

Vinegar Girl Study Guide

Vinegar Girl by Anne Tyler

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



Contents

Vinegar Girl Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-6.....	9
Chapters 7-9.....	14
Chapters 10-11.....	18
Chapter 12, Epilogue.....	22
Characters.....	25
Symbols and Symbolism.....	28
Settings.....	30
Themes and Motifs.....	31
Styles.....	35
Quotes.....	37



Plot Summary

This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Tyler, Anne. *Vinegar Girl*. Hogarth Shakespeare, 2016.

Vinegar Girl is a modern novelization of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew." It tells the story of Kate Battista who is strong-willed and acerbic in her everyday interactions. The novel opens with Kate tending her garden and getting a phone call from Dr. Battista, her father, requesting that she bring him the lunch he forgot. When she arrives at her father's lab, Dr. Battista introduces Kate to Pyotr, who is his lab assistant.

Kate soon learns that Pyotr is at risk for deportation as his visa is set to expire. Because her father believes that his research study can only be successful with Pyotr's assistance, he suggests that Kate and Pyotr enter into a marriage so that Pyotr can stay in the country. Initially, Kate is offended by the suggestion and refuses. As she goes on about her way, she begins to recognize that she may actually be lonely and desire a relationship. While she is unhappy at the prospect of having such a relationship thrust upon her, she wonders if it is all she deserves.

Kate works as a teacher's aide at a preschool. As she observes the other young women in the school, she becomes increasingly self-aware of how she differs from the women. She thinks herself awkward and outcast. As Pyotr begins to try and woo her, Kate resists his advances. As she begins to warm up to Pyotr, she turns on him the moment she can sense that he senses her warmth.

Pyotr is attracted to Kate's personality. He appreciates her directness and likes that she reminds him of the women he grew up around in his home country. Pyotr comes for dinner at the Battista house in an effort to ingratiate himself to Kate. He meets Kate's younger sister Bunny, a teenager who is more interested in flirting and impressing Edward, the older boy next door.

Kate finally agrees to marry Pyotr, and Bunny cautions her. Bunny begins to notice the subtle ways that Pyotr appears to be controlling Kate. While Bunny warns her sister, she is also dealing with Edward. She claims to have become a vegetarian because Edward has told her about the detrimental effects of meat processing and cruelty to animals.

As the wedding nears, Kate is introduced to Mrs. Murphy, the elderly woman Pyotr shares a house with, and Mrs. Liu, the woman who helps Mrs. Murphy. Pyotr is introduced to Kate's family as well. Kate's Aunt Thelma tries to persuade Kate into having a larger wedding, but Kate refuses. Aunt Thelma settles for throwing the couple a small reception.

The day of the wedding arrives and Pyotr is late. When he does show up, he is angered, having just come from the lab where he discovered that the mice used in the research have been stolen. Pyotr and Kate marry, and after the conclusion of the ceremony, Pyotr accuses Bunny of stealing the mice. Kate defends her sister, but Pyotr

is unconvinced. Kate suggests that Edward may be the culprit and Pyotr goes after Edward, which ends in a physical altercation.

After everything is settled with the police, the mice are recovered, and both parties agree not to press charges, Pyotr and Kate attend their wedding reception. Kate defends Pyotr's reactions. The novel concludes with a flash forward into Kate and Pyotr's marriage.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter One opens with Kate Battista gardening. The phone rings and by the time she gets inside, the answering machine has picked up. She grabs the phone and it is her father asking her to bring him his lunch because he forgot it. Because he forgets his lunch frequently, Kate finds it odd that he has requested that she bring it. She decides to walk, instead of taking the car, to make him wait. On her walk, she overhears conversations of girls, likely students at Johns Hopkins, talking about boys. She arrives and her father introduces her to his research assistant, Pyotr Cherbakov. Dr. Battista mispronounces Pyotr's name and Pyotr corrects him. Kate gives her father his lunch and tells him to be sure to bring home the box. Pyotr comments that Kate's directness reminds him of the women in his home country. Dr. Battista attempts to get her to stay, but she has no intention. He then tries to distract her with his cell phone and takes a photo of her, which she demands he erase. Dr. Battista tells Pyotr that Kate works with children at a school. Kate reminds him that she hates small children and Pyotr asks why. She replies that "they're not very bright" (17). Dr. Battista sees her out. He explains to Kate that he is having trouble keeping his lab assistants and how much he values Pyotr and his contributions to his autoimmunity study.

Chapter Two finds Kate working at the Charles Village Little People's School. She overhears some little girls playing with their dolls, talking about how one of the dolls is in love with someone else. Kate was not interested in working in a preschool, but was expelled from college for disagreeing with her botany professor. Instead of reapplying to the school the following year, her aunt Thelma arranged for her job at the preschool and Kate began looking after her sister Bunny.

Kate works for Mrs. Chauncey as a teacher's aide. She understands that she does not interview well and cannot think of what else she might be qualified to do. She remembers being in the coed dorm and playing chess, which she was never good at. She started to beat her opponent, but then another classmate observed that "She has. No. Plan" (25). Kate has lunch with the children and then is called to Mrs. Darling's office.

Mrs. Darling, the founder of the school, asks Kate how she would rate her performance at the school and Kate explains she would not know. Mrs. Darling explains that while the children like her, some of the parents do not feel similarly. She cites Jameesha Crosby's father's concern about Kate's comment about his daughter sucking on her fingers. Kate had said that Jameesha will likely stop when "her fingers grow so long that she pokes both her eyes out" (33). Kate finds the comment funny and thinks herself witty. Mrs. Darling suggests that Kate needs to be more mature and exhibit "tact, restraint, diplomacy" (37).



Kate thinks about her meeting with Mrs. Darling on her walk home. Pyotr catches up with her on the walk and they talk. Pyotr tells her about a proverb about work from his homeland. He asks how long she has been growing out her hair and she is caught off guard by the sudden change in topic. She quit going to the salon because she did not like the women gossiping. Kate points out that Pyotr is walking in the opposite direction of the school.

Once Kate arrives at home, she talks to Bunny, who is home alone with Edward Mintz from next door. He is a good bit older than Bunny and never left for college. He is older than Bunny and is tutoring her in Spanish. Kate reminds Bunny that she is not supposed to be alone with a boy in the house. As they debate, Kate is annoyed by how Bunny “turns declarative sentences into questions” (41). Kate thinks about her dead mother and the stress of being pregnant with Bunny placed on her mother’s heart. Her thoughts drift to how Bunny resembles their mother and how Kate differs with her dark skin and large frame. Dr. Battista arrives and he asks Kate if she had a pleasant walk home and what she talked about with Pyotr. Kate tells her father about Edward Mintz and Dr. Battista begins talking about Pyotr and his soon-to-be expired visa and suggests that perhaps Pyotr could marry Kate to stay in the country.

Analysis

As the novel opens, the reader is introduced to Kate in her garden. She is alone and responding to the phone ringing. Once inside, she is summoned by her father to bring his lunch to the lab. This introduces the theme of Patriarchy. While Kate’s position in the garden is isolated, she appears to be independent, but one call redirects her day. When she arrives at the lab, Dr. Battista, her father, introduces her to Pyotr. Pyotr is likely someone she has encountered before, but at this juncture, Pyotr becomes a person of importance. Her father is directing her attention. She does not know his motivations, but she understands that his behavior is out of the ordinary. He has forgotten his lunch many times over, but one this day, he insists that she bring it to him. Kate tries to make the trip a quick one, but each time she tries to leave, her father redirects. Dr. Battista maintains control of her, almost as though she is part of an experiment in his lab.

Dr. Battista plants the seed that Pyotr is both important and is in trouble of leaving. Because his research is of the utmost importance to Dr. Battista, he is making plans to salvage what he can. The theme of codependency is introduced through Dr. Battista’s actions to save Pyotr from deportation. Kate is unclear of what her father is up to at first. Dr. Battista places tremendous value on Pyotr. Because of this, he can justify suggesting the marriage between Kate and Pyotr. Through this lens, Pyotr is almost like a reward to Kate.

Kate, of course, is a difficult personality. As the reader can ascertain from her initial interactions with Pyotr, Kate is not interested in pleasing people. This introduces the theme of conformity. While there may be societal expectations of social graces and how a person should act during introductions, Kate is not interested. She is blunt and says what is on her mind. When her father brags that Kate works with children, he hopes that



this quality will be attractive to Pyotr. Dr. Battista knows his daughter well enough to know how people perceive her behaviors. By indicating that she is good with children, he is trying to tell Pyotr that Kate would be a viable wife and mother. Kate, of course, counters with her statement about children not being very bright. Unexpectedly, Pyotr gravitates toward Kate's attitude; it reminds him of the women in his home country. Her disposition is not nearly as jarring as it would be to a lot of men that Kate may have encountered.

Kate's directness may be a defense mechanism to keep people at a distance. She is self-aware enough to recognize her insecurities. As she watches the children playing with dolls on the playground, she recognizes social norms that are not necessarily in her purview, such as the dolls being in love.

The theme of conformity is further examined in Mrs. Darling's conversations with Kate. It is clear from Mrs. Darling's behavior that this is not the first time she has had to confront Kate about her behavior. Because Mrs. Darling is a friend of Kate's Aunt Thelma, she may offer Kate more latitude than would likely be expected. Kate does not try to defend herself, but she also does not see where some of the things she says are wrong. In fact, she finds them witty. For the most part, the author lets the reader know what Kate has said by having another character reveal the statement. This removes some of the sting of her words and allows the reader to enjoy Kate's words along with Kate and keep the reader at a distance from what may be considered Kate's cruelty.

Kate agrees to work on the "tact, restraint, diplomacy" (37) that Mrs. Darling recommends. The expectation would be that Kate will conform to Mrs. Darling's suggestions as a way to keep her job, but knowing that Kate appreciates the cleverness or honesty of the things she says, suggests that Kate has no intention to conform to Mrs. Darling's standards.

At home, the reader is introduced to Kate's sister Bunny. Kate and Bunny are sharply different personalities. While Kate views herself as gawky and large-framed, Bunny embraces her femininity at an early age. Bunny is a reminder of what Kate is not and this places strain on their relationship. Because Kate is charged with looking after Bunny, Bunny is fine with challenging her sister, whereas she might not be as inclined to do so were her father around more.

Bunny invites Edward over under the guise of being a Spanish tutor, but Bunny likely has other things in mind. She may have chosen Edward because of his proximity since he is the boy next door. Bunny is not bothered by the age difference, while Kate is able to recognize the issue with a 20-year-old man hanging out with a 15-year-old girl.

Kate is comfortable reprimanding her sister and running the household. But she also begins to recognize that she may be missing something. When she remembers the chess game from when she was at college, she realizes the significance of her not having a plan. This lack of plan has left her open to her father's suggestion that she marry Pyotr, which is a plan she will resist.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Kate demand her father erase the photo he takes of her? What does this suggest about her character?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dr. Battista tell Kate about Pyotr's contributions to his study?

Discussion Question 3

What does Kate's reaction to Bunny inviting Edward over reveal about her character?

Vocabulary

partitioned, portico, shunted, autoimmune, abide, billowy, reprovngly, middy, catapult, rapsallions, benign, reproachful, obstreperous, audacious, unorthodox, surreptitiously, deferential, microphylum, emanate, venture, flippant, tact, diplomacy, probation, pantomime, solicitous, soporific, daintier, spendthrift, perturbed, lichen, didactic, asterisk, demure, gawky, concoction, requisite, trivet, genteel



Chapters 3-6

Summary

Chapter Three opens at the preschool. Kate has been asked to Mrs. Darling's office again, but does not know why. When she gets to the office, Mrs. Darling explains that Emma Gray was upset after she asked Kate who the best drawer in the class was and Kate replied Jason. Kate stands by her assessment, but because this episode happened before the previous issue, she assures Mrs. Darling that she is working on her tact.

Kate arrives at home to find Bunny cooking tofu because she has decided to become a vegetarian after talking to Edward. Bunny asks that Kate make meatless meat mash for dinner instead of the traditional meat mash they eat. Dr. Battista arrives with Pyotr. Pyotr presents Kate with a bag of chocolate bars for dessert. Dr. Battista and Pyotr have drinks in the living room. Over dinner, Bunny declares that she is vegetarian and Pyotr thinks that is absurd and comments on how Americans eliminate things from their diets, while the rest of the world wants to include more healthy foods. Bunny suggests that mice are being tortured in the lab, and Pyotr denies it. After dinner, they eat the dark chocolate bars and Bunny and Dr. Battista put honey on them to sweeten them.

While cleaning up, Pyotr asks about Kate's mother. She explains that she had depression and that she did not know her well. Kate distinguishes how Pyotr's English is better when he is talking about his work in the lab, versus small talk with her. Later that evening, Dr. Battista asks if Kate would be willing to marry Pyotr. Kate is offended at the suggestion, claiming that he would never ask the same of Bunny. Dr. Battista explains that Bunny is too young and that she has boys chasing after her. Kate completes his thought by stating that she does not.

Chapter Four finds Kate processing her hurt feelings. She notices that when she walks to work she feels alone. At school, she thinks about how she is only 29 and could still find a husband on her own. She observes the other teacher's aides and how Natalie and Adam flirt with one another. She thinks about how the time she wore a skirt to school made her feel awkward instead of feminine. She talks with Adam and he compliments her teeth and she awkwardly accepts the compliment. On her way home, Kate thinks about her mother instructing how to properly put the utensils in the dishwasher. At home she wonders if Pyotr knows about her father's plan for him to stay in the country. She confronts Bunny about stealing her beef jerky and Bunny insists that she is vegan now. At dinner, Kate notices that her father is very complimentary of her, but then mentions that he noticed the taxes have not been completed. She tells him he can do his own taxes and Bunny cheers her on unexpectedly.

In Chapter Five Kate notices that the crocuses she planted in the fall did not come up. Dr. Battista calls her to tell her he forgot his lunch again. She reluctantly agrees to take the lunch to him, but instructs Bunny to take it for her. Bunny does not want to, but



Edward offers to drive her. Kate tells her that she cannot go in the car alone with a boy and Bunny accuses Kate of being like their father. Bunny goes with Edward anyway.

Later, while Kate is in the back garden, Pyotr shows up unexpectedly. He suggests that he and Dr. Battista offended Kate and that asking her to deceive the government was inconsiderate. She accepts his apology and reminds him that he could be arrested for marrying someone for a green card. She expects him to leave, but they end up conversing about the names people have for each other, such as how Kate calls Dr. Battista "Father," while Bunny calls him "Papa." Pyotr calls Kate Katya, which she does not like. He asks why she dropped out of college and she tells him she will see him out.

Chapter Six opens with Dr. Battista returning home in a celebratory mood to Kate's confusion. He tells her that Pyotr said they had a good afternoon together and that Kate now likes Pyotr. Kate does not deny this outright, but tells him liking Pyotr and marrying him are two different things. Dr. Battista talks about the documents they would need to pull off the marriage for Immigration. Kate reminds him that what he is doing to her is tantamount to human trafficking. He tells her that she should start texting Pyotr because Immigration will ask for their cell phones.

They end up talking about Kate's mother and her depression. Dr. Battista admits that Kate's mother sometimes felt belittled by his intellect. He confesses that her depression caused a problem in their relationship and that he found a new drug for her to take. She responded well to the treatment, but was not aware of a dangerous side effect. The drug contributed to the heart problem that ultimately killed her. After a moment, Dr. Battista suggests that it ended up offering "valuable data for my colleague" (109). Kate is saddened that she missed the good times with her mother and Dr. Battista tells her that she used to go shopping with her mother and that they would get their nails done. As their conversation winds down, Dr. Battista tells Kate that he is worried that she will never find a husband. Kate is offended and he attempts to clarify by observing how much time she spends at home alone and that she does not have much opportunity to meet someone. Kate relents and tells him that she will marry Pyotr. His mood is celebratory and the chapter closes with Dr. Battista asking her to do his taxes and she agrees.

Analysis

At the opening of Chapter Three, Kate returns to Mrs. Darling's office. Kate reassures Mrs. Darling that she is working to improve, but justifies her actions because what she did took place prior to her previous discussion with Mrs. Darling. This reinforces the theme of conformity. Kate is willing to make an effort, but must still grapple with reminders of what she has done.

In keeping with the conformity theme, when Kate gets home, she discovers Bunny cooking tofu. It is uncommon for Kate to find her sister cooking, but stranger still is the tofu. Bunny has decided that she is going to be a vegetarian after Edward enlightens her about how meat is processed. When Pyotr arrives for the dinner with the family, he



is confused as to why anyone would be a vegetarian. His comments on Americans removing things from their diet reveal his thoughts on conformity. It is not just that other parts of the world consume the food they do for the nutrition. It is also about people finding things to have in common to share with other people. It is as if there is a failure to connect and so people gravitate toward special interests to find companionship or to impress people.

Pyotr uses the dinner as an opportunity to better connect with Kate. While they are cleaning up afterward, Pyotr asks about Kate's mother. This addresses the theme of family. Kate likely feels a tremendous sense of loss and abandonment from her mother's death. She tells Pyotr that her mother suffered from depression. Imagining a young girl dealing with a depressive episode works against what would ideally be expected for a young girl and her mother. It is possible that Kate has thought a lot about the expectations she would have had for her mother and the reality did not match. It may be a way for Kate to reconcile why she feels like an outcast. She may view the loss of her mother as a lost opportunity to learn how to be what is expected of a young woman.

Dr. Battista finally broaches the subject of Kate marrying Pyotr. Kate's reaction is expected and understandable. She does not want to marry Pyotr and is offended by the suggestion. Her offense is further deepened by Bunny's comment about the lack of men who pursue Kate. This reinforces Kate's status as an outsider.

Bunny's comments lead to further reflection for Kate. In rejecting her father's suggestion that she marry Pyotr, she becomes aware of what she does not have in her life: a relationship. At 29, she is not old and still has time to find a husband if that is what she chooses. But as she considers all of this, she must confront her awkwardness. She sees how she differs from other women. For Bunny, flirting comes naturally. When she sees Natalie with Adam, their flirtation is natural as well. Even when Kate has made attempts to conform to expectation, like the time she wore a skirt to work, she is left feeling uncomfortable. Societal expectations of how a woman should act are not something that Kate is comfortable in following. Instead of embracing her differences, this prompts Kate to feel even more awkward.

Building on the theme of conformity, Bunny declares herself a vegan, but Kate knows that she is stealing beef jerky from Kate's stash. Kate recognizes that Bunny is claiming to be one thing to fit in, but is sneaking around to do the opposite. This may seem strange to Kate because of her natural directness. Bunny is able to present one facet of her personality for show, but stay true to herself at the same time. Kate views this as a phase that Bunny is going through, but it also something that seems quite foreign to Kate. Kate does not want to change anything about who she is, regardless of how she may or may not feel about aspects of herself. In this way, Kate demonstrates a rigid personality, whereas Bunny's appears more fluid.

Dr. Battista makes another attempt at getting Kate and Pyotr together by requesting that Kate bring him his lunch again. Kate declines and gets Bunny to do it instead. Edward takes Bunny to the lab, which foreshadows a later episode at the lab.



Because Kate refused to take her father his lunch, Pyotr decides to visit Kate at the house. The two have a conversation and seem to adjust and even enjoy each others company. As soon as Kate realizes that she may be getting comfortable around Pyotr, she shifts. She does not want to let her guard down around Pyotr, or anyone else for that matter. Pyotr makes an appeal to Kate when he admits that asking her to help him defraud the government so that he could stay in the country was wrong. Pyotr also recognizes the way in which Kate and Bunny interact with Dr. Battista differently. Pyotr is making an effort to understand Kate, to get to know her. This indicates that Pyotr's intentions may not strictly be in the interest of getting a green card. He seems to be taking a genuine interest in Kate. Because Kate is not used to this kind of attention, she deflects. When he asks about why she dropped out of college, he reaches a level of intimacy that Kate is not comfortable with. She shows him out. Much as what was revealed in an earlier chapter, Kate is without a plan. Reminding her of college, reminds her of her lack of direction.

Kate and Dr. Battista debate about the issue of the arranged marriage. Kate even goes so far as to suggest that what her father is doing could be considered in the realm of human trafficking. This may seem an overreach in seriousness, but it reflects how Kate feels. As their conversation continues, Dr. Battista explains to Kate more about her mother's condition and Kate learns things about her mother that she previously had not known. She may not remember her mother, but Dr. Battista is able to shed some light on the time they spent together. Kate is surprised to learn that she would have ever been one to get her nails done. This revelation may have opened Kate to possibility. If she once enjoyed doing something such as getting a manicure, then perhaps she is the type who would want to get married. Her father's concern about whether or not Kate will ever find someone forces her to confront what Kate may have been denying herself. She agrees to go through with the marriage to Pyotr.

Discussion Question 1

What does Dr. Battista putting honey on the chocolate bars reveal about his character?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Kate begin to recognize that she feels alone?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Pyotr tell Dr. Battista that Kate likes him now?

Vocabulary

presumptuous, frolicking, hospitable, dilutes, fortified, infinitesimal, impassive, conspicuously, raucous, weebegone, commiserating, contentious, peregrinating,



regimented, meddle, varmint, indignantly, illustrious, oligarch, edict, consolation,
boorish, deleterious, cerebral



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter Seven opens with a text exchange between Kate and Pyotr, with him asking if she is at home. Kate is at work and the two Emmas at the school are staging a wedding for the ballerina and sailor dolls. Kate now wears her great aunt's diamond for an engagement ring. She decides to tell people at the school that she is engaged. Her co-workers ask about him and she tells them he works in her father's lab. She tells the kids in her class as well. When Adam hears he asks if she is jumping into something. She shrugs and hints that it may not last forever; Adam is surprised, regarding marriage as a "covenant" (121).

Later, Kate and Pyotr stage photos together. Bunny watches Kate and Pyotr doing dishes together and is confused by how they seem to have changed. When Bunny and Kate talk later, Bunny is unsure about Kate marrying Pyotr. Kate defends her decision because it will help their father and the lab. Bunny counters that they should be their father's life instead of the lab.

The next morning, Kate and Pyotr go to the market together for groceries. While they are out, Pyotr again references a proverb from his home country: "Beware against the sweet person, for sugar has no nutrition" (126). Kate tells him that in the United States, one can catch more flies with honey. Pyotr calls her "vinegar girl" (126), which agitates Kate and she pulls away from him. Kate thinks about how she will have to have her Aunt Thelma to dinner to meet Pyotr. She does not want Thelma at the wedding because she would make too much fuss. Pyotr does not understand why Kate does not want Thelma around, arguing that she is family.

Later that afternoon, Dr. Battista and Pyotr talk and Edward and Bunny are in the living room and Kate catches them together. Kate tries to reason with Edward that Bunny is too young and that her dismal Spanish grade suggests that he is not tutoring her at all. Bunny accuses that at least her father did not have to find her someone to marry. The chapter concludes with another text from Pyotr, telling Kate that he and Dr. Battista went to get the marriage license.

Chapter Eight introduces Aunt Thelma. Thelma asks how Kate met Pyotr and comments on Bunny's sundress because she finds it inappropriate. Dr. Battista joins them and Thelma is introduced to Pyotr. During their conversation, Pyotr tells the family that Kate can quit working or go back to school if she chooses and that he is willing to pay for it because he is taking responsibility for Kate. Kate retorts that she is her "own responsibility" (142). Pyotr is also introduced to Uncle Theron and Uncle Barclay. Thelma offers to take Kate shopping because Kate will not be able to fit into her mother's wedding dress. Kate hears Theron mention something about premarital counseling. During dinner, Thelma suggests having a reception since she was not being invited to the marriage ceremony. Kate says she will consider it, but the wedding is



already getting bigger than she would like. Kate decides not to mention that there would not be a honeymoon.

At work, Adam gives Kate a dream catcher as a wedding present and she thanks him. Later, Thelma asks if Kate will take Pyotr's surname, which Kate has no intention of doing so. Thelma asks Kate and Pyotr about where they will live. Dr. Battista believes that Pyotr will move in with them, but Pyotr tells him that he has the top floor of Mrs. Murphy's house where he currently lives; he plans for Kate to join him there. Kate mentions that she will be able to garden in the large backyard because Mrs. Murphy is wheelchair bound and unable to go into the yard. She says she will plant a vegetable garden, which she is unable to do in her present garden. Dr. Battista is not pleased. Over dessert, Pyotr tells Kate that he thinks her family likes him; she responds: "if you say so" (158). Theron reminds Kate about the marriage license and she tells him that her father and Pyotr already took care of it and the form she will need for Immigration. Kate does not understand why no one picks up on the comment about Immigration or feels that she might deserve actual romance.

Chapter Nine takes place a couple days before the wedding. Pyotr takes Kate to Mrs. Murphy's house to introduce her and move Kate's belongings into the house. He shows her around and Kate thinks that she will "feel private here" (162). Pyotr tells Kate about overhearing a friend's parents talking once when he spent the night, suggesting that they would one day be able to sit and have conversations like that.

Kate meets Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Liu, who brings Mrs. Murphy out in her wheelchair. They welcome her and encourage her to go and see the yard for her garden. Outside, Pyotr tells Kate that the women like her and Kate counters that they do not know her.

Analysis

As Chapter Seven begins, Kate and Pyotr are building evidence of their relationship. Dr. Battista suggested that they begin texting one another in an effort to establish history in their relationship. The theme of Conformity is seen again as Kate makes her way to school and announces her engagement. While there is surprise that Kate is getting married, her colleagues and the students seem to express happiness for her. In these moments, Kate is able to feel part of something she did not expect for herself. That is not to suggest that Kate is completely at ease with this newfound inclusion. During her conversation with Adam, she expresses concern about whether or not Kate is rushing into the marriage. Kate indicates that the marriage may lack permanence. He is surprised by this comment, and while he has no basis for understanding the context in which Kate intends the remark, he reinforces that she is entering into a "covenant" (121). This calls back to the themes of gender roles and patriarchy. Adam is likely surprised that a woman would make such a comment. He may not be as inclined to be offended by the remark if it had been uttered by a man. Adam's question about whether or not she is jumping into something, suggests his desire to protect her, both as her friend and colleague, but perhaps also as a man.



The theme of conformity continues as the photos of Kate and Pyotr are staged. Dr. Battista is doing whatever he can think of to make Kate and Pyotr's relationship appear legitimate and viable. Watching this happen is troublesome for Bunny. She confronts Kate about going through with the wedding. Kate has made up her mind, so Bunny's line of questioning is rejected. She tells her sister that she knows what she is doing. Bunny is not so convinced and recognizes that Dr. Battista's priorities may be askew. It is clear that Dr. Battista values his research study above all else and Bunny believes that she and Kate should be ranked as high. Bunny may see herself as being marginalized or at risk of being put in a situation that she may not want as she grows older. This awareness is fleeting, as would be expected from a teenager. It does, however, foreshadow Bunny's protectiveness of her sister in later chapters.

The reader and Pyotr are introduced to Aunt Thelma in Chapter Eight. Aunt Thelma is Kate's mother's sister and likely gives some insight into how Kate's mother would have reacted were she still alive. Kate is uncomfortable with the attention that Thelma brings. She does not want a big wedding or a reception. Kate likely would not feel differently under different circumstances. Kate and Thelma are very different in their social expectations. Thelma plays a familiar feminine role. It may also be one that would be expected for Bunny to grow into as well. Kate has an ulterior motive for keeping Thelma at a distance from the wedding. Kate does not want Thelma to know the circumstances under which she is getting married. While Kate may be able to adjust to the fact that her marriage has effectively been arranged, Kate does not want that fact to be broadcast. Kate is already self-conscious enough about how the family and others see her that she is not going to want any additional fodder for her status of being different.

While Kate agrees to marry Pyotr, she is not conforming to all the expectations of a wife. Kate rejects the possibility of taking Pyotr's surname. She is challenging the societal norms of the wife belonging to the man. She is not going to relinquish her identity and accept a new one because she married someone.

The theme of Patriarchy is seen further in the reveal that Kate will be moving out of the Battista house after the wedding. Dr. Battista is shocked by this and resists it. The theme of codependency is evidenced by his reluctance to have Kate leave. He expected that Kate would stay at the house and continue with the roles she plays in the household. While the marriage was expected to change things for Kate, Dr. Battista had not considered that there would be changes for him as well. Pyotr begins to take ownership of Kate during this time, which Bunny finds unsettling. Kate recognizes what is going on, but she is also thinking beyond the marriage. It is clear that Kate is beginning to develop a plan. She will participate in the wedding, and is okay with moving out. She likes that she is breaking free in that way. Further, she has it in her mind that if the marriage fails, she will not move back. Instead, she will get an apartment and a job; she begins to see a life of her own.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Pyotr call Kate “vinegar girl” (126)? Why might the author have deemed this single comment important enough to become the book’s title?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Uncle Theron suggest that Kate and Pyotr receive premarital counseling?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Kate concerned that her family may not think she deserves romance? What themes tie into this?

Vocabulary

bugaboo, conceptions, inane, covenant, algorithms, esoteric, vertiginous, braising, subjunctive, empirical, perennial, dispensation, alliterative, idioms, pontificating, exuberantly, clapboard, garish, proximity, bric-a-brac



Chapters 10-11

Summary

Chapter 10 opens on the day of wedding. Kate wakes up and Bunny sits at the end of the bed and tells Kate she does not have to go through with the wedding. Bunny is concerned with how Pyotr treats her, suggesting that he acts “like he owns you” (169). Kate insists she can take care of herself and defends Pyotr. Bunny tells her to remember that she was warned and Kate realizes that not once had Bunny ended a statement as a question. Kate thinks about how she has no plans to move back into her father’s house after Pyotr gets his green card. She wants a place of her own, a degree, and perhaps a career. Kate wears her blue dress for the wedding and her father compliments how she looks even though he has seen her in the dress before.

The wedding is set to take place at Uncle Theron’s church, the Cockeyville Consolidated Chapel. Theron takes her to his office to go over the vows while they wait for Pyotr to arrive. They do away with the phrasing “to obey” and “who gives this woman” (178). Pyotr is late and Dr. Battista explains to Theron that they have to be married before they can start the paperwork for Immigration. Dr. Battista tells Kate and Bunny that he married their mother in this church. Kate tries to imagine her mother at the wedding. Dr. Battista wonders if something has gone wrong at the lab and that is why Pyotr has not arrived. Bunny takes Dr. Battista’s phone from him and texts Pyotr. Pyotr replies that the mice from the lab are gone. Dr. Battista panics, thinking of all the research that will be lost with the mice gone and how he will lose his funding. Kate tries to calm the situation, but Dr. Battista accuses her of being happy that she does not have to marry Pyotr now. She is confused and Theron asks why Kate would “have to get married” (187). Dr. Battista becomes overwhelmed, suggesting he has nothing else to live for.

A short while later, Pyotr arrives at the church, telling Bunny that she will be arrested for releasing the mice. Bunny denies any involvement. Pyotr motions to Kate to have the ceremony and Dr. Battista hesitates. Kate tells her father that he can check the lab after the ceremony. Bunny cannot believe that Kate is going through with the wedding. At the altar, Pyotr tells Dr. Battista that he did not understand what happened with the mice and that he spoke with the police. Theron performs the ceremony while Pyotr continues to give details about what happened. After they are married, Pyotr tells Dr. Battista that the police want to speak with him.

Chapter Eleven picks up after the wedding. Kate gets into Pyotr’s car and asks if he was texting and driving. Dr. Battista tells them that he is going to drop Bunny off at home, stop by the lab, and meet them at the reception. In the car, Kate tells Pyotr that Bunny had nothing to do with the mice at the lab and Pyotr tells her that he already told the police that she did it. He claims that she did it because she is a vegetarian and Kate tells him that she is not really because she keeps stealing Kate’s beef jerky. Pyotr tells her not to contradict him.



At Mrs. Murphy's house, Pyotr gets out of the car in a huff and realizes he does not have his keys when he gets to the door. He rings the bell and Mrs. Liu confronts him about ringing the bell during Mrs. Murphy's nap. Mrs. Liu tells Kate that Pyotr is rude and Kate defends him. Kate notes that Mrs. Liu seemed to like Pyotr when they first met, but now they behaved as though they did not like each other.

Kate tries to get Pyotr to tell the police that Bunny had nothing to do with the lab mice. After Pyotr talks to the detective, he tells Kate that "this is the worst day of my life" (201). While Kate understands, she is insulted by the comment. Pyotr begins to tell Kate about how he feels like he does not belong. He still has issues with the language and for the last three years he has been lonely. He says he wishes Bunny had taken the mice so that she could tell him where they were. Kate realizes it was Edward who took the mice and Pyotr rushes from the house without Kate. She regards the way Pyotr has treated her since the wedding as "downright abusive" (203).

After Pyotr leaves, Kate makes herself some food, waiting for the reception that evening. She considers how they would handle their household expenses and remembers the coed dorm from college. She familiarizes herself with her surroundings. She notices that her bed is not made up. She ends up going into Pyotr's room. She sees the suit he was going to wear to the wedding before the incident at the lab. Later Kate hears Pyotr coming up the stairs. Pyotr tells her that her sheets are in the wash because they were new. He tells her that he was able to get the mice back. He went to confront Edward about the mice and got them back. He tells Kate they are late for the reception.

Analysis

The theme of family is witnessed in how Bunny looks after Kate. Prior to the wedding, Bunny talks to Kate about not going through with it. Bunny is concerned about Pyotr's behavior, finding him controlling. It is as though after Bunny becomes aware of how Dr. Battista puts his research above all else, so she feels she needs to be there for her sister. Bunny recognizes the influence of a patriarchal society has on her relationship with her father and how that also extends to her sister and her impending marriage.

Bunny wants Kate to be happy and may be concerned that Kate's pride may be clouding her judgement about the marriage. Kate sticks to her decision to marry Pyotr. Whether Kate wants to marry Pyotr or she has resigned herself to her fate is unclear, but Bunny has offered her warning.

Everyone arrives at the church, but Pyotr is not to be found. There is not a tremendous amount of concern as to where Pyotr is. This may be contributed to Kate and Dr. Battista both knowing what is at stake for Pyotr with the wedding. While they are not forthcoming about why Kate and Pyotr are getting married, they do not seem concerned that Pyotr has changed his mind. The other family members may not express concern because of how sudden the wedding is, or even Kate's disposition. The family is surprised that Kate is getting married, so it is likely they are just going along with it.



Pyotr does arrive, of course. He tells Dr. Battista about what happened at the lab. Dr. Battista is understandably upset that his research is gone. Because of what losing the mice means to the research study, it would be reasonable for the wedding to be called off. If the study is over, Pyotr does not need to stay in the country. Kate could back out or Pyotr could back out.

Instead, Pyotr and Kate exchange vows while Pyotr continues to explain what happened. How he handles telling the news marginalizes the wedding vows. It is almost as though they are perfunctory. Perhaps Pyotr knows that he will be able to continue with the study and will need to stay in the country or perhaps not. He may also want to marry Kate for reasons beyond staying in the country. That he combines the vows with the story shows him in a state of conflict. His needs may be competing for attention.

As soon as they are married, Pyotr's focus shifts entirely to the mice. He wants to recover them and is adamant that Bunny is responsible for the theft. Just as Bunny defended Kate earlier in the novel, it is Kate's turn to reciprocate. She defends her sister and shifts suspicion to Edward. Pyotr dismisses Kate to go after Edward. Yes, time may be critical, but as much as Dr. Battista puts his work before his family, Kate glimpses that this may be true of Pyotr as well. For Kate it cements their relationship as a marriage of convenience. Pyotr even goes so far as to declare it the day the worst in his life.

Kate knows better than to dwell on any offense she may have taken from his comment. She recognizes where Pyotr's focus is and understands that it is probably the best place for his focus to be. She knows what the mice mean to the study and subsequently Pyotr and her father. While Kate is alone at Mrs. Murphy's house, she is able to think and reflect on being alone and achieving a new level of independence. That is not to suggest that Kate regards Pyotr's behavior as acceptable. She recognizes the "abusive" (203) nature of how he is treating her.

When Kate realizes that her bed has not been made up, she feels dejected. It is as though now that she has married Pyotr and he got what he wanted, she is left without anything. For Kate, this likely makes her feel more isolated than she felt before. Now she has done what society would have her conform to and gotten married. The expectation, however, differs from the reality. Although Kate's expectations were unclear. She had previously considered why her family never questioned whether or not she deserved romance. Now, she is alone in an unfamiliar house, lacking something as basic as bed linens. When Pyotr returns, Kate gets clarity about the bed linens and begins to see that now that the issue with the lab has been resolved, Pyotr returns his focus to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Bunny tell Kate to remember that she warned her? What does this comment act as for readers?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Dr. Battista think he has nothing to live for after the mice are stolen? What does this suggest about his character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Kate feel that Pyotr has been abusive toward her?

Vocabulary

paraphernalia, consignment, cavalier, plodding, aptitude, agitation, contradict, laborious, impromptu, reconnoiter, frivolities, nonchalant



Chapter 12, Epilogue

Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Kate and Pyotr arrive at Thelma's for the reception and apologize for being late. Dr. Battista has told Thelma about the day. They have a toast and Dr. Battista starts taking a lot of pictures, realizing he had not taken any during the ceremony. Richard, Thelma's son announces that the family is relieved that Kate has been married off. Pyotr tells him that he is relieved as well because he was not sure if Kate liked him. As they interact with the reception guests, Kate realizes that she can piece together memories with Pyotr from the time that they have known each other.

At the dinner, Bunny refuses to sit by Pyotr and Uncle Barclay tells Pyotr that it appears he is going to have problems with his sister-in-law. Dr. Battista starts looking under the table for Kate's bag. She asks what he wants and he shows her the Immigration papers and Kate snaps at him.

Barclay tries to soften things between Pyotr and Bunny, but Bunny refuses, accusing Pyotr of assaulting "an innocent man" (228), claiming that Pyotr almost broke Edward's jaw. She explains that Pyotr barged into the Mintz house and confronted Edward about the mice. During the altercation, Mrs. Mintz called the police on Pyotr and the only way that the Mintz' were not going to press charges was if Dr. Battista agreed not to press charges against Edward. Kate defends Pyotr's actions, suggesting Edward instigated the attack. Bunny accuses Kate of obeying Pyotr like a "zombie" (231) and that she would never relent to her husband as such. Angered, but calm, Kate defends Pyotr by explaining that men have not have the same opportunities as women to learn to control their emotions. She explains that she is trying to figure out how they both can have room to be themselves with each other and that it will take time. Pyotr goes to Kate and puts his arm around her and tells her to kiss him.

The Epilogue skips ahead in time. Kate and Pyotr have a son named Louie. On this particular evening, Kate and Pyotr are going to Washington so that Kate can accept a botany prize. As they get ready for their night out, Kate grouses as to why she cannot wear pants. Pyotr tells her that he is wearing a suit and that she should wear a dress.

Dr. Battista is now Louie's regular sitter since Bunny married and moved to New Jersey, but Dr. Battista is attending the awards ceremony. Mrs. Liu agrees to watch Louie. Louie thinks back to when Dr. Battista and Pyotr had to leave the country in order to get their prize. As Kate and Pyotr prepare to leave for their night out, they stand in the doorway, holding hands, and Kate asks how they look.

Analysis

The theme of family is developed at the wedding reception begins. Kate and Pyotr arrive late for reception, but they are in a better frame of mind after resolving the issue



with the lab and Kate's feelings of being dejected. The occasion is not without reminders that marriage was not expected for Kate. Richard, Thelma's son, declares the families relief that Kate has finally married. Richard's comment may have stung more were it not for Pyotr declaring his own relief that she married him. Pyotr makes an effort to be inclusive of Kate. More than perhaps anyone in her family, Pyotr is able to understand the parts of Kate's personality that baffle others. Their union may not be perfect, but there is a foundation on which to build.

During the reception, Kate begins to piece together memories she has of Pyotr. This demonstrates how she is letting him and letting her guard down. If he is willing to defend her, then that should mean something to her. It also gives her permission to defend Pyotr's behavior to her family.

Bunny is understandably upset about what happened with the assault on Edward. The physical attack does not look good for Pyotr and should raise concerns. What Edward did was wrong, but how Pyotr went about handling the theft was also wrong. In observing the tension between Bunny and Pyotr and other members of the family, Kate is prompted to defend her new husband. She recognizes how gender roles shape a person's worldview. In understanding that men and women are taught to view the world differently, she sees how expected reactions may differ. Kate may have struggled with her own feminine identity, but she knows that women are taught to have a more empathetic lens through which to see the world. Much as she has been accused on lacking tact or restraint, she knows why Pyotr reacted the way he did. In this moment, Pyotr realizes Kate's commitment to the relationship and they share a kiss. It portends that they may be able to succeed in their marriage.

The Epilogue confirms that the marriage does last. Pyotr and Kate have a child together and both achieve respectable accolades in their career. The night mentioned in the Epilogue shows Kate getting ready to accept a botany award. This demonstrates to the reader that Kate has been able to create and follow through on a plan. She has risen above the subservient roles she was delegated to previously. The profession recognition helps to make Kate and Pyotr equals as well.

Kate is not without the insecurities that plagued her in earlier chapters. She remains self-aware and still feels uncomfortable in a dress. When she turns to her son and asks how she and Pyotr look, they are standing in the doorway. They are side-by-side and seen as a unit, as equals.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Kate begin to remember times she has spent with Pyotr after the wedding?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Kate defend Pyotr? What does this say about their relationship?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Kate ask her son how she and Pyotr look? What does this scene suggest about their relationship?

Vocabulary

veranda, belligerently, milieu, jargon, emphatic, vichyssoise, parquet



Characters

Kate Battista

Kate Battista is a 92-year-old woman who works as a teacher's aide at a local prep school. She is strong-willed and has issues with polite social interaction as well as reading social cues.

After her expulsion, Kate dropped out of college altogether. She lives with her father and sister and has cared for her sister, and taken care of the cooking and housekeeping.

She resists the idea of marrying Pyotr in an effort to help her father's research. She wants to be accepted for who she is, but fears no one will love her.

Her character is the equivalent to Katherine in "Taming of the Shrew."

Pyotr Cherbakov

Pyotr Cherbakov is Dr. Battista's research assistant at the lab. He is in the country on an O-1 visa, which designates him as having a special skill to use while in the country, but it is soon to expire.

Pyotr is more comfortable speaking English in his work life than in personal conversations. He likes Kate's personality because it reminds him of the directness of the women in his homeland.

Pyotr accuses Bunny of stealing the mice from the lab. When he realizes Edward is the likely culprit, he confronts him, getting into a physical altercation that could jeopardize his ability to stay in the country even if he marries.

Pyotr has a tempter and a sense of duty. He wants to stay in the country and is more taken with Kate than she is at the start, although his original motives remain unclear.

Pyotr character's equivalent in "Taming of the Shrew" is Petruchio.

Dr. Battista

Dr. Battista is a research scientist at Johns Hopkins. A widower, he raised his two daughters to the best of his ability. He is very work-centric and the impetus for suggesting Kate marry Pyotr is to keep Pyotr on his staff at the lab.

Dr. Battista worries about Kate's ability to meet someone, and in his more vulnerable moments, will admit to wanting to see her happy.



He is devastated by the loss of the mice and is instrumental in keeping Pyotr from facing charges after Pyotr assaults Edward.

Dr. Battista character's equivalent in "Taming of the Shrew" is Baptista Minola.

Bunny

Bunny is Kate's teenaged sister. She is flirtatious and feminine. She spends time with Edward, claiming he is her Spanish tutor. Bunny becomes a vegetarian to impress Edward and is responsible for taking him to Dr. Battista's lab, where Edward gets the idea to take the mice.

Bunny is a foil to Kate, but she does care about her sister and wants her to be happy.

Bunny's character's equivalent in "Taming of the Shrew" is Bianca.

Mrs. Murphy

Mrs. Murphy owns the house that Pyotr lives in. Wheelchair bound, Mrs. Murphy is dependent on Mrs. Liu's help to get around.

Mrs. Liu

Mrs. Liu is an older Asian woman who cares for Mrs. Murphy. She will sometimes verbally spar with Pyotr.

Uncle Theron

Uncle Theron is Aunt Thelma's brother. He marries Kate and Pyotr and is the minister at the church where they marry.

Edward Mintz

Edward Mintz is the boy next door. He is about 20 years old and lives at home, having foregone college. He steals the mice from Dr. Battista's lab.

Edward Mintz's character's equivalent in "Taming of the Shrew" is Luciento.

Aunt Thelma

Aunt Thelma is Kate's mother's sister. She would like to make a bigger production of Kate's wedding, but compromises with throwing Kate and Pyotr a small reception.

Uncle Barclay

Uncle Barclay is Aunt Thelma's husband.



Symbols and Symbolism

Chess Game

Chess game is symbolic of Kate's life. Just as she had no plan to win the chess game, Kate is without a plan for what she wants from her life.

Children

Children symbolize Kate's immaturity. Just as they are developing their social skills, Kate begins to recognize how she needs to develop hers as well.

Proverbs

Proverbs symbolize expectation and reality. One may have the expectations of the lesson of the proverb, but it may not always apply to the given situation. An example would be Pyotr's proverb "beware against the sweet person, for sugar has no nutrition" (126) in contrast with catching more flies with honey.

Immigration Papers

Immigration papers symbolize commitment. More so than the marriage license, the immigration papers represent the seriousness of the marriage and potential consequences should there be a failure.

Dreamcatcher

The Dreamcatcher symbolizes Kate finding someone to share her life with who can appreciate her for who she is.

Mice

Mice symbolize the courtship of Kate and Pyotr as if their relationship is an experiment.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism symbolizes changing who one is to connect with someone else. Bunny declares herself to be a vegetarian to connect with Edward, but she is not being true to herself



The Garden

The garden symbolizes Kate's relationship with Pyotr growing throughout the novel. Just as Kate tends to the garden, she tends to Pyotr as the novel concludes.

Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate symbolizes Pyotr's attraction to Kate. Much as he prefers the bitterness of the chocolate, he is drawn to the bitterness in Kate's personality.

Kate's Expulsion

Kate's expulsion from college symbolizes Kate as an outcast.



Settings

The Battista House

The Battista House is where Dr. Battista, Kate and Bunny live. It is where Kate has her flower garden and where they have the first dinner with Pyotr. Edward lives next door.

Charles Village Little People's School

Charles Village Little People's School is a children's prep school where Kate works as a teacher's aide. It is where Mrs. Darling reprimands Kate's behavior and Adam gives her a dream catcher as a wedding gift.

The Lab

The Lab is where Dr. Battista conducts his research at Johns Hopkins. It is within walking distance to the Battista house and is where Edward steals the mice.

The Cockeysville Consolidated Chapel

The Cockeysville Consolidated Chapel is where Kate and Pyotr are married by Uncle Theron. It is also where Dr. Battista and his wife had their wedding.

Mrs. Murphy's House

Mrs. Murphy's House is where Pyotr lives on the second floor. It is where he plans to live with Kate after the wedding.



Themes and Motifs

Patriarchy

The author maintains the theme of patriarchy in this novelization of “Taming of the Shrew” in an effort to demonstrate how modern society continues to deal with patriarchal ideas and influences.

As the novel opens, Kate is on her knees in the garden when she hears the phone ringing. She is literally in a subservient position at the outset. She answers the call and her father beckons her to bring him the lunch she faithfully prepares for him, but he religiously forgets. Dr. Battista is caught up in his work and his work is of the utmost importance.

Dr. Battista is so consumed by his work that he wagers his daughter in an effort to keep Pyotr in the country. In this way, he elevates Pyotr to a status above Kate. Pyotr is crucial to his work, therefore, he is willing to exchange, not merely what he has, but what he is willing to sacrifice.

Dr. Battista’s dedication to his work has limited his interaction with his daughters. He keeps the girls in their place. While he was supportive of Kate challenging her professor by telling her that she was right in her assessment, he did not encourage Kate to continue on with her studies. Instead, he took advantage of having Kate at home to care for his other daughter Bunny. He tries to control the girls by giving Kate the tasks of cooking, caring for the house, and looking after Bunny. He also limits Bunny’s exposure to boys, which Kate reinforces by extension.

The patriarchal theme is also evidenced by how Pyotr treats Kate. While he claims to be drawn to women who are direct, because this is what the women in his home country are like, he still maintains control of Kate. He is late to the wedding, which is meant to benefit him, without apology and in an agitated state because of what happened at the lab. After the wedding, Kate regards his demeanor as abusive. He accuses Bunny of stealing of the mice and dismisses Kate’s attempts to defend her sister. He does not want to be contradicted.

By novel’s end, Kate and Pyotr have reconciled their relationship, but Pyotr still maintains the dominant voice when he tells Kate what to wear to her award ceremony.

Conformity

The theme of conformity is used to demonstrate how Kate is an outsider who fights social expectations, but ends up conforming to meet the expectations of her father.

Kate does not fit social expectations for a young woman. She is not outwardly feminine, although she does have long hair. She prefers to wear pants because she feels out of



place in a skirt. She has made efforts to be more feminine and fit in. She went to a hair salon, but once she grew tired of the gossiping expected at the salon, she quit going and grew out her hair. When she wore a skirt to work one day, she felt awkward, as though her larger frame was not suited to the style.

At work, Kate interacts well with the children, but they are just learning how to manage their own impulses and what they say to others. When Mrs. Darling calls Kate into her office, she reminds Kate to practice tact, diplomacy, and restraint. Kate agrees to do so, but also fails to see the problem in what she has said because she was being honest.

Kate agrees to the marriage to Pyotr because she begins to experience self-doubt. She resists the idea of marrying him when Dr. Battista first suggests it and exhibits no interest in Pyotr. Her self-consciousness has led her to be withdrawn from others. Once she becomes aware of her isolationism, she begins to wonder if finding someone is what she wants. Because she has been conditioned to think that she is undesirable, she settles for the arranged marriage, thinking that it is her only opportunity.

Another way that conformity is explored in Pyotr relating to both the language and the culture of his adopted country. Proverbs from his homeland are at the ready and Kate counters with the American equivalent. Both connect with their own sayings as opposed to conforming to others. Further, Pyotr continues to learn the nuances of the English language, often checking in with Kate to see if he is on the right track.

Gender Roles

The character of Kate, the protagonist of the novel, is made more complex through her simultaneous defiance of gender roles in so many aspects of her life, yet ultimate compliance to them in order to please her father.

The overarching plot of the novel is to get Kate and Pyotr together. While not a traditional romance, the man is the pursuer and the woman is pursued. The marriage is not based on love, but, rather, a negotiation. The marriage will allow Pyotr to stay in the country and continue his work with Dr. Battista. Meanwhile, Kate agrees to the marriage to help her father, but the marriage does not really offer her anything in exchange.

While Kate is strong-willed and outspoken, her life revolves around generalized expectations of what a woman would traditionally do. She tends a flower garden, but does not grow vegetables because there is not enough sunlight. Growing vegetables, however, might associate her gardening with farming, which would be a traditionally male job, particularly in providing food for a family.

Kate does the cooking for the household, in addition to cleaning the house and doing the shopping. She looks after her younger sister and is protective of Bunny. The girls have different personalities, but do appear to look after one another. Neither sister really listens to the other because theirs are not male voices. Bunny can warn Kate about Pyotr's behavior, but Kate dismisses her. Likewise, Kate reinforces Dr. Battista's rules



about Bunny having boys over, but Bunny disregards the rules because she hears them from Kate.

At Kate's job, the girls play with dolls and Mrs. Darling talks to Kate repeatedly about how she should act. Kate remains subservient in the school as well. She is not the teacher, but rather the teacher's aide.

Once the marriage takes place, Pyotr's needs are put front and center. He leaves Kate immediately after the wedding to confront Edward about the mice that were stolen from the lab. It is not until Kate defends Pyotr's actions during the reception that Kate breaks free of her expected gender role. Pyotr has acted poorly and violently, but Kate defends his honor. Defending one's honor is seen classically as a man defending a woman, but here Kate uses what women are taught and men are not to defend Pyotr.

Family

The theme of family is used in the novel to give a traditional base to contrast the expectations of what a family should look like versus how a family is.

If the expectation is a nuclear family, then the Battista family differs. The mother is deceased, so Kate, the eldest, takes on the traditional mother role to Bunny. While she cooks and cleans and looks after Bunny, Kate differs from maternal expectations because she is not a natural nurturer. She cares for Bunny and her father. She defends Bunny when Pyotr accuses her of taking the mice and she consents to marrying Pyotr for her father's sake, but outward expressions of love are not her forte. She shows her love through her actions as opposed to expressing feelings.

As with many families, there is sibling rivalry. Kate and Bunny have very different personalities. They are different in temperament, desires, and intellect. While Kate is known for her cruelty, Bunny has this ability as well. She tells Kate "At least I didn't have to rely on my father to find me a boyfriend" (135), knowing that this will tap into Kate's insecurities. Yet, as Bunny begins to witness how Pyotr takes a domineering role in the way he treats Kate, Bunny interferes. She wants her sister to be happy.

In asking Kate to marry Pyotr for the sake of his research, Dr. Battista demonstrates that his primary love and dedication is his work. While his decision to ask Kate to marry Pyotr so that Pyotr can stay in the country seems objectionable, Dr. Battista does view Pyotr as a suitable mate for his daughter. He does not anticipate, however, that marrying her off will result in her moving away from the family home. Although taken by surprise that Kate does plan to move out, Dr. Battista does not fight it.

Another way in which the theme of family is explored is in how the parents of the children react to Kate. The children are accepting of Kate and like her. While she may hurt their feelings from time to time, as in when Emma asks about who the best drawer is, Kate's honesty is not meant to be cruel. The parents, however, do not appreciate the honesty and complain. When Mrs. Darling intercedes on the parents' behalf, she



becomes somewhat of a maternal figure for Kate. She is both patient and stern with Kate because this is the approach that Kate may be more inclined to respond to.

Codependency

The author uses the codependency in two primary relationships throughout the novel - that of Kate and her father, as well as Dr. Battista and Pyotr - as a main motivator of their actions and, subsequently, the plot.

Kate is fiercely independent, yet she is subservient to her father. While this may seem contradictory, it demonstrates the reliance the two characters have on each other. Kate's personality has had a detrimental effect on her relationships with others. Her father accepts her, likely seeing elements of his own personality in her's. This creates a safe place for Kate to exist in. Likewise, Kate's dependence on her father allows Dr. Battista to be equally reliant on her. He does so in the way that he leaves Kate to care for the house, Bunny, and even himself.

Pyotr takes a dominant role in his relationship with Kate. He pursues her and begins to get her to warm up to him, but his motives are clouded by his need to stay in the country. Kate is a means to an end. Perhaps he would be able to find someone else to marry to stay in the country, or find another option for keeping his green card. Regardless, he chooses to pursue this route. He likely trusts Dr. Battista, and by extension, Kate to uphold the secrecy that would be needed in perpetrating the fraud that will allow him to remain in the country.

Dr. Battista's motivations for arranging the marriage between Pyotr and Kate are selfish. Dr. Battista has a codependent relationship with Pyotr. He knows that he needs Pyotr for his research to be a success. Without this motivation, Dr. Battista likely would not risk marrying off his daughter.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view of *Vinegar Girl* is a third-person narrative that functions as a novelization and modern adaptation of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew." Because this is an adaptation of a play, it is logical to use a third person, omniscient narrative, as this most closely represents the narrative structure of the play.

The primary focus of the novel is on Kate Battista, a 29-year-old woman who is a college dropout and lives with her father and sister. She has obligations to her family and works as a teacher's aide at a preschool. While Kate demonstrates some subservience to her father and in her job, she is also strong-willed and appears to show independence from societal norms; she is not actively seeking a husband or a relationship of any kind. She resists the notion of marrying Pyotr for awhile, but is eventually worn down and relents to the marriage.

The novel demonstrates Kate's self-awareness. While she is a modern woman, she still must cope with patriarchal social norms. As the novel progresses, Kate and Pyotr find their place as equals in their marriage.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary throughout the novel is accessible - far more so than the older language and style of speaking used in the play this novel is based off of, Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew." No swear words are used. The use of slang is limited to using "U" for "you" in a text message.

The focus of the novel is on Kate's thoughts and perception. While the thoughts and feelings of other characters, in particular Dr. Battista and Pyotr, are occasionally shared, the focus remains squarely on Kate. In doing so, it assures the reader that Kate's voice is the loudest.

While this is a novelization of a play, there is not a heavy reliance on dialogue. The use of dialogue is appropriate and conversational. There are nods to Pyotr's broken English, but it is used sparingly and does not detract from understanding Pyotr's character.

There is sporadic terminology in reference to the autoimmunology study at the lab. The proverbs that Pyotr references are not necessarily what Western readers would expect. This works to demonstrate Pyotr as an outsider to the country, but also makes him an outsider, relating him to Kate's status as an outsider as well.

Structure

The novel is comprised of twelve chapters and an epilogue. The chapters are largely equal in length.

The novel has a linear structure. No flashbacks are used, although characters from the past are referenced. There is also a memory from Kate's time in college when she is playing a game of chess.

The novel is presented in a traditional novel format. Dialogue is used throughout the book, but Kate's character is developed through the narrative. The acerbic comments that Kate makes are presented by someone recalling something she said as opposed to the reader hearing a firsthand account of her making the statements. This softens the reader's perception of Kate as it diminishes that side of her character.

The narrative flow of Chapter Seven is interrupted by the text messages sent between Pyotr and Kate. This is used sparingly and for comedic effect. The messages also continue to move the plot forward and are not disruptive.



Quotes

She wouldn't take the car, though; she would walk. Let him wait."

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 18)

Importance: The quote demonstrates Kate's strength and ability to hold her ground.

She has. No. Plan."

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 27)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how Kate is not in control of her life.

Funny how you have to picture losing a thing before you think you might value it after all."

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 10)

Importance: The quote shows how Kate has blocked things that she did not think she could have, such as a husband, and now wonders if it is something that she desires.

You could really feel physically wounded if someone hurt your feelings badly enough."

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: The quote shows Kate's sensitivity and how elements of her personality are defense mechanisms.

She felt both gratified and humiliated to know that he comprehended this."

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 67)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how Pyotr is able to see Kate in a way that others are not.

I mean no doubt I was smarter, but intelligence is not the only factor to consider in a marriage."

-- Dr. Battista (chapter 6 paragraph 69)

Importance: The quote shows how Dr. Battista was able to appreciate and be attracted to more than just what he thought he may have wanted in a mate.

At least I didn't have to rely on my father to find me a boyfriend."

-- Bunny (chapter 7 paragraph 193)

Importance: The quote demonstrates the sibling rivalry in the sisters and how Bunny can be just as cruel with her words as Kate.

What?' Kate said. 'I'm not your responsibility! I'm my own responsibility."

-- Kate (chapter 8 paragraph 39)



Importance: The quote shows Kate's independence and her rejection of patriarchal rules.

Meaning that she saw no reason why he couldn't be the tentative one and she the more definite."

-- Narrator (chapter 9 paragraph 25)

Importance: The quote shows how Kate wants balance in her relationship with Pyotr for it to work.

I know you think you're just doing a little something on paper to fool Immigration," Bunny said, 'but this guy is starting to act like he owns you!'"

-- Bunny (chapter 10 paragraph 4)

Importance: The quote shows how Bunny is protective of her sister, but also that she is more observant than previously given credit for by her family.

Ever since the wedding he had been downright abusive, as if now that they were married he thought he could treat her however he liked."

-- Narrator (chapter 11 paragraph 88)

Importance: The quote demonstrates the expectations of what Kate's marriage looks like with the influence of patriarchal ideas.

They're a whole lot less free than women are, when you think about it. Women have been studying people's feelings since they were toddlers; they've been perfecting their radar – their intuition or their empathy or their interpersonal whatchamacallit."

-- Kate (chapter 12 paragraph 119)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how Kate is willing to defend her husband and how she understands the influence of gender roles on how people interact with the world.