

The Art of Hearing Heartbeats Study Guide

The Art of Hearing Heartbeats by Jan-Philipp Sendker

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Plot Summary

“The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” is a romance mystery novel by Jan-Philipp Sendker in which a young woman, Julia Win, sets out to track down her father four years after he disappeared in Burma. When the novel begins, Julia has recently arrived in the town of Kalaw, Thailand, from New York. Her father has abandoned her family, and she is seeking to find answers. She meets a mysterious man named U Ba at a tea house. U Ba knows almost everything about Julia, which perplexes and intrigues her. He explains he knows her through her father. U Ba speaks to Julia about the importance of love, and he begins to tell the story of her father’s first twenty years of life, something unknown to Julia and her family.

U Ba begins his story by telling Julia that her father, Tin Win, was born to a very superstitious mother and a mildly-superstitious father. An astrologer prophesied that Tin Win would be negatively affected by his eyes. The astrologer's prediction coincided with Tin Win's mother's belief that Tin Win was a bad omen because all of the chickens in the neighborhood had died after his birth. A great aunt died eight weeks to the day after Tin Win was born. When Tin Win's father was accidentally killed at work, Tin Win's mother had been through enough. She abandoned Tin Win when he was six.

Tin Win was cared for and raised by a neighbor, Su Kyi. By the age of ten, he was developing cataracts that ultimately left him blind. He studied with U May, a Buddhist monk, at the local monastery. Through U May's guidance, Tin Win learned to rely on his other senses, especially the sense of sound. By the age of fourteen, he had met a local girl of the same age named Mi Mi. Though he could not see her, he immediately fell for her because of the sound of her heartbeat and the gentle sweetness of her voice.

Mi Mi took an instant liking to Tin Win, too. She did not look down on him for his blindness. She herself had deformed legs and feet. She could not move around freely without assistance or crawling. Tin Win, however, found nothing wrong at all with Mi Mi. The two became inseparable, with Tin Win carrying Mi Mi on his back. Together, they made one whole person. She told him where to go as they traveled together. By the age of eighteen, they had sex with each other, and Mi Mi's mother considered marriage a real possibility.

It was then that U Saw, Tin Win's estranged and wealthy uncle, intervened. U Saw had learned of a potential personal and professional catastrophe if he did not help a family relative in need. U Saw sent for Tin Win, who was forced to leave Mi Mi behind and travel to Rangoon. Tin Win had hoped to be away for only a few weeks. While there, U Saw had Tin Win's sight restored with surgery. According to custom, Tin Win could not argue with a generous male relative acting in the stead of a father. So, when U Saw decided to send Tin Win to Saint Paul's High School in Rangoon, Tin Win had no choice. Meanwhile, all of the letters he and Mi Mi wrote to one another were intercepted by U Saw.



Two years passed. U Saw decided to send Tin Win to study law in the United States. He sent a letter to Mi Mi, falsely claiming to have written on Tin Win's behalf. He told Mi Mi not to contact him again until he finished school. By then, Tin Win realized his uncle was orchestrating his future, which included work as a partner in his uncle's business affairs and an arranged marriage. To avoid this, Tin Win stayed in the United States. He eventually met and fell in love with Julia's mother. They were married, even though he was still in love with Mi Mi. Fifty years after leaving Mi Mi, he returned to her. The two had sex and died together the next morning, wrapped in the other one's arms.

After hearing U Ba's story, Julia is stunned to learn that her father and Mi Mi have been dead for four years. U Ba explains to her that love is important. It can transcend great distances and time. As the novel closes, Julia discovers that U Ba is actually her half-brother. He is the child of Mi Mi and Tin Win.



Part I, Chapter 1 – Part I, Chapter 11

Summary

Part I, Chapter 1 – An old man named U Ba approaches Julia Win at a tea house in Burma, saying he has been waiting to speak to her for four years. He knows all about her, including that she was born in New York City on August 28, 1968, to a Burmese father and an American mother. He asks Julia if she believes in love; Julia laughs in response. U Ba says he speaks of the kind of love that is so deep it brings meaning to life and knows no bounds. He explains that the tea house in which they now speak was where he first met Julia's father. He was amazed by the story and by the fact that the only religion her father believed in was love. The old man then disappears into the crowd, leaving Julia unsettled and wanting to know how U Ba knows so much about her and her father.

Part 1, Chapter 2 – Julia does not need to pay for her tea because she is considered U Ba's friend. It is very hot and humid outside in the small mountain village. A young man who knows Julia, but whom Julia does not know, directs her back to her hotel. In her room, Julia thinks about U Ba. She wonders if he is some kind of con man. She finds it hard to believe her father would have bared his soul to a stranger like U Ba. She has come to Burma to find her father, who has gone missing. His last known location was Bangkok. The police suspect him of living a double life. Julia intends to get to the bottom of her father's past.

Part 1, Chapter 3 – This chapter recalls events of the past. Four years before, the morning after graduation from law school, Julia wakes to see her father, a Wall Street lawyer, at the foot of her bed in a fancy old gray overcoat and brown Borsalino hat. Borsalinos are a trademark and good-luck charm for him since he wore one to the first interview for his first job. Julia's father tells her he loves her and that he is going to Boston for a few days. At the time, Julia thinks that it is a routine business trip. Later that morning, her father's secretary, Susan, calls to say he has missed his ten o'clock appointment. It worries Julia.

Within a few days, the news media carries the story of her father's disappearance. She learns he drove to JFK Airport, but he went to Los Angeles instead of Boston. From there, he went to Hong Kong on United Airlines Flight 888. A flight attendant remembers him reading a volume of Pablo Neruda's poetry. Julia's father then spends the night at the Peninsula Hotel, Room 218, in Hong Kong. Next, he takes Pacific Flight 615 to Bangkok where he stays the night at the Mandarin Oriental. The police believe that he has never left Thailand, for his trail goes cold there. Originally, her father had come from Burma to study law in New York in 1942, becoming an American citizen in 1959. He had listed his birthplace as the British colony capital of Rangoon.

Part I, Chapter 4 – This chapter recalls events of the past. Julia wonders what could have made her father change so quickly and do something so out of the ordinary. She



receives a package from her mother. It contains some old photos, documents, and papers that had fallen behind a dresser. The contents had belonged to her father. The photos are happy family photos. The documents and papers include business calendars and naturalization papers. The oldest calendar, dated 1960, contains a transcribed Neruda poem and a blue airmail envelope addressed to a Mi Mi at 38 Circular Road, Kalaw, Shan State, Burma. There is also an unsent love letter written by Julia's father to Mi Mi dated April 24, 1955. He promises that they will be together again. Julia then decides to fly to Thailand. From there, she will go to Burma.

Part I, Chapter 5 – This chapter continues recounting events of the past. Julia announces her plans to her mother. Her mother finds them ridiculous, and she is angry and bitter at her husband for leaving. She is also mad because he made false promises to her, doing things only superficially for her, such as becoming Catholic and declaring his love for her. Meanwhile, she alienated herself from her parents for marrying someone who was not white. Julia's father had kept the first twenty years of his life a secret from her mother. Julia's mother had found an unsent letter to Mi Mi before the wedding, but she loved him too much to break their engagement. Julia's mother no longer cares to learn the truth about Julia's father.

Part 1, Chapter 6 – This chapter returns the narrative to the present. As Julia is eating breakfast, she reads about the town of Kalaw, where she is now staying. It is located on the western edge of the Shan Plateau at 4,300 feet. Most residents speak English. She goes on to make a list of things she will need. She lists a car, a driver, a tour guide, and a phone book. She will also need a local map to find the address on her father's unsent letter and to keep her from getting lost as she questions people. Then, Julia goes jogging. She later finds U Ba at the tea house.

Part 1, Chapter 7 – U Ba continues to tell Julia events from the distant past. Mya Mya enjoys the cool weather of December in Kalaw. She is pregnant and in labor. She doesn't know how to be a mother. In labor, she remembers watching her brother drown seventeen years earlier. That tragic event makes her avoid water except for bathing. On the other hand, her brother's drowning helps her deal with the accidental burning of her family's hut.

Part 1, Chapter 8 – This chapter continues to relate past events. Mya Mya believes that her son, Tin Win, is a curse because all of her chickens die after his birth. This is further confirmed for Mya Mya when her neighbors' chickens all die. It means he will be a curse for other families as well. She decides to approach her husband about it.

Part 1, Chapter 9 – Mya Mya's husband, Khin Maung, thinks she is jumping to conclusions. While his son may not have been born at the best time, it doesn't mean he is cursed. Khin Maung and Mya Mya go to see an astrologer. The astrologer contends the baby will bring them great sorrow because he has a medical condition relating to his eyes. Khin Maung explains that sorrow does not mean a curse. However, his wife will not listen to him.



Part 1, Chapter 10 – Khin Maung wonders if there is such a thing as fate at all. When a great-aunt dies eight weeks to the day Tin Win was born, Khin Maung accepts that his son is fated. He spends as little time as possible around the baby. He and his wife come to act as the ground keeper and housekeeper for the estate of Khin Maung's wealthy uncle. Khin Maung also works at a nearby golf course. On Tin Win's sixth birthday, two policemen arrive to explain that Khin Maung has been accidentally killed by being struck by a golf ball to the temple. Mya Mya abandons her son.

Part 1, Chapter 11 – Tin Win anxiously waits for his mother's return. Days pass. Neighbors, including Su Kyi, bring food and water, but Tin Win refuses all kindnesses. When he nearly dies of hunger, exhaustion, and thirst, Su Kyi moves in with him and restores him to good health. She becomes his surrogate parent. She knows that he dearly misses his real parents. She also hopes that he will know one day that time does not heal all wounds, but only makes some small enough to be manageable.

Analysis

"The Art of Hearing Heartbeats" is a romance mystery novel by Jan-Philipp Sendker in which a young woman, Julia Win, sets out to track down her father four years after he disappeared in Thailand. Immediately, the novel delves into themes of mystery and love. Julia's questions are numerous: Why did her father leave? Where exactly did he go? What does Mi Mi have to do with all of it? Was her father leading a double life? What happened to him for the first twenty years of his life? Is her father still alive?

Naturally, the question of love also arises, especially through Julia's conversation with her mother, Judith. Julia wonders if her father ever truly loved her mother because he abandoned her after years of marriage. Judith contends that her husband never loved her. Likewise, she isn't interested in the truth behind the mysteries that Julia is setting out to solve. For Judith, the mystery of the truth ended when her heart was broken.

Julia, however, focuses exclusively on getting to the bottom of things. The significance of her encounter with U Ba –who seems vaguely familiar to her – and his purpose in telling her the story of Tin Win and Mi Mi are unknown at this point. However, the telling of the story of her father's early life begins to solve the mystery of her father's life up to the age of twenty. It is something her father had not shared, which kept his past a mystery until now.

The mystery of the past unfolds in a mix of past and present narration. Through the back-and-forth recounting, the theme of family emerges. At this point in the novel, the family appears to be a highly dysfunctional thing at best. Julia's family has been broken apart by Tin Win's departure and disappearance. Her mother's heart is broken. Julia herself is scrambling for answers, having to travel around the world to try to find them.

What Julia learns so far about her father's birth family is also disheartening. Tin Win's mother was incredibly superstitious; his father was mildly superstitious. The ill-omens surrounding Tin Win's birth –from his prophesied medical malady relating to his eyes, to



the chickens dying, to the death of a great aunt eight weeks to the day of his birth – convinced his mother that something is very wrong. Tin Win's father was unnerved, but not totally convinced. When Tin Win's father died, Tin Win's mother abandoned him.

In America, such a thing is frowned upon. Here, the differences between the East and West become apparent and are introduced as a theme. Americans tend to be less superstitious than those of the East. For example, such occurrences –including dead chickens and a dead great aunt –would not be blamed superstitiously on a child. Americans tend to rally around those who need help in some form or another, especially when it comes to family. Tin Win's mother abandons him, finding prophecy more potent than family. It is repeatedly noted throughout the novel that Burma is still a very conservative country in terms of old ideas and superstitions.

Julia finds it hard to believe that her father, who was himself abandoned, could abandon his own family decades later. But, as she learns through U Ba, this has largely to do with the idea of love. Here, love becomes an essential theme to the novel. U Ba contends that love is something that is strong enough to defy death and selfishness. It is life-transforming. Julia considers such talk of love the stuff of fairy tales. She is interested in reality, not fantasy.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Julia find it difficult to believe that her father could have abandoned her family or have led a double life? What does she hope her trip to Thailand will accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

Like her mother, Julia begins to doubt that Tin Win ever loved their family. Why does she begin to believe this? Given the events of the novel so far, do you think that her belief is justified? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe that Julia finds it so difficult to believe in the idea of love as explained by U Ba? Why is this especially difficult for her to believe in conjunction with her father?

Vocabulary

futile, reproach, premonition, pretentious, humility, cursory, sufficed, harbinger, inauspicious, venerable, incantation, profligate



Part I, Chapter 12 – Part II, Chapter 4

Summary

Part I, Chapter 12 – This chapter continues relating events from Tin Win's childhood. He begins to notice that his vision is becoming blurred. It gets so bad that it seems he is constantly looking through a milky, white cloth. After turning ten, everything goes black. Taking Tin Win to the local doctor, Su Kyi is informed that Tin Win's sight might return as mysteriously as it had gone.

Part I, Chapter 13 – Tin Win struggles on a daily basis with his blindness, readjusting to new routines. While the doctor assures Tin Win that his other senses will make up for his sight, this does not happen for Tin Win. Things only get worse. School especially becomes difficult. Su Kyi is sure that Tin Win will one day commit suicide.

Part I, Chapter 14 – In the present, U Ba pauses his story. Julia believes she is being told a fairy tale. U Ba says he does not believe in fairy tales, God, or magic. Julia is sickened to think anyone could abandon a sickly child. She demands to know where her father's whereabouts. U Ba reminds her this is her father's story. He excuses himself for the day, but he explains that her father is very near.

Part I, Chapter 15 – In the present, Julia thinks about the past, about how her father was always there for her through sickness and through health. She also thinks about how the stories her father told her as a child rarely had happy endings, such as "The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile."

In the story, a sad and lonely princess lives on the bank of a river. On the other side is a king notorious for being strict and pushing his people to work hard. The princess's father and the other king hate each other. But, the other king's son meets and falls in love with the princess. They are taken back and forth across the river by the crocodile. The other crocodiles become angry; so, the first crocodile hides the prince in his mouth, causing the prince to suffocate. The princess dies of a broken heart. Their bodies are burned on the same day by their fathers. All the animals sing, causing the plumes of smoke from the pyres to intertwine.

Part II, Chapter 1 – In the present, Julia dreams of comforting the child Tin Win. U Ba comes to meet Julia just after ten in the morning. He brings her to his home into the old British part of town, which is now run-down. She is surprised to see him living with a bee's nest in his home. He explains he and the bees do not bother one another, and he is honored that they have chosen to live with him.

Part II, Chapter 2 – U Ba continues his story about Tin Win's childhood after he was abandoned. Su Kyi takes Tin Win to the monastery in town where her most trusted friend U May serves as abbot. U May has helped Su Kyi to get through the deaths of her husband and children in the past. He always tells her that life is a gift none must



disdain. She hopes that U May will get through to Tin Win. U May himself has dealt with tragedy, coming from a rich family that arranged a business marriage for him. The arranged marriage resulted in his father sending U May's sixteen year-old pregnant girlfriend packing. U May's girlfriend and their child later drowned accidentally.

U May tells Tin Win that the greatest treasure one has is the wisdom in one's own heart. The words move Tin Win. He comes to spend the next several weeks with the Buddhist monks. There he truly feels at peace, and he is reluctant to leave. He will return again and again to spend more time at the monastery.

Part II, Chapter 3 – In his time at the monastery, the monks help Tin Win learn to handle his blindness with a staff. As his confidence improves, so does his willingness to do chores, such as laundry and cutting firewood. U May and the other monks also train Tin Win in the use of other senses, such as sound and touch. U May explains that the heart, especially, is not relied on enough by those who have sight. U May also explains that fear is powerful, but there is another force far more powerful than fear. Tin Win is determined to find it.

Part II, Chapter 4 - As the years go by, Tin Win continues to spend time at the monastery. He becomes U May's best student. He learns to read in Braille and develops an excellent memory. One day, at the monastery hall, he encounters a girl named Mi Mi. He is drawn to her by the sound of her heartbeat. His own heart races as a result. Mimi must leave with her mother a short time later, but she says she will see Tin Win again.

Analysis

As the novel continues, the themes of mystery and the past return to the fore. This is accomplished by way of U Ba's narrative of Tin Win's life. Though much of her father's first twenty years alive are still very much a mystery, pieces of the past are beginning to fill in. It is in this section of the novel that the reader begins to suspect that the past not only has to do with the present mystery of Tin Win's disappearance, but it might be central to it.

The mysteries that Julia seeks to solve—including why her father left, if he ever loved her or her mother, and where he is now—remain. However, she is beginning to realize that the past has a tremendous bearing on the present. She herself is proof of this idea because the disappearance of her father has led to her traveling around the world to Burma. Interestingly, a symbolic sort of parallel can be drawn between Tin Win's blindness to the physical world around him and to Julia's understanding of her father. She is blind to the past; he is blind to his world.

When it comes to the Eastern world, Julia thinks U Ba is telling her a fairy tale about love. U Ba notes that he does not believe in fairy tales, but he does believe in love. Here, the themes of East and West, love, and family all meet in Julia's consideration of her father's childhood. She finds it horrible that a mother would leave her own son over



something like superstition, especially in the wake of the death of her husband who was the father of the abandoned child.

In the Western tradition, especially in America, families normally grow closer in tragedy. Tin Win's mother abandons him. In the Western tradition, especially in America, superstition is considered nonsense. In Burma, it is life-changing and life-defining. In Western tradition, love is viewed to be all-conquering. In Burma, it appears as if love – especially familial love – is unable to overcome tragedy. Julia's father, a native of the East, cannot demonstrate love for his own family, even after he himself had been bereft of love as child.

This is especially hard for Julia to understand. As the child of an abandoned child, she imagines that her father should somehow be more sensitive to the idea of abandonment. Family has long meant everything in the world to Julia. Her father has been a role model and a hero. It is very likely that her own pursuit of law owes in large part to her father's work in law.

Among the many things Julia recalls about her father is the fact that she loved to listen to him tell traditional Burmese stories – fairy tales meant to convey deeper truths, meanings, and messages. One such story is “The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile.” Separated in love during life, the two lovers are united in death when the plumes of smoke from their respective funeral pyres intertwine. The distance of the physical world, including the river and the orchestrations of their fathers, are not enough to keep them separated forever.

It is easy to see why Julia doubts U Ba's belief in love. At first, she thinks that she is being told a fairy tale about a blind boy being abandoned by his superstitious mother. However, Julia will learn that there is more to U Ba's story than meets the eye. Also, she will find out that there the tale about the prince, the princess, and the crocodile is not just a fairy tale. It is a significant story.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Julia believe she is being told a fairy tale by U Ba? Why does U Ba insist that what he is telling her is not a fairy tale? What evidence is there to support U Ba's claim?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it so hard for Julia to believe that a mother could abandon her child? Is Julia justified in her disgust with the idea that Tin Win could be abandoned? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Su Kyi bring Tin Win to the Buddhist monastery in town? What does she hope will be accomplished there? Why does she opt to bring Tin Win to a Buddhist monk rather than a doctor for his blindness?

Vocabulary

stalwartly, toiled, severity, repose, archaic, vehemence, inextricably, ardent, industrious, jostled, bewilder



Part II, Chapter 5 – Part II, Chapter 14

Summary

Part II, Chapter 5 – This chapter continues the story of Tin Win's past. All Tin Win can think about is Mi Mi's heartbeat. At home with Su Kyi, he hears a buzzing-slurping sound that Su Kyi cannot hear. He cannot find the source of the sound.

Part II, Chapter 6 – Tin Win's attempt to walk home from the monastery by himself results in his stumbling and falling. Mi Mi, waiting for her brother at market, comes across Tin Win. She smells like pine after the first rain, and her heartbeat sounds like a melody. He asks her to help him locate the slurping-dripping sound he heard the day before. She agrees to help. They believe it is coming from a bird's nest. Tin Win puts Mi Mi on his shoulders, and she guides him to the nest. The sound turns out to be the heartbeat of a baby chick in an egg. Tin Win believes he and Mi Mi could go on to discover other such mysteries. Tin Win learns that Mi Mi needed his help to see into the nest because her legs are deformed. They turn inward.

Part II, Chapter 7 - Mi Mi's mother Yadana had given birth to Mi Mi when she was thirty-eight. Mi Mi is considered a gift, even though her feet are deformed. She gets around by crawling. Yadana's husband, Moe, is worried about Mi Mi's feet, but he finally comes around. Mi Mi grows to have a gentle voice and a good memory. By the age of fourteen, Mi Mi decides she wants to save her voice. However, she does not know the purpose for saving it. Yadana worries that Mi Mi may have to crawl all her life.

Part II, Chapter 8 – In the present, Julia finds it hard to believe her father was ever blind and had lost his heart to a crippled girl. She can't imagine how her father would abandon his family to try to return to Mi Mi after fifty years apart. She has always seen her father as a no-nonsense, quiet kind of lawyer. Julia asks U Ba where her father is. He says he could answer in one sentence, but the story must be told.

Part II, Chapter 9 - This chapter returns to the past. Su Kyi does not know why the normally quiet Tin Win is restless and wants to know about the market. Tin Win cannot get Mi Mi out of his mind. All he wants is to go to the market to find her again. At the market, he is guided by the sound of Mi Mi's heartbeat.

Part II, Chapter 10 – Mi Mi has adorned herself with makeup like others her age. Her mother wonders but does not question. She is waiting for Tin Win. She knows that waiting, especially for someone dependent on help from others, is natural. Her youngest brother disbelieves her about the nest story. But, Mi Mi knows that people falsely believe that seeing can only happen with eyes and only footsteps can overcome distances.

Part II, Chapter 11 – Tin Win decides to carry Mi Mi home from market. They take a detour through town. Mi Mi guides him by speaking directions. They get fresh



sugarcane juice. They are thrilled to be with each other. As they continue along the railroad tracks, she helps him to gain a rhythm. He begins to run. They later lie down in the grass and talk about the sound of hearts beating.

Part II, Chapter 12 – Tin Win has a difficult time sleeping. All he can think about is Mi Mi. He feels alive because of her. As the months pass, Tin Win and Mi Mi spend every moment they can together. They often pause in a location, so that Tin Win can describe what he hears and Mi Mi can tell about what she sees. Together, they make a whole person. He thinks about how Mi Mi's voice matches her heartbeat, but how U May's voice –strong –does not match his heart –weak. Tin Win wonders if he will ever know why, and he hopes Mi Mi may help him find answers to some of his many questions.

Part II, Chapter 13 – While Mi Mi is grateful for the concern her family shows her, she knows they truly do not understand what goes on inside her. She is later amazed to watch Tin Win clean a place in the monastery that he cannot see. She is also amazed by how he carries on with daily routines despite his handicap. It gives her hope for herself. Over time, Tin Win teaches her how to hear better and how to truly listen. When Mi Mi is not at the monastery one day, Tin Win becomes alarmed. He is attacked by stinging bugs and brought home by three neighbors.

Part II, Chapter 14 – Tin Win cries and wails in his sleep. Su Kyi thinks he might be sick. He becomes sick to his stomach. This goes on for days. Su Kyi brings him to U May. U May recognizes the signs of love and is not concerned. On the seventh day, Mi Mi arrives with her brother to see Tin Win. She falls asleep beside him.

They awaken hours later, and Tin Win appears much better. Mi Mi explains that an aunt has died and she and her family must leave before daybreak to be with relatives. Mi Mi and Tin Win go for a walk in the rain. Tin Win begins to notice how her breasts feel against his back and how close she seems now to him. They end up kissing. They explore their bodies with their fingers but Tin Win stops respectfully when he finds her pubic hair. She wants more but settles for his head on her breast.

Analysis

As the novel continues to unfold, love becomes a significant theme. Tin Win's sight completely fails, but he adjusts to his other senses. Sound becomes especially important to him. Throughout the history of mankind, the heart has most often associated with love. Tin Win's sight fails, but his sense of hearing is heightened. It is by no coincidence that the sound that comes to him more loudly and clearly than anything else is Mi Mi's heartbeat.

It is not the sight of Mi Mi that first attracts him to her. It is the sound of her heartbeat. The heartbeat symbolizes love. Tin Win's love for Mi Mi is instantaneous. He has no idea what she looks like, though he is able to construct something of a picture of her in his mind based on touch. He is aware that she suffers from a physical deformity of the



legs and feet. The deformity does not bother him in the least. Though Tin Win falls for Mi Mi quickly, their romance begins with friendship.

In all cultures, sight is often associated with love. Visualization is considered instrumental in the process of falling in love, though it is not absolutely necessary. Tin Win's falling for Mi Mi though he is blind and Mi Mi's falling for Tin Win who cannot see her demonstrate that sight is not absolutely necessary for love to exist. Love is much deeper than mere appearance. Julia begins to understand this through U Ba's narration.

Though they are physically limited apart, Tin Win and Mi Mi together form a whole person. Apart, they are two halves of a heart; together, they are one heart. What Tin Win lacks, Mi Mi provides, and what Mi Mi lacks, Tin Win supplies. She becomes his eyes, and he becomes her legs. Their travels together demonstrate that their love for one another can overcome any obstacle –whether it is merely walking through the market or climbing a tree. Love seems to conquer all for Tin Win and Mi Mi. Julia realizes now that she is not being told a fairy tale. It is a love story.

The love that Tin Win and Mi Mi feel for one another is best seen through the understanding Mi Mi has about sight and walking. She knows that far too often people confuse sight with seeing. Also, the ability to walk is confused with traversing distance. Mi Mi believes that having eyesight is not the same as really seeing and walking does not always mean covering distance. This is quite clear of Tin Win and Mi Mi, who are able to overcome their impediments by giving themselves completely to one another. The depth of the love Tin Win has for Mi Mi can be seen in his utter agony when she disappears for one week.

It is also through this section of the novel that family reemerges as an important theme. Su Kyi has emerged as a surrogate parent for Tin Win. Her love and devotion to him are clear. Beyond bringing him to the Buddhist monastery to train with U May, she sees to his everyday needs like any real parent would. Su Kyi becomes more of a mother to Tin Win than Tin Win's biological mother had ever been. Mi Mi's own deformities do not drive away her parents the way that Tin Win's birth ultimately drove away his mother. Instead, in keeping with how family is supposed to be, Mi Mi's family faithfully rallies around her with love.

It is through the story of her father's teenage years that much of the past continues to unfold for Julia. Her father's blindness, for example, is something that was unknown to her. A number of new mysteries arise as the past is revealed. More questions arise than are answered. One of those questions is why her father chose to keep his youth a secret from the rest of his family.

Discussion Question 1

What does Mi Mi mean when she believes that people falsely believe that seeing can only happen with eyes and only footsteps can overcome distances? How do her beliefs apply to her and Tin Win?



Discussion Question 2

What evidence can be gleaned from this section of the novel attesting to the fact that Tin Win is deeply in love with Mi Mi? Why has Tin Win fallen so quickly for Mi Mi? How does Mi Mi feel about Tin Win? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Su Kyi is unable to determine that Tin Win is in love, but U May is able to do so? Why are both Tin Win and Mi Mi reluctant to tell their respective families that they are falling in love?

Vocabulary

jubilant, obstinacy, articulate, repertoire, emaciated, haggard



Part II, Chapter 15 – Part III, Chapter 4

Summary

Part II, Chapter 15 – This chapter recalls events of Tin Win's earlier life. The next four years pass. Tin Win and Mi Mi continue to spend as much time as possible with each other. They become inseparable. A longing and a desire within her have awakened. She has never known the feelings before. Tin Win teaches her how to trust. He is the only one who knows she is humiliated to have to crawl. They swim naked, and she wraps her legs around him, telling him she cannot bear to be without him.

Part II, Chapter 16 – A heat wave comes to Kalaw. U May's health rapidly declines. As U May nears death, it makes Tin Win think about his own mortality. He fears not only his own death, but U May's as well. Tin Win and Mi Mi are with U May as he dies, telling them that all life contains the seed of death and that Mi Mi will tell Tin Win he is smiling. Tin Win tells U May to spare himself. U May asks for what, and then he dies. Tin Win believes no life should end with a question.

Part II, Chapter 17 – Yadana is glad to see that Mi Mi and Tin Win are together so much. She is likewise impressed by Tin Win warming up to the family and helping around the house. She begins to refer to him as her youngest son. With both Tin Win and Mi Mi being eighteen, Yadana begins to think about marriage. She does not know whom to approach, however, because Tin Win is an orphan. She imagines it won't hurt to wait a little longer to figure it out.

Part II, Chapter 18 - This chapter recalls events of the past. At home one night, Tin Win is surprised to find that two men have been charged by Tin Win's uncle, U Saw, to bring Tin Win to the city of Rangoon immediately. Hearing Su Kyi sigh puts Tin Win on alert. Neither knows what his uncle wants with him. She figures he won't be away for more than a few weeks. His uncle's request troubles him, because he will be without Mi Mi. He travels to her house to let her know. They have sex.

Part II, Chapter 19 – Tin Win packs what little he has for the journey. With tears in her eyes, Su Kyi walks him to the train station to meet the two men. Tin Win boards the train.

Part II, Chapter 20 – The novel returns to the present as U Ba takes a break from telling Julia the story. Julia begins to wonder how her father must have felt knowing that he had to leave and might lose everything with Mi Mi. It is now night. U Ba fixes up the couch for Julia, who quickly falls asleep.

Part II, Chapter 21 – In the present, Julia wakes up early in the morning, feeling refreshed. She finds U Ba working in a library to repair old volumes and books. He is currently working on a book of T. S. Eliot poems. The hundreds of books he owns were left to him by the British, many of whom never returned after World War I. Those who



did return rarely took things like books with them when they ultimately left, he explains. U Ba pulls out a book, one of Tin Win's favorites, given to U Ba before Su Kyi died. Julia can hear children singing somewhere. It makes her think of her father, who always said that only music could make him believe in a God or Heaven.

Part III, Chapter 1 – Julia asks to see the house where her father spent his childhood. U Ba directs her to the place, but he remains behind to take care of something unexplained. The entire property, Julia discovers, is overgrown. After hearing the children singing in the monastery, Julia realizes she is being told a true story. U Ba catches up and sees that Julia is troubled. She wonders how her father could love her since he left her and her family. U Ba explains there are many different ways love is understood and practiced. They sit on a bench built by Julia's father and eat fruit as U Ba continues the story.

Part III, Chapter 2 – This chapter recalls events of the past. Tin Win feels horrible for leaving Mi Mi behind. The train arrives in Rangoon. Tin Win dines with his uncle, U Saw. U Saw is very wealthy and employs many servants. He made his fortune by purchasing several German-owned businesses when their owners left during World War I. He has reached out to Tin Win because an astrologer has predicted a personal and commercial catastrophe if a family member in distress is not helped. He arranges for Tin Win's eyes to be examined by Dr. Stuart McCrae, an elite physician at Rangoon's largest hospital. The possibility that his eyes might be healed excites Tin Win. Hla Taw, a houseboy, is assigned to see to Tin Win's needs.

Part III, Chapter 3 – Tin Win suffers from diarrhea and sleeplessness. He is thinking about his mother's abandonment and Mi Mi. Mi Mi is constantly on his mind as the days pass. Dr. McCrae diagnoses Tin Win with cataracts, unusual for his age – but operable. The operation is carried out quickly, consisting of injections and cutting. He will need glasses, but he will be able to see again. When the procedure is finished, Tin Win is amazed by the blinding white light. He knows there is no going back to the way things were before.

Part III, Chapter 4 - Tin Win has not been able to see anything for eight years. The return of his sight is shocking. Ten days pass, and Tin Win still cannot get used to seeing everything. Sound still remains his dominant sense. Seeing something doesn't make it more real to him. Nevertheless, he spends hours wandering around, taking in the sights of the city. U Saw decides that Tin Win will attend Saint Paul's High School, even though he is older. Tin Win does not want to, but good manners dictate that he must comply with his uncle's request.

Analysis

As the years pass, the love between Tin Win and Mi Mi grows stronger. The two become inseparable just as the theme of love becomes completely imbedded in the novel. Love has become central to their lives –a fact that is well explained by U Ba and not missed by Julia. The deep love between Tin Win and Mi Mi is compared only



naturally to the love –or what Julia perceives to be the lack of love –between her parents.

U Ba explains that love doesn't always appear the way someone thinks it should. Though Julia doesn't understand this now, she will later. To Julia, the love her mother and father supposedly shared should have been akin to what her father and Mi Mi shared. The past, as important as it is for Julia to understand, is working thematically to change Julia in two ways. First, she is seeing her father in three-dimensional ways now, as a man with flaws and passions. Secondly, she is beginning to soften her stance against her father.

The past also opens up more mysteries. It is questionable as to how Tin Win could have ended up in America when he clearly loved Mi Mi so much. But, the answer also rests with the past and unfolds as a result of U Ba's narration and cultural understanding. In Burmese culture, parents and parental figures –particularly fathers –must be obeyed without question, complaint, or defiance.

Owing to Eastern superstition, U Saw –who has been absent from his family's life – decides it is time to suddenly appear in Tin Win's life. His decision is based on an astrology prediction. More concerned about his personal status, wealth, and business than anything else, U Saw has Tin Win collected and brought to the capital city of Rangoon. There, Tin Win is treated for cataracts, and his sight returns. Though his sense of sight has been restored, what he truly sees is the slipping away of his freedom and his innocence. His uncle greatly intercedes in Tin Win's life, determining that Tin Win will attend a local high school. His uncle's decision is final.

Owing to this Eastern superstitious respect and being entirely concerned about only himself, U Saw commandeers Tin Win's life. Tin Win becomes U Saw's shield against prophecy. If the prophecy had never been made, U Saw would have never been troubled about his nephew. It is a cruel and cheap ploy made by U Saw. U Saw represents yet another negative manifestation of family.

At this point in the novel, it is important to think back to the story told to Julia by Tin Win when Julia was a child –“The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile.” In the story, the prince and the princess were separated by distance –the river –and by the dictates of their fathers, both kings. In the present, Tin Win and Mi Mi have been separated by distance –by way of the railroad –and by a king of sorts, being Tin Win's wealthy and influential uncle. The stage is set for tragedy.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do Tin Win and Mi Mi compare to “The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile”? How do they differ? Do you believe the similarities are enough to warrant an omen of tragedy? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Do you think that U Saw would have taken an interest in Tin Win had it not been for the astrology prediction? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

As the past unfolds, what mysteries are solved? What mysteries remain? What new mysteries arise? Does Julia begin to look at her father differently as a result? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

chafed, beleaguered, incomprehensible, strenuous, threadbare, resonance, felicitous, ostensibly, arduous, obsequious



Part III, Chapter 5 – Part III, Chapter 12

Summary

Part III, Chapter 5 - This chapter continues recounting the past. U Saw cruelly refuses to mail any of Tin Win's letters to Mi Mi, and he pulls Mi Mi's letters from the mail when they arrive. This goes on for over a year. They write to one another every single day. U Saw considers the love between to be a madness. He hopes the infatuation will fade in time. He also knows that the predicted catastrophe appears to have been avoided. Meanwhile, U Saw also knows it is only a matter of time before the Germans take London and the Japanese overthrow Burma's government.

Part III, Chapter 6 – It is U Saw who sends Tin Win to the United States to study law with the intent that he will return to ultimately become a partner in the company and one of the wealthiest men in the city. He is heartbroken, but he does his best to remember that he is loved by and loves Mi Mi. He hasn't heard from her in two years; but, that does not matter. The fact that he will not see her for several more years does not matter either. He will find his way back to her.

Part III, Chapter 7 – In the present, U Ba shows Julia a letter written to Mi Mi from U Saw. The letter explains that Tin Win has not written in two years due to being busy with school. The letter goes on to say that Tin Win will be in the United States for years studying law and Tin Win does not want Mi Mi to write to him at all. Julia is stunned. She is further stunned by Mi Mi's kind response, letting U Saw know she is glad that Tin Win is doing well and that she will honor the request not to write. It is clear to Julia that Mi Mi is stronger and smarter than she's been given credit for.

U Ba explains that over the next few years, every member of Mi Mi's nuclear family dies. As tragic as life becomes, Mi Mi does not lose heart. She does her best to remain strong and remains beautiful. Love makes people beautiful, U Ba explains. Mi Mi turns down countless marriage proposals, for her love for Tin Win does not die. She is looked after by relatives over the decades. She rolls cigars which are reputed to be good luck. She comes to be known as a source of great wisdom and kindness. After World War II, U Saw's fortunes rapidly decline for having supported the Japanese and for always supporting the wrong side in the violent factionalism in Burma that follows. He dies while playing golf.

U Ba himself could have studied abroad in England, but he gave up a chance at a wealthy life to care for his ailing mother. He knew Julia's father from Saint Paul's High School. Everything he has ever needed, such as love, has been in Kalaw.

Part III, Chapter 8 - This chapter intertwines events of the past and the present. In the past, Julia is eight or nine years old. She and her father stand on the Brooklyn Bridge. Her father loves areas only interesting to tourists, especially the Staten Island Ferry. It was how he arrived in New York in 1942.



In the present, Julia wonders if her father ever truly loved her mother or why he even married her to begin with. U Ba explains that her father refused to return to Burma because his uncle had become a father-figure. Returning to Burma would have meant his entire life being mapped out, including an arranged marriage rather than a chance at living with Mi Mi. Julia imagines that perhaps her father did love her mother, but it was a different style of love than her mother had expected. Julia now feels sorry for both of her parents. U Ba brings Julia to a house where she can hear her father's breath and see Mi Mi crawling on the floor.

Part III, Chapter 9 – The story switches back to the past. Tin Win has told his story to U Ba. He then sets out into the town of Kalaw. It is incredible to be back. Everything is familiar –especially the sounds. He goes at once to Mi Mi's house, where they make love all night. In the morning, he hears her heartbeat. It sounds weak. He knows he has come just in time.

Part III, Chapter 10 - A relative finds Mi Mi and Tin Win holding one another in bed. Both have died of heart failure. People pour in from around the countryside to offer their respects. The bodies of Mi Mi and Tin Win are cremated.

Part III, Chapter 11 – In the present, Julia is stunned to learn about her father's death. She is hurt deeply, hoping to have been able to see her father again. U Ba explains his own wife died years ago, before she had even reached the age of thirty. In impoverished places, death is a regular part of life. U Ba then brings Julia to where the ashes of her father and Mi Mi were scattered to the wind. She feels at peace. She knows her father did indeed love her mother and his children, but he had also loved Mi Mi. U Ba explains the smoke from the funeral pyres interwove with one another while some in attendance reportedly heard animals singing.

Part III, Chapter 12 – Julia sleeps in late the next morning. A package of five photos is delivered to her at the hotel. They feature Mi Mi at ten year intervals with a boy growing into a man. It is U Ba, the son of Mi Mi and Tin Win. She meets him at the memorial being given for Mi Mi. He motions for her to remain silent. Now Julia knows that U Ba is her half-brother. They share Tin Win as a father.

Analysis

As the novel concludes, the past and the present intertwine, and all of the mysteries that have percolated through the novel are solved. This is very much so the case with her father. Julia learns that her father's journey to the United States was mandated by U Saw –but also learns that U Saw's plan totally backfired on him when he refused to return to Burma, to an arranged marriage, and to a future in business laid out for him in stone. The prophesy of U Saw's downfall comes about by his own hand. He is the source from which his nephew needs help, throwing obstacles rather than support at Tin Win. Here, family serves to be an overwhelmingly detracting and negative thing.



In the United States, the woman who will become Julia's mother aggressively pursues Tin Win. Tin Win himself does not aggressively try to stop her. Julia comes to understand that this is because Tin Win did indeed love Judith, but like U Ba said, love is manifested in different ways and different styles. One's own perceptions of love influence how one expects to be loved. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Tin Win never fell out of love with Mi Mi, and despite the fact that Tin Win began his own family, Julia cannot get over the fact that he still abandoned them. While she has softened immensely toward him –even understanding why –she cannot say what he did was alright.

Here is one of the great strengths of family in the novel: Julia has set out across the world to learn about her father and to discover the truth behind his disappearance. She has done so, and has refused to turn her back on her father in the end. Unfortunately, she is unable to speak to her father again –or to Mi Mi, for that matter –because both her father and Mi Mi died four years before. However, Julia learns that she does indeed still have family in the area: U Ba is her half-brother. He has opened up her eyes to an entirely unknown part of her life, and proves to be a vital link to her deceased father.

It is also through her father's returning to his home country that Julia's Western ways meet the Eastern ways. Despite different ways of handling things like love, East and West share much in common –such as a healthy respect for love in and of itself. Tragedy in love is common in the West as it is in the East. America is known in pop culture as a land of happy endings, from movies to novels. But the stories of other cultures are notably darker, or are bittersweet at best.

Such is the case with "The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile". Only in death are the prince and princess reunited when the smoke from their funeral pyres entwines. The same occurs for Tin Win and Mi Mi. The bittersweet ending also ties into Julia's own story. Julia had been hoping to meet with her father again, to speak with him personally –only to find out she was four years too late to do so. However, the fact that she discovers her half-brother, and in him she discovers she finally has the key to the past – a bittersweet ending.

Discussion Question 1

What is the truth behind Tin Win's decision to marry Judith, and to remain in the United States? How does Julia react to this truth? Why? Do you believe Tin Win is justified in having married Judith? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What is the truth behind Tin Win's decision to abandon his family to return to Burma? How do you believe he felt about making such a decision and carrying it out? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe U Ba keeps his identity as Julia's half-sister a secret for nearly the entire novel? How does Julia respond to learning this? Why?

Vocabulary

Prestigious, illustrious, inevitable, dissemination, prattle, unfathomable, scrupulously, equanimity, ubiquitous, perfunctory



Characters

Julia Win

Julia Win is one of the two narrators in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendker. Born in New York in 1968, Julia is a law school graduate. She is beginning a new job when she decides to fly to Thailand. It has been four years since her father, Tin Win, abandoned the family and returned to his homeland. Mysteries and rumors about him abound, including that he lived a double-life. Julia wants to get to the bottom of it all. She is critical, skeptical, and uncompromisingly set against her father’s actions, especially when she finds an old love letter from her father to a woman in Thailand. She wonders if he ever loved his family in New York at all.

When Julia Win arrives in her father’s hometown of Kalaw, she meets a mysterious man named U Ba at a teahouse. U Ba knows everything about her, which confuses Julia and makes her suspicious. Over the next few days, she meets with U Ba as he begins to tell her the story of her father’s past, primarily the first twenty years of his life. U Ba contends that love is the sole motivating factor of the story and of her father’s actions, but Julia is still skeptical. However, the more she learns about her father, the more she begins to soften her stance toward him and his actions. She comes to realize that her father loved her and her mother, but that the love he shared with Mi Mi was a different kind of love. She is heartbroken to learn that her father and Mi Mi have been dead for four years, but she is stunned to learn that U Ba is her half-brother.

U Ba

U Ba is a native of the town of Kalaw, Thailand, where he lives in a dilapidated British-style home with a swarm of bees. The son of Tin Win and Mi Mi, U Ba is sad when his parents die, but he looks forward to the day he will meet his half-sister, Julia Win. U Ba knows all about Julia and her life because their father, Tin Win, had shared his life story with U Ba before dying. U Ba is determined to share the story with Julia. When she arrives, he tells the story of Tin Win’s life over the course of several days. He tells about Tin Win’s death. The last thing U Ba reveals to Julia is that he is her half-brother. He is the son of Mi Mi and Tin Win.

Tin Win

Tin Win is the father of Julia, the former husband of Judith, and the long-time love interest of Mi Mi. Tin Win’s mother, Mya Mya, believed Tin Win would bring bad luck and misfortune based on a prophecy. After chickens, a great-aunt, and his father dies, Tin Win is abandoned at the age of six by his mother. He is raised by a neighbor who becomes a mother to him, Su Kyi. Tin Win’s develops cataracts and, eventually, becomes blind. Su Kyi brings him to her friend, U May, at the Buddhist monastery. There, U Saw helps guide Tin Win to rely more heavily on his other senses, including



sound. At the age of fourteen, Tin Win meets a girl named Mi Mi. He is instantly attracted to her due to the sound of her heartbeat.

Though Tin Win cannot see Mi Mi, he finds her beautiful. Mi Mi has deformed feet that force her to crawl or to be carried. The sound of her heart and her voice compel Tin Win to fall in love with her. Four years pass, and the two become inseparable, growing increasingly romantic with one another.

Fearing prophesied disaster unless he helps a family member, Tin Win's uncle, U Saw, forces the now-eighteen year-old Tin Win to journey to the capital city of Rangoon. Before Tin Win leaves, he and Mi Mi have sex. In Rangoon, Tin Win is treated for his eyesight, which is restored. Observing his Eastern culture, Tin Win must do as his uncle says; so, he is forced to remain in Rangoon for two years to attend school. U Saw intercepts all letters between Tin Win and Mi Mi. Tin Win is then sent to America to study law.

In America, he refuses to return to Thailand because he knows that his whole life will be dictated by his uncle. Tin Win falls in love with Judith and marries her. They have children, including Julia. Then, years pass. Finally, Tin Win decides to look for Mi Mi. In Thailand, he meets his half-son, U Ba, and goes to find Mi Mi. He and Mi Mi have sex all night. Both die the next morning as they lie in an embrace.

Mi Mi

Mi Mi is the lifelong love interest of Tin Win. Born with deformed feet and legs, Mi Mi must get around by crawling or relying on help from others. She is beautiful, sweet, gentle, and kind. She is very patient, knowing she is often at the mercy of others. She meets Tin Win near the market and likes him immediately. She and Tin Win end up becoming inseparable over the next few years, falling deeply in love. They have sex the night before Tin Win's uncle forces Tin Win to move to Rangoon. Mi Mi writes to Tin Win every day, though her letters are never answered. She continues to love him long after he leaves for America. Over the decades, she grows more beautiful and becomes a sage in the village. Fifty years later, Tin Win returns as Mi Mi's heart is failing. The two have sex all night, and both die the following morning.

Judith Win

Judith Win is the former wife of Tin Win and the mother of Julia. She meets Tin Win while in college, aggressively pursuing him. She learns about Tin Win's love for Mi Mi prior to marriage, but she decides to marry him anyway. She alienates her family by marrying a non-white man. She never truly feels loved by Tin Win. After he abandons the family, Judith washes her hands of him, no longer caring about the reason for his behavior.



Mya Mya

Mya Mya is the mother of Tin Win and the wife of Khin Maung. Highly superstitious, Mya Mya is told by an astrologer that her son is an omen of misfortune and bad luck. When all the chickens in the neighborhoods die, followed by the deaths of a great aunt and Khin Maung, Mya Mya has had enough. She willingly abandons her six year-old son and never returns.

Khin Maung

Khin Maung is the husband of Mya Mya and the father of Tin Win. Khin Maung is not very superstitious. At first he doubts his wife's assertions that their son is bad luck. However, even Khin Maung begins to suspect this might be the case. Nevertheless, Khin Maung refuses to abandon his son. He is later killed by a golf ball to the head at the golf course where he works.

U Saw

U Saw is the incredibly wealthy uncle of Tin Win. The owner of several German-founded companies in Thailand, U Saw learns from an astrologer that he will face catastrophe unless he helps a family member in need. He uproots Tin Win from his life to have Tin Win's sight restored. U Saw later decides that Tin Win will remain in Rangoon for two years to attend a proper high school. In that time, U Saw prevents correspondence between Tin Win and Mi Mi by intercepting their letters. When he learns that Tin Win is brilliant and may be an asset to business, he decides to send Tin Win to America to study law. He prevents Mi Mi from contacting Tin Win. U Saw's business later falls apart for supporting the Axis powers in World War II and for always taking the wrong side in the postwar violence in Thailand.

U May

U May is a Buddhist monk who resides and practices at the monastery in Kalaw. He is incredibly wise, patient, and kind. A longtime friend of Su Kyi, U May becomes both teacher and mentor to Tin Win, helping Tin Win to rely on his other senses. U May ultimately passes away, doing his best to continue instructing Tin Win to the end. Tin Win encourages U May to spare himself the difficulty of speaking as he dies. U May replies with a question, "Why?" This teaches Tin Win that no life should end with a question of any kind. Later, this lesson helps prompt Tin Win to leave America for Thailand.

Su Kyi

Su Kyi is an elderly friend and neighbor of Tin Win who comes to live with Tin Win after he is abandoned by his mother. Su Kyi ultimately becomes a mother figure to Tin Win in her own right. It is Su Kyi who introduces Tin Win to her friend, U May, and helps Tin Win to handle living without his eyesight. When Tin Win is ordered to Rangoon by his uncle, Su Kyi is deeply saddened not only for herself, but for Tin Win and Mi Mi as well.



Symbols and Symbolism

Staff

A staff is given to Tin Win by U May while Tin Win studies at the Buddhist monastery. The staff is what Tin Win uses to help him feel his way around while he walks. It allows him a degree of independence without his eyesight. He later ceases using the staff when he begins to carry Mi Mi on his back. She serves as his eyes and his guide.

Heartbeats

Heartbeats are especially apparent to Tin Win when he learns to use his other senses in lieu of the loss of his eyesight. It is the sound of Mi Mi's heartbeat that first attracts Tin Win's attention, causing him to fall for her instantly. Her heartbeat is a beautiful and comforting sound to Tin Win. When Tin Win returns half a century later to Mi Mi, he can hear the sound of her heartbeat weakening. He knows that he has returned just in time. Heartbeats become symbolic of the love shared between Tin Win and Mi Mi.

Blue envelope

A blue envelope is discovered by Julia among her father's possessions. It is addressed to Mi Mi in Kalaw, Thailand. It contains a love letter from the 1950s written by her father to Mi Mi. It throws Julia's father's love and loyalty into doubt. It causes her to question everything she thought she knew about her father and provides a starting point for her journey to find her father.

Love letters

Love letters are written by Tin Win and Mi Mi to one another for the two years Tin Win is forced to remain in Rangoon by his uncle. The love letters are intercepted by U Saw, who is amazed that there are never any accusations or statements of hurt or anger in the letters. He believes the two are infatuated with one another. He also believes that it will quickly fade. The letters prove otherwise.

Photographs

Photographs of Mi Mi and a child growing into a man are given to Julia in an envelope at the hotel. The young man growing up in the pictures is U Ba. The photos reveal that U Ba is the son of Mi Mi and Tin Win. Julia realizes that U Ba is her half-brother. Immediately, she sets out to find him.



Guidebook

A guidebook is purchased by Julia Win when she travels to Thailand. The guidebook gives her information on the facts and history of the country, including Kalaw. Through the guidebook, she learns that Kalaw is an old town once popular with the British. The town rests at 4,300 feet above sea level. The guidebook tells her very little about Kalaw, specifically. This makes it difficult to determine the connection between the place and her father.

List

Julia composes a list of things she'll need while in Kalaw as she seeks to find her father. The list includes a car, a driver, a tour guide, and a phone book. She will also need a local map to find the address on her father's unsent letter. Ironically, she ends up only needing a guide.

Glasses

Glasses are worn by Tin Win from the age of eighteen. As a child, Tin Win develops horrible cataracts that lead to blindness. He is later brought to Rangoon by his uncle. There, with money and access to the best medical care it can buy, Tin Win's sight is restored. However, in order to see sharply, Tin Win wears glasses.

"The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile"

"The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile" is a Burmese fable told to Julia by Tin Win when Julia is a child. It is her favorite. Like many Eastern stories, the ending is bittersweet. The story involves forbidden love between a prince and princess, who live on opposite sides of a river, and a crocodile ferrying them across to be with one another. The prince and princess both end up dying, and the smoke from their funeral pyres intertwines and unites them in death. The story takes on important significance as the prince and the princess were separated by distance –the river –and by the dictates of their fathers, both being kings. Tin Win and Mi Mi were likewise separated by distance –by way of the railroad –and by a king of sorts, being Tin Win's wealthy and influential uncle. When they die, their funeral smoke also intertwines just as in the story.

Rice

Rice is a major crop and export of Thailand. Prior to World War II, numerous companies owned by Western powers, including the British and the Germans, had business stakes in the rice market. U Saw purchased two such German rice companies. He made his profit in rice as a result of the German pullout when the war began.

Settings

Kalaw

Kalaw is a small mountain village 4,300 feet above sea level on the western edge of the Shan Plateau in Burma. It is the town of Julia's father's youth and the place of Mi Mi's birth. It is the hometown of U Ba and the town to which Julia has come to find her father. It is a close-knit, friendly community that is steeped in tradition and superstition. The town was formerly popular with the British, and it is the site of a Buddhist monastery where Tin Win is trained by U May to rely on his senses to compensate for his sight loss. Kalaw is the village to which Tin Win returns to spend one last night with Mi Mi before the two of them die in while embracing.

Burma

Myanmar, formerly the British colony of Burma, is the country to which Julia travels to find her father. The country is referred to as Burma throughout the novel. Burma is the location of the Shan Plateau and the town of Kalaw. Burma is a country steeped in tradition and superstition. It is where Tin Win was born and spent the first twenty years of his life. The country's markets are invested in and participated in by foreign powers, including the British and the Germans. Burma was invaded by the Japanese during World War II and later wracked by civil war and internal factionalism and violence. In the present, the country is largely stable.

New York

New York is the city and state where Tin Win is sent to study law by his uncle in 1942. There, he decides to remain in America in order to call his own shots in life, even though it greatly pains him to have to leave Mi Mi behind. In New York, Tin Win meets and marries Judith. The two have children, including Julia. Tin Win loves New York, especially the tourist attractions. He brings Julia to the attractions all the time. His favorite is the Staten Island Ferry. However, the call of Tin Win's homeland and the memory of Mi Mi become too much for him to bear. After fifty years of being apart from Mi Mi, he leaves New York behind and returns to his native home.

Staten Island Ferry

The Staten Island Ferry is a tourist attraction in New York which Tin Win loves to ride. He takes Julia to ride on the ferry frequently during her childhood. For Tin Win, the ferry summons up memories of his arrival in New York when he first rode the ferry. The ferry to Tin Win is a bittersweet symbol because his newly-found freedom was achieved at the cost of everything he left behind—including Mi Mi.

Buddhist Monastery

The Buddhist monastery is located in Kalaw, Burma. It is where U May and numerous other Buddhist monks practice their faith and live their lives. It is a community hub for the town, where people come to pay their respects, listen to the music of the monks, and to meditate. Su Kyi brings Tin Win to the monastery to study with U May. There, U May helps guide Tin Win in the use of senses other than sight. It is at the monastery that Tin Win begins taking on average, everyday chores. This impresses Mi Mi.



Themes and Motifs

Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendeker. As a theme, love can take many forms. In this novel, it assumes the roles of both familial and romantic love. Love is central to the plot and central to the lives of the characters of Tin Win, Mi Mi, Julia, and Judith.

When the novel begins, familial and romantic love are in question. Tin Win has abandoned his family and gone to Burma. The police suspect that Tin Win has been living a double life. Judith doubts that Tin Win ever loved her. She believes her entire marriage was a sham. She has always known that Tin Win has been in love with another woman. Judith feels that she has never been truly loved by Tin Win.

Julia, too, doubts her father’s familial love for her. She can imagine no situation in which Tin Win would abandon her and her family. If he loved them, she reasons, why would he abandon them?

Love remains central to events as they unfold in Burma. In Kalaw, Julia meets U Ba who explains that love is critical to understanding Tin Win. Julia considers the kind of love that U Ba talks about –the kind that gives meaning to life and transcends time and distance –to be the kind found in fairy tales. U Ba disagrees and says that love is very much real. Given the abandonment by her father, it is only natural that Julia should believe love to be a myth.

As Julia learns more about her father, she learns that love does indeed exist. Love arises between Tin Win and Mi Mi because of the sound of Mi Mi’s heartbeat ensnaring the attention of Tin Win. Hearts are most often associated with feelings of love. Mi Mi is the most beautiful girl Tin Win has ever known based on her heartbeats. It is easy to see why he falls for her so quickly. Over four years, the two become inseparable, falling so deeply in love that family members contemplate marriage.

Forces beyond Tin Win’s control influence events, including Tin Win’s uncle’s actions. When Tin Win is forced to Rangoon by his uncle, he and Mi Mi continue to send letters to one another. U Saw intercepts all letters and is amazed to find only messages of love rather than accusations or cruelty for each not having heard from the other. He believes that the romance is nothing more than infatuation, but it is love. The two are so confident in their love for each other that they are undeterred by a lack of communication.

Their love spans and survives fifty years and thousands of miles between them. Though Tin Win does indeed fall in love with Judith, his love for Mi Mi also remains. Realizing this, Julia softens her stance toward her father. Though she still dislikes the fact that he abandoned them, she does not hate him for it anymore. She realizes her father did



indeed love her as well. He had chosen not to abandon her until she was well out of school and independent.

The love Tin Win keeps for Mi Mi brings him around the world and back into her arms. They share one last night together, their love unabated and unchanged in fifty years. Tragically, they die in an embrace the following morning. The doctors can only describe the deaths as heart failure.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendker. Family involves mutual love, compassion, and loyalty. Family members offer emotional, spiritual, and physical support to one another. The individuals in a family may or may not be blood-related, but they behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Sometimes a family is not a positive influence in the life of an individual. In fact, it can fail a family member.

When the novel begins, family appears to have been a failure for Julia and for her mother. The family has been abandoned by Tin Win, who has left them for another woman in Burma. His entire family is heartbroken and angry. Tin Win left his wife and children without even saying good bye.

Julia later comes to wonder how her father could have possibly abandoned his family, when he himself had been abandoned by his family years before. Believing Tin Win to be a bad omen and a source of misfortune –resulting in the deaths of chickens, a great-aunt, and Tin Win’s father –Tin Win’s mother decides to abandon Tin Win when he is merely six years old. She does not entrust his care to anyone else, but simply leaves. Thus, it is difficult to understand how Tin Win could willingly walk away from people he supposedly loved when he knows firsthand the pain that comes from being abandoned.

Julia ultimately realizes that her father did indeed love her because he made sure that she was okay in life before leaving. Why he never told anyone about where he was going or for what reason is never made clear. Julia, however, comes to accept that her father acted as he thought he must.

Meanwhile, Julia comes to learn more about her father’s own history and the importance of family as a result. Abandoned by his parents, Tin Win is raised by Su Kyi, an old family friend and neighbor. Su Kyi becomes something of a mother, perhaps even grandmotherly figure for Tin Win. She watches out for him, takes care of him, and protects him from the dangers of blindness. She brings Tin Win to meet with U May, who becomes something of a father figure. U May not only teaches Tin Win wisdom, but self-reliance and reliance on senses other than sight. In so doing, Tin Win comes to have a family of his own.

Whereas Tin Win’s biological family abandoned him at an early age because of a prediction, Mi Mi’s family rallied around her. Mi Mi is born when her mother is thirty-eight. It is a late birth, considered lucky. Mi Mi’s deformity does not deter her family.



Instead, they rally around her. They become her protectors and her means of transport. They help her with everyday activities and chores and make sure she is well-cared for.

Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendker. In the novel, mystery involves that which is unknown or never truly revealed. There are multiple instances of mystery in the novel, with each one of them adding to or fueling the plot in some way.

The primary mystery that Julia confronts in her search for truth has to do with the abandonment and disappearance by her father. There are numerous questions that need to be answered. Why did he leave? Where did he truly go? Why did he not say goodbye? Was he leading a double life as the police believe? She finds out that her father left for love and was leading a double life of sorts, but not in the usual way. Why he chose to leave without explaining himself or actually giving a real goodbye is a mystery never answered.

Mysteries about her father’s disappearance lead Julia to other questions of a more personal nature. Did her father ever truly love her mother? If he did not, why did he marry her in the first place? Did Tin Win ever truly love his family as whole? If he did, how could he have abandoned them? As Julia learns, her father did indeed love her mother, but it was a different kind of romantic love than might be expected. He also deeply loved his family, and he did not leave until they could support themselves and make it on their own.

Meeting U Ba only causes Julia more questions, beginning with U Ba himself. How does U Ba know so much about Julia? Who exactly is U Ba? What is his relation to everything going on? Julia learns that U Ba is her half-brother and that he knows as much as he does because Tin Win told him about the past, about his life in New York, and about Julia.

The final set of mysteries that Julia must figure out have to do with her father’s departure from Mi Mi in the first place. If his father was so in love with Mi Mi, how did he end up in New York? Why did he remain? As Julia comes to learn, her father ended up in New York against his will.

Uncle U Saw forced Tin Win to journey to Rangoon to defy a prophecy. Tin Win was later forced to go to New York to study law. There, Tin Win made the conscious decision not to return in order to live his own life –at the expense of leaving Mi Mi behind. If he had returned to Burma, he would not have been allowed to be with Mi Mi. At least in New York, he could call his own shots.



Eastern and Western Culture

Eastern and Western culture form an important theme in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendker. In the novel, Western and Eastern cultures are understood in light of one another, principally through the character of Julia Win. Julia is half-American and half-Burmese. She has been brought up in the American Western tradition. Her understanding of everything from love to family to responsibility is understood in that context.

When Julia comes to Kalaw, she sees the vestiges of Western colonization. This is evidenced through the British houses and architecture that can be found in one section of the village. Everything else about the village is distinctly Eastern –from tea houses to the Buddhist monastery to the ideas and beliefs of the people themselves. Much of this can be seen in the story of Tin Win’s life.

One difference between America and the West and Burma and the East has to do with superstitious beliefs. As U Ba himself explains, Burma is a very conservative country that embraces superstition and ancient beliefs. While Americans generally have little time or patience for superstition, nearly all Burmese live by superstition.

Convinced her son is bad luck and a cause for misfortune, Tin Win’s mother abandons him. This sort of thing does not frequently happen in the Western world. Traditionally, misfortune and bad luck cause families to rally in America, not to abandon members. Julia is horrified by the fact that Tin Win should be abandoned at the age of six through no fault of his own.

In the Western world, especially in America, love determines life. Judith, fueled by love, aggressively pursued Tin Win in order to marry him. In Burma, Tin Win’s love for Mi Mi did not stop his uncle from interfering in his life. For Tin Win’s uncle, love doesn’t matter at all. Arranged marriages –especially arranged marriages based on wealth and business – are favored in the Eastern culture. Such arranged marriages went out of style in the United States decades ago.

Yielding to Eastern culture, Tin Win does not try to sway his uncle on any point. He dutifully does as he is told, as custom expects a family member to bow to the will of a fatherly figure. Only when Tin Win travels to America and experiences Western culture and freedom firsthand does he decide to refuse to return to Burma. As a result, he is able to call his own shots in life –including returning to Burma fifty years later.

The Past

The Past is an important theme in the novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” by Jan-Phillip Sendker. The past –essentially, a person’s history –has tremendous relevance on the present. Julia’s determination to unravel the mystery of her father –indeed, the mystery of who her father is himself –is wholly dependent upon her understanding of the past.



Julia travels to Kalaw, Burma, to find truth. There, she meets U Ba, who over the next few days, recounts the story of Julia's father's first twenty years on Earth. Those twenty years are essential to understanding Tin Win. They are a mystery to Julia because her father has never spoken of them.

U Ba explains that love has been central to Tin Win's life. At an early age, he suffered the death of his father, the abandonment of his mother, and the loss of his eyesight. He was raised lovingly by Su Kyi, but he never truly felt loved. He felt as if his life was incomplete, and he had no real reason to live until he met Mi Mi.

Mi Mi changes Tin Win's life. She gives him a reason to live, to hope, to love. Over four years, Tin Win and Mi Mi become inseparable. They fall deeply in love with one another. They are so close that Mi Mi's mother begins to consider marriage as a real possibility. Tin Win and Mi Mi complete one another as people. Tin Win's legs allow Mi Mi to walk; her eyes allow him to see.

Due to Eastern superstition and prophecy, Tin Win's uncle forces Tin Win to travel to Rangoon to avert catastrophe. There, Tin Win's sight is restored, and he is sent to school for two years. He is then forced to attend law school in New York. Heartbroken, but wanting to call his own shots in life in the free country of the United States, he remains in America rather than returning to Burma. He never falls out of love with Mi Mi, which is why he ultimately returns to her fifty years later.



Styles

Point of View

Jan-Philipp Sendker tells his novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” from the first-person, limited omniscient perspective and the third-person, omniscient perspective. The sections of the novel told in the first-person narrative are from the point of view of Julia Win as she seeks to learn the truth about her father’s past and his disappearance. The third-person sections of the novel are told by U Ba. They recount the early and recent history of Julia’s father as was related to U Ba by Tin Win himself.

The first-person sections of the novel give the reader an intimate glimpse into the reactions, thoughts, feelings, and emotional distress Julia endures as she learns about the past. The third-person narrative allows the reader to learn the facts of Tin Win’s early life as Julia learns them.

The weaving of both narrative modes helps to transition the reader between past and present, as all past sections relating directly to Tin Win are told in third-person, while those relating to Julia are told in the first-person. Julia’s sections of the novel tell about events as they unfold; therefore, what she knows is limited, giving her narrative an aspect of limited-omniscience. However, since U Ba is telling about events that have already occurred, his sections are fully omniscient. He is able to put many things in context so that Julia has a better understanding of the past.

Language and Meaning

Jan-Philipp Sendker tells his novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least three reasons. First, it allows for a brief read, keeping the reader’s attention on the plot. This is important because the plot plunges the reader into Eastern, specifically Thai culture. This is reflective of Julia’s own sudden immersion in Thai culture.

The simple and straightforward language helps the reader to be immersed in Thai culture. Second, it allows Sendker to make his points clearly and directly. Third, it allows for a sense of realism. In Thai culture, simplicity is considered beautiful –thus the simple and straightforward language is evocative of beauty and reflective of Thai culture. This gives a greater sense of realism and atmosphere to the events of the novel.

Structure

Jan-Philipp Sendker divides his novel “The Art of Hearing Heartbeats” into three primary parts, each further subdivided into chapters. Each part deals with an overarching section of the plot. For example, Part I begins with Julia’s search for answers about her father. Each chapter deals with a smaller part of the novel. Part I, Chapter 15 recounts



Tin Win's telling Julia the story of "The Tale of the Prince, the Princess, and the Crocodile," which has great symbolism at the end of the novel. The chapters themselves are often relatively short, with many being no more than three or four pages. The simple and straightforward structure of the novel is in keeping with the simple and straightforward language. It allows the reader to move briskly through the story by focusing attention on the story, rather than the structure of the book itself.



Quotes

I speak of a love that brings sight to the blind. Of a love stronger than fear. I speak of a love that brings meaning into life, that defies natural laws of deterioration, that causes us to flourish, that knows no bounds. I speak of the triumph of the human spirit over selfishness and death.

-- U Ba (Part I, Chapter 1 paragraph 13)

Importance: Julia Win, in Kalaw, Thailand, searching for her father, meets U Ba almost immediately. U Ba contends that the story he is about to tell Julia is of love and romance. Julia thinks that U Ba is speaking of something fantastical, like a fairy tale; but, U Ba explains that true love is real. Not only is love real, but it is life-changing as well. It is important the U Ba speaks of life and death because death will make its mark by the end of the novel.

And so there must be in life something like a catastrophic turning point, when the world as we know it ceases to exist. A moment that transforms us into a different person from one heartbeat to the next.

-- Julia (Part I, Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, Julia wonders about what could have happened to her father to make him abandon his family and travel around the world to his birthplace. There is something, she contends, that makes all people snap or transform sooner or later. It is interesting to note that Julia describes such a moment as a heartbeat, for it is a heartbeat that changes her father's life when he is young, setting the trajectory for his life.

Was there really such a thing as fate we could not escape? If we were not the masters of our lives, then who was?

-- Khin Maung (Part I, Chapter 10 paragraph 2)

Importance: Tin Win's father begins to wonder about his son potentially being a bearer of bad luck and misfortune. Between his wife's insistence that their son is such, the death of many chickens, and the death of a great-aunt eight weeks to the day of Tin Win's birth, Khin Maung wonders if there is something to fate. He is not a very superstitious man and has never really considered fate before now. But, if his son is fated for misfortune, then his son will infect all those around him. This is in sharp contrast to Julia's American ideas, in which superstitions are largely entertained but not seriously respected.

Life is a gift none might disdain.

-- U May (Part II, Chapter 2, paragraph 5)

Importance: After Tin Win goes blind, he begins to wonder what his life will be like without sight. U May contends that life is still worth living because life is a gift. Life,



despite the challenges one may face, should not be wasted, misused, or discarded. U May is very right, as Tin Win's future will clearly demonstrate.

She never minded the waiting. She had learned early on that it was a natural part of life for anyone who couldn't walk, who depended on the help of others. Waiting was so interwoven with the rhythm of her life that it almost disturbed her when anything happened right away.

-- U Ba (Part II, Chapter 10 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, U Ba describes Mi Mi's personality and character. Having been born with a deformity that prevents her from walking on her own, she learns quickly to be patient and to wait for things –especially for good things. Little does Mi Mi know –and as Julia will later find out –Mi Mi will have to wait some fifty years to be reunited with her true love, Tin Win. Even then, it is only for a few brief hours before they both die.

With her, he turned toward life.

-- U Ba (Part II, Chapter 12 paragraph 4)

Importance: While Tin Win has grown to appreciate life through his other senses, there is still a part of him that is missing. It is not sight, but love. Through Mi Mi, and the sound of her voice and heartbeat, Tin Win comes to truly begin to live. She becomes his reason for living, for happiness, for all that he does. Each day revolves around seeing her, being with her, touching her, and hearing her. The world opens up to him through Mi Mi, and his life begins through her.

No life should end with a question.

-- U Ba (Part II, Chapter 16 paragraph 18)

Importance: When U May dies, Tin Win and Mi Mi are by his side. Tin Win tells U May not to bother himself with speaking as he dies, only to have U May ask him, "For what?" It causes Tin Win –and U Ba –to realize that no life should end with a question. For Tin Win, that question would have obviously been, "What if?" Tin Win would never have been able to answer that question if he had not journeyed to see Mi Mi before she dies. Thus, his life did not end with a question, but with sound knowledge.

We wish to be loved as we ourselves would love. Any other way makes us uncomfortable.

-- U Ba (Part III, Chapter 1 paragraph 30)

Importance: Throughout the novel, Julia wonders whether or not her father ever truly loved her mother. Her mother has wondered the same. U Ba explains that the issue is that people would love to be loved the way that they love. When they are not loved in the way that they love others, they are uncomfortable at best or feel unloved at worst. This may be true with Julia's parents and Julia herself. Julia would never have abandoned her family or her father. So, having a father who abandons the family is difficult to accept.



Love makes us beautiful.

-- U Ba (Part III, Chapter 7 paragraph 25)

Importance: Despite Mi Mi aging and the deformities that she and Tin Win had, they are still beautiful to one another. To feel love –to truly feel loved –one feels confident, secure, warm, happy, and beautiful. Beauty comes not merely in physical appearance, but in the soul as well. Mi Mi's beauty was within and without. It continued to be so until the day she died because he knew she was deeply loved by Tin Win, no matter where he had gone or what he had done.

The dream had woken me, and I appreciated how merciful reality had been.

-- Julia Win (Part III, Chapter 12 paragraph 4)

Importance: Though a nightmare awakens Julia at the end of the novel, the dream she truly speaks of is her life before Kalaw. She imagined her father to be a two-dimensional, straightforward kind of a man, but the journey to Thailand has changed all that. She has learned about his past. More importantly, she has learned that he was only human. The dream she had of her father has been shattered, replaced by an even better, if more nuanced version. Her father did not lead a double-life, and he did not mean to harm his family by abandoning them. However, he was in love with someone besides Julia's mother. It is not the terrifying reality which Julia had imagined, but something much less.

Behind her stood a young man, his hands on her shoulders. Both were smiling in the same open and friendly way, but with a clear trace of melancholy.

-- Julia Win (Part III, Chapter 12 paragraph 9)

Importance: Here, Julia examines the photographs delivered to her at the hotel in a manila envelope. The photographs feature Mi Mi and her son -a younger version of U Ba, who grows older with each photograph. Julia discovers that U Ba is her half-brother. Both U Ba and Mi Mi, happy to have each other, were long saddened by the fact that Tin Win was not in their lives. It makes Julia reflect on all the time she herself was privileged to have with Tin Win, when others did not.

Darkness had settled over the yard. Through a crack in the wall I could see that the whole place was now illuminated by candles.

-- Julia Win (Part III, Chapter 12 paragraph 22)

Importance: Here, Julia joins in the procession that goes to Mi Mi's house, where the villagers all flock to pay their respect on the anniversary of her death. The story that U Ba has told about the life of their parents brings a light to the darkness of events as they unfold. What otherwise would be a sad time is given hope by the story of love between Tin Win and Mi Mi. It is the symbolic candlelight in the darkness.