

Discussion Questions for *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*

1. Munro's story titles are often brief descriptions of what the story is about—"Train;" "Night;" "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage." But this story's title is a variation on a children's song. What is the author trying to tell us with this title?—*Sarah Barnett*
2. What is this story really about—love, loyalty, atonement, none of the above, all of the above? Or maybe there is no overarching theme. Does there need to be?—*Judy Catterton*
3. **Judy Wood** echoes this: I read the Munro story for the 4th time. I think her word choice and the way certain sentences opened a picture of character or place are so vivid that I was jealous. And yet, even with all the gorgeous writing. I'm confused about what she was trying to say. Is this simply a tale of a deep, passionate, and enduring love story? Are Grant's meandering conjectures on marriage, sexual attraction, infidelity, loyalty, mental deterioration, and aging simply meant to describe the journey of that love story? Or is Munro wanting to explore each of those concepts as a way to talk about the irony of life and the choices we make along the way? Does it matter?—*Judy Wood*
4. Another take from **Maribeth**: I felt that Munro was perhaps asking us to consider in this story that there are multiple versions of things and no version is more real than any other. Or maybe what we think is real, isn't. There are references throughout: Grant not being sure what is real (coins in the bottom of the fountain's pool—glued there just as decoration—or had real people actually made wishes on those coins? Fiona's reading about a plant whose leaves gave off heat, but when she touched such a plant, couldn't tell if it was heat or her imagination). And most significantly, near the end of the story, Grant reflects that practical people, like Marian, might imagine that people like him (educated, literary, rich) were people who had lost touch with reality—silly people full of boring knowledge and protected by some fluke from the truth of life... So maybe...maybe... this is a story about sadness that what is real—for everyone—constantly shifts. Might that be the case?—*Maribeth Fischer*
5. Or is this a simple morality tale, Grant is getting payback for cheating on Fiona.—*Paul Dyer*
6. Regardless of what the story means, did Munro do enough to break away from the dementia tropes we've seen so often: the mental decline, post-it reminders/cues, one partner witnessing the other engaged in a relationship with someone else in the facility, etc. What does the writer do who wants to tell a story that has been told many times so that it doesn't feel tired to the readers? Did Munro succeed?—*Katherine Gekker/Maribeth Fischer*

7. The writer is telling a story in the present day, but also provides back story of Grant and Fiona's relationship. Are the author's jumps back and forth in time effective in communicating these important details?—*Sarah Barnett*
8. Did Munro begin this story in the best place?—*Katherine Gekker*
9. What is the point of the seven references to Iceland, the land of Fiona's mother's ancestors and the literature that Grant taught?—*JoAnne Sinsheimer*
10. The ending of the story deliberately leaves some unanswered questions. Does the ending feel incomplete?—*Sarah Barnett/Judy Catterton*