The thirteen-year-old Salamanca Tree Hiddle begins her narration of the novel with a flashback to the moment when she and her father first moved to Euclid, Ohio from their farm in Bybanks, Kentucky. Salamanca (Sal for short) is horrified when she sees the small, cookie-cutter houses pressed up against each other and realizes how different this place is from their the farm, with its trees, swimming hole, wide-open spaces, cows, and chickens. Her alarm increases when she sees Margaret Cadaver, a friend of her father's who helped him find a job in Euclid. Sal begins to panic as her father urges her out of the car and into Margaret's house. In her consternation, she scans the houses around her and spots a small face in an upstairs window. The face, Sal explains, belongs to Phoebe Winterbottom, who becomes Sal's friend in Euclid. Sal flashes back to a point more recent in time, after she and Phoebe became friends, but prior to the moment of narration, when, during a long car trip with her grandparents, Sal told them the story of what happened to her and Phoebe in Euclid. Sal then compares Phoebe's story to a plaster wall in Sal's farmhouse in Kentucky, at which Sal's father had begun chipping away shortly after Sal's mother left her and her father. Sal remembers that on the night she and her father had found that her mother was not returning, he had chipped at the wall all night and found a brick fireplace behind the wall. Sal explains that, as the fireplace was hidden behind the wall, her own story is hidden behind Phoebe's.

Sal now turns to the story of the trip she took with Gram and Gramps across the country. The trio plans to travel from Ohio to Lewiston, Idaho in order to "see Momma," who is "resting peacefully" in Lewiston. Sal darkly suspects her father has endorsed this trip to give her father and Margaret time to be alone. Sal is overcome with a sense of urgency and fear: she feels they must make it to Lewiston by Momma's birthday, which is in seven days, and she knows her grandparents have a reputation for disastrous experiences in cars. She begins the trip praying intently, but eventually her grandparents distract her with a plea for a story. Finally, Sal abandons her prayers and agrees to tell them Phoebe's story.

Sal begins the story with her first moments in Lewiston. She overhears Margaret pleading with her father to tell Sal how they met, but Sal rudely refuses to hear the story. Sal marches glumly through their new house, situated only a few blocks from Margaret's, complaining about its size. When she starts school a few days later, the other children admire her long, black hair while Sal silently decries her classmates' absurdity and uniformity. After several days, Phoebe introduces herself and invites Sal over to dinner. At this point, Gram interrupts her story, and Sal reflects on her Momma's parents, Grandmother and Grandfather Pickford. Her Grandparents Pickford were proper and somber people.
who never laughed, and Sal recalls moments when, even though her mother usually seemed very different from the Pickfords, her mother worried and frowned as well.

**Chapter 4: That's What I'm Telling You**

Sal returns to Phoebe's story, recalling how glad she was to have an excuse not to eat dinner with her father and Margaret that night. On their way to Phoebe's, however, they pass Margaret's house, where Mrs. Partridge is sitting on the porch. Mrs. Partridge, a wizened and eccentric old woman, beckons to the girls. On the porch, Mrs. Partridge guesses Phoebe's age by feeling her face. Phoebe is unimpressed, telling Sal about a man at the carnival who did the same thing and guessed that Phoebe's father, who was thirty-eight, was 52. At home, the girls tell Phoebe's mother about Mrs. Partridge, and this time Sal points out that Mrs. Partridge is blind. While the girls wait for supper, Phoebe tells Sal that she suspects the morbidly named Margaret Cadaver of foul play.

**Analysis**

Walk Two Moons, with its unlikely, convoluted plot, its tender, humorous voice, and its exaggerated, satiric characterizations, is an example of an adventure or accomplishment romance novel. This is a novel in which the main character takes on a quest, endures suffering and must make a sacrifice, but emerges, often mentally or spiritually, triumphant. The adventure/accomplishment romance often centers on young adults, and a protagonist's quest, as in Walk Two Moons, and becomes his or her initiation into the adult world. Romances often use plot devices to represent or stand in for internal dramas, and the personalities of characters are condensed and metaphorical. Like most adventure/accomplishment romance heroes, who are usually male, Sal embarks on a risky journey from which she hopes to gain wisdom. Her main companions along the way—Phoebe in the novel's internal narrative and Gram and Gramps in the main narrative—provide humor with their inexplicable and uncontrollable behaviors, which also drive the tortuous plot.

Creech establishes the parallel construction of the novel in the first few chapters of the book. Phoebe's story, which is also Sal's story between the time she arrived in Ohio and the commencement of her trip to Idaho with her grandparents, mirrors the story of the trip itself. In keeping with romance's tendency to use characters and narrative events as metaphors, Walk Two Moons uses this other coherent, self-contained narrative as a metaphor for Sal's quest. Sal uses Phoebe's story simultaneously to avoid and to uncover her own narrative. Sal's quest, which involves traveling halfway across the country, involves no more and no less than coming to terms with her own story.

Sharon Creech asserts that establishing a sense of place and depicting both its beauty and its impact upon character plays a significant role in her writing. In Walk Two Moons, Sal's very language, which is filled with humor and local color, helps to create that sense of place and to depict the impact of physical localities upon a person. Her descriptive words and phrases—"a caboodle of houses," "plucked me up like a weed," "ornery and stubborn as an old donkey," "a hog's belly full of things to say about her"—describe her and her past as much as they do her present surroundings, for they show her frame of reference. Her words reveal her as a deliberately quirky girl from the country, who rather precociously and swaggeringly embraces her peculiarities.
Besides her bravura with words, Sal possesses a keen eye: she is quick to debunk the words of grownups around her, expressing constant suspicion of her father’s motives toward Margaret Cadaver, and secretly suspecting the real reason she is going on the trip with her grandparents is to keep them from getting in trouble. Sal, sharp-eyed and fast-talking, seems less like a teenage girl than like a cynical ranch hand, or a hard-bitten private eye. This characterization again displays the romance’s bent for exaggeration and metaphor. Sal perhaps likes to appear tougher and more insouciant than she really is in her tall-tale retelling of her quest. Sal’s voice also serves as a source of the humor Creech finds so integral to her writing.
Chapters 5–8

Summary

Chapter 5: A Damsel in Distress

Gram interrupts Sal’s tale with her own reminiscences, and the three travelers pull into a rest stop. Sal, who wants to hurry onward as quickly as possible, recollects two times in the recent past when her grandparents were arrested during road trips. In the rest stop, Gramps spies a woman timidly examining the engine of her car. He proceeds to "help" her by pulling all the hoses out of the engine. Before long, they summon a car mechanic and continue on with their journey.

Chapter 6: Blackberries

Back on the road, Sal Launches into her story. Mr. Winterbottom comes home from work, cutting short Phoebe’s grim conjectures about Margaret Cadaver. Sal sits down to dinner with the Winterbottoms, noting how prim, proper, and careful they are. Sal feels especially sorry for Mrs. Winterbottom, who tentatively mentions all of her housewifely tasks, only to be utterly ignored by her husband and children. After dinner, Phoebe tells Sal that she thinks Margaret Cadaver dismembered her absent husband and buried him in the backyard. In bed that night, Sal, her memory jogged by a blackberry pie at the Winterbottoms’ home, reminisces about her mother: one morning, her father had left fresh flowers on the breakfast table. Her mother, deeply moved by his gesture, wanted to surprise him at work in the fields. She and Sal snuck up behind him, but he turned around at the last second. Before her mother could say anything, he pointed proudly to the fence he had built that morning. Inexplicably, Sal’s mother had burst into tears, repeating over and over that she was not good enough for him. The next morning, Sal’s mother had put bowls of freshly picked blackberries out on the breakfast table, and, when her father kissed her in thanks, she timidly asserted that she was almost as good as her husband.

Chapter 7: Ill-Ah-No-Way

The three travelers cross the border into Illinois. Gram looks at Lake Michigan with longing, and, despite Sal’s worries about time, Gramps drives down to the shore for a break. That night, Sal tries to imagine what it will be like in Lewiston, but instead her mind lingers stubbornly on the past. She recalls that before her mother left, Sal had understood the entire world based on cues from her mother, taking on all her mother’s moods. When her mother had left, Sal felt no emotions for almost two weeks, until the sight of a new calf made her realize, with some surprise, that she could have emotions independently of her mother. The next day, back on the road, Sal reflects on their trip itinerary. They are following the path her mother took on her trip to Lewiston.

Chapter 8: The Lunatic

The next day, Sal resumes Phoebe’s tale. Sal and Phoebe are alone at Phoebe’s house on a Saturday morning and about to walk down the street to a friend’s house when the doorbell rings. Phoebe, who suspects that the stranger at the door might be a lunatic with a gun, opens the door timidly. The young, dark- haired boy asks for Mrs. Winterbottom, and Phoebe, afraid to let him know that she and Sal are there alone, closes the door and walks through the house,
calling for her mother. Unable to keep up this ruse, she returns to the door and tells the boy her mother is actually out. She asks him if he wants to leave a message, but he declines, turns around, and walks away. Once he is out of sight, the two girls race over to their friend's house.

Analysis

Sal's narrative demonstrates the way in which the present itself is riddled with memory and the way in which physical objects are loaded with metaphorical and narrative significance. The memory of her mother and the blackberries is a story buried within other stories. For example, she remembers/tells the story of her mother in the context of her narration to us, the audience, of the tale she told her grandparents. Within the tale she is telling her grandparents, she ate the pie that triggered the memory. In other words, the narrative has four layers: the blackberry story, which is embedded within the story of Phoebe, which is embedded within the story she is telling her grandparents, which is embedded within the story she is telling us. The journey in Walk Two Moons consists not only of asphalt, rest stops, and national parks, but of isolated moments, bits of narratives, unexpected strangers and emotions. The past does not merely precede and lead up to the present, it bubbles up into the present as Sal struggles to make sense out of past experiences that haunt and confuse her. Similarly, objects come to stand for entire memories, emotions, anecdotes, and characterizations. The blackberries, simple enough as a small breakfast treat, take on much greater significance when embedded within the larger narrative: they give us a glimpse into the fears, inadequacies, and frustrations that Sal's mother felt in her life on the farm in Kentucky. Objects themselves carry, contain, and symbolize Sal's past and prefigure her hazy understanding of her future.

Like the heroes of many young adult novels, Sal feels wary of adults and more comfortable with other young people and the elderly. Sal resents her father for his interest in Margaret, she watches the conventional Mr. and Mrs. Winterbottom with pity and fascination, she dreads Margaret, and she cannot help but feel that at some level, her mother has abandoned her. Sal is on the brink of her own adulthood—her world is changing as she grows older, but she does not fully understand or fully trust the adult world toward which she is moving. Her break with her mother symbolizes that Sal has begun to leave behind childhood. Before her mother left, Sal explains, she took all her emotional cues from her mother, but two weeks after her mother's departure, Sal found, to her surprise, that she was capable of feeling emotions for herself. Sal is moving toward adulthood, but reluctant to leave the past. She longs for the farm, she resents the town, she fumes at her father and Margaret, she embarks on the long cross-country journey with a childish hope that she will be able to bring her mother back.

In contrast to her indeterminate and unstable attitude toward the adults in her life, Sal enjoys a reliable and comfortable relationship with her grandparents. Her grandparents listen to Sal's story wholeheartedly and intermingle bits of their own memories with Sal's retelling. Unlike the Winterbottoms, they take risks and act unconventionally and spontaneously. Unlike her father or her mother, they have not betrayed Sal in any way. To some extent, Sal actually parents them, worrying about how quickly they are progressing across the country and secretly convinced that she is traveling with them to keep them from getting into trouble, whereas her grandparents act like children, wanting to stop and linger at all
the attractions that catch their eyes. Sal’s grandparents aid her in her quest to untangle her past and better understand herself.
Chapters 9–12

Summary

Chapter 9: The Message

Phoebe and Sal visit Mary Lou's house, which is chaotic and wild with children. Sal remembers seeing Mary Lou's parents at a school event and being secretly envious of the way they had participated in all the games. The girls sit in Mary Lou's bedroom with her cousin, Ben, and discuss the lunatic. Ben teases Sal about her name and her long hair, and as she is leaving the room, much to Sal's surprise and consternation, he kisses her collarbone. Phoebe and Sal return to Phoebe's house, where Mrs. Winterbottom appears to be crying on the couch. Phoebe quickly tells Mrs. Winterbottom about the lunatic. Mrs. Winterbottom worriedly tells Phoebe not to tell her father. When the two girls walk outside, they find an envelope on the doorstep with a message inside: "Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins." Mr. Winterbottom comes home, and the family looks at the message with worried perplexity.

Chapter 10: Huzza, Huzza

Gram, Gramps, and Sal arrive in Madison, Wisconsin. They stroll around the town, enjoying the scenery and eating ice cream. Sal feels uneasy, still longing to be on the road, rushing toward Lewiston. Her grandparents ask if she wants to buy some postcards, and she adamantly refuses, remembering the trail of postcards her mother sent during her trip to Idaho. They continue on, only to be diverted by the Wisconsin Dells, a theme park featuring Wisconsin's Native American heritage. Sal walks around with Gram, ruminating on her own Native American heritage and the fact that she prefers the phrase "American Indian" to "Native American." While she and Gram watch some dancers, Sal dozes off. When she awakes, Gram is no longer beside her, and she panics, fearing that they have abandoned her and that eventually everyone, like her mother, will abandon her. She calms down, however, when she realized that Gram has merely donned a headdress and joined the dancers.

Chapter 11: Flinching

The travelers reach Minnesota, and Sal continues Phoebe's story. Soon, another message appears on Phoebe's doorstep, reading, "Everyone has his own agenda." The girls, uncertain of the meaning of "agenda," try to decipher the message at Mary Lou's. Later, they go with Mary Lou's brothers and Ben to the store. On the way, one of the young boys runs into Sal, knocking her over into Ben's arms. Ben holds onto Sal, and although she demands that he let her go, she finds herself shivering slightly at his touch. At the store, Sal sees the lunatic, and begins to feel a little frightened. On the way home, Ben starts to tell the girls that they should not call the other boy a lunatic, but does not explain himself. Then he accuses Sal of flinching whenever anyone touches her. He uses this as an excuse to hold her arm, and Sal works hard not to flinch at his touch. He then asks where her mother is, and touches her again, causing her to flinch. Sal, bothered by Ben's comments, recalls hugging her mother, snuggling with her in bed, and pretending that they were on a raft floating away down the river. Ben touches Phoebe, who also flinches, and Sal starts to wonder if Sal used to pull away from her mother the way that Phoebe pulls away from Mrs. Winterbottom.
As they arrive at Phoebe’s, Margaret Cadaver pulls up and, despite Phoebe’s protests, enlists Ben’s help in unloading the contents of her car, which include an axe. Inside, Phoebe shows Mrs. Winterbottom the second note. At home that night, Sal asks her father what it means if a person flinches when someone touches him or her. Her father, eyes red from crying, pulls her to him and hugs her.

Chapter 12: The Marriage Bed

The travelers are closing in on the South Dakota border, but Gramps sees a sign advertising a national monument at Pipestone, Minnesota and pulls off the interstate. At the monument, another tribute to, as Sal would have us say, American Indian culture, they learn how American Indians made pipes from stone and they try smoking from a pipe. Sal irrationally feels her mother is disappearing with the smoke. At the motel that night, Gramps plumps up the bed and repeats his nightly mantra: “Well, this ain’t our marriage bed, but it will have to do.” Sal then recalls the story of Gramps and Gram’s marriage: Gramps had met Gram when he was seventeen and had fallen in love with her immediately. He followed her around incessantly and finally asked her to marry him. Gram, strangely, asked him about his relationship with his dog, and judging from how warm and gentle Gramps was with his beloved beagle, Gram determined that he would be a good and loving husband and agreed to marry him. They were soon married, and on the day of the wedding, Gramp’s father and brothers secretly carried Gramp’s parent’s bed, in which he and his brothers had been born, into the new little house they had built for the newlyweds. Gramps avows that he will die in that very bed, and Sal finds herself wondering if she will ever have such a marriage bed.

Analysis

As Sal and her grandparents draw closer to Lewiston, Idaho and as Phoebe’s story unfolds, we get an increasingly clear picture of what is missing from the narrative. We learn the reason why Sal’s mother left them, the reason she went to Lewiston, and what happened to her in Lewiston. Sal’s stories circle around that moment and center on this knowledge. She narrates family history, she narrates moments from her life in Kentucky with both of her parents, she narrates the events in Kentucky and Ohio taking place after her mother left, but does not narrate her mother’s departure and trip. The string of postcards her mother sent draws a maddeningly incomplete and inconclusive trail between her departure and the events in Lewiston that serves only to intensify our desire for this narrative, the heart of the story. Sal’s own refusal to narrate the story indicates that the uncovering of this story is the goal of her quest. The stories she tells and the misadventures she has on the way are merely leading up to her ultimate confrontation with this painful story.

Just as the objects embedded in Sal’s stories often carry their own histories and narratives, the stops that Sal and her grandparents make along the way tell a history of the land across which they are traveling. Their stop in the Wisconsin Dells and in Pipestone reminds Sal of this country’s ancient heritage. The dances, the stone, and the pipes carry history much as the blackberries do. These artifacts are not merely sentimental, but color the present with emotion and inform Sal’s understanding of the present. Though these two stops are tourist attractions, glamorized and stylized for middle-class consumption, Sal and her grandparents cut through this veneer, refusing politically correct terminology by referring to themselves as Indians and throwing themselves into the heart of the rituals, dancing, smoking, and conversing with
the people who work at the monuments. Sal’s heritage provides another example of the way in which history in not only embedded in the present, but also constantly interacting with and redefining the present.

Sal draws closer to adulthood in both of the novel’s parallel narratives. Her emerging sexuality embedded within Phoebe’s story mirrors her increasing proximity to her confrontation with her mother, her past, and her loss of childhood in the novel’s framing narrative. As they draw closer and closer to Lewiston, Sal finds herself increasingly attracted to Ben and both mark her increasing involvement in the adult world. While these two trends are in one sense parallel, taking place at different levels of the narrative, they also intersect and affect each other. Sal’s emerging attraction to Ben leads her back to the painful narrative that she must confront. His comments about her flinching at his touch lead her to wonder if she had drawn away from her mother and if she and her father still hug enough. Sal stands at the cusp of two worlds, wanting physical affection both from her parents and from a boy her age.
Chapters 13–16

Summary

Chapter 13: Bouncing Birkway

Sal tells her grandparents about Mr. Birkway, her English teacher. Mr. Birkway is a passionate and energetic teacher who, on the first day of class, collects the journals his students wrote over the summer. Sal, a new student, did not write in a journal, and feels relieved as she watches her classmates warily hand their journals over to their teacher. The journals, Sal tells her grandparents, later cause a great deal of trouble.

Chapter 14: The Rhododendron

That weekend, Phoebe and Sal watch from Phoebe’s upstairs window as Mrs. Cadaver works vigorously in her backyard garden. Suddenly, much to the girls’ surprise, Mr. Birkway drives up and begins helping Mrs. Cadaver dig up and transplant a rhododendron bush. Phoebe feels certain a dead body is buried underneath the uprooted bush. Sal goes along with Phoebe’s slander of Mrs. Cadaver, thinking with resentment of how happy her father seems when he is with Mrs. Cadaver. Phoebe’s mother, who again appears to be crying, arrives at home. Sal suggests they help Mrs. Winterbottom unload the groceries, but Phoebe insists that her mother likes to do the work herself. Sal wonders how Phoebe can remain blind to the fact that Mrs. Winterbottom is unhappy. Later, she observes Mrs. Winterbottom ask her other daughter, Prudence if she “leads a tiny life.” Prudence essentially ignores her, asking Mrs. Winterbottom to hem a skirt for her, which she does readily. Sal wonders about Mrs. Winterbottom and her family. When Sal gets home, her father presents her with a gift from Mrs. Cadaver, which Sal stubbornly refuses. She fleetingly notices that she is acting just like Phoebe.

Chapter 15: A Snake has a Snack

Sal and her grandparents reach South Dakota. They promptly take a swim in the Missouri River to cool off. Sal watches her hair float around her in the water and remembers how her mother cut off her own long, black hair shortly before she left. Sal had kept the hair in a plastic bag under the floorboards of her room. Suddenly, a boy appears, wielding a knife. He informs them they are on private property and begins rifling through Gramps’s clothes, looking for his wallet. He stops, however, when a water moccasin bites Gram. Quickly, the boy makes cuts in her leg over the bite and begins to suck the poison out of her leg. They drive to the hospital, where Gram spends the night. Sal, half afraid Gram will not live through the night, sleeps out in the waiting room.

Chapter 16: The Singing Tree

Gram awakens in good health and ready to leave. As they walk out to the car, Sal hears a bird in a tree that reminds her of Kentucky. She pauses to recall a tree in their backyard she had dubbed “the singing tree” because it housed a bird with a beautiful song and appeared to sing by itself. Sal remembers keeping sad vigil over the tree on the day she and her father found out her mother was not coming back from Idaho. The tree did not sing at all on that dark day. As Sal and her grandparents resume their travels, Sal no longer feels the need to rush: suddenly, she wants to slow down.
"Stories" or "tales" serve several functions in Walk Two Moons. First of all, they symbolize the past’s immediacy, or the ways in which we continually relive the past and try to reconcile ourselves with it. Sal’s repeated memories of her mother give an example of this struggle. Sal combs over the events leading up to and following her mother’s departure, trying to understand why things happened as they did and what these events mean to her life. Stories also provide their tellers with a means of comparing themselves to others. For example, Sal, in observing and retelling Phoebe’s story, continually ponders possible parallels between her own and Phoebe’s story. Sal wonders if she treated her mother the way Phoebe treats Mrs. Winterbottom, and she sees herself unwillingly miming Phoebe’s inconsiderate treatment of Mrs. Winterbottom when Sal rejects Margaret Cadaver’s gift. By observing Phoebe’s story, which is comparatively easy for Sal to understand, Sal gains insight into her own story.

Next, stories act as a sort of currency between characters and often indicate the nature of the relationships between characters. Sal willingly shares her story with her grandparents and gladly listens to theirs. On the other hand, she refuses to hear Margaret Cadaver’s story or her father’s story, and in fact, Sal and Phoebe willfully misinterpret Margaret Cadaver’s story, attributing her with grizzly and murderous acts. At this point in the novel, Sal can share only part of her story with Ben. Sharing one’s story with someone means sharing oneself with that person and trusting him or her; refusing to share or accept stories serves as a repudiation of that person and/or an attempt to guard oneself. The students in Mr. Birkway’s class, who feel such reluctance and trepidation at being asked to give up their journals to him, understand exactly what a risk it can be to share stories with another person.

The novel, in keeping with the tropes of an adventure/accomplishment romance, continues to reflect Sal’s internal life through external events and objects. Sal, whose hair long, black hair resembles her mother’s, has hidden her mother’s cut hair and the postcards she sent during her trip to Lewiston under the floorboards in her bedroom in Kentucky. The hair and postcards, which symbolize not just Sal’s mother, but the personal changes that caused her to leave Kentucky, lie not just hidden and buried, but buried in a place far away from Sal. Though Sal has buried them beneath the floorboards in her bedroom and is drawing physically farther and farther away from them as the novel progresses, she is at the same time drawing physically and emotionally closer to what they represent—her mother’s decision to leave home and the disaster that followed. In the same way, the singing tree externalizes the numbness and grief Sal felt when she and her father found that her mother was not coming back. In the world of the novel, the natural world and the events of the present not only serve as “exit points” into memories, but also serve as expressions and reflections of emotions characters are experiencing.
Chapters 17–20

Summary

Chapter 17: In the Course of a Lifetime

Phoebe, worried that Sal has not yet told her father about Mrs. Cadaver, asks Sal what she will do if Mrs. Cadaver murders her father. To her surprise, Sal finds herself saying that she will go and live with her mother, even though she knows this is impossible. At Phoebe’s, the girls find Mrs. Winterbottom hacking glumly at a pan of burned brownies. Both Phoebe and Prudence become frustrated with Mrs. Winterbottom’s attempts to help them with their problems. Phoebe finds another note on the doorstep, asking them, “In the course of a lifetime, what does it matter?” The message seems to strike a chord with Mrs. Winterbottom, but her daughters do not notice the change in her demeanor. Sal walks home, musing that Phoebe’s and Prudence’s problems do not matter in the course of a lifetime, but the way they are treating their mother does.

Chapter 18: The Good Man

Sal pauses in her double narrations to tell the reader about the events leading up to her mother’s departure. She begins by describing her father’s character, saying that he is pure of heart, considerate to a fault, and loves the earth and the outdoors. Sal remembers that shortly before her mother left, her mother was berating herself for not being as selfless as her father and stated that she had to leave to clear her head and balance herself. Sal admits that her mother was not well, having undergone some stress and shock that Sal does not at this time describe. Her mother left Sal a note promising her speedy return, and Sal describes the tense and empty days following her departure. When they found out her mother was not returning, Sal’s father flew to Idaho, and upon his return put the house up for sale, feeling that Sal’s mother was too painfully present in the house and the farm. He also began to correspond with Margaret Cadaver at this time. Sal, outraged and secretly hoping that her mother would return to the farm, threw tantrum after tantrum, but, eventually, when her father agreed to rent the house instead of sell it, she acquiesced and drove with him to Ohio. On the ride up, Sal found herself, like her mother, wishing her father were not so perfect so that she could blame someone—not her mother—for what had happened.

Chapter 19: Fish in the Air

Sal, at Phoebe’s urging, tries to warn her father about Mrs. Cadaver. Her father is glad Sal wants to talk about Mrs. Cadaver, but listens skeptically to Sal’s worries. When her father offers to explain about her, Sal refuses his explanations. In English class, Sal finds herself daydreaming about the afternoons her mother would read stories, often Native American, to her in the fields. After class, Mr. Birkway assigns Sal a mini-journal. As Sal and Phoebe are walking home, they find themselves face to face with the lunatic. Screaming, the run to Phoebe’s house and rush inside. Mrs. Winterbottom tries to calm them, but looks just as frightened as Phoebe.
Chapter 20: The Blackberry Kiss

In her mini-journal, Sal writes about a habit she picked up from her mother. Sal had been watching her mother one morning from her bedroom window. Her mother, thinking no one could see her, popped a couple of fresh blackberries in her mouth and threw her arms around and kissed a tree. Later, Sal had crept up to the tree, on which she thought she could see a small purple stain from the blackberries. Sal kissed the tree, and, since then, often kisses trees, which, she writes, always taste faintly of blackberries. The next day in English class, they read e.e. cummings’s “the little horse is newly,” and Sal enjoys ruminating on the newborn colt’s first experiences and sensations. After school, Ben uses a spurious claim that he can read palms to trick Sal into letting him hold her hand. Sal, shocked at her body’s pleasant reaction to his touch, storms off without a word. Ben trails her, and when he leaves her at Phoebe’s doorstep, he kisses her ear.

Inside, Sal finds Phoebe worrying about a note from Mrs. Winterbottom telling her to lock the doors. Notes for Prudence and Mr. Winterbottom rest on the table. As the other members of the family come home and open their notes, the family finds that Mrs. Winterbottom has gone away for a few days without any substantive explanation. Phoebe flies into a panic, certain that the lunatic is responsible for her disappearance. At home, Sal relays this turn of events to her father, who tells Sal sadly that usually people come back. Sal hopes wildly that his words might mean that through some miracle, her own mother will come back.

Analysis

Written messages appear throughout the novel, buried within its different narratives, as alternatives and companions to storytelling. Sometimes they offer an alternative to speech, as when both Mrs. Winterbottom and Sal’s mother leave notes announcing their departures. These letters demonstrate the difficulties inherent in verbal confrontation and interpreting the stories of others: both Sal’s and Phoebe’s mothers cannot bring themselves to say goodbye to their daughters and leave notes instead, but both girls pore over the notes, struggling to understand their meaning and significance. Sometimes, as in the case of the notes left on Phoebe’s doorstep, written language intentionally mystifies, while at the same time adding to or encouraging verbal discourse. The stranger’s messages on the doorstep mystify Phoebe’s family members but find their way into the family’s thoughts and vocabulary. The messages and letters feed, drive, and enrich the verbal narrative.

Sal continues to read Phoebe’s life with great ease. She is the only one who sees how upset Mrs. Winterbottom is, and how deeply the notes affect her, and Sal understands the significance of Mrs. Winterbottom’s departure in a way that Phoebe cannot. Sal wonders at Phoebe’s blindness to her mother even while she herself stubbornly continues to push Margaret Cadaver and her father away. Phoebe’s life gives Sal cause to reflect on her own life, but does not seem to change her present behavior. Sal can apply the lessons she learns from Phoebe’s life to her past, but not her present. Sal finds that while she understands the lessons contained in Phoebe’s story, she herself must internalize those lessons through her own experiences. While she recounts Phoebe’s story to her grandparents, she herself is engaged in a long and perilous trip to learn lessons about her own family.
Sal’s mother and Mrs. Winterbottom’s flight from home and family serve as a crucial step toward the girls’ initiation into adulthood. Young adult adventure/accomplishment romances involve three stages: being separated from friends and family, undergoing a test of courage, and being reunited with friends and family in a new, more adult role. Both Sal and Phoebe now, at this point in their parallel narratives, find themselves without a mother, without the person who has always provided for their physical and emotional safety. Their mothers’ departures precipitate crises, and the girls must learn to provide for themselves physically and emotionally, as well as reconcile themselves with the reasons their mothers left and their roles in their mothers’ departures.

As Sal moves farther from her protected childhood realm in the framing narrative, she continues shyly to experience the pleasures of an increasingly adult sexuality in the internal narrative. The cummings’s poem, “the little horse is newly,” encapsulates Sal’s flirtation with Ben. Sal is new to her sexuality and drinks in its newness and its sweetness with unjudging wonder. Her continued separation from her father and her mother is the symbolic price she pays for these new, more adult experiences. Her quest, though, offers her the chance not simply to leave her childhood behind, but to reconcile herself with it and to take aspects of it—affection, spontaneity, closeness with her parents—into adulthood.
Chapters 21–24

Summary

Chapter 21: Souls

The next day at school, Sal watches in sympathy as Phoebe, so obviously sad and worried, tries to act normally. In English class that day, Mr. Birkway has his students draw their souls in fifteen seconds. The class is surprised by how similar the drawings are; each has a central, basic shape with a design in the middle. Sal and Ben discover that they have made the same drawing, a circle with a maple leaf inside.

Chapter 22: Evidence

Sal spends the night at Phoebe’s, and in the morning looks on as Phoebe tries to convince Mr. Winterbottom that she is too sick to go to school. Everyone rushes around, clearly missing Mrs. Winterbottom’s presence. Sal remembers that her household felt the same way when her mother left. At school, Phoebe finds herself lying to her friends about Mrs. Winterbottom’s whereabouts and snapping at Sal when Sal tries to comfort her. Still sympathetic, Sal recalls the times she has lied rather than divulge what has happened to her mother. On the way home, Sal silences the friends trying to pry more information from Phoebe by repeating the message stating that everyone has their own agenda. At home, Phoebe, convinced that Mrs. Winterbottom has been kidnapped, roams the house looking for clues, and Sal recalls manufacturing a story that her mother was wandering around Lewiston, Idaho with amnesia. When Prudence and Mr. Winterbottom arrive at home, they find that Mrs. Winterbottom has carefully stored casseroles with baking directions in the freezer for her family, further evidence, Phoebe’s father argues, that she left intentionally.

When Sal starts off for home, Mrs. Cadaver calls out from next door, inviting Sal to have dessert with her and her father. Sal refuses flatly. When her father meekly joins her on the walk home, foregoing dessert with Margaret, Sal feels as if she has won a small victory. Sal tells her father about Phoebe’s theories about Mrs. Winterbottom’s departure, asks her father if someone possibly forced Momma to go to Idaho, and idly wishes that they had stopped her from going. Her father sadly tells her that they had had to allow her mother to do as she pleased. They sit miserably on the porch step, looking out into the night.

Chapter 23: The Badlands

As Sal and her grandparents approach the Badlands, Sal reveals to us that her mother chose to travel to Lewiston to visit a long-lost cousin who, she thought, could help her remember who she was before she became a wife and a mother. Sal and her grandparents stop the car and look at the jagged beauty of the Badlands. Gram’s breathing is troubled, and Gramps spreads out a blanket for her. Sal sees a pregnant woman, which triggers another, crucial memory of her mother. When her mother was eight months pregnant with Sal’s little sister, Sal fell from the high branches of a tree a good distance from the farmhouse, broke her leg, and fell unconscious. Sal’s mother found her, carried her home, and rushed her to the hospital to be fitted in a cast. At home later that night, Sal’s mother went into a difficult labor. The doctor arrived too late: the umbilical cord had strangled the baby, and Sal’s mother was hemorrhaging badly. Both she
and Sal ask to hold the dead baby, and her father tells the guilt-ridden Sal that carrying her to the house had not caused her mother to go into an early labor. Sal’s mother had to undergo a hysterectomy to save her life.

Looking out at the Badlands, Sal finds herself remembering a Native American legend her mother had told her. Napi, who created humans, decided whether they would live forever or die by choosing a rock and dropping it into the river. If the stone floated, human beings would live forever; if it sank, they would die. Of course, the stone sank. People, Sal sadly acknowledges, die.

Chapter 24: Birds of Sadness

That night, the travelers, much to their amusement, sleep on waterbeds at a hotel. Sal imagines she is floating down a river on a raft and dreams about her mother, who is asking how it is possible that they are all dead. The next day Sal once again takes up Phoebe’s story. Another message, explaining that “you can’t keep the birds of happiness from flying overhead, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair,” appears on Phoebe’s doorstep. Phoebe continues to lie about Mrs. Winterbottom’s whereabouts at school. In English class, Ben delivers an oral report on the myth of Prometheus. Prometheus, a member of the Greek pantheon, stole fire from the Olympian gods and gave it to humans. As punishment for this infraction, Zeus sent man a troublesome woman, Pandora, and chained Prometheus to a rock, where vultures ate at his liver for all eternity. That night, Sal eats supper at Mary Lou’s, and her father blandly tells Sal he will eat at Margaret’s.

Analysis

While stories serve as a path to truth and understanding in Walk Two Moons, Sal and Phoebe also use stories to hide from the truth. They both lie to friends about their mothers, Phoebe clings to the idea that Mrs. Winterbottom has been kidnapped by the lunatic, Sal tells herself that her mother will come back, that her mother has amnesia and is wandering around Lewiston, Idaho, and even goes so far as to try on Phoebe’s kidnapping formula, when she suggests to her father that perhaps someone forced her mother to leave. Sal explains the purpose of these unlikely stories when she admits that she and Phoebe are actually trying to understand what reasons could possibly motivate their mothers to leave them. Fantastical stories provide the girls with a desirable answer, and they imagine scenarios where their mothers did not want to leave or were forced to leave. Sal feels especially conflicted, as she connects her broken leg with her mother’s miscarriage and ensuing depression. She can build a logical chain of events that connects her actions with her mother’s desire to leave, but she hides this chain beneath wild hopes and stories.

Part of Sal’s coming-of-age journey involves learning to see her mother in more than her role as mother. Her mother is a complex being who can love Sal at the same time as needing to be away from her. Just as children strive to define and assert their independence from their parents, so must parents strive to maintain their emotional and personal independence from their children. As Sal endeavors to break away from her dependence on her parents while at the same time maintaining a strong and affectionate relationship with them, she must learn to see her parents as complex and often internally divided individuals with competing loyalties and visions of themselves.
Myths and dreams, another form of self-contained narrative, populate these four chapters of the novel. The two myths, that of the Native American god Napi and that of Prometheus, are alternate but thematically similar stories of man's origin. The Napi myth explains man's mortality, whereas the Prometheus myth depicts man being punished for trying to snatch power from the gods. Both myths illustrate that man's place is upon the earth, not among the gods. Man must give up any claims to godlike power over the elements or over death. These myths resonate with Sal, who is struggling to reconcile herself to the great losses she has suffered. In her dream, she tries to process the contradiction between the beauty and incredible generosity of a lifetime on earth with the suddenness and irrevocability of death. Slowly, Sal is learning to leave behind her childhood notions of permanence. She realizes that life itself, in all its manifold forms, from stories to myths to messages on the doorstep to the events of her life, reminds her that circumstances and emotions change and people die. Her dream reminds her of the suddenness and irrevocability of death and change.
Chapters 25–28

Summary

Chapter 25: Cholesterol

When Sal and Phoebe arrive at the Finneys for supper, the house is bursting with activity. The boys are playing, Mary Lou’s sister is on the phone, and Mr. Finney is doggedly cooking in the kitchen. When they sit down to dinner, Phoebe expresses shock that the Finneys are serving fried chicken, explaining the dangers of cholesterol to the entire table. She refuses every dish handed to her on the basis of its fat content. Eventually, Mrs. Finney grimly presents the finicky girl with a bowl of muesli. On their way home, Sal impulsively asks Phoebe to spend the weekend at her house. Phoebe rushes into the house to ask Mr. Winterbottom’s permission. Mr. Winterbottom, Sal can see, is clearly upset about his missing wife, but Phoebe, oblivious to his sadness, chatters on about calling the police. Later that night, Phoebe calls Sal, telling her friend that she thought she saw Mr. Winterbottom crying on the couch, but dismisses her own perception, explaining to Sal that her father “never cries.”

Chapter 26: Sacrifices

Phoebe arrives at Sal’s on Saturday morning, and immediately begins to complain about Sal’s house and room, explaining that Mrs. Winterbottom has taught her that guests deserve the most lavish treatment. Sal fumes at Phoebe’s complaining, even though she understands that her friend is upset and distracted by worry for her mother. Fleetingly, Sal wonders if her father feels this way when Sal throws tantrums. The two girls decide to visit Mary Lou. Sal sits with Ben on the front porch and finds herself inexplicably wanting to touch his face, but she restrains herself. Sal, realizing how much Mary Lou’s parents remind her of her own parents, watches a bit wistfully as Mr. and Mrs. Finney climb a ladder to the roof of the garage, where, alone for a few moments, they hug and kiss each other. That night, Sal sleeps on the floor, leaving the bed to Phoebe, who cries herself to sleep. Sal leaves her to her sadness, recognizing that Phoebe wants to be alone with her pain.

Chapter 27: Pandora’s Box

When Phoebe returns home the next day, Mr. Winterbottom informs her that Mrs. Winterbottom phoned Mrs. Cadaver to tell the Winterbottoms that she was safe. Phoebe, suspecting Mrs. Cadaver of dismembering and burying Mrs. Winterbottom, wants to call the police. Mr. Winterbottom concedes that if they have not heard from her by Wednesday, he will call the police. The next day at school, Phoebe delivers an oral presentation on the Pandora myth. She carefully corrects the flaws in Ben’s interpretation, pointing out that Pandora was a gift to man, not a punishment. She injects the myth with details and values from her own life, and finally explains Pandora’s double bind: the gods gave her insatiable curiosity and then tempted her with a beautiful box, which they told her not to open. Naturally, she opened the box and all the evils of the world came pouring out. Among the evils was one source of good: hope. Later that night, Sal reasons that if a box of all the good in the world existed but contained one evil, that evil would be worry. Sal feels overwhelmed by her desire to call Phoebe and explain to her that Mrs. Winterbottom has left for her own reasons, reasons that had nothing to do with Phoebe. At this point, Sal’s grandparents turn to her, echoing her words: her mother’s leaving had
nothing to do with Phoebe. Sal stops, realizing for the first time that in the same way, perhaps her mother’s leaving had nothing to do with her.

**Chapter 28: The Black Hills**

Once again, Sal feels the need to rush toward Idaho. She worries about the time while her grandparents insist on visiting the Black Hills and Mt. Rushmore. Gramps, tired of driving, jokes that Sal, whom he taught to drive on the farm, should take the wheel. Sal enjoys the magical, whispering Black Hills, which are sacred ground for the Sioux Indians. Mt. Rushmore, however, disappoints the three travelers. Sal wonders if the Sioux feel deeply affronted by having the faces of American presidents carved into their holy land. Gram and Gramps also feel let down, and they leave Mt. Rushmore in a hurry. Sal begins to panic as she sees how far they still have to travel and how little time they have left. She urges her grandparents to hurry, but they insist that they must stop to see Old Faithful at Yellowstone National Park.

**Analysis**

In most families, meals serve a crucial function. Meals are a time when the entire family gathers and shares both physical and emotional nourishment. A family’s behavior at mealtime provides a window into their inner workings. The Finney’s meals, characterized by chaos, noise, horseplay, and delicious but fattening food, contrast sharply with meals at the Winterbottoms’ home or at Sal’s. Meals at Phoebe’s are stiff, disconnected affairs during which family members miscommunicate or refuse communication, and Creech never describes meals at Sal’s house, perhaps because Sal and her father eat at their friends’ houses so much. This fact suggests that Sal and her father do not quite feel like a functional family without Sal’s mother.

The Finneys give us a picture of the family life that Sal suggests her parents wanted: they are loving, messy, spontaneous, and enthusiastic. The Winterbottoms depict a version of the family life that Sal and her parents experienced just before her mother left. The members are withdrawn, caught up in and confused by their own sadness. Sal and her father stand in limbo somewhere between these two familial poles. Sal, like Phoebe, flinches when she is touched. She and her father seem to be together fairly rarely, and their times together are characterized by the sadness and distance typical of the Winterbottoms. At the same time, Sal remembers a time when her family was like the Finneys, and, though she feels resentful of and distant from her father, she makes consistent efforts to communicate with him.

Phoebe’s account of the Pandora myth demonstrates the way in which the stories we tell reflect our own experiences and concerns. Throughout her report, Phoebe refers to the importance of being a good host, clearly thinking back to her high-cholesterol dinner at the Finney’s and her weekend at Sal’s house. Phoebe highlights and embellishes the aspects of the myth that are important to her. Her delivery of the story demonstrates that not only can we learn about ourselves by telling others stories, as Sal constantly learns about her own life by reflecting on Phoebe’s experiences, but we also tell our own stories through the stories of others. Our perspective, concerns, and values leak out through the details we choose to highlight, the tone in which we speak, the outcomes and actions we emphasize.
The Pandora myth also serves as a response to Ben's version of the Prometheus myth. First, Phoebe recasts the role of woman in her presentation of the Pandora myth: Pandora is a gift to man, and not, as Ben stated, a punishment. Moreover, the two myths depict man's acquisition of two very different rewards: the Prometheus myth explains man's attainment of fire, a source of physical advantage and power, while the Pandora myth depicts mankind's acquiring, along with all the evils of the world, hope. Both of these aspects of the Pandora myth resonate with the themes of Walk Two Moons. First, mothers and wives, such as the neglected Mrs. Winterbottom or Sal's misunderstood mother, are often unappreciated gifts in the lives of those they love. Second, evil and hope come hand in hand: without loss and suffering, humankind would not know the transformative power of hope. As Sal comes to terms with the loss of her mother, she learns that the greatest tragedy of life—its brevity and inconstancy—is the root of its great emotional beauty and riches.
Chapters 29–32

Summary

Chapter 29: The Tide Rises

One day in class, Mr. Birkway reads Longfellow's "The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls," which tells the story of a man traveling at night by the sea who mysteriously disappears. The students discuss their interpretations of the poem: Sal, for one, is sure the man died, and Phoebe follows her lead, arguing that the man was murdered. When Ben suggests that the man died normally, Sal retorts that death is never normal. Ben responds by suggesting that terrible things can be normal as well. Upset by the poem, Sal and Phoebe race to the police station after school. Phoebe shows the skeptical Sergeant Bickle the evidence she has collected. Mr. Bickle calls Mr. Winterbottom, who takes the girls home. Phoebe insists to Mr. Winterbottom that Mrs. Winterbottom is the victim of foul play, explaining that Mrs. Winterbottom loves Phoebe too much to leave her without any explanation. At this, to the girls' shock, Mr. Winterbottom begins to cry.

Chapter 30: Breaking In

One night, after Mrs. Cadaver has left to work the late shift, Phoebe and Sal sneak into Mrs. Cadaver's darkened house. Inside, they find Mrs. Partridge, reading in the dark. When they turn on the lights, the girls are taken aback by the room's unusual furnishings. Phoebe observes the room intently, cataloguing suspicious items. As the girls are leaving, Mrs. Partridge tells them that she has met Phoebe's brother, but Phoebe, perplexed, insists that she does not have a brother.

On their way home, Sal, remembering her own mother, tries to tell Phoebe that Mrs. Winterbottom may have wanted to leave, but had not been able to explain why she wanted to leave to Phoebe. She goes so far as to suggest that Mrs. Winterbottom might not come back, and Phoebe silences her vehemently. Sal lays awake that night, thinking of how she used gifts and objects to remember her mother after she was gone, and musing on the Longfellow poem and Mr. Winterbottom’s tears.

Chapter 31: The Photograph

The next day, another note, bearing the message, "We never know the worth of water until the well runs dry" appears on Phoebe's doorstep. Before school, Sal and Ben are talking at Ben's locker, and Sal almost kisses him, but misses him and ends up kissing the locker. In English class that day, the students discover, much to their horror, that Mr. Birkway intends to read excerpts from everyone’s journals to the rest of the class. He changes the names used in the journals and hides their covers, but everyone can tell who is writing and about whom he or she is writing by the writer’s language and topic. One by one, students burst out in anger at each other, as Mr. Birkway, enjoying the "honesty" or "conflictual emotions" of the passages, reads out from journal after journal.
After school, Phoebe and Sal run to the police station once again with the new message and the "clues" in Mrs. Cadaver's house. Sergeant Bickle leads Phoebe out of his office, and Sal idly glances over the pictures on his desk. To her shock, she sees a photo of Sergeant Bickle, his wife, and the lunatic.

Chapter 32: Chicken and Blackberry Kisses

Sal and her grandparents reach Yellowstone National Park in the evening and find a motel, planning to see Old Faithful in the morning. Before they go to sleep, she continues Phoebe’s story. On her way home from the police station, Sal walks past Mrs. Cadaver’s house. To her surprise, Mr. Birkway appears, ready to escort Mrs. Partridge to an event. She soon learns that Mr. Birkway and Mrs. Cadaver are twins, and Mrs. Partridge is their mother. Sal tries to find Phoebe and tell her, but cannot find or contact her at all that night. The next day at school, Phoebe refuses to tell Sal where she was the night before. Sal’s perplexity with Phoebe dissipates as Mr. Birkway resumes reading from journals. One writer expresses frustration with English class and its obsession with text and symbols, which causes Mr. Birkway to use an optical illusion to demonstrate how amazing it is to be able to see one thing in two—or more—ways. Then he reads from Sal’s journal. The class titters at Sal’s tree-kissing proclivities, but is quickly distracted from their amusement when Mr. Birkway, to his increasing chagrin, reads aloud Phoebe’s journal entry, which contains her suspicions about Mrs. Cadaver. Chaos breaks out in the class as the bell rings.

Analysis

The Longfellow poem, the journals, and the mysterious messages illustrate the relationship between the written word and lived experiences. When the students read “The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls” in class, the students project their own experiences onto the poem: Sal, familiar with death and loss, states adamantly that the traveler has drowned in the sea. Phoebe, obsessed and paranoid with Mrs. Winterbottom’s disappearance, insists that the man was murdered. Ben holds that the man died “normally.” As the students defend their views and follow their assertions to their logical conclusions, the poem becomes a starting point for a discussion of the nature of death. Sal asserts that death is terrible, while Ben argues that perhaps it is both normal and terrible. Thus, literature acts as a mirror onto which individuals can project their experiences and ideas, or a lens through which they can examine, explore and better understand their own stories.

Mr. Birkway further develops the question of literature’s relation to life when he reads from and reacts to the journal of a student who dislikes English class. The student objects to literature’s indeterminacy, the way in which it can mean almost anything. Mr. Birkway quickly points out that each individual interpretation is valid, simply because that interpretation has meaning for that person. He enthusiastically suggests that being able to see numerous interpretations for one text brings both pleasure and wisdom to a reader. Mr. Birkway’s assertion resonates with Sal’s emotional undertaking. She must learn to interpret her mother’s departure and the ensuing tragedy from more than one point of view in order to reconcile herself with the loss. People, like texts, act and develop according to ambiguous, complex, and often self-contradicting internal compasses. As Sal comes to understand both her mother and herself, she learns that she can and must interpret her mother’s actions from a different point of view.
Mr. Birkway, an adult and an English teacher, is used to savoring text purely for its aesthetic value, however, he forgets the ways in which the written word can have a direct, and not merely metaphorical, impact on people's lives. He enjoys reading journal excerpts, seemingly oblivious to the havoc they are wreaking upon the friendships of his students, until he finds his own sister, Margaret Cadaver, implicated in Phoebe's journal. Flustered and with a weakening voice, he finds himself compelled to read to the class about Phoebe's suspicions of his own sister. Suddenly, the written word becomes not just a medium for discussion and reflection on personal experience, it becomes a medium for communicating information and ideas that perhaps should not have been shared with the general public.

The events in the novel's internal narrative, Phoebe's story, up until this point have taken place mainly in Phoebe's or Sal's home. As the novel progresses and the two girls draw nearer to their confrontations, Creech sets more events outside of the home: in classrooms, school hallways, and the police station. This gradual shift of setting indicates that Phoebe and Sal have committed themselves to the first stage of their quest, their separation from family, and are preparing for the test of courage that ensues. Sal is involved in a double quest. She will face a test of courage and reconciliation within Phoebe's narrative, and will face an even greater test when she reaches Lewiston in the framing narrative.
Chapters 33–36

Summary

Chapter 33: The Visitor

Gram finds that she cannot fall asleep, and asks Sal to go on with the story. That evening, Sal rushes over to Phoebe’s house, but before she can tell her that Mr. Birkway is Mrs. Cadaver’s brother, Mr. Birkway himself appears at the Winterbottom house with Phoebe’s journal in hand. He apologizes to her for reading her journal aloud and proceeds to explain that Mrs. Cadaver is his sister and that her husband died in a car accident that also blinded Mrs. Partridge. Margaret, he sadly adds, was the nurse on duty at the emergency room the night of the accident, and had tried to treat her husband and mother. When Mr. Birkway leaves, Sal reveals to Phoebe that the lunatic is Sergeant Bickle’s son. They devise a plan, and Sal goes home. That night, Sal lays awake, imagining what Mrs. Cadaver had felt when the ambulance brought her husband and mother to her in the emergency room. The words of the mysterious messages permeate her visualization.

Chapter 34: Old Faithful

When Sal wakes, she finds that her grandmother spent the whole night lying awake, but is still determined to see Old Faithful. When they reach the geyser’s roped-off site, Gram, in her eagerness to get a better look, begins to climb under the ropes, but is stopped short by a ranger. Together, they watch as the geyser builds up energy and sprays into the sky, causing the ground beneath them to rumble and a fine warm mist to cover them. Gram delightedly lifts her face to the mist, and, as they are leaving, breaks out into tears of happiness at having finally seen Old Faithful.

Chapter 35: The Plan

As Sal and her grandparents drive across the mountainous roads of Montana, Sal is overcome by the wild beauty of the land and by terror as they climb the steep and vertiginous hills. To squelch her fear, she continues with Phoebe’s story, determined to finish it that day. Phoebe and Sal plan to locate and talk to Sergeant Bickle’s son, and through him, find Mrs. Winterbottom. The next day at school, Mr. Birkway apologizes to the class for reading their journals aloud and sends them to the library. In the library, Ben and Sal flirt bashfully, and Sal futilely tries to remain still long enough for Ben to kiss her successfully. After school, Phoebe calls all the Bickles in the phone book until they determine which number belongs to Sergeant Bickle. Later that night, Sal calls the Bickles, pretending to be a friend of his son’s, and manages to get his son’s name and address from him. Mike Bickle, they find, studies at a university not far from their homes.

Chapter 36: The Visit

When the girls arrive at the bus stop the next morning, they find Ben waiting for the bus as well. He explains that he is going to visit someone at a hospital in Chanting Falls, and the girls quickly lie that they are visiting a friend at the college there. As they ride the bus together, Sal, who is sitting next to Ben, enjoys feeling Ben’s arm press up against hers. At the university, the two girls, feeling absurdly out of place, timidly ask for Mike Bickle’s room number at the front desk of
his dormitory. The man promptly gives them the number, but the two girls panic and run outside. Outside, however, they find the lunatic himself sitting on a bench with Mrs. Winterbottom.

**Analysis**

Text and story do not always, as Mr. Birkway would have us believe, lead to experiment with other perspectives and gain greater personal understanding. Phoebe repeatedly demonstrates how texts can be willfully misinterpreted and can lead one further from the truth instead of closer to it when she melodramatically interprets the messages on her doorstep as clues about Mrs. Winterbottom’s “kidnapping” or “murder.” However, Sal finds herself practicing the lessons she learned in English class and the lesson contained in the messages when Mr. Birkway reveals part of Margaret Cadaver’s story to her and Phoebe, and Sal later finds herself identifying with Margaret’s grief and horror. The revelation of Margaret’s past has a double significance to the narrative: first, it plays a role in Phoebe’s search for Mrs. Winterbottom, closing off one “potential” explanation for her disappearance. Secondly, Mrs. Cadaver’s experience affects Sal’s own narrative: she can no longer so easily dismiss, belittle, and ignore Margaret. In fact, that night, she finds herself living through Mrs. Cadaver’s life-shattering experience, showing the way in which taking on another person’s perspective allows us to better understand and sympathize with them.

Sal and Phoebe’s actions expose their lack of vision and contribute to the unlikely twists of the plot. The girls cling at straws and follow the most preposterous but most easily accessible leads to mystery of Mrs. Winterbottom’s disappearance. They suspect Mrs. Cadaver because of her name, her missing husband, and her “suspicious” actions in the back yard. When they discover that the lunatic is connected to Sergeant Bickle, they are determined to track him down, convinced that he has information about Mrs. Winterbottom. Although the girls’ logic is preposterous, in the end, it leads them to the information they want. They find Mrs. Winterbottom and the lunatic together, after all. Walk Two Moons sustained a great deal of criticism for resorting to such unlikely plot twists and machinations, but it is important to remember that Creech’s story is, in a way, a tall tale, and intentionally filled with exaggeration, caricature, and humor. As an adventure/accomplishment romance, the plot twists often stand in for and represent the hero’s internal growth. Sal, by remaining faithful to her friend and determined in her quest to, one way or another, get more information about the strange people around her, grows and draws closer to her own truths.

Old Faithful, a symbol both of nature’s strength and inexorability, awes its spectators for both its unbridled and magnificent power as well as its clocklike regularity. Old Faithful reminds us of nature’s spectacular power but also of the comforting regularity of many natural occurrences: birth and death, day and night, the turning of the seasons, the motion of the earth relative to the stars. Gram immerses herself in the beauty of the powerful geyser, attesting to her acceptance and appreciation of the forces of the natural world. Her communion with the geyser, her sudden tears in the car afterwards, her sleepless night, and Sal’s determination to finish Phoebe’s story foreshadow a predictable but tragic confrontation between Gram and the forces of time and nature.
Chapters 37–40

Summary

Chapter 37: A Kiss

Sal, overcome with shock, races off campus, leaving Phoebe behind her. She accidentally runs past the bus stop and finds herself at the hospital. On impulse, she asks the receptionist if she can see Mrs. Finney, Ben’s mother. The woman informs her that Mrs. Finney is in the psychiatric ward, and only family members can visit her. She suggests Sal look for her on the back lawn. There, Sal finds Ben and his mother sitting on the lawn. Ben tries to introduce Sal to her, but she hardly seems to notice Sal, and even stands up and begins to walk absently around the lawn, reminding Sal of her mother after she lost the baby. Finally, Sal decides to leave, but her eyes meet Ben’s, and the two lean forward to kiss each other.

Chapter 38: Spit

Sal finds a disgruntled Phoebe waiting at the bus stop. Phoebe describes watching Mrs. Winterbottom and the lunatic sitting on the bench, laughing, and spitting into the grass, an act that disgusts Phoebe and causes her to decide that Mrs. Winterbottom does not need her after all. At home, Prudence tells Phoebe and Mr. Winterbottom that Mrs. Winterbottom has phoned, saying that she and a guest will come home the next day. Mr. Winterbottom becomes upset, demanding to know more about this guest, but Prudence only knows that the guest is a man. Phoebe storms into her room. That night, Sal tells her father about the developments in Phoebe’s story and wishes that her mother, like Mrs. Winterbottom, would come back.

Chapter 39: Homecoming

The next day, Phoebe calls Sal, begging her to come over and be with her during Mrs. Winterbottom’s return. Sal reluctantly agrees. At Phoebe’s house, Mr. Winterbottom and Prudence are wracked with worry, fussing nervously over the house itself. Finally, Mrs. Winterbottom arrives at the door. She is a changed woman: she has a stylish short haircut, and she is wearing makeup and stylish, casual clothes. Behind her is Mike Bickle, the lunatic. Mrs. Winterbottom begins crying in confusion and anguish, and soon explains to her family that Mike is her son, whom she bore when she was young and whom she gave up for adoption. She is distraught that she is not as respectable as her family thinks, but Mr. Winterbottom repeatedly insists that he does not care about respectability. He is visibly upset, but graciously welcomes Mike into the family. Phoebe grabs Sal’s arm and storms out, and the two girls almost collide with Mrs. Partridge, who is leaving a message on the front stoop.

Chapter 40: The Gifts

Sal and her grandparents reach Idaho, and Sal begins to believe that they will indeed reach Lewiston on the next day, her mother’s birthday. Gram’s voice and breathing sound troubled, and Sal and Gramps begin to worry about her. At Gram’s prompting, Sal launches into the end of Phoebe’s story. On the stoop, Mrs. Partridge explains that she has been
leaving the messages, which Margaret writes for her, out of a sense of fun. As Mrs. Partridge returns to her home, the
two girls walk to the street. Gathering their courage, they spit into the street. Phoebe turns and walks back into her	house, and Sal, following Phoebe’s lead, turns and walks into Mrs. Cadaver’s house. After Mrs. Cadaver tells Sal how
she met her father, Sal returns home, where Ben is waiting for her. Ben has bought her a chicken, which he tells her,
after kissing her, he has named Blackberry. Sal, having finished her story, sits back, but then worriedly notices how ill
Gram looks. The car speeds toward Lewiston.

Analysis

Troubled mothers haunt the pages of Walk Two Moons. Sal’s mother, we know, felt inadequate next to her husband and
was deeply troubled by her miscarriage and hysterectomy. Phoebe’s mother not only feels troubled by the way in which
her family never seems to notice her, but by her stifling desire to hide her past in order that she appear “perfect” to her
family. Ben’s mother, though the novel does not tell us the source of her problems, floats absently through the lawn at
the mental hospital, reminding Sal of her own mother. The fathers in the novel seem troubled in their own ways—Mr.
Winterbottom is emotionally withdrawn and rigid, Sal’s father is clearly still grieving over his wife, but not to the point of
emotional breakdown. Thus, Creech suggests that the mental strain of being a wife and mother exceeds the strain of
being a husband and father, or that this strain arises from a wife and mother’s tendency to define herself only in terms
of those two roles. The Finneys provide an exception to these patterns, but, significantly, Mrs. Finney, Mary Lou’s
mother, works.

Both Sal’s mother and Mrs. Winterbottom endured problematic births. Sal’s mother lost her baby and nearly lost her life in
childbirth, and Mrs. Winterbottom bore an illegitimate son whom she had to give up for adoption. The actual bearing of
children is, after all, one of the few responsibilities of childrearing that can be fulfilled only by women. Significantly,
childbearing is also often the riskiest and most ideologically charged of these responsibilities. Sal’s mother almost loses
her life in childbirth, and Mrs. Winterbottom must bear the shame and confusion of being a young, unwed mother. These
trying experiences lie at the core of the two women’s malaise and, in their own forms, activate the two women’s quest
for self-renewal.

Mrs. Winterbottom’s quest for reconciliation with her past and self-renewal challenges the roles of all her family
members, especially Mr. Winterbottom. For the first time, he realizes how much the functioning of the household depends
on her, and, as the days pass and she does not return, he becomes more and more aware of how much he depends on
her emotionally, finally breaking into tears, though Phoebe has never before seen him cry. When Mrs. Winterbottom
returns, he worries that she may be having an affair—he becomes visibly upset when Prudence tells him Mrs.
Winterbottom is bringing a man with her when she returns home and frets over his wife’s reaction to the house. When she
does finally arrive, his voice and hands tremble, and he defied Mrs. Winterbottom’s understanding of him by avowing that
he does not care whether she is respectable, he only cares whether or not she feels she can communicate with him. Mrs.
Winterbottom’s decision to leave has forced him to reexamine his role as father and husband.
The two girls, before facing up to their respective challenges, mimic Phoebe’s mother by spitting into the road. This act symbolizes Phoebe’s decision to accept and even embrace Mrs. Winterbottom’s defiance of the role and behaviors she herself, with the reinforcement of her husband and daughters, has thus far in her life prescribed for herself. Moreover, it shows Phoebe, with Sal’s support, relinquishing some of her own overly developed sense of propriety. The significance of Phoebe’s decision also indicates the significance of Sal’s decision to talk to Margaret Cadaver. Although Sal downplays this decision by withholding the details of the encounter from us at this point in the narrative, this confrontation takes as much courage and resolve as her decision to travel to Lewiston to see her mother. The girls’ spitting recalls a compact, in which two partners spit in their palms and shake. Together, the two girls agree that they must, on their own but with the support of the other, face their dragons.
Chapters 41–44

Summary

Chapter 41: The Overlook

Gram falls unconscious, and Sal and Gramps rush her to the hospital in Coeur D’Alene, where the doctors tell them that Gram has had a stroke. Despite the protests of the doctors, Gramps refuses to leave her side for even a second. Sal, reflecting on grandfather’s emotions, wonders if he suspects the snakebite caused the stroke and blames himself for taking her to the river. Sal realizes then that just as Gramps should not blame himself for Gram’s illness, so she cannot blame herself for her mother’s miscarriage. She then recalls the process through which their dog weaned her puppies: though the beagle was protective and caring when the puppies were first born, after a few months, she roughly pushed them away. Sal’s mother had explained to Sal that the mother dog wanted her puppies to be able to take care of themselves in case something happened to her, and Sal realizes that in a way, her mother’s trip to Lewiston was her way of trying to make Sal more able to take care of herself. Later that night, Gramps tells Sal that he must stay with Gram, but hands her the car keys and all his money, tacitly giving her permission to drive to Lewiston herself.

Sal spends four hair-raising hours driving down to Lewiston. When she reaches the tall hill just outside the city, she creeps down the hairpin curves, finally stopping at an overlook. Another man stops and, pointing out the broken trees and a faintly glinting hunk of metal, begins to tell her about the terrible bus crash that took place a year ago in exactly that spot. He goes on to tell her that only one person survived the crash, but Sal already knows all this.

Chapter 42: The Bus and the Willow

As dawn is gathering, Sal climbs down the hillside toward the overturned bus. She looks into its mangled and moldy interior and sadly realizes that there is nothing she can do here. When she climbs back up to the car, a sheriff greets her. At first he is angry with her for climbing around the bus and driving at the age of thirteen, but when Sal tells him her story, he drives her to her mother’s grave, which is on a hill overlooking the river. Sal sits down to drink in all the details of this spot and, to her joy, finds a nearby “singing tree,” a tree with a songbird living in its highest branches. Only then she leaves, knowing that, in a way, her mother is alive in this place.

Chapter 43: Our Gooseberry

The sheriff drives Sal back to Lewiston, lecturing her about the dangers of driving without proper training. Sal questions him about the accident, explaining what she learned the day she decided to talk to Mrs. Cadaver. Mrs. Cadaver had been the lone survivor of the terrible crash, and had sat next to Sal’s mother during the entire trip, listening to her stories about Bybanks and her daughter. After the accident, Sal’s father, who came to Lewiston to bury his wife, met Mrs. Cadaver and discussed his wife’s last days with her. During the conversation with Margaret, Sal had asked her if she planned to marry her father, and Margaret, surprised, explained that her father was still too much in love with her mother to marry anyone else.
When they arrive in Coeur D’Alene, Sal discovers that Gram has died. She finds Gramps, who has already arranged for Gram to be sent back to Kentucky, in a nearby motel. The two move mournfully through the room the rest of the day, and that night, Sal helps Gramps recite his nightly, now slightly altered, mantra: "This ain’t my marriage bed, but it will have to do."

Chapter 44: Bybanks

Sal resumes her narration a few months later. She, along with her father and Gramps, are back in Bybanks. Gram is buried in a nearby aspen grove, and Gramps continues to give Sal driving lessons. The pair now practices "walking in other people's moccasins"—routinely imagining how they would feel if they were one of their friends or family members. Sal shares one other Native American myth—that of Estsanatlehi, who is born, dies, and is reincarnated ad infinitum. Sal and Ben exchange letters, and Sal looks forward to an upcoming visit from all her Euclid friends: Ben, Mrs. Cadaver, Phoebe, and Mrs. Partridge. Sal closes her story, content with what she has, accepting of what has been, and anticipating what will come.

Analysis

In the final few chapters of the book, Sal undergoes the most extreme and literal version of separation she experiences in the book: she drives by herself through the night to the site of her mother's death. Her father and her friends are thousands of miles away. Her grandparents, who have been her constant companions and support during her separation from her home, now wait, immobilized, in the hospital. This separation is emotionally and physically dangerous, as she is retracing the perilous trek down the side of the mountain that resulted in her mother's death. Sal must negotiate the treacherous turns while simultaneously negotiating the knowledge that her mother's last moments alive were spent on that very road. Sal endures this trial bravely and successfully. She inspects the site and finds a capable adult, the sheriff, who drives her to see her mother's grave in Lewiston. Sal's experience of separation extends even beyond her solo pilgrimage to the site of her mother's death and her final resting place. When she returns to Lewiston, her grandmother is dead. Sal bears up under this trauma as well, bravely supporting Gramps in his grief.

However, in a way, Sal has already undergone her trial long before she reaches Lewiston. Her quest was to sift through the details of her mother's death, to verify it, and to reconcile herself with it. Sal, who knows more about the accident than the sheriff, despite the fact that he was present at the scene of the crash a year ago, has already faced the reality of her mother's death when she confronts Margaret Cadaver. Her decision to speak with Margaret that day in Euclid signifies her willingness to confront the possibility that her father may be falling in love with someone else, that her mother's death is permanent, and that the world is moving on without her. Sal's quest is not so much to change the world, but to accept it as it is, and she moves close to obtaining this acceptance with her decision to hear Margaret's story.

After a romantic hero's separation and trial, he or she is united with earlier companions in a new, more adult role. Appropriately, Sal, having undergone her trial and gained the reward of a wiser and more adult perspective, returns to
Bybanks, where she is reunited with her home, Gramps, her father, and the spirit of her mother. The final pages of her narration demonstrate her more adult attitude: she accepts the losses she has suffered, and she actively seeks to understand and sympathize with the people around her. Though she may have not gained exactly what she set out to achieve, she has gained the ability to accept and make the best of that which life offers her.

As the book draws to a close, Sal mentions both Prometheus and Pandora in passing, but closes with one final myth: that of Estsanatlehi. Estsanatlehi, the mother goddess who grows old and dies only to be reincarnated as an infant in an endless cycle, represents not only the eternal cycle of the seasons, but the hope that humans, too, or some unidentifiable aspect of them, live on beyond death. Indeed, as Sal moves around the farm, she senses her mother's presence continually. This hope, that Sal's mother has left her with irreplaceable memories and gifts through which she lives on, is the hope at the bottom of the Pandora's box opened by the tragic chain of events leading to her death.