

The Improbability of Love Study Guide

The Improbability of Love by Hannah Rothschild

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Improbability of Love Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Prologue, Chapters 1-6.....	4
Chapters 7 - 12.....	8
Chapters 13 - 18.....	12
Chapters 19 - 23.....	16
Chapters 24 - 28.....	19
Chapters 29 - 33.....	22
Chapters 34 - 38.....	27
Characters.....	32
Symbols and Symbolism.....	35
Settings.....	37
Themes and Motifs.....	38
Styles.....	41
Quotes.....	43



Plot Summary

The Improbability of Love is a satire about the wealthy - and sometimes sinister - world of international art collecting. Annie McDee, a 31-year old woman has moved to London from a smaller English town after the end of her relationship with a man named Desmond who was also her business partner. Annie is a personal chef which she feels is a dead end job. The job, plus the end of her personal life, have drained Annie of all enthusiasm for life. She has recently taken up with a man to stave off loneliness but he really wants to return to his wife and children. Annie buys a painting for him in a junk shop and plans to give it to him for his birthday, along with a special dinner. Unfortunately, he doesn't come for dinner and Annie is left with a painting she doesn't want so she plans to return it. When Annie arrives at the site of the junk shop the next day, she learns that it has burned down and its owner has died. She is now out of money she couldn't afford to lose and is stuck with a painting she doesn't want.

Unbeknownst to Annie, she has purchased a masterpiece titled "The Improbability of Love" painted by French artist, Jean-Antoine Watteau. The painting is able to speak to the reader and shares its celebrated past as property of royals and wealthy notables in world history. Annie determines to trace the origins of "The Improbability of Love" and slips into the mysterious world of art collecting. In her attempts to learn about the painting's provenance, she meets a starving artist named Jesse who quickly falls in love with her. Annie keeps Jesse at a safe distance, though, because she is not willing to have her heart broken again. Adding to Annie's personal grief is the recurring inappropriate behavior of her alcoholic mother, Evie.

Taking a temporary cooking job with the Winkleman family, well known in the international art world, she is introduced to the wealthy and powerful. Annie's painting had been the property of the Winkleman family but was lost to them and the head of the Winkleman family, Memling, is fierce in his pursuit of it. Memling's daughter, Rebecca, discovers that her father is not who he says he is, having taken on the identity of a Jewish Holocaust survivor and building an art empire with his duplicitous greed.

Rebecca can't afford to have the Winkleman empire collapse if the public were to find out about the Winklemans so she frames Annie for theft and murder of the junk shop. What once was a simple purchase of an assumed simple piece of art lands Annie in prison as the Winkelman family scrambles to cover its horrific behaviors. Love does conquer all, however, and Annie is released from prison after Jesse's refusal to believe in Annie's guilt and his perseverance in ferreting out the truth.



Prologue, Chapters 1-6

Summary

The employees at Monachorum and Sons auction house in London prepare for what is considered to be the sale of the century. A world-famous painting called *The Improbability of Love* is being auctioned off tonight and wealthy people from many walks of life arrive to bid on it. Earl Beachendon runs the auction house and he nervously issues last minute instructions to his employees on how to conduct the evening with their wealthy clients. Art historian, Delores Ryan, is an expert in French eighteenth-century art bemoans the fact that she had had the celebrated painting and let it slip away. Russian Dmitri Voldakov arrives at the auction house with his stunning fiancée, Lyudmilla, and plans to outbid his nemesis, Vlad.

After all the major players have arrived, the auction begins and Earl Beachendon is in such a state of anxiety that he doesn't see a young Chinese man examining the velvet covered plinth supporting the painting. When it is discovered that the painting is missing, the heads of security resign their jobs.

In Chapter 1, it is six months earlier than the gathering held at Monachorum and Sons. A woman named Annie McDee stops in a junk shop to buy a birthday gift for the man she has been seeing. She buys a painting that catches her eye, spending nearly all the money she has.

In Chapter 2, the story is told from the perspective of the painting that Annie purchased. The painting feels that it is the greatest ever representation of love and is outraged at its recent treatment of living in a junk store. The painting is 300 years old and used to being displayed at palaces and other grand environments. The painting's first language is French but has also lived in Germany, Spain, England, Russia and Italy. The painting recalls Annie perusing the junk shop and selecting the painting as a gift. The painting is outraged at being jammed into a plastic bag and then loaded into the basket on Annie's bicycle. The painting is less than enthused about the prospect of living in Annie's little flat or wherever her boyfriend lives. The painting is intrigued, though, by the way Annie studies it and wonders about its story. Watching Annie prepare food and then get dressed, the painting can feel Annie's pain when her boyfriend doesn't show up for dinner.

In Chapter 3, Annie awakens with a hangover, having drunk too much wine after last night's disappointment. Annie spots the painting and vows to return it to the junk shop tomorrow. Annie picks at the food left over from last night, makes some coffee and thinks about Desmond, the man with whom she had partnered in business and in love. After her breakup with Desmond, she spent six months in India and returned to England where she took a job as private chef to movie director Carlo Spinetti. Unlike what some of her friends think, Annie's life is lonely and far from glamorous. Annie decides to take a walk and discovers that the junk shop where she bought the painting has burned to the



ground. Annie asks a policewoman about the fire and learns that the owner has perished. The policewoman asks Annie to answer some questions about how she knew the man but all Annie can think about is how she can get a refund for that painting.

As she continues on her walk, Annie receives a call on her mobile phone from a policeman asking Annie to come to the station and pick up her mother, Evie, who is drunk again. When Annie arrives at the station, Evie is making a loud scene. Annie recalls defending her mother's drunken behavior when she was a child, but she is weary of the behavior now and her mother's dependence on her. At Annie's flat, Evie admires the painting because it reminds her of something that would be seen at the Wallace Collection, a fine art gallery that she and her deceased husband used to frequent. Evie thinks that Annie's painting could be something special and encourages her to have it appraised.

In Chapter 4, Carlo Spinetti's wife, Rebecca Winkleman, works for her father, Memling Winkleman at the family art acquisition business, Winkleman Fine Art Ltd. Rebecca is very docile and subservient to her father who controls her life both in the business and on the outside. She loves her philandering husband for his spirited personality even though most people think she stays with him because she is afraid of being alone. When the Winklemans' chef suffers a stroke, Carlo urges Annie to apply for the job and she does. Annie finds the atmosphere at the Winkleman office dark and gloomy and doesn't think she'll fit in but Rebecca hires her in spite of her own misgivings. Annie quickly realizes that cooking for the Winklemans will be a bland, repetitive job and she's ready to resign by the third day.

However, Annie takes heart when Rebecca asks her to prepare a dinner for twenty in honor of their client, Melanie Appledore. The purpose of the evening is to introduce Mrs. Appledore to the work of the painter, Caravaggio, in the hopes that she will want to buy it. Annie learns that most dinners served to Winkleman guests consist of fish and light fare but when she views the dark, rich colors of the bloody scene she decides to prepare a banquet of foods that would have been consumed by Caravaggio's 16th century patrons.

Annie sleeps in the galley kitchen because she doesn't want to face Evie at home but Evie surprises her and shows up at Winklemans the next morning. It is Evie's birthday and she wants to go to lunch and then to the Wallace Collection with Annie but Annie protests that she has too much work to do. Annie relents, though, and they leave on what Annie hopes will be a quick outing. At the Wallace Collection, Annie locks eyes with an unkempt guide named Jesse but she soon makes it clear that she's not interested in him. Annie looks around and spots Evie holding up Annie's painting to others in the collection and they see similarities among the works showing half-naked shepherdesses and lascivious male onlookers.

Annie can hear Jesse telling his tour group about an artist named Antoine Watteau, famous for painting elegant people in park landscape settings. Evie spots definite similarities between Watteau's paintings and Annie's painting. When she leans in too closely to the art, Evie is escorted from the building and Annie follows at a safe



distance. Soon Jesse runs up to Annie to give her a postcard of a painting resembling hers on which he had written his phone number. He invites Annie to call him if she ever wants to explore the origins of her painting.

In Chapter 5, Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George, known to most people as Barty, appraises his 69-year-old fit body appreciatively and is validated by one of his assistants. Barty is a stylish gay man who has developed a business creating lifestyles for the wealthy. Barty had left his repressed childhood behind and moved to London where he became the darling of the rich and famous because he could fix any problem all the while oozing impeccable style. Barty gets his clients through referrals from people who are amazed at what he can do for them, whether it's finding the perfect real estate or throwing extravagant parties.

Barty is driven to a house in London's Berkeley Square to meet a new client, a Russian named Vladimir Antipovsky. Vlad is an extremely wealthy 41-year-old man exiled from Russia for being outspoken against the government. Barty is happy at the prospect of getting a big chunk of Vlad's money in exchange for helping him establish a new life in England. Vlad is a typical Russian emigre who longs for his homeland and can't shake his depression about his new situation. Barty proceeds to advise Vlad on where he should live, the kind of car he should drive and even the hobbies he should take up.

In Chapter 6, the story continues from the perspective of the painting which feels that its future depends on people believing that it is worth something. Being in Annie's care is disconcerting because she doesn't know what she has and places no real value on it. The painting is further mortified to have been dragged around London in a plastic bag by Evie. The painting is very complimentary of its creator's skills and he likes to think that Annie can intuit this when she studies the painting.

Analysis

The author begins the story at the ending and the rest of the book is a flashback to explain how it reached this point. The author establishes a sense of mystery and intrigue by telling the reader that an important painting has gone missing just before a big sale. The novel will go back in time to share the events that led up to the ending and the reader is kept in suspense throughout.

She establishes the setting for the story as the art world in London where the very wealthy gather to see and be seen. In stark contrast is the life of Annie McDee who has unwittingly purchased a painting for a lover and doesn't realize what she has acquired. The theme of love will be an important one in the story. The reader learns that Annie's most recent lover has been invited to her flat for his birthday dinner but he never showed up and never called. Annie is angry with herself for buying the painting and spending money she really shouldn't have on a man who had so little regard for her. Annie questions her ability to make good choices in love especially in light of the break up of a long-term relationship she had with a man named Desmond, her business



partner and lover. Annie still suffers the effects of this loss in her life and feels as if she will never find love again.

The theme of art is also an important one in the story. The author establishes the power and lure of art for the wealthy and how that world is so different from the world of ordinary people. The author blends the themes of art and love and names the famous painting, "The Improbability of Love."

The author also uses the technique of anthropomorphism which means that she has given human characteristics to something; in this case it is the painting. Two chapters in this section are told from the painting's perspective and this technique will be repeated throughout the novel. The reader learns that the painting is 300 years old and has been in the possession of royalty and other wealthy people in several countries. The painting is of French origin having been painted by Antoine Watteau, a famous 16th century French painter. It is interesting to note how the author shares not only what the painting has seen, but also how the painting feels about events and experiences. So far, the painting is the only character who realizes its real worth and it is disturbed by that because its value lies in the perception of its current owner. The painting isn't thrilled to be reduced to such lowly circumstances as Annie's flat, but the painting is the greatest expression of love so it holds out hope that something good will come for Annie.

Discussion Question 1

What is a flashback and is that an effective method for telling such a complicated story?

Discussion Question 2

What is the painting's perspective on its current situation of living in a very modest flat as opposed to some of the grander rooms where it has hung?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author try to engender sympathy for Annie so far in the book to make her a relatable character as opposed to the flamboyant characters of the art world?

Vocabulary

portico, paparazzi, accredited, hullabaloo, vantage, atrium, penchant, minion, acquisition, indispensable, penury, peccadillos, coiffed, iconic, colossi, aesthetes, equity, allegro, staccato, osteoporosis, improbability, alchemy, principality, avaricious, couture, eviscerated, mania, simultaneous, atrocity, factions, notoriety, flotsam, jetsam, desultory, connoisseurs, relegation, bavette, moniker, jaunty



Chapters 7 - 12

Summary

There are less than 17 hours to go before the Winklemans' big dinner party and Annie is exhausted, not having slept much for the last week due to preparations. Annie plans to transport the dinner guests back to the 16th century in a sumptuous feast for the senses. Although Annie loves doing these grand events, she's also afraid that she'll lose her job because the Winklemans usually entertain in a much more austere manner.

Earl Beachendon attends an emergency meeting of the board of directors at Monachorum and Sons to discuss recent significant losses. Art is being sold for less than its appraisal and it is becoming more difficult to acquire pieces to sell. Things look bleak and Beachendon knows that his days at the firm are numbered. He wonders how he will support his family when he loses his job.

Barty and his friend, Delores Ryan, an art historian, meet to share gossip and the subject turns to her arch rival, Trichcombe Abufel, and his plans to destroy Memling Winkleman. Barty also talks about his hopes to get his new client, Vlad, to invest in art. Delores realizes that she's late for the Winkleman party so she dresses quickly and rushes out.

Rebecca Winkleman dresses for her party and thinks about the Antoine Watteau painting that has gone missing. She reviews the grainy photos captured from the closed circuit TV security cameras which show a girl placing the painting into the wire basket of her bicycle and pedaling away. The girl hasn't been identified but Rebecca feels that she has seen her somewhere. In the kitchen, Annie oversees last minute preparations for the party. When Rebecca sees the sumptuous setting for the dinner, she is not pleased but Annie hopes that it will put the guests in the mood to buy the painting. The guests are beginning to arrive and they are all in awe of Memling Winkleman.

Memling is 91-years-old but still plays tennis regularly and walks his dog every day. He has always been quite striking for his pale blue eyes, accented now by a shock of white hair. Memling's patrician bearing is even more enigmatic when people learn that he survived two years at the Auschwitz concentration camp but that the rest of his family perished there. The dinner guests are amazed at what Annie has created and insist that she come to the dining room where they could applaud her. Mrs. Appledore states that she might have to buy the Caravaggio painting just to remind her of such a lovely dinner.

In Chapter 8, Annie leaves the Winkleman house at one in the morning and savors her success as she walks.

Vlad wakes up to see three young women in his bed and he thinks about how wealthy he is, something he never imagined in his wildest dreams. When one of the girls wakes,



Vlad talks with her and she asks if he would ever kill anyone. Vlad remembers hating his brother for stealing his girlfriend and then pushing his brother down the deep shaft of a mine and how his brother's face sometimes haunts him still.

Annie hops on a bus to get home and she thinks about the time she spent in India after she and Desmond broke up. While there, Annie stopped at an Internet cafe and read an email from Desmond telling her that he is a new father and he hopes that Annie can be happy for him. Annie remembers crying because she had wanted children but Desmond had told her that he didn't but now it seems that he just didn't want to have children with her. In the present, Annie returns to her flat where her mother has left her a note that Jesse called and she dares Annie to call him.

In Chapter 9, Annie meets Jesse for breakfast and she learns that he paints as well as gives tours at art museums. Annie has brought her painting so he can look at it and discuss whether it's worth having it appraised by experts. Jesse has fallen in love with Annie but she isn't interested in a relationship with a messy painter, or really anyone, at this point. After they finish their meal, Jesse takes Annie to another cafe because the light is better and they can examine her painting. When Jesse is able to point out things about the painting that Annie never noticed, she gets more enthused about learning about it. Jesse thinks the painting is probably very special and they proceed to Jesse's flat to look even closer at the painting.

Jesse shows Annie that the painting has been relined a couple times which means that it has been laid over two other canvases. This means that the painting is probably around 300 years old. Jesse suggests that they show the painting to Delores Ryan because she is an art historian and has just written a book called "Watteau's Women" and may have some insight to this piece of work. Jesse suggest that another art historian, Trichcombe Abufel, would be a great resource but he is a virtual recluse and hard to contact. Jesse also tells Annie that his father had been working on a process to identify oils and paints on paintings but he died suspiciously. The only other person who understands his father's work is his colleague named Agatha who might be able to help them.

In Chapter 10, Delores Ryan has left a phone message for Annie at the Winklemans office. A couple days later Annie goes to Delores' flat with her painting in tow. Annie sees that Delores has written several books about Watteau and his work. Annie can see some similarities in some of the other work and her own painting. Delores wants Annie to produce an extravaganza for 50 people for her 60th birthday. Annie asks Delores if she'll look at her painting and Delores thinks it's a nineteenth-century copy in the style of Watteau. Annie is disappointed and Delores offers to give her 20 pounds for it but Annie declines.

Vlad spends a lot of time looking for expensive art to buy. He also meets with his nemesis, Dmitri Voldakov, another Russian emigre, Both men have to pay 30% of their income every week to the Russian government in order to guarantee his safety. Vlad is not sure how to make the weekly payments and Dmitri tells him to alternate stocks and shares with art or jewels and make the drops at the safe house.



Chapter 11 is just a few lines from the painting stating that it is still here and vastly more interesting than food and longer lasting than love.

In Chapter 12, Jesse visits his friend, Larissa, and he can't stop thinking and talking about Annie who has been distant from him. Larissa suggests that Jesse use the exploration of Annie's painting's origin be a way for him to spend more time with her and hopefully win her love.

Rebecca returns to the office late one night after a business dinner and sees Annie leave the back entrance and she knows now that this is the person who had been caught on the security cameras taking the missing painting and leaving on her bicycle. Rebecca thinks that Annie has masterminded her way into the business and is a major threat.

Analysis

The introduction of the name of Trichcombe Abufel by Barty and Jesse is an example of foreshadowing in the story. Barty's mention of Abufel's plans to destroy Memling Winkleman is especially important because it will be very important to the conclusion of the story. Jesse mentions that Abufel would be a great resource for helping to identify Annie's painting, but he is a recluse so is not a truly viable option. This is ironic, because it will be Abufel who will ultimately bring the story to a positive close for Annie, but not in a way that anyone could have predicted.

There is also foreshadowing when the author describes Memling Winkleman's physical appearance, especially his pale blue eyes. His physicality will become important when the story reaches a climax and his identity differs from who he has claimed to be all his adult life.

The theme of greed begins to become important as the board members of Monachorum and Sons meet to discuss their lagging business. They are not realizing the same profitability as they used to and the board members won't be making the money they're accustomed to making. They begin to panic because their greed overrules any sense of rational thinking. They also intend to make Earl Beachendon the one who will ultimately pay because he will lose his job. Beachendon's greed comes into play when he thinks about all the luxuries he will have to forego if he is no longer working at the art auction house.

There is also an element of greed that comes into play when Delores Ryan offers to buy Annie's painting for 20 pounds. It is clear that Delores knows that it is worth more, possibly a lot more, and she is not above taking advantage of Annie's ignorance in order to secure the painting for herself.

There is irony in Desmond's email to Annie telling her about the birth of his child. Annie and Desmond had broken up and she was spending some time in India to mourn the loss of the relationship and try to put her life back together. When Annie gets an unexpected email about the baby, she is shocked and surprised because she had



wanted to have children but Desmond never did. Now, ironically, Desmond has a new child and hopes that Annie can be happy for him. It appears that Desmond just didn't want to have children with Annie.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Annie's use of food and drama with the art world in which she now finds herself.

Discussion Question 2

What is ironic about the email Annie received from Desmond when she stopped in the Internet cafe while in India?

Discussion Question 3

Why has the author made the painting an important character in the book?

Vocabulary

jaunty, contemplative, strewn, illustrious, cacophony, penchant, proboscis, stipend, crestfallen, lorry, interminable, faux, transience, soiree, alabaster, gait, conduit, etiolated, stevedores, palpable, blatant, provenance, ingenious, coquettish, fluke, connoisseur



Chapters 13 - 18

Summary

Chapter 13 is told from the perspective of the painting which is horrified at the prospect of being cleaned because it had seen other paintings destroyed by vigorous restoration efforts. The painting tells about the afternoon that Jesse and Annie had taken the painting to Jesse's father's former colleague, Agatha, to discuss the restoration of the painting. Agatha states that since the painting has been relined several times, it clearly was valuable or sentimental. Agatha is able to determine that a white smudge in the corner is actually the figure of a clown named Pierrot who was a performer in the late 16th century and portrayed innocence. It's possible that the clown was painted in by the painter to show the futility or cruelty of love. Agatha takes a closer look at the painting and feels that it is an important work and she offers to keep it to work on restoring it in her free time.

In Chapter 14, Rebecca has become suspicious of Annie and has removed her from the Winkleman kitchen until further notice. One day Annie goes to the London Library to do some research on the food and entertaining customs of Versailles for Delores' party. She then goes to the British Museum to view some drawing collections of Watteau's work. While reviewing the works, Annie is approached by a man named Trichcombe Abufel who has seen Annie comparing a picture of her painting on her cell phone to the drawings. He tells Annie that he has been looking for that painting for a long time and shows her a painting in a book that is very similar to hers. Abufel translates the name of the drawing and the painting as *The Improbability of Love*. Abufel would like to see Annie's painting to make sure it is authentic but Annie isn't interested.

Chapter 15 is told from the perspective of the painting which is pleased with the unhurried way Agatha has approached its restoration. The painting also tells about its painter, Antoine Watteau, who fell in love with a dancer named Colette. He would sit at her performances to draw her and then painted her in *The Improbability of Love* which shows all Watteau's feelings of love and passion. When the painting was finished, Watteau took it to the theater to show Colette, but her rival scratched it with her fingernail in jealousy. Colette wanted the painting anyway but he said he would give it to her only when she agreed to marry him which never came to pass. In all his work from that point forward, he painted women's faces to look like Colette and introduced the clown, Pierrot, as a self portrait of rejection and derision.

In Chapter 16, Annie arrives for work and is told that her mother has called several times that morning. Evie tells Annie that someone has broken into Annie's flat. Annie does not know that it was Rebecca who had ordered a search of Annie's flat and no information was uncovered about the painting. Rebecca is extremely frustrated because she can't find any information in spite of their vast network of appraisers and security people who would alert her if the painting had surfaced anywhere. Rebecca paces her



office and realizes that her father won't tell her why this painting is so important so she will have to find that out on her own.

Rebecca locks her office door and opens a secret room containing special paintings and records of all the sales that had taken place at Winkleman over the years. The records date back to 1946 after Memling was freed from Auschwitz. More than 1,150 paintings had passed through their firm, mostly acquired from auctions or private sales. Rebecca does not have a photo of the missing painting and had searched earlier to learn that only three Watteau paintings have ever passed through Winkleman's firm. As she searches the ledgers, Rebecca notes the classifications of paintings of pre-war or post-war. Memling had often told his children that Jewish people had sold their paintings to get money to escape Nazi Germany during that time.

Memling had told Rebecca that the painting had left his ownership 20 years ago, yet Rebecca finds no documentation on it. While searching, Rebecca sees handwritten notes from her brother, Marty, related to certain paintings that dot the pages of the ledgers. Marty had committed suicide a few years ago and Rebecca still mourns for him. As she is about finished for the evening, Rebecca discovers a hidden notebook in which Marty had documented about 125 paintings separate from the main ledgers. On the front of the book was listed an address in Berlin. Rebecca shoots a photo of each page with her cell phone, locks the room and heads to Heathrow Airport.

Barty takes Vlad to look at a house in Chester Square but Barty thinks it looks too common so it will need extensive renovations. Vlad doesn't really understand Barty's plans but agrees to buy it.

Earl Beachendon has been given a deadline of six months to produce some sales for Monachorum or he will be terminated. Beachendon has compiled a list of 20 collectors or artists to visit in the hopes that they will want to part with some major works. Earl first visits the collector, Sir Patrick O'Mally, but O'Mally is old and infirm and his young wife isn't interested in selling any of their pieces.

In Chapter 17, Rebecca has arrived at the Berlin address from Marty's notebook where she meets an old woman named Frau Danica Goldberg. Danica remembers the Winkleman family which perished at the concentration camps. Danica produces a business card with Marty's name on it because he, too, had come to the apartment looking for answers. Rebecca wonders why Marty had never told her that he had come here and if it was a clue to his sudden death. Danica says that Marty had asked to see any family photographs and she offers to show them to Rebecca too.

Rebecca spots her father in the photos immediately because she and her daughter look just like him. Danica tells her, though, that the child in the photo is not Memling, but a boy named Heinrich Fuchs. Heinrich lived with an abusive father and often sought refuge in the Winkleman's apartment. Rebecca recalls her father's stories about being forced into the concentration camps and having the identification numbers tattooed on his arm. Rebecca's head spins contemplating the possibility that her father is not the Jewish survivor, Memling Winkleman, but a German named Heinrich Fuchs. Rebecca



asks Danica if the Winkelmanns had had any art and she replies that they had one painting of a woman and her lover in a park being watched by a clown. Danica points out the painting in a photograph and Rebecca knows that this is the painting that her father wants to find.

Danica tells Rebecca that the Germans took everything from the Jewish people including the Winkelmanns' possessions. Heinrich had a position on Hitler's personal art squad and Danica remembers Heinrich showing up one day to take paintings. He stood and watched while the Winkelmanns' painting was taken away from them. Before Rebecca leaves, Danica tells her that she thinks Rebecca is a Fuchs and not a Winkelmann and all that Rebecca can reply is that she doesn't know.

After she leaves Danica's apartment, Rebecca reviews the photos of paintings from Marty's notebook and sees that Marty had documented the artist's name as Antoine Watteau who had painted it in 1703. Rebecca now knows that Marty had discovered the truth about their father and she vows to find out the truth.

In Chapter 18, Memling Winkelmann knows that he must find the painting because it has the potential to destroy him and his family. Memling thinks about a farmhouse in Bavaria and how he had tried to burn it down on his last visit but couldn't bring himself to do it. Memling recalls the love of his life, a woman named Marianne whom he married. They had a long term affair but Memling would not leave his wife. He had given the Watteau painting to Marianne and asked her family for it after she died but they had sold all her house contents in a public sale. Memling looked for the painting for years but never found it. Memling recalls that he had loved Marianne because she gave him unconditional love and he was able to forget the indignity and shame he felt for adopting another man's identity.

Annie meets Jesse and Agatha at the National Gallery's conservation studio where Agatha tells her that her painting is very old and is probably an original. The painting had been the property of royalty and other wealthy people over the years.

Analysis

The theme of love is an important one in this section. On the surface, the painting appears to be a setting of a man adoring a woman whom he loves. But when it is revealed that the clown figure, Pierrot, is revealed in the painting, the feeling of love alters into a state of painful or unrequited love. Pierrot is a symbol of innocence and his persona displays that he has been wounded in love because of his simple and pure emotions. Sometimes love is not returned when it is offered, and Pierrot symbolizes this dejection. Jesse is a modern day Pierrot because he is someone who loves with authenticity but Annie does not return his affection. Jesse, like Pierrot, lives in a dejected state and becomes less hopeful every day that Annie could possibly love him.

The theme of art continues in this section too. Jesse states that all good works of art are filled with complexity and emotion which is their power because they say things that



people find difficult to articulate. Often times people aren't really sure why they are attracted to a visual piece of work, but something appeals to them emotionally and subconsciously. Even Memling Winkelman, who is an austere, patrician man is moved to tears over the significance of the missing painting, "The Improbability of Love" because it has a really strong emotional attachment for him.

On a more commercial level, art represents a big business and global wealth which is another reason that people pursue it. It is very powerful to own important pieces of art and people who collect it judge themselves and others by the significance of the pieces that they own.

The theme of deceit is an important one in this section too. Rebecca suspects Annie of possibly deceiving her to conspire to steal the painting from the Winklemans. Little does she know that nothing could be further from the truth as far as Annie is concerned, but Rebecca has lived in the cutthroat world of high stakes art acquisition all her life and she thinks that everyone is capable of deception to further their own goals.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Annie find the title of her painting, "The Improbability of Love," humorous as something belonging to her?

Discussion Question 2

What does Pierrot the clown usually represent in artwork, and what is the significance of his being painted into the scene of The Improbability of Love?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Rebecca shocked when she learns that her father has taken on the identity of another man and is not Jewish at all?

Vocabulary

effluents, sartorial, temerity, buffoon, claustrophobic, expunged, impenetrable, protocol, truffles, pureed, drachma, deluge, evocative, plait, biro, cognoscenti, aura, foppishly, narcissist, artifice, bonhomie, bucolic, voila, wee, truce, affidavits, equilibrium, baroque, pretentious, exemplification, imbues, firmament, cachet, visage, meticulous, loathe



Chapters 19 - 23

Summary

Chapter 19 is told from the perspective of the painting. The painting knows that Jesse is in love with Annie but Annie doesn't seem to be interested. The painting also thinks that Annie should explore the painting's history because humans need methods of classification and reassurance. Even though the painting has hung with very notable works of art, the artist never became that famous, possibly because he wasn't interested in courtly life and didn't have a very good art dealer. The painting knows that beauty has an intrinsic value and that most art investors buy it to be assumed creative or aesthetic. Beauty is a large part of assuaging loneliness for humans and so they gravitate toward art.

In Chapter 20, Rebecca locks the doors of her office and spreads the company ledgers on the floor of her office. She hopes to find evidence to disprove her suspicions about her father stealing the identity of a Jewish man and living a lie for so many years. All seems in order until Rebecca sees documentation of the acquisition from a family named Gandelstein located at the Berlin address of Danica Goldberg's apartment building. Rebecca is confused because Danica had told her that no Jewish families from the building survived the concentration camps. As Rebecca continues to search, she finds that paintings acquired from the years 1940-1947 had very little information recorded in the ledgers.

Rebecca does an online search for a recurring term she sees on the ledgers--ERR--which she learns stands for Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, the Nazi task force which confiscated all cultural property of Jews. She also determines that the letters KH and NC also noted in the ledgers refer to Karl Haberstock, Hitler's personal art dealer, and Neuschwanstein Castle, where some confiscated artwork was stored. She also notes that a painting simply titled "The Love" painting was acquired by Hitler in 1943. Rebecca thinks the painting may be "The Improbability of Love," Memling's missing painting. Rebecca tries to give her father the benefit of the doubt and considers that maybe Memling had simply tried to sell the paintings for Jewish people needing money at the time.

Rebecca also thinks about the tattooed number on Memling's arm indicating that he had been in a concentration camp. Did he have the tattoo done at some time to further his deceit of being a Jewish concentration camp survivor? Rebecca also wonders about Marty and if their father had anything to do with his death after Marty discovered the truth about him.

In Chapter 21, Agatha texts Annie to tell her that the white cloud in her painting is actually a clown which was a characteristic of a Watteau painting. Annie decides that the painting is too much trouble so she decides to collect it from Agatha and simply hang it in her flat.



In Chapter 22, Annie rises very early to make some trial dinner preparations for Delores' upcoming party. Evie offers to help but Annie declines because her mother is not reliable. Evie states that she is going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings now and promises to change but Annie has endless memories of her mother's new starts that never came to fruition.

Rebecca has asked her father to meet her for lunch and finds that he has already ordered for her when she arrives. Rebecca has changed, though, and her father's control over her is no longer acceptable so she orders her own meal. Rebecca tries to calm herself as she prepares to confront her father about his deceitful behavior. Rebecca asks her father why the missing painting is so important to him and he tells her that it belonged to his family and it is the only link he has with them. Memling then tells Rebecca how he had given the painting to Marianne and that's how it came to be lost to him. As Memling cries, he begs Rebecca to find the painting and she vows to do just that.

In Chapter 23, Earl Beachendon visits the reclusive Czech artist, Ergon Janacek, to see if he wants to sell any of his paintings. Any acquisitions from Janacek would save Beachendon's job and return Monachorum and Sons to solvency. Janacek declines the request because any sales of his paintings would create renewed interest in his personal life and he doesn't want any intrusions of his privacy.

Analysis

The author continues the technique of anthropomorphism in which the painting takes on human thoughts and expressive capabilities. By doing this, the author can share historical information about the painting as well as current events that the human characters aren't aware of.

The theme of deceit becomes important in this section. Rebecca is determined to get to the bottom of her father's activities in the art business and she uncovers information that leads her to strongly suspect that he has deceived people about his identity since the 1940s. Memling has conducted business with the persona of a Jewish holocaust survivor and raised his children to believe they are of Jewish heritage. Rebecca is outraged when she thinks about the concentration camp tattoo on Memling's arm and wonders how he accomplished that when he was never a Nazi prisoner at all.

Rebecca is very close to discovering the truth and she wants to confront her father but still wants to give him the benefit of the doubt because he has been the person she has known and loved all her life. Rebecca also doesn't want her suspicions to be true because the truth would bring their business crashing down. Rebecca wants to get to the core of the information and try to do damage control.

Rebecca is doubly hurt by her father when she learns that the real reason he wants the missing painting returned is that it reminds him of his true love, Marianne. This is



startling information for Rebecca who has grown up thinking that her father loved her mother, but this is something else that Memling has deceived people about.

The theme of greed becomes important in this section too. The Nazis confiscated cultural treasures of the Jewish people in order to possess them or sell them for their own advancement. This was just one more gross indignity perpetuated on the Jewish people and it stemmed from a position of greed and hate.

The theme of love continues to be important too. The painting reveals that Jesse loves Annie but she does not seem interested in him. Annie has been deeply wounded in love and is afraid to open her heart to anyone again. Love is also the basis for Memling's wanting to find his missing painting. Rebecca is shocked to find out the real reason for the painting's importance to him--that he had loved a woman other than Rebecca's mother and wants the painting back because it reminds him of her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the painting think that humans really like to collect art?

Discussion Question 2

Why are the terms ERR, KH and NC critical to Rebecca's investigation of Memling's activities?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it so important to Memling that Rebecca find his lost painting, "The Improbability of Love?"

Vocabulary

depravity, oeuvre, erstwhile, untrammelled, cynical, morass, sordid, sundry, talisman, guilt, nocturnal, marzipan, unscrupulous, absconding, mitigate, satire, grouse, moor, conjugal, rotund, girth, wizened, wunderkind, phantasmagorical, recalcitrant, vivified, chlamydia, dregs, aubergine, matrix, caricatures, daubing, vicariously, envisaged



Chapters 24 - 28

Summary

Chapter 24 is told from the perspective of the painting which Annie has picked up from Agatha. The painting feels demeaned because Annie has put it in a plastic bag where it still sits in Annie's flat. The painting has seen a woman break into Annie's flat and go through her drawers and computer accounts. The woman then talked to someone on her cell phone about the painting and how important it was that the woman find it. The painting wanted to scream out its location to the woman so it could be purchased by someone who would know its value. The painting then shares its lineage of ownership from Pope Pius VI, Napoleon and Empress Josephine, King George IV of Great Britain, Princess Victoria of Great Britain, a footman at Buckingham Palace in London, Esther Winkleman in Berlin, and then to a pale-eyed Nazi during World War II.

In Chapter 25, Annie invites Agatha and Jesse to dinner to thank Agatha for her work on the painting and as a trial run for Delores' upcoming party. Jesse and Annie talk awkwardly but Jesse still offers to help Annie in the kitchen. Jesse does such a great job that Annie asks if he'll help her at Delores' party and he agrees so they decide to meet the next day to go over menus and plans. As Jesse continues to help Annie with dinner, he has to will himself not to kiss her, but before he leaves for the evening, he does kiss her goodnight.

In Chapter 26, Trichcombe Abufel mopes around his flat, not able to forget about Annie and her painting which he suspects is the painting Memling Winkleman is looking for. Abufel has seen articles lately that the Winklemans had lost a small Watteau and Abufel thinks that he has found it. Abufel had once worked for Memling Winkleman for several years until Memling was unable to provide the source of paintings he was acquiring. One day, Abufel saw the painting, "The Improbability of Love" on Memling's desk and asked about it. Memling stated that it was personal and refused to give any information. He then had Abufel's things removed from the office and Abufel was terminated.

Memling blackballed Abufel in the art world and Abufel barely made a living for years. Abufel's secret longing for the past 42 years has been to unmask Memling and determine the real value of the painting. Abufel is very close to determining the painting's provenance; all he needs to do now is locate the painting and confirm the fate of Memling's parents in Berlin.

Vlad goes to the safe house for the first time to leave a deposit for the Office of Central Control. Some weeks Vlad transfers money to the office, but this week he wants to deposit a huge diamond so he must go to the office and navigate a labyrinth of passwords and secret passages. As Vlad drives away, he wonders how he will ever be able to find appropriate items to satisfy the office every week. Vlad meets with Barty to discuss his dilemma and Barty, in characteristic form, tells Vlad that he has a plan.



In Chapter 27, Annie transforms the Amadeus Centre in Maida Vale into an 18th-century grand inspired by her painting with the help of set designers, painters and dressers. Annie had tables set in the style of Louis XV, complete with candied fruit, golden goblets and linen napkins folded into the shape of swans. Annie prepares her cooking and wait staff with military precision because Delores' party must be perfection.

Delores arrives at her party dressed as Marie Antoinette and she cries at the beautiful atmosphere that Annie has created. Mrs. Appledore comes as Madame Pompadour and Barty is dressed as an 18th-century courtesan. Vlad arrives dressed as Peter the Great. Rebecca can't attend so Memling brings Rebecca's daughter, Grace, a pierced and tattooed Gothic punkess. Grace is seated next to Vlad and he is immediately smitten. The dinner is such a huge success that the guests call for Annie to give her a standing ovation. Annie and Jesse bask in the glow of the evening's success and Jesse tells her that tonight is the beginning of Annie's new life as a chef and caterer to the wealthy and famous.

Chapter 28 is told from the perspective of the painting which states that Jesse's feelings of love for Annie aren't enough to win her over; he must show proof of his love. Annie's heart has been broken in love, just as Watteau's was. He died of a broken heart and the painting does not want the same crushing fate for Annie. The painting admits that it has not always brought good luck to its owners but hopes this time will be different.

Analysis

The theme of food is important in this section. Annie prepares a trial run of Delores' upcoming dinner for Jesse, Agatha and her mother. The author provides intricate details of how Annie researches food and entertaining customs of the time period. She also gives details on how Annie will shop for food and drinks for the event as well as other supporting decorative touches. Annie totally immerses in the theme and preparation of the party and she lovingly creates a dinner to be remembered by all the guests.

Even though Annie refuses to lean in to Jesse's advances, food is often shared as an act of love. Annie wants to share with the people who are important to her right now and she invites Jesse as one of them. This supports another important theme in the book-- hope. Jesse keeps hoping that Annie will warm up to him and return the feelings and affection that he so strongly feels for her. Jesse not only feels hopeful toward Annie; he gives her hope for a new life. Even if Annie never enters into a relationship with Jesse, he gives her praise and confidence to entertain the idea that she can alter the course of her life. The possibility that Annie's painting may be one of significance, added to Annie's glowing success at Delores' party, combine to provide a more hopeful view of life than Annie has had for quite awhile. Jesse not only loves Annie; he admires her talents and sincerely wishes that good things finally come her way.

It is interesting to note how the author has positioned Memling Winkleman as a distasteful, domineering person who runs over everyone in his immediate universe. Now the author reveals a quiet, unassuming man, Trichcombe Abufel, who very well might be



the person to bring the Winkleman empire to its demise. The author teases the reader with this idea and it will be interesting to see how justice may be meted out after so many years.

The theme of love also continues in this section as the painting hopes for a different fate for Annie than the one met by Watteau who perished from unrequited love. The painting acknowledges that it has not always brought good luck to its owner, but hopes that this might be rectified in Annie's case.

Discussion Question 1

Why has Trichcombe Abufel vowed to unmask Memling Winkleman after so many years after his termination?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways is Annie's life now poised to take on a new, more positive direction?

Discussion Question 3

The painting compares Annie to Watteau and hopes she doesn't meet the same fate. What does it mean by that?

Vocabulary

au revoir, self-immolation, indefatigable, capricious, ignominiously, arteriosclerosis, bacchanalian, gluttonous, buffoon, prostrate, audacious, saute, disparaging, pouffe, veloute, chevrons, al dente, jacquard, communal, pre-pubescent, penury, restitution, languid, irrefutable, emigres, lummoX, disconsolate, edifice, festoon, lachrymose, doppelganger, madrigals, demure, peripatetic, contempt



Chapters 29 - 33

Summary

Annie wakes early to return the van and party equipment from Delores' party. She sees that she has eight missed calls on her cell phone; four from Delores, one from Agatha, one from Jesse and one from an unknown number. Jesse's message asks Annie to go out but she still doesn't want to open her heart to anyone. Delores' messages thank Annie for a great party and ask if Annie still has the painting she had told her about. The unknown caller was Trichcombe Abufel who wants Annie to call him. And Agatha says that something strange is happening and asks Annie to call her.

Trichcombe Abufel has arrived in London, having made a quick trip to Berlin. Abufel checks to make sure that his digital camera and an important paper are in his jacket pockets. Abufel had also secured Annie's phone number from a librarian at the British Museum. He had called her twice from Berlin and will call again now that he's back in London. Abufel ponders which magazine he will provide his story to so that he can finally destroy Memling Winkleman.

Barty is visiting Delores on her birthday and they talk about whether Vlad might buy the missing Watteau when it resurfaces. Delores had heard about the missing painting when Rebecca called to alert her that it had been stolen from Memling. Delores recalls the painting that Annie had brought to her and wonders if this is the missing art. Delores tells Rebecca that she has not heard anything about it but Delores and Barty plan to claim it somehow and start their own museum.

Rebecca has returned to Berlin to visit Danica again and has stolen a photograph from Danica's album showing the painting in the background of a family photo. Once outside, Rebecca had torn the photo into pieces and released them into the wind. Rebecca learned from Danica that she had just had another visitor and even though Danica couldn't remember the man's name, Rebecca knows it was Abufel by way Danica described him. Rebecca had always thought that Memling should have retained Abufel on a small fee just to keep tabs on him. Rebecca thinks about her father, and in spite of the wrong he has done, she still doesn't want him to suffer public humiliation. She also now knows that Marty had also found out about Memling's secret and killed himself rather than face the consequences. Before leaving Berlin, Rebecca calls her father and tells him to meet her at Hyde Park later that afternoon.

In Chapter 30, Rebecca meets with her father and tells him that she knows everything about his secret life and that he is really Heinrich Fuchs. Rebecca also tells him that she had visited Danica and saw photos of him and has also thoroughly reviewed the business ledgers. Memling ultimately tells Rebecca that he had tried to help the Winklemans, even offering them a large sum of money when Hitler wanted to buy the Watteau painting, but they refused even though they could have left Germany with the money. It wasn't until 1944 that Fuchs found out that the Winklemans had been killed in



concentration camps. Fuchs returned to their apartment and took the Watteau, as well as paintings from other abandoned apartments.

Fuchs' original intent had been to save the paintings for the Jewish people so he hid them in a cellar. Hitler demanded the Watteau which he wanted to give Eva Braun as a wedding gift after the war so Fuchs held onto it. During the war it was Fuchs' job to find pieces of art for the benefit of Hitler's Germany. After the war, Fuchs' superiors were executed or imprisoned and his own father killed himself and his mother. Fuchs had no real identity and there was nowhere he really belonged.

In 1945, Fuchs visited an abandoned farmhouse with a disused mine filled with stolen art that had been destined for Hitler's personal collection. Fuchs was the only person remaining who knew about the hidden art. Fuchs then decided to alter his identity. He went back to the Winkleman's apartment and took Memling Winkleman's library card and returned to the farmhouse where he lived for a year. In 1946, an American platoon spotted signs of life at the farmhouse and stopped where they found an emaciated Fuchs who they assumed was an escaped Jew. The Americans helped Fuchs recover and sent him to America with identity papers naming him Memling Winkleman because of the library card they found at the house.

Memling then tells Rebecca that he had the concentration camp tattoo done at a tattoo parlor. The number he used was the one tattooed onto Esther Winkleman, a sign of respect in Memling's eyes. Memling then tells Rebecca that Marty had sent him a letter when he found out the truth. Memling wrote back to Marty telling him that he would turn himself in or swallow a cyanide pill which he still carries with him to this day. Rebecca tells Memling that what is most important is that Grace inherits a clean title and fortune. Rebecca tells Memling that he must write a full confession so that if anything is ever expected, it will be revealed that Rebecca knew nothing about Memling's deceit.

Rebecca tells her father that Trichcombe Abufel has a photo of the Watteau which is a possible threat. Rebecca also tells him that it is possible that Annie might be in possession of the painting because she was caught on camera loading the right sized package into her bicycle basket one day. Rebecca tells her father that they can't find any secrets on Annie so it's time to create a little damage. Rebecca tells Memling that he is going to Germany tomorrow and he is to go to the farmhouse and burn the paintings.

In Chapter 31, Evie feels guilt over what she has put Annie through all her life due to Evie's alcoholism. Evie only knows that she drank all those years to take away the pain and loneliness in her life. In spite of her thoughts, though, Evie gets dressed to go out for a few drinks. When Evie realizes that she doesn't have any money, she wraps the painting and takes it with her to a pub frequented by young artists where she might be able to use it as collateral to get her drinks.

Memling is at the farmhouse in Germany, surveying the thousands of pieces of art stored in the mine shaft. He has brought cans of gasoline and flame torches but doesn't have the courage to set the art on fire. He does, however, torch the house before he



drives away, smiling to himself as he thinks of the surprise someone will have one day when the art treasures are discovered in the abandoned mine shaft.

Through the years, Trichcombe Abufel has mailed hard copies of all his manuscripts to his nephew, Maurice, who lives in Wales. Today Abufel is mailing what is probably the most important document of his life and he calls Maurice's wife, Delia, to ask her to keep an eye out for the postal delivery. Abufel watches as the postman puts the package in his van and drives away. He has an appointment with a magazine editor later today and he will soon have his revenge on Memling Winkleman. As Abufel stands outside his flat, two men approach him; one puts a cloth over his mouth and another sticks a syringe into his neck.

In Chapter 32, Earl Beachendon scours the obituary notices in the hopes of finding the name of a wealthy person whose estate may want to sell some important art. Beachendon doesn't find any names but he does spot an article showing a photo of a pub owner holding a small painting. Apparently, a woman had left it as collateral so she could buy drinks. When no one showed to pay the woman's bar tab, she was sent off to jail.

Annie's life is returning to normal after the success of Delores' party. She's trying to avoid her mother so she's been sleeping in the galley kitchen at the Winkleman's. Annie realizes that she can think of Desmond with a sense of detachment now and that by leaving him, she is able to fashion a life that is less about him and more about what makes her happy. One night she is having a drink in a bar before going home and she receives a phone call from a police officer informing her that Evie is being held. The pub owner where Evie had run up her tab is holding the painting until the bar bill is paid. Annie has reached her limit and tells the officer that her mother is not her problem anymore and hangs up. Annie has had a job offer from Mrs. Appledore in New York and she decides to take it.

Rebecca has been methodically shredding the ledgers that held the documentation about the paintings obtained and sold during World War II. Rebecca thinks about Annie and wonders if she had known about the painting or if possibly Carlo sent her as a chef replacement because he had found out about Memling's past. Rebecca checks the security camera films again and sees Annie bringing a package about the size of the missing painting into work one day. The package lay on Annie's desk all day, even while Rebecca went through Annie's drawers. Rebecca is furious, knowing the painting was within her grasp and she didn't realize it. Rebecca realizes that if Annie were a true art thief, she wouldn't have been so cavalier about the painting either.

Rebecca knows that all she has to do to get the painting back is slice the security footage to make it look like Annie had stolen the painting from the Winkleman storeroom. It would be the word of a temporary chef against that of a reputable art businessman who is also a Holocaust survivor. Before retiring that night, Rebecca goes out for a walk where she spots a newspaper with the photo of the missing painting. Rebecca is recharged and sets to work altering the security footage and changing some aspects of the family's records.



Chapter 33 is told from the perspective of the painting which is delighted to have been discovered and in the limelight again. Rebecca has published the history of the painting and states that it came to the Winklemans who had taken the painting, his mother's most treasured possession, after escaping the concentration camps and had hidden in a remote farmhouse until he was rescued by the Allies in 1946. The painting is currently hanging in state at Monachorum and Sons and it will go on tour soon. The only sad thing for the painting is that Annie is in jail on charges of theft, arson and the murder of the junk shop manager. The story is that Annie had plotted and worked her way into the Winklemans' lives, obtained keys and passwords and then stole the Watteau painting.

Analysis

The themes of deceit and greed are important in this section. When Barty and Delores discuss "The Improbability of Love", Barty suggests that Vlad buy the piece but its location isn't known. When Rebecca calls Delores to alert her to the painting being missing, Delores says that she hasn't heard anything about it. In fact, Delores and Barty make plans to claim it and start a museum. Even further, Delores has actually held the painting when Annie had shown it to her but she never tells Barty or Rebecca. Delores is deceitful in that she doesn't reveal the truth about what she knows in the hopes that she can work the situation to her favor. This is also representative of greed. Delores would like to acquire the painting and then perhaps sell it for a large amount to benefit herself, leaving Barty and Rebecca out of the equation.

The most important instance of deceit in the story is Memling Winkleman's adopting the identity of a Jewish man in order to perpetuate a lie and grow an art empire. Memling has not only wronged the Jewish family that was so good to him, he had created his family on a lie. Rebecca grew up thinking that she was Jewish because her father was Jewish and a Holocaust survivor. When she learns that her father was a Nazi, she suffers emotionally because, not only was her father part of something evil, she doesn't know her true identity as a person. Her whole life has been built on a lie her father perpetuated and she is very vulnerable both from a personal perspective and in her professional life.

This discovery is a turning point in the relationship of Rebecca and her father. Up until this point, her father had controlled her life, even determining what she would order in a restaurant. But now that Rebecca has uncovered her father's lie, she has the power to destroy him and that gives her a feeling of control she has never had before. The power has shifted and Rebecca is now in control, making her father the vulnerable one for the first time ever.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when Memling tells Rebecca that he carries a cyanide pill with him all the time and he can take it to stop any further humiliation for her. Memling does indeed take the pill at the end of the story to end his life because he can't live with the scrutiny into his past.



Rebecca also possesses a tremendous amount of greed as exhibited in the fact that she is willing to set up the unsuspecting Annie for theft and murder. Rebecca can't risk the Winkleman family business going under because she needs to keep the wealthy lifestyle to which she's become accustomed.

Discussion Question 1

In spite of all that she has learned about her father's deceitful past, why can't Rebecca bring herself to expose him publicly?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it so ironic that the American troops discovered Fuchs and helped him travel to America?

Discussion Question 3

Rebecca tells her father that he is deceitful and evil for perpetuating a false life. In what ways is she just like her father?

Vocabulary

twinge, noxious, tendrils, languishing, cravat, adage, countenance, subterfuge, destitute, conscripted, patriarch, plausible, mendacious, solipsistic, vortex, diamante, emanated, sobriquet, abyss, epithet, publican, deduce, scintilla, expunging, plausible



Chapters 34 - 38

Summary

Annie has been in prison for three weeks but she has refused to see Jesse until today. Annie hasn't slept or eaten properly and she looks like a shell of her former self. Annie is despondent because no one besides Jesse believes that she is not guilty. Jesse is disturbed by Annie's despondence and he is adamant about trying to help her. They go over Annie's activities on the day she bought the painting and identify anyone who knew that Annie had it. Annie recalls that Trichcombe Abufel had called her but she never called him back. Since he is now dead, Annie has lost the hope that he might be able to help. Jesse vows to not stop in his pursuit of justice for her.

The painting is scheduled to be sold at auction and Annie has signed away her rights to it. Annie tries to think about any reason that Rebecca would try to frame her for the crime but can't think of anything personal; it must be something that Rebecca discovered about the painting that she is trying to hide. It is clear that Rebecca is manipulative and cunning and Annie can't afford to have Rebecca find out that Jesse is helping her. Jesse and Rebecca discuss the fact that Trichcombe Abufel had called Annie several times from Berlin and she never got a chance to talk to him.

Jesse is convinced that Trichcombe Abufel is the key to unlocking the mystery of Annie's imprisonment. He poses as a colleague of Abufel's in order to gain access to his flat where he sees a note board stating: Manuscript to Mold, Lunch Apollo, Fairy Liquid and thank you note to Larissa. Jesse shoots a photo of the board and leaves.

Rebecca and her father meet in Kensington Gardens to talk and he wants to know if she is happy with the way everything has worked out. Rebecca had not been prepared for all the media coverage. Memling doesn't want everything to spin out of control and Rebecca reminds him that it was Memling that had the junk store burned, killing the owner in the process. Memling balks at the idea of a documentary about the painting but Rebecca insists and he is in awe of her new sense of confidence. He is also surprised that Rebecca has no qualms about ruining Annie's life by framing her in the theft of the painting. Memling tells Rebecca that she will always be haunted by guilt for her actions. Memling confirms that he has written a letter exonerating Rebecca, her husband and daughter in his fraudulent activities; the letter is in a vault in a Swiss bank.

Earl Beachendon is basking in the glory of having found the lost Watteau painting when he spotted a photo of it in the newspaper in an article about the drunken Evie. Beachendon had paid Evie's bail and she gave him the painting for his kindness. The painting now hangs in a bullet proof case at Montacorum and Sons where it will be auctioned in a couple days. The Winklemans had claimed ownership of the painting but agreed to have it auctioned to raise money for good causes and asked Montacorum and Sons to represent them.



Jesse has dinner with his friend, Larissa, at her home and he tells her about Annie's situation and his love for her. Jesse asks Larissa if she knew Trichcombe Abufel and she states that he was an acquaintance for 20 years and had been to her home a couple nights before he died. Abufel was in good spirits that night, telling Larissa he was working on something that would cause a huge scandal. Jesse is shocked when Larissa says that Abufel never got over being fired by Memling Winkleman. Apparently Abufel had found out some secret about Winkleman and Winkleman terminated him. Larissa says that any of Abufel's manuscripts would have been sent to his nephew in Wales.

In Chapter 35, Vlad and Grace have been inseparable since Delores' party and she has asked him to prove his love to her. Vlad is baffled so he asks Barty for advice. Vlad wants to return to Russia and take Grace with him even though he will lose all his assets. In a moment of inspiration, Barty tells Vlad that he must buy "The Improbability of Love" for Grace and she will be touched because it belonged to her great grandmother.

Larissa watches a documentary on television about "The Improbability of Love" which tells the story of Memling Winkleman's survival of the concentration camps. Larissa is alarmed because Memling has shockingly pale blue eyes which is strange for an Ashkenazi Jew. Plus, he looked down at his hands every time he talked about his parents. Larissa recalls her last dinner with Trichcombe Abufel and how he talked about a photograph in Berlin and a birth certificate. She calls Jesse and asks him to come over immediately.

In Chapter 36, Jesse travels to Wales to meet with Trichcombe Abufel's nephew, Maurice, based on what Larissa has told him about her last conversation with Trichcombe. Jesse tells Maurice about Annie and the painting and hopes that Maurice has saved his uncle's manuscripts and letters because there might be something in there that will help Annie. Jesse also tells Maurice that he doesn't think that his uncle's death was an accident. After much searching, Maurice's wife is able to produce Abufel's letter.

The letter states that Memling Winkleman a duplicitous Nazi who stopped at nothing to create an art empire. Abufel also states that he could never understand how Memling could always produce new pieces of art even when the marketplace had dried up. Abufel had done some sleuthing and discovered that about 30 paintings they had handled had been originally owned by Jews exterminated during the Holocaust. One day Abufel has seen "The Improbability of Love" on Memling's desk and picked it up to examine it. Memling was outraged and fired Abufel immediately. Word of his termination spread and he had a difficult time finding employment, barely existing on small writing projects.

Abufel's letter continues and he says that he saw a drawing of the painting that Annie had with her in a museum one day and she told him that she had the painting. Abufel saw an opportunity to expose Winkleman and wrote an essay laying out all the details which he hopes have been published by now. Abufel asks his nephew, in the event of



his death, to make sure that this information becomes public so that a great wrong can be made right.

Jesse and Maurice read Abufel's essay which spells out all his dealings with Memling as well as the provenance of all the stolen paintings including "The Improbability of Love." Abufel also includes a copy of a photo with "Memling" and the real Winkleman family posing with the painting in their Berlin apartment. He included a copy of birth certificates for the real Memling Winkleman and a boy named Heinrich Fuchs. He provided photographs of Fuchs, a younger version of the man who would come to be known as Memling Winkleman, in the Hitler Youth organization. Jesse takes photos of all the documents and sends them to a remote server before he and Maurice pack up and leave for London.

Chapter 37 is a newspaper article which provides an update on "The Improbability of Love" which was to be auctioned at Monachorum and Sons but a power cut at the building threw the event into chaos. Police converged on the site and the panic caused Mrs. Appledore to have a heart attack and die. Because of all the mayhem, no one noticed that the painting disappeared and speculation ensues on who could have taken it.

The article also states that Memling Winkleman and his daughter, Rebecca, were taken to the police station for questioning that morning. Annie McDee has been released from prison and all charges have been dropped against her. The Simon Wiesenthal Center announced that one of the last remaining leaders in Hitler's art squad, Heinrich Fuchs, had been unmasked. By midday, the British government releases an a statement that "The Improbability of Love" that one of their operatives had been able to rescue the painting from auction and it is now being held at an undisclosed address.

Chapter 38 is told from the perspective of the painting which states that the British operative cut a hole in the glass case at the auction house, put the painting in a sack and walked out the back door. The painting is disappointed that it was denied the chance to set a record sale amount in the auction. Since Annie had signed away any claim to the painting, there is a scramble to find any relative of the real Winkleman family. The painting longs for some peace and a lovely place to hang for awhile. The painting has also heard that Memling Winkleman swallowed a cyanide pill and died in his jail cell. A letter was produced to exonerate Memling's daughter from any wrongdoing and also revealed the German location of a cache of valuable works of art stored in an abandoned mine shaft.

Before Annie leaves for New York, she stops to see "The Improbability of Love" one last time and thanks the painting for restoring her faith in love. A woman named Tomi Horshaft has been identified as Ezra and Esther Winkleman's granddaughter and heir to the painting. She plans to sell the painting and build a school in their honor. The people of Great Britain purchased the painting for 340 million pounds and it spent weeks at a time at various museums while on an extended tour. The painting learns that Annie and Jesse are living in a farmhouse in upstate New York where Annie runs a catering business called Foodalicious. Jesse still paints landscapes in his studio.



Rebecca received a short custodial sentence and continues to run a flourishing gallery. She has made many charitable donations in an attempt to eradicate the negative impact of her father's fraudulent past.

Analysis

The author has written the ultimate in irony when Annie is "framed" for the theft of a painting. It may be a tongue-in-cheek bit of humor but an obvious instance of irony on a high level.

The theme of hope is an important one in the story too. Throughout the book, Jesse has held out hope that Annie could learn to love him because he thinks she is amazing and wants to be in her life. In spite of everything, Annie is a hopeful creature, wishing for a new life after her old one dissolved. It is Jesse who helps her see that she can have confidence in herself and that she shouldn't give up hope even when she is imprisoned for crimes she didn't commit. Their perseverance and hope in new possibilities leads them to a new life in America where each of them does the artistic work that interests them.

The theme of love closes out the book. Jesse's love for Annie is evident. He is the only one who believes her innocence and refuses to leave her until she is released from prison. He goes to extreme lengths to get to the bottom of the situation because he loves her and she needs him. This is a good way for Annie to regain her trust in men and to learn to love again too. In an unusual twist on love, Rebecca is angry at how her father deceived so many people for so long and how he controlled every aspect of her world. But in spite of all that, Rebecca loves her father and doesn't want him to experience public ridicule so she finds a way out of their problems, saving face for her father.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Memling so surprised by Rebecca's new and decisive personality? Is she more like him than he ever gave her credit for?

Discussion Question 2

Revenge is not always a positive emotion but in the case of Trichcombe Abufel, it worked out to be that way. Discuss revenge and its negative and positive aspects.

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the painting's title, "The Improbability of Love?"



Vocabulary

queue, stupor, harlequin, remonstrates, lank, accomplice, tentative, embezzlement, juxtaposition, accrued, loquacious, discreet, duplicitous, consumptive, deviant, avarice, oligarchs, winced, skulduggery, pornographic, peerages, placards, semiotician, mercenary, emaciated, privet



Characters

Annie McDee

Annie McDee is a 31-year old British woman who lives in London and works as a personal chef to a movie producer. Annie had spent six months in India after the break up of a long-term relationship with a man who was her lover and business partner. Annie has recently spent time with a man whose real interest is returning to his wife and children. When he doesn't show up for the birthday dinner she has prepared for him, Annie swears off men. Annie is an only child and has a love-hate relationship with her alcoholic mother. Annie loves to cook and design big events complete with decor, music and sumptuous food. She is hopeful that she can quit her dead-end job and start her own catering business one day.

The painting

The painting, "The Improbability of Love," is a main character in the story. The author uses the literary technique of anthropomorphism which means that she has given human characteristics to an inanimate object. The painting speaks to the reader in a few dedicated chapters in the book to share its perspective of its current situation as well as to talk about where it has resided in the past. Because the painting is French, its primary language is French and it uses French phrases.

The painting measures 18 by 24 inches. The composition is a glade in a park, a female dancer with a man at her feet looking adoringly at her. There are overhanging trees, sunlight coming from the top left and the image of a white clown observing the scene.

Evie McDee

Evie McDee is Annie's mother. Evie is an alcoholic and Annie is frequently called to the police station to retrieve her. Evie is lonely since the death of her husband many years ago and she has tried to fill the loneliness with other men and booze. Annie is weary of Evie's behavior and is short tempered with her. Evie just wants Annie to be happy and tries to get Annie to embrace life more fully and take more chances in order to live a richer life.

Earl Beachendon

Earl Beachendon runs the Monachorum and Sons art auction house in London. He has a wife and two daughters to support and when he is in danger of losing his job, he panics about taking caring of them in the style to which they have become accustomed. Beachendon tries to be resourceful in acquiring new paintings for the auction house and his coup is finding "The Improbability of Love" after spotting a photo of it in a



newspaper. He then becomes the hero of the auction house and enjoys a raise and a new position as well as luxury gifts from others in the art world.

Mrs. Melanie Appledore

Mrs. Melanie Appledore is an elderly woman of great wealth who lives in the United States. She was born Inna Palokowski in Poland in 1935 and was raised by nuns when the Russians killed her family. She was sent with other orphans to America in 1948 and met her future husband, Yannic, on board the ship. When they married in 1951, they changed their names to Horace and Melanie Appledore and became rich in finance and real estate. Eventually, Melanie learned the ways of New York society where she now reigns as a figure in cultural events. She plans to open a museum dedicated to her dead husband and wants to buy "The Improbability of Love" at the auction. Unfortunately, she dies of a heart attack during the evening and her goal is not realized.

Desmond

Desmond was Annie's business partner and lover for 15 years. She stayed with him even though she wanted children and he didn't. Annie moved to London to start a new life and later learned that Desmond became a father with a woman whom he had known only a short while. It takes Annie well over a year to realize that her life with Desmond was built on his terms and that he had never really considered her.

Rebecca Winkleman

Rebecca Winkleman is married to the film director, Carlo Spinetti. She is the daughter of art businessman, Memling Winkleman. Rebecca is controlled by her father in the business and in her personal life. She is a highly anxious person who dresses sedately so she won't draw attention to herself. Most people see Rebecca as a woman caught between an unfaithful husband and a controlling father. Rebecca's true personality as a strong businesswoman emerges when she uncovers her father's duplicitous identity and she takes control of him and the business.

Memling Winkleman

Memling Winkleman is the head of a very successful art business. He is known for his shock of white hair, pale blue eyes and patrician bearing. He controls everything and everyone in his world, including his daughter, Rebecca, who works in the business. Memling has lived a lie, however, because he stole the identity of the true Memling Winkleman, a Jewish boy he knew prior to World War II in Germany. In reality, Memling is Heinrich Fuchs, who became an important member of Hitler's art squad which stole important pieces of art belonging to Jewish people killed in the Holocaust.



Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George (Barty)

Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George, known to most people as Barty, is a 69-year-old gay man who has a business of styling lives for wealthy people.

Vladimir Antipovsky

Vladimir Antipovsky (Vlad) is an extremely wealthy Russian man who has been exiled from the country because he has spoken out about the government.

Delores Ryan

Delores Ryan is an art historian who loves to gossip and eat. She is a large woman with a large appetite for food and culture. She has written a book called "Watteau's Women."

Trichcombe Abufel

Trichcombe Abufel is an art historian and writer. He had once worked for Memling Winkleman but was terminated when he showed an interest in "The Improbability of Love" in Memling's possession. For 42 years after that, he has sworn to get revenge on Memling and he does even after his own death in the form of a letter left that reveals Memling's duplicitous fraud against the Jewish people.

Agatha

Agatha is a very accomplished art restorer who had worked with Jesse's father before he died. Agatha is able to determine that a white smudge on Annie's painting is actually the figure of the clown, Pierrot. Agatha had secretly loved Jesse's father so she is very happy to help with exploring the source of the painting.

Frau Danica Goldberg

Frau Danica Goldberg is an elderly woman who lives in a small apartment in Berlin. She is sweet and provides information about the Winkleman family to Rebecca and Trichcombe Abufel without knowing the reason for their inquiries. She does intuit that Rebecca has uncovered a secret about the Jewish Winkleman family and encourages her to do the right thing.



Symbols and Symbolism

Food

Food is an important aspect of life for Annie. She loves to plan for it, shop for it and prepare it. To her, food shows love as well as being another art form for people to enjoy.

Pierrot

Pierrot was a clown shown in paintings to represent innocence. He was usually dressed all in white as in the case of "The Improbability of Love." Pierrot is known to be unlucky in love so he is sometimes portrayed as sad and melancholy like in the Watteau painting.

The Improbability of Love

"The Improbability of Love" is the name of the painting painted by famous French artist, Jean-Antoine Watteau. The painting of a man gazing longingly at his beloved evokes sentimentality and almost aphrodisiacal powers over those who look at it. It can also symbolize the futility of the search for love.

Winkleman Family Photo

The Winkleman family photo taken in their apartment in Berlin prior to the war shows not only "The Improbability of Love" but also Heinrich Fuchs who later adopted the persona of Memling Winkleman.

Farmhouse and mine shaft

The farmhouse and mine shaft where Heinrich Fuchs hid out during the war and ultimately used to store art treasures symbolize the secret that he would adopt, showing himself to the world as Memling Winkleman, a Holocaust survivor.

Barty's costumes

Barty dresses in an elaborate fashion, especially for parties, which symbolizes his ability to be whatever his clients need to be.



Trichcombe Abufel's letter

The letter that Trichcombe Abufel writes to his nephew, accompanied by the essay exposing Memling Winkleman, was sent to destroy Winkleman should something happen to Abufel. Ironically, it is what saves Annie from imprisonment.

Wealth

The wealth of the art patrons catapults them into a world that most people can't even imagine. And although it may be envied, the wealth brings its own set of problems and challenges for the people who possess it.

Love

Love can be wondrous or disastrous, depending on the circumstances. In the cases of some of the people--Annie and Jesse, Vlad and Grace--it is magical, but for Evie who feels the lack of it, it is destructive.

Museums

For those who can't own any great works of art, fortunately there are museums. Literally, life and beauty are put on display for people to see and covet.



Settings

Annie's flat

Annie's flat is a three-story walk up in a section of London that is less than desirable. It is small and simple, furnished minimally, with one bedroom. Most of the items are cooking related as that is Annie's passion as well as her job. Even though the flat is small, Annie allows her alcoholic mother to stay with her because she doesn't have the heart to kick her out. Annie also hosts small dinners there when she does test runs for upcoming catered events.

Monachorum and Sons

Monachorum and Sons is an art auction house located in London. It is a large, impressive building with a great portico and Doric columns. It is where "The Improbability of Love" is to be auctioned off but the painting is stolen prior to the sale.

Winkleman Fine Art Ltd.

The Winkleman Fine Art Ltd. building is a large, impressive building with security cameras at designated positions. The interior is very quiet and fairly dark with spots of light to highlight certain paintings. Annie works in the kitchen of the building where everything is as well ordered as the business side of the building.

Berlin

Berlin is the location of Frau Danica Goldberg's apartment and the place where Memling Winkleman (Heinrich Fuchs) grew up. Rebecca and Trichcombe Abufel both travel to see Danica to get more information about the family, Heinrich Fuchs and the painting.

The farmhouse and mine shaft

The farmhouse and mine shaft in Germany is where Heinrich Fuchs hid out during the war and where he stored the huge collection of art stolen from Jewish people killed during the Holocaust.



Themes and Motifs

Love

The theme of love is an important one in *The Improbability of Love*. It is central to the story and the basis of the painting, "The Improbability of Love." The painting was painted by Jean-Antoine Watteau, a French artist, for the woman he loved. His love was not reciprocated, though, and he died of a broken heart. It appears that Annie, too, may suffer the same fate as she has been unlucky in love. Having broken up with a long-time lover, Annie is devastated and takes up with an unavailable man who also rejects her. It seems appropriate that she should be in possession of the painting for these reasons.

However, Annie does eventually learn to open her heart again when she falls in love with Jesse, an artist who loves her spirit and style. Jesse loves Annie in return and it is his love for her that propels him in helping her learn about the provenance of the painting as well as his unrelenting efforts to free her from prison.

There is also parental love that is important in the story. Even though she is an alcoholic and not really able to care for herself that well, Evie loves Annie. She wishes that she and Annie could connect like they used to but life has been cruel to both of them and they are changed. Ultimately, they love each other but love can morph into new shapes.

In another situation of parental love, the Winklemans love each other but it is a restrained, formal sort of love. Memling loves his daughter as much as he is capable of loving a child. His form of love is very controlling which has certainly affected how Rebecca has grown up. In turn, Rebecca loves her father even though she is tired of being controlled. Even when she finds the information that could ruin him, she does not want to make it public because, in spite of everything, he is still her father and she doesn't want to hurt him.

And, finally, love drives Memling Winkleman to find the lost painting because he had once given it to the love of his life and he wants it back in his life as a reminder of their beautiful times together.

Greed

Greed is an important theme in the story. The wealthy art collectors want to possess things that other people can't have because they think that makes them more important or valuable. To that end, buying something visible like famous pieces of art lets them put their wealth on display. All the collectors in the story covet "The Improbability of Love" for its beauty and appeal but also because they know that other people want it too. Securing possession of such a prized painting brings out the greed in all of them. Basically they want what no one else can have and they're willing to go to extraordinary lengths to achieve it.



Greed is a very human trait, however base, and the author shows how it exhibits in people in the world of art collecting. The author shows that greed knows no boundaries regarding religious beliefs, gender or nationality. She also wants the reader to see that greed is likely at the root of personal ambition as well as government issues as in the case of Vlad and Dmitri who must continually feed tokens of wealth to the Russian government.

The most obvious example of greed is Memling Winkleman who has adopted the persona of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. He has perpetuated this story to further his art business. He had also stolen treasured pieces of art from Jewish people killed during the Holocaust so that he could sell them and make his fortune. His daughter, Rebecca, also buys into the greed because even when she finds out the real truth about her father, she doesn't make it public because the company would collapse and she would no longer have her wealthy lifestyle either.

Deception

Deception is an important theme in the book. Being deceitful means that a character presents himself or herself as someone totally different from who he or she really is. Deception is usually employed to hide a secret or to appear favorably in the eyes of someone whose opinion or perspective matters. Usually deception is employed in order to gain something that couldn't have been achieved in usual circumstances.

The most obvious example of deception is when the young Nazi, Heinrich Fuchs, assumes the identity of Memling Winkleman, a friend who was killed at the concentration camps. Fuchs takes on Memling's name and story; that he was a survivor of the Holocaust. By assuming Memling's identity, he betrayed the love and loyalty extended to him by the Winkleman family when his own father was abusive to him. The Winklemans, especially Mrs. Winkleman, took Fuchs in in a gesture of magnanimity when they didn't have much to spare.

Fuchs extends the deception by having a concentration camp identity number tattooed on his arm to present an authentic front. He was able to build a very successful international art acquisition business perpetuated by this lie.

Heinrich Fuchs also deceived his wife and family by posing as a Jewish survivor. They thought they were Jews and took on his heritage as their own. When the truth comes out, his son, Marty, kills himself and his daughter, Rebecca, struggles with her true identity. The cost of deception is deep and even though Fuchs profited financially, he is diminished in the eyes of his children and there is no going back from there.

Art

Art is an important theme in the book. Obviously, "The Improbability of Love" is a coveted piece of art which dominates the story. However, the collection of art is important to the wealthy collectors, art houses and artists. The collectors like to possess



things that other people can't have because it makes them feel important. It is also a way for them to visually display their wealth.

The art houses make their fortunes in the buying and selling of art pieces. People like Earl Beachendon, Memling Winkleman and Rebecca Winkleman are trained to identify important pieces of art and their lives are almost consumed with that passion. There are also art historians and art restorers in the book who have a huge interest in the pieces but their roles are to document and restore.

And then there are people like Jesse and Annie who create their own art. Jesse is an aspiring painter who loves to create landscapes while Annie is an artist with food who prepares visually stunning dishes for people to appreciate and enjoy.

Hope

Hope is an important theme in the book. Most of the characters hope for something and the most obvious example is Memling Winkleman's hope that "The Improbability of Love" be returned to him. It reminds him of the only woman he had ever really loved and he wants it back before he dies.

Evie is also a character filled with hope. She has had a very disappointing life with the exception of her daughter, Annie, and she drinks to excess to hide her disappointment and loneliness. In spite of it all, though, she keeps hoping that things will turn around for her. Each day brings with it new possibilities and she is open to what may happen. She is especially hopeful for Annie and encourages her to take risks and really live her life.

Annie has become a bit jaded by life and its disappointments and she finds it difficult to get out of her rut of a life. It is only when she finds career satisfaction in creating opulent events and personal satisfaction in loving Jesse that she finally shakes off her depression and embraces hope that she can create a new life.

Jesse knows as soon as he meets Annie that he is in love with her even though she does not return his feelings. He is persistent, though, and hopes that she will come to love him one day. By the end of the story, Annie recognizes Jesse's love for her as his greatest attribute and they move to New York state to begin a new life.

Styles

Point of View

Like many novels, *The Improbability of Love* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "She went into a small cafe and bought a cup of tea and a doughnut, fortification for the hours to come. She was certain what lay ahead. Her mother would go through predictable cycles of denial, anger, recrimination, and depression." Because this is omniscient, the author is able to tell what Annie is thinking as she sits with her cup of tea. A narrative perspective would only be able to state that Annie went into a cafe and bought a cup of tea and a doughnut.

The author also uses an interesting technique called anthropomorphism to give human characteristics to "The Improbability of Love." Several chapters are told from the painting's point of view. For example, the painting says, "I knew I'd be rescued but never thought it would take fifty years. There should have been search parties, battalions and legions. Why? Because I am priceless and I am also the masterpiece that launched a whole artistic genre. And if that isn't enough, I am considered to be the greatest, the most moving, and the most thrilling representation of love." Through the eyes of the painting which speaks in a first person narrative point of view, the author is able to provide background information as well as insight on what is currently happening in its environment.

Language and Meaning

Because "The Improbability of Love" is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses twenty-first-century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current technology references and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

Because the story is set in England, the author uses British English and terms that are native to the country. For example, she writes, "The sun beat down on the crowd, and the auction house, as a gesture of good will, handed out free bottles of water and ice-llollies. As Big Ben struck six mournful chimes, the police diverted normal traffic and sent two mounted officers and eight on foot to patrol the street."

The author also uses French language and expressions when the painting speaks because it is of French origin. For example, she writes, "I will not converse with pisspots or faux-pearl necklaces. Non! I am used to magnificence, the rustle of taffeta and le



mouffle du damask, the flicker of candlelight, sheen of mahogany, the delicate smell of rosewater and beeswax, the crunch of gravel and the whispering of courtiers."

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. The *Improbability of Love* takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does.

It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.



Quotes

What could I say? She has the eye. The heart. She may be bog poor but she knows, doesn't she? She can feel and sense my greatness. Like anyone, I need to be loved and admired.

-- The painting (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: The painting reveals what is important to it and that Annie has the ability to value it like it should be. A person doesn't have to be a wealthy art collector to recognize love and beauty, and it is clear that Annie has that gift.

Still plotting the downfall of Memling Winkleman. It will never happen--that family has it all sewn up," Delores said.

-- Delores Ryan (chapter 7 paragraph 10)

Importance: Barty asks Delores about her arch rival, Trichcombe Abufel, and what he is doing now. She responds that he is still planning to ruin Memling Winkleman. There is foreshadowing in this quote and it will be very important as the story extends.

I have some wonderful news. One week ago today I became a proud father to Magnus Rory Andrew. He weighs nine pounds and has lots of blond hair like mine. Baby and mother are doing splendidly. It's been a bit of a shock but I am coping and am very proud. I hope that you can find it in your heart to be happy for me.

-- Desmond (chapter 8 paragraph 2)

Importance: Desmond has sent an email to Annie after their break up, telling her that he is a new father. Annie had wanted to have children when she was with Desmond but he did not. Now Annie knows that he just didn't want to have children with her. Their entire relationship seems false and even more disappointing with this news.

All good works of art are about complexity and emotion," Jesse said. "That's their power. They say something that we can't quite put into words.

-- Jesse (chapter 13 paragraph 5)

Importance: Annie wonders why people are so interested in the painting and Jesse tries to tell her why art is so important for people. They are drawn to it because it evokes feelings and emotions that people can't put into words for themselves.

I was painted to celebrate the wild cascades of love, the rollicking, bucking, breaking and transformative passion that inevitably gave way to miserable, constricting, overbearing disappointment.

-- The painting (chapter 14 paragraph 3)

Importance: The painting wants to let people know the reason why Watteau painted it and why it has the title of The Improbability of Love. People love to be in love but when love ends, it is the height of misery and the artist wanted to share his feelings about it.



It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile--what matters is doing the right thing.
-- Danica Goldberg (chapter 17 paragraph 9)

Importance: When Rebecca visits Danica, she learns that her father, Memling, is not who he says he is. He is not a Jewish survivor, yet he had taken that identity and lived his whole life as a lie. Danica can sense that Rebecca is troubled by that information and hopes that she will do the right thing regarding her father's--and her family's--true identity.

Tell me who you walk with and I will tell you who you are.
-- The painting (chapter 19 paragraph 4)

Importance: The painting wants the reader to know that in pictorial terms, who you have hung with tells a lot about who you are. The painting has felt unvalued because of its recent reduction in social standing. It has hung alongside major works of art for hundreds of years and has value far more than what it is being perceived as having by Annie, the present owner.

I love the stakes being so high. These days food doesn't mean enough. It comes in ready-made packets--few would know how to spot a potato or a leek in a garden, let alone know how to make a soup or a stew. We should learn how to respect and procure it.

-- Annie (chapter 22 paragraph 5)

Importance: Annie's way of expressing herself artistically is through her love of food. She has wearied of all the talk and attention about the painting but creating beautiful meals and special ambiance really excites her. Annie is authentic in her art form as opposed to the wealthy people who acquire paintings.

I don't wish this pathetic outcome on anyone, let alone the lovely Annie; I just don't see love as a panacea or the grassy track connecting dark and light. I want her to prove my worth, to sell me, to set herself free financially, at least. I want her to enjoy creature comforts, to have the space and means to fulfill her dreams. I have not always brought luck to my owners; this time it must be different.

-- The painting (chapter 28 paragraph 1)

Importance: The painting knows that Watteau had died young and had been unlucky in love. It now witnesses Annie's life and wishes she had a fuller experience because, even though the painting is used to grander settings, it has come to care for Annie and wishes her to have a better fate than the man who painted her.

How odd that I have not had any visitors for years since your brother, and in the space of a few hours I receive you for the second time and that man," Danica told Rebecca, "and that you are all so interested in my funny old photographs. They were just snaps.

-- Danica (chapter 29 paragraph 1)

Importance: Rebecca had hoped to do damage control about her father's past and



returns to Danica's flat to steal the snapshot of the Watteau painting with the Winkleman family. However, when Danica describes a man who has also come to see that snapshot, Rebecca knows that it is Trichcombe Abufel who will want to seek revenge against Memling. She knows that she has more work to do to protect her father.

I know everything," Rebecca said. "You are Heinrich Fuchs and you don't have a drop of Jewish blood. You are just a petty thief.

-- Recca (chapter 30 paragraph 1)

Importance: Rebecca has discovered the truth about her father's life and she has finally summoned the courage to tell him. This is the turning point in their relationship and he can no longer control her; the power is now hers.

There is something transformative about that painting--it captures your spirit and your heart--you'll understand when you see it, when we get it back.

-- Memling Winkleman (chapter 30 paragraph 10)

Importance: Memling expresses what everyone who has ever seen the painting knows--it has a mesmerizing effect on those who see it and most people want to possess it for the feelings it evokes.