

The Crane Wife Study Guide

The Crane Wife by Patrick Ness

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Ness, Patrick. *The Crane Wife*. Canongate Books Ltd, 2013.

At the beginning of the novel, George Duncan, a nice but lonely divorced man hears a noise that causes him to go outside in the middle of the night. Once there, he finds a crane in his backyard with an arrow in its wing. After first thinking that he cannot remove the arrow, George finally takes action and saves the crane. The next day, a mysterious woman named Kumiko comes to his printing shop to see if the shop can reproduce her work: tiles made of feathered cuttings. George has just created a cutting that Kumiko recognizes as a crane. George is instantly attracted to her and the two begin to date each other. Kumiko takes George's crane and adds it to one of her tiles, which creates an amazing work of art. A customer comes in, sees it, and wants to buy it. George does not want to sell it, but Kumiko comes in with another tile and encourages George to sell that one. After that, people come in looking for tiles to buy.

At the same time, George's daughter Amanda is also leading a lonely life as a single, divorced mother. She works with two women, Rachel and Mei, whom she tries and fails to befriend, which is common for Amanda. She has a son, JP, whom she loves. She also still loves her ex-husband, but he now lives in France with his new partner. As things become more and more serious between George and Kumiko and the tiles sell for high prices, Amanda wants to meet Kumiko and does so one day during her lunch break. Kumiko gives her a tile that makes Amanda think of forgiveness and love.

It turns out that George has had a sexual relationship with Amanda's friend Rachel as well. When news spreads about the success of the tiles, Rachel starts to harass George and says that she wants to be with him.

George and Kumiko decide to get married, and they announce their engagement at a party he holds. After that, he and Amanda have a disagreement and stop talking because Amanda wonders whether he is moving too quickly.

While George and Kumiko create tiles that they sell, they also work on a series of tiles that tells the tale of the volcano and the lady in the cloud. This is a story that Kumiko is telling George. In the tale, the lady in the cloud, who spreads forgiveness, and the volcano, who creates war and chaos, marry each other, and together they nurture the earth. When things go well between them, things are happy on earth, but when their relationship is bad, there are wars and other bad occurrences on the earth. The two do not trust each other. The volcano believes that the lady in the cloud is spreading forgiveness, and the lady in the cloud thinks that the volcano is causing wars. At one point, she follows the volcano and finds a general in a war. She begins the ritual of forgiveness with him, but then realizes that the general is the volcano in disguise. He tells her to continue the ritual and destroy him, but she cannot do it. She gives him permission to destroy her and he hits her with an arrow. She falls to earth and is the crane that George saves.



Kumiko wants to finish her story, but George needs to create a cutting for the last tile. One night, when Kumiko is not at George's residence, he calls Rachel and they sleep together. After that he feels guilty, and the tension helps him create a cutting of a volcano. He is so excited that he goes to Kumiko's apartment, unannounced, to show her what he has created. When he gets there he sees Rachel coming out of the apartment and once he goes in, sees Kumiko in her crane form working on the tile. Then he finds Kumiko by his side and she tells him that he has a fever. They go to his place and wake up to discover that the house has been engulfed by a fire. Rachel has called Amanda who rushes there with her son. Amanda goes into the house looking for George and Kumiko. George gets out and Kumiko asks him to perform the forgiveness ritual on her. He cannot and when she tries to convince him Rachel intervenes. The volcano has been in Rachel's body for quite some time, just as the lady in the cloud as taken the form of the crane and Kumiko. Now the volcano and the lady in the cloud argue as themselves. Finally the lady in the cloud performs the forgiveness ritual on the volcano. Rachel collapses when the volcano leaves her. JP tells George that Amanda is in the house and George tells Kumiko. She goes inside the house. Amanda is dead, but Kumiko and Amanda perform the forgiveness ritual. Amanda gets Kumiko's heart and Kumiko receives the forgiveness she has been seeking. Amanda joins George and Kumiko takes Amanda's place as the dead body found in the fire.

Afterwards, Rachel leaves town. Amanda is promoted to Rachel's job, and she creates a better working atmosphere for the women in the office. She also has a better relationship with her ex-husband. George is sad, but he becomes joyful when he receives the cutting of a crane made from a blank piece of paper and starts writing Kumiko's story. He is happy when Amanda calls as the two of them can share the amazement of what has happened in their lives.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

In Chapter 1, a man wakes up in the middle of the night. He thinks he wakes up because he has to go to the toilet. He has to do this a lot during the night even though he is only 48 years old and thinks that this is something that happens to men who are much older. It is a sound, however, that really wakes him up. He gets up and goes to the toilet. It is cold and, while he is there, he laments about never placing a radiator in the house even though he has been meaning to do so since moving in after his divorce. That was over nine years ago. The entire house is cold in general, something his daughter has commented on as well. He is about to flush the toilet when he hears the sound again. He has no idea what it is, but he thinks it sounds like a cry for help. He dresses himself and goes outside to investigate the situation. Once there, he finds a big white bird. The bird sees him, too, but does not fly away even when the man rubs his arms to warm himself. He tries to figure out what type of bird it is and realizes that it is a crane. Then he sees that the crane has been shot with an arrow. He does not know how to get the arrow out of the bird, though, and he begins to feel like a failure. The bird even seems to think that the man has failed it and this makes the man think of how women think of him in general, including his ex-wife. He has a lot of female friends, but he cannot sustain romantic relationships. His ex-wife told him that he was only sixty-five percent and she needed a minimum of seventy percent.

Then the man feels a crack in the wood of the arrow, tells the crane that he will try to get it out, and manages to break the arrow. The bird seems happy and the man tells the crane that his name is George. The crane seems to reply through its motions. George gets ready to leave when he hears the sound again. He thinks it is the crane saying goodbye, but then realizes that the sound came from him.

In Chapter 2, George is at the printing shop he owns. He is having problems because of printing and delivery errors. One customer is mad because his name is spelled wrong on a vest he needs for a Breast Cancer event. Mehmet, George's employee, is talking to the customer about the error when the chapter opens. George finally intervenes, promising the man that he will have the vest with the correct spelling of his name prior to the event. There is another possible problem with an order that the customer does not know about yet. He tries to get Mehmet to be preemptive and try to fix the situation before it becomes a problem, but Mehmet complains that he works too hard while George does not do anything. He makes fun of the cutting of a crane that George has made and the fact that George does not have a girlfriend. They are in the middle of their discussion when a new customer walks in. Her name is Kumiko.

Chapter 3 goes back to George's memory of his childhood school days. When he first started school, his teachers put in him a higher reading class and praised him as a student. He was a dreamer, but in a good way. His third grade teacher, however, told his parents, at a parent-teacher conference, that he was nothing special. When his parents



tried to explain why they thought he was, his teacher pointed her finger at George's mother, who bit the finger. George then went to a private school and became friends with a boy names Roy. The two were walking one day with Roy's new bike and an old woman hit them with her car. They were not seriously injured even though they could have been. George realized that even though he was the victim, his mother drew focus. Afterwards, he lost contact with Roy and ended up going back to his old school. The fourth grade teacher was much better than the third grade teacher was. George still tells these stories to people and he realizes how the information can change depending on who is telling the story, but what really matters he the fact that it keeps the memory alive.

Analysis

This section of the novel functions to give a modern-day twist to the beginning of the Japanese folklore tale, by the same name, on which the novel is based by setting up the initial two scenes: the man's saving of the crane and the arrival of a mysterious woman to pay the man back for his kindness. The man is George, who saves the crane he finds in his backyard by removing the arrow. The woman is Kumiko who shows up in George's printing shop afterwards. The alignment with the folklore tale continues with the portrayal of George's life as poor in terms of romantic love, which compares to the folklore tale in which the man who saves the crane is financially poor. The narrative paints the picture of George being poor in terms of relationships by showing that he is a lonely, divorced man who yearns to find love but is unable to sustain a romantic relationship because of his character. "He had more female friends, including his ex-wife, than any straight man he knew. The trouble was they'd all started out as lovers, before realizing that he was too amiable to take quite seriously" (14). The description of George's house shows how sad he is by describing his house as cold and showing that he does not even have the energy to make renovations in the house that would make his life more comfortable and warm. "A huge city allegedly thrummed and dazzled just meters from the man's doorstep, yet inside might as well have been draped in the chill fog of a hundred years past" (5).

This section uses the story of the car accident involving George, Roy, and the old woman to support the theme that while stories may have many different truths, the important issue is that stories are told to keep the memory alive and that stories that are told grow. This theme manifests itself as the narrator notes George's realization that different people involved in the accident will tell a version of the story based on their perspective. George has his version, the old lady will have hers, and witnesses will have theirs. All of these truths are the truth in the eyes of the people who tell the stories. The narrator reveals how George feels when he tells the story to demonstrate that the truth issue does not matter. What matters is that when George tells the story, he feels as if he is there and during that time "pain was at bay, fear was held off, and everything was astonishment and wonder" (42). This feeling is important to remember as it appears again at the end of the novel.



The character of Mehmet injects the narrative with humor and provides a non-Western view of the story. The humor is added through the exchanges he has with the customer who comes in to complain about the incorrect name on his vest and the exchange he has with George about the crane cutting that Mehmet calls a goose. Both exchanges consist of a fast exchange in which Mehmet has comebacks that are funny in a sarcastic way. After the customer leaves, for example, Mehmet says, "...Well, he was a grouchy one" (21) which of course he was because the vest has the wrong name on it. After George explains that what Mehmet calls a goose is really a crane, Mehmet still says, "I'll leave you alone here with your goose" (24). Readers can feel that George is both frustrated and amused.

Mehmet is different from others because he is Turkish. He even uses that fact in a humorous way as an excuse as to why he would not recognize the difference between Paddy and Patty. "I'm from Turkey. We don't have Paddy versus Patty, okay? So how was I to know?" The customer does not protest this explanation. He protests the thought that the color of the vest (pink) causes the confusion. When Mehmet cries racism as he says that George accuses him of everything, George does not even take him seriously because he knows that Mehmet is not serious. He just tells Mehmet to make the phone call to the customer.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the narrator does not tell us George's name until after he has removed the arrow from the crane's wing? How does this reflect upon George's character and the structure of the narrative?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does this chapter cause you to anticipate the rest of the story? What elements of foreshadowing are potentially at work in this section?

Discussion Question 3

What impressions of George do you have after reading this chapter? How does the narrative characterize him?

Vocabulary

ignominious, plausible, illuminated, incongruity, insignia, rancid, definitively, tumult, irrevocably, acquiesce, keening, emblem, parochial, ostensibly, bewildered



Chapters 4 - 6

Summary

In Chapter 4, Amanda, George's daughter, goes on a picnic with two female coworkers, Rachel and Mei. She is trying to be friends with them, but relations degrade when Amanda makes a comment about the Animals In War Memorial that the girls do not appreciate. They get out of the car at the picnic site. Mei checks on where her ex-husband has taken their child. Amanda breaks a bottle of wine.

Amanda laments that this is something that tends to happen to her when she meets new people. When people first meet her, they think she will be a good mate, but they are wrong. She had once had a roommate named Karen with whom she had gotten along for two weeks. One night, they came home after clubbing, and Karen was excited to find that the Wizard of Oz is on TV. Amanda proceeded to tell her how much she hated the movie. What made things worse was that she called the Cowardly Lion a pedophile and said Karen's grandfather had "fiddled" with her until he had died. Her parents refused to believe it and made her say that she had been lying. The expression of her opinion about the Wizard of Oz had ended Amanda's friendship with Karen. The head of HR at the company she works at, Felicity, had even told Amanda that she got the job because she was a woman even though she was the least qualified of the people she had interviewed, but she had to hire her to avoid a lawsuit because there were so many men in the company.

Amanda does not know why things go wrong with people, but she feels as if something is broken inside of her.

At the picnic, George is looking after Amanda's son, JP. The women talk about George being willing to take care of his grandson and then Rachel comments that at least Mei's husband is still there to take care of their child instead of being off with a new girlfriend and not remembering that he is a father. Rachel's rendition of Amanda's situation is not totally correct, however, as Amanda's ex-husband, Henri, calls JP and wants his child to know his French heritage. Amanda had married Henri at an early age, but she had grown to hate him and forced him to leave after an incident in which she slapped him and he had seen the look in her eyes that showed that her hatred for him is stronger than her love for him. When JP was born, she named him after Henri's uncle as she had said she would do, however she was still angry at herself for loving Henri and for Henri because of this fact.

Amanda apologizes for what she said earlier. Then they discuss George's nationality. The women do not believe that George is American. Amanda also tells them that George has a new girlfriend, Kumiko. Then the cute guy that they had seen earlier hits Amanda in the head with his football. He comes over and Rachel offers him some food. He joins them.



Chapter 5 opens describing George's love for books and how hard it was for him to cut the pages out of one, but this is what he has done. He had drawn when he was married and had continued to sketch. Recently he had found a destroyed book and instead of drawing on a page had decided to cut into it and create something with the cuttings. When he finished, Mehmet said that product of his efforts looked like a lily, and so had started George's themed cuttings. He continued to do them, but never thought much about them until Kumiko arrived.

When Kumiko comes into the shop, she asks whether George can make reproductions of three images. He thinks they are breathtaking and what attracts him to them even more is that they are cuttings made with feathers. She sees his cutting and recognizes the shape of a crane.

She invites George over for dinner. She calls it their first date, and this reference makes him happy. She tells him that she used to teach overseas and how she had started doing her cuttings. She finds out that George is American and she asks permission to "perform impertinence" (72).

The next day at the shop is a tough one as George deals with the customers and Mehmet who is pretending to be sick so he can go home early. Then Kumiko comes in. She has put his crane with her cutting of a dragon and even Mehmet thinks that it is great.

After that, George sees Kumiko almost every night, and they have sex on the night that she shows him the tile. She says that he is the type of man who would forgive and this is what she needs, but does not explain what she means by this.

Chapter 6 tells the story of the birth of a crane. She flies away and runs into a fisherman. She tells the fisherman that he wants to trap her, he admits that she is right and she kills him. He thanks her for setting him free. She eats the fish. Then throws the ones she did not eat back into the water. She pushes the fisherman's body in the water, too. Then she flies off again.

Analysis

With the introduction of Amanda, the narrative reveals another character who deals with similar problems of isolation to George. Amanda's problem is the opposite of her father's, though. He is too nice, but she is filled with anger and is unable to censor herself and expresses her thoughts without paying attention to the feelings of the people she is talking to. Like her father, people like her at first, but she runs them away, not because she is too amicable, but because of her insensitivity and anger.

The section uses Amanda's outing with Rachel and Mei and her relationship with her ex-roommate and ex-husband to portray her failed relationships with people in general. After she expresses her opinion about the Animals In War Memorial, she knows that, "she was lost, that this might not be the last time she was invited to cram into Rachel's car...but the list of invitations had definitely become finite" (45). In the case of her old



roommate, Amanda's rant regarding the Wizard of Oz causes her roommate to start, "bringing friends over with whom she'd abruptly stop talking whenever Amanda entered the room. And that, once more, was that." This happens in spite of the fact that the two women had been so close to each other that they even went clubbing together. She had attracted Henri, her ex-husband, because of her fire, and she had run him away for the same reason. "It's not the slap...A Frenchman can take a slap. Lord knows. It is how your face looked when you did it" (55).

The discussion about George being American and Henri's relationship with JP supports the theme that even though people may be different from each other, in the end, they are the same. Rachel has met George and still believes that he is British and not American. Mei thinks that Amanda is thinking about Hank, her stepfather. Amanda even gives up trying to convince the two women that George is American. When the conversation turns to George's relationship with Kuniko, Rachel refers to George as Amanda's "allegedly American father" (58).

Henri is French and lives in France, but he takes the same interest in his son as Mei's ex-husband does in his. He wants to be a father to him. The narrative portrays his interest in his child by stating that Henri wants JP to hear French and he calls him every week even though JP is only four and only has basic phone skills.

In addition, this section uses the crane-fisherman story and the Amanda-Henri story to show the duality of love including possession and freedom, love and hate, and anger and forgiveness. The man wants to possess the crane, but the crane wants to be free and fights for her freedom. She forgives the man for wanting to possess her and then both of them are free. Amanda exhibits hatred and anger towards Henri because she still loves him. "Henri had been the love of her life, and she'd never be able to forgive him for it. Or herself, it seemed" (55).

The story of Henri's and Amanda's situation supports the theme that stories have different truths depending on who is telling the story. Rachel tells her version of what Henri is doing now, but the narrator indicates that there is another truth. "Because it wasn't like that. Well, it was, but it wasn't" (53).

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between George and Mehmet. How is their relationship significant to the story?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think inspires George to make a crane cutting? How does this represent a turning point for George?



Discussion Question 3

How does the narrative compare the problems of George with the problems of Amanda? Does it present one situation to be worse than the other? Explain.

Vocabulary

impromptu, finite, conversely, incredulous, carapace, grueling, omnipresent, vehemence, chronological, incision, conglomerate, assemblage, impertinence, feigning, affixed



Chapters 7 – 9

Summary

In Chapter 7, after knowing Kumiko for only two weeks, George tells Amanda that he is planning to ask Kumiko to move in with him. What he is saying does not register with Amanda at first because she is consumed with asking George whether he can babysit. She thinks that he is crazy for wanting Kumiko to move in with him after only knowing her for such a short period of time. Amanda thinks that George will get hurt. Then she starts crying because she thinks George is telling her how evil she can be. She tells him that she thinks that she messed up with Rachel and Mei, and they discuss her inability to be able to talk to people. George says that he has a problem as well because he can get people to be friends with him, but nothing further. Amanda discusses how politely her ex-husband treats her. At the end of the chapter, George says that it might be good that she is crying. Amanda says they are angry tears.

Chapter 8 opens with Kumiko working on another piece. George wants to see it, but she will not let him do so. He asks her to move in with him again, and she only laughs, as usual.

Kumiko does not think that her work has much life alone. The narration goes back to when she had combined her cuttings with George's in a way that should not have worked, but had. She wants to give the piece to George. He says it is hers. Mehmet continues to say that he will take it. Kumiko asks George whether he makes his cuttings on a regular basis. After that, he starts making more. The next one is a lion. Kumiko takes it when he shares it with her.

George wants to know more about Kumiko, like what she does for a living. He does not spend time at her place because she says that it is too small. One night they talk about his wish to know about her, and she says that she does not want to relive the past. She also tells him that he is soft and nice. This worries him because this has been his problem with women so far. The way she says that his character is what she needs makes him think that she means she only needs him temporarily. He does not know if she is really thinking this, or if he only fears it.

As it turns out, George takes the work depicting a crane. He cannot figure out where to hang it at home, so he decides to hang it over his desk at work. A man sees it and offers a lot of money for it, but George repeatedly says that it is not for sale. Kumiko comes in with the tile that has the lion in it. The man loves it too, and Kumiko convinces George to sell it for a lot of money. When George tells Amanda about the sale, she tells George that she wants to meet Kumiko.

Kumiko shows him one of the tiles she has been working on and tells him the story surrounding it. It is not for sale, but the one with the next cutting that George has given her sells when the man who bought the one with the lion brings a woman with him who



pays a large sum of money for it. George and Kumiko also agree to have a party so that Kumiko can meet Amanda.

At the beginning of Chapter 9, Henri surprises Amanda by actually coming to the house on the day that he is supposed to call JP. Amanda and Henri talk about her state. She kisses him and he responds, but says they should not go any further, but they do. Henri says that he misses JP and Amanda says that she know he does. She cries when she goes to bed.

One day after this, while JP is feeding the ducks with Amanda, they see something that at first Amanda thinks is a stork, but then remembers George's experience, which she thought really might have been dream, and thinks that it could be a crane. She tells George about the sighting. Then she talks to her mother about George. Her mother admits that she worries about George.

At Amanda's office, Rachel bothers Amanda about the report Amanda is working on. Amanda tells her when she will have the report ready and suggests that they have lunch together, but Rachel says that she already has plans. Amanda thinks that they could have been friends, but in reality, they could not have been.

Amanda finally meets Kumiko when she goes to lunch. Amanda has to pay for a lady's dry cleaning because she is standing in the bike lane when a cyclist comes by and causes her to spill her coffee on the lady. Everyone blames Amanda because she was in the bike lane. She starts crying, and the woman who comes up to her is Kumiko. They sit down and another cyclist whizzes by. Amanda curses at him. She cries again, but this time they are not tears of anger.

Analysis

The primary function of this section is to deepen the connection between George's story and the Japanese tale of the crane wife; Kumiko, as an allegorical stand-in for the crane wife, serves to improve George's life and outlook. It is important to note as well that the narrative continues to add its own twist to the story by having George want Kumiko to move in with him at this point instead of asking her to marry him, and as a modern day, sensitive man, he helps create the art and it is the two of them who make it great. Kumiko continuously tells George that her work alone does not breathe. "They lack life" (89). A transformation occurs, however, once she puts his work with hers. "The dragon now had a purpose. The crane now had context... Together, they were more than two incomplete halves, they were a third thing, mysterious and powerful and bigger than the small black square that imprisoned them" (90).

The narrative uses language to emphasize the idea that George's transformation is due of Kumiko's influence. After describing the great artwork that the two of them make together, the narrator says, "And she had given it to him" (90). Literally, she gives him the piece, but figuratively she gives him a belief in his creative abilities. Later, the narrator makes it even more clear that Kumiko gives George the push to develop his



artistic abilities when she asks him whether he makes his cuttings on a regular basis, the narrator states, “Which really started everything” (90).

The fact that the artistic products are better once the couple creates them together serves as a comment on the power of collaboration. This dynamic serves as a comment on the positive and constructive nature of relationships. One George and Kumiko begin to work together, their art flourishes, and they receive mutual emotional benefits from their shared companionship.

A deviation from the main folklore tale that appears in this section is the fact that Kumiko wants things for herself instead of simply being present to enhance George’s life. She tells George that he is perfect for her because she needs someone nice who can forgive. Her admission ties into the story of the crane and the fisherman in which the crane gives forgiveness. However, the violence in which the forgiveness is given might make readers wonder whether someone as nice as George will be able to fulfill Kumiko’s wish once the time comes. Thus, yet another deviation from the Japanese tale, the entry into Amanda’s life to enhance it by transforming her, could be done to give Kumiko another option should George not be able to forgive her

The section also looks at relationships and the fact that when people are in relationships they want to know about each other’s past as a form of building intimacy. However, how much should one, or does one have to, share about themselves and is it natural for someone to want to keep secrets from their partners? George wants to know everything about Kumiko but she does not ask him a lot about his history and she says that she does not want to live the past over again. The fact that she does not talk about herself adds to the mystical element of her character and the novel and supports the fact that she cannot talk about herself in the way humans talk about themselves because she is the human embodiment of the crane. It is ironic that she does share her past when she tells him the story of the crane and the volcano, but he does not realize that she is doing so. In regards to relationships, the story also shows how opposites attract as she is full of love and forgiveness and a volcano is full of fire and hatred.

This section also explores how possessiveness can degrade a relationship, and the narrative examines this possessiveness as a type of greed. George shows signs that he, like the fisherman, wants to possess the crane. George wants Kumiko to move in with him and he wants to know all about her past. Amanda also wants to prove that she still has power over Henri by enticing him to have sex with her even though she knows that he loves his current partner and he knows that they should not do so. Both Kumiko and Henri retain their freedom, though. Kumiko refuses to move in with George and Henri returns to France as planned.

Discussion Question 1

Does the narrative appear to condone the suddenness with which George falls in love with Kumiko? How does this suddenness affect their relationship?



Discussion Question 2

How does the narrative examine the concept of greed? Does the narrative ever present George as a greedy man? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the first meeting between Kumiko and Amanda. What are the circumstances surrounding this meeting? What appear to be the most prominent aspects of their interpersonal dynamic?

Vocabulary

smitten, courteous, bashful, tantalized, malevolence, assemblage, indefinably, extravagant, imbued, serenity, entailed, commencing, flinch, pompous, immaculate



Chapters 10 - 12

Summary

In Chapter 10, Rachel calls George. The narrative reveals that George had had a sexual with Rachel. He thought it was over, but she has been repeatedly contacting him, and she does so again when she learns about the art work that is now visible on the internet. He tells her that he cannot see her anymore because he is with Kumiko. Even though Rachel has been dating the man she met at the picnic with Amanda, Wally, she says she compares him to George and he is not as nice. She threatens to tell Amanda about them. Then she tells him that she is pregnant, but George does not believe her.

Chapter 11 tells the story of a female entity who flies and talks to volcanoes, telling them what will become of them. All of them believe and listen to her except for one. That one is angry and has become a warrior when she sees it again. They talk, and she tells the volcano that he will not see her again. She flies up and calls for her father, who does not answer. Once she has gone, her father calls her by her name.

In Chapter 12, George begins to have strange dreams that he does not remember, but they seem to impact his personality. He buys a new printer for the shop with the money he received for the first piece of art. George's and Kumiko's work continues to sell quite well. George runs the business. Mehmet thinks that it is strange how this all happened. George does too and does not have any explanation for it. He talks to Kumiko one day while she is cutting his hair. They end up talking about stories and what they are for.

One day, George is out with JP. He makes up a story about a lady in a cloud. As they are talking, JP calls George by his first name as Amanda does. George does not like this and tells him that he would like JP to call him grand-père. It is special because JP is the only one who can do that. When the conversation returns to the lady in the cloud, George says that she met a volcano and that this meeting caused complications.

At the end of the chapter, George has another dream. In this dream, he is flying. The crane is with him, and he sees JP and Henri dressed as the Little Prince. Then the crane turns into a volcano. It throws him into a comet, and it destroys him. When he wakes up, he says that he wants Kumiko, although she is not there. He is ashamed of the fact that he has this thought.

Analysis

This section begins to merge the real world with the mystical world when George begins to dream about cranes and volcanoes. It is significant that this happens when he is flying high with Kumiko (the crane) due to his romantic relationship with her and the selling of their art work and when readers learn that George has had a fling with Rachel who threatens to destroy him by exposing their relationship. Rachel's behavior, in



conjunction with the dream, foreshadows the fact that she is the embodiment of the volcano. Thus, both characters of the mystical world are present in George's real world.

George's character appears to show demonstrable changes when he asserts himself in interactions with Rachel and JP. Rachel tries to sway him by telling him when he is being cruel and that this behavior does not suit him. "I can't bear you being cruel, George. That's the last thing you ever are" (126). Later she says, "You're being mean again, George. And it doesn't suit you" (127). While he apologizes, by saying that he is sorry and wishing her well, he even does not give in when she says that she is pregnant. Standing up to JP brings tears to the child's eyes, yet he does not back down and let JP call him "George." Instead he explains to him why he prefers that he call him grand-pere.

The section establishes another event that occurs in the Japanese folktale, which is that the man who saves the crane becomes greedy, just as George is becoming greedy. However, the two narratives differ in the manifestation of the greed as the man in the folktale wants more money and George wants more of Kumiko. When he wakes up from his dream he says that he wants Kumiko, "Oh, how I want you" (147). Then, because he is still a nice man, he becomes "ashamed of his greed" (147).

The interaction between George and JP in the park is significant in that it showcases their personality differences, as well as the fact that they can overcome these differences in order to maintain a healthy grandchild relationship. They feed the ducks, George tells him a story. At the same time they speak French and JP finds out that George is American. The news is even surprising to JP, who says, "Whoa" (144) when he finds out that his grandfather is American .

A final important element about this section is the focus it brings to the idea of the importance of stories and continuing to tell stories. Both Kumiko and George have the same view of stories and readers discover that the tiles that she is making tell her story and it is the story of the lady and the volcano, once again bringing the mystical into the real world. They agree that stories help people live with the extraordinary and thus when he tells her about an extraordinary story, he shares the story of when the old lady had hit him with the car. He also attempts to tell her story when he talks to JP in the park.

Discussion Question 1

How does the history between George and Rachel affect the portrayal of George's character? What significances does this relationship hold with regards to the narrative?

Discussion Question 2

What do George's dreams mean? How do they effect his outlook and personality? What do the dreams symbolize with regards to the overall narrative?



Discussion Question 3

Why is George ashamed by how much he wants to be with Kumiko? How does this fact inform George's personality and perception of relationships?

Vocabulary

clandestine, residue, luxuriant, plummeting, scandalized, coalesce, preposterous, gormless, ablutions, laissez-faire, coincidences, skeptical, prelude, cataracts, expanse



Chapters 13 - 18

Summary

Kumiko had given Amanda a tile at the end of their first meeting. In Chapter 13, Amanda brings it to work with her because of the way it makes her feel. It makes her think of love and forgiveness. One day, Rachel sees it.

Amanda never tells George about Kumiko giving her the tile, even though she does tell him about meeting her. He is glad that Amanda liked her. Amanda and her mother talk about George, and Kumiko and her mother says that she is glad George is happy, but admits that it is nice to be a part of something that makes someone successful.

Rachel had become nicer during the few weeks preceding the sighting of the tile. She had asked Amanda to lunch and the movies, even surprising Mei. Finally Amanda agrees to go out with them. It is the same day that Rachel sees the tile. They had had lunch before then and Rachel had had a breakdown because things are not going well with Wally, the man she is dating, and both Amanda and Mei say that there are people around them whom they love. Amanda says that she loved Henri. That statement upsets Rachel and she leaves with teary eyes. When Amanda gets back to the office, she pretends that nothing happened. When Rachel sees the tile Amanda quickly shuts her drawer. As Rachel leaves her desk, Amanda finds herself feeling sorry for her and understanding her. She invites her to George's party for people to meet Kumiko, and notices that Rachel seems triumphant when she gets the invitation.

In Chapter 14, the story of the volcano and the lady in the cloud returns. The two characters realize that they are attracted to each other, so they get married. They create a new world, which they call their child. However, they develop distrust for each other, thinking that when they are away, each of them has gone back to their old ways. Their child realizes that things are not right with them and attracts their attention. When the lady in the cloud and the volcano pay attention to their child, there is peace and good weather, but things go wrong when they start watching each other again.

The party at George's house takes place in Chapter 15. Clare comes with Hank. During the event, Amanda suggests that Hank talk to Mehmet. Mehmet is the only Turkish person there, and Hank is the only black person there. Rachel also comes to the party. She confronts George and tries to kiss him. During the evening, George meets and talks to a lady who likes his art, but does not realize that he is the artist. She cannot believe that such a great artist lives in the house the party is being held in. Mehmet suspects that something great, that could also be terrible, is going to happen. George announces that he and Kumiko are getting married, shocking everyone. When everyone has gone, Kumiko shows him another tile in the series of the lady in the cloud and the volcano. She says that the story is almost over.



In Chapter 16, Amanda wakes up after having the same type of nightmare her father has been having. She has been feeling sick ever since the party and she has this feeling that she needs to see Kumiko to live, but it has been hard to see her or her father. After the party, she had spoken to her father on the phone about everything going so fast and he had told her to mind her own business, and he had not apologized for doing so. Then he had insulted her by saying that she was never going to find anyone because of the way she went through life. He had apologized for that, but it was too late. They have not spoken to each other since then. Rachel has also been acting strange. She now laughs and complements Amanda on her work.

Amanda starts to wonder whether she is pregnant with Henri's child and then she hears a sound outside. She cannot figure out what it is, though. She tries to convince herself that she is not pregnant when she hears the sound again. She still cannot find where it came from and goes back to sleep and has another dream. In it she is the volcano and is being ravished by it. She does not wake up from it because she does not want to do so.

Chapter 17 returns to the story of the lady in the cloud and the volcano. The lady in the cloud follows the volcano to a war and finds a general there. He says that he wants her to forgive him. She pierces his heart, but he does not die. She tells him that she is going to rip his eyes out, but as she does, she sees the volcano. He tells her to end it for him because they cannot go on this way, but she cannot do it.

In Chapter 18, Rachel and George have sex on a night when Kumiko is not at George's place. He tells Rachel to leave, but she does not. Instead, she talks about possession and what she has learned about it and what is wrong with his relationship with Kumiko. Right before she leaves, he thinks he hears a noise outside, but she says that she did not hear anything.

Analysis

The conflicting elements of love, forgiveness, and possessiveness and freedom are key elements in this section as the story of the lady in the cloud and the volcano comes to a climax and develops its parallel themes alongside the main narrative. The tale of the woman and the volcano examines the power and necessity of forgiveness in a loving relationship. Amanda learns how to embrace both love and forgiveness, and Rachel highlights to George that his relationship with Kumiko will not work because he wishes to possess her completely, which is impossible. In this way, George's relationship with Kumiko and with Rachel share parallels with the relationship of the woman and the volcano.

The things that the lady in the cloud and the volcano love about each other are the things they come to hate once they are married, thus illustrating how a relationship can devolve if not properly tended. They both think that they can change the other or at least use their traits to create something that is good. They manage to do the latter when they create their child, but they cannot change each other. Thus the volcano continues to



wreak havoc and the lady in the cloud continues to forgive. The volcano realizes that the two of them cannot continue living this way and gives her the opportunity to forgive him which involves destroying him. Yet, she loves him so she cannot do it. This part of the story foreshadows future events when Kumiko wants George to forgive her. Doing so involves killing her, which is something that he cannot do.

In the real world, Amanda is able to resolve her personal issues with the help of Kumiko; Amanda finds that she is able to forgive Rachel and admit to the others that she has not yet overcome her lingering love for her ex-husband. Readers know that it is Kumiko who invokes this change because when Amanda looks at the tile Kumiko gave her, she thinks that “it felt like love. Like forgiveness, somehow, which maybe were the same thing sometimes” (152). Amanda’s statement that she loved Henri is so strange coming from Amanda that the statement even surprises Mei as shown by the fact that she asks Amanda about her statement with her eyes opened wide while she and Rachel accept it when Amanda says that she loves JP and George. When Rachel has her breakdown, the narrator says that Amanda still does not like Rachel, but now “she glimpsed a harrowing sliver of understanding about her” (162). This feeling causes her to do something that is surprising and new for her. The narrator uses the words “inexplicably” and “clumsy” to describe how she invites Rachel to George’s party.

This section helps illustrate the corrosive effects of selfish desire by demonstrating George’s folly of wishing to fully possess his romantic partners. As Rachel continues to talk about possession and the fact that George does not possess Kumiko and that Kumiko does not want to be possessed, he never denies that she is right. Finally forgiveness becomes entwined with possession as Rachel says that she cannot forgive George because she possessed him and he possessed her and that is also why she cannot leave.

Amanda’s pregnancy scare is another manifestation of the wish to possess someone. Henri has not mentioned their sexual encounter since it happened. Being pregnant, however, would force him to pay attention and she would possess him on some level because of the child and the circumstances under which it had been conceived.

Another salient point in this section is that it uses the conversation between Amanda and her mother to show how fulfilling it is to create something that is more powerful than either individual member of a couple can do on their own. Clare is not jealous in terms of wanting him back. She is jealous because she has not been the person who helped her partner do well. “Darling, wouldn’t you want to be the person who’d made someone do that well? Wouldn’t that be a nice feeling?” (157)

This section also shows how pretentious the art world can be via the conversation George has with his fan who does not realize that she is talking to him. It also shows how people make things worse for people who are different thinking that they are actually doing these people a favor. Hank is the head of a hotel owned by an American conglomerate. Mehmet jokes about being Turkish, but no one has put him down because of it. Amanda is the one who notes that Hank is the only black person in the



room and that Mehmet is the only Turkish person and she makes them stand out by putting them together.

Discussion Question 1

What are the parallels between the story of the woman and the volcano and the main narrative? How does the inclusion of this story affect the structure and themes of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

How does the narrative contrast individual success with shared success? What effects do these different types of success have on the characters in the narrative?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Amanda not tell her father about the tile she received? How does this reflect upon the state of their relationship?

Vocabulary

ventured, monosyllabic, gratifyingly, subsequent, harrowing, triumphant, billowing, prank, intoxicated, solicitude, agonizing, unfathomable, irrational, doused



Chapters 19 - 28

Summary

In Chapter 19, George is at the store making what Kumiko has called his final cutting. He has a fever and is upset with himself for sleeping with Rachel. Mehmet comes in and tells George that he sticks around because George inspires loyalty. That is why everyone sticks around once they know him. George fires him, telling him that he is doing so for Mehmet's own good.

Kumiko has put all of the tiles out of the story she has been telling. There is only one left to go. George tries to get Kumiko to tell him the content of what she is working on so he knows what to do, but she does not. She just tells him that as an artist he will know it when he makes it. After that, things had gotten strange between them even though they did not have a fight, and she has gone back to her place to work. That was when he had called Rachel.

He cannot think of what his cutting should be. As he gives it one last try, he thinks of why he had called Rachel and as he thinks about it, he realizes that he has made a cutting of a volcano. He feels that the story can end.

He rushes to Kumiko's apartment. When he arrives there, he sees Rachel coming out of the building. She sees him, but pretends not to. He thinks that she looks confused and a little disappointed. Then he starts getting mad at Kumiko because she has given so much worldly stuff, but not of herself and that is what he wants. When he goes in, he finds a bird plucking its feathers to add to the tile and he knows that this is not something that he should have seen and that having seen it means that their story is coming to an end.

The next thing that he remembers is waking up and Kumiko is there. She says he has a fever. He asks about Rachel, but she says she did not see her. He gives her the cutting and she says that once she has finished she will move in, become his wife, and they will live happily ever after. He thinks that it sounds like a goodbye.

In Chapter 20, Amanda is taking a pregnancy test when the phone rings. She at first thinks it sounds like a keening, but then looks at her phone and sees that Rachel is calling her. She finally answers it, listens to Rachel, and then gets JP and rushes out of the house.

In the final chapter about the lady in the cloud and the volcano (Chapter 21), the lady in the cloud hits the volcano with permission which is the permission to do her harm. He tries to but nothing happens until he strikes her with an arrow. Then she falls to the ground, shocked.

In Chapter 22, A fire starts in George's apartment, and the narrative presents five versions of the story of the fire. In one version, Kumiko finishes the tile and they go to



bed, leaving the candles lit. George gets up to go downstairs to put them out, but it is too late because one has started the fire. In the second version George had gotten up, destroyed all of the tiles and set them, and the apartment, on fire. In the third version the feathers had come off the tiles, swirled around and exploded. In the fourth version, the volcano came out of the tiles and set the fire because he was mad at the version of the story they told. In the fifth version, Rachel had started the fire because she was angry.

In Chapter 23, Amanda rushes to George's house wondering why Rachel had been there. Rachel is still there when she arrives, but the firemen are not there yet because Rachel had called Amanda first. Rachel tells her that George and Kumiko are still in the house. Amanda makes Rachel watch JP while she goes into the burning house.

In Chapter 24, George and Kumiko wake up they realize that they are trapped. George is about to fall downstairs into the fire, but urges Kumiko to jump. He falls, but feels himself being caught, and in Chapter 25 he dreams that he is flying and the crane is the one who is carrying him. He cries and his dream ends.

In Chapter 26, George wakes up naked in his backyard. Kumiko asks him to forgive her for getting him into the mess they are in. George does not want to because he knows she will leave. She says, though, that she will leave either way. He realizes who she is and is about to do what she wants when Rachel tells him not to do it. Kumiko and Rachel look as if they are about to fight and JP tells George that Amanda is still in the house.

The volcano (Rachel) and the lady in the cloud (Kumiko) talk to each other in Chapter 27, and the lady in the cloud kills the volcano.

Chapter 28, Rachel collapses. George tells Kumiko that Amanda is in the house. She blurs and then comes back to say that Amanda is safe. She kisses him and is gone.

Rachel stands up and feels better. George sees Amanda and they reunite. George laments that Kumiko is gone. Rachel asks Amanda to tell their colleagues that she is not coming back to work. Amanda realizes that Rachel looks free.

Analysis

This section details further merging between the real world and the story of the woman and the volcano, thus drawing further parallels between the two narratives. When the volcano hits the lady in the cloud with an arrow, readers realize that the crane is the lady in the cloud who fell to earth and that George pulled the arrow the volcano shot out of her wing. Saving the crane sets the Japanese folklore into action. George follows the script of the Japanese folklore when he goes to Kumiko's apartment and sees her plucking her feathers. The narration ties what George sees to the mystical story through a shift in the type style and a dreamlike tone. He realizes that he "should not have seen this" and he also "knows in an instant, that it is now only a matter of waiting for the end" (234). These two facts are consistent with the folktale as when the man in the folktale



also sees the crane creating art in her real form even though he is not supposed to, and once he does, she leaves.

In addition, both men are greedy. However, in this area the two tales differ because the man in the Japanese tale's source of greed is money. He wants more and wants the crane wife to produce more of her work so he can make more money. George, however, is greedy because he wants Kumiko to share herself with him and she has not done it to the point that he wants. The narrator says, "He was greedy for her. He wanted more than she was giving, and though that greed was against all his tendencies, all the things that made everyone like him, he still felt it...and she wouldn't feed him" (230). It is interesting that Kumiko puts the fairytale ending on their story when she says that she will become his wife and they will live happily ever after. However, this serves to foreshadow future events as this type of ending is not what one finds in real life. George feels this which is why the narrator says that her statement feels like a goodbye to him.

The difficulties George has in creating his final contribution to the tile demonstrate what creative people go through when they are trying to create something and show the importance of tension in the creative process. This is something that George has struggled with and still does not really understand how he is supposed to deal with it until Kumiko tells him that, as an artist, he has to keep on working and that he will know when what he has produced is right. It is also important to note that he comes up with his masterpiece when he feels tension as he starts thinking of Rachel and he gets angry. When he puts himself into his art, he finally creates his cutting. The narrative implies that without this tension, without putting oneself into one's work, one will never get the perfect piece or the piece that makes people feel.

This section also helps readers understand the role that George, Amanda and Rachel have played in the coinciding story of the lady in the cloud and the volcano because readers now realize that George and Amanda are basically pawns of the lady in the cloud and the volcano and that Rachel has been acting the way she has been acting because she has been possessed by the volcano. Thus, when the volcano dies Rachel is literally set free because she gets her body back and can now start living her own life.

In terms of forgiveness, readers see that being extremely nice does not mean that one can forgive as George and the lady in the cloud have problems forgiving because they are nice beings. The volcano, however, has no problems doing so because he comes from the side of anger. Amanda who is more like the volcano is able to forgive because she also has an angry side to her.

The presence of multiple versions of the story of the fire serves to illustrate how one event can exist in different forms in different people's minds. The multiple versions also represent the different viewpoints of the characters as they think back to the event. The differences in the version of the story illustrate the differences in each character's beliefs, outlook, and personal history.



Rachel is not the only person who obtains a new life in this section. So does George when his house burns down, ending the sad life he has led since his divorce. He is literally naked on the lawn, which represents his rebirth.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the narrative draw connections between art and personal tension? In what ways does the narrative demonstrate this tension as necessary to the creation of art?

Discussion Question 2

What appear to be the sources of friction in George and Kumiko's relationship? How does the narrative chart the worsening of these flaws?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the connection that the narrative makes between niceness and an inability to forgive. In what ways does the narrative present this connection as credible or as false?

Vocabulary

redundancy, penultimate, irreparably, metaphorical, silhouettes, beguiled, coalescing, tendencies, resolution, plausible, ambiguity, firmament, counterintuitively, ordeal, inexorable



Chapters 29 - 30

Summary

In Chapter 29 Amanda is promoted to Rachel's position and gets her own office. She still has the tile that Kumiko gave her and has told George about it, but he is the only one who knows about it and she decides that she cannot keep it out in her office because it is too valuable financially. It is also personally valuable and she wants George to be the only person who knows about it.

Rachel has left to find out what else there is in the world, as she feels as if she has wasted a lot of time in her life. Amanda gets the news about Rachel from Mei. When Amanda gets her new job, she confronts the HR director, Felicity, about hating people in general. Felicity is about to tell Amanda off for recording the conversation they have been having and threatening to take her to the tribunal when Amanda asks her about the animal memorial and Amanda completes Felicity's sentence. After that, the women have an easier time in the office, Amanda gets her own office, the two women have lunch once a week and Amanda even thinks they are becoming friends.

Amanda has an assistant who tells Mei that she does not have time to meet with her and that she does not like meetings in general and she sets him straight. Then she remembers what happened in the fire at George's house. She had died, but Kumiko had forgiven her and she, in turn had performed the rite of forgiveness on Kumiko. Kumiko had taken Amanda's place as the dead person.

JP is in France with Henri, but for only a week as Henri sees that JP is homesick. JP will return to France during the following summer. While he is gone, Amanda and Mei decide to go clubbing and the two women agree that they will not back out.

Amanda wants to call her father and does so. She is happy to hear his voice.

In Chapter 30, George now lives at the hotel that Hank manages, and he still has the original tile that Kumiko had given him. He shows it to those people who come by every once in a while looking for tiles. He discovers that it was Mehmet who had spread the news about the tiles and he allows him to maintain a website about them. Mehmet has found a new girl, Nadine, who is also a budding actress, and he is at the shop with George to train her. The two console George when he starts to feel sad. He has not told anyone that Kumiko had asked him to remove her heart, blurred and then come back to kiss him before vanishing. JP had not seen her there. He still dreams, but the dreams are calmer now and center around Amanda's tile. He is beginning to see himself as an overseer in a story that is turning into history.

In the shop, Nadine comes to ask whether she can be four hours late on Thursday because she has an audition and George agrees without complaining about it. Then she gives him a cutting of a crane that she and Mehmet found. He says that he did not make



it and then realizes that it is a wordless page. George becomes sad, but refuses to take time off when Mehmet says they will cover for him. When a customer comes in, Nadine and Mehmet leave to help the person and George thinks of all that has happened and whether Kumiko was really the crane. He sees the blank piece of paper as a message and asks Mehmet for blank notebooks and starts writing his version of the story of Kumiko with him in it as this is the story he knows.

Amanda calls and he is happy to talk to her about the story and Kumiko.

Analysis

The portrayals of George's and Amanda's current lives in this section show how they have grown as a result of their interaction with Kumiko. Amanda has grown professionally as she has now been promoted and has her own office. Personally, she has grown because she has learned how to balance her angry personality with being nice and is giving back by trying to help other angry people as shown with her interaction with Felicity and her assistant. Amanda behaves like the old Amanda in demanding that she has an office and recording her conversation with Felicity. However, she takes a different approach than her usual outburst when Felicity denies her by making an attempt to show that she and Felicity have something in common through their shared opinion about the animal memorial. She also stands up to her assistant to support Mei, whom he had denied a meeting with.

In each of these actions, Amanda also works to pay back what she received from Kumiko by helping other angry people. Her conversation and weekly meetings with Felicity causes Felicity to give women in the office an easier time. Readers do not know whether or how Amanda's assistant changes, but Amanda recognizes the anger in him and gives him a lecture that will make him think about his life and the course he is taking in it. "And that's where the mistake is easy to make... You end up hating so many people that without noticing, you start to hate everyone. Including yourself. But there's a trick, you see?... You've got to love someone" (288).

One significant change in George is that he embraces creativity to the point that he lets Nadine come in late without complaining about her wish to do so. In addition, he embraces his own creativity by not doubting himself, but instantly listening to his instinct and writing when he sees the crane made from a blank sheet of paper. When he sees it he does not ask anyone what he should write, as he used to do when he was making his cuttings. Instead he goes with the flow. When he starts writing he feels "his heart, surge as if a golden light was flowing from it. Because this was it" (304).

It is significant that George can now write and tell his version of a new story that is full of astonishment and wonder. He had not been able to do this before with paper and had thus made the cuttings which played a major role in his and Kumiko's story. Now he has the emotions necessary to tell such a story. The previous story he told about the car accident had happened to him, but this is a story that he was a part of and was truly amazing. He had not been able to tell Kumiko the story about the crane before because



he did not know the story. Now, he does. His writing of the story supports the idea of the importance of stories to keep events and people alive as it does not matter that this will be his version of the story. What matters is that he will keep her alive by telling it. "This is where he would remember her. This is where she would live" (304). Another significant point about this story is that not only does it present a version of a story, but it is also another version of the lady in the cloud story. This time it is her in her human form with a mortal in contrast to the story she tells about herself as a lady in a cloud with a volcano.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Amanda finally tell George about the tile? How does this reflect upon the ways in which their relationship has evolved?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast George and Amanda as they appear at the end of the novel. What are the similarities and differences between them?

Discussion Question 3

What lessons does George appear to have learned from his time with Kumiko? How has he changed over the course of the novel?

Vocabulary

wake, putative, manifest, gambit, abomination, inferno, indecision, simultaneously, distraught, inaccurate, urgency, surge, uncomprehendingly, unhesitating, stich



Characters

George Duncan

George Duncan's niceness and his tendency to fall short of doing what he needs to do to sustain romantic relationships and develop his artistic abilities makes him an unfulfilled man at the beginning of the novel. He grows as the narrative progresses, however, and by the end of the novel he is able to embrace his creative side, stand up to family members when they do not show him respect, and act in a manner that seems harsh, but is needed to save a person from a life of mediocrity. George is one of the main characters in the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, George is living a life of inaction and mediocrity after his divorce from his ex-wife Clare, who divorced him over nine years ago and the fact that he does not have a new romantic interest. His problem is that he is too nice. His unhappiness with his current situation is vividly revealed by his reaction to the fact that he has to get up and go to the bathroom so often during the night even though he is only forty-eight years old. He attributes this need to something one associates with a much older man. He is cold when he goes to the bathroom because he still has not fixed the radiator even though he has been planning to do so ever since he moved into the house, over nine years ago. The house itself is cold and is stuck in time. Life was going on outside of his house, but the inside of his house was stuck in the "chill fog of a hundred years past" (6). George has the opportunity to transform his life at the beginning of the narrative when what he perceives as his weakness, the fact that he is too nice, becomes a positive trait as it attracts the crane to him and makes him want to help it. He finally takes the act of helping the crane which leads it to come back in the form of Kumiko, but doing so is not easy for him. His ex-wife's description of being only around sixty-five percent when she needs a minimum of seventy is something that he feels the crane also feels as he hesitates, thinking that he cannot do what is needed to save the crane. He reaches a low, thinking that he is a failure. He grabs the opportunity and his transformation takes place when Kumiko walks into his shop.

One of the key manifestations of George's transformation is the confidence he gains in his creative abilities. At the beginning of the novel, readers learn that he has also fallen short of expectations in this area of his life. He has always been able to draw, but never progresses even though he continues to sketch. His niceness almost causes him to miss the opportunity to create the cuttings because he hates the idea of cutting into the book. Once he dares to take action he gets into a flow and creates his first cutting, a lily. His relationship with Kumiko takes his confidence to a new level as she gives him the confidence of creating without editing himself. Towards the end of the novel, his pleasure with the cutting he has struggled with makes him so happy that he dares to go to Kumiko's apartment without asking. After she goes he cannot make cutting anymore, but takes the new opportunity the crane gives him and starts writing a story.



Overall, the most important manifestation of George's transformation is that he learns how to balance being nice with being assertive as well as the need to be harsh to those he cares about for their own good. He stands up to Amanda, telling her that she should not talk to him the way she does. He also does not let JP get away with calling him George instead of grand-pere. At first his reaction is harsh. When JP calls him "George" he yells at him for doing so, making JP cry. Then, though, he makes everything okay with his explanation as to why he likes it when JP calls him grand-pere. At the end of the novel, he saves Mehmet by firing him. The key points to note are these. At the beginning of the novel, George lets Amanda speak to him in the manner that is not the way a daughter normally speaks to a father while towards the end, he demands respect from both Amanda and JP. In addition, when Kumiko asks him to forgive her and set her free, by doing what seems harsh in taking her heart, he cannot do so. Yet at the end of the novel, he realizes that in order for Mehmet to thrive and be happy he needs to cut him loose from the shop, even though the move seems harsh as Mehmet no longer has a job. The repetition of similar actions in different contexts in the novel serves to clearly define George's transformation.

Amanda Laurent

Amanda is one of the novel's main characters and, like her father, is transformed by Kumiko's intervention by the end of the narrative. Like George, she is divorced and lonely and has problems sustaining relationships. Unlike him, her problem stems from being angry. Her anger causes her to say and do things that hurt people without realizing how far she has gone and when she should stop. This happens with her roommate from college when Amanda criticizes the Wizard of Oz and touches on a sensitive issue in her roommate's life, when she goes on a picnic with her colleagues, and when she slaps her ex-husband with such venom in her eyes that she runs him away. As a result of what she sees as something wrong with her because she has difficulty with people, she has become even angrier, sarcastic and foul mouth.

At the beginning of the novel, Amanda is having an especially difficult time as a result of the bad environment in the office in general and the fact that she has jeopardized her relationship with Rachel and Mei, her coworkers. She wants to be nicer and even tries by asking Rachel out to lunch, but does not know how to do so as she confesses to George during a telephone conversation. Her frustration is shown by the fact that she cries tears of anger. When events come to a head and she falls apart after she spills coffee on a woman and everyone blames her instead of the cyclist who causes her to spill the coffee, she meets Kumiko who gives her a tile that makes her think of love and forgiveness. Her transformation begins when this happens.

One of the key manifestations of her transformation is that she begins to understand Rachel and in a move that she does not even understand, she invites Rachel to her father's party. In addition, she is able to admit that she loved her ex-husband. By the end of the novel she still has her anger, but now knows when it is appropriate to use it and she does so to improve the character of her boss, Felicity, making the working environment better for Mei and the other women in the office.



One of the most important transformations is that she is able to forgive herself, Henri and Kumiko. It is interesting that in this way she is like the volcano who also acts upon the lady in the cloud's permission to forgive her.

Kumiko

Kumiko, who is the embodiment of the crane, is the Crane Wife denoted in the title and functions to play the role of the woman who comes to enhance the life in the man who saves her in her crane form as is done in the Japanese folklore tale also called the Crane Wife. The narration portrays Kumiko as mysterious and mystical because literally she is and this comes across in the real world as someone with secrets. People assume that she is Japanese because of her name, but do not really know where she comes from, the source of her income, or who her family is.

Her character diverges from the original tale in that she is also there to find the forgiveness she seeks. Early on in the narrative she tells George that she needs someone like him because she feels that he is someone who can forgive. At the end of the novel, instead of simply flying away as the woman does in a common version of the Japanese tale when George discovers her secret, she seeks forgiveness. In addition, she also enhances Amanda's life by teaching her how to accept herself and feel both love and forgiveness through the tile that she gives her. When she seeks forgiveness and cannot get it from George, the man whom she thinks will give it to her because of his character, she turns to Amanda who has learned how to do so because of the inspiration Kumiko's tile provides.

Kumiko's romantic interaction with George in her human form and the volcano in her mystical form shows the dual emotions of power versus restraint, possession versus freedom, destruction versus creation, and anger versus forgiveness. Her relationship with George incites him to become greedy to the point that he wants to know everything about her and possess her. She continues to keep her secret. Given the situation, George has to exhibit restraint and often apologizes when he attempts to gain power by being too forward in his wish to possess her. She, in turn, asks permission before using her power to make his cutting great. The volcano destroys throughout its life and he uses Rachel to try to destroy the relationship between George and Kumiko. Finally he uses Rachel to try to destroy George and Kumiko in a fire. The crane, in its own form and that as Kumiko creates. It creates life on earth, the tiles that generate income, and a better life for George and Amanda. The volcano and the crane express anger because their actions are contrary to the sensibilities of each, but the crane is finally able to forgive the volcano and find forgiveness herself. Once this is done, Kumiko, the mortal form of the crane and the lady in the cloud dies.

Mehmet

Mehmet works for George at the beginning of the novel, but in addition to being his employee he is also a loyal friend who, by the end of the novel, George treats as one of



his family members. He helps George by generating the interest in the tiles and he continues to work for George as opposed to giving his own career the time and attention it needs because he thinks that George will be lost without someone there to help him. He even tells George that George inspires loyalty in the people whose lives he touches which is why people continue to be George's friends.

In addition to serving as a chief catalyst in bringing people's attention to the tiles and thus providing a continuation of the modern day telling of the Japanese folklore tale by helping George make money from them, Mehmet also adds humor to the novel through the exchanges he has with people such as the one with the customer at the beginning of the novel whose name is misspelled on the vest, the conversation when Kumiko wants to give George the tile and Mehmet continues to say that he will take it, and the conversation at the end of the novel when Nadine wants to come in late.

The author also uses Mehmet to show that people can be different but their differences are often not noticed until people draw attention to them. The author uses Mehmet's nationality and the party at George's house to deliver this message. Mehmet is different because he is Turkish. Readers know this because Mehmet references the fact during his jovial conversation with the customer at the beginning of the novel and George also comments about it when he and Mehmet discuss Kumiko's possible origin,. Yet these differences do not keep George from seeing Mehmet as part of his family at the end of the novel when he puts Mehmet's number in his cell phone. At George's party, however, Amanda makes him stand out by sending Hank in to talk to him, thinking that he needs it as he is the only Turkish person there.

While Mehmet is a flat character, he does get the freedom to grow at the end of the novel when George forgives him and forces him out by firing him so that he can pursue his career. Thus, his character also serves to show that George has learned how to be harsh when it is necessary to do so to help someone.

Rachel / The Volcano

Just as Kumiko is the human embodiment of the lady in the cloud and the crane, Rachel is the human embodiment of the volcano, however, the volcano interacts with Rachel in a different way by possessing her in order to foil Kumiko's relationship with George. His possession of Rachel helps explain why George references Rachel's bad character when he invites her to his house, she has her breakdown when she has lunch with Amanda and Mei, she tries to get close to Amanda when she cannot temp George through her phone calls, she is so happy to be invited to George's party, George sees her at Kumiko's house, and her role in the fire. As the volcano creates wars and destruction, he tries to create one between George and Kumiko and when that does not work, he creates destruction by setting fire to George's house and trying to destroy George's relationship with Kumiko by literally destroying George and Kumiko.



As the volcano is not Rachel, but only possess her, Rachel becomes herself again once she is freed from the volcano when the lady in the cloud forgives him, and leaves in order to regain the part of her life that she has missed while the volcano possessed her.

Henri Laurent

Henri is a minor character, but show that, even though he is a Frenchman, he is not different from the British in that he loves and misses his son, JP, and can love and forgive Amanda, his ex-wife, even though there is no future for them as he loves his new partner. In this way he mirrors Clare, who is British. She remains friends with George and forgives him for being who he is, but now loves her new partner and knows that there is no future for her and George.

His sexual encounter with Amanda shows the need for people in love to try and possess those that they love. In this instance it is Amanda who wants to prove that she still has possession of Henri because she can seduce him. Henri, however, retains his freedom by going back to France and not leaving a future connection between them in terms of a child, even though Amanda hopes to keep a connection by being pregnant with Henri's child.

Jean Pierre Laurent

With an American grandfather, a French father, and a mother who is British on her mother side of the family, JP is different and the author uses him to support the theme that people can be different, but in the big picture they are the same. One example of this is the interaction he has in the park with George. The two are able to communicate with each other even though JP interweaves French with English. He behaves as all children do, laughing and joking with his grandfather and they show their love for each other.

The author also uses JP to show that Amanda is capable of love as she loves JP and does not demonstrate her angry outburst towards him. He also shows the benefit of Amanda's ability to forgive as when she forgives herself and Henri she lets JP go to France where he can grow as a complete person through his interaction with his father and his French heritage.

Clare

Clare is a minor character who serves to represent the fact that George can attract desirable women, but cannot keep them and the notion that success feels better when it is achieved in conjunction with another person.

Clare is a successful lawyer who is so successful that George is sure she will be a judge some day and even though she marries him and stays for a long time, she finally



leaves him because he is only about sixty-five percent and she needs a minimum of seventy percent.

When she finds out about Kumiko and George's success with his cuttings, she laments the fact that she has not partnered with either one of her husbands in their success, showing that this is something she wishes she could have done. For her, George's success is especially hard as she had encouraged George's drawings. They were not partners in his efforts, though, as Kumiko is with George. It is this form of partnership that she is jealous of, not George's romantic relationship with Kuniko.

Mei

Although a minor character in the novel, Mei serves to show Amanda's growth and her ability to forgive people as at the end of the novel Amanda defends Mei when her assistant talks about her in a negative way. Amanda's relationship with Mei at this point is in contrast to what it was at the beginning of the novel when Amanda goes on a picnic with Rachel and Mei and things go badly with both women. The situation is so bad between them that Mei is shocked when Rachel starts being nice to Amanda.

Amanda's defense of Mei shows that she is now able to forgive, and she knows how to channel her anger in a constructive way, using it when needed instead of being in a constant state of anger.

Hank

Hank is a minor character who represents the notion of the differences between people in that even though people may be different from each other in some way, they are really the same. He also represents another theme in term of differences in that he shows that people may not recognize differences until others point them out.

Hank is different in that he is black and American. Being black does not deter him from being successful as he manages a large hotel for a big American conglomerate. He is so comfortable in his place as part of the family that he makes it possible for George to stay in one of the hotel's rooms after his house burns down. When he goes to George's party, Amanda suggests that he talk to Mehmet to serve as a bridge. He is an accepted family member, but being different, he can relate to how Mehmet may be feeling as he is different, but is not a family member. Still the fact that Amanda chooses him, because he is also different from the other guests at the party, shows that people accentuate differences by pointing them out, as now it is obvious that both he and Mehmet are different as they have been set aside from the rest of the party.



Felicity

Felicity is a minor character in the novel who serves to show Amanda's growth. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator portrays Felicity as a harsh person who hates women and makes sure Amanda knows that she was not hired due to her skills.

When Felicity appears again at the end of the novel, Amanda is able to channel her anger to use it to become friends with Felicity and not only helps improve Felicity's character, but also the total office environment for the women who work there.

Roy

Roy is a minor character who appears in George's memory of his past as part of the only amazing story he has to tell about his life before meeting Kumiko as it is Roy's bike that had miraculously saved him.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Wish for People to Know the Origin of Kumiko's Name

The wish for the characters to know the origin of Kumiko's name symbolizes people's wish to know everything about people in order to understand them. Her evasiveness in terms of explaining it symbolizes people's wish to keep secrets about themselves.

George's Firing of Mehmet

The fact that George fires Mehmet for his own good symbolizes the fact that George has learned that sometimes one needs to do something to somebody that seems extreme for the good of that person. As George says, if Mehmet stays in the comfort of working at the print shop, he will settle and never grasp the opportunity to follow his dream of becoming an actor which will bring him joy.

Jean Pierre Laurent

JP symbolizes innocence as, as a child, he sees events in a simple way and as they really are in the real world. For example, he does not see Kumiko with George in during the fire. This is because she is a part of the mystical element of the novel. JP also symbolizes the ability to merge differences.

The Success of the Cuttings

The success of the cuttings symbolizes that strength that comes to projects when one works with others.

George's Conversation with the Woman at the Party

George's conversation with the woman at the party who does not realize that George is the artist symbolizes the pretentiousness of people in the art world.

The Picnic Amanda Goes on With Rachel and Mei

The picnic symbolizes the bad relationship Amanda has with the girls as they cannot get along while eating together which is normally a time of communion and getting together. When these gatherings do not go well, it means that there is strife amongst the participants.



The Bruning Down of George's House

The fact that George's house burns down and that he is naked when he is outside symbolizes his rebirth and growth from the experience he has had.

Kumiko/The Crane/The Lady in the Cloud

The form of Kumiko, who is the human form of the crane/the lady in the cloud, symbolizes new opportunities that one can have if one grasps the chances when presented to them.

The Relationship Between The Crane/The Lady in the Cloud and The Volcano

The relationship between the crane and the volcano symbolizes the dual forces involved in romantic relationships which include conflicts about power versus restraint, possession versus freedom, destruction versus creation, and anger versus forgiveness.

The Different Versions of the Stories About How the Fire Started

The different versions of the stories that are told symbolizes the notion that it is hard to know the truth of events when people tell stories because the "facts" differ depending on the point of view of the person telling the story.



Settings

George's House

George's house is where pivotal moments take place in the story of unrequited love. It is where he first sees the crane, where he announces their engagement, and where he loses her. It is also the place where readers see the pretentiousness of the art world as his patrons attend the party at his house.

The Print Shop

George's print shop is where he first meets Kumiko and where the sale of the tiles take off when the customers see them. It is also where Mehmet gets his rebirth and release when George fires him for his own good. This setting shows George's relationship with people outside of his family.

Amanda's Office

Amanda's office is where she meets Rachel and interacts with her. It also allows readers to see how she interacts with people outside of her family and it shows how she has grown at the end of the novel when she lets love and forgiveness in her life and makes it a better place to work.

Amanda's House

Amanda's House is where readers see her interaction with her son and her ex-husband. Here readers see that there are people who she loves and who love her.

The Side of The Street Where Amanda Has Lunch

This is where Amanda first meets Kumiko in person and Kumiko gives her the tile that begins to change her view of life.

The Park

The Park is a place where readers get to see the innocence of JP as he interacts with George and how he is just like any child even though his father is French, he has a French name, and he speaks French.



Themes and Motifs

Stories

When the narrator tells the story of the car accident that George miraculously survives, the narration introduces the concept that one may never know the truth of a story as people will always tell a story from their point of view, but this fact does not matter. True importance lies in the telling of stories because doing so brings life to past events that die if the stories neglected. Thus, when George tells his story about the car accident and the finger biting incident involving his mother and his third-grade teacher that led to his meeting of Roy, he knows that different people will tell the same story in different ways. Roy, the old lady who hit him and the witnesses will tell the truth according to them, maybe even making themselves the center of the story. The way George feels when he tells the story, though, shows that just telling the story is what matters. When George tells the story, "...he would often sit back a little, not listen very closely, temporarily retreating into his memory...that moment still happened. It was always still happening. And for that eternally repeated instant, pain was at bay, fear was held off, and everything was astonishment and wonder" (42).

The notion that the same story has different truths depending on who is telling it manifests itself again when Rachel, Mei, and Amanda are together and Rachel talks about Henri's relationship with JP and the narrator tells the story about how the fire started in George's house. Rachel tells the story of Amanda's current situation with her ex-husband and JP from an outsider's point of view. Henri is living with another woman in another country. Amanda has the insider's view of the story and has a hard time dealing with what Rachel says, "Because it wasn't like that. Well, it was, but also wasn't. Henri was back in France..but Amanda had basically forced him to go, booting him out of her and JP's life..." (53). Still he calls JP on a regular basis and wants to be part of his life as much as he can be considering that he is a long-distance father. The story about how the fire started has five different versions which enforces the theme.

The motif of the story and the question of the purpose of the story manifests itself again when George wants Kumiko to tell him her story and they discuss the purpose of stories in general and at the end of the novel when George realizes that he must tell what he knows of Kumiko's story because doing so will keep her alive and he will see the world in amazement and wonder as he does when he tells the story about the car accident. George and Kumiko surmise that stories help people deal with extraordinary events. When Kumiko says that a story must be told George says, "How else can we live with the extraordinary?" (149). She agrees with him. At the end of the novel, he gets her message through the crane on a blank piece of paper that he needs to tell her story as he knows and that that will keep her alive. When he talks to Amanda after making this decision he is full of astonishment and wonder.



Interpersonal Differences

The narrative uses Henri, JP, Hank, George, and Mehmet to portray the idea that despite people's differences, people are essentially the same in all truly important ways. For example, Henri is French, but he has lived in England for at least his time as a student and during his married life with Amanda. Readers know that he is French because he says so; JP is named after a family member, and he wants JP to know about his French heritage. However, it is not the fact that he is French that causes his divorce from Amanda. It is her anger. He says that it was not the slap that caused him to leave but the look in her eyes when she did it. In fact, being French, he says, makes it possible for him to take the slap. Thus their marriage ended for the same reason a marriage between two people from the same culture and country might end their marriage.

JP, their son, is French from his father's side of the family, British from Amanda's side and American from George's side of the family, yet he acts like a common little boy does talking about farting, being shocked when he hears George say the word "damn", copying his mother by calling George by his first name, feeding the ducks and being homesick when he is in France. When he is in the park with George, JP even uses French when he speaks. Yet JP and George are still able to communicate with each other and George even starts speaking French. Still people seeing the two of them together would simply think that a British man was with his British grandson in the park.

The fact that everyone thinks that George is British demonstrates the triviality of supposedly significant differences. When he tells the story of being hit by a car when he was young, the narrator says that he does so with all his Americanisms. Yet Rachel and Mei do not believe Amanda when she says that George is American. JP has no idea that George is American until George tells him that he is and then JP is shocked. The narrator says that in general, people do not believe that George is American.

People realize that Hank is American especially since he works for an American conglomerate, but it is only obvious that he is black because the narrator tells readers that he is. The same is true of Mehmet who tells people that he is Turkish. Readers only realize that the two men are different from others in the novel because attention is brought to the fact that they are. This fact manifests itself at the party when Amanda realizes that Hank is the only black man in the room and she sends him to talk to Mehmet because he is the only Turkish person. In doing so she makes them different by drawing attention to their differences.

Creativity

The novel uses George's creative struggles and the success of the tiles to demonstrate the idea that in order to create, one needs tension. The novel promotes the idea that true artists follow a general creative flow and possess an inner barometer that allows them to sense when they are creating something amazing. Moreover, the collaborative



creative exercises showcased in the novel promote the idea that collaboration creates something better than the single pieces alone.

The difficulties George faces when he has to create the cuttings demonstrate that he has never progressed in his artistic abilities because he lets perfectionism get in the way. He constantly worries about what is right rather than allowing himself to experiment and proceed in his artistic endeavors without an excessive amount of self-consciousness. He asks Kumiko what she is doing in order to give him a better idea of what he should do. He also directly asks her what he should do. Instead of answering his questions, she tells him that a real artist simply creates and knows when their creation is good. When George is really lost during the creation of his final cutting, he literally creates while being tormented by the thought that he has betrayed Kumiko by sleeping with Rachel. Under the control of this tension, his brain cannot edit itself and he creates something so wonderful that he knows that it is what he is supposed to make and he has to show it to Kumiko. This idea allows the novel to show how tension and turmoil lead to the creation of great art rather than calculation and contemplation.

The novel further explores the merits of collaboration by demonstrating the positive effects that are produced when George combines his work with Kumiko's. While George's work is good, it is not truly great until he allows Kumiko to combine it with hers. Even then, although it should not work, their collaboration creates a work of art described as magical. This shows that collaboration does not have to come from the same disciplines and that creation comes from taking things from different places, turning them upside down and mixing it to create something new.

Love

The love stories in the narrative—between the lady in the cloud and the volcano, and Kumiko and George—show that combating emotions such as possessiveness and freedom and anger and forgiveness inevitably exist in romantic relationships. The story in the novel about the crane and the fisherman shows the tendency for someone to want to possess what they love as the fisherman wants to possess the crane. This wish is dangerous, however, because people, at least those who are free spirits, value their freedom. In this relationship the two desires do not coincide with each other. The same is true of the relationship between George and Kumiko as George wants to possess Kumiko and she wants her freedom. George wants to move fast in their relationship. After knowing her for only two weeks he wants her to move in with him. He wants to know all about her. He is greedy and knows it, but even though he feels guilty for feeling this way he still does not back away. She says no to him when he wants her to move in. She builds her story slowly and when he finds out the whole truth about her, the spell is broken and she leaves. This fact promotes the idea that there needs to be some aura of secrecy or mystery in order to keep a relationship alive.

The novel explores how the conflicting elements in a relationship and the subsequent forgiveness are often necessary to the survival of the relationship itself. The crane forgives the fisherman and the relationship lives in the story. Amanda cannot forgive



herself or Henri for the fact that she loves him and that she is the one who sabotages their relationship because of her anger. She also tries to possess Henri again through having sex with him and halfway hopes that she is pregnant. Possession is not the answer though as the encounter means nothing to Henri. He never even mentions that it happens even though he calls afterwards to talk to JP. While she can no longer have a romantic relationship with Henri they do have a good relationship when she forgives herself and him. Then she is able to let JP go and see Henri and he realizes that she is a good mother and loves JP when JP is homesick.

Another significant marker of these love stories is that partners are attracted to each other by characteristics that they grow to hate. The fisherman loves the crane because it is such a beautiful creature. The volcano and the lady in the cloud are attracted to each other because they are different from each other. Henri and Amanda admire each other's fiery spirit. Kumiko thinks that George is the perfect person for her because he is nice and George is attracted to Kumiko because she is a mysterious being. In the end, the partners hate these attributes. The ultimate point about forgiveness in terms of relationships is that partners have to forgive each other for the fact that they are who they are and they are not going to change. Forgiving them allows their partners to be free to continue to be themselves.

Self-Acceptance

One of the unifying themes of the novel is that George, Amanda, and the lady in the cloud and the volcano suffer personal difficulties until they accept themselves for who they are. George is miserable at the beginning of the novel because he feels that he is too nice and fails to appreciate the value of the relationships he has with the people in his life. During his transformation he goes to the other extreme and becomes so mean to Amanda that he hurts her feelings and the father and daughter stop talking to each other. After the fire, when he is reborn, he is still nice, but has learned to be hard when it is necessary to be so. He fires Mehmet for his own good, setting him free to pursue his goal. In this way he forgives him for not being the best employee and takes harsh steps to set him free. George is also no longer going to turn down help from others and he knows who his true friends are which is why he has the phone numbers of Amanda, Clare and Mehmet in his cell phone after the fire.

Amanda is another major character who struggles with difficulties regarding her personal identity. Amanda is angry at the beginning of the novel and lashes out without considering the feelings or opinions of others. She is the opposite of George in temperament and laments that she has no friends. Her transformation allows her to see why she is angry and learn how to channel her anger for the good of others. She helps Felicity become a nicer person and creates a better office atmosphere for the women at work. She also becomes nicer herself, accepts that she loves people and then freely lets these people in her life.

The novel emphasizes its notions of self-acceptance with the allegorical portrayal of the volcano and the woman in the cloud. The volcano accepts that he will always start wars



and the lady in the cloud will always forgive and that because of that, their relationship will always be at odds. Therefore, he wants the forgiveness ritual to take place. The lady in the cloud still hopes that he will change. He knows that this is not going to happen, so when she gives him permission to forgive her he attempts to do so and strikes her with the arrow.



Styles

Point of View

The narrative is written in the past tense it is written from a third-person point of view that moves from the perspective of George, Amanda, and Kumiko through her telling of her story, that of the lady in the cloud and the volcano. This is appropriate given that the novel is not about one person, but is the story of each of these people. In addition, given the theme that stories have multiple truths, the narrative attempts to share the truth of the characters' stories based on the people who are the main characters of their own stories.

It is important to note, however, that even though it is a third-person narrative, the perspective is so close to those of the main characters of George, Amanda, and Kumiko that it can still be unreliable. The narrative brings attention to this point with one of the versions of what causes the fire in George's apartment. This version says that the volcano sees the tiles and destroys them all because he does not like the version of the story that the lady in the cloud (Kumiko) tells.

It is important to also note that the third-person point of view helps readers see how much George and Amanda grow during the narrative as they see the lives of the two characters before and after Kumiko's intervention.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel can at times be sophisticated, old-fashioned, and poetical which adds to the mystical element of the narrative. The mystical and more poetic tone appears in the first chapter when George finds the crane, during the telling of the story between the lady in the cloud and the volcano and when George finds Kumiko working on the tile in her apartment.

This type of language is in direct contrast to the modern day language to bring readers back to the real world. Such a juxtaposition exists as the narrative transitions from George's saving of the crane and his printing office in the next chapter. Thus the language works with the novel's structure as the novel itself is a modern-day version of an old Japanese folktale.

It is also important to note that French appears in the novel as well and the use of this language supports the theme that people may be different. but in the big scheme of things, they are really the same. JP speaks French and both Amanda and George encourage it. Yet, the language does not create a barrier. Amand and George both understand and communicate with JP in French. JP is just like any boy in spite of the fact that he is different based on his heritage.



Structure

The narrative is divided into five sections with approximately the same number of chapters in each section. The narrative follows the arc of showing the issues George and Amanda face before Kumiko, what they go through during their period of transformation, and how they are after she leaves.

While the main narrative continues, there is the underlying narrative of the lady in the cloud and the volcano which is interwoven in the modern-day narrative. It has approximately the same number of chapters as the modern-day narrative and merges with it towards the end of the novel.

The structure works with the motif of the story as a story is told within a story which is within a story. The first story is the Japanese folklore tale of the Crane Wife. The next story is the story of George, Amanda and Kumiko. The third story is that of the lady in the cloud and the volcano. The structure is such that the Japanese tale and the story of the lady in the cloud and the volcano merge with the modern-day tale creating a new story which George decides to tell at the end of the novel.

The structure supports the theme that there are many truths to a story, but the story must be told anyway as these stories can have different versions. The narrative tells another version of the Japanese Folklore tale and the volcano may not agree with the lady in the cloud's version of their story. George admits that he is telling Kumiko's story as he knows it because it is what he knows.



Quotes

But the name came to him, and regardless of where it might have come from or how it might be right, it was right. He knew it, and speaking made it more so.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote occurs when George finds the crane in his backyard and appears after the narrator laments that people do not bother any more to look for the extraordinary. Yet he does and realizing that this extraordinary bird is in his yard starts his extraordinary story. Speaking it makes it come alive and grow just as telling a story makes it live and grow.

No one wanted to hear that people other than themselves might be complicated, that no one was ever just one thing, no history ever just one version.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote appears as the narrator tells readers that people are surprised when they hear that George is American and is ready to tell George's story about being hit by a car. It shows that people do not bother to think about what makes people different and they do not bother to think that stories have different truths.

Not special at all,' said Miss Jones

-- Miss Jones (chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: Miss Jones says this to describe George when he gets to the third grade. This quote said at the time foreshadows his life with women as they think that he is special at first and then believe that he is nothing special. It also sets off the events that lead to the car accident.

Life was unravelling under the threat of a single, terrible finger, looming as large as a coming apocalypse from which there would be no mercy, no forgiveness, just everlasting despair.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 21)

Importance: This quote is George's explanation as to why his mother bit his teacher's finger and shows that people do extreme things to hide other issues they may have. It is interesting that George's mother had such issues as Amanda feels that something is not right with her and uses anger to keep people from seeing it.

At her core, she was broken, and life was just one long attempt to distract people from noticing.

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 47)

Importance: The narrator says this about Amanda when relaying the story about her college years. It helps explain her anger and coincides with the same feeling her



grandmother had in which she lashed out due to feelings inside her and not the event itself.

The truth mattered less than the story's life.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 89)

Importance: This quote comes from George's point of view as he thinks about his story of the car accident. It states a major theme in the novel, namely the importance of storytelling in everyday life.

It is hard, but it is bearable if your love for me is bigger than your hate.

-- Henri (chapter 4 paragraph 70)

Importance: Henri says this after Amanda slaps him. The quote states what Amanda later learns which is that it is necessary to have someone to love in order to not be angry about everything in life,

Let it be enough that I have lived and changed and been changed. Just like everyone else.

-- Kumiko (chapter 5 paragraph 70)

Importance: Kumiko says this when George first meets her and tries to find about her past. The statement adds to her mystic, foreshadows that she is not going to be rushed in the relationship to share herself even though George is going to want to know all about her, and shows that while people may have different histories they are the same in that it has somehow changed them.

A story must be told. How else can we live in this world that makes not sense?

-- Kumiko (chapter 12 paragraph 63)

Importance: Kumiko says this to George as she cuts his hair and they discuss stories. The statement continues the motif of stories and supports the mystical elements of the novel as the stories that are told are extraordinary. It also foreshadows that George will have a new story to tell at the end of the novel as his current experience is extraordinary.

The net catches some of the truth, but not all, never all, only enough so that we can live with the extraordinary without it killing us.

-- Kumiko (chapter 12 paragraph 67)

Importance: Kumiko says this to George during the conversation she has with George about stories. It supports the idea that it does not matter whether or not a story portrays the story's truth. What matters is that the story is told.

Why is what you are never enough for you?

-- Kumiko (chapter 15 paragraph 126)



Importance: Kumiko says this to Amanda at George's party. The quote supports the theme of self acceptance.

The only ones who can free us are the very ones who are too kind to do so.
-- The Volcano (chapter 27 paragraph 26)

Importance: The volcano says this to the lady in the cloud when they come face to face during the fire at George's house. He is referencing not only that George cannot let her go, but that she cannot let him go because she is too kind as is George.