

Interpreter of Maladies Study Guide

Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri

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"A Temporary Matter"

"A Temporary Matter" Summary

Shoba and Shukumar are young married Indians. An electric line is down from the last snowstorm. Power to their neighborhood is being turned off at eight nightly for an hour over the next five days to make repairs. They live in a house within walking distance of stores and a trolley stop. The late March evenings are mild.

Shoba reads the electric power notice out loud. She leaves her briefcase in the hallway and walks into the kitchen wearing a raincoat over her sweatpants and sneakers. Shoba is coming home from the gym. Her face has traces of cranberry lipstick and eyeliner on it. Shukumar thinks she looks like she does after a party or a bar when she is too lazy to wash her face. Shoba comments they should fix the power during the day. Shukumar replies meaning when he's here. Since January he works at home during the day to finish his dissertation. He cooks lamb and asks when the repairs start.

Shoba walks to the calendar on the wall, replies March 19th and asks if today is the 19th. The calendar is a Christmas gift from a friend, although they did not celebrate Christmas last year. She reminds Shukumar that his dentist appointment is Friday. He remembers he did not brush his teeth again that morning. Shukumar does not leave the house that day nor had he the previous day. Shoba becomes more involved with her work, but he stays in more. Shukumar does not even get the mail or shop at the nearby stores.

Shukumar attends a September academic conference in Baltimore six months earlier. He does not want to go but Shoba insists. She is pregnant and due in three weeks but assures him everything is okay since she has a ride to the hospital. She can contact him if there is an emergency. He recalls seeing her pregnant for the last time. She waves good-bye to him as he rides off in the taxi. He remembers how large the taxi seems to be, even to his six-foot frame and large hands. He feels dwarfed in the back seat of the station wagon. Shukumar imagines needing a station wagon some day to drive their children between lessons and appointments. He sees himself driving while Shoba hands out juice boxes to their children. He welcomes becoming a parent despite still being a student at thirty-five.

At the conference he receives a phone message from the hospital. By the time he gets to Boston their baby is delivered dead. Shoba is asleep in a small private room. She has a caesarean delivery but it is not soon enough to save the baby. Shoba recuperates in a few weeks and may be able to have children in the future.

Shoba's schedule requires her to get up and go to her office before Shukumar awakes. When he wakes he sees long black hairs on her pillow and thinks of her. She is already downtown in her office having a third cup of coffee. Shoba searches for and codes typographical errors in the textbooks she edits. She promises to edit his dissertation



when he finishes it. Shukumar envies her task specificity. His work is unspecific. He is diligent in his teaching duties until September. He is not able to withdraw from teaching after the baby dies. His adviser allows him the spring semester to study so he can finish by September in his sixth year of graduate school. Shoba goes to work, but Shukumar lies in bed until he gets bored. He often does not get out of bed until lunchtime. They avoid each other by staying on separate floors of their three bedroom house. He does not look forward to weekends. Shoba spends her time working. Shukumar does not play music in the house for fear of disturbing her. He thinks they will get over the baby's death.

Shukumar cooks dinner at seven-thirty and looks outside at the dark sky and snow along the sidewalk. The snowfall provides him with an excuse for not leaving the house in the last week. Shukumar says the lamb won't be done by eight and they may have to eat in the dark. Shoba suggests candles and takes a shower. He picks up after her and recalls she used to pick up after herself and be more concerned about their home. She is typically organized, prepared and keeps a stocked pantry. They shop together every other Saturday. Shoba always has a lot of food on hand for unexpected dinner guests. If they arrive she fixes meals from her organized recipes and supplies. Shukumar uses her instructions and menus. They each get dinner from the stove and eat in separate rooms while working or doing other things. He works in the baby's room because Shoba avoids it. She only comes in to say good night before going to bed. Since power is off they will eat together for the first time in months.

Shukumar rummages through drawers and finds only birthday candles. He thinks about the surprise birthday party Shoba gives him and one hundred twenty guests in May when she is five months pregnant. Her mother visits for two months in September to help Shoba. She does not talk to Shukumar about Shoba and the baby except to say he wasn't there. He finds a dried ivy plant pot to stand the candles. He sets the table with the ivy and candles as centerpiece, place mats and guest dinnerware. He plays jazz music. Shoba returns from her shower and expresses surprise. Shukumar announces the meal is ready just as the power goes off. Shoba says perfect timing.

Shukumar opens a bottle of wine and puts new lit candles in the plant as the old ones melt. Shoba comments it's like India where power is off for hours at a time. They are not used to eating together. Shukumar adapts to the dark silence. Shoba says they all had to say something during dark times as a child in her grandmother's house in India. Shoba suggests they play the game by telling each other something they have not told each other before. Shoba tells Shukumar the first time in his apartment she looks to see if she is in his address book. Shukumar tells her he forgot to tip the waiter the first time they went out for dinner after meeting four years earlier. He admits he feels he might marry her.

Shoba returns home earlier the next day. Shukumar prepares leftovers so they can eat at seven. He shops that day for candles and batteries. Together they clean up the dishes. When power goes off Shukumar lights a taper candle for each of them. Shoba suggests they go outside since the evening is warm. They greet their neighbors passing by. Shukumar looks forward to the second night of their telling game. He is anxious



about things Shoba might tell him. She tells him about a time when his mother visits them. Shoba has a drink with Gillian instead of working late. Shukumar admits he cheated on an exam in college. Although it is fifteen years ago he feels better telling her. They sit together until power goes on. They wave again to their neighbors and go back inside the house holding hands. The next day Shukumar thinks about things to tell Shoba. Their telling game is turning into confessions. That night Shukumar admits he didn't lose the anniversary sweater she bought him. He exchanged it for cash that he bought drinks with. Shoba admits not telling him she saw food on his chin because she is irritated with him. Shukumar tells her the fourth night he tore out and kept a picture of a woman he wants when she is pregnant. She admits disliking the poem he published because it was sentimental. In the dark they are able to speak to one another again. The third night they kiss. They make love the fourth night and hold each other as they fall asleep.

Shukumar receives notice the power is repaired and lights will stay on the next day. He is disappointed because he plans a special meal for Shoba. She returns at seven-thirty with her makeup redone and says he can still light candles. When they finish dinner she blows out the candle and turns on the light. She wants him to see her face when she tells him she has an apartment and needs time alone. She signs the lease before coming home that night. Shukumar believes this is why she suggests the telling game. He tells her something they think neither knows. They agree the doctor would not tell the baby's sex. It is the one thing she wants to be a surprise. Shukumar tells Shoba he held their five pound dead little boy before its cremation. Shukumar goes to the window and sees the neighbors. Shoba turns off the light. They sit down to cry for telling what they know.

"A Temporary Matter" Analysis

Shoba and Shukumar are married young Indians living in Boston. Shoba is a textbook editor who works downtown. Shukumar is a sixth year graduate student who is dispirited at still being in school. He works at home to finish his dissertation on agrarian revolts in India. Shoba was pregnant and due to deliver the previous September. Shukumar is at an academic conference when told of an emergency by the hospital. Shoba delivers early by caesarean section and the baby is born dead. By March of the next year Shoba is more involved in her work and other activities and Shukumar is less involved. They have not recovered from the pregnancy. He is depressed and unmotivated. She is hyperactive, a workaholic and loses interest in using her domestic skills. The baby's death is a gap they cannot bridge. The pregnancy brings them together but the death drives them apart.

The baby is a metaphor for their relationship. While Shoba is pregnant their relationship develops and they grow closer together. Shoba is organized, efficient and caring while pregnant. She is always prepared for company at home. Shukumar looks forward to becoming a father. He commits to finish his dissertation so he can care for his family. The death of their baby causes their relationship to deteriorate. Shoba becomes inefficient, disorganized and unprepared at home. Shukumar becomes unmotivated and

depressed. He loses interest in his work while Shoba becomes more involved and interested in her work. The telling of their last secrets lets the relationship die also. The temporary lack of lights initiates intimacy and they speak honestly with each other.



"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" Summary

Lilia is a ten-year-old Indian girl. She recalls events that occur in the fall of 1971. Her family has a regular dinner guest at their home. Mr. Pirzada is from Dacca, the capital of Pakistan. He lives there with a wife and seven daughters whose names all start with A. Because of the war with India he does not hear from them in six months. Mr. Pirzada has a grant to study New England foliage. He begins in Vermont and Maine but now lives in a graduate dorm room at a university north of Boston where he lectures. His grant is small, so Lilia's parents feed him and others visiting from their homeland.

Lilia is unaware of country distinctions until she asks about setting a glass for the Indian man. They speak the same language, share the same customs and look similar, but her father says he is not Indian. He explains the British gave independence to India in 1947 and divided the country by Hindu and Muslim sects. Her father shows a map displaying Pakistan and India, one yellow and the other orange. He asks whether she is aware of the current situation. Lilia nods but is totally unaware. Her mother and father discuss what she learns in school and what she avoids by living in America instead of India. He wonders if she learns about Partition. Lilia silently recalls George Washington and King George.

Mr. Pirzada usually arrives at six for dinner and shakes hands with Lilia's father. Lilia takes his coat. He dresses well in suits of matching ensembles and maintains a good posture. He walks to their house about twenty minutes away, although Lilia's father offers a ride. They express concern about the nine million refugees on Indian Territory. They sit down in the living room to eat while they watch the news. Mr. Pirzada follows a nightly ritual of giving Lilia little candies. She likes the treats but feels uncomfortable. They are like jewels she keeps in a sandalwood box by her bed. The family sits around the coffee table and Lilia's mother brings dishes from the kitchen. Lilia brings water glasses, lemon wedges and chili peppers. Mr. Pirzada takes out a band-less watch he holds to his ear, winds and puts on the table while they eat. The watch is set to the time in Dacca, eleven hours earlier. Lilia realizes his life in Dacca is ahead of his time here.

When the news begins at six-thirty, Lilia's father turns up the volume and asks Lilia to pay attention to the news instead of the book she usually reads. There are tanks in the streets and Pakistanis fleeing to India. They discuss the news. Her father comments to Lilia what children her age do to survive. She imagines Mr. Pirzada's wife and children waving from a balcony and how relieved he would be. When Lilia goes to bed she thinks about Mr. Pirzada's life on the television. She cannot sleep, worries his family is dead and as she eats a piece of candy says a prayer. So as to not rinse the prayer away she does not brush her teeth.

At school the next day Lilia studies the American Revolution but cannot concentrate. She finds a section in the library labeled Asia and a book about Pakistan. She reads



about Dacca and is asked if this is part of her report. When she answers no she is told there is no reason to read it. News about Dacca becomes rarer as the weeks pass. Mr. Pirzada and her parents spend more time in the evening until the news at eleven to hear more. Lilia goes to bed earlier. She wants to join them, but can only pray for Mr. Pirzada and his family as she eats a piece of candy for their sake.

In October Mr. Pirzada asks what the large orange vegetables are that he sees on porches. Lilia's mother answers pumpkins and asks Lilia to remind her to get one. Lilia explains to Mr. Pirzada that you make a jack-o'-lantern and they decide the next night to carve the one she gets. They all gather around the dining table and forget about the news. Lilia shows Mr. Pirzada how to carve a face on it. Her mother gives him a spoon to clean out the seeds. Her father separates them to dry before roasting. While carving the pumpkin they overhear that Pakistan and India may go to war. When Mr. Pirzada hears that, the knife slips. Lilia's father shows him how to fix the face so a new one is not necessary.

The next night Lilia and her friend Dora dress up for Halloween as witches. They have empty rice sacks for collecting candy. Their parents agree to let them go alone this year if they follow certain rules. When Mr. Pirzada arrives he gives Lilia a box of mints when she says trick or treat. As the girls prepare to go Mr. Pirzada offers to go along. Lilia's mother assures him they will be safe and Lilia says don't worry. She says those words in her prayers for him but wants to say them to him for his family. She feels ashamed now that she says them for her own sake. Dora asks why he wants to go along. Lilia says he misses his daughters. The girls walk the route to Dora's. Lilia calls her mother who is not relieved to hear. Dora and Lilia sort candy and Dora's mother drives Lilia home.

When she returns, Mr. Pirzada and her parents do not greet her. They are not watching television and seem upset. They hear that evening and several nights after that Pakistan and India are drawing closer to war. On December fourth they declare war and twelve days later Pakistan surrenders. During this period Lilia's father does not ask her to watch the news with them. Mr. Pirzada brings no more candy and her mother fixes boiled eggs and rice for dinner. Some nights Mr. Pirzada sleeps on their couch. Lilia recalls they seem to share lives as if they are one. Mr. Pirzada is busy the rest of the year and they do not see him very much. In January he returns to Dacca. Months later they receive a letter from him. He is reunited with his wife and children. They survive the war by staying with his wife's grandparents. Lilia and her parents have a special meal to celebrate and toast Mr. Pirzada. For the first time Lilia misses him. Every night since January she eats one piece of candy for his family. Tonight she does not and in time throws them away.

"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" Analysis

Lilia's mother and father offer foreign nationals meals and friendship to share traditions and customs from their homeland. Mr. Pirzada is from Pakistan, not India as Lilia's family are. Countries declare war while at the same time Indian and Pakistan friends join together. The imagery of individuals in warring countries growing closer as one



while their governments grow apart is a continuing trend. Her parents are troubled she does not learn about India in the school she attends. Lilia is conflicted between their worries in India and Pakistan and her school that teaches her American history. Her schoolteacher reprimands her when she reads a book about Dacca since it is not about her report. Her insensitivity symbolizes American ignorance of history, geography and cultures not its own. Mr. Pirzada asks about American customs of Halloween, pumpkins and trick or treating. He is interested and participates with Lilia, her parents and her friend Dora.



"Interpreter of Maladies"

"Interpreter of Maladies" Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Das are arguing at the first rest stop about whose turn it is to take their daughter to the toilet. Mr. Das complains he bathed her the night before. Mrs. Das gets out of Mr. Kapasi's car to take Tina. It is a Saturday in mid-July. Mr. Kapasi is driving the Das family from their hotel to the Sun Temple at Konarak. He is assigned to pick up foreign tourists because he speaks English. The Das' also have two boys, Ronny and Bobby. The parents are under thirty and look Indian but dress like foreigners. Mr. Das squeezes Mr. Kapasi's hand greeting him like an American. Mr. Das holds a tour book titled "INDIA" and wears shorts, T-shirt, sneakers and camera around his neck. Ronny exits the car to see a goat. Bobby stays in the car. Mr. Das tells him to watch his brother but Bobby says he doesn't feel like it. Mr. Kapasi tells Mr. Das the goats are tame.

Mr. Kapasi asks if he left India as a child. Mr. Das explains he and Mrs. Das were born and raised in America but are visiting their parents who retired in India. Tina returns. Mr. Das indicates this is her first trip to India and asks her where Mina is. Mr. Kapasi finds it strange Mr. Das asks his daughter about her mother using her first name. Tina points to her mother buying something from a shirtless man at the stall. As she walks away, the man sings part of a Hindi love song that Mrs. Das seems not to understand. Mr. Kapasi notices her short skirt and tight-fitting blouse like a man's undershirt. Mr. Das answers Mr. Kapasi they live in New Brunswick, New Jersey and he teaches science in middle school. Mr. Das compares his student trips to a New York Museum with Mr. Kapasi's work as a tour guide. Mrs. Das returns and asks how long the trip is. Mr. Kapasi answers two and one half hours. Mr. Das responds the tour book says eighteen miles. Mr. Kapasi says it's actually fifty-two miles and roads are poor. Mr. Kapasi checks the door locks before starting the car and leaving the tea stall.

As they drive down the road, Ronny yells monkeys to what Bobby points at. Mr. Kapasi indicates they are common in the area as they jump into the road and on the car. They have only seen monkeys in a zoo. Mr. Das asks to stop so he can take pictures. Mrs. Das does her nails and tells Tina to leave her alone. The boys are confused by drivers on the opposite side than in America. Mr. Kapasi says he knows from watching Dallas. He thinks to himself the Das family act like brothers and sisters. The parents act just like an older brother and sister. Mrs. Das complains the car is not air-conditioned. She asks if Mr. Das saves fifty cents because of that. He tells her to quit complaining and it's not so hot. Mr. Das asks Mr. Kapasi if his job is tiresome. He tells him to stop so he can take another picture. Mrs. Das looks away at the sky.

Mr. Kapasi looks forward to guiding tours, and the Sun Temple is a favorite destination. He guides tours only on Friday and Saturday, and has a job in a doctor's office the other days. Mr. Das asks if he's a doctor. Mr. Kapasi explains he interprets for a doctor who does not speak Gujarati. Mr. Das says that's interesting. Mrs. Das says it's romantic. She puts her sunglasses atop her head. Her eyes meet Mr. Kapasi's in a drowsy gaze



through the rearview mirror. Mr. Das turns to her to ask what's romantic. She tells him she doesn't know. Then she asks Mr. Kapasi if he wants some gum and to tell them more about his job. He asks what she wants to know. She says a typical situation. So she can picture what happens she tilts her head and closes her eyes. Mr. Kapasi tells them of one. She says it's neat, patients depend on him, he has a big responsibility and Mr. Das agrees.

Mina explains that patients are more dependent on Mr. Kapasi than the doctor since neither understands the other without him. Mr. Kapasi reflects on what they say and how he never thinks of it that way. He thinks interpreting patient maladies is a failure to be the interpreter for diplomats and scholar of foreign languages he wanted. He remembers few foreign phrases anymore and his children know better English. He met the doctor when his son was sick and had to barter language skills for the medical treatment his son needed. The son died but he continues on with the doctor to pay their bills. This reminds his wife of their son. She never asks about his job.

Mrs. Das' interest in it flatters him. Mr. Kapasi reflects on how his marriage and the Das couple seem similar. They both seem unhappily married to each other and have children to raise. He wonders if they're a bad match also. He is exhilarated by her comment about his romantic job. He is happy to wear his good suit that morning and checks his reflection in the mirror while driving. He glances back at Mrs. Das and tells her more patient stories. The children look for monkeys, Mr. Das reads his tour book and Mr. Kapasi feels like he's talking alone with Mrs. Das. When they stop for lunch, Mrs. Das calls Mr. Kapasi to sit with them. When they finish Mr. Das tells Mr. Kapasi to move near Mrs. Das so he can take a picture. She asks for his address to send pictures. He writes it down and dreams about writing to her.

The Das tour group arrives at the temple. Mr. Kapasi tells them its history and leads the family on a walking tour of the grounds. Mr. Das follows taking pictures. They pass by friezes of naked couples entwined in making love, elephant processions and topless female musicians. Mr. Kapasi sees Mrs. Das stare silently at the figures. He admires the back of her legs and points out features of Surya as he dreams of embracing her. He asks when they will return home. She says ten days. He hopes to hear from her in six weeks.

The group starts back to the hotel. Mr. Kapasi thinks about ways he can make the tour last longer. He mentions a side trip to another site on the left and the children agree. Mr. Kapasi fantasizes what he will say to Mrs. Das and that he might take her hand. When they arrive she says her legs are tired and won't get out of the car. Mr. Das and children start up the hill. When Mr. Kapasi says he will join them to explain the caves Mrs. Das asks him to stay and gets into the front seat with him.

Mina watches Raj and her children hike up the hill and confides in Mr. Kapasi. She says Bobby is not Raj's son. She explains they were young when they married and still in college. They had Ronny and she stayed at home to take care of the baby so she sees few friends. Raj didn't mind because he enjoys coming home to play with the baby. He invites a friend of his to stay with them. She makes love to him and conceives Bobby



the afternoon he leaves. Mr. Kapasi refers to her as Mrs. Das, but she says he should not call her Mrs. She is twenty-eight and he probably has children her age. He is crestfallen that she thinks he is as old as her parents. She tells him her secret because of his talent. She has not told anyone for eight years. Raj doesn't even suspect her secret. She is in pain and hopes Mr. Kapasi knows what to say to relieve her so she feels better.

Mina's secret depresses Mr. Kapasi. He asks her if its pain or guilt that she feels. She glares at him to say something insulting then gets out of the car to walk up the hill. As she walks eating handfuls of puffed rice, bits fall on the ground. The bits attract monkeys that pursue her up the hill. Mr. Kapasi follows so as not to alarm her by calling out. Mrs. Das calls out to Mr. Das to wait for her. Mr. Kapasi chases off the monkeys as he catches up with the Das family. Mr. Das asks where Bobby is. Mrs. Das asks what's wrong with all of them. They call for him but do not hear his screams. He is surrounded by monkeys pulling at him. One is hitting him with a stick. Mr. Kapasi chases them away and picks up Bobby. He takes him stunned and frightened to his parents. They decide to go back to the hotel. Mrs. Das pulls out her brush to fix Bobby's hair. When she pulls it from her purse the slip of paper with Mr. Kapasi's address flies out and flutters away on the breeze into the trees with the monkeys.

"Interpreter of Maladies" Analysis

Mr. and Mrs. Das are taking a tour in India with their family. The husband and wife are no longer in love. They have two sons close in age and a younger daughter. The children and parents are thought by Mr. Kapasi, the tour guide, to act like siblings. The wife has a secret known only to her. She experiences emotional pain from keeping the secret for over eight years. The tour guide interprets maladies on weekdays for a doctor and his patients whose language he speaks. Mrs. Das believes Mr. Kapasi has a remedy for her pain if she reveals her secret to him. Mr. Kapasi is flattered by her questions and interest in his "romantic" job. He fantasizes about an affair with her. His fantasies are fueled by her questions as they tour the Sun Temple.

Mr. Kapasi also has an unhappy marriage. He compares the Das marriage to his own. He believes an affair with Mina Das will make him happy and is what she wants as well. He extends the tour by a side trip to the hills of Udayagiri to spend more time with her. Mina Das stays in the car rather than hiking up the hill with her family. Mr. Kapasi is excited by an opportunity to be alone with her. She gets in the front seat with him to reveal her secret. She has a son by an illicit relationship with her husband's friend. Mr. Kapasi is crestfallen by her secret. He is preening himself for this moment of fantasy. She sees him as a father figure, confessor and healer. Mr. Kapasi feels crushed.



"A Real Durwan"

"A Real Durwan" Summary

Boori Ma lives in and sweeps the stairwell of a building in India. She is unable to sleep for two nights. The third day in the morning she shakes mites out of her quilts under the letter box and again by the entrance to the alley. She makes the crows scatter. It is the beginning of the rainy season when her knee swells. In order to climb the four flights to the roof she holds her knee with one hand and holds her bucket, quilts and broom with the other. Boori Ma is sixty-four and looks as thin from the front as from the side. Twice daily she sweeps the stairwell and recites in her shrill, bitter and tart voice her sorrows since the Partition. She claims to have lost her husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house and her life savings. She proclaims times were easier then.

Boori Ma climbs up the stairwell. By the time she gets to the second floor she has got the attention of the whole building. She recites the menu from her daughter's wedding between chasing a cockroach and adjusting the supplies she carries. Sunlight warms the steps and shines into the stairwell already by eight in the morning. The building is so old it has windows without glass. Boori Ma recites how she had men to pick fruits for her and now she eats from a rice pot. The truth of her stories is doubtful since her estate grows larger every day. Her trip from East Bengal may be by hemp truck or bullock cart. The details seem to change every day. The fact is her rants are unconvincing and unavoidable.

Mr. Dalal wonders how a landowner is sweeping floors. Mr. Chatterjee thinks she is just a victim of changing times. The commonly accepted theory is that she probably worked for a rich man in the east and exaggerates from what she sees. They consider her entertaining. In exchange for keeping the stairwell clean she sleeps under the letterbox and behind the gate as a sort of protection from the outside world. The residents do not own much to protect. They do appreciate that Boori Ma is available to help and maintain a vigil just as a real Durwan would in a fancy neighborhood.

Boori Ma hangs her quilts on the roof and beats them with her broom. She complains whatever is inside them is keeping her up at night. Mrs. Dalal is there to dry salted lemon peels and says she doesn't see them. Boori Ma says they must have wings. Mrs. Dalal says she must be imagining or maybe its prickly heat. She decides Boori Ma should have new bedding that the residents can provide. The rain comes fast and washes Mrs. Dalal's lemon peels into the gutter as Boori Ma sweeps the stairwell from top to bottom. She knows her bedding is being destroyed but remembers Mrs. Dalal's promise and finishes sweeping. She prepares her lunch and takes a nap on a temporary bed of newspapers.

Boori Ma visits her neighbors who welcome her on some days. Occasionally they give her food or drink. She knows not to sit on their furniture and crouches in doors and hallways. She decides to accept Mrs. Dalal's invitation to stop by for some prickly-heat



powder. On the way she sees Mr. Dalal drive up. He says he has a job for her. He wants her to help him carry the two basins he just bought up to the third floor. Mrs. Dalal complains to Mr. Dalal who just got a promotion that she has no need for two basins in their two-room apartment. She wants the fridge he promised her when they married. Their argument is loud and long enough to attract the neighbors and last through two rains. Boori Ma sweeps the stairwell the second time that day without complaining and sleeps on the temporary bed of newspapers.

Their argument goes on to the next day. Mr. Dalal decides to install the second basin on the first floor so everyone can use it. The workmen take all day to install it and Boori Ma cannot sweep. By evening Mr. Dalal demonstrates the basin to the residents who are pleased. Next morning the wives stand in line waiting to brush their teeth. They are frustrated and impatient having to share and wait unlike the Dalals who have their own basin. Mr. Dalal gives his wife other things so she's happy. They go away for ten days. Mrs. Dalal promises to bring Boori Ma a blanket made in the mountains. Boori Ma is the only one to wish them a safe journey.

The other wives decide to make improvements to the building. Workmen come and go all day long. Boori Ma cannot sweep the stairwell, watch the gate or sleep under the letterbox. She moves to the roof to sleep on newspapers. Boori Ma walks through the neighborhood in the day and spends what little money she has. At the market someone steals her life savings and skeleton keys. She returns to the building to find the basin is gone and there is a hole in its place. The residents take Boori Ma to the roof and scream at her for not guarding the gate. They ask why she betrays them by talking to strangers. They say for years they put up with her stories and why should they believe her now. They ask Mr. Chatterjee what they should do. He says Boori Ma is not changing but the building is improving now so they need a real Durwan to protect it. The residents throw out her bucket, her rags and Boori Ma.

"A Real Durwan" Analysis

Boori Ma has an unknown background. She speaks loudly and disturbs other residents of the building with stories of her past experiences and riches. Details change so often the truth cannot be determined. Boori Ma irritates the building tenants. They have few possessions. She cares for and guards the property for her room under the letterbox and provisions she begs. They tolerate her. Her status changes when the tenants make some improvements and begin to feel like they have things to protect.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalal are her patrons. Trouble begins when Mr. Dalal is promoted and brings two basins home. He installs one in their apartment and one on the first floor for the other tenants. They are impatient when they have to wait and envious they don't have their own. The Dalals go on vacation for ten days. Other improvements are made. Workmen come and go and Boori Ma moves on the roof to stay out of their way. Since she cannot sweep during the day she wanders the neighborhood. Her life savings and skeleton keys are stolen. When she returns, she finds the basin has been torn out also. They blame her that strangers know about their building and do not believe anything

she says. Since they have some things that need protection, they no longer want Boori Ma.



"Sexy"

"Sexy" Summary

Laxmi and Miranda work in adjoining cubicles in the fund-raising department of a public radio station. Laxmi usually talks on the phone to her husband. Today Laxmi tells Miranda about her cousin's husband who falls in love with another woman. He sits next to her while flying from Delhi to Montreal. He gets off at Heathrow and calls his wife to tell her he needs time to figure things out. Laxmi is on the phone talking to her cousin for over an hour. Since they are often on the phone asking for money, no one notices.

Miranda is not listening to their phone conversation but hears Laxmi say Indian words occasionally. She is on the phone talking with Dev to decide where to meet. One word Miranda overhears from Laxmi is Bengali and she recalls that Dev is from Bengal too. She thinks it is a religion until Dev brings her a magazine with a map of India showing Bengal. He throws the magazine in the trash as he leaves. She watches him drive away back to his wife and home in the suburbs. She retrieves it and returns to bed where they make love. She dreams about him and their lovemaking just moments ago.

Miranda recalls their meeting a week ago in Boston on her lunch break at a department store. She purchases pantyhose and then stops at the cosmetics department. She enjoys walking through the familiar department with its perfumes, aromas and smells. That day she sees a tanned, well-dressed man with black hair and no wedding ring paying for his purchase with crisp bills. The saleslady asks what she can get for Miranda. She really just wants to watch the man, but then finally says a cream. The saleslady asks Miranda her age. She shows her a cream that at twenty-two helps avoid the wrinkles that will form by twenty-five and show after that. The saleslady rubs the cream on Miranda's face. She notices the man rubs gel on his hand while watching her. Miranda is described by others as striking with pale skin and dark and glossy as an espresso bean colored hair.

Miranda finishes her purchases and pays with a credit card. The saleslady says goodbye to Miranda as she leaves. The man walks behind her and says part of her name is Indian. He has an aunt named Mira. His name is Dev and he works at an investment bank. Dev wears a mustache and Miranda likes it. As they walk to the station, Miranda asks if his purchases are for Aunt Mira. He says for his wife who is going to India for a few weeks.

Dev and Miranda begin an affair at her apartment. They spend nights together, but he leaves at two or three in the morning. His wife calls home at six in the mornings. They talk to each other several times each day. Dev compliments her and treats her like a lady. Miranda is not used to a gentleman. She dates only boys in college. Dev brings flowers and kisses her hand at dinner. She wants to tell Laxmi about Dev since she is Indian. Laxmi is too busy on the phone with her cousin. She would like a picture of him to hang in her cubicle like Laxmi has. They explore the city together. Dev shows



Miranda his favorite place. Inside the Mapparium's globe-shaped room they see countries around the world. Dev points out different places. Miranda finds London where Laxmi's cousin's husband is. There is a bridge where they stand far apart but can hear each other whisper. Dev encourages her to try it. She says hi. He says she's sexy.

Laxmi tells Miranda about her cousin's troubles with her husband. She says what she would do if her husband were unfaithful and asks Miranda if she wouldn't too. Dev's wife is returning the next day. Miranda goes shopping while Dev picks up his wife at the airport. She looks for things a mistress should have. She finds a pair of black high heels, a scallop-edged satin slip, silk robe, slinky silver cocktail dress and sheer stockings with a seam. An older woman in the fitting room gives her tips. She recalls places they'd been to and dreams of how they will look together again. Dev wears a suit and Miranda wears her new cocktail dress. Dev is the first man to call her sexy.

Dev returns to her apartment where Miranda greets him at the door wearing only her new knee-length silk robe. Dev wears sweatpants and sneakers and doesn't notice. He carries her over to the bed and, without saying a word, enters her. When she puts the robe on Dev complains he wants to see her long naked legs. After that she greets him wearing jeans. She still looks forward to their time together on the weekends when Dev can get out with an excuse to go running. Miranda buys special things for them to eat and they talk together in bed. After making love he naps for twelve minutes. She watches and notices he is getting a belly but sees him only as perfect. After his nap he dresses in his sweats and runs home to take a shower.

Miranda remembers the only other Indians she knows except for Dev and Laxmi are the Dixit's she grew up with as a child. Work keeps her busy during the week. Laxmi and Miranda go out to lunch at an Indian restaurant. Laxmi updates her on her cousin and tells Miranda what she would do. Miranda spends her evenings waiting and watching for Saturday's call from Dev. Sunday he comes to visit. She asks him what his wife looks like and he says like Madhuri Dixit, an actress. Miranda wonders if they're related and looks through videos at an Indian grocery. Laxmi asks her cousin to stop in Boston on her way to California. She is getting a divorce. She schedules a day with her and asks Miranda if she's available Saturday to take care of her son.

Miranda agrees to baby-sit. She plays games with seven-year old Rohin. He asks for coffee and she prepares a cup for him. They play name the capital game and draw together. They watch cartoons for awhile and Rohin explores Miranda's apartment some more. He finds her cocktail dress and tells her to put it on. She doesn't want to but eventually agrees. She tells him to leave her room. Rohin says his mother changes in front of him but Miranda insists. She puts it on and then also puts on the silk stockings and high heels she's never worn. She can't zip it up and asks Rohin to help. He does and she twirls around to show him her costume. Rohin says you're sexy.

Miranda asks the seven-year old what it means. Rohin says he can't tell because it's a secret. She presses and finally he says it means loving someone you don't know. He says that's what his father does. Miranda goes numb as she imagines what scenes Rohin experienced with his parents arguing and getting a divorce because of his affairs.



Rohin takes a nap and Miranda changes back into her jeans. She recalls the Mapparium when Dev says that to her. On Sunday when he calls Miranda says she has a cold and can't see him. She asks if he remembers what he said that day at the Mapparium. He pauses and says let's go back to your place. He ends the conversation by saying next Sunday then. That week it snows. Miranda and Dev do not see each other then or ever after that.

"Sexy" Analysis

Miranda and Laxmi are co-workers that share adjoining cubicles. Laxmi's cousin is having marital difficulties. Laxmi tries to console her. Her husband met a girlfriend on his way through London at Heathrow airport. He called her and told her he is going to stay in London while he decides what to do. Laxmi's cousin is emotionally distraught about the situation. Miranda and Laxmi share many things during the day. The marital problem with her cousin takes Laxmi's time and energy. Laxmi is happily married. She has a picture of herself and her husband in front of the Taj Mahal in her cubicle.

Laxmi's concern for her cousin's difficulty enables Miranda to keep a secret from her. Miranda meets a boyfriend at the cosmetics counter of Filene's. He is an Indian and married with a wife in the suburbs. Dev's wife will be in India on vacation for a month. Dev pursues Miranda who is willing. Their illicit relationship parallels that of Laxmi's cousin. Laxmi's cousin's husband is Indian and his girlfriend is English. He calls Laxmi's cousin from Heathrow to tell her he will stay in London with her. Miranda is an American from the Midwest living in Boston. Her boyfriend is an Indian from Bengal. Dev stays at Miranda's apartment until early morning. He leaves in the morning so he can answer the phone when his wife calls home from India. Miranda would like to tell Laxmi about Dev, but does not since he is married. Miranda is the "other woman" like the one destroying her cousin's marriage. Laxmi might not share Miranda's happiness when her cousin has pain from a similar situation. Miranda may feel some guilt as well.

Miranda and Dev have a particularly happy time at the Mapparium. The bridge allows a person to whisper on one end and be heard clearly thirty feet away at the other end. Dev whispers you're sexy. Miranda is flattered and delighted. Dev is the first man to tell her she is sexy. She shops at Filene's to buy clothes she thinks a mistress should have. Dev picks up his wife at the airport. When Dev visits at her apartment again she wears a sexy robe. He tells his wife he's jogging as an excuse to get out. He wears sweatpants and sneakers. Miranda does not model her sexy new mistress clothes until Rohin asks. He tells her she's sexy. She presses him to find out what he means but he says it's a secret. He finally says it means loving someone you don't know. Miranda seems embarrassed that this seven-year-old little boy says what she does with Dev. When he wants to come over again she refuses him. She asks Dev if he remembers what he whispered to her at the bridge. He has apparently forgot about her being sexy as he answers let's go to your place. She recognizes that she is his mistress and only of interest to him for sex. The romance has disappeared with the return of his wife.



"Mrs. Sen's"

"Mrs. Sen's" Summary

It is September in a university town. Eliot is an eleven-year old boy whose mother is trying to find an acceptable after-school babysitting arrangement. During the previous year a university student took care of him, but refused to fix him any food with meat. Mrs. Linden took care of him, but would greet him at the door drinking coffee with whiskey from a thermos. Mrs. Sen is a professor's wife who advertises being responsible and kind. She offers to baby-sit in her home. Eliot's mother makes an arrangement with Mrs. Sen and says the others baby-sit at Eliot's home so there is an adult in the house. Mrs. Sen says she does not know how to drive but would take Eliot at her home.

Mrs. Sen lives in a university apartment across from the campus. She keeps a clean, safe home with her husband. Mr. Sen is also there for their meeting. He is a short stocky man and they both wear flip-flops at home. Mr. Sen teaches mathematics. Mrs. Sen is thirty, has a gap between her teeth and wears a white sari for their meeting. Eliot's mother wears shorts, is thin and refuses the biscuits offered. She asks questions and records answers on her steno pad. She is concerned that Mrs. Sen does not know how to drive. Eliot's mother works fifty miles north and his father lives two thousand miles west. Mr. Sen says he is giving her lessons and she should have a license by December. Mrs. Sen says she is a slow learner and is accustomed to a driver at her home in India.

Eliot does not mind going to Mrs. Sen's because the beach house he shares with his mother is cold in September. There is little for Eliot to do alone on the beach. Only a few neighbors stay after Labor Day. Mrs. Sen's place is warm, and Eliot enjoys watching her chop things. He is fascinated by her sitting in the middle of the living room floor chopping vegetables. She keeps one eye on the television, one on Eliot and neither on the blade. Her chopping takes about an hour each day. She asks that Eliot not walk around while she chops. She uses a special blade from India that curves like a Viking ship prow. Each Indian household has at least one. The women bring their blades to chop vegetables for weddings.

Mrs. Sen tells Eliot about her home in India. Eliot thinks about home with his mother. Before his mother comes to pick him up, Eliot and Mrs. Sen clean up the chopping and put away all the days work. She starts dinner for herself and Mr. Sen and then sets the table at one end of the living room. When Eliot's mother arrives in her business suit she stands by the door waiting for Eliot to get ready. Mrs. Sen offers something to eat or drink but she refuses. Eventually Eliot's mother nibbles at something while sitting on the sofa. She confides in Eliot that she really doesn't like the flavors. She looks forward to the wine, cheese and crackers she has at home and the pizza they share later.



Mrs. Sen meets Eliot each afternoon at the pine tree grove where the bus drops him off. She gives him a snack as they walk back from the bus stop. They walk to the car and get in. Mrs. Sen fears the sounds the car makes and likes to have someone sit with her as she practices. She adjusts the seat and radio and backs out of the parking space. She drives around the apartment parking lot. She sees the main road at the pine trees where she is not allowed to drive without Mr. Sen. Eliot tells her how his mother turns onto the road and speeds up when she enters a highway. The racing cars frighten Mrs. Sen.

Mrs. Sen and Eliot stop at the mailbox after driving around the parking lot. She is happy when she receives a letter from her family. She asks Eliot to reach in the box and sort the mail. She waits anxiously with her eyes shut while he looks for the letter she describes. He finds the letter. She hugs him and grabs the letter. They return to her apartment. Mrs. Sen kicks off her shoes and hurriedly opens and reads the letter. She immediately calls and asks for Mr. Sen. She speaks to him rapidly and loudly in her native language.

After hanging up she takes Eliot for a walk across the main road to the university. They explore the campus and stop at the student union cafeteria to eat French fries and drink tea and soda. Later they walk past the building, where Mr. Sen teaches classes, to the athletic building. They watch the swimmers in the pool. Mrs. Sen rereads the letter and tells Eliot that her sister has a baby girl. She tells Eliot the baby will be three years old by the time she sees her. Mrs. Sen asks Eliot if he misses his mother when he stays with her. He never thinks of it and says he sees her at night.

Mrs. Sen is also happy when she gets fish from the seaside. She mentions how much she likes fish to Eliot's mother. She suggests Mrs. Sen try the supermarket. Mrs. Sen says she can never find a single fish she likes there. Her custom is to eat all of a fish twice a day in Calcutta. She finds whole fish at a market that will hold it for Mr. Sen to pick up before returning to his night class. Mr. Sen begins to hold office hours so he tells Mrs. Sen to make chicken since he cannot pick up fish. The fish market calls the next week to tell Mrs. Sen they have a fish for her. She tells Eliot to get ready and calls Mr. Sen. He has a meeting he must attend. Eliot finds her crying in the bedroom. She is upset and throws her clothes around in anger. The phone rings and Mr. Sen tells her to meet him at the car with Eliot. Mr. Sen asks her to drive. She refuses because Eliot is there. They ride in silence to the fish market. She gets out with Eliot. Mr. Sen tells her to not waste time since his meeting is in twenty minutes. They return home and she prepares her fish.

Mrs. Sen would not practice driving on many days in November. She is not chopping and does not call the fish store. She sits and reads old letters from her family that she keeps in a shoebox. She feeds Eliot crackers and peanut butter. Mrs. Sen does not offer his mother anything when she picks him up. Eliot's mother asks if he notices Mrs. Sen's behavior is changing. He says no. She listens to tapes of her family talking about things that happened after she left India. Her grandfather died according to a letter she receives one weekend. She cooks again the next week. Mr. Sen calls one day to take them to the seaside. They shop at the fish market together. The couple buys so many



fish that Eliot helps carry them. They eat at a restaurant, walk along the beach and take pictures. Mr. Sen insists that Mrs. Sen drive when they get ready to leave. She protests but he insists. He shuts off the radio to instruct her as they go. She gets confused and doesn't follow his instructions. Other drivers blow their horns. She pulls over to stop and refuses to drive.

Mrs. Sen decides to take a city bus with Eliot when the fish market calls again. They talk about the nursing home where the bus stops and Eliot's mother. The fish market gives Mrs. Sen a bag. They buy clam cakes for the ride home. When the bus stops at the nursing home an elderly woman gets off. The bus driver asks Mrs. Sen and Eliot what they have in the bag and tells him to open a window. When the fish market calls again a few days later Mrs. Sen calls Mr. Sen but he is not available. She begins chopping eggplant for dinner and tells Eliot she is going to make stew with fish. He asks if Mr. Sen is going to take them. She tells him to put on his shoes. They leave the apartment and go to the car. Mrs. Sen drives around the parking lot several times. She watches the main road as she passes it.

Eliot thinks she is practicing but then she signals and turns. A mile later she takes a left turn in front of an oncoming car. The car misses her but blows the horn. Mrs. Sen is so upset that she hits a telephone pole. The policeman asks for her license. Mrs. Sen tells him that her husband teaches at the university. Mr. Sen arrives to talk to the policeman. Mr. Sen ignores Mrs. Sen while driving back to the apartment. He tells Eliot he is lucky to not be hurt. Mrs. Sen prepares a snack for Eliot and goes into her bedroom. Mr. Sen waits for Eliot's mother to arrive. He apologizes and gives her check back. She takes Eliot home, apologizes and gives him a key. She calls to assure herself he's okay when he returns home from school the next day. She says he's a big boy now.

"Mrs. Sen's" Analysis

Mrs. Sen is a transplanted Indian housewife. She takes care of her daily chopping and homemaking. She is proud of her professor husband. She promotes babysitting duties in her home by mentioning that fact. Eliot's mother is happy with all of Mrs. Sen's services except that she cannot drive. Mr. Sen takes care of business and she takes care of the house. He is teaching her to drive. She is reluctant because she is used to chauffeurs and servants doing errands in India. When she wants something she phones Mr. Sen at work to get it. He is not always able to get what she wants when she needs it. He wants her to drive for her own errands. Mr. Sen is less traditional and encourages Mrs. Sen to adapt.

Mrs. Sen misses India and home. She is happy when she receives letters from her family in India. Mrs. Sen enjoys fresh fish prepared whole but can find only one fish market in the area that sells whole fish. The shop is driving distance away by the sea. Her trouble getting fish conveys the frustration, longing and aggravation she feels adapting to her new home. She is delighted to find the market and pleased with their service. She calls them or they call her when they have fish. She calls Mr. Sen to pick up her order. He does as she asks the first time. Her fish orders become more frequent.



He has meetings and other things to do and cannot always get her fish. If she would learn to drive she could get her own fish. When he takes her driving she refuses to drive or becomes rattled by other cars. Mrs. Sen and Eliot take the bus when the fish market calls again. Another passenger complains about the bag's smell on their ride home. The bus driver tells them to open a window. She cannot reach Mr. Sen when the fish market calls again.

Mrs. Sen is in conflict. She wants to make fish stew and begins chopping. She can't ask Mr. Sen to get the fish. If she takes the bus she will offend the other passengers and bus driver. Mr. Sen tells her to drive even with Eliot in the car. She drives every day in the parking lot. She has no driver's license but she is a professor's wife. Mrs. Sen decides to drive to the fish shop. Just after entering the main road she misses an oncoming car and crashes into a pole. The police call Mr. Sen to take care of the accident. He apologizes to Eliot's mother. Mrs. Sen withdraws to her room and from the new culture she is in.



"This Blessed House"

"This Blessed House" Summary

Twinkle and Sanjeev are cleaning and inspecting the house they are moving into. They are a Hindu couple. Twinkle finds a vinegar bottle and Christ figure that she kisses and places on top of the undusted mantel. Sanjeev is irritated by having to remind her that they're not Christian and other self-evident things. Twinkle finds more Christian items to place on the dusty mantel. She wonders if the previous owners are born-again or trying to convert others. Sanjeev organizes his college engineering texts and remarks he thinks it works in her case. He is irritated by the Christian icons and wants to complain to the Realtor. Twinkle is intrigued by them and looks forward to finding more.

They listen to Mahler's Fifth Symphony on the following Saturday. She finds a large watercolor poster of Christ with a crown of thorns and peanut-shell size tears. Sanjeev thinks it's a shade. Twinkle says they must put it up and lights a cigarette. Sanjeev refuses to display it. She rolls it up and says she'll put it in her study so he won't see it. He worries that their housewarming guests will see it. She says she'll put it behind a door so they won't.

Sanjeev reflects on the tender adagietto section in the symphony. Mahler sent it as a proposal to his wife. Twinkle hollers the music is putting her to sleep and won't impress his friends. Sanjeev looks at himself in the bathroom mirror. He is concerned that he is shorter than Twinkle when she wears heels as she does the first weekend they moved and ate dinner in Manhattan. She drinks four whiskeys, browses in a bookshop for an hour and makes him dance a tango on the sidewalk. They walk a long way to the car because Sanjeev fears the stories of parking in downtown Manhattan. He says her three-inch heels look uncomfortable and she should not wear them. She complains of not being able to wear heels at the desk she sits at all day. He knows she does not since he finds her in bed reading in the middle of the day because she is bored. He thinks of, but does not say, the many things she could do if she is bored. Another day Sanjeev finds her on the phone before five o'clock calling a friend in California when the long-distance rates are still high. She sits on the kitchen floor talking while a pot boils over on the stove.

Sanjeev reflects on her girlish quality that he does not understand. Small things excite and delight her. She crosses her fingers at unpredictable things. She is childlike with an endearing quality and named after a nursery rhyme. This is their second month of marriage and only their fourth since meeting each other. Twinkle's parents live in California and Sanjeev's in Calcutta. Their parents are old friends and arrange the meeting at a party when Sanjeev is on business in Palo Alto. They sit next to each other at dinner and share similar likes and dislikes. They call and then visit one another back and forth to Stanford and Connecticut. She is twenty-seven and just abandoned by an American. He is lonely and makes far more money than he needs. They marry in India among friends and family at Christmas. She is not skilled, but prepares dinners with



bottled dressings, prepared deli dishes and pre-roasted supermarket chickens. This night she makes a dish of her own with fish, parsley, tomatoes and a broth. Sanjeev is pleased with its taste but annoyed that Twinkle doesn't know the mix of ingredients. He is also displeased that she serves it from things she finds in their new home. He notices the pot sits on a Jesus trivet and the bread is covered with a Ten Commandments dishcloth.

The housewarming party is planned for October. Guests are friends and associates from Sanjeev's former bachelor days and his office. Some are Indian couples he hardly knows, but who invited him to dinner when he was single. Twinkle is finishing her master's thesis in Irish poetry at Stanford. She knows no one in Connecticut but Sanjeev and an old boyfriend. Sanjeev purchases the house by himself before he left for India to marry Twinkle. He decides to buy it without seeing the Christian and other religious details she sees when they move in. They are raking leaves when he hears Twinkle screech. He runs to her thinking she needs help. He finds her on the ground laughing silently at the waist high Virgin Mary statue she finds in the bushes. She wants to clean and display it on the lawn like the neighbors. Sanjeev says they will think we're insane. She says it is bad luck not to display it. Twinkle asks why he is concerned with what others think.

Sanjeev wonders whether he made a mistake-marrying Twinkle compared to the pictures of Indian women his mother used to send. He wonders if he loves her. He said he did when she first asked him at the movies. She gives him a piece of popcorn when he answers but does not say she loves him. He wonders now if he knows what it means. His mother used to tell him every month that he needs a wife to look after and love. Now he has a pretty one from a high caste that will have a master's degree. He visits her in the bath where she is soaking her sore muscles. He tells her he is going to move the Virgin from the front lawn to the garage. When he says he is going to take it to the dump on his way to work she stands up and says he dare not and that she hates him. She threatens to leave in her bathrobe. When he sees a tear on her cheek he apologizes and holds her. They agree to place it at the side of the house.

Sanjeev and Twinkle clean and run errands for the party. The first guests notice the statue and ask if they're Christian. They say they think Sanjeev and Twinkle are Indian. Sanjeev says there are Christians in India. The guests that arrive are dressed elegantly in American or Indian clothes. Sanjeev is impressed that his friends have taken so much care for their party. They all admire Twinkle. Sanjeev keeps answering that he's not Christian. Twinkle tells him how much they like the poster in her study. His intelligent and professional male friends tell Sanjeev how attractive Twinkle is and wonder if her last name is Little Star.

He overhears her saying every day is like a treasure hunt. They all explore for treasures. They go to the attic where Sanjeev and Twinkle have not been. Sanjeev does not join them. He thinks of things he could do while alone in the house. He hears her say you won't believe this Sanj. As she comes down the stairs he holds her waist to steady her. She is holding a thirty pound silver bust of Christ. She wants to put it on the mantle just for the night and says she knows he hates it. He admits he does hate it. Its



value makes him hate it all the more. He says nothing as he carries it for Twinkle to the mantel.

"This Blessed House" Analysis

Sanjeev and Twinkle are both Indian and the result of an arranged marriage. They meet at a party and within six months find themselves married but not particularly happy with each other. Their habits, personalities, mannerisms and interests are far apart. If they were not by custom introduced to each other at an arranged party they may never meet each other. The future of their marriage is doubtful. The best chance for their marriage is her popularity with his friends and what they would think if he divorces her.

Sanjeev is pretentious and more concerned with what other people think than with his own feelings. He harbors deeply hostile thoughts and feelings while his guests are on a treasure hunt with Twinkle. His success as an engineer and probable officer of his company do not inspire self-confidence. His concerns remain with what his neighbors think of him and his wife. Twinkle asks who cares what anybody else thinks. Twinkle is full of life and infectious enthusiasm. Sanjeev is dark, depressive and just infectious. Sanjeev may stay married not for love but for fear what the neighbors might think. Twinkle will stay only if she sees a little light shining in Sanjeev.

Unbeknownst and unsuspecting Sanjeev buys a blessed house and brings blessing to Twinkle. She is an Americanized Indian female and claims her blessings by making it clear he dare not remove their shared property. She is a symbol of all her name suggests. Their relationship symbolizes yin and yang, the dark and light incarnate. Whether he lets her light up his life remains a question. Sanjeev has little chance of darkening her spirit.



"The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

"The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" Summary

Bibi Haldar is a twenty-nine year old female who suffers from an undiagnosed ailment. She is treated by spiritual healers, charlatans and medical doctors. She is taken to holy sites, medical facilities and Calcutta in hopes of a cure. Many proposed treatments conflict with other proposed treatments. The methods vary, but the results remain unsuccessful. The ailment struck all of a sudden. She is confined to the building where her cousin and wife rent an apartment. Bibi might collapse and fall into an episode at any time. She is unable to go out on her own because of that risk. Bibi spends her days in a low-ceilinged storage room on the roof. For a living she sits in the storage room recording the inventory of her cousin's courtyard cosmetics business. The storage room has an adjoining latrine and shelves. She is paid in meals, provisions and cotton, but no money. She sleeps on a cot in her cousin's second floor apartment.

Bibi arrives in the morning wearing slippers and a housecoat. She whines and complains loudly to the other tenants who are on the roof hanging laundry or doing other chores. She is not a pretty woman. She asks stridently whether it's fair for a single girl to spend her days this way. Bibi speaks as if she is talking to a deaf person. She makes it very clear she wants a man so her life may change. She bothers the neighbors to tell stories about their weddings. Bibi complains so much as to occasionally work herself into an attack. In her extreme moments the neighbors try to calm her. In calmer times they encourage her to go with them. They hope that going along on errands will improve her prospects of finding a man. They tell her to dress better if she wants to attract a man. She complains she will never be cured and never married.

Bibi Haldar has a bad episode one evening. The neighbors all rush out to help her as she writhes about on the third floor. Her moaning is loud enough to echo throughout the stairwell. The neighbors send for her cousin who does not come from his shop for ten minutes. He tells the neighbors to stop fussing. He sends Bibi in a rickshaw to the polyclinic. The doctor takes many blood tests and proclaims marriage to be a cure. Her hand is examined by palmists who confirm seeing a union in her skin. Neighbors are excited about Bibi's cure. They imagine how she may please a man and look forward to her prospects. Bibi is excited about the cure and begins to prepare for a married life. She sees her body differently. She begins to care for her skin, lips, diet, clothes and style.

Haldar and his wife do not share Bibi's enthusiasm. They do not believe this hope for her cure. They have no time for indecent suggestions that she just must endure when there is no cure. His fat wife wonders whether anyone would. She can't cook. They shelter her from practical matters. The wife keeps her from fire for fear devils possess her. Haldar keeps her from television. He fears it excites her. They do not teach her. The neighbors encourage Bibi's cure. The Haldars complain that she just wants attention and it is better to keep her busy. The neighbors suggest a husband will get her off their



hands. They complain they don't want to waste their money on her wedding. The neighbors dress her in special clothes so Haldar can have her picture taken for potential in-laws. He refuses and calls her a liability and loss for business and no one needs a photo to see that.

Bibi stops recording inventory. She tells the neighbors stories on the rooftop loud enough for nearby rooftops to hear. Bibi tells about Haldar and his wife's private habits so all the neighbors can hear. Haldar advertises to find a husband for Bibi so she will keep quiet. The readers of the ad know who Bibi is and do not answer. He advertises for two months and receives no replies. The neighbors encourage her to learn about being a wife. They introduce her to practice with various suppliers who come by. The neighbors coach her about what to expect and how to answer possible suitors. Her father took care of her and watched over her before he died but now only the neighbors help her. They are glad that she is not their responsibility.

Haldar's wife is pregnant and in November tells Bibi she's contagious like the pox and will spoil the baby. She isolates Bibi from their living utensils. One day Bibi has another episode by the fish pond. The neighbors attend to her. A group of the husbands take her home with the women following behind. Haldar refuses to let the hysterical Bibi spend the night with his pregnant wife. Bibi sleeps in the storage room. After the baby's birth he lets her sleep by their apartment, in the corridor. Bibi spends time alone, has more seizures and is left unattended.

The neighbors protest by no longer shopping at Haldar's store. The shelves and inventory grow dusty. The weather gets colder and the baby gets sick. Haldar's wife blames Bibi for the baby's sickness. Haldar moves her out of their apartment completely. She stays in the storage shed and makes her home there. She stays alone and no longer goes out at all.

Haldar clears out all of his inventory by mid-December. The neighbors drive him out of business. He and his family leave town and mail is returned unopened from any relatives of Bibi. She stays in the storage shed and the neighbors leave food for her. They find her four months pregnant in April. She does not remember what has happened. She does not identify the father. By September she delivers a son. They show her how to feed and care for him. She cleans up the storage room and turns it into a store. The neighbors buy goods from her. She takes care of herself and raises her son. She is cured.

"The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" Analysis

The life and suffering of Bibi Haldar typifies the support of an Indian community to aid one of their own. Bibi is unpleasant in loud complaints and lifestyle like Boori Ma but Bibi is encouraged and supported by her neighbors to the very end. Her cousin and his wife provide for her at the start. Through the many paths to a remedy for her malady, Haldar is steadfast in providing her a job that pays her in room, board and provisions.



She works on the roof in his storage room during the day. She sleeps in his apartment on a cot at night. Bibi is in her late twenties with life ahead of her if she can find a man.

Haldar is happy to send her to charlatans for pretend remedies. When her fits become too obvious to the neighbors he sends her to a real doctor. He prescribes a man for her cure. The neighbors are delighted and encourage her. Haldar worries about losing cheap labor and discourages her. Haldar runs a spurious ad to show he cares. When there's no reply he claims vindication. When the Haldars have a baby that gets sick Bibi is blamed. They banish her to the roof where she stays day and night. The neighbors are offended by the Haldars' treatment of Bibi and refuse to buy from his store. Eventually the Haldars' bad intentions cause them to abandon their shop, storage shed and inventory. Bibi stays in the shed and the neighbors feed her. They find her pregnant by an unknown father. When she delivers, she takes over the business Haldar left. She has a baby boy and realizes the cure is a man after all.



"The Third and Final Continent"

"The Third and Final Continent" Summary

The narrator recounts his tale of leaving India in 1964 with a commerce certificate and the equivalent of ten dollars in his pocket. He sails on a cargo ship for three weeks across the Arabian, Red and Mediterranean seas to England. He lives in London with twelve or more penniless Bengali bachelors like himself. They live three or four to a room and share the meals they cook together. He attends LSE and works at the university library. They have few responsibilities beyond their jobs. They lounge around on weekends and meet more Bengalis they join for dinners. Occasionally one of them moves out to live with a woman his family in Calcutta arranged for him to marry. When he is thirty-six years old, the narrator's family arranges a marriage. At the same time he receives a job offer in America at the MIT library. He accepts the job and receives a green card. He flies to Calcutta for his wedding and then flies to Boston to begin his employment.

The narrator spends his first night in America at the Student Guidebook suggested YMCA near Cambridge, within walking distance of MIT. He rents a small room with a desk, cot and wooden cross over a noisy city street. No cooking is allowed in the room. He reports to his job at the Dewey Library the next day. Through the day he opens a bank account and shops for a bowl and spoon to eat his first meal in America. He eats cornflakes and milk sitting at his desk in the YMCA. Over the next week he gradually adjusts to shopping for the things he needs. He expects to stay at the YMCA to wait six weeks for his wife's passport and green card processing. He looks for housing they can share but finds a room for immediate occupancy. He calls from a pay phone to make an appointment for seven that evening. This is the first time he would live in the home of someone who is not Indian.

A tiny old woman opens the door when he arrives at the appointed time and rings the bell. Her first instruction to him is to lock the door when he enters. She shows him her house and says she expects him to be on time with the rent. He offers a letter confirming his MIT employment. The way she handles it suggests she does not read it. She asks again if he locked the door. She tells him to sit on the bench next to her. She says there's an American flag on the moon. He says yes with little thought though he did read about a moon landing in the newspapers. She asks him if that isn't splendid. When he says yes, she commands him to say that's splendid. She bellows it again and he murmurs his response. It offends him that she commands him to say it again louder. She then tells him to go see the room. He climbs the stairs to find a room with an open door and twin beds. She demands his decision from the bottom of the stair. He accepts. She tells him house rules, gives him a key and introduces herself as Mrs. Croft.

The narrator tells Mrs. Croft he is married but she doesn't hear him. He follows the custom when marrying Mala. His older brother and his wife arrange the match and he has no feelings about it. She is an unlovely twenty-seven year old daughter of a teacher



and a talented homemaker but not of fair complexion. He sleeps with her for five nights before leaving for Boston. He reflects on six years earlier when his mother died in the next room. Mala now lives with his brother until her papers are ready for her to join him.

He moves into the room at Mrs. Crofts the next day. When he enters he finds her at the bench wearing the same thing she wore the day before. She asks him if he's locked the door. She tells him there's an American flag on the moon. He recognizes this to be a nightly ritual. It lasts ten minutes until she drifts off to sleep so he goes along with it. Friday morning when the rent is due he hands it to her in an envelope rather than on the ledge above the piano keys. That evening she is sitting on the bench. She does not ask about the flag, but says it is very kind of him, still holding the envelope. On Sunday there is a knock at his door. An elderly woman introduces herself as Helen, Mrs. Croft's daughter. She asks how he is doing and says Mrs. Croft refers to him as a gentleman. Their conversation is interrupted by Mrs. Croft hollering for them to come downstairs. Mrs. Croft tells them it's improper for an unmarried man and woman to have a private conversation without a chaperone. He helps Helen carry the two grocery bags of soup cans she's brought for Mrs. Croft.

Helen opens the cans and fills the two pans with them. She explains Mrs. Croft can no longer open cans since forty years of giving piano lessons ruined her hands. They share a cup of tea. Helen reveals Mrs. Croft is a widow and eats only soup since she turned one hundred, three years ago. He is amazed. He thinks she is in her eighties, maybe ninety. He reflects that his mother's widowhood drove her insane. His father died when he was sixteen and his mother never adjusted. They were unable to help her. His brother gave up his education so he could take a job to keep the household running. His responsibility was to watch over and take care of her. He offers to help Mrs. Croft with her soup and Helen says that would kill her. He worries about her and decides to spend time with her on the bench in the evenings. He gives her the limited care he can as a tenant.

The narrator receives a telegram from his brother in August with Mala's flight schedule. At the same time he receives a note from her. He doesn't recall clearly what she looks like. He sees an Indian woman having trouble on the street and realizes the responsibility he has to take care of Mala. He recognizes he got used to many things in the six weeks he has been in America, but he has not got used to Mala. He finds an apartment he and Mala can share. He pays Mrs. Croft on Friday and tells her he is leaving. She asks for her cane so she can see him to the door to lock it.

He meets Mala at the airport and recognizes her. He takes her home to have egg curry and settle in. She brings sweaters she knitted and a letter from his brother. He has no present for her. He spends their first week together just getting used to her being there. She walks with him one morning to MIT and he gives her a tour. He stops to have a key made for her. The next day she asks for some money. When he returns he sees new kitchen utensils. One evening he asks if she'd like to go out. They walk by Mrs. Crofts and he opens the gate, hoping to say hello. Helen answers the ring and asks if they will visit for awhile so she can run out for errands. Mrs. Croft cannot stay alone these days.



The couple enters the parlor and finds Mrs. Croft in bed. She tells him to sit on the sofa, but Mala wanders over to the piano and sits on the bench. Mrs. Croft says she broke her hip, called the police and asks what he has to say. He cries out splendid. Mala laughs and Mrs. Croft asks who that is. She asks if she plays the piano. When she says no Mrs. Croft tells her to stand up. After looking at her for a long time she says she is a perfect lady. He laughs quietly and then he and Mala smile at each other. It was then that the distance between him and Mala began to lessen. They begin exploring Boston together. He tells her of his early experiences in London and then in Boston and the YMCA. Months later he reads of Mrs. Croft's obituary and stares silently at the wall, not able to speak.

Years later they move to a town north of Boston where he works in a small university library. They become American citizens and decide to grow old there. They visit Calcutta regularly. They have a son who attends Harvard. When they visit him he drives past Mrs. Croft's house. He points it out to their son and talks about his first home in America. He tells his son whenever he is discouraged, that if his father can live on three continents, there is no obstacle his son can't conquer. Despite that, there are still times when he cannot imagine all he has done.

"The Third and Final Continent" Analysis

An interesting feature of this last tale is the main character's lack of a name. He is referred to in this summary and analysis as the narrator. He is an archetype of the male Indian American immigrant. His life and experiences characterize the model Indian expatriate. He speaks English and is well educated. He leaves the Indian subcontinent as a young bachelor, spends some time in Europe living in London, returns to India for his arranged wedding and then travels to his final destination in the Northeast United States. When he is appropriately settled in his new job at the MIT university library, his Indian bride Mala, who has been living with his older brother's family since the wedding, joins him in Boston. Mala and the narrator take time to get to know each other as a married couple and begin their life in a potential adopted homeland. After years they decide to stay, become naturalized citizens and find a smaller, more family-friendly Northeast town to live in and raise a family. Their son attends Harvard. The narrator encourages him by sharing the dream and vision he has when leaving India to resettle in America, the third and final continent. The irony of this vision is for the son to relive his father's experience he must return to the continent his father departed and the home he only visits.

Along the narrator's path he experiences things similar to those all Indian expatriates do. He begins his sojourn by sailing to England where he lives as one among many bachelor Indian students in London. In his mid-thirties the older brother and his wife arrange a marriage with the late-twenties daughter of a teacher they approve. While in India for his wedding, the narrator recalls that as a young boy, he took on the traditionally oldest brother's duties of care for their widowed and insane mother. In America he meets the much older Mrs. Croft, also widowed and a mother, but whose oldest daughter insists he not help her. She fears too much care for the independent



Mrs. Croft would kill her. In fact only months after she is bedridden and requires help Mrs. Croft dies.

He confronts Christianity at the YMCA with a wooden cross in his room and cornflakes with milk for his first meal. Patriotism faces him with an American flag on the moon tale Mrs. Croft insists he holler splendid to. He introduces her to Mala. Her approval brings them together. They smile at each other like a couple falling in love.



Characters

Shoba in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba is a thirty-three year old Indian-born female married to Shukumar. She works in downtown Boston as a textbook editor. Six months earlier in September, she expected to deliver her first baby. Prior to and during her pregnancy Shoba behaves like a traditional Indian housewife. She maintains an organized, prepared and well-stocked home, kitchen and pantry. Through her pregnancy she keeps an active and engaged lifestyle with her husband. Despite her employment in the publishing business she resolves to avoid being caught up in its pressures. Her focus is on home, family and friends. She is always ready to welcome and entertain unexpected company.

Birth by caesarean section of her still-born baby marks a distinct change in her life and behavior. She is no longer an expectant mother and is traumatized by the baby's death. Shoba is physically recuperated from the operation. She seems to be emotionally healed as well. Shoba is actively involved in increasingly more business projects and a regular schedule of working out at the gym. She leaves home early in the morning before her husband awakes. Shoba returns around eight in the evening to eat dinner alone while she works or does other things. Her weekends are spent working at home in areas away from her husband. After the baby's death Shoba becomes fully caught up in her career. Shukumar in "A Temporary Matter"

Shukumar is the thirty-five year old husband of Shoba. He is six feet tall and has large hands. He is reluctant to attend an academic conference out of town when she is due in three weeks. Shoba reassures him she is okay and can call him if anything happens. He is embarrassed and uncomfortable that he is a student at thirty-five. Shukumar is happy about becoming a father. They decorate a room as a nursery for the baby. When the baby dies he becomes depressed and withdrawn. Shukumar holds their deceased baby boy before it is cremated. Shukumar stays home in January and strips the nursery of decorations for a study. Shoba does not enter his study since she is haunted by the room.

Shukumar is raised in New Hampshire, United States. The first time he visits India he nearly dies. He is left with his aunt and uncle in Concord when his parents return to India after that. He likes sailing and ice cream as a teenager more than returning to Calcutta. After Shukumar's father dies while he is in college, he becomes interested in India as a subject. Shukumar has no Indian childhood stories to tell as Shoba does. Shoba's Mother in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba's mother visits Shoba and Shukumar after the baby dies. She is a polite Indian lady who is very courteous. She is resentful of Shukumar however, and only speaks to him when she comments that he was not at the hospital when Shoba went into labor.



Shukumar's Mother in "A Temporary Matter"

Shukumar's mother visits Shoba and Shukumar after her husband, Shukumar's father, dies. During her visit, Shoba tells Shukumar she has to work late when she actually meets Gillian for a drink.

Gillian in "A Temporary Matter"

Gillian is Shoba's friend from work with whom she secretly has a drink. Gillian drives Shoba to the hospital when she goes into labor. Shukumar is out of town at an academic conference.

The Baby in "A Temporary Matter"

The baby is delivered caesarean and born dead. Shoba does not want to know its sex and agrees with Shukumar the doctor would not tell them its sex. Shukumar holds the dead baby boy and keeps its sex a secret until Shoba tells him she is moving to an apartment.

Lilia in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Lilia is a ten year-old Indian girl who lives with her parents in a city north of Boston. She is not exposed to a world beyond what her parents share with her or what she learns in school. Her father worries that she learns little about her nationality in the school she attends. Lilia tries to read about Pakistan, a country she hears about from television news, her father and their guest Mr. Pirzada. When her teacher sees Lilia reading a book in the library about Pakistan, she tells her if it's not about her report it doesn't matter.

Lilia is a curious young girl who is caught between learning about the world her parents want her to know about and her teacher who tells her it doesn't matter. She is reminded by her parents how much she avoids by growing up in America rather than India. Lilia tries to learn about her country in school but is told it doesn't matter. She lives an Indian lifestyle at home and is told only American culture matters at school. Lilia is trained to welcome Mr. Pirzada by taking his coat as an Indian girl should. She appreciates savors and saves the little candies he gives her when he arrives for dinner.

Lilia's father insists she watch the news with them, so she sees how children her age survive in India. She worries about Mr. Pirzada and his family. Lilia says a prayer while she eats one piece of candy to show her concern. She is not taught about prayer, so she believes it is more effective if she doesn't rinse the candy out of her mouth by brushing her teeth. When the conflict between India and Pakistan ends, Mr. Pirzada returns to his family. Lilia believes her prayers are answered and has no more need for the candy.



Mr. Pirzada in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada is from Pakistan. He lives in Boston on a government grant to study New England foliage. He has a wife, seven daughters and a home in Dacca, Pakistan that he leaves to study in America. He is a regular dinner guest of Lilia's parents. Mr. Pirzada dresses in well-matched suits that he wears to dinner with Lilia and her family. He walks to their home, twenty minutes from the university where he lectures. He worries about his family, which he has not seen in six months. He carries a watch set to Pakistan time. When he sits down to eat he takes out the watch to remind himself of his family.

There is trouble between the governments of his country and India. Although Lilia and her parents are Indian they share many customs, habits and lifestyles with the Pakistani Mr. Pirzada. He is particularly worried about his wife and daughters because he has not heard from them during this time of civil unrest. Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada watch the evening news together. They hope to hear positive developments from their shared and neighboring homelands. Nightly news indicates a worsening situation. Pakistan refugees are leaving for India and he becomes more concerned about his family.

In October he notices pumpkins on his walk. He learns about the American custom of carving a pumpkin for Halloween. That activity gives him a break from the depressing news. He brings Lilia a box of mints for trick or treat. Mr. Pirzada shows concern to the American customs of his Indian friends, even in the midst of his own sadness. Pakistan and India declare war. Mr. Pirzada stays over some nights at Lilia's parent's house. He returns to Pakistan and his family in January. His wife and daughters spend the war time with relatives and are safe. He writes to Lilia's family to let them know.

Mr. Pirzada's Wife in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada's wife stays in Dacca with her daughters until war begins to break out. She moves with them to her relative's house but is unable to keep in touch with her husband because of the war.

Mr. Pirzada's Daughters in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada has seven daughters whose names he has difficulty remembering. His wife insists on naming them with names starting with the letter A. They stay with their mother in Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada misses them and worries because he does not hear from them.

Lilia's Father in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Lilia's father is an Indian male who insists Lilia watch television during initial conflicts with Pakistan. He explains that Mr. Pirzada is Pakistani when she asks if she should set a glass for the Indian man. Lilia's father fears she does not learn about India in



American schools. He asks if she is aware of what is going on and what they teach her at school.

Lilia's Mother in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Lilia's mother shares their home and prepares meals for countrymen of the India-Pakistan area who live in or are visiting America. Lilia's mother and her husband find compatriots at the university by searching the roster for Indian and Pakistani names.

Dora in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Dora is Lilia's childhood friend who tells her when the teacher comes into the library. Dora and Lilia trick or treat together on Halloween. Dora asks her about Mr. Pirzada. Her parents drive Lilia home after they walk their Halloween trick or treat route.

Mr. Das (Raj) in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Raj Das is an Indian man under thirty years old, born and raised in America. Raj and his wife have three children and live in Brunswick, New Jersey. He teaches middle school science. Raj and his wife are visiting their parents who retired in India. Raj takes his family on a tour. He dresses and acts like a typical American tourist wearing a T-shirt, shorts, sneakers and camera hanging around his neck. While on the tour he consults an Indian tour guidebook as his tour authority. He checks it for accuracy of any distance or travel time estimates the tour guide makes. Raj often asks to stop to take pictures on the tour. Mr. Das and Mrs. Das have an apparent distant and contentious relationship.

Mrs. Das (Mina) in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Mina Das is also born in America of Indian heritage but is twenty-eight. Mrs. Das argues with Mr. Das about whose turn it is to take their daughter to the toilet. Mina Das takes Tina but lets her return alone. Mina shops at the tea stall to buy something from a man who is not wearing a shirt. Mrs. Das wears a short skirt and tight-fitting blouse. While on the tour she does her nails. Mrs. Das is fully self-centered. She tells Tina to leave her alone, complains the car is not air-conditioned and criticizes Raj for saving fifty cents. When he asks to stop for a picture she acts bored or irritated.

She flirts with Mr. Kapasi by saying his medical job is romantic and lifts her sunglasses to catch his eye in the rearview mirror. Mina encourages him to tell her more and offers him gum. Mrs. Das flatters him by saying how responsible his job is. She invites him to sit with them at lunch and asks for his address. When they stop at the hills for a hike, she says her legs are tired and asks Mr. Kapasi to stay with her. Mina gets into the front seat with him. On the tour Mina shows hostility and boredom with her husband but expresses interest in Mr. Kapasi's job. The way she dresses, words she uses and interest she shows in Mr. Kapasi excite him, whether or not she intends to or even



realizes it. Mina Das may just want his attention so she will feel comfortable telling her secret.

Mina keeps the secret of her affair with Raj's friend since Bobby's conception eight years earlier. She hopes Mr. Kapasi will relieve her of the bad feelings she has had since then. Mina takes eight years and all day with Mr. Kapasi's patient stories to trust he will be able to cure her malady. Her hopes of a remedy disappear when he suggests she just feels guilty. Mina wants to retaliate by insulting him but stomps away to her family instead.

Tina Das in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Tina is the young daughter of Raj and Mina Das. They argue over whose turn it is to help her. Raj refers to her mother as Mina when asking Tina where she is. Mina tells Tina to leave her alone and to play with her doll when they are touring in the car.

Ronny Das in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Ronny is the nine-year old son of Mina and Raj Das. He gets out of the car to watch the goat. He yells from inside the car when he sees the monkeys. Mina Das stays at home to take care of Ronny when he is a baby. She sees few friends during that time.

Bobby Das in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Bobby is the eight-year old son of Raj's friend and Mina. Raj tells him to watch Ronny but Bobby says he doesn't feel like it. Mina confides in Mr. Kapasi that Bobby's birth father is not Raj. The monkeys surround and attack Bobby. Mr. Kapasi saves him and carries Bobby back to Mina.

Mr. Kapasi in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Mr. Kapasi is a favorite Indian tour guide because he speaks English. He is forty-six years old and has receding silver hair. Mr. Kapasi enjoys being a tour guide and likes the Sun Temple tour destination. During the week he works as an interpreter for a doctor. He guides tours on Friday and Saturday. His work as a medical interpreter was not his first choice. Mr. Kapasi wants to be a diplomat or language scholar and considers his medical job a failure. He takes the job to barter his son's medical bills and keeps it after he dies. The job reminds Mrs. Kapasi of his death and she shows Mr. Kapasi no interest in it.

Mr. Kapasi knows his marriage is unhappy and believes the Das marriage is too. Mina Das' interest in and questions about his romantic job stir his interest. Mr. Kapasi feels flattered by her. His male Indian ego is stimulated by her feminine charms and American indelicacy. He suspects she is coming on to him. When Mina asks for his address he is



sure she is. He watches her look at naked couples on the friezes and believes their tryst is soon to come. Mr. Kapasi is in lust with fantasies of a passionate affair with Mrs. Das. He accepts her trust in him as she tells her secret. Mr. Kapasi seems shocked by her secret infidelity. He is devastated when she tells him to call her Mina since he probably has children her age. His fantasies about her vanish when she refers to him as a father.

Mr. Kapasi's Wife in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Mr. and Mrs. Kapasi have fallen out of love with each other. She has no respect for the language skills he uses to interpret for the doctor. He thinks his job reminds Mrs. Kapasi of their dead son. Mr. Kapasi compares his relationship with her to the relationship the Das' seem to have with each other.

Boori Ma in "A Real Durwan"

Boori Ma is the sixty-four year old Indian woman who sweeps the stairs and does other duties at the four-story building. She sleeps under the letterbox on the first floor. She carries her supplies up to the roof and sweeps the stairs down from there. Boori Ma complains loudly all the time about her life now, compared to her previous life. This irritates her neighbors but they tolerate her noisiness. She does a valuable service by sweeping and watching over the building at low cost. Boori Ma does the work of a real Durwan for room under the letterbox and what the residents give her to eat.

She may be from a wealthy landowning caste as her stories suggest. Her troubles began with the Partition. Details seem to vary by the day and the listener, so the truth remains in question. She is an old woman made older by a hard life. She seems good-hearted and willing to help the neighbors. She watches over their building and does tasks unexpected of her age and assignment. Residents do not believe the stories of her past life, but her dedication to serving them well at next to no cost justify forgiving minor differences. She protects them from the outside world.

Boori Ma is not healthy. She is thin, has a weak knee and sleeps fitfully. She carries all her worldly possessions with her up the stairwell in the morning. Under one arm she holds bedding, broom and bucket. The other hand holds her swelling knee as she climbs. She screeches her sorrows in a shrill voice up the stairs. She is afflicted by mites but others think she has prickly heat. She hangs her bedding on the roof and beats the mites out of it. She is promised a new quilt so Boori Ma lets it hang as she sweeps the stairs. The rains start, but she remembers Mrs. Dalal's promise and leaves her bedding to soak.

When one of the tenants, Mr. Dalal, installs a basin on the first floor, Boori Ma's life deteriorates even more. Workmen come and go during the day so she cannot sweep the stairwell and keep track of strangers. She spends her days walking through the market and the skeleton keys she keeps as a reminder of her past life are stolen. What little money she has hidden in her sari is taken as well. She returns to the building to



find the basin torn out and the neighbors angry with her. They do not believe anything she says so she cannot defend herself. They kick her out of the building with nothing.

Mr. Dalal in "A Real Durwan"

Mr. Dalal is one of the tenant-residents of the building. His wife is Mrs. Dalal who is Boori Ma's self-appointed protector. Mr. Dalal is promoted and buys a basin for their apartment and one to put on the first floor for the other tenants. His promotion lets him make up to his wife for promises he has not kept. He takes her on a ten day vacation. During their vacation Boori Ma has a lot of trouble with the other tenants.

Mrs. Dalal in "A Real Durwan"

Mrs. Dalal is the wife of Mr. Dalal and Boori Ma's protector. Mrs. Dalal promises Boori Ma a new quilt since her old bedding is destroyed in the rain. Mrs. Dalal complains to Mr. Dalal about all the things he promises to get her that he has not yet done.

Mr. Chatterjee in "A Real Durwan"

Mr. Chatterjee is a knowledgeable and well-respected tenant whose opinion is valued. He believes Boori Ma is the same as she has always been. The building is improved and now requires a real durwan. His last word about Boori Ma is accepted by the tenants as the decision to throw Boori Ma out so they can hire a real durwan.

The Building Residents in "A Real Durwan"

Tenants in the four-story building are the neighbors of Boori Ma. They are irritated by her noisy complaining but tolerate it because of the cheap cost of her services. She takes care of the building by sweeping the steps twice daily and watches out for any strangers who might take something. The residents are poor and have few possessions to protect. When they get the basin from Mr. Dalal and have to wait to use it they envy the Dalals who have their own. They begin to make other improvements. When the basin is stolen they decide they need a real durwan to protect their building. They kick out Boori Ma.

Laxmi in "Sexy"

Laxmi is a married Indian woman. She has a cousin whose husband falls in love with another woman after nine years of marriage. Laxmi works in the fund-raising department of a public radio station. She is a few years older than Miranda who is twenty-two. They work in cubicles next to each other. She has a picture of her husband and herself on their honeymoon in front of the Taj Mahal. Laxmi calls it the most romantic place on earth. Laxmi spends a lot of time on the phone trying to console her



cousin. Laxmi feels badly about her cousin's boy. He's been kept home for days. Her cousin hasn't been able to get out of bed since her husband's call. Laxmi tells Miranda about her cousin's troubles. She invites her cousin to visit. Laxmi asks Miranda to baby-sit Rohin her cousin's son.

Miranda in "Sexy"

Miranda is a twenty-two year old American female. She was born in Michigan where she grows up and goes to college. She moves to Boston where she becomes a co-worker of Laxmi. They have adjoining cubicles in the fund-raising department of a public radio station. Miranda overhears some of the Indian words Laxmi says on the phone. The words remind her of her Indian boyfriend. She first meets Dev on her lunch break in Filene's cosmetics department. Miranda is instantly attracted to him. She appears striking with her pale skin and dark, glossy espresso bean colored hair.

They start an affair without delay. His wife is in India for only a few weeks. Miranda is totally charmed with Dev and the way he treats her. She has dated only high school and college boys. Dev treats her like a lady and she cannot resist him. They explore Boston together. At the Mapparium he says she's sexy. No one has said that to her before. She shops at Filene's to get the sexy clothes she thinks a mistress should have. When she and Dev next meet she wears her new silk robe. He says nothing but takes her to bed for sex. He says he likes to see her long naked legs. He naps for twelve minutes after sex then goes back home to his wife. Miranda experiences her life as a mistress.

The affair starts as an exciting romance with dining and roses. While she is in love Miranda is insensitive to the pain Laxmi tells her about her cousin. Miranda wants to tell Laxmi about her experiences with Dev because he's an Indian too. The pain of Laxmi's cousin affects Miranda when she meets her and Rohin. The innocent definition the seven year old gives of sexy strikes her heart. She is touched when Dev first says it to her. She has a new insight when Rohin says sexy means loving someone you don't know. She asks Dev what he said then. When he replaces the word sexy with let's go back to your place, Miranda realizes that Dev just wants her for sex.

Laxmi's Cousin's Husband in "Sexy"

Laxmi's cousin is married to an Indian man. He has an affair with an English woman he sits next to on a flight from Delhi to Montreal. Her husband disembarks the plane at Heathrow Airport in London. He calls Laxmi's cousin to tell her he needs some time to figure things out. He later divorces his wife and stays in London.

Dev in "Sexy"

Dev is the nickname of Miranda's Bengali lover who is married and has an Indian wife in the suburbs. Devajit Mitra is a rich, successful middle-aged investment banker who has



an affair with Miranda while his wife vacations in India. When his wife returns he just wants to have sex regularly with Miranda at her apartment.

Rohin in "Sexy"

Rohin is the seven-year old son of Laxmi's cousin and her estranged husband. He stays with Miranda so Laxmi and her cousin can spend the day together. Rohin plays name the capital game. He tells Miranda she's sexy. He redefines its meaning for Miranda. Rohin's words help her recognize the pain he experiences and realize what her affair with Dev does to his family.

Laxmi's Cousin in "Sexy"

Laxmi's cousin is Rohin's mother. Her husband is having an affair with an English girl in London. She visits Laxmi on her way to California as a break from her divorce.

Mrs. Sen in "Sexy"

Mrs. Sen is a thirty year old Indian lady married to Mr. Sen. She lives in America with her husband and is having trouble adapting to American culture. Mrs. Sen is from a wealthy Indian family with servants and chauffeurs. Mr. Sen tries to teach her how to drive but she resists learning. Driving would give her greater freedom and flexibility to baby-sit and do errands. Mrs. Sen might adapt to the new culture more readily if she could drive. Her refusal to learn represents a resistance to the cultural adaptation she needs to live successfully in the United States. In a fit of exasperation she decides one day to drive out on the main road to the fish market. The cultural desire to have fresh fish overcomes her fear of driving. Fortunately the crash resulting from this cultural clash does not cause any injuries. Mrs. Sen further withdraws from adapting to the culture.

Mr. Sen in "Sexy"

Mr. Sen is an Indian man married to Mrs. Sen and teaches mathematics at the university. He takes care of all the business for the family but is aggravated when Mrs. Sen calls him to pick up fish for her. Mr. Sen tries to teach her to drive, but she does not want to and is afraid of other cars. Despite his encouragement she resists learning from him. When she drives without a license and has a collision Mr. Sen takes care of the resulting problems.

Eliot in "Sexy"

Eliot is an eleven year old boy who lives with his mother at a beach house. She hires many sitters for him that do not work out. The last attempt is Mrs. Sen. Eliot does not



need a sitter, but his mother wants an adult available for an emergency. Mrs. Sen turns out to be less of an adult than Eliot's mother hoped for. Mrs. Sen causes emergencies rather than helps to alleviate any Eliot might have. Eliot "earns" his key but Mrs. Sen still does not earn her drivers license.

Eliot's Mother in "Sexy"

Eliot's mother is a divorced single mother who lives on the beach with her son. She works fifty miles away from their home. She cannot find Eliot a sitter more responsible than he is. His mother gives him his own key.

Twinkle in "This Blessed House"

Sanjeev's twenty-seven year old Indian wife is fully Americanized. Twinkle is a young and pretty California girl. She smokes, drinks, dances and likes wearing three-inch heels when she goes out. Twinkle says she sits at her desk all day studying so she can't wear heels there. Twinkle's friends and Indian parents live in California where she grew up. She is finishing her master's thesis at Stanford in Irish poetry. Twinkle is girlish and enthusiastic. Although she has few domestic skills Twinkle is willing to try and enjoys experimenting with cooking. Listening to Mahler symphonies make her sleepy.

Twinkle is a pretty Indian national who comes from a high caste. Her parents arrange her marriage to Sanjeev with his parents, their old friends in Calcutta. She is vulnerable and on a rebound from breaking up with an American boyfriend. She marries Sanjeev in India. They honeymoon in Jaipur where they buy silk paintings. While moving into their house she finds lots of Christian memorabilia that arouse her curiosity. She thinks the previous owners are "born-again" Christians and she and Sanjeev live in a blessed house.

Sanjeev in "This Blessed House"

Sanjeev is an organized thirty-three year old Indian engineer who is being considered for a vice presidency. He has twelve people working for him, as well as his own secretary. He is irritated by the Christian icons his new bride, Twinkle, finds in the house he bought without her. Her response aggravates him even more. Sanjeev likes Mahler symphonies and finds the tale of his Fifth Symphony an emotional experience. He feels inadequate from being short and anxious about crime when in the city. Many critical and hostile thoughts occur to him that he does not express. Sanjeev is preoccupied with what others think of him. He is pretentious and worries what his office staff, his friends and neighbors will think.

His mother is intent on arranging a marriage for him. She sends him many pictures of Indian ladies who may be a match for him. She believes he is lonely and makes more money than a successful bachelor needs. She arranges a meeting with Twinkle's parents who are old friends. They meet at a party when he is in California on business.



He likes Twinkle and thinks they share similar likes and dislikes. His marriage is arranged and he buys a house for them to live in on his way to the wedding in India. Sanjeev now admits he does not understand Twinkle and is annoyed by her flamboyance.

Housewarming Party Guests in "This Blessed House"

Sanjeev invites his friends, associates and colleagues that he is trying to impress to their housewarming. The guests like Twinkle and enjoy her treasure hunt for undiscovered Christian memorabilia. They seem to fully appreciate her flamboyant and sparkly nature. None of his Hindu friends say anything negative about her to Sanjeev.

Bibi Haldar in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Bibi is a twenty-nine year old female who suffers from an undiagnosed ailment. She sees many charlatans who have not been able to cure her. Often new remedies they prescribe conflict with remedies she is trying. Illness and unpredictable behavior confine her to the building where she lives. She goes out only with someone who can help her. She works during the day counting inventory in her cousin's storage shed. She sleeps on a cot in the Haldar's apartment. Bibi receives room and board for her work. She complains loudly to the neighbors about her plight and that she will never be married. When she has an especially bad episode Haldar at last takes her to a real medical doctor. The physician prescribes her cure as being a man. A palmist provides a second opinion to support that cure.

Now that she has a confirmed medical cure, the neighbors encourage her to follow the prescribed treatment. They help Bibi plan and prepare for a man. Haldar and his wife resist her treatment. He has a good business deal with her cheap labor and does not want her to marry. Haldar will have to invest in finding her a man to arrange a marriage. He discourages her and argues with the neighbors about her cure. When the Haldars have a baby they tell Bibi she must move to the storage shed. Bibi falls into deep depression and withdraws completely into the shed. She becomes pregnant by an unknown man. When the neighbors find her pregnant they help her with her pregnancy and the baby boy. She turns the shed into a home for herself and the man in her life, a baby boy. She is cured.

Haldar in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Haldar is Bibi's cousin and owns a shop in the four-story building. Bibi works for him to keep track of inventory for room, board and provisions. Neighbors do not like how he treats Bibi. They refuse to buy from him. He abandons the store and Bibi to leave town.



Haldar's Wife in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Haldar's wife is a fat woman who does not like Bibi. When she gets pregnant and has a baby she insists that Haldar move her out of their apartment.

The Neighbors in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

The building is occupied by residents and friendly neighbors. They help and encourage Bibi with her illness at first, and then with her cure and the baby. The residents stop buying merchandise from Haldar to run him out of business and the building. After the Haldars leave they purchase merchandise from Bibi and help her raise her baby.

Bibi's Baby Son in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

The father of Bibi's baby boy is unknown, but the baby son gives Bibi a reason to live and is the cure she needs for her ailment.

Narrator in "The Third and Final Continent"

The narrator is not named. He is the quintessential Indian expatriate. The narrator represents the model of Indian custom, immigration and acculturation. When living in India as a young son growing up he takes care of his insane, widowed mother. His older brother foregoes an education to take a job and accept responsibility for the family. After his mother dies the narrator leaves to study in London. He returns to India for the wedding his older brother arranges. The narrator then flies to the United States where he begins his employment.

He takes a room at the YMCA for his first night in America. The next day he finds a room in Mrs. Croft's boarding house. He stays there to wait for his arranged wife's papers to be processed so she can join him. Mala joins him in the furnished apartment he finds after leaving Mrs. Crofts. Eventually they settle in a small town in northeast United States. The narrator and his family fully adapt as an Indian expatriate family in America.

Mala in "The Third and Final Continent"

Mala is the arranged bride of the narrator. According to custom she lives with his older brother and wife while waiting for her immigration papers to be processed. She joins the narrator in America and they form a family.

Mrs. Croft in "The Third and Final Continent"

Mrs. Croft is the landlady who rents a room to the narrator while he waits for his wife to join him. Mrs. Croft is older than his mother but well adjusted considering she is over



one hundred years old. Mrs. Croft's years of piano teaching disable her from opening soup cans so her daughter opens them. She is an independent widow who lives alone and runs the boarding house.

Narrator's Older Brother in "The Third and Final Continent"

The narrator's older brother is an Indian man who arranges the narrator's marriage according to custom. The older brother takes over most of the family's responsibility when their father dies. The narrator takes care of their ailing mother so he can work.

Helen in "The Third and Final Continent"

Helen is the daughter of Mrs. Croft. She takes care of opening Mrs. Croft's soup cans and preparing her soup pans for the week. Helen helps her while reassuring her of her independence.

Narrator and Mala's Son in "The Third and Final Continent"

The narrator and Mala raise a college-aged son who attends Harvard and is a natural born American. The narrator encourages him to persevere when he feels discouraged.



Objects/Places

Shoba and Shukumar's House in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba and Shukumar own a three bedroom house in Boston that is big enough for them to avoid each other on weekends. The house is located in a family neighborhood within walking distance of shops and the trolley.

Shoba and Shukumar's Baby in "A Temporary Matter"

The baby symbolizes Shoba and Shukumar's relationship. Shoba's pregnancy enhances their relationship and they look forward to becoming parents together. When the baby dies their relationship begins to deteriorate and they become isolated from each other.

The Telling Game in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba plays a childhood game at her grandmother's house in India when the lights are out. Each of the children tells something to the others that they do not know. Shoba initiates the telling game with Shukumar when their power is out.

The Candles in "A Temporary Matter"

Shukumar can find only small birthday candles to provide light on the first night. Each candle is too small for enough light to eat dinner. Shukumar puts several lit candles in a flower pot. As each one burns out he replaces it with a new lit candle. He goes shopping the next day after weeks of seclusion to buy tapered dinner candles for the second night.

Picture of a Woman in "A Temporary Matter"

Shukumar tears out a picture of a woman from Shoba's magazine to fantasize with while she is pregnant. He keeps this secret from her until the telling game when he tells her.

Sweater Vest in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba gives Shukumar a sweater vest as an anniversary gift. Shukumar does not think it's appropriate for an anniversary so he exchanges the vest for cash. He uses the cash to buy drinks. He keeps this secret from her until the telling game when he reveals it.



The Lights in "A Temporary Matter"

Power is turned off for an hour at eight o'clock for repairs. They have no electric lights so they eat together by candlelight. The darkness lets them speak honestly with each other when they play the telling game.

Last Night Secrets in "A Temporary Matter"

Shoba tells Shukumar she is taking an apartment and moving out. When he holds their dead baby he promises himself not to tell her because Shoba wants the baby's sex to be a surprise. He keeps her wish after the baby dies until now. When Shoba tells Shukumar she is moving out he reveals the baby's sex in retaliation.

Lilia's Parents' House in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Lilia's parents live in a house north of Boston where they host dinner for visiting Indian and other nationals from their homeland. They eat in the living room while watching the evening news.

Mr. Pirzada's Candy Gifts to Lilia in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada brings candy for Lilia when he arrives for dinner. Lilia treats each candy as a prayer for his family. He returns to his family and she discards the candy that remains.

Mr. Pirzada's Watch in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada takes out a watch from his pocket at dinner that is set to Pakistan time. He places it on the table while he eats to remind him of what his family is doing.

Dacca, Pakistan in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada lives in Dacca, Pakistan with his wife and daughters. Dacca is the capital of Pakistan.



Pumpkin in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Mr. Pirzada asks what the orange vegetable is that he sees on his walk to their house. Lilia and her parents show him how they make jack-o'-lanterns. The family shares carving the Halloween pumpkin and is distracted from the news.

Pakistan-India War in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"

Refugees from Pakistan cross the border into India. This causes civil hardships in India from absorbing the burden. India threatens war if Pakistan doesn't resolve the problem. India's demands are not met so it declares war. Within days Pakistan surrenders and the conflict ends. Mr. Pirzada does not know his family is safe with relatives until he returns.

Tea Stall in "Interpreter of Maladies"

The tea stall is the first rest stop on the tour Mr. Kapasi guides. Mrs. Das takes Tina to the toilet there. She buys snacks from a shirtless vendor on her way back to the car.

Sun Temple in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Sun Temple is a main destination and favorite tour of Mr. Kapasi. The Das family walks around the temple paths. The friezes of naked lovers stimulate Mr. Kapasi's fantasies of Mina Das. She walks up behind him and stands next to him at the statue of Surya.

Monkeys in "Interpreter of Maladies"

The Das boys see the first group of monkeys from the car on the way to Sun Temple. The monkeys play freely in the trees and on the ground. The boys have only seen monkeys in the zoo. Mr. Kapasi assures them the monkeys are harmless from inside the car. They see the second group of monkeys on the hills of Udayagiri. Raj Das and the children hike where the monkeys wander but are safe if they do not feed them. Mrs. Das jumps out of the car and walks up the hill eating snacks. She drops snack bits that attract monkeys to what she drops. Monkeys seeking more snacks encircle and attack Bobby. Mr. Kapasi runs up the hill and chases the irate monkeys away to save Bobby.

Mr. Kapasi's Address in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Mr. Kapasi writes down his address and gives it to Mrs. Das to put in her purse. He hopes to have an affair with her. When she pulls a brush from her purse the wind blows away the paper with his address written on it.



Kapasi Car in "Interpreter of Maladies"

Mr. Kapasi has a large car with no air-conditioning that he uses to drive tourists in on the tours he guides.

The Hills at Udayagiri in "Interpreter of Maladies"

The hills are a side trip Mr. Kapasi recommends so he can spend more time with Mrs. Das. She tells her secret to Mr. Kapasi there while sitting with him in his car. The slip of paper with his address blows away on the hills carrying away his fantasy with her.

The Stairwell in "A Real Durwan"

Boori Ma lives and works on and about the stairwell. She sweeps the four-floor stairwell twice daily from the roof to the ground floor where she sleeps under the letterbox.

Boori Ma's Bedding in "A Real Durwan"

Boori Ma sleeps on quilts overnight. In the morning she carries them to the roof for airing. A rainstorm destroys the quilts she leaves on the roof to air. Boori Ma uses old newspapers while waiting for Mrs. Dalal to bring the new quilt she promised.

The Two Basins in "A Real Durwan"

Mr. Dalal brings home two basins. He installs one in their apartment and the second on the first floor for tenants to share. The tenants are irritated when they have to wait to use it. A stranger steals it when Boori Ma is not there. The tenants blame her for the theft because she tells stories to strangers about the building and is absent when it happens.

Boori Ma's Sari, Skeleton Keys and Life Savings in "A Real Durwan"

Boori Ma keeps keys and her life savings tied up in the bottom of her sari. Skeleton keys are all she has left from her prior life. Her keys and life savings are stolen from her sari.



Economist Magazine with Bengal Map in "Sexy"

Dev brings his Economist subscription copy to Miranda's apartment to show her Bengal on the map. Dev throws it away but Miranda keeps it to remember where he's from. When Rohin sees Dev's name on the magazine he asks Miranda who Devajit Mitra is.

Mapparium in "Sexy"

The Christian Science Center has a global display room called the Mapparium. Visitors can walk inside the room to see where different countries are located in relation to one another. There is a bridge in the room that enables visitors to whisper on one end of the bridge and be heard thirty feet away at the other.

Miranda's Mistress Outfit in "Sexy"

Miranda buys new clothes at Filene's that she can wear to attract Dev. She wants to wear sexy clothes like a mistress because Dev calls her sexy. Miranda wears the robe but Dev wants to see her naked. Miranda models her clothes for Rohin and he also calls her sexy.

Her Apartment in "Sexy"

Miranda and Dev have their affair at her apartment. Miranda takes care of Laxmi's nephew Rohin at her apartment. While exploring her apartment Rohin finds Miranda's mistress outfit and Dev's magazine.

Filenes in "Sexy"

Filenes is a department store in Boston where Miranda shops on her lunch hour and meets Dev. Miranda buys stockings, cosmetics and her mistress clothes there.

Gym Clothes in "Sexy"

Dev wears sweatpants and sneakers to run in and as an excuse to get away from his wife. He wears gym clothes to Miranda's apartment. She opens the door wearing a sexy robe.

Sen's University Apartment in "Sexy"

The university provides Mr. Sen and Mrs. Sen an apartment just across from the university campus where he teaches. Mrs. Sen agrees to baby-sit Eliot there.



Mrs. Sen's Indian Blade in "Sexy"

Mrs. Sen uses a traditional Indian cutting tool. She chops vegetables, chicken and other foods. Indian wives bring their own Indian blades when they prepare food for celebrations.

Mr. Sen's Car in "Sexy"

Mr. Sen teaches Mrs. Sen to drive in the car they use for errands. She practices driving it around the parking lot alone with Eliot. Mr. Sen warns her to never take the car out on the main road without him since she has no license to drive.

The Fish Market in "Sexy"

The fish market is a shop at the beach where Mrs. Sen can buy whole fish. Whole fish are reminiscent of her Indian custom of eating fresh, whole fish everyday. She gets fresh fish only when Mr. Sen can drive there or she can get a ride to pick it up.

Whole Fresh Fish in "Sexy"

Mrs. Sen is used to the custom of preparing and eating whole fresh fish everyday in India. This custom reminds her how much she misses India. Mrs. Sen can find only one market that sells whole fresh fish.

Eliot's Key in "Sexy"

Eliot receives a key to their beach house from his mother. She believes he is old and responsible enough to go directly to their beach house alone after school. The key is a symbol that Eliot no longer needs a babysitter.

Twinkle and Sanjeev's House in "This Blessed House"

Sanjeev buys a house in Boston before Twinkle sees it and without a suitable inspection. When they move in together she finds Christian statues, pictures and other religious artifacts. Twinkle considers living in the house a daily treasure hunt. Previous owners may be "born again" Christians who leave memorabilia they forgot or want to convert the new owners. Sanjeev is irritated by the memorabilia she finds in their house.

The Christ Figure in "This Blessed House"

The first thing Twinkle finds in the house is a Christ figure that she puts on the mantel.



Christ Poster in "This Blessed House"

Sanjeev finds the poster rolled up and thinks it's a shade. Twinkle unrolls it and finds a picture of Christ. The poster offends Sanjeev and he wants to throw it away so his guests and co-workers won't see it. Twinkle puts it in her study so they will not see it.

Virgin Mary Statue in "This Blessed House"

Twinkle finds a dirty and uncared for lawn ornament under the bushes. She wants to display it. Sanjeev wants to throw it away because of what the neighbors might think.

Christ Silver Bust in "This Blessed House"

Twinkle and the housewarming guests find a thirty pound silver bust of Christ in the attic. Sanjeev begrudgingly carries it for Twinkle only because the silver is valuable.

Bibi Storage Shed in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Bibi works all day in this storage room on the roof to record Haldars inventory. When Haldar kicks her out of the apartment Bibi fixes the storage shed up as a home to live in. Haldar abandons his business and Bibi sells merchandise out of the transformed shed.

Haldar's Cosmetic Store in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Haldar has a shop on the ground floor where he runs a cosmetics business. Tenants don't like how he treats Bibi and won't buy from him. He closes the shop and leaves the city.

Haldar's Apartment in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Bibi and the Haldars share an apartment in the four-story building until they kick her out.

Bibi's Cot in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Bibi sleeps on the cot initially in the Haldar apartment. Eventually the Haldars move her cot into the hallway and then into the storage shed on the roof.

Bibi's Ad in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"

Haldar writes and runs a negative newspaper ad to prove Bibi cannot find a man.



YMCA in "The Third and Final Continent"

The YMCA is a private Christian organization that rents no-cooking rooms. The narrator rents one for his first night in Boston. The small room has a desk, chair and wood cross. He eats his first American meal of cornflakes and milk at the desk with a bowl and spoon he buys at a store.

Mrs. Croft's House and Bench in "The Third and Final Continent"

The narrator finds a rooming house where he rents a room from Mrs. Croft after he leaves the YMCA. He lives there while waiting for his bride's paperwork to be processed and her arrival in America. When the narrator comes home from work Mrs. Croft tells him to sit on the bench. She tells him about the American flag on the moon. Mrs. Croft and the narrator settle into a nightly ritual of conversation on the bench.

The American Flag in "The Third and Final Continent"

The first astronauts to reach the moon place an American flag on it. Mrs. Croft says the event is splendid and insists that the narrator agree that it is splendid also.

Soup Cans in "The Third and Final Continent"

The narrator helps Helen with Mrs. Croft's soup cans. She cannot use the can opener so Helen opens a week's supply of soup cans. Helen puts the soup in pans to refrigerate. The narrator offers to help Mrs. Croft with her soup. Helen says it would kill her since fixing her own meals is vital to her independent spirit.



Themes

Secrets Withheld and Revealed

Secrecy is a recurrent theme in this collection of short stories. Main characters keep secrets from their partner or community. The telling game Shoba and Shukumar play set a tone for the effect secrets have. Narrative method creates an ongoing sense of secrecy. The reader is told how or what characters think about each other. Specific secrets may have a positive or negative impact on characters. Some secrets are better not revealed.

Shoba's drink with Gillian and Shukumar's vest secret ease the tellers' mind and are fairly neutral. Shukumar tells Shoba their baby's sex to hurt her for moving out. Mrs. Das tells Mr. Kapasi her secret about Bobby to find a remedy. She is angry when he suggests it is guilt she feels. The telling alone might ease her guilt. There is no suggestion she wants Raj Das or Bobby to know. She runs back to them in an obvious attempt to reconcile after confessing to Kapasi. Telling of either secret to their spouse can only be hurtful.

Lilia keeps secret the candy she turns into private prayers of care for the Pirzada family. She's embarrassed or uncomfortable telling him. Boori Ma's history and Bibi's malady are secrets proclaimed to the neighborhood. Boori Ma reveals so much that nothing is believed and a deeper secret may be assumed. Bibi's symptoms are seen but the cause is secret. Boori Ma's nonstop telling causes neighbors to be rid of her. Bibi tells Haldars' secrets. Their treatment of her causes the neighbors to support the cure for her malady.

Miranda keeps her affair with Dev a secret from Laxmi so she won't hurt her more over her cousin's grief or risk disapproval. Dev keeps Miranda secret from his wife to have an affair. Laxmi's cousin's husband tells his wife of his affair to change their life. Rohin keeps secret his meaning of sexy until Miranda presses him. His telling helps reconcile her life. Mr. Kapasi keeps his fantasies secret from Mina Das and is less a fool for not telling.

Other secrets may not be so painful to the characters. Eliot protects Mrs. Sen's behavior change from his mother. Sanjeev worries about what his neighbors and fellow workers might think despite Twinkle's openness. His deep dark thoughts of hostility are hidden in the pretense of his wife's comment that they're good little Hindus.

Indian Family Life Traditions and Customs

Indian customs are revealed in this collection of stories. The individual characters' ability to adapt to a new culture and changing times is exposed in different settings. None of the couples fall in love and then get married as an American does. Every married couple has an arranged marriage. A senior male, grandfather, father, husband or older brother in each family conducts the business of buying a home, taking a job or arranging a



marriage. Traditional customs may be a standard to measure an individual's adaptation. Arranged marriage between Indians does not ensure success if they live outside the cultural and social structure.

The narrator and Mala are standard bearers of Indian-American adaptation. They learn to live the life of an Indian couple fully adapted to American culture. Characters in the other stories exhibit an inability to accept or adapt to changing times. Some characters are poorly adjusted to the adopted society. Their marriage is the ideal Indian model. Oldest brother and wife arrange their match because their father died long ago. Narrator accepts his older brother's duty to care for their ailing mother. Oldest son forgoes an education for a job and the younger son studies and cares for their mother.

Shoba and Shukumar are married. Shoba is born and raised in India. Shukumar is raised in America because visits to India make him sick. Shoba performs domestic chores like a model Indian homemaker until her pregnancy ends in a stillborn baby. Shoba becomes a workaholic businesswoman, working days, nights and all weekend on business. On her way home she works out at a gym. Shukumar feels unappreciated by Shoba as an Indian man should be. She adapts to an American lifestyle while he reverts to Indian traditions.

There is an extended family group present in the stories. They may be related by blood or by residence. Often they are family members and in-laws of several generations or just the neighbors. They are a cultural collective conscience. Unlike nuclear American family groups of husband, wife and kids, Indian cultural groups extend far beyond.

Mrs. Sen does not adapt and resists any incentive or pressure to change. Mr. Sen has adapted and is frustrated by his wife's apparent unwillingness to try. She expects the Indian life of a privileged caste in America. She is the wife of a professor. Mrs. Sen is not lazy and works hard at her domestic chores. She is just used to many others around to help her. She has in India a believable version of Boori Ma's ramblings. Her cultural center remains in India with her extended family, not in America with just her husband. Mrs. Sen does not want to learn how she can drive anywhere. She just wants to be with her family and can hardly wait the three years until she sees her sister's baby.

Mr. Pirzada, too, is just passing through. Like Mr. Sen, he is a professor teaching in the northeast United States. His hosts, Lilia's parents, are his cultural center while his family is out of touch in Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada is more like Lilia's father who really doesn't want to adapt than he is like Mr. Sen whose wife resists changing times. Lilia's parents are happy she is in the United States but not necessarily that they are. They want guests to share their homeland customs with.

Sanjeev and Twinkle's meeting and their wedding are arranged. He buys their house by himself on the way to India for the wedding ceremony without asking her. Although of Indian heritage, Twinkle's a California girl studying at Stanford. He is a rich, established engineer in Connecticut, but his treatment of neighbors, marriage and a wife are distinctly Indian. His primary concern is what the neighbors or his friends and associates



think. He and Twinkle have known each other for six months. Their families are friends for years.

In some respects they are opposites of Shoba and Shukumar. They are all Indian with arranged marriages. Shukumar and Twinkle are raised in America and Shoba and Sanjeev are raised in India. Shoba has domestic skills she doesn't practice since the baby died. Twinkle has no domestic skills but is willing to practice. Sanjeev and Shukumar are of similar age but Sanjeev is a wealthy professional raised in India. Shukumar is a poor student raised in America who is studying about India. Shoba has become a workaholic and Sanjeev always is one. Twinkle is effervescent and Shukumar is depressed. Shoba and Shukumar seem to understand that American couples share property rights but ,when Twinkle lays claim to her interest in their house and property Sanjeev seems shocked.

Marital Maladies and Guilt

Many characters in the stories have maladies that need interpretation. Often a malady is really guilt in another form. Mina Das carries guilt from her affair with Raj's friend. She does not know why she feels bad. She hopes Mr. Kapasi will have a remedy. He points out that her bad feelings may be guilt. Mr. Kapasi believes his marriage and that of the Das' are similarly unhappy. He hopes she will cure his malady of an unhappy marriage with an affair. His fantasies are dashed when she says he probably has children her age.

Source of Bibi's malady is unknown but the cure is a man. When she cannot find one to marry she has sex with an unknown male. He becomes the father of her son who is the cure for her malady. Mina Das has casual sex with a male. She is already married so she develops a malady in the form of her son Bobby. Laxmi's cousin has a husband who calls her from Heathrow to tell her he'll be in London to spend some time with a cure for his malady. He meets her sitting next to him on the flight. Laxmi's cousin is crushed with the news that eventually becomes her malady of divorce from his affair with another woman. Miranda is Dev's cure for his malady while his wife vacations in India. Rohin cures Miranda's malady when he interprets meaning of the word sexy as loving someone you don't know.

Shukumar's malady is carrying a picture of a woman he fantasizes having sex with when Shoba is pregnant. His cure results in the loss of both the baby and Shoba. Sanjeev is developing his malady by ignoring his wife in favor of what the neighbors and his friends might think. Twinkle makes it clear to him it doesn't matter what they think but is unable to cure him with her enthusiasm. Mr. Pirzada is in pain from lack of communication with his wife and daughters during the war. He endures his malady with the sharing of Lilia's parents and by giving Lilia bits of candy she transforms into silent prayers of care offered up to cure the Pirzada family malady of separation.

Style

Point of View

In "A Temporary Matter" Shukumar's perception is the prevailing point of view. The author's objective narration is sympathetic to his feelings about Shoba and their life together. He recalls events that happen and his feelings about them. Shoba's thoughts, feelings and motivations can be inferred from her actions and comments. Shukumar's thoughts, feelings and frustrations are clearly stated. Additional insight about the characters is provided by subjective comments in quotes and the reaction of their partner. For example, Shoba says they should fix the power during the day. Shukumar does not say anything but thinks she really means since he's there all day.

Lilia's point of view prevails in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine." She is a ten year-old Indian girl. The objective narration tells her thoughts from the perspective of an adult Lilia recalling childhood events. The author reveals what Lilia feels as a ten-year old in adult terms. Lilia is portrayed as a child with a developing understanding of the cultural and social events occurring around her. Her parents and Pirzada represent the Indian world at home and her teacher and Dora represent the American world at school she experiences.

In "Interpreter of Maladies" Mr. Kapasi's point of view prevails. He guides the tour. His reflections and the perceptions of his tour guests are expressed in third person objective narration. The author is not particularly sympathetic to Mr. Kapasi. His feelings, hopes, fantasies and desires are revealed as he guides the Das' through the day's tour. He becomes frenzied with desire for Mina Das and fully misinterprets her malady as desire for him.

The viewpoint in "A Real Durwan" is that of an indifferent and unsympathetic objective narrator. There are no feelings, thoughts or moral opinions about Boori Ma and her treatment by the other residents expressed in the narration. Readers can form their own opinion of what happens to Boori Ma and the tenants in the building. The events that occur to Boori Ma in themselves create a sense of pathos, but little sympathy for her.

Miranda's point of view in "Sexy" is expressed as an objective narration. The reader can infer a moral opinion from the comments, viewpoint and pain expressed by Laxmi about her cousin's husband's affair. Miranda is treated sympathetically. The events of Miranda's affair and transition into and out of being a mistress reflect her maturing self awareness.

The author in "Mrs. Sen's" uses a narrative third person, objective point of view and is unsympathetic to the characters. Mrs. Sen has trouble adjusting to cultural changes. Events are revealed with no moral assessment of any character. Reader is not told how an individual feels or thinks except through dialogue they have with each other.



Characters perform different activities, but it is up to the reader to evaluate their propriety and response.

In "This Blessed House" Sanjeev's point of view is revealed through objective third party narration. The author is unsympathetic to the cold and unfeeling Sanjeev, but sympathetic to Twinkle. His inner thoughts, feelings and reactions are revealed. Twinkle's character is shown by her comments and the perceptions and comments of Sanjeev's friends. They are a couple newly married through an arranged meeting. They experience marital discord since just meeting and getting to know each other within the last six months.

In "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" the point of view is that of the residents told in the third person. They are sensitive and sympathetic to Bibi's needs. They oppose her treatment by Haldar. They care about her malady and aggravated when Haldar does not make a sincere effort to help find her cure. Tenants' alleviate the abuse of Bibi by boycotting Haldar's store. When Haldar mistreats Bibi they help her. The tenants drive Haldar out of business, the building and the city. They encourage Bibi to replace Haldar's shop to support her son and become fully cured.

The narrator reveals his point of view in "The Third and Final Continent" in the subjective first person rendering of his life and experiences. He does not reveal his name, but tells about adjustment to transitional life in London and settling down in Boston. He represents the male Indian expatriate. He does and experiences all the things an Indian should do. The narrator's life is the path and point of view every Indian man is expected to follow and have.

Setting

In "A Temporary Matter" the setting is in Boston at the home of Shoba and Shukumar. Shoba is reading a notice that the power will be off temporarily for repairs. Interaction between Shoba and Shukumar occurs primarily in the kitchen and dining room. Their three bedroom house is large enough for them to avoid each other by staying on separate floors. Shukumar references other activities and events that occur inside and outside the house. Shukumar imagines Shoba in her office and flashes back to feelings and thoughts he has about other experiences. He reflects on his taxi trip to the conference, his time there and the hospital room where he holds their dead baby.

The temporary power outage creates the restricted setting for Shoba and Shukumar to restore their communication with each other. Their house has no lights for one hour each night. The darkness requires they use candlelight to eat dinner together. Shoba uses the darkened surroundings to initiate telling each other their secrets.

Lilia reflects as an adult on one segment of her ten year-old childhood in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine." The author uses adult language to express the thoughts and feelings of a ten-year old Indian girl. Since this is a child's recollection the tone and style



are simple and devoid of philosophical meaning and symbolism. The candy is a prayer the child does not rinse away at bedtime but discards when unneeded.

The setting in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" is mid-year 1971 at the home of Lilia's parents during the start of the Pakistan-Indian war. Pirzada walks from the university to their house for dinner. Lilia's mother serves dinner in the living room where they gather around the television to eat. Global events are viewed through the home as a focal point or prism. Lilia's family and Pirzada watch civil strife occurring in Dacca, Pakistan on the evening news. Other events that occur in Lilia's school and library are discussed by her father when he asks what she learns in school. Lilia's parents offer their home as a cultural gathering spot for Indian and Pakistan nationals living near Boston as temporary expatriates.

The primary setting in "Interpreter of Maladies" is Kapasi's car on tour from the hotel to the Sun Temple in India. The tour group rides in his car to the first rest stop at the tea stall where sexual overtones begin. Kapasi's perceived romance begins in the car on the way from there to the next stop. Mina Das sits in the back seat and Mr. Kapasi drives. Their eyes meet in the rearview mirror. She calls his job romantic, offers him gum and asks him to tell her more about it. At the lunch stop she asks him to sit closer to her and for his address. The Sun Temple has walking paths, statues and friezes depicting naked couples making love and topless female musicians. The Temple has a statue of Surya that Kapasi describes. They make the last stop at the hills of Udayagiri where monkeys roam free. Mina Das gets in the car's front seat with Mr. Kapasi when her family hikes up the hills to explore.

The setting in "A Real Durwan" setting is the stairwell and roof of an old four-story building in India. Boori Ma rants about events in her life before Partition in 1947. She wanders neighborhood streets and markets but only because she is unable to work in the stairwell. Strangers and thieves roam the streets and markets along with vendors and customers. The residents accuse Boori Ma of telling strangers about the building. Thieves in the market rob her.

There are several different settings in "Sexy." The first setting is Miranda and Laxmi's workplace where they have adjoining cubicles. Miranda's cubicle is plain, but she wants to post a photo of Dev in it like Laxmi's honeymoon photo of herself and her husband at the Taj Mahal. Miranda and Laxmi work in the fund-raising department so they spend much time on the telephone with donors or personal calls. Filene's is a large downtown Boston store where Miranda shops in the clothing and cosmetics departments during her lunch hour. She spends time with the saleslady at the cosmetics counter when she sees Dev notice her there. They meet in the street as they walk to the station together. Miranda returns to Filene's to purchase sexy mistress clothes on the day Dev picks up his wife on her return from India.

The setting of primary significance is Miranda's apartment. The location, appearance and furnishings of the apartment are nondescript compared to the events that occur there. Miranda and Dev begin, maintain and end their affair in her apartment. Dev spends nights until early morning in her apartment at the beginning of their affair. When



his wife returns Dev spends only his free time on the weekends. The apartment has a door, bed and closet. Miranda opens the door wearing only her sexy silk robe to greet Dev in his gym clothes. He takes her to the bed where they have sex and eat, he naps and she dreams about making love with him. Rohin explores her apartment and closet where he finds the mistress outfit she models for him.

There are other settings in Boston that Dev takes Miranda. Inside the Mapparium they visit a globe-shaped room where Miranda can locate countries in relation to each other. There is a thirty foot long bridge in the room that has unusual acoustics. A whisper at one end of the bridge can be heard clearly on the other end. Miranda visits a grocery store that has Indian products and videos to find out what Dev's wife looks like. The date of these events is not significant except that they occur within a few years of Miranda's graduation from college and relocation to Boston.

There are several settings in "Mrs. Sen's", including the Sen's apartment and their car, the fish market, the bus, the university campus, and the beach near a northeast United States city. It is the late summer and early fall of any current year. The primary setting and Mrs. Sen's most comfortable cultural location is her apartment home and complex where Eliot goes after school. Mrs. Sen meets him on the apartment grounds, walks with him to the garage and drives around the apartment parking lot with him in the car. They return home where she chops food for dinner and watches Eliot until his mother picks him up.

Mrs. Sen turns the car radio up loud when she drives with Eliot because the sounds of the car make her nervous. Mr. Sen turns the car radio off when she drives so she can hear his instructions. If Mr. Sen is in a hurry when they go to the fish market and beach he may drive. If he is not in a hurry he encourages Mrs. Sen to drive. After they shop at the fish market together they walk along the beach and eat at a restaurant. He insists she drive the car home, but turns off the radio to give her instructions. She is confused in traffic and refuses to drive when the other cars blow their horns.

Mrs. Sen and Eliot also take the bus to the fish shop and beach. The bag she carries makes the bus smell of fish. Mrs. Sen and Eliot walk to Mr. Sen's university campus. They stop at the student union cafeteria and walk the path past the building where Mr. Sen teaches. They stop at the athletic building and watch swimmers in the pool.

The primary setting in "This Blessed House" is the home and yard of Sanjeev and Twinkle in Connecticut. Sanjeev purchases the house on his own with minimal inspection. They move in and prepare for a housewarming party. Twinkle has not seen the house and yard before and is exuberant about the Christian things she finds. Sanjeev is irritated at what she finds and does with the items. She says living there is like a daily treasure hunt. Sanjeev wants to complain to the realtor about things the previous owners didn't take or he didn't see.

In "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" settings include the stairwell, Haldar's apartment and storage room, and the roof of a four-story building in India. Other environments are referenced in the course of Bibi's treatments and responses to them. Bibi works in



Haldar's storage shed on the roof. She sleeps on a cot in the Haldar's apartment at night. She eventually is not allowed in their apartment, but sleeps on the cot in the hallway and then just the storage shed. Bibi turns the storage shed into a home and business for herself and her son.

In "The Third and Final Continent" settings are in several venues from 1964 and 1969 to a current date. He starts with sea passage from India to England and life with other Bengali bachelors in London during student days. He accepts a job in Boston after a return to India for his arranged wedding. He flies to the United States to begin employment. He spends his first night at the YMCA in Boston and then to Mrs. Croft's boarding house to await his bride's arrival. From there they move to a furnished apartment and a town twenty miles north of Boston.

Language and Meaning

In "A Temporary Matter" the prevailing tone and style of language is understated and low key. Shukumar and Shoba are both well-educated Indian nationals who speak American English. Events are related in a simple, basic and direct manner. The writer narrates occurrences in a linear sequence. Meaning is expressed in feelings, actions and perceptions drawn from events.

In "Interpreter of Maladies" simple language describes events that occur on the day tour. The author illustrates action, clothing and settings in plain, clear terms. The descriptions conceal symbolic undercurrents. Mina buys snacks from a shirtless tea stall vendor who sings a Hindi love song she does not understand. During the tour Kapasi figuratively sings a love song to her that she doesn't understand. Mina Das dresses in a sexy outfit and uses the word romantic to describe Kapasi's job. She does not understand the effect she has on him. Kapasi thinks she wants to have an affair with him. He does not understand that Mina Das just wants him to cure her malady. Events of the tour symbolize the continuing misinterpretation that the unhappily married Das and Kapasi couples experience.

In "A Real Durwan" the stairwell is a metaphor for Boori Ma's life. The language used is simple and basic. She sleeps under the letterbox, gathers her few possessions and struggles daily with them to climb the four flights to the roof. While climbing, she mutters about the life she may have had or imagined. She is plagued by mites that she tries to beat away on the roof. The rains come and ruin her bedding. Each day she loses more of her possessions until she has none. The neighbors throw her down the stairs and out of the building stairwell.

In "Sexy" the language expresses feelings and thoughts of the impressionable young Miranda. She is charmed by Dev, a suave married older Indian, who represents to her a cosmopolitan, worldly-wise gentleman. He is the first to treat her like a lady, she thinks. Her persistent search for London, Bengal and other cities on maps belie her innocence and naivety. Her gullibility is shown by enthusiasm about dressing like a mistress after



being called sexy. Rohin's simple meaning of the word sexy to mean making love with someone you don't know finally brings her to her senses.

In "Mrs. Sen's" language used is direct, simple and basic. Events that happen are expressed simply as occurrences. Any inference or symbolism intended is left to the reader to make. For instance, Mrs. Sen's ambivalence about driving may be representative of her reluctance to assimilate the life of an American housewife. She may be uncomfortable learning to drive in traffic or with her husband teaching her. There is adequate flexibility to allow interpretation by the reader on different levels.

In "This Blessed House" Twinkle discovers things that aggravate Sanjeev as they explore together the house Sanjeev bought but never inspected. The house and its daily treasure hunt is a metaphor for the life of this newly wed couple. The meeting, marriage and wedding is arranged according to Indian custom. Twinkle is born and raised in California, so her customs are more American than Indian. Sanjeev is a typical mid-thirties successful, professional Indian Hindu male. He is offended by Twinkle's openness and other American ways.

In "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" Bibi's tale parallels that of Boori Ma. Similar settings and characters reveal social treatment by the society's they are each set within. Boori Ma is helped by the Dalals and spurned by the neighbors. Bibi is spurned by the Haldars and helped by the neighbors. Bibi has an unknown affliction and Boori Ma is afflicted by her unknown history. Bibi is helped by her neighbors but Boori is rejected. Bibi's neighbors help overcome Haldar's rejection. Boori Ma's neighbors reject her despite the Dalals' encouragement.

In "The Third and Final Continent" time at Mrs. Crofts symbolizes his last days with a dying mother. She helps him adapt to a new life and the United States but he is of limited help to her independent spirit. He is a prototypical Indian male adapting to expatriate life. Mrs. Croft is another mother who helps him in the United States. She is too independent to help as he did with his own mother. The significance is the revelation of an Indian male assimilating to another culture.

Structure

The plot in "A Temporary Matter" develops over a five day period in the couple's life. Experiences that occur prior to this period are included to reveal the emotional impact on the characters. Recollection of those events exposes significant times in the history of their marriage. The secrets they tell each other during the temporary power outage reveal the linear unraveling of their union. A temporary matter refers to the temporary power outage of the dark nights and by inference their relationship.

In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" the timeline proceeds in chronological order from mid-year 1971 through fall and spring of 1972. Lilia and her family gather to watch events of the India-Pakistan War on nightly news. The impact of the war on Pirzada and Lilia's families is depicted. Events unfold in linear order as they occur. Plot starts with



beginning hostilities and runs to the climax and end of the war. Mr. Pirzada's arrival for dinner represents the key feature to Lilia.

In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", the Das family is on a day trip for tourists. The plot begins with a stop on the way from the hotel to Sun Temple and ends on the way back to the hotel. Mr. Kapasi guides the tour. His passion for Mrs. Das grows during the drive to the Temple and climaxes on a side trip to the hills of Udayagiri. The name is ironic since the interpreter of maladies misinterprets Mina Das' malady as passion for him rather than an attempt to trust him.

In "A Real Durwan" Boori Ma climbs the stairs from the bottom of the stairwell to the top. She reveals events of her twice daily trek to the roof. Plot timeline is chronological and linear like the stairwell. Each day she struggles to reach the top of the stairwell and sweeps, or is swept, from the roof to start over again. Boori Ma serves as a real durwan that does all the work of one but receives none of the pay. When the tenants receive a basin to share that is stolen, they decide they need a real durwan.

In "Sexy" the structure is based on the timeline a typical illicit love affair lasts with an impressionable young girl and a successful middle-aged man. The tale begins progresses and ends as does Miranda's affair with Dev. They meet, make torrid love for a month or so while his wife is gone and end when the wife returns. Miranda realizes she is desired not for being sexy but for sex. "Sexy" characterizes the change in Miranda's perception and self-respect.

In "Mrs. Sen's" Mrs. Sen accepts a job to watch Eliot at her home. Eliot's mother is concerned that Mrs. Sen does not drive. The timeline is two or three months into the fall. The plot reveals Mrs. Sen's trouble getting errands done. She is used to servants and a chauffeur in India. In America she struggles with Mr. Sen teaching her to drive, taking a bus, walking or having Mr. Sen drive her. Mrs. Sen's conflict is finally resolved with a car crash, the loss of her job and withdrawal into her room.

In "This Blessed House" it is early October as Sanjeev and Twinkle are moving in and cleaning the house and yard he purchased. They have a housewarming the end of the month for his friends, associates and office staff. The couple begins finding religious icons in the living areas of the house. They proceed to the yard to prepare for the housewarming. The party guests and Twinkle find more treasure in the unexplored attic. This blessed house refers to the religious icons in their house and Twinkle's feelings about it.

In "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" the history of Bibi's cure is revealed. Malady has no defined starting point but Bibi and her neighbors struggle to help her find a cure. The structure is the path through episodes until a cure is determined. The cure happens despite a specific plan. The resolution occurs when the cure is found to be the new life and child she begins in her home on the roof. Bibi's treatment can be interpreted on several levels. Her malady causes the need for treatment different than that she receives from the Haldars who treat her badly. Tenants treat her well and

sympathetically, like her father. Bibi's treatment of herself and her son finally cures her malady.

In "The Third and Final Continent" the structure is a six-week period beginning with the narrator's first night in a YMCA and relocation to Mrs. Croft's boarding house. He begins a path to assimilate into America and experiences his middle journey waiting for Mala to join. Over a rebirth in the United States he learns to adapt much that he shares with Mala, and later their son. The narrator lives on three continents before reaching his final destination.



Quotes

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"How about telling each other something we've never told before." (A Temporary Matter, pg. 13)

"He had held his son, who had known life only within her, against his chest in a darkened room in an unknown wing of the hospital. He had held him until a nurse knocked and took him away, and he promised himself that day that he would never tell Shoba, because he still loved her then, and it was the one thing in her life that she had wanted to be a surprise." (A Temporary Matter, p. 22)

"What exactly do they teach you at school? Do you study history? Geography?" (When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, p. 26)

"Eventually I took a square of white chocolate out of the box, and unwrapped it, and then I did something I had never done before. I put the chocolate in my mouth, letting it soften until the last possible moment, and then as I chewed it slowly, I prayed that Mr. Pirzada's family was safe and sound. I had never prayed for anything before, had never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the circumstances, that it was something I should do. That night when I went to the bathroom I only pretended to brush my teeth, for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well." (When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, p. 32)

"I am not a doctor. I work with one. As an interpreter." (Interpreter of Maladies, p. 50)

"It means that I'm tired of feeling so terrible all the time. Eight years, Mr. Kapasi, I've been in pain eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy." (Interpreter of Maladies, p. 65)

"No one in this particular flat-building owned much worth stealing. The second-floor widow, Mrs. Misra, was the only one with a telephone. Still the residents were thankful that Boori Ma patrolled activities in the alley, screened the itinerant peddlers who came to sell combs and shawls from door to door, was able to summon a rickshaw at a moment's calling, and could, with a few slaps of her broom, rout any suspicious character who strayed into the area in order to spit, urinate, or cause some other trouble." (A Real Durwan, p. 73)

"Boori Ma's mouth is full of ashes. But that is nothing new. What is new is the face of this building. What a building like this needs is a real durwan." (A Real Durwan, p. 82)

""You're sexy", he whispered back." (Sexy, p. 91)

"He cupped his hands around his mouth, and then he whispered, "It means loving someone you don't know."" (Sexy, p. 107)



"Professor's wife, responsible and kind, I will care for your child in my home." (Mrs. Sen's, p. 111)

"How do you expect to pass the test if you refuse to drive on a road with other cars?" (Mrs. Sen's, p. 126)

"No, we're not Christian. We're good little Hindus." (This Blessed House, p. 137)

"Face it. This house is blessed." (This Blessed House, p. 144)

"This is our house. We own it together. The statue is a part of our property." (This Blessed House, p. 149)

"They say it's the only hope. A case of overexcitement. They say" - and here we paused, blushing - "relations will calm her blood." (The Treatment of Bibi Haldar, p. 162)

"In this manner she raised the boy and ran a business in the storage room, and we did what we could to help. For years afterward, we wondered who in our town had disgraced her. A few of our servants were questioned, and in tea stalls and bus stands, possible suspects were debated and dismissed. But there was no point carrying out an investigation. She was, to the best of our knowledge, cured." (The Treatment of Bibi Haldar, p. 172)

"Within days it became our routine. In the mornings when I left for the library Mrs. Croft was either hidden away in her bedroom, on the other side of the staircase, or she was sitting on the bench, oblivious to my presence, listening to the news or classical music on the radio. But each evening when I returned the same thing happened: she slapped the bench, ordered me to sit down, declared that there was a flag on the moon, and declared that it was splendid. I said that it was splendid, too and then we sat in silence." (The Third and Final Continent, p. 183)

"Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer." (The Third and Final Continent, p. 198)



Topics for Discussion

Explain how the secrets Shoba and Shukumar keep from each other eventually result in their splitting up as a couple.

Discuss how Mr. Pirzada adapts to his temporary student life in the United States while his family is experiencing hardships during the war with India and Pakistan.

Explain how Mr. Kapasi's fantasies, hopes and aspirations for Mina Das are dashed when she tells him she is as old as his children could be.

Discuss how Boori Ma's living arrangements in the four-story building might be different from the building occupancy codes authorized by a typical American city.

Discuss how the marital difficulties of Laxmi's cousin parallel the lifestyle Miranda is developing with Dev and his wife. Does it bother Miranda? What does she do about it?

Why does Mrs. Sen drive on the highway with the car and Eliot when she has expressed such fear about doing so in the past?

Compare and contrast relationships between the male and female partners in the similarly situated couples: Shoba and Shukumar, Twinkle and Sanjeev, and the narrator and Mala.

How does Bibi and her relationship with the building tenants compare to Boori Ma and her relationship? Discuss how their relationships change over time.

How does the narrator compare and contrast his relationship with his widowed mother and that of Mrs. Croft?

Compare and contrast how the characters relate, individually and as couples, and adapt to the community of neighbors they each have.