

The Yonahlossee Riding Camp For Girls Study Guide

**The Yonahlossee Riding Camp For Girls by Anton
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Plot Summary

It is 1930 when 15-year-old Thea Atwell is sent to the Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls. Thea has lived her entire life in the small town of Emathla, Florida with only her parents and twin brother Sam as company. Thea is resistant to the camp and wishes she didn't have to leave her home. The reader learns that Thea was sent away for doing something "terrible" involving a boy.

Thea slowly begins to adapt to life at the camp. She lives in a cabin with five other girls. One of them, a popular and wealthy girl named Sissy, becomes Thea's closest friend at the camp. Thea has spent her entire life riding a pony named Sasi, and continues riding every day at camp. The only other rider as skilled as Thea is Leona, a domineering and very wealthy girl.

Thea's mother and father write her letters wishing her well and cursing the "terrible thing" Thea did to be sent away. Soon after Thea arrives, there is a school dance. Sissy begins a romance with a boy named Boone.

One afternoon, Thea goes riding in the pouring rain. A few days later, she is incredibly sick and confined to the infirmary. Mrs. Holmes, the headmistress, diagnoses her with homesickness, but Thea protests. Mr. Holmes, the headmaster, visits Thea in the infirmary and reveals that she won't be leaving when the summer term is over. Thea realizes that her parents have sent her away for the full year instead of just the summer. She feels betrayed and resolves to make a better life for herself at Yonahlossee, without her family.

When Thea is well again, she asks Mr. Holmes if she can give his three young daughters riding lessons. Flashback scenes reveal the previous year, during which Thea begins growing closer to her cousin Georgie. There is a sexual undertone to their encounters and finally, around Christmas, they kiss. Their relationship continues and begins to create space between Thea and her twin brother Sam. Meanwhile, tensions grow between Thea and Georgie's parents, as Thea's Uncle George has lost his money to the Great Depression.

After Christmas, Mrs. Holmes is out of town for two months on a fundraising trip. Decca gets in a bad riding accident during Thea's lesson. Thea is riddled with guilt, and goes to Masters one night to apologize to Mr. Holmes. She begins visiting Decca every day while she recovers from a broken collarbone. Thea begins developing feelings for Mr. Holmes and tries to see him more and more. They begin talking after Thea's visits with Decca and one night Thea kisses him.

Girls begin leaving Yonahlossee because of the Depression. A rumor spreads that Leona's family has lost everything, and this creates a sense of panic among the students. Thea receives a letter from her mother that says they are selling the house in Emathla and moving to a smaller home in Orlando. Thea is devastated, as she is deeply connected to her childhood home. Meanwhile, Thea continues developing her



relationship with Mr. Holmes. They discuss their relationships with their respective families and Mr. Holmes helps Thea understand that parents are not always right in their actions. Thea begins focusing more on Mr. Holmes and less on her friends. It becomes so noticeable that a rumor begins spreading about her obsession with him.

In a flashback scene, Thea and Georgie have sex. Thea immediately regrets the act, as she has become increasingly unsure of her relationship with Georgie. The next day, Thea takes Sasi for a ride and runs into Sam and Georgie. Thea is clearly distressed in Georgie's presence, and Sam violently attacks Georgie. They have a physical fight during which Sam loses control and causes Georgie severe head trauma. Thea and Georgie's relationship is brought to light to everyone in the family.

In the present at Yonahlossee, Thea finally receives a letter from Sam. He sounds sad and exhausted. After reading the letter, Thea goes to see Mr. Holmes and they have sex in a clearing in the woods. Thea is in control of the experience and enjoys it. The following day is Yonahlossee annual Spring Show. Thea and Leona are neck-and-neck for first place. Thea does the final course in record-breaking speed and astonishes everyone. She wins first place. That night, there is a dance. Thea attends wearing an eye-catching green dress. She and Mr. Holmes have a final, brief confrontation about their relationship. Mrs. Holmes has returned from her fundraising trip.

That night, Sissy does not return to her cabin. Mary Abbott notices. Soon, a rumor is spreading about Sissy being seen in the woods with a boy. Everyone is certain she will be sent away if Mrs. Holmes finds out. Early one morning, Thea goes to Mrs. Holmes's office and takes responsibility for Sissy's actions, saying it was her in the woods and not Sissy. Mrs. Holmes sees through Thea's lie, but maliciously chooses to let Thea accept the blame. Thea feels she is ready to see her family again, though, and accepts being expelled.

Thea takes the train to Florida, where her mother and father greet her. Her father has aged greatly and her mother is now plagued by migraines. Sam seems older, too, and is still feeling the emotional toll of his fight with Georgie. Thea is not home for very long before she realizes she wants to leave again. Her mother accepts this. Thea reveals that Georgie dies several years later and Sam never leaves Florida. Thea attends a boarding school in the Northeast and, in growing apart from her family, comes to understand more about the larger world.



Chapter 1

Summary

It is the summer of 1930 when Theodora “Thea” Atwell is transported from her family’s 1,000-acre ranch in central Florida to the Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Though it is the start of the Great Depression, Thea’s family is able to afford the camp because her father is a physician and the Atwell’s have “family money.”

The book opens with Thea and her father driving through the Blue Ridge Mountains, where the camp is located. They arrive and Thea is in awe of the main building, called the “Castle,” as it is built on stilts into the mountain. Thea and her father are promptly greeted by Henry Holmes, the headmaster. They all head inside, where Thea’s father and Mr. Holmes ask to speak privately. Thea waits outside and sees several stacks of brochures. One says Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls, the other says Yonahlossee Riding School for Girls.

Thea is then taken to see her new living quarters. The girls at the camp all live in bunks named after the camp’s founders. Thea’s bunk is called Augusta House, and five other girls already live there: Elisabeth “Sissy” Gilliam, Gates Weeks, Mary Abbott McClellan, Victoria Harpen, and Eva Louise Crayton. Sissy introduces herself first and Thea likes her immediately.

Thea’s father leaves and the girls get ready for bed. They all walk to the privy in pairs, and Thea goes with Mary Abbott. Mary Abbott seems very nice, but Thea observes from other girls’ reactions that she is not someone to be seen with. As the girls fall asleep, Thea thinks about the fact that she has never been around so many other girls before. The last girl she had known was a neighbor named Milly. Milly was good friends with Thea’s twin brother Sam. Thea didn’t like their relationship, however, and buried Milly’s doll so she would stay away.

The next morning, a bell rings everyone awake. At breakfast, Thea is amazed by the sheer amount of girls. There are more than 200 girls in uniforms and the only way to distinguish them is by their hair. Thea is seated at a table with Mary Abbott, Victoria, Henny, and Miss Metcalfe, among others. A girl named Molly asks Thea why she arrived at the camp so late in the summer. Thea is clearly nervous answering, but quickly makes up a story about being in Paris.

Mrs. Holmes, the headmistress and wife of Mr. Holmes, finds Thea at her table and asks to speak with her. In her office, Mrs. Holmes shares the history and mission of the school. Thea finds out that Mrs. Holmes is an old friend of her mother’s. This shocks Thea because she didn’t think her mother had any old friends.



After meeting with Mrs. Holmes, Thea walks out to the horseback riding grounds. Mr. Albrecht, the German stablemaster, greets her and introduces her to the horse Luther, which Thea will use for her riding evaluation. Thea completes the evaluation course in a “blur.” She sees Mr. Holmes watching, but he leaves before she finishes. At the end of the chapter, Thea takes Luther back into the stables and cries.

Analysis

In this opening chapter, Thea is removed from the comfort of her familiar childhood surroundings and placed in an entirely unfamiliar environment. Her childhood in Florida was very sheltered and, therefore, she has more affection for the land and the home itself than for the people who populated it. Thea’s privilege is suddenly irrelevant, though, because the camp is filled with hundreds of other girls who come from wealthy families. Because of the Great Depression, only those who have a lot of money in their families can afford to come to the camp in the first place.

Now Thea’s main concern is fitting in with those around her. She is highly aware of the movements and expressions of other girls. She almost instantly notices that a friendship with Mary Abbott is frowned upon, and is just as quick to cast her aside. She is similarly relieved when she receives the uniform nightgown, as the one she had packed would have been “all wrong.” The nightgown is a metaphor for the way that Thea is just as wealthy as the other girls, but she does not understand the social behaviors associated with that wealth.

Thea mentions her twin brother, Sam, frequently throughout the chapter. He appears to be the strongest bond she has with anyone inside or outside of her family. She compares any man she meets to Sam, and is constantly wondering what he is doing at any given time. When Thea leaves home, she takes one of Sam’s monogrammed handkerchiefs and keeps it inside her dress or under her pillow. The handkerchief becomes a symbol for Thea’s powerful connection to her twin and how she wishes to keep the idea of him close at all times.

Thea has a vague but complicated relationship with her parents. While she and her father are driving to the school, Thea reflects on how formal and tense their relationship is. One evening on the road, they dine together and Thea realizes this is the first time she has ever eaten a meal alone with her father. They sleep in separate bedrooms in a hotel and Thea is concerned he will hear her crying through the wall.

When Thea hears that Mrs. Holmes is an old friend of her mother’s, Thea is completely shocked. It seems that Thea thinks she knows everything there is to know about her own mother, so not knowing about a friendship from the past is very significant. Thea is also concerned about Mrs. Holmes having contact with her mother, because it means that someone at the camp might know just exactly what Thea’s “trouble” was that caused her to be sent away.



Thea hints at the fact she was sent to the camp for something bad she did at home. Her late arrival indicates this was a last minute decision for the family. Thea is not willing to share the information about why she was sent away with those around her or with the reader. Though the reader does not know what Thea's "trouble" is, her tone indicates she is ashamed of it. Her attitude is not angry for being sent away, but desperate to compensate for her mistakes.

Throughout the chapter, Thea's emotional state is in constant fluctuation. She alternates between finding beauty in her new surroundings and loathing everyone and everything around her. Thea does not want to appear childish or overly emotional to those around her, yet her thoughts reveal that she is a combination of doubtful, scared, angry, and curious. She is torn between the shelter of her old life and the mystery of her new life at the camp.

At the end of the chapter, the reader sees Thea engage with horses for the first time. Throughout the novel, horses are a symbol of comfort and happiness. Riding is a state of solace for Thea. This is why, after having her riding evaluation, Thea cries. Riding a horse provides Thea with an emotional release in a world where emotional expression is stilted.

Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Thea's relationship with her family members? How do the ways she talks about her mother, father, and Sam differ?

Discussion Question 2

What are your first impressions about the camp itself? How would you describe the mood of the place?

Discussion Question 3

What does Mrs. Holmes mean when she says, "In this world of uncertainty, a lady is more important than she ever was"?

Vocabulary

melancholy, imposing, astride, coarse, sconce, toile, terrarium



Chapter 2

Summary

Thea walks back to Augusta House after her evaluation ride with Luther and Mr. Albrecht. She thinks about how she and Sam used to go on rides early in the morning. She recalls one day in particular when she was riding her pony, Sasi, and Sam was walking alongside her. All of a sudden, Sasi stepped in an underground yellow jacket nest, causing the bugs to sting all of them. Though Thea panicked, Sam remained incredibly calm and helped Thea and Sasi to safety.

Back at Augusta House, Thea begins looking for talcum powder to put in her riding boots. She decides to look through the other girls' desks and cabinets. First, she looks through Sissy's things, and finds many expensive dresses and jewelry. Thea finds a pair of ruby earrings and tries them on. Next, she looks through Eva and Mary Abbott's things. She discovers Mary Abbott is very religious.

Thea pauses and looks out the window, where she sees Mr. Holmes walking through the courtyard. She admires how handsome he is. Thea doesn't notice when Docey, the maid, comes into the cabin. Thea thinks she's been caught snooping, but Docey doesn't say anything. When Docey leaves, Thea thinks that she makes a motion reminding her to take off the ruby earrings.

Later that day, all the girls go to the bathhouse. Thea is nervous being naked in front of everyone else. After they wash, Sissy asks Thea why she was so late coming to camp. Thea confesses she was "sent away" from home, and immediately regrets being truthful.

The girls return to Augusta House, where Gates is working on her penmanship. Thea asks about the life of a schoolgirl. Sissy says that Thea must be a schoolgirl, too, because this is a year-round cabin. Thea mentally denies this, and said she was placed in this cabin because there was no room elsewhere.

Analysis

This chapter is focused on comparing Thea's new daily life to her old life in Florida. The anecdote about Sam and the yellow jacket's nest shows that Thea is quick to panic, and that she relies on Sam to help her through difficult situations. This chapter introduces Thea's childhood pony, Sasi. Thea emphasizes how she would ride Sasi every single day and this shows how deep their connection is. Sasi becomes a symbol for Thea's childhood connection to nature and the land around her. Later in the novel, Thea will begin neglecting Sasi just as she is neglecting herself as a child.

After the anecdote about the yellow jacket's nest, Thea says a situation like that wouldn't even happen at the camp because everyone is being "watched" all the time.



Though Thea is not as sheltered as she once was, there is a sense of control and order that are just as, if not more, present. Watching is a theme that continues throughout the novel. Thea feels watched by those around her, but she is also a keen observer herself.

Thea's role as a "watcher" is evident when she is looking through her cabin-mates' things. Here, Thea briefly experiences lives that are different from her own. She is most struck by Sissy, who has clothes and jewelry even more beautiful than her own. When Thea looks through Eva's things, she thinks about how she has never been to a party (only to a restaurant), and has never been with a boy in a romantic sense.

At the bathhouse, Thea is nervous about being naked in front of so many other girls. The theme of being watched is reiterated in the bathhouse, where all of the girls wash at one time. Thea tries to focus on herself, yet also can't help but look around. This scene introduces the theme of sexuality. Thea is going through puberty and seems uncertain about the ways in which her body is changing. There is also a sense of shame attached to Thea's nakedness.

Any hint of sexuality is frowned upon throughout the camp. Thea's cabin-mates share stories about girls who have gotten in trouble in the past. One girl was caught smoking in the woods and received a warning. Another girl was caught with a boy and she was sent away immediately.

Towards the end of the chapter, Thea begins to let her guard down around the other girls. At the bathhouse, she jokes around with Sissy, and when Sissy laughs, Thea realizes she has never made someone else besides Sam laugh so hard. After connecting Sissy to Sam, Thea seems to begin building trust with Sissy and decides to reveal that she was so late coming to the camp because she was "sent away" by her family. As soon as she says the words, however, Thea regrets them. She feels it would be better to trust no one and keep up appearances, as she has been taught. The repeated tone of shame in Thea's thoughts begin to foreshadow that Thea may have been sent away for something sexual in nature. In response to Thea's confession, Sissy only makes a joke and it is unclear how she feels about Thea's confession.

Talking to her cabin mates about life as a schoolgirl reveals how Thea is in denial about her position at the camp. The way she thinks and acts indicates that she believes she is only there as a summer "camper" and not a year-round "schoolgirl." This clear denial foreshadows that Thea may be staying at the camp for a longer time than she anticipated.

The chapter ends with Thea once again comparing herself to the girls around her. She feels alienated from them because of her upbringing, where she was only a girl among "boys and men" and her mother was the only standard of female beauty. Finally, Thea falls asleep touching Sam's handkerchief under her pillow. This symbol reminds the reader that, though Thea is making friends and starting to fit in at Yonahlossee, her mind and heart remains with her family.



Discussion Question 1

Thea sees Mr. Holmes and thinks he is the most beautiful man she has ever seen. Make a prediction about how his role in the story might develop.

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Thea is right to begin trusting the other girls? Do you think Sissy and the others genuinely care about Thea or do they have an ulterior motive?

Discussion Question 3

Thea tells Sissy that she has been “sent away” from her family. Are there any textual clues that indicate why she would have been sent away?

Vocabulary

fervor, tacked, keenly, languidly, sidling



Chapter 3

Summary

On Thea's seventh day at the camp, she receives a letter from her father. In the letter, Thea's father expresses how sad he was to leave Thea, but he also says that she was kept too secluded throughout her life and that her time at camp will be an opportunity to learn. Thea puts the letter under her pillow, with Sam's handkerchief.

It is rest hour, but Thea's cabin mates are talking excitedly about a dance Mr. Holmes announced during lunchtime. For the girls, a dance is a rare and special occasion. Thea isn't too interested, though, and instead focused on memorizing the Robert Frost poem "The Cow in Apple Time" for her elocution class.

Thea drifts into thinking about her family's history. She recollects how her great-grandparents moved to Florida and accumulated their wealth in the citrus industry. Thea's parents met at a semiformal dance in Atlanta and settled in Emathla, Florida, where Thea's father would be the only doctor for miles. Thea's uncle George, his wife Carrie, and their son Georgie settled in Gainesville.

A bell rings, and rest hour is over. Thea wakes up, not even realizing she had fallen asleep. The girls get dressed and head to the stables for horseback riding. On the way to the stables Sissy points out Leona, a very tall and beautiful girl from Fort Worth. Sissy says Leona is incredibly wealthy and has been trained in horseback riding by masters.

Thea compares herself to Leona, which leads her to think of her family. She thinks of Sam and the day they said goodbye to each other. She found Sam on the back porch caring for a newborn baby squirrel. Sam was wearing clothes from the day before and had messy hair and a bruised eye. Thea realizes how badly she must have hurt him, but does not explain how or why.

Back at the stables, Thea is introduced to her new horse, a mare named Naari. She is placed in the advanced class with Leona and Gates. Sissy is in the intermediate class and not a very good rider. Mr. Albrecht instructs the class and Thea moves nimbly through the lesson.

Some time passes and Thea is now at morning prayer. While Mr. Holmes leads the prayer, Thea observes Mrs. Holmes and the Holmes' three young daughters who are sitting at the front of the room. After his prayer, Mr. Holmes says that President Herbert Hoover believes the Depression is ending. Mr. Holmes encourages the girls to tell their fathers to invest and spend money. Mrs. Holmes then asks for donations for the less fortunate. The realizes she doesn't have any physical money, and asks Eva what to do about this. Eva makes a comment about Thea being from Florida and immediately feels bad, but Thea agrees and says Florida is a strange place.



Analysis

When Thea receives the letter from her father, she says she has never received a letter before, only a postcard from her cousin Georgie. These letters reinforces the isolation of Thea's childhood in comparison to her new, more open life at the camp. She now has relationships that exist outside of her immediate space. The tone of the letter shows how disconnected Thea is from her parents. Her father's tone is caring, but in a removed sort of way that reveals there is something unspoken between them.

Thea and Sam's respective relationships with animals are a prominent theme in this chapter, and in the story overall. When Thea thinks back to the morning she and Sam said goodbye, Sam was on the back porch caring for one of his baby squirrels. Sam's gentleness and sensitivity are emphasized in the way he faithfully cares for his animals. Thea, on the other hand, has a powerful relationship with her horses. During her first ride with Naari, Thea works in tandem with the horse to begin building a partnership. These two different relationships with nature are one of the many ways in which Thea and Sam are similar in their philosophies but different in who they are as people.

Sam's physical state on the day that he and Thea said goodbye helps to foreshadow what Thea's "trouble" might be. He is disheveled and has a black eye. Thea notes these things with regret, and they are clearly connected to whatever it was that Thea did to be sent away.

Riding Naari is the only time that Thea doesn't seem focused on what others are thinking of her. She feels in control and confident in her talents as a rider, even in comparison to the highly-skilled Leona. Being at the stables is the closest Thea feels to "home." Nature is a theme in the novel and represents a place where Thea is free from outside pressures. Nature is where Thea connects with her horses and herself.

Though Thea comes from a wealthy background, Mr. Holmes' comments about Herbert Hoover make Thea realize that wealthy or not, her family is very different than the other girls'. The other girls are very rooted in Southern high society and hope to preserve that identity. Thea says she has never even held physical money. Thea's feelings of being different are emphasized in the classes she is taking. She says her parents were never concerned if Thea had perfect handwriting or perfect table manners, but these are things that other girls seem concerned about.

Though Thea is now growing more comfortable at the camp, she is still questioning what everyone around her thinks of her. Away from her family, Thea is uncertain of her own identity. During Mr. Holmes' morning prayer, Thea watches his three daughters and questions whether they think she is pretty. After Mr. Holmes makes comments about Herbert Hoover, all of the girls laugh. Thea laughs not because she understands the joke, but because she doesn't want to be seen doing something different than the other girls. This chapter begins to emphasize the tension between Thea's desire to stand out as special, but also to fit in as average.



Discussion Question 1

How would you describe the tone of the letter that Thea receives from her father? Does it seem genuine?

Discussion Question 2

What is your first impression of Leona? Will she and Thea grow to become friends or enemies?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of this chapter, Eva alludes to Florida being a different kind of place. What seems to make it different than where the other girls are from, based on Thea's description as well as her personality?

Vocabulary

capricious, speculator, droned, unmoored, impertinent



Chapter 4

Summary

On the day of the dance, Thea receives a letter from her mother. In the letter, Thea's mother talks about the garden for two pages, before finally addressing her feelings towards Thea, which alternate between anger and sadness.

Thea's cabin mates are very excited for the dance that evening, and Eva and Sissy practice a waltz together. Thea and Mary Abbott are the only people who are not excited.

Thea thinks about the story of when she and Sam were born. There was a rare winter storm that destroyed the garden. Thea's parents were not expecting twins, but Thea was born first and followed quickly by Sam. Thea thinks about the ways in which their lives were entirely planned out for them, through college and beyond.

At the dance, all of the girls put on their finest clothes and jewelry. Thea observes the different cliques, from the snobbish girls from Memphis to the big-city Atlanta girls. The dance takes place in the dining hall, which has been decorated with many flowers. The boys at the dance, who come from a boarding school in Asheville, stand in a line at the front of the hall.

Mr. Holmes announces the start of the dance, and the boys approach the girls. Thea accidentally bumps into Leona and they speak briefly. A skinny boy named Harry asks Thea to dance. Thea doesn't enjoy it very much, and excuses herself after one song. Sissy finds Thea and says she saw Leona talking with her.

Thea accepts a few more dances before sitting to the side of the room. Henny is there, criticizing the dresses of the other girls. Thea sees Mary Abbott standing alone on the other side of the room. She debates whether or not she should go and speak with her. Eventually, Mr. Holmes appears and begins talking to Mary Abbott.

A dark-haired boy named David approaches Thea and asks her to dance. She sees other girls are jealous of her and her attractive partner, but at the same time Thea hardly wants to dance at all.

She feels a tap on her shoulder, and Mrs. Holmes gives Thea a warning that she and David are dancing too close together. Thea hadn't realized, and she is very embarrassed. She feels like everyone is watching her, and excuses herself from the dance. Mr. Holmes offers her a smile of consolation, but Thea still feels ashamed.



Analysis

Thea continues to hide the reason she was sent away, but continues to include subtle clues. Thea receives a letter from her mother that ends with a reference to the “terrible thing” that Thea did that caused her to be sent away. The letter from Thea's mother is written on elegant monogrammed stationary. This stationary is a symbol for the way in which Thea's mother is concerned with maintaining proper appearances. She would rather maintain her image instead of have an open discussion of emotion.

Later in the chapter, when Thea is talking about the status of other girls at Yonahlossee, she notes that her family was never in the “society pages” and that her “mistake” was therefore only a risk to the relationships within her family. At the dance, Thea thinks it doesn't matter what she does or doesn't do, because she has already “failed, at home, in a way that could not be forgiven.” Perhaps Thea is repressing what actually happened, but is experiencing the feelings and repercussions in her present moment at Yonahlossee.

The theme of sexuality is heavily present in this chapter. Thea seems uncomfortable around and uninterested in boys. Thea is not very excited about the dance, despite the fact that all of the other girls seem to be. At the dance, Thea dances with the handsome David and can see the fact that her classmates are jealous of her attractive partner. However, Thea doesn't seem at all interested. She is once again more interested in the approval of her peers than anything else. Mrs. Holmes reprimands Thea for dancing too close to David. Thea's is mortified and immediately leaves, though it does not seem like Mrs. Holmes was very angry. She is filled with feelings of shame and immediately connects these feelings to when she was sent away from her family.

Thea wrestles with the idea that she was an “unwanted” child, showing she is questioning her place within her family. Her parents were anticipating a son based on the way her mother carried during pregnancy. So when Thea came first during the birth, Thea's parents were disappointed, only to then be overjoyed when Sam arrived. Yet because they had been expecting a son, Thea was the real surprise between the two. This idea of Thea being “lesser” is reiterated when she describes how her and Sam's futures would have unfolded. The two seem equal for the most part: both of them would go to Emory and receive an education. After college, though, Thea envisions Sam becoming a doctor or lawyer, while she would merely find a husband and live wherever he did. This concern of Thea's is tied to the theme of womanhood. Thea is forced to come to terms with the fact that she is becoming a woman, and as a woman, she will be valued less than Sam.

As the narrator, Thea often foreshadows to her life once she has left the camp. At the end of the chapter, Thea says “it would be years” before she realized that she was not a monster, as her mother made her feel, but merely a “confused, wronged girl.” Though Thea indicates that she would outgrow this phase as an adult, the final words of the chapter, “I came to Yonahlossee a person worthy of blame,” (87) indicate there is still much about this journey that the reader has yet to learn.



Discussion Question 1

How would you characterize Thea's view of boys her own age?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways were Sam and Thea treated differently by their parents?

Discussion Question 3

Does Thea seem to genuinely believe she is worthy of blame, or is she simply repeating the opinions of her parents?

Vocabulary

unnerved, relented, colicky, convalescence, interminable



Chapter 5

Summary

The chapter opens with Thea reminiscing about when her mother used to take her and Sam to Orlando. Thea is mystified at how her mother could have been happy living such a quiet and isolated life.

Thea describes how she would ride Sasi every single day, regardless of whether she was sick or it was raining. Thea says her mother used to ride, but doesn't anymore. Sometimes, Thea would take Sam riding with her and the experience was thrilling.

The chapter then turns to a flashback sequence to when Thea was 14. Thea woke up in Florida, and her cousin Georgie asked her to come outside with him. Thea protested, saying she was tired, but eventually gave in and accompanied Georgie to the back porch. Thea thought Georgie seemed distant, though he was usually so open and confident. They talked for a while before falling asleep on the porch, where their fathers found them laying the next morning. When Thea went inside, she found she had gotten her period for the first time and was horrified.

That afternoon, Thea, Sam, and Georgie went out looking for a snake for Sam's terrarium. Thea spotted one in the grass and was proud of herself. When Thea returned to the house, her mother was waiting for her and confronted her about getting her period. Thea was mortified, but her mother explained that it was nothing to be ashamed of. She explained that this meant Thea could have a child now.

That evening, when Thea's father came home from work, Thea overheard her parents whispering about something involving her aunt and uncle. The whole family then gathered on the back porch for drinks. Thea and Georgie watched Sam play with the snake they found earlier that day.

Suddenly, Thea heard someone crying and turned to see it was Aunt Carrie. Uncle George revealed that he had lost all of his money on a bad property investment in Miami. Thea's father tried to comfort his brother. Thea felt sick.

Georgie stood and walked off. Thea, angry too, ran after him. They went to the barn, where Georgie revealed how frustrated he was that he didn't have money in the same way that Thea did. Thea comforted him and told him everything would work out. Georgie calmed down and Thea was momentarily pleased with her world.

Analysis

This chapter introduces Aunt Carrie, Uncle George, and Georgie as significant characters in Thea's past. The effects of the Great Depression are suddenly very prominent in the Atwell family. Thea doesn't fully grasp her uncle's financial situation,



highlighting her disconnect from the world of money, despite the fact that she is wealthy herself. The Thea in this flashback chapter seems much more naive than the Thea who has been at Yonahlossee for some time. This emphasizes how much Thea has sobered and been forced to mature in the short space of time, revealing that elements of her young womanhood may have been forced upon her.

Thea is ashamed of getting her period, despite the fact that her mother is happy and tells her it is normal. Thea's mother is comforting and encouraging, which contrasts the sad and angry image of her that Thea has painted so far. She wants Thea to be happy and honest with her. This adds to the foreshadowed idea that is slowly being built relating to the "terrible thing" that happened. Here, Thea's mother is teaching her to not be ashamed of becoming a woman. Yet in the present chapters, Thea has great shame attached to her womanhood. The reader is able to make the connection between these scenes and understand that Thea's "terrible thing" is sexual in nature.

Thea getting her period also acts as a symbol: it is an official line that disconnects her from Sam and Georgie. She is no longer a child who easily blends in with the other children, but a woman capable of having children herself. This is reflected in the way that Thea is mortified at the thought of Sam and Georgie finding out. Though Thea's mother assures her she won't tell anyone, Thea is paranoid that her brother and cousin will somehow know and be disgusted by her, now different from them.

Sam's terrarium is a symbol that appears first in this chapter, and will appear again later in the novel. The terrarium represents the different ways that Sam and Thea see the world. Sam is eager to catch creatures and observe them at a safe distance for a short amount of time, just as he is content to remain at home in safety and comfort. This contrasts the way that Thea eventually comes to embrace the larger world. The snake in this chapter also acts as a symbol. In this case, it represents the evil that Thea will fall into. In this scene, Thea is rewarded for finding the snake, when later she will be punished for her curiosity and fearlessness. The snake also acts as a phallic symbol and represents how Thea will be punished for her foray into the sexual world.

Georgie is afraid of horses and does not seem at home in the wilderness. This contrasts the ways in which Thea and Sam are both very in touch with the nature around them. In the scene where Thea, Sam, and Georgie go for a walk in the forest, Thea and Sam are very in sync in seeking out and identifying the snake. Georgie seems like a third wheel in this scene, as he is not as familiar with and in command of nature as Thea and Sam.

Thea and Georgie appear to have a very close relationship. He confides in her even when he is feeling angry and sad about his father's monetary loss. They also appear to have a comfortable physical relationship: Georgie lightly rubs Thea's arm and plays with her hair. Thea describes the intense pleasure of these slight touches in a way that seems to go beyond what would be considered normal for cousins. Thea doesn't see their relationship as strange, though, and is proud of the way she is able to comfort Georgie in his time of distress. In her moment of consoling Georgie, Thea doesn't seem to think that her world will ever be any bigger or different and that she will remain completely happy with that. This paints a stark difference in Thea's character,



specifically her innocence and connection to childhood, as it appears in the past and the present.

Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Thea's relationship to Georgie in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Thea in this flashback scene to Thea at Yonahlossee.

Discussion Question 3

How do Thea's parents seem different in this flashback scene than in the present scenes at Yonahlossee?

Vocabulary

vile, ponder, bridle, curried, decanter, mollified



Chapter 6

Summary

This chapter returns to Thea's present time at Yonahlossee. It is pouring rain and Thea is in the middle of her group riding lesson. Each girl is being individually evaluated and Thea is next in line. Thea is able to maintain focus despite distractions. On the last jump, Thea's leather saddle breaks and she is left hanging off of Naari's side. Thea is trapped and can't let go or else she will be trampled. Finally, Thea manages to hoist herself up by Naari's neck and safely dismount the horse.

After the lesson, Thea and Leona are both in the stable at the same time. They talk and have a disagreement about horses. Leona believes a dumb horse is better because it will always follow instructions. Thea believes a smart horse is better. Leona says that a horse is a weapon. She shares the story of her sister, who died after being kicked in the head by a horse.

At night, Mary Abbott wakes Thea. Thea realizes she is very ill, despite only having a cold when she went to bed. Thea is taken to the infirmary, where Mrs. Holmes checks up on her every hour. A doctor comes to examine Thea and Mrs. Holmes tells him that, on top of riding in the rain, Thea has been very homesick. The doctor disagrees with Mrs. Holmes and says it is merely a bad cold.

Several days later, Thea is still in the infirmary and Mr. Holmes comes to visit her. Thea is reading *Howards End* and the two briefly discuss their love for literature. Mr. Holmes brings up Thea's homesickness, which Thea protests. She believes she will be going home soon, when the summer ends. Mr. Holmes reveals that she will be staying, as her father reserved space for a year. When Mr. Holmes leaves, Thea cries into her pillow. Thea recalls when she was ten, a woman in Emaltha killed herself because she believed she was responsible for her child's death. Thea is filled with a renewed sense of independence and decides that she will make a home for herself.

Sissy visits Thea in the infirmary. She shares a rumor that Thea was sent away because of a boy. Thea admits that it's true. Sissy then asks for Thea's help with Boone, a boy she met at the dance. They have been writing each other letters and want to meet in the woods at night. Thea, too, received a letter from David after the dance, but did not respond. Sissy says she is in love with Boone. Thea agrees to help Sissy, despite the risk that Sissy could be expelled from Yonahlossee.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the theme of fearlessness. Thea is fearless when it comes to horses, and she even describes herself as such. She is a quick-thinker when riding Naari, even in the doubly-dangerous conditions of rain and a broken saddle. Thea also has faith in her horse's abilities and intelligence and tries to remain in touch with what



Naari is thinking and seeing while riding. This interaction reinforces the theme of Thea's connection to nature. At Yonahlossee, Thea's emotions are constantly fluctuating, but her care and control while riding has remained consistent. Thea believes an intelligent horse is better because it represents an equal connection between human and animal. Thea has previously expressed a larger compassion for nature and land than for people.

When Thea is sick in the infirmary, she explores the idea of physical self-punishment. After Mr. Holmes reveals that Thea will be remaining at Yonahlossee for a full year rather than just the summer, Thea is filled with anger and self-loathing. She feels she has been betrayed by her parents even more than before. When Thea thinks about the woman who killed herself by drinking ammonia, she is thinking about how she must now suffer further for her past mistakes.

Yet, instead of harming herself, Thea decides to take charge and make Yonahlossee her home. Home is an incredibly important physical and mental state for Thea, who previously described her deep love for the house and land on which she grew up. She now feels abandoned by her family, and decides that she will forge a new family at Yonahlossee.

The reader is given another clue about Thea's past mistakes when Sissy brings up the rumor that Thea was sent away because of a boy. Thea says that this rumor is true. So far, the only boys that have been brought up in Thea's past are Sam and Georgie. The collective information thus far foreshadows that Thea was sent away because of exploring her sexuality in relation to a boy, potentially someone close to her.

Sissy's genuine infatuation with Boone is a foreign concept to Thea who, in the present, is still uninterested in being more involved with boys. Yet, she decides to help Sissy because of her newfound realization about the world being bigger than her home in Emathla. At the end of the chapter, Thea actually feels bad for Sam because he is still isolated while Thea has been liberated and allowed to see another part of the world. This thought contrasts Thea's thoughts in earlier chapters, where she expressed jealousy that Sam would someday go on to see the world while she would be doomed to remain a housewife. Now, Thea's perspective has shifted and she is able to see that, in being sent away from home, she is actually getting to experience a world she otherwise wouldn't have experienced.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Thea is actually homesick? How else might her feelings be described?

Discussion Question 2

Are there any clues in the text indicating who the "boy" that got Thea sent away might be?



Discussion Question 3

How do you think Thea's new outlook will influence her time at Yonahlossee in the coming chapters?

Vocabulary

imperiousness, delirium, musty, rube, condolences, overwrought, incredulously



Chapter 7

Summary

After three weeks, Thea leaves the infirmary. She describes that she actually became sicker before getting better, and that she was kept under Mrs. Holmes's orders. It is now fall, and Thea experiences the changing of the seasons for the first time. Many other things have changed during this time: Henry is now engaged, Katherine Hayes's uncle murdered his wife because they lost money. Jettie was caught drinking. Victoria, one of the Augusta House girls, had left because her family business went bankrupt. The summer-only campers have gone home. Sissy finds out that the three-week fundraising trip Mrs. Holmes goes on every winter will be six weeks this year because of the difficult economic times.

Thea is not allowed to ride, and her muscles have heavily deteriorated from being sick in bed. Thea still goes to the stables, though, to visit Naari. While she is there, she runs into Decca Holmes, the youngest Holmes daughter, and she and Thea talk and feed Naari sugar cubes. Thea realizes she has never seen any of the Holmes girls on horseback. She walks with Decca back to the Castle.

The next day, Thea approaches Mr. Holmes and asks to speak with him. They go to his office and Thea tells Mr. Holmes that she wants to teach his daughters how to ride horses. Mr. Holmes ponders the idea and says they do need to learn at some point. Thea begs him, saying that she needs to be around horses when she herself can't ride. Mr. Holmes finally agrees and says he will convince his wife.

Thea is distracted during a history lesson and is disappointed in herself, thinking Sam would know all of the answers. After class, Thea runs to catch up with Leona. Thea thanks her for sending chocolates while Thea was sick. They part and Thea sits down for dinner, eager to once again be one of the many Yonahlossee girls.

Analysis

When Thea leaves the infirmary and sees the colors of fall for the first time, she experiences the beauty of nature in an entirely new way. Before, she was convinced that her homeland was the best of all, but now she is beginning to see new ways in which the outside world can offer her its own kind of beauty.

As soon as Thea is released from the infirmary, she hears and onslaught of new rumors and information, proving that Yonahlossee is a small world and word travels quickly, but also that there will always be a new rumor to take place of the old one. In the last chapter, Sissy mentioned a rumor about Thea, and Thea was embarrassed, but there is already new information to take its place. This is another way in which Thea begins to realize the larger world. She is focused on herself and the perception of herself. The novel being told in first-person is a technique that helps set the tone of everything



happening directly around Thea. Yet, in this chapter she is growing to understand that not everything happening directly implicates her.

Even though Thea can't ride horses for a time because of her weak state, horses still empower her to be fearless. After speaking with Decca just once in the stable, Thea is bold enough to seek out Mr. Holmes and ask to set up riding lessons for his daughters. She is highly persistent and describes her own "desperation" in the situation. Yet Thea also has an ulterior motive that inspires her persistence. She thinks to herself that part of the reason she wants to give the Holmes girls lessons is simply to be around a family. Because Thea feels she has lost the connection to her own family, the Holmes family acts as a replacement for that same kind of connection Thea so desperately seeks. Thea also wants to be closer to Mrs. Holmes. Thea describes how she wants Mr. Holmes to "watch" her teaching his daughters. Though she genuinely wants to make the Holmes girls good riders, Thea is also seeking out the approval of Mr. Holmes.

Leona appears to have developed a fondness for Thea. We find out that Leona sent Thea chocolates while she was sick, and when Thea thanks her for it, Leona playfully acknowledges her. Though she pokes fun at Thea's naivete by tricking her into thinking the chocolates were sent from Texas, the gift itself means that Leona took note of Thea's absence.

Discussion Question 1

After Thea made the declaration that she would make Yonahlossee her home in the last chapter, how do you see her behavior changing in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

How do you see Thea and Mr. Holmes's relationship evolving up to this point and beyond?

Discussion Question 3

Would you consider Thea and Leona rivals, friends, or something else?

Vocabulary

Impassioned, quizzically, scrumptious



Chapter 8

Summary

Chapter 8 opens with Thea receiving another letter from her father. The letter says that Thea has not written home in almost a month. Thea's father says he hopes this means Thea is busy, but he also asks her to "take pity" on and "be merciful" to her parents and send a letter. Thea acknowledges to the reader that she has not written since she found out she would not be returning to Florida at the end of the summer. Thea describes "training" herself so she will not desire her family.

It is now Thanksgiving and every girl except Mary Abbott has gone home to celebrate the holiday. At dinner, Decca finds Thea and invites her to sit with the Holmes family and the teachers at the head table. Thea sees other girls file in and makes eye contact with Leona. There have been rumors of Leona's family losing money, but Leona doesn't seem to be acting differently.

At the head table, Thea notices Mrs. Holmes's old-fashioned mourning locket. She thinks about how she has developed genuine love for the three daughters now that she has been teaching them. Thea also likes the feeling of being needed by the family. Mr. Holmes leads the girls of Yonahlossee in a prayer and acknowledges, for the first time, the girls who have been sent home recently because of financial strains.

During the meal, Thea converses openly with those at the table. She talks about how being from Florida is being "a different breed." Suddenly, Rachel begins to cry. Mrs. Holmes leaves with her. After the meal, Leona finds Thea and suggests they go on a nighttime ride. Thea follows Leona to the otherwise empty stables and they take Naari and King out on a trail. They arrive in a clearing and race their horses at full speed. Thea beats Leona in the race to the other side. After they ride, they walk together to cool down their horses. Leona confides that she knows other girls don't like her and find her "cold." She also says that she doesn't care what others think, and only cares about horses. Thea thinks there's no way Leona's family could be losing money based on the way Leona is acting.

That night, Thea thinks of her mother. Specifically, how her mother used to ride a horse named Chikee who died when Thea was seven. Her mother has not rode since. Thea sees a face outside the window and realizes it is Boone. Thea explains Sissy is gone for Thanksgiving. They continue to stand outside and talk. He offers her a cigarette. Boone genuinely wants to know if Sissy has feelings for him. He also mentions David, who sent Thea a letter that was never answered.

Thea writes Sam a letter, telling him that she thinks of him all the time. She acknowledges the "terrible thing" she did and how Sam must hate her for it. She also tells him about teaching the Holmes girls to ride. Thea then receives a birthday gift from her family: a pair of pearl and diamond earrings. She recalls her last birthday, on which



Sam and Georgie were given matching rifles. Thea doesn't tell anyone at Yonahlossee that it is her birthday.

Analysis

Thea puts the letter from her father into her desk drawer, where Sam's handkerchief now sits. These once-significant items being moved from their former place under her pillow symbolizes Thea trying to detach herself from her family. They are now kept in her desk drawer, where the other girls keep mementos from their families. Thea is succeeding both in "training" herself away from her family and becoming more like the other girls, who did not grow up as isolated with their families and, therefore, dependent upon them.

Though Thea is separating herself from her biological family, she is climbing the social ladder at Yonahlossee and has garnered influence within the Holmes family. Her invitation sit with them at Thanksgiving dinner indicates a place of significance within the Yonahlossee administration. Thea does her best to be quick-witted and worldly around these people, and her conversation flows easily and naturally as they talk about the South.

Thea draws a comparison between Mrs. Holmes and her own mother. Mrs. Holmes's mourning locket, called a cameo, is compared to one Thea's mother had. Thea has previously talked about how her mother's physical appearance is reminiscent of the Victorians. These similarities show a similar standard of beauty and thinking between the two. Both of the women are represented as quiet and contemplative, and neither reveals too much emotion.

Thea and Leona's connection continues to deepen in this chapter. They go for a nighttime ride, and though they don't talk much, they both experience the beauty and power of horses during an impromptu race. Leona embodies the fearlessness that Thea feels when she rides. Though rumors are swirling that Leona's family is in financial trouble, Leona manages to maintain a calm attitude. She even addresses the fact that other girls dislike her, but in not caring she is expressing power over her public image and a true fearlessness.

Boone and Sissy represent a normal romantic relationship between two teenagers, something that Thea has never seen before. Thea has a confused and shameful mentality when it comes to sexuality, and this is evident when she is talking alone with Boone. On one hand, she sees that he is a genuinely nice person and cares about Sissy, but on the other hand, Thea momentarily believes Boone is going to kiss her. She feels "foolish" in this moment, and reprimands herself for seeing signs where they don't exist. Thea often sees these kinds of "signs" throughout the book, and she is constantly aware of any male presence around her.

Thea's letter to Sam is the first time they have communicated since Thea left for Yonahlossee. The letter begins talking about their birthday, but quickly becomes veiled



references to the “terrible thing” that Thea did, and how Sam must now hate her. These references are still not elaborated upon, but the focus is much more on the point of blame. At the end of the letter, she asks if Georgie is healing, indicating that something must have brought him harm. This implicates Georgie in the “terrible thing” that Thea did. Gradually, the pieces of Thea’s past are coming together. When Thea first arrived at Yonahlossee, she thought of Sam near-constantly. Now, she is thinking of him much less regularly. Yet this letter reveals that Thea’s connection with Sam is still incredibly important. Though he is not at the forefront of her thoughts, she seeks his approval and his forgiveness as much as ever.

Discussion Question 1

How is Thea’s relationship developing with each member of the Holmes family?

Discussion Question 2

What might have happened to Georgie that he is now “healing?”

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Thea compares her mother to Mrs. Holmes? Are they actually similar or does Thea find these similarities for another reason?

Vocabulary

melodious, velocity, earnest, autonomy



Chapter 9

Summary

In Chapter 9, Thea thinks back on last year's Thanksgiving, which was spent at her aunt and uncle's home in Gainesville. Thea was sick and resting while her family prepared the meal. Georgie visited Thea in bed and Thea was once again filled with a sense of "intense pleasure" at his presence. She was "greedy" for this feeling and didn't want it to end. A few moments later, Thea realized that Sam was in the room as well.

The day after Thanksgiving, Thea felt better. She woke up in the room where Sam and Georgie were also sleeping, and noticed Georgie was gone. Georgie then entered the room and Thea was suddenly nervous and excited to see him. Thea invited him into bed with her. Georgie touched Thea's face and throat. Thea thought this felt different and more intense than their usual friendly touching. Just as they were getting closer, Thea's mother knocked on the door and entered to wake up the children. Georgie pretended to be asleep while Thea's mother observed the situation. Sam and Thea were then alone in the room, and Sam seemed "strange." Thea felt as though she had been "caught."

A few weeks later, Thea was helping her mother decorate the house for Christmas. She found the work "tedious" and was annoyed that Sam was off doing whatever he wanted while she had to work. Thea's mother then revealed that Georgie would be staying with them for a few weeks because of his parents' financial situation. Thea's mother specified that Georgie will sleep in Sam's room, which irritated Thea. Thea's mother explained it is because Thea was "getting older."

Thea took Sasi for a ride and took out her frustrations on him by being an overly-aggressive rider. She found Sam sitting on the fence and told him that Georgie would be staying with them. Sam already knew, and knew that Georgie would be sleeping in his room. Thea was enraged that he knew this and rode Sasi away.

The chapter then transitions to when Georgie had arrived. Thea, Sam, and Georgie were playing hide and seek. Thea hid in the barn, and Georgie quickly found her. Thea playfully tried to run away, but Georgie grabbed her by her dress and didn't let go. He pressed her to the wall and chastised her.

Thea tried to sleep that night, but was restless. She went downstairs and admired the Christmas tree. Georgie appeared on the stairs, and seemed to have followed her. He headed outside to watch the moon, and Thea followed him. Georgie touched Thea's hair then leaned in and kisses her. They kissed for a time and Thea describes the feeling as bliss.



Analysis

Thea and Georgie's relationship has transitioned from the casual friendship of their childhood and into new territory. Georgie is initiating the excessive and sensuous physical contact, and Thea is very eager to receive his attention. There have been signs of their growing affection in earlier chapters, but this is the first time that Thea acknowledges there is something more between them. Thea doesn't fully comprehend the nature of their relationship, though. She is openly upset in front of her mother when she finds out that Georgie won't be sleeping in the same room as her. This indicates that Thea is oblivious to the implications of their inappropriate relationship. This is also symbolic of Thea resisting her transition into being a young woman. She is not willing to accept different treatment based on her adolescence.

Thea mistreats Sasi in order to release her frustrations related to Georgie. This is the first time we see Thea abuse her relationship towards nature. Earlier in the novel, Thea used Luther for consolation and solace. Now, she is still using horses to vent her emotions, but in a more abusive way. Because she is so isolated, Thea has no understanding of romantic relationships and nothing to compare her feelings to. She is overwhelmed by her feelings for Georgie, which she can't fully describe, even to herself. She knows she is angry and feels betrayed because things are now "different." Thea is even frustrated towards Sam, who she is normally so comfortable and honest with.

Thea's budding womanhood and sexuality is transforming not only how she perceives herself in relation to Georgie, but also to Sam. Sam and Thea's relationship is changing as they are getting older. Thea is more of an individual than a part of a pair now. She sees the ways in which, as a boy, he is allowed to do as he pleases, while Thea has new responsibilities of helping her mother with household chores. The fact that she can't tell him about Georgie is another wedge between them.

Watching is a very prevalent theme in this chapter. Thea often describes feelings of being watched at Yonahlossee, but in this chapter it is Georgie watching her. He tells Thea that he always knows where she is, but Thea protests that God is the only one who knows. This is a moment in which Thea is confronted with the decision of whether or not to proceed with Georgie. She can sense how their relationship might be considered wrong, but ultimately lets Georgie kiss her. Their kissing is strange, as Thea has never seen anything like it. Thea justifies the feeling by saying she was not raised in a way where pleasure equated guilt. Her feelings are constantly conflicting in this way: realizing that she and Georgie is something to be ashamed of, but not knowing enough about her own sexuality to understand why.

Discussion Question 1

Does Thea's mother sense Thea and Georgie's relationship?



Discussion Question 2

How is Sam and Thea's relationship changing?

Discussion Question 3

How might Thea's upbringing have influenced her desire for Georgie?

Vocabulary

Imprudent, impassively, oblique, acquiescence, endeavor, luminescent



Chapter 10

Summary

Chapter 10 picks up at Yonahlossee, where it is a few weeks after Thanksgiving. The Holmes girls and Mr. Holmes greet Thea at her cabin, ready for their riding lesson. The five of them walk to the barn, where Thea readies the horses for the lesson. Mr. Holmes watches Thea instruct his daughters. Later, when Thea is cleaning the horses, Mr. Holmes approaches her and they speak casually. Sissy is excited about Thea's close relationship with the headmaster and his family.

On Christmas Eve, Thea is the only girl in Augusta House who hasn't gone home for the holiday. She makes the excuse that Emathla is too far away to travel for the short amount of time. Thea is awake and can't sleep when she hears someone outside. At first she thinks it's Boone, but goes outside and finds that it's Jettie. Jettie is carrying a bottle and is drunk. She tells Thea that her father lost his job, so now she has to get married to an old man with money.

The next morning, Thea goes outside and sees snow for the first time. She sees Mr. Holmes and they talk briefly. Thea wishes that he would invite her to his family dinner. For Christmas, Thea receives a cashmere coat from her family, which she stuffs into an empty drawer. She thinks about last Christmas, when her family hadn't exchanged presents because of her aunt and uncle's financial trouble. It was a week after Thea and Georgie first kissed, and Thea was obsessed with their budding relationship. She thought of him at all times and craved his attention. One afternoon, they were sitting on the front porch, holding hands and sharing an intimate moment. Thea saw Sam come around some shrubs and felt she had been caught in the act, but Georgie assured her he didn't see anything. At Christmas Eve dinner, tensions were high among the family members. The adults bickered, while Georgie touched Thea's leg under the table. That night, Thea had a sexual dream about Georgie.

Early on Christmas morning, Thea went for a ride on Sasi. She tried a new jump she had built, but fell off Sasi. She tried again and made the jump. After cooling Sasi down, Thea went back inside and peeked into Sam's room where he and Georgie were sleeping. Thea saw Georgie's erect penis through his pajamas and felt ashamed for seeing something so private. She also felt the "opposite of ashamed: "a little powerful."

Analysis

The theme of watching continues in this chapter, with Mr. Holmes watching Thea instruct his daughters during their riding lesson. This scene parallels the previous chapter with Georgie watching Thea, and foreshadows a potentially deeper connection between Thea and Mr. Holmes. Any time Mr. Holmes is around, Thea is highly aware of his presence, and hopes that his eyes are on her. This feeling is also expressed for



Georgie in the flashback scenes, indicating that Thea's feelings for Mr. Holmes might be bordering on romantic. She is certainly proud to be seen with him and his family, and clearly wishes she could be closer to all of them, as evidenced when Thea wishes she would be invited to Christmas dinner at the Holmes's house. Watching also has a more negative connotation in this chapter, when Thea sees Sam appear around the shrubs as she and Georgie are being intimate on the porch. Thea is always aware of Sam in relation to Georgie, as she wants to make sure that Sam has no idea and that the relationship between the three of them remains normal. Sam's presence is a signal to Thea that her relationship to Georgie is forbidden. Sam represents the closest version of Thea to herself, and in not facing Sam she is also unwilling to face the consequences and potential punishment for her relationship with Georgie.

In the flashback scenes, Thea and Georgie are now at a new level in their relationship. Thea is experiencing new sexual desires that she doesn't fully understand. Sam seems highly suspicious of Thea and Georgie, particularly in light of the tension between their parents. Thea knows that cousins being in a relationship is not considered acceptable, but she is more overwhelmed by the pleasure it brings her, such as the sexual dream she has. Though Thea is ashamed of her involvement with Georgie, she is not ashamed of the pleasure it brings, and will seek that pleasure no matter what. Georgie has even "replaced Sasi" in Thea's daydreams. Sasi was once Thea's most loyal companion and they would spend hours alone together. Yet, when Thea takes Sasi out for a ride on Christmas morning, she falters on a jump and falls off the horse. This is symbolic of the ways in which Thea is losing her connection to the land around her and to Sam, who is connected with nature in the same way.

Thea's present state at Yonahlossee suggests that things with Georgie may take a turn for the worse. Jettie is distressed about her romantic prospects, and Thea agrees that it might be better to not be involved with men at all. She is highly disillusioned when it comes to the idea of romantic happiness. There are other elements of foreshadowing in this chapter, such as when Thea says her mother had no idea about her and Georgie, though it "had all happened right under her pretty nose."

At the end of the chapter, Thea feels the first hints of power in her own sexuality. She sees Georgie's penis while he is sleeping and when she is done feeling scared, she feels powerful. She has never seen a naked man before, and only has a vague idea of what seeing Georgie's genitalia means. Yet, because Georgie is asleep, the moment is entirely Thea's own learning experience that Georgie is not involved in.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mr. Holmes view Thea in Chapter 10?

Discussion Question 2

What does Thea's conversation with Jettie reveal about her perspective on love and marriage? Does this seem different than what Thea in the flashback scenes might feel?



Discussion Question 3

What might be going through Sam's head in the flashback scenes of Chapter 10?

Vocabulary

imperceptibly, inquisition, contemplative, deferred



Chapter 11

Summary

It is February at Yonahlossee. Mrs. Holmes has left for her fundraising trip and Thea is riding once again. She is still teaching the Holmes girls how to ride, and Mr. Holmes attends their lessons once or twice a week. Thea looks forward to his appearances. One night, Boone arrives at the cabin to visit Sissy. Thea has a difficult time waking up Sissy, and this wakes up Mary Abbott, as well. Thea believes that if Mary Abbott knew about Sissy and Boone, she would tell Mrs. Holmes.

The next morning, Thea takes the Holmes girls out for their riding lesson, and Sarabeth announces that Mr. Holmes will be watching them. They arrive at the stables to see that a tree has fallen into the riding area. Mr. Albrecht assures the girls it is still safe to ride. Rachel notices an injured owl is stuck in the tree. Thea is concerned it will spook the horses and make it unsafe to ride. She tells the girls to stay away from the tree. While Thea is teaching the other girls, Rachel goes back to look at the tree and acts like she doesn't hear Thea protest. Mr. Holmes arrives and watches Thea teach Sarabeth. Suddenly, Rachel and Mr. Holmes break into a fight. This scares the owl, who flies out of the tree and in the direction of Decca's horse. Thea realizes she has accidentally left the gate of the ring open, and Decca's horse runs at full speed out of the ring with Decca still on the saddle. Decca falls off the horse and is clearly injured. Mr. Holmes calls for a doctor. Thea runs and seeks Henny for help. When she arrives back at the ring, everyone is huddled around Decca. Thea sees iodine being used, but doesn't see any blood. Thea comforts Sarabeth, who is sitting nearby. Rachel is nowhere to be found.

Analysis

Though Thea is eager to fit in with the Holmes family, she seems pleased that Mrs. Holmes is not around for the time being. She comments on how Mr. Holmes doesn't seem "worse for the wear" (189) without his wife around, and also takes note of the fact he isn't wearing his wedding ring. Though there are no evident signs of marital discord, Thea is eager to cultivate a relationship with the Holmes' where she takes the matriarchal role.

Decca's fall in this chapter parallels Thea's fall in the last chapter, though Decca's injury appears to be more serious. In the last chapter, Thea's fall was associated with her increasing interest in Georgie taking over her childhood life of Sam and Sasi. In this chapter, Decca's fall is associated with Thea's growing interest in the Holmes family over her friends and peers at Yonahlossee. Even though the open gate was Thea's careless mistake and Decca's injury could be considered Thea's fault, Thea salvages her position within the family by eagerly comforting Sarabeth.



It is possible that Mary Abbott has discovered Sissy and Boone's relationship. Thea is confident that Mary Abbott would reveal this relationship to the Yonahlossee administration, which would almost certainly mean Sissy's expulsion. Sissy and Boone confess they are genuinely in love with each other, and appear to be sharing a real connection, there is irony in Sissy being more at risk for her relationship than Thea and her growing affection for Mr. Holmes that is bordering on obsessive.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Mary Abbott knows about Sissy and Boone? Would she reveal their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

Is Thea responsible for Decca's injury?

Discussion Question 3

How does Mrs. Holmes's absence play a part in the events of Chapter 11?

Vocabulary

elicited



Chapter 12

Summary

Word spreads quickly across the camp that Decca has been injured in an accident. No one knows for sure what the injury is, but Thea feels it is dire. On her way back from the bathhouse, Thea is approached by Molly, who asks if the rumor is true that Rachel tried to kill Decca. Thea aggressively denies the rumor. Thea returns to Augusta house and pretends to sleep, so she can ignore everyone. She can think only of Georgie, but wishes she could erase the memories of him. The other girls of Augusta House return from dinner, and Mary Abbott tells Thea that Mr. Holmes asked everyone to pray for Thea and Decca. Thea feels betrayed.

That night, Thea sleeps fitfully. Sissy wakes her up because she was talking in her sleep. They briefly discuss Decca's injury before Sissy goes out to meet Boone. After Sissy goes out, Thea leaves too. Thea sees the lights of Masters, the Holmes's house, are still on. She heads there, running through the mud. She is eager to confront Mr. Holmes after Decca's incident. She enters the house, as the door is unlocked.

Thea goes upstairs and finds Mr. Holmes in his office. He tells Thea she shouldn't be there, and that Decca merely suffered a broken collarbone and a cut. He apologizes that he didn't tell Thea sooner. Thea is overwhelmed with emotion, and Mr. Holmes tells her not to be sorry. Mr. Holmes then tells Thea about how Mrs. Holmes is not having a successful fundraising trip thus far. Thea notices that he is drinking whiskey and seems more casual and unguarded than usual. Thea tells Mr. Holmes that he shouldn't be upset with Rachel, and that she merely made a mistake. Thea realizes the inappropriateness of their situation and says she should go. Mr. Holmes leaves her to show herself out.

Analysis

When Thea is in bed thinking of Georgie, she foreshadows what may become of him. She makes a distinction between how Georgie was when she left him and when she knew him best. Though the reader knows Thea and Georgie were in a pseudo-relationship, there is something more to happen between them and Thea is growing closer to revealing what that was every chapter. At this point, the reader can make many guesses at the specifics of what will become of Thea and Georgie, but the course ahead seems relatively obvious to the reader. Still, the structure of the book continues on in two parts, telling both the past and present. Though the course of events may not come as a surprise down the road, the significant differentiation in these chapters lies in Thea's perception of herself, her womanhood, and her sexuality. Her tone and guidelines differ greatly when she is thinking about Georgie and Mr. Holmes. This tells the reader that Thea has changed as a person and shows how past actions and consequences are now directly affecting her present life at Yonahlossee.



Thea is deeply affected by Decca's accident, and even compares the events of the accident to the "terrible thing" that happened in Florida, referencing it as the "other terrible day." She blames herself for causing the accident in the same way she blames herself for tearing her family apart. Thea notices these comparable feelings and discusses the ways in which the worlds of Yonahlossee and Florida are "eerily merging" (201). Thea feels she is the catalyst of this merge, and uses it as another way to blame herself: that everywhere she goes she causes trouble among families.

Yet, Thea's conversation with Mr. Holmes helps her understand that there is a difference between being a bad person and making a mistake. Mr. Holmes changes Thea's way of thinking when he tells her that life is a series of events. He says that there is no way a parent could ever hate their own child. Though Mr. Holmes is speaking about his own daughter, Rachel, the conversation has obvious implications for Thea's own situation.

The chapter also has a sense of foreboding. When Thea realizes that Boone is coming for a second night in a row, she is filled with dread. She says "I felt like something awful was going to happen. I could smell it" (202). Things have been going very well for Sissy and Boone and Thea has a sense that something might take a turn for the worse at any moment.

Discussion Question 1

Is Thea's life at Yonahlossee starting to parallel her life in Emathla? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does life being "a series of events" change Thea's way of thinking?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Thea feel dread for Sissy and Boone's relationship?

Vocabulary

gaggle, kneading, discern, pomade



Chapter 13

Summary

Chapter 13 begins with a letter from Thea's mother. She starts by asking Thea about her Christmas, and says she wishes she could see her. She tells Thea she wishes she would have stayed a child longer. She mentions the letter that Thea wrote to Sam and the fact that he hasn't written back. She also mentions that Georgie is "fine."

It has been three days since Decca's accident, and after a day of mourning, Yonahlossee has returned to normal. Mr. Holmes seems exhausted when Thea sees him at mealtimes. Rachel and Sarabeth have left camp to join Mrs. Holmes on her fundraising trip. Thea thinks this will give her a chance to be closer to Mr. Holmes.

Thea has her riding lesson with Mr. Albrecht. Mr. Holmes visits the riding ring and approaches Thea to tell her that Decca is feeling better. Thea asks if she may visit Decca and Mr. Holmes readily agrees. Thea admits to herself that she has a crush on him.

That afternoon, Thea visits Masters and is greeted by their housekeeper, who leads Thea to Decca's room. Decca is asleep, but Thea sits by her side anyway. Thea plans to visit her daily, both because she cares about Decca and also because she hopes to run into Mr. Holmes. After three days of visits, Thea still hasn't seen Mr. Holmes. The girls of Augusta House think it's strange that Thea continues to visit Decca. Thea falls asleep thinking of Mr. Holmes.

Thea writes a letter to her mother. The letter is cordial and simple. At the end, though, Thea mentions her mother's friendship with Mrs. Holmes. She tells her mother not to worry about her, and to not even think about her.

One day, as Thea is visiting Decca, Decca mentions a phone call she overheard where Mr. Holmes was talking angrily to Mrs. Holmes. Decca doesn't answer directly, but instead wonders when her sisters will be back. Thea mentally declares that she hopes to make Mr. Holmes fall in love with her.

Analysis

Thea feels her affection for Mr. Holmes "hurtling toward obsession" (213). After Decca's accident, Thea hopes to shoulder the responsibility of keeping the Holmes family happy. She begins visiting Decca daily, and though she genuinely hopes to comfort Decca, Thea is eager for an inside look into the Holmes's life, such as when Decca casually mentions overhearing an angry phone call between her parents and Thea prods her for more information. Spending time with Decca is also a way to create more opportunities for running into Mr. Holmes. At the end of the chapter, Thea closes her eyes and Mr.



Holmes is all she sees. This language directly parallels the flashback sequences when Thea is becoming more and more interested in Georgie.

Thea's attraction to Mr. Holmes further parallels Thea's attraction to Georgie in the way that it is causing her to alienate those close to her. Just as Thea avoided Sam and kept secrets from him, Thea is moving away from Sissy and her "normal beau" in order to grow closer to Mr Holmes. Thea even continues to alienate her family in Florida from the camp. In the letter to her mother, Thea tells her mother to put her out of her mind. Thea isn't entirely unaware of these comparisons, yet she feels propelled forward in her situation. She doesn't spend too much time reflecting on her actions because she "no longer knew what kind of girl" she was. This statement is reflective of Thea's transitioning identity. She knew who she was in Emathla, and felt that way still when she arrived at Yonahlossee. Now, for the first time in her life, she is left to form her own identity.

Mr. Holmes seems somewhat receptive to Thea's presence. When they speak in his office, he is relaxed and speaks to her more casually than would be customary for a headmaster and student relationship. Throughout the chapter, Mr. Holmes begins approaching Thea in order to relay updates about Decca and his other girls. Because his wife is away, there is a slight sense that Mr. Holmes may actually be relying on Thea to provide comfort to his children and confidence to himself. Thea is eager to respond to these hints. She seeks out an almost matriarchal role within the Holmes family. This reflects Thea's own complication relationship with her mother, who was the only woman Thea had to model herself after.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mr. Holmes feel about Thea in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

Is Thea still genuinely caring for Decca or is she more concerned with Mr. Holmes?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think it's possible that Mr. Holmes could fall in love with Thea?

Vocabulary

maudlin, reeling, cursory, nuances, pricked, whuffed, wan, happenstance, sparseness, furtive



Chapter 14

Summary

Chapter 14 is a flashback to Thea's family visiting Gainesville after the holidays. Thea had only seen Georgie three times since Christmas, and felt that was much less often than usual. Earlier that morning, Thea looked in her mother's purse to find perfume, and ended up finding a check written to Uncle George for "the largest sum of money" she "had ever seen."

The family arrived at Uncle George's house and Thea was surprised by the home's poor condition. Thea's mother unloaded a crate of food from the car and Thea didn't believe that her aunt and uncle were in such need. Aunt Carrie told Thea and Sam that Georgie was at a neighbor's house, but would be back soon. Thea felt incredibly impatient. Sam and Thea slipped away when the adults got into serious conversation. Sam asked if Thea wanted to go explore outside, but Thea feigned exhaustion. Thea rested in her aunt and uncle's room and watched Sam disappear into the woods outside. Thea fell asleep, and when she awoke Georgie was there. He assured her that everyone else was outside. They laid on top of each other and kissed for a time before Georgie suggested they go downstairs and join the others. They both expressed concern for if the family caught them, but both seemed confident in their secrecy.

On the way home, Thea was pretending to sleep in the back of the car while her mother drove and Sam sat up front. Mother asked Sam if everything was okay and said he seemed so quiet. Sam began to speak and Thea was concerned he knew something about her and Georgie. Instead, Sam was sad that Georgie had been ignoring him. Mother comforted Sam, saying that Georgie was upset about his family's financial situation. Sam protested, saying that Georgie didn't ignore Thea. Mother said that's okay, because Thea is a girl and "doesn't matter" in the same way as Sam. Thea was incredibly hurt, but remained silent. She decided she mattered, to Georgie at least.

Analysis

Aunt Carrie and Uncle George are in deep financial trouble and it only seems to be getting worse. Though Thea's parents are helping them, as evidenced by the large check Thea finds in her mother's purse, tensions are still very high between the two groups of adults. Their conversations are filled with references to money and prosperity. Thea is very oblivious to the world of finance, and doesn't seem fully aware of the real reason unspoken frustration between the adults. Instead, she reads their tension as suspicion and this only adds to the paranoia she feels about her relationship with Georgie.

The most significant element of this chapter is the final scene, in which Thea overhears her mother telling Sam that, because Thea is female, she "doesn't matter" (234) in the



same way that Sam does. This creates an entire shift in Thea's world view. Until now, she has always viewed Sam as her equal--a person who would be present throughout her entire life. This belief in equality is likely due to the isolation of her world. Thea has not yet had the opportunity to experience the different ways boys and girls are treated and valued. But this overheard conversation confirms the fact that Mother and Father do not see their children the same way, and believe that a son is worth more than a daughter. In response, Thea's instinct is not to simply believe what her mother says, but to rebel against it. She firmly decides that she does matter--particularly because she matters to Georgie.

Believing that she matters to Georgie is likely to propel Thea even deeper into her relationship with her cousin. Her secrecy has already created a divide between her and Sam, and Mother's words will only make this divide even stronger. Thea feels that her parents and brother don't value her, but her cousin does. This gives her all the more reason to cast aside her fears about the relationship and explore it even further.

Discussion Question 1

What past actions or words might indicate the ways Mother and Father view Thea and Sam differently?

Discussion Question 2

What might Thea do now that she knows her family doesn't value her in the same way?

Discussion Question 3

How might Aunt Carrie and Uncle George's financial situation create a greater risk for Thea and Georgie's relationship?

Vocabulary

mohair, gnarly, plaintive, malaise



Chapter 15

Summary

At Yonahlossee, word has spread that Leona's family has lost everything. Despite this, Leona continues to act proud and cold to all. Everyone is concerned about their own family's financial situation.

One night, Eva brings out a Ouija board and the girls of Augusta House use it. Gates thinks it's foolish and against the rules. Mary Abbott agrees. Eva decides they will contact Lettie Sims, a Yonahlossee girl who drowned in the 1800's. Gates asks the spirit if the girls will be "all right."

After a week of visiting Decca, Thea finally encounters Mr. Holmes. Thea and Decca are playing dominoes when Mr. Holmes enters. Decca spills her glass of milk and Mr. Holmes sends her upstairs and invites Thea to sit and talk. Mr. Holmes has a drink and Thea asks him about Mrs. Holmes, who still has a month left of her fundraising trip. They discuss the Depression until Thea leaves and Mr. Holmes thanks her for all of her help.

After that night's dinner, planning commences for the Spring Riding Show. The girls get into their riding groups to plan the riding courses. Thea is very clearly distracted and watches Mr. Holmes and Mr. Albrecht across the room. Leona mocks Thea for so obviously staring at the head table. Gates warns Thea that Leona won the show last year and desperately wants to win it again.

Later, Thea opens a letter from her mother. The letter explains Mother's relationship to Mrs. Holmes long ago, but that she has since lost touch with her. Mother tells Thea that they sold the house, and that the family will be moving to Orlando. She tells Thea that the family needed a fresh start. Thea is heartbroken and immediately destroys the letter. Thea knows this means Sasi will be sold, too.

The next day, Mr. Holmes arrives during Thea's visit with Decca and they again have a moment alone. Mr. Holmes is drinking and Thea notices how this turns his personality boyish. Mr. Holmes asks Thea about Leona, and Thea tries to act coy about the subject. Mr. Holmes admits to watching Thea and observing her personality and mannerisms. Thea feels he is insulting her and goes to leave. Mr. Holmes follows her and touches her along her back and cheek. Thea goes back to her cabin and masturbates.

Analysis

In this chapter, Thea experiences many of the negative effects of the Great Depression. First, there is Leona, who is rumored to have lost everything. Though she is proud and generally disliked, Thea feels very sorry for her. She feels that Leona is being punished by having to leave Yonahlossee and her horse, King, despite the fact that Leona never



did anything wrong. Leona's situation parallels how Thea was sent away from her family and punished for her mistakes. Yet, Thea doesn't make this connection herself and it shows how Thea recognizes injustice and sympathizes with others, but is still incapable of coming to terms with her own situation and forgiving herself. Still, it is a moment of growth for her character, as she is slowly accepting the idea that young women are individuals who exist outside of their families.

The mood at Yonahlossee is one of fear and concern. If Leona's family is capable of losing everything, then certainly the same thing could happen to anyone. Thea mentions articles popping up in Ladies' Home Journal about small jobs women can do to supplement their husband's income. She is not naive enough to think that women are capable of saving the "family fortune." Thea finds these articles foolish because she now understands the way people believe women "matter" less than men.

The economic paranoia is further reflected in the scene where the girls of Augusta House play with a Ouija Board. Though Gates thinks the Ouija Board is foolish and initially doesn't want to participate, she ends up being the first to ask the Board if everyone will be "all right." By this, she wants to know whether or not they will be forced to leave Yonahlossee.

Thea is most personally affected by the Depression when she receives a letter from her mother revealing that they are selling the house in Emathla and moving to Florida. Not only does Thea's family moving touch on the theme of money, it also touches on the theme of Thea growing up. Thea is devastated, and can't believe that she will never again see the place where she spent her childhood. In earlier chapters, Thea spent much time describing her connection to the very land itself. Though Thea was physically removed from her home in Emathla, essentially forcing her to grow up, this is an even more permanent punishment in her mind. Thea was devastated when she learned that she would be staying at Yonahlossee for a year instead of just the summer. Now, because her childhood home is lost, it is as though Thea will never be able to truly return to where she came from.

In this chapter, Thea receives a haircut from Eva. The haircut, which transforms Thea's long locks into a short, fashionable bob, acts as a symbol of Thea's transformation and assimilation into Yonahlossee. In the flashback chapters, Thea often references wearing her hair in a long braid that Sam and Georgie toy with. Now, with short hair, Thea is metaphorically untouchable. She has cast aside her childhood ways in a physical manner.

At the end of the chapter, Mr. Holmes reintroduces the theme of watching. He has been drinking and is very talkative. Mr. Holmes's whiskey acts as a symbol for his desire for Thea. He drinks and becomes more open towards her, as though the liquor is permitting him to express his desire for her. Mr. Holmes's drinking also reveals his weak spots, as it makes him emotional and confessional when it comes to camp-related business. Thea has never before met an adult who is willing to trust her as a confidante.



During this conversation, Mr. Holmes tells Thea that he often watches her and observes the way she “slinks” and “creeps” around school, watching everybody else. Though Thea desperately wants Mr. Holmes to notice her, she feels offended by his words, and thinks they are more fit for “animals” and “criminals.” Yet, Thea connects her unease to sexuality. Though she is upset, she immediately goes home and masturbates, as though the pain creates pleasure. This tells the reader more about how Thea's sexuality is evolving. She now understands the concept of self-pleasure and that sexuality does not necessarily need to be connected to someone else. Yet, she seems to draw pleasure from her own discomfort, showing that she still has a corrupted understanding of the intersection between pain and pleasure.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Leona is able to remain so calm despite her family's financial situation?

Discussion Question 2

How do you think the Atwell family is handling Thea's absence? Why do they need a “fresh start?”

Discussion Question 3

After the events of this chapter, what do you think might happen between Thea and Mr. Holmes?

Vocabulary

falter, wont, primly, obstinate, scalpy, plight, daunting, ensconced, impudent, appraising,



Chapter 16

Summary

Chapter 16 is a flashback chapter that begins with Thea asking her mother when they would next go to Gainesville, as Thea had not seen Georgie in three weeks. Mother ignored Thea's persistent questions. Georgie's family ended up coming the next week, though, and all seemed well among the families. Sam wanted Thea and Georgie to come exploring in the woods with him, but Georgie firmly denied and says he was going to work on homework. Thea was upset and wanted Georgie to be nice. She took Sam's side, but Sam was already too upset and leaves. Later, Thea sat out on the porch with her parents and aunt and uncle, while the boys were off elsewhere. The adults discussed Thea growing up and there was tension between everyone. Sam and Georgie came outside and were talking casually, apparently reconciled from earlier.

That night while Thea lay awake, Georgie came to her room and took her out to the barn. In one of the stalls, he had spread out a blanket for them. Thea warned him not to leave it there, because Mother would notice. They kissed and touched each other and Georgie attempted to put himself inside her. Thea stopped him and took control of their intimacy.

The next morning, Thea came in from playing golf with Sam and Georgie to find her mother sitting at the kitchen table. Thea's mother pulled the blanket out from below the table and asked her why it was in the barn. Mother seemed to think it was Sam and Georgie responsible instead of Thea. Thea sat on the steps and was filled with paranoia that either her mother or Sam knew about her and Georgie.

Analysis

Georgie is becoming more concerned about his family's financial situation, and this enables Thea to take control of their relationship for the first time. This directly parallels the previous chapter, in which Mr. Holmes confided in Thea and that enabled Thea to deepen her own concept of sexuality. Almost every present chapter and its past counterpart now contain parallels that explore Thea's growth between the two periods of time.

In this chapter, Georgie's distress about money makes him more openly rude towards Sam. He feels he needs to be more adult now, and spend time inside studying. He treats Sam's desire to go explore in the woods as childish. Thea is left torn between supporting her brother and consoling Georgie. She attempts to defend Sam, but her hesitation makes it clear that she is unsure of where to place her allegiance. For Sam, there should be no choice between the two boys. Sam is still attached to Thea as they were when they are younger. He sees the two of them as part of an inseparable pair and is starting to feel betrayed when Thea is no longer immediately rushing to his side.



Yet, there is irony here in the fact that Thea is being taught that because she is older now, she is different from Sam. These conflicting sources of information are making Thea's relationships even more complicated. The simplest and most pleasurable choice is Georgie, thus she will choose him. Thea's reaction to the situation carries more weight than anyone else's, as evidenced when Sam and Georgie appear on the porch together, talking as normal. Though the boys are able to make up easily, the damage is done between Thea and Sam.

As Thea and Sam's relationship becomes more damaged, Thea begins to trust Georgie less. Though she still desires him physically, she is concerned for the way her actions might make him reveal their relationship to Sam. He is much more casual about their relationship and its potential effects on others. When Thea asks him why he was mean to Sam earlier in the day, he doesn't apologize, but instead calls him a "child" and promises to "be nice to him." Thea feels "very adult" for the "first time" when she is with Georgie. Thea is being told by her mother that she needs to grow up and become a woman, yet her family is still treating her as a child. Because Georgie makes her feel adult, Thea connects this sensation with pleasing her family. Sam represents being a child, while Georgie represents being an adult, which is the more desired trait. Thea is simultaneously conflicted between her relationships with the two, as well as her relationship with childhood and adulthood.

Thea's paranoia reaches a new peak when her mother reveals the blanket she found in the stable. Though Thea doesn't reveal anything about its origins, and Mother seems to believe Sam and Georgie were responsible for the blanket, the way she sneakily presents it seems to imply that she was trying to catch Thea off-guard. The blanket here is a symbol for the dangerous nature of Thea's relationship to Georgie. The blanket is symbolic of a bed, which is symbolic of sex. Thea is moving into more dangerous territory with Georgie, as she is also neglecting her relationship with nature for him. The blanket being in the stable shows how Thea is conflicted about replacing her childhood love of horses and the outdoors with a boy.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Sam acts like a child? Why might Georgie see Sam and Thea differently?

Discussion Question 2

How is Mother helping or hurting Thea's transition into womanhood?

Discussion Question 3

Does Mother truly believe that Sam and Georgie left the blanket in the stable? Or does she seem in denial?

Vocabulary

crestfallen, goad, squabble, mahogany, grotesque, shirk



Chapter 17

Summary

Thea and Mr. Holmes spend time together again after Thea visits with Decca. Decca and Emmy, the Holmes's housekeeper, head outside to play. Thea and Mr. Holmes discuss Yonahlossee's admission process and the family connections necessary to attend. Mr. Holmes says he likes running the school, but that he'd prefer just reading books. Thea rises, sits next to him, and puts her hand on his knee. Mr. Holmes expresses concern for the future of the camp due to the Depression, and Thea comforts him by kissing him. They go upstairs into Mr. Holmes's library, where they continue to kiss. When Thea leaves Masters, she runs into Leona, who asks her if she wants to join her on a visit to the stables. Thea tells Leona to stop pretending to be her friend. Leona mocks Thea in return.

The next time Thea and Mr. Holmes meet, they immediately go to the library and begin kissing. Mr. Holmes won't let Thea touch his genitals, but focuses on pleasuring her. He is calm and relaxed. After he finishes, they talk. Thea asks him if he will ever leave Yonahlossee. Mr. Holmes says no, and proceeds to recount his youth, journeying from Boston to New Orleans. He says he hasn't seen his family since Sarabeth was a baby. Thea is shocked and asks what he did to deserve such a punishment. Mr. Holmes assures her that he didn't do anything, but that he and his parents were simply different kinds of people. Thea says she ruined her family, and Mr. Holmes protests and says that what your family thinks of you is not the most important thing. Mr. Holmes begins touching Thea again, and this causes Thea to think of Georgie's face.

One afternoon, Thea leaves class early and returns to Augusta House early because she doesn't feel well. Docey is there, mopping the floors. Thea thinks of Mr. Holmes and drifts off to sleep. Docey wakes her up because she was saying "nonsense words" in her sleep. Thea asks Docey if she knows Emmy, and Docey replies that Emmy is her sister. Thea realizes that Docey and Emmy must speak of her and Mr. Holmes.

Thea and Mr. Holmes continue their romantic arrangement. One day, Mr. Holmes seems sad and quiet. Thea takes him outside, to the woods behind the house. They speak again about disappointing their families. Mr. Holmes says the worst thing is to disappoint yourself. They come to a clearing and kiss passionately.

Analysis

This chapter largely focuses on the development of Thea and Mr. Holmes's physical relationship. Their relationship springs out of a combination of Thea's fearlessness, Mr. Holmes's loneliness and concern for the camp, and Mrs. Holmes's absence. Thea craves his attention and affection, and sees an opportunity to capitalize on Mr. Holmes's vulnerability. Thea initiates the physical relationship, knowing that Mr. Holmes would



never cross that line himself, but would be receptive if she tried. This bold maneuver is an example of Thea's fearlessness and recklessness. Thea's underlying fearlessness has so far appeared when riding horses or being intimate with Georgie. These moments reveal Thea's inner boldness and want of something greater than the simple roles of daughter and schoolgirl she has been offered.

The theme of watching emerges when Thea and Mr. Holmes are intimate with each other. However, in this chapter, Thea does not feel watched by Mr. Holmes, but "observed" and "carefully accounted" (279). This contrasts the sinister connotations of watching so far in the text, particularly the way Thea feels in Georgie's presence. It also contrasts the last chapter, in which Mr. Holmes aggressively tells Thea about the ways he watches her. Instead, Thea is "observed" here, and considered as an individual person as opposed to a subject for the first time in the novel.

Mr. Holmes helps transform Thea's view of herself and her family. She expresses regret for the way her family views her, but Mr. Holmes assures her that there is more to life than a parent's opinion. He says, "You're sixteen years old. What your family thinks of you seems like everything, but it's not. They have their own interests to protect" (282). His advice carries authority both as a parent, and as someone who does not have a lasting relationship with his own parents. Mr. Holmes does not patronize Thea, but tries to understand her perspective. Thea felt like an adult in Georgie's presence because of their sexual exploration. Here, Thea is treated like an adult by Mr. Holmes when he shows respect for her ideas and concerns.

Thea's relationship with Mr. Holmes will soon come to an end, and Thea knows this. When Mrs. Holmes returns, there is no way they will be able to maintain their regular visits. Though Thea is aware that the relationship is temporary, she says she has always been good at "ignoring the inevitable" (292). This is an allusion to her relationship with Georgie, and the paranoia and uncertainty that came with it. With Georgie, part of Thea always knew that they couldn't last forever. Unlike Georgie, Thea has the option with Mr. Holmes to end things in a better place. But her skills at "ignoring the inevitable" mean she is at risk for ending up in another bad situation.

Discussion Question 1

Does Mr. Holmes give Thea good advice or does he not fully understand her situation?

Discussion Question 2

Does Thea and Mr. Holmes's relationship seem mutually beneficial or is there a power imbalance?



Discussion Question 3

How do you predict Thea and Mr. Holmes's relationship might come to an "inevitable" end?

Vocabulary

articulated, eked, solace, divining, artifice, sonorous, stricken, melancholy, furtive, finials, mired, transgressions



Chapter 18

Summary

Thea and Sissy are returning from the barn one day when Sissy tells Thea that she is spending “too much time in Masters” and that “girls are talking.” The rumor is that Thea is obsessed with Mr. Holmes. Thea protests, saying she only goes there for Decca, but Sissy sees through Thea’s lie. Sissy warns her to be careful, especially because she was sent away because of a boy in the first place.

Spring comes and Yonahlossee is full of flowers and color. Thea is waiting for Mr. Holmes to end their relationship, but he does not. Thea decides not to care that her mother would be disappointed. Thea’s desire for Mr. Holmes is even more powerful than her desire for Georgie ever was. Thea thinks her parents could not understand how she feels.

Analysis

In this chapter, Thea explores her newfound boldness and fearlessness. She tells the reader that, after beginning her affair with Mr. Holmes, “I had started to do whatever I wanted to” (294). Thea is no longer focused on fitting in with the other girls, as she was when she first came to Yonahlossee. Instead, she is focused on being independent and not spending as much time with Sissy and others, so that she can make time to be with Mr. Holmes. Though Thea is learning a lot of positive lessons from Mr. Holmes, her perspective of their relationship parallels how she felt about Georgie. Thea is making Mr. Holmes a priority over Sissy as she once made Georgie a priority over Sam.

Thea’s affection for Mr. Holmes overpowers her affection for Georgie. When Sissy encourages Thea to find someone her own age, like David, Thea thinks that David is merely a boy. Thea thinks, “David was a boy and reminded me of Georgie. I was done with boys” (296).

Though Thea is exploring her identity as a young woman and seeking independence, she is also creating danger for herself. Sissy warns Thea that there are rumors about her and Mr. Holmes. At Yonahlossee, if rumors get into the wrong hands, they have the power to ruin someone’s life. This is foreshadowing for both Thea and Mr. Holmes, as well as Sissy and Boone who are still continuing their illicit relationship.

Discussion Question 1

Who might be circulating the rumors about Thea and Mr. Holmes?



Discussion Question 2

What are the benefits and risks of Thea asserting her independence?

Discussion Question 3

How has Thea's focus shifted since she first arrived at Yonahlossee?

Vocabulary

incredulously, plaintively, deigning



Chapter 19

Summary

This chapter is a flashback to the previous summer. Thea woke up early in the morning and went out to the porch, where she found Sam already sitting. Sam told Thea that he wanted to go away and travel. Thea thought they had never spoken of leaving home. She laughed at Sam's thought of going out on a ship. Sam was offended, even after Thea apologized. Sam said that Thea wouldn't be sad if he left, because she didn't need anyone except Georgie. Thea didn't say anything, and the conversation turned before dying out. They ended up falling asleep on the porch. Sam's comment about Thea needing Georgie echoed in her head. She thought about how marriages between cousins used to be considered normal. Thea did not want to marry Georgie, though, because she did not want to be poor. Thea desired Georgie more than ever, but was also more paranoid about the potential consequences of someone finding out than ever.

The next time Thea saw Georgie, Thea chastised him for leaving the blanket in the stall. Georgie was not overly apologetic, and instead shared all of his concerns about how poor the economy was and how everyone was suffering.

During the Fourth of July, Georgie's family visited. The family watched fireworks together. That night, Thea visited Sasi in the barn and dozed there. She awoke when Georgie appeared in the barn. Georgie began to kiss and caress her, but she was uncomfortable because she felt they were at a risk of being discovered. Georgie put his penis inside Thea and Thea immediately felt regret. She thought of how upset Sam would be if he knew. Georgie finished, and Thea was terrified. Georgie assured her it was "very natural." Thea believed what they did was wrong, but Georgie disagreed. Thea threatened to scream if he didn't leave. He left, and Thea slept in the barn.

The next day, Thea was filled with regret. After breakfast, she took Sasi out for a ride. While out, she ran into Sam and began crying. Georgie followed after Sam, and Thea noticed that both of them had guns slung over their shoulders. Georgie approached Thea and put his hand on her thigh. Thea screamed at him to not touch her. Sam confronted Georgie, asking what he did to make Thea so upset. The boys then began physically fighting. Sam pushed Georgie to the ground and slapped him across the face. Thea screamed for them to stop, but the fight escalated. Sam took the butt of his rifle and struck Georgie. Thea tried to ride Sasi between them and divide them, but Georgie panicked and ran towards Sam, who hit him in the head with his rifle. Georgie collapsed to the ground and Sam realized what he had done. There was blood everywhere. Sam ran to the house to get their father. The adults returned, and Sam and Thea were sent away. Thea's mother found her walking Sasi to cool him down. She told Thea that Georgie was not dead, but demanded to know what happened. Thea didn't say anything, and her mother walked away.



Analysis

Thea and Sam's conversation at the beginning of the chapter foreshadows the events to come in the chapter and beyond. Sam suggests that he wants to leave the family home and travel. Thea is surprised, and realizes that she and Sam have never even mentioned the idea of going anywhere else. The fact that Thea finds the idea of traveling so ridiculous creates a sense of irony, as the reader knows she will soon be forced out of her home and into another world. Sam, on the other hand, is the one expressing the desire to travel, and he will be the one allowed to stay.

When Thea visits Sasi in the barn, she notes that she has not been taking very good care of him lately. Not only is she out of touch with Sam's emotions, but Sasi as well. Thea has been too busy focusing on Georgie to focus on Sam and Sasi, who symbolize her childhood relationship to nature. Sam and Sasi represent innocence, freedom, and fearlessness, whereas Georgie represents the confines and worries of adulthood. Thea has not been balancing herself between the two worlds, and Sasi is physical evidence of Thea's neglect.

Because of his family's financial situation, Georgie is simultaneously vulnerable and volatile. Thea addresses the blanket her mother found in the stall, and the great risk that poses to their relationship being discovered. Georgie is not apologetic about this fact, and doesn't seem overly concerned about the potential discovery of their relationship. Instead, he launches into a lecture about the state of the economy. Georgie relies on Thea to console him when he worries about his family's finances. Simultaneously, he uses Thea to take out his frustrations, as evidenced when he coerces her into having sex with him.

When Thea and Georgie finish having sex, Thea is naked and Georgie is fully clothed. This contrast acts as a metaphor for the differences in the way young women's and young men's sexuality are treated. For Thea, she is treated as a powerless disgrace. Even Georgie is disgusted with her when she expresses regret. Thea thinks, "I was a young woman when young women were powerless" (315). Not only is there a power imbalance between Thea and Georgie, but a power imbalance between Thea and all boys her age. She is a girl and therefore does not "matter" the same. Even to Georgie, Thea realizes that she cannot be an equal. Even though Thea does not want to marry Georgie, she believed that they understood each other in a way that others could not. The way Georgie treats Thea after they have sex proves that Georgie does not value Thea's emotions as much as he values his own fleeting sexual desires.

The tensions between the families, between Sam and Thea, and Georgie and Thea all culminate in the bloody fight between Sam and Georgie. The fight is sparked when Georgie touches Thea, and this confirms Sam's suspicions about his sister and cousin's relationship. The fight is a physical metaphor for the ways the family has been growing apart over the past few months. Sam causes harm to Georgie using a rifle he received as a birthday gift. The rifle is symbol of Sam forgoing his peaceful nature in favor of violence. It is also a symbol of the intense division between Sam and Georgie. Both of



the boys received the same rifle on that birthday and they are both carrying them in this scene. They were given the rifles as equals just as Thea attempted to balance her relationships with the both of them.

Strangely, it is Sam who is most responsible for Georgie's severe injuries but Thea who was sent away. Though most of the questions about the "terrible thing" Thea did have been answered, the reader still has yet to understand why Thea was sent away and Sam remained with their parents. This bloody fight also reveals the potential risks for Thea in the present time and her relationship with Mr. Holmes.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think was going through Sam's head when he decided to attack Georgie?

Discussion Question 2

Have there been any clues elsewhere in the text indicating what might happen to Georgie after this fight?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways is Thea powerless in her family and in what ways does she have power?

Vocabulary

detriments, ricocheting, goading, periphery, gait, colic



Chapter 20

Summary

It is the day before the show when Thea receives a letter from Sam. In the letter, Sam talks about moving and the new, large family that will occupy their house. He says that something is wrong with Georgie, but the adults won't tell him what it is. Sam ends the letter saying that he is bored and wishes he had a friend. Thea reads and rereads the letter many times. Thea sees how this whole situation has turned Sam into an angry person. She feels it is time to return to her family, but she does not want to. Thea puts on her mother's earrings and heads to Masters. She leads Mr. Holmes into the woods, as they did last time. Thea wants to have sex with him and thinks of all the ways it will be different than having sex with Georgie. When they do have sex, Thea enjoys the feeling and understands the convergence of pleasure and pain.

The day of the show is beautiful and sunny. Thea walks to the ring with Sissy and Mary Abbott and examines the course she will ride with Naari. She notices the difficult series of jumps at the end. Thea thinks she should let Leona win, but hopes that she can actually beat her. During the qualifying round, Thea misses the final jump. Then, Thea notices Mrs. Holmes outside the ring. She has returned from her trip a day early.

The final round is between Leona, Jettie, and Thea. Thea feels Mr. Holmes watching her while she warms up. During her turn on the course, Thea feels daring and fearless. She and Naari go incredibly quickly through the course, pushing through every obstacle with speed. They clear the final jump and complete the course. Everyone stares at Thea, in awe. Thea suddenly feels very sorry for riding Naari so hard. The winners are announced, and Thea becomes the first "new girl" to ever take home first place. Thea feels anxious and sorry for what she has done to Mrs. Holmes. After accepting her award, Thea leaves and walks alone with Naari.

There is another dance, and Thea chooses a very formal dress to wear. She arrives at the dance ahead of her cabin mates, and the Holmes's are waiting outside of the Castle to greet everyone. David is among the boys at the dance, and Thea accepts his invitation to dance. She feels Mrs. Holmes is watching her while she dances. Thea, Sissy, David, and Boone sneak to a corner and drink whiskey. Thea sees Mr. Holmes watching her, and breaks away from David to leave the dance. Mr. Holmes follows her out and wants to talk to her. They realize there is too much to say, so they decide not to say anything. Thea tells him she wants to leave Yonahlossee and return home.

Analysis

Sam's letter gives Thea a glimpse into the home life that her parents did not want her to see. While Mother and Father's letters talked about tending to the garden or the holidays, Sam is more frank and reveals that Georgie is still very unwell and that his



condition is kept a secret. Sam's tone is blunt, angry, and lonely--all uncharacteristic traits for someone who was previously so calm and gentle. Thea originally believed that life was carrying on without her, and that she was the sole recipient of punishment. Yet Sam's letter helps open her eyes to the fact that Thea was sent away from a situation at home that became suffocating.

Thea has sex with Mr. Holmes and maintains control over the situation the entire time. Whereas Georgie "felt like a violation" (326), Thea feels right with Mr. Holmes. She thinks, "Mr. Holmes changed me. I was a different girl because of him" (329). Indeed Mr. Holmes helped drastically shift Thea's perspective on family and independence. Now, after they have sex, Thea is able to reclaim her sexuality and understand that it can bring pleasure instead of pain. Her guilt over Georgie starts to subside, and Thea realizes that she is not to blame. "I now saw it all started before I was even born" (326), she thinks. This quote encapsulates the idea that it was not Thea herself that bears the responsibility for making a mistake with Georgie, but she was merely placed in a very specific set of isolated conditions that gave way to difficult decisions. Even if she and Georgie has never been together sexually, the two families would have gone down the same path to splitting eventually.

At the Spring Show, Thea reclaims her fearlessness and her connection to nature. She rides Naari at an incredible speed that leaves the entire audience speechless. Previously in the text, Sasi has represented Thea's childhood connection to nature. Here, Naari represents Thea's transition into adult independence. She is connected to nature physically, via riding an animal. But she is also connected to her own inner nature because she now better understands herself.

Mrs. Holmes's early return signals the end of Thea and Mr. Holmes's relationship. Thea feels "sick to my stomach" (336) at the sight of Mrs. Holmes, and is anticipating the same guilt and shame people made her feel because of Georgie. Instead, Sissy comforts Thea. Thea thinks, "Nobody had hugged me last year, after Georgie. Nobody had touched me" (332). Now, Thea has grown to form significant relationships outside of her family with people who better understand her and respect her emotions.

Watching is a significant theme in this chapter. The eyes of Yonahlossee are on Thea both at the Spring Show and at the dance. Yet, Thea has transitioned from feeling scrutinized to finding power in being the center of attention. She is the focus because of her talent and beauty as opposed to rumors about her. The green dress Thea wears to the dance helps symbolize this transition. It is a gown more suited for an adult woman, as Thea has come to terms with her womanhood. At the same time, the dress is also green, symbolizing that Thea has found a balance in her connection to nature and her childhood self. She realizes she does not need to abandon those parts of what makes her an individual in order to grow up. At the start of the novel, Thea felt small and insignificant, and now she has grown to embrace the attention she commands.



Discussion Question 1

How does Thea's interaction with David in this chapter differ from their interaction at the first dance?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Thea chose to try and beat Leona at the Spring Show instead of letting her win?

Discussion Question 3

In this chapter, how does Thea's relationship to Sissy compare to her relationship with Sam?

Vocabulary

perfunctory, oxet, unflappable, pirouetting, roiling, chiseled, pert, admonishment, buoyed, chaste, decorum



Chapter 21

Summary

Thea returns from the dance, and all of her cabin mates are still awake. Sissy is the only one who is missing. Before they go to bed, Mary Abbott asks where Sissy is, and if they should tell someone she isn't home. When everyone is asleep, Thea gets up and lays in Sissy's bed. She is momentarily angry at Sissy's carelessness.

The next morning, as Thea walks to the Castle, she feels girls around her staring and whispering, but she isn't sure if it's just her imagination. Rachel appears and takes Thea's hand. She wants to know if Thea will start giving them riding lessons again. Thea avoids the question, but knows she won't. Sissy tells Thea that she and Boone are secretly engaged. Thea genuinely congratulates Sissy. Thea points out that people are staring at them, but Sissy brushes it off. Thea and Sissy head to the stables, where they see Gates. Gates seems angry and tries to walk away, but Sissy stops her. Sissy asks her if there is a reason she's being ignored. Gates leaves and Thea blames herself. Sissy, both angry and sad, curses Mr. Holmes and tells Thea she should have loved someone else. Thea abruptly confesses the details of her romance with Georgie, and the ensuing violence when Sam found out. She feels relieved to have told someone. Sissy echoes Mr. Holmes and says that family should not decide the rest of your life.

Thea rests at Augusta House while everyone else is at the Hall. Mary Abbott arrives at the cabin and asks Thea if she knows about Sissy's romance with Boone. She says there is a rumor that Mrs. Holmes knows that Sissy was out with Boone on the night of the dance. Thea realizes that everyone staring and whispering was directed at Sissy, not at her. Thea takes Naari out for a ride and thinks about Sissy and the fact that she will be sent home if Mrs. Holmes finds out about Boone. When she comes back from the ride, Mr. Albrecht congratulates her on winning the Spring Show. He tells Thea that she is a truly talented horsewoman and that, if she stuck with the sport, she could achieve great things.

Analysis

When Sissy fails to return on the night of the dance, Thea is agitated. Thea is frustrated with Sissy's carelessness because she understands the consequences. When Sissy and Boone are off together, Thea can see her relationship with Georgie reflected in that they are taking a great risk with a potentially disastrous outcome: Sissy being sent away from Yonahlossee. There is a difference in that Sissy and Boone are genuinely in love and have become engaged. This heightens the potential for emotional disaster even further. The fact that Mrs. Holmes is aware of the rumor involving Sissy and Boone means, almost certainly, that Sissy will face the consequences. Just as Thea was sent away for her illicit relationship, Sissy could be sent away for hers.



When Thea realizes that all of the girls were staring at Sissy because of the rumor, and not at her, Thea is relieved. This is a significant moment because it represents a change in Thea's understanding that she isn't always the subject of criticism and rumors. Thea is paranoid because of all that has happened in her life up to this point, but this moment causes her to realize that she has grown beyond being the subject of whispers.

Thea's relationship with Sissy is incredibly significant because she is the only person to whom Thea is able to confess the full details of her relationship with Georgie. Before Sissy even reacts, Thea feels relieved to have told the story out loud to someone else. Now that she has "confessed" to what caused her to be sent away, Thea can put Georgie behind her and proceed with her life. Sissy does not respond with judgement or shame, but understanding. Both Sissy and Mr. Holmes tell Thea not to let her family influence her entire life. At the same time, Sissy and Mr. Holmes represent two new relationships outside of her family that Thea was able to grow with and learn from. In a way, Thea has already accepted and enacted this advice without realizing it.

Thea seems to have settled back into a place where she is able to use riding as a way to center herself. Riding alone gives Thea a space where she can work through problems and make more logical decisions. It also gives her an opportunity to reconnect with the land itself. Thea has a very unique and important relationship with horses, and Mr. Albrecht tells Thea this when he congratulates her on the Spring Show. He can see that Thea's talent and connection with horses runs deep and that, should she pursue the sport, she would be unstoppable.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think Thea means by "a right girl"?

Discussion Question 2

How might Thea's relationship with horses grow and benefit her life?

Discussion Question 3

Who might have started the rumor about Sissy and Boone?

Vocabulary

abashed, tautened, tremulous



Chapter 22

Summary

The next morning, Thea gets up very early and goes to the Castle. On her way to Mrs. Holmes's office, Thea runs into Emmy. Emmy says that Docey feels bad for Thea. Thea asks if Mrs. Holmes "knows." Emmy says she doesn't, at least not from her. Both Mr. and Mrs. Holmes are in the office when Thea arrives. Mrs. Holmes is expecting Thea, who says she wants to discuss Sissy. Thea says that the girl spotted in the woods wasn't Sissy, but herself. Thea says that punishing Sissy would be a terrible mistake, and that she should take the blame instead. Mrs. Holmes knows that Sissy and Boone are engaged, and doesn't understand Thea's logic for coming here. Mrs. Holmes becomes angry, and asks Thea if she knows why her parents sent her here. She reveals that Thea's parents thought she might be carrying a child. Mr. Holmes tells his wife to stop, but she continues ranting about Thea possibly bearing her cousin's child. She tells Thea she will have to make an example of her, and Thea agrees. Mrs. Holmes ends her lecture by telling Thea that her mother was "the fastest" young woman at their school.

At breakfast, Mrs. Holmes makes the announcement that Thea will be sent away "for an infraction involving a young man." Sissy looks at Thea across the room and knows what she has done for her. Docey appears behind Thea and comforts her.

Later, Thea finds Sissy crying in the woods. Thea explains the whole situation to her friend. Sissy says that everyone believes Thea was actually in the woods with a boy. Thea says it's okay, because it is time for her to go home anyway. Thea wants to see Sam. Though, Thea knows that she will be leaving Yonahlossee "in shame" and that her parents would be notified of the scandal. Thea is forced to spend the night in the infirmary. Mary Abbott visits her there and confesses that she told Henny about Sissy's absence on the night of the dance. Thea is at first shocked, but then unsurprised.

The chapter switches to a flashback, after Sam and Georgie's fight. Thea had confessed everything to her mother, besides the fact that she and Georgie had sex. Sam told Thea he wished he had stopped her and Georgie. He told Thea that their parents planned to send her away, and Thea was heartbroken. Thea visited her father in his study and he told her that Georgie is in the hospital and that his brain was damaged. He then tried to persuade Thea to change the story of Georgie and Sam's fight to Georgie falling on a rock. Thea agreed to this story. Later, Thea's mother told her they were sending her away because it was best for her. On Thea's final day at home, she took Sasi out for a long ride. Idella, the maid, helped Thea pack.



Analysis

Thea attempts to take the blame for Sissy for two reasons. First, because it is a way for her to exit camp and she feels that it is her time to go home. Second, because it is a way to protect Sissy from the same fate that Thea suffered at the hands of her parents. Thea is ready to leave Yonahlossee. She wants to see Sam and take what she has learned at Yonahlossee and apply it to her life in Florida. After reading Sam's most recent letter, Thea senses the discord at home and feels that she could go back and not be the focus. Thea also sees the ways in which Sissy's current predicament with Boone parallels Thea's relationship with Georgie. Sissy will be disgraced and forced to leave camp. She will likely never see Boone again. Not only will she suffer the same humiliation that Thea was forced to suffer, but Sissy and Boone genuinely care for each other and have a potential future together, unlike Thea and Georgie. Thea understands Sissy's mistakes as she now understands her own, and she doesn't believe that either Sissy or herself should suffer humiliation because of it.

When Mary Abbott confesses to Thea that she was the one who told Henny about Sissy and Boone, Thea is angry at first, but then comes to understand. Mary Abbott's role in this situation parallels Sam, who provoked a fight with Georgie when he felt something was wrong. Though neither Mary Abbott nor Sam knew the full details and consequences of what they were doing, they had Sissy and Thea's best interests at heart, respectively.

Mrs. Holmes, on the other hand, uses Thea's false confession as an opportunity to humiliate her. Though there is no indication that Mrs. Holmes knows about Thea and her husband, it seems as though Mrs. Holmes feels threatened by Thea, perhaps for spending so much time with Decca in her absence. Mrs. Holmes reveals the details of Thea's relationship with Georgie in front of Mr. Holmes, who was previously unaware. She also accuses Thea's mother of being "fast" as a young woman. Though Thea is intrigued by the idea of her mother as a sexual person, there is also hypocrisy inherent in this claim. Thea's mother has consistently repressed Thea's sexuality when apparently she explored it quite a bit.

The flashback scene in the chapter reveals even deeper hypocrisy within the Atwell family. Thea's father doesn't want to believe that his own son would attack someone, nor does he want Sam to suffer legal consequences for his actions. Thus, he changes the story of Georgie's injury before Thea even has an opportunity to tell the truth. This reveals just how deep the imbalance between Sam and Thea runs. Thea's parents were so eager to preserve Sam's reputation, and just as eager to send Thea away. Ironically, Sam seems angry and lonely in his letters, and Thea has grown into a new, more worldly person while away from the family she was so eager to remain with.

Discussion Question 1

If Mrs. Holmes doesn't believe Thea's confession about being in the woods with a boy, why does she agree to send Thea away?



Discussion Question 2

How would you describe Thea's relationship with Emmy and Docey? What have they contributed to her understanding of the larger world?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Thea willing to leave Yonahlossee "in shame"?

Vocabulary

shrewd, impudent, incredulously



Chapter 23

Summary

Thea takes a train from Asheville to Orlando. The train is mostly empty, but there is another girl of Thea's age in her car. Thea notices both the girl's wealth and her shyness. Thea wishes she could tell the girl to stop being nervous and take charge. Thea then begins questioning her own desire to return to her family. When she spots her parents on the train platform, she feels she isn't ready to see them. Thea greets them. Her mother looks agitated and her father looks much older. Thea is surprised by how busy Orlando is in comparison to Emathla. Thea's mother is exhausted and tells Thea she now suffers from a permanent headache. She tells Thea they are living in a hotel, but will be leaving for their new home the next week.

When they arrive at the hotel, Thea and her mother are momentarily alone. Mother tells Thea to let Sam come to her. Thea thinks back to her final night at camp. She snuck out of the infirmary and went to the barn a final time. There, she ran into Leona, who congratulated her for winning the Spring Show. Thea told Leona she was sorry she would have to leave Yonahlossee and her horse. Leona said the same to Thea.

Back in the present, Thea awaits Sam at her hotel room door, but he does not come. She sleeps and when she wakes it is evening. Thea opens the door and sees Sam walking down the hallway. They exchange greetings, but he doesn't meet her eyes. Thea invites him into her room. Their conversation is stilted, as there is so much to be said but neither person can say it. Eventually, they hug. He reveals that Aunt Carrie, Uncle George, and Georgie moved to Missouri and that no one besides Father has seen them since the fight. Sam says that it is their fault for the ways their lives have changed, but Thea refuses to take the blame.

The next day, Thea has lunch with her mother and Sam. Mother barely eats, and Thea observes how much she cares about the opinion of everyone around her. For dinner, Thea eats with her father and Sam. Father asks what Thea learned, and Thea says she learned how to be around other girls.

The next morning, the family goes for a drive to see the new house. It is just outside of Orlando, and smaller than their home in Emathla. There is no barn. Mother is clearly upset and missing the old house. Thea tells her mother that she wants to leave again, and her mother agrees, saying there is nothing here for Thea anymore. That night, Thea tells Sam she wants to leave, and Sam says he never wants to leave.

Thea goes for a walk alone and ends up at the train station, where she watches people come and go. Thea begins recounting events in the future: Georgie dies six days before his 25th birthday, and she never saw him again. Mother becomes an "invalid" who locks herself in her room and suffers from migraines. Thea is sent to a boarding school in the Northeast, where she continues to ride. Sam never leaves the South, and remains with



his parents. Thea and Sam grow apart, as Thea only comes home from her Northeastern boarding school for four weeks out of the year. Thea grows to understand that her parents sent her away because she would never be content with life in Florida. Most importantly, Thea learns that her life and her happiness are her own to claim.

Analysis

The novel ends with Thea returning to Florida and interacting with the way things have changed. On the train to Orlando, Thea sees a girl similar in age and wealth. This girl is representative of Thea before she went to Yonahlossee: private, shy, unaware of the larger world. Thea wishes she could speak to this girl frankly, as she wishes she could speak to herself of a year ago and tell her that not everything is as dire as it seems.

Before leaving camp, Sissy gives Thea her diamond horseshoe necklace. This becomes an enduring symbol of their friendship and the time Thea spent at Yonahlossee. Thea may have put herself in a position to be sent home from camp, but she will never forget the friends and lessons she made and learned during that year, and the diamonds will be an enduring testament to that fact.

While Thea has returned to her family a more mature and worldly person, the rest of the Atwell family seems to have changed for the worse. Sam has grown older, and is quiet. He blames himself and Thea for what happened to Georgie, rather than the adults or the larger circumstances of their upbringing. Father has aged greatly, and his hair is entirely gray. He seems filled with guilt for sending away his daughter, and not protesting when Mother insisted that she go to Yonahlossee. Mother is the worst of all, though, and suffers from a headache that won't leave her. The perfect world that she crafted has been broken, and she is entirely unable to cope with this fact and move on. She would rather remain sickly and stuck in the past than learn to accept change. Thea sees her mother in this state and feels sorry for her. Thea understands that this is what she could have become had she not gone away to Yonahlossee, and she is grateful she was given the opportunity to have left.

Thea is only in the presence of her family for a few days before she realizes she wants to leave again. She has outgrown her family and is willing to accept that she needs the larger world to thrive. Sam holds on to the guilt of the past and thinks Thea should accept this guilt, too. Thea refuses to accept this and calls the past "a series of events" that has come and gone. In a previous chapter, Sissy told Thea that "God grants happiness only to those who seek it," and Thea repeats those words to her brother. Now, Thea will leave and seek her happiness.

Thea reveals what happens after the events of the novel: Georgie dies; Mother remains sickly; Sam stays with their parents; and Thea goes off to attend a boarding school in the Northeast, which causes her to only see her family a few times a year. She emphasizes that she continues to ride horses. It's as though her family becomes more and more irrelevant as Thea grows into her own life. Had she not been sent away to Yonahlossee, it's likely that Thea would have been like Sam and remained close to her



family forever. Though Thea was sent away because of the hypocrisy of her family, it carried with it the blessing of Thea understanding herself as an individual.

Thea emphasizes her connection to the natural world in this chapter and how it inspired her fearlessness. Thea will always remain connected to the natural world. At the start of the novel, nature was a uniting force for Sam and Thea. Now, they are divided. Sam retains the innocence and simplicity of nature, whereas Thea adopts the wildness of the natural world. Thea is no longer half of a set of twins, but her own woman with her own perspective. Thea is forced to sacrifice the close relationships of her childhood in order to break free of their restrictions and closed-minded mentality.

Discussion Question 1

How do you think Thea's life would have differed had she not gone to Yonahlossee?

Discussion Question 2

How does Thea's homecoming differ from her expectations?

Discussion Question 3

How has Thea's relationship with her mother changed?

Vocabulary

atrophying, vulgar, plaintive, intoned, uproariously, languidly



Characters

Thea Atwell

Thea Atwell is 15 years old at the start of the novel, and turns 16 during the course of events. She is from Emathla, Florida, where she was raised in a very isolated rural environment. She is an excellent horseback rider and has spent the majority of her childhood exploring her family's sprawling farmland on her pony, Sasi. The year before the events of the novel, Thea and her cousin Georgie explore a complicated romantic relationship that ends in a bloody physical fight. When the relationship is discovered, Thea is sent away to the Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls.

Thea is a twin to her brother, Sam. Until Thea attends Yonahlossee, Sam is Thea's closest friendship. At Yonahlossee, Thea interacts with other girls her own age for the first time. She is able to explore and understand what it means to be a young woman in a way that she would not have had she remained in Florida, where she was a child one day and then expected to be an adult woman the next.

At Yonahlossee, Thea becomes a more fearless horseback rider, and brings a sense of fearlessness into other parts of her life. She develops bold, headstrong, and passionate characteristics. Though she was raised in isolation, Yonahlossee helps Thea grow to love the larger world. After the events of the novel, she attends a boarding school in the Northeast.

Sam Atwell

Sam is Thea's twin brother. He is a gentle and calm lover of nature. Alongside Thea, he spent his childhood exploring the outdoors. When Thea begins her romantic relationship with Georgie, Sam is suspicious. Gradually, a wall builds between Sam and Thea that changes their relationship to be not as close as it once was. Sam attacks Georgie and leaves him with brain damage. Following this fight, Thea goes to Yonahlossee while Sam remains at home. He grows up during this period and becomes a more closed-off, sullen person who believes he deserves blame and punishment for his actions. After the events of the novel, Sam marries and has children, but remains in Florida for the rest of his life.

Henry Holmes

Mr. Holmes is the headmaster of the Yonahlossee school. He is married to Beth Holmes and they have three daughters together: Rachel, Sarabeth, and Decca. Mr. Holmes is in his early 30's and very handsome. Many girls at the school have crushes on him. He begins a friendship with Thea when she starts giving his daughters riding lessons. Their friendship elevates to a romantic and sexual relationship when Mrs. Holmes is away on



a fundraising trip. Mr. Holmes does not have a good relationship with his family, and he helps Thea come to understand that one's family is not always right.

Elisabeth "Sissy" Gilliam

Sissy is a very wealthy and popular girl from Monroeville. She lives in Augusta House with Thea, and becomes Thea's closest friend. Sissy meets a boy named Boone at a school dance and begins a secret relationship with him that eventually leads to an engagement. Sissy is open and friendly to everyone. She is the only girl that Thea truly confides in.

Elizabeth Atwell

Elizabeth Atwell is Thea and Sam's mother. She is a very proper and old-fashioned woman who prefers tending to her home and her garden to interacting with people. According to Mrs. Holmes, Elizabeth used to be a free-spirited young woman, but by the end of the novel she is reclusive.

Leona

Leona is a student at Yonahlossee in the same year as Thea. She is known throughout the camp for being incredibly wealthy as well as the best horseback rider. Leona is standoffish and doesn't have many friends. She and Thea develop a bond of mutual respect through their love of horses. In the novel, Leona's father loses his money and Leona will be forced to leave Yonahlossee, as well as her horse, King.

Georgie Atwell

Georgie is Sam and Thea's cousin on their father's side. He is older than Sam and Thea, but they have all grown up together as siblings. Georgie and his family live in Gainesville, Florida, which is a short drive from Emathla. Unlike Sam and Thea, Georgie does not have a strong connection to nature. The year before the events of the novel, he instigates a romantic and eventually sexual relationship with Thea. He seems to rely on her for emotional support, as his parents are losing their money. Georgie is attacked by Sam and this leaves him brain damaged. He eventually dies in his mid-twenties.

Decca Holmes

Decca is the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes. She is full of energy and very curious. She grows close with Thea during their riding lessons together.



Mary Abbott McClellan

Mary Abbott is a Yonahlossee student and resident of Augusta House. She has a strange, straightforward personality and doesn't see the world the same as the other girls around her. She often annoys Thea with her excessive, prodding questions.

Beth Holmes

Beth Holmes is the headmistress of Yonahlossee and wife of Mr. Holmes. She is very proper and aims to maintain order, as she is responsible for disciplining the girls of the school. She knows Thea's mother from when they attended school together.



Symbols and Symbolism

Sam's handkerchief

Sam's handkerchief symbolizes the ways in which Thea remains connected to Sam while she is away from home. Thea brings Sam's handkerchief with her to Yonahlossee. She keeps it in her dress and then under her pillow. Thea thinks of Sam almost constantly in her early days at camp, as it's the first time they've ever been apart. Eventually, Thea puts the handkerchief into her desk drawer and hardly thinks about it. Similarly, Thea doesn't think about Sam as often as she develops her friendships with other girls and rejects her relationship with her family members, as she feels they wronged her.

Sissy's diamond horseshoe necklace

Sissy's horseshoe necklace symbolizes her wealth that eventually becomes a symbol of her enduring friendship with Thea. Sissy wears the diamond horseshoe necklace every day. This is a subtle show of her extreme wealth and it is also ironic because Sissy does not enjoy horseback riding. At the end of the novel, Sissy gifts Thea this necklace. It becomes a symbol of their enduring friendship, as well as a memento of Thea's time at Yonahlossee.

Cameo

The cameo pins that appear throughout the book symbolize the way in which adults have maintained outdated views and customs from the past. Both Mrs. Holmes and Mother wear a Victorian-era cameo pin on their shirts. This is a symbol of the way that both of these women have retained the strict morals of another era. Thea also notes that cameo pins traditionally represent death, adding to their status as a symbol representing a dying age of culture.

Sasi

Sasi symbolizes Thea's powerful childhood connection to nature. Sasi is Thea's pony throughout her entire childhood in Emathla. Thea rides him every single day until she begins her relationship with Georgie. Sasi represents Thea's childhood connection to land and the natural world, and how Thea begins to reject this connection because of Georgie. Eventually, Sasi is sold to another family when Thea's parents leave Emathla. Though Thea would have outgrown Sasi eventually, the family selling her before Thea's return is symbolic of the way in which Thea's childhood was forcefully taken away from her when her parents sent her away.



Sam's terrarium

Sam's terrarium symbolizes his restricted world view. In the flashback scenes, Sam is often collecting bugs and small animals to put into a glass terrarium. Though Sam loves the natural world, his terrariums are symbolic of the way in which he is content to remain in a small, confined, and safe space, rather than exploring the larger world.

Thea's hair

Thea's hair symbolizes her transition from being a girl of Emathla to a young woman of Yonahlossee. Thea has always worn her hair long, tied in a braid that hangs down her back. For 1930, this was a very old-fashioned look. Thea cuts her hair to be a blunt bob, which was considered much more fashionable. This haircut not only symbolizes Thea outgrowing her life in Emathla, it also shows she is becoming more like the girls of Yonahlossee.

Mr. Holmes's whiskey

Mr. Holmes's whiskey symbolizes the rules he is willing to break. Often when Thea and Mr. Holmes share intimate moments, Mr. Holmes has been drinking. Alcohol was outlawed in the United States during this time period, and his taste for the forbidden drink parallels his forbidden relationship with Thea.

Sam's rifle

Sam's rifle symbolizes a corruption of nature. Sam and Georgie both receive hunting rifles one year on Sam and Thea's birthday. Sam later uses this rifle to severely injure Georgie during their fight. Sam is typically a protector of nature and wouldn't shoot and kill an animal. Yet, the gun symbolizes how his nature was corrupted in that moment and passion overtook his typically level-headed approach.

Mother's stationary

Mother's stationary symbolizes the order and appearances she maintains at all times. Thea's mother writes to her on beautiful monogrammed paper. The letters she writes to Thea are perfunctory and don't address the larger emotional issues at stake. The lovely stationary is symbolic of the way Mother insists on keeping up appearances and avoiding real emotions.

Thea's green dress

Thea's green dress symbolizes the transformation Thea has undergone during her time at Yonahlossee. At the last dance of the year, Thea borrows a green satin gown from



Sissy. It is a very grown-up and mature dress that emphasizes both the physical ways that Thea is transforming into a woman, as well as the emotional ways she is changing. It is emphasized that the other girls at the dance are all wearing shorter dresses and that Thea stands out. Yet, at this point of the novel, Thea is not afraid to stand out and command attention.

The snake

The snake Thea spots in Chapter 5 is representative of the way Thea is punished and rewarded for her exploration of sexuality. When she finds the snake, she is rewarded with praise, despite its position as a symbol of evil. Later, Thea will be punished for supposed evil, but will be blindsided as she has not been taught right from wrong when it comes to sexuality. The snake is also explicitly a phallic symbol and represents the start of Thea's foray into her sexual exploration.



Settings

Emathla, Florida

Emathla, a very small town in Florida, is Thea's hometown. Her family lives on a very large plot of land where they have no neighbors. The home itself is very large, though only four people live there. There are stables and a forest nearby. The climate is always hot, and the seasons do not change.

Masters

This is where the Holmes family lives. It is a large house on the edge of the Yonahlossee campus. Thea begins visiting there regularly in order to see Decca while she recovers from her horseback riding accident. Later, Thea visits Masters every day to be with Mr. Holmes.

Augusta House

Augusta House is the dormitory where Thea lives. Sissy, Eva, Mary Abbott, Gates, and Victoria all live there. Each girl has a desk and a wardrobe for their belongings. The girls sleep on bunk beds.

The stable

The stable is a place where Thea goes to think and be with her horses.

In Emathla, Sasi's stable becomes a negative space after Georgie and Thea have sex there. Thea feels violated in this space.

At Yonahlossee, the stable is a place where Thea learns to reconnect with her nature-loving side. She and Leona have many conversations about the nature of horses and riding at the stable.

Orlando, Florida

Orlando is the new city that the Atwell family moves to. It is a much more populated city than Emathla and Thea is surprised to find she likes the hustle and bustle. When Thea returns from Yonahlossee, her family is staying in a hotel in Orlando but will soon relocate to a smaller home right outside the city.



Themes and Motifs

Watching

Overall, the theme of watching is highly ironic, as Thea is surrounded by people who judge and criticize her, but she does not have someone in her life who is willing to guide her and help her make decisions.

Thea is the narrator of the novel and therefore a "watcher" herself, but her isolated childhood condition and her time at a secluded school also make her a subject that is constantly observed by others. Watching often takes a negative connotation, and speaks to the way that Thea's actions are criticized by those watching her.

During her childhood, Thea is free to roam her family's land alongside her brother Sam. There is little supervision and there is no sense that Thea is being watched here. Yet, as she begins her adolescence, Thea starts to notice the ways in which she is constantly being observed.

As a student of Yonahlossee, Thea feels watched by the administration and the other girls. The administration, particularly Mrs. Holmes, are seemingly aware of everything that happens within the walls of the school. Rumors spread rapidly and if compromising information gets into the wrong hands, one can be sent away from school the very next day.

Mr. Holmes comments on the way Thea watches everyone around her and silently digests the information. Thea is at first hurt by his comments, but later comes to understand them. Thea feels watched by Mr. Holmes in return. When they are intimate, Thea specifies how he "observes" her. This act of observing is different, and more tender, than Georgie, who watched Thea almost aggressively and obsessively.

At the end of the novel, "watching" ties into Thea's desire to see the larger world. Thea comes to realize that there is more to life than living in a big house with a few people. She wants to leave so that she may continue to take in all she can.

Fearlessness

Thea's fearlessness helps the reader understand Thea's inner strength and how she is able to tackle the numerous obstacles that come her way. Her sense of fearlessness also helps the reader understand how Thea is different from those around her. She is not merely content to do as she is told, but takes risks and deviates from the expected path.

This fearless attitude originates in Thea's confidence on the back of a horse, where she is capable of completing high jumps and incredibly fast races. Thea continues riding after coming to Yonahlossee, and each time she rides, the reader gets a glimpse into



her inner fire and passion for life. Though everything else in her world may be shaky and rapidly shifting, the reader is reminded that she is capable of taking risks and being brave.

Thea's fearlessness on the back of a horse translates into her everyday actions. She is able to overcome being cast out by her family and crafts a new family and identity of her own at Yonahlossee. We see her great boldness when she decides to kiss Mr. Holmes and when she takes responsibility for Sissy being caught in the woods with Boone.

Thea is never rewarded for her fearlessness, and it is not considered a desirable personality trait. Yet, for her, it is a survival mechanism. In order to survive and find happiness in a world where, as a young woman, she has limited options.

Family

In the novel, family is explored as a source of both happiness and devastation. Thea grows up having interacted with only her family, but is sent away from them almost overnight. At Yonahlossee, Thea develops her own nontraditional family and comes to a greater understanding of the function of a family.

Family consumes Thea's entire life until she arrives at Yonahlossee. Even during her first few months at the school, she thinks only of those she has left behind in Emathla. She constantly compares everyone new she meets to Sam and wonders what he is doing at that time. For Thea, the only idea of family are the people who are immediately related to you. On top of that, Thea has no other relationships besides her family--making them quite literally her whole world. Understandably, Thea is devastated when she is sent away from them. Though Thea takes the blame for the fracturing of her family, Thea's relationship with Georgie actually brings to light the fractures that already existed within the family structure.

At Yonahlossee, Thea becomes consumed by the Holmes family. Not only does she seek a romantic relationship with Mr. Holmes, but she becomes highly involved in the lives of his three daughters. She finds beauty in their seemingly flawless relationships and the united front they present to the school. It is as though Thea is seeking a replacement family for the one she left behind. Thea takes care of Decca in a way that is almost motherly. At times, it seems as though Thea is attempting to compensate for her own damaged relationship with her mother.

Eventually, both Sissy and Mr. Holmes help Thea come to the realization that one's family does not necessarily need to be comprised of one's immediate family members. Not only that, but Thea realizes the ways in which her family was wrong for shaming her and casting her out.



Womanhood

The novel follows Thea through a time when she is exploring her young womanhood and demonstrates how confusing this maturing process can be if one listens to what everyone else thinks they should be doing; rather, a girl becomes a woman only when she learns to think for herself and stop caring what others think of her. After a highly isolated childhood in the early twentieth century, Thea is unsure of her place in the world. Thea is growing up and realizing that what is expected of her is changing. This is most evident in the way that the distinction between her and Sam grows wider.

Thea receives many conflicting views of what it means to be a woman from the different people in her life. Throughout Thea's childhood, the only woman she knew was her own mother, who is an old-fashioned housewife. As Thea gets older, mother talks about womanhood to Thea in terms of finding a suitable husband and having children. As a child, Thea's concept of being a woman revolves solely around these things. Yet there is tension here because Thea views herself as being more like Sam than Mother.

Thea feels in control of her womanhood when she begins her relationship with Georgie. Georgie makes Thea feel very "grown-up," yet he does not treat her with adult respect. Thea enjoys the sensation of adulthood because she does not understand the connotations of her relationship with Georgie. Eventually, she is punished for exploring the sexual elements of womanhood, though she arguably didn't know any better.

At Yonahlossee, Thea explores the sexuality inherent in womanhood. Mr. Holmes treats her with a sense of respect and Thea feels a level of authority between them that she did not feel with Georgie. Thea naturally starts to outgrow her childhood ways, rather than having them taken away from her by force.

By the end of the novel, only a year has passed. Yet Thea has come to elements of adulthood on her own terms. She actively seeks out a life away from her family, showing she has developed an adult sense of independence.

Nature

Thea's relationship to nature is a direct link to her childhood innocence and happiness. Throughout the novel, she maintains a constant connection to nature and it serves to remind her of the positive aspects of her youth.

During her childhood, nature is Thea's entire world. Though she does not have many relationships, she has the world around her home, which she explores every day with Sam. Eventually, Thea begins to turn away from this relationship to nature when she begins her romance with Georgie. She neglects Sam's woodland explorations as well as her daily rides on Sasi. Thea has sex with Georgie in the stable and this is a turning point both in their relationship and in Thea's relationship to nature. In this scene, childhood and adulthood are placed too close in proximity to each other and the result is disastrous.



At Yonahlossee, Thea comes to embrace this connection once again. Her horseback riding skills are elevated to a new level. Thea also has sex with Mr. Holmes in a clearing in the woods, as opposed to in his library, where they have been meeting. This moment represents a merging of Thea's childhood self with her adult self.

By the end of the novel, Thea has a relationship to nature as a space for meditation and reflection. Though her relationships to Sam, Georgie, and Mr. Holmes have all transformed--her relationship to the land has remained a consistent source of security and confidence.

Sexuality

Thea explores the theme of sexuality through her relationships with both Georgie and Mr. Holmes. Thea is living in an age where a young woman's sexuality is not openly discussed, and so Thea is forced to develop her own understanding of sexual thoughts, desires, and actions.

In the early stages of her relationship with Georgie, Thea justifies the pleasure she gains from the encounters by saying that she was not raised to associate pleasure with shame. This indicates that Thea's parents never discussed sex and sexuality with her. Thea doesn't understand the source of the pleasure, but willingly goes along as Georgie leads her from one encounter to the next.

Despite never having discussed sex with Thea, her entire family casts her out and shames her when they find out about the nature of her relationship with Georgie. Because of this, Thea's visceral reaction to sexuality is instant shame. When Mrs. Holmes lightly chastises Thea for dancing too close to a boy, Thea is mortified as though she had committed a much greater crime.

Thea begins to explore her sexuality once more when she develops feelings for Mr. Holmes. She becomes obsessed with him and actively pursues a relationship with him. During her infatuation, Thea masturbates and has sexual dreams. Mr. Holmes helps guide Thea through the difficult emotions she is feeling, and through this Thea understands that a sexual relationship can be a place of mutual respect. When Thea and Mr. Holmes finally do have sex, Thea is in control of the situation and enjoys it. She has overcome the shame her family made her feel.



Styles

Point of View

In this novel, the author uses the first-person perspective of Thea Atwell. Thea is both the narrator and main character, which means the reader is mostly focusing on her thoughts and actions. She can only speculate about what those around her are thinking. Throughout the narrative, Thea shifts her storytelling from her present experience at Yonahlossee to her past experiences in Emathla. The first-person perspective creates a limited understanding of what happened in the past. This creates a sense of suspense, as the reader is waiting for Thea to reveal the "terrible mistake" she made that caused the transition from Emathla to Yonahlossee.

Language and Meaning

The world of the novel is painted entirely with Thea's own language. Therefore, the reader comes to understand much about what is important to Thea. Her main focus switches between interpersonal relationships, sexuality, her family, and horses. Though there is much else happening at Yonahlossee, such as schoolwork, the reader is not given a thorough understanding of these things as they are not at the forefront of Thea's present interests.

The way Thea speaks often provides clues as to things the reader has yet to learn about the past, as well as things that will come in the future. For example, Thea is filled with shame throughout the first few chapters. She often references disappointing her family and desperately wishes to be among them, but the reader does not have any idea why this could be until much later in the novel when Thea finally reveals what exactly caused her to be sent away.

Words and phrases relating to horses and horseback riding are a specific set of vocabulary used in this book. Thea often uses technical jargon when talking about caring for horses or riding them. This reveals she is entirely at home in this world and has no need to explain what any of these specific terms mean.

Structure

The novel begins in the present, with Thea arriving at Yonahlossee and getting settled into her new surroundings. The chapters remain in the present until Chapter 5, which begins a pattern of flashback chapters. The two pieces of the story begin to parallel each other until Chapter 19, which is the final flashback chapter.

The present chapters follow Thea through her time at Yonahlossee. She is dealing with the emotional aftermath of her relationship with Georgie as well as being away from her



family for the first time in her life. Thea's primary focus becomes her relationship with the Holmes family, and eventually her sexual relationship with Mr. Holmes himself.

The past chapters follow Thea the year before she arrived at Yonahlossee. These chapters chronologically follow the Atwell family coming apart because of the Great Depression. Thea and Georgie begin a flirtation that turns into a sexual relationship. At the climax of the story, it is revealed that Sam severely beat Georgie because of this relationship.



Quotes

It seemed very womanly, to have everyone watching you.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 5)

Importance: This quote reflects the theme of "watching" that is present throughout the novel. Thea is in a transitional time in her life, and feels that all of her actions are being observed and scrutinized. In this particular scene, Thea is observing her own mother's careful movements and considering the ways that a woman must constantly be performing for an audience.

And there was always truth to the rumors, sometimes just a morsel of it, but still.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 12)

Importance: When Thea returns from her time in the infirmary, she hears a fresh batch of rumors. Thea's first few weeks at Yonahlossee are filled with rumors and questions about why she was sent to camp. Thea knows that rumors have the power to grow and spread, even if only a fraction of the rumor is true.

Beds were so rarely unmade in my world.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 14)

Importance: Here, Thea is referring to the literal unmade bed of her aunt and uncle. This quote acts symbolically to show how privileged and fortunate Thea has been. Unlike her aunt and uncle, who are facing the effects of the Great Depression, Thea has someone make her bed for her every day. The unmade bed also refers to how the peace of Thea's isolated world is being disrupted.

But we were no one, nothing, without our families.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 12)

Importance: Every girl at Yonahlossee comes from a privileged background, as the school is expensive and private. Thea wrestles with the idea that, though your family doesn't define your life and who you are, your family is responsible for much of the way you are shaped.

I was fearless. It was a trait that served me well in the ring, and badly in life.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 20)

Importance: On the back of a horse, Thea is willing to be creative and take risks. The same applies for situations out of the riding ring. Unfortunately, many fearless decisions--such as Thea's relationships with Georgie and Mr. Holmes--also have negative consequences.

I think I am a lost cause, to my parents.

-- Thea (chapter 22)



Importance: Here, Thea is expressing a sense of inner peace to Sissy. She will be returning to Florida in shame, but she is willing to accept that. No longer will she hold on to the shame and resentment they caused. Thea now understands they are judging her, but she does not need to judge herself.

It seemed an easy thing, to let my father believe what he wanted so badly to believe.
-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 22)

Importance: Thea's father wants to believe that Sam didn't maliciously attack Georgie, but that Georgie fell and hit his head on a large rock. Thea doesn't want to disappoint him or have Sam suffer the legal consequences of the attack, so she decides to play into her father's story.

This place is ruined.
-- Mother (chapter 22)

Importance: Mother is deeply attached to the land of the Atwell's Emathla home. She has spent her life perfecting the place and forming a connection with it. Now, Mother blames Thea's actions for ruining her ability to have peace in her home.

I was not so angry with my situation that I could not discern beauty.
-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 1)

Importance: Thea has just arrived at Yonahlossee and is looking out the window, admiring the Blue Ridge Mountains. She has only ever known flat land and hot weather, so the complex terrain of Yonahlossee fascinates her.

A door closed in my brain, then, unexpectedly. My understanding of our world shifted: it was a series of events, I thought, all of it.
-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 12)

Importance: Mr. Holmes helps Thea understand that she should not permanently hold onto the shame and humiliation her parents made her feel. Thea did not ruin her life or her family, because her actions were merely pieces of a larger chain--one that will continue no matter what.

Thea's a girl. She doesn't matter like you do.
-- Mother (chapter 14)

Importance: Mother explains to Sam that Thea is not as important as him because of her gender. Thea overhears this while pretending to be asleep in the car and is shocked. She and Sam have always been treated as equals, but now that they are growing up, Thea is experiencing the ways in which Sam is valued more because he is a boy, while Thea is reduced to helping with housework and thinking about marriage.



If Leona's father could lose everything, what of our own fathers? What of us? The question floated above us, now, a cloud.

-- Thea as Narrator (chapter 15)

Importance: When the rumor spreads that Leona's family has lost their money, a sense of paranoia and dread hangs over the camp. Leona seems so powerful and wealthy, that if even she is susceptible to the Depression, that means nobody is safe.