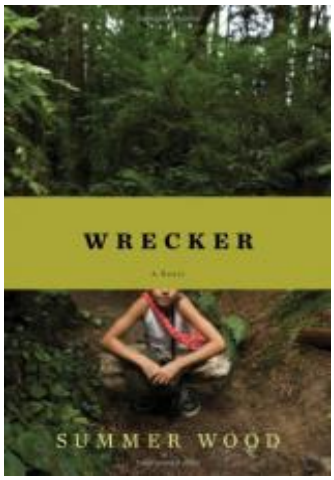
Wrecker

by Summer Wood



About the Book

Wrecker is three years old and alone in the world. His mother, Lisa Fay, has high hopes for her son, but the temptations of San Francisco in the 1960s land her in prison. Lisa Fay?s sister, Meg, gets custody of Wrecker, but a botched root canal has left Meg brain damaged and fully dependent on her devoted husband, Len. It falls to Len to adopt Wrecker, a skittish but fearless child, but Len quickly realizes that he can?t manage both Meg and Wrecker at the same time.

Len?s neighbors, the tiny commune at Bow Farm, agree to take Wrecker in. Melody, the youngest, bonds with Wrecker instantly and dreads the day she might lose him to his birth mother. Ruth, the eldest, shares an impish sense of humor with the unruly boy. Johnny Appleseed teaches Wrecker respect for nature and suspicion of the law. And Willow, who walked away from her own family, finds herself fighting two overwhelming urges: her maternal feelings for Wrecker and her growing attraction to Len. As two milestones approach --- Wrecker?s eighteenth birthday and the end of Lisa Fay?s prison sentence --- this slapdash family quickly bonds around Wrecker?s mysterious history, and the hopeful possibilities of his future.

Discussion Guide

1. Compare the three settings of Wrecker: hippie San Francisco, the women?s prison at Chino, and the secluded Mattole Valley. How does each of these settings look and feel in the novel? What does Lisa Fay miss most about San Francisco? Why does the Mattole Valley feel like home to Melody?

2. Discuss the circumstances of Meg?s illness. What was Meg like before she got sick? What toll does Meg?s condition take upon her marriage, and how does Len express his devotion and his doubts?

3. What are Len?s first impressions of 3-year-old Wrecker? What reservations does Len have about taking Wrecker in? Are his worst fears justified? Why or why not?

4. Each resident of Bow Farm --- Melody, Willow, Ruth, Johnny Appleseed, and Wrecker --- has survived a difficult past. How do we learn about their histories? What are they running away from, and how do they reconcile a painful past with a hopeful present?

5. Young Wrecker?s early days at Bow Farm are full of ?love in overalls, love with a spade in its hand.? (28) Why is taking care of Wrecker such hard work? What does each of his caretakers contribute, and how do they make this unusual family work?

6. Compare Melody and Willow, the two founders of Bow Farm. How do their personalities, homes, and parenting styles differ? What are the sources of tension between these two friends, and how do they eventually resolve their differences?

7. Lisa Fay puts off naming her son until he says to her, ?I a wrecker.? (63) What is the meaning of this unusual name? What are some of Wrecker?s destructive tendencies, and how does he fight the urge to ?wreck? the things and people around him?

8. Love doesn?t come easily in this novel: Arlyn leaves Lisa Fay, Melody and DF Al don?t stay together, Len misses the old Meg, and Ruth mourns the death of Elizabeth. What does this theme of difficult romance add to the novel? How do these stories of lost love compare to Len and Willow?s romance?

9. Trace the journey of the photo that Belle snapped on Wrecker?s third birthday. How does the photo get passed along, and what does it mean to each person who has it? How does it eventually land in Wrecker?s hands?

10. Consider Lisa Fay?s 15 years in prison. How does she cope with her circumstances, and what memories and emotions threaten her sanity during these long years?

11. When Melody tells Wrecker about his mother, she finally understands that ?her omission could be as gravely harmful as an outright lie.? (239) Why does Melody keep Wrecker?s history from him for so long? What are the consequences of her silence? Was her ?omission? a mistake? Why or why not?

12. While Wrecker is at his first school dance, Len and Willow finally admit their feelings for each other. Discuss how these two scenes fit together: Wrecker meeting girls and Len and Willow getting closer in a bar. What discoveries do these characters make during this trip to town?

13. Why does Willow share her own story as a mother in her good-bye letter to Wrecker? Discuss how Willow?s family history leads her to give Wrecker the following advice: ?Listen to me. Don?t choose. Melody is your mother. Lisa Fay is your mother, too.? (259). How does Wrecker respond to Willow?s advice?

14. Wrecker spans twenty years, from the boy?s birth to his young adulthood. When does time seem to pass slowly in the novel? When does it pass quickly? Which important events mark these years of Wrecker?s life? How does Bow Farm and the Mattole Valley change over these two decades?

15. Discuss the last scene of the novel, when Wrecker, Ruth, Len, Willow, Melody, and Lisa Fay sit down to dinner together at Bow Farm. How does this dinner make them into a family? Why do you think it is told from Ruth?s perspective? How would this scene be different from the point of view of another character?

Author Bio

Summer Wood is the author of **Arroyo**. In 2007 she was awarded the Literary Gift of Freedom from A Room of Her Own Foundation for her work on **Wrecker**. She teaches writing for the University of New Mexico's Taos Summer Writer's Conference and in 2009 directed the first annual NEA/Taos Big Read. She is currently the director of the Young Writers' Mentorship Program and has lived in Taos for the past 20 years.

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