

TEACHER DEMONSTRATION TEXT: COMPANION BOOK TO “THE STOLEN PARTY”

Introduction

“The Stolen Party” by Liliana Heker introduces Rosaura, a protagonist who dreams big. In the first scene, Heker shows the reader that this young girl hopes to be rich someday like her friend Luciana. Luciana is having a birthday party and Rosaura has been invited. Rosaura’s mother, a maid for Luciana’s family, doubts that this invitation is real. The story unfolds as Rosaura attends the party and believes she belongs, but the author lets the reader see that the mother may have been right. By the end, this story has turned tragic, and Rosaura is forced to face the fact that her dreams were pure fantasy.

In this companion book, you will read about the complicated relationships that the author develops in this story. These have twists and turns that are worth thinking about. You will also read interpretations of key settings and images—how these are symbolic in the story. And finally, you will get a real treat: a chance to read a fan fiction scene that is not in the original story, but helps explore Rosaura’s friendship with Luciana.

This book will make you think even more about this powerful story, and the effective craft of Liliana Heker.

Chapter 1: Mothers and Daughters Just Don’t Understand

(text structure: compare/contrast)

From the beginning of “The Stolen Party,” Lilian Heker introduces tension between Rosaura and her mother. The story starts with a kind of flash forward, letting the reader know that Rosaura does end up going to the party, and that there is in fact a monkey there. Heker then takes the reader back to an argument before the party, when Rosaura is trying to convince her mother that Luciana is in fact her friend, and that there will be a monkey at the party. The two characters have completely different perspectives on Luciana and her family. This is shown in their dialogue and in Rosaura’s inner thinking (we don’t get to hear Rosaura’s mom’s thinking.).

Rosaura’s mom says, “I don’t like you going . . . it’s a rich people’s party.” (p. 1) When she says this, she lets Rosaura and the reader know that she is suspicious of people with money. She clearly doesn’t see herself as friends with Luciana’s family and can’t see her daughter that way either. She also says that Rosaura “fart[s] higher than [her] ass.” (p. 1) This is a shocking way of talking to a child—it shows that the mother speaks plainly, even using gross language, and it makes her point even stronger that she and Rosaura don’t belong at fancy parties. The author probably chose these words to show that Rosaura’s mother doesn’t always speak politely.

On the other hand, Rosaura desperately wants to go to this party. What she says to her mom and what she thinks reveal that this is more than just a fun afternoon for her. When her mom tells her that Luciana is not really her friend, she yells, “Shut up! You don’t know anything about being friends!” Sometimes people get extra mad when they are nervous that they might be wrong. Maybe Rosaura is worried that her

mother could be right, and she yells to convince herself that what she wants to be true is. In this same scene, Heker reveals some of Rosaura’s thinking. She writes, “Rosaura too wanted to be rich, of course. If one day she managed to live in a beautiful palace, would her mother stop loving her? She felt very sad. She wanted to go to that party more than anything else in the world.” (p. 1) Heker is letting the reader see that this is about something much bigger than just a party. Rosaura wants things her mother doesn’t want her to want.

At the end of the story, there is a quick and horrible twist in this relationship. Throughout most of the party, Rosaura has believed that her dream is coming true. She was welcomed with the other children, she got to serve cake and help out the magician. The magician even called her a “little countess.” (p. 4) When she tells her mother of these things, her mother begins to soften. Heker lets the reader know this by describing the way the mother smiled: “one could see that she was beaming.” (p. 4) But sadly, this hope that Rosaura’s dream could be true is crushed when Senora Ines tries to pay Rosaura for her “help.”

The mother and daughter finally share an emotion at the end of the story—but unfortunately that emotion is despair. We can only hope that Rosaura will see her mother’s real love for her as just as important as her imagined friendship with Luciana.

Chapter 2: Rosaura and Senora Ines—Same Party, Different Worlds

(text structure: chronological/cause and effect)

Throughout the party scene in “The Stolen Party,” Senora Ines asks Rosaura to help. The way she asks Rosaura hides what she is really doing, which is getting the maid’s daughter to help serve at her own daughter’s party. This sets up a conflict between Senora Ines and Rosaura that Rosaura doesn’t even know is there, but that the author lets the reader see. This conflict builds until the end of the story when the truth about Senora Ines comes out and Rosaura is devastated.

When Rosaura first arrives, Senora Ines treats her as she would any other guest. She says, “How lovely you look today, Rosaura.” (p. 2) But quickly, Senora Ines puts Rosaura to work. She says Rosaura is the only one of the children allowed in the kitchen because the others are “too boisterous” (p. 2). Then she asks Rosaura if she can handle the orange juice jug. These conversations hide the fact that Senora Ines is using Rosaura. Rosaura is tricked into thinking that she is special and that Senora Ines actually feels closer to her than to the other children. This manipulation is effective, because Rosaura enjoys the jobs she’s given, including serving hot dogs and passing out cake. (p. 3)

By the end of the party, Rosaura feels like she is on top of the world. She truly believes that she has fit into Luciana’s world and has even started to convince her mother of this. The two of them are getting ready to say goodbye, when Senora Ines makes a final move that changes everything. Rosaura’s mother is already worried because Senora Ines has asked them to “Please wait here a second.” (p. 4) Just as Rosaura is picturing which party favor she is going to receive, Senora Ines reaches into her purse and pulls out money, which she hands to Rosaura with the words, “You really and truly earned this.” And then, “Thank you for all your help, my pet.” (p. 5) Rosaura goes from being a “countess” to a “pet” in just a few minutes, which shatters her joyful mood. Her

face says it all, and Senora Ines is forced to face the damage she's done. The story ends in a freeze frame, with Rosaura's "cold, clear look" staring at Senora Ines, and Senora Ines with her arm still hanging in the air. This ending leaves us realizing that they are not close, and they never will be.

Chapter 3: The Significance of the Kitchen

(text structure: essay)

The kitchen in "The Stolen Party" is important right from the very first line. "As soon as she arrived she went straight to the kitchen to see if the monkey was there." (p. 1) Even before the story truly begins the author puts Rosaura in the kitchen. This is a clue to the reader that this place is important in the story. The kitchen is important because it links Rosaura to her role as servant, and because the monkey in the kitchen tricks Rosaura into thinking she's in the kitchen because she wants to be.

The kitchen is where all the cooking and preparation work happen during a party. Rosaura goes straight to the kitchen when she gets to Luciana's house, and this sets her up to be the "helper." Although she thinks she is asked to help because Senora Ines trusts and likes her (see Chapter 2: Rosaura and Senora Ines), it's clear that she is being used as a servant, and no other children are being used that way. This is symbolized by the fact that no other children are allowed in the kitchen: it is the author's way of letting the reader know that Rosaura is the only servant.

The saddest thing about "The Stolen Party" is that Rosaura can't see what is really going on. The kitchen scene shows us how this can happen easily to a child. Children are easily entertained: there is a monkey in the kitchen, and Rosaura is so excited by this that she is tricked into thinking she's there just because she wants to be. Luciana set up Rosaura to only see the kitchen as a place with a monkey, not as a place where she is being given chores. It's not clear if Luciana intended to do this, but it doesn't matter if she did or didn't—the result is the same.

Although there are other important places in the story, like the magician's set, the kitchen plays a huge part in setting up the most important problem for Rosaura. By setting up the kitchen as a place that only Rosaura can go, Lilia Heker shows the reader that only Rosaura is treated as a servant, but also makes it understandable that Rosaura would feel special. This difference in perspective is at the heart of the story.

Chapter 4: The Monkey in the Middle of the Story

(text structure: essay)

"Monkeys at a birthday?" (p. 1) Rosaura's mother asks her, in practically the first line of "The Stolen Party." It's a question that the reader probably has too, because it's a strange idea. Why does Lilia Heker choose to put a monkey at this party? It's not just a minor part of the story, as the story starts with Rosaura's discovery of the monkey, and builds to the moment when Rosaura has the monkey in her lap as part of the magician's act. The monkey is more than just a monkey. It actually is a symbol for Rosaura. It symbolizes how she is at the party as a servant, and how she is not like the other children there.

From the beginning, Rosaura is linked to the monkey, and, like the monkey, to the role of servant. She runs straight into the kitchen as soon as she arrives. (p. 1) The monkey is in the kitchen, “deep in thought, inside its cage.” (p. 2). The monkey is kept in the kitchen, and Rosaura, too, is in and out of the kitchen throughout the story. The reader can imagine, if Rosaura is pouring juice and serving hot dogs and passing out cake, that she has to go in and out of the kitchen quite a lot. And we know that she is the only child allowed in the kitchen. (See Chapter 3: The Significance of the Kitchen.) The monkey is in a cage waiting to entertain the kids; Rosaura is in a kind of invisible cage that makes her a servant to the other children.

Rosaura is not like the other children at the party, even though she desperately wants to be. Like the monkey, she is alone at the party, even if she doesn’t feel it. Luciana’s cousin points this out, even though Rosaura doesn’t want to see it. The cousin tells Rosaura, “You are not a friend of Luciana because I am her cousin and I know all her friends. And I don’t know you.” (p. 2) This conversation upsets Rosaura but she still can’t see that in fact the cousin is right. It’s not until the end of the party, when Senora Ines tries to pay her for her help, that Rosaura finally sees the truth. In this key moment, Senora Ines says, “Thank you for all your help, my pet.” (p. 5) Liliana Heker chose this word “pet” carefully, and it connects Rosaura even more to the monkey.

The monkey is a symbol throughout the story of how Rosaura is viewed as a servant, and not like one of Luciana’s actual friends. What starts out as a funny question at the beginning turns ugly by the end, when it’s clear that the people Rosaura wanted to impress see her as no different from an obedient and amusing lesser creature.

Chapter 5: Fan Fiction: Rosaura and Luciana on a School Night

Rosaura stood outside Luciana’s house and got ready to ring the doorbell. She took a few seconds to look up at the balcony on the second story. She had never been up to that room—Luciana’s parents’ room. She wondered what it looked like. She pictured a canopied bed and lots and lots of space. And if you ran out of space inside, there was always the balcony. . . . She thought she would ask her mother later what that room was like. Then she thought that her mother wouldn’t like her thinking about that. “Don’t get so interested in rich people,” she would probably say.

Rosaura sighed and rang the doorbell.

Senora Ines said, “Luciana’s in her room. Why don’t you go do your homework in there with her? You can probably help her—you’re so smart!” Rosaura shrugged her shoulders but smiled as she walked away. Senora Ines was right: she was smart, and reading and math came easily for her. Even though she and Luciana went to different schools, she often answered Luciana’s questions about her homework, and sometimes did some of it for her. She felt proud that Senora Ines had noticed.

“Hi Luciana,” she said. The girl was sitting at her white desk, pencil in hand.

“Oh, hi Rosaura, I’m glad you’re here. I’m just at the tricky part of this math. Could you do these for me? I actually really have to redo my nails.”

Luciana handed a stapled packet of papers to Rosaura without really waiting for an answer. As usual, Rosaura said, “No problem, of course. If I can help I always will.”

She took her usual place on the floor, her back propped against the wall. She pulled out her science textbook to use as a clipboard as she started in on Rosaura's math homework. The problems were not difficult for her, and she tried to stay focused on the clarity of getting the right answers, instead of noticing that Luciana kept her back turned as she applied a fresh coat of pale pink polish to her fingernails.

Conclusion

Liliana Heker gives the reader a lot to think about in the short story "The Stolen Party." Rosaura's dream to fit in with her wealthy friend's family and life is crushed. Rosaura's mother is proved right, but is sadder because of this. Is the lesson of this heart wrenching tale "Don't dream big?" Perhaps. Or it may be the kind of story where there is no easy lesson to learn. Instead, it might be a reminder that it hurts to be used by others.