it again. Pepper comes running in and Ada can no longer see her mother. Ada finds Pearl again in the kitchen. A bird has gotten into the house and Captain is going after it. Pearl tells Ada to get the bird out, but Captain catches it and feathers go flying. Outside, Ada tells Pepper that the bird got away, but Pepper knows better and is mad at the cat. Pepper goes upstairs and refuses to come down, upset about the bird. In the kitchen, Ada makes herself something to eat.

Chapter 19 finds Pepper going out to look at the dead bird. The old woman appears and tells Pepper that she is surprised that another animal has not taken the bird. Pepper explains she is angry with Captain and the woman tells her that "all cats are bastards" (137). The woman suggests that Pepper bury the bird if she is that upset about it. Pepper tries to dig a hole, but the ground is frozen. The old woman tells her that there will be more birds in the spring, but Pepper laments that she will not be there in the spring.

Time passes and the ice gets worse. One day Petey comes by to ask Pepper to play. Pepper is confused, but they go out and walk along the road. Petey collects items in his



pockets as they go and Pepper tells him that she will not be around much longer. They go to a swingset and play. Pepper sees Ray come out of a nearby house. Ray asks about the house. She tells him that people want to have a holiday there. Petey agrees with her. Ray leaves in his car and Petey and Pepper play on the seesaw.

Chapter 20 opens with Ada at the restaurant and Howard is out sick. There is a deer carcass on the table and Val asks her to handle it. Reluctant at first, Ada starts in on making cuts of the meat. Val checks in on Ada, who is continues to work on the deer. Ada starts to cook with some of the meat and put the rest in the freezer. She makes a venison potpie dish and customers ask for it when they smell it cooking. Val tells Ada that one of the customers has asked to return with a table of friends the next day for the food.

In Chapter 21, Ada thinks about how it was a bad idea to return home during the winter. She remembers an ice storm when she was 12 and the heavy rain the following winter. She thinks about all the past winters at the house, from the wind and rain and heavy snows. She remembers the year the river froze and hundreds of starlings in the trees. Another winter, she recalls her mother making bread, only to burn it and have to throw it out.

In Chapter 21, Ada thinks about how quickly December is passing. Tristan is helping fix things up around the house and she hears him talking to himself. Ada goes to her mother's bedroom and starts to go through her clothes and jewelry, something she has been dreading. Tristan comes in and interrupts her. They have coffee and Tristan tells her about an upcoming holiday party. She tells him she is not going and asks if he is. He says yes. Tristan returns to his work outside and Ada goes back to her mother's closet. Pearl tells her to not get rid of old shoes because people need them more than new shoes. Ada comments about liking a shirt and Pearl claims she never liked it. Ada finds a brown dress with the price tag still on it. Pearl tells her to get rid of it and Ada comments about her mother never having worn it.

Later Ada tries on a dress and looks at how her body has changed in the mirror. Instead of wearing something new, Ada puts on a black dress and Pearl asks her when she last wore it. Ada does not respond and Pearl tells her she knows when she wore it. Pearl asks how many people showed up to the funeral, but there were not many. Pearl admits she isolated herself. Ada tells her she will not be at the party long.

As they arrive at the party, Ada sees lots of cars parked outside of Luke's. She has more cocktails than she thought she would have and Judy talks to her. Outside by a bonfire that is too close to the house, Ada sees Tristan. Ada tells Tristan that Luke told her about Tristan's accident and how he hurt his leg. Tristan explains that he fell out of small tree and that it was not that good of a story.



Analysis

The scene in the pub allows readers to understand that the expectations in the pub are low. Luke is able to eat his food because his injury damaged his sense of taste. The other patron returned the food, rejecting the local cuisine in much the same way Ada appears to be rejecting the town. It sets the stage for Ada to find her place, foreshadowing the episode with the deer.

Ada has never butchered an animal and is not sure where to begin. The deer is a metaphor for the house. Ada rejects it at first, but focuses and decides to conquer her fear. She makes quick work of the deer and almost immediately begins to cook with it. While her recipe is not perfected at the outset, it is enough to lure customers back the following day with more patrons. Ada remains removed from interacting with others, but her cooking makes for a tangential connection.

While it appears that Ada is withdrawn as a way to protect herself from falling back into a town where she does not want to belong, Pearl readily admits the ways in which she isolated herself while she was alive. When the two women interact while Ada dresses, Pearl tells Ada this, likely as a way to prompt Ada to not follow suit. When Ada arrives at the party, she is reserved, but after a few drinks, she begins to loosen up and enjoy herself. She is able to talk more freely with Tristan and she learns more about him, including how he hurt his leg.

Because of the alcohol and the repeated mentioning of the bonfire being too close to the house, there is a sense of danger to Ada letting loose. While everything turns out fine in the party, the way in which Ada is moved through the party becomes reminiscent of the way in which Pearl moves through the river.

The theme of grief is further developed by the conversation between the women as well. Ada does not feel comfortable when she is getting ready for the party. In a way, Ada is likely uncomfortable because she knows she will be interacting with others. Her conversation with Tristan is what prompts her to go. But as Pearl watches Ada dress, she asks about the funeral. Ada does not want to discuss the funeral. It is understandably painful for her, but she also does not want to discuss with her mother the lack of people who attended. Pearl knows that she isolated herself, so she is not entirely shocked by the revelation. For Ada the conversation reminds her of her mother's death.

For all the work that is being done in the house, Ada avoids her mother's bedroom and tries to keep Pepper from the study. These are the two places where Pearl's memory is likely too much to bear. When Ada does go through Pearl's closet, she begins to get some insight into her mother's life while she was away. The brown dress prompts confusion and foreshadows an event that contributes to Pearl's isolation. In much the same way the black dress prompts Ada to avoid her mother's question, the brown dress has a similar effect on Pearl.



The theme of memory continues to be explored through Pearl's memories. For the first time, Pearl recalls Ada. Similar to how Pearl appears in the house and Ada can hear her moving, in Pearl's memory, the appearance is reversed. She hears Ada and sees her on the day that Ada leaves. Ada reassures her mother that she will only be gone for about six months, but it is clear that Ada does not want to tell her mother it will likely be longer. The reader knows that Ada's departure is for the remainder of Pearl's life.

While Ada looked forward to leaving, Pepper's scene with the old woman reveals the opposite. Pepper is distraught after Captain kills a bird. The old woman tries to lift her spirits by reminding her that the birds will return in the spring, but this does not offer comfort to Pepper. From her experiences, Pepper knows that she will not be around in the spring, depriving her of the opportunity to see the other birds.

Pepper connects to the land quickly, reinforcing the theme of nature. Pepper wants to learn about the birds and is drawn to the river. In a way, the river's perpetual movement may make Pepper feel comfortable because she is used to moving around. Because Pepper has worked to befriend Captain, she is hurt when he kills the bird. The old woman suggests that she bury the bird because it is clear that Pepper is grieving its loss. She tries, but is met with frozen ground. Her environment is not offering her any comfort.

Throughout the novel, nature shows its power and dominance. Ada recalls the hardship of past winters. They are part of her, but those memories do not bring her comfort. While she recalls witnessing the natural beauty of the river freezing and the birds in stark trees, the landscape that she describes gives the reader a persistent feeling of isolation. There is danger in enduring winters on this land. Earlier in the novel, Pepper suggests that someone will freeze, while this did not happen, Pepper was able to recognize the danger at a young age. The winter is harsh and the rain and snow and ice are persistent forces, which will come into focus in the coming chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Ada relieved that Pepper has lost interest in the camera?

Discussion Question 2

How does Ada's interaction with her mother's ghost inform her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Pepper tell Ray that people want to holiday at the house?



Vocabulary

haranguing, stoically, cusp, tarmac, silage, ghoulish, deficient, gallivanting, extricate, bramble, sepia, aligned, condensation, translucent, gaunt, furrows, pallid, cerise, tinge, sinew, gristle, waft, garnished, scrutinizing, chilblains, tepid, skulking, opaque, spate, nocturnal, cloying, laden, eyelets, acclimatized, ochre, idyllic, cacophony



Chapters 23-29

Summary

Chapter 23 opens with Pepper hiding a bird ornament behind her back. It is the first gift she has ever gotten for her mother. Pepper watches Ada unwrap the tissue and Ada tells her it is pretty and Pepper is disappointed that her mother did not tell her it was something she would keep forever. On New Year's Eve, Ada works at the pub and there is a large crowd. Pepper is keeping track of the time and a man tells her that the crowd at the pub is because of Ada's cooking. Luke is there and he tells Pepper who people are in the restaurant, including Val's brother, even though the siblings no longer speak to each other. Ray comes in and Luke tells Pepper he asked about the house. Pepper does not want to hear it.

Later Pepper wakes up to find that she slept through midnight and it was the next morning. She goes outside and finds that it snowed. She walks down to the river, walking along the bank. She slips on a stone and rolls in the mud and hurts her knee. As she starts her way back to the house, her knee keeps giving out. She wonders if she will die and sees a sheep above her along the bank. She asks the sheep if it knows where they are.

Chapter 24 is a list of things Pearl lost and found in the river. She remembers losing items like a watch and screwdriver, but finding stones and an oar. She thinks about what she loves and hates about the river, from loving the sound of babbling, but hating the sound of rushing.

Chapter 25 finds Ada in bed, listening to Tristan's truck leaving. She takes a bath and sees that it is snowing. She watches out the window and comments on a heron on the bank. Pearl comments on Tristan's age and tells Ada that she has gotten fat. Ada tries to ignore her mother. Pearl comments about stones on the bank and that Pepper had been there. Ada jumps out of the bath and checks on Pepper and finds that she is not in the house. Ada gets a call from Judy that they found Pepper.

Ada arrives at Judy's and Pepper is telling Judy and Robbie that this is "third time she'd almost died" (188). Ada scolds Pepper for not telling her where she was going and Pepper replies that everyone was asleep. Ada looks at the mark on Pepper's cheek. After a bit, Robbie takes Pepper to check on the animals and Ada and Judy talk. With the snow coming down, Judy invites them to stay the night and Ada agrees. That night, Pepper tells Ada that she talked to Judy and Judy told her that she did not want children. She tells her mother that she probably will not have any either.

The next morning, they drive back and the snow has turned slushy. Ada has come down with something and goes to sleep in her mother's room. She feels a cold hand on her forehead.



In Chapter 26, it is revealed that while Ada was not a sickly child, but when she did get sick, it was serious. Pearl remembers making the decision of waiting the illness out or going for help. One night, Luke had asked Pearl out for a date and she dressed in a new brown dress, with the tag tucked into the back, and Ada came down with an illness fast. Pearl cancelled on Luke and they never talked about rescheduling or making another date. They just remained friends.

Pearl watches Ada sleep and then walks around the house. She sees her cameras and wonders how and why she became fascinated with them. She looks closely at one of the cameras and thinks about how lonely Ada must have been growing up in the middle of nowhere.

Chapter 27 opens with Ada calling for Pepper to get in the car. She takes Pepper to a school and tells her that she will not have to go there for long. Ada offers to go in with her, but Pepper gets out of the car and makes her way to the playground. She goes inside and sees Petey. He shows her around the classroom and tells her about the books he likes to read. She asks why he reads well and Petey shrugs. After school, Ada asks Pepper how it went and she does not give a definitive answer.

At the house, Pepper is by the river thinking about what she could take to school for show-and-tell. The woman asks her why she is by herself and comments about Pepper being alone a lot. Pepper admits that she is lonely sometimes, but not when she takes pictures.

A week later, Pepper continues to go to school. She draws a picture that the teacher hangs in the corridor. Over the weekend, Pepper asks if they are going to the pub and Ada says no. She tells Pepper that Ray is coming to look at the house again. Pepper asks her mother what they are doing and Ada does not know. Pepper tries to reassure her by suggesting that she is trying.

In Chapter 28, Ada looks at her list for the menu at the pub and thinks about Ray coming to look at the house and how she has not seen Tristan since New Year's. She is peeling potatoes when Tristan knocks. He offers to help her peel and she explains that she feels like she messed up. They work through the potatoes and it is snowing outside. Pepper comes in and reminds Ada that she was supposed to take her to Judy's. Tristan offers to take her.

At the pub, Ada makes meringues and Val talks to her about planning the summer menu and Valentine's Day coming up and if Ada had anything planned for the menu. Ada is uncomfortable with Val's discussion and focuses on the cooking. Howard offers to help Ada with food prep and Val starts talking about the summer menu again. Ada tells her that she will not be around in the summer.

Later, it finally stops snowing and Tristan tells Ada he should have completed tiling the roof. Ada asks if he knows she is leaving soon and he tells her yes. She talks about how the house is too much work and Tristan agrees with her. She gets frustrated with him while trying to tell him she will leave.



In Chapter 29, Ada tells Pepper that school is closed because of the snow. The phone is not working and Ada explains that the snow is expected to get worse through the week. Finally, Ada decides she needs to go check on Luke, leaving Pepper in the house alone. After an hour, Pepper makes peace with the noises the house makes. She looks at the camera and a bird book. She sees Captain outside in the snow. She calls him and he comes into the house. She sees the old woman staring through the window.

Analysis

The theme of generations is further developed with the gift Pepper gives Ada. This is the first time Pepper has given her mother a gift and she wants it to be memorable. When Ada does not react the way Pepper expects, it is clear she does not understand how the gift addresses the dynamics between Ada and Pearl. Since their arrival, Pepper has become fascinated with birds. Because Ada connects the birds to her mother, she is left with a sense of loss when she sees the ornament. This demonstrates the distance between Ada and Pearl, but it also touches on how that same type of relationship can interfere with Ada and Pepper.

Pepper is not sure what to make of families, but exhibits curiosity. She asks Judy about why she does not have kids and this prompts Pepper to think that she will do the same. Ada does not make a big deal out of Pepper's declaration, but she does not dismiss it either. Ada's reaction gives the reader insight into Ada's feelings about children. Ada proves to be a caring mother to Pepper, but she also gives Pepper a lot of latitude and freedom. Pepper does not necessarily adhere to her mother's wishes either, such as when she goes out along with river alone. But Ada's acceptance that some people do not want children may indicate that having a child may not have necessarily been in the plan for her either. There is only a brief mention of Pepper's father in conjunction with Ada's fading memory of him. The reader cannot know what kind of relationship they had, or even if they had a sustained relationship. Like Pearl, Ada is left raising a daughter on her own.

Just as no information is given about Pepper's father, the reader has not yet been exposed to any information about Ada's father as well. When Pearl reveals that she missed her date with Luke because Ada fell ill, it is clear that Ada's father is out of the picture. Pearl exhibits devotion to her daughter's care, but it ends up being detrimental to her possible relationship with Luke.

Pearl explains to Luke that Ada is sick, but makes no attempt to reschedule their date. Pearl indicates that neither of them spoke about it again, but that they remained friends. Certainly Luke could have asked again, but something between them maintained the divide. This further develops the theme of loneliness. Pearl allowed it to be awkward with Luke until they returned to the way they were before. Clearly, Pearl and Luke cared greatly for each other, both demonstrating acts of devotion, yet she kept her distance from him. Pearl admitted earlier that she purposefully isolated herself, but in doing so gives no indication as to why. Pearl fears making a connection, which may indicate why Pearl is suspect of Ada's relationship with Tristan.



Following the New Year's Eve party, Ada and Tristan spend the night together. The following morning while Ada is in the bath, Pearl comments negatively about Tristan. She does not direct her comments toward Tristan, however, instead putting Ada down about her age and weight. If the reader considers that Pearl may only be a figment of her imagination brought on by grief, then it is natural to assume that Ada remembers her mother's voice in the way she heard it. Ada can anticipate that her mother would comment about the age difference or the changes in Ada's body as she ages. Further, these elements Ada is likely already self-conscious about. Regardless of how she sees herself, Ada's thoughts follow suit with Pearl's, making her more likely to push people away and embrace her isolation.

An indicator that Pearl is really there is when she prompts Ada to look for Pepper. This part of the novel shows Ada, Pearl, and Pepper in varying states of aloneness. Ada is looking for Pepper, Pearl is wandering around the study, and Pepper is alone along the river.

During this time, Pearl begins to reflect on the isolation that Ada must have felt growing up along the river. It is as though this is something she had not considered before. Pearl liked being along the river, but she also recognizes how isolating it was.

Pepper's isolation extends further than being an only child living in a new town. Pepper seems to be far more interested in interacting with other people than Ada does. She likes talking to Luke, plays with Petey, and interacts with the old woman. Still, Pepper is left feeling alone. She tells the old woman that she does feel lonely, but that she is able to make a connection through the camera. Pearl likely empathizes with this outlook. The pictures offer proof of existence. While the pictures may not be of people, it shows the reality of the place in which she lives. Pepper seems to understand this.

Further, while Pepper is sociable, she is limited in the way she socializes. She has had trouble interacting with kids at her previous schools, and when Petey invites her to play, she does not understand what that means. Eventually, Ada enrolls Pepper in school and this reveals another aspect of Pepper's isolation: she is unable to read. At six-years-old, Pepper should have some reading ability and she is in awe, but subsequently diminished by Petey's reading ability. Pepper is undecided on her feelings about school, but she demonstrates interest in Petey's learning and the community around her.

Her experience in school is short-lived for the time being because of a snowstorm. The storm comes not long after Val tries to talk to Ada about what they will do for the Valentine's Day and summer menus at the pub. Val is planning ahead, while Ada maintains that she is planning on leaving. While she is not quite ready to go and still needs to sell the house, it is as if nature wants to insist that she stay.

Almost as if Ada does not want to be controlled by the weather, she treks out into the snow to check on Luke. It is understandable why Ada would want to go and check on an old man. Further, it is understandable why she would not want to take Pepper with her, but given the risk of going out in the storm, it is disconcerting that she would leave Pepper on her own at the age of six.



Much like the New Year's Eve party when there is a sense of foreboding, the situation ends up resolved without issue. Luke is fine and ends up helping Ada more than she was able to help him. When Ada returns to the house, however, she finds Ada near a broken window in the kitchen with the old woman staring in. This shows an intersection of the generations. Yes, Pearl has appeared to Ada in the house and to Pepper along the river, but now there is a confluence of them in the storm.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Pepper disappointed in Ada's response to the gift she gives?

Discussion Question 2

What do Pearl's comments about Tristan and Ada's body implicate about their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Ada uncomfortable with Val's comments about the summer menu?

Vocabulary

amulets, tussocks, chuntering, stilted, delirious, plait, parboil, pungent, syllabub, bemused



Chapters 30-38

Summary

Chapter 30 returns to Pearl calling out Frank's name in the snow. She tries to remember his skin and his eye color. She remembers asking Frank about his dreams and telling him that she dreamed she was on an island and climbing a tree. She thinks of how small Ada looked as an infant in Frank's arms and how he would sing to her. Frank complains about the sound of the river to Pearl and tells her that he is going to go out for milk. Pearl tells him she will go. He asks how she will get there and she tells him she will walk. When she returns, she finds Frank gone, an extra blanket tucked on Ada, and milk in the refrigerator. He takes his wallet, but leaves the bank book. Pearl looks around and realizes she is 45 and on her own with a baby.

Chapter 31 finds Ada making her way through the snow with tins of food to take to Luke. When she arrives, she knocks a long time before Luke answers. He tells her she did not have to come and puts on a kettle. He slices bread and puts out crackers and Ada looks around, understanding that he does not need what she brought. He tells her she walked three miles and Ada figures her mother would have made the trip faster. Luke tells her about the first time he saw Pearl after she moved into the house and that she told him that she and Frank were fixing up the place. He gives Ada some of the starter for bread that he originally gotten from Pearl. He gives her milk and jam before she heads back out into the snow. When Ada gets back just before dark, she hears her mother in the kitchen and finds Pepper by a cracked window with snow blowing in.

Chapter 32 details snow coming into the house and the problems with the windows, roof, chimney and walls. It reveals that the house will likely only hold one more winter.

Chapter 33 opens with Pearl looking for work in the rural area. She finds an office job and buys a used car. She puts the car in a ditch and a man stops to help and she explains she needs a ride into town. He reluctantly helps her. She remembers reading the newspaper and suggesting to Frank that they go out in the evening, but she ends up going to the café alone. She applies for a part-time job baking bread and does not get the job. She finally gets a job operating an oven in a shop.

Chapter 34 returns to Ada waking up to a strange sound, finally realizing it was the snow sliding down the roof and pressing against the windows. It has been snowing for four days and now is raining. Pepper explains that the rain woke her up. Pepper complains about how loud the river is. The lights are not working. Ada notices Pepper packed up the cameras. Pepper gives Ada the pictures and Ada sees that Pepper wrote her name.

Ray shows up at the house and has to yell over the sound of the river. She invites him in and he tells her he has been reconsidering the house. He makes her an offer less



than what she originally asked and she declines. He offers her full price and she tells him she changed her mind about selling.

Later Pepper asks about the water coming into the house. She looks for Captain as the house floods. She worries about the cameras and Ada tells her they should be fine on the desk for now. She asks Pearl if there are any more sandbags and Pearl says no. Ada says she does not know what to do. She notices how her mother's eyes look like "murky water" (264). She tells her mother about eating the center of the bread she baked that Pearl burned and threw away. Pearl feels the water pulling at her. Ada asks her mother what birds she sees and Pearl tells her she does not want to know. Ada insists that she does. Her mother's voice fades with the water and Ada stays on the steps listening to and watching the water.

Chapter 35 returns to Pearl. It is raining and the river has flooded the house, slapping her against the walls. She tries to hold on, but the current is strong. She stares at the house and tries to fight against the river. She remembers going into the river and Frank watching her. He told her to sit in the water to get used to it. The river continues to take her and, much as she tries to hang on, she knows the river will win.

In Chapter 36, Pepper asks her mother to try and start the car again, but it will not. Ada tells her they will walk and Pepper does not want to, but she follows. Pepper asks how long it will take to clean up the house and Ada admits that it will take a long time. At the shop, Mick offers to sell Ada more wood, but she dismisses him by telling him she will think about it. When they get back to the house, Robbie pulls up in his truck and tells them they are going to Luke's because no one could reach him. Pepper reassures her mother that it will be okay. They learn that Luke was out digging a hole looking for something and could not get out of the hole. When Pepper sees Luke, he shows her the coin he found.

They stay at Luke's and Pepper checks on Captain because of Shep. Tristan helps in the kitchen, shopping onions. Ada asks Pepper if she likes Tristan. Pepper admits she likes him the same as Shep. Later, Pepper sees a heron and says "Frank" (281). Her mother asks why she said that and Pepper explains that it is the sound the heron makes. Pepper takes out the camera and adjusts the focus to take a picture of the heron.

In Chapter 37, Ada and Pepper are by the river. Ada watches the heron and appreciates the beauty of the river. Ada watches the water and remembers her mother.

Chapter 38 returns to Pearl. The river takes her through the woods and past houses she recognized. She gets a taste of the saltiness in the water and knows the river has taken her to the sea. She thinks about how when it rains, she will go back to the beginning.

Analysis

The theme of memory continues to develop with Pearl's recollections of Frank. The reader finally gets some insight into Ada's childhood and Pearl's relationship with Ada's



father. Just as Ada commented to Pepper earlier about the fading memory of Pepper's father's eye color, Pearl also finds that her memories of Frank are fading. She puts effort into trying to remember, but is left with vignettes of their life together in which Ada figures prominently and Frank is an elusive presence.

This continues with the theme of loneliness. Pearl and Frank bought the house together to fix up, but the isolation appears to have gotten to Frank. Pearl can sense how he distances himself from her and the two do not physically interact. The two conversations Pearl's relays consist of Frank telling Pearl how to adjust to the cold water in the river as he stays on shore, and telling her that he wants to go out for milk.

Pearl is sharp enough to recognize that her relationship with Frank is breaking down, yet she tries to postpone the inevitable. Just as Pearl did not want Ada to leave, she does not want Frank to either. This demonstrates her fear of abandonment, which likely influenced why she never made another attempt with a relationship with Luke. While there is much to compare between Pearl and Ada and how they react to their surroundings, the reader can also find similarities between Ada and Frank. Not only did Ada leave Pearl behind as Frank did, but she left Pepper alone during the storm, just as Frank left the infant Ada alone while Pearl went for milk.

Pearl struggles as a single mother, particularly when it comes to finding work. Pearl seems to be unable to find a place that is a good fit. It is also revealed that Frank left her with an infant when she was 45. This age difference between Pearl and Ada may also have contributed to Pearl's insecurities. She may have thought Ada would be there for her as she got older. But as Ada realizes earlier in the novel, she did not really stop to think about her mother aging.

Meanwhile, Ada and Pepper are dealing with the house in the aftermath of the snowstorm. The flooding allows the river to make itself known. It roars and Ada has to shout over it when Ray comes to look at the house for the second time. He makes an offer and Ada finally relents to the fact that she has decided to stay. It is in the moment of being forced to let go of the house that she cannot. She knows the house may not last another winter, but in staying she thinks she will be able to remain connected to her mother. It also gives Pepper a sense of permanency.

Yet as Ada makes this decision, the force of nature seems to be taking her mother away. As the house floods, Ada can see the water in her mother's eyes. She is able to understand how the river took Pearl and Pearl is unable to fight the river. Ada makes an attempt to connect with her mother by asking about the birds, but she also tells her about the bread that she ate. The women have a shared memory of the time Pearl burnt a loaf of bread. Frustrated, Pearl disposed of the bread, yet she did not know that Ada ate it. It is a metaphor for how Ada understands that her mother tried to do right by her, but that she got frustrated. Luke's gift of the bread starter likely prompted this memory for Ada. In doing so, he gave Ada and Pearl an opportunity to connect through the experience.



After the storm and the flood, Ada and Pepper settle into their roles in the community. Ada is no longer talking about leaving, and she continues to connect with Tristan. While Ada rejects isolating herself by starting a relationship with Tristan, she remains motivated to stay by the memory of Pearl. It is possible that staying close to the memory of her mother will perpetually prompt her to make connections with others and give Pepper a stable home. Still, Ada maintains a need to connect with her mother's memory as a way to deal with her grief. She is able to appreciate the beauty of the river and how it reminds her of Pearl.

As the novel draws to a close, it ends similarly to how it begins: with Pearl in the water. There are fewer struggles than witnessed in the first chapter. Pearl knows she is moving out to sea. Having these chapters be linked by the movement of the water shows how Pearl is part of the cycle of the seasons. Finding herself in the sea, she understands how far the river has taken her. She knows that rain will return her to the source of the river and that she will be able to make the trip down the river in perpetuity. This gives her hope that she will be able to return to Ada and Pepper throughout the seasons as well.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ada leave Pepper to check on Luke?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ada change her mind about selling the house?

Discussion Question 3

What does Pearl's reaction to being taken out to sea reveal about her character?

Vocabulary

impending, divots, askew, runnels, fissures, gouge, bulbous, affronted, temperamental, dusters, intricate, surged, unremitting, eddying, chrysalis, terracotta, monotonous, refractions, mica, siphoned, viscous, flotsam, weir



Characters

Ada

Ada is a 34-year-old single mother. She has recently lost her mother and has returned to the house she grew up in to settle her mother's affairs. She has a six-year-old daughter named Pepper and has no relationship with Pepper's father.

She is reluctant to return to the house and does not want to stay long. She was not close to her mother and had not been home in about 13 years. Returning to the house brings up a lot of memories, including how she felt living somewhere so isolated as a child. She does not want that for Pepper.

As she works on the house and weathers a harsh winter, she reconnects with her mother's spirit and begins to engage in life in the area. She meets Tristan and they begin a relationship and she starts working at a pub. Eventually, she changes her mind about selling the house and decides to stay.

Pearl

Pearl is Ada's mother and lived in the decrepit house along the river on her own for many years. She and Ada's father, Frank, bought the property to fix up, but after Frank left her, she fended for herself.

She is fascinated by nature, compelled to spend time at the river and take photographs of birds. She is particularly fond of a heron.

As she is being pulled away by the force of the river, she reflects on her life, not to regret, but rather to understand. She appears to Pepper as an old woman who teaches her about taking photographs and cats, but does not tell her who she is. She appears to Ada as a ghost or spirit, enabling them to reconnect and better understand each other.

Pepper

Pepper is Ada's six-year-old daughter. She has a wild, independent streak and a history of getting into trouble in schools. She understands her mother's nomadic nature and accepts that they will not be staying at the house long, even though Pepper connects with the land and people.

She develops a fondness for watching the birds and an interest in photography. She befriends Peter and begins to go to school.



Pepper's independence sometimes puts her at risk. She often treks out along the river on her own, at one point falling and hurting her knee on New Year's Day.

Tristan

Tristan is a 24-year-old handy man. He has a limp from falling out of a tree. He helps with the repairs around the house and begins a relationship with Ada. He is understanding as she continues to tell him that she is not staying, but he wants her to.

Judy

Judy is a local woman who knows Ada. They reconnect when Ada arrives and Judy helps with caring for Pepper when needed. She also gives Ada advice on how to handle people in the town, such as Mick.

Luke

Luke is an older man who befriended Pearl. When Ada was younger, he asked Pearl out on a date, only to have it canceled because Ada fell ill. He remained a close friend to Pearl.

Val

Val owns the pub and hires Ada to work as a waitress and a cook. She asks Ada to carve up the deer when she is unable to.

Petey

Petey is the young boy that Pepper befriends.

Frank

Frank is Ada's father who ran out on Pearl when Ada was an infant.

Mick

Mick is the shop owner. He sells Ada unseasoned firewood that she is unable to use.

Symbols and Symbolism

Birds

Birds, in particular the heron, are symbolic of Pearl. The birds are seen along the river, just as Pearl is introduced in the river and is first seen by Ada on the river bank. When Captain kills the bird that gets into the house, Pepper properly mourns it as she would have her grandmother if she had known her.

River

The river is symbolic of life and death. The river is shown to be a powerful force that is attributed with human sounds, like muttering, and roaring. It offers companionship to Pearl, but also takes her life. As the river takes her to her death, she remembers her life.

House

The house is symbolic of the relationship between Ada and Pearl. The house is falling apart and in desperate need of repair. The two women are estranged and Pearl's death returns Ada to the house where she is able to make peace with her relationship with her mother. She is also able to find value in returning to live in the place where she grew up.

Weather

Weather is symbolic of lack of control. Ada likely would not have returned to the house if the river had not risen and killed her mother. When she does return, she remembers all the hardships they faced from thunderstorms, snow, and ice. She understands the harshness of the winters and must come to an understanding that she is unable to control all that is around her, including her emotions.

Camera

The camera is symbolic of memory. Ada tries to keep Pepper from the study because she knows that is where her mother kept her camera and photos. By keeping Pepper out of there, she can delay confronting her memories of her mother. Pepper disobeys her mother and takes the camera, fostering a relationship and creating memories with the grandmother she never knew.



Rain

Rain is symbolic of renewal. When Ada and Pepper arrive at the house, rainstorms soon follow. It marks Ada's renewed relationship with her mother. While Ada resists throughout much of the novel and throughout the harsh winter, she begins to accept and renew her relationship with her mother and the house she grew up in as the spring rains come.

Timepieces

Timepieces are symbolic of circular time. Pearl's timeline is associated with circular time, such as seasons or the hours in a day. She works on repairing clocks and watches at home and for others. It illustrates how time moves forward and is able to heal relationships, such as Ada and Pearl, even if it is done in an abstract fashion.

Mending and Repair

Mending and repair symbolize the relationships between mothers and daughters. From the outset of the novel, the relationship between Ada and Pearl is strained and because of Pearl's death looks to be irreparable. As Ada works to repair the house, it mirrors the way in which Pearl repaired jewelry and watches. The women work to repair what is around them and it begins to influence how their relationship can be fixed.

Cooking

Cooking is symbolic of nurturing. At the house, Ada relies on canned food and cereal, but when she goes to work at the pub, she begins to cook. Before she begins to embrace cooking, she must confront butchering a deer carcass. She is intimidated by doing it, but the act of doing so gives her the confidence to start cooking in earnest. This brings more customers to the pub and she begins to nurture and develop relationships with people around her. It even leads to giving Pepper a sense of community as well.

Bread Starter

The bread starter is also symbolic of renewal. Ada reaches out to Luke during the snowstorm. While there, Luke gives her a start from the bread starter that Pearl once gave to him. As the river starts to flood during the thaw, Ada tells Pearl that she ate the bread that she threw away because it was burned. She explains that the bread was good in the center and that just the exterior was ruined. It shows that all is not lost in their relationship and that Ada's feelings toward her have rejuvenated.

Settings

The House

The house is the primary location of the novel. It is located along a river on a moor in rural England. It is where Ada and Pepper come to stay after Pearl's death.

The River

The river runs along the property that Pearl owned. It is where Pearl and Pepper watch birds. Ada spreads Pearl's ashes along the river. The river flooding is what contributed to Pearl's death.

Luke's House

Luke's house is about three miles from the house. It is where Ada treks through the snowstorm to check on him.

The Pub

The pub is where Ada works part-time for Val. She begins by waiting tables, but after she ends up cutting up a deer, she begins to cook more. Her cooking brings more people into the pub.

The Shop

The shop is run by Mick and his wife. It is where Ada takes Pepper to get supplies. Mick sells Ada some unseasoned firewood during her first trip to the shop when she returns home.



Themes and Motifs

Memory

The author uses the theme of memory as a way to connect the living and the dead. The alternating perspectives of Pearl and Ada give insight into how the reader can complete the memory. If Pearl remembers being at the river, Ada thinks of watching her mother from the house.

Ada has conversations with Pearl's ghost. However, the conversations could easily be Ada's memories of her mother informing how her mother would react to Ada. This is seen when Pearl comments about the changes in Ada's body and her comments about Tristan's age.

Returning to the house prompts Ada to remember pieces of her childhood. She finds that her memory is not always reliable. When she sees the mixing bowls in the kitchen, she remembers the markings on the bowl differently.

As Pearl makes her way down the river, she remembers different parts of her life. She remembers a failed first date with Luke, her husband Frank leaving her, as well as Ada leaving. The memories indicate Pearl's fear of abandonment, which also helps to develop the theme of loneliness.

Loneliness

The theme of loneliness is used to illustrate a fear of intimacy and a fear of abandonment.

Both Ada and Pearl are single mothers with a daughter. While it is unclear what happened to Pepper's father, Ada's father left when she was an infant. As only children, both Ada and Pepper understand the isolation of growing up alone.

For these reasons, Ada is reluctant to return to the house where she grew up. She remembers being lonely and wanting to get away from the isolation. It is not until Pearl is reflecting on her life that she recognizes the amount of time Ada spent by herself and how lonely that must have made her.

Unlike Ada, Pearl embraces the isolation of living along the river. She connects with the wildlife around her. It is as though her most sustained relationship is the one she has with the river. In that regard, it is fitting that the river would take her so that they could be together.

While Pearl and Luke clearly had a strong connection, they were unable to pursue a relationship after Pearl cancelled what would have been their first date. With Ada's



sickness being the cause, it is also likely that Pearl was afraid that Luke would leave her as Frank did.

Ada keeps her distance from Tristan, reminding him throughout the novel that she is leaving. She gives him reasons to not become emotionally invested in their relationship. He assures her that he hears what she is saying, and he makes no grand gestures in an effort to get her to stay. When Ada changes her mind about leaving, Tristan is there and they maintain the potential to continue with their relationship.

Grief

The author uses the theme of grief to introduce the reader to the possibility of healing through the supernatural.

In many ways, *Weathering* can be considered a ghost story. The lights do not come on until after Ada sees her mother's ghosts. Pepper interacts with the old woman by the river, who shows up at the window during the snowstorm. And Ada realizes Pepper is gone on New Year's Day when Pearl tells her.

Pearl's presence becomes a constant reminder of what Ada has lost. The purpose for her visit is to spread her mother's ashes and get the house fixed up to sell. It is clear from the outset of the novel that she has no intention of staying, and her only connection to the house is the loss of her mother.

In losing her mother, she is able to reconnect with her. Pearl's spirit is a manifestation of Ada's grief. While it is easy for Ada to begin working on the cosmetic aspects of the house and hire Tristan to help with the exterior issues, Ada delays going into the study or her mother's bedroom.

When Ada finally feels ready to confront her grief, she begins going through her mother's belongings. She learns about her mother's isolation, her missed opportunity with Luke, and her frugality.

Generations

The author uses three generations of women to convey the cycle of shared behavioral characteristics.

When the reader is first introduced to Pearl, she is being taken away by the river current. The next chapter introduces Pepper at the river's edge with her mother. When Luke meets Pepper, he immediately notes a resemblance to Pearl.

The connection between the women goes further than appearance. While Ada remains quick to move on from the house, Pepper takes interest in the things that Pearl used to enjoy. She likes the camera and watching the birds. Pepper feels comfortable spending time along the river.



Like Pearl, Pepper is comfortable being alone. This is also something that is shared with Ada. The women push people away, likely having learned the behavior from the others. Pearl pushes Luke away and Ada does the same with Tristan. They keep the men at a safe distance so that they do not get close enough to really get hurt.

At six-years-old, Pepper is not going to push away a romantic suitor, but it is clear that she struggles with how to interact with people. In the past she has gotten in fights in school, and when Petey tries to befriend her, she is confused as to what they would do because she really has not had any friends.

Pearl's observations about Ada's body and age demonstrate the influence one generation has over the next. While Ada may not plan on staying at the house, she begins to understand what it means to her and to Pepper.

Nature

The author uses the theme of nature to illustrate how forces beyond human control can influence characters' lives.

From the outset of the novel, nature is in control. Pearl is drowning in the river and she hits rocks and mud on the river bed. The river is the force that runs through the entirety of the novel, moving swiftly at times, and at others finding calm. Additionally, the river is personified by its chattering and rumbling that it feels like another character.

Though the river is responsible for Pearl's death, it is clear that she holds respect and admiration for the river, considering it her constant companion. When Ada returns, she does not hold the river in such high regard, but respects its power and understand how to coexist with it.

The river is not the only force of nature. Ada regrets returning to the house as winter approaches because she remembers many harsh winters. The house is drafty, electricity and gas unreliable, and yet it manages to be resilient in the wake of massive storms.

Thunderstorms and rain showers give way to massive snowstorms, ice, and flooding when it thaws. While Val may look to the summer months, the novel presents a world in which the weather holds power over the people who live there. It isolates them and that isolation manages to connect the people in the town.

As Pearl makes her way out to sea, she becomes a force of nature herself. She feels as though she will be able to begin the cycle through the river again, by returning at the start as rain.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is a third-person, omniscient narrator. The perspectives shift from Ada and Pepper in the present, to Pearl's experience in the river and remembering her past.

The viewpoints are of three women: Ada, Pearl, and Pepper. The three women are at distinctly different points in their lives and see the world thusly. Pearl reflects on her past and makes peace with aging and her subsequent death. Ada focuses on getting away from the place where she grew up only to discover how much the land and house and community are a part of her. Pepper, while logical and sometimes dark, sees the world through fresh, young eyes.

The story is contemporary, but does not offer a specific time and place. This allows the story to be viewed as a universal experience, particularly in familial relationships and the theme of man vs. nature.

The focus also shows each of the women with agency for themselves. They are self-reliant and self-sufficient. Though they all must learn to adapt to their environment, they do what they must to understand and figure out what is the right thing to do.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary in the novel is accessible, with minimal advanced words. The novel uses British spelling, such as "centre" (15), "labour" (15), "tyres" (87), and "pyjamas" (131).

British colloquialisms and slang are also utilized, such as "lorry" (87), "windscreen" (153), "jumper" (161), and "bonnet" (247), as well as "arse" (3) and "bullocks" (12).

Most of the novel is conveyed through prose. Dialogue is used throughout and is appropriate. The speakers' voices are natural and speak appropriately given ages and stations in life.

There is a lot of discussion of the elements and their impact on the house and people. Ada and Pepper arrive in the fall with the rains. They endure a harsh winter of snow and ice. A considerable amount of language is used to convey these natural elements.

Structure

The novel is comprised of 38 chapters of relatively equal length, although a few chapters are only a couple pages long. There is not a prologue or epilogue. The novel is 290 pages long.

The novel opens with Pearl in the water. The chapters told from her perspective move the timeline of the novel backward. She brings in the river and thinks back over her life with Ada and Ada's father Frank. The novel closes with Pearl moving from the river into the sea.

Pearl's timeline could be considered circular, in that her timeline will come back around like the seasons, as she reaches the sea and realizes she will become the rain and start her journey through the river again.

The majority of the chapters focus on Ada and Pepper in the present day timeline. Ada does have memories of her mother. Eventually, Pearl's ghost appears to Ada and she gains further insight into her mother's life. Ada's timeline is linear.

The weather plays a dominant role in the novel. It is a driving force in the plot. It also demonstrates power over the characters and locations.



Quotes

Her mother always said that they'd stay, but they never did."

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 28)

Importance: The quote illustrates the transient nature of Ada and Pepper's lives and indicates that Pepper would like to stay in one place.

Something roared and thumped. The river. It sounded like it was in the room."

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 11)

Importance: The quote demonstrates the powerful presence of the river and how it demands attention.

Pearl endured the rain all night. The kind that wore away at her bones. Battered, huddled on her rock, each drop seeping in until she was doused."

-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 59)

Importance: The quote shows the power over Pearl and her experience in the river.

She looked in the empty compartment one more time and tried to remember all the things she'd taken pictures of but she couldn't, they were lost, and she couldn't even look for them because they had never really existed."

-- Narrator (chapter 15 paragraph 56)

Importance: The quote demonstrates Pepper's isolation. Because she did not know about using film, she has lost her pictures and feels as lost as they are.

For the hush. To forget. To make some sort of record – but of what she wasn't sure exactly."

-- Narrator (chapter 17 paragraph 6)

Importance: The quote gives insight into how Pearl reacts to the river and allow it become part of her even though she may not understand it.

He was reliable, everyone kept telling her that, and he didn't have any other work on at the moment."

-- Narrator (chapter 22 paragraph 6)

Importance: The quote shows Ada talking herself into hiring Tristan for reasons other than her attraction to him.

She had forgotten to get wrapping paper – had never bought a present for her mother before."

-- Narrator (chapter 23 paragraph 1)



Importance: The quote illustrates Pepper's anxiety in giving her mother a gift because she wants it to be memorable and something she will cherish always.

How lonely it must have been for Ada out here, left behind in the house while Pearl went out looking for her dragonflies and her hoarfrosts.”

-- Narrator (chapter 26 paragraph 20)

Importance: The quote shows Pearl beginning to understand Ada's loneliness given Pearl's focus on isolating herself.

She glanced at Tristan, saw the freckles on his cheeks, thought of the tea-coloured freckles on his back.”

-- Narrator (chapter 28 paragraph 56)

Importance: The quote illustrates Ada's attraction to Tristan as she begins to recognize things about staying.

Then, suddenly, there was a face at the window – the old woman, standing outside and staring at the glass.”

-- Narrator (chapter 29 paragraph 24)

Importance: The quote illustrates the first time that Pepper, Ada, and Pearl are all connected to one another.

Ada stayed sitting on the step for a long time, watching the water. Listening to it like a voice that faded and surged and faded again.”

-- Narrator (chapter 34 paragraph 75)

Importance: The quote shows Ada's acceptance of her mother and understanding of why Pearl chose to stay.

And out she went. Spreading and dissolving in the water, stretching into peaks and humps, creased, folded scouring stones and bending sticks.”

-- Narrator (chapter 38 paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote shows Pearl becoming one with the water as her ashes move out to sea.