

Bel Canto: A Novel Study Guide

Bel Canto: A Novel by Ann Patchett

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Plot Summary

Bel Canto is a story about a group of people from various parts of the world who come to a developing country in South America and attend a function to hear Roxane Coss sing and encourage a businessman to invest in that country. Shortly after the performance is finished, the lights go out and the entire room is taken hostage by a group of kidnapers. As the weeks and months unfold, the lives of both the kidnapped and the terrorists change as they endure a stalemate between the terrorists and the local government.

Interestingly, this novel progresses far beyond its overall plot of a group of people being held against their will. Against this backdrop of violence and fear, the story unfolds as one of the most romantic and beautiful plotlines ever written. Roxane Coss is the reason why Mr. Katsumi Hosokawa flies to this South American country. The local politicians there have planned a birthday party for him to encourage him to invest in their country. Mr. Hosokawa has no intention of investing there, but when he hears that Roxane will be singing, he agrees wholeheartedly to attend. He is an avid fan of opera and Roxane is the premiere soprano in the world.

Gen Watanabe is the translator for Mr. Hosokawa as he travels around the world. He is very loyal to Mr. Hosokawa and after the terrorists take over the room, he plays a central role in everyone's lives. Many of the people in attendance speak a language other than Spanish, the host country's language. Mr. Hosokawa and his associate speak Japanese. Roxane speaks English. The terrorists speak Spanish and a colloquial form of Spanish from their region. There are also a number of Russian men in the audience as well. When the negotiator Messner arrives, he speaks Swiss and some broken Spanish. Gen is able to translate for everyone to ensure that they can all communicate.

Initially, everyone lives in fear of the terrorists. Messner encourages them to let all of the women, the sick and the wounded leave within the first few days. All leave except Roxane Coss, whom the terrorists force to stay. Their plan had been to take the President at this function, but at the last minute, the President does not show up. They keep Roxane because she is a celebrity and they feel it gives them more bargaining power.

As the weeks progress, everyone—terrorists and hostages alike—settle into a routine. Roxane will sing for everyone in the morning to practice and they all take on different responsibilities. The Vice President, for example, continuously plays host to not only the hostages but the terrorists as well, cleaning up after everyone and making sure they are comfortable despite the fact that he rarely spent time in the house before. The other kidnapers read the newspaper as it is delivered with the daily rations the government sends in with Messner to keep the hostages comfortable. The terrorists watch television, which they were unfamiliar with previously, and some learn a new skill or talent. Carmen, for example, is surreptitiously taught how to read and write in Spanish and English at night by Gen. Cesar is naturally talented with music and Roxane begins to tutor him. Another terrorist Ishmael learns chess.



Along the way, nearly every man in the room falls madly in love with Roxane. She is described as a "pocket Venus" and is the perfect representation of beauty, love and grace for all of the men in the room. She, however, falls in love with Mr. Hosokawa, despite the fact that they cannot communicate in the same language; they must rely on Gen for that whenever he is able to help them. They eventually consummate their relationship at night and from then on, are wholly inseparable despite the fact that Mr. Hosokawa has a wife and family back in Japan.

Gen, meanwhile, falls in love with Carmen, the young terrorist he is tutoring secretly at night in the china closet. They, too, consummate their relationship in the park outside the house, but can never openly demonstrate their affection for one another because they are separated during the day as hostage and terrorist.

Life continues in this way for some time as Messner tries to warn the terrorists to give in and walk away as these situations never end well. He is ultimately correct when one day, the government sends in their army. The soldiers shoot without warning and kill all of the terrorists before they can realize what has happened. By this time, however, many of the hostages and terrorists are friendly with one another and so the end of the stalemate is not a relief to anyone in the house.

Every terrorist is killed in the attack. However, a single bullet accidentally kills Mr. Hosokawa and Carmen simultaneously.

After the attack, the Thibaults, French ambassadors to this South American country who had been kidnapped along with the rest, attend a wedding. It is the wedding of Gen and Roxane, who have fallen in love and married for the love of everyone. They are in Lucca, Italy and the four of them spend the day together to celebrate the new marriage of Gen and Roxane together.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

As soon as the accompanist kisses the opera singer, the lights go out in the performance. All around the stage is an international audience that has come together in a South American country to hear Roxane Coss sing for Mr. Katsumi Hosokawa's birthday. Yet, when the lights go out, no one seems surprised or worried and instead believes that it is all a part of the performance.

Mr. Hosokawa is a successful businessman who has no intention of investing in the South American country, although that is the reason why he is being catered to. He has attended the birthday party only because he is an avid fan of opera and a faithful admirer of Roxane Coss. Her voice is unparalleled for him and he has flown around the world to hear her sing. He is at the birthday party with only his translator and friend, Gen Watanabe, who is similar to him in many ways. Both respect each other very much.

The group finally realizes that their party has been taken over by terrorists looking for the President of the country. However, the President is not in attendance at the party because he is an avid follower of soap operas and a climatic episode is on television at the same time as the party so he stays home.

There are three generals and fifteen soldiers from the age of fourteen to twenty years old. They take over the room, demanding the guests' attention. They demand the President come forth and instead, the Vice President comes forward, telling them that the President is not there. The terrorists are stumped and stand still as they wonder what their next course of action should be while an entire room of hostages waits for their decision, filled with fear.

Chapter 1 Analysis

From the start, the pure beauty of Roxane's voice is described. The very first sentence describes the love that a man has for Roxane. Yet, against this beautiful backdrop, terrorists take over the room, filling everyone with fear and horror, replacing their love of the music and Roxane.

This dichotomy will continue throughout the novel. The house will become the location where the unreal becomes possible and two contrasting sides will unite in ways that normally would not work. In this way, the beautiful song ("Bel Canto") of Roxane and her talents will be combined with the rough, crass and aggressive nature of these terrorists.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

The hostages begin to get more familiar with their situation, although their fear certainly does not dissipate. However, in addition to the fear, Mr. Hosokawa feels a great sense of responsibility, believing he is the root of why all of these people have been taken hostage. After all, they were all there for his birthday in a country that he deceived into thinking he might invest in them.

All of the hostages have been told to lie on the floor and Mr. Hosokawa lies near Roxane Coss. He realizes that she is not a perfect beauty physically, but it does nothing to diminish his great appreciation for her talents. One by one, hostages are beginning to be led off and great apprehension grows that they are being shot one at a time—until the hostages return and tell the others that it is merely a bathroom break.

Meanwhile, the accompanist is using his body to protect Roxane, but as time progresses, it seems more and more likely that he needs her help rather than the other way around. His health is rapidly deteriorating, but he is so wholly protective and affectionate of Roxane that everyone in the room assumes them to be lovers (which they are not).

Simon and Edith Thibault are French ambassadors to this country and now, in the light of potential doom at any moment, Simon sees his wife in a whole new light. He realizes that he has been in love with her for years, but has not always been faithful or appreciative of her, taking her for granted. In the light of this hostage situation, however, he realizes how precious she is and how amazing she is to him. He falls back in love with her in an instant.

There is a knock at the door and Joachim Messner enters the house, a Red Cross negotiator who has been brought in to alleviate the situation and end the hostage situation. Gen is called in since Messner is not fluent in Spanish. He is on vacation when the hostage situation develops and is not planning to work during his vacation time. He discovers that the terrorists are not from the most violent group in the country, as previously assumed, but instead are a lesser-known group from the jungle.

Father Arguedas is among those held captive in Ruben's home. He is an avid fan of the opera and fortuitously got a ticket to this function so he could hear Roxane sing. When it comes time to let some of the hostages go, the terrorists say that both Father and a Monseigneur can leave the house, but the Father chooses to stay behind. He feels more needed in the house and his presence will be greatly appreciated in the upcoming weeks.



Among the others permitted to finally leave are all of the women and sick with the exception of Roxane and Ruben. The accompanist also refuses to leave despite the fact that he is looking more and more ill with each passing moment.

Chapter Two Analysis

Gen is a superior translator, making the individuals speaking truly feel like they are talking with one another, although the words are actually coming out of Gen's mouth. It is his supreme skill that will play a huge role in the overall hostage situation, helping the hostages to communicate with each other and with the terrorists.

Since Ruben's face needs stitches, he sees his children's nanny Esmeralda with new eyes. Just as Simon sees his wife anew, Ruben realizes that Esmeralda is something of a saint for him, patiently and effectively sewing his face as if she were mending socks. He is thoroughly appreciative of her and it is the start of his seeing his everyday surroundings in a new way.

Father Arguedas will play an important role during the hostage situation. His connections in town and love of opera will make the hostages' lives easier, while he simultaneously plays the role of religious help during the seige.

Ruben is not allowed to leave his home despite the fact that he is injured because for the terrorists, he represents the government they want to overthrow. For this reason, even with his future hospitality during the seige, the generals and soldiers treat him poorly. The accompanist, on the other hand, refuses to leave Roxane behind, even though he is deathly ill. We will soon find out that his death is a meaningless sacrifice that is foolish and easily avoidable.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

All of the women are released save one: Roxane Coss. She attempts to walk out with the accompanist, but the generals turn her around, back into the house. They do not have the President, yet they still have a famous soprano and they keep her for this reason. She is outraged, but there is nothing she can do about it.

The generals are pleased after the women and the sick leave, feeling now their group of hostages is manageable and they have enough space to walk around comfortably. The accompanist continues to become sicker and sicker. Father begins to give him Last Rites and asks Roxane to say something about him. She does not really know the man well, but says a few nice things and sinks to the floor, placing her hands in his pockets. It is then that she sees the hypodermic needle with empty vials for insulin. They were supposed to have returned to the hotel by midnight, plenty of time for him to get more insulin. Instead, the accompanist is slipping into a diabetic coma.

After the accompanist dies, the generals contemplate shooting him to show the government they are serious, but they are talked out of it finally.

Through Gen, Mr. Hosokawa makes his first communication with Roxane. He immediately asks for her forgiveness for putting her in this situation. She tells him that there is plenty of blame to be placed in the situation, but she does not blame him in any way. He is relieved.

Gen takes on the role of a secretary to the generals, who appreciate his knowledge of many languages. In this way, he records all of the different hostages by profession and income. They want to separate the important hostages from the others and know everyone's skills as much as possible. The remaining hostages are all released with the exception of the wealthier, more influential members of the party. These people are the ones that will stay on for the long-term.

Chapter Three Analysis

The accompanist is never called by his name—Christof—until he is dead. He refuses to leave Roxane's side because he is utterly in love with her, so much so that he will not leave her alone among the terrorists without his protection even if it means his own death. At any point, he could have mentioned his need for insulin and been rescued, but he is so committed to Roxane he will not go. Unfortunately for him, Roxane does not return his feelings and his declaration of his love for her is recent and not welcomed by her at all.

The fact that the generals contemplate using the accompanist's body as a prop to demonstrate how serious they are with the government is an early indication that these



terrorists are not typical. They do not wish to kill anyone, but still want to be taken seriously, which is why they contemplate using the accompanist's body. Their decision to ultimately respect the dead man again shows that these are not your typical, aggressive terrorists.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

When the hostages look out the window, all they see is a dense and heavy fog that the locals call "garua." It makes it seem as though the hostages and terrorists could be anywhere in the world since they cannot see or hear any discerning features outside their windows. The fog will stay outside their window for weeks at a time and play a role in how the terrorists and hostages interact with each other.

Very slowly, the terrorists start to let down their guard each day. The details of the capture begin to fall away and life starts to resume somewhat more normally as the terrorists become more laid back with their hostages. General Benjamin is the only general whose motive is explained; his brother Luis is in solitary confinement in a jail and he wants to free him.

For many of the men in the room, they are important businessmen who never sit still without being responsible for a particular task for a long period of time. The siege gives each of them a chance to sit and think, reflect on their lives and what they have accomplished so far. In the case of Mr. Hosokawa, he will begin to look more inward and work on personal achievements rather than his typical day-and-night business approach to living.

The hostages start to teach the terrorists different things, such as where they are on the map in the world. The terrorist named Ishmael starts the game and enjoys finding out where his hostages live.

Even if the hostages had wanted to form a group and take over the terrorists, their lack of communication makes it impossible. They have a language barrier that is too vast to be able to work together to overthrow the terrorists. Gen asks Mr. Hosokawa whether he thinks to rise against the terrorists and he calmly states that something will eventually happen, but it is out of his control and so the thought weighs on him heavily.

Each day, the terrorists become more and more familiar with the house. When Simon turns on the television one afternoon, it shocks the soldiers and he nearly loses his life. However, once they realize what it is, they are mesmerized and watch it continuously. Also, it is revealed that two of the terrorists are females, although it was previously believed that all of them were men. One is Beatriz and the other is Carmen; however, the girls are very different from one another as the hostages will learn in the future.

Carmen seems to be in love with Roxane, but then again, they are all entranced by her presence. Oscar Mendoza is a contractor who lives down the street from Ruben and in speaking with him, tells him that he will tell Roxane that he is in love with her—unless Ruben would like to go first. Oscar does not have to wonder if Ruben is in love as well since they are all in love and everyone knows it is a shared love.



Roxane looks for someone to play the piano so she can sing again. No one can play until finally Tetsuya Kato steps up. Gen knows him, but he rarely speaks and has had a secret life as a piano player each morning throughout his career. Although he is a numbers man in his career, his true passion is playing the piano. When he begins to play effortlessly, the hostages and terrorists all gather around for the music concert. Even General Benjamin is pleased to think that the dead accompanist has been replaced. Kato plays until everyone in the room forgets that they desperately wish they were somewhere else. They all bond together over the music and Roxane agrees to sing for them tomorrow.

Chapter 4 Analysis

As the garua envelops the house, the hostages and terrorists begin to concentrate more on each other rather than on the outside world, simply because they cannot see it. They feel as though they could be anywhere in the world and since they feel wholly cut off from everyone, they begin to build relationships with each other. Perhaps the reason these relationships exist in this hostage situation that is partly due to the fact that in a way, they begin to live as if they are the only ones left in the world.

Ishmael's geography game is just the start of what the terrorists will start to learn from their hostages and vice versa. It will become a rarefied world where the borders of their society are broken down so that these terrorists go from being ignorant jungle revolutionaries to becoming more learned, civilized people.

When it is revealed that the boy soldier so in love with Roxane is in fact a female named Carmen, it is understood that the young girl is enamored with Roxane's clothes, civilized manner and all the other aspects of her that are so different from Carmen.

When Kato begins to play the piano, it sets the tone for the rest of the novel. The language of music is able to be fully understood no matter what language the individual might speak. It is appreciated by both the civilized and the ignorant. It is a universal communicator. Kato's playing allows everyone in the room to actually enjoy where they are for a moment, after weeks of wishing they were somewhere else. Through the music, they all have something they can share together and it allows the terrorists to let down their guard even more and the hostages to open up and share their knowledge and education with them.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Gen is constantly working, translating for all of the hostages among themselves and working as the secretary for the terrorists, writing their list of demands daily. Mr. Hosokawa, meanwhile, spends his day at the piano with Kato and Roxane, fully engrossed in the music. Since Mr. Hosokawa cannot speak the same language as Roxane or the terrorists, he is experiencing a new sensation of not being in control and being outside the conversation. Roxane, however, begins to have more and more appreciation for Mr. Hosokawa as he seems to understand her needs before even she does. He will get her little things that she needs

Ruben has taken to being the house's charming host with a knotted towel around his waist, taking care of dirty dishes and cleaning up after the terrorists and hostages alike. Messner comes into the house every day at 11, bringing the supplies that have been requested. He gets frustrated and thinks the soldiers are the most unprofessional terrorist organization he has dealt with yet. When Roxane mentions that she is going to sing again, Messner feels the oddest sensation of actually being a little jealous of the hostages. She is able to sing because of Father Arguedas' local connection to the sheet music that she needs.

Messner notices Carmen and asks her how she got caught up with a group of people like this. She says she is seventeen and wants to work to free the people. He thinks she is a lovely girl but cannot understand why she is with these brutes. She speaks Quechua, a local dialect, normally, but is teaching herself Spanish.

For Carmen, the seige is the happiest time in her life and that is because of the music. The music and her current surroundings are far better than where she is living with her family in the jungle and she appreciates it. That night, during her watch, she finds Gen among all of the sleeping bodies and stealthily creeps to him. She lies down next to him and carefully wakes him up to ask him to teach her how to read and how to write in Spanish.

Chapter Five Analysis

The biggest revelation of this chapter is Carmen. She is a young girl who is obviously smart, but trapped in an unfortunate situation due to where she was born. In the jungle, the only way for these children to make a name for themselves and hope to better their situation is to become terrorists. However, during this seige, they are getting the education they desperately crave.

The music permeates every individual in the room and helps some of them to grow more bold. In the case of Carmen, she is able to take advantage of Gen's knowledge. She wants him to teach her what he knows. As he is already drawn to her and

understands how difficult this situation would be for her, he agrees. It is the beginning of their intense relationship and the start of the terrorists tutelage by the hands of the hostages.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Messner brings a box of opera music in for Roxane to sing and later, those involved in the siege will remember it as a time before the box of music and a time after it. Life starts to take on a new kind of routine. Kato sits down at the piano at 7am and at 7:15, he begins the scales with her. She warms up her voice before singing her choice. On the first day, she sings a piece that Mr. Hosokawa had suggested for his birthday present. She sings rigorously for three hours.

In the beginning, the generals tell each other that they will tell Roxane what to sing, but that fades away like many of the other ideas that the generals have. After Roxane finishes singing, Mr. Hosokawa gets up to get her a glass of water with no ice, just as she likes it. She does not have to ask for it; he simply understands that this is what she needs. It strikes him that he is completely happy. He is experiencing that happiness in music, which he has done in the past, but now he is experiencing the music first-hand and it makes him exponentially happier.

Gen gives Beatriz his watch so that she can tell time and know when her new favorite program, the soap opera with Maria, is on. It is a love she shares with President Masuda, although neither one of them are aware of the common love. Beatriz learns how to tell time thanks to Mr. Hosokawa's patience. He will later be rewarded for his kindness towards her.

Gen starts to look for Carmen, whom he is now mysteriously attracted to. Mr. Hosokawa allows Gen to leave his side even though it means that he will not be able to communicate with Roxane, but he is learning how to speak with her without using the common languages they both know.

Gen and Victor Fyodorov strike up a conversation when Victor seeks him out, saying he is sometimes jealous of how busy Gen has become. Victor talks of how much their life has changed after being taken hostage. He finally gets to the point of the conversation, which is that he wants to declare his love to Roxane.

Meanwhile, Ruben is looking at the daily supply of food and gets worried. The packaged foods have stopped and the government is now sending in fresh vegetables, which they must prepare on their own for dinner. He does not know how to cook and he is not certain that any of the men there know how to cook either. Thus, he does the only thing he knows how which is to approach Roxane to help cook dinner. She laughs in his face and tells him that she forgives his sexism, but she does not cook.

Simon, being French, is the next obvious choice and here is their solution. However, they need knives in order to prepare the food. Gen approaches General Benjamin with the request to use the knives and the general agrees to let three of the soldiers learn



how to prepare the vegetables. As Gen is leaving, he tells him to ask Mr. Hosokawa if he would like to play chess sometime, which Gen promises to relay to his employer.

Gen, along with Carmen, Beatriz, Ishmael, Ruben and Simon, begin to prepare and cook dinner. Simon teaches them how to cook the vegetables properly and in this environment, Carmen gets up the courage to tell Gen to meet her in the china closet tonight to begin her instruction.

Chapter 6 Analysis

As each day progresses, more and more love is finding its way into this violent, potentially fatal situation. Gen feels strong affection for Carmen and their meeting in the china closet will be the beginning of their romantic relationship together.

Ruben's approach to Roxane to cook her food signals that even among the cultured members of the hostages, there are still some societal differences. For Ruben, it makes complete sense that he would approach the only woman in their group with cooking the food. Meanwhile, this educated woman can no more cook than any of the other businessmen in the room who are used to be waited upon, not doing the waiting on. This move demonstrates how similar Roxane is to the rest of her audience.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

Finally, by the middle of November, the garua lifts — much later than initially predicted. Together, Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane stand by the window, pointing out nature to each other from areas previously unseen in the garden surrounding the house. The garden responds to the lift by blooming and bursting with life. They open the windows, which allows them to hear more of the outside world, but it also brings in fresh air for the first time since their capture.

During one of the morning singing sessions, Carmen whispers to Gen that Roxane is in love with Mr. Hosokawa. Gen had not yet acknowledged this fact to himself, but he realizes that she is completely right. Gen, meanwhile, has fallen for Carmen and is astonished by her sharp mind and personality. There has never been a girl like Carmen for Gen and he has never been in love before her.

Gen asks Carmen about Mrs. Hosokawa and the rest of the real world; Carmen replies how they all have been unconsciously living—that their home is this house now. It is the only way that they are all able to continue with their lives and foster the growing relationships that they have built. If they honestly look at their situation and acknowledge that something awful is about to happen, they would be stuck in fear.

Carmen goes to the bathroom to meet Gen there when Gen is stopped by Victor Fyodorov. He wants to have his conversation with Roxane now, to tell her about his love for her. It is a bad time for Gen; he wants to meet up with Carmen in the bathroom, but Victor is insistent. He waits outside the door while Carmen and Gen are inside, whispering to each other and finally sharing a kiss. Victor pounds on the door, anxious to go.

Gen finally comes out and takes Victor to Roxane. Victor begins his conversation by telling Roxane about a book of Impressionist art that his grandmother once owned and how treasured the book was for his family in Russia. Even to this day, he and his brother will share the book with each other, trading off after a few years because neither one can live without the book for very long. After this story, he proclaims his love for Roxane. She does not reciprocate as she is in love with Mr. Hosokawa, but Victor tells her that his love is not so limited as to be merely a romantic or sexual desire. His love is much more all-encompassing and he appreciates her talents as much as her person. He tells her that it is just as critical to have a worthy audience as to have the kind of divine talents that she has been given. Without the right audience, the artist's talents are lost. When he proclaims his love for her, he is actually telling her that he fully appreciates her art.

After he is finished, Roxane gives her thoughts on love, which is that in order for a person to be in love, you have to know them and they have to know you.



One of the soldiers, Cesar, has decided that while the rest of the house is in love with Roxane, it is the music that he lusts for. He has fallen in love with opera.

Chapter Seven Analysis

Just as the garden explodes with vivacity after the garua lifts, the budding relationships among the hostages and terrorists become full-grown as well. When Carmen tells Gen that Roxane is in love with Mr. Hosokawa because of her actions to him, including always choosing to be near him and the way she looks at him, she is also telling Gen that she is expressing her own love for him in these ways. She must live, however, as if they are permanently suspended in time in order to protect themselves psychologically. For this reason, she tells Gen that their home is this house now, ignoring the fact that it all must come to an end eventually.

When Victor declares his love for Roxane and explains how much he appreciates and values her talents, he is actually speaking for the entire room without realizing it. As all of the hostages and terrorists alike are all in love with Roxane, his admission mirrors how all of them feel about her and her artistic gifts. However, at one point during his translation, Gen questions whether he should literally translate what Victor is saying. After all, his employer is Mr. Hosokawa and he does not want to ruin a potential relationship between him and Roxane. Gen must realize, finally, that it is not his job or luxury to edit what is being told to him; instead, it is his responsibility to translate and not question its content.

Roxane explains how she sees love when she tells Gen that in order for two people to be in love they must understand one another. For Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa, this love transcends their mere inability to communicate in the same language; they understand each other on another, more intense level of communication.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Mr. Hosokawa and General Benjamin play chess together for hours. Both of them play very similar strategies and their games last for hours, trading wins. They only have two observers that pay true attention: Roxane and Ishmael. Through hours of watching, Ishmael teaches himself the game and finally gets the courage to ask General Benjamin if he can play the winner or loser of the next game. General Benjamin is surprised, but respects that he has just taught himself the game and allows him the next game against Mr. Hosokawa.

Messner comes to visit and, yet again, try to urge the terrorists to give up. Again, he finds himself oddly jealous of the hostages and their ability to stay with Roxane for extended periods of time. Unlike any other hostage situation, Messner realizes that he does not care who wins this siege. He feels odd sympathy for the terrorists and they have grown on him, although he is well aware that the government will win as it always wins in these situations. He just wishes that they were not about to experience the horrible end that is coming and feels sorry for them.

Roxane has been thinking and decides to ask Gen and Carmen to help her. She wants Mr. Hosokawa to visit her in the bedroom at night to consummate their relationship. It takes a bit of convincing for Carmen, who could lose everything by agreeing to this, but she finally agrees to help.

Meanwhile, Beatriz is bored and goes to find Father Arguedas to entertain her. She listens in on Oscar Mendoza's confession of his dreams and then goes to him herself. She confesses her sins for the first time, using Father Arguedas' guidance. She feels a weight come off her shoulders and feels better after he talks with her. In the end, Father asks her to be kind and helpful. She agrees to try.

Later, when she catches Carmen helping Mr. Hosokawa sneak into Roxane's room, she agrees to be helpful and not report her to the generals, which would certainly get her killed. After Carmen helps Mr. Hosokawa sneak into Roxane's room, she and Gen go out to the garden at night and make love as the rest of the house sleeps peacefully.

Chapter Eight Analysis

Just as Mr. Hosokawa recognizes Roxane's talent with singing, she watches and appreciates his skill at chess. Ishmael becomes the second soldier who learns a new skill during the siege. He teaches himself chess and is good enough to hold his own against men who have been playing for years.

Neither Roxane nor Gen realize that Carmen puts her life at risk by helping Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa meet at night, but she does it because she loves Roxane and is in love



with Gen. It is through actions like these that she demonstrates her love for both of them.

Beatriz's visit to Father and promise to be kind will be crucial for Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa, although neither one will realize the extent of her kindness. She will be kind and helpful to Carmen and, by helping her, she will help to ensure Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa can be together. Gen and Carmen also spend the evening together, although Gen will later wish that he had taken her by the hand, walked out of the house and flown away together to live happily together forever.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

The next morning, it is a morning like every other morning except that Kato waits longer than usual at the piano for Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa remains peacefully asleep on the floor in his usual spot. Finally, at 8:15, there is still no typical activity. Beatriz disapproves of the late-night activities, but does not let on with Carmen and instead relishes having this knowledge that she can use at any time, like unused money.

Suddenly, someone else begins to sing a cappella. It is a lovely voice, vaguely familiar. It is Cesar who has decided to sing to replace Roxane who has not yet come downstairs and his imitation of her is uncanny. His fellow soldiers laugh at him, but Cesar continues on because his love of the music is far more important than his fellow comrades' reactions. However, as he is peaking his song, Roxane is standing among them and suddenly yells "Basta!" She does not want him to peak and try to hit the high notes, destroying his voice, which is not warmed up enough to try the notes. Cesar misunderstands her and takes off outside the house, climbing into a tree to hide.

Carmen is sent outside to bring Cesar back inside. She tells him that Roxane thinks his singing is beautiful and that he is naturally talented. He does not believe her, so Carmen leaves to return back to the house.

Roxane feels bad that she stopped Cesar and he misunderstood her. She is standing next to Mr. Hosokawa who whispers his love to her, which Gen must translate. Roxane wants to go visit Cesar in the tree to tell him to come down. She asks Carmen if she thinks the Generals would let her go outside to talk with Cesar. Carmen feels honored to be included. She goes to General Benjamin to ask and surprisingly, he agrees and also adds that everyone should go outside.

When all of the hostages walk outside, it is as though they are new people. Upon hearing that they can leave, they abandon everything to walk outside in the garden. Roxane coaxes Cesar out of the tree and tells him that she will start to train him the next day. Ruben talks with Ishmael while working in the garden the next day, telling him that he will adopt him into his family and he is wholly serious about the offer. It disturbs Father Arguedas to hear this conversation; this signals that while the rest of them have decided to ignore the fate awaiting the soldiers, the priest is fully aware of the future reality.

Chapter Nine Analysis

Cesar's attempt at singing like Roxane is obviously a culmination of his love of music being built up inside him day after day. He finally bursts forth with song, uncaring about his fellow soldiers' reactions or what the generals might think. For him, it is more



important to sing. When he misunderstands Roxane, it crushes him as he has seen his life already formed, singing duets with an approving Roxane.

When Carmen comes back into the house after speaking with Cesar, she looks into the house to see Gen. She sees his beauty and watches him as if seeing him for the first time. She is fully in love. Also in love is Mr. Hosokawa. It puts Gen in the unusual situation of translating what would typically be a very intimate and private conversation between two people. Roxane handles the situation perfectly by never looking at Gen to confuse the situation.

When Carmen goes to General Benjamin to ask for permission to allow Roxane outside, he flashes back to his youth. It is one of the rare glimpses into the life and motivations for the generals. Perhaps it is an acknowledgement that the siege is wholly useless when he allows everyone outside. The strict rules and regulations initially put into place have obviously fallen away. General Alfredo balks at the idea, but General Hector states simply that no one would leave now as they have nowhere to go. He is correct as even Gen and Carmen, who have ample opportunity to leave the house, choose to return.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Thanks to repetition, Mr. Hosokawa can now walk through the house utterly silently. He has learned a great deal from Carmen and a greater appreciation for being quiet and blending in with his surroundings. He has a private life now, whereas before his whole world was a business transaction and everything for appearances. He has never felt so alive and so happy in his life as when he is climbing the steps at night to visit Roxane. He knows that being with her every evening is a miracle and he is consumed by the wonderful aspect of it all.

Gen and Carmen, meanwhile, try to establish rules about how long they will study together before making love, but they fail. They finally realize they must spend time romantically first before they will be able to concentrate. If anyone else suspects a relationship between Gen and Carmen, no one mentions it. They only recognize the relationship between Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane, who make their love evident to all.

Messner comes to visit again and has lost all resolve to help the situation. He has given up all hope. He notices that the terrorists are now playing soccer against the hostages. General Benjamin is just as tired as Messner over the situation. He remarks to Gen on the siege as a whole: "It makes you wonder. All the brilliant things we might have done with our lives if only we suspected we knew how." In that sentence, he recognizes that their violence could have been easily replaced with more civilized, peaceful exercises had they not been so ignorant.

Gen asks Messner what is about to happen and he indicates that the government is about to solve the situation for them. Gen panics; how could he have fallen in love with so many people so suddenly? Messner tells him he could try to have them give up, but he doubts even that would help them at this point. As soon as Gen realizes that something bad is about to happen, he forces himself to forget; it is the only way they have learned to live in this situation and he continues to do so. He tries to talk with Carmen about it briefly but no one wants to face reality.

Even Roxane has fallen in love and then fallen in love again with training Cesar. It is as though she has found a new partner in life and they have given birth to a child wholly consumed by the music as they are. He sings as if he were of her being and she wonders at the idea that he might have lived and died in the jungle without ever knowing his talent. The rest of the situation continues to reach blissful proportions. Mr. Hosokawa is wholly in love with Roxane. Gen and Carmen are ideal. The world is well with all of them.

Then the military comes in. Roxane screams at the man she does not recognize and just like that, a world of bullets rain on the terrorists. Within moments, all of the terrorists are dead, including Carmen and Mr. Hosokawa, who are killed together by a single



bullet as they exit the kitchen after Roxane's singing. Mr. Hosokawa tries to save Carmen, but they both die in the attempt. The time that stopped suddenly rushes at all of them and everything happens in an instant.

Chapter Ten Analysis

For a man like Mr. Hosokawa, learning how to be silent and pass unnoticed is quite a remarkable skill to have learned from a simple girl from the jungle. After all, he is so important as to be the motivation for an entire country to throw him a birthday party. Now, he is creeping silently through a house to visit his lover in the middle of the night.

It is a much-changed man that tries to save Carmen during the military event that takes down all of the terrorists. It is an unlikely pairing, Carmen and Mr. Hosokawa killed together by the same bullet, but it foreshadows the future pairing of other relationships after the siege.

The Epilogue

The Epilogue Summary

A happily married couple leave the chapel and are met by Simon and Edith Thibault. They are in Luzza, Italy to celebrate the nuptials and go to find a bar to spend time together. It is Gen and Roxane, recently married. They have married each other for love and for the love of everyone involved in the siege. However, Gen reflects that when he tells Ruben Iglesias that they are going to be married, Ruben urges him to wait, that it is too fast. Now he realizes that with all of the reports, there are never any reports of two women soldiers being killed. He wonders if Carmen is not among the dead. However, he is married and walks off with his new wife to continue on with life.

The Epilogue Analysis

The ending of the book leaves a question mark for both Gen and the reader. Did Carmen die in the siege? Did she somehow survive and this is what Ruben is trying to tell Gen by warning him against marrying too quickly? The marriage of Gen and Roxane itself seems to be an odd pairing, until the reader analyzes the role both of these individuals played during the siege. Both facilitated communication and unification between the hostages and terrorists and as they are the only two to have survived, their marriage is a logical conclusion. Gen helped to unify everyone through the practical use of his translating skills, while Roxane intoxicated everyone by her talents as a singer of beautiful music, which they all learned to appreciate. For these two ideal communicators to come together and be able to speak on all levels signals an ideal relationship, but Gen's thoughts of Carmen even on his wedding day signify that he has definitely not forgotten about her.



Characters

Gen Watanabe

There is no clear main character in this novel, but Gen Watanabe certainly is a central figure. Without him, the story would be a far different one. Thanks to his natural skill with languages and his ability to speak many different ones, Gen is able to facilitate communication between all of the characters, including the Red Cross negotiator Messner with the terrorists.

Gen is the translator for Mr. Hosokawa and is very loyal and educated, which Mr. Hosokawa appreciates. He comes from a mixed background; his parents spoke different languages, which encourages a natural love of languages in his life. For Gen, he is able to finally speak Russian with other Russians, whereas before he had only read the language in books. He switches easily from Spanish to Russian, English and Japanese and through his mouth, the other characters are able to hold full conversations. In this way, Gen is the holder of all knowledge within the group since nearly no one can communicate with more than a handful of people without using Gen to translate.

One evening, a terrorist named Carmen reveals herself to be a female (it was previously thought all of them were men) and overcomes her shyness one night to tell him that she would like for him to teach her how to read and write in Spanish and English. He is shocked, but he is more shocked to discover that he is falling in love with her. Each night, they meet in the china closet to teach Carmen a new word in English or how to write words in Spanish. He is impressed by her memory and dedication to learning, admiring how sharp her mind is.

Together, they help Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane sneak into a bedroom together in the middle of the night. Afterwards, Gen and Carmen walk out into the moonlit garden of the house and spend the night together as well. For Carmen, these actions are a sign of her full love and commitment to Gen since any of these actions could get her killed by the terrorists without question.

Gen spends his afternoons as the secretary for the terrorists, often writing their demands to the South American government. Then he translates conversations that are needed throughout the house. Each evening he stays up with Carmen rather than sleeping and thus, Gen is almost always sleep deprived, sometimes wondering if he is awake or dreaming.

When the military comes in to kill all of the terrorists, Gen is outside. He immediately screams for Carmen, telling anyone who will listen that she is his wife because that is how he sees her now. After he learns she is dead, he instead marries Roxane, but even on his wedding day, wonders if Carmen might still be alive and if he acted too rashly.



Mr. Katsumi Hosokawa

Mr. Hosokawa is an important businessman from Japan who is also an avid fan of opera and the voice of Roxane Coss in particular. It could be argued that he is in love with Roxane due to her voice and love of music despite the fact that he has never met her.

Throughout his life, Mr. Hosokawa has worked tirelessly. He has a wife and children, but they are not highly important to him. Although he does care for them, they are more like appropriate adornments in his thoroughly successful life. He has no intentions of investing in the South American country that he visits for his birthday and would not have attended the party except that Roxane Coss has been paid to come sing for him. To hear Roxane, he is more than willing to fly halfway around the world.

Before the terrorists take over the room, Mr. Hosokawa thinks of his life in terms of all of these successes. However, during his captivity, he will realize how many things he has yet to learn. For example, he cannot speak English, the language that Roxane speaks. When they fall in love, he must rely on Gen to communicate his feelings to her although they eventually learn to be in one another's presence and communicate through their love of music. In addition, he cannot read music, despite his intense love of opera. He asks Gen to teach him a new word of English or Spanish each day, which he studiously writes in a little notebook to carry with him throughout the day. Gen notes that he picks up a new language much slower than his other pupil, Carmen.

When Roxane asks Gen to facilitate getting Mr. Hosokawa to her room one evening, Mr. Hosokawa happily agrees, despite his family in Japan. It is here that he learns another skill from Carmen—how to sneak through the house without being noticed. Each evening, he meets with Roxane to spend the evening with her and returns back to his required place on the floor by the morning. During the day, he spends every moment with Roxane and after each morning singing practice, warms up her drink to give to her to restore her voice.

In the end, Mr. Hosokawa is killed by an errant bullet meant to kill only Carmen. They are both killed together as Mr. Hosokawa is returning to give Roxane her final drink after her singing practice session.

Roxane Coss

The leading soprano in the world, Roxane Coss is an American who speaks English. She has an exquisite voice and is a beautiful person. Nearly every man in the room either falls in love with her or is captivated by her in some way. She is the reason Mr. Hosokawa flies around the world to the South American country.

Her voice mesmerizes even the terrorists who will allow her demands for things like sheet music for her to practice with and other desires. Throughout the weeks of her captivity, she appreciates Mr. Hosokawa for being a calming presence for her and also for giving her the things she needs without asking. She falls in love with him and they



can communicate without the need of a shared language. They begin to spend their nights together and walk around holding hands. They are never far apart from one another.

When he reveals his voice to the entire house one morning, Roxane realizes that one of the terrorists, Cesar, is a naturally gifted singer. She takes him under her tutelage and he begins to truly excel. Her daily routine changes from a simple singing session in the morning to include singing with Cesar and training him as well.

After all of the terrorists are killed, including Cesar, along with Mr. Hosokawa by mistake, she travels to Lucca, Italy to marry Gen.

Carmen

A simple girl, Carmen is one of the terrorists that take over the Vice President's house. She comes from the jungle, but despite her rough beginnings, she is a smart, sharp girl who is eager to learn. She initially appreciates Gen for his ability with languages and then falls in love with him after their training begins. She is renowned in the group for her shyness and for her ability to walk among everyone without ever being noticed. Her quiet ways are highly appreciated by Mr. Hosokawa as she teaches him how to sneak around the house at night to see Roxane.

In the end, despite his belief that Carmen is like his wife, Gen cannot save her. She is a terrorist and the government army comes to shoot every one of them. Unfortunately, she is killed by the same bullet that kills Mr. Hosokawa as they come out of the kitchen together.

Ruben Iglesias

The Vice President of the country, Ruben's home is the setting for the entire book, although he does not own the home, but inherited it when he won the election. When the terrorists take over, however, Ruben becomes the host he never was before. He constantly attends to everyone, both hostages and terrorists. Due to his work, all of the hostages have a high appreciation for him, although the terrorists continue to hate him because he represents the government they want to overthrow.

He realizes during his capture that he is actually quite good at domestic tasks that he had never attempted to do before. In addition, he plays an integral role in negotiations between the hostages, terrorists and the Red Cross negotiator Messner in the beginning. Towards the end, however, he becomes no more or less important than all of the other individuals in the room.



Ishmael

One of the terrorists, Ishmael is a young boy about the same age as Ruben's son. Ruben eventually tells the group that he will adopt Ishmael into his family and raise him as one of his own. Ishmael is a smaller boy, but very bright and responsible. He teaches himself how to play chess and does a good job with the game, demonstrating his intelligence. Ishmael does not survive the attack by the military army.

Cesar

Another young boy from the jungle, he is a member of the terrorists who does not stand out in any way until the day he opens his mouth and sings. He is a naturally gifted singer and Roxane decides to tutor him right away. He is wholly in love with music, never having experienced it before the day that they attempted to kidnap the President of the country. Roxane sees him as her pet and is very proud of his musical accomplishments. He will be assassinated in the military attack.

Beatriz

The only other female in the group of terrorists other than Carmen, Beatriz is Carmen's polar opposite. Brash, aggressive and crass, Beatriz fits the stereotype of an uneducated girl from the jungle as a member of a terrorist organization. Her biggest interest in the house during the siege are the soap operas shown on television. She is an excellent soldier and rarely thinks for herself.

When she becomes excessively bored one day, she visits Father Arguedas to pray and confess her sins. He has to teach her how to do it and urges her to do good in her life. She feels a weight come off her chest after the conversation and later, when confronted with the possibility of turning in Carmen for helping Mr. Hosokawa to see Roxane at night, she instead decides to help Carmen and not report her. She dies in the military attack.

Joachim Messner

The Swiss Red Cross negotiator, Messner is a very pale man who is on vacation in the country when he is called in to handle the negotiations between the terrorists and the government. He does not speak Spanish well and thus relies on Gen's translating abilities. He facilitates the demands that the terrorists make by handing their lists to the government and also brings in the newspapers and other daily necessities to make life livable for the hostages stuck inside the Vice President's home. He consistently urges the terrorists to give up and walk away, telling them that these situations never end well. However, by the end, even he feels some sympathy for the terrorists and sees them more as people. He feels sorry for them and their inevitable doom.



Victor Fyodorov

A Russian, Victor falls in love with Roxane while detained in the Vice President's home. He decides to declare his love to her one afternoon, although he will clarify at the end how his love for her is not a sexual kind of love, it is more wide-ranging and encompassing than that since he has a family at home. Instead, he tells her a story about art and his love of it, how he cannot live without a specific book of paintings for very long in his life. In the end, he remarks that it is just as important to be able to appreciate the art as to be the person with the talent. For without the appreciation, there is no place in the world for the artist or singer in Roxane's case. His declaration of love sums up the entire house's feelings about Roxane and how they are all so wildly in love with her and her talent.



Objects/Places

Garua

The name for the oppressive fog that hangs outside the house during the first part of the siege. It makes the hostages feel as if they are even more cut off from the world and is perhaps the reason why the terrorists and the hostages begin to form such intimate bonds with one another. Since they cannot see more than a few inches past their windows, it gives the impression that the house and the inhabitants inside are all that is left in their world.

The Vice President's Home

The Vice President, Ruben Iglesias, is the host for the birthday party and opera event with Roxane. He will later wonder why the party was not held at President Masuda's home instead. The house becomes a kind of haven during the siege for the hostages and terrorists alike.

The China Closet

The secret room where Gen and Carmen meet at night so he can teach her how to write in Spanish and speak English. Here, they fall in love and begin to consummate their relationship in private every evening.

The Garden outside the Vice President's home

When Gen and Carmen want privacy, she takes him outside to the garden at night. The next day, thanks to Cesar's outburst, the rest of the hostages will also get their first chance outside since the siege began.

The Chess Board

Ishmael spends hours watching General Alfredo and Mr. Hosokawa play chess together, teaching himself how to play through their moves.

The Piano

The instrument that brings everyone together, the music is played by Mr. Kato and sung by Roxane and later by Cesar as well. The piano's music unifies them, communicating with a language they can all understand.



The Television

For the terrorists living in the jungle, many of the young soldiers have not seen a working television before. When Simon nonchalantly turns it on, it nearly gets him killed as it surprises the soldiers so much.

Roxane's bedroom

It is important to note that Roxane is given her own bedroom, which is a luxury that no one else in the house has, including the Generals. It is because of this privacy that she and Mr. Hosokawa are able to be with one another in the evenings.

Cooking knives

When the daily deliveries stop being sandwiches and begin to be cooking items instead, Simon, Gen and other hostages argue that they need knives to cut vegetables for dinner. The Generals give in by letting some of their own soldiers cook, including Carmen, Beatriz and Ishmael. Simon teaches them how to cook.

Glass of drinking water

After each singing performance, Mr. Hosokawa delivers the perfect glass of water to Roxane. This glass is an expression of his love for her since they cannot speak the same language and also the symbol of how he can anticipate her needs before she has to express them.



Themes

Art

The reason why all of these international guests come together in the same house is to hear a talented opera singer. It is also the cause that will unite all of them, despite their cultural and language barriers.

The role that music and opera plays in this novel cannot be understated. It is the central theme that runs throughout the siege, allowing all of the characters—regardless of their background, education or socioeconomic status—to share something. It unifies them.

When Roxane begins to sing during the siege, the generals and hostages alike can appreciate the beauty of her music. When Kato offers his talents as a piano accompanist, the siege is transformed from an uncertain, aggressive situation into a type of cultured environment where they are all able to appreciate and listen to Roxane sing, the initial reason many of them traveled to this home in the first place. They might need Gen to communicate with one another, but through the music, they are able to share in their appreciation for her talent.

From the beginning, all of the men in the room assume that each of them are in love with Roxane. It is not a question, but an assumption. Why are they all so immediately and wholly in love with this woman? Perhaps because they can recognize and appreciate her unique talent as a beautiful opera singer. When Victor asks Gen to translate his admission of love to Roxane, the reader quickly sees that his love of her has little to do with a common, romantic type of love, but instead a higher appreciation for her talents as a singer. His admission underlies the common theme of art and art appreciation as he tells her that it is just as important to have an audience that recognizes and appreciates the art for what it is as it is to be born with the talent itself. Without the audience, the art is lost and in the case of the hostages and terrorist caught in this siege, Roxane is blessed by having the perfect audience to hear her and eventually Cesar's singing.

Thanks to the rarefied environment, Cesar hears opera for the first time. While the rest of the male soldiers lust after Roxane herself, Cesar lusts after the music. It is the music that he has dreams of and when he reveals his voice, Roxane takes on the role of audience and teacher, cultivating his raw, natural talent during his limited time in the house.

Knowledge

How do we discover our talents? By being exposed to arts, religion and games like chess, we discover and cultivate our skills and talents. However, the soldiers from the remote jungle villages have never been exposed to these arts because it is presumed that their daily lives concentrate on the basic necessities of getting food, shelter and



supplies. For the international members who are held hostage, however, they have access to these cultural niceties that they can then share with the ignorant terrorists.

Carmen, for example, has a sharp brain that retains all of the knowledge that Gen gives her. She craves knowledge about reading and writing, asking more and more questions of Gen. Had she been given the opportunity, she may have been a great resource in her community for her knowledge, perhaps being a translator like Gen. Instead, her limited background denies her the chance.

Cesar, meanwhile, has never been exposed to opera before. He is a natural talent and when he chooses to open his mouth, he stuns everyone by his remarkable imitation of Roxane's voice. In weeks, he is able to cultivate a voice that took her years to train. Ishmael, on the other hand, teaches himself chess by watching General Alfredo and Mr. Hosokawa as they play. Outside the jungle, he might have been a great strategist. Finally, Beatriz has no knowledge of religion before she becomes bored one day and visits Father Arguedas. After just one "confession," she feels a weight come off her chest and strives to be a nicer, kinder person. Imagine how much she may have changed if she had been exposed to religion and all of its tenants throughout her life.

As the novel progresses, it seems that the terrorists are more sympathetic, likeable characters that might have been something more in life had the opportunities presented themselves. Instead, the best and the brightest from these remote areas must turn to revolutionary activities in order to learn something new and do something with their lives.

Just before the military comes in to end the siege, General Benjamin remarks how different the lives of these soldiers could have been if they had just been given the same opportunities as the rest of the educated world. He states, "It makes you wonder. All the brilliant things we might have done with our lives if only we suspected we knew how." Obviously, they had natural skills that could have been cultivated in a different environment. As Gen says to Simon at one point in the novel, "Who knew that being kidnapped was so much like attending university?"

Love

The story of Bel Canto opens with a kiss, but just like many of the other situations in this novel, the kiss is not as simple as it initially appears. The kiss between the accompanist and Roxane might make it appear as if the two are lovers to the rest of the audience, but the truth is far from it. The accompanist simply falls victim to the same affliction that will soon affect all of the other men who become hostages with Roxane: he loves her from afar after hearing her sing and can no longer keep his affections to himself. He is not bothered by the fact that she does not return his affection and is actually annoyed by it.

As the story unfolds, love becomes defined and experienced in a number of ways for the characters. Due to their unusual circumstances, they are able to experience



situations that would not be possible in an everyday surrounding. One of the most obvious examples of romantic love is the relationship between Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa. They unite thanks to their shared love of music, but cannot actually communicate in a shared language since Roxane speaks English and Mr. Hosokawa speaks Japanese. She falls in love with him because she recognizes that he not only appreciates her music and music in general, but is also able to satisfy her needs without her having to ask. He fetches her a glass of water after a performance and is able to give her practical gifts like a pen and paper when she needs them.

When Victor declares his love for Roxane, she tries to tell him that it is not reciprocated and he cuts her off. Do not think of love like an American, try to be more broadminded, he tells her. In this way, another form of love is revealed as an appreciation for one's talent and gifts, rather than a sexual or romantic love. After Victor's admission of love, it seems that this is the same love many of the other hostages and soldiers alike have for Roxane; he has summarized their thoughts.

Gen and Carmen also experience a romantic and sexual love, but their love is the most complete form of love demonstrated in the novel as it also encompasses Carmen's true appreciation for Gen's art of languages and knowledge. She loves him for his knowledge and from this affection, they build a romance together when he sees how sharp her mind is. However, since she is a soldier terrorist and he is a hostage, their love is doomed from the very beginning.

The many different faces and facets of love are explored in the novel. When Gen and Roxane marry at the end of the novel, it is a culmination of all the different types of love coming together in one relationship, representing the entire siege situation.



Style

Point of View

The point of view changes throughout the novel. In this way, the reader gains a better understanding of each of the different characters.

There is an omniscient narrator throughout the story, especially in the beginning, who describes the situation for the characters. However, as the characters begin to talk and interact with one another, the story follows their unique perspectives. Interestingly enough, the Generals' point of view is never covered in the story, only the soldiers whose lives are enriched thanks to the siege. Some of the hostages are used for their perspective, such as Gen, Roxane and Mr. Hosokawa, while others like Victor and the rest of the Russians, are essentially ignored.

Thanks to the knowledge of the omniscient narrator, the reader knows from the very beginning that the end of the story will turn out badly for the terrorists. However, working with that information, the reader still falls in love with the terrorists and appreciates them better after the long siege thanks to the changing perspectives throughout the story, which give the reader a greater understanding of the soldiers' talents, motivations and background.

Setting

The setting of the entire book is the home of Ruben Iglesias, the Vice President of the country. It is here that Mr. Hosokawa's birthday party is planned and where Roxane sings for the invited guests. It is where the terrorists climb through the air vents to take over the party and where Messner will enter to attempt to negotiate with the hostages. When the military army finally storms the house, they come in and surprise everyone here, both hostages and terrorists alike.

Thanks to the garua that arrives shortly after the hostage situation takes place, the house becomes almost an island unto itself. The hostages feel as though they could be trapped anywhere in the world because they cannot make out discerning details outside their window. In this way, the house becomes a microcosm of a world that could possibly be if the terrorists were given another opportunity to make something with their lives. Over time, the hostages and terrorists learn to appreciate if not love one another and some of the terrorists lead a much more enriched life thanks to the siege.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in a conversational, descriptive manner. The characters talk amongst themselves regularly, but the reader must remember that all of this conversation is actually going through Gen, the translator. Just as the reader must hear

the story through the viewpoint of the omniscient narrator and rely on his interpretation, so the characters must oftentimes rely on Gen's interpretation of their language. There are times when Gen does not continue to translate exactly what the characters say, but most of the time, he is a reliable interpreter of events and does not self-edit what is being told to him.

The dialogue between the characters (often through Gen) gives the reader a good understanding of the characters, although we rarely get to hear what they are thinking. The main characters are given small glimpses into their background and what they presently feel about their situation, but for many of the other characters, we learn more about them through their dialogue.

Structure

The structure of the book is essentially linear, but the omniscient narrator gives away some of the key plot lines in the very beginning of the story. For example, the narrator mentions that the terrorists will not survive the siege and the reader continues on with this knowledge in the back of his mind. The plot rarely moves forward too quickly, but does occasionally jump backwards to give important historical facts about a character to better explain their current thinking or emotional state.

For most of the story, time progresses as it would in real life until a climactic event occurs, such as when the military takes control. During this event, the book races to explain everything that is happening simultaneously, which helps to give the impression of sheer chaos and terror for the hostages and terrorists alike.



Quotes

"It was the unspoken belief of everyone who was familiar with this organization and with the host country that they were all as good as dead, when in fact it was the terrorists who would not survive the ordeal," p. 13.

"Gen only wished he could parody the weight of his voice, the way he struck every word like a soft mallet against a drum," p. 88.

"One could almost tell from the cut of the tuxedo who would be staying," p. 102.

"The day no longer progressed in its normal, linear fashion but instead every hour circled back to its beginning, every moment was lived over and over again. Time, in the manner in which they had all understood it, was over," p. 106.

"Then it seemed that armed children were a much more dangerous breed than armed adults. They were moody, irrational, anxious for confrontation," p. 111.

"She was a pixie, a pocket Venus," p. 120.

"Since they had been taken hostage, Mr. Hosokawa had felt the frustration of the deaf," p. 133.

"He did not speak the language of the libretto, the singer, or the host. He was beginning to feel more at ease with all he had lost, all he didn't know. Instead, he was astonished by what he had: the chance to sit beside this woman in the late afternoon while she read. Her hand brushed his as she set the pages down on the couch between them, and then her hand rested on top of his hand while she continued to read," p. 155.

"Every note was distinct. It was the measurement of the time which had gotten away from them. It was the interpretation of their lives in the very moment they were being lived," p. 156.

"They would each and every one of them die. Surely they had always known this, but now death came and sat on their chests at night, peered cold and hungry into their eyes," p. 161.

"What he wanted then was something he could barely believe. He wanted to fold her in his arms. He wanted to kiss the parting of her hair. He wanted to touch her lips with the tips of his fingers. He wanted to whisper things to her in Japanese. Maybe, if there was time, he could teach her Japanese as well," p. 196.

"Some people are born to make great art and others are born to appreciate it. Don't you think? It is a kind of talent in itself, to be an audience, whether you are the spectator in the gallery or you are listening to the voice of the world's greatest soprano. Not everyone can be the artist. There have to be those who witness the art, who love and appreciate what they have been privileged to see," p. 217.



"She didn't listen to the prayer. She only heard words here and there, beautiful words, father and blessed and forgiveness. It was just such a pleasant sensation, the weight of his hands on her head. When he finally took his hands away, after what seemed to be a very long time, she felt delightfully weightless, free. She lifted up her face and smiled at him," p. 246.



Topics for Discussion

Name some of the skills learned by some of the terrorists during their stay at the Vice President's house. How do these new skills impact their lives?

Would the story have been much different if Roxane had been allowed to leave with the rest of the women? Why or why not?

What if the terrorists had done what Messner recommended from the beginning and given up? What would the ending of this story have looked like?

Why do you believe Gen and Roxane marry at the end of the novel despite the fact that they were not in love during the hostage situation?

Name how taking over Ruben's home enriched three different terrorists. What did they learn during the siege that they would have never known if the attack had gone as planned and they had not spent weeks in the house with the hostages?

Is this a story about romantic love? Why or why not?

Recall Victor's conversation and admission of love to Roxane. Why do you think this could be an important theme of the novel?