

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia Study Guide

**How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia by Mohsin
Hamid**

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Contents

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 – 3.....	4
Chapters 4 – 6.....	7
Chapters 7 – 8.....	10
Chapters 9 – 10.....	13
Chapters 11 – 12.....	15
Characters.....	17
Symbols and Symbolism.....	20
Settings.....	23
Themes and Motifs.....	25
Styles.....	29
Quotes.....	31



Plot Summary

NOTE: This guide refers to *How to Get Filthy Rich in Asia* - First Riverhead Trade Paperback Edition, March 2014

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia is a novel by Mohsin Hamid which resembles a self-help book featuring the reader (you) as the main character and recipient of its advice. Each chapter provides certain teachings about life and how your own life plays out against those instructions.

The never-named self-help guru explains that to become filthy rich in rising Asia, you must move to the city because your hometown has no hope for the future. Your family is impoverished, but your father finally makes enough to move you, your mother, and your siblings to the city. There, you are given an education which helps form a solid foundation from which you will one day become rich. While a teenager in school, you fall in love with a gorgeous young girl –hereafter known to you as “the pretty girl.” You do this despite the narrator’s insistence that falling in love will distract you from your life goal of getting rich. You are brokenhearted when the girl decides she is leaving to become a model.

Slowly, your career begins to climb. You avoid idealists and learn from a master. The master is a man who oversees an empire of repackaging out-of-date food and selling it to local businesses. You save up enough money to go into business for yourself. Your business purifies, bottles, and sells water to people who would otherwise be forced to drink polluted city water. Your business takes off quickly, and you rapidly expand into new buildings and new markets. You come afoul of a rival water bottling company by drawing away their business, and your life is threatened. You reach out to a gang and have them settle the dispute. All the while, you watch with longing as the pretty girl becomes a full-fledged celebrity model. Now in your forties, you marry a girl half your age, have a son, and continue to see ways to grow your business.

Years pass. You end up taking on municipal contracts for the city. As the narrator recommends, you get in bed with government and military officials. The money pours in, and you design and live in a gated, guarded community of gated, guarded mansions. Your son grows and moves to America. Your marriage falls apart as distance grows between you and your wife. Your business slowly begins to decline. Friends and allies turn against you. A relative steals money from the company. Your business falls apart; you suffer two heart attacks; and, you come to live in a hotel. In such a situation, you must focus on the fundamentals, advises the narrator. You do when you reconnect with the pretty girl, now an old woman. You begin a romantic relationship with her that lasts a few years until cancer takes her life. Sometime later, you follow her in death, and she is there to welcome you to Heaven.



Chapters 1 – 3

Summary

Chapter 1, Move to the City – Written in second-person narration by an unnamed narrator, with the reader (referred to hereafter as “you”) assuming the role of the main character, the narrator begins by speaking about how self-help books can lead you into a slippery world of more self-help books. Narration goes on to tell you, a young boy, that this is one such self-help book about getting rich in rising Asia. The narrator explains that to accomplish this requires starting at the beginning, where you are the child of impoverished parents. Your father is usually away working as a cook in the city. He comes home to visit only three or four times a year. His cannot support bringing everyone to live in the city. Your rural village is alongside a filthy, polluted creek, and is one of only many that draw water from and pollute the creek. The men who work in the city come home each year to help with the harvest, for they owe rent to their landlords who most do not even look in the eye. Your mother is stubborn and vain, and she constantly clashes with her mother-in-law. You may feel powerless and doubtful of change, but change is coming, and this book will offer you a choice. Even though you are ill, you tell your father that you are well, taking your destiny into your own hands. A month later, you are well. Your father is earning just enough to bring everyone to the city to live. The narrator tells you that moving to the city is the first step to getting rich in Asia.

Chapter 2, Get an Education – The narrator wonders why you are reading foreign novels and textbooks, imagining you must read them either to pass the time or to learn something about the rest of the world due to how globalization affects your life daily. You are one of fifty students in a classroom meant for thirty, and your teacher is quick to deal out physical punishment. At home, you grow close to your sister, who declares herself a woman now that she has her period. You do not agree. You focus on spending time with her when she is not at work as a cleaning girl. Your older brother is a spray painter’s assistant who is currently working in a European-designed commercial neighborhood. He has a bad cough from a lack of safety equipment. The narrator explains that the order of the births of you and your siblings means you are able to attend school and that you will not have to work in the same way as your older brother.

Chapter 3, Don’t Fall in Love – The narrator tells you that this self-help book advises you not to fall in love because love can be an impediment to getting rich. Making money attracts girls, but achieving love takes away motivation for success in business. Love also distracts you from financial pursuits. You come to notice a dark-skinned, thin, pretty teenage girl in your neighborhood. She is the sort of modern girl you see in the media. Fertile, heavy girls are no longer in style. You now work as a knock-off DVD delivery boy, while the girl works in a beauty salon and looks you in the eye whenever you see her. You always try to look your best and be in shape. You and the girl exchange numbers, and you steal DVDs to give her as a gift. The girl’s father is an unemployed drunk. The pretty girl plans to escape so that she can live her own life. She currently



sleeps with the marketing manager of a shampoo line in exchange for cash. She intends to use her connections to photographers who use the salon to advance herself. She sleeps with you before she announces to you she is leaving. You are angry and heartbroken.

Analysis

Moshin Hamid crafts *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* to resemble a self-help book in which the unnamed narrator, speaking in second-person, addresses you, the reader, directly. You become the reader of a self-help book. As such, you assume the role of the main character. While there are differences between you (as the reader of the novel) and you (as the reader of the self-help book), there are enough similarities between both of you to allow Hamid to personally connect. While the circumstances may vary, Hamid is essentially presenting the story of every reader, everywhere, all over the world. You come from humble beginnings, as most do, and your life is what you will make it. The title of the novel is not an accident. The phrase "filthy rich" denotes dishonesty, underhandedness, corruption, immorality, and illegality. The steps to take to achieve the status of filthy rich will be neither clean nor clear-cut.

Chief among the points that Hamid makes through his novel is the thematic idea that you only have one life to live, and so you must not waste it. This is first represented by the example of your father, who wants more for you out of life than he ever had himself. This is why he struggles so hard to make the most out of his own life so that you can make the most out of yours. It is how you end up moving to the city and how you end up getting an education that will form the foundation of your future. But to make the most out of your life –with your life goal being to get filthy rich –you cannot allow yourself to be distracted or even sidetracked with things like love. The narrator strongly advises against falling in love, for it will take away from the mission of your life. Yet, because you are human, you fall in love anyway.

Your decision to become filthy rich is emblematic not only of striving to make the most out of the one life you have been given, but to escape your childhood. Just as your father wants more for you than what he had, you want more for you than what you had at birth. The same is true for the pretty girl. Both of you are trying to escape your childhoods. This becomes an important theme throughout the rest of the novel. Everything you both do from here on out will be in the effort to get past your childhoods and to become what you were not in the beginning. It is why you do not pursue the girl any harder, and it is why the girl is so quick to leave.

Discussion Question 1

Why does your father struggle so hard in order to bring you and the rest of your family to the city? Why does no one wish to remain in your home village?



Discussion Question 2

Why does the narrator argue against falling in love? Do you believe that the narrator is correct? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How is it that you come to attend school when your siblings do not? What does the education you receive mean for you and for your future? How will this set you apart from people like your brother? Why?

Vocabulary

lascivious, analogous, incongruous, ergonomic, subterranean, vulnerability, globalization, pedagogical, invariably, falsified, prosaically, impediment, strenuous



Chapters 4 – 6

Summary

Chapter 4, Avoid Idealists – According to the narrator, ideals only get in the way of making money. You should avoid ideals and idealists. In this chapter, you have gone on to study at secondary school at your father's urging. Here, you must deal with idealists, corruption, and nepotism as the university depends on money from the wealthy and from the state. As a result, some are favored over others. You join a hostel gang for protection, money, and security. You see images of the pretty girl on billboards, for she has made it as a model. You feel a sense of loss because of this. You return home when you learn your mother is sick with cancer. You learn that your mother must be operated on, or die –but the cost will be more than your father's annual salary. You seek out your hostel leader for the money, but the leader suggests having your mother brought to one of the gang's hospitals. Though the operation to remove a tumor is successful, the cancer spreads and kills her. You are sad and lost, and your hostel leader becomes worried about you and urges you to remain focused. On the way home one night, you see the pretty girl in a car and wave, but she does not see you.

Chapter 5, Learn from a Master – The narrator explains for the collaboration between you and the book to work you must know what you want and where you want to go. You agree you want to be filthy rich in rising Asia, so the narrator goes on to recommend partnering with a master with much experience. Your master is middle-aged, has several cars, a driver, a guard, and is in reselling name-brand goods that are past their dates of expiration, with re-printed expiration labels. You become a salesman for him and begin to make a little money. You go to a club with a friend where you sneak in dressed up as a waiter. You encounter the pretty girl, now a name-recognized model who dates numerous wealthy and famous men. The girl is happy to see you and leads you backstage where you both catch up. She explains that she has changed from the person that you once knew. She gives you her number and heads back to the party. You go on to speak to her occasionally by phone and hope it may one day lead to something more. Meanwhile, your father has become ill from a weak, broken heart. He becomes religious, looks forward to death, and prays for you.

Chapter 6, Work For Yourself – The narrator explains that becoming filthy rich requires working for oneself. The fruits of labor are delicious, but they do not add up to anything individually. You must consume your own fruit and the fruit of others when possible. You are now in your mid-thirties. Your father is dead, and you operate a bottled-water business. You pump water in from the city pipes, boil it, purify it, and make it drinkable for the masses. You employ a technician and a runner, and are thrilled when the pretty girl asks you to dinner. As you head to meet her at her hotel's restaurant, you wear fancy, tailored clothes that make you realize you are gaining weight. The pretty girl looks as she always has to you, even though your vision of her is not reality. You catch up, and learn your parents are all dead, and you are both now alone. You and the pretty girl eat and sleep together, where you learn she is worried about her future as a model as



younger and prettier girls appear all the time. She will not settle down for marriage, though. This haunts you as you take your brother's children to the zoo, and financially support your brother and his family. Your brother insists you find someone to love, but you tell him you have your business. You decide to expand your business.

Analysis

Idealism, like love, is dangerous because it means believing in something that one must live up to other than oneself. Your goal is to be rich, and ideals will make that difficult, if not impossible. Ideals require that you must live up to a commitment that may at times be at odds with the pursuit of money. You have only one life, and you must not waste it. To the individual, things like love or idealism may or may not be a waste –or may even be the core features of a life considered full. For the sake of getting rich, idealism is considered a means to waste a life. You gain more experience far from idealism when you partner with a master, who repackages expired food for reselling. It is a dishonest thing to do, but it is easy money. You take note of this –of a simple, necessary, and easy process which in turn leads to easy profits. You apply it to yourself in the production of water purification for mass consumption.

Here, you are continuing to do your best to escape from your childhood. The promise of success and the terror of returning to what you once were are enough to drive you forward. You are driven now only by thoughts of money, unhindered by love or idealism. In your mind, you are not wasting your life at all by making the central part of it financial. As the narrator will later describe, you must focus on the fundamentals. Focusing on the fundamentals becomes a very important theme as the novel continues to unfold, and to you at this moment, the fundamentals of life consist wholly of making money. You tell this to your brother when your brother insists you need to find someone to love.

All of the changes that come with making money, and with life, are natural. Indeed, as Hamid argues with the novel now fully underway, change is one of the very few guarantees in life. And your life has changed dramatically. You were once a small boy in an impoverished, rural village; and now you own your own business in the city, and are beginning to make good money. Some of the changes you have endured have been difficult to handle –such as the pretty girl leaving and going on to become a celebrity model dating rich and famous men –while other changes have been thrilling to embrace, such as your owning your own business and being the boss. Other changes are strange, such as the fact that you now financially prop up your older brother and his family while you have no family of your own. It is not a welcome change in general for you, but you are glad to be able to help the brother who once helped you.

Discussion Question 1

Why is idealism dangerous to your becoming filthy rich in rising Asia? Do you agree or disagree with the narrator's assertions about idealism? Why?



Discussion Question 2

When you come to work for yourself, what changes occur both in terms of business and in terms of life in general? Are these changes welcome? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the importance of learning from a master? How does this influence you and your own line of work later on?

Vocabulary

ideals, malcontent, adamant, nepotism, affectations, exquisitely, invigilators, philanthropy, metaphorically, lucrative, numeracy, deprecatingly, metropolis, imperious, compunction, idiosyncratic, nonchalantly, omitting, ubiquitous



Chapters 7 – 8

Summary

Chapter 7, Be Prepared to Use Violence – Being rich, the narrator tells you, requires not being squeamish. Being rich will require you to do things you might otherwise find difficult. This includes dealing with violence directed against you, such as when your delivery truck is destroyed in a riot. By now, your water operation is an entire factory building, with separate offices. The loss of the truck is factored into doctored books, approved of by the tax collector whom you have paid off. You are married to the daughter of your accountant. Just turning twenty, she is only half your age and looks on the marriage as a matter of business, not love. She asks that she be allowed to complete university before having children, and you agree. Your wife, however, longs for there to be romance now, but you can only think about the pretty girl. You have your life threatened by a rival bottled-water company owner. You are angry, frightened, and set on revenge. You meet with the leader of a protection gang with whom you regularly do business. You are given extra help by the faction, including a guard. You become paranoid and distracted. Your wife tries to soothe you sexually and emotionally, but is unable to help. Word comes that your sister is killed by dengue fever, after which an assassination attempt is made on your life by your rival. Your guard intercedes and guns down the would-be assassin. The gang then brokers peace with the rival water-bottling company. Meanwhile, your wife continues to seek affection from you, but you ignore her and can only think of the pretty girl.

Chapter 8, Befriend a Bureaucrat – The narrator explains a relationship with the state, with the government, is very important to becoming rich. The narrator explains it is only sensible to harness the state's power to your own advantages. Bureaucrats of the state, and bankers secretly dealing with the state, are necessary to succeed, especially if you want a municipal contract for water. Greasing palms with money, making connections, and doing favors are standard business for you. You deal with government people at every level, including those at the top. You secure the contract. You are now also father to a five year-old boy, while you have grown even more distant from your wife following the birth of your son. The birth resulted in the tearing of her anus and the need for diapers and reconstructive surgery to fix the problem. You hire your wife's relatives into the company, hoping it will improve relations with your wife. At the same time, you reconnect with the pretty girl. The pretty girl went from model to television chef to designer-kitchen-showroom-owner to furniture and décor dealer in the present. You force yourself to focus on your business.

Analysis

If there ever was a reason not to fall into the trap of idealism on the path to becoming filthy rich in rising Asia, violence and powerful connections are both reasons. The idea that life cannot be wasted, in addition to Hamid's assertion that you must be willing to



compromise yourself, now mean that you are prepared to take the next steps. Idealism would prevent you from getting into bed with government officials, or from using gangs to carry out violence against those who threaten you or try to get in your way. Even without idealism to act as a bulwark against underhanded business practices, you must compromise yourself by making connections with the right politicians, and passing along kickbacks. You must also compromise your otherwise peaceful life by sequestering the help of a gang against a rival bottled-water magnate. The use of violence not only compromises your still-relatively stable morality, but compromises your comfort and your security. Putting some money into someone's hand is one thing, but committing to violence is quite a drastic change.

The more you grow in power, wealth, and stature, the more changes will come. You are still running to escape your childhood, worried always that you will become that impoverished boy once more. You remain focused on the fundamental aspects of your life, even with being married now. Yet even your marriage is more a business arrangement than a romantic engagement, for your mind is still pulled by the pretty girl. No one can take her place, and it is clear that she is already far too much a distraction for you. The changes that you would have endured with her rather than without her are incomprehensible. You remain focused on the fundamentals of your life –making money and growing your business to make more money. Yet, you ignore a potential for romance with your wife by refusing to see that she is a good person and longs to be in love with you. As noted earlier, the narrator explains that in time, things like love will be possible after wealth has been achieved –but now you ignore love in favor of more money. And this will come back to haunt you.

Discussion Question 1

Why must you be prepared to use violence in pursuit of wealth? Why do you use violence at all in this particular instance? Do you believe violence is justified here? Why or why not? Do you believe violence is ever justified in making money? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you focus so much more time on your business than your marriage? What effect does this have not only on your life, but on the life of your wife?

Discussion Question 3

What changes do you face as your business expands? Do you welcome these changes? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

inherent, equilibrium, supplicants, obsequious, juxtaposition



Chapters 9 – 10

Summary

Chapter 9, Patronize the Artists of War – The narrator explains to you that we are all information –from our DNA to written words to constellations. Information, the narrator explains, is power. It allows patterns to be determined and predictions to be made. You are now doing business with not only political leaders, but military leaders and military-friendly businesses as well. You are now providing water to entirely self-contained communities for the elite. Paramilitary forces are used to ensure that violence and trouble stays out of good areas. You have your own gated mansion in such a gated community, watched over by guards and CCTV. You have separated from your wife, though you still live together. Your son is growing fast, and you love to be around him. You use your knowledge of computer security to hack into the laptop camera of the pretty girl, who looks forward to a visit to a tropical island. Meanwhile, your older brother dies at last from poor lungs from spray painting for so many years. You and your son attend his funeral.

Chapter 10, Dance with Debt – The narrator encourages to move quickly and to hurry up, for time is shorter as you are growing older. You are now thin and mostly bald. Your son has gone to study in America, but he has decided to stay there because it, like Asia, has promise. Your business is slowly declining. Your brother-in-law urges you to borrow or leverage: buy another water company or sell your own. You agree to the plan. You suffer a heart attack, go to see your doctor, and suffer a second heart attack in the ICU. Your family comes to see you, including your ex-wife, her new husband, and their family. You survive life-saving surgery. It is possible that you have only a few months to a few years of life left. You learn from your ex-wife that her brother has run off with the company's money. You are fingered in an anti-corruption campaign launched by politicians who were only recently friends and allies. You are not poor, but you must move into a hotel. That night, the pretty girl's showroom is burglarized. Her assistant is killed, and her money is stolen. Heartbroken, the pretty girl no longer wishes to live in the city.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, you reach the absolute height of your power, wealth, influence, life, and career. You have never been higher up than you are now, and you are the furthest you have ever been from your childhood. You are now an old man, a striking change in and of itself. You have a grown son, watch your marriage fall apart, and attend the funeral of your brother. Your avoidance of ideals and love mean that you are essentially alone, but you have company in elite politicians and military officials. You have become filthy rich in rising Asia –and you wonder what you have to show for it besides having made it. There is nowhere else to go, for you have gone as far as you can in the field of business. And once you have reached the very top, once you have



stopped climbing, you can only fall. The changes that come now you have little control over, and are not expecting –you lose your friends, your connections, your health, and your business. Everything your life has been –business –is now gone. Having largely given your family the cold shoulder, you have nowhere to turn because the fundamentals you focused on were the wrong fundamentals.

You are now by no means poor, but you are closer back to you where you were in childhood than you ever thought you would be. Your life in many ways mirrors the pretty girl's life, who long ago fell as her youth and beauty faded, replaced by other younger, prettier girls. She, like you, has focused on the fundamentals of what she wanted her life to be –fame, fortune, and freedom. But like you, she now wonders what she truly has to show for any of it. Even what she still has –a designer showroom –is not safe, as it is compromised by armed thugs who kill one of her employees. The pretty girl decides that she has had enough of the city as it is, and no longer wants to be an active part of it. Though she is not in the position she was in as a teen girl, she is no longer the furthest away from it she can be. It is a change she finds difficult to accept, but she does her best to handle. Change remains the one constant thing in life.

Discussion Question 1

What is your downfall like? What finally brings it about? How do you handle the decline in your life and your fortune? Why?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways does your life mirror that of the pretty girl's, especially in regards to those things you both considered to be fundamental? How do those things affect your lives now? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What are your heart attacks like? How do they affect your life? Do they change anything about your attitudes and beliefs about life itself? If so, what and why? If not, why not?

Vocabulary

inevitably, effeminate, paramilitary, unobtrusively, exorbitant, plausible, inanimate, precariously, brusque



Chapters 11 – 12

Summary

Chapter 11, Focus on the Fundamentals – The narrator explains you do not need to be wealthy for the next advice to be given, which is to focus on the fundamentals by cutting costs down to the bone. You do away with owning a car, negotiate a long-term lease agreement at the hotel, and eat only one meal a day. The limited savings you have can be used for medical purposes and other emergencies. People come to visit you to see how you are –former employees, friends, family members, and so on. You help them how you can, point them in the right direction, and give them advice. Meanwhile, the pretty girl travels out less and less, but enjoys evening walks. You and the pretty girl find one another again at the pharmacy. You get together at a coffee shop and discuss your lives with one another over tea. You begin to spend time together, going out on dates and exploring the city. You have sex, but both of you are unable to finish the act. You both laugh as a result.

Chapter 12, Have an Exit Strategy – The narrator apologizes, saying this has not been the best get rich self-help book. The narrator says that we are all refugees from our childhoods. In life, there is a moment at which anything is possible, and there is a moment at which nothing is possible. You must create what is in between. Lives are stories that people create. You and the pretty girl take on a small townhouse in which to live together. You and the pretty girl continue to explore the city when you can, but take pleasure in simply being at home with each other. Your son comes to visit. He is now thirty and a full-fledged American citizen. He and the pretty girl get along well. Eventually, the pretty girl's cigarette smoking catches up with her, gives her cancer, and kills her. Time passes, and you end up in the hospital without realizing how you got there. The pretty girl is there, much younger, and she takes your hand and leads you on into the next world.

Analysis

At long last, the narrator explains that you should be focusing on the fundamentals of life. All along, you have believed the fundamentals consisted wholly of financial things. To some degree, they do. Your efforts to cut costs are an example. But, the fundamental aspects of life –things like love –are things which you have shunned in pursuit of wealth, the wealth which you no longer have. You have achieved everything financially possible in your life. However, your life is largely empty. You really are alone. Your son, the only remaining family member who is emotionally close to you in any way, now lives in America. With a busy life behind you and your health in the balance, you focus on the simpler things in life, such as walks and quiet evenings spent at home.

Eventually, you cross paths with the pretty girl once again. You focus now on the truly important fundamental parts of life, the parts which you ignored or trampled over in the



pursuit of money. Among these are love and companionship. The same is true of the pretty girl. What both of you needed but never wanted you have now both found far too late in life. It is still enough to matter, but not enough to have truly made a difference in the way that it could have. You have traded lifetimes of happiness for lifetimes of pursuing things which are fleeting. To be rich, you must compromise yourself, and you have compromised your entire lives for things which you cannot keep. You have largely wasted your lives. The tail-end of your lives will at least be happy. This is not because of fame and fortune. It is because of love and companionship.

Discussion Question 1

To be rich, you must be willing to compromise yourself. Do you believe compromising yourself has been worth everything you have achieved and lost? Which compromises have been the most difficult and the most influential? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What fundamentals does the narrator insist you focus on now that your wealth and life have largely gone out of your hands? Why do you focus on these things only now?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that either you or the pretty girl have wasted your lives? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

desiccate, permutation, affiliations, factotum, diminutive



Characters

You

You are both the reader of the novel and the reader of the self-help book the novel is meant to represent. You come from an impoverished background in a rural village. You have the desire to devote your life to escaping your childhood and becoming filthy rich in rising Asia. You move with your father to the city where you gain an education, work various odd jobs, and fall in love with the pretty girl. You force yourself to stay focused on money after she leaves, and you begin working for yourself as a bottled-water magnate. You grow in confidence, wealth, stature, and power. You make important friends and become everything you always wanted to be. You even marry and have a son, though the marriage falls apart due to your indifference. Your son, though loved, chooses to live in America. You long for the pretty girl, but you can never have her. Eventually, your business declines and fails when a relative-employee steals money from the company and leaves you broken, alone, living in a hotel, and recovering from a double heart-attack. You run into the pretty girl, and the two of you begin a much delayed romance which lasts only a few years until she dies. You yourself die. The pretty girl leads you to Heaven.

Narrator

The narrator, never-named, is a self-help guru who has written the book *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. The narrator is well-versed in the art of money, and it is no accident that he signifies and defines rich as being “filthy.” He provides a twelve-step program for getting “filthy” rich, many of which are filthy steps themselves –such as using violence and getting into bed with government officials. The narrator offers no apologies about seeking to be filthy rich until the very end, when he argues that the fundamentals should be focused on, fundamentals which mostly come too late.

The Pretty Girl

The pretty girl comes from a working class background, with her mother providing for the family while her father is a stay-at-home drunk. The girl dreams of freedom, fame, and fortune. You meet her when you are both teenagers. The pretty girl falls in love with you, but she will not admit it. She will not allow her life to follow any path other than the one she has planned for it. She is terrified of never escaping her childhood. She quickly becomes a famous model, dates the rich and the famous, and is disheartened when her beauty and youth fade. She goes on to take on other jobs that pay well, such as managing a home décor and furniture showroom. She does not want to return to the world of her childhood. Eventually, your paths cross when you are both old, and you begin a long-delayed romance that ends a few years later when the pretty girl, a lifelong smoker, dies of cancer.



Your Father

Your father is the head of your family. He is a hardworking, brave man. He spends most of the year in the city where he works as a cook. He scrapes together a living to provide for you and the rest of your family back home. He wants you and your siblings to have a better life than his own life has been. By serving you and your family he is fulfilling his life, making it worthwhile. Your father eventually earns just enough money to bring everyone to the city, where you can get an education. He helps you navigate your twenties and your thirties. As his heart weakens, he becomes deeply religious. He prays you will continue to have a better life than his as he dies.

Your Mother

Your mother is the head of the family when your father is away, and she is a strong-willed and opinionated woman. Family is vital to her life, for she has devoted her life to her husband and her children. She is fulfilled each day she can care for them. She hopes that all of her children will have a better life than she had. She later dies of cancer, which devastates your father.

Your Brother

Your brother is older by several years. He is a good and decent man who spends his life helping to provide for the family in the city. He takes on dangerous work as a spray painter's assistant. It is dangerous because there is no safety equipment to protect his lungs. Your brother works hard for the family until he begins his own. He struggles along, and you quietly provide financial support to him. In turn, he can provide for his family. Years of work as a painter without protective equipment finally catch up to your brother. When he dies, the loss devastates you.

Your Wife

Your wife is younger than you by more than twenty years. She is beautiful, kind, and loving. She recognizes that her arranged marriage to you is primarily business. Still, she longs for love and romance with you, but you do not give this to her. It leads to a cold, distant marriage that ultimately ends in divorce. You recognize too late what you could have had with your wife, but she has by now remarried and has children of her own.

Your Son

Your son is the closest thing to a personal relationship you will allow yourself to have at the height of your power. You want your son to have only the best in life and to do better than you have done. You hope your son will follow in your footsteps in rising Asia, but he chooses instead to study in America and to relocate permanently there. He comes to



visit you once he has set himself up in America, and he visits you as he can until you die.

Your Mentor

Your mentor is the man from whom you gain real-world, practical experience in making money. He heads up an empire repackaging expired food to sell to local stores and businesses, undercutting regional distributors. He is immensely wealthy, but he has many enemies as his underhandedness catches up to him. From him, you learn about the need for simplicity in making money to meet mass demand. You also learn that the quality of the product you sell must be good.

Your Rival

Your rival heads up a competing water-bottling company. He is jealous of his markets and resents your success in his areas. He dispatches a hired hand to threaten your life if you refuse to stop expanding, but you refuse. His hired hand is killed. A gang paid off by you brokers a truce with your rival, who is thereafter at peace with you.



Symbols and Symbolism

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia

How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia is a self-help book written by the unnamed narrator. The narrator has some experience with getting rich, and it is no accident that he defines the kind of rich as being “filthy.” You will be making a lot of money in every possible way, including immorally and illegally. How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia is a self-help book for you, the reader-character of the book, and a novel, too.

Money

Money is your primary and fundamental goal in life so that you may fully escape your childhood and never again return to the dire straits of poverty. Money ekes everything else out in your life, including love, ethics, and idealism. You devote your life to the making of money, working for others and then beginning your own water-bottling business. Money serves to be your main priority throughout the vast majority of your life, edging out even your own family in your pursuit of it. Ironically, you lose nearly all the money you make throughout your life toward the end, forcing you to reevaluate the things you have considered fundamental.

Education

Education is critical to being a success in the world. There are two kinds of education in the novel, academic and experience. You receive a firm foundation in academic education, which gives you a secure footing from which to step out into the world. Your practical education of experience through your mentor, through your work in the field, and through the self-help book complement your academic education. Together, they are put to good use in your water-bottling business. Your practical education, for example, teaches you that the product you provide must indeed be a good product, while your academic education allows you to grasp some of the finer parts of politics, markets, and economics.

Expired Food

Repackaged, expired food is sold by your mentor, who has built an empire around the scheme. He is immensely wealthy, but he quickly becomes immensely hated by those whom he has scammed. From the ordeal of the repackaged, expired food, you learn that your own products must be of good quality and that cheating people out of expected goods will not benefit you in the long run.



Water

Selling water is how you make your fortune. You purify the polluted, corroded water flowing through the city, bottle it, and sell it. The delicious, healthy water and the cheap prices create a startling demand for your product. Your business grows dramatically for years and years. The water you provide as a product is a key resource for people who would not have had access to a quality water source previously. They are happy to pay for the water because drinking it means less illness and more security.

Municipal Contracts

Municipal contracts are awarded to water vendors in the city. Through your connections and through greasing the palms of the appropriate people, you manage to secure municipal contracts to actually provide water for the city itself. This brings you extravagant wealth like you had never before imagined and denotes the very height of your power, fortune, and influence.

Protection Gangs

Protection gangs are used by businesses, politicians, the wealthy, and other elites who worry for their safety, or the safety of their enterprises. You pay one such protection gang to provide services when your life is threatened by your competition. A hired assassin is taken out by the gang member employed as your bodyguard, and the gang pressures your rival competitor into a truce of peace.

Bodyguard

When your life is threatened by a goon hired by a rival water bottler, you reach out to a protection gang that provides you with a bodyguard. Your bodyguard is a large man who is fierce-looking and always watches out for you. When an assassin attempts to kill you, your bodyguard intervenes and kills the would-be assassin. With the assassin dead, the bodyguard returns to the gang. The gang uses the killing as leverage to help broker a peace between you and your rival. Without your bodyguard, you feel alone and vulnerable. Eventually, you adjust to a normal life without him.

Modeling Advertisements

Modeling advertisements are to be found in magazines, on television, and throughout the city on billboards and store displays. At the height of her career, many of these advertisements feature the pretty girl. This is how you remind yourself of the pretty girl and how you keep apprised of her career as it unfolds. The advertisements featuring the pretty girl remind you of everything you do not have, including her love.



Tea

Tea becomes your favorite drink later in life, and it is over tea that you again begin to bond with the pretty girl. The two of you end up dating because of meeting up for tea. Among your favorite things to do later in life is to sit down and enjoy tea with the pretty girl as you read, play games, or chat.



Settings

Village

The village is one of many along a foul and polluted river, and is where you are born and spend the early part of your childhood. It is your childhood in this place which compels you to want to become rich so you will never have to return or live in the same way again. Your home village is full of much sadness, for your father spends most of each year away in the city, earning enough money to support you and your family. It is only when your father begins to save enough and earn enough that he can just barely afford to bring you and the rest of the family to the city. You do not never look back with fondness on the village where you grew up, and instead only look back on it with fear of returning.

City

The city is one of many in rising Asia that are the way of the future. Western investment in these cities is heavy, and an ascendant population looks to thrive. However, only a handful of people make it into the most elite upper classes. The middle classes expand greatly. The working classes shoulder the dangerous jobs and difficult jobs. The city is where dreams are possible. It is where you become your own employer as the manufacturer of bottled water, while the pretty girl becomes a famous model. The city, as it prospers and grows, becomes divided into good, wealthy, and elite sections, and bad, poor, and dangerous sections. You come to live in a gated, guarded mansion in a gated, guarded community within the city, and there spend the final good years of your life prior to the failure of your business.

Gated Community

The gated community where you spend the final few good years of your life before your business plummets is an entirely self-contained place for which you provide the water. The gated community, full of posh restaurants, shopping centers, and other places to spend your money, is well-landscaped, clean, and safe. The gated community becomes a city within a city. It is there that you pursue your only real personal relationship, and that is with your son to ensure he grows into a good man. Your marriage deteriorates in the gated community, and you fall into complacency with your beautiful house, gardens, trappings, and guards. Following the decline of your business, the loss of your wealth, and the loss of your reputation, you are thrown out of the very community you helped to create.



America

America is the world's lone superpower, and despite the rise of Asia, America remains the world's dominant economy and place to pursue dreams. You have hoped that your son would follow your footsteps in Asia, but he has chosen instead to strike out on his own in America. He begins by studying at school in America, then decides to move there, then decides to become a full-fledged American citizen. Your son comes to visit you from America every so often until you die.

Hospital

The hospital is where you spend much of the time in your later years. After suffering a major heart attack, you are admitted to the hospital, where a second heart attack follows. You spend time recovering after life-saving surgery there, and are allowed to go home. You spend the next several years visiting the hospital for check-ups and operations. Eventually, you wake up in the hospital without any idea as to how you have gotten there. It is then at the hospital that the pretty girl appears to you to take your hand and lead you to Heaven.



Themes and Motifs

You must not waste your one life.

Mohsin Hamid argues in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* that you only have one life and you must not waste it. Although Hamid's book is not overtly religious, it does adopt the belief of the three major world religions that life in Heaven follows this life and that a person lives their life on Earth only once. Because this is the case, one must make the most out of his or her life. This is especially true of you and your family.

Your father spends most of the year away in the city where he works as a cook to earn enough money to support you and the rest of your family. Your father works as hard as he does because he has life better than his father did, and he desires that all of his children should have life better than he does. Your father's desire ultimately comes to affect you. When you have your own son, you want his life to be better than your own life has been. Life is only what you make it, and you are determined that your life should not be wasted.

You begin your life with a sound education both in academics and in experience. You work a variety of jobs and learn a variety of hard lessons that come to affect how you handle your own business as a bottler of water. The advice given to you in the self-help book argues that you should nothing allow you to be dissuaded or distracted from your life goal, which in this case is to become filthy rich. This means focusing on your goal to the exclusion of all else, including love and family, according to the book. No matter what you gain or lose financially, you always feel as if you are missing something else.

Only belatedly does the narrator of the self-help book tell you to focus on the fundamentals. This means not only paring down expenses and conserving money, but finally focusing on things like love and family –things which arguably should have been focused on sooner. Hamid argues just as much, even if his self-help narrator belatedly recognizes the importance of such things for you. It may be argued that a life without love and family is a waste, but fortunately, you and the pretty girl have at long last recognized that love is exactly what you have both been missing. You have several years together before she dies of cancer, and therefore, several years of a life fulfilled.

You must focus on the fundamentals in life.

You must focus on the fundamentals in life, according to Mohsin Hamid in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Many fundamentals –the important aspects of life that make life worth living and make a fulfilled life possible –will vary according to each individual, but there are some fundamentals which apply to everyone in all times and in all places.

The predominant fundamentals of life –including love and family –are recognized only belatedly by the characters in the novel but serve as a warning to readers that life can be wasted without love and family in it. You and the pretty girl only very lately commit to



one another romantically, and then, an entire lifetime has passed by without the other. Money, fame, wealth, beauty –all these things come and go, but love, loyalty, family, belonging, and cherishing are things which never end and which make everything else in life worthwhile.

Another fundamental in life which applies to all is the following of dreams. Everyone has dreams. Love and family may be seen as a foundation for pursuing dreams, or, in the case of the self-help book narrator, a detriment. Regardless, one must pursue one's dreams. This is certainly the case when it comes to you. You focus on becoming filthy rich in rising Asia at the expense of everything else in life –from love to idealism to morality to family. You succeed wildly in achieving your dreams by becoming financially wealthy, but even more quickly you lose everything you have spent a lifetime trying to achieve.

The third important fundamental that the narrator of the self-help book ascribes to is paring down. The pursuit of wealth is not necessarily a bad thing, but one should not endeavor to live beyond one's means. In the novel, you must pare down to the essentials, especially as your wealth declines. You must fire all your servants, move out of your mansion, take a cheap hotel room, get rid of your car, your driver, and your guard, and must count the money that you spend in order to survive and keep your small savings intact for medical emergencies.

Everyone tries to escape their childhood.

Everyone tries to escape their childhood argues Mohsin Hamid in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. As noted in previous themes, Hamid argues both that a life should not be wasted and that you should focus on the fundamentals of your life. The focus on achieving something important in your life always stems from being afraid of never moving beyond your place as a child, where you feel hopeless and helpless at the very minimum. No one ever wishes to return to the place from where they have come. They always strive to become everything they were not.

You were born in a small, rural village. You were dirt poor as a child. You were ill and without money. You vowed you would never be the same again, and you have spent your life seeking to become wealthy so that you would never have to return to the same place. You are terrified of your childhood, and everything you do is to ensure you will not fall back. You become rich, powerful, and influential, but your decline is unavoidable. Although you do not fall back into such abject poverty, you lose your ability to take your money for granted.

The pretty girl, too, is terrified of her childhood. Born in a working class household to a working mother and a drunkard father who is perpetually unemployed and unemployable, the pretty girl is forced to help supplement the household income. She vows she will never again be tied down to anyone and will never again seek to support anyone else beside herself. She uses her youth, beauty, and body to both model and sleep her way to where she wishes to be. But just as quickly, her youth, beauty, and



body fade as other young girls come up and replace her. She then uses what fame and fortune she has to begin a number of successful businesses that she owns and operates, ultimately retiring after one of her employees is murdered.

Escaping your childhood is often a good thing because it drives you on to be a better person. But, it can be a hindrance as well. Only now in old age do you and the pretty girl finally commit to one another romantically. You are old and have enough money that you will never again be destitute and powerless as you were when you were young. However, in your attempt to escape your childhood, you have missed out on a lifetime of love out of the fear that it would hold you back. Now only at the end of your lives do you hold onto something which you could have had all along because you were trying to escape what you once were.

Change is one of the few guarantees in life.

Change is one of the few guarantees in life argues Mohsin Hamid in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Change occurs in all ways, shapes, and forms in the novel, both in terms of society and culture, and in terms of your own life and your own body. No matter what else may happen in life, things will change.

Change begins in the novel early on. The Western tradition of individual self-worth and looking others in the eye has caught on, as many local farmers and peasants now look their landlords in the eye. Girls do the same now. Your life in the rural village changes as your father now earns enough money to bring you all to the city, where your life changes yet again. You are given a sound education, both in academics and in real world experiences, both of which set you on your future path. You also meet a girl with whom you will fall in love, but never have until the very end of your life.

Throughout most of your life, things continue to change. Asia, once opposed to Westernization, embraces it. The economy thrives, and much money is to be made, including by you. You become extraordinarily wealthy, and you also lose almost everything you have. You are a man in your prime, then you are middle-aged, and then you are old and your health fails you. Your marriage ends in divorce, and your son moves to America rather than taking up for himself in rising Asia.

But, not all changes are negative. After decades –after a lifetime –you finally commit to romance with the pretty girl, who is now herself an old woman. Your romance is less sexual than it is companionable. You find belonging in one another, and you experience, however briefly, the things you denied yourselves through the course of your lives. You have a brief taste of what your lives would have been like with one another in them, but you were both too afraid of becoming who you were as children than to take a risk on change for each other. But at least, for the last few years of your life, you have a positive change in the romance that the other brings.



To be rich, you must be willing to compromise yourself.

To be rich, you must be willing to compromise yourself, argues Mohsin Hamid in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. As the title of the novel and the title of the self-help book denotes, your goal is to become not just rich, but filthy rich in rising Asia. “Filthy” here refers not only to the plenitude of money that you will make, but that you will be willing to do whatever it takes to make that money, including immoral, unethical, and illegal things.

While you are not religious or particularly moral, you are not a bad person. Some would even describe you as a good person. You hold no ill-will against anyone, do not cheat or steal from anyone, and seek to provide an honest, healthy, and quality product through your bottled water company. Your biggest flaw is seemingly that you will not open yourself up to the possibilities of having love in your life.

However, you want to become filthy rich. This means cooking the books and paying off the taxman to sign off on things. It means paying off local gangs for protection and paying off local politicians for their support, influence, and inclusion. As you grow more powerful and influential, you network with upper echelon politicians and military commanders. You bribe your way into landing municipal contracts for providing water, and then your wealth explodes.

You also use other unscrupulous methods to ensure your ascendance continues. You pay off your protection gang for protection when a rival threatens your life, and the would-be assassin is in turn killed and used as violent leverage against your rival for the purposes of peace. You continue to get into bed with government and military officials so that you may be included in the most elite communities in the city, for which you also supply water. You do not allow yourself to be distracted by things like love and family, and so your marriage falls apart and your son ultimately moves to America. You have compromised yourself and achieved what you wanted. However, in the end, you nearly lose it all.

Styles

Point of View

Mohsin Hamid tells his novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* in the second-person, omniscient perspective. The unnamed narrator of the self-help book *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* narrates your life as a character in the novel reading the self-help book. It also directly addresses you as the reader becoming the character in the novel. You, as the reader, are directly addressed (as “you”), and you are directly addressed because Hamid wants his novel to resemble an overall story between a reader, a self-help book, and the reader’s life. This directly draws the reader in to the life of the reader of the self-help book, allowing you to experience firsthand the things the reader of the self-help book does. This also serves the point of breaking the fourth wall, in which the audience is directly addressed and personally invested in the events of the novel. While the experience of the self-help book reader is not exactly the experience of the novel reader, there are many similarities between the two (such as seeking to make something out of your life) that allow the reader to truly place themselves in the position of the reader, and to be able to personally relate to the main character.

Language and Meaning

Mohsin Hamid tells his novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* in language that is straightforward and directly engaging. This is explained early on as the narrator of the self-help book of the novel tells you, in simple language which is directly addressed to you, that this book will help you get filthy rich in rising Asia. The narrator pulls no punches, and instead –through breaking the fourth wall –directly addresses and instructs the reader on how to pursue the dream of becoming rich. The narrator directly provides advice and suggestions while narrating the events of your life. This direct language and direct conversational style between the narrator and the reader also ensures that Hamid is able to make his points and deliver her messages clearly and succinctly. For example, Hamid argues that a human life without love in it is a human life that is wasted. This is seen directly and clearly through the way your life proceeds through the course of the novel, and how regretful it is that you only belatedly come to seek a relationship with the pretty girl. It is also seen in the narrator’s direct apologies to you for not telling you to focus on such fundamentals earlier in your life.

Structure

Mohsin Hamid divides his novel *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* into twelve consecutive, chronological, linear, numbered, and titled chapters from 1 to 12. The twelve chapters are reflective of twelve-step programs and twelve-step self-help guides, with each chapter given a title relating to the next step in the program in the path to becoming rich. For example, Chapter 1 is titled, *Move to the City*, while Chapter 3 is



titled Don't Fall in Love, and Chapter 7 is Be Prepared to Use Violence. Each chapter's events deal in some way with the title of the chapter, against which is set the unfolding events of your life. For example, Chapter 11, Focus on the Fundamentals, urges readers to pare down expenses and focus on the truly important things in life. At the same time, your life is on full display as your business crumbles and you are forced to live in a hotel, having to move out of your mansion and fire all your staff. Yet, the fundamentals also include reaching out in love for the pretty girl, with whom you find a fundamental importance in life even though your life is near the end.



Quotes

This book is a self-help book. Its objective, as it says on the cover, is to show you how to get filthy rich in rising Asia.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Here, the narrator lays out the book succinctly. The narrator describes the novel as a self-help book, and that the book is exactly about what the title says. The narrator uses the book to trace the rise of you in Asia, beginning with your humble and poverty-stricken upbringing.

...it must seem that getting filthy rich is beyond your reach. But have faith. You are not as powerless as you appear. Your moment is about to come. Yes, this book is going to offer you a choice.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains that no one is ever necessarily stuck in poverty forever, especially you. You will have a choice very soon, which will affect the rest of your life. It is a choice clarified in part by the self-help book. Chance plays a role in life's outcome, too.

There are forks in the road to wealth that have nothing to do with choice or desire or effort, forks that have to do with chance, and in your case, the order of your birth is one of these.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains to you that getting rich is a combination of things. Among these things are chance. Because you are the third child, you are not forced to return home to the farm, you are not dead, and you are not forced into working as a painter's assistant. You have a chance unlike any of your other siblings.

Because as far as getting rich is concerned, love can be an impediment.

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains that falling in love is a dangerous thing, and should be avoided. Love takes away the motivation of an individual toward other pursuits in their lives, such as work and making money. Love also tends to distract, as you will come to find out when you meet the pretty girl in your neighborhood –someone you will never be able to forget. When the pretty girl leaves, you are thrown into anger and heartache and distracted from your future.

For our collaboration to work, in other words, you must know yourself well enough to understand what you want and where you want to go.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains to you that you must have a clear idea about



what you want, and where you want to go. Without your own commitment and goals, self-help and advancement are not possible. You still aspire to become filthy rich in Asia, of which the narrator approves and redoubles his efforts to keep helping you. Firsthand experience is just as important. You must now seek out a master from which to learn.

The fruits of labor are delicious, but individually they're not particularly fattening. So don't share yours, and munch on those of others whenever you can.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains to you the simple truth of business. Benefiting from labor is important and can yield good returns. However, to be truly successful, you must work for yourself. It is the only way to assure that you have the greatest possible income, and it is the only way you can reap the work of others as well. As such, you go into the bottled water business.

Becoming filthy rich requires a degree of unsqueamishness, whether in rising Asia or anywhere else.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains that being rich requires a strong stomach. This is because being rich is not an easy thing to achieve, maintain, or increase. To be rich, you must do things that will make you uncomfortable. You will be required to do things such as pay for protection gangs and pay to have a threat against your life handled.

No self-help book can be complete without taking into account our relationship with the state.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: Here, the narrator encourages you to get in bed with the government. This will require making connections and greasing palms, all leading to better business deals and business conditions for you to operate in. This leads to your receiving a municipal water contract, meaning immense new business and even more money.

Information is power.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9)

Importance: The narrator explains that everything in the world is composed of information, right down to your DNA. But information is not merely information. It is also power. It allows patterns to be observed and predictions to be made. Information helps make sound business choices, but also keeps people aware of the things going on in the world. Those things include change. Everything changes –from the pretty girl getting older to your marriage getting cold to your brother dying. It is a lot to handle, and signals that your time is growing short.

We must hurry, we are nearing our end, you and I, and this self-help book too....”

-- Narrator (Chapter 11)



Importance: The narrator urges you to hurry up and to keep moving because time is short for you. You are now thin, old, and mostly bald. The business is in jeopardy. You must buy another or sell your own. As you decide to do this, you suffer two major heart attacks which nearly kill you, during which time your brother-in-law steals all the company's money intended for an acquisition. You endure. Though you are not poor, you must now live in a hotel.

As luck would have it, this advice is unaffected by the loss of your wealth, since it applies to those of modest means too. And the advice is this. Focus on the fundamentals... prioritize what's core to your operation.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11)

Importance: The narrator explains that to get by you must focus on the fundamentals and cut costs down to the bone. You get along by negotiating a long-term deal with the hotel and doing away with owning a car. However, these are only some of the bare bones needed to survive. The fundamentals include love and companionship. You find these again in the pretty girl, and the pretty girl finds them again in you.

We are all refugees from our childhoods.... there was a moment when anything was possible. And there will be a moment when nothing is possible. But in between we can create.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12)

Importance: The narrator explains that life is what you make it, that everyone tries to be something they were not during their childhood, that they always want to do better and be better than what their childhood was like. Life begins and life ends, and everything in between is up to you.