

Super Sad True Love Story Study Guide

Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart

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Contents

Super Sad True Love Story Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Do Not Go Gentle – The Fallacy of Merely Existing.....	5
The Next Plane Home – The Nuclear Option.....	9
Temperance, Charity, Faith Hope – I’ll Love Him Even More.....	13
Anti-Inflammation – Dating Tips.....	17
Five-Jiao Men – Welcome Back, Pa’dner.....	21
Characters.....	24
Symbols and Symbolism.....	27
Settings.....	30
Themes and Motifs.....	32
Styles.....	36
Quotes.....	38



Plot Summary

Super Sad True Love Story is a speculative romance novel by Gary Shteyngart in which New Yorker Lenny Abramov attempts a relationship with the much younger Eunice Park in a dystopian future America that is collapsing. Lenny, 39 and one day hoping for immortality, works for Staatling-Wapachung, a wealthy business that deals in property, security, and life extension (in which health regiments and beta technology rejuvenates human bodies). Lenny works as a salesman for the life extension department of the company. While in Rome for work, Lenny meets 24-year-old Korean-American Eunice Park at a party held by a mutual friend. Lenny is immediately smitten with Eunice, who herself is mildly attracted to Lenny. Lenny pursues Eunice online after he returns to the United States.

Eunice, who emerges from a failed relationship, and who deals with family dramatics by way of her father's alcoholism and physical abuse, as well as her mother's relentless and unachievable expectations, sees in Lenny everything her family is not. He is kind, gentle, and warm. Eunice decides upon her return to the United States that she will move in with Lenny. Lenny is thrilled, and the two quickly begin a relationship. As the months pass, Lenny brings Eunice to meet his parents, who are thrilled not only that Lenny has someone, but has someone who is as responsible and mature as Eunice. When Lenny meets Eunice's parents, they are not thrilled because Lenny is not Korean, is not rich, and is not attractive.

When Lenny introduces Eunice to his boss, Joshie (who along with Lenny and a few others began Staatling-Wapachung many years before), trouble emerges. Joshie is in his late sixties, but looks as if he is in his twenties thanks to the company's youth technology. Eunice and Joshie quickly fall for one another and begin seeing each other behind Lenny's back. Eunice finds in Joshie everything Lenny is not: Joshie is strong and decisive.

At the same time, the frail framework of security in the United States falls apart as the economy ruptures, riots break out across the country, and the government is unable to pay the National Guard Army promised bonuses. Joshie announces that the collapse of the United States is good for business, for foreign investors will be looking for places to spread their influence. The Chinese and the Norwegians become the biggest investors in America, and the company soars.

Ultimately, Joshie breaks the news to Lenny that Eunice has been seeing him behind Lenny's back. Lenny is crushed, and quickly breaks up with Eunice. Years pass. Lenny writes a book about his experiences during the collapse, consisting of his journal entries, and consisting of messages, e-mails, and instant message conversations from one of Eunice's social media accounts. The book is a bestseller, but the public attention causes Lenny to change his name and to move to the Free State of Tucson. Eunice breaks up with Joshie and begins to date a Scotsman. Joshie's youth technology turns out to be harmful rather than helpful to human bodies, and Joshie watches his company

dissolve as he awaits death. Lenny, meanwhile, looks forward to growing old among fellow Americans who have no desire to live forever.



Do Not Go Gentle – The Fallacy of Merely Existing

Summary

Do Not Go Gentle: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is June 1. Thirty-nine-year-old Lenny Abramov, American son of Russian immigrants, vows in his diary that he will never die, that to die is to be nullified, and that each death is a tragedy. Lenny declares that life is not a journey the way people say, because to be on a journey means you have to end up somewhere. Lenny feels older than his age, and determines he must be healthy is if he is to live forever with the assistance of medical technology, such as smart blood and through his own position as the Life Lovers Outreach Coordinator of the Post-Human Services division of Staatling-Wapachung Corporation, which deals in Indefinite Life Extension. Sandi, a fashion designer and friend of Lenny's, recommends Lenny file for the official American citizens re-entry program because he has been abroad for more than 250 days, otherwise upon his return, Lenny could be held for sedition. Lenny handles his case at the American consulate, which is being sold and cleaned out.

Using his apparat (similar to a tablet or iPad), wherein an animated otter with a Southern American accent asks Lenny questions about his stay in Italy, including his credit score, if he would like to subscribe to the Bipartisan Party newsletter, and if he has had sexual relations with any non-Americans, Lenny begins the re-entry process. When Lenny responds he has slept with an Italian woman named Fabrizia DeSalva, the otter freezes. Lenny must then call for human assistance from Mrs. Nettie Fine, an old friend of Lenny's family who, along with her husband, works for the American government. Mrs. Fine is glad to see Lenny, but bemoans the decoupling of the Chinese and Europeans, says that all immigrants with weak Credit are to be deported, and she is worried about the number of American military deaths in Venezuela. She also berates Defense Secretary Rubenstein, but Lenny notes his own parents love Rubenstein. Lenny explains he has been in Italy looking for European High Net Worth Individuals to buy into Indefinite Life Extension. Mrs. Fine then notes that Lenny's apparat has frozen because Lenny has been flagged. She tells him not to worry about it, programs her coordinates into the apparat, and says that if he is stopped, Lenny should call her and she will handle everything.

That night, Lenny meets up with Fabrizia at her place, where she is hosting a party. There, he encounters a petite Korean-American woman, 24-year-old Eunice Park of Fort Lee, New Jersey, who studies art history at Elderbird College in Massachusetts. A rich, drunk American sculptor declares that America is history, spills red wine on Eunice's sweater while he hits on her, and she rejects his advances. When he continues, Lenny intervenes, sending the sculptor away. Lenny leaves the party with Eunice, offering to point out a good drycleaner. Lenny and Eunice quickly take to each other, with Lenny noticing that Eunice is young and sassy. They agree to go to dinner



and drink heavily. They then return to Lenny's apartment, where Lenny performs oral sex on Eunice.

Sometimes Life is Suck: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Eunice writes to a friend and fellow student with the screenname "Grillbitch," telling her all about her encounter with the sculptor and with Lenny. Eunice's mother writes to her, telling Eunice she is disappointed that Eunice has scored so low on her LSAT. Her mother also reminds her to date Korean man only and not to give away her mystery. She notes that Eunice's father has been drinking recently, which worries Eunice. Eunice promises to do better next time, then gets in touch with her sister, Sally, to ask her about what is going on. Instead, Sally only wants Eunice to bring back new designer bras with holes cut into them so people can see girls' nipples. Sally also says she will be protesting the American Restoration Authority and the Bipartisan Party. Eunice warns her not to get political. Eunice then receives a message from Lenny, asking to meet up again back in the States.

The Otter Strikes Back: From the Diaries of Leonard Abramov – Lenny is smitten with Eunice, and wonders how he can make her fall for him. Drawing on Chekov's novels, Lenny begins to look up whatever information he can about Eunice online to learn more about her. He learns that her family is originally from California, that her father is a podiatrist named Sam Park, and that Eunice seems beaten. When Lenny's plane lands, it is boarded by members of the New York Army National Guard, who drag a fat man off the plane. The soldiers then order everyone out. A tank rolls up, from which the gunner puts out a sign telling those present they are to deny the existence of the tank until they are half a mile from the security perimeter of JFK International Airport, with thanks from the American Restoration Authority.

The Only Man For Me: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Eunice feels rejected by a cute boy named Ben she has been dating, and does not feel attractive enough to be deserving of him. She also comes to think about how she compares everyone to her father, who helped poor Mexicans out in California. Eunice learns from her mother that more and more military vehicles are to be seen out and about. Sally asks for TotalSurrender panties, which are sheer and pop off as needed. Sally also explains she feels helpless, as if nothing in life will get any better. Eunice learns that her father has been physically abusive with her mother. Eunice does her best to remind Sally to remain optimistic, and that she will indeed buy Sally some TotalSurrender panties.

The Fallacy of Merely Existing: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – Joshie Goldmann, Lenny's employer, asks to discuss Lenny's future employment and salary, which worries Lenny that he may be fired. Lenny considers all the possibilities of an uncertain future, and takes stock of what things he has in life, such as physical books and a nice apartment. On his way to Staatling-Wapachung, Lenny comes across a racially-segregated Credit rating sign, which urges Chinese to Spend and Latinos to Save. Lenny tries to message Mrs. Fine but is stunned to see her account has been deleted, which is unheard of in this day and age. At the company, Lenny learns from Kelly Nardl that Vasily Greenbaum has turned 40 because he didn't meet his most recent quota.



Lenny then meets with Joshie, who is in his sixties but looks twenty thanks to the company's technology.

Joshie explains the Europeans are looking to break away from doing business with America, that America's assets are worth nothing, but it is good news for life extension because then the Chinese or another rich country may buy them out. Joshie then explains Lenny is to be demoted to Intakes in the Welcome Center, and that Lenny will need a new apparatus and must learn to surf data streams faster and rank people quicker. Lenny then learns from Howard Shu in finance that he will be docked 239,000 yuan-pegged dollars for extravagance while in Italy, and Shu questions why the ARA has flagged Lenny. Lenny says he hasn't done anything. Shu tells Lenny to follow CrisisNet, get his data in order, and learn how to properly use his new apparatus and the RateMe Plus app. On the way home, Lenny realizes immortality is not what it is cracked up to be, and that it means his generation is very selfish, with everyone thinking they matter more than anyone else.

Analysis

When Gary Shteyngart's novel *Super Sad True Love Story* opens, the reader is struck by several things. First, the world in which Lenny and Eunice inhabit is in many ways similar to the world of the mid-2010s, but is in some ways different given that the setting is the near-future. For example, smartphones, iPhones, iPads, and tablets have been replaced by the all-consummate apparatus, and social media popularity has evolved into literal sexually-based apps like RateMe. Second, the mainstream fascination with youth has morphed into an obsession. Anyone older than 30 is considered ancient, unless like Joshie, they look younger than their age by artificial means. Indeed, Lenny's very job is based on people like Joshie who wish to set their ages back decades. Third, in addition to the obsession with youth, obsession with physical attractiveness has reached a crescendo, where physical attraction, along with youth, matters more than anything else.

As Shteyngart will come to argue through the course of the novel, youth isn't everything, and youth is taken for granted as a result of people believing it is. In the case of Lenny, Lenny fears getting older and doesn't want to die. Because he only has limited access to youth rejuvenation technology, he is still aging although at a slower rate. Because of this, he places much value on life here and now. This is to be contrasted with Eunice, who at the age of 24, is naturally young and considered in the prime of her life.

The reader should note that Eunice, her friends, her family, and everyone she knows uses a GlobalTeens social media account – and the reader should place emphasis on the “Teens” part of the name. Here again is the mainstream obsession with being and staying young. But Eunice, her sister, and their youthful friends are quick to pass judgment on those over the age of 30, and behave, speak, and act as if they themselves will never age. They are taking their natural youth for granted, living in the moment, and not thinking about the future. Lenny, on the other hand, is obsessed with not dying, and so he is forgetting to live in the present. There is a balance between



appreciating the present without taking it for granted, and a balance between looking forward to the future and obsessing over the future.

In the novel, the future is a journey. Lenny argues early on that he does not believe life is a journey because for him, journeys are about going to physical places. But as Shteyngart argues, and as Lenny will later come to figure out, journeys can be emotional, mental, personal, and spiritual as well as physical. The reader should note and remember Lenny's original proclamation in the novel – that he will find a way to never die – for it is from this proclamation that Lenny will journey. Shteyngart also uses Lenny's proclamation as a way to begin laying the groundwork for another important theme on which he will expand as the novel progresses, in that immortality is actually selfishness. Lenny realizes that immortality in the novel means someone believes they are worth more than everyone else, because they (because of their money) are able to live forever, while so many others are not.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Lenny declare that he will never die? Why does Lenny want to live forever?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the international obsession with youth. How does the obsession with youth appear in the novel? How do Eunice and Lenny approach the idea of youth? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Lenny believe immortality is selfish? Do you believe immortality is selfish? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

progeny, nullified, heft, cajoling, incomprehensibly, indispensable, apparat, idyll, diminution, impudent, indefatigable, ersatz, furlong, acolytes



The Next Plane Home – The Nuclear Option

Summary

The Next Plane Home: From the GlobalTeens account of Eunice Park – It is June 9. Eunice learns from her mother that her father is very mad at her, believing she has not protected her mystery. Her mother reminds her that she is American in name only, that the Americans owe everything to the Chinese, and being American isn't what it used to be. Eunice decides to come home, but Sally tells her to stay in Rome and enjoy herself. Eunice then tells Grillbitch she has stopped seeing Ben because Ben is so handsome and is a rising star in Credit, making her feel unworthy. She then explains she would prefer to be with Lenny even though he is older and gross, because she doesn't have to pretend to be something else with him, and can imagine herself having sex with him so long as she closes her eyes and pretends they are both other people.

RateMePlus: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is June 12. Lenny is sad because he has not yet heard from Eunice. He is also disheartened to learn his investments and bank account are not doing well because of economic instability around the world. Lenny considers that money equals life, because money pays for eternal life. Lenny has begun using CrisisNet, to keep up with current events, especially financial crises. At home, Lenny discovers a dead man in a wheelchair in the lobby of the building, while the EMTs enjoy a smoke break. Lenny confronts them over their lack of respect, but they shrug him off. Lenny then goes to meet his friends, Noah Weinberg and Vishnu Cohen-Clark at Cervix, a bar for older men where younger girls go to be picked up. Lenny notes that Noah seems older and angrier lately, reflecting the decline of the country. The three friends decide to do a RateMe Plus for Lenny on their apparats, where a person is judged on their appearance based on the blood pressure of the viewers based on their sexual desire for the person being judged. Most of Lenny's ratings come back very low, causing Lenny to get drunk and speak openly, live, about Eunice.

Fire Up That Eggplant: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – It is June 13. Lenny messages Eunice again, apologizing for his live declaration of love for her. Eunice writes back that she will be returning to America, wants to stay with Lenny for a little while, and that she though his live stream was cute.

Total Surrender: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is now June 18. Lenny is thrilled that Eunice is staying with him. He brings her to Central Park and shows her around New York. Eunice tells Lenny she does not want to hurt him, that everything she touches turns to shit. She does say that she thinks Lenny could make her happy. He even offers to meet her parents, but she will not hear of this. She tells Lenny he doesn't understand a thing about her family, and shuts him down. This hurts Lenny deeply.



Something Nice is Growing Inside Me: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Eunice tells Grillbitch she feels like she has a double responsibility now between her parents not getting along, and Sally getting political. Eunice admits to missing Ben, but is enjoying being with Lenny. She writes about how poor people are being evicted in New York so when the Asian Creditors come, the Americans don't look poor. She goes on to say she has opened up to Lenny about what her father did to her, Sally, and their mother. She also says she feels bad because while she likes Lenny personally, she can't see past his looks. Eunice is concerned to learn that Sally is becoming so political. Sally feels bad for the armed marches of National Guards returning from the war who are demanding the pay bonuses they were promised, but have not yet received.

The Nuclear Option: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – Lenny and Eunice go to visit the Bronx Zoo since it will soon be closed. At work, Lenny is promoted out of Intakes and back onto the main floor where he assesses the viability of applicants for life extension. Only 18% of applicants are accepted. Lenny worries about his own life, and how his docked pay means he can't go in for certain youth treatments. Joshie reminds him that no one may necessarily live forever. The next day, Eunice heads out with Lenny to Long Island to meet Lenny's parents. They take the train, which reminds Lenny of how he first came to have a thing for Korean girls based on the Asian-majority high school he attended where a girl named Eunice Choi stuck up for Lenny when he was bullied. Lenny and Eunice arrive in Westbury, where his parents are thrilled to meet Eunice and ask her a thousand questions about how Lenny lives and takes care of himself. Lenny recognizes that Eunice and his mother are both considering the same thing: that Lenny is a child who still needs to grow up.

Analysis

Shteyngart uses the obsession with, and taking for granted of youth, as a way to argue that looks – a person's physical attractiveness – is not everything. Physical attraction does not determine a person's mental, emotional, and spiritual attractiveness. It is something that Eunice is surprised to discover through Lenny. Initially, her hang-up with Lenny is not even so much that Lenny is much older, but that Lenny is unattractive. Yet, the more Eunice gets to know who Lenny is, rather than what he looks like, the more Eunice decides she wants Lenny. Lenny, though certainly physically attracted to Eunice, grows closer to her and falls in love with her the more he learns about her.

A huge part of the obsession with looks has to do with presentation by way of images and videos that are posted online on social media platforms. Images deal only in physical appearance, and so it is easy to see why appearances should matter so much to the young, especially. Because of this, a person only ever really knows another by their physical appearance. Here, Shteyngart advances the argument that technology can be dehumanizing. Consider again, for example, Eunice's thoughts on Lenny. She initially has severe reservations about Lenny because he is not attractive enough for her, which is hypocritical given the fact that she does not feel she was physically attractive enough to be with Ben.



Because of this, she places no worth on the individual – either herself or Lenny – at first. But her relationship with Lenny helps Eunice to begin to look inward at her own humanity, and helps her to recognize the humanity in others, especially Lenny. He may not be the handsome guy that Eunice has always wanted to date, but he is a good man, and that counts for everything. For Eunice, however, this will ultimately prove not to be enough, as she will stray from Lenny. The reader should bear this in mind, because the reader will come to notice how Eunice struggles between the goodness of Lenny, and the attractiveness of others; and as Eunice struggles between the goodness of Lenny, and the human qualities of others.

As Shetyngart continues to argue with events, life is not merely about going places, but about a process of becoming. In the case of Eunice, this journey is a process of self-discovery and an awakening of sorts. At first, she is very obsessed with looks, but through her experiences with Lenny, she comes to realize that looks are not everything. She begins to appreciate Lenny for who he is, rather than what he looks like. This is also an important concept reinforced by Eunice's own relationship with her sister, Sally. Sally may not be the most attractive girl ever, but she is a decent and good person. At the same time, Lenny, who has previously been obsessed with living forever, is now questioning the idea of artificial immortality. He notes how old his friends are beginning to look, notes how desperately they are trying to keep up with new technology and social trends, and realizes that it can be an exhausting thing to do because they are not placing enough value on the correct things in life. For example, Lenny's friends are more concerned with broadcasting his drunken declaration of love for Eunice than they are with listening to what Lenny is actually saying.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eunice seem to have such difficulty seeing beyond Lenny's physical attractiveness? Do you think she is to be held to blame for this? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does Eunice feel about meeting Lenny's parents? Why does she agree to meet them? Why do Eunice and Lenny's mother get along so well? How does this bode for Lenny?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Lenny continue to worry about his own life despite his slowly changing perception of the idea of immortality? How does his relationship with Eunice affect his consideration of immortality? Why?

Vocabulary

bade, capricious, negligible, beatific, prestigious, placid



Temperance, Charity, Faith Hope – I'll Love Him Even More

Summary

Temperance, Charity, Faith, Hope: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Eunice writes to GrillBitch about how smart Lenny is, and finds it interesting that he reads real books. She also says she enjoyed meeting his parents, and especially enjoys the fact that Lenny's mother takes no crap from her husband, or from Lenny. Eunice meets up with Sally to go shopping, during which time she finds that Sally has gained weight and is stuck between wanting to attend church and wanting to dress as slutty as possible. Eunice also relates giving away her old apparats to poor people, and feeling good to see them so happy to have apparats.

Amy Greenberg's "Muffintop Hour": From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is June 30. For Family Night, Lenny and his friends invite their significant others to Cervix. Lenny brings along Eunice. There, an old Asian friend named Grace whispers to Lenny that Eunice is too young for him. Lenny says he worries about dying, but Grace counters that everyone will die sooner or later, despite the technology.

A riot in Central Park breaks out into violence between the poor and the National Guards. Lenny attempts to get in touch with Nettie Fine again to talk about the riots and the brutal crackdown against the poor, and this time, she responds by saying it will backfire on Rubenstein. Amy Greenberg, Noah's girlfriend, learns that dozens of people have been killed. In a televised press conference, Secretary Rubenstein blames the violence on riot leader Aziz Jamie Tompkins, who is reported to have trained with Islamofascists in southern Lebanon. Before the night ends, Grace slams Lenny for dating Asian girls and white-trash girls. After the evening ends, Eunice is furious with Lenny because of his taste in friends, and spends the night on the couch. Still that night, they have sex for the first time, with Eunice begging Lenny never to leave her.

The Quiet American: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – By now, Eunice's family knows she is staying in New York, and her mother urges her to come back to the safety of Fort Lee. She says that the family originally came to America to be free of martial law, and now they are faced with the same situation they had back in Korea. Sally reports that she and her fellow college students have been warned not to leave campus. Eunice tells her not to do anything political at all. She then reveals the truth about Lenny to Sally, who only wants Eunice to be happy. Eunice then tells Sally that she will be bringing Lenny to meet the family, and that she wants everyone to impress Lenny. Eunice then tells Grillbitch that the condition for Lenny meeting her family is that he is supposed to pretend to be a platonic roommate, which has upset Lenny.

Eunice also confesses to hanging out with a cute guy named David, who was formerly in the National Guard and who, along with others like him, are thinking about joining the



movement against the National Guard. Eunice confesses she is going to help the movement however she can. Eunice then confesses that she is in love with Lenny. Eunice receives a message from David, saying that the ARA and the Bipartisan Party were a mistake, that trying to cover over differences means they lost their responsibility for the common future. David says that when the ARA and the Bipartisan Party fall, it will be like 1776 all over again.

The Sinner's Crusade: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is now July 7. Lenny says July reminds him of early middle-age, which in turn reminds him how far away he is from immortality. At work, Joshie reports that no matter what the ARA has tried, nothing has helped the economy. Joshie explains that their company, however, is part of the creative economy, which is the last, best hope for the nation's future.

At home, Lenny is thrilled to learn that, although Eunice's parents do not know the truth about him, Sally does. He is happy to be able to meet Eunice's parents, and is even willing to attend a worship service at Madison Square Garden because of it. Lenny is proud and nervous to be meeting Eunice's family. The service he attends is spoken in both English and Korean. Lenny becomes unhappy with the urges of the pastors for the audience members to do good and avoid shame because he believes all the people in the audience are good anyways. Afterwards, at dinner, Lenny praises all of Eunice's talents, and notes how Eunice and the other females defer to, and fear her father. Lenny realizes this is why Eunice must have run away to Rome. The Parks ask about Lenny's company, which he explains does three things primarily: property, security, and life extension.

I'll Love Him Even More: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Eunice believes dinner has been a disaster, and that Lenny's view that good guys always win in the end is wrong. Eunice explains that after the dinner, her parents realized Lenny was her boyfriend, and her mother especially slammed Eunice for dating an ugly guy. Eunice explains the more her family detests Lenny, the more she loves him. However, this causes Eunice to begin seeing in David all the things Lenny is not –strong-willed, strong, and decisive. Eunice admits to hanging out with David more while bringing supplies to his movement. Grillbitch responds later that the LAPD is being disbanded, and that it is probable her parents will move back to Korea with the situation in America so unstable. Grillbitch does not like David or the rioters, and believes they are to blame for everything. Eunice says that only a rich country with spoiled white people could let something so good get so bad. Sally later invites Eunice to come pick out new carpeting for the family house. Eunice agrees to come if she can bring Lenny.

Analysis

Eunice's journey continues in full force in this section of the novel. She explains she actually enjoyed meeting Lenny's parents, and that the more she learns about who Lenny is – beyond what he looks like – the more she comes to want him. For example, she finds it amazing that he still reads actual, physical books, and this endears him to her. At the same time, Eunice's fascination with Lenny is to be contrasted with the



consideration of Eunice by Lenny's friends. For example, Grace, in keeping with the times, is primarily concerned with Eunice's youth and age. While she finds it acceptable for older men to sleep with younger women, she does not find it acceptable for older men to be in relationships with younger women. Without seeking to get to know Eunice or understand who Eunice is, Grace draws conclusions about Eunice based solely on her physical appearance and age.

Lenny himself has been able to see beyond age with Eunice. While he appreciates her youth and beauty, this comes to pale in comparison to the countless other reasons that he loves her, most notably who she is as a human being. Without realizing it, Lenny is in the midst of a journey. However, Lenny's ability to see beyond Eunice's age and appearance – further underscoring Shteyngart's argument that appearance does not wholly make a person – is not an ability shared by Eunice's mother. Eunice's mother does not care so much that Lenny is older (a fact which will be confirmed later by her support of Eunice seeing the decades-older Joshie), but that Lenny is not handsome and Lenny is not insanely rich. Yet again, Eunice confirms that there is more to Lenny than meets the eye, and that he is more than the sum of his looks (or his bank account).

Interestingly enough, the way that Eunice's mother slams Lenny only pushes Eunice closer to Lenny. Again, she finds everything in Lenny that she does not find in her family: love, acceptance, warmth, and kindness among other things. The experience with her family reminds Eunice that looks are not everything, and who Lenny is as a person is the most attractive thing about him. Lenny, in turn, realizes from meeting Eunice's parents that Eunice ran away to Rome to get away from her family and to be somebody different. It is clear that Eunice never intended to fall in love with someone like Lenny given his physical appearance, but Eunice's unique circumstances (her family's cruelty) has helped allow her to see past a person's exterior. To the outside world, Mr. Park is a quiet but devoted father. To Eunice, her father is a physically abusive alcoholic.

The reality behind Eunice's family is also tragic in terms of technology dehumanizing people. To the rest of the world, a good front is always put forward. Images replace reality. The only other people who know about Eunice's father's brutality are her mother and her sister (and now Lenny). By hiding reality with images of ideals and perfection, people are dehumanized as problems, flaws, and issues are glossed over or hidden. But because Eunice has allowed herself to get to know Lenny personally, and because she has allowed Lenny to get to know her personally, Eunice opens up about the past and her father's abusiveness. Because of this, she and Lenny are drawn closer together, with their love becoming utterly essential to one another. Problems, flaws, dark pasts and all, Eunice and Lenny are very much human and have found one another in person rather than seeing one another by way of technology.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eunice finally allow Lenny the opportunity to meet her parents? What is the experience like? Why?



Discussion Question 2

What are the consequences and results of the meeting that occurs between Eunice's family and Lenny? How does the meeting affect Eunice, especially with respect to her feelings for Lenny?

Discussion Question 3

The relationship between Lenny and Eunice primarily occurs in person, rather than through apparats and social media. How does this affect their relationship, and their understanding of one another? Why?

Vocabulary

ilk, invalidate, devolved, governance, caricature, tyrants, truculent



Anti-Inflammation – Dating Tips

Summary

Anti-Inflammation: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is July 20. Lenny notes that he and Eunice seem to argue every day, and that she never backs down from fights. They usually fight over social commitments. Lenny and Eunice go shopping in the United Nations Retail Corridor for summer clothing for Eunice for a party Joshie is hosting. Eunice also ensures that Lenny dresses more maturely and eats healthier. Lenny himself notices he seems more a grown man now. At work, Shu takes Lenny into his confidence, saying a big realignment will be coming, and that Post-Human Services values him. Shu also explains Lenny's apparat has been updated so that he can point it at National Guards and identify the good from the bad. Later, when Eunice accompanies Lenny to Joshie's party, she tells Lenny she feels like she is being forced into attending. At the party, Lenny kisses Eunice on the ear so Joshie and others can see he is not only with Eunice for her youth and beauty. Eunice is, in turn, impressed with Joshie's artistic talents. Joshie is, in turn, impressed with Eunice's artistic skills and suggests taking an art class together. On the way home, Eunice says the night was enjoyable after all, declares her love for Lenny repeatedly, and asks him if they can get married. Lenny agrees.

Old Man Spunkers: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – Joshie writes to Eunice to let her know he will help her get a job and that she should take an art class with him. He also goes on to say he was once an angry young man until he realized he did not have to die, and that he no longer succumbs to the Fallacy of Merely Existing. Eunice then messages Grillbitch to tell her that she can't stop thinking about Joshie, especially sexually. Eunice also relates that her father brought a load of medical supplies to David's camp, and that he and her father hit things off and have become friends. In a private conversation with her father, Eunice relates he asked her how she was doing, which is something he has never done before. Eunice also learns from Grillbitch that Grillbitch's father has gone missing after going to check on the family's factory.

The Rupture: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is July 29. Lenny learns that the credit market debt has exceeded 100-trillion Northern Euros at a party thrown by Grace and Vishnu announcing their pregnancy. A short time later, CrisisNet reveals that China has quit the U.S. Treasuries while violence breaks out in New York City. Eunice demands to go to Tompkins Park, where she says a friend and her sister might be. Lenny puts his foot down and says no. A message from Joshie is then sent out, predicting the imminent collapse of the Rubenstein/ARA/Bipartisan regime. Staatling-Wapachung is reaching out to other wealth funds for investment and alliance, and that the creative economy has exciting opportunities ahead. CrisisNet then notes that Venezuelan naval warships have been sighted off the North Carolina coastline. Joshie calls Lenny and tells him to get himself and Eunice back home to Manhattan. Lenny then tells Amy and Noah they must come with him and Eunice back to Manhattan. They



agree to go. Word comes that the Venezuelans are now sailing up the Potomac River, and that fighting has broken out all over New York. Eunice insists the group veer off toward Tompkins Park, so they take ferries across to Manhattan. The ferry on which Noah and Amy travel is destroyed by a helicopter.

Security Situation in Progress: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is August 5. Lenny is sleeping on the couch, having barely spoken to Eunice since refusing to let her continue on her way to Tompkins Park. Lenny is still stunned by the deaths of Noah and Amy. With stability returned to New York, Lenny is called back into work. He tells Eunice they are just too different to make things work as he leaves. Along the way, a black man on the street corner blames everything on Lenny's company.

As Lenny arrives at Staatling-Wapachung, he discovers the company has suddenly employed now out-of-work National Guardsmen, who are keeping a mob of people back from the building. Inside, Joshie tells Lenny that he is glad he and Eunice are safe. Joshie explains that reports of Venezuelan warships were only rumors, and that America is to be divided into sectors for foreign investment to get the country back on its feet in recovery. He tells Lenny that whoever invests will want everything the creative economy has got. Lenny is unmoved, saying there is no food downtown. Joshie slaps Lenny, then apologizes, blaming it on stress. Lenny worries his company has indeed had something to do with the downfall of America. Joshie reveals the company will be downsizing, but Lenny will be kept on because he and Joshie were among the founders of the company, and because Lenny will be needed in the future. Back at home, Lenny discovers that Eunice is drunk. She apologizes for everything. Lenny then performs oral sex on her to put her to sleep.

Dating Tips: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Parks – Eunice is unable to get in touch with her family, so she messages David to ask if he is okay, and if her sister had been with his group during the violence. Eunice learns the GlobalTeens system has been disrupted, and is unable to contact anyone at all. Instead, the GlobalTeens systems returns errors messages which include sexual dating tips for young girls. Eunice admits that she doesn't blame Lenny for refusing to let her go to Tompkins because he was only trying to keep her safe.

By August 20, Eunice believes things are much better between her and Lenny, and that she now feels like Lenny is in control following his nearly dumping her. Joshie begins sending Eunice messages, which excites her, and in which he tells her to brush up on her Norwegian and Mandarin because things are going to get better very soon. He also promises to check after her family. Joshie then admits he has feelings for Eunice, which makes Eunice happy.

Analysis

Despite the closeness that Lenny and Eunice have achieved, their relationship becomes very rocky as time goes on. Eunice isn't so much for going out and being with friends in the way that Lenny is. Here is something of a generational divide that age makes



apparent, but not impossible to overcome. The younger generations are more concerned with sitting at home and being online, while the older generations are more extroverted and willing to do things in person. Yet, almost every time Eunice goes out with Lenny and his friends, she comes to enjoy it. In the present, however, the arguing, along with Eunice's unshakable fixation with physical attractiveness comes back to haunt her through Joshie. Eunice is immediately smitten with Joshie because he is so handsome – but her learning about him personally, seeing beyond his looks to who he is as a person, only makes her fall harder for him. Just as Lenny was everything her family was not, Joshie is everything that Lenny is not.

The collapse of America only further creates the conditions which makes Eunice's unfolding affair with Joshie possible. Eunice has several opportunities to step away from the situation, and even reminds Joshie that she is in a relationship with Lenny, but this ultimately counts for nothing. Eunice does not have the loyalty or the courage to break up with Lenny or to reject Joshie. Joshie's own obsession with Eunice has begun as a matter of her youth and attractiveness, things which Eunice recognizes and exploits by continuing to allow Joshie to pursue her. Meanwhile, this can be contrasted with Lenny's love of Eunice for more than just her youth and beauty, noted by the kiss he places on her ear at the party in an earlier chapter.

As the relationship between Eunice and Lenny begins to head south, so does the fate of the United States at large. The riots of late July, the sheer number of deaths, the survival of corporations like Staatling-Wapachung, and the interest of foreign investors from Norway and China essentially remake the fabric and nature of America. The corporations are solely concerned with their own survival, which is, in turn, to be seen symbolically as corporate immortality. As Shteyngart has previously argued – and continues to argue – immortality of any kind is selfishness. The corporations of the novel have no concerns or cares for the country at large, or the people who live in America, but are only concerned with making money and getting into bed with the coming foreign investors.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the relationship between Lenny and Eunice turn bad through this section of the novel? Who is to blame for this? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Eunice encourage, rather than outright reject Joshie's advances on her? How does this affect her relationship with Lenny?



Discussion Question 3

With the collapse of America, what are Joshie's primary concerns? Why? What are the primary concerns of Lenny and Eunice? Why? How do the concerns of Lenny and Eunice clash and factor into Joshie's concerns?

Vocabulary

effervescent, predicated, egotistical, intermittent, voluptuous, tenuous, warble, calamity, alacrity,



Five-Jiao Men – Welcome Back, Pa'dner

Summary

Five-Jiao Men: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is September 5. Lenny reports that there have been a rash of suicides, and that he has had difficulty emotionally connecting to anyone. Schools have been shut down and food is scarce. Among the biggest employers now is Staatling-Wapachung, which now has a Works Progress program paying five-jiao coin per hour. Eunice, meanwhile, tends to the elderly people in the building, passing on their food requests to Joshie, who brings in shipments of food just for their building – which confuses Lenny. Eunice's care for the elderly, however, in addition to Lenny's fear of the elderly, makes Lenny fall in love with her all over again. Eunice in turn seems to realize just how deeply Lenny loves her, and their sex reaches a new level of pleasure and intensity. However, a short time later, Eunice disappears for 20 hours before coming back, which worries Lenny.

Oh My God, I'm Such a Bad Girlfriend: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Parks – Joshie writes to Eunice to thank her for the day they spent together, which consisted of going out to eat, exploring what remains of New York, attending art class, and having sex. Joshie says it is a relief to have learned that Eunice's family is still alive, and he has put in a request for relocating them. Eunice writes back that she loves Lenny, that she has been a horrible girlfriend, and that she cannot explore anything other than friendship with Joshie right now. Joshie writes back that he is hurt, puts down Lenny, says he will always love Eunice, and that there will be some violent activity in the area coming up, so he will arrange for a visit to Long Island for Lenny.

Deaf Child Area: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – It is now October 12. Telenor has restored communications to the area, during which time Lenny is able to learn that his parents are alive and well. Lenny is also thrilled to learn that Eunice's family is alive and well. A message comes from Joshie telling Lenny to go out to visit his parents, and that an elite unite of guards will bring him out safely. While there, he ensures the guards bring his parents to the food store to pick up groceries, because his parents barely have anything in their house to eat. Lenny tries to get in touch with Eunice, but discovers her apparat signal disappears in the Upper West Side. Lenny can only wonder what she is doing there. Lenny begins to wonder about himself, who he is, where he stands politically, and what his life is like – but then comes to accept that he is merely his parents' son.

How Do We Tell Lenny?: From the GlobalTeens Account of Eunice Park – While Lenny is on Long Island, Eunice goes to see Joshie. Joshie, meanwhile has Howard Shu work to get Eunice's family better papers so they appear to have better Credit than they actually do. Eunice writes herself a message, so she can recall the events of the past one day, and what she is about to do. She loves being with Joshie, and sees in him something that she can fix. She declares she must be stronger, and writes down words of apology to Lenny. Eunice then writes to Joshie, saying she is turned on by how



hardworking he is. She tells him he is stronger than Lenny, and that he has soft lips. She then asks Joshie if there isn't anything he can do to help the elderly in the city. Eunice's mother writes soon after, saying that the family has been approved to move to New York, and that Eunice should go after Joshie and leave Lenny behind. Sally tells Eunice to stop lying to Lenny, and be honest about Joshie. Joshie writes to Eunice, saying he feels guilty when she talks about old people because there is nothing he can do about them. He goes on to tell Eunice she needs to be with him, not Lenny, because Lenny will not live forever.

Forever Young: From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov – Lenny decides he will die, and that he will not try to live forever in any way. He explains that upon his return from Long Island, he discovered many neighborhood buildings in ruins. He learns that Grace and Vishnu are to be relocated in Vancouver. In late October, Lenny and Eunice are stunned to discover their buildings will be torn down by Lenny's company for new Triplexes, and that all existing residents are being thrown out. Lenny and Eunice are being moved to the Upper East Side, however, courtesy of the company. Lenny is not happy in his new home, and feels disconnected from Eunice. The two attend an art opening which doubles as a welcome party for the Chinese at the new Triplexes in November. At the party, Joshie reveals his feelings and relationship with Eunice to Lenny. Lenny is heartbroken and quickly leaves Eunice.

Welcome Back, Pa'dner: Notes on the New "People's Literature Publishing House" Edition of the Lenny Abramov Diaries – Lenny now lives in the Free State of Tucson, where he learns that his parents have died and that Nettie was killed two days after his leaving Rome. Years have passed since New York. Lenny is now a writer, with his diary entries and excerpts from Eunice's GlobalTeen account comprising the book. In Tucson, Lenny finds peace and is welcome among others who age naturally. As it turns out, Joshie's war on mortality backfired, as the methods they used hurt bodies in the long run. Joshie now awaits death. Eunice has long since broken up with him, now supposedly living with a Scotsman. Lenny later learns that a video spray is to be made of his book. Sick of all the fame and attention, Lenny takes to calling himself Larry Abraham and pretends both Lenny and Eunice are already dead.

Analysis

After months of secretly seeing one another, Joshie finally tells Lenny about the sexual affair he is having with Eunice. Lenny is devastated and breaks up with Eunice immediately. It is betrayal of the highest order – the betrayal of one's true love, and one's closest friend. It is a sad mark in Lenny's journey, but it is by no means the end. Because of having to deal with the duplicity of Joshie and Eunice, and because he has been able to be in a relationship with someone like Eunice, Lenny is a stronger person for it. He is more courageous, more decisive, and more confident in himself and his abilities. Because of this confidence, he is able to publish a book about his romance with Eunice against the backdrop of the fall of America.



Perhaps even greater than Lenny's self-confidence is the self-discovery through journey that he does not want to live forever. A large part of this comes because of his heartache, but an even larger part comes from a broader and better understanding of reality. What use is living forever if you can't trust anyone, and what use is there in living forever if immortality causes you to take things like love and loyalty for granted and as expendable, Lenny realizes. A limited lifespan means valuing that life all the more, and valuing all the time that one has on Earth. Growing older is not a bad thing. Lenny comes to realize this as time passes, and so he travels to a place where growing older is appreciated, respected, and valued because it is so very human.

The idea of aging teaches people to respect life in general, for it is frail and does not last forever, and is therefore not to be taken for granted, and not to be wasted. Eunice's natural youth, and Joshie's artificial youth compel them to take all aspects of their lives for granted – including love and loyalty – because they feel as if they are invincible because of their youth. As Shteyngart maintains through the end of the novel, youth is not everything. As it turns out, Joshie's technology backfires, rapidly aging him and poisoning him for the death he tried so hard to avoid. Because he did not value life as it was, Joshie now faces death without friends and without love. He is very much alone because he has taken and used everything in his life for granted. Because of this, immortality is selfish: it has trained Joshie to put himself first ahead of all others, including those closest to him. It is a hard, and late lesson to learn.

Discussion Question 1

How does Joshie's life turn out in the end? Why? How does this reinforce Shteyngart's argument that youth is not everything, and that immortality is selfish?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Lenny publish a book about his romance with Eunice? Why does Lenny subsequently change his name despite the book being a hit?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Eunice leaves Joshie? Why do you believe that Eunice's movements are so hard to trace following her relationship with Joshie?

Vocabulary

impotent, contraband, reminiscent, methodical, abattoir

Characters

Lenny

Leonard “Lenny” Abramov is the 39-year-old boyfriend of Eunice, and the Life Lovers Outreach Coordinator of the Post-Human Services division of Staatling-Wapachung Corporation, dealing in Indefinite Life Extension. Lenny is also close friends with Joshie, with whom Lenny helped begin the company.

Lenny is a kind and gentle, but indecisive and often irresponsible man who originally desires to live forever and who first meets Eunice at a party in Rome. Lenny is instantly smitten with her, and romantically pursues her until she agrees to come and stay with him. Lenny comes to gain greater confidence in himself and his abilities as he falls in love with Eunice. Lenny is later devastated by Eunice’s affair with Joshie, and breaks up with her as a result.

Lenny comes to publish a book about his relationship with Eunice against the backdrop of the fall of America, which is so successful and earns Lenny so much attention that he changes his name and moves to the Free State of Tucson to age gracefully.

Eunice

Eunice “Euny” Park is the 24-year old girlfriend of Lenny, and is a college graduate seeking work. Having been emotionally and physically abused by her parents, Eunice is emotionally damaged when she meets Lenny at a party in Rome, where she has traveled to escape. Although she is repulsed at first by the fact that Lenny is not attractive, she comes to fall in love with him because he is gentle and kind. He teaches her that she has more worth than she gives herself credit for, and helps her to grow in her own confidence.

Eunice comes to have an affair with Joshie because she finds him more attractive and more decisive than Lenny. When Joshie’s company falls apart, and Joshie begins to rapidly age, Eunice leaves him. The last anyone hears of her, she is dating a Scotsman.

Joshie

Joshua “Joshie” Goldmann is the head of the company Staatling-Wpachung, which he, along with a number of others including Lenny, founded some time ago. The company is very successful, and Joshie is thrilled to be among those beta testing radical new youth rejuvenation technologies. In his late sixties, Joshie looks, feels, and is as healthy as a person in his twenties.

Because of his sense of immortality, Joshie takes friendships, loyalty, and love for granted, ruining Lenny’s relationship with Eunice for his own benefit. Ultimately, Joshie’s



company fails as the technology for youthful rejuvenation turns out to be harmful and even deadly. Eunice breaks up with Joshie, while by the end of the novel, Joshie awaits death.

Sally

Sally Park is the sister of Eunice. Chubby but pretty, Sally worries she is not pretty enough to live up to the expectations and standards set by everyone on social media platforms and apps like RateMe. As the novel unfolds, Sally is caught between her Christian faith and the social expectations of her to live like a slut. Sally also becomes political through the course of the novel, favoring the overthrow of the Rubenstein government.

It is through Sally that Eunice has some of her most personal conversations, and it is through Sally in part that Eunice realizes not everyone can be judged by their appearances.

Mr. Park

Mr. Park is the father of Eunice and Sally, and the husband of Mrs. Park. Mr. Park is a podiatrist who drinks heavily and is physically and emotionally abusive towards his family. Mr. Park is everything that Eunice does not want in a relationship, and his cruelty helps drive her toward Lenny because of Lenny's kindness.

Mrs. Park

Mrs. Park is the mother of Eunice and Sally, and the wife of Mr. Park. Although emotionally and physically abused by her husband, Mrs. Park defends and makes excuses for him. She has unachievable expectations for her daughters, and comes to oppose Eunice's relationship with Lenny because Lenny is not attractive or rich. Mrs. Park later comes to support Eunice's relationship with Joshie because Joshie is handsome and rich.

Dave

Dave is a soldier with the National Guard Army who has served in South America, and now back home, has joined the opposition movement determined to bring down Rubenstein. Dave is a good man who wants to see the country saved, but his actions actually help to hasten the downfall of America by standing against it violently. Dave and Eunice very nearly become romantically involved, but Eunice ultimately becomes involved with Joshie instead.

Grillbitch

Grillbitch is the screenname of Eunice's best friend from back in California. It is with Grillbitch that Eunice discusses the more sexual aspects of her life. Grillbitch's family owns a successful factory that is stormed and destroyed by mobs, prompting Grillbitch to express opposition to the riots and those opposed to Rubenstein. Grillbitch's father is presumably killed by the mobs, and Grillbitch herself is never heard from again after the GlobalTeens service goes down.

Mrs. Abramov

Mrs. Abramov is the mother of Lenny, and is the wife of Mr. Abramov. Lenny's mother is a kind, gentle, and sweet woman with a tough side: she takes no slack from anyone. Eunice admires this in Mrs. Abramov, and Mrs. Abramov in turn approves of Eunice's maturity and responsibility. Mrs. Abramov and Eunice both realize that Lenny is an overgrown child who needs someone to help him grow up.

Rubenstein

Defense Secretary Rubenstein is responsible for the national security policy and military operations of the United States. A series of wars in South America has tested America's military might, and has led to much dissent at home. Rubenstein is either loved and praised or hated and cursed. Rubenstein is thrown from power when America collapses by way of a bad economy and riots in the streets, leading to heavy foreign investment and interference.



Symbols and Symbolism

Apparats

Apparats are tablet-like, smartphone-like devices used by individuals in the novel to access the internet and social media, and represent the degree to which people are driven by a need for technology. At no point through the novel is someone without an apparat by choice. The apparats, when used excessively, dehumanize people, such as when Lenny's friends would rather broadcast his declaration of love to Eunice with their apparats, rather than actually listen to what Lenny has to say.

GlobalTeens

GlobalTeens is a Facebook-like social media platform used by everyone in the novel, and symbolizes the obsession everyone has with being and acting young. The very name of the platform, with emphasis on "Teens," demonstrates an obsessive drive for youth. The service allows the sending and receiving of messages, photographs, videos, and other files. Full-grown adults even use GlobalTeens in the attempt to remain, act, and feel young. This in turn drives the market for youth rejuvenation services, such as those offered by Staatling-Wapachung.

RateMe

RateMe symbolizes the narcissism encouraged by media within the society of the novel. RateMe is a social media platform wherein users are given a rating based on their sexual attractiveness. The rating is based on the reaction garnered by blood pressure of the viewer, and which symbolizes dehumanization. Simple ratings occur when a photo or a video of an individual is shown, but more advanced ratings occur when users willingly film themselves in sexual situations, which in turn drive up views and ratings. RateMe compels viewers and users to focus on images of others and themselves, placing emphasis on physical attractiveness and sexual extremes instead of who someone is as a person.

CrisisNet

CrisisNet symbolizes the downward spiral of America in the novel. CrisisNet is a social media news outlet that publishes stories and updates about violent, dangerous, and destabilizing situations, events, and occurrences worldwide. As part of his job, Lenny is required to listen to CrisisNet to make better decisions about areas in which he seeks to pursue sales in life extension. When America collapses, Lenny and the others follow the fall in real time by listening to, and reading updates on CrisisNet.



Youth rejuvenation technology

Youth rejuvenation technology symbolizes the lengths of which society is willing to go in its pursuit of eternal youth. Beta technology for youth rejuvenation is being developed by Staatling-Wapachung's Indefinite Life Extension. While the particulars of the technology are never specifically or explicitly discussed, the technology is able to use free radicals and other agents to set the clock back on a human body by decades. Among the early users of the technology is Joshie. As it turns out, the technology backfires, as it does long-term damage to the body after which rapid aging occurs, leading to death.

Creative economy

The success of the Creative economy in the novel symbolizes society's prioritization of things like appearances over other, more practical, focuses. The Creative economy is the part of the global economy that uses creativity for industrial purposes, such as Life Extension. The Creative economy is one of the only parts of the economy that is doing well because the services offered by the Creative economy (such as Life Extension) transcend social, cultural, and national divides. Joshie has specifically positioned Staatling-Wapachung to capitalize on the fall of the United States by getting into bed with the Norwegians and Chinese.

Kiss on Eunice's ear

A kiss on Eunice's ear is given to Eunice by Lenny at Joshie's party, and symbolizes that Lenny is interested in more than just Eunice's youth and beauty. The kiss on Eunice's ear is also symbolic of the depth of Lenny's love for Eunice, and becomes symbolic of jealousy on the part of Joshie, who comes to want Eunice for himself. The kiss comes to mean the world to Lenny, but is something which ultimately makes Eunice uncomfortable since everyone is watching when it happens.

Human immortality

Human immortality symbolizes the ultimate in human greed, for society and the earth cannot sustain people who live forever. Human immortality is what Lenny, Joshie, and most characters in the novel are obsessed with. None of them want to die, and want to live forever. The quest to live forever becomes obsessive, and leads to the devaluing of humanity, love, loyalty, and countless other important aspects of human life. However, by the end of the novel, humanity proves to be elusive for everyone, including Joshie.



Corporate immortality

The drive for corporate immortality symbolizes the height of corporate greed. Corporate immortality is what Joshie, apart from human immortality, is especially concerned with. Corporate immortality consists of a business or entity's ability to exist forever, always turning a profit and remaining a vital part of life even when circumstances change, such as the fall of the United States. Joshie helps Staatling-Wapachung to achieve corporate immortality temporarily, from the fall of America to the rise of China and Norway by helping to back the fall of America. However, the failure of the company's youth rejuvenation technology results in the collapse of the company and the denial of corporate immortality.

The National Guard Army

The National Guard Army in the novel symbolizes the main theme of appearances do not tell the whole story; while the army is implied, and appears, to be strong, it is not at all what it used to be. The National Guard Army is the name for the standing armed forces of the United States of America in the novel. The National Guard Army is very large, but is a shadow of its former self after repeated wars, the devaluing of the dollar, and a bad economy. Much of the opposition to Rubenstein comes from National Guardsmen who were promised, but never received bonuses. With the fall of the United States, the National Guard is disbanded. Many of them are employed by Staatling-Wapachung as the company comes to deal extensively in security with the chaos and violence following the fall of the United States.



Settings

Rome

Rome is the capital of Italy, and is the city to which Lenny travels to sell Life Extension. Rome is also the city to which Eunice travels to escape her overbearing parents. It is in Rome at a party that Lenny and Eunice first meet, and became interested in one another. When Lenny leaves Rome for New York, he continues to write to Eunice who remains behind in Rome to pursue a relationship that fails. From Rome, Eunice travels to New York to stay with Lenny.

New York City

New York City is where Lenny and Joshie live and work, and where Staatling-Wapachung is headquartered. Lenny invites Eunice to come and stay with him in New York, which she agrees to do. Eunice is happy to be living in New York with Lenny, because it keeps her away from her home in New Jersey. However, New York becomes a central battleground during the fall of the United States, as rioting groups target National Guards, and National Guard units target the rioters. Much of New York is destroyed so that it can be rebuilt according to Joshie's specifications, and to spur Norwegian and Chinese investment.

Long Island

Long Island is an island located at the southern tip of New York state, just beyond New York City. It is on Long Island, half an hour from the City, that Lenny's parents live. It is to Long Island that Lenny brings Eunice to meet his parents, and later to Long Island that Lenny travels to visit his parents after the fall of America. During Lenny's visit to Long Island, Eunice stays behind in the City to cheat on Lenny.

China

China is a country located in Asia which has emerged as the world's primary economic and military power as the United States has slipped from its role as world superpower. China has been looking to either divest itself completely of America economically, or to make a move to completely take over the economy. By the end of the novel, China has made moves to do just that. The end of the novel features the arrival of a Chinese delegation to begin laying the foundation for a Chinese takeover.

The Free State of Tucson

The Free State of Tucson is located in the former American Southwest. The Free State of Tucson is one of the places in the country that has broken away and declared independence from the fallen United States. It is a place that values tradition, human life, and freedom. It is where Lenny ultimately comes to live and grow old at the end of the novel.



Themes and Motifs

The journey of life is not merely about going places

The journey of life is not merely about going places, argues Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story*. When the novel begins, Lenny explains that he does not believe life is a journey, because to him, journeys are about going to physical places. However, journeys can also be processes of self-discovery and self-improvement by way of one's mind, emotions, and soul. This is certainly the case for Lenny and for Eunice, as their lives prove to be important journeys in and of themselves.

When the novel begins, Lenny is self-confident, irresponsible, and obsessed with immortality. His primary goal in life is to be able to live forever. He is selfish, and living primarily for himself. Meeting and being in a relationship with Eunice changes everything for Lenny. He comes to feel better about himself through Eunice's affections, and becomes more responsible because he is living for someone other than himself. Feeling loved, Lenny comes to feel more confident about who he is and what he wants in life. He ultimately comes to decide he does not wish to live forever because he feels it is selfish and causes people to take things made important by mortality in life for granted with immortality.

The journey for Eunice occurs unexpectedly, and ultimately fails because Eunice does not grasp the things she has learned, and does not embrace the growth she has sustained. When the novel begins, Eunice is in Rome to escape her overbearing parents. She is unsure of herself, and looks to be loved and accepted. As with any member of her generation, youth and physical attraction matter more to Eunice than anything else. But meeting and being in a relationship with Lenny changes all of that. Eunice comes to appreciate Lenny for everything he is beyond his physical attractiveness. Lenny is not attractive, but he is warm and kind and accepting of Eunice. As a result, she comes to feel better about herself as a person.

While Eunice comes to see more to people than just their physical appearances, she cannot do away with habits that she has grown into over the course of her life. Meeting Joshie excites Eunice, for Joshie has all that Lenny lacks –strength, decisiveness, and good looks. Eunice quickly begins a sexual affair with Joshie that culminates with the breaking up of Lenny and Eunice. Eunice's happily-ever-after with Joshie does not happen either, as Joshie's technology and business fail, and as Joshie rapidly ages and is poised to die. It is clear that Eunice has taken none of the lessons she has learned to heart, and that her journey in life is still very much underway.

Immortality is selfishness

Immortality is selfishness, argues Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Immortality is something which Lenny is obsessed with when the novel begins. By the



end of the novel, however, Lenny is content to die and no longer wishes to live forever. His brief flirtation with immortality has been enough to convince him that immortality is not for him, and is not a good thing.

Lenny quickly comes to see immortality as selfishness through Joshie and through the young people he meets and works with. Immortality means that someone, rather than everyone else, will be able to live forever. While others may not have the money or the health to live forever, some do. Immortality means a self-importance in which one person considers himself better and more important than all the others in the world in that their life is worth preserving forever, while the lives of others are not. As Lenny notes, money literally equals life.

Lenny also comes to realize that immortality forces people to focus on the wrong things in life. Immortality gives people the impression of being invincible, and so they will live more recklessly and will only live for the moment. Life is meant to be lived not only for the moment, but with thoughts for the future as well. Focusing only on the present denies long-term stability and considerations except insofar as it matters to those who will not die. Joshie is only concerned with himself and his company when America falls – and cares not at all for the dead, the dying, and the starving around him unless they can benefit him, especially because they are not immortal.

Immortality also causes people to take things for granted, because of the belief that they are invincible and have nothing to worry about. Things like love and loyalty are done away with because they are not considered necessary if one is going to live forever. One will have limitless friendships and loves with limitless life, so love and friendship are heavily devalued. Consider how the immortal Joshie betrays Lenny – his closest friend – by stealing Lenny's girlfriend. By the end of the novel, Joshie has lost everything, and is poised to die alone without love and without friendship because he has taken them all for granted.

A human being cannot only be considered for their looks

A human being cannot only be considered for their looks, argues Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Looks are not everything, and the novel provides clear evidence to this effect. Certainly physical appearance plays a part in attraction, but in the end, it does not matter. This is something both Eunice and Lenny learn, but is a lesson which only Lenny ultimately takes to heart.

When Lenny first meets Eunice, he is floored by her beauty and her physical appearance. Yet, as he gets to know her, and gets into a relationship with her, he falls in love with her because of who she is as a person. He values her toughness, her independence, and her maturity. He also comes to want to protect and care for her given the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her parents. He determines to be strong for her where she is weak, and Eunice comes to deeply appreciate Lenny for this.



When Eunice first meets Lenny, her primary concern is not his age, but his appearance. She has difficulty coming around to being willing to get to know him because he is not attractive. This is hypocritical given Eunice's own concerns about her own attractiveness in a previous relationship – but she moves past Lenny's appearance to get to know who he is as a person. She learns that he is kind, gentle, and a good man – exactly what she has been looking for. The more she gets to know Lenny, the more she falls in love with him.

However, the sway of appearances is too strong for Eunice when she meets Joshie. In Joshie, she finds the handsome individual she believes she deserves, and finds the physical attractiveness that lacks in Lenny. Without stopping to consider much about Joshie beyond his love of art, strength, and his flirtatiousness, Eunice begins a sexual affair with Joshie that leads to a breakup with Lennie. As Eunice comes to discover, her pursuit of Joshie primarily for his looks comes back to haunt her when everything heads south for Joshie. Desperate to avoid the situation she has gotten herself into, Eunice jumps to the next man she finds, a Scotsman. Her fate remains uncertain at the end of the novel, but it can only be hoped that she has moved beyond physical appearances as the primary means to relationships.

Youth is not everything, and youth is wasted

Youth is not everything, and youth is wasted, argues Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story*. As Joshie tells Lenny in the novel and simultaneously sums up the attitude toward youth, "Youth is youth. Talk young, live young" (223). The desire to always be young leads to many problems and serious situations, such as a lack of responsibility.

Youth is what almost everyone in the novel aspires to, especially when it comes to social activity. Even full-grown adults are using the GlobalTeens social media service to remain current and be among, and hit on young people. The desire to be a part of the young world is what drives Lenny's friends to film and stream his love confession for Eunice, rather than talking to one another as friends to understand Lenny's feelings better. The desire to be young is what causes young people to find anyone over 30 ancient, and the desire to be young is what causes everyone over 30 to want to be young and act under 30.

Those who are naturally young in the novel, and those who are artificially young in the novel (such as Joshie) take their youth for granted. Because they are young, people like Eunice and Grillbitch assume they will live forever and will never age. As a result, they live recklessly – from the way they dress to the use of drugs to the performance of public sexual acts which are streamed and recorded on social media apps for public approval and ratings. Everyone is so glad they are not 30 that they have no thought or idea about what they will do when they turn 30.

In people like Lenny, the desire to be young and live forever causes them to forget about simple daily tasks, and causes them to lose sight of the long-term goals. For example, Lenny has difficulty even cleaning his own apartment, and is unable to make



any sales the entire time he is in Europe. Instead of working in Europe, Lenny makes half-hearted attempts at sales and spends the rest of his time living up life by attending parties and seeing the sights of Italy. Indeed, both Lenny's mother and Eunice come to see Lenny as an overgrown child that must grow up quickly.

Technology can dehumanize the human individual

Technology can dehumanize the human individual, argues Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Technology's dark side comes through how human beings are portrayed, viewed, and treated. In the novel, technology does far more harm than good, and it dehumanizes.

To begin with, technology is chiefly associated with the young. Social networking platforms like GlobalTeen play especially to the young, and fully grown adults, desperate to be young, will use platforms like GlobalTeen to fit in and remain relevant. Lenny's friends, for example, would rather stream his feelings for Eunice than talk to him about his feelings for Eunice. This causes adults to behave like children, and causes young people to avoid thinking about the future or getting ready to live in the world of adults since everything cycles back around to being young.

Technology also provides the primary means of communication for people. More often than not, people would prefer to message one another and speak to one another through e-mail than to personally, directly speak with someone. While Lenny (who is of an older generation) has more of an inclination toward wanting to go out and socialize with friends, Eunice does not (even though she ends up always enjoying the outings afterwards). Because of online communication, one can present an image of oneself to another – an image that is prepared for the world that masks flaws and hides truths. People are made to be ideals of themselves rather than presented as their real selves – which is among the reasons why Eunice is afraid to have Lenny meet her family (because he is not perfect and her family is not perfect).

Along with how someone presents themselves to the world on social media platforms through technology, technology also helps foster the demand for ideals, perfection, and physical attractiveness. This is done through apps like RateMe, for example, in which the more sexually, physically attractive someone is, the higher a rating they will receive from viewers. This leads to explicit and extreme sexual acts which are streamed and filmed, focusing the viewer's attention solely on the body of the individual being filmed. No longer is a human being on the other end of the camera, but a disposable sexual object worth only as much as his or her attractiveness and rating. It no longer matters who the person is, or that they are a human being worthy of love and respect. All that matters now is the rating.



Styles

Point of View

Gary Shteyngart tells his novel *Super Sad True Love Story* in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective, from the points of view of both Lenny and Eunice. The novel is presented as a series of diary entries, e-mails, social media messages, and instant messages. The diary entries are all from Lenny's point of view (given that he is more old-fashioned and still writes things by hand) while the majority of electronic communications are from Eunice (since the majority of her communications are online). Because it takes two people to make a romance, and because both people will approach the romance from different places and with different perspectives, only by understanding both individuals can one truly understand the romance as a whole. A relationship is incomplete with only one person. As such, Eunice and Lenny are both given the ability to have their voices heard as it relates to their relationship, creating a duller, deeper story. The first-person narrative mode allows the reader to understand, firsthand, the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perspectives of each of the main characters.

Language and Meaning

Gary Shteyngart tells his novel *Super Sad True Love Story* in language that is casual and straightforward. This is done for several reasons. First, the novel is set in the near future, with the language being a further devolution of contemporary English. The casual, internet-heavy language of mid-2010s America is made even more casual in the novel. Internet abbreviations (such as WTF, ROFLAARP, etc.) are standard even in personal conversations outside of electronic communications, and are used by the young and by adults wanting to remain young and relevant. New casual slang phrases are present. For example, rather than calling someone to speak to them, one is "verballed." This provides grounds for the second reason, that the drive to be young and be relevant has rendered grown individuals to be overgrown children in their communications and relations. The desire to be young removes the desire for, and importance of responsibility. Third, Shteyngart intends his novel not only to be a social commentary on the mid-2010s, but a warning of what could be coming. To make the novel as real as possible, Shteyngart zeroes in on the language of the mid-2010s, and then exaggerates it to demonstrate what may indeed be the future.

Structure

Gary Shteyngart divides his novel *Super Sad True Love Story* into unnumbered, titled chapters. Each chapter is told primarily from the point of view of either Lenny or Eunice, and the majority of the chapters alternate between Eunice and Lenny. This allows the reader to have an intimate glimpse into the thoughts, beliefs, fears, hopes, dreams,



feelings, and ideas of Lenny and Eunice. It also allows the reader to understand both sides of particular situations, events, or circumstances – such as Eunice’s affair with Joshie. As it turns out by the end of the novel, the diary entries and electronic communications featured in the preceding chapters constitute a book compiled by Lenny to detail his romance with Eunice against the backdrop of the fall of America. It is a book that has made Lenny famous and wealthy, and has allowed him to finally be happy in life and retire in the Free State of Tucson.



Quotes

Don't let them tell you life's a journey. A journey is when you end up somewhere."
-- Lenny (Do Not Go Gentle)

Importance: When the novel begins, the very old-fashioned Lenny disagrees with the idea that life is a journey because to him, a journey is when you end up some place different, physically. What Lenny does not realize is that journeys are not only about physical destinations, but personal experience as well. Lenny, through his relationship with Eunice, is in for quite a journey.

And that's what immortality means to me, Joshie. It means selfishness. My generation's belief that each one of us matters more than you or anyone else would think.
-- Lenny (The Fallacy of Merely Existing)

Importance: Here, Lenny describes why he no longer wishes to live forever. He finds that eternal life on Earth is selfishness, because it means that someone matters enough to live forever somewhere while other people do not. It means that one life is worth more than others because one can live forever while another (without means and money) cannot. It means people will perpetually look and be young, even if nature does not intend this.

Money equals life.
-- Lenny (RateMe Plus)

Importance: When Lenny returns to America, one of the first things he does is to check on his investments and bank accounts. He learns they are down, which disheartens him. He reveals that in life, money really does equal life, because money pays for eternal life. If anyone wants to live forever, they must have the money to do it.

This child still needs to be brought up.
-- Eunice and Lenny's mother (The Nuclear Option)

Importance: When Eunice and Lenny's mother meet, they both come to the same agreement: he is immature and still needs to grow up. Rather than being wary of one another, like most mothers and girlfriends usually are, Lenny's mother and Eunice get along well and realize they have the same interest in Lenny. Lenny, while he may handle work well, does not handle the rest of life well. Eunice determines that, even though she is younger, she must act older and help Lenny to become more responsible.

...I saw that there were at least two truths to my life. The truth of my existence and the truth of my demise.
-- Lenny (Amy Greenberg's "Muffintop Hour")

Importance: When Lenny and Eunice have sex for the first time, these are the thoughts Lenny has. He recognizes his love and need to be with Eunice, and realizes that she is



everything good in his life and makes his existence worthwhile. Yet, he also knows she will be his demise, for he will not be able to live without her.

Was this why she had run of to Rome, learned Italian, found someone pliable and kind, if unbeautiful, to be her companion, tried to become a different person?

-- Lenny (The Sinner's Crusade)

Importance: When Lenny meets Eunice's father, he realizes how much of a tyrant the man must be at home for both his daughters and his wife to fear him. Lenny understands now that Eunice has fallen in love with him because he is everything her father is not. He also understands that her father is why Eunice chose to go to Rome – to get away, to be safe, to be somebody new. It brings him closer to Eunice, and gives him a better understanding of her.

Like the more she detested him, the more I loved him.

-- Eunice (I'll Love Him Even More)

Importance: Eunice explains to Grillbitch that she loves Lenny all the more because her mother dislikes Lenny so much. Eunice essentially confirms Lenny's belief that she has fallen for him because he is everything her family is not: gentle, kind, good-hearted, and loving. However, this also leads Eunice to begin looking elsewhere (to David) for everything Lenny is not. Despite this, Eunice seems to remain committed to Lenny.

Youth is youth. Talk young, live young.

-- Joshie (Anti-Inflammation)

Importance: Here, Joshie sums up the universal attitude toward youth in the novel. Youth is everything, and youth is nothing. Youth is what everyone is striving to retain, both in looks, in health, and in mannerisms: no one wants to grow up. Yet, many of those who are young, and those who are genetically-modified to be young, are careless with their youth, taking it for granted with their actions and attitudes. It is a strange paradox that underlines the strangeness of society.

I wanted to cut my ties with my country and my scowling, angry girlfriend and everything else that bound me to this world.

-- Lenny (The Rupture)

Importance: As Lenny watches the ferry on which Noah and Amy travel explode after being attacked by a helicopter, Lenny is angry and horrified. He suddenly feels sick of his country, of all of the violence and underhandedness, and longs to be able to free himself of everything, including Eunice. It is Lenny's lowest point, and marks the place at which he must either endeavor to make his life better, or let things continue on as they are.

I need you too, you know. Don't look at me like that. Of course I need you.

-- Joshie (Security Situation in Progress)



Importance: With the situation in a fallen America stabilizing, Joshie's company looks to come out ahead by taking advantage of the situation through the creative services it offers. The company will downsize but retain core members like Lenny. This confirms in Lenny's mind that their company did indeed have something to do with the destabilizing of the situation, and the violence that broke out across the country some days before.

I feared the old people, feared their mortality, but the more I did so, the more I fell in love with Eunice Park.

-- Lenny (Five-Jiao Men)

Importance: With the fall of America, Eunice commits to helping the elderly. Her gentility is part of what makes Lenny fall in love with her all over again. The other part of his love for her is in the recognition that the elderly will not live forever, and could very well be his own fate. In other words, their time is limited and their lives should not be taken for granted. Lenny applies this lesson to his own life: he cannot take his own time, or his love of Eunice, for granted. Mortality reminds people to value what limited time they have.

I am going to die.

-- Lenny (Forever Young)

Importance: Fed up with the state of America, heartbroken over Eunice, and feeling betrayed by Joshie stealing Eunice away, Lenny decides to die. He will not try to fight the aging process anymore, but will simply take life as it comes, and value what life he does have. He becomes wealthy from turning his relationship with Eunice – and the background events of the fall of America – into a book, after which he ultimately goes to live in the Free State of Tucson.