

Avenue of Mysteries Study Guide

Avenue of Mysteries by John Irving

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Plot Summary

Juan Diego is an accomplished writer and teacher as an adult, which is a dramatic change from his childhood. He has just retired from teaching when he takes a trip to various places in and near the Philippine Islands. The trip is arranged by a former student, Clark French, who is a well-known author in his own right. Juan allows Clark to set his itinerary, including where he'll be staying and how he'll travel. It's early in the trip when Juan encounters two women who capture his attention and manipulate his time and attention for most of the trip.

The women are Dorothy and Miriam. Juan believes Miriam is Dorothy's mother, but soon believes there is something strange about the women. When a young boy takes their photo, the two women don't appear. They seem to know things about Juan that he never revealed in public. Juan has sex with Dorothy and then with Miriam. He realizes that he can't stop thinking about the two women but he can barely think rationally about anything when he's with either of them. After days of sexual encounters, Juan Diego discovers that he's tired of dealing with both of them.

As he travels, Juan Diego thinks back over his life, focusing on a time when he and his sister, Lupe, lived in Mexico. They lived in a shack at the dump. Juan Diego's father, Rivera, was the boss of the dump workers. He looked after Juan Diego and Lupe, giving them his protection and providing for their basic needs. Juan Diego and Lupe shared a small shack with Rivera remaining nearby. Juan Diego was intelligent and taught himself to read in several languages, rescuing books from the dump. It was his reading that first captured the attention of a local priest, Brother Pepe.

Lupe was able to read minds and had the limited gift of telling the future. To everyone other than Juan Diego, her speech is garbled. This made some people believe she might be "retarded" though she was actually quite intelligent. Their mother was a prostitute and her speech was also garbled when she became excited. A local physician, Dr. Vargas, suggested that Lupe's speech impediment was genetic but he couldn't explain her ability to read minds.

When Juan Diego was 14 and Lupe a year younger, their mother was living the life of a prostitute. She also worked as a cleaning woman in a Catholic church. One day, she fell while cleaning the statue of the Virgin Mary. Juan Diego and Lupe saw the statue scare their mother to death before she fell, and Dr. Vargas confirmed that she did die of fright. Juan Diego and Lupe went to live in a church-run orphanage at that point, but their future was bleak.

The two joined the circus with the idea that their lives would be better there than in an orphanage or at the dump. They soon discovered that the lion tamer was a brutal man and that their time at the circus would be limited as well. Lupe felt that Juan Diego's future was tied up in the emerging relationship between a struggling young priest, Eduardo, and the transvestite he'd fallen in love with, Flor. She climbed into the lion cage and was killed, in order to set the wheels in motion to save Juan Diego from a life



of uncertainty in Mexico. Juan Diego moved to Iowa with his adoptive parents, and it was there that he became a writer and teacher. Eduardo and Flor died of AIDS, and Juan Diego never married. He never got over the deaths of those he loved, especially Lupe.

When Juan Diego begins his final trip, he is planning his next novel. He battles the effects of beta blockers and sometimes manipulates the dosage. He argues with Clark over the politics of the church and other issues, but is obviously fond of the younger writer. They are visiting a church dedicated to Guadalupe when Juan Diego falls ill. Dorothy and Miriam, dressed as mourners, are in the church. Clark rushes Juan Diego to the nearest hospital, but it's obvious that he's dying. Clark doesn't notice that Dorothy and Miriam, still dressed in black, glide down the hall. Juan Diego remembers training to be a skywalker in the circus, and he knows that his life is ending. He is relieved that the ending is so simple.



Chapters 1-4

Summary

In Chapter 1, *Lost Children*, Juan Diego sometimes says he's Mexican because he was born in Mexico, sometimes says he is American because he's lived there most of his life, or sometimes just says he's a Midwesterner. He considers that his life is in two distinct parts – the childhood in Mexico and the adult life in America – and that the two are parallel.

Juan Diego and his sister, Lupe, lived in a shack in Guerrero, a small “colony” of shacks inhabited by the people who worked in the dump, or *basurero*. The dump was in Oaxaca, Mexico. When he was 14, Juan Diego was aware of how other people talked about the kids who lived at the dump. By that time, he had taught himself to read. He read many books that were thrown away by various people, including leaders of a nearby Jesuit school. He could read in Spanish and in English, and was fluent in both languages. He was known as the “dump reader.”

Brother Pepe was a large man who was a teacher at the Jesuit school. The Jesuits also maintained an orphanage that was named *Hogar de los Nino Perdidos* but commonly known as *Home of Lost Children*, or just *Lost Children*. Brother Pepe put all his heart and energy into the school and the orphanage. He was horrified by the conditions at the dump. There were stray dogs everywhere and fires released columns of smoke. He asked around and was directed to the home of *el jefe*, or the boss.

Brother Pepe found the correct shack and met Juan Diego and Lupe. Lupe spoke incomprehensibly. Only Juan Diego could understand her. She was also a mind reader and immediately know who Brother Pepe was because of his thoughts. She decided that he was a nice person. Inside, he found lots of books. Juan Diego immediately launched into his thoughts on religion. Brother Pepe soon learned that Juan Diego read in Spanish and in English, and that he read very sophisticated material. Brother Pepe began to think about ways to help the children. Lupe read his mind and made it clear that they weren't going to live at the orphanage.

Juan Diego revealed that their mother was *Esperanza*, one of the Jesuit's best cleaning women. However, she also worked nights on *Zaragoza Street* where prostitutes spent their time. The subject of Juan Diego's father was more complicated. Lupe insisted that the dump boss, *Rivera*, was better than a father. Juan Diego said that *Rivera* protected them from many of the harsh aspects of the dump, though that meant the workers in the dump looked down on them. Brother Pepe leaves to avoid Lupe's continuous mind reading.

Juan Diego had a recurring dream as a teenager, about walking upside-down in the sky. Lupe would say only that it was a death dream.



The story reverts to the present. Juan Diego's doctor and friend, Rosemary Stein, has prescribed a beta blocker because Juan Diego seems to be at a high risk for a heart attack. He hates that the pills make him feel "diminished." They have also interfered with his dreams, and he hates that most. Rosemary has prescribed Viagra even though Juan Diego isn't involved in a sexual relationship.

Chapter 2, *The Mary Monster*, opens with Juan Diego in New York City for Christmas. He's a writer and his publisher invited him to the city. He has recently retired from his teaching position, though he plans to continue writing. He is now setting on a trip and a former student, Clark French, insisted on making the arrangements.

As a teenager in Mexico, Juan Diego met an American draft dodger. The young man's father died in a war and he wanted to visit the Manilla American Cemetery and Memorial to "pay his respects to his slain father." The draft dodger died in Mexico and Juan Diego has set out on this trip in his stead. He doesn't know the young man's name and doesn't know how he's going to find the man's grave, but feels compelled to take the trip. He's going to stop off in the Philippines to spend time with Clark, though that wasn't Juan Diego's idea.

Juan Diego thinks back to his childhood. Lupe was very interested in the virgins, especially the Virgin Mary, partly because she didn't know anyone else who could read minds. However, both Juan Diego and Lupe are skeptical that there are true miracles. They were both observant and had gotten a lot of information from the books. Lupe had the opinion that the Virgin Mary was "domineering," which prompted Lupe to call her the *Mary Monster*. She had complicated ideas about the Virgin Mary and Guadalupe based on her own thoughts and ideas. She hated that the Virgin Mary statue in the Jesuit Church was huge and that Guadalupe was very small in comparison. Part of Esperanza's job as a cleaning lady was to clean the huge statue of the Virgin Mary in the Jesuit Church.

Chapter 3, *Mother and Daughter*, opens with Juan Diego's time at the JFK Airport waiting for the weather to clear so that his flight to Hong Kong can leave. He realizes that his beta blocker pill is in his luggage, meaning he'll miss a dose. At one point, he considers that missing a dose isn't good for him, but he hopes that he might have a dream about his childhood.

He knows that most of his faithful readers are women but doesn't realize just how many fans he has. Two women, who Juan Diego assume are mother and daughter, recognize him. The younger is Dorothy and the older is Miriam. They are attractive and know all about his books. They help Juan Diego on board the plane and make it clear they'll see him again.

In Chapter 4, *The Broken Side-view Mirror*, the story reverts to Juan Diego's childhood. Rivera "probably" wasn't Juan Diego's father and he wasn't Lupe's father, but he took care of the children. He'd remodeled his shack for them and slept somewhere else, though they didn't know where. One day, Rivera arrived with a load of copper on his truck. Lupe and Juan Diego were going with him to deliver the metal. Juan Diego saw a



feather under the truck and bent to retrieve it. Rivera didn't see him and the truck "lurched" backwards over Juan Diego's right foot. Lupe lashed out at Rivera, saying he should have fixed the mirror. She also lashed out at a small statue of Guadalupe on Rivera's dash, saying she didn't do her job. Rivera got Juan Diego in the truck and Lupe whispered to him that the two children were the "miracles."

Analysis

Juan Diego's life as a child in Mexico is introduced early in the book. Brother Pepe arrived at the dump and began to ask around, looking for the young boy who could read. There is a lot of important information provided in this chapter, including that Juan Diego was so intelligent that he had taught himself to read. Brother Pepe also learned that Juan Diego and his sister, Lupe, lived under the protection of the dump boss, but there was obviously some gossip surrounding the question of whether the dump boss was Juan Diego's father.

Lupe met Brother Pepe at the door of their shack. She began talking in her unintelligible language that only Juan Diego could understand. She told Juan Diego that Brother Pepe was from the Jesuit school and that he thought Lupe was retarded. Juan Diego yelled out that Lupe wasn't retarded. Brother Pepe hadn't said this aloud, which made him very confused. He didn't know how Juan Diego knew that he was thinking that. This is an important first look at these three characters, and gives the reader some basic information that will be fleshed out as the story progresses.

Juan Diego was reading about church history when Brother Pepe met him for the first time. He immediately began talking about his thoughts on the church, including the focus on the Virgin Mary above Guadalupe and the fact that the Jesuits weren't the first religious order in the area. This is important because attitudes about religion are one of the book's overriding themes. It's interesting that Juan Diego gets some of his earliest information about the church from books thrown away by church officials.

Juan Diego isn't really sure how to handle Dorothy and Miriam. They are pushy but he doesn't take offense. For example, they learn where he's staying in Hong Kong and change his reservation to a hotel nearer the airport. Juan Diego thinks that one or both of them might be flirting with him, but he doesn't really know for sure, and that makes him feel old.

Chapter 4 has a great deal of description about the dump and about Juan Diego, Lupe, and Rivera. The dump was a horrible place to live but several families depended on it for a living. They were scavengers who picked up items of value, mostly to be recycled. There were lots of dogs there and it was a dangerous place to live.

There are still questions at the end of this passage about Rivera and Juan Diego's parentage. It's clear that Rivera was not Lupe's father, but he "probably" wasn't Juan Diego's father. The reader will not learn more of the details about this until much later. Rivera was actually the most likely person to be Juan Diego's father. However,



Esperanza obviously didn't like him very much. She said that Juan Diego was smart and demanded that Rivera never claim to be the boy's father. Her point was that Rivera wasn't smart enough to have fathered Juan Diego and Rivera followed her demands. Both Juan Diego and Lupe defended Rivera regarding his role in their lives. Lupe said repeatedly that Rivera was better than a father. She obviously had seen men who didn't take care of their children and she knew that Rivera had gone above what most biological fathers would do. This is an important look at these characters, and at the setting and situation of Juan Diego's childhood. Juan Diego wished that Rivera was his father, and took opportunities to express it to some small degree.

Lupe talked directly to Juan Diego because he was the only one able to fully understand her. However, she was able to read the minds of almost everyone she met. This meant that she was exposed to ideas and facts that a child of her age shouldn't be able to understand. Lupe knew a lot about sex and said that men thought about sex all the time. Rivera said he tried not to think about sex when he was around Lupe and Juan Diego. This made Lupe into a different character than she would have been if she hadn't been able to read minds.

The incident in which Juan Diego's foot got crushed is an important piece of information because it drives many aspects of the story. He did heal but with a serious limp. That limp changed some major aspects of his life.

Lupe's reaction when Juan Diego was hurt was to lash out at the Guadalupe statue on Rivera's dash. She slapped it and kicked it. This indicated that Lupe did believe in the Virgin, therefore in the religious ideas behind it. Her anger was a sign of her frustration that the Virgin of Guadalupe could have prevented the accident and that she chose not to. Rivera's reaction is equally important. He shouted at Lupe to stop, saying that she should be praying to Guadalupe instead of striking her. This indicates that Rivera was a believer, and that he felt it was possible that Guadalupe could heal Juan Diego even after the damage was done. The varying attitudes about religion is one of the book's themes.

There are lots of passages about religion, especially about the attitudes of Juan Diego and Lupe regarding religion. As the end of Chapter 4, Lupe was telling Juan Diego that the two of them were the "miraculous ones." The author points out earlier that the two children probably didn't have a lot of reason to believe in miracles because of the harsh life they lived. Lupe didn't explain herself to Juan Diego and he doesn't explain what he thinks she means, but the phrase sticks with him and he murmurs it in his dream. It's left to the reader to decide exactly what Lupe meant.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the lives of Juan Diego and Lupe as children.



Discussion Question 2

What was Lupe's special gift? Why would this be difficult, especially for a child of her age?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Lupe meant when she said that she and Juan Diego were the "miraculous ones?"

Vocabulary

defuse, commonality, epitome, mantra, abject, cacophony, insouciant, eponymous, seditious



Chapters 5-8

Summary

Chapter 5 is titled "Yielding Under No Winds. A missionary named Brother Edward Bonshaw arrived by plane in Oaxaca about the same time that Rivera was taking Juan Diego to town. Brother Pepe was intrigued to find that Edward, who was from Iowa, was wearing a wild Hawaiian style shirt. He was very interested in miracles. He was outgoing and fun, and Brother Pepe knew that the church elders, Father Alfonso and Father Octavio, were going to be "unnerved" by Edward. Pepe quickly learned that Edward was a flagellant and that he liked to read. Pepe took a wrong turn and they wound up at the dump. Edward saw the children there and thanked Jesus for his "total immersion" in the missionary field.

The story reverts to the present. Juan Diego is murmuring in his sleep. Dorothy and Miriam wonder about his words. They consider that he might be actually "writing" in his sleep. Juan Diego has an erection, which is uncommon because of the beta blockers. He continues to dream, remembering the pain in his foot and the way Lupe cradled his head.

Chapter 6 is titled Sex and Faith and opens in the present with Juan Diego arriving in Hong Kong. Dorothy makes several sexual comments and Miriam says that "not everything is about sex." The three of them walk together out of the airport. At one point, Juan Diego gets a glimpse of himself in the mirror and notes that he doesn't see the reflections of the two women. Juan Diego has the impression he's seen Miriam and Dorothy before, but he can't remember where.

They arrive at their hotel. Dorothy gives Juan Diego her room number and Miriam's. He notes that they aren't sharing a room. He is feeling the effects of having skipped a dose of his beta blockers. He puts his Viagra tablets on the bathroom sink, thinking that Dorothy, Miriam, or both of them might be "available to him" later. After Juan Diego cleans up, he joins Dorothy and Miriam for a train ride and spend the evening together.

At a train station, Juan Diego takes out his phone, planning to take a photo of Dorothy and Miriam. They object, saying they hate how they look in photos and try to take a photo of Juan Diego instead. A young man offers to take a photo of the three of them. The women object again but he snaps it when they are unaware. The young Chinese boy and a girl who is with him stare at the phone and are obviously "disturbed" by what they see. Later, Juan Diego can't find the photo in his phone.

During the train ride, Dorothy questions Juan Diego about a passage from his novel, "A Story Set in Motion by the Virgin Mary." They talk about a character and Juan Diego becomes upset to the point that he cries. They ask Juan Diego if the character was "real," and come to believe he was. Juan Diego says the name, "Senior Eduardo." The Chinese girl on the train also recognizes Juan Diego. He becomes more upset as the



conversation continues. Dorothy hugs him to her chest and Miriam kisses the back of his neck.

Chapter 7 is titled Two Virgins. Juan Diego returns to his hotel room and decides to skip another dose of his beta blocker. His dream is vivid. Juan Diego remembers Rivera placing him at the feet of the Virgin Mary at the Jesuit church. Brother Pepe and Brother Edward arrive about that time. Juan Diego remembers that there were two women at the church. They were dressed entirely in black and “his pain abated” the moment he saw them. He wondered if he had already died. He didn't expect a miracle. He was distracted by Lupe and the arrival of Pepe and Edward. His pain returned. When he looked for the women again, they were gone.

Esperanza arrived. Juan Diego believed that the statue of the Virgin Mary “glowered” at Esperanza. She spent a few minutes pleading for a miracle then turned her fury on Rivera. Lupe said Juan Diego should be worrying about Guadalupe because “she's still making up her mind about you.” Lupe told Juan Diego that Edward is “the miracle man.” She said he had come to Mexico for Juan Diego. She thought about it for a minute and said that Edward was only meant to be Juan Diego's miracle, and that he wouldn't be hers. Pepe insisted that Rivera take Juan Diego to the medical facility. Before they left, Pepe introduced Edward to the church elders and was not disappointed in their reaction. Pepe looked at Edward and realized that he was “truly a man with a purpose.”

The story reverts to the present. The telephone wakes Juan Diego and he realizes he has an erection again. Dorothy asks if he's alone, and specifically if Miriam is there.

In Chapter 8, Two Condoms, Juan Diego and Dorothy have sex and she predicts he'll be capable of having sex again. Juan Diego begins a lengthy story about church history while Dorothy begins arousing him. At one point, Juan Diego sees Dorothy's eyes and compares it to that long-ago scene when Lupe said Guadalupe was “still making up her mind about you.” He thinks Dorothy has that same look. While in the throes of sex, Dorothy speaks a language that Juan Diego believes is Nahuatl, “the language Our Lady of Guadalupe spoke.” He can't imagine how she would know that language.

Miriam calls and talks to Dorothy. When he wakes the following morning, Dorothy is gone and he can't remember any details. He also can't remember whether he took one beta blocker or two. Miriam calls again and urges Juan Diego to hurry. She arrives at his room and makes comments about the blood from a cut he suffered and a condom in the bathtub. Juan Diego prepares to catch his flight to Manilla. The women say they'll meet up with him later. They walk with Juan Diego to the metal detector, then disappear.

Analysis

Edward was a different kind of missionary in that he had a fresh outlook and an enthusiastic attitude about the work he hoped to do in Mexico. Brother Pepe was happy to see that Edward had an excitement for his new job, but he was also at least a little uncertain about Edward. He knew that the older men and women of the church would



be “unnerved” by Edward's appearance because he was wearing the bright shirt. An important look at Edward's character is seen when the two men arrive at the dump. Edward was interested in the children and literally thanked Jesus for bringing him to a place where he would be so needed. This indicates that he was very determined to do his best and that he didn't hold any prejudices against the very poor. He felt they were in need of salvation and obviously felt that he could reach them. Interestingly, Brother Pepe was amazed that Edward felt the kids were “candidates” for salvation. Over the coming chapters, Brother Pepe is explored in greater depth. He didn't seem to be a snob regarding these children, which makes his reaction strange.

The scene in the church after Juan Diego's accident is lengthy and chaotic, and some aspects of it seem ridiculous. Juan Diego was at the foot of the Virgin Mary. Lupe was running around shouting, but no one other than Juan Diego could understand her. Brother Edward was amazed by Lupe's language. Esperanza arrived and her excited shouting sounded very much like Lupe's language. The two church elders took time to talk to the newly-arrived Brother Edward and Brother Pepe took time to notice their reactions to Edward's clothing and manner. All this took place while Juan Diego was shouting in pain and bleeding from an obviously horrific wound. This kind of scene takes place several times over the course of the book and it's left to the reader to decide the author's purpose.

There are many settings that are described in great detail. Some of these descriptions become ponderous but are apparently meant to build information about characters and themes. For example, there is a lengthy description of the Hong Kong airport, including a Nativity scene. Juan Diego remarks that the Baby Jesus is missing. On the surface, the conversation doesn't seem to have any real purpose and some readers may find these passages frustrating.

In Chapter 6, the readers begin to get a closer look at Dorothy and Miriam. Juan Diego has the impression that he knows them, but he can't remember having met them. He catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror but can't see their reflections. The women make a big deal of not having their photos taken. Juan Diego thinks his limp is less painful and less noticeable when he's with Dorothy or Miriam. All this begins to make the reader think that they might be vampires or some other supernatural being. They are never fully identified, though there is more information offered as the book comes to a close.

Juan Diego talks briefly about his journey and the reason for it, but the details are not revealed until later in the book. This is one of many instances in which the writer releases an aspect of the story in small pieces, building on it until the reader finally gets the whole story. This is meant to build suspense but some readers may find it distracting from the story line.

There is a great deal of sex in the story, especially between Juan Diego and the two women, Dorothy and Miriam. These are not as graphic as they could be, but some readers may find them offensive. Some readers may also be upset by the curse words throughout the book. These are mainly in conversations and are likely used in an attempt to ensure that the conversations seem genuine.



Discussion Question 1

Describe Juan Diego's accident.

Discussion Question 2

Who is Edward? Is he likable? Believable?

Discussion Question 3

Make a list of what you know about Juan Diego's ideas about religion. Compare that to the ideas of other characters, including Lupe, Rivera, and Esperanza. Keep the list and make additions as more information is revealed.

Vocabulary

dossier, preternaturally, flagellant, zealot, dogma, surmised, impeccable, acolyte, resurgent, rhetorical, languid, preternaturally



Chapters 9-11

Summary

In Chapter 9, *In Case You Were Wondering*, opens Juan Diego having a dream. When Edward was 7, he fell on a mah-jongg game tile and cut his head. His dog, Beatrice, was licking his face when his father arrived and thought the dog had bitten Edward. His father shot the dog. Edward always carried the tile in his pocket.

Juan's dream turns to the day of his accident. He was taken to Dr. Vargas, an orthopedic surgeon. Lupe announced that Dr. Vargas didn't think he could do anything for Juan Diego. Dr. Vargas was fascinated by Lupe's speech. Lupe then told Juan Diego that Dr. Vargas has gotten drunk the day before a planned family trip, and that his entire family was killed while he slept it off. Juan Diego translated it into English for Edward. Dr. Vargas said he probably couldn't do anything, but said they needed x-rays to be certain. The conversation turned to religion and Edward urged Juan Diego to remain open to believing.

The conversation then turned to the possibility that Lupe and Juan Diego could have a better life in the circus. Pepe's doubts that Lupe could really read minds was eliminated when she related the story of his dog being shot. Lupe bonded immediately with Edward.

Chapter 10, *No Middle Ground*, Juan Diego dreams about his mother, Esperanza. As always, he is relieved to wake up from that dream. In the dream, he was yelling at her and was angry at her because she had become infected with a Sexually Transmitted Disease. As an adult, he realizes he had judged her harshly.

Lupe had predicted they'd live at the Lost Children orphanage. Because Lupe could only communicate through Juan Diego, the children shared a room while all the other children slept in dorm rooms separated by gender. Esperanza had a room in the servants' quarters but often went to Juan Diego's room for a bath after a night of working as a prostitute. The children settled in but the idea of being in the circus remained.

In Chapter 11, *Spontaneous Bleeding*, Juan Diego and Lupe came up with the idea of using water guns filled with "gunk" made to resemble blood. They would squirt someone, then Lupe would babble about a miracle and wipe the blood away. Often, the person would offer the children money. One day, a man selling balloons made it clear that he knew their trick and that he could understand Lupe. The situation made them wary of being in that area.

The story reverts to the present. Juan Diego arrives at the airport and a driver who calls himself Ben picks him up. The talk eventually turns to the bomb-sniffing dogs at local hotels. Juan Diego remembers his childhood. There were lots of dogs in the dump. The



children tried to take care of them, especially the puppies, and tried to burn the bodies of the dead before the vultures could begin to eat them. Not all the dogs were friendly. There were “rooftop dogs” that scared Lupe. She believed they were ghosts.

Analysis

Brother Pepe and Brother Edward had adjacent rooms and Pepe learned a great deal about Edward, including that he flagellated himself very regularly. Pepe and the other church officials also knew a lot about Esperanza. She was a prostitute and continued working at that profession even though she had a job as a cleaning woman. Her cleaning job included a place to sleep but she kept returning to the prostitute district. The writer suggests that Esperanza might have been able to talk to Edward about his views on celibacy and flagellation, and that he might have had questions about her reason for continuing to work as a prostitute. These two characters are one of several contrasts the writer provides. Edward's attitude will change dramatically but Esperanza will die before making any change.

Juan Diego and Lupe had a scam in which they would target anyone who looked like they might be sympathetic and have some money. They would load up a beet juice concoction in a squirt gun and squirt a little on someone. Sometimes they squirted a leg or a hand, but sometimes they would squirt a shoe. Lupe then ran to the person, wiping off the “blood” and shouting what sounded like gibberish with Juan Diego translating. If Juan Diego squirted the person's hand, he would throw in the word “stigmata.” This is yet another example of the theme related to attitudes about religion. Juan Diego and Lupe knew that the people they encountered would be open to the idea that this spontaneous bleeding might be religious in nature, and that feeling would make these people more likely to give Juan Diego and Lupe some money.

The man with the balloons is one of many characters that made brief appearances and never returned to the story. Juan Diego never knows how he understood Lupe but it was obvious that he was warning them to stop their scamming with the squirt guns and “blood.” The limited perspective means the reader never learns anything more about the balloon man.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the characters of Esperanza and Edward. How are they similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the scam Juan Diego and Lupe used to get money. Why do you believe some people fell for their scam?



Discussion Question 3

What do you know about the relationships Lupe and Juan Diego have with their mother? Does it seem believable?

Vocabulary

discernible, perturbed, impromptu, disparaging, anomalies, stigmata, albatross



Chapters 12-14

Summary

Chapter 12, Zaragoza Street, reverts back to Juan Diego's childhood. Vargas insisted that the circus people took care of their children. The local circus was named Circo de La Maravilla because of "The Wonder" who was the star performer. Vargas told Edward he should talk to a woman named Soledad, the lion tamer's wife. The plan was to tout Lupe as a fortune teller and Juan Diego as her interpreter.

Zaragoza Street was where the prostitutes spent their time. Juan Diego and Lupe sometimes went there. One night, they encountered a transvestite named Flor who offered up some information about the circus. While they were talking, they saw a young American draft dodger everyone calls the Good Gringo. He often sang "The Streets of Laredo." He was involved in a fight. Lupe suggested they take him back to their room. He was obviously drunk and sang the song during the walk back and even some in his sleep.

Lupe said that she would marry the young boy, but that she didn't believe either one of them were going to get much older. It upset Juan Diego but he comforted himself with the idea that Lupe wasn't always right about the future.

In Chapter 13, Now and Forever, Juan Diego arrives at the Makati Shangri-La, a hotel where Clark arranged for him to spend the night. Juan Diego falls asleep during the car ride. When they arrive, he's dreaming about Edward's dog, Beatrice. When the driver opens the car door, Juan Diego almost falls out. The hotel's two bomb-sniffing dogs immediately begin intently sniffing Juan Diego, pinning him to the seat, which catches the attention of the security guards. Juan Diego manages to get out of the car but the guards think his limp means he's carrying a bomb and they shout at him. Meanwhile, the dogs catch the scent of a half-eaten muffin in Juan Diego's pocket and become intent on the bulge there. It takes several minutes for the situation to be righted. Juan Diego begs the hotel manager not to treat the dogs harshly for their mistake. Juan Diego is spending only one night because he's going to meet up with Clark French's family the next day.

Juan Diego returns to his memories of Mexico. The morning after they let the Good Gringo sleep in their room, they were trying to figure out how to get him out unseen. Esperanza had finished her bath and she helped them get the boy into the bathtub. One of the nuns, Sister Gloria, became involved. She and a group of kindergarten students wound up in Juan Diego's bathroom where there was a confusing scene that included the idea that the large tattoo on the Good Gringo's chest had miraculously appeared there.

Finally, Juan Diego and the Good Gringo were alone and the Good Gringo told Juan Diego about his father's death. He wished he could have met his father. Since that



wasn't a possibility, he wished he could visit his father's grave. The Good Gringo asked Juan Diego that he would travel to the Philippines if the Good Gringo wasn't able to go himself. Juan Diego made the promise.

Chapter 14 is titled Nada. The Good Gringo bought a large statue of Guadalupe for Juan Diego and a small Coatlicue figurine for Lupe. Coatlicue is a goddess of childbirth, sexual impurity, and wrongful behavior. Lupe said she liked the Coatlicue goddess because "no one messes with her."

The next day, Juan Diego is supposed to visit the Manilla American Cemetery and Memorial but he checks on a couple of hotels recommended by Dorothy and Miriam instead. The driver, Ben, tells Juan Diego what he knows about the other hotels. When they stop at a light, Juan Diego rolls down his window and gives money to some children who look like beggars. Ben urges Juan Diego to stop handing out the large sums of money, saying it's "too much." Juan Diego reveals that he had grown up in a dump, and that there was no such thing as "too much" for these children.

Juan Diego has altered the dosage of his beta blockers several times on this trip. He is not himself, partly because of the altered doses. Juan Diego remembers a trip to Mexico City where he saw the Avenue of Mysteries. He rambles on about it but doesn't make a lot of sense as Ben continues the drive to the airport.

Analysis

Lupe was very afraid of the rooftop dogs. These were apparently real dogs that had somehow become stranded on roofs, and would jump from one building to another but always stay on the roof. Sometimes, the dogs would fall to their deaths. The headlights of passing cars lit up their eyes, which is apparently why Lupe said they were ghosts. Children were sometimes attacked and one of the doctors frequently treated children with dog bites. Lupe loved other dogs, which makes it significant that these dogs frightened her so much.

The scene in the bathroom is chaotic and confusing, much like the scene in which Juan Diego was placed at the feet of the Virgin Mary statue. Sister Gloria winds up in the room with Esperanza, Lupe, Juan Diego, and the Good Gringo. Sister Gloria has a group of kindergarten student with her and they wind up in the bathroom as well. It seems that Sister Gloria would have been focused on keeping the children out of the room, even if she had felt compelled to go in herself. There is also a disjointed conversation between Lupe and Esperanza with Juan Diego translating. Lupe said that she wanted to marry the Good Gringo but she discovered that Esperanza had sex with him. Lupe said her heart was broken and Esperanza replied. Sister Gloria heard bits and pieces of their conversation and became more upset by the moment. All this gives more information about some of the characters, including Esperanza's attitude about her role as a mother. While the basic story line is presented in a straightforward style, these convoluted scenes often contain conversations and provide an air of confusion that is sometimes difficult to follow.



Lupe told Juan Diego that she and the Good Gringo probably weren't going to live much longer. Lupe made several comments about her death, including the demand that Juan Diego will ensure that her body is burned at the dump with no one present other than Juan Diego and Rivera. She later recanted that statement and made a new list of demands. With Juan Diego's knowledge of Lupe's gift for knowing the future, it seems he should have paid attention to her prediction, but he didn't.

The Good Gringo appears only for a short time in the book but he is an important character because of his request that sets Juan Diego on his journey to the Philippines. He told Juan Diego that he was 26. He was American and was living in Mexico to avoid being drafted. His father died in the war when the Good Gringo was an infant, which was part of the reason the Good Gringo became a draft dodger. The young man told Juan Diego that he planned to visit his father's grave, but he may have had some premonition that he wouldn't live to make the trip. He asked Juan Diego to promise to make the trip in his place. Juan Diego agreed. The reader should remember that Juan Diego was 14 at the time and was a very poor child living in an orphanage. It seems incredible that he remembers his promise all these years, and that he arranges the trip to follow through on that promise. This is an important part of Juan Diego's character and aptly demonstrates what kind of person he is.

Juan Diego's medicine is an important aspect of the story because it greatly affects how Juan Diego acts and feels. He hates that he's so "diminished" when he is taking the beta blockers but he worries, at least some, that he is doing damage by not taking them. This changing attitude is probably at least partly caused by the fact that he's skipped a few doses and changed his routine regarding the medication. This becomes an increasing problem for him over the coming days as he continues his travels.

Discussion Question 1

Who was the Good Gringo? How did he wind up in Juan Diego's room?

Discussion Question 2

What is the promise Juan Diego made to the Good Gringo?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Juan Diego's situation regarding his medication.

Vocabulary

ambiguously, ebullient, eschewed, benevolence, proselytizer, obdurately, labyrinthine, lucid, vagabond, incessant, pacifist, contradictory, servile, ennui



Chapters 15-17

Summary

In Chapter 15, *The Nose*, Juan Diego makes the short flight from Manila to Tagbilaran City, Bohol, where he's supposed to meet up with Clark French. He thinks back to a conversation with Edward and Pepe in which he had questioned the church's ability to make sexual decisions when the church leaders abstained from sex. One day, Juan Diego and Lupe were in the church when Esperanza got a ladder to dust the Virgin Mary statue. She was flicking the duster over the statue's nose when Lupe began shouting. Juan Diego saw the statue's eyes become angry and Esperanza fell. Lupe insisted that Esperanza died before she even fell and that was borne out by an autopsy.

The statue's nose was broken off though no one could figure out how that happened. Juan Diego surreptitiously put the nose in his pocket and denied knowing what happened to it. Juan Diego said he'd seen "Mary Monster's" eyes move. Edward immediately said it was a miracle but the church elders refuse to say so. The church officials planned an elaborate funeral for Esperanza but Rivera, Juan Diego, and Lupe went to the morgue to pick up her body. There, they found the Good Gringo's body as well. They convinced the surgeon at the morgue to let them take both bodies. At the dump, they got a fire going and placed Esperanza, the Good Gringo, a dog Lupe called *Dirty White*, and the Mary Monster's nose together to be cremated. Church elders arrived after the fire was burning too much to stop the cremation. Juan Diego and Edward engaged in a conversation about fate and destiny.

In Chapter 16, *King of Beasts*, Juan Diego is dreaming when the plane lands and flight officials call for medical personnel to check on him. Clark French and his wife, Dr. Josefa Quintana are waiting to meet Juan Diego. They go to the Encantador, a resort hotel on Pangloa Island. Josefa's entire family has gathered for the New Year holiday. Juan Diego learns that there is one unrelated guest and he believes it will be Dorothy or Miriam. Juan Diego then falls asleep in the car.

He dreams about the day he and Lupe moved to the circus. Flor and Edward took them. Flor took hormones and had breasts, but had male genitals. Lupe read Edward's mind and gave him those details. Edward was enthralled. Lupe immediately knew immediately upon their arrival that Ignacio, the lion tamer, was "a pig."

In Chapter 17, *New Year's Eve at the Encantador*, Juan Diego is still asleep until they arrive at the hotel. He thinks about his limited first-hand knowledge about sex compared to the extensive writing he had done about sex. He continues to carry Edward's mah-jongg tile in his front pocket. Juan Diego and Clark immediately begin to talk about issues they feel are important. When Juan Diego mentions celibacy, Clark reminds him that they aren't to talk about anything like that until after the children have left the dinner gathering. They do argue extensively and in depth about matters related to religion and the church with Clark always taking the side of a believer who supports the church.



Some children connect to Juan Diego and talk to him. They sit down to dinner but Juan Diego notices that he's very tired. Josefa warns Clark and Juan Diego that they are not to talk about controversial topics, including abortion, unless they are alone. Miriam suddenly appears. There are lots of geckos around the hotel and one lands in Miriam's plate. She spears it with a fork and calmly asks for a replacement. A couple of children are interested in Miriam. When she holds a little boy in her lap, he calms immediately and is soon asleep.

Analysis

Juan Diego and Edward had a conversation about fate, which is one of the book's themes. Edward believed his life was defined by the moment when his father shot Beatrice. He holds onto that event as setting the rest of his life in motion. Juan Diego argued that there had to be other defining moments in his life when other doors were opened and Edward might have chosen a different path for his life. As they talked about this, Juan Diego wondered if the situation with the nose from the "Mary Monster" and the death of his mother has set his future in motion. Lupe interrupted, saying they were headed to the circus because that was what they were supposed to do next. Lupe knew limited details about the future, which might have led her to make that decision. Ultimately, she knew that she wouldn't leave Mexico but that Juan Diego would. She didn't reveal her entire plan or all her information to Juan Diego, but it seems possible that she simply knew this was the next step toward accomplishing a better future for Juan Diego.

The church didn't condone cremation and insisted on traditional funerals and burials. This is what they planned for Esperanza and what they would have demanded, given an option. Rivera stood up to them, saying that Esperanza's children wanted her to be cremated. In the minds of Lupe and Juan Diego, being cremated was a sign of cleansing. They lived in a dump and the only way to clear debris from there was to haul it off for recycling or to burn it. While the church objected, the cremation seemed appropriate to Juan Diego and Lupe, and Rivera apparently accepted it though he agreed with the church on most points.

One point that doesn't really make sense is the saving of ashes from the cremation of Esperanza and the Good Gringo. They were burned at the dump, apparently in an open fire. That fire would have contained a lot of debris, including garbage, and the ashes would not have been at all purely human. It apparently didn't bother Lupe and Juan Diego that the ashes they saved were probably only a small percentage of their mother and were largely other items.

The nose from the Mary statue becomes an issue in coming chapters. Apparently, Esperanza was just dusting it with a feather duster when the nose came off. She might have struck it during her fall, but it seems unlikely. Juan Diego and Lupe, who saw the entire incident, couldn't explain it. It's left to the reader to decide how the nose came off and whether that's significant.



Throughout the story, Juan Diego struggles with his identity. This was especially true when he was a young boy. He made a comment to Edward that he would like for them to be related. This is a sign that Juan Diego wanted to belong to a family and longed for a father with whom to connect. Lupe answered that Edward and Juan Diego were going to be related for the rest of their lives, which is an example of fate, another of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how Esperanza died.

Discussion Question 2

What is the “Mary Monster” and what is Lupe's attitude about it?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Juan Diego say that he wished he was related to Edward? What was Lupe's response?

Vocabulary

rapport, bickered, opaque, harangued, vernacular, disparagingly, disputation, conundrum, parlance, connotation, exacerbate, obstreperous



Chapters 18-20

Summary

In Chapter 18, *Lust Has a Way*, Juan Deigo kept in touch with Brother Pepe for many years. Lost Children closed and he worked with another orphanage and became involved in helping AIDS victims. Back in the present, Juan Diego realizes that Miriam reminds him of the statue of the Virgin Mary. He is thinking about that when Miriam indicates he should take his Viagra pill. A few minutes later, Miriam says he had already taken it, though Juan Diego doesn't remember.

Miriam is soothing a little girl when a gecko falls on a boy's head. Both the children immediately begin to scream. Juan Diego is surprised at their reaction until he realizes they are probably expecting Miriam to spear it with a fork along with the little boy's head. The music begins and Miriam and Juan Diego slip away. Juan Diego is trying to think but keeps losing the context of his thoughts. He knows that "lust has a way of distracting you."

Chapter 19 is titled *Boy Wonder*. The story reverts to Juan Diego's childhood. There was a ladder made of loops of rope high in the main tent. A performer would hang by her feet, "walking" through the loops. It was more dangerous because there was no net. She was known as *The Wonder*. Her identity changed frequently and the current *Wonder* was Dolores. Soledad was the wife of Ignacio and a former acrobat who trained the young acrobats. Lupe knew all about the horrors of Ignacio's mind the moment she met him. She ranted to Juan Diego about Ignacio's desire to have sex with Dolores and all the other young girls in the circus.

Juan Diego suggested that he might become a skywalker because his lame foot was frozen in the perfect position for the task. Soledad was interested. Lupe was furious. She said Juan Diego would die skywalking and that he was supposed to leave Mexico with Edward. After a brief conversation, Ignacio said he believed Lupe to be a real fortune teller.

Soledad told Juan Diego that his position in the circus could be more secure if he learned to be a skywalker. She pointed out that Lupe's gift was to read minds and that no one would pay her to tell them what they were thinking. Since she couldn't accurately tell the future, their stay in the circus might be tenuous. She called Juan Diego "Boy Wonder" and said he should think about it. Ignacio wanted Lupe to read the minds of the lions. Lupe learned all this by reading Juan Diego's mind. She was angry.

Edward asked Flor if she really had breasts and a penis. Flor insisted she did and bared her breasts. Lupe said that Flor and Edward were going to be together, and that they would take Juan Diego out of Mexico. Edward realized at that moment that his life in the church would end. He said he was "falling for" Flor, who suggested they should have sex and see what happened next. They all walked to the lion cages together. Juan



Diego told Lupe that she should be careful with her words. Lupe pointed out that no one could understand her unless he translated.

In Chapter 20, Casa Vargas, Juan Diego wakes in the hotel. He can't remember any details about having sex with Miriam, but believes they did. He comes to believe she isn't breathing. They begin talking about mundane things, including that Edward taught him to swim at the pool on the University of Iowa campus. He remembers that Edward was welcomed back to his university teaching position. The move was a tremendous change for Flor. She did her best but sometimes returned to Oaxaca where she would spend a few days partying and being herself.

The story returns to Juan Diego's childhood. Lupe believed the "Mary Monster" killed Esperanza and that the right thing to do would be to spread Esperanza's ashes at the Shrine to Guadalupe in Mexico City. The circus routinely traveled there and the children plan to use the trip to spread the ashes. Lupe had read the lions' minds. Hombre, the only male lion, thought only about food and sex. He usually loved Ignacio but sometimes hated him. The 3 lionesses hated Ignacio all the time and Lupe said they will eventually kill him.

Dr. Vargas held a dinner party at his huge family home. The guests discovered that it was haunted by his parents. Flor was angry that Vargas had cautioned Edward about STDs and she didn't attend. Brother Pepe was worried that Flor had always been in and out of trouble and wanted Edward to be careful on that front. Vargas had examined the young girl acrobats and knew that Ignacio was brutal once he forced them into sex. When he learned that Lupe as supposed to read the lions' minds, Vargas wanted them to leave the circus. Vargas had visited the Guadalupe shrine and he warned them about the street leading up to it – the Avenue of Mysteries. His warning wasn't sufficient to keep them from the trip.

Analysis

It occurs to Juan Diego that Miriam looks very much like the statue of the Virgin Mary where his mother was killed. There are several possible explanations for his thought. Juan Diego is nearing the end of his life, though he doesn't know it. Miriam could be a divine intervention sent to help him through his final days. She may also be something evil planning to enact revenge. There are other possibilities as well, but it's left to the reader to decide the significance.

There is more information here about Miriam that leads the reader to decide she's supernatural. Some of the children are interested in Juan Diego and Miriam captures their attention as well. One of the boisterous little boys sits in Miriam's lap and is quickly mesmerized into a calm state and then to sleep. This seems supernatural and one of the little girls becomes wary of Miriam because of it. It's also becoming a pattern that Juan Diego can't remember details of events when he is with either of the women. In this case, he doesn't remember taking the Viagra tablet but Miriam said he did.



Dr. Vargas was a socialist and he routinely gave away his medical services. He continued to live in his family home. It was a mansion filled with Spanish conquistadors and other historic pieces. During the dinner party, it became apparent to everyone that the house was haunted. Lupe assured Vargas that his parents were pleased that he had lived and that there was no animosity. Vargas seemed to already know this. Vargas continues to live a life of punishment because he can't forgive himself for missing the plane trip that ended his parents' lives. This sounds very much like the punishment Edward had been giving himself in an effort to end his thoughts about sex. This desire for self-punishment and self-deprivation is an undertone seen throughout the book in several characters.

Discussion Question 1

List what you know about Miriam and Dorothy. Who (or what) do you think they really are?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Juan Diego think he might be able to become a skywalker? Why does he think it's a good idea?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Dr. Vargas' house. Why does he continue to live there? What does this indicate about his character?

Vocabulary

vicariously, domination, babbling, tawdry, juxtaposed, moribund, dirgelike, laconic, zenith



Chapters 21-23

Summary

Chapter 21 is titled Mister Goes Swimming. Juan Diego wakes to find Miriam is gone. One of Clark's relatives has mysteriously died. She apparently fell and broke her neck. Clark obviously disapproves of Juan Diego's relationship with Miriam. The disapproval heightens when Juan Diego says that he has slept with Miriam and her daughter, Dorothy. A couple of the children talk to Juan Diego. He says he enjoys swimming because he isn't crippled when he's swimming.

The story reverts to Juan Diego's childhood. Juan Diego, Lupe, and Edward were traveling with the circus to Mexico City. Juan Diego noted that Dolores looked unhappy and knew that it was because of Ignacio. Lupe slept and Juan Diego talked with Edward. Edward said the children should be back at the orphanage. Juan Diego knew that Edward was planning to leave with Flor. Juan Diego then revealed that he'd overheard Edward talking to Vargas about a pornographic postcard. Edward said he was obsessed with the postcard as a young man. He said the girl on the postcard was Flor. Edward said that he had always loved Flor, even before he met her.

Back in the present, Juan Diego continues swimming but steps on some sea urchins. He begins to cry as Josepha tends his feet. He says he should have married a doctor, but that she said yes to someone else before it occurred to him to ask her. He knows most people think that Juan Diego never married because of the strange example set by Flor and Edward. The truth is that he never felt he could have found someone to love him as completely as Flor and Edward loved each other.

In Chapter 22, Manana, Ignacio had demanded that Lupe be the one to feed the lions. Edward insisted on making sure it was safe. Lupe showed him that the feeding slot slid in and out and that Hombre couldn't get through the slot. Lupe later told Juan Diego that the lions couldn't get out, but that she could fit in through the feeding tray slot. The circus set up in a field near a cemetery. A horse named Manana jumped the fence and broke his leg. Ignacio shot the horse in the cemetery and there was a great deal of haggling before authorities would allow the circus people to remove the carcass. There is a chaotic scene during the removal.

One morning, Clark and Juan Diego meet up at the pool. Juan Diego has a notebook and is working on ideas for his next novel. Their conversation typically dissolves into arguments about church politics, religion, and other issues upon which they disagree.

Juan remembers a conversation with Brother Pepe. Pepe said Rivera had confided in him. Rivera was likely Juan Diego's father but Esperanza had said Rivera was "too stupid to have fathered a genius." She demanded that he never tell Juan Diego that he was his father because it would undermine Juan Diego's self-confidence. Rivera had told Pepe he shouldn't reveal this to Juan Diego until after Rivera's death. Brother Pepe



had eventually given up his VW Beetle in favor of a motorcycle and was killed in an accident.

Chapter 23, Neither Animal, Vegetable, nor Mineral, opens in the present. Juan Diego is on a flight back to Manila. He is dreaming so vividly that he talks and gestures, which concerns the woman seated next to him.

In Juan Diego's dream, he is on the Avenue of Mysteries with Edward and Lupe. They had a coffee can with the ashes of Esperanza, the Good Gringo, and the little dog. Their plan was to scatter the ashes at Guadalupe's feet. There were literally "hordes of pilgrims" along the avenue. Their taxi driver thought they were taking Lupe to the shrine in an effort to heal her voice. There was a news camera crew taking footage and various groups. The place had a circus-like atmosphere. Someone heard Lupe talking and a group became excited because she was "speaking in tongues." Lupe, Edward, and Juan Diego were quickly disappointed and push their way through the crowds to get out of there.

Analysis

Juan Diego believed that Edward should tell Flor that he knew about the postcard. It was common knowledge that something bad happened to Flor during a brief stay in Houston, and this was that bad thing. Edward said he would wait for Flor to talk to him about it, but she never did. This is another example of one of the book's most important themes – fate.

By now, the reader has a great deal more information about Clark, and about his relationship with Juan Diego. Clark is a writer and his books have become very popular in the Philippines. Juan Diego remembers that Clark was such an upbeat student that some others made fun of him. His writing mimics that attitude, and that also gained him the disdain of fellow students. Juan Diego is also a bit of a snob about Clark and Clark's writing, though he doesn't really admit it. He can't imagine that Clark is actually doing so well and that people really like his writing, mainly because that's not what Juan Diego writes or likes. The story is presented in third person but the majority of the story is from Juan Diego's limited perspective. In this case, the reader gets more information than Juan Diego has, and that gives the reader a greater level of understanding about Clark.

Clark and Juan Diego argue at length about specific things, including church politics such as the church's dictates on birth control and abortion. The men don't agree on these points and it seems likely that they never will. It may be that they really like to argue with someone who takes an opposite stand and who stands by his beliefs. There is no doubt that the butt heads on some important issues and that they seem to enjoy their arguments.

Clark is also something of a prude. He informs Juan Diego that Dorothy and Miriam are succubi and obviously disapproves of Juan Diego's relationship with them. The writer points out that Juan Diego enjoys dog paddling and spending time "in the past." Clark



believes that to be a waste of time and he wants to be forever moving forward. With all this information, it seems strange that Clark and Juan Diego have remained friends after Clark's graduation. The details are not revealed but it seems likely that Clark has been the catalyst for that continued friendship. Juan Diego says that Clark is manipulative and that he enjoys having the upper hand.

The scene at the Avenue of Mysteries leading up to the shrine of Guadalupe was an important turning point in Lupe's life. She had remained adamant that the Virgin Mary was domineering and that Guadalupe allowed herself to be dominated. While Lupe seemed to want to be a non-believer, she undoubtedly did believe that the Virgins were capable of taking action. She felt that Guadalupe could have stood up for herself more. Lupe and Juan Diego were probably expecting a holy reverence at the shrine in Mexico City and they were horrified by the crowds and the attitudes. There were tour guides with megaphones. It was loud and irreverent. This apparently made Lupe reconsider her attitude about the Virgin Mary and she later asked Juan Diego to scatter her own ashes at the feet of Mary.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Clark and Juan Diego remain friends?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the postcard Edward had when he was young?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the scene at the Avenue of Mysteries. How does it affect Lupe and Juan Diego?

Vocabulary

succubus, consorting, paramour, simultaneity, sublime, appellation, tandem, overt, scrupulously, tepid, secular, dogmatic, flaccid



Chapters 24-26

Summary

Chapter 24 is titled Poor Leslie. Leslie is a young single mother and aspiring writer. She knows Clark. Dorothy contacts Juan Diego with the information that she's met "poor Leslie" in a time of need. Clark and Juan Diego continue to communicate and Clark obviously disapproves of Juan Diego's relationship with Dorothy and Miriam. Juan Diego fully expects that Dorothy and Leslie might have had sex. He briefly considers going home.

He thinks back to Edward and Flor, and the fact that Edward had seen her photo long before he met her. He once asked Dr. Vargas if that was "coincidence or fate," but Vargas said it was "somewhere in between." Juan Diego decides that his current situation is also "somewhere in between" coincidence and fate. Juan Diego meets up with Dorothy, though he isn't certain that he wants to. Almost as soon as they are together, Dorothy suggests that he might need to take a pill, and leads him to them. He's very tired but notices that he doesn't seem to limp at all.

Chapter 25 is titled Act 5, Scene 3. Juan Diego recalls the Boyd Tower building, part of the University of Iowa Hospital complex, where the HIV/AIDS clinic was located. Flor was diagnosed with AIDS and Edward's diagnosis followed soon after. The most difficult aspect for Flor was that she had to stop taking her estrogen, meaning she became more masculine. Flor blamed herself because of her occasional trips back to Mexico but Edward never blamed her. Juan Diego became convinced he might be AIDS positive as well, though his physician, Dr. Rosemary Stein, said he'd done nothing to contract the disease. He eventually allowed a nurse to take over the care of Flor and Edward, and they died within days of each other. They were buried together with the ashes of Beatrice, kept by Edward's mother all those years. A quote from a Shakespeare play, Act 5, Scene 3, was engraved on their headstone.

During high school, Juan Diego was tormented about Flor and Edward, especially by one specific boy. He stood up for his parents, saying that they loved him and that was all that was important. One night when he was an adult, Juan Diego was at a restaurant with Rosemary, her husband, and another friend, when he heard that boy from high school – now a grown man with a family – berating his daughter. Juan Diego went to their table and said that the man hadn't changed from the obnoxious bully he was in high school. On the way home that night, Rosemary said she possibly should have asked Juan Diego to marry her.

In Chapter 26, the Scattering, Juan Diego is spending time with Dorothy. Clark texts repeatedly, saying that "poor Leslie" was expecting to see Dorothy again. Dorothy and Juan Diego make another short flight and Juan Diego's memories return to his childhood. Juan Diego and Lupe were on their way back to Oaxaca on the circus bus, and he was holding the coffee can with their mother's ashes. Lupe believed they should



throw the ashes on the Virgin Mary statue and give the icon “a chance to prove herself.” Juan Diego wound up throwing the entire can toward her head and the ashes went even higher than he expected. The church elders were horrified that there were so many ashes and that they included the statue’s nose, a dog, and the Good Gringo. Rivera volunteered to clean up after services that night. Lupe noticed that Rivera had cut his hand.

Analysis

There's no doubt that Juan Diego has begun to question Dorothy and Miriam, including their nature and their purpose. He remembers that they had once said, in unison, “spare me God's will.” Juan Diego now wonders if they resent God's will because they carry it out. This seems to indicate that he believes they might be some sort of angels of death. The fact that they resemble pieces of Juan Diego's memories and imagination makes it possible that he has literally conjured them up. He notes that people see Dorothy and Miriam when he's with them, but they don't seem to breath and they seem to have mystical abilities. Their true identity is never fully revealed and it's left to the reader to decide exactly what they are.

The relationship between Dorothy and Leslie is never explained. It seems that Leslie wouldn't want to be with Dorothy if she knew that Juan Diego has begun to think that Dorothy and Miriam are angels of death, but she doesn't know any of that. She does know that some strange things happened while Dorothy was present, including an incident with jelly fish and another with a water buffalo. It seems that both Juan Diego and Leslie should have been ready to distance themselves from Dorothy, but neither is able to do so. Leslie continues to text Clark that she needs to see Dorothy again. Dorothy eventually instructs Juan Diego to be rude to her so that Leslie will stop contacting them. Leslie will be seen again in an upcoming section, but her real purpose in the story seems to be only to further the idea of fate putting people together. Fate is one of the book's primary themes.

Juan Diego was willing to stand up to the bullies who tormented him about Edward and Flor. Even as a teenager, he merely told the loud-mouthed bully that Flor was the best woman that hormones could make her. This contradicts another place where Juan Diego chose to walk to school rather than letting Flor drop him off because he didn't want to give the bullies any more ammunition. It seems likely that Juan Diego, like all teenagers, just wanted to have a normal life, but he was ultimately happy that he had two parents who loved and cared for him.

Dr. Rosemary Stein is not a major character in the book but she does play an important role in Juan Diego's life. They were the same age and he didn't really think about asking her to marry him until after she had agreed to marry someone else. They obviously had a friendship connection in addition to the doctor-patient relationship, and she was impressed the night he stood up to the bully at the restaurant. Juan Diego's life might have been a lot different if he had developed a romantic relationship with Rosemary or someone like her.



After being so disappointed in the Guadalupe shrine, Lupe suggested that they should scatter her mother's ashes on the Virgin Mary statue. This indicated that she was willing to give the icon another chance to prove herself, but Lupe wanted a sign that the Virgin Mary was real and that she had power. Edward said he approved of the idea and that he didn't feel Lupe had really given the Virgin Mary an honest chance. After Juan Diego threw the entire coffee can, they all stood around watching, obviously hoping that there would be some immediate sign from the Virgin Mary. The attitudes about religion are fluid in the story as characters grow, adapt, and learn. This makes this theme more realistic as humans are often changing their minds and attitudes.

The writer makes a point of the fact that Rivera had an injured hand when he arrived at the church after Juan Diego threw the ashes. He was wearing his woodworking apron and was obviously in the middle of some project when he was summoned to the church, but he didn't say what that project was and seemed reluctant to let them see his injury. They noted that he worked with his hands all the time and never hurt himself. This becomes important in an upcoming chapter as Lupe and Juan Diego wonder what Rivera was doing to injure himself.

Discussion Question 1

How is Juan Diego's attitude about Dorothy changing by this point in the story? Describe "poor Leslie" and her connection to Clark and Dorothy.

Discussion Question 2

Where and how did Juan Diego and Lupe dispose of their mother's ashes? Why did they choose this place and what did they expect from it?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the deaths of Flor and Edward.

Vocabulary

traded, disparaging, hotelier, magnate, umbrage, pique, misbegotten, xenophobia, proselytizer, veritable, acquiesce, gregarious



Chapters 27-29

Summary

Chapter 27 is titled A Nose for a Nose. Juan Diego remembers the conversation with Rivera when Dr. Vargas was putting stitches in the cut on his hand. Rivera explained that the object he was working on didn't really have a base and was difficult to hold. Lupe was watching the stitching and asked Vargas whether lions could get rabies. Juan Diego translated. Vargas didn't have an answer but said he'd see if he could find out. He later did research but wondered exactly what Lupe had in mind.

By this time, Juan Diego and Lupe had drifted apart. Juan also remembers that he dreamed about skywalking before he even knew what it was, and that Lupe had evasively told him it was a death dream. He had been practicing skywalking in the practice tent where the ladder was only a few feet off the ground. One day he went to the big tent and climbed the 80 feet to the performance ladder, but couldn't make himself try it and climbed back down. Dolores watched. She was already pregnant with Ignacio's child and she died a short time later from a botched abortion.

The same day that Juan Diego almost skywalked, the Virgin Mary had a new nose. Rivera had cleaned up the ashes but the Virgin Mary's skin was suddenly darker than it had been. No one knew where the nose came from and there was a lot of speculation. While they were still in the church, Lupe gave strict instructions of how to handle her body when she died. She said she did not want cremation but that they could burn a few of her things and scatter those ashes at the feet of the Virgin Mary. Not even Juan Diego questioned Lupe's statement or wondered why she was thinking about dying.

In Chapter 28, Those Gathering Yellow Eyes, Juan Diego is traveling again and the lights of an oncoming car push him into the past. He remembered waking up in the tent he shared with Lupe to find her gone. He found her body in Hombre's cage. The lion had killed the girl with a single bite to the back of the neck. He didn't maul her body and was sitting on the opposite side of the cage, "looking remorseful." Ignacio was afraid to go in the cage to get Lupe's body and he shot and killed Hombre. The next day, the lionesses killed Ignacio while he was feeding them. Those events marked the beginning of the end of the circus.

Back at Lost Children, Edward was trying to figure out how he and Flor can adopt Juan Diego.

In Chapter 29, One Single Journey, Juan Diego and Dorothy are at another hotel. This one was a favored retreat for young soldiers on leave during a previous war. Juan Diego and Dorothy have talked at length about the soldiers who died in Vietnam Dorothy encounters more than one ghost soldier. Juan Diego doesn't see these ghosts but he's surrounded by the ghosts of his own past as he dreams.



The church gave Lupe a huge funeral service. The circus people, Vargas, and others attended. Rivera, Juan Diego, and Edward agreed that they would burn a few of Lupe's personal belongings and scatter those at the feet of the Virgin Mary, just as she requested.

The story reverts to the present. Juan Diego wakes tired. He finds his cell phone and locates the picture taken at the train station. He can't understand why he is alone in the photo. He struggles to figure out what it means, but he's too caught up in the memories of sprinkling Lupe's ashes.

Analysis

Juan Diego looks back on the conversation with Lupe about lions and rabies, and he wishes he had taken time to think about it then. With the knowledge of how she died, he feels he should have pressed her to explain her question. But Juan Diego had a lot on his mind. He was only 14 at the time and it's understandable that Lupe's seemingly random question didn't really capture his attention. Vargas, however, was another matter. Vargas treated Dolores after her botched abortion but the infection was too far advanced and she died. He had treated other young girls who were brutally raped by Ignacio. Vargas was very worried that Lupe was in such close contact with Ignacio and he thought a great deal about her question. He felt certain that she wanted to know if the lion could transmit rabies to Ignacio, but he couldn't figure out why she wanted to know. As an interesting aside, long after Lupe's death, Vargas continued to study the question of rabies in lions. This early, Lupe was looking for a way to arrange the future. Ignacio's death and Juan Diego's adoption may have all been intertwined in her mind. The limited perspective means the reader never knows exactly what Lupe had in mind. This all figures into the idea of fate, which is a recurring theme.

After Lupe's death, Juan Diego explained to Vargas what he believed happened. Lupe had read Ignacio's mind and knew that none of the young girls at the circus would ever be safe from him. She had read the minds of the 4 lions and knew that Hombre would never hurt Ignacio and that the lionesses would kill Ignacio only if he killed Hombre. All this plays together to make Lupe's actions seem that she was only trying to ensure that she stopped Ignacio, but she may also have been trying to ensure that Juan Diego never tried the skywalking. Remember that she told him it was a "death dream," and that turns out to be true.

There has been a great deal of discussion about the Virgin Mary and Guadalupe. Some believe that they were the same woman but that the church officials didn't acknowledge that for many years. The Virgin Mary statues were light-skinned while Guadalupe had darker skin. That's why it was significant that the statue of the Virgin Mary was darker after Lupe and Juan Diego covered it with ashes. The statue also had a new nose the day after Rivera was left alone in the church to clean up. Considering that Rivera had a cut on his hand, it seems likely that he was making a new nose for the statue and that he was responsible for making the skin darker as well. He may have done these things to help Lupe and Juan Diego find a way to share his faith in the Virgin Mary.



Lupe made an important statement after the Virgin Mary had a new nose. She said that the Virgin Mary had finally “done something” even though it wasn't the kind of miracle some people might have expected. She then pointed out to the priests that it might be a miracle and that it might not, but that it didn't matter. Lupe seems to be changing at this point and she was apparently willing to take the new nose as a sign and didn't care if it was man-made or supernatural.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Lupe's death. What do you think she expected to accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

What was the significance of the new nose on the Virgin Mary statue?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Juan Diego's journey, considering both the physical journey and his emotional journey. Which journey do you think is most important and why?

Vocabulary

nonchalance, soliloquy, speculating, stolid, insinuations, redolent, demise, emaciated, capitulated, irked



Chapters 30-32

Summary

In Chapter 30, The Sprinkling, Edward, Flor, and Brother Pepe were working on getting Edward, Flor, and Juan Diego into the United States as a family. Juan Diego arrived at the church with the ashes. The church elders demanded to know what was in them, and wanted to be sure that Juan Diego was going to scatter only a few at the statue's feet. As Juan Diego began, Brother Pepe dropped to his knees and said that Edward had something to tell the Virgin Mary. Edward announced that he was in love with Flor and that he was sorry if he's disappointed her. He then turned his attention to the two priests. He said they could expedite the process of allowing Edward and Flor to have custody of Juan Diego. The priests said it was "shameful" and refused. Dr. Vargas pointed out that Juan Diego had no chance to better himself if he remained in Mexico. Juan Diego began to shout at the Virgin Mary statue. He said he understood if she couldn't help him, but wanted to see her do something. His level of belief was gone by that point.

Just then, a tear fell from the Virgin Mary statue and landed on Edward's hand. More tears fell. There was discussion of whether it was a true miracle. The two old priests hated to use the word miracle and said the situation would have to go through the proper "process," beginning with the bishop. Brother Pepe pointed out that Edward, Flor, and Juan Diego would be leaving for Iowa, and that the rest of them would never tell anyone about the miracle of Mary's tears. The priests left the room and Rivera said there was no doubt they would help Edward adopt Juan Diego.

Juan Diego wakes again and goes to the bathroom. This time, he sees the ghost of a young soldier. The soldier isn't reflected in the mirror above the sink. Juan Diego is still standing there when Dorothy walks in. She guesses that he's seen a ghost and kisses the back of his neck. He realizes that he can't see her in the mirror either, even when he can feel her kissing him. He suddenly decides he doesn't need to know who – or what – Dorothy and Miriam are. He realizes that he "would have been prone to make up a young woman like Dorothy."

Juan Diego thinks about Lupe's sacrifice. He knows that she literally "willed him" to have a better life. He remembers her saying that they – Juan Diego and Lupe – were the "miraculous ones." The rest of his life pales in comparison. He and Dorothy spend some more time together before returning to Manila.

In Chapter 31, Adrenaline, Juan Diego and Dorothy check into a hotel in Manila. Miriam arrives about that time. Dorothy and Miriam have an exchange and Dorothy leaves, obviously in a "huff." Miriam and Juan Diego go out to dinner. He decides that he should talk continuously so that Miriam doesn't have a chance to "bewitch" him. Juan Diego plans to visit the cemetery the following day but Miriam says there is a festival planned and that he should put it off.



Juan Diego realizes his phone has been turned off. When he turns it back on, Clark has sent lots of messages and is nearly frantic. Clark announces that he and Juan Diego are slated to be speakers at a literary event. Juan Diego isn't happy about it, but agrees to go. Clark also announces that he's made arrangements for a car to take them to the Guadalupe Viejo, though Clark says it's nothing more than a cemetery and a few old buildings. Juan Diego suddenly realizes that this sounds like the place that a “dump reader from Oaxaca would end up.”

Juan Diego takes his beta blocker plus an extra half of a tablet. He joins Miriam in bed. He feels all over her chest for a heart beat. Juan Diego says that Miriam and Dorothy might very well be his “personal angels of death,” but that he's “unimpressed” by them. Miriam says she knows Juan Diego took his beta blocker, indicating that she knows they won't be having sex. The next morning, she's gone. When Juan Diego prepares to meet Clark for the literary event, he considers that they will probably enter into their usual bout of arguing. He skips his beta blockers, believing that he needs “all the adrenaline” he can muster.

In Chapter 32, Not Manila Bay, Clark and Juan Diego have a heated debate at the literary event. Dorothy, Miriam, and Leslie are all in attendance. Juan Diego notices that Dorothy and Leslie are holding hands. Leslie questions Clark and Clark responds heatedly. Soon, Leslie leaves with Miriam and Dorothy. Juan Diego wonders if there's significance to the departure of Miriam and Dorothy. Juan Diego joins Clark and others for a gathering after the event. Clark says that he is “very disappointed” in Leslie's decision to leave with Miriam and Dorothy.

On Tuesday morning, Clark and Juan Diego set out on their trip to the Guadalupe Viejo. Clark talks incessantly about the history of the place and offers up lots of information. Juan Diego begins to feel bad but he can't seem to get Clark's attention. They are in the old church. Miriam and Dorothy are there, but no one would likely have recognized them. As a writer, he always paid attention to the chronology of a story, but it's not clear whether Juan Diego realizes that he has begun to die.

Clark rushes Juan Diego to the nearest hospital. The emergency room nurse is fully aware that Juan Diego is going to die. She suggests that they call a priest but Clark vehemently objects. He says that Juan Diego wouldn't want that. Dorothy and Miriam glide down the hallway and agree, that Juan Diego wouldn't want that. Clark calls his wife, who is a doctor, and the nurse is relieved to get him out of the room.

Juan Diego is suddenly walking without a limp. He's 80 feet in the air and is upside down. He's skywalking. He takes a couple of steps, then more and more. He realizes that skywalking isn't that big of a deal. After all, he'd saved books from the fires of the dump. He might have actually been a skywalker, if he'd been brave enough to try. But even if he had, his future – and Lupe's – was uncertain.

Juan Diego stops walking. He knows that skywalkers never hesitate during their walk. But he stops anyway. It's at that moment that he knows he isn't really skywalking, but that he's dying. Juan Diego realizes also that this is exactly what he'd want from death.



He doesn't care about "life after death." He's really interested in the life of a hero that he'd once tried to reach. He finds himself in complete darkness. The nun at his bedside utters "Thus passes the glory of this world," but Juan Diego is already dead and doesn't hear it.

Analysis

The exchange between Dorothy and Miriam at the opening of Chapter 31 is interesting because it seems to indicate that Miriam knows the details of Juan Diego's time with Dorothy, including his having seen the ghost. Miriam says that Juan Diego has probably "seen enough of Dorothy's ghosts." Dorothy responds that Miriam is saying it's her "turn." Miriam responds that it's not always about sex. Their exchange continues until Miriam says that they are in Manila and that it's "that time." Their conversation is not explained and it, like many things related to Miriam and Dorothy, is left up to the reader's interpretation.

Juan Diego notes that he's getting tired of Clark's manipulation, but he's also grown tired of Dorothy and Miriam as well. It seems that he's simply growing tired. Part of this may be related to the way he's manipulated medication over the course of the trip. It's not clear how big a role this played in his death, or if it was simply his time to die. It could also be that his "angels of death" have pushed him into the situation so that he would die at his appointed time.

Clark arranges for Juan Diego to visit a campus dedicated to Guadalupe, including an old church. Juan Diego says that it might be a more appropriate use of his time than visiting the cemetery where the Good Gringo's father was buried. This seems like a turn around from Juan Diego's determination to follow through with his promise to the Good Gringo, but it may be that he has realized the futility of that visit and that he feels he might gain something by visiting the Guadalupe church.

Throughout the book, Juan Diego refers to himself as a "dump reader." The term refers back to that early information about Juan Diego's reading and the fact that he saved so many books from being burned at the dump. In some ways, the term seems derogatory but it's actually a compliment. Juan Diego had to be an intelligent young man to teach himself to read and then to read and comprehend so many books. This is just one of many facets of his character.

In the final scene of the story, Juan Diego is in the hospital and is obviously facing death. His dream turns to the skywalk ropes from the circus. The reader should remember that Juan Diego had that same dream when he was a teenager living in Oaxaca. When he asked Lupe what it meant, she said it was a death dream. It's fitting that this is the final thought Juan Diego has in life, and that it really is his death dream. This brings the story full circle and wraps up Lupe's prediction. It seems that death and the skywalk were fated to be together for Juan Diego. Since he didn't actually perform the skywalk as a teenager, this seems to fulfill Lupe's prophecy.



The final paragraph of the book indicates that Juan Diego might have found some “glory” that he really never believed in. The nun offers up a quote about “the glory of this world.” The author then says that “not every collision course comes as a surprise,” which indicates that Juan Diego might have found something he never expected.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Juan Diego's state of mind by this point in the story? What factors are contributing to his current state?

Discussion Question 2

Clark said that Juan Diego would not want a priest. Do you think that Juan Diego might have changed his mind in the final moments of his life?

Discussion Question 3

With the final scene in mind, what is the significance of Lupe's prediction that Juan Diego's dream about skywalking was a death dream?

Vocabulary

beseech, peevishly, suppress, laconically, assailing, contradict, patrons, abstinent, infuriating, pontificator, aspirations



Characters

Juan Diego Guerrero

Juan Diego grew up as a “dump kid” in Oaxaca, Mexico. He was intelligent and taught himself to read in several languages with books he saved from burning in the dump. This brought him to the attention of a local priest, Brother Pepe, who began bringing Juan Deigo books to read. Because his first books were literally what other people – including the church – threw away, Juan Diego learned a great deal of history and read material that was not appropriate for young teenagers. Included in this history is information about the Jesuit Church. While Juan Diego is probably not a true atheist, he learns to hate the politics of the church.

He was utterly devoted to Lupe, his younger sister. She was unable to speak naturally and Juan Diego was the only person who could understand her. This meant that he had to translate everything she said to other people, making her completely dependent on Juan Diego in this way. Juan Diego fully accepted Lupe as she was, including her mind-reading ability. He carried this tolerance over to other people, including his adoptive parents and his former student, Clark French. He never blamed his father, Rivera, for the accident that left Juan Diego crippled for the rest of his life.

As an adult, Juan Diego is a successful writer and a teacher. He believes that real life isn't suitable material for novels because real people are never as predictable, developed, and complete as the characters in novels. Despite that, he did write about the things that happened to him as a child, though he never set his novels in Mexico. He goes on one last trip where he spends time with Clark French and his extended family before his heart fails and he dies.

Lupe Rivera

Lupe, named for Guadalupe, was Juan Diego's younger sister. She was a mind reader with a limited ability to tell the future. She could tell what almost everyone was thinking, including Juan Diego, but no one could understand her except Juan Diego. This means Lupe was exposed to the thoughts and ideas of adults, which was difficult for a young girl to handle. She was disgusted by the thoughts of sex and she hated that men seemed to focus on sex so much of the time.

Lupe was entirely devoted to Juan Diego though it didn't always seem so. She was heavily dependent on him to interpret her words to others. She couldn't communicate with anyone if not for Juan Diego's help but she often didn't seem to care whether others understand her. That, however, was not the basis or the total of her dependence on Juan Diego. She was dedicated to him to the point that she was willing to die in order to ensure that Juan Diego had a better life.



Lupe loved animals and believed it was an honor to be cremated with one of the many dogs that regularly died at the dump. She seemed to identify with the dogs in the circus and knew what the lions were thinking, which prompted her to plan her own death. The male lion of the group killed her, which prompted the lion tamer to kill the lion, which led to the lionesses killing the lion tamer.

Lupe had chaotic attitudes about religion and the virgins. She was angry that the Virgin Mary seemed to be such a bully while Guadalupe was given less attention. She fully believed and accepted that the Virgin Mary statue scared her mother to death. She coined the term, "The Mary Monster." However, she had a change of heart after she visited the shrine to Guadalupe and discovered that it wasn't what she'd expected.

Clark French

Clark is a former student of Juan Diego's writing class. He is a writer in his own right when Juan Diego is going on his final trip. Clark is optimistic and opinionated. He is pushy and wants others to agree with him. His novels all end on optimistic notes which has earned him a great deal of popularity in the Philippines and a great deal of criticism in the United States. He is with Juan Diego up until the final moments of Juan Diego's life.

Dorothy

Dorothy is apparently the younger of two women Juan Diego meets during his trip to the Philippines. She often focuses on sex and is attractive, though more coarse than Miriam. Juan Diego initially assumes that Dorothy is Miriam's daughter but others who see the two women say that isn't possible. Dorothy is apparently a messenger of death or some sort of angel of death. She is present at the church when Juan Diego falls ill and is at the hospital where he is dying.

Miriam

Miriam is the older of the two women Juan Diego meets during his trip to the Philippines. She is very attractive and captures the attention of everyone she encounters, especially the men. She is with Juan Diego for several days in the hotel just before his death. It's obvious that she isn't human but Juan Diego doesn't really know what she is until the final days of his life. Miriam is in the church when Juan Diego falls ill and is at the hospital when he is dying.

Rivera

Rivera was probably Juan Diego's biological father. He was the boss at the dump where Juan Diego and Lupe lived as children. He was a kind man who obviously cared deeply for both Juan Diego and Lupe, and for their mother, Esperanza. He hinted that Juan



Diego's father died of a broken heart, indicating that he deeply loved Esperanza. He never entered another serious relationship. He was a religious man and he might have been responsible for changing the statue of the Virgin Mary, including the creation of a new nose.

Edward Bonshaw

Edward, or Eduardo, was a teacher who arrived in Mexico to teach at the church-run orphanage. He whipped himself as a means of trying to control his thoughts and impulses. He was an intelligent, exuberant young man who connected with and cared deeply for people. He fell in love with a transvestite named Flor and left the priesthood in order to live with her. He remained faithful to Flor and loved her deeply, even though he contracted AIDS from her. He adopted Juan Diego and probably helped ensure that he received a good education.

Flor

Flor was a transvestite man who lived as a woman. She had spent some time in America during her younger years, but returned to Mexico and worked as a prostitute in a rough neighborhood. She met Eduardo when the two of them drove Juan Diego and Lupe to their new home at the circus. She moved with Eduardo to Iowa and filled the role of mother for Juan Diego. She died of AIDS and blamed herself for giving Eduardo the disease. She was a kind person who genuinely cared for others. She died of AIDS.

Esperanza

Esperanza was the mother of Juan Diego and Lupe. She was an uneducated woman who worked mainly as a prostitute, though she also worked as a cleaning lady at a church. She was deeply religious. Her speech often became garbled when she was excited, which led Dr. Vargas to believe that Lupe's condition was genetic. Esperanza was cleaning the huge statue of the Virgin Mary when she died. Juan Diego and Lupe were present at the time and they believed that the Virgin Mary's eyes became angry and that the statue frightened Esperanza to death.

Dr. Vargas

Dr. Vargas was an orthopedic physician in Oaxaca, Mexico, where Lupe and Juan Diego lived as children. He claimed to be a non-believer with regard to religion. He believed Lupe's speech impediment was a genetic disorder that could be cured, but he couldn't explain her mind-reading ability. He was a sad man because of an incident involving his parents; they were killed in an accident and Vargas had avoided death because he was drunk. He continued to live in the large house owned by his parents, which was obviously haunted. Lupe visited there once and told Vargas that his parents

were glad he'd survived. He said he already knew that. He was a gruff character but was kind when kindness was needed.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Lions

The lions were part of the circus where Juan Diego and Lupe lived for a brief time. There was a male and 3 females. The male lion killed Lupe, apparently because she provoked him into it. The lion tamer killed the male lion and the lionesses then killed the lion tamer.

The Statue of the Virgin Mary

The huge statue was located inside the Jesuit Church. Part of Esmeralda's job as a cleaning woman was to clean the statue. Lupe and Juan Diego saw the statue glare at Esmeralda and believed she frightened Esmeralda to death. They later saw the statue cry, which gave Brother Pepe the leverage to convince the church elders to support Juan Diego's adoption.

The Manila American Cemetery and Memorial

This is where American servicemen were buried and the Good Gringo's father was among the men who died here. The Good Gringo wanted to visit his father's grave and asked Juan Diego to promise that he would go if the Good Gringo wasn't able to. Juan Diego promised that that's why he is on this final trip of his life.

The Shrine to Guadalupe

The shrine was located at Mexico City. Lupe and Juan Diego expected to find that it was a wonderful, religious place to spread their mother's ashes. When they arrived, they found that it was really a commercial place filled with ridiculous people and a circus-like atmosphere. The visit to the shrine changed the attitudes of Juan Diego and Lupe, and they didn't spread her ashes there after all.

Juan Diego's Medication

Juan Diego takes blood pressure medicine and Viagra. The blood pressure medication makes him feel "diminished" and he hates the feeling, which prompts him to skip doses when he wants to avoid that feeling. He takes the Viagra even though he isn't in a sexual relationship because he likes the rush of adrenaline.



Dogs

There were lots of dogs at the dump where Lupe and Juan Diego lived as children. Lupe was very attached to these dogs and felt that burning one with her mother was a sign of honor. These dogs are a symbol of the lives of the children who live at the dump. Lupe and other children try to take care of the dogs, but the living conditions are so harsh that many of them die. The children likely felt sorry for the dogs because their own lives were so harsh. Just as the children couldn't really make a difference in the lives of the dogs, no one can improve the lives of the children. Juan Diego remains fond of dogs even as an adult.

Beatrice

Beatrice was Edward's dog when he was a young boy. He fell on a mah-jongg tile and cut his forehead. His dog, Beatrice, was licking the wound and Edward's father, thinking Beatrice had attacked Edward, killed the dog. This event was obviously traumatic and it changed Edward's life. He always remembered Beatrice and he always carried the mah-jongg tile with him.

Sexuality

Sexuality is present throughout the book, especially with Lupe's ability to read minds. She knew that most of the men she encountered spent a lot of time thinking about sex. There was a homosexual relationship between Flor and Edward and Juan Diego is highly aware of Dorothy's and Miriam's sexuality when he meets them during his journey.

Mary's Nose

This was literally the nose from the statue of the Virgin Mary. Esperanza was dusting the statue when she died and the nose fell off the statue as Esperanza fell from her ladder. Juan Diego picked up the nose and burned it in the fire with the bodies of Esperanza, the Good Gringo, and the dog. The nose was later replaced or repaired, and some thought it was a miracle.

The Pornographic Postcard

Edward saw a pornographic postcard when he was a young man and he became overly obsessed with it. When he met Flor, he realized that she was in the photograph. He said that he loved Flor even before he met her. This is one of many examples of destiny or fate, which is one of the book's themes.



Settings

The Dump

Known as the basurero, this was literally a dump where garbage was left. Lupe and Juan Diego lived there and had a relatively decent life compared to the lives of some poor families of the time and place. The people who lived there were scavengers who made money by retrieving items of value, including metals. The dump was where Juan Diego was run over by a truck, which caused him to limp for the rest of his life.

Circo de La Maravilla

This is the circus where Lupe and Juan Diego went to live after their mother's death. It was named for the "wonder" who performed as a skywalker. The circus was made up of tents and the typical circus people. Some of the adults had the attitude that the circus performers took good care of the children who worked there, which prompted the idea that Lupe and Juan Diego would be safe there. The opposite was true because the lion tamer was a cruel man who took sexual advantage of the young girls. The circus was where Lupe died.

The Lost Children

This is the orphanage where Juan Diego and Lupe lived for a short time after Esperanza's death. The orphanage was run by the Jesuit Church and this was where Juan Diego developed some of his attitudes about religion. The orphanage seemed typical for the time and place. Most of the children lived in gender-specific dorms, but Juan Diego and Lupe had a room and bathroom of their own. The orphanage was connected to the church and continued to function for a time after Juan Diego left.

Iowa

Edward lived in Iowa prior to his time in Mexico. He returned to Iowa with Flor and Juan Diego where he worked as a teacher. The family lives in a typical midwestern area. It's a conservative college town. There are general descriptions about the house where they live and the fact that Juan Diego walks a mile to attend school. Juan Diego likes to swim and they spend time at the college pool.

The Philippines

Juan Diego planned to travel to the Philippines to keep a promise he made as a teenage boy. There are several distinct settings in the Philippines and Juan Diego spends time there with Clark French, Dorothy, Miriam, and others. The settings include

hotels and neighborhoods, and many of these remind Juan Diego of his childhood in Mexico, which prompts dreams and memories of his childhood.



Themes and Motifs

Attitudes about Religion

Juan Diego read a lot of books during his early years. Many of them were thrown away by elders in the church because they didn't approve of the content. This meant that Juan Diego was exposed to negative an array of information about the church during his early years. At least some of this information was negative or contradictory. Juan Diego's intelligence allowed him to form opinions based on that information and on his own personal experiences with the church. This results in a negative attitude about the church in general by the time he's an adult.

Juan Diego doesn't hide his feelings in this regard and it's apparent that most people know his attitudes toward the church and organized religion, though they might not know all the details about the cause. This is seen at the end of the story when Juan Diego is in the hospital and is obviously facing death. He is in a church-run hospital and there are nuns present. The immediate reaction of the staff is to call for a priest, but Clark French objects, saying that Juan Diego wouldn't want that. This indicates that Clark is fully aware of Juan Diego's thoughts on the subject.

An extension of this theme is seen in the attitude about the Virgin Mary and Guadalupe. Lupe and Juan Diego believe that the Virgin Mary is placed in a more prominent position in the church than Guadalupe, and that Guadalupe is the more important of the virgins. They refuse to spread Esperanza's ashes around the base of the Virgin Mary Statue and travel to Mexico City to the shrine of Guadalupe instead. There, they find that the shrine has no religious feel but is nothing more than an overcrowded, commercialized tourist trap. They return to scatter the ashes over the Virgin Mary after all, indicating that they believe in the virgins and that their main problem is the church itself.

Lupe's attitude changed, at least slightly, near the end of her life. She asked for a conventional burial and that her ashes be spread at the Virgin Mary's feet. She said they should spread only a few of the ashes. When they spread Esperanza's ashes, they threw the entire contents of the can in a very disrespectful manner. Lupe wants to ensure that they don't do the same thing with her ashes, which indicates a change in attitude.

Juan Diego was not typical of the characters of the book with regard to his attitude about religion. For example, Rivera was looking for a miracle after he ran over Juan Diego's leg. He took Juan Diego directly to the church first, obviously praying for religious intervention. They were at the church for awhile before Juan Diego was moved to a medical facility for a doctor's care. This indicates that Rivera, who obviously loved Juan Diego very much, believed that a miraculous intervention was possible, or even probable.



Fate

Lupe is the key to this theme because it's her visions that establish the idea of fate for several of the characters. Lupe was a 13-year-old girl during Juan Diego's memories of her. His memories show the reader that she was intelligent, partly because Juan Diego read to her so much. This intelligence was an important part of her character. Another important part was her ability to read minds. Lupe was able to tell what most people were thinking but she also had a limited ability to tell the future. This all leads to the idea that she knew what Juan Diego's life should be like.

Very early in the story, Juan Diego remembers a dream he had and Lupe's reaction to it. He dreamed that he was walking upside-down in the sky. Lupe would not tell him what the dream meant, but said it was a dream about death. This is obviously a reference to his time in the circus when he considered being a skywalker, which is a performer who maneuvered through a series of loops in a rope strung 80 feet off the ground. The performer hung upside-down and "walked" through the loops with her feet. Juan Diego's deformed foot made him decide that he could become that performer. Some readers may expect that Lupe's interpretation was that Juan Diego would die if he actually attempted the walk. As Juan Diego is in the final moments of his life, he thinks about being a skywalker. In his dream, he isn't afraid and he sets out on the walk. This indicates that Lupe's prediction was correct, and that his dream was a death dream, though not in the way some readers would expect.

Another example of this theme is seen in Lupe's action regarding the lions. Lupe hated Ignacio, mainly because of his attitudes toward the young women of the circus. He literally lusted after every single one of the women and believed every one of them should be available to him. Because Lupe could read his mind, she soon hated him completely. Lupe could also read the minds of the lion and the lionesses. She knew that they thought about eating a lot, and that the lionesses were jealous of the lion's relationship with Ignacio. Lupe put herself in the lion's cage to be killed, knowing the series of events that would follow. She knew Ignacio was afraid of the lion and he killed the lion before retrieving Lupe's body. This made the lionesses hate him, which prompted them to kill Ignacio the first time he came near. It could be argued that Lupe was fated to die and that she was intent on ensuring that Ignacio couldn't hurt anyone else.

While Lupe is at the heart of this theme, it seems likely that other characters sometimes felt they were fated to live or do specific things. Flor and Eduardo, for example, met entirely by chance and fell in love because of that chance meeting, but Eduardo had loved Flor since seeing Flor's picture on a postcard years earlier. It's also noteworthy that Eduardo arrived in Mexico just as Rivera was rushing Juan Diego to town after the accident that caused his limp. Both the limp and Eduardo played an important role in Juan Diego's life.



Juan Diego's Journey

Juan Diego sets out on a journey as an adult, and this trip drives the story. However, there is a second journey taking place at the same time as Juan Diego is thinking back on his life as a teenager in Mexico. Juan Diego's trip is a lengthy one that takes him to New York City for Christmas. He is there at the invitation of his publisher and the story opens as that holiday is coming to a close. Juan Diego is then ready to set out on the rest of his trip, but he encounters the two women, Dorothy and Miriam, before he gets out of the city. Their presence during Juan Diego's travels are an important part of his journey. While it appears during their initial meeting that the women are just fans of Juan Diego's writing, it later becomes clear that there's something unearthly or supernatural about them. It's not until the final pages of the book that the reader begins to fully understand that they are literally there to be part of the end of Juan Diego's life.

Juan Diego's travels include a few days with his former student and fellow writer, Clark French. His relationship with Clark is important because he has been honest with Clark about his thoughts and ideas. For example, Clark is fully aware of Juan Diego's attitude about religion. As Juan Diego is dying, Clark is adamant that Juan Diego would not want the services of a priest. The two men spar about many topics, including moral issues. Juan Diego knows that Clark is horrified that Juan Diego has sex with both Dorothy and Miriam, but he gives Clark that information anyway.

Juan Diego's ultimate goal is to visit to an American military cemetery and memorial because of a promise he made as a teenager. His life was impacted by many people he met during those years, including a "good gringo." This man was an American who traveled to Mexico to avoid being drafted into the war in Vietnam. He was kind to Juan Diego and Lupe, and both cared for this nameless man. The man's father was killed during a war and the man always felt that he should someday travel to the military cemetery to pay his respects. The young man died in Mexico and Juan Diego pledged that he would go in the young man's place. He didn't make the trip immediately and years have passed before he was able to keep his promise. He doesn't know the young man's name or the name of his dead father, so he won't be able to actually find the correct grave, but he feels compelled to complete the trip anyway.

The journey is literal in that Juan Diego is traveling from New York to the Philippines, but it is also a figurative journey as Juan Diego remembers his childhood and dreams about events that led him to his life as an adult. These memories are sometimes in the form of Juan Diego's thoughts and conversations with others, but are often dreams that come to him, especially when he isn't taking the beta blockers. This aspect of the journey is every bit as important as the literal trip.

Juan Diego's Identity

Juan Diego struggles with his identity throughout the story, but especially during his early teenage years. He didn't know his father's identity and that bothered him greatly. The subject was an open one and was discussed, apparently at length. It was open to



gossip and the people at the dump were quick to tell Brother Pepe that there was a question about whether Rivera was Juan Diego's father. Juan Diego questioned Rivera about it and Rivera said he was "probably not" Juan Diego's biological father. When Juan Diego asked why he put himself in that category, Rivera said he wasn't smart enough to be related to Juan Diego.

Readers may jump to the conclusion that Rivera actually was Juan Diego's father. He at least seemed to know the identity beyond reasonable doubt. He said Juan Diego's father had died of a broken heart. Juan Diego took that to mean his father had died of a heart attack, but Rivera said that wasn't what he meant. His words hint that Rivera was truly in love with Esperanza and that he had a broken heart when she ended their relationship.

It's obvious that Juan Diego wanted to have a father. He was 14 years old at the time of the events of this book and was either unable or unwilling to come right out and say this to Rivera. Instead, he demonstrated that he was going to grow up to be a strong man, believing that this would connect him at least slightly with Rivera.

While Juan Diego obviously hoped that Rivera was his father, he kept hoping that he could have that connection with someone, even if it was someone other than Rivera. Edward and Flor took Lupe and Juan Diego to the circus. Edward stepped in elephant dung and it created a cement-like case that caused him to limp. Edward and Juan Diego were both limping and Edward jokingly said that people would think they were relatives. Before he could even stop to think, Juan Diego said he wished they were related. This is another indication that having a father was important to Juan Diego. Lupe announced that they would be related for the "rest of their lives," which ties in with another of the book's themes – fate.

After leaving Mexico, Juan Diego's identity changed. He was adopted by Flor and Edward, and lived a relatively happy life in Iowa. He did many of the normal things typical American families might do but the fact that Flor was a transvestite impacted how some people saw him. Juan Diego said that he walked to school to avoid having Flor drop him off.

Juan Diego opened the story by saying that his life was defined in two specific pieces – his childhood in Mexico and the rest of his life in America. This created yet another identity crisis for Juan Diego. He didn't want to be called Mexican-American. He sometimes identified himself as Mexican based on his childhood but other times identified himself as American based on the years he lived in Iowa.

Finally, Juan Diego's name created something of an identity crisis. As a child, he used Rivera's name as a surname so that he was called Juan Diego Rivera. As an adult, he became Juan Diego Guerrero.



Juan Diego's Limp

Juan Diego was a normal boy until Rivera ran over him. He was 14 when the accident occurred. He was standing near the back of Rivera's truck when he saw a feather. He retrieved it and was disappointed to discover that it was just an ordinary bird feather. As he was about to move, Rivera's truck moved backwards and ran over Juan Diego's foot. Rivera and Lupe took Juan Diego to the hospital where Dr. Vargas announced that he would live with a permanent limp. Juan Diego endured extensive recovery time, including some time in a wheelchair and more time using a cane before he became able to navigate without aid. Despite the fact that he was able to walk, the limp was very pronounced for his entire life.

At the circus, Juan Diego saw the opportunity to use the limp to his advantage. He wanted to become the first male skywalker at the circus. He felt the limp meant that one of his feet was already frozen in the correct position to perform the act and he managed to make the walk sometimes in the practice tent where the rope was only a short distance off the ground. He was never able to bring himself to actually to try it from the full height of 80 feet in the circus tent.

After he moved to Iowa, he walked to school even though the limp was pronounced and caused him problems. At one point, he admits that it was easier to deal with limping the entire distance to school rather than facing the judgment of other students by allowing Flor to drop him off. He continued to deal with the limp throughout his life but he completed a degree and became a teacher and successful writer. This indicates that he never let the limp control his life or limit his opportunities to continue his education.

As an adult, Juan Diego sets out on the trip to the Philippines. He's sometimes afforded special accommodations because the limp is so pronounced. During his trip, he meets up with Dorothy and Miriam. Juan Diego becomes sexually attracted to both women, though he initially believes they are mother and daughter. He soon realizes that he doesn't limp nearly as much when he's in the presence of the women. He comes to suspect that there's something supernatural about the two women, but he also changes up the doses of his medication, which may account for an increased adrenaline that lessens the limp.

He notices that his limp is less pronounced when he is with Dorothy and Miriam. He believes that it is somehow associated with Dorothy and Miriam, but he doesn't know how to explain it. The limp is a symbol of limitations and it's appropriate that Juan Diego, who has dealt with that limitation for most of his life, gets a minor reprieve from it during the final days of his life.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person from a mostly limited point of view. Throughout the majority of the book, the reader knows only what Juan Diego knows. This limitation means the reader never knows some specific details. For example, Lupe apparently commits suicide by climbing into a lion's cage and enticing the lion to bite her. Juan Diego didn't see the event and so the reader only knows the information Juan Diego is able to share. Juan Diego also doesn't know exactly why Lupe took this course of action, which means the reader never knows for certain either. It seems likely that Lupe's decision was based on her hatred of Ignacio and her desire for Juan Diego to have a different life. It can be assumed that she knew her death would begin a series of events that would lead to Ignacio's death and to Juan Diego's departure from Mexico. These remain speculations based on Juan Diego's knowledge, and even he admits that he doesn't know what went on in Lupe's mind all the time.

The story is presented by a narrator rather than in first person by Juan Diego. It seems the writer could have chosen a first-person story until the end of the book. As Juan Diego lies dying, the story's perspective broadens slightly. Juan Diego is literally lying on his death bed and Clark French is rushing around, trying to find something productive to do. Juan Diego isn't aware of Clark's actions, but the narrator reveals them to the reader. There is also a nurse present and she is fully aware that Juan Diego's heart is past recovery. She doesn't say this aloud, but the reader learns this detail through the narrator.

Another exception to the perspective is seen in Chapter 5 when Brother Edward arrived in Mexico. Juan Diego was injured and on his way for medical care but the reader gets a look at Brother Pepe's first meeting with Edward. In this case, the perspective is limited to Brother Pepe and the reader doesn't know what Edward is thinking unless he shares those thoughts with Pepe. The reader also hears a few exchanges between characters, such as a conversation between Dorothy and Miriam, that Juan Diego doesn't hear. These changes in perspective are rare.

Language and Meaning

The story is written mainly in English though there are some Spanish words and phrases. These are generally explained either through the context or with an outright translation. The Spanish words and phrases occur sporadically but the English-speaking reader shouldn't have a problem with them.

The overall tone of the story is complex. While Lupe and Juan Diego face horrible living conditions and a series of tragedies, there is a somewhat hopeful undertone despite the fact that so many people die and so many things go wrong. This hope seems somewhat



out of place but it does exist, probably because Juan Diego is ultimately a human being with human hopes.

The story contains sexual situations and overtones, especially with regard to Juan Diego's interaction with Dorothy and Miriam. The fact that Lupe can read minds creates another series of sexual scenes. She is disgusted that men think about sex so often. There is a highly sexual homosexual relationship between Flor and Edward, and later, between Juan Diego and the two women, Dorothy and Miriam. Some of these scenes are somewhat graphic and some readers may find them offensive.

Overall, the story is written in a straightforward style aimed at engaging the reader. There are highly descriptive passages and these sometimes seem to slow down the action though most are meant to give more depth to the story line and the characters. There are some difficult words that some readers may not recognize. These are mainly used to lend depth to the conversations, including those between Juan Diego and Clark French. At other times, these words and phrases make the reader remember that Juan Diego is a highly intelligent man with an intelligent perspective of the world.

Structure

The story is divided into 32 chapters. Each is numbered and titled. The titles are meant to give the reader some idea of what's happening in that chapter, though the reader generally won't understand the title until after reading at least part of that chapter. For example, "The Mary Monster" is a chapter that focuses largely on Lupe's attitude about the Virgin Mary and the Virgin of Guadalupe. She believed that Mary was a "monster" because she was a domineering virgin. Her attitude was furthered by the Virgin Mary statue in the Jesuit Church. That statue was very tall, especially compared to the smaller statue of Guadalupe. Lupe's opinion of Mary as a monster is examined further in a later chapter, when Lupe's mother falls while cleaning the statue.

The book opens with a chapter titled "Lost Children." The title refers to the Jesuit orphanage that people called "The Lost Children" but is also a reference to the status of Lupe and Juan Diego. They lived under the care of a kind man named Rivera who was not Lupe's biological father and was "probably not" Juan Diego's father. They were left to care for themselves in some ways and Brother Pepe felt that they would be better off in the Lost Children orphanage.

The story does not flow in chronological order. In the opening pages, Juan Diego examines his idea that he has lived two distinct lives – one in Mexico and one in America. The story follows a chronological path of Juan Diego's trip from New York to the Philippines, including his encounters with Dorothy and Miriam and his reunion with Clark French. That path is interrupted by Juan Diego's dreams and memories of his life in Mexico. That part of the story also appears in mostly chronological order. The result is that the reader frequently switches between Juan Diego's adult life and his childhood. Some readers may find this to be a distracting presentation of information and may occasionally have trouble keeping track of what happened last on each track.



Quotes

When Pepe stepped out of his VW Beetle, the smell of the basurero and the heat of the fires were what he'd imagined Hell would be like – only he hadn't imagined children working there.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1, Lost Children paragraph 15)

Importance: Brother Pepe arrived at the dump – or basurero – for the first time when he was delivering books to Juan Diego. He is religious, which is probably why he compares the place to Hell. The fact that children were working in such horrible conditions provides an important look into the lives of Juan Diego, Lupe, and the others who lived there.

But you're someone else. You're not always going to be Juan Diego Rivera – that's not who you are,' was all Lupe would say about it.

-- Lupe (Chapter 4, The Broken Side-view Mirror paragraph 58)

Importance: Lupe and Juan Diego were talking about Rivera and the possibility that he could be Juan Diego's father. Lupe said that Rivera was a kind man who loved them both, and acknowledged that both Lupe and Juan Diego used Rivera's last name as their own. However, she said that Juan Diego's identity would change, which was an indication of her ability to tell the future and that Juan Diego's future would involve changes.

He had an ax to grind – not with people of faith, or believers of any kind, but with the certain social and political policies of the Catholic Church.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 6, Sex and Faith paragraph 17)

Importance: This is one of many references to Juan Diego's attitude about religion and the church, which is one of the book's themes. It's clear that Juan Diego believes that anyone has the right to believe what they want, but that he's angry at the politics of the church.

But Juan Diego was more of a believer than he let on. He had his doubts about the Church – the local virgin politics, as he thought of them, included – yet the miracles intrigued him. He was open to miracles.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 9, In Case You Were Wondering paragraph 6)

Importance: This is another examples of the book's theme related to religious attitudes. This reiterates that Juan Diego isn't really an atheist but he has a problem with the official church and church doctrine.

Most dump kids are believers, maybe you have to believe in something when you see so many discarded things. And Juan Diego knew what every dump kid (and every orphan) knows: every last thing thrown away, ever person or thing that isn't wanted, may have been wanted once – or, in different circumstances, might have been wanted.”



-- Narrator (Chapter 15, The Nose paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote shows the necessity of hope for those in less fortunate positions or life circumstances; many people find that hope through religion.

Yes, his novels came from his childhood and adolescence – that was where his fears came from, and his imagination came from everything he feared.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19, Boy Wonder paragraph 6)

Importance: Juan Diego insists that he doesn't write about true events in his own life, but some details of his stories mimic events that happened in his life. For example, one character in one of his novels was killed when a religious statue fell on her, which is very similar to what happened to his mother. It's significant that Juan Diego recalls fears from his childhood. This is an indication that his childhood wasn't secure and that he carried these fears with him for the rest of his life.

How are your pills? Should you be taking something?

-- Dorothy (Chapter 24, Poor Leslie paragraph 79)

Importance: Juan Diego's medication has been an issue throughout the story and it's becoming a dangerous situation. He has skipped doses of his beta blockers and increased the number of Viagra tablets. The combination is impairing his judgment, but his contact with Dorothy and Miriam seems to be an even greater issue.

There was other dialogue that weighed on him, a moment when he might have (could have, should have) seen something coming – a moment when he might have diverted the course of things to come.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 27, A Nose for a Nose paragraph 20)

Importance: Lupe had just asked Dr. Vargas if lions could get rabies. Looking back on it from years later when he knew how Lupe died, Juan Diego wishes he had paid more attention. He believes as an adult that he might have changed the fate of things if he had pressed Lupe to explain why she was interested.

And compared to what had happened to Juan Diego in Mexico – compared to his childhood and early adolescence in Oaxaca – nothing had happened to Juan Diego since he'd moved to the United States that he felt was worth writing about.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 28, Those Gathering Yellow Eyes paragraph 17)

Importance: Juan Diego says that his life is divided into 2 distinct sections – his childhood in Mexico and the rest of his life in the United States. His childhood was traumatic on many levels. He lost friends and family after moving to America, but none of those deaths were as horrible for Juan Diego as those he experienced in Mexico.

Knowing he hadn't been alone on that platform was sufficient to make Juan Diego believe he'd merely dreamed he was making this journey without Miriam and Dorothy. As he lay down beside Dorothy – at least it seemed to Juan Diego that Dorothy was



really there – perhaps the journey word reminded him of something before he could fall back to sleep and fully return to the past.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 29, One Single Journey paragraph 82)

Importance: The identities of Dorothy and Miriam are never spelled out for the reader, meaning it's up to the reader to decide whether they are real humans or something else. By this time in the story, Juan Diego has come to doubt that they are human and at one point, he calls them his “angels of death.” The fact that he's thinking about the “journey” is important because this is one of the book's themes.

The first of the Mary Monster's tears fell on the back of Edward Bonshaw's hand; her tears fell from such a height, they made quite an impact, quite a splash.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 30, The Sprinkling paragraph 47)

Importance: This scene occurs just after Juan Diego spreads Lupe's ashes around the feet of the Virgin Mary statue. The church elders are in the midst of condemning Edward and Flor when the Virgin Mary statue begins to shed tears. Edward makes a bargain that none of them will ever tell about the miracle if the church elders will help Edward, Flor, and Juan Diego.

No Filipinos were watching, and Juan Diego wasn't swimming; he was walking without a limp, at last. He was walking upside down, of course; he was skywalking, at 80 feet – he'd taken the first two of those death-daring steps. (And then another 3, and then 2 more.)”

-- Narrator (Chapter 32, Not Manila Bay paragraph 107)

Importance: It's appropriate that the final of Juan Diego's thoughts is focused on the skywalking. He'd always believed that he would not walk with a limp if he was on the skywalking ladder and Lupe had said it was a death dream. They were both correct.