The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF YUKIO MISHIMA

The Japanese writer and right-wing militant Yukio Mishima was born as Kimitake Hiraoka to a respected family with deep roots in the traditional Japanese aristocracy and the samurai tradition. He attended an elite private school, where he excelled and studied a mixture of Japanese and European literature. A well-known Japanese literary magazine published Mishima's first story when he was just 16 years old and deemed him one of the nation's greatest young writers. In 1944, in the closing months of World War II, he was drafted into the Imperial Japanese Army. However, he failed his medical examination due to an illness and never went to war, where he likely would have died. After the war, the prominent writer Yasunari Kawabata helped Mishima publish his early writing, much of which focused on death, Japanese history, and same-sex love. While well-known, he was very controversial because of his strong affinity for traditional Japanese culture. In the mid-1950s, Mishima became an avid weight trainer and martial artist. He also married and had two children, even though he was widely known to be gay. In addition to his books, Mishima directed numerous plays. Starting in the 1960s, his work became highly political, and he was embroiled in a number of public scandals. In 1967, Mishima spent six weeks secretly undergoing military training and then helped found two right-wing ultranationalist civilian militias dedicated to protecting the Emperor. Finally, on November 25, 1970, Mishima and four other militia members attacked a military base and took a commander hostage. Then, Mishima gave an impassioned speech trying to convince the base's soldiers to overthrow the government. Instead, the soldiers heckled and laughed at him. After his speech, Mishima yelled "Long live the Emperor!" and committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*). He is still best known for this act of terrorism, which is known as "The Mishima Incident" in Japan. To this day, scholars still debate whether Mishima sincerely wanted to overthrow the Japanese government or was just seeking the kind of dramatic, glorious death that he praised across his work. While the Japanese public widely ridiculed and condemned Mishima's suicide, it also brought greater international attention to his work and helped cement his status as one of Japan's most influential postwar writers.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Sailor Who Fell from Grace in the Sea is set in the tumultuous social context of post-World War II Japan. After the war's end in 1945, U.S.-led Allied forces occupied Japan for seven years and implemented a number of political and economic reforms. Most importantly, the Allies turned Japan's government into a representative parliamentary system, dismantled its military and overseas empire, and redistributed land and property to limit the power of the nation's wealthy traditional elite. They also extended the vote to women and left Emperor Hirohito (or Shōwa) on the throne, but stripped most of his powers. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Allies imposed a series of economic policies designed to foster capitalism and combat communism. The economy grew rapidly, around 10 percent per year. In particular, the Korean War contributed to industrial growth in cities like the naval port Yokohama, where *The Sailor Who Fell with Grace with the Sea* is set. When the occupation formally ended in 1952, the new Japanese government was significantly less powerful and more divided than ever before. Meanwhile, largely because of the presence of occupying American soldiers, Western culture began to have an outsized impact on life in Japan (and vice-versa). This Western influence is clear in *The Sailor Who Fell with Grace with the Sea*, in which two of the three main characters—Fusako Kuroda and her son Noboru—live a thoroughly Westernized lifestyle. In the 1960s, when Mishima wrote and set this novel, Japan also started reducing barriers to trade with the rest of the world. This contributed to a rapid growth in Japanese exports. Of course, the sailor Ryuji Tsukazaki's journeys around the world are part of this economic expansion, which helped Japan grow into the world's second-largest economy by 1970. But not everyone was happy with Japan's new liberal democratic government and capitalist economy. Many politicians and cultural leaders—of whom Yukio Mishima was one of the most prominent—openly called for an end to Westernization and a return to the old system. In particular, Mishima wanted to restore greater power to the emperor. In fact, this novel is largely an allegory for Mishima's militant belief that Japan should rekindle its traditional culture, reassert its military power overseas, and avenge its loss in the war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace in the Sea* is among the most popular of Yukio Mishima's 34 novels, most critics don't actually consider it one of his best or most significant. His most acclaimed novels include the semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956), a fictionalized version of the famous arson of a significant Buddhist temple. His masterpiece is widely considered to be his final work, the four-book series *The Sea of Fertility*: *Spring Snow* (1969), *Runaway Horses* (1969), *The Temple of Dawn* (1970), and *The Decay of the Angel* (1971). Mishima is also recognized for his plays, including both Western-style plays like *Rokumeikan* (1956) and *Madame de*

Sade (1965) and his adaptations of traditional Japanese Kabuki and Noh dramas, like *The Lady Aoi* and *The Sardine Seller's Net of Love* (both 1954). Mishima's most important mentor, peer, and contemporary was his close friend Yasunari Kawabata, who won the 1968 Nobel Prize for Literature and is still widely celebrated for novels like *Snow Country* (1948), *The Master of Go* (1954), and *The Old Capital* (1962). A volume of Kawabata and Mishima's correspondence has also been published in various languages. The most significant biographies of Mishima in English are *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima* (2012) by Naoki Inose and Hiroaki Sato and *Mishima: A Biography* (2000) by John Nathan, Mishima's friend and the definitive translator of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace in the Sea*. Dozens more are available in Japanese. Another important portrait of Mishima is the American film *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Gogo No Eiko*, which literally means *Tugging in the Afternoon* or *The Afternoon Towing*. Mishima and translator John Nathan agreed on the alternate English title *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea.*
- **When Written:** 1963
- **Where Written:** Tokyo, Japan
- **When Published:** 1963 (original Japanese), 1965 (first English translation)
- **Literary Period:** Postwar Japanese Literature, Postmodern
- **Genre:** Allegorical Novel, Philosophical Novel, Tragedy
- **Setting:** Yokohama, Japan in the early 1960s
- **Climax:** Noboru, the chief, and their four friends take Ryuji Tsukazaki to a mountaintop and prepare to murder and disembowel him.
- **Antagonist:** Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki (as father and husband)
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Glory in Translation. The novel's Japanese title literally means *Tugging in the Afternoon*, which is a reference to tugboats. But the Japanese words for "glory" and "tugging" are homophones—they sound the same but are written differently. Therefore, the Japanese title is a pun about the relationship between glory and sailing. John Nathan, Mishima's friend and translator, struggled to capture this pun in English. Even after finishing the whole translation, he still couldn't find an adequate title, so he met with Mishima, who offered him several alternative titles in Japanese. They agreed on one that translated elegantly to English: *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea begins in the **sweltering** Yokohama summer. Fusako starts locking her 13-year-old son Noboru in his room at night because he has been sneaking out to meet with his gang of friends. Like the gang's leader, a boy called simply "the chief," Noboru believes that the universe is empty and that most people's lives are meaningless. However, he thinks that a select few heroic geniuses—like him and his friends—are destined to save the world from collapse through their special insight.

While locked in his room one night, Noboru angrily pulls the drawers out of his wall-mounted dresser and discovers **a peephole** that leads into his mother Fusako's bedroom. He starts looking through it at night before bed and watching his mother undress. One evening, he sees her with Ryuji, the strapping sailor they met a few days before onboard **the freighter Rakuyo**. A ship blasts its horn while they have sex, and Noboru feels like everything in the universe has suddenly come together into a beautiful whole.

The next morning, Ryuji reflects on his life as a sailor. After losing his home and entire family in the closing days of World War II, Ryuji shipped out on the *Rakuyo* in order to escape the brutality of life on land. While he gets to spend his days visiting exotic lands and pursuing his dreams of glory, he has little to show for it besides the money he has saved in his bank account. He sometimes wonders if an ordinary life onshore might be more fulfilling. Fusako briefly returns to her room, and she and Ryuji embrace before she leaves for work.

Fusako arrives at her shop, which sells imported European luxury clothing to wealthy foreigners, businesspeople, and celebrities. She briefly meets with one of her clients, the popular but naïve actress Yoriko Kasuga, but she spends most of the day reminiscing about meeting Ryuji. Noboru is obsessed with ships and sailing, so Fusako took him to tour the *Rakuyo* two days ago. Ryuji showed Noboru around, and Fusako felt an immediate, otherworldly connection to him. She realizes that she hasn't gotten so close to a man since her husband died five years ago.

Meanwhile, Ryuji is also lost in his memories of Fusako. He goes to the park and relives the conversation they had there on the previous night. He scolds himself for getting tongue-tied: instead of explaining his complex, heroic ideas about love, death, and glory, he just talked about banal things like vegetables and his favorite song. On the one hand, he feels like Fusako is the ideal woman from his dreams, who is supposed to bring him death and glory. But on the other, he feels like settling down with a woman like Fusako would be impossible or even unreal. And he worries that by forcing him to give up sailing, it would actually *ruin* his chances of achieving glory. On his way out of the park, he runs into Noboru, who is playing with his friends.

But Noboru and his five friends aren't as innocent as they look. They spent the morning at the pier, discussing "the uselessness of Mankind [and] the insignificance of Life." Noboru told them about Ryuji, whom he sees as a kind of hero—but the boys' leader, the chief, insisted that the six of them are the only real heroes in the universe. After lunch, they went to the chief's house, where they caught a stray kitten. Noboru killed it by throwing it against a log, and then the chief cut it up with a pair of scissors, pulled out its organs one by one, and told his friends that *this* is the true nature of reality. Proud Noboru believes that the kitten has achieved "wholeness and perfection" by dying, and he finally feels like a "real man."

Back in the present, after running into each other, Noboru and Ryuji go back to Noboru and Fusako's house, where they cool off in the air conditioning. Noboru resents Ryuji's kindness but excitedly asks him more questions about sailing. Meanwhile, Ryuji marvels at how different his life has become in just a few days. His relationship with Fusako still doesn't feel real, and he is supposed to ship back out on the *Rakuyo* tomorrow. He leaves to meet Fusako for their second and final date.

On their date, Fusako is devastated to know that Ryuji will be leaving, but she doesn't want to turn into the stereotypical sailor's wife, waiting for her man to return from **sea**. In contrast, Ryuji knows that he loves her, but feels that he has to leave her behind in order to fulfill his destiny. They decide to spend the night in a hotel. When the housekeeper informs Noboru that his mother won't be back until morning, he's furious. He writes a list of charges against Ryuji in his journal, and then he spitefully stares through the peephole into his mother's pitch-black room. The next afternoon, Fusako and Noboru go to the docks to see Ryuji off. After a brief conversation, they watch him sail off into the sunset like a true Japanese hero.

For the next several months, Noboru, Fusako, and Ryuji exchange letters, and Fusako and Ryuji's love deepens. The novel picks up in the freezing winter, when Ryuji returns to Yokohama. Fusako picks him up from the piers and takes him to her house. He gifts Noboru a taxidermized baby crocodile from Brazil, but Noboru isn't satisfied: he feels like Ryuji is somehow fake and corrupt, a shadow of his former heroic self. They all celebrate New Year's Eve together, and at dawn, Fusako and Ryuji sneak off to the park to watch the New Year's sunrise over the sea. When the blood-red sun peeks out over the horizon, Ryuji asks Fusako to marry him. She says yes. And when the *Rakuyo* leaves five days later, Ryuji stays in Yokohama.

Fusako goes out to lunch with Yoriko Kasuga, the actress, and tells her all about her engagement to Ryuji. Yoriko suggests hiring a private detective to make sure that Ryuji is who he says he is—and isn't just courting Fusako for her money. Offended by Yoriko's distrust, Fusako hires the detective just to spite her and confirms that everything that Ryuji has told her is true.

Meanwhile, Noboru meets with his gang and reports that Ryuji is no longer the masculine hero he used to be. He has given up sailing and—worse still—tried to become Noboru's father figure. The chief goes on a long monologue about the inherent evil of fatherhood and says that Noboru is lucky that his own father is dead.

When Fusako and Ryuji tell Noboru that they're getting married, he's secretly furious. He hides in his dresser to watch them have sex through the peephole but falls asleep with his flashlight on. Ryuji and Fusako discover the peephole. Devastated, Fusako asks Ryuji to punish Noboru. But Ryuji decides to be a kind father and forgive Noboru. Ironically, this devastates Noboru: it shows that Ryuji has given up his old, swaggering, heroic style. Noboru vows to enact revenge and calls his gang together for a meeting.

At their meeting, Noboru shows the chief his list of accusations against Ryuji, and the chief proposes they "make that sailor a hero again." They hatch an unthinkable plan: they'll do to Ryuji what they practiced on the kitten. The chief pulls out a law book and explains that since they're only 13, the boys can't be convicted of a crime.

About 10 days later, the gang asks Ryuji to spend an afternoon telling them sailing stories. He enthusiastically agrees, and they lead him to a remote mountaintop far on the outskirts of Yokohama. As he looks out over the city and ocean, Ryuji realizes that he has made a terrible mistake by giving up his glorious sailor's life in order to marry Fusako. In just a few days, he threw away his lifelong dream of finding glory, death, and love all together on the open sea. Now, he has given up glory and death for the sake of love. At least, that's what he thinks—but Noboru and his friends have other plans. In the book's closing lines, the chief prepares his medical equipment while Noboru passes Ryuji a cup of poisoned tea. Ryuji drinks it, and the novel ends, "Glory, as anyone knows, is bitter stuff."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Noboru Kuroda – Noboru Kuroda, an angsty, nihilistic 13-year-old schoolboy living in Yokohama, is the protagonist of the novel. Like many teenaged boys, Noboru and his gang of friends believe that human life is meaningless and that society is just a set of pointless conventions adults have invented to hide the truth. But unlike most teenagers, they actually act on these beliefs, to disastrous effect. Noboru strives to be emotionless and coldhearted: for instance, he viciously kills a small kitten at the behest of his group's leader, the chief, and he even proudly boasts about his own father's death. At the same time, he's also childishly obsessed with sailing and **the sea**. He dreams of living the adventurous, solitary life of a sailor—like Ryuji

Tsukazaki—and has taught himself practically everything about ships. In the first half of the novel, he discovers **a peephole** hidden in the back of his dresser, which allows him to see into his mother Fusako's bedroom and watch her undress at night. He also watches Fusako have sex with Ryuji the night after they meet him on **the freighter Rakuyo**. Noboru starts to view Ryuji as a heroic, self-reliant sailor, but he grows frustrated when Ryuji fails to live up to this fantasy—particularly when he falls in love with Fusako and starts to treat Noboru like a son. To punish Ryuji for giving up on the quest for glory, Noboru and the chief plan to murder and dismember him. The book seems to condone rather than condemn Noboru's sadism, presenting it as a metaphor for Japan's quest for global domination.

Ryuji Tsukazaki – Ryuji Tsukazaki, the subject of the novel's title and arguably its central character, is an eccentric, passionate 33-year-old sailor who has lived and worked on **the freighter ship Rakuyo** for more than a decade. At the end of World War II, he lost his home, his only remaining family members died, and he graduated from merchant-marine school. So, instead of shipping out to war, he went to work on the *Rakuyo*. For years, much like sailors during the war, he dreamed of achieving glory **at sea**. Specifically, he expected to find glory, death, and love all together by pursuing a "Grand Cause." But instead, he just grew increasingly weary of the sailor's life. During the events of the novel, he gives Noboru and Fusako Kuroda a tour of the *Rakuyo* while docked in Yokohama, then falls in love with Fusako and decides to marry her. In the process, he quits sailing and gives up on his dreams. Instead, he adjusts to a more conventional life as a shopkeeper, husband, and father. To Noboru, Ryuji initially represents the pinnacle of glory and Japanese manhood, as he lives a solitary life of nautical adventure. But Noboru turns on Ryuji when he gives up sailing to stay with Fusako—and particularly when he starts to treat Noboru like his son. Accordingly, Noboru and the chief plot Ryuji's murder—then begin to execute their plan in the book's closing scene. However, the novel actually portrays this as a way for Ryuji to get the glorious death he always dreamed about. Beyond serving as a vehicle for author Yukio Mishima's beliefs about masculinity, death, and glory, Ryuji also represents Japan itself, as it struggled to define its identity and forge a path forward after World War II.

Fusako Kuroda – Thirty-three-year-old Fusako Kuroda, Noboru Kuroda's mother and Ryuji Tsukazaki's lover, is a wealthy widow who runs her late husband's imported luxury clothing store in Yokohama. Sophisticated, respected, and self-reliant, Fusako represents both traditional Japanese ideals of femininity and the powerful Western influences on Japanese culture and society in the postwar era. Five years after her husband's death, she feels intensely lonely, particularly given the challenges of raising Noboru alone in a patriarchal culture. Thus, when she meets and falls in love with Ryuji Tsukazaki, she is elated—but she also worries that, because of his unpredictable life as a sailor, she would become dependent and powerless as his wife. Fusako represents author Yukio Mishima's complicated attitudes toward women. As a successful single mother, she defies the limits of traditional gender norms, but when she becomes Ryuji's fiancée, she falls back into them. While she drives the plot just as much as Noboru and Ryuji, the book presents her needs and desires as less important than theirs. The chapters narrated from her perspective focus almost entirely on her attraction to Ryuji and her rivalry with Yuriko Kasuga. Similarly, while her conflicts with Noboru set the stage for the novel's conclusion, she essentially disappears in its final chapters, and the novel leaves these conflicts unresolved. Some readers may view Fusako as representing women's endurance and willpower, while others may see her fate as evidence of how Mishima's worldview limits women's freedom and potential.

The Chief – The chief is the murderous, authoritarian, highly intelligent leader of a cultlike gang of 13-year-old schoolboys, including Noboru. At the gang's meetings, the chief lectures the other boys about "the uselessness of Mankind [and] the insignificance of Life" and ridicules them whenever they question or contradict him. He argues that society and its norms are meaningless, fathers are evil oppressors, and violence is necessary to prevent the world from falling apart. Most importantly, he believes that he and his gang are special "geniuses" who are not only exempt from the normal rules of morality but are actually responsible for setting these rules for everyone else. Accordingly, he frequently sorts out which people and things are "permissible" (like **the sea**) and which ought to be destroyed (like Ryuji Tsukazaki). Then, he leads his gang in violent rituals, like dismembering the kitten and eventually murdering Ryuji. It's hinted that the chief's distant, abusive father is responsible for his antisocial tendencies and disdain for authority. In addition to driving much of the novel's plot and deeply influencing Noboru's personal beliefs, the chief also communicates many of author Yukio Mishima's beliefs about the senselessness of everyday life. In particular, he preaches the values of traditional, imperial Japan—arguably, he represents the Emperor himself, which is why the other boys swear loyalty to him.

Yoriko Kasuga – Yoriko Kasuga is a popular actress and regular customer at Fusako Kuroda's clothing store, Rex. Fusako treats Yoriko kindly but secretly resents her because Yukio is naive and desperate for attention. In particular, Yoriko constantly complains that she doesn't win acting awards and has no friends besides Fusako. When they go out for lunch in the second half of the novel, Yoriko tells Fusako that her ex-fiancé tried to steal her money and recommends that Fusako hire a private detective to investigate Ryuji so that he doesn't do the same. This offends Fusako, who decides to get back at Yoriko indirectly by provoking her jealousy: she hires the detective, who proves that Ryuji is honest, then calls Yoriko and tells her.

In the novel overall, Yoriko serves as a character foil who highlights Fusako's femininity, desires, and insecurities. For one, Yoriko represents a feminine ideal of innocence, youth, and beauty that Fusako both deplores and secretly hopes to achieve. Fusako is far more elegant, competent, and respectable than Yoriko, but Fusako knows that men do not necessarily appreciate these traits in women. Like Fusako, she supports herself and her family, but feels incomplete and lonely without a man. The difference is that Fusako carefully manages and hides her insecurities, whereas Yoriko is overwhelmed by her own.

Noboru's Father – Noboru Kuroda's father (and Fusako Kuroda's husband) died five years before the events of the novel. The reader learns little about him, except that he used to own Rex, the store that Fusako now runs. However, Noboru is actually proud of his father's death because he believes in the chief's theory that all fathers are evil and oppressive.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Housekeeper – The Kurodas' housekeeper maintains their extravagant house and helps Fusako keep Noboru in line. She's friendly and professional but strongheaded. The housekeeper is also highly suspicious of Ryuji when Fusako starts seeing him. She once worked for a wealthy foreign family, and she comments on their strange customs.

Number Two – "Number two" is one of the boys in the chief's gang (along with "number one," "number four," "number five," and Noboru, who is "number three").

Mr. Shibuya – Mr. Shibuya is the loyal manager at Rex, Fusako Kuroda's luxury store. He is an expert on elegant European clothing and has dedicated his life to selling it. He has even traveled around Europe to build contacts with major brands.

The Chauffeur – Fusako Kuroda's chauffeur drives her to pick up Ryuji Tsukazaki when he returns for the winter.

THEMES

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GLORY, HEROISM, AND DEATH

In Yukio Mishima's controversial novel *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, 13-year-old Noboru Kuroda watches a budding love affair between his widowed mother, Fusako, and the passionate, enigmatic sailor Ryuji Tsukazaki. At first, Noboru idolizes Ryuji, whom he sees as the perfect masculine hero: a strapping seafarer living a fabulous life of adventure. But Ryuji's feelings about his own life are more complicated. While he dreams of achieving greatness and dying a glorious hero's death at **sea**, he is also tired of sailing and he worries that his glory will never come. When Ryuji and Fusako get engaged, Noboru is furious to see Ryuji abandon his glorious life. He plots his revenge along with his gang of nihilistic friends, whose sadistic leader (the chief) believes that he is destined to restore meaning and order to the empty universe through violence. In the novel's jarring climax, the gang leads Ryuji to a remote mountaintop and prepares to murder and disembowel him. Surprisingly, the novel implies that the gang is actually doing Ryuji a favor: by murdering him, they give him the glorious, heroic sailor's death that he always wanted and save him from living a boring, purposeless life. In this sense, the book actually endorses murder and celebrates death. Shaped by Mishima's deep reverence for traditional Japanese notions of glory and honor, the novel suggests that violence and self-sacrifice may be the only way to disrupt the meaninglessness of modern life and make an impact on the world.

The novel suggests that modern people must choose between conventional life, which is essentially pointless and dull, and that the daring alternative of a life lived in pursuit of glory. Ryuji's internal monologues show him battling between these two tendencies. He has always resolutely believed that "*there's just one thing I'm destined for and that's glory*." He doesn't understand *why* he feels this way or where his glory will come from, but the thrill of life as a sailor—traveling the world on **the freighter Rakuyo**, meeting different people, and confronting life-threatening challenges like hurricanes—suggests that he is always just a step away from achieving it. But he's also increasingly world-weary. When he meets Fusako, he understands the appeal of an ordinary, settled life for the first time, and he chooses it over the glorious future that he long imagined. In contrast, Noboru and his friends resolutely choose the pursuit of greatness and glory over conventional life, no matter how long the odds appear. The chief repeatedly insists that "society basically is meaningless," and the gang believes that normal teenage boys' interests—like sex and money—are distractions from the real purpose of life, which is to leave a mark on the world. This is why Noboru initially admires Ryuji: he rejects society and lives a heroic, solitary life of adventure at sea. When Ryuji gives up this life, Noboru starts to resent him for failing to fulfill the hero stereotype.

Moreover, the book strongly associates adventure and glory with *death*—it suggests that dying honorably is what makes people exceptional and gives meaning to their existence. Ryuji and Noboru both view death and glory as two sides of the same coin. Ryuji has organized his life around pursuing "the glory beyond and the death beyond"—while he doesn't know why, he has always assumed that, when he achieves his destiny and finds glory through his seafaring adventures, he will inevitably die in the process. He sees this heroic death as his only alternative to the meaninglessness of everyday life. In fact, Mishima's life and autobiographical writings show that he also associated true glory with dying in pursuit of a "Grand Cause." Tellingly, so do Noboru and his gang, who constantly talk about achieving greatness through death (and specifically *murder*). One summer day, they organize a ritual sacrifice to test their theory: Noboru kills a tiny kitten, and then the chief cuts it open and tears out its organs. Afterward, the chief says that Noboru has become a "real man," while Noboru decides that the kitten has achieved "wholeness and perfection" in death. Like Ryuji, they don't explain *why* sacrifice makes things whole. Instead, ironically, they view meaningless killing as the only way to rebel against the meaninglessness of human life. Similarly, they see breaking social taboos by pointlessly mutilating innocent animals as the best way to rebel against the pointlessness of society. According to the chief, true greatness requires either dying for a cause (like Ryuji) or killing for it (like Noboru and the chief). Thus, the novel's conclusion—in which the gang prepares to murder and disembowel Ryuji—promises glory for Ryuji *and* Noboru's gang. Namely, the gang commits the murder that it thinks will restore order in the universe, and Ryuji gets to die the glorious sailor's death he always dreamed of—the boys will ritually sacrifice him while he gazes out at the sea from a remote mountaintop and tells stories about his adventures aboard the *Rakuyo*. Thus, even though he has abandoned his own plans for a glorious death, the gang gives him one anyway.

Readers might find Mishima's attitude toward death and violence jarring because it runs counter to modern social instincts and moral principles. And Mishima's obsession with death wasn't just talk: he famously committed *seppuku* (ritual suicide by disembowelment) during an ill-fated attempt to overthrow Japanese democracy. Of course, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* also celebrates violence, and its closing scene shows Noboru and his friends prepare to gruesomely disembowel Ryuji. If this conclusion is an accurate indication of Mishima's beliefs, it suggests that he viewed his suicide as his own special path to glory. But ultimately, readers must decide for themselves whether Mishima's writing can be separated from his lifelong obsession with violence and death.

JAPANESE NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY

Set in the Japanese port city of Yokohama in the early 1960s, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* is at heart a political allegory. After Japan lost World War II, the occupying Americans imposed a liberal democracy and capitalist economy that enabled the nation to grow and reconstruct, but—according to traditionalists like the novel's author, Yukio Mishima—also crushed its people's spirit and identity. Thus, by the 1960s, Japan faced a stark choice between its native traditions and Western modernity. *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* transforms this grand political transition into family drama. Namely, the sailor Ryuji Tsukazaki abandons a glorious life of voyaging around the world for a drab job selling imported European clothing in his Westernized fiancée's shop. In other words, he sacrifices his own values and ends up subservient to the West—just like Japan itself. In contrast, Noboru and the chief refuse to accept Western influence, and they ultimately murder Ryuji to make him do the same. This extreme act represents the triumph of Japanese tradition. The novel uses this allegory to make a bold, controversial case that Japan should reject Western values and return to its former imperial might.

The novel emphasizes foreign influences in 1960s Japan to suggest that the nation lost an essential part of its identity when the American occupation imposed democracy and modern capitalism on it. The entire book takes place in and around Yokohama's port, postwar Japan's commercial link to the rest of the world. Its central character, Ryuji Tsukazaki, is a sailor who was supposed to fight in the war but ended up working on a freighter (**the Rakuyo**) helping transport goods around the world instead. Similarly, his attraction to **the sea**—which is a key symbol of Japanese identity—is tied to the Japanese Empire's goals of expansion and global domination. Thus, Ryuji's job shows that Japan maintains its spirit of militarism and empire after the war, but that the country is forced to redirect that spirit toward more mundane pursuits like trade. In contrast, Ryuji's lover, Fusako, lives an extravagant Western lifestyle, which suggests that many Japanese people rejected their own culture after the war and embraced Western culture instead. The novel repeatedly describes her expensive Western furniture and notes that she doesn't follow any Japanese traditions (except on New Year's Day). She also runs a store where wealthy Japanese businesspeople and celebrities buy imported European goods. Thus, she represents how Japan's postwar economy and culture were structured around foreign influence. Finally, the book constantly references the American occupation in order to emphasize how it changed Japan. For instance, when Noboru first discovers **the peephole** that lets him see into his mother's bedroom, he wonders if an American soldier built it during the occupation. He reacts with visceral disgust to the idea of a foreigner modifying his family home. Similarly, the very end of the book, Noboru's gang murders Ryuji at an abandoned U.S. military base, a setting that represents how, after the occupation, Japanese people were forced to make do with the changed society that the U.S. left behind.

The novel's conclusion represents Japan's potential to reassert itself against the West and overcome its position of weakness. First, Ryuji's marriage to Fusako stands for Japan's capitulation to the West after the war. The book makes this link clear when Ryuji proposes to Fusako during the sunrise on New Year's Day. The rising sun is a longstanding national symbol of Japan—after all, the country's Japanese name means "Land of the Rising

Sun"—and New Year's Day symbolizes the beginning of a new era. Thus, this scene strongly suggests that Ryuji and Fusako's engagement is a metaphor for Japan's fate after World War II. When Ryuji stops sailing and starts helping out at Fusako's store instead, this represents Japan's transformation from a global power into a mere cog in the Western-dominated global economy. Yet Ryuji's fate also shows why Mishima thought Japan made a mistake by handing power over to foreigners. Just before Ryuji dies, he realizes that he has turned from a valiant adventurer pursuing "forever and the unknown" into just another aging sailor telling stories about his travels. (Early in the novel, Ryuji explains that he hates nothing more than hearing other sailors' tall tales.) Like Japan after the war, all Ryuji truly has left are his memories, because he has given up on achieving glory. This sense of unachieved glory is partially an expression of Japan's sense of moral and cultural loss after the war, which took away its chance to become a world-leading superpower. Finally, Ryuji's murder at the hands of Noboru's gang is a metaphor for Mishima's desire to defeat Western influence and reestablish traditional imperial rule in Japan. Noboru and the chief decide that it's unacceptable for Ryuji to quit sailing to become a shopkeeper and father, so they plot his murder. This fits into their broader philosophy of breaking modern cultural taboos in order to rebuild a traditional society based on pure power and domination. The boys believe that they are inherently superior to other people and have a special right to rule over the world. Therefore, they argue that the unimaginative laws and social norms that adults impose on them don't apply. These laws represent the laws imposed by the U.S. occupation, which Mishima believed couldn't fairly apply to Japan's unique people, culture, and history. The boys see murdering Ryuji as a way to vindicate themselves and protect his honor, and the novel sets this murder up as an allegory for Japan reasserting its national might.

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Ryuji's murder at the end of the novel foreshadows Mishima's lifelong dream of overthrowing Japanese democracy and reinstating its former empire. The novel's connections to Mishima's personal life are undoubtedly complex, but his nostalgia for a Japan that was ruled by traditional culture—and, more controversially, that ruled much of Asia in a brutal overseas empire—is abundantly clear.

MASCULINITY, LOVE, AND FAMILY

The family drama at the center of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* isn't just an elaborate metaphor for Yukio Mishima's political and philosophical beliefs—it's also a detailed commentary on family itself. At the beginning of the novel, 13-year-old Noboru finds a **peephole** that allows him to see into his widowed mother Fusako's bedroom and watch her have sex with the strapping sailor Ryuji Tsukazaki. While Noboru views love as childish, sex as a mere biological curiosity, and the family as an oppressive institution, Ryuji has more complicated views on the matter. He yearns to meet and marry a woman, even though he believes that his destiny is to live an adventurous life alone on the open **seas**. But then, his passionate love for Fusako—who embodies stereotypically feminine ideals just as he embodies stereotypically masculine ideals—lures him away from life at sea and spells his demise. On the one hand, then, the book reflects the traditional idea that men and women have opposite but complementary essences, which come together through love. On the other, it argues that men sacrifice themselves when they fall in love with women—and particularly when they form families. Thus, the novel portrays love as a natural but dangerous kind of self-sacrifice: it brings men into families that ultimately destroy them.

First, the book suggests that men and women have naturally opposite, complementary essences. Both Ryuji and Noboru aspire to a traditional masculine ideal of toughness and adventurousness. Ryuji dreams of reaching the "pinnacle of manliness" through sailing—but judging by the novel's description, he's already pretty close to it. He's muscular, self-reliant, and aloof, and he seems to be the exact kind of brutish, iron-hearted man that Noboru idolizes. Meanwhile, Fusako embodies a similarly traditional view of femininity. Although she's a successful, independent, working single mother, the book portrays this as a *defect* in her otherwise perfect femininity: she's beautiful, delicate, emotional, and (above all) passive. The novel's descriptions focus on her beautiful clothing, unstable emotions, and sense of loneliness without a man. In other words, despite her complexity as a character, the novel implies that her femininity is the main thing that counts.

Next, the novel uses Ryuji and Fusako's relationship to suggest that love is the natural union of these complementary masculine and feminine energies. Throughout his time as a sailor, Ryuji dreams about a love in which "he [is] a paragon of manliness and she the consummate woman." In other words, he imagines love as finding a perfect feminine woman who can complement his perfect his masculinity. He achieves this aspiration when he falls in love with Fusako, whom he quickly recognizes as the woman from his dreams. When they first meet, Ryuji is attracted to her "delicate" and "fragrant" body, her "softness," and her "extravagant, elegant woman[hood]." Meanwhile, Fusako is attracted to Ryuji's rugged attitude and intense, piercing stare. In other words, Ryuji and Fusako fall in love (and eventually get engaged) because they both view each other as ideal complements—or perfect examples of stereotypical masculinity and femininity that complete each other. Indeed, even Noboru recognizes this: when he watches his mother and Ryuji have sex through the peephole in his wall, he describes seeing the unity of male and female and feeling that "the universal order [has been] at last achieved." This shows that the novel's main characters all think true love depends on the perfect union of male and female energy.

However, while the book portrays love as a natural and inevitable force, it also shows how love has the potential to be destructive. In particular, it suggests that the family prevents men from truly living out their masculinity. The chief voices this perspective by arguing that "fathers [are] the vilest things on earth" because they disempower their sons, stifling their creativity and strength. Noboru's discomfort around Ryuji in the second half of the book illustrates this. Noboru hates that Ryuji becomes his "new father" after Ryuji and Fusako get engaged, and that he tries to teach Noboru moral lessons—when Noboru has already studied morality extensively and decided that it doesn't exist. For Noboru, then, fatherhood really amounts to one man unjustly imposing his values on another. Furthermore, Noboru and the chief also believe that fatherhood limits fathers' own freedom to pursue their dreams. Ryuji's regrets about settling down with Fusako support this view. He realizes that marrying her will get in the way of his masculine pursuit of adventure, as he believes that the order of the world is that "the man sets out in the quest of the Grand Cause; the woman is left behind." So when he stays behind with Fusako rather than returning to his life as a sailor, he realizes that he has given up his destiny. This helps partially explain why Noboru and the gang decide to murder Ryuji at the end of the book: it alleviates both his own resentment about having a father and Ryuji's resentment at having to stay in Japan with his future wife. Like the mythological Oedipus, who famously killed his father and married his mother, Noboru gets to remain the dominant man in his family by killing Ryuji. In other words, the book proposes that even though love creates families, destroying the family is the only way to truly free people to be themselves.

Readers might find the novel's ideas regressive and misogynistic by modern standards, but it's clear how they stemmed from Mishima's own life. Mishima insisted on marrying a woman and having children even though he was gay, and he viewed his own authoritarian father, who prohibited him from writing and constantly told him that he wasn't masculine enough, with a complicated mix of resentment and respect. He became an avid bodybuilder and martial artist to deal with his insecurities. These factors help illustrate why Mishima idealized the womanless, adventurous, and unquestionably masculine life of sailors like Ryuji, and why he portrays women like Fusako as objects and afterthoughts in the novel.

REALITY, PERCEPTION, AND IDENTITY

The central characters in *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* are preoccupied with identity: they worry about who they truly are and what kind of people they will become. For instance, Noboru wants to become an adventurous sailor like Ryuji, but also a cold-hearted nihilist like the chief, and doesn't know if he can be both at the same time. Similarly, Ryuji wonders if he can remain a sailor at heart when he starts living in an ordinary home with his new family (Fusako and Noboru). And Fusako wonders how marrying Ryuji will affect her social status. She also refuses to become the stereotypical sailor's wife, constantly waiting to see her husband at port. In other words, all of the book's characters feel that they have to choose between different sides of themselves in order to pin down their identities. They worry about which characteristics will come to define them, and they try to define themselves before anyone else can. However, the novel also shows that it's impossible to pin down the truth of identity: when people search for the underlying reality behind things, there is never just one good answer. And when people try to select one answer at the expense of all the others, they often end up violently imposing their version of reality on others. The book therefore suggests that while people naturally seek to define their own reality in order to gain control over their lives, they cannot define reality for anyone else without causing destruction.

The novel shows that people's key decisions often depend on how they understand the world and their own identities. Noboru and his gang are obsessed with understanding the nature of "existence itself," which they distinguish from the outward appearance of things in the world. They claim that their special insight makes them morally superior to others and justifies them doing things that others can't (like murder). Noboru also brings this idea home: he justifies looking through **the peephole** in his bedroom wall to watch his mother undress by telling himself that it's part of his quest to understand the utter ugliness and emptiness of the universe. In other words, he believes that violating his mother's privacy is acceptable because it gives him special insight that will help his gang save the world from corruption. But Ryuji also bases major decisions on his attempts to discern the underlying reality of the world. For instance, when deciding whether to give up life at sea for "shore life," he repeatedly notes that "shore life" feels unreal, like a dream. He takes this as an indication that he doesn't belong onshore. This shows how people's perception of what is and isn't real determines how they view their own identities and destinies.

But by comparing radically different perspectives on the same things, the book demonstrates that people should not mistake their understanding of the world for the absolute truth about it. The novel frequently shows how the same object can take on different meanings when it's viewed in different contexts. For instance, in the first chapter, Noboru sees his mother's bedroom as thrilling and exotic through the peephole but utterly mundane when he simply walks inside. Similarly, later in the novel, Noboru muses that a pool looks inviting and calm when it's full of water during the summer, but foreboding and dangerous when it's empty during the winter. These examples show that the reality of things depends as much on the observer as the things themselves. The book also shows how emotion and memory distort perspective. Most of its first half and all of its sailing scenes are actually narrated as memories, and this technique shows how perception isn't absolutely reliable, but rather depends on people's past experiences and present state of mind. For instance, Ryuji fantasizes about love while sailing but fondly remembers sailing when he's in love. Thus, his quest to understand what he *really* wants is pointless—he can never achieve an objective state of mind that would let him see the clear desires hidden beneath his complex feelings. In other words, people's perceptions about themselves are unreliable: they change over time and aren't necessarily more accurate than other people's.

In fact, the book suggests that when people view their particular perspective as the only valid one, they end up violently and destructively imposing their views on others. This is clearest in Noboru's gang, whose members believe that they must destroy things in order to bring them down to their true biological nature. In the hopes of showing their friends the truth of "existence itself," Noboru and the chief kill and dismember a kitten (and, later, do the same to Ryuji). In other words, they justify atrocious violence through their assertion that society is all a lie, and that only biology is truly real. But surprisingly, Ryuji does something similar, which is part of why Noboru kills him. After deciding to stay with Fusako, Ryuji convinces himself that he belongs onshore and is now Noboru's "new father." But Noboru rejects this—he hates when Ryuji acts like his moral superior and tries to teach him lessons, particularly because he remembers that Ryuji was anything but self-righteous just a few months earlier. Thus, Noboru sees that Ryuji's actions have changed because his *self-image* has changed. While certainly not murderous, Ryuji's narrow ideas about himself make Noboru's daily life uncomfortable. Again, this suggests that it's dangerous to view one's own perspective as absolutely true and infallible.

Readers might feel that Mishima's skepticism about truth and identity contradicts his deep conviction that people *should* impose their will on the world in pursuit of glory. And they would be right: this novel is full of tension between aspiration and doubt, because Mishima takes people's desires just as seriously as their inability to truly understand those desires. Ultimately, he concludes, the only thing more dangerous than *not* understanding our identities, desires, and reality is pretending that we *fully* understand them and then insistently imposing our views on others.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PEEPHOLE

The peephole leading from Noboru's wall into Fusako's bedroom represents the power of perspective and secret insight—specifically, it shows how knowledge can become a tool for domination. At the very beginning of the novel, Noboru angrily pulls the drawers out of his wall-mounted dresser and discovers the peephole hidden behind it. Looking through, he gains a new perspective on his mother: he sees a "mysterious chamber" full of exquisite imported furniture and clothing. But when he merely walks into his mother's room, it looks "drab and familiar." In other words, the peephole gives him special insight, a new perspective on something he already knew.

Later, he starts watching his mother undress and have sex with Ryuji through the peephole. He believes that this gives him knowledge about "the universal order" of the world. He's referring to how human life comes from intercourse, but also to how he has access to his mother's deepest secrets, which he views as the source of her power over him. In other words, he feels that his special insight gives him special *powers* that make him superior to others.

Fusako and Ryuji eventually discover the peephole. Distraught, they confront Noboru, but he isn't afraid or sorry—instead, he's proud, because he views his relationship with them like a war. To Noboru, Fusako and Ryuji are merely afraid of his secret weapon, which means that they acknowledge his superior power over them. When Ryuji decides to forgive Noboru—or make peace instead of war—Noboru decides that he must escalate the conflict and reassert his power over Ryuji by murdering him. The peephole was merely one tool in the endless war Noboru believes he's waging against the world.

THE SEA

The sea comes to mean many, often contradictory things over the course of the novel, but above all, it represents desire—and particularly Japan's desire for power. At the same time, the novel also shows that the sea is untamable and unknowable, which suggests that people can never fully achieve their dreams.

To Noboru, the sea represents the quest for power and adventure, while for Fusako, it tends to represent nostalgia and loss—specifically, the loss of her husband and her sense of loss while Ryuji is away on **the Rakuyo**. But the sea is most significant to Ryuji. For him, the sea represents his search for an alternative to life on land and his obsession with three things: glory, death, and women. As a sailor, he felt like he could see "his glory knifing toward him like a shark from some great distance in the darkly heaping sea," and he always imagined dying in the ocean. He also compares the sea to a woman because of its beauty and capriciousness—and because sailors constantly yearn for the sea but can never satisfy their thirst with it.

The novel's central plot point is Ryuji choosing life on land over the seafaring life that he always believed was his destiny. Then, he symbolically returns to the sea at the end of the novel, when he looks out at it while Noboru's gang prepares to murder him. Thus, for Ryuji, the sea represents the fulfillment that he longs for but can only achieve in death. This desire for fulfillment at sea is also closely tied to Japan's loss in World War II. As an archipelago, Japan's economic and military power has always depended on its navy, and Ryuji and Noboru's interest in sailing also represents author Yukio Mishima's desire to avenge Japan's loss in the war.

THE RAKUYO

The *Rakuyo*—the mighty freighter ship on which Ryuji worked and sailed the world for more than a decade—represents the connections among power, masculinity, and Japanese identity. The novel's descriptions emphasize the ship's unimaginable size and power. When Noboru and Fusako first see it, Noboru feels a sense of awe and reverence for it, while Fusako feels arousal and surprise. Tellingly, they also meet Ryuji on the ship and feel precisely the same emotions toward him. In this sense, the *Rakuyo* represents the very masculinity that first draws Noboru and Fusako to Ryuji.

The *Rakuyo* features most prominently in the last chapter of the first part of the novel. In this scene, the ship sails out to **sea** with Ryuji onboard. Before its departure, the novel compares it to "the blade of a colossal ax fallen out of the heavens to cleave the shore asunder." This description emphasizes the ship's power, connects it to the principle of divine destiny, and—most importantly—suggests that the ship's purpose is to divide the land, which represents its connection to Japan's imperial legacy.

After the ship sails off, Fusako and Noboru see Ryuji in the distance, standing beside the Japanese flag in "the splendor of the setting sun." The ship, the flag, the sea, and the sun are all key symbols of Japanese identity (and particularly the Japanese Empire). Thus, this scene represents Japan's national glory—which, depending on the reader's perspective, may have perished with the war, or may simply be awaiting revival.

HOT AND COLD

Extreme hot and cold in this novel illustrate how the world is governed by opposite, complementary forces that humans struggle to integrate. The first half of the novel is set in the suffocating, humid Yokohama summer and the second half in its freezing winter. But in both seasons, the novel constantly emphasizes how the temperature affects his characters' feelings and perceptions. In the summer, Ryuji sweats through his shirt and Fusako hides from the sun under a parasol; in the winter, they run around the park together at dawn to keep warm, while Noboru and his friends hide from the freezing wind when they visit the piers.

The novel strongly associates heat with masculinity, life, and love, while it associates cold with femininity, weakness, and death. In the summer heat, Noboru praises Ryuji to his friends; in the freezing winter, they plot to kill him. Similarly, in the scenes where they meet and fall in love, Ryuji and Fusako are both overwhelmed by the heat, but they agree to get married in the freezing cold of New Year's morning. In other words, their love heats up into a passionate affair, and then cools down into a stable relationship. Finally, in the book's closing scene, Ryuji sits on a freezing mountaintop and daydreams about the tropical heat he used to encounter as a sailor. In other words, he spent his life seeking adventure while moving around the sunny tropics, while his death comes in the chilly Japanese mountains, after he has stopped moving and settled down.

Thus, like all the other binaries that dominate the novel—land versus **sea**, male versus female, order versus change, life versus death, and light versus darkness—hot and cold represent the contradictory aspects of people's identities and relationships, which they struggle to integrate into a coherent whole.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* published in 1994.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

> Noboru couldn't believe he was looking at his mother's bedroom; it might have belonged to a stranger. But there was no doubt that a woman lived there: femininity trembled in every corner, a faint scent lingered in the air.
> Then a strange idea assailed him. Did the peephole just happen to be here, an accident? Or—after the war—when the soldiers' families had been living together in the house…He had a sudden feeling that another body, larger than his, a blond, hairy body, had once huddled in this dusty space in the wall. […] He ran to the next room. He would never forget the queer sensation he had when, flinging open the door, he burst in.
>
> Drab and familiar, the room bore no resemblance to the mysterious chamber he had seen through the peephole: it was here that he came to whine and to sulk.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6-7

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening passage of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, 13-year-old Noboru Kuroda finds a mysterious peephole in the wall behind his dresser. He discovers that it leads into his mother, Fusako's, room, and this passage describes what he sees the first time he looks through it. The peephole turns his mother's room into an unfamiliar and exotic representation of her personality, almost like a still-life painting. Unlike when he merely visits her, Noboru has a secret and therefore privileged vantage point on her life when he looks at the room through the peephole—he gets to look in from the outside, rather than observing it from within. Indeed, when he later goes into her room, it loses all its charm and becomes "drab and familiar."

But the peephole doesn't just represent the way people's place in the world shapes their perspective on and relationship to it. It also highlights the way gender and Japanese identity influence the novel's message. First, the description of "femininity trembl[ing] in every corner" of the room establishes a clear link between Noboru's mother and idealized notions of womanhood. This becomes significant when her relationship with Ryuji comes to represent the union of idealized femininity and masculinity. Second, Noboru's sudden thought about occupying American soldiers shows how the novel's sociopolitical context—Japan after World War II and the U.S. occupation—deeply structures its characters' feelings about themselves and their identities. Noboru's disgust at imagining the soldiers suggests that the occupation was a source of shame and weakness for Japan, which violated the nation's privacy and integrity just like Noboru violates his mother's by watching her through the peephole.

> And the zone of black. [...] He tried all the obscenity he knew, but words alone couldn't penetrate that thicket. His friends were probably right when they called it a pitiful little vacant house. He wondered if that had anything to do with the emptiness of his own world.
>
> At thirteen, Noboru was convinced of his own genius (each of the others in the gang felt the same way) and certain that life consisted of a few simple signals and decisions; that death took root at the moment of birth and man's only recourse thereafter was to water and tend it; that propagation was a fiction; consequently, society was a fiction too: that fathers and teachers, by virtue of being fathers and teachers, were guilty of a grievous sin. Therefore, his own father's death, when he was eight, had been a happy incident, something to be proud of.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda, The Chief, Noboru's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

After Noboru discovers the peephole leading into his mother's bedroom, he begins watching her undress and straining to look at "the zone of black" between her legs. But his voyeurism isn't motivated by sexual perversion or adolescent curiosity—instead, as the novel explains in this passage, it's really part of the rebellious philosophy he shares with his schoolmates. Namely, he connects his mother's sexuality with emptiness—which is a reference at once to her lack of a lover since Noboru's father's death and Noboru's feeling that human life (including his own, which came from her mother's womb) is inherently empty and meaningless. Thus, for Noboru, sex represents the way that even the things people most value and yearn for are ultimately pointless.

Noboru goes on to explain the overarching philosophy that these musings on sex fit into. For him and his friends, there is no inherent purpose in life, which means that it is really nothing more than a long preparation for death. Presumably, this also means that it is better to have never been born—and that the people who create and socialize children, like fathers and teachers, are really agents of evil. Of course, it's significant that Noboru believes that *fathers* are responsible for creating children, whereas he views his mother's womb as an empty vessel (or "pitiful little vacant house"). Not only does this allow him to blame his father for his own unhappiness and exempt his mother from responsibility—it also justifies his belief that he, as a man and a genius in his own estimation, will have special power to shape the world in the future.

> He never cried, not even in his dreams, for hard-heartedness was a point of pride. A large iron anchor withstanding the corrosion of the sea and scornful of the barnacles and oysters that harass the hulls of ships, sinking polished and indifferent through heaps of broken glass, toothless combs, bottle caps, and prophylactics into the mud at harbor bottom—that was how he liked to imagine his heart. Someday he would have an anchor tattooed on his chest.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Because Noboru believes that life and society are meaningless, he views emotions as a sign of ignorance and weakness. People who truly understand the nature of reality refuse to let their feelings control them, he thinks. Of course, this is deeply tied up with his feelings about masculinity: he views cold-heartedness as a key part of *male* honor in particular. Thus, in this passage, he explains how he tries to apply his philosophy to his own life. An anchor is an apt metaphor for a wise man's heart because it stoically endures all of the environment's pernicious effects. That said, despite Noboru's aspiration to make the anchor-like part of himself the centerpiece of his identity, he clearly doesn't have one yet—in many ways, he's still an immature young boy. For instance, he becomes uncharacteristically excited when he gets to visit the ships docked in the harbor, and he admits that he often visits his mother's room to throw tantrums.

Still, this passage is particularly significant because it introduces the persistent association between sailing, masculinity, honor, and heroism that runs through the book. Of course, this attitude helps explain Noboru's interest in ships and leads to his meeting with Ryuji—which, in turn, leads to his mother's new romance and marriage. In fact, Ryuji shares Noboru's feelings about sailing as the ultimate masculine calling and source of glory. This shared reverence for the sea is grounded in Japanese history, throughout which sailors were the nation's primary connection to the rest of the world—and its main source of power during its imperial era.

> Assembled there were the moon and a feverish wind, the incited, naked flesh of a man and a woman, sweat, perfume, the scars of a life at sea, the dim memory of ports around the world, a cramped breathless peephole, a young boy's iron heart—but these cards from a gypsy deck were scattered, prophesying nothing. The universal order at last achieved, thanks to the sudden, screaming horn, had revealed an ineluctable circle of life—the cards had paired: Noboru and mother—mother and man—man and sea—sea and Noboru…
>
> He was choked, wet, ecstatic. Certain he had watched a tangle of thread unravel to trace a hallowed figure. And it would have to be protected: for all he knew, he was its thirteen-year-old creator.
>
> "If this is ever destroyed, it'll mean the end of the world." […] *I guess I'd do anything to stop that, no matter how awful!*

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda (speaker), Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel's first chapter, Noboru looks through the peephole he discovered in his bedroom wall and watches his mother have sex with the handsome sailor Ryuji Tsukazaki in her bedroom. During the act, a ship's horn sounds in the nearby harbor. This astonishes and inspires Noboru, who feels like he is witnessing a miracle. As the novel explains here, he feels that disparate symbols in the world (like scattered "cards from a gypsy [tarot] deck") have suddenly come together into a meaningful formation. Thus, Noboru momentarily abandons his belief that the world is empty and meaningless—instead, he feels like he has decoded the world's meaning by discovering the "universal order" or "hallowed figure" that underlies it.

Specifically, the order that Noboru sees is a "circle of life" that represents his fundamental worldview. It's based on a series of critical relationships that are really expressions of the union of opposites. "Noboru and mother" represents parenthood, and "mother and man" represents the sexual unity of male and female, which makes reproduction possible. The reader will soon learn that "man and sea" represents the glory of human achievement, while "sea and Noboru" represents the human aspiration to greatness.

Struck by the beauty of this vision, Noboru pledges to defend it from destruction. Of course, this is the moment that sets in motion the rest of the book: Noboru and his friends ultimately murder Ryuji precisely because he stops fitting into this specific vision of the world. This passage also shows how aesthetic values—or people's ideas about beauty—fundamentally motivate the human quest for greatness. Moreover, it clearly connects Noboru's behavior in the novel to Japan's attempts to recover its identity and dignity after World War II. Namely, traditionalists like Mishima (the book's author) associated reviving the Japanese empire with protecting this kind of universal order. Indeed, Mishima felt that his life mission was to defend the beautiful social and moral order that he associated with Japan's traditional culture, empire, and samurai aristocracy.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

But as the years passed, he grew indifferent to the lure of exotic lands. He found himself in the strange predicament all sailors share: essentially he belonged neither to the land nor to the sea. Possibly a man who hates the land should dwell on shore forever. Alienation and the long voyages at sea will compel him once again to dream of it, torment him with the absurdity of longing for something that he loathes.

Ryuji hated the immobility of the land, the eternally unchanging surfaces. But a ship was another kind of prison.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's second chapter, Ryuji Tsukazaki contemplates his life as a sailor. While he chose the profession out of a desire for adventure and glory, he has grown increasingly wary of it. He has traded the stability of life on land for the flux of life at sea, but he has little to show for it. His job involves constant travel, so he hasn't gotten the chance to build strong ties to any particular place or community. This all fosters profound alienation: Ryuji feels lost and purposeless no matter where he is, because there's no certainty in his life besides the certainty that he will leave every place and lover behind.

Of course, this passage serves first and foremost to literally capture sailors' predicament: it shows how they are doomed to miss either the sea or the land—whichever they don't have at the moment. At the same time, this passage is also a metaphor for modern humanity's struggle to search for meaning. First, it represents how people search for meaning and greatness in a modern world that treats them as irrelevant and interchangeable cogs in a machine. And second, it represents Japan's situation after World War II, when it was caught between its rooted traditions and the growing influence of rootless Western culture.

Sometimes, as he stood watch in the middle of the night, he could feel his glory knifing toward him like a shark from some great distance in the darkly heaping sea, see it almost, aglow like the noctilucae that fire the water, surging in to flood him with light and cast the silhouette of his heroic figure against the brink of man's world. On those nights, standing in the white pilot-house amid a clutter of instruments and bronze signal bells, Ryuji was more convinced than ever:

There must be a special destiny in store for me; a glittering, special-order kind no ordinary man would be permitted.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Noboru Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Ryuji reflects on his decade as a sailor and starts to think about the belief that spurred him to sail in the first place: his lifelong conviction that he is somehow destined for greatness. For as long as he can remember, he has assumed that he is inherently superior to other people and will eventually find the glory that he is entitled to. He doesn't know where, when, or how he'll find it, but he strongly believes that it's out there. He has tried to keep this dream alive despite an endless supply of evidence to the contrary—but now, after meeting Fusako, he starts questioning whether his dream has any value at all.

Of course, it's significant that Noboru and his gang share Ryuji's feeling about their own greatness: they also think that they're inherently superior to everyone else in the world and therefore destined to rule over them. And they're willing to do anything—including die—in order to achieve the glory that they believe the universe is saving for them.

The author, Mishima, also shared this feeling—he was entirely prepared to fight and die in World War II, until the Japanese military rejected him for medical reasons. He deliberately gave Ryuji a similar backstory: Ryuji graduated from the merchant-marine school just after the war, so he ended up working on the commercial freighter *Rakuyo* instead of his expected path of joining the navy. Arguably, their desire for glory is a holdover from the war, in which Japanese men were encouraged to think of their military efforts as a glorious sacrifice for their country. But it's also much more than that: it represents modern people's attempt to achieve greatness and change the world, even as the world seems completely indifferent to their presence.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

The cloud-dappled sky was partitioned by an intricate crisscross of hawsers; and lifting up at it in reverence like a slender chin was the *Rakuyo*'s prow, limitlessly high, the green banner of the fleet fluttering at its crest. The anchor clung to the hawsehole like a large metal-black crab.

"This is going to be great," Noboru said, brimming over with boyish excitement.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda (speaker), Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Noboru is obsessed with ships and sailing, so his mother takes him for a tour of the freighter ship *Rakuyo*. (This visit sets up the rest of the novel's events because it's where they meet Ryuji.) When they arrive at the docks, Noboru looks up at the *Rakuyo* and admires its might. He notices the hawsers (thick cables) mooring it to the docks and feels that it is reaching up toward the sky, as though it were about to take flight. Of course, this metaphor represents its glorious power. Despite seeing an anchor—which would presumably remind him of his anchorlike cold heart—Noboru is giddy with excitement, like the young boy that he is.

In addition to showing the reader how Noboru's stoic principles contrast with his tendency to enthusiastically worship power and glory, this passage also sets up the *Rakuyo* as a metaphor for Japan itself. After all, the book's 20th-century readers would have easily seen the link between Japan's powerful shipping industry and its naval might during World War II, as well as between its people's dreams of glory and its former imperial aspiration to rule over broad swaths of the world.

That was their first encounter. She would never forget his eyes as he confronted her in the corridor. Deep-set in the disgruntled, swarthy face, they sought her out as though she were a tiny spot on the horizon, the first sign of a distant ship. That, at least, was the feeling she had. Eyes viewing an object so near had no business piercing that way, focusing so sharply—without leagues of sea between them, it was unnatural. She wondered if all eyes that endlessly scanned the horizon were that way. Unlooked-for signs of a ship descried—misgivings and delight, wariness and expectation...the sighted vessel just barely able to forgive the affront because of the vast reach of sea between them: a ravaging gaze. The sailor's eyes made her shudder.

Related Characters: Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29-30

Explanation and Analysis

When Fusako first meets Ryuji aboard the *Rakuyo*, his "ravaging gaze" immediately strikes her. It fills her with a mix of awe, excitement, and apprehension—she feels like he is staring at her like a distant ship across the sea. Presumably, she feels appreciated by a man for the first time in a long time. Ryuji's gaze is at once admiring and predatory. It suggests an instant, deep connection between him and Fusako—but also that there's an inherent danger hidden in that connection.

In this passage, the comparison between Ryuji's stare at Fusako and his gaze across the sea is significant. For Ryuji, the sea represents desire and the unknown, but also the search for glory through adventure and conquest. Thus, the novel draws the parallel between love and glorious conquest that later returns in the form of Ryuji's obsession with finding love, death, and glory all together at sea.

Meanwhile, this passage also shows how Ryuji's hypermasculinity attracts Fusako—whom the novel has already depicted as a paragon of femininity. Thus, this passage sets their love up to represent the unity of male and female.

The terrifyingly deliberate prelude and the sudden, reckless flight; the dangerous glitter of silver in a twist of fraying cable—standing under her open parasol, Fusako watched it all. She felt load after heavy load of freight being lifted from her and whisked away on the powerful arm of a crane—suddenly, but after long and careful preparation. She thrilled to the sight of cargo no man could move winging lightly into the sky, and she could have watched forever. This may have been a fitting destiny for cargo but the marvel was also an indignity. "It keeps getting emptier and emptier," she thought. The advance was relentless, yet there was time for hesitation and languor, time so hot and long it made you faint, sluggish, congested time.

Related Characters: Fusako Kuroda (speaker), Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Near the end of their tour of the *Rakuyo*, Fusako and Noboru watch a crane unload its cargo. The scale of this spectacle is almost too grand to believe, the containers unbelievably massive and the crane unbelievably powerful. When the cargo is lifted away, Fusako feels her own sense of "sudden, reckless flight"—which represents the excitement and surprise of her electric connection with Ryuji. The crane lifting cargo off the ship becomes a complex metaphor for Fusako's feelings, which is why the novel comments that "the marvel was also an indignity."

On the one hand, the crane represents the way Fusako's connection with Ryuji lifts a weight off of her conscience: it opens up new directions for her future and promises that her misery need not last forever. On the other, the crane also leaves the ship startlingly, remarkably empty, and it is so massive that stopping its advance seems impossible. This reminds Fusako of the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness that dominates her life. Thus, the crane unloading the ship comes to represent the two contradictory dimensions of people's pursuits in the modern world: their excitement and their apparent underlying meaninglessness.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

"It was the sea that made me begin thinking secretly about love more than anything else; you know, a love worth dying for, or a love that consumes you. To a man locked up in a steel ship all the time, the sea is too much like a woman. Things like her lulls and storms, or her caprice, or the beauty of her breast reflecting the setting sun, are all obvious. More than that, you're in a ship that mounts the sea and rides her and yet is constantly denied her. It's the old saw about miles and miles of lovely water and you can't quench your thirst. Nature surrounds a sailor with all these elements so like a woman and yet he is kept as far as a man can be from her warm, living body. That's where the problem begins, right there—I'm sure of it."

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Ryuji walks in the park on the morning after his first date with Fusako and thinks about all the things he wishes he would have told her but was too inarticulate, cowardly, or unsure to say. This passage captures what he wishes he would have said about the sea's beauty and mystery. As he explains here, his one-sided relationship with the sea taught him virtually all he knows about love. The sea is formless, limitless, and unpredictable. It represents the infinite, untamable realm of human aspiration and feeling. Thus, looking out at the ocean from the helm of a ship is much like contemplating the endless possibilities of human life and immersing oneself in the all-consuming feeling of love. This internal monologue helps show how, in Ryuji's mind, love, glory, and death are all inextricably linked to one another—and to sailing. All represent humankind's confrontation with the infiniteness of the world and inevitable failure to tame it.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

> "That sailor is terrific! He's like a fantastic beast that's just come out of the sea all dripping wet. Last night I watched him go to bed with my mother."

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda (speaker), Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda, The Chief

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after he watches Ryuji and Fusako have sex, Noboru meets with his gang of friends and tells them what he saw. In this passage, Noboru discusses his admiration for Ryuji, who seems to embody the apex of heroism and masculinity. Notably, Noboru communicates this admiration by comparing Ryuji to a brutish sea-monster. In addition to referencing Ryuji's profession as a sailor, this metaphor shows how Noboru idolizes the sea as a place for men to build strength, character, and identity. Of course, Ryuji shares this idea, which is historically linked to Japan's naval fighting in World War II.

This passage is also significant because it shows how Noboru's feelings about Ryuji shape the course of the novel. First, Noboru clearly admires Ryuji because of the fantasy he represents, more than because of the person he actually is. When Ryuji later fails to live up to Noboru's fantasy, Noboru is devastated and retaliates against him. Second, Noboru's feelings about Ryuji also contradict the nihilistic philosophy that he and his friends have learned from the chief. Specifically, the chief argues that life is meaningless and that there is no such thing as a hero—at least beyond his gang of six boys, who are the only people in the world with the power to truly change anything. Thus, he thinks the boys should try to be as emotionless and coldhearted as possible. While they all *want to* live up to these ideals, in reality, they actually don't: when it comes to things that affect them, they easily let their emotions control them. For instance, while they frequently complain about their parents' objective moral flaws, it's clear that they're actually just angry, hurt, and resentful of how their parents treat them. Noboru's comments about Ryuji follow the same pattern: his excitement about Ryuji shows that he isn't truly the confident and coldhearted "genius" that he's supposed to be.

> "Real danger is nothing more than just living. Of course, living is merely the chaos of existence, but more than that it's a crazy mixed-up business of dismantling existence instant by instant to the point where the original chaos is restored, and taking strength from the uncertainty and the fear that chaos brings to re-create existence instant by instant. You won't find another job as dangerous as that. There isn't any fear in existence itself, or any uncertainty, but living creates it. And society is basically meaningless, a Roman mixed bath. And school, school is just society in miniature: that's why we're always being ordered around. A bunch of blind men tell us what to do, tear our unlimited ability to shreds."

Related Characters: The Chief (speaker), Noboru Kuroda, Number Two

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

"Number two," one of the boys in Noboru's gang, complains that his parents won't let him buy an air rifle because it's too dangerous. This quote is the chief's response. He argues that life requires "dismantling existence" in order to bring back "the original chaos" of the world, and then "re-creat[ing] existence" from the ground up. Although this argument is haughty and garbled, it still communicates a clear philosophy about the world and the gang's role in it.

First, the chief talks about "dismantling existence." His subsequent comments show that he's really talking about rejecting the norms, taboos, and dictates that society imposes on us. He argues that the "blind men" who "order[] around" everyone else—or the elite who holds power in modern societies—set rules that constrain and oppress people, rather than liberating them.

Next, the chief talks about returning to "the original chaos" of the world. In other words, he thinks that after wiping away society's influences, the gang should try to return to a primitive, premodern way of life. The author, Mishima's, own life and political activism suggest that the chief is talking about Japan's old political and social system, which were based on power, honor, and tradition rather than democracy and capitalism. In particular, Mishima seems to be emphasizing the spiritual outlook associated with this old system, which focused on embracing the chaos of the world rather than controlling it.

Finally, the chief argues that the gang should try to "re-create existence." He's referring to the gang trying to rebuild society in line with their traditional values. Thus, the chief's speech makes it clear why he views his gang as a special revolutionary elite, who are destined to take power over the world and reshape it in their own image.

> Noboru seized the kitten by the neck and stood up. It dangled dumbly from his fingers. He checked himself for pity; like a lighted window seen from an express train, it flickered for an instant in the distance and disappeared. He was relieved.
>
> The chief always insisted it would take acts such as this to fill the world's great hollows. Though nothing else could do it, he said, murder would fill those gaping caves in much the same way that a crack along its face will fill a mirror. Then they would achieve real power over existence.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, The Chief

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

After Noboru and his gang meet at the piers to discuss the meaninglessness of existence and their dreams of ruling the world, they go back to the chief's house for a ritual sacrifice. Of course, this is really just a trial run for the other ritual sacrifice at the end of the novel. They catch a kitten, and Noboru brutally kills it. This passage captures his feelings in the run-up to the act: he interrogates his own emotions and reflects on the chief's faith in the beauty and power of murder.

Needless to say, readers may find this scene baffling and disturbing. Noboru, the chief, and their friends take *pride* in committing brutal, cold-hearted violence without remorse. Indeed, they make a deliberate effort to suppress their emotions while killing, and they believe that murder is somehow the key to remaking the world as they wish to see it. This idea is one of the great, unexplained mysteries in this book. While murderers take control over others' life and death, which gives them a special kind of "power over existence," it's unclear why this power would help them transform the world and build the rigid, hierarchical society the boys wish to create.

Readers may think that the boys' philosophy is just a flimsy excuse for their sadism and cruelty, but they may also genuinely believe that they're destined to change the world (and just struggle to precisely explain how). Furthermore, it's impossible to know if Noboru and the chief's ideas accurately reflected the author, Mishima's—although his life story and dramatic death suggest that they very well may have.

> Noboru tried comparing the corpse confronting the world so nakedly with the unsurpassably naked figures of his mother and the sailor. But compared to this, they weren't naked enough. They were still swaddled in skin. Even that marvelous horn and the great wide world whose expanse it had limned couldn't possibly have penetrated so deeply as this…the pumping of the bared heart placed the peeled kitten in direct and tingling contact with the kernel of the world.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda, The Chief

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

During a ritual sacrifice at the chief's house, Noboru kills an innocent kitten, and then the chief dismembers its body with a pair of scissors. After slicing open the corpse, the chief pulls out the kitten's organs, then cuts and crushes them up in front of his friends. All the while, he proclaims that *this* is the naked truth of reality. Meanwhile, Noboru starts to remember watching his mother having sex with Ryuji.

The novel doesn't just associate murder, dismemberment, and incestuous voyeurism for shock value. For better or worse, it's also presenting an underlying theory about the nature of life and reality. Noboru and the chief suggest that human beings, like the kitten, are really no more than a collection of organs wrapped together in skin. Nudity and sex are as close as people get to recognizing this bare reality in their everyday lives, but for the most part, people prefer to conceal and ignore it. Thus, the novel suggests that people should view life more as a physical, biological force than a spiritual or emotional one. Of course, this perspective fits with Noboru and the chief's traditionalist belief that society should be organized around pure power and domination, rather than fairness or democracy.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

His eyes roved the dim room and he marveled at the golden clock enthroned on the mantel, the cut-glass chandelier depending from the ceiling, the graceful jade vases poised precariously on open shelves: all delicate, all absolutely still. He wondered what subtle providence kept the room from rocking. Until a day before, the objects here had meant nothing to him, and in a day he would be gone; yet, for the moment, they were connected. The link was a glance met by a woman's eyes, a signal emanating from deep in the flesh, the brute power of his own manhood; and to know this filled him with a sense of mystery, as when he sighted an unknown vessel on the open sea. Though his own flesh had fashioned the bond, its enormous unreality with respect to this room made him tremble.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Fusako Kuroda, Noboru Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68-69

Explanation and Analysis

On the hot summer day after Ryuji's first date with Fusako, he runs into Noboru near the park and decides to follow him home to cool off in the air conditioning. Lounging around in Noboru and Fusako's living room, Ryuji looks out at the decorations that represent their settled life and marvels at the remarkable coincidence that he has crossed paths with them.

Knowing that he will soon return to sea, Ryuji begins to see the ordinary life of people on land as somehow both realer and more fantastical than ever before. It seems realer because he can see it up close, and it seems all the less real because he perceives how remarkably different it is from his own life. Indeed, he notices that this living room simply could not exist on a ship: the rocking sea would knock over and destroy its fragile decorations. Of course, these decorations also evoke Fusako's femininity—after all, the novel frequently describes her as beautiful, still, and delicate. This also explains why, in the same breath as his description of the room, Ryuji starts to think about his own masculinity and "brute power." He knows that his relationship with Fusako represents the perfect, seemingly impossible unity of opposite realities: masculinity and femininity, sea and land, and power and beauty.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

Since dark antiquity the words have been spoken by women of every caste to sailors in every port; words of docile acceptance of the horizon's authority, of reckless homage to that mysterious azure boundary; words never failing to bestow on even the haughtiest woman the sadness, the hollow hopes, and the freedom of the whore: "You'll be leaving in the morning, won't you?…"

Related Characters: Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

The seventh chapter—which follows Ryuji and Fusako on their second date—begins with this reference to the timeless pattern that their romance replicates. For as long as there have been sailors, the novel suggests, they have left behind women who love them. These women have been forced to live lonely, isolated lives, occupying themselves as best they can while they wait for their lovers to return to land. By falling in love with Ryuji, the novel explains, Fusako has become one of these women: he will go sailing around the world and she will wait for him in Yokohama, like so many other women throughout history. Ryuji understands this—after all, he believes that, according to destiny, "the man sets out in quest of the Grand Cause; [and] the woman is left behind."

But Fusako finds this prospect harder to accept. Since her husband died five years before the events of the novel, she has been isolated and lonely but also financially and emotionally self-reliant. Therefore, her romance with Ryuji is bittersweet: while she is delighted to find love, she is also devastated to feel emotionally dependent on someone who will spend nearly all his time at sea. Out of both fear and self-respect, she resolves not to become the stereotypical sailor's lover. And yet, against her better judgment, she does anyway. She ends up falling hopelessly in love with Ryuji and eagerly awaiting his return. Her attempts to beat her fate, the novel suggests, are doomed to fail—love is too strong a force to resist. Thus, Ryuji and Fusako fulfill the timeless pattern, whether they want to or not.

> The thought of parting with her the next day was painful, but he had a maxim to countermand his pain, an insubstantial refrain which played over and over in his dreams: "The man sets out in quest of the Grand Cause; the woman is left behind." Yet Ryuji knew better than anyone that no Grand Cause was to be found at sea. At sea were only watches linking night and day, prosaic tedium, the wretched circumstances of a prisoner.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

Fusako dreads Ryuji's departure, both because she doesn't want to see him go and because she doesn't want to become the stereotypical sailor's lover, desperately awaiting his return onshore. But Ryuji's feelings about the situation are more complex. On the one hand, he knows that he will miss Fusako just as desperately as she misses him; but on the other, as he notes here, he believes that he's destined to leave her behind. This shows how, once again, Ryuji's strong but inexplicable sense of destiny guides him through life. This is the same sense of destiny that promises he will achieve glory at sea.

Of course, this destiny isn't just personal: it's also linked to deep cultural archetypes. The idea that the man seeks a "Grand Cause" while "the woman is left behind" dates back to the earliest warrior myths in both Western and Japanese culture. But it was also a recent memory in the 1960s due to World War II, which saw numerous men all around the world ship out to fight and leave their lovers behind. Thus, the novel uses Ryuji's internal monologue to establish that his relationship with Fusako represents this timeless archetype—and that their decisions about their relationship also stand for broader changes in human history (like Japan's decision to abandon what the book's author, Mishima, saw as its imperial destiny).

> For Ryuji the kiss was death, the very death in love he always dreamed of. The softness of her lips, her mouth so crimson in the darkness he could see it with closed eyes, so infinitely moist, a tepid coral sea, her restless tongue quivering like sea grass…in the dark rapture of all this was something directly linked to death. He was perfectly aware that he would leave her in a day, yet he was ready to die happily for her sake. Death roused inside him, stirred.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

When Ryuji kisses Fusako, he thinks of death and the sea—in fact, he remembers the trinity of death, love, and glory that he has always imagined achieving at sea. This passage's most obvious functions are to signal that Ryuji's relationship with Fusako is part of the destiny he has always dreamed about and to foreshadow the novel's conclusion, which brings death, love, and glory together, just as Ryuji has always imagined. However, it also speaks to the deeper worldview that leads Ryuji to link all three.

Unlike in Western culture, in this novel, the so-called kiss of death doesn't represent betrayal or misfortune (although it still *does* represent fate). In fact, Ryuji fully understands that his love with Fusako will draw him toward death—and he's perfectly happy about it. Indeed, this trinity of death, love, and glory represents true fulfillment for Ryuji: if he achieves it, he will have accomplished all that he yearns for in life.

While the novel frequently portrays the association between death, love, and glory through detailed descriptions like this one, it doesn't explain *why* Ryuji feels this way. In fact, the novel's critics and biographers have often attributed this to a quirk of the author, Mishima's, own psychology, in which he could not help but think of death and sex together. Still, there's a clear link between them: all three involve transcending one's identity and losing oneself in something far greater than oneself. Death means transcending life, glory means transcending ordinariness, and sex and love mean transcending the limits of one's own body and mind. Thus, Ryuji collapses all three together because he really desires to transcend himself and the confines of his own experience.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

Noboru, as he affected childishness, was standing guard over the perfection of the adults, the moment. His was the sentinel's role. The less time they had, the better. The shorter this meeting was, the less perfection would be marred. For the moment, as a man leaving a woman behind to voyage around the world, as a sailor, and as a Second Mate, Ryuji was perfect. So was his mother. As a woman to be left behind, as a beautiful sailcloth full-blown with happy memories and the grief of parting, she was perfect too. Both had blundered dangerously during the past two days but at the moment their behavior was beyond reproach. If only Ryuji didn't say something ridiculous and spoil it all before he was safely under way. Peering from beneath the broad brim of his straw hat, Noboru anxiously studied first one face and then the other.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87-88

Explanation and Analysis

When Noboru and Fusako visit the docks to see Ryuji off, Noboru feels like the world is matching up to the perfect universal order that he observed at the end of the novel's opening chapter. The sailor heads out to pursue glory at sea, while the woman loyally waits for him onshore. In other words, Noboru has a specific idea of how things ought to be in the world, and he's delighted to see that idea play out at the moment of Ryuji's departure. He views himself as the master of the universe, not because he *determines* people's destinies, but rather because he *understands* their destinies and does what he can to help fulfill them. This is why he compares himself to a "sentinel" who is "standing guard over the perfection of the adults [and] the moment."

Noboru's ideas about destiny match up with Ryuji's, as well as with the archetypal tales of sailing and adventure that both of them look to for their ideas about honor and masculinity. But Noboru's satisfaction with this scene also points to another, darker side of his thinking about destiny: he believes that it requires Fusako and Ryuji to stay apart, and he is willing to do what he can to make that happen. Needless to say, this attitude explains the book's conclusion, when Noboru and his friends prepare to murder Ryuji. Modern readers might also notice that Noboru and Ryuji's vision of destiny forces women into a passive, powerless, permanently subservient role. Fusako is supposed to have "happy memories and the grief of parting," but neither the love nor the independence that would truly make her happy.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

But the tears of joy had washed anxiety away and lifted them to a height where nothing was impossible. Ryuji was as if paralyzed: the sight of familiar places, places they had visited together, failed to move him. That Yamashita Park and Marine Tower should now appear just as he had often pictured them seemed only obvious, inevitable. And the smoking drizzle of rain, by softening the too distinct scenery and making of it something closer to the images in memory, only heightened the reality of it all. Ryuji expected for some time after he disembarked to feel the world tottering precariously beneath his feet, and yet today more than ever before, like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle, he felt snugly in place in an anchored, amiable world.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the second half of the novel, Ryuji returns to Yokohama in the winter and rekindles his romance with Fusako. To his surprise, settled life doesn't seem exotic and unreal, as it did before—instead, it feels uncannily familiar. Unlike the sea, which changes constantly and unpredictably, the city is largely the same (even if it has changed from summer to winter). Thus, for Ryuji, ordinary life seems like a more realistic possibility than ever before.

In addition to foreshadowing Ryuji's decision to stay onshore in the rest of the novel, this passage also shows how his worldview and sense of reality transform over time. Of course, the fact that Yokohama's sights "failed to move him" also shows how, when the exotic becomes familiar (or vice-versa), it can easily lose its enchantment. Thus, while Ryuji feels more comfortable than ever before with the prospect of settled life in this scene, he also sees clear signs that this comfort could easily disappear again in the future—as it does at the end of the novel.

"Mr. Tsukazaki, when will you be sailing again?" Noboru asked abruptly.

His mother turned to him with a shocked face and he could see that she had paled. It was the question she most wanted to ask, and most dreaded. Ryuji was posing near the window with his back to them. He half closed his eyes, and then, very slowly, said: "I'm not sure yet."

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 104-105

Explanation and Analysis

When Ryuji returns to Yokohama in the winter, he moves into Fusako's house. While Noboru admires Ryuji, he's far from happy about this situation: he feels like Ryuji is abandoning his destiny as a sailor and unfairly imposing himself on Noboru's life. So, he asks Ryuji the taboo question that Fusako is too afraid to consider: when he will return to sail away on the *Rakuyo*. Of course, while Noboru pretends to just be wondering about Ryuji's plans, everyone in the room knows that he's really asking if Ryuji is planning to return to his sailing life at all. This is why his question horrifies Fusako: she doesn't want to confront the possibility that Ryuji will soon ship back out, and that she will have to wait several more miserable months for his next visit. But Ryuji's response shows that he still hasn't decided—which means his (and the family's) future is still up in the air. This confirms to Noboru that it's not too late to stop Ryuji—but also that he's dangerously close to abandoning his destiny at sea.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

Are you going to give up the life which has detached you from the world, kept you remote, impelled you toward the pinnacle of manliness? The secret yearning for death. The glory beyond and the death beyond. Everything was "beyond," wrong or right, had always been "beyond." *Are you going to give that up?* […]

And yet Ryuji had discovered on the return leg of his last voyage that he was tired, tired to death of the squalor and the boredom in a sailor's life. He was convinced that he had tasted it all, even the lees, and he was glutted. What a fool he'd been! There was no glory to be found, not anywhere in the world.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Fusako Kuroda, Noboru Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 110-111

Explanation and Analysis

After Ryuji returns to Yokohama in the winter, he and Fusako go to the park on New Year's morning to watch the sunrise. While there, he contemplates the dilemma that the universe has placed before him: he must choose between an extraordinary but uncertain life and an ordinary but stable one. He can leave Fusako and stick to the quest for adventure, glory, and transcendence that has always driven him. Or he can give up that quest—which has rewarded him with nothing but weariness and disappointment—and choose his love for Fusako instead. Meeting Fusako has thrown Ryuji's lifelong sense of fate and purpose into question, and it gives him the chance to make an irreversible, life-changing decision on the spur of the moment. He finds the power to control his destiny in this way intoxicating, but he doesn't see a clear solution yet. Of course, his decision also has wide-reaching implications: it will affect Fusako and Noboru's futures, as well. And it's also a broader allegory for Japan's choice between its traditional culture and Western influence after World War II: Ryuji and Japan can see both sides but struggle to pick one.

A minute later, far to the right of the floating lumber and surprisingly high up, a gauzy red ring loomed in the slate-gray sky. Immediately the sun became a globe of pure red but still so weak they could look straight at it, a blood-red moon.

"I know this will be a good year; it couldn't be anything else with us here like this, watching the first sunrise together. And you know something? This is the first time I've ever seen the sunrise on New Year's Day." Fusako's voice warped in the cold. Ryuji heard himself bellow in the resolute voice he used to shout orders into the wind on the winter deck: "Will you marry me?"

Related Characters: Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

At sunrise on New Year's Day, overlooking the Yokohama harbor from the park on Yado Hill, Ryuji asks Fusako to marry him. The question is sudden and unexpected—Ryuji says it with a "resolute voice" that indicates that he hasn't fully thought through what he's doing and may not even fully believe himself. But as soon as he says it, he and Fusako understand that it will change their lives forever. Ryuji has made his decision: he will give up sailing to stay with Fusako for the rest of his life.

This passage marks a crucial turning point in the novel, but this isn't the only reason it's so significant. It also shows how the book uses the environment to mimic its characters' emotions and reveal their actions' broader significance. Thus far, the novel has consistently associated cold with home, family, and settled life, so it's fitting that Ryuji and Fusako decide to get married on a bitterly cold winter morning. Fusako's comments about the coming year emphasize the way New Year's Day represents novelty and change—like Ryuji's decision to enter an entirely new phase of life. When he proposes marriage to Fusako, Ryuji is also looking out at the sea—which has thus far represented his desires and sense of purpose. In a way, then, he is bidding farewell to the sea as he leaves it behind for a life onshore. Last and most importantly, the blood-red rising sun—Japan's longtime national symbol—makes the scene's allegorical implications clear. Ryuji abandoning the sailor's life to marry Fusako represents Japan abandoning its dreams of dominating the world and making peace with Western rule instead.

Ryuji had told the same sort of sea story before, but this time his delivery seemed different. The tone of his voice reminded Noboru of a peddler selling sundry wares while he handled them with dirty hands. Unsling a pack from your back and spread it open on the ground for all to see: one hurricane Caribbean-style—scenery along the banks of the Panama Canal—a carnival smeared in red dust from the Brazilian countryside—a tropical rainstorm flooding a village in the twinkling of an eye—bright parrots hollering beneath a dark sky…No doubt about it: Ryuji did have a pack of wares.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

After Ryuji and Fusako decide to get married, Ryuji tells Noboru another of his sailing stories—one about surviving a vicious hurricane in the Caribbean. Fusako finds the story horrifying and asks Ryuji to stop, while Noboru starts to question Ryuji's authenticity. In this passage, he compares Ryuji's story to products for sale in order to emphasize how it seems forced and self-serving. In Noboru's mind, then, Ryuji is no longer a heroic, masculine sailor—rather, he's a pathetic, ordinary man *pretending* to be a heroic, masculine sailor in order to trick people like Fusako. On the surface, this passage just suggests that Noboru can tell that Ryuji has decided to stop sailing and stay with Fusako. But on a deeper level, it shows that he sees this decision changing Ryuji. Perhaps Ryuji truly has become a less adventurous, more conventional person since the summer. Or perhaps Noboru is just angry that his fantastical picture of Ryuji was wrong, and his mother's romantic one was right.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

If Ryuji were really an opportunist with all kinds of dreadful secrets, I would never have fallen in love with him. Yoriko may be a gullible fool, but I happen to have a sound sense of what's good and what's bad. The thought was equivalent to a denial of that unaccountable summer passion, yet the whispering inside her began suddenly to seethe, to swell until it threatened to burst out.

Related Characters: Fusako Kuroda (speaker), Ryuji Tsukazaki, Yoriko Kasuga

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Fusako gets formally engaged to Ryuji, her loyal client, the actress Yoriko Kasuga, visits her store. Fusako and Yoriko go out for lunch and, as usual, Yoriko starts to complain about her loneliness and her failure to win acting awards. When Fusako tells Yoriko about her engagement, Yoriko advises her to hire a private detective and take several other steps to make sure Ryuji is who he claims to be.

As usual, this advice really represents Yoriko projecting her own ideas and experiences onto everyone else. But it strikes a nerve with Fusako, who secretly does worry that Ryuji—whom she's only truly met three times—is lying to her, perhaps in the hopes of swindling her out of her money. Fusako struggles to decide how she really feels. On the one hand, she deeply loves and trusts Ryuji, and she resents the very idea that she may be as gullible as Yoriko. On the other, she recognizes that everything Yoriko fears is absolutely possible, which is why "the whispering inside her" starts to haunt her. Caught between these two incompatible realities, she decides to hire the investigator (whose findings prove that Ryuji *was* completely honest).

Part 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

"There is no such thing as a good father because the role itself is bad. Strict fathers, soft fathers, nice moderate fathers—one's as bad as another. They stand in the way of our progress while they try to burden us with their inferiority complexes, and their unrealized aspirations, and their resentments, and their ideals, and the weaknesses they've never told anyone about, and their sins, and their sweeter-than-honey dreams, and the maxims they've never had the courage to live by—they'd like to unload all that silly crap on us, all of it!

[...]

They're suspicious of anything creative, anxious to whittle the world down into something puny they can handle. A father is a reality-concealing machine, a machine for dishing up lies to kids, and that isn't even the worst of it: secretly he believes that he represents reality."

Related Characters: The Chief (speaker), Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Noboru's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136-137

Explanation and Analysis

During their first meeting of the new school year, Noboru and the chief's gang discuss Ryuji's obviously unheroic decision to stay behind in Yokohama and marry Fusako. The chief discusses his conflicts with his father over winter break, then quickly pivots to this monologue about the inherent evil of all fathers in general. While he's primarily motivated by anger and resentment, his ideas are still coherent. In fact, they help explain Noboru's complex feelings about Ryuji and fit clearly with the novel's broader depiction of family and power.

The chief argues that fathers are evil because they stand in the way of their children's—although he really means their *sons'*—autonomy and growth. Fathers pass down their specific worldviews and teach their sons to aspire to the same kind of achievements that they value. As a result, the chief thinks, young men never learn develop their full creative, moral, or intellectual abilities. They accept their fathers' limited perspectives on reality instead of developing their own original ones. Instead, the chief thinks, young men should take power over themselves and resist their fathers' influence. Rather than letting others dominate them, he insists, boys must learn to dominate others.

Of course, Noboru's admiration for Ryuji is the key undercurrent to this entire speech. Noboru *does* share Ryuji's worldview—particularly his "unrealized aspirations," "resentments," "ideals," "sweeter-than-honey dreams," and "maxims." (Ironically, his worldview also closely represents the chief's—who certainly "believes that he represents reality" more than anyone else.) But when Ryuji decides to stay in Yokohama rather than return to his glorious life at sea, he essentially betrays this worldview, leaving Noboru angry and confused. Thus, the chief's speech justifies Noboru's rebellion against Ryuji. Naturally, this scene is also part of the novel's allegory for Japanese history and identity, as the boys' rebellion against their fathers is a clear metaphor for Japan's rebellion against Western occupation and influence.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

The moment he huddled inside the chest he was calm again. The trembling and the trepidation seemed almost funny now; he even had a feeling he would be able to study well. Not that it really mattered: this was the world's outer edge. So long as he was here, Noboru was in contact with the naked universe. No matter how far you ran, escape beyond this point was impossible.
Bending his arms in the cramped space, he began to read the cards in the light of the flashlight.

abandon
By now this word was an old acquaintance: he knew it well.

ability
Was that any different from *genius*?

aboard
A ship again; he recalled the loudspeaker ringing across the deck that day when Ryuji sailed. And then the colossal, golden horn, like a proclamation of despair.

absence

absolute

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Noboru's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 149-150

Explanation and Analysis

When Fusako and Ryuji decide to start leaving Noboru's door open at night, he is furious, and he decides to take out his rage at them by watching them through the peephole. To give himself an alibi if he's caught, he brings his flashlight and English flashcards, so that he can pretend that he's just studying. (Apparently, the enclosed space in the dresser helps him focus.)

The words on Noboru's flashcards are significant: they clearly comment on the novel's plot and themes. Noboru feels "abandon[ed]" by Ryuji. He believes that his superior "ability" (or "*genius*") will allow him to do extraordinary things that others will not. And "aboard" is where Ryuji should be (and Noboru dreams of going). "Absence" is also a central concept in the novel: the main characters are all trying to make up for Noboru's father's absence, for example. Noboru frequently associates his mother and society with nothingness, and Ryuji's sense of purpose in life comes from his long absences from land. And "absolute" represents Noboru's feeling that he's at "the world's outer edge" and "in contact with the naked universe"—in other words, encountering what philosophers call the *absolute*, or the transcendent truth and unity of the universe. He views looking through the peephole as a way to access this truth, much like killing and skinning the kitten earlier in the book, because it gives him special insight into people's most fundamental and primitive behaviors.

Of course, this scene with Noboru studying English in the dresser recalls the novel's opening scene, in which Noboru also associated the peephole with foreign culture. Specifically, he associated it with the occupying American forces who temporarily took over the house—he imagined an American soldier huddling in the dresser, watching another soldier and his wife have sex in the next room through the peephole. This clearly links Noboru's desire for power (which he gains by invading his mother and Ryuji's privacy) with foreign power over Japan's politics, economy, and culture.

❝ Obviously, his mother was not mistaken; and she had brushed against "reality," a thing she dreaded worse than leeches. In one sense, that made them more nearly equal now than they had ever been: it was almost empathy. Pressing his palms to his reddened, burning cheeks, Noboru resolved to watch carefully how a person drawn so near could retreat in one fleeting instant to an unattainable distance. Clearly it was not the discovery of reality itself that had spawned her indignation and her grief: Noboru knew that his mother's shame and her despair derived from a kind of prejudice. She had been quick to interpret the reality, and inasmuch as her banal interpretation was the cause of all her agitation, no clever excuse from him would be to any purpose.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

When Fusako discovers the peephole that Noboru uses to spy on Fusako and Ryuji, she feels humiliated and distraught. But Noboru isn't ashamed; instead, he feels proud and powerful. This shows how deep his nihilistic, power-obsessed worldview goes. Noboru understood his voyeurism as a source of power, because it let him infringe on Ryuji and his mother's privacy. When she discovers him, he believes that she is merely reacting to his power—or the fact that, despite playing the part of a sweet young boy, he was secretly scheming against her. Noboru proudly tells himself that *he* understands and accepts the reality of the world, whereas *she* tries to ignore it, like a coward. Worse, Noboru thinks, his mother unfairly interprets what she has seen because of her prejudices. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Noboru simply thinks that his mother is biased and wrong because she disagrees with him—and that he is objective and correct simply because he believes himself to be. At base, then, Noboru's worldview ultimately boils down to little more than the idea that anyone who disagrees with him is irrational and ought to view things from his perspective instead.

> To beat the boy would be easy enough, but a difficult future awaited him. He would have to receive their love with dignity, to deliver them from daily dilemmas, to balance daily accounts; he was expected in some vague, general way to comprehend the incomprehensible feelings of the mother and the child and to become an infallible teacher, perceiving the causes of a situation even as unconscionable as this one: he was dealing here with no ocean squall but the gentle breeze that blows ceaselessly over the land.
>
> Though Ryuji didn't realize it, the distant influence of the sea was at work on him again: he was unable to distinguish the most [exalted] feelings from the meanest, and suspected that essentially important things did not occur on land. No matter how hard he tried to reach a realistic decision, shore matters remained suffused with the hues of fantasy.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki, Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

When Fusako and Ryuji discover Noboru looking through the peephole to watch them have sex, Fusako tells Ryuji—the family's "new father"—to punish Noboru. Ryuji feels like he's encountering the first serious decision in his new life onshore. In fact, he has spent all his life utterly alone, without close enough relationships to have to make any serious ethical decisions like this one. After more than a decade as a bachelor, he is suddenly responsible for a young boy and has to decide how to treat his misbehavior.

This situation leads Ryuji to contemplate the way living onshore will change him forever and totally reevaluate his decision to stay with Fusako. While it's already too late to change this decision, Ryuji simply didn't expect that *he* would have to change completely if he wanted to adapt to his new life. He didn't think through the mundane challenges he would face—like being an effective father and running a household—would seem so foreign yet insignificant. After all, the challenges one faces at sea are more black-and-white: stay alive, keep the ship afloat, and deliver the cargo. Thus, this passage shows how people struggle to adapt to new perspectives on reality, and how people often don't appreciate the full consequences of their decisions until it's far too late to change them.

> Noboru listened feeling as though he were about to suffocate. *Can this man be saying things like that? This splendid hero who once shone so brightly?*
> Every word burned like fire. He wanted to scream, as his mother had screamed: *How can you do this to me?* The sailor was saying things he was never meant to say. Ignoble things in wheedling, honeyed tones, fouled words not meant to issue from his lips until Doomsday, words such as men mutter in stinking lairs. And he was speaking proudly, for he believed in himself, was satisfied with the role of father he had stepped forward to accept.
> *He is satisfied.* Noboru felt nauseous.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda (speaker), Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

After Ryuji and Fusako catch Noboru watching them have sex through the peephole, Ryuji decides to forgive Noboru instead of beating or punishing him. Ironically, Noboru is horrified: even though he's spared the pain of a beating, he interprets this decision as evidence that Ryuji has profoundly betrayed his own values and identity. Namely, Noboru thinks that a heroic sailor would protect his and his lover's honor by punishing the person who violated it. But Ryuji has chosen a path of weakness instead. He has replaced honor with morality and force with words, and he behaves toward Noboru like a loving father, not a powerful master.

Thus, whereas Noboru thought that Ryuji once shared his worldview—which revolves around power, glory, and domination—he sees that this is no longer the case. (This is all also a metaphor for Japan abandoning its traditional aristocratic values and embracing Western ones instead after World War II.) For Noboru, this change in perspective is actually Ryuji's ultimate betrayal, arguably even more than his decision to abandon sailing and stay in Yokohama. Noboru realizes that his hero has fallen from grace, and he resolves to do something about it.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Quotes

"I'm sure you all know where our duty lies. When a gear slips out of place it's our job to force it back into position. If we don't, order will turn to chaos. We all know that the world is empty and that the important thing, the only thing, is to try to maintain order in that emptiness. And so we are guards, and more than that because we also have executive power to insure that order is maintained."

Related Characters: The Chief (speaker), Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 162-163

Explanation and Analysis

After Ryuji and Fusako discover Noboru's peephole and confront him, Noboru calls his gang for an "emergency meeting." At this meeting, the chief gives another speech about the meaning of life and the gang's purpose in it. Again, he explicitly argues that he and his friends are specially ordained to rule over the world—as he puts it here, they are supposed to "maintain order" in a universe that is constantly at risk of collapse. (In this specific situation, that means killing Ryuji.)

The chief's worldview resonates in significant ways with Ryuji's view of glory, traditional Japanese notions of honor and order, and of course Noboru's ideas about his own purpose in life. All depend on two basic yet contradictory principles: that humans belong in a social hierarchy, and that life is meaningless. On the one hand, these worldviews suggest that certain people are inherently superior to others and destined to rule over them, achieve glory, maintain the order of the universe, and so on. But on the other, they also suggest that the world is empty and meaningless *unless* these exceptional people act to imbue it with meaning. The tension between these ideas is that, if there is nothing valuable in the world but human action, why can only a select few heroic humans act in the right way to make the world meaningful? This is equivalent to asking why, in this passage, the chief thinks that the world can be both empty and ordered. The answer is rather complicated, but it hinges on the difference between the concept of emptiness in Western thought and in Buddhist-influenced Japanese philosophy—the latter of which associates emptiness with the underlying essence of the world, more than absence and nothingness.

At that moment, the pool was terrifically deep. Deeper and deeper as watery blue darkness seeped up from the bottom. The knowledge, so certain it was sensuous, that nothing was there to support the body if one plunged in generated around the empty pool an unremitting tension. Gone now was the soft summer water that received the swimmer's body and bore him lightly afloat, but the pool, like a monument to summer and to water, had endured, and it was dangerous, lethal.

Related Characters: Noboru Kuroda, Ryuji Tsukazaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

For their final meeting, Noboru's gang assembles at a swimming pool near the foreigners' cemetery in Yokohama. Both of these places have important symbolic meaning: the pool is a miniature, artificial version of the sea, while the cemetery suggests the death of foreign cultures. But this particular description of the swimming pool is noteworthy because it highlights how the contrast between summer and winter drives the novel's plot and allows its characters to view the same circumstances from radically different perspectives.

Specifically, this description focuses on the pool's emptiness—and the sense of danger that it evokes. Now, the novel points out, anyone who tries to swim in the pool will inevitably fall to their deaths. Something that was once comfortable and safe has become lethal and foreboding under new conditions. Of course, this isn't just a general comment on how things change—it's also a metaphor for Noboru's souring attitude toward Ryuji over the course of the novel, which has gone from warm admiration to cold resentment and disdain.

"We must have blood! Human blood! If we don't get it this empty world will go pale and shrivel up. We must drain that sailor's fresh lifeblood and transfuse it to the dying universe, the dying sky, the dying forests, and the drawn, dying land."

Related Characters: The Chief (speaker), Ryuji Tsukazaki, Noboru Kuroda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Just after Noboru's gang agrees to murder Ryuji and congratulates itself on its plans, the chief offers this heated speech. He is bloodthirsty, in the most literal sense of the word: he believes that Ryuji's murder will nourish "the dying universe" and bring it back to life. He views violence and sacrifice as a way to reverse the world's decay—presumably, its loss of traditional norms and values, which it increasingly replaces with modern ones.

More than any other passage in the novel, this highlights the gang's cultlike fanaticism—the six members truly believe that they, and nobody else, are destined to save the world. Of course, the chief's speech also shows the link between this fanaticism and the author, Mishima's, ultra-nationalistic ideas about Japan's identity and future. The chief and his gang represent the traditional Japanese elite, while Ryuji's transition from sailor to shopkeeper represents Japan's shift from a glorious, global naval power to just another capitalist economy. Thus, the chief's belief in saving the "empty world"—with an emphasis on geographical features like the "sky," "forests," and "land"—is a clear reference to the idea that Japan must rebuild its national power and greatness and can do so through militaristic force.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

> Gradually, as he talked to the boys, Ryuji had come to understand himself as Noboru imagined him.
>
> *I could have been a man sailing away forever.* He had been fed up with all of it, glutted, and yet now, slowly, he was awakening again to the immensity of what he had abandoned.
>
> The dark passions of the tides, the shriek of a tidal wave, the avalanching break of surf upon a shoal...an unknown glory calling for him endlessly from the dark offing, glory merged in death and in a woman, glory to fashion of his destiny something special, something rare. At twenty he had been passionately certain: in the depths of the world's darkness was a point of light which had been provided for him alone and would draw near someday to irradiate him and no other.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki (speaker), Noboru Kuroda, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179-180

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's closing pages—and his own final minutes of life—Ryuji looks out at the sea and contemplates his decision to give up sailing in favor of his new, settled life onshore as a father and husband. Blessed with a new perspective, he outright regrets his choice for the first time. He remembers the mystical feeling that drew him to sailing: the feeling that the sea is calling out to him and promising him some hidden, secret greatness. In the past, he dismissed his quest for glory and superiority as a naïve fantasy, but in this passage, he starts to sincerely miss it. Thus, the gravity of what he has lost by choosing love over adventure truly strikes him—as he puts it, he thinks that has found the woman he dreamed of, but not the glory or the death. (For better or worse, Noboru and the gang will soon prove him wrong when they murder him.)

Perhaps the most significant line in this whole passage is, "Ryuji had come to understand himself as Noboru imagined him." This shows that Noboru's idea of him as a heroic, hypermasculine sailor wasn't just a delusion—Ryuji understands it, even if he might not agree with it completely. And yet that idea is no longer sustainable; Ryuji has long since thrown it out. Thus, Ryuji finds himself in a tragic situation: he knows precisely what he must do in order to fulfill his destiny—return to sailing—and yet it is no longer possible for him to do so.

> Still immersed in his dream, he drank down the tepid tea. It tasted bitter. Glory, as anyone knows, is bitter stuff.

Related Characters: Ryuji Tsukazaki, Noboru Kuroda, The Chief, Fusako Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

The novel's closing line leaves its true climax untold. It's absolutely clear that Noboru, the chief, and their friends are going to murder and dismember Ryuji—after all, the chief has already put on his latex gloves, and the tea Ryuji drinks in this final line is bitter because it is drugged. But novel merely gestures toward that last critical scene rather than depicting it outright. Arguably, this stylistic decision allows the author, Mishima, to surprise the reader and emphasize the allegorical and symbolic meaning of Ryuji's death.

Indeed, this final line suggests that, against all odds, Ryuji does conclude the book by "falling from grace with the sea." The tea reminds Ryuji of glory not only because it seems to be unpleasant but worth the effort, but also because it will kill him. After all, he has always associated glory with his death; of course, he also associates it with love (which he has found through his relationship with Fusako) and the sea (which he is looking at in this final scene). Thus, the true twist in this novel's ending isn't just that Ryuji dies—rather, it's that he dies in a way that fulfills his lifelong dream of achieving glory.

Finally, this last scene certainly connects to Mishima's argument about Japanese nationalism and identity—as well as his decision to commit suicide during a dramatic coup d'état attempt at the end of his life. While the precise nature of these connections is open to interpretation, it's possible to read Ryuji's death as a metaphor for Japan (or specific Japanese people, like Mishima) making a grand sacrifice in order to save the nation.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Noboru's mother (Fusako) tells Noboru, "sleep well, dear," then closes his bedroom door, locking him inside. She wonders how he would escape if the house burned down. But it's Noboru's own fault that he's locked inside—he recently snuck out at night to meet someone he calls "the chief." Noboru and his mother live in Yokohama, atop Yado Hill, and occupying forces took over their house after World War II. Now, 13-year-old Noboru is humiliated to be locked inside.

This opening scene introduces several key motifs that recur throughout the book. Noboru's conflict with Fusako reflects his adamant rebellion against the adult world, while Fusako's hypothetical worry about the house burning down is an early example of the novel's preoccupation with death, destruction, and the nature of reality. Meanwhile, the house's occupation by U.S. forces formed part of the Allied occupation of Japan after WWII, which transformed the nation's political and economic system. Throughout the novel, characters struggle to choose between Western and traditional Japanese values as they cope with the occupation's legacy.

One morning, alone at home, bored, and angry, Noboru starts tearing apart his room. He pulls all the drawers out of his dresser, then finds a **peephole** in the back of it. It leads into his mother's room, which is lit by **the hot summer sun** bouncing off **the sea**. Looking through the peephole, Noboru sees the shiny American beds that his father bought before his death and a cloth embroidered with a "K" (for the family surname, Kuroda). He notices his mother's dressing table, with its opulent mirror and her perfumes. Her embroidery frame is propped up on her couch, with the outline of a bird's wings, and her window reflects the sky. The room seems like a stranger's, but it exudes femininity.

The inexplicable, almost mystical peephole helps Noboru escape the boredom of being locked in his room. It provides him with a new, special perspective on his mother—one that makes the familiar appear strange. In this sense, the peephole represents Noboru's search for truth—he finds new insight into reality by adopting new perspectives. It also shows his desire for exploration: the peephole gives him a temporary escape from the limits of his dull teenage life (and being locked in his room). Finally, everything Noboru sees in his mother's room reflects her femininity and her marked Western tastes, which are a metaphor for Western cultural influences on Japan after WWII and U.S. occupation.

Noboru wonders where **the peephole** came from. He imagines "blond, hairy" occupying soldiers looking through it, and he starts to feel sick. He gets up and goes into his mother's room. Now, it's the "drab and familiar" place where he goes to whine, and where his mother rebukes him for acting like a little boy. He finds the other side of the peephole, which is hidden in the design carved into her walls. Then, he goes back to his room, puts his clothes away, and decides to keep the peephole a secret.

Noboru's visceral feeling of disgust about the white American soldiers represents the way Japan—and particularly young Japanese people with traditional values, like Noboru—struggled to cope with and recover from the legacy of the U.S. occupation. By associating the occupation with the peephole, the novel clearly implies that the occupation was a profound violation of Japan's sovereignty and privacy. Noboru's mother's room looks and feels completely different when he actually goes inside, instead of viewing it through the peephole. This shows how the perspective with which one observes something shapes how that thing looks. In particular, when Noboru walks into his mother's room, he's reminded of her power over him as a parent—whereas, when he views her room through the peephole, he has a special power over her instead.

Over the following months, whenever Noboru and his mother argue, he pulls the drawer out of his dresser at night and watches her get ready for bed through **the peephole**. She usually sits naked for several minutes, watching and sometimes touching herself at her dressing table. Noboru notes the shape of her body and wonders about the "zone of black" between her legs.

It's significant that Noboru only spies on his mother after they argue: this shows that he looks through the peephole not because of curiosity, but because of his desire for revenge. Violating her privacy in her most intimate moments is really a way to take power over her. In fact, Noboru's voyeurism doesn't seem to be sexually motivated at all—instead, it's practically intellectual. His fascination with his mother's "zone of black" is really about his interest in the source and meaning of life.

Like the other teenagers in his gang, Noboru thinks he's a genius who knows the secret of life: to prepare for death. He believes that fathers and teachers—the people who propagate society—are evil sinners. He's even proud of his own father's death. When Noboru sees his mother's naked body in the moonlight, "visions of emptiness" torture him. He feels like ugliness is consuming the world. But he never cries. He's proud of his cold heart, which he compares to an old, rugged anchor.

Like many angsty teenagers, Noboru takes a nihilistic view of the world: he sees no good in it, only evil and emptiness. He focuses on death and destruction because, while they're not necessarily meaningful in and of themselves, they're also the only alternative to the meaninglessness of life and society. Meanwhile, he associates his mother's body and sexuality with "visions of emptiness" because they're the source of his own life, and also because he views women as little more than empty vessels through which men propagate life and society.

Late in the summer, a sailor named Tsukazaki gives Noboru a tour of his ship. As a thank-you, Noboru's mother takes the sailor out to dinner. Then, she brings him home, and Noboru watches them through **the peephole**. While Noboru's mother undresses slowly, the muscular, hairy sailor sheds his clothes in an instant. A ship blasts its horn, and Noboru compares the sound to **the sea** screaming, full of longing and grief. With the sound, Noboru sees the universe come together into a kind of miraculous whole: "Noboru and mother—mother and man—man and sea—sea and Noboru…" He feels that it's his duty to protect this cycle of life.

Noboru's disdain for fatherhood and procreation baldly contradicts his admiration for the sailor Tsukazaki and the cycle of life that he represents. The difference is that Noboru admires the sailor because he can imagine himself in the sailor place—unlike fathers and teachers, the sailor doesn't have power over Noboru. Instead, the sailor represents the kind of masculine power that Noboru wants to have. In particular, the sailor's connection to the sea represents Noboru's attraction to exploration and discovery. It's also a metaphor for Japan's former global power, which was based around its navy. Thus, although Noboru cannot quite explain why, the sexual unity of his mother, the sailor Tsukazaki, and the ship's horn appears to represent an alternative to the meaninglessness of Noboru's life and the society in which he lives.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Ryuji Tsukazaki wakes up alone and remembers that Noboru's mother has to go wake Noboru, so that he can go to swim with his friends. It's almost 8 a.m.— Ryuji has only slept four hours, but he feels energized and clear-headed in **the morning heat**. He stretches and turns on the fan.

The novel switches points of view, which allows it to show how the same reality that the reader has already encountered through Noboru's eyes looks radically different from another perspective. It also clearly associates the summer heat with Ryuji's energy, strength, and sexual potency.

Ryuji has dreamt of the quartermaster summoning him for his nightly 12–4 a.m. watch on **the freighter Rakuyo**. The other sailors always viewed him as "unsociable and eccentric" because he avoided them and hated their tall tales. And he never loved **the sea**—he just hated land. After the war, he shipped out as soon as the occupiers allowed Japanese merchant ships to sail freely. He got to visit beautiful, tropical lands like Taiwan and India, but he still felt lost and alienated. He was trapped on the ship, just like he had been on land.

Ryuji's dreams suggest that, with his all-consuming work routine, it's very unusual for him to be on land with a woman instead of at sea with the rest of the crew. Like Noboru, Ryuji feels an overwhelming sense of loss and alienation, which completely dominates his thoughts and life. He feels that his search for purpose in the world is futile, and yet he can't let go of his desire to find a sense of meaning. This is all a metaphor for Japan's condition as a declining power after World War II. If Ryuji came of age a few years earlier, of course, he would have shipped out to fight in the war instead. (Tellingly, Mishima also wanted to fight in the war but very narrowly missed the opportunity to do so.)

In his youth, Ryuji used to believe that he was destined for glory, and that "the world would have to topple" for him to achieve it. But sailing showed him "the dynamic stability of the wobbling world," and he started to forget his dreams. Yet sometimes, during his night watch, they would surge back to him like a shark leaping up out of **the sea**.

Ryuji can't explain why he feels destined for glory, even if this feeling is the primary motivation for his life decisions. His reference to "toppl[ing]" the "wobbling world" shows that he clearly understands how unlikely it will be for him to achieve the glory he dreams about. Again, this is all a metaphor for Japanese ambition and World War II. On the one hand, the "dynamic stability" of the postwar global order made it unimaginable that Japan would return to its former prominence. On the other, traditionalists like Mishima still felt a strong need to avenge the war and reassert power for Japan—even if this meant turning the world on its head.

Ryuji loved popular sailor songs like "I Can't Give Up the Sailor's Life," which is about a seafarer who knows that "**the sea**'s my home" but still cries when he leaves "the harbor town where my heart was glad." Ryuji would hum it on his afternoon watch, then listen to the record over and over again until dinnertime. Sometimes, he would cry, thinking about his own itinerant life. For more than a decade, he did little but sleep, keep watch, and save money. He avoided the other sailors; instead, he befriended the stars, sea, and clouds.

While lighthearted, Ryuji's favorite song captures his complex feelings about sailing as a lifestyle and profession. He views it as part of a profound personal destiny but doesn't actually enjoy the day-to-day responsibilities of his job and feels that he is sacrificing something significant—the chance to live happily on land—in order to take his chances at sea. Like Noboru, Ryuji outwardly lives a dull life that doesn't fully match up with his inward dreams and desires. He is caught between these two versions of the sailor's life: he keeps waiting for his grand destiny to present itself, but in the meantime, his life feels dull and pointless.

Back in the present, Ryuji is lying on the bed, smoking. He was by no means celibate as a sailor—he remembers his first sexual experience, which was with a sex worker in Hong Kong. He remembers how an older sailor took him to a floating brothel in the harbor. He chose an attractive young woman from the crowd, and while they had silent, lifeless sex under her quilt, he was busy watching the stars.

The fact that Ryuji watches the stars while having sex for the first time suggests that, like Noboru, he isn't interested in sex for the sake of physical or psychological gratification. Instead, he is fixated on greater things—at most, he views sex as part of this broader quest to find a place for himself in the universe.

Fusako (Noboru's mother) comes into her bedroom with breakfast for Ryuji. She apologizes for making him wait and comments on the day's brutal **heat**. When Fusako pours coffee, Ryuji feels that he no longer recognizes her arms. He kisses her and asks about her plans—she has to be at work by 11. He thinks about how far he can take their relationship. By her expression, he can't tell if she wants to forget their night together, or to prove that it wasn't a mistake.

The morning casts a fresh light on Fusako and Ryuji's relationship, forcing them to view one another from a new perspective. Specifically, they evaluate whether lust and loneliness—their motivations for getting together the night before—can translate into genuine affection and emotional connection. In other words, they're struggling to figure out whether they're falling in love.

Ryuji and Fusako look out the window at the harbor, which is tucked behind blocks and blocks of warehouses. They caress each other, and Ryuji feels like he has crossed the whole world to arrive precisely at this "point of delicate sensation." Fusako tells Ryuji that Noboru appears to have found out about their romance.

Ryuji and Fusako have just met, but their budding relationship gives Ryuji the feeling of satisfaction that he has always sought through his adventurous life at sea. He feels like he's arrived at his destiny—and yet this version of his destiny (a relationship with Fusako) is clearly incompatible with the other destiny he has always sought (glory at sea). Thus, Ryuji encounters a fork in the road: he's forced to choose between two different versions of his future.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Fusako Kuroda runs Rex, her late husband's luxury shop, which sells expensive European menswear to rich foreigners and Tokyo celebrities. Through her connections at the port, Fusako always gets her first pick of the fine English sweaters and Italian leathers that arrive in Japan. The devoted store manager, Mr. Shibuya, has made business contacts all across Europe through his travels.

Fusako's luxury shop represents Western influences on postwar Japanese culture, which were largely a legacy of the American occupation (and the capitalist economy it set up). In particular, it shows how the Japanese elite pivoted from exalting traditional Japanese goods and culture to privileging the West.

When Fusako reaches the store, she goes to her office, opens her mail, and lights a cigarette. She's relieved to be at work, rather than at home. Today, the actress Yoriko Kasuga will be visiting to buy accessories, and a secretary will come to buy Italian golf shirts for her boss. But so far, the store is still empty. Fusako wonders if Mr. Shibuya has noticed her red eyes, and for the first time, she realizes how long her husband has been dead: five years. But Fusako also still feels Ryuji's presence all over her body.

Fusako is a successful, financially independent woman, and her store is clearly her dominion—she feels more comfortable there than at home, where she clashes with Noboru. Between her ability to own a business and the imported goods that her business sells, the novel clearly links her independence to her Westernized values and lifestyle. But Mishima isn't necessarily presenting Fusako's independence as a good thing—instead, he connects it to her husband's death and attributes it to necessity.

Fusako first met Ryuji two days ago, when she took ship-obsessed Noboru to visit the enormous **freighter Rakuyo**. At the port, Noboru chattered on about ships, while Fusako languished in the sweltering **heat**. But when she first saw the mighty *Rakuyo*, she felt unexpectedly aroused. As the ship unloaded its cargo, Noboru and Fusako wandered its corridors, looking for the Captain. Instead, they met Ryuji. Fusako showed him a letter from her shipping executive friend, which was supposed to authorize the visit. Ryuji explained that the Captain was not there, but he offered to give Noboru and Fusako a tour instead. Fusako will never forget how intently Ryuji looked at her—it was as though he were gazing at a distant object across **the sea**.

Fusako clearly wasn't looking forward to reaching her store so that she could get away from Ryuji—instead, she spends her time at the office reminiscing about meeting him, which suggests that she views their connection as far more than a one-night stand. Of course, the novel suggests that Ryuji feels the same way: when it describes him looking at Fusako as though he were gazing out at something across the sea, it directly links his dreams about his glorious destiny to his romance with Fusako. But again, in this scenario, Ryuji takes the active role—traveling across the metaphorical sea to reach Fusako—while Fusako passively waits for him. Finally, Noboru's obsession with ships shows that he shares Ryuji's vision of glory and masculinity: he also views sailing as the way for men to prove their might and achieve greatness. (Of course, this vision is also rooted in Japan's geography—which makes the sea its only lifeline to the rest of the world—and its navy's legacy during WWII.)

Ryuji took Noboru and Fusako up to **the ship**'s bridge (or command center), and Ryuji told Noboru how the port assigns berths (places for ships to dock). Meanwhile, Fusako contemplated Ryuji's ruggedness and indifferent attitude. Ryuji commented that while Noboru clearly knows a lot about sailing, he should find other aspirations—sailing is "a miserable business if ever there was one." Noboru wanted to see and touch everything, starting with the ship's navigation instruments, nautical charts, and daily log. When Fusako dropped her parasol, Ryuji picked it up and offered it to her slowly, like a diver gracefully rising to **the ocean**'s surface.

Noboru and Fusako experience their visit to the Rakuyo *from completely opposite perspectives that reflect their completely opposite interests. Fusako is mainly interested in Ryuji and Noboru in the ship, which Noboru uses to gleefully explore his fantasy of becoming a sailor. Of course, his childish enthusiasm contradicts his proud cold-heartedness, and this suggests that his nihilism is less a sincere philosophy than a bold attempt at rebellion. Meanwhile, Ryuji also makes his reservations about sailing clear, warning Noboru about the vast difference between the job's reality and his fantasies about it.*

Mr. Shibuya draws Fusako out of her memories by calling her down to meet Yoriko Kasuga, the film actress. Fusako descends and chats with Yoriko about **the heat**. Yoriko complains about filming 30 takes for a mediocre movie on the docks that morning. She is desperate to win an acting award, the narrator explains—in fact, she's visiting Rex to buy gifts for the awards jury. She's a reliable customer, but Fusako can't stand her gullibility and vulgarity. Fusako offers to show Yoriko the ties, shirts, and perfume that she has chosen as gifts. But Yoriko replies that she is in a rush and trusts Fusako to choose the gifts—as long as she wraps them beautifully.

The novel lurches back into the present. Fusako's client, Yoriko Kasuga, represents the superficiality and mediocrity of the modern consumer culture that Mishima thinks the West imposed on Japan. She also serves as a character foil for Fusako: her selfishness and indifference highlights Fusako's responsibility, elegance, and thoughtfulness. Of course, Fusako also represents Japan's drift toward Western influences, chiefly because of her line of work. But the novel suggests that her personality is still compatible with traditional, idealized notions about Japanese womanhood.

After Yoriko leaves and the secretary visits to buy her shirts, Fusako knows she has no more customers for the day. She brings her lunch to her office and lays down in her chair. Closing her eyes, she returns to her memories of meeting Ryuji on **the Rakuyo**. She remembers following him down to the boat's lower decks, where they watched a powerful crane unload giant cargo containers up through a hatch, relentlessly emptying out the ship in **the sweltering heat**. She invited Ryuji to dinner. Then, she remembers their dinner and their long walk in the park afterwards. She talked more to Ryuji than to any other man since her husband's death.

In addition to completing the story of her meeting with Ryuji for the reader, Fusako's memories also help show why he so fascinates her. Evidently, in addition to Fusako and Ryuji's mutual attraction, their shared feeling of extreme loneliness has brought them together. Meanwhile, the cargo-unloading crane shows the impressive power necessary to run the Rakuyo and coordinate international trade in modern Japan. But to Fusako, it's also clearly a metaphor for Ryuji's own strength and the great weight she feels lifted off her conscience through meeting him.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

After leaving Fusako's house, Ryuji goes to the park that they visited on the previous night. Reminiscing about their evening, he scolds himself for sounding like a fool when he tried to explain his theories about death, glory, and passion. He feels worthless, but he also knows that he's destined "to tower above other men." When Fusako asked why he isn't married, he couldn't tell her the truth: he thinks that marriage will tie him down and prevent him from answering the call of glory. But he also believes that the universe will bring him "the perfect woman" from his dreams, then use her to lure him toward death. Now, he knows that Fusako is this woman. But last night, he couldn't even explain his dream to her.

Ryuji's failure to explain his theories shows how much can be lost in translation when people try to depict their interior lives for others. After all, he struggles to even understand his feelings for himself: he cannot precisely explain why he thinks he's destined for glory, why this glory is so closely tied to death, or why Fusako is "the perfect woman" for him. The course of his relationship with Fusako will show whether his ideas about his destiny are true or just a dangerous fantasy. Crucially, much like Noboru, he views his destiny as not just doing great things, but becoming superior to others and having power over them. In other words, his sense of self depends on a deep need to dominate others. And, given the novel's constant references to Japan's national destiny, Noboru and Ryuji's desire for domination is also a metaphor for Japan's former imperial ambitions.

Instead of describing his dream, Ryuji told Fusako about his life—like how rare and thrilling it is to see green vegetables at **sea**. He recounted how his hardworking single father raised him, how he lost his home during the war, and how his father and sister died shortly after it ended. As a result, life on land reminds him of "poverty and sickness and death." This is why he became a sailor.

Readers can speculate about how Fusako would have responded if Ryuji told her about his dream of falling in love with her and then dying a glorious death—for better or worse, his insecurities led him to make small talk with her instead. Still, this small talk speaks volumes about his personality and character. For instance, his comment about vegetables captures the isolation he felt as a sailor and the way that life on land is just as exotic to him as life at sea is to ordinary people (like Noboru). Most importantly, Ryuji's commentary about his past shows how loss has shaped his identity and—much like Noboru—he viewed the sea as a way to rebel against and escape from his misery.

Ryuji wanted to tell Fusako that **the sea** is like a woman to him, and that it taught him how to love. But instead, he just quoted the lyrics from "I Can't Give Up the Sailor's Life." Fusako called the song wonderful, but Ryuji could tell that she was just being polite—she didn't understand the song's deep meaning or his own deep longing for love.

This scene is full of irony. Ryuji feels that his inability to communicate his deep feelings cuts him off from Fusako, but little does he know that she's just as lonely and desperate for love as he is. Meanwhile, the song actually does communicate his conflicted feelings about giving up an ordinary life to become a sailor. Arguably, Ryuji's real issue isn't his failure to communicate his feelings about sailing, but rather his recognition that his feelings aren't unique—they're part of a pattern so common that they've even become a popular song.

Still, Fusako's elegance and gentle beauty enchanted Ryuji. As he watched her body move under her black kimono, he thought of his own death. He admired her well-formed nose and lips, her expressionless eyes, and her graceful shoulders. And he thought about how it would feel to make love to her. When they kissed, "they poured each other full of light," as though their bodies were merging into one. Fusako invited Ryuji to spend the night at her house. When they stood up in the empty park, Ryuji checked his watch: 10 p.m.

When Ryuji met Fusako, he fixated on her femininity and physicality, which suggests that these were the traits that attracted him. Of course, the previous chapter showed that Fusako's attitude toward Ryuji was similar: she focused on his stereotypically masculine traits, like his physical strength and piercing stare. Thus, when they kissed and felt like they were merging into a complete whole, this represented the unity of absolute masculinity and femininity.

Back in the present, Ryuji can't stand the afternoon **heat**. He has forgotten to bring his hat, and he has already sweated through the dress shirt that he chose for his date with Fusako in two hours. From the edge of the park, he gazes out at the harbor. He remembers how, while watering the plants as a child, he used to splash his face with the hose. He leaves the park and contemplates the houses surrounding it. Settled life seems "abstract and unreal" to him. In fact, so does everything physical, including his own desire for sex. He will see Fusako again tonight, but tomorrow, he has to sail away. He wonders if he will "evaporate," like a memory.

The suffocating Japanese summer makes another appearance—the opposition between the heating effects of the sun and the cooling effects of water dominate this passage of the novel. This is connected to the complementary opposition between male and female, which Ryuji and Fusako's romance appears to unite into one. Ryuji also associates these binaries with the opposition between reality and unreality (or the physical and the abstract). Of course, he observes that distance is the only true difference between what seems real and what doesn't: once he is far away from Yokohama, Fusako will feel as "abstract and unreal" to him as he will to her.

Further down the hill, several boys are playing—including Noboru, who freezes and stares at Ryuji. Ryuji greets him, but Noboru just asks why Ryuji's shirt is wet. Ryuji says that he showered at the park fountain.

Ryuji's chance encounter with Noboru suddenly confirms what he had started to doubt: that his experiences over the last few days have been real. Ryuji's wet shirt is curious: where it's really the result of the heat (sweat), he instead blames it on the measures he's taken to cool down from the heat (swimming in the fountain). Of course, neither of these would be surprising for a sailor—except that it's Ryuji's day off.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Noboru worries that Ryuji will tell his mother about seeing him with his gang of friends (including the chief). In the morning, they didn't actually go swimming—instead, they just visited the pier, then talked about "the uselessness of Mankind [and] the insignificance of Life." Besides the chief, the five other boys call one another by numbers. (Noboru is number three.) Number two found a perfect meeting place behind an abandoned maintenance shed, and everyone sat down.

Noboru's fear of his mother shows that, in reality, he isn't nearly as bold or fearless as his supposed philosophical beliefs would suggest. It seems that, rather than actually living by nihilism, he merely aspires to it in order to fit in with his friends. These friends voluntarily erase their particular identities by calling one another by numbers rather than names—this highlights their sense of alienation and even suggests that they are interchangeable. Of course, this fits in with their nihilistic belief that, as members of humankind, they have no real value.

Noboru described watching his mother have sex with the heroic, brawny Ryuji. The chief argued that heroes do not exist, but Noboru insisted that Ryuji is destined for greatness. The chief replied that the six of them are the only people in the world who can truly do impossible things. Then, number two complained that his parents refused to buy him an air rifle because it would be too dangerous. In response, the chief gave a monologue about how life is inherently dangerous because it requires embracing chaos and destroying the order of the world in order to recreate it. Society and school are meaningless, the chief concluded. But Noboru said that **the sea** must have some meaning. The chief called the sea "permissible," but said that ships are meaningless. Noboru and the chief both accused each other of not understanding.

Noboru's admiration for Ryuji suggests that, despite his professed nihilism, he really does *believe in something: heroism, masculinity, and glory. Of course, his aspiration to Ryuji's heroism is really about an admiration for Ryuji's* power*. Thus, Noboru's idea of heroism is almost identical to Ryuji's idea that he's destined for glory, and the chief's belief in the gang's special destiny to save the world. In particular, the chief objects to Noboru's ideas about Ryuji because he views Ryuji as a threat to the group's special status. Of course, this raises the question of what happens when multiple people who consider themselves destined to save the world try to do so in incompatible ways. The chief's talk about chaos, order, and the "permissible" sea is a confusing jumble. But his argument is essentially that since the boys find the world and society meaningless, they are responsible for creating meaning in it through their own actions. Mishima's interest in a small group's special power to control the fate of the world also reflects his commitment to Japan's former empire, which viewed setting a new global order as its destiny.*

When the boys started eating, the elderly warehouse watchman came over to their meeting place but said that they could stay. After he left, number four mocked him for being common and simpleminded. Proud of their "matchless inhumanity," the boys munched on the extravagant lunches their mothers packed them. As Noboru ate under **the sweltering sun**, he imagined visiting the tropics. The chief mocked Noboru for daydreaming, but Noboru didn't respond. The chief has "trained" his gang by showing them pictures of "intercourse in every conceivable position" and teaching them about the moral and intellectual worthlessness of sex. Next, the chief invited the rest of the gang to help him find a cat and then follow him to his house.

The gang's interactions with the warehouse watchman and packed lunches show the contradiction between their actual lives and the moral principles they claim to believe in. First, they play the part of innocent young boys to appease the watchman, while inwardly praising themselves for "matchless inhumanity." Second, while thinking of themselves as all-powerful and totally autonomous, they are actually dependent on their affluent families' support to fulfill their day-to-day needs. They would certainly believe that their ability to lie and take advantage of their families' resources speaks to their ingeniousness, but in reality, it suggests that their youth and privilege have given them an unrealistic view of the world. Finally, the gang's detached, scientific attitude toward sex explains how Noboru thinks of his mother when he sees her through the peephole. Rather than viewing sex as a source of pleasure or glorious procreation, they view it as meaningless—probably because they value neither pleasure nor procreation.

As usual, the chief's large house was quiet and empty, and the boys went to his garden shed. They caught a tiny stray kitten, then undressed and took turns cooling off from **the heat** with water from the sink. The chief instructed Noboru to kill the kitten. Noboru felt his "hard, cold heart" start beating faster as he grabbed the kitten around the neck. He thought about the chief's belief in giving meaning to the world through murder. Noboru threw the kitten at a log as hard as he could, then picked it up and did it again. The kitten fell over dead.

Like Ryuji before his date, the boys try to cool off from the heat before their ritual killing. This is an example of how Mishima subtly links love with death throughout the novel—not just in Ryuji's internal monologues, but also in the plot itself. Unlike the gang's discussion, this ritual killing suggests that the boys are actually taking action in line with its beliefs. Killing the kitten is a way to symbolically reject life and society—which the boys consider to be meaningless. However, murder does not seem to mean anything besides *a rejection of life and society. Thus, it's unclear why Noboru and the chief believe that senseless violence will help the world or restore it to greatness. The boys could have a deeper, more complex philosophy about this matter—or all their talk about the meaning of society could be just a cover for their desire for power and rebellion.*

The chief took a pair of scissors and started skinning the kitten's corpse. For the boys, the cat's organs represented the naked inner secret of life. Noboru remembered seeing his mother naked with Ryuji, but he felt that the kitten was even more naked—it was "in direct and tingling contact with the kernel of the world." The chief cut out the liver, sliced apart the colon, and then tore out the heart and crushed it between his fingers. Noboru imagined the kitten "finding wholeness and perfection" through death, and he proudly told himself, "*I can do anything, no matter how awful*." The chief praised Noboru for finally becoming a "real man."

For some readers, the chief dismembering the kitten might be even more disturbing than Noboru murdering it. Of course, Mishima uses this scene to call attention to how most people's actions and worldviews are constrained by their respect for the sanctity of life. But the boys don't share this belief—instead, they worship death and destruction. In particular, the chief presents murder as a way to understand the true nature of reality: he says that the kitten's organs represent the truth of its being, whereas its skin is just a misleading outer shell. This shows that he views people and animals as nothing more than biological machines, or collections of organs. In contrast, he views most of the features that people conventionally associate with identity (like the way people look, talk, and think) as mere distractions from the underlying reality. This is also why Noboru thinks the kitten is even more naked than his mother and Ryuji. Noboru's remark about the kitten "finding wholeness and perfection" through death resembles Ryuji's faith that he will achieve greatness through a glorious death. Finally, Noboru feels that killing the kitten makes him masculine and mature. Again, Mishima presents power—the ability to dominate others—as a key heroic virtue.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Now, when Noboru runs into Ryuji by the park, he worries that bloodstains or the smell of death will incriminate him. He also fears that Ryuji will tell his mother that he wasn't out swimming. The other boys disperse, leaving Noboru and Ryuji alone. Noboru thinks that the chief definitely won't believe that Ryuji is a hero now: Ryuji's wet shirt, fake smile, and absurd story about showering in the fountain make him look like an idiot. Clearly, he wants Noboru to like him.

So far, the novel has narrated almost everything through the three main characters' memories. In contrast, this chapter is primarily set in the present tense, and it is the first time the novel presents multiple characters' perspectives side-by-side. (However, it's still primarily told from Noboru's perspective.) Noboru continues to worry that his mother will find out about his actions, which shows that even if he felt like killing the kitten made him more of a man, he's still very much a child. Meanwhile, Ryuji's attempts to seem likable ironically turn Noboru off to him. Instead, Noboru looks for the same traits in Ryuji as his mother does: authenticity, heroism, and above all, masculinity.

Noboru and Ryuji walk toward the house together. "There's something funny about both of us today," comments Ryuji, who agrees not to tell Fusako that Noboru was in the park. Noboru runs over to a pile of sand and covers his legs and feet in it, so that it looks like he was at the beach. Then, he invites Ryuji over to his house.

During his monologue in the park, Ryuji lamented that he fails to say what he really means. Accordingly, the reader can only guess what he's really trying to say with his comment to Noboru. Most likely, he's pointing out that both of them are lying (him about the fountain and Noboru about the sand). Thus, the novel again highlights how appearances deceive.

At home, the housekeeper orders Noboru to wash the sand off his feet, and then Ryuji and Noboru lay down in the air-conditioned living room to cool off from **the heat**. After Ryuji and the housekeeper comment on Noboru's day of swimming, the frustrated housekeeper leaves the room. Noboru tells Ryuji that he knows all about ships, but when Ryuji jokes that Noboru probably knows even more than "an old pro like me," Noboru angrily responds that he doesn't appreciate flattery.

When Ryuji and Noboru escape the heat through the air conditioning, the novel once again uses the complementary forces of hot and cold to comment on people's need for balance and dependence on their physical environment. Here, it associates cold with Noboru and Fusako's house, which foreshadows the link between cold and domestic life in the second half of the novel (which is titled "Winter"). And Ryuji's flattery again shows how he and Noboru misunderstand each other's expectations. Thus, Noboru faces a common adolescent problem: he wants to be treated like the adult he feels like inside, not the child he appears to be on the outside. In other words, he wants Ryuji to recognize him as a dignified equal rather than talking down to him like a subordinate.

Noboru is also full of questions. He excitedly asks Ryuji about his night watch, how much a boat lists (or tilts) in a storm, and where **the Rakuyo** sails. He asks about different countries' main exports and what the trees are like in Haiti. These questions remind Ryuji of images like a beautiful grove of palm trees and the sunset over the Persian Gulf. He remembers how much power **the sea** has to shape his moods.

Noboru's eager questions suggest that he still very much is a child, and they remind Ryuji how interesting and adventurous his life as a sailor once was. Even though Ryuji associates sailing with the quest for power and glory, he also feels powerless in the face of the sea. Of course, the sea has always represented this very quest to Ryuji. Thus, this passage points to the deeper tension between autonomy and fate in the novel.

Noboru closes his eyes and daydreams about the places that Ryuji has described. Meanwhile, Ryuji looks around at the expensive living room decorations and realizes that they are only meaningful to him because of his relationship with Fusako—which still feels unreal. He wonders what he is doing spending a summer afternoon in a mysterious woman's house, after spending practically his whole life **at sea**. In Noboru's mind, images of Fusako with Ryuji, the dead kitten, heroism, and happiness all swirl together until he falls asleep. Ryuji leaves for his date. On his way out, he asks the housekeeper to get Noboru a blanket—and the housekeeper says she expects to see Ryuji again at night.

Noboru and Ryuji each contemplate places that are totally foreign to them but utterly familiar to the other. In this scene, they represent the complementary forces of change and stability, or motion and stillness, which people must balance in order to live well. Ryuji's thoughts about settling down after a life at sea can be viewed as a metaphor for Japan's struggle to transition from a regional empire with global aspirations to an insular democracy. And his thoughts about Fusako reflect how people perceive the world through the prism of their experiences. Finally, as Noboru falls asleep, he focuses on the same association between death, love, and heroism that dominates Ryuji's life, thoughts, and destiny.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

In ports, women have always asked sailors, “You’ll be leaving in the morning, won’t you?” But Fusako won’t say those words, even if they will protect “a simple man’s pride.” Indeed, from their conversation in the park, Fusako could tell that Ryuji was simple—but she appreciates it. She wants a safe, reliable man, not a passionate dreamer.

The novel suggests that sailors and their wives fall into an inescapable, universal romantic pattern: the independent man heads out to sea, and the dependent woman passively waits for him. But Fusako doesn’t want to embody this archetype, as she recognizes how this kind of love can limit her freedom. Ironically, because Ryuji failed to communicate his true, profound feelings about his life and destiny, Fusako ends up viewing him in a way that’s totally opposed to his view of himself.

During their second date, on their way to dinner, Fusako and Ryuji stop in a café for drinks. In a moment of “peaceful physical intimacy,” Fusako eats the cherry on top of her frappé, and then Ryuji decides to pop the cherry pit into his mouth. After dinner, they walk through the neighborhood, holding hands. Fusako can’t believe that Ryuji is leaving tomorrow. “I’ve sunk pretty low thanks to you,” she tells him, but she won’t say why. She doesn’t want to be like every other woman who loves a sailor.

Fusako and Ryuji’s rather tame moment of intimacy signals that their physical connection isn’t limited to lust and sex. Fusako realizes that falling into the stereotype of a sailor’s wife would mean sacrificing her freedom in two ways: first, she would become emotionally dependent on Ryuji. Second, she would lose the freedom to set her own course in life and instead live out a well-worn, predictable script. However, her comment to Ryuji, “I’ve sunk pretty low thanks to you,” signals that she feels herself falling into this pattern despite her best efforts to avoid it.

Ryuji lets it go: while he knows that he will miss Fusako, he also knows that he must leave her behind in order to pursue his “Grand Cause.” Still, he knows that he won’t find his “Grand Cause” **at sea**. What awaits him is far more mundane: radio transmissions, the daily log, the mess hall, and the roaring engine.

While Fusako rejects the timeless pattern of sailors leaving their lovers behind, Ryuji embraces it: he believes that he has to love and then leave Fusako in order to fulfill his destiny (achieving glory by dying in service of a “Grand Cause”). Since Fusako fulfills this pattern against her wishes, the novel seems to suggest that it is inevitable or fated. In other words, Mishima suggests that, just like Ryuji and Fusako are destined to come together because of their complementary energies and personalities, Ryuji is destined to leave Fusako behind as part of an inherent universal pattern.

Ryuji and Fusako come upon a nursery and decide to go inside, even though it’s closed for the night. They wade through the greenery until they find an area with tropical plants, where they kiss. This kiss reminds Fusako of Ryuji’s imminent departure, and it reminds Ryuji of death. Even though he will leave tomorrow, he would still “die happily for her sake.” The sound of a departing ship’s horn distracts Ryuji, who withdraws from the kiss to light a cigarette. But Fusako grabs his lighter. She tries and fails to set a leaf on fire, but by the lighter’s flame, Ryuji sees her crying. He starts crying, too.

Fusako and Ryuji’s reactions to their kiss—she thinks of his travels, while he thinks of death—extends the ongoing association between love, death, and glory in the novel. Again, this points to Ryuji’s impassioned belief that he is fated to encounter all three together—a belief that reflects Mishima’s own feelings throughout his life. It's telling that Mishima stages this scene among tropical plants: this setting furthers the association between heat, passion, destiny, and the tropical climates that Ryuji visits while sailing. Ryuji’s lighter also explicitly links heat to love and loss.

Meanwhile, Noboru is annoyed that his mother hasn't come home yet. When she calls and tells the housekeeper that she will be spending the night with a friend, Noboru is furious and afraid—he won't be able to watch her and Ryuji through **the peephole**. Noboru tries to do some of his summer homework, but he can't focus because he's too angry. He can't sleep, either. When he hears his mother's door open, he decides to look through the peephole, just in case his mother was lying to him. Just then, the housekeeper knocks on his door. Noboru doesn't want her to find out about the peephole, so he pushes against the door until she gives up and locks him inside.

Noboru isn't angry because he misses his mother or because she has chosen Ryuji over him. Instead, he hates that they are spending the night elsewhere because it takes away his ability to watch them through the peephole—which allows him to gain power over them by invading their privacy. In other words, Noboru is really resentful about his own powerlessness. When he tries to fight back against the housekeeper and ends up locked inside instead, this again shows how his attempts to assert his power against the world end up backfiring. He ends up feeling even more powerless and resentful.

Furious that he can't sneak out to meet the chief, Noboru starts writing an angry diary entry listing Ryuji's crimes: smiling like a coward, wearing a wet shirt, and spending the night with his mother. (He removes the third, which he decides is too subjective.) Noboru angrily brushes his teeth and then decides to look through **the peephole**, just because he can. On the other side, his mother's room is pitch black because the housekeeper has closed the curtains. It looks like "the inside of a large coffin […] alive with jostling particles […] the blackest thing in all the world."

While it's clear that Noboru's complaints about Ryuji stem from his own personal resentment—and not from Ryuji breaking any absolute moral principles—he still tries to give these complaints an air of objectivity. He sees Ryuji's smile and wet shirt as crimes because they represent Ryuji deviating from the ideal of masculine heroism that Noboru has projected onto him. In this chapter's closing lines, Noboru looks through the peephole just to prove that he hasn't lost the power to do so. But he sees darkness, which the narration associates with both life ("alive with jostling particles") and death ("the inside of a large coffin"). Specifically, Noboru knows that the particles in his mother's room are alive, but cannot see them, which is why the room reminds him of death. While this may or may not represent Noboru's death, it certainly does represent his powerlessness and loss of insight—meaning his sudden inability to understand the order of the universe, which always seemed clear to him in the past.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Fusako and Ryuji spend the night at drab hotel near the docks. In the morning, Fusako goes home and Ryuji goes to work on **the Rakuyo**, which is scheduled to leave for Brazil at 6 p.m. In the afternoon, Fusako and Noboru go to the pier to say goodbye. While Fusako waits in the car, Noboru races madly around the pier, gawking at ships and exploring the sheds full of cargo. When he sees Ryuji standing on the ship, he runs back to get his mother. They wave to Ryuji, who waves back and returns to work.

When Fusako and Noboru return to the pier, they relive their previous visit: Fusako waits in the car while Noboru runs around, admiring the ships that represent his dreams of greatness. Of course, Ryuji's presence in their lives gives this all a new significance: Noboru is imitating Ryuji by playing sailor, while Fusako is waiting for him. This parallels the broader pattern surrounding gender in this novel: men embrace motion, change, and adventure, while women passively wait for love.

Noboru is proud to know a hardworking sailor, but Fusako feels a sense of overwhelming grief engulfing her. To hide from **the scorching sun**, they both squat by a **sea** wall and watch the waves, ships, and seabirds. Noboru notices numbers on the side of **the Rakuyo** and asks Fusako if she thinks the water line ever reaches the highest one—but she doesn't answer.

The novel again associates heat with departure, adventure, and masculinity. And Noboru and Fusako's contrasting responses once again show that Ryuji means completely different things to each of them. To Noboru, Ryuji is a heroic role model, and his departure represents him fulfilling his destiny of pursuing glory. (Despite the events of the last chapter, Noboru doesn't seem to resent Ryuji anymore.) In contrast, Fusako feels the characteristic grief of the woman left behind at port—even though she told herself that she wouldn't.

At 5 p.m., with **the Rakuyo** all loaded for departure, Ryuji descends the gangplank to meet Fusako and Noboru on the docks. Fusako comments that she wore a kimono because Ryuji won't see another one for a long time, but she decides not to mention her loneliness. They say little more. Noboru thinks that Ryuji and his mother both represent perfect archetypes: the sailor leaving to travel the world and the woman grieving his departure. Ryuji knows that he can't kiss Fusako with Noboru around; he secretly yearns to leave immediately and cut short the pain of departure. And Fusako wishes Ryuji's face were easier to forget. Noboru asks Ryuji to write them, and Ryuji agrees, then says goodbye and returns to the ship.

Fusako's decision to wear a kimono is significant: she all but tells Ryuji that she wants this to make her a representative of Japanese womanhood in his eyes. This choice represents her gradual transformation from an independent, Westernized woman into a woman who fulfills traditional Japanese gender roles (like waiting onshore for her beloved sailor to return). Indeed, Noboru's sense that Ryuji and Fusako are transforming into archetypes supports this interpretation. It also shows that he shares Ryuji's idea that heroic men are destined to go pursue a "Grand Cause" and leave the women they love behind. Thus, while Noboru, Ryuji, and Fusako all want to defy stereotypes and live distinctive, independent lives, they have ended up reproducing those stereotypes instead. This turn of events suggests that people cannot escape their fate—which is often to live out a preestablished, universal pattern.

Noboru notices the seagulls, shadows, and warehouse signs on the empty, **sun-seared** docks. At 5:45 p.m., **the Rakuyo**'s horn blasts. Noboru feels like this is "where all dreams began and ended." He calls out to Ryuji, who is standing next to the Japanese flag. Ryuji waves back, then returns to work. To Fusako, the ship looks like a heavenly blade, dividing up the shore. Its smokestacks sputter out black smoke, its sailors yell, and a tugboat starts rotating it and dragging it out to **sea**. From the side, it looks completely different. The mighty ship's horn blasts "one last enormous farewell" that shakes the entire city. It sails out to sea, and Ryuji is gone.

In this passage, the novel draws several explicit connections between Ryuji's departure and Japan's national destiny. The most obvious are the flag and the sun (Japan's national symbol). But Noboru's comment about dreams also references both Ryuji's dreams of glory and the Japanese Empire's dreams of global domination. Similarly, Fusako's vision of the ship as a divine blade cleaving up the shore also references the Japanese Empire's aspiration to conquer and divide up the world. After all, just two decades earlier, this same image of a Japanese ship sailing off into the sunset would have represented its navy heading off to fight for glory in World War II. Fusako and Noboru's perspective on the ship changes as it turns, to the point that it looks like an entirely different object. If the ship's departure represents Japan's advance into the future, then these changing perspectives represent the wide variety of different possibilities inherent in the nation and its people. Through all of these associations, the novel presents Ryuji's departure as both the beginning of a heroic quest for glory and a new starting point for the nation itself.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

On the morning of December 30th, Fusako waits for Ryuji in the empty, artificial-feeling Center Pier neighborhood. Through the car window, she watches Ryuji leave the customs shed and walk out into the rain. The chauffeur gets him, and he joins Fusako in the back seat. "I knew you'd come," he tells her. They kiss, and Ryuji grabs at Fusako's body under her mink coat. They make small talk about their letters and Noboru, who is at home with a cold. They weren't supposed to get along so easily after half a year apart, but Ryuji feels completely at home with Fusako. Life on land seems realer than ever.

The book jumps from Ryuji's departure in the summer to his return in the winter. Again, Yokohama's severe climate shapes the novel's descriptions and mood: whereas heat and abundance dominated the first half, a chilly emptiness pervades it now. It's also noteworthy that the novel narrates nothing during Ryuji's months-long absence. Ultimately, the novel still depicts Ryuji's presence as the factor that gives events their significance. While Noboru and Fusako were probably just following their ordinary school and work routines during those months, clearly, Fusako and Ryuji have kept in touch and maintained their romantic connection. In fact, they seem far more comfortable with each other now than they did in the summer, which suggests that their love has grown.

The car drives up Yado Hill to the Kuroda house, and the chauffeur shields Fusako with an umbrella on her short walk to the front door. Ryuji follows, but when he enters the house, he feels that something is slightly different. The housekeeper brings them tea, and Fusako shows Ryuji the embroidery pieces and tennis trophy that she has added to the living room. She has occupied herself with these hobbies since Ryuji's departure; although she never wanted to, she has been eagerly awaiting his return. Meanwhile, Ryuji has become more social on **the Rakuyo** ever since meeting Fusako. He even told the other sailors about their romance.

Ryuji and Fusako return home as a couple, and the security of their newly-strengthened relationship leads Ryuji to view the house in a new light. They both recognize that although they once hoped to build a relationship on their own terms, they have fallen into common romantic clichés instead. Fusako is becoming the stereotypical sailor's lover, waiting for him at home and occupying herself with menial hobbies, while Ryuji has started proudly telling his fellow sailors about his beloved. This indicates that the workings of love and fate are much stronger than their will as individuals.

Fusako asks Ryuji if he wants to see Noboru, and Ryuji clearly sees that "he was the man they had been waiting for, the man they loved." Ryuji goes upstairs with his present for Noboru: a taxidermized baby crocodile. But Noboru refuses to smile, and Fusako asks if he has a fever again. Ryuji gives Noboru the crocodile and explains how the native tribesmen in Brazil dress up in crocodile and leopard skins for carnival. Noboru thanks him, accidentally glances at his chest of drawers, and then starts to worry that his mother and Ryuji will notice **the peephole**.

Ryuji's thought indicates that he, Fusako, and Noboru have become a family, whether they originally intended to or not. But Noboru's reaction to seeing Ryuji shows that he doesn't seem to agree. Whether or not he's actually happy to see Ryuji and receive his gift, Noboru pretends not to be. His anxiety about the peephole—which represents his power in his family—suggests that he's really worried about Ryuji usurping his role as the man of the house.

Noboru stares at Ryuji's tanned face and decides that Ryuji is acting unnatural and inauthentic. He calls the crocodile "phony"—Ryuji explains that it's just a baby, and Fusako criticizes Noboru's rudeness and ingratitude. She shows Ryuji how Noboru saved the stamps from all his letters in an album. Noboru asks when Ryuji will sail off again, and Fusako looks horrified. But she wants to know, too. Ryuji says he's not sure. The ship won't be ready until at least New Year's.

Noboru's cold reaction to Ryuji and the gift contrasts with his obvious enthusiasm for Ryuji's adventures (as proven by the stamps). Again, even though Noboru views himself as stoic and sophisticated, he is actually still quite immature. In fact, he's playing a part even more than Ryuji. Still, Ryuji seems phony to him because he now acts like an ordinary family man, not an intrepid sailor. And the crocodile seems phony because it's just stuffed skin. This recalls how, after Noboru killed the kitten, the chief suggested that its organs represented reality, while its skin was meaningless.

Later, Noboru adds two new accusations to his list of charges against Ryuji: saying that he isn't sure when he'll sail out and "*coming back here again in the first place*." But Noboru is ashamed to feel angry—he has been trained to live with "absolute dispassion." After his rage subsides, he reviews what he has written in his journal. Then, he hears a noise in the next room—it's his mother with Ryuji. With his door unlocked, he wonders if he can take out the drawer and reach **the peephole** without anyone noticing.

*Noboru remains caught between his passionate thirst for power and his belief that emotions are childish and meaningless. This is why he tries to logically reevaluate his accusations against Ryuji after initially writing them out. The problem with Ryuji's failure to specify his departure date is that it suggests he is less committed to his heroic profession than before. But the problem with him "*coming back here again in the first place*" is clearly just that it challenges Noboru's power and autonomy as his household's only man.*

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Ryuji gives Fusako a pocketbook made of armadillo. Mr. Shibuya disapproves when she takes it to her store on December 31st. She spends all day at work, and Ryuji returns to **the Rakuyo** for his afternoon watch. Then, Ryuji, Noboru, and the housekeeper clean the house. In the evening, Fusako walks in on them with buckets and mops, and she complains that Noboru is sick and that cleaning might harm his health. But Ryuji thinks she's worrying about nothing.

Noboru's frustrations with Ryuji quickly vanish and he begins to take on a paternal role in the home. At the same time, in a comical inversion of traditional gender roles, Fusako goes to work while Ryuji and Noboru stay home to clean the house. Of course, this New Year's Eve cleaning session also symbolizes getting rid of the old in order to make way for the new, which points to the life transition that all three characters are starting to experience due to Ryuji's return.

Over dinner, the housekeeper tells a story about how the European family who used to employ her threw New Year's Eve parties where everyone started kissing one another. Afterward, Ryuji and Fusako go to the bedroom. And at dawn, Ryuji proposes they go watch the sunrise from the park. Fusako bundles up in luxurious imported clothing, and then they run around the park in the **cold** morning twilight. They end up at the viewpoint, looking out over the harbor. Fusako prays that it will be a good year, and Ryuji kisses her and says, "It will be. It has to be."

The housekeeper's anecdote pokes fun at foreign customs that don't fit into Japanese culture, while Fusako's clothes symbolize how those customs are also slowly changing Japan. On their spontaneous morning adventure, Fusako and Ryuji return to the park where they had their first date. When they reminisced about that date in the book's third and fourth chapters, both were fighting the oppressive summer heat, which represented the passion and excitement of their romance. Now, in the winter, they're overwhelmed by the cold instead, which represents the way their relationship's initial excitement has cooled off and given way to a more constant, stable kind of love. Meanwhile, their conversation about the coming year is really a proxy for discussing their future together.

A sliver of light reflects off the water, and Ryuji suddenly understands what is happening: he is building a life onshore, and he must give up on achieving glory. The ships start to move, and Ryuji keeps asking Fusako if she's **cold**. But he's really asking himself if he's willing to give up sailing. On the one hand, **the sea** promises him glory, death, and "luminous freedom." On the other, he's tired and bored of sailing, and he's not sure that glory is even possible anymore.

Ryuji reaches a critical turning point in the novel: he realizes that he must choose between two possible futures. He can keep pursuing his lifelong aspiration of becoming a glorious hero, or he can pursue his newfound love for Fusako. Glory is a dream and love is a certainty—but choosing glory would make him truly unique, and choosing love would make him nothing more than an ordinary man. This choice will test his faith in his principles, as well as the viability of the traditional worldview that they represent.

The park's lights go out and the "pure red" sun begins to rise. Fusako predicts a good year and tells Ryuji that it's her first New Year's sunrise. Beside himself, Ryuji asks Fusako to marry him. She's confused, but he firmly repeats his question. "I may be just a dumb sailor," he says, "but I've never done anything I'm ashamed of." He says that he has saved two million yen and will be giving it to Fusako no matter what. Fusako starts crying. In the **cold** under the rising, blindingly bright sun, Fusako says yes. But she explains that they have to deal with some obstacles: Noboru, her job at the store, and Ryuji's job sailing the world. But Ryuji promises not to sail away anytime soon.

Ryuji chooses a path forward, but he decides based on instinct rather than careful deliberation. He immediately understands that marrying Fusako will mean throwing away the entire life that he has built for himself over more than a decade. The sunrise has always been Japan's national symbol—the country's Japanese name even means "Land of the Rising Sun." Thus, Ryuji's proposal during the sunrise on New Year's day clearly carries political symbolism. It may represent the end of WWII, or the beginning of a new era in which Japan (represented by Ryuji) gave up on its traditions and overseas empire to make peace with its Western enemies (represented by Fusako). Arguably, the opposite case could also be made: perhaps Ryuji is giving up on the rest of the world to stay home in Japan.

New Year's Day is the only day of the year when Fusako puts aside her "thoroughly Western" lifestyle to follow Japanese customs. Their breakfast reminds Ryuji of all the times he spent New Year's at Japanese consulates in Europe. Ryuji leads the first New Year's toast, instead of Noboru. He tells the story of enduring a terrible hurricane on **the Rakuyo**, but Fusako asks him to stop. This annoys Noboru, who was enjoying the story. Noboru starts to wonder if Ryuji is telling the story for him or for his mother. He starts to feel like Ryuji is being dishonest, like a slick salesman.

Fusako's traditional breakfast suggests that her engagement might not entirely represent a break from Japanese culture. Still, by associating this with his memories of the consulate, Ryuji suggests that her fidelity to Japanese culture is limited—at best, she can achieve a hybrid of East and West. Meanwhile, Ryuji's story is a clear example of the kind of adventure that he will never be able to have again, now that he has given up sailing. Noboru's reaction suggests that he will no longer have Ryuji as a heroic role model—instead, Fusako's version of Ryuji has won out over Noboru's. This is also why Noboru starts to see Ryuji as dishonest: he believes that Ryuji is abandoning his true essence by choosing love over glory.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

When **the Rakuyo** sails away five days later, Ryuji doesn't go. He stays with Fusako and Noboru. The following morning, at Rex, Fusako receives a shipment of vests, sweaters, and slacks. Mr. Shibuya tells Fusako that they have been invited to pre-season fashion show, and Fusako reminds him about their upcoming meeting with the Foreign Trade Ministry to secure permission for their imports from New York. Then, Fusako asks Shibuya about his worsening health and encourages him to visit a doctor.

Ryuji officially decides to abandon his life as a sailor and stay with Fusako onshore. This decision is full of important symbolism because it means that he has given up on his lifelong dreams of glory at sea. If these dreams represented Japan's imperial ambitions, then Ryuji's decision to stay behind represents the nation losing the war and accepting Western occupation. Of course, Fusako's job selling Western clothing makes this link even clearer. Her daily work routine doesn't change, but her meeting about imports is a reminder that she represents the other side of the same industry as Ryuji. He transported products around the world, while she sells imported products. Whereas he helped Japan spread its goods and influence around the world, she helps foreigners spread their goods and influence in Japan.

The actress Yoriko Kasuga visits to buy some accessories, and Fusako takes her out to lunch at a gourmet French restaurant. Yoriko is clearly lonely and distraught about missing out on yet another acting award. Even though she is famously beautiful, Yoriko says that she envies Fusako's looks. She gives the waitress an autograph, then explains that she doesn't trust anyone but her fans and Fusako, who is her "only real friend."

Fusako's decision to take Yoriko to a French restaurant and Yoriko's incessant, selfish complaints about her life once again represent the idea that Western cultural influences transformed Japan for the worse. On their previous meeting, Yoriko and Fusako shared a deep sense of loneliness. But now, Yoriko's complaint about her lack of friends merely highlights how Fusako has overcome her own loneliness through her relationship with Ryuji.

Fusako thinks that Yoriko is truly happy with her life, despite all her complaints. After all, she supports a 10-person family, and her beauty gives her strength. Fusako decides to confide in Yoriko about her romance with Ryuji. When Yoriko learns that Ryuji gifted Fusako his life savings, she remarks that Fusako is lucky, and that Ryuji is a real man if there ever was one. But Yoriko also tells Fusako to hire a private detective to tail Ryuji, exchange medical certificates to make sure he doesn't have any diseases, start training him to help out at Rex, watch his relationship with Noboru, and make sure that he isn't using her for her money.

Fusako's opinion of Yoriko again shows the subtle difference in how each of them represents Western culture. Namely, Fusako's values are still ultimately Japanese—she prizes dignity and honor, while Yoriko primarily cares about money, fame, and outward appearances. For instance, while Yoriko's advice to Fusako is remarkably practical and specific, she care more about protecting Fusako's money than her honor. She is also deeply skeptical of love, which she views more as a tool of manipulation than a genuine feeling.

At first, Fusako is astonished that Yoriko can be so practical. Then, Yoriko explains why: her cheating, diseased ex-fiancé nearly swindled her out of her money. This deeply offends Fusako, who thinks that Ryuji would never do the same. She decides that Yoriko is "*just a customer, not a friend.*" While she tells herself that she's not as gullible as Yoriko, she also remembers that her relationship with Ryuji started as a passionate summer fling.

While Yoriko means well, she also imposes her own circumstances onto Fusako's life by assuming that Ryuji is just as dishonest as her own ex-fiancé. Fusako's response is more complex than she lets on: while Yoriko's insinuation certainly does offend her, she also seems to genuinely fear that Yoriko might be right. Of course, when Fusako reminds herself that Yoriko is her customer and not her friend, she also implicitly points out that Yoriko is too immature to make the same distinction.

Yoriko shows Fusako the shallow scars on her wrist and admits that she attempted suicide when her engagement fell apart. (Fortunately, her manager kept it out of the newspapers.) Fusako resents Yoriko but remembers that she's a client and compliments her. Out of spite, Fusako decides to hire Yoriko's private investigator and prove that Ryuji is an honest, respectable man. Yoriko agrees to write Fusako a letter of introduction.

Fusako recognizes that Yoriko's story is tragic, but she also views it as pathetic, because Yoriko let a man destroy her life. On the one hand, the novel presents Yoriko as a pitiable character chiefly because she is weak. But on the other, it doesn't present weakness as a vice for women to the same extent as it is for men. Of course, Fusako has also centered her whole life on a man, so her resentment toward Yoriko is partially about her own embarrassment.

Eight days later, Fusako phones Yoriko to thank her and read her the private investigator's report about Ryuji. The investigator writes that Ryuji's claims about his childhood and education are accurate, and that he doesn't seem to have ever had a relationship with another woman. Ryuji is eccentric and solitary, the investigator writes, but also conscientious, healthy, and financially responsible. At the end of the call, Fusako explains that Ryuji has started working at the store, and that Yoriko can meet him on her next visit.

The investigator's report serves two functions. First, it proves Ryuji's authenticity and assuages Fusako's sincere doubts about his character (which are largely rooted in their class differences and the whirlwind nature of their romance). Second, it gives Fusako a tool to passive-aggressively spite Yoriko, who she knows will become desperately jealous of her loving relationship.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Noboru's school starts on January 11th, with a half-day ending at noon. After he gets out, he goes to Yamashita Pier with the gang, whom he hasn't seen all winter break. The pier is empty, since it's under construction and the weather is **freezing cold**. The boys can see smokestacks and lighthouses across the harbor, and they notice two ships docked nearby. They start playing around in the abandoned plywood boxes scattered across the pier. The chief picks a crate to meet in, and the gang assembles inside. A sailor has scribbled graffiti about his hopes and dreams across the crate's walls, but the chief angrily says that it's full of lies. He pounds on the wall with his tiny fist.

Just like Ryuji and Fusako relived their first date in the park, Noboru relives his summer meeting with his friends. The tone of their meetings becomes more pessimistic, though, in parallel with the seasonal shift from summer to winter. The abandoned docks are a significant setting, because they reflect Ryuji's decision to give up sailing. Similarly, the chief's reaction to the unknown sailor's graffiti foreshadows the coming conversation about Ryuji and demonstrates that he's skeptical about the very idea of sailing as a path to achieving greatness. Of course, this has been his attitude toward Ryuji since the very beginning.

Next, the chief asks Noboru about his "hero" (Ryuji). Noboru explains that Ryuji has returned and heroically survived a hurricane in the Caribbean. The chief jokingly asks if Ryuji got wet during the hurricane, like he did that summer day in the park. The boys laugh at Noboru, who proudly continues his story. He explains that Ryuji stayed behind when **the Rakuyo** left. Now, Ryuji smells like "the putrid odors landsmen reek of, the stench of death." Fusako has been giving him books and teaching him to help out at the store.

Noboru's faith in Ryuji has clearly fallen apart: he can no longer sustain his former fantasy of Ryuji as a great hero and role model because Ryuji has given up on that aspiration for himself. Of course, Noboru giving up on Ryuji is also significant because it implies that Noboru must give up on viewing himself as a potential hero in the future. His references to death suggest that, far from dying a glorious death at sea, Ryuji will now die an utterly conventional death on land. After all, he has traded an exciting and unpredictable professions for shopkeeping, which is arguably more mundane.

Noboru's story frightens the boys; they feel like their dreams are collapsing into "a bleak, dreary future." The chief asks Noboru if he wants "to make that sailor a hero again." Noboru points out that Ryuji still keeps his uniform in the closet, but the chief says that truly making Ryuji into a hero will require something different—although he won't say what.

Noboru's story seems "bleak" and "dreary" to the other boys because it suggests that their two contradictory beliefs cannot coexist. Namely, it suggests that the meaninglessness of ordinary life ultimately wins out over people's fantasies of greatness and heroism. Given the chief's beliefs, his foreboding message strongly suggests that he's hatching a sinister plot for revenge against Ryuji.

The chief describes his own winter vacation and mentions how much he hates his father. All fathers are evil, he argues, because they either neglect their sons or burden them with their own dreams, problems, and weaknesses. When the chief asked about his father's purpose in life, his father said that people have to choose their own purpose. The chief thinks this is stupid and unimaginative. He also admits that his father beats him. Noboru suggests that he should retaliate, but the chief says that "there are worse things than being beaten."

The chief's troubled relationship with his father clearly motivates his ideas about the evil inherent in fatherhood, but these ideas also have their own coherent logic. Namely, the chief assumes that young men need autonomy in order to flourish—although his idea of flourishing is really learning to impose one's will on the world. Fathers get in the way of this because they impose their will on their sons (like by beating them and pressuring them to make certain decisions). But fathers can also do "worse things," such as teaching their children the wrong values in the first place—like weakness rather than strength. Needless to say, the characters are focused entirely on how men should live in this passage; they have absolutely no interest in women's needs.

The chief says that Noboru is lucky because his father died. But he also argues that people can become powerful by learning about the evil that their fathers embody. Number four complains that his father drinks, beats his mother, and has three mistresses. Number five, whose father constantly prays and worries about the family's moral purity, says that he envies Noboru. And while Noboru feels lucky to not have a father, he worries that he won't stay so lucky for long.

The chief and his gang worship power above all else, so they suggest that young men can learn to dominate others by imitating the fathers who dominate them. They therefore suggest that while Noboru's lack of a father gives him more freedom than other boys, it also deprives him of a key role model. Of course, this all raises serious questions about Noboru's relationship with Ryuji, who is quickly turning from a role model into a father figure—or, if the chief is right, an intolerable oppressor.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Fusako gradually becomes kinder and more attentive to Noboru, who suspects that she's trying to compensate for upcoming news that he won't like. One night, she nearly forgets the key to Noboru's bedroom, and Ryuji suggests that she stop locking him inside. So, she leaves the door unlocked. But Noboru isn't happy—he doesn't want the grownups to make him mature. He prefers the door locked.

The novel strongly implies that Noboru already knows about Fusako and Ryuji's upcoming marriage. Their failure to win him over through kindness shows that he's right to think that adults underestimate his intelligence. At the same time, he disdains the idea that Fusako and Ryuji would trust him with more privileges (like an open door) in the hopes of helping him mature. This isn't because he believes in immaturity—although readers might consider him immature. Rather, it's because he thinks maturity means conforming to the meaningless, oppressive norms of adult society. Of course, he wants the door closed for entirely different reasons: so that he can keep spying through the peephole.

One evening, Ryuji and Fusako take Noboru to a movie and then for his favorite dinner, Chinese food. They seem hesitant and afraid, and Noboru already knows what they're going to tell him. He plays the part of the innocent child when his mother informs him that Ryuji will be his "new father." She explains how she became lonely after Noboru's real father died and will be marrying Ryuji next month. Noboru thinks this all sounds stupid, but he's delighted that the adults are afraid of him. He puts on a wicked smile, but Ryuji notices it and thinks he's glad. Ryuji declares that he'll start calling Noboru "Son," and they awkwardly shake hands across the table.

Fusako's speech and Ryuji's attitude explicitly confirm what the last chapter strongly implied: Noboru will no longer be free from fatherhood. Instead, Ryuji will act as his father—which, to Noboru, really just means that Ryuji will have unearned power over him. Noboru expertly manipulates Ryuji and Fusako in order to prove to himself that they are weak and don't deserve this power. In particular, he suggests that Ryuji has become the worst version of himself by abandoning his admirable, rugged sailor's life to live a meaningless, conventional life instead.

That night, Fusako leaves Noboru's room unlocked. Inside, Noboru broods, struggling to control his emotions. He hopes his mother will come back and tell him that the wedding is a lie. But he also wants to hurt her. He hasn't looked through **the peephole** in weeks—it feels too risky with his door unlocked. But tonight, he finds courage. He pulls out the drawer and lets it crash to the floor. He hides inside the chest with a flashlight and his English vocabulary cards. That way, he can spite his mother—if she finds him, she will be furious at him, but then notice that he was just innocently studying. He laughs villainously—he feels that he's on "the world's outer edge." After studying a few words, he falls asleep. The flashlight is still on.

Torn between his emotions and his belief in prioritizing dispassionate analysis over all emotion, Noboru once again turns to the peephole, which combines both. Namely, it enables him to act out his anger precisely by observing and analyzing his mother's private life (and now Ryuji's, too). Noboru's feeling of being at the "outer edge" of the world shows that he understands the great risk he's taking. But he delights in that risk because he believes that he can manipulate his mother into misunderstanding the situation.

Ryuji and Fusako go to the bedroom around midnight. Fusako feels a sense of shame, but she can't pinpoint why. She asks Ryuji to turn off the lights. They get into bed and have sex. Afterward, Fusako admits that she was even more embarrassed with the lights off than she is with them on. Then, Ryuji notices a light emanating from a spot in the wall. He points it out and promises to fix it, but when she sees it, Fusako instantly understands what has happened. She runs out of the room and into Noboru's. Confused, Ryuji lights a cigarette and waits.

Fusako and Ryuji spy Noboru's peephole through a mirror image of the situation in which he used to spy on them: now, Noboru's dresser is filled with light and Fusako's room with darkness. The peephole explains why he appeared to mysteriously know about their relationship at the very beginning of the book. The darkness alters Ryuji and Fusako's perceptions: not only does it make the peephole stand out, but it also changes the way sex feels to them by changing what they pay attention to during the act.

Fusako drags Noboru out of his dresser and starts hitting him harder than he ever imagined possible. When Noboru comes to, he sees her standing above him, with her robe open and her face covered in tears. He remembers this moment from his dreams. Fusako screams that Noboru is disgusting and that he humiliated her. Noboru doesn't mention his studying—he believes that his mother has finally discovered reality itself and is distraught because of her prejudice against it.

Noboru has absolutely no sympathy for his mother, and he doesn't even care if he has lost her respect or affection. Instead, he's proud to have humiliated her, because this proves that he has power over her. His claim that Fusako is merely prejudiced against reality suggests that he doesn't take moral objections to his behavior seriously. Instead, he insists that force and coercion are the true basis of the universe, that he has an inherent right to use them, and that anyone who objects to this right on moral grounds is simply in denial. Of course, in one specific way, he's right: the only way to stop someone who doesn't believe in any moral constraints at all is by overpowering them.

Fusako declares that Ryuji will come punish Noboru. Meanwhile, Noboru proudly reminds himself that **the peephole** has shown him the true meaning and source of the universe. When Ryuji comes in, Fusako explains that Noboru was spying on them and needs a serious beating. Ryuji calmly asks if Noboru has been spying on them since the beginning, and Noboru nods. Ryuji contemplates what to do—this is his first true "decision about shore life." He remembers **the ocean**'s violent fury, and he thinks about the other decisions he will have to make in the coming years. Compared to the swelling sea, they all seem unreal.

Noboru views being caught at the peephole as proof that morality doesn't exist, and that the way of the universe is for the strong to win out over the weak. In contrast, Ryuji tries to formulate an appropriate moral response to the situation. This is what distinguishes his first "decision about shore life." When he was a sailor, he could solve most of the challenges he faced through force, but now, he has to decide based on moral principles because his life is tied up with other people's. In other words, when he has to punish Noboru, Ryuji is no longer a heroic outsider to society, but rather one of the people responsible for enforcing its rules and perpetuating its principles.

Ryuji decides that beating Noboru would be unwise. He sits down and says that since his own arrival has changed Noboru's life, Noboru's curiosity about him is understandable. So is using **the peephole**, even though it was clearly wrong. He proposes forgiving Noboru and moving on. Privately, Noboru is horrified to see his great manly hero saying such sensitive, dishonorable things. He recalls the chief's comment: "there [are] worse things than being beaten."

Ryuji's response to the situation shows that he is taking his role as a father seriously and wants to model morality and restraint for Noboru. Ironically, Noboru expects just the opposite: he wants to be punished, not forgiven, because he believes that morality is meaningless and that physical force is the only way that people can really teach others. Noboru remembers the chief's comment because he realizes that he could continue to respect Ryuji if he responded with a beating—but not when he responds with a moral speech. Thus, the "worse thing[] than being beaten" is losing faith in one's role model—or learning that one's hero is no hero at all.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Noburu's gang meets the next day after school. The boys gaze down at the foreigners' cemetery on the way down the hill to their meeting place, an abandoned swimming pool nearby. They sit on the bleachers next to the pool, and Noboru pulls out the section of his diary that lists his 18 accusations against Ryuji.

The foreigners' cemetery is a symbolically important setting—on the one hand, it represents foreign influence in Japan, but on the other, it's also where these foreigners go to die. These dual associations link it with Noboru and his gang's desire to crush modern influences on Japan and return to a more traditional culture based on honor and power.

The chief declares that Noboru's charges are worth 150 "points," which means that Ryuji can't be saved. The six boys are true geniuses trying to make sense of an empty world, the chief says, and they alone are responsible for deciding what is and isn't permissible. Therefore, the chief explains, the gang has to do something about Ryuji, who betrayed Norobu by becoming his father. This is the only way to maintain order in the world. It's finally time to "make [Ryuji] a hero again," just like the chief promised Noboru on January 11th.

The chief doesn't explain his "points" system or his blind insistence that he and his gang have a right to set the rules of morality for everyone else. While this could be read as little more than a thinly-veiled excuse for imposing his will on others, his gang clearly believes that his judgments are based on a special insight into the truth about reality and the universe. Moreover, the idea that a small group of intellectually superior elites should rule over everyone else has deep roots in Japanese imperial history and traditions.

The boys stare into the pool, thinking about how it helps people float when it's full but invites them to plunge toward death when it's empty. The chief declares that tomorrow, Noboru must bring Ryuji to the pool. The chief will bring a scalpel and sleeping pills, which he'll crush up. The other boys will bring rope, tea, cups, a blindfold, a towel, and knives. They will do the same thing to Ryuji that they did to the cat. The chief asks the boys one by one whether they're afraid. Nobody responds.

The chief makes it clear what he means by "mak[ing Ryuji] a hero again." The gang will murder and dismember Ryuji for his crimes, which include giving up on the pursuit of glory and becoming Noboru's father. In the context of the novel's political allegory, this plan represents an attempt to save Japan by returning it to its heroic traditions. The boys' thoughts about the pool reflect the way that, depending on the circumstances, the same object can be either inviting or menacing, comfortable or deadly. Of course, like shift from summer to winter over the course of the novel, this is a metaphor for Ryuji's transformation and the gang's changing attitudes toward him.

The chief pulls out a law book that states that children under 14 can't be punished for crimes. He argues that adults made this law to protect children, but they will use it to strike back and claim their freedom. After all, they will all turn 14 in the next two months. Therefore, the chief concludes, now is their final chance to truly exercise their freedom, bring meaning and order to the world, and avoid becoming the kind of horrible, ordinary men who dedicate their lives to idle gossip and raising a family.

From the chief's perspective, the law shows that adults underestimate young people's competence and therefore give the wiliest ones a loophole to avoid responsibility for their crimes. But, depending on their perspective, readers might think that the law is right to exempt the chief and his gang from responsibility for their crimes—perhaps their nihilism and rebellion are just signs of their immaturity. Similarly, the chief's complaints about adults imposing laws on children could be read as analogous to the way the U.S. imposed its own laws on Japan during the occupation. While the gang still doesn't clearly explain how their crime will restore order to the world, this political interpretation suggests that they're literally talking about Japan's traditional moral order (in which power, honor, and great men used to rule).

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

On January 22nd, Ryuji and Fusako make some arrangements for their wedding in the morning, then go to their store. In the afternoon, Ryuji leaves, supposedly to meet an old classmate at the pier. Fusako jokes that he might board a ship and never come back. In fact, Ryuji is really going to meet Noboru, who has asked him to share sailing stories with his friends after school. The six boys meet him on top of the hill near the pool.

This final passage uses dramatic irony to create the impression that Ryuji is racing toward his tragic, unavoidable fate. First, Ryuji believes that Noboru and his friends look up to him and are seeking guidance and entertainment in their afternoon together. But in reality, the reader knows that they look down on him and are planning to kill him. Second, the reader knows that Ryuji will probably never return, but Fusako's comment about him disappearing onto a ship suggests that she might never learn of his death. Presumably, she will believe that he chose to abandon her instead. This suggests that the gang's actions will devastate Fusako, too—but also that she knows that Ryuji's fate lies elsewhere.

One of the boys (the chief) suggests going to the dry dock, and Ryuji agrees. He's surprised when the boys lead him to the streetcar, then take it to the very end of the line. But he also notices that Noboru is happy and animated around his friends, and he's glad that he decided to spend the afternoon with them. As Noboru's new father, he feels that it's the right thing to do. After the streetcar, the boys lead Ryuji up a road towards the mountains. He asks them how there can be a dry dock there, but he follows them anyway.

Ryuji doesn't question the boys' unusual behavior; thinking as a father, he assumes that their intentions must be innocent. Of course, readers know that this is hopelessly naïve. Ryuji now views the world through the lens of care and morality, but Noboru and his friends only believe in power and domination. In fact, they are planning to kill Ryuji precisely because they think that adults fail children by teaching them morality and encouraging them to fit into society.

The boys lead Ryuji past a power plant and through a tunnel, then up a hill and past a construction zone. The chief says that the area was once a U.S. Army base. The road ends, and the top of the hill is covered with empty fields. There's absolutely no one around. Ryuji follows the gang across the field to an abandoned water tank. An English-language sign declares the tank U.S. property and states that trespassing is punishable by law. The chief facetiously asks Ryuji what "punishable" means, but Ryuji can tell that he already knows. Ryuji and the gang reach the top of the hill, which offers them a panoramic view over the city and out to **the sea**.

The location of the chief's "dry dock" is significant. For one, it's isolated and empty—the perfect place for a murder. In addition, its history as a base for occupying U.S. forces adds to the political significance of the book's closing scene: it suggests that the chief's gang is symbolically taking Japan back from the occupiers by murdering Ryuji. (Similarly, as a construction zone, it indicates that the boys are building a new future there.) This spot also offers Ryuji a view of the sea, the key symbol of his past as a sailor, and this allows him to reevaluate his decision to marry Fusako and pursue a life onshore.

Ryuji suddenly misses **the sea**, which he hasn't truly seen for a long time. He sees several small ships out in the ocean and comments that **the Rakuyo** was far bigger. The chief leads the group to a clearing on the mountain. Ryuji asks who found this hiding place and where the dry dock is—the chief says that he found it, and that the dry dock (where they repair old ships) is nearby. Everyone sits down.

Ryuji's longing for the sea suggests that he regrets leaving the Rakuyo—and that his relationship with Fusako may have even been a grave mistake. By calling the clearing on the mountaintop a dry dock, the chief suggests that the gang will be fixing something old and broken there—most likely Ryuji, Japan, or society as a whole. Of course, this reflects the gang's shared belief that violence is the key to fighting the meaninglessness of modern life and bringing the universe back into its proper alignment.

Ryuji starts telling stories about his life **at sea**. He describes seasickness and sings the song "I Can't Give Up the Sailor's Life," which makes the boys laugh. Noboru starts playing with Ryuji's cap and thinks about how, once upon a time, it broke free of the shackles of land and sailed around the world, into the beauty of the unknown. Ryuji tells more stories from his voyages: he discusses his first trip to Hong Kong, going through the Suez Canal, loading coal in Australia, and so on.

Noboru pictures the vision of adventure and glory that Ryuji once imagined for himself but can no longer achieve, now that he has given up sailing. Instead, Ryuji has become exactly the kind of rusty old sailor, full of dubious stories, that he always loathed on the Rakuyo. He has given up the chance to be an actual hero in order to tell children tall tales about the time that he could have been a hero. In other words, as the novel's title suggests, he has fallen from grace. Of course, just as in the rest of the novel, Ryuji is also a metaphor for Japan itself. Specifically, he now represents Japan after World War II, powerless but nostalgic for its past greatness and close call with glory.

Ryuji notices the chief putting on latex gloves but assumes it doesn't mean anything. Then, he sees a ship out on the horizon and starts to realize why Noboru used to admire him: as a sailor, he could have kept moving forever, pursuing his glory. But he has abandoned that life, and he is realizing too late how much he has lost. He always imagined finding glory, death, and a woman all together. But now, he only has a woman—death and glory don't seem to want him.

Ryuji's feelings of regret confirm that Noboru was right all along: it was a mistake to give up the heroic quest for glory for the sake of stability and love. Even if Ryuji had doubts about his destiny, he concludes, he should have pursued it anyway. However, Mishima layers on more dramatic irony in this scene. Not only does Ryuji have no idea that he is about to be ritually murdered, but he is actually yearning for the exact kind of fulfillment that this murder will give him: death, glory, and love all together. Namely, he has finally met Fusako, the woman of his dreams, and he is about to die the glorious, spectacular death he always dreamed of.

The chief offers Ryuji some tea, but Ryuji keeps daydreaming. He thinks about tropical islands, palm trees, and the promise of dying a heroic death in a majestic storm. Noboru passes Ryuji the tea, and he drinks it. It tastes bitter, but the narrator ends by noting that "glory, as anyone knows, is bitter stuff."

The novel's conclusion isn't surprising because the gang starts carrying out its plans to murder Ryuji—the reader has known about those plans for the whole chapter. Instead, it's surprising both because they don't finish murdering Ryuji and because the book presents the murder as a good thing. It's the way Ryuji fulfills his destiny—and, metaphorically, the way Japan achieves its own.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Jennings, Rohan. "*The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 11 Oct 2021. Web. 11 Oct 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Jennings, Rohan. "*The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*." LitCharts LLC, October 11, 2021. Retrieved October 11, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-sailor-who-fell-from-grace-with-the-sea.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Mishima, Yukio. The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea. Vintage. 1994.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Mishima, Yukio. The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea. New York: Vintage. 1994.