

# Tuck Everlasting



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NATALIE BABBIT

Natalie Babbitt's family moved around in Ohio several times when she was a child. She graduated from Laurel School, a private girls' high school, and went on to attend Smith College. She married Samuel Babbitt and the two had three children in the late 1950s. In 1966, Babbitt and her husband worked together on their first picture book, which her husband wrote and she illustrated. After this, however, Samuel Babbitt wasn't interested in writing more books, so Natalie Babbitt began to write her own. After writing several picture books and a few chapter books, her fourth children's novel, *Knee-Knock Rise*, won the 1971 Newbery Honor. *Tuck Everlasting*, which she published in 1975, has been consistently popular with children and with teachers; it was named an ALA Notable Book after its publication and won the 1976 Christopher Award, while in the 21st century, it's made it onto lists of 100 best books for children compiled by the *School Library Journal* and the National Education Association. Babbitt continued to write and illustrate books, including several books of poetry by Valerie Worth, until a few years before her death in 2016. She died at home not long after she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1880, when the novel takes place, the U.S. was continuing to expand westward. It's implied that Miles's wife and children went west on the Oregon Trail, while the transcontinental railroad was completed about ten years prior to the start of the novel, in 1869, thereby making it easier for people to move west. During this time the U.S. was engaged in the Indian Wars, which sought to remove Native Americans from their ancestral lands so white people could settle there. The U.S. also started to crack down on Chinese immigration and formally ended post-Civil War Reconstruction, which eventually gave rise to Jim Crow laws and the disenfranchisement of the black population in Southern states. While the man in the yellow suit never defines what he means by "worthy" when he mentions selling the brook's water to worthy people, it's more likely than not that his idea of who deserves the water is influenced by the general racism of the era as well as his clearly stated classism.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Natalie Babbitt has said that her love of literature stemmed from reading Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as a child. Like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Tuck Everlasting* has withstood the test of time and remains a favorite children's novel decades after

publication, as have other children's classics such as Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. Babbitt has also written several other novels, including *Knee-Knock Rise* and *The Search for Delicious*. Scholars often look at *Tuck Everlasting* in terms of how it handles the idea of death in children's literature. While earlier novels, like *The Secret Garden*, tended to use death as just a plot device, *Tuck Everlasting* is unique in that it engages with death as an idea. Authors have also explored the idea of immortality throughout history and in a variety of ways. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explores immortality as well as the inevitability of age, while the novel *The Postmortal* by Drew Magary explores many of Angus Tuck's fears of what would happen if people stopped aging.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Tuck Everlasting
- **When Written:** 1974
- **Where Written:** Clinton, NY
- **When Published:** 1975
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Children's Novel; Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Treenap, 1880
- **Climax:** Mae hits the man in the yellow suit with her rifle, killing him
- **Antagonist:** The man in the yellow suit
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Adaptation Successes.** *Tuck Everlasting* has been adapted three times, twice to film (in 1981 and 2002) and once into a Broadway musical. Though the first film isn't as well-known given the success of the second, which was produced by Disney, its success enabled director and producer Fred Keller to move on to work on television shows like *CSI: Miami* and *House*. The musical, which ran between 2013 and 2016, was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Costume Design of a Musical in 2016.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator explains that the first week of August is the highest point of the year's cycle and that during this time, people do things they regret later. The world, the narrator suggests, is like a giant wheel, with spokes connected in the center by a hub that, in this case, is a small wood owned by the

Foster family. On the outside of this hub, connected by the wood, are the Tuck family, ten-year-old Winnie Foster, and the man in the yellow suit. The wood is a strange place and it makes people want to avoid it. The narrator insists that this is wise, as if a person were to go into the wood, they'd discover a huge ash tree and a spring coming from its roots. Discovering this stream would be a disaster.

On the first day of the first week of August, Mae Tuck wakes up, excited to go meet her sons in Treetop. Her husband, Angus, isn't excited and assures Mae that he'll be fine while she's gone, as nothing can happen to him. Mae ignores this and the narrator explains that nothing can happen to Angus, Mae, or their sons, Jesse and Miles: they're all immortal. At noon on this day, Winnie sits inside her family's **fence** and tells a toad on the other side that she'd like to run away so she can be independent and do something important. At sunset, the man in the yellow suit appears at the Fosters' gate and asks Winnie if she knows everyone in Treetop. The man makes Winnie suspicious, but she speaks to him and suggests that he talk with her father. Winnie's Granny rescues her from the conversation, though they all hear tinkling music that makes Granny pause excitedly. She tells Winnie that this is the elf music she hears every now and again and leads Winnie inside. The man in the yellow suit walks away, whistling the tune from the "elf music."

By the next morning, Winnie has decided that she's too afraid to be alone to run away, but she does decide to walk into her family's wood and explore. The wood is surprisingly pleasant, especially when she comes across a handsome young man who introduces himself as Jesse Tuck. Winnie is immediately smitten and asks Jesse if the water she saw him drinking is good to drink, as she's thirsty. He is trying to keep her from drinking the water when Mae and Miles show up. They immediately throw Winnie onto their horse and lead her away quickly. They pass the man in the yellow suit on the far side of the wood and ask Winnie to not scream or be afraid as they go. Finally, they reach a stream on the other side of a meadow, offer Winnie Mae's music box to look at (which Winnie learns is the source of the "elf music") and tell Winnie a fantastical story: 87 years ago, they drank from that stream in the wood and since then, they haven't aged at all. Miles's wife left with their children after 20 years of marriage, believing that Miles sold his soul to the devil, and the Tucks eventually figured out that the water was the source of their immortality.

Winnie isn't convinced, but the Tucks are clearly relieved to have told someone. Jesse says that being immortal is fantastic, but Miles suggests that Jesse should take things more seriously. Mae asks Winnie to help them keep their secret and says that they need to take her home with them so she can understand, but they'll bring her back the next day. Winnie decides to agree and feels as though anything is possible. The world feels wide and wonderful, and she and the Tucks don't notice that the man in the yellow suit was also listening to the

story.

It takes hours to reach the Tucks' homestead. Jesse and Miles jump straight into the **pond**, while Angus greets Winnie with a smile. Winnie is shocked to see how disorderly the Tucks' home is: it's dusty and organized haphazardly, but it feels homey and comforting. Mae explains that Jesse and Miles spend their time away, working when they can, and says that Jesse's eternal youth means he can't settle down. She says that she and Angus will have to move soon so people don't begin to suspect anything about them, which Winnie thinks is sad. Mae suggests that life needs to be lived, no matter how long it is. Next, the Tucks and Winnie have supper. Winnie is shocked to eat in the parlor without napkins, and soon she begins to think that eating is a private, intimate activity that she shouldn't be doing with her kidnappers. She announces that she wants to go home, and Angus says that he'll take Winnie out on the pond to talk. They discuss how the man in the yellow suit saw the Tucks leading Winnie away, and this thought gives Winnie confidence--she believes the man will tell her father and help her get home.

Winnie boldly gets in the boat with Angus. He softly tells her that in the pond, all around them, creatures are growing and changing. He tells her that the water in the pond will eventually reach the ocean and then return to the pond as rain. He allows the boat to get stuck in some roots on the downstream side of the pond and says that the Tucks are like the boat; they're stuck and they can't continue to grow and change. Winnie realizes that she's going to die, which shocks her and makes her suddenly angry. Angus says that this feeling is normal, but Winnie nonetheless needs to die someday, as living without dying is barely living at all. He says that if people drank the water from the spring, they'd never understand what they're giving up. Miles interrupts by yelling that someone stole the horse.

The man in the yellow suit arrives at Winnie's parents' house a while later on the Tucks' horse. He explains that he knows where Winnie is and makes Winnie's father agree to give him the wood in exchange for getting Winnie home safely. Then, the man wakes up the constable and the two start out for the Tucks' homestead, the man in the yellow suit riding on ahead.

Mae makes the sofa into a bed for Winnie, who's not happy about going to bed in a stranger's house, without her nightgown or bedtime routine. As Winnie starts to fall asleep, Mae tiptoes out of the bedroom to apologize and says she wishes that Winnie were theirs. A bit later, Angus comes to check on Winnie and offers to sit with her until she falls asleep. He kisses her on the cheek before returning to bed. This makes Winnie feel cared for and she thinks that they're not actually criminals. Finally, Jesse creeps down and suggests that Winnie drink the water when she turns seventeen so she can see the world with him.

Winnie wakes up early in the morning. Miles gets up too and invites her to go fishing with him. As they step into the boat,

Winnie thinks that the Tucks are her friends and she loves them. Miles explains that his daughter, Anna, was a lot like Winnie. He says that it would've been unnatural for his children and wife to drink the water, though he thought about it. Winnie remarks that it'd be nice if things never had to die, but Miles points out that if nothing died, there'd be no room for new life in the world. Miles takes over fishing as Winnie decides that Miles is right. Miles says he wants to do something useful to earn his place in the world, though he's not sure what to do. Just then, he catches a fish and pulls it up into the boat. Winnie wants to cry and asks Miles to put it back. He does, but he also reminds her that people sometimes need to eat meat and kill things in order to live.

At breakfast, Winnie is excited to go home but also decides that the Tucks really are her friends. She thinks about the possibility of drinking from the stream as she studies Miles, Jesse, and then Angus, who looks sad. They hear a knock on the door and open it to find the man in the yellow suit. He explains that he heard the story of a family that never ages from his grandmother, and using the melody from the music box, tracked the Tucks down. He wants to bottle and sell the stream's water and sell it to "deserving" people, and he'd like the Tucks' help in marketing the water. When they refuse, the man grabs Winnie and says he'll make her drink to use her instead. At this, Mae hits the man with the butt of her rifle, knocking him out immediately. The constable sees this as he arrives. He's shocked when Winnie says that the Tucks didn't kidnap her, and he insists that he needs to take Winnie home and put Mae in jail. If the man dies, Mae will be put to death by hanging. As the constable starts to ride away with Winnie, Winnie tells Angus that it'll be all right. She knows that Mae cannot die even if she goes to the gallows.

That night back in her own home, Winnie sits in a small **rocking chair** and thinks about what happened. She thinks about her experiences with the Tucks and decides that those experiences are, satisfyingly, all her own. She wonders if the Tucks' story is true and thinks that if it is, the man in the yellow suit has to die. Just then, the constable knocks on the door and Winnie hears him say that the man died. Winnie remembers feeling awful for killing a wasp once and wonders if Mae feels bad for killing the man. She vows to do something to keep Mae from going to the gallows.

Winnie goes outside after breakfast the next day. She notices the toad and asks Granny to help her give the toad some water, but the toad disappears in the time it takes Winnie to fetch a bowl. A bit later, Jesse appears and explains that they're going to break Mae out of jail later. Winnie says that she wants to help by taking Mae's place in the cell so that the Tucks have more time. She also accepts Jesse's bottle of spring water, which he tells her to drink when she's seventeen. Winnie spends the rest of the day waiting for midnight. She wonders if her parents will ever trust her again and is shocked when they

don't wake up to stop her sneaking out. As Jesse leads Winnie to the jailhouse, a thunderstorm starts. Miles pulls out the nails of the window and, with a clap of thunder, finally pulls the metal window frame right out. Mae crawls out and after each of the Tucks hugs and kisses Winnie, they boost her inside and refit the window. In the morning, Winnie reveals herself to the constable. She's too young to be charged, but her parents confine her to the yard indefinitely. Winnie tells her mother that she did it because she loves the Tucks and they're her friends, and her family accepts this. Fortunately for Winnie, her rule-breaking makes her more interesting to other children in town. Winnie notices the toad, which is being harassed by a big dog. She grabs the toad, brings it inside the fence, and fetches the water from Jesse. She pours it on the toad and reasons that if she wants to join Jesse later on, she can go drink from the stream.

Years later, Angus and Mae ride into Treegap. The town is barely recognizable; it has pavement and a number of shops, while Winnie's cottage is gone. They also can't find the wood. A man at a diner tells them that the wood was struck by lightning a few years ago, burned down, and it was bulldozed. While Mae goes shopping, Angus goes to the graveyard and finds Winnie's grave. He sees that she's been gone two years and was a wife and mother. He cries and salutes her. As he and Mae leave town, Angus saves a toad from being run over.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Winnie Foster** – The ten-year-old protagonist of the novel. When the reader first meets Winnie, she's deliberating about running away to escape the stifling care of her mother, father, and Granny, whom she believes pay her too much attention. She tells all of this to a toad on the other side of the **fence** outside her house, adding that she wants to make a difference in the world. Though Winnie loses her nerve overnight because she's afraid of being alone, she does decide to take a walk in her family's wood. There, she meets a young man named Jesse drinking from a stream, and she's immediately attracted to him. Jesse, his brother Miles, and his mother Mae whisk Winnie away and tell her a fantastical story about becoming immortal after drinking from the stream. Winnie doesn't believe them, as she's not one for fairytales or fantasy stories, but nonetheless agrees to go with her kidnappers to their homestead. There, Winnie is shocked to discover that the Tucks live a happy yet disordered life that's completely different from her own. She vacillates between being scared and feeling as though the Tucks are dear friends as she gets to know them. Through several conversations with Angus and Miles, Winnie confronts the fact that she's going to eventually die. She begins to believe Angus that being immortal is a curse, though Jesse invites her to drink the water when she's 17. The next morning, the man in

the yellow suit shows up and threatens to make Winnie drink the water so she can help him sell it. Mae clubs the man over the head, killing him. Winnie knows that the man was going to do a horrible thing but also believes that killing is wrong. She decides to help the Tucks break Mae out of jail by taking Mae's place, which she believes is a way of making a difference in the world. A few weeks later, she gives the water that Jesse gave her to the toad. Decades later, Angus discovers that Winnie chose not to drink the water and died at age 78 after getting married and having children.

**Mae Tuck** – Mae is a kind, "potato-shaped" woman. She's more than 100 years old because, 87 years before the start of the novel, she and her family unwittingly drank water from a magical brook that made them immortal. Mae is of the mind that life is meant to be lived, no matter how long or short a person's life might be. She finds her husband Angus's tendency to dwell on his immortality and think of it as a bad thing tiring and unproductive. Mae carries a small music box with her everywhere and after she meets Winnie, she discovers that Winnie's Granny thinks that the music comes from elves. In reality, Mae meets her sons, Miles and Jesse, in the wood every ten years and she winds up her music box while she's in the wood. Though Mae accepts her lot in life, she understands that being immortal is hard for Miles and Jesse, who were ready to live adult lives and, because of their immortality, never really got the opportunity to do so. Because of this, she believes that it's extremely important that she and her family make it clear to Winnie that immortality isn't actually something that anyone wants to have. This discussion becomes even more difficult when the man in the yellow suit, who heard about the Tucks from his grandmother, arrives to take Winnie away and says he wants to sell the water. To stop him from making Winnie drink the water, Mae hits the man over the head with her rifle and kills him. She accepts that she has to go to jail for this, though her family breaks her out and they run away so that Mae doesn't get sentenced to death by hanging, which would give away the secret.

**Angus Tuck** – Angus (sometimes referred to as simply Tuck) is Mae's husband and the father of Jesse and Miles. He's a sad and withdrawn man, which the narrator suggests is because he's unhappy with his life as an immortal. He dreams of being in heaven and when he later looks at the body of the man in the yellow suit, he feels envious. Winnie is afraid of him at first, but Angus is thrilled to have a real child in the house again. He takes her out onto the **pond** after supper and tries to impress upon her that it's absolutely necessary for everything to grow, change, and die, as that's the only way that the cycle of life and the cycles of nature can continue and support the world's inhabitants. In addition, he says that because he and his family can't die, they're no different than rocks or inanimate objects that don't change. A suspicious man, Angus is worried when someone steals the Tucks' horse, and he is also very concerned

about getting Winnie back to her family. Everything that Angus does makes Winnie think that he's especially dear to her, including offering to sit with her until she falls asleep and allowing her to help them break Mae out of jail. Decades after the novel ends, Angus goes alone to the Treegap graveyard to see if he can find Winnie's grave. When he finds her headstone and learns that she was a wife and mother, he cries and salutes her.

**Miles Tuck** – Miles is Angus and Mae's oldest son. He's 22, strong, and he's worked as a carpenter and a blacksmith. In the years after he and his family drank the water, Miles got married and had two children, one of whom was his daughter, Anna. After 20 years of marriage, Miles's wife got suspicious because he never aged and ultimately left him, taking their children and eventually going west. This was heartbreaking for Miles, but he tells Winnie that it would've been "unnatural" for him to find his wife and children and offer them the water, as his children would've been nearly his age by then. He believes that he needs to make a difference in the world, though he's not sure how to go about doing that since he doesn't have an education. He travels around, working where he can and moving often so that nobody suspects that there's anything amiss about him. Miles teaches Winnie to fish on the **pond** and throws his trout back when she asks him to, though he does try to impress upon her that everything needs to die eventually. After Mae is arrested, Miles uses his carpentry skills to remove the metal window from the jail and get her out.

**Jesse Tuck** – Jesse is Angus and Mae's younger son. He's 17 and Winnie is immediately attracted to him when she comes across him drinking from the stream in her family's wood. Of all the Tucks, Jesse seems the most relieved to finally share the secret with Winnie. After he, Miles, and Mae tell Winnie their story, he suggests that life should be enjoyed and remarks that he's seen all sorts of things and, because he's immortal, will get to see much more. He behaves as though he reciprocates Winnie's feelings; he shows off for her and gives her a small flask of the brook's water so that when Winnie is 17, she can drink it and join him in enjoying life eternally. He also suggests that he'd like to get married. Mae, however, explains that because of Jesse's youth, he's not able to settle down. He moves around constantly and works all manner of jobs, from bartending to manual labor. Jesse is, according to his parents, very sad when Winnie never drinks the water and joins him.

**The Man in the Yellow Suit** – The villain of the novel. He's never named but is described as being in constant motion and moving like a marionette. He travels to Treegap from the west in search of the Tucks, whom he heard about from his grandmother, who knew Miles's wife, and his mother; his mother played with Anna, Miles's daughter, as a girl and told the man in the yellow suit stories about the family that never aged. He dedicates his life to finding them and when he discovers the Tucks with Winnie, he offers to bring them in on

his business plan to sell the water to "deserving" people. The way he talks about this betrays that he's extremely classist, as he suggests that the Tucks--who are very poor--aren't deserving people and refers to them as "illiterates" when he speaks to Winnie's parents. He strikes a deal with Winnie's father to bring Winnie back in exchange for assuming ownership of the wood. When he attempts to take Winnie away from the Tucks and threatens to make her drink the water so that she can prove to potential buyers how well it works, Mae hits him over the head with the butt of her rifle, ultimately killing him.

**The Constable** – The chief law enforcement official in Treegap. He's a friendly and good-natured man who takes pride in his work. He's not thrilled when the man in the yellow suit drags him out of bed in the middle of the night to ride 20 miles to find Winnie, but he tries to make the best of it by attempting to engage the man in the yellow suit in conversation. The constable witnesses Mae hitting the man in the yellow suit, so he arrests her for murder and is proud and excited to be able to lock her up in Treegap's brand-new jail. He's later livid when he finds Winnie in the cell instead of Mae.

**The Toad** – The toad is a wild toad that Winnie sees several times on the other side of her cottage's **fence**. She talks to the toad and tells it about her desire to run away, and she decides to venture into the wood because she's afraid that the toad will laugh at her for losing her nerve. Several weeks after Winnie's adventure, she rescues the toad from a dog that's harassing it and pours the water from Jesse over it, making the toad immortal. In the epilogue, Angus and Mae nearly run the toad over when they come across it sitting in the middle of the road.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Granny** – Winnie's grandmother. Though she's proper and orderly, like Winnie's mother, Granny is a bit more free-spirited and believes that the elves are responsible for the song she hears coming from the wood every once in a while.

**Winnie's Mother** – A prim and proper woman who thrives on cleanliness and order. Along with Granny, she trains Winnie to keep a spotless house.

**Winnie's Father** – A proud man who owns the cottage and the wood.

**Anna** – Miles's daughter. She played with the man in the yellow suit's mother.

black and white.



## THE PURPOSE OF LIVING

*Tuck Everlasting* introduces 10-year-old Winnie Foster, a wealthy and sheltered girl, as she tries to decide whether or not to run away from home to escape the constant, overbearing supervision of her parents and grandmother. However, after witnessing young Jesse Tuck drinking out of a brook in her family's wood, Winnie is promptly whisked away by the Tuck family, who tell her, puzzlingly, that they can live forever--the four members of the family, Mae, Angus, Miles, and Jesse, as well as their horse, haven't aged at all for the last 87 years. As Winnie grapples with this impossible assertion and listens to each of the Tucks tell her about their experiences being immortal and what they feel the purpose of life is, Winnie too is forced to examine her own reasons for living and the questions raised when a person cannot die. Ultimately, *Tuck Everlasting* suggests that the true purpose of life is to make a difference through forming connections with other people, and in order for that difference to be meaningful, a person must gradually mature and eventually die.

Even though Winnie believes at the start of the novel that, practically speaking, she's too young to make a real difference in the world, she already recognizes that this is one thing she should endeavor to do with her life. As she ponders whether or not to run away one afternoon, she declares to a toad lounging outside her cottage's **fence** that she wants to do "something that would make some kind of difference in the world," which, in her understanding, she can't do while she's cooped up in her yard. Winnie's goal is, notably, a concise encapsulation of what the novel suggests the purpose of life should be, though it lacks much nuance or detail. Winnie begins to gain some of this nuance when, at the Tucks' home, she has conversations with all of the Tucks about what they feel the meaning of life is.

Miles Tuck, who is 22 years old, affirms Winnie's suspicion that the purpose of living is to make a difference. He says that it's no good thinking only of oneself; he tells Winnie that "people got to do something useful if they're going to take up space in the world." However, though Miles travels, working as a carpenter and as a blacksmith, he finds that he can't keep a job for too long or else people will get suspicious when he doesn't age. Because of this forced transience and his lack of education, Miles suggests that he's not able to make as much of a difference in the world as he'd really like to. 17-year-old Jesse, on the other hand, tells Winnie that the purpose of life is to enjoy it and even encourages Winnie to wait until she's his age and drink the water so that the two of them can enjoy life for the rest of time. Notably, the differences between Miles's and Jesse's understandings of what it means to live speak to their age gap and the maturity levels in which they're forever trapped. Miles got married and fathered two children in the years after drinking from the stream; his wife left and took the



## THEMES

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children after about twenty years of marriage, devastating Miles. His answer reflects his maturity level and suggests that such understanding can only come with age and experience, specifically the experience of having loved and lost people he cared about. In contrast with Miles, Jesse still looks like a teenager and has the mindset of a 17-year-old. Unlike Miles, Jesse has never had to think about the welfare of anyone other than himself. Through this contrast, the novel suggests that it's actually impossible for Jesse to come to a more nuanced understanding of what he can do with his life, as his mindset will forever be that of a selfish and pleasure-seeking teenager. It seems, then, that there is a deep connection between aging and gaining understanding of life's purpose.

Angus and Mae offer Winnie even broader and more far-reaching explanations of the purpose of living than their sons do. Angus suggests that in addition to making a difference in the world, a person must also die when they've finished making a difference--something that none of the Tucks can do. Similarly, both Angus and Mae make it very clear to Winnie that one of the greatest joys of life is being able to grow, change, and mature, something that none of them--most notably Jesse--will ever be able to do. Mae and Angus ask Winnie to imagine what it would be like if she stopped maturing at age ten, as well as what would happen if *everyone* stopped maturing. They suggest that as an eternal 10-year-old, Winnie would be stuck, like Jesse, in the early stages of maturity and would never be able to move forward, therefore rendering her incapable of either making a meaningful difference (as there's only so much that even an immortal 10-year-old can do) or developing a more mature idea of what it means to be alive.

The fact that Winnie begins to learn about the purpose of life by connecting with others suggests that, alongside making a difference, making friends is also an important element of being a living person in the world. It's only because Winnie starts to make friends, first with the toad and then with the Tucks, that she's able to make her mark by saving them from their respective fates. When Mae is sentenced to death for killing the man in the yellow suit, Winnie does what she can, given her age and maturity level, by choosing to help the Tucks free Mae from jail. Weeks later, Winnie taps into her sense of empathy again and gives the toad the magic water, thereby saving it from death. All of this suggests that in order to make a meaningful mark on the world, it is necessary to connect with others and ultimately act in service of them. Additionally, in the epilogue, Angus learns that Winnie went on to marry and have children before her death, which suggests that Winnie continued to connect with and support others throughout her life. By illustrating the many different ways that one person could make a difference in the world, and especially by including Winnie's death in this category, *Tuck Everlasting* suggests that the true purpose of life is to connect with others, make a difference wherever possible, and accept death when the time

comes.



## CHILDHOOD, INDEPENDENCE, AND MATURITY

*Tuck Everlasting* introduces Winnie at the very beginning of puberty. She's still a child, but she also shows glimmers of maturity and the desire to explore the world, both of which the novel suggests are necessary precursors to coming of age. By illustrating how Winnie begins to come of age, *Tuck Everlasting* suggests that the process of reaching maturity is one that begins when a young person begins to understand complex realities and experiment with making independent choices in the face of that complexity.

When the reader first meets Winnie, she appears very much like a child. She hits the iron fence surrounding her family's cottage with a stick in a childish and thoughtless way, and she believes that she's going to grow up to be just like her mother and her Granny--that is, she'll grow up to inhabit a stuffy world of "proper" femininity, as modeled for her by these adult women. Winnie appears childlike here because she never questions what her future is going to look like; she blindly trusts the adults around her to guide her towards adulthood. Further, aside from suggesting that she's not excited about the version of adulthood they represent, Winnie doesn't show any recognition that she has the power to make choices about her future. Despite these qualities that firmly establish Winnie as a child, the novel also suggests that she's at a point in her maturation where she's ready to begin questioning reality. Though she thinks about running away from home and ultimately decides not to, contemplating doing so suggests that she craves independence and the ability to make her own decisions. Further, Winnie's obvious attraction to 17-year-old Jesse, whom she meets when she wanders into her family's wood, suggests that her sexual maturity isn't far off either.

Winnie's decision to leave her fenced yard for the wild of the wood becomes a symbolic representation of her choice to begin her coming-of-age journey. While Winnie's home and yard signify the safe, controlled, and reliable world of childhood, everything outside of them introduces Winnie to the fact that her home and her way of life are only one way of living, an understanding that the novel suggests is essential to becoming a mature individual. However, though the novel suggests that beginning this journey is a simple choice that's as easy as opening a garden gate, what Winnie discovers outside of the gate paints the adult world as one that's simultaneously delightful and terrifying--in every case, it upends Winnie's expectations of what the world should be like. Winnie initially finds the wood extremely pleasant and wonders why she never chose to play in it before this first time. However, the wood soon turns into the setting of her worst nightmare when Mae, Jesse, and Miles kidnap her after she sees Jesse drink from the stream. Further, despite this fear, Winnie calmly observes that

her nightmare isn't at all like she'd imagined it would be, which indicates that Winnie is beginning to appreciate that the adult world is more complicated than she'd imagined in her childish nightmares. Similarly, though Winnie's reasoning for not wanting to run away hinges on not wanting to be alone, she soon discovers that with the Tucks, she *isn't* alone--though she does vacillate between thinking that the Tucks are horrible criminals and dear friends. This impresses upon Winnie the adult world is confusing and scary, but it's also possible to find bright spots in that world even in unexpected places.

Once the constable returns Winnie to her parents after 24 hours away, Winnie has time to reflect on the journey she took and decide how she's going to move forward. Several things remind the reader that Winnie is still very much a child at this point. She again stays inside the fence, per her parents' request, and she seeks comfort from her mother and by sitting in a child-size **rocking chair** that's much too small for her. All of this suggests that while Winnie may be beginning her coming-of-age journey, she still has a long way to go. As she continues to grow, she will move backwards and forwards between childhood and adulthood, stepping out as she feels ready and retreating back into childish comforts when the world feels too big to handle. Importantly, however, Winnie notices that her parents treat her differently after her adventure, as though something important has happened to her, and she realizes that she now has the power to dictate the course of her own life. Her parents' treatment suggests that, after her journey outside the fence, Winnie is not just a little girl anymore. Having learned more about the world, she understands that she can step out of her comfort zone at any moment and in particular, she understands that stepping out has consequences: her actions changed the Tucks' lives dramatically, caused Winnie's parents to question Winnie's trustworthiness, and introduced Winnie to an entirely different way of living. Through these descriptions of Winnie's dawning maturity, the novel characterizes coming of age as a process in which children discover their own agency and how it can affect the complexities of the world around them.



### NATURE AND THE CYCLE OF LIFE

The narrator of *Tuck Everlasting* is keenly interested in the natural world; the narration frequently mentions the weather, the animals, and the plants that inhabit Treegap and the surrounding countryside. While the narrator's observations primarily function to illustrate the splendor of the natural world, Angus Tuck takes this appreciation one step further by encouraging Winnie and the reader to see the natural world as a metaphor for the cycles of life. By engaging with this metaphor and gaining a deeper appreciation of the natural world, Winnie discovers that life needs to remain cyclical--that is, all beings need to experience life and death--in order for the entire world to remain beautiful

and functional.

The narrator suggests that the natural world and its cycles are essentially a giant wheel that connects all people to each other in mysterious ways. For example, the narrator takes great care to note that the events of the novel could only take place in the first week of August, which "hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning." The narrator suggests that this "pause," combined with the way that this metaphorical wheel connects people, is why Winnie meets the Tucks in the wood and why the villainous man in the yellow suit also shows up in the wood at this particular point in time. The wood itself is an important player in this cycle as the narrator asserts that it, not the planet's core, is the center of Winnie and the Tucks' world. To illustrate its central role, the wood contains the ash tree and its magical stream--whose waters can stop a person from aging and allow them to live forever. In other words, per the novel's logic, the water from the brook turns a person into a fixed point at the very center of a metaphorical wheel. While other people, animals, and plants grow, change, and die, a person who can live forever is stuck in time and cannot change, which the novel suggests prevents them from truly living.

When Angus Tuck takes Winnie out on his **boat**, he makes a similar point using a natural metaphor on a slightly smaller scale. Angus rows the boat across the pond--which is fed on one end by a stream that continues out the other side--until he reaches the downstream side of the pond and gets the boat stuck in some roots and weeds. Angus then tells Winnie about the water cycle: the water in the pond is very much alive with fish, insects, and plants, even if it looks still. Additionally, on a grander scale, the water currently in the pond will eventually reach the ocean and, some time after that, fall back into the pond as rain. The boat caught in the roots, however, is like the Tucks: stuck and unable to complete the cycle, something that Angus suggests makes him little better than a rock or an inanimate object. As far as Angus is concerned, stopping the cycle of nature or the great wheel of the world is a crime worse than any other and, beyond that, is extremely painful to bear. He explains how Miles's wife took their two children away after 20 years of marriage, when it became impossible to ignore the fact that Miles still looked 22. Miles never got to see his children grow and develop, and he has to live daily with the pain of knowing that he has great-grandchildren out there somewhere whom he can't connect with, as it would be "unnatural" for him to do so as a person who will never get any older.

Through all of this, Winnie only gradually begins to understand the necessity of death, something that, at 10 years old, frightens her immensely. At first, she's unconvinced that dying is at all necessary or a good thing. However, while fishing with Miles, a biting mosquito makes her question what the world would be like if mosquitos never died but continued to

multiply--eventually, they'd crowd out everything else. Similarly, Angus suggests that if all humans lived forever and multiplied, they--as well as the natural world, which would struggle to support its inhabitants--would suffer as well. While this all begins to push Winnie in the direction of accepting that death is an essential part of the cycle of life on earth, she only truly understands the importance of death when the man in the yellow suit, who wants to bottle the stream's water and sell it to "worthy" people, threatens to force her to drink the water. He believes that a child performing deadly tasks to demonstrate the water's efficacy would be more compelling to potential buyers than an adult performer. To stop this from happening, Mae hits the man in the yellow suit over the head with the butt of her rifle, ultimately killing him.

Though Winnie is understandably disturbed that Mae commits murder, she also recognizes that Mae does this to save Winnie, the rest of humanity, and the natural world from the unspeakable fate of never dying. Winnie begins to grasp not that dying isn't just important—it's an absolute necessity. Indeed, she chooses to take Angus's advice to not drink the brook's water and eventually dies at the age of 78. The novel suggests that in some way, every death--of a human or an animal--is as important and as meaningful as the death of the man in the yellow suit. While not all deaths remove dangerous people from the world, all deaths create a space for new beings to begin their own journeys around the wheel of life, and this cycle is what keeps the world as a whole in balance.



### MORALITY, CHOICES, AND FRIENDSHIP

In *Tuck Everlasting*, Winnie is confronted with a number of choices that would be high-stakes choices for anyone, let alone for a 10-year-old like Winnie. As Winnie thinks over her choices and considers the moral implications of all her options, she begins to understand that morality isn't entirely black and white; nothing is unequivocally good or bad. However, Winnie does come to the conclusion that when she makes decisions that are based on friendship and care for others, those moral gray areas become much easier to accept and live with. Through Winnie's experiences, the novel suggests that relying on friendship may be the best way to navigate life's moral ambiguity.

From the start, the novel makes it very clear that every choice, no matter how small and seemingly innocuous, has the potential to carry immense consequences. Winnie initially reasons that her choice to leave her **fenced** yard is a safe and inconsequential one; in her mind, she's just going for a walk in her family's wood, which she has every right to do. It doesn't take long, however, for her to see that this choice has changed her life forever. The novel draws similarities between this seemingly innocuous choice and the choice that the Tuck family made 87 years ago, when they first drank from the enchanted brook. Like Winnie, they never expected the choice to quench

their thirst to have any lasting or negative consequences, and yet, this choice completely transforms their lives. Importantly, what happens to Winnie after she leaves her yard and what happens to the Tucks after they drink from the brook aren't things that they can anticipate or control. Mae, Jesse, and Miles bundle Winnie off without her consent, while the Tucks become immortal without choosing to do so. These sudden turns of events impress upon the reader that though a person can do their best to engage with options logically and with an open mind, it's sometimes impossible to know what the consequences of one's choices will be.

In the events that follow, the novel suggests that one of the most effective ways to make decisions in light of this moral ambiguity is to develop friendships and relationships with others. This, per the novel's logic, introduces people to other points of view and ways of life that are crucial to coming to terms with the moral implications of one's actions. The Tuck family helps guide Winnie in this direction as they implore her to believe their story and agree to keep the stream secret. Notably, they also understand that the choice to tell or remain silent will be Winnie's choice and her choice alone. By respecting her autonomy, the Tucks create space for Winnie to truly consider their stories. As a result, Winnie eventually appreciates their humanity, decides that they're her friends, and learns to trust herself in making morally complex decisions.

Because Winnie considers Mae a friend and thinks that she's a kind and generous person, Winnie ultimately decides that Mae's choice to kidnap Winnie--though wrong from a legal perspective--wasn't wrong in a moral sense. Further, Winnie recognizes that her kidnapping is a relatively minor offense compared to what would happen if the secret of the brook were to get out. This doesn't mean, however, that Mae's murder of the man in the yellow suit is easy for Winnie to accept. Though Winnie is scared of the man and understands the many negative implications of selling the water, she never fully reconciles the wellbeing of the wider world with the violent, purposeful, and untimely death of a single person. This reminds the reader that Winnie is still in the process of learning to live with this kind of ambiguity, while also suggesting that in some cases, it doesn't actually get easier as a person becomes more mature--even Angus is disturbed by Mae's actions.

However, Winnie's friendship with Mae ultimately leads Winnie to make moral choices herself, even if Mae's choices to protect Winnie were questionably moral. When Winnie learns that the constable intends to hang Mae for the murder of the man in the yellow suit, she knows that this cannot happen: Mae won't die and will therefore end up giving away the secret she killed a man to protect. Winnie also suggests that because Mae acted for the good of humanity, she doesn't deserve to be punished. To help right the situation, Winnie volunteers to trade places with Mae when Angus, Jesse, and Miles go to break her out of jail, as this will give the Tucks more time to escape. This action

represents several major leaps for Winnie. First, it indicates that she understands that her choices have consequences--she could get in a great deal of trouble for helping to free a convicted murderer. Second, it shows that Winnie recognizes that this is a sacrifice worth making for someone she considers a dear friend. Importantly, even Winnie's mother accepts the explanation that Winnie behaved as she did because Mae is her friend. This suggests that this reasoning makes sense even to the novel's authority figures, who have presumably had to face similar challenges themselves even though Winnie finds them uninteresting.

Ultimately, *Tuck Everlasting* leaves the reader with a number of morally ambiguous situations and outcomes. Mae never has to answer for murdering the man in the yellow suit, though she presumably has the rest of time to think about her actions--something that the novel implies could be either fair given the weight of the crime, or overly harsh since Mae will never be able to forget. Similarly, while Winnie kindly gives the magical water from Jesse to the toad when a dog harasses it, it's unclear whether this is truly in the toad's best interests--a dog or other animal could still certainly harass it, and it's also implied that it could get hit by a car. However, the novel still seems to insist that the true decider of whether a choice or action is moral or not is whether it's intended to care for a friend or another vulnerable individual. This perspective leaves room for moral ambiguity and suggests that the intention behind a choice matters just as much as the action itself.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### WINNIE'S ROCKING CHAIR

When Winnie returns home after her 24 hours with the Tucks, she seeks comfort from her mother as well as from a child-size rocking chair she was given years ago. Winnie's desire to seek comfort from something like this rocking chair illustrates one element in the novel's broader exploration of what it means to grow up. Though Winnie can step outside her **fence** and experiment with adulthood, her reliance on the rocking chair suggests that she will also naturally step back inside and toward her family, looking for comfort and assurance from familiar and childish things. This tension indicates that Winnie is still in the beginning stages of her coming-of-age journey and will continue to move back and forth between the wider, scary adult world and the safe and comforting world of childhood. Still, that childhood world doesn't fit as comfortably as it did when Winnie was a small child, just as the rocker is no longer truly the right size for Winnie.



### THE BOAT AND THE POND

During Winnie's stay with the Tucks, Angus takes her out on the pond in his rowboat. The pond is fed by a small river on one side and empties via another river on the other side. Angus allows the boat to get stuck in some roots and weeds on the downstream side of the river, and he suggests that the boat's relationship to the water is symbolic of the Tucks' place in the world. Because the Tucks can't die, they'll never complete the cycle of life, which Tuck explains to Winnie by telling her about the water cycle. The Tucks, like the boat, will remain stuck forever, even as the rest of the world, as represented by the water, continues to move and change.



### THE FENCE

While Winnie is at home, she's most often sitting just inside her family's wrought-iron **fence**. She initially conceptualizes of the fence as a prison, trapping her inside and not allowing her to experience the world beyond it. However, when she decides to go for a walk in her family's wood, she discovers that the fence is actually easy to breach. The way that Winnie engages with the fence comes to encapsulate her journey as she begins to come of age and experiment with stepping outside of the careful, contained world of childhood. While her budding maturity means that she craves independence and getting outside of the fence, she recognizes after some time away that the fence also holds comforts, like her mother and her **rocking chair**, that help her cope with what she sees in the larger, more adult world. Developing this kind of nuanced understanding that the fence is a permeable barrier helps Winnie and the reader realize that coming of age and becoming an adult doesn't happen all at once. Instead, just as Winnie goes back and forth from one side of the fence to the other, children move back and forth between childhood and adulthood as they feel comfortable and ready to do so.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Square Fish edition of *Tuck Everlasting* published in 1975.

### Prologue Quotes

●● No connection, you would agree. But things can come together in strange ways. The wood was at the center, the hub of the wheel. All wheels must have a hub. A Ferris wheel has one, as the sun is the hub of the wheeling calendar. Fixed points they are, and best left undisturbed, for without them, nothing holds together. But sometimes people find this out too late.

**Related Characters:** The Man in the Yellow Suit, Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

In introducing the story, the narrator tells the reader to think of the events and characters in the novel as a giant wheel, with the Fosters' wood in the center of this particular wheel. By situating the wood as the hub of this wheel, the narrator makes it clear that the natural world is something that connects people in a variety of ways and is the center of all these connections. This allows nature to function as an all-knowing, all-powerful element and entity that dictates the course of life and has a great deal of control over it.

Then, when the narrator insists that the "hubs" of these wheels need to be left alone, the narrator tells the reader outright how the reader should view the events to follow. The man in the yellow suit's desire to sell the brook water, which is at the center of the wood, would in the narrator's explanation constitute disturbing this wheel and destroying it. While the Tucks' immortality, thanks to drinking the water at the center of the wood, may also have disturbed this wheel to a degree, selling the water to so many other people would cause disruption on such a large scale that the universe presented in the novel might never recover. This shows that Winnie's quest in the novel will be to preserve the center of this wheel so that she, along with Mae and the Tucks, can save the world.

## Chapter Three Quotes

💬 "I want to be by myself for a change." She leaned her forehead against the bars and after a short silence went on in a thoughtful tone. "I'm not exactly sure what I'd do, you know, but something interesting--something that's all mine. Something that would make some kind of difference in the world."

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster (speaker), The Toad

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 14-15

### Explanation and Analysis

Winnie sits inside her family's fence and tells a toad why she'd like to run away from home. Everything she says here

positions Winnie as a child on the brink of coming of age. She expresses an interest in independence and, specifically, in existing independently from her parents and her grandmother. Then, when she says that she'd like to do something that would make an impact on the world, it shows that she's beginning to think about and grapple with her role in the world and what she should do with her life. She recognizes that it's not fulfilling to simply sit in the safety of her childhood home and do what her parents tell her to do; she understands that in order to be a contributing member of society, she needs to put herself out there and make a difference. Notably, the novel suggests that this is only something that Winnie can do as she comes of age, which speaks to the necessity of growing up and maturing so that a person can make a difference in the world.

## Chapter Five Quotes

💬 But she realized that sometime during the night she had made up her mind: she would not run away today. "Where would I go, anyway?" she asked herself. "There's nowhere else I really want to be." But in another part of her head, the dark part where her oldest fears were housed, she knew there was another sort of reason for staying at home: she was afraid to go away alone.

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 22

### Explanation and Analysis

After sleeping on it, Winnie decides that she's not going to run away because she's afraid to be alone. When compared to her earlier reasons for wanting to run away (to gain independence and to make a difference in the world), this choice begins to speak to the tensions between looking forward and being afraid, and between joy and terror, that the narrator suggests are natural parts of growing up and coming of age. At this point, Winnie is too overcome by terror to fully embrace the wonders of the world outside of her fence, which in turn keeps her from starting her coming of age journey now.

Winnie's reasoning also suggests that she doesn't see the outside world beyond her fence as one that has the potential to introduce her to possible friends. Instead, she sees the world as fundamentally scary and hostile to her, an idea that her parents have used to their advantage to impress upon Winnie the importance of staying in the yard and staying safe. However, as Winnie does go on to grow up

and venture outside the fence, she learns that her parents aren't actually correct: outside her fence, there are a number of people who are willing to be her friends and show her new things about the world, just as there are others--like the man in the yellow suit--who actually do embody her parents' fears.

## Chapter Six Quotes

☛☛ Winnie had often been haunted by visions of what it would be like to be kidnapped. But none of her visions had been like this, with her kidnapers just as alarmed as she was herself. She had always pictured a troupe of burly men with long black moustaches who would tumble her into a blanket and bear her off like a sack of potatoes while she pleaded for mercy. But, instead, it was *they*, Mae Tuck and Miles and Jesse, who were pleading.

**Related Characters:** Jesse Tuck, Miles Tuck, Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 31-32

### Explanation and Analysis

As Winnie bounces along on the Tucks' horse when they kidnap her, she calmly thinks that the reality of being kidnapped is nothing like she imagined. First, it's important to note that Winnie is calm in this situation and she's able to observe what's going on around her and recognize that this is different from what she expected. Though this does speak to her fear--Winnie is in shock at this point--it also speaks to her maturity and her ability to think rationally about things that upend her expectations. Then, Winnie's ability to recognize that the Tucks are just as afraid and upset about all of this as she is suggests that she already has the capacity to humanize strangers and recognize that, though they may be kidnapping her, they might also be possible friends or at the very least, kind people who don't want to hurt her. This shows that she's willing and able to connect with people, even as she recognizes that people are complex and not entirely good, bad, or logical.

## Chapter Eight Quotes

☛☛ "Just think of all the things we've seen in the world! All the things we're going to see!"

"That kind of talk'll make her want to rush back and drink a gallon of the stuff," warned Miles. "There's a whole lot more to it than Jesse Tuck's good times, you know."

"Oh, stuff," said Jesse with a shrug. "We might as well enjoy it, long as we can't change it. You don't have to be such a parson all the time."

"I'm not being a parson," said Miles. "I just think you ought to take it more serious."

**Related Characters:** Miles Tuck, Jesse Tuck (speaker), Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

After the Tucks tell Winnie their story of becoming immortal, Jesse and Miles argue about whether or not their fate is fantastic or something that should be taken a bit more seriously. For Jesse, who's eternally 17, life is something that exists to be enjoyed. He feels this way, however, exactly because he is trapped at the maturity level of a 17-year-old boy who, naturally and understandably, thinks mostly of himself and the fact that the world contains a variety of wonders for his taking. Miles, on the other hand, is 22, and the extra five years he has on Jesse give him a much more mature outlook on life. Though he doesn't explain here, he believes that he needs to make a difference in the world to justify his presence in it, and he doesn't think much of Jesse's desire to only do things that make him happy.

Though neither Miles nor Jesse will continue to age, this moment does speak to the effects of growing up--five years extra is enough to make Miles far more mature than his younger brother. This offers the implication that while Winnie is only 10 at this point, if she chooses to not drink the water and continues to age and change, she too will continue to rethink and reevaluate how she feels about her life and what she feels the meaning of life is. Stopping in one place, on the other hand, means that a person will never be able to evolve in this regard, given that their maturity won't continue to develop as time goes on.

☝ But she felt there was nothing to be afraid of, not really. For they seemed gentle. Gentle and--in a strange way--childlike. They made her feel old. And the way they spoke to her, the way they looked at her, made her feel special. Important. It was a warm, spreading feeling, entirely new. She liked it, and in spite of their story, she liked them, too--especially Jesse.

**Related Characters:** Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster, Miles Tuck, Jesse Tuck

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

After hearing the Tucks' story, Winnie reasons that she shouldn't be afraid of the Tucks and finds that she actually likes them. The feelings that Winnie notices are feelings of friendship and trust, though she can't name them quite yet. This reminds the reader of how lonely Winnie has been up to this point; she's not really had any friends and definitely hasn't been around adults who treat her like a fellow adult. The fact that the Tucks do treat Winnie as much like an adult as like a child suggests that even if Winnie's not aware of her liminal state between vulnerable child and mature adult, the Tucks are. They recognize that there's something meaningful and special in treating Winnie like an adult, and they know that treating her this way will make her more receptive to their story and their request. Finally, Winnie's comment about liking Jesse also makes it very clear that she's on the brink of sexual maturity, given that her attraction to Jesse seems to be of a romantic nature.

☝ Closing the gate on her oldest fears as she had closed the gate of her own fenced yard, she discovered the wings she'd always wished she had. And all at once she was elated. Where were the terrors she'd been told she should expect? She could not recognize them anywhere. The sweet earth opened out its wide four corners to her like the petals of a flower ready to be picked, and it shimmered with light and possibility till she was dizzy with it. Her mother's voice, the feel of home, receded for the moment, and her thoughts turned forward. Why, she, too, might live forever in this remarkable world she was only just discovering!

**Related Characters:** Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster, Miles Tuck, Jesse Tuck

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 44-45

### Explanation and Analysis

After agreeing to go to the Tucks' homestead with them, Winnie feels suddenly as though her life is opening up before her. First, when the narrator suggests that Winnie can shut out her fears in the same way that she shut the gate of her family's fence, it shows that the line between childhood (as represented by the yard inside the fence) and adulthood (as represented by everything outside the fence) is very much a permeable barrier that Winnie can choose to cross at will. Further, the fact that she's closing away her fears specifically speaks to the tension between joy and terror that the novel suggests is an intrinsic part of coming of age. As Winnie begins to pull away from her family and, specifically, from her mother, the world is at varying points something that thrills her and scares her. This reminds the reader that coming of age isn't an easy or linear process; it's one that will proceed as Winnie moves back and forth through the metaphorical gate, experiencing the terror and glee at what she finds outside of it in turn. Additionally, Winnie's focus on the natural world here underscores how it can remind humans of their own natures and their connections to the rest of the world.

## Chapter Ten Quotes

☝ "Jesse, now, he don't ever seem too settled in himself. Course, he's young." She stopped and smiled. "That sounds funny, don't it? Still, it's true, just the same."

**Related Characters:** Mae Tuck (speaker), Winnie Foster, Jesse Tuck

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

While Mae gives Winnie a tour of her small house, she explains what Miles and Jesse do with themselves and suggests that Jesse, because of his youth, isn't able to settle. This reminds the reader that though Jesse is actually 104 years old, his maturity doesn't reflect the fact that he's been alive for more than a century. In the novel's understanding of what it means to be immortal and stop aging, a person stops developing mentally and emotionally wherever they are when they drink the water--an old and wise person

would never become even wiser, while a toddler would never move past childish games and wonder. With this, the novel impresses upon the reader that Jesse's advice should be taken with a grain of salt, as his is the advice of a teenager who, though he's seen many things, doesn't necessarily have the maturity to interpret or engage with his experiences in an adult way. He's forever in a state of limbo, caught between adolescent and adult.

☝ It sounded rather sad to Winnie, never to belong anywhere. "That's too bad," she said, glancing shyly at Mae. "Always moving around and never having any friends or anything."

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster (speaker), Angus Tuck, Mae Tuck

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 54

### Explanation and Analysis

During Winnie's tour of the house, Mae tells Winnie that she and Angus have to move often so as to not make other people suspicious that they're immortal. Winnie's suggestion that this is sad suggests that she's beginning to understand that an important part of being a person in the world is forming friendships with other people, which the Tucks are unable to do because they don't want to make people suspicious. The Tucks are therefore isolated and never get to exchange thoughts or ideas with other people, which likely contributes to their inability to make sense of what they're doing on earth as immortals.

In a broader sense, Mae's description of loneliness also ties in with Angus's assertion that he and his family have "fallen off the wheel." Because they can't age and aren't part of the cycle of life anymore, they're unmoored and are unable to connect with anything that's still truly living. Further, because Angus and Mae believe that this is a fate worse than any other, they're reticent to invite others to join them in dropping out of the cycle of life, thereby keeping themselves even more isolated and alone.

☝ "Life's got to be lived, no matter how long or short," she said calmly. "You got to take what comes. We just go along, like everybody else, one day at a time."

**Related Characters:** Mae Tuck (speaker), Angus Tuck,

Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

Not long after Winnie arrives, Mae tells Winnie that she and her family have to move forward with their lives and take what comes, just like any other person in the world does. With this, Mae seeks to make Winnie understand that the Tucks aren't that different from anyone else, even if they are immortal. This helps Winnie to humanize the Tucks and see them as people who are possible friends and good people, not just criminal kidnappers.

This also offers some insight into what Mae believes the purpose of life is. In her opinion, life exists to be lived and experienced, not just thought about. This places her in opposition to Angus, who appears to spend most of his time thinking about his life and what he can or should do with it. Mae is, in other words, a person of action, while Angus is one of thought.

## Chapter Twelve Quotes

☝ "Life. Moving, growing, changing, never the same two minutes together. This water, you look out at it every morning, and it looks the same, but it ain't. All night long it's been moving, coming in through the stream back there to the west, slipping out through the stream down east here, always quiet, always new, moving on."

**Related Characters:** Angus Tuck (speaker), Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 61

### Explanation and Analysis

Out on the pond, Angus draws Winnie's attention to the water and makes the case that though the water looks much the same every day, it's actually constantly in the process of moving and changing. By drawing out this relationship between the water cycle and the grander cycle of the world, Angus is able to illustrate for Winnie how the world functions--and in his understanding, how the world has to function in order for it to continue doing so. As far as he's concerned, people and animals must continue to grow and

then die in order to make room for new life, just as the water will always continue to move and circulate to bring life to different places. This allows Winnie to visualize Angus's insistence that everything must die in a way that makes sense for her, given her youth and her maturity level.

☝ Winnie blinked, and all at once her mind was drowned with understanding of what he was saying. For she--yes, even she--would go out of the world willy-nilly someday. Just go out, like the flame of a candle, and no use protesting. It was a certainty. She would try very hard not to think of it, but sometimes, as now, it would be forced upon her. She raged against it, helpless and insulted, and blurted at last, "I don't want to die."

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster (speaker), Angus Tuck

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

During Angus's talk in the boat, Winnie suddenly realizes that if what Angus says is true, someday she'll die. Being so young, this realization is understandably difficult for Winnie. When contrasted with the way in which Angus thinks of death (as something necessary and, once a person becomes old, a welcome next step after a long life), this unhappiness on Winnie's part speaks to the way in which as a person ages, the way that they think about death changes as well. Further, the tone that the narrator takes reminds the reader that this is something that Winnie will grapple with time and again as she grows up. This isn't a one-time realization and because of that, Winnie has the ability to rethink how she feels about death as she has this realization again and again over the course of her life.

☝ "If I knew how to climb back on the wheel, I'd do it in a minute. You can't have living without dying. So you can't call it living, what we got. We just *are*, we just *be*, like rocks beside the road."

**Related Characters:** Angus Tuck (speaker), Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

Using the metaphor of a wheel, Angus tells Winnie that he'd gladly give up his immortality for the chance to die, as he believes that dying is an intrinsic part of living. The way that Angus suggests that he and his family aren't truly alive shows that he believes that one cannot truly call themselves alive if they can't fulfill every part of the cycle of life, which necessarily includes dying. Because of this, he suggests that his family cannot truly make a difference; they are as helpless as the rocks or inanimate objects that, like the Tucks, never die or change.

Importantly, Angus shows Winnie that at a certain point, death becomes something that a person might want. Being comparatively old (Angus was likely somewhere in his forties when he drank the water), he has begun to desire a break from life and wants to be able to make room for new life in the world. Because he can never die, he can never do that, an idea that adds a new layer of meaning to Winnie's own complicated feelings about aging.

## Chapter Seventeen Quotes

☝ "It'd be nice," she said, "if nothing ever had to die."

"Well now, I don't know," said Miles. "If you think on it, you come to see there'd be so many creatures, including people, we'd all be squeezed in right up next to each other before long."

**Related Characters:** Miles Tuck, Winnie Foster (speaker), Angus Tuck, The Man in the Yellow Suit

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis

While Miles and Winnie are out fishing, Miles suggests that death is a good thing if only so that the planet doesn't become overpopulated. This adds another dimension to Angus's insistence that at a certain point in a person's life, death is an earned privilege. Here, Miles insists that death is a necessity for the sake of the wider world. By encouraging Winnie to engage in this thought experiment and imagine what it would be like if nobody ever died, Miles shows Winnie that all beings must die to make room for new ones,

so that those new beings can have a chance to live their own lives.

Though the man in the yellow suit is still alive at this point in the novel, this also is one of the most direct justifications for the man's death. The man's desire to bottle and sell the stream's water would result in the overcrowding that Miles warns against here, and taking out the man in the yellow suit and his business plan with him ensures that life on earth will proceed as it always has, without creating the overcrowding that immortality would bring. It seems, then, that opposing the man in the yellow suit is one way that Miles and Winnie can make the kind of difference that they both crave.

## Chapter Nineteen Quotes

☝ "Not Winnie!" she said between clenched teeth. "You ain't going to do a thing like that to Winnie. And you ain't going to give out the secret." Her strong arms swung the shotgun round her head, like a wheel. The man in the yellow suit jerked away, but it was too late. With a dull cracking sound, the stock of the shotgun smashed into the back of his skull. He dropped like a tree, his face surprised, his eyes wide open.

**Related Characters:** Mae Tuck (speaker), The Man in the Yellow Suit, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 100

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes the moment in which Mae kills the man in the yellow suit, who threatened to make Winnie drink the stream's enchanted water so he could use her to sell the water to "deserving" people. First, when the narrator says that Mae swings the shotgun "like a wheel," it again brings up the idea that the world and its inhabitants are all connected to each other by way of a giant wheel or cycle. In this instance, Mae gets to function as the center of the wheel to complete one action that, the novel suggests, is essential to making sure the cycle continues: killing someone. By killing the man in the yellow suit, Mae makes sure first of all that the cycle will be able to continue, as this will protect the secret of the Tucks' immortality and the stream's magical powers. Then, the death of the man in the yellow suit also makes way for another being to begin a life cycle without overcrowding. Essentially, by likening Mae's motion to that of a wheel, the narrator justifies Mae's actions and shows they can be viewed as moral in the grand scheme of the world, even if murdering someone is still

wrong.

## Chapter Twenty Quotes

☝ And then Winnie said something she had never said before, but the words were words she had sometimes heard, and often longed to hear. They sounded strange on her own lips and made her sit up straighter. "Mr. Tuck," she said, "don't worry. Everything's going to be all right."

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster (speaker), The Man in the Yellow Suit, The Constable, Mae Tuck, Angus Tuck

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis

Before the constable takes Winnie and Mae back to Treegap, Winnie comforts Angus by telling him that everything is going to be okay. The way that Winnie conceptualizes these words as being ones that she's longed to hear shows that in this instance, she's stepping into an adult role and using her newfound maturity to care for others. This shows that she's beginning to come of age and experiment with what she can do as a mature person, though she will return home to the safety of her family and her yard after this. Her words also speak to the strength of the friendship that Winnie has formed with all the Tucks. She now believes that, as their friend, she has a responsibility to help them feel better and deal with this difficult situation, and she knows that one of the best ways to do this is by being comforting and showing them that she cares for their plight.

## Chapter Twenty-One Quotes

☝ Winnie pulled her little rocking chair up to her bedroom window and sat down. The rocking chair had been given to her when she was very small, but she still squeezed into it sometimes, when no one was looking, because the rocking made her almost remember something pleasant, something soothing, that would never quite come up to the surface of her mind. And tonight she wanted to be soothed.

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

During her first night back at home, Winnie sits down in her rocking chair to think. The rocking chair allows Winnie to feel close to her parents and close to her childhood, which, at her age, is beginning to slip away from her. This is represented by the size of the rocking chair in relation to Winnie's body. The chair isn't quite big enough for her, just as Winnie's life as a child is no longer big or interesting enough to hold her. Though she can continue to return to the rocker and to this sense of being a child, Winnie is absolutely starting to come of age and venture outside of these childish comforts into the scarier, more adult world.

☝ "You mean, if he dies," Winnie had said, flatly, and they had sat back, shocked. Soon after, they put her to bed, with many kisses. But they peered at her anxiously over their shoulders as they tiptoed out of her bedroom, as if they sensed that she was different now from what she had been before. As if some part of her had slipped away.

**Related Characters:** The Man in the Yellow Suit, Granny, Winnie's Father, Winnie's Mother, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 106

### Explanation and Analysis

When Winnie's parents discuss the possible fate of the man in the yellow suit, who isn't yet dead, Winnie is the only one willing to say outright that if the man dies, her family reassumes ownership of the wood. This is shocking for Winnie's family. The fact that her family treats her differently after she says this shows that though Winnie still looks like a child, she's begin to truly come of age since she went away with the Tucks. This change shows that she's much like the pond in the way that Angus described it. Like the pond, Winnie still looks the same, but underneath, she's always changing and developing and moving towards bigger things, just as the water in the pond will move constantly in the direction of the ocean. Again, the narrative reinforces the connection between the cycles of the natural world and

the personal growth cycles of individual humans.

☝ Was Mae weeping now for the man in the yellow suit? In spite of her wish to spare the world, did she wish he were alive again? There was no way of knowing. But Mae had done what she thought she had to do.

**Related Characters:** The Man in the Yellow Suit, Mae Tuck, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 110

### Explanation and Analysis

Back in her rocking chair, Winnie thinks about death and wonders if Mae is mourning at all for the man in the yellow suit. These questions show that Winnie is maturing and now has space in her mind to hold several different and opposing truths in her head at the same time. She's able to understand that the man in the yellow suit's death was a horrible tragedy, while she's also able to understand that in important ways, the man's death was absolutely necessary. Because he's dead, life on earth will be able to proceed as normal and beings will still be able to die and make room for new life, which the man sought to stop by selling the water in the stream. The fact that Winnie is asking these questions from her rocking chair again reminds the reader that Winnie is still very much a child, even as she does ask these complicated questions and come to very mature answers about them. This illustrates how a child like Winnie is able to use childhood and childish comforts as a safe space to engage with the bigger and scarier questions of the world, in preparation for moving into that world as an adult.

## Chapter Twenty-Two Quotes

☝ "I mean, what'll they say to you after, when they find out?" "I don't know," said Winnie, "but it doesn't matter. Tell your father I want to help. I have to help. If it wasn't for me, there wouldn't have been any trouble in the first place."

**Related Characters:** Winnie Foster, Jesse Tuck (speaker), Winnie's Father, Winnie's Mother, Mae Tuck, Angus Tuck

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

When Jesse comes to visit Winnie at the fence, Winnie asks to be included in the plot to break Mae out of jail and insists that she's willing to accept the consequences of her actions. This is notable in that Winnie now shows that she understands that all of her actions will indeed have consequences. While she grasps the more obvious fact that committing a crime like breaking a murderer out of jail is something she'll have to answer for, she also now recognizes that even choices that seem innocuous, like deciding to leave her yard and walk in the wood, have the capacity to bring unexpected consequences. Her desire to help also shows that in addition to accepting these consequences, Winnie now understands how to use her agency to make a difference in the world. She believes that this is what she must do as she gets older in order to have a fulfilling and meaningful life, and now that she's beginning to come of age, she knows that she can start this endeavor.

**Related Characters:** Granny, Winnie's Father, Winnie's Mother, Winnie Foster

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 121

### Explanation and Analysis

When Winnie sneaks out of her family's home to help break Mae out of jail, she's shocked and guilty to discover that her family apparently trusts her enough to think that she'd stay in bed and not try to pull a stunt like this. This shows that just as Winnie now recognizes that it was actually a seriously consequential decision to leave her family's yard in the first place, choosing to leave this time will also have major consequences for Winnie herself and for her family. She understands that because she's choosing to leave again, her family won't trust her like they currently do to do as she's told and stay safe. This impresses upon Winnie that her actions can and will affect everyone, from herself, to her friends like the Tucks, and even her family. Notably, however, Winnie still relies on her own understanding of what's right, demonstrating that she's gained the ability to make independent choices apart from the protection of authority figures.

## Chapter Twenty-Four Quotes

☛ Leaving the house was so easy that Winnie felt faintly shocked. She had half expected that the instant she put a foot on the stairs they would leap from their beds and surround her with accusations. But no one stirred. And she was struck by the realization that, if she chose, she could slip out night after night without their knowing. The thought made her feel more guilty than ever that she should once more take advantage of their trust.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PROLOGUE

The narrator explains that the first week of August is the highest point of the year. The months before are just spring, while the months after represent a decline towards fall. That week in August, however, is hot, silent, and still. The lightning at night is just lightning, with no rain or thunder. During this time, people do things they're guaranteed to regret later.

The narrator says that one day during this time of year, three things happened that seem disconnected but actually are very connected. First, Mae Tuck left for Treegap to meet her sons, Miles and Jesse. Winnie Foster, whose parents own Treegap wood, decided to think about running away, and a stranger (the man in the yellow suit) showed up at the Fosters' gate. The narrator says that the wood is the hub of a "wheel" that connects these people. It's important to leave the hub of wheels alone, as they hold things together.

*By beginning with an explanation of the time of year and where August fits into the cycle of the year, the narrator situates nature and these natural cycles as a unifying motif of the novel.*



*Here, by connecting three seemingly unconnected people to each other by way of the wood, the narrator again situates nature as a central, unifying force for all life. By saying that it's best to leave the hub alone, this moment also sets up the novel's central conflict as being a question of preserving the wood or altering it, which the narrator suggests will bring only bad things.*



## CHAPTER ONE

The route of the road to Treegap was developed long ago by a herd of cows. The road meanders pleasantly over and around hills and meadows until it gets to the wood, at which point it makes a sharp turn to go around the wood. On the other side of the wood, the road loses its pleasantness as it leads into the village of Treegap. It becomes straight and the grasses on either side look sad. The first cottage it passes has an iron **fence** around a cropped lawn, and it looks imposing and cold. The narrator says that this cottage, the jailhouse, and the gallows are the only things in Treegap that matter to the story.

The narrator says the wood is strange. Both the first cottage and the wood make a person want to pass by without disturbing them, but for different reasons. The wood looks like it's sleeping and shouldn't be disturbed, and the Fosters, the family that own the imposing cottage, also own the wood. The narrator suggests that the idea of owning land is odd, as it's unclear whether a person owns just the top of the earth or whether ownership extends all the way to the earth's core. Even though the Fosters own the wood, none of them, even the 10-year-old child Winnie, goes there. Winnie's not even curious about it, which the narrator suggests is because her family owns it and things are only interesting when they're not your own.

*Notice that the narrator's true interest is in the natural world surrounding Treegap, not the village of Treegap itself. By drawing a contrast between the wilder landscape outside of Treegap and the cut lawn on the inside of the cottage's fence, the narrator also shows how people have the ability to manipulate the natural world and make it look the way they want it to--though the language suggests that this isn't necessarily a good choice.*



*When the narrator insists that the idea of owning land is an odd one, it suggests that the narrator would advocate for a relationship to land that isn't predicated on ownership and instead would be based on a sense of curiosity and community. This shows that as far as the narrator is concerned, humans are an intrinsic part of the natural world, even as they try to impose unnatural systems of ownership on it.*



While the wood itself may be just like any other wood, with trees, birds, leaves, and bugs, the narrator suggests that the cows that routed the road around the wood were very wise. Had the road led through the wood, the people would've gone through too. Then, the people would've noticed a giant ash tree and a spring coming from around its roots, though the spring is hidden under a pile of pebbles. The narrator says that this would be a disaster that would make the whole planet tremble.

*Here, by telling the reader outright that discovering the spring would be a disaster, the narrator shows that there are certain parts of the natural world that definitely shouldn't be owned or even known about. By giving credit to the cows for keeping this disaster from taking place, the narrator also indicates that all choices, no matter how they're made or how innocuous they seem, have major consequences.*



## CHAPTER TWO

Mae wakes up at dawn on the first day of the first week of August and remarks that the boys will be home. Angus, Mae's husband, doesn't respond; he's fast asleep and in this state, the sad lines on his face are relaxed and he smiles. Mae wakes him and Angus's smile vanishes. He sighs that he was dreaming again of being in heaven, but Mae tells him that the dream won't change anything and he should be accustomed to things by now. She announces that she's going to ride to Treegap to meet Jesse and Miles and when Angus expresses concern, she insists that nobody will remember her since it's been ten years since she was last there. Angus goes back to sleep.

*For most people, dreaming of being in heaven--that is, dreaming of being dead in a Christian sense--wouldn't necessarily be such a great thing, as most people aren't looking forward to dying. Angus's happiness with the dream, combined with Mae's mysterious chiding that the dream won't change anything, suggests that there's something strange with the Tucks, and that they don't look at life and death the same way that other people might.*



Mae dresses and as she pulls on a shawl, Angus sleepily says it's too warm for it. Mae ignores this and asks if Angus will be okay until she gets back. Opening his eyes, Angus asks what could happen to him and says he can never forget. He rolls over and goes back to sleep. Mae pulls on her boots, takes out a small music box and puts it in her pocket, and coils up her long hair without looking in the mirror. The narrator says that Mae no longer has to look in the mirror, as she's looked the exact same way for the last 87 years. Angus, Miles, and Jesse have too.

*When the reader learns that the Tucks are immortal, Angus's dream makes more sense. It now shows that Angus, on some level, wants to die and doesn't think living forever is all that great. With this, the novel introduces the possibility that the only way someone can truly learn to appreciate one's mortality is by being denied that mortality.*



## CHAPTER THREE

At noon that day, Winnie sits on the closely cropped grass inside her **fence**, talking to a toad outside. She tells it that she might run away tomorrow, but she can't tell if the toad is listening or not. Winnie's been at the fence for a while. She came out earlier feeling annoyed and angry, so she threw some pebbles in the toad's general direction. When she ran out of pebbles, she started to talk to it. Now, Winnie tells the toad she can't stand it much longer. As she does, a window in the cottage opens and Granny tells Winnie to not sit on the grass, while Winnie's mother calls her for lunch.

*Though minor characters in the grand scheme of the novel, Winnie's mother and Granny show the reader here that they're likely overbearing--or at the very least, Winnie thinks they are. Winnie's desire for independence suggests that she's beginning to come of age and is getting ready to step out on her own, while her willingness to talk to the toad indicates that she's in need of a friend to connect with.*



Winnie tells the toad that because she's an only child, the adults want to look at her and look after her all the time--but she just wants to be alone for a while. She says that she'd like to do something interesting that would make a difference, and she might like a new name too. Winnie suggests that she could keep a toad as a pet, but when the toad heaves itself further away from her, she suggests that her pet toad would be no better off than she is, as she's basically in a cage too. She laments that her family never lets her leave the yard by herself and declares that she's going to run away. Winnie's mother calls again and the toad begins to hop toward the wood. Winnie tells the toad she's serious about running away tomorrow.

*By seeing the fenced yard as a cage, Winnie conceptualizes childhood as something that's being forced upon her. Notably, she sees the fence as something she can't just leave, just as she believes now that she can't just choose to not be a child anymore. Though this again speaks to Winnie's readiness to begin to come of age, her unwillingness to question her own agency or the efficacy of her boundaries shows that at this point, she still relies on and trusts the adults around her to mediate her experience with the outside world. Her mention of wanting to make a difference also introduces the idea that Winnie is starting to contemplate how to create a meaningful life.*



## CHAPTER FOUR

At sunset, the man in the yellow suit saunters up to the Fosters' **fence**. He watches Winnie trying to catch fireflies and calls out to her after a few minutes. He tells Winnie that he used to catch fireflies when he was a child. As he speaks, Winnie notices that the man's body moves continuously but gracefully, "like a well-handled marionette." Winnie is instantly put off by this, but thinks that he looks friendly and so answers his questions. She explains that her family has lived in this cottage for a long time; her Granny was born here when the wood was still a forest.

*The language that the narrator uses to describe the man in the yellow suit--including not naming him--functions to dehumanize the man and make him seem scarier and less like a real, living person. Though at this point he does just make Winnie slightly uncomfortable, these descriptions take on more meaning later when the reader learns that he wants to sell immortality--in effect, he wants to turn everyone into an inanimate marionette, just like him.*



The man in the yellow suit insists that if Winnie's lived here so long, she must know everyone. Winnie says that she doesn't and suggests that the man speak to her father. The door opens and Granny steps onto the porch. Winnie calls her over and the man greets Granny by calling her "fit," which offends Granny. The man doesn't explain why he's at the gate, but says that he suspects that Granny knows everyone in the village. Granny suspiciously says that she doesn't know everyone and doesn't talk about this sort of thing with strangers in the dark.

*Winnie's choice to try and redirect the man in the yellow suit to her father shows that she does trust her parents to care for her; she knows that this man is strange for wanting to talk to her instead of an adult. This indicates that though Winnie is still an immature child, she also has a finely tuned sense of other people's trustworthiness and understands that this man isn't actually her friend.*



After a moment of silence, Granny, Winnie, and the man in the yellow suit hear a tinkling bit of music coming from the wood. Wide-eyed, Granny gleefully tells Winnie that the music was the elf music she's told her about. She grabs Winnie to lead her inside, but the man in the yellow suit eagerly asks Granny if she's heard the music before. They all listen to another wisp of the music and when it fades, Winnie suggests that it sounds like a music box. Granny leads Winnie inside. The man remains at the gate for a while and gazes at the wood. He looks satisfied and when he finally turns and walks away, he whistles the melody that he heard coming from the wood.

*Though Winnie implies that Granny is a boring old lady who only cares about order and cleanliness, Granny's glee at hearing the "elf music" suggests that there's more nuance to adulthood than Winnie currently allows for. In other words, Granny is living proof that adulthood doesn't have to mean that a person is boring and has no interests; it's possible to be an adult while also retaining a childlike sense of wonder and fantasy.*



## CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning, Winnie wakes up early and decides that she's not going to run away. Though she reasons that she doesn't really want to leave, she also knows that she's afraid to be alone. Winnie thinks that it's one thing to talk or think about being alone, but according to the adults around her, the world is a dangerous place and she won't be able to manage. She thinks it's awful to admit she's afraid and wonders if the toad might laugh at her if it returns to the **fence** later. Winnie decides that instead of running away, she'll just go into the wood to investigate the source of the music. She thinks that she can always decide at that point to run away.

Though it's already a hot day, Winnie finds it's cooler in the wood. Surprisingly, the wood is very pleasant. Green and gold light filters through the trees, illuminating little flowers and moss. She notices all the small creatures bustling around and even comes across the toad. Winnie tells the toad that she's following through on what she said yesterday; she did leave her cottage. The toad seems to nod and then hops away.

Winnie wanders for a while longer, thinking about the melody, and then she notices something moving ahead. She crouches down and creeps toward the clearing, reasoning that if it's elves, she can sneak up on them. When she gets close enough to see, however, her mouth drops open. A handsome young man (Jesse) sits against a huge ash tree, gazing up at the branches. He carefully moves a pile of pebbles to reveal a little stream. He drinks from it and as he wipes his mouth, his eyes lock onto Winnie's. After a minute, he frowns and tells her she can come out.

Sternly, Jesse asks Winnie what she's doing in the wood. Winnie insists that the wood belongs to her and she can come whenever she wants. Winnie asks what he's doing in the wood, but says that it's okay with her if he visits the wood. Grinning, Jesse says he doesn't live nearby. Absentmindedly, Winnie asks Jesse how old he is. She thinks he's laughing at her when he says that he's 104 and then amends this to 17. She then asks if he's married. He isn't, but he jokes that when Winnie turns 11 next year, she might get married.

*Winnie's reasons for not wanting to run away all speak to her desire, as a young child, to still be cared for by trustworthy adults, even as she longs for independence. This is a perfectly normal place for Winnie to be. Notice, however, that Winnie thinks of stepping into the wood as not as meaningful as choosing to actually run away. This shows that at this point, she doesn't understand that every choice she makes has consequences, even if she can't always predict what they'll be.*



*The pleasure that Winnie takes in admiring the natural world again reminds the reader that per the novel's logic, humans should endeavor to be more connected to nature, as Winnie is here. What she tells the toad suggests that she now conceptualizes stepping outside of her fence as stepping into nature, not necessarily as moving away from her family or her childhood.*



*Winnie's clear admiration of and attraction to Jesse reminds the reader that though she's a child, her sexual and romantic maturity aren't far off—boys are definitely interesting for her and represent a version of maturity in her mind. Especially when the narration juxtaposes this mature attraction with Winnie's childish musings about sneaking up on elves, it drives home that Winnie is in a liminal state between child and adult.*



*The tenor of this conversation makes the age difference between Jesse and Winnie glaringly obvious. He treats her like she's a young child, especially when he jokes that she'll be getting married in a year. This makes it very clear that though Winnie might be attracted to Jesse, she's not yet old enough to actually be able to flirt with him or convey her attraction in a mature and meaningful way.*



Winnie asks if the water is good to drink, but very seriously and quickly, Jesse says the water is dirty. He begins to put the pebbles back as Winnie insists that he drank from it and since she owns the wood, she can drink too. She says her father would let her drink from it, in response to which Jesse puzzlingly asks if Winnie is going to tell her father about the brook. They hear a crash a little ways away and Jesse calls gratefully for Mae and Miles. They appear in the clearing and Mae looks as though Winnie is the worst thing she's ever seen. She sighs that it's happening at last.

*Notice that Winnie's justification for why she should be able to drink the water hinges on her belief that she owns the wood; in her understanding, that means that she has the right to everything in it. This indicates that she believes at this point that she has the power to dominate nature and bend it to her will, rather than understanding that nature is something she needs to learn to respect and coexist with.*



## CHAPTER SIX

Winnie has thought often about being kidnapped, but this is nothing like what she imagined. Jesse and Miles lift her, put her on the horse, and run on either side of her while Mae drags the horse forward. Winnie always thought that she'd have to plead with her kidnappers, but in real life, her kidnappers plead with her to not be frightened and to not scream. They promise to explain things when they've gone far enough. Winnie is scared but strangely calm as the Tucks lead her out of the wood and start across the meadow. At the edge of the wood, Winnie sees the man in the yellow suit watching them, but she doesn't shout for help.

*The fact that this real-life kidnapping is so different from Winnie's imagined kidnappings introduces a key point that the novel makes about the nature of growing up: a normal part of doing so is realizing that the world is very different in reality than a child can conceptualize in their imagination. Winnie's ability to think these thoughts calmly speaks to her relative maturity. She's independent enough to not find this especially scary; she's not eager to scream for a parent to protect her.*



After a few minutes, the road passes close to a small stream. Mae stops and decides that they'll catch their breath and tell Winnie why they're kidnapping her. They sit for a moment and Winnie is suddenly overcome with fear. As she thinks of never seeing her mother again, Winnie starts to sob. Mae assures Winnie that they're not bad people and will bring her back home tomorrow, but this makes Winnie wail even louder. Jesse and Miles remark that this is awful, and Mae says that she never thought that they'd come across a child. She pulls out her music box and winds it up, starting the tinkling melody Winnie heard earlier.

*Notice that Mae makes it very clear that she's going to explain to Winnie why they have to kidnap her and why they have to do this. This shows that though Mae kidnaps Winnie against Winnie's will, Mae also recognizes Winnie's agency and knows that in order to make Winnie understand everything, they have to engage with her like she's a real person with agency--not a child to be manipulated.*



Hearing the melody, Winnie begins to calm down and she thinks that when she gets home, she'll tell Granny that elves don't make the music. She turns to Mae and shares that Granny thinks that elves make the music. Mae offers Winnie the music box to look at and tells her how to wind it up. As she listens to the music again, Winnie thinks that a person who owns such a pretty thing can't possibly be too bad. She smiles and hands it back to Mae. Both Jesse and Miles sit down, and Jesse says that they need Winnie's help.

*Though the music box is an inanimate object, just like the marionette that the narrator compares the man in the yellow suit to, the fact that the music box seems more pleasantly human allows Winnie to begin to connect with the Tucks in a way that she wasn't able to connect with the man in the yellow suit.*



## CHAPTER SEVEN

What Mae, Jesse, and Miles tell Winnie is the strangest thing she's ever heard. They explain that 87 years ago, they all came west and found the forest. They'd planned to start a farm on the other side, but the forest went on for miles. Finally, they got to the ash tree in the center, and everyone, including the horse but except for the cat, drank from the stream. On the other side of the forest, they started their farm. Then, strange things started to happen. Jesse fell out of a tree, hunters shot the horse on accident, and a snake bit Angus--but they didn't die.

Though this was worrying enough, even stranger was that none of them were aging. When Miles was about 40, he still looked 22. His wife decided he'd sold his soul to the devil and left with their children, and the family's friends started to suggest that the Tucks were involved with witchcraft. The family started to wander east again, came through Treegap and found the wood, and returned to the clearing in the wood. The tree looked exactly the same as it had twenty years ago, and they remembered that they all drank from the stream. The cat, the only one who didn't drink, had died ten years before, and they figured they weren't aging because of the water. To test this, Angus shot himself through the heart. He didn't die.

Jesse explains that they all went crazy for a while, excited that they'd live forever, but soon realized that it'd be awful if everyone in the world found out about the stream. Mae looks Winnie in the eye and says that if she drank the water now, she'd stop growing right where she is. She'd be 10 forever, and she'd never grow up. Jesse says that Angus thinks that the stream is left over from "some other plan" for the world, and it somehow got forgotten. He says he was telling the truth earlier; he really is 104, but he's also going to be 17 forever.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Winnie doesn't believe in fairy tales; she doesn't even really like Granny's story about elves. She can't believe what she's hearing, but Jesse excitedly says that it feels great to tell somebody about being immortal. Jesse says that it's mostly fantastic, as he's already seen lots of things and will be able to see so much more. Miles cautions Jesse that talking this way will make Winnie want to drink, but Jesse says that they need to enjoy their lot in life since they can't change it. Miles suggests that Jesse take it more seriously.

*The origins of the Tucks' story functions to establish them as normal people, looking to start a life somewhere in the American Midwest. In other words, they begin this way in an attempt to show Winnie that they're not scary or different from anyone else; they want to farm and have families, and they have accidents and mishaps like all people do. It's particularly notable that they never chose to change their lives in this way; the transformation happened essentially by chance.*



*The fact that Angus is the one to test the stream's efficacy by shooting himself reinforces that Angus is the Tuck who's most uncomfortable with eternal life--he's uncomfortable enough with it to try to take his own life. Pay attention too to the trauma that Miles certainly experienced when his wife took his children. This reminds the reader that immortality isn't actually wonderful; it deprives Miles of the ability to watch his children grow and develop, and he lost the woman he loved because of it.*



*Because of Winnie's youth and immaturity, she doesn't yet grasp the gravity of what it would mean for her to stop developing right where she is. At this point in her development, the world is her oyster and it may be appealing for her to want to stop there. However, stopping there would also deprive her of experiences that would only be available to her as an adult, which is a point that Angus will go on to make later.*



*This exchange between Miles and Jesse reinforces their age and maturity differences. For Miles, who's 22 and has five years on Jesse, there's more to life than enjoying it--but then again, Miles also had the experience of losing his wife and children and is certainly scarred by that. Jesse, being 17, has never had to think of anyone but himself and is therefore stuck in eternal adolescence.*



Addressing Winnie, Mae says that they need her help in keeping the secret. She says that they'll answer Winnie's questions later and sighs. Mae explains that though Winnie's mother and father will worry, they need to take Winnie home with them so that Angus can talk to her about why she can't tell anyone, but she promises to bring Winnie home tomorrow. Winnie agrees, reasoning that even if she didn't, they'd make her go anyway. Winnie also thinks that the Tucks don't seem scary. They seem gentle and strangely childlike. The way they talk to Winnie also makes her feel very important and special, and she really likes Jesse.

With a whoop of joy, Jesse asks Mae for breakfast. They walk and ride along, eating bread and cheese. Jesse swings from trees and shows off for Winnie. Winnie feels as though she finally has friends and reasons that she is running away, but isn't doing so alone. With this, she feels as though she's closing away her fears like she closed the gate of her yard. Winnie is elated and she feels as though the whole world is welcoming her. She thinks that she might also live forever and runs down the road, whooping like Jesse. In her elation and happiness, nobody notices that the man in the yellow suit heard the Tucks' story and is now following them with a smile.

## CHAPTER NINE

Winnie is exhausted long before noon. Miles carries her for a while and she sleeps in his arms while wearing Mae's sunhat to keep her from getting too burnt. The landscape is dry and motionless except for the bees and the crickets. Eventually, in the afternoon, Mae says that they're almost there. They reach some dark pines and Jesse and Miles whoop and run through the trees. Mae and Winnie follow slowly as the horse picks its way along a rutted path. When they reach the other side, Winnie peers around Mae and sees a **pond** with a house and barn next to it. They hear Miles and Jesse jump in.

When Mae and Winnie reach the house, Angus is there and demands to see the "real, honest-to-goodness, natural child." Winnie feels shy, but he smiles and gently lifts her down off the horse. He says that he's happy to meet her, and that her visit is the best thing that's happened in 87 years. Angus shakes Winnie's hand and gives her an expression that makes Winnie feel like she's a gift to him.

*Notably, the Tucks speak to Winnie in a manner that gives them a chance to become friends with her—they treat her like a person worthy of respect and kindness. This is also how they might speak to an adult, which no doubt appeals to Winnie's desire to move out in the world and have independent, adult experiences. Mae's insistence that Winnie needs to talk to Angus suggests that Angus's views on the matter are the ones that Winnie—and by extension, the reader—should take most seriously.*



*Winnie's quick transformation from terrified child to elated young adolescent shows that an essential part of coming of age and joining the cycle of life is experiencing these sudden, unpredictable transitions between terror and joy. Further, knowing that she can shut away her fears just as she shut the gate of her yard shows her that she has the power to move back and forth between childhood and adulthood, especially as her decision to leave the fence becomes a metaphor for her leap into adulthood.*



*Being carried by Miles like this returns Winnie to a clearly childish state, reminding the reader again that as Winnie continues to grow, she'll bounce back and forth between childhood and maturity depending on the situation. The narrator's description of the landscape again re-centers the narrative on the relationship between humans and nature, and the stillness of the land suggests that Winnie too is currently in a pause in her development.*



*Remember that Angus hasn't been around "real" children in decades, probably since Miles's children left. Winnie's arrival reminds Angus that life does go on in the outside world, even if his own life is at a standstill due to his immortality. For him, Winnie is truly a symbol of life and its potential to grow and flourish, and her presence reminds him of the importance of forming genuine connections with other people.*



## CHAPTER TEN

The narrator explains that Winnie has grown up in a house that's orderly and clean. Winnie's mother and Granny are always cleaning, and they're training Winnie to live the same way. Because of this, the Tucks' house is a bit of a shock for her. There's dust, cobwebs, and a mouse that lives happily in a drawer in the table. Dishes are stacked haphazardly, and things are piled everywhere. Angus's forgotten shotgun sits in a corner. In the parlor, there's a sofa and some tables, and there's lots of old soot in the fireplace. There's a bedroom with a rickety bed and a loft where Jesse and Miles sleep when they're home.

Though Mae says after giving Winnie the tour that this is all, Winnie sees so much more. She notices bits of Mae's sewing projects everywhere, while there are pins and needles stuck in the arms of the chairs. Angus carves toys and bowls out of wood, so there are wood shavings and toy parts everywhere. The bright light from the windows spotlights bowls of daisies and the sound of the wildlife that lives in and around the **pond** filters through as well. Winnie is amazed that people live like this, but she finds it charming and comfortable. She wonders to herself if the Tucks think they have forever to clean up, but then considers that maybe they just don't care about the mess.

In the loft, Mae explains that Jesse and Miles aren't home much. Winnie asks what they do when they're gone, and Mae says they get jobs. Miles can do carpentry and blacksmithing, while Jesse is so young that he can't settle. Mae laughs, and then says that he just does whatever he feels like at any given moment. She sighs and says that none of them can stay in one place for too long, as people start to wonder. Mae explains that she and Angus have been in this house for twenty years and they'll need to move soon.

Winnie thinks that moving all the time and not having close friends sounds sad, and she tells Mae this. Mae says that she and Angus have each other, though she notes that Jesse and Miles struggle. Every ten years, they meet at the spring and come home together so they can all be a family again. Mae folds her arms and says, mostly to herself, that life has to be lived and they have to take what comes along. She says that most of the time, she even forgets what happened and usually doesn't feel any different, but sometimes she does wonder why it happened to them. Mae can't decide if it's a blessing or a curse, or what they did to deserve it either way. Jesse and Miles interrupt as they climb up to the loft, soaking wet and still in their clothes.

*The shock that Winnie feels at seeing how the Tucks live jumpstarts another aspect of her coming of age: realizing that not everyone lives the same way she does, and understanding that people who live differently can do so happily. This in turn helps her humanize others and see other people as potential friends or, at the very least, other human beings worthy of respect and kindness.*



*Winnie's ability to understand that the "mess" she sees is actually a sign of life shows that she's learning quickly how to humanize people who seem different from herself. These signs of life are proof that Mae and Angus are making a mark on the world by creating objects. Winnie's realization that the Tucks might not care about the mess shows that she's in a place to make these leaps and embrace the fact that not everyone lives the clean and orderly life that she does.*



*Mae's description of Jesse, in particular that he can't settle, suggests that despite Jesse being more than 100 years old, he's very much an eternal 17-year-old. Like any normal 17-year-old, he's interested in experimenting and finding his place in the world--but because he'll never be any older than 17n, he'll never truly figure out where he fits.*



*Winnie's comment that the Tucks' way of life sounds sad shows that though she appears to be a lonely child, she does understand that friendship and connections are very important if a person wants to be happy in the world. In her understanding, it's taking away from the quality of Mae and Angus's life that they're not able to make friends and form connections with people, which helps Winnie begin to piece together what she thinks is important in her own life.*



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Tucks and Winnie have supper. They eat sitting in the parlor, which Winnie has never done before. She watches carefully in case there are new rules to eating this way, but she doesn't observe any except that while there's food to eat, nobody speaks. Because there are no napkins Winnie understands she can lick syrup off of her fingers, something she's not allowed to do at home. This makes dinner seem luxurious until the silence begins to get to Winnie. She feels as though outside, the world belonged to all of them, while inside, everything must be done the Tucks' way. Winnie thinks for the first time that eating is a personal activity, and that she shouldn't be eating with strangers. She suddenly decides that the Tucks are criminals and can't expect her to actually sleep here.

Winnie puts her fork down and announces that she wants to go home. Kindly, Mae says that she'll take Winnie home tomorrow, after Winnie promises to keep the stream a secret. To try to cheer Winnie up, Miles offers to take Winnie out on the **pond** after supper. Jesse insists that he'll take Winnie, but Angus sternly says that he'll take Winnie out himself so they can talk, as he suspects they don't have much time. Jesse laughs, but Mae asks Angus why he's worried. She notes that they did see the man in the yellow suit as they ran away with Winnie, but he didn't say anything. Winnie admits that she knows the man and he's nice, but she was too afraid to call out to him. Angus shakes his head and asks Winnie to follow him to the pond.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

As Winnie follows Angus to the **pond**, she feels brave again with the thought that the man in the yellow suit might rescue her. She enjoys the sound of her boots on the rowboat and listens to a bullfrog across the pond. Angus climbs in with her and pushes the boat out across the pond. Softly, he says that this is feeding time for the creatures in the pond. He says that all around them, creatures are living, growing, and changing. Even though the pond looks the same every day, it isn't, because it's always moving. Eventually, it'll reach the ocean.

*The way that Winnie thinks of the division between inside and outside continues to complicate the narrator's earlier discussion of ownership: here, Winnie suggests that land itself isn't actually owned, while indoor spaces are owned and governed by the owner's rules. Realizing that eating is something private and intimate shows that Winnie is beginning to see herself as a person among people, who can and should do things to protect her own privacy as well as that of others.*



*Though Winnie hasn't shared with the Tucks her thoughts on the differences between indoors and outdoors, the offer to take Winnie out to the pond shows that on some level, the Tucks all recognize that being outside is likely more comfortable for Winnie, who's clearly never been around people who are so different from herself. Angus's insistence that he needs to speak to Winnie soon reminds the reader that it's important not to wait to do important things, for opportunities can disappear in an instant.*



*Remember that Winnie isn't entirely sure that the man in the yellow suit is a good or trustworthy person. Her willingness to place her trust in him anyway shows how alone and unmoored she feels at this point and illustrates that she's not yet ready to handle adult situations on her own. By introducing Winnie to the water cycle, Angus is able to introduce Winnie to the cycle of life using a metaphor that Winnie will be able to see and understand in real time.*



Angus and Winnie drift in silence and watch the sunset. After a bit, Angus says that after the water reaches the ocean, it evaporates, moves back over the land in clouds, and falls into the streams as rain. He says that it's part of a wheel, along with the animals and people, and it's always supposed to grow and change. They reach the far side of the **pond** and the boat bumps into some weeds and branches. Winnie watches the water continue past this obstacle. Tuck repeats that the water will continue on but says that the Tucks are stuck, just like the boat. They're not part of the wheel anymore, though everything around them, including Winnie, is growing and changing.

Suddenly, Winnie understands what Angus is saying. She'll die one day, without a question. Feeling helpless, she says she doesn't want to die. Angus says calmly that she'll have to someday, as it's important and necessary to live the entire cycle of life. Angus says that as someone who can't die, his life is somewhat useless and he's barely living. Winnie is amazed, as nobody has spoken to her like this. Angus gruffly says he wants to grow and change, and he wants to die, but he didn't know he felt this way until after he drank the water. He says that if people knew about the spring, they'd all drink the water and nobody would know until after that it's a horrible fate. Winnie feels numb and watches the water. Miles interrupts her reverie and yells that someone stole the horse.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A while later, the man in the yellow suit ties the Tucks' horse to the Fosters' fence and lets himself into the yard. He knocks on the door and notices that the lights are all still on. Granny opens the door and the man in the yellow suit cheerfully asks to come in: he knows where Winnie is.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

As Mae makes the sofa into a bed for Winnie, Angus and Jesse discuss the possible motive of the horse thief. Angus has a bad feeling about it and wonders if the thief had a special reason for stealing the horse. Mae says soothingly that there's nothing they can do now, so it's best to get a good night's sleep and deal with it in the morning.

*Running the boat into the branches and likening it to the Tucks is a very obvious way for Angus to tell Winnie how he and his family are forced to live because of their immortality. His tone also makes it clear that he believes this isn't a good thing; the water, he suggests, is able to complete a correct and natural journey while the Tucks are like the man-made and unnatural boat and can only go certain places. This moment hints that part of the purpose of life is actually death.*



*The very fact that Winnie is amazed to be spoken to like this indicates that she hasn't had experiences where adults in her life level with her and treat her like a fellow adult, as Angus does here. Winnie's reaction shows that engaging with a child like this has the potential to make that child understand very mature concepts, even as these concepts shock and numb Winnie. When Angus insists that he's useless because he can't die, he makes it explicit that in order to truly live, one must also die and complete the cycle.*



*Though the man in the yellow suit appears to be helping here, his appearances throughout the novel--and the fact that he stole the horse--tell the reader that he's not someone to be trusted and he's likely not choosing to act in Winnie's best interests.*



*Mae's advice again shows that as far as she's concerned, she and her family have to do what they can do and shouldn't waste time or energy worrying about things they cannot change. With this, she advocates for looking forward and taking action, rather than dwelling on the past.*



Winnie stays awake for a long time. The sofa isn't at all comfortable and Winnie feels lost without her nightgown and her bedtime routine. She no longer feels happy about running away; she's afraid and thinks that being here with the Tucks is an outrage, though she recognizes she can't do anything about it. She muses that the Tucks never seemed to consider that she might not believe their story. She thinks of the man in the yellow suit and is comforted when she reasons that he's probably told her parents where she is by now.

Winnie thinks of this over and over again until, finally, the sounds of the night are more interesting than her scared thoughts. Just as she starts to fall asleep, Mae tiptoes out to check on her. Mae apologizes for bringing Winnie here and awkwardly says that having her here is a good feeling. She touches Winnie's hair and says that she wishes Winnie were theirs.

A while later, Angus also comes out to check on Winnie. He offers to sit with her until she falls asleep, which surprises and touches Winnie. Uncertainly, he tells her to yell if she needs something and apologizes for the uncomfortable sofa. He kisses her cheek before returning to bed. Winnie feels both confused and cared for. She suddenly wonders what will happen to the Tucks when her father arrives, and wonders if she'd be able to explain how kind the Tucks have been to her. Winnie remembers thinking that the Tucks were criminals, and guiltily thinks that maybe they still are.

Not long after Angus leaves, Jesse creeps down the loft stairs and kneels beside the sofa. Wide-eyed, he says that Winnie definitely has to keep the secret, but he also suggests that when she's 17, she should go drink the water and come away with him. He says that they could get married and have lots of fun, as life is meant to be enjoyed. Winnie feels overwhelmed, thinking that Jesse seems "amazing." She agrees to think on it, but she doesn't know what to think or believe.

*This regression to anger and terror reminds the reader that Winnie will continue to bounce back and forth between fear and elation as she continues to come of age. Her sense of her own helplessness, meanwhile, suggests that she still thinks of herself as a child without the power to make choices—in reality she could, of course, choose to get up and set off for home by herself.*



*Even as Mae advocates for looking to the future, her treatment of Winnie here suggests that she still dreams of things she can't have, like more children or grandchildren that will grow and change. Again, Winnie becomes a symbol of a purposeful life, and of a life that Mae cannot have.*



*By offering to sit with Winnie, Angus shows her that though he recognizes her maturity and her capacity to understand complex concepts, he also recognizes that she's a child in need of comfort. Winnie's realization that she'll have to explain all of this to her father shows that she's realizing that this situation is more complex than a simple kidnapping, especially as she begins to decide that the Tucks might not actually be evil criminals. The confusion that Winnie feels here hints at the choice she'll soon have to make about what it means for her to do the right thing.*



*Jesse's suggestion that they get married indicates that he does want to mature and grow up, but remember that he'll forever be 17. Asking her to take this leap for him speaks to how lonely he is, given that he has to keep his immortality a secret and cannot ever truly connect with anyone, friends and romantic partners alike.*



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Back in Winnie's family's cottage, the man in the yellow suit explains that he followed Winnie and her kidnappers and then came right back. He doesn't allow any of the Fosters to speak as he says that he's wanted a wood just like theirs for a long time, and he'd love to have the Fosters as neighbors. With a frown, the man says that kidnapping is awful, that the "illiterates" might harm Winnie, and reminds Winnie's family that he's the only one who knows where she is. He leans forward and says that they each have something the other wants, and he suggests that if they don't accept his help, Winnie might not make it. He says that he wants to trade the wood for Winnie and explains that he'll write up a contract. He assures Winnie's father that he'll go fetch Winnie with the constable.

*The way that the man in the yellow suit speaks about the Tucks shows that he holds very specific views of what it means to be a person in the world. Calling the Tucks "illiterates" suggests that he doesn't think poor and uneducated people are actually people worth thinking much about, and that they're fundamentally untrustworthy and bad. Note that because Winnie's family has no way of knowing whether or not the Tucks are kind, the man in the yellow suit is effectively threatening to kill Winnie himself and blame it on them if Winnie's father doesn't comply. This shows that this man has little regard for the lives of others, and this lack of connection to other people seems to be linked to his immoral behavior.*



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Late in the night, the man in the yellow suit and the constable start off for the Tucks' homestead. The constable isn't at all excited about this and points out that he can't run his horse too hard. When he suggests that they could've waited until dawn, the man in the yellow suit reminds him that the Fosters are very upset. The constable is suspicious that the man in the yellow suit might actually be involved with the kidnappers himself, but the man insists that he didn't report the kidnapping immediately since he had to see where they took Winnie. He also mentions that the Fosters sold him their wood. This impresses the constable, who says that the Fosters are the proudest family in town.

*The constable's assessment of what the Fosters are like suggests that because of the Fosters' pride and wealth, others in Treemap might not think of them as being thoughtful, emotional people. This suggests that because Winnie is learning to understand others who are different and, specifically, those who have less money, she may have the power to help her family gain acceptance in the Treemap community. This idea suggests one more way that Winnie may be able to make a difference in the world through building connections with others.*



The man in the yellow suit explains that they have to go 20 miles north, which makes the constable groan. He slumps back in his saddle and tries to make small talk. He says that he's never had a kidnapping case before and talks about how excited he is to put the criminals in his brand-new jailhouse. With a chuckle, the constable says that the circuit judge will come through next week and take care of this, even though Treemap now has its own gallows. He tries to ask the man in the yellow suit what he's going to do with the wood, but the man won't share. Annoyed, the man in the yellow suit says that he's going to ride ahead because he's worried about Winnie. The constable agrees and makes the man promise not to do anything until he arrives.

*The constable's excitement over getting to jail someone in Treemap for the first time introduces the idea that for him, justice is simply black and white. There's no acknowledgement from him that the Tucks might not actually be criminals, or that their "crimes" might not warrant the gallows in the first place. This shows that while Winnie is gaining a more nuanced understanding of morality and law and order, not all adults develop this same awareness.*



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Winnie wakes up very early and looks out the window. She admires the mist sitting on the water and watches a toad hopping by. She remembers her toad at home and feels as though she's been away for weeks. Winnie starts to blush when she hears steps on the stairs and thinks that Jesse is coming, but it's Miles. He smiles and invites her to help him catch fish for breakfast. Winnie steps carefully into the **boat**, accepts the fishing poles and bait, and notices frogs and fish in the water. She thinks that she gets to go home today and thinks fondly of the Tucks' visits to her the night before. Winnie decides that they're friends and she loves them.

Miles steers the **boat** to some lily pads and baits the hooks. Winnie studies Miles, whose face is thinner than Jesse's but whose body is more solid. Softly, Miles looks up and says that one of his children was a girl named Anna. He took her fishing too, and she's almost 80 now if she's still alive. Winnie asks why Miles didn't take his family to the spring to drink. Miles explains that he didn't figure out that the spring was to blame until after his wife left, but by that time, his wife was almost 40 and his children were close to his age. He says it would've been too strange, and besides, Angus thinks that the fewer people know about it, the better.

Miles hands Winnie her pole and she lets the hook down into the water. She remarks that there are a lot of frogs in the pond, and Miles says they'll stay unless the turtles move in. Winnie sighs that it'd be nice if nothing had to die, but Miles says that if nothing died, pretty soon there'd be no room for any new life. Winnie admits that Miles is right as a fish nearly jerks the pole out of her hands. The fish gets away and Winnie hands Miles the pole.

Winnie slaps at a mosquito that lands on her knee and thinks that Miles is right; it'd be awful if mosquitos lived forever. She decides she's going to keep the Tucks' secret and asks Miles what he's going to do with so much time. Miles says he wants to do something important. He doesn't think that Angus's habit of hiding is useful, and he also doesn't believe that he should think only of his own pleasure. He believes that in order to take up space, he has to do something useful, though he's not sure what that is.

*In the light of day, Winnie is able to think more clearly about what's happened to her and make some sense of it. Because the Tucks recognize her agency and treat her like a person with valid thoughts and feelings, it opens up the door for her to think of them as friends that, in return, she should treat with the same kind of respect. Further, the fact that she takes note of the natural world around her suggests that she's becoming more comfortable with the natural cycles she's been learning about.*



*Miles's tone indicates that losing his family was very traumatic for him, underscoring how crucial interpersonal connections are for a fulfilling, moral life. This suggests that part of his belief that he and his family need to take their immortality seriously comes from the fact that stepping out of the cycle of life brings great loss with it. His choice to not find his family and invite them to drink shows that he also doesn't think that immortality is a great fate, given how much loss it can bring.*



*When she thinks about it in terms of animals, Winnie is better able to accept that death is normal, natural, and necessary. With this, the novel is able to use another metaphor to help the reader think about the same questions and make those questions and answers easier to understand and conceptualize.*



*Miles's insistence that he wants to do something important confirms and validates Winnie's own thoughts on what she believes she should do with her life. This suggests that though Winnie may have been on the right track before meeting the Tucks, actually befriending them and sharing ideas with them is an essential part of her coming of age process, as it confirms her suspicions while teaching her new things.*



Winnie reaches out and touches a lily pad. Then, Miles catches a trout and pulls it up into the boat. It's simultaneously beautiful and horrifying, and the sight of it makes Winnie want to cry. She tells Miles to put it back and he does. Winnie feels silly as she asks if the trout will be okay. Miles says it'll be fine, but people have to eat meat sometimes--and that means killing things.

*By suggesting that humans need to kill animals and eat them sometimes, Miles connects human life with the natural world and suggests that the two are more connected than sheltered Winnie might imagine. This moment also shows Winnie that sometimes, she'll have the choice whether or not to take a life--and she'll have to live with the consequences of that choice, even if the consequence is just feeling foolish.*



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

When Miles and Winnie return to the house, Miles tells Mae that they didn't catch anything they wanted to keep. Mae makes flapjacks and is serving them when Jesse comes down from the loft. He's perturbed that there's no fish and good-naturedly insults Miles's fishing abilities. They all head to the parlor to eat and Angus reminds them that they have to figure out how to get Winnie home without the horse. Mae tells him to finish breakfast before they discuss it. Winnie joyfully licks syrup off her fingers and thinks that the Tucks aren't criminals, though they might be crazy.

*The fact that Miles keeps Winnie's embarrassment about the trout a secret indicates that he believes Winnie is entitled to privacy and secrets, just like any of the adults in the house. This in turn helps Winnie decide to trust the Tucks, as they treat her with kindness, empathy, and care.*



Angus asks Winnie how she slept. Winnie says she slept well and then silently wishes that she could stay and grow up here. She thinks about drinking from the spring when she's 17 as she looks at Jesse, then Miles, and then the sad look on Angus's face. Then, someone knocks at the door. The Tucks are shocked, as they've never had visitors. Mae goes to the door and opens it. It's the man in the yellow suit.

*Fixating on Angus's sad face implies that Winnie understands that Angus's experience of being immortal is one that she should pay attention to, as it's even less fulfilling than Jesse's or Miles's. This begins to give Winnie reason to not drink from the stream when she's 17 and indicates that she's gaining some appreciation of how complex this issue is.*



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

The man in the yellow suit looks around for a minute before addressing Winnie and telling her she's safe. Winnie thinks that there's something suspicious and unpleasant behind the man's expressionless face. Angus explains that they were going to bring Winnie home themselves. The man tells Angus to sit down and listen to what he has to say. He stands by the hearth and says that he was born in the west, where his grandmother told him stories about one of her friends who married a man who never got any older. Her husband's family didn't get older either and finally, the friend left her husband. Miles whispers, "Anna."

*Here, the man in the yellow suit begins to symbolize the age-old interest in immortality and evading death. While this is something that humans are naturally curious about, since it's something that humans can't actually know, Angus's talks with Winnie suggest to the reader that this man's curiosity and desire to figure out the secret are actually misplaced.*



Mae tells the man in the yellow suit that he has no right to talk to them about this, while Angus tells the man to get to his point. The man in the yellow suit says that he was fascinated by these stories and went to school to figure out how it could be true. After school, the man gave his grandmother a music box, which made the grandmother remember that her friend's mother-in-law had a music box. The friend's children knew the melody by heart and the man's grandmother taught it to him. He says that he started looking a few months ago and finally heard the melody coming from the Fosters' wood, saw the Tucks take Winnie, and heard their story.

Mae goes suddenly pale and asks the man in the yellow suit what he's going to do. With a smile, the man says that Winnie's father gave him the wood in exchange for bringing Winnie home. Flushing, the man says that now, he can bottle and sell the water to "certain people, people who deserve it." It will be very expensive. He says that "ignorant people" like the Tucks shouldn't have the opportunity to purchase it, but since the Tucks are already immortal, he'll pay them to perform deadly tasks to demonstrate the water's efficacy. In a dull voice, Jesse says that the man wants them to be freaks.

This makes the man in the yellow suit raise his eyebrows. He says that he thought it'd be nice to offer and points out that with the money, the Tucks could live "like people again, instead of pigs." At this, Angus, Jesse, and Miles shout at the man, who grabs Winnie and roughly shoves her out the door. Winnie screams that she won't go with him. She turns to see Mae behind her, holding the rifle like a club, and Mae tells the man to leave Winnie alone. The man says that it's selfish to not share the water and says that when Winnie drinks the water, she'll be even more effective in demonstrating its power. Mae's face is bright red as she swings the shotgun and hits him in the back of his head. The man drops instantly as the constable emerges from the trees.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Winnie stands with her arms around Angus as the constable declares that the man in the yellow suit isn't dead yet. Mae explains that she hit the man because he was trying to take Winnie away against her will. Winnie turns to face the constable and says that the Tucks didn't kidnap her; she came because she wanted to and because they're her friends. The constable shrugs and they all look at the man in the yellow suit, who looks like a marionette. Winnie glances at Angus, who's staring at the body with envy. Winnie touches him and he takes her hand.

*Because the man in the yellow suit has dedicated his life to figuring out how to evade death, he represents a third option for how a person can spend their days (the first option being Winnie, who's alive and seems as though she'll continue to grow, and the second being the Tucks, who don't change and in some cases long for death). However, the man's classism and distaste for the Tucks suggests that he's a foe, not a friend, and his intentions aren't actually good.*



*With this, the man in the yellow suit suggests that only a certain type of person (one who's able to pay and who comes from an affluent background) should have access to immortality. This suggests that one type of life is more valuable than others, something that the novel overwhelmingly indicates isn't actually the case. Just as the novel suggests that people should take the lives of non-human beings seriously, it also suggests that all people, no matter who they are, play crucial roles in the cycle of life.*



*The way that the man in the yellow suit speaks about the Tucks also suggests that he assigns moral value to economic standing--that is, poor people like the Tucks are, in his eyes, less "good" and not as moral as wealthy people like himself. Mae's choice to hit the man with the gun shows that even if she's resigned to her fate as an immortal, she doesn't believe that anyone should be forced to make the same decision and is willing to remove a dangerous person from the world in order to protect Winnie from this fate.*



*Standing up to the constable and telling him that she wasn't kidnapped shows that Winnie now understands that she has the power to talk to adults and influence them using her point of view. Angus's envious stare reminds the reader that what Angus wants most is to finish his cycle of life and die, though it also suggests that he fixates on his desire to die too much to effectively live.*



The constable tells Angus to take the man in the yellow suit inside and look after him until he can send a doctor. He says that he has to take Mae and put her in jail, and he needs to take Winnie home. Miles and Jesse promise Mae that they'll get her out, but the constable explains that if the man dies, Mae will be hanged. Winnie watches as Jesse and Miles carry the man inside and Mae swings up onto the horse. Winnie looks at Angus and says with conviction that it's going to be okay. The words feel strange to say, but she knows she'd want to hear them right now.

The constable swings onto his own horse behind Winnie and Winnie again assures Angus that things will be okay. She sits up straight and watches Mae ride in front of her. Winnie looks at the meadows and fields around her and knows that, more than anything else, she has to stop Mae from hanging. She knows that even if Mae were a cold-blooded murderer and deserved to die, she can't die.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Winnie pulls a child-size **rocking chair** up to her window. She sits in it even though it's too small because it makes her feel comfortable and soothed. She remembers how, when the constable brought her home, her mother, father, and Granny met her at the **fence**. They refused to believe that Winnie left of her own accord and that the Tucks were good and kind people. They were horrified when Winnie told them that Mae hit the man in the yellow suit, and Winnie's father reasons that they'll get the wood back if he doesn't make it. He cannot finish the sentence, however, and when Winnie finishes it for him, the adults are shocked. They tuck her into bed and treat her as though she's a different child than the one that left.

Sitting in her **rocking chair**, Winnie thinks that she is different and experienced things that are "hers alone." She finds this lonely and somewhat satisfying. The rocking makes her feel connected to her family, but she also now feels connected to the Tucks. Winnie watches heat lightning in the distance, puts her head on her arms, and sees an image of the man in the yellow suit, motionless in the dust. She thinks that the man can't die, but she also thinks that if the Tucks' story about the spring is true, the man *has* to die. Winnie knows that this is why Mae hit him.

*Telling Angus that it's going to be okay allows Winnie to channel things she's likely heard from her parents and grandmother and use those comforts to help someone else. This is a major point in Winnie's coming of age, as it shows her stepping into an adult role and understanding that adults, just like children, sometimes need reassurance and comfort.*



*After this experience, Winnie understands that by keeping Mae from the gallows, it is possible for her to make a mark on the world and do something useful. Her recognition that Mae can't die, even if she should, also shows that she's beginning to develop a more nuanced idea of what constitutes morality.*



*The way that Winnie's parents treat her makes it very clear that what Winnie experienced at the Tucks catapulted her into maturity in a number of ways. She now understands that death is necessary and is willing to speak these hard truths, as well as ask the adults to listen to what she has to say. However, even as she's taken these steps in the direction of maturity, Winnie is still a child. She still seeks comfort from things like the rocking chair, which is a reminder of how safe and comfortable her childhood was before she learned these difficult things.*



*Feeling connected to both the Tucks and to Winnie's family shows that as Winnie has gone through this journey to start to come of age, an essential part of that was making new friends that are hers and hers alone. The fact that she finds this independence both satisfying and lonesome speaks to her liminal space in her development, where she's not totally a child but not entirely an independent adult yet.*



Winnie hears hoof beats and a knock at the door. She creeps out of her room and listens to the constable tell her father that they can't press kidnapping charges, since Winnie says she chose to leave. However, the man in the yellow suit is dead and now Mae is a convicted murderer. Winnie creeps back to her room, climbs into bed, and thinks that Mae killed the man and meant to do it. She remembers killing a wasp once so it wouldn't sting her, but when she saw the wasp's body, she cried and wished it were alive again. Winnie wonders if Mae wishes the man in the yellow suit were alive, even if Mae does want to save the world. Winnie decides that she has to do something to save Mae from the gallows.

*Winnie's thought process shows a great deal of maturity and nuance. She recognizes that there are multiple ways to look at what happened and importantly, that she doesn't have to choose to look at things from only one direction: she can mourn and feel bad for the loss of the man in the yellow suit, while also believing that Mae did the right thing in killing him. Because Mae is Winnie's friend, that connection gives her the space to come to this mature conclusion and illustrates how friendship can help foster this nuance.*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

After breakfast the next morning, Winnie heads outside. Her parents treat her carefully and while they normally would insist she stay inside on such a hot day, they just ask her to come in if it gets too hot. Winnie leans against the **fence** and thinks of Mae in the jailhouse. She suddenly notices the toad on the other side of the road. It looks dry and parched, so Winnie runs inside to ask Granny for some water to give the toad a drink. Though Granny wrinkles her nose, she explains that toads take water in through their skin and accompanies Winnie back outside with a bowl of water. The toad is gone when they get there, so Winnie dumps the water on the ground. It evaporates immediately and Granny goes back inside.

*When Winnie's parents let her go outside, it shows that they recognize that she's a more mature person than she was two days ago. The fact that Winnie is back inside her fence suggests that her return home represents a return to childhood, though Winnie's desire to help the toad also seems to come from the things she learned with the Tucks--in other words, it's a mark of her newfound emotional maturity, even if she is physically stuck inside the fence.*



Winnie sits down and closes her eyes. A few minutes later, Jesse interrupts her reverie. Winnie grabs his hand through the **fence** and asks if they have a plan to get Mae out. Jesse whispers that Miles is planning to use his carpentry skills to remove the window in the jail cell so Mae can climb through tonight. The constable, however, is so proud to be using the jail that he'll certainly notice immediately. He says that he's come to say goodbye, as his family will have to leave for a long time. He gives Winnie a small bottle of spring water so that when she's seventeen, she can drink it and join them.

*Reaching through the fence to Jesse reminds the reader and Winnie that the fence isn't an impenetrable barrier. It's something that she can pass through, reach through, and even mentally exist on either side. The bottle of water is effectively a symbol of the choices that Winnie will need to make as she grows up. Now, she can choose to stop her life and join Jesse, or she can choose to keep on living and changing.*



Winnie accepts the bottle and excitedly whispers that she can help. She says that after Mae escapes, she can take her place in the jail cell, make herself look large, and fool the constable. Jesse says it might work and asks what Winnie's family will say. Winnie says that it doesn't matter what her family thinks, since she wants to help and needs to get the Tucks out of this situation that she got them into in the first place. They agree to meet at midnight and Jesse slips away.

*Winnie's lack of interest in the bottle--and her interest in helping Mae instead--foreshadows Winnie's choice to not drink the water. It's more important for her to help her friends than it is to live forever and be one of them, even at this early point in her development. Here, Winnie displays her newfound sense of autonomy and morality by taking responsibility for her actions and relying on her friendships to guide her through this complex situation.*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The day is the longest and hottest of the year. Nothing stirs in Treegap, the wood, or the surrounding countryside. Winnie's mother and Granny sit in the parlor in a surprisingly unladylike state of disarray, sipping lemonade. Though Winnie thinks this makes them more interesting, she takes her lemonade upstairs and sits in her **rocking chair**, after hiding the bottle of water from Jesse. Winnie rocks in time to the ticking of the grandfather clock in the hallway. After supper, Winnie sees that the sky is thickening and the air is growing heavy. She believes it's going to rain, and her family closes all the windows when they go to bed.

At nine that night, Winnie wanders around her room. She's excited, but she also feels very guilty. She knows that she shouldn't go down to the jailhouse and switch places with Mae and she wonders if her parents will ever trust her again. Around 11 o'clock, Winnie lies down and thinks of Angus, Mae, Miles, and Jesse. She thinks that they seem helpless and too trusting, and they need her help. She turns her thoughts to Jesse and wonders if, when she's 17, she'll really drink the water and if she'll be sorry later. Winnie reasons it's probably not even true and the Tucks are crazy, though she loves them anyway. She falls asleep and wakes up just before midnight.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Winnie is a bit shocked by how easy it is for her to leave the house. She expects her parents and Granny to wake up and try to stop her, and she realizes suddenly that if she wanted to, she could sneak out all the time. This makes her feel even guiltier. Jesse is waiting for her at the gate and they run together down to the jailhouse and the gallows. They see lightning and hear thunder far away and a refreshing breeze starts up.

At the back of the jailhouse, Angus hugs Winnie tightly and Miles squeezes her hand before they all creep to the window. Winnie repeats a poem over and over in her head until the words become meaningless and listens to the storm get closer. Miles gets on a box, pours oil around the frame of the window, and begins to pry the nails out of the window frame. They drop down when they hear the constable whistling as he checks Mae's cell, but when they see his light disappear, Miles returns to the window and pulls out more nails. He grabs the bars and waits for a crash of thunder to pull on the window. It takes two tries, but the window comes free.

*The new and interesting way that Winnie's mother and Granny behave on this day shows Winnie that even as these women act separate from the natural world by cleaning, organizing, and staying indoors, they actually are still a part of the natural world. Returning to her rocking chair allows Winnie to gain comfort from something that she doesn't have to explain herself to, as her mother would certainly notice and be suspicious if Winnie were seeking extra comfort from her.*



*Winnie's ability to wonder whether her parents will trust her again shows that now, she knows and understands that her actions have consequences and affect more people than just herself. This choice to go down to the jailhouse will have negative consequences for Winnie's family--it will make them look bad, she will look disrespectful, and it's also illegal. However, her recognition that she should do it anyway suggests that acting in the service of friends makes these negative consequences easier to live with.*



*Knowing that she can sneak out at any time again reminds Winnie of all the choices that she could make, while her guilt reminds her yet again that those choices, while certainly available to her, do indeed have consequences. It also highlights how permeable the boundary is between Winnie's safe world at home and the complexities of the outside world. The coming storm suggests that this strange week of August, and the strange events Winnie has experienced, are coming to a close.*



*The thunderstorm seems more than coincidental, suggesting again that the natural world and humans are more connected than Winnie or the man in the yellow suit thought possible at first. Especially when Miles uses the thunder to his advantage to mask the sound of the window, it shows that when people accept nature for what it is and seek to work with it and not change or control it, humans can do far more than they could otherwise.*



Mae slowly climbs out the window with Angus's help and lands in a heap on the ground. It begins to rain as Mae, Angus, Miles, and Jesse kiss Winnie. Jesse tells her to remember as he hugs her tight. Then, Miles boosts Winnie through the window and onto the cot. She watches Miles refit the window and wonders if he's going to put the nails back in. After a few minutes, Winnie looks out the window and sees that the Tucks are gone, though she thinks she can hear a bit of the music box's melody.

*Though the Tucks leaving isn't the same as death, they're still leaving Winnie's life, presumably forever. This reminds Winnie that it's necessary to let things go, whether by letting them physically leave or by understanding that all living things must someday die.*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Two weeks later, it already feels as though autumn is on its way and the "wheel" is turning again. Winnie stands at the **fence**, listening to the birds and admiring the blooming goldenrod across the road. None of the Tucks has been found, and Winnie is thrilled about this. She remembers how, soon after she wrapped herself in the blanket back in the jailhouse, the constable came in to put a shutter over the window and stared at the blanket. Winnie stayed awake all night and didn't get up to investigate a terrifying crash outside. In the morning, she saw that the gallows had blown over.

*Notice how, though Winnie is still inside the fence, she's now more tuned into the natural world beyond it. This shows that she now understands that as she grows, she can mentally and emotionally leave the fence and become mature. The fact that the gallows blew over again speaks to the sentience of nature, and its desire to impose its own sense of morality on the human world that, in nature's opinion, got this one wrong.*



When the constable found her, Winnie was already sitting up. The constable looked astonished for a moment and then very, very angry. He scolded her that she committed a very serious crime but was too young to be punished. He turned Winnie over to her father and for days, Winnie's parents asked her why she did it. Eventually, through sobs, Winnie told her mother that she did it because the Tucks are her friends and she loves them. This caused Winnie's family to rally around her and defend her to the other villagers.

*When Winnie's family rallies around her after she explains that she loves the Tucks, it shows that her explanation isn't a childish one. It seems to be something that all adults can understand and respect, which suggests that learning the value of friendship is something that comes with maturity for everyone.*



Though Winnie's family confines her to the yard, other children start to wander by. They're all impressed with her and want to talk to her about her adventure. Now, she's interesting to them while before, she'd been too uptight to be a friend. Winnie is excited to start school this year because of this.

*This turn of events sets Winnie up to use what she learned in the process of befriending the Tucks to become friends with children her own age, who will be able to provide her friendship and guidance for years to come.*



Suddenly, the toad jumps out of some weeds right on the other side of the **fence**. At the same time, a big dog trots down the road and notices the toad. The dog begins to bark at the toad and ignores Winnie's cries to leave the toad alone. As the dog reaches out a paw to touch the toad, Winnie grabs the toad and pulls it inside the fence. She feels revolted for a minute but then remembers that the toad didn't actually feel disgusting. She strokes its back, tells off the dog, and races to her room. Winnie grabs the bottle of water that Jesse gave her and carefully pours it over the toad. She holds it for a long time and thinks that if she decides she wants to join Jesse, there's more water in the wood.

*Winnie's ability to evaluate how the toad actually felt, not how she initially thought it felt, speaks to how much she's grown up over the last few weeks. Now, she can think logically and critically about things and come up with appropriate ways to care for other beings. Giving the water to the toad also suggests that Winnie won't choose to drink it herself, as well as that she does believe there are beings in the world who can benefit from immortality--just not her, and possibly, not any humans at all.*



## EPILOGUE

Mae and Angus ride into Treetop on a wagon, pulled by their old horse. The town is barely recognizable. The main street is the same, but it now has asphalt and many streets crossing it. Winnie's cottage is gone, but there's now a pharmacy, a dry cleaner, and a hotel. They pass the jailhouse with a black and white police car parked in front. Mae suggests that they get a cup of coffee at a diner. There, they ask the counterman if there used to be a wood on the other side of town. The man says that a few years ago, a big storm blew through and a tree got hit by lightning and set the whole thing on fire. They had to clear the entire wood. Mae and Angus sip their coffee and Angus asks about a spring in the wood. The counterman doesn't know anything about it.

Later, while Mae shops for supplies, Angus walks back through town to a little hill and the cemetery there. They'd noticed it on their way in but hadn't mentioned it. Angus studies the gravestones and notices a tall monument with "Foster" carved on it. Nearby, he finds Winnie's grave. Her headstone reads that she was a wife and a mother and died in 1948, two years ago. Angus cries, salutes Winnie, and leaves the cemetery.

As Mae and Angus leave town, they discuss that Winnie died and feel sorry for Jesse, even though he knew long ago that Winnie wasn't coming. They say that there's no reason to return to Treetop anymore and Mae cautions Angus to not hit a toad in the road. Angus climbs down and looks at the toad, who seems unconcerned by the passing traffic. He carries it to the edge of the road and remarks that it must think that it's going to live forever. Mae winds up her music box.

*What the counterman says about the wood suggests that it and the stream never were found out, and also that they're no longer around to tempt people with eternal life. The fact that the wood and the stream were done away with by an act of nature--the storm--suggests that the natural world finally took it upon itself to remove this dangerous temptation from the world so that people can continue to grow, change, and die, as Angus believes nature intended them to.*



*The fact that Winnie became a wife and a mother is, in Angus's opinion, indicative of other ways that Winnie likely contributed and made a difference in the world. She not only gave life to new people, but she probably helped guide them towards adulthood and the same kind of understanding of nature and the purpose of life that she learned as a child. Angus's deep respect of Winnie also indicates that she acted wisely by allowing herself to die.*



*Notice that while the toad clearly isn't concerned about being hit by traffic, the fact that it's likely hit often raises a number of moral questions, such as whether or not this is truly a humane thing to do for an animal. By leaving the reader with this question, the novel encourages the reader to continue to ask these questions as they come to their own understanding of what's good, right, and moral.*





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