

A Step from Heaven Study Guide

A Step from Heaven by An Na

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Plot Summary

A Step from Heaven by An Na is the story of a young immigrant's life from childhood to adulthood told in snapshots. Each chapter is a small scene of Young Ju's life that helps to shape the woman she becomes. The novel begins with Young Ju as a baby playing in the ocean with her parents. Her father, Apa, drinks heavily. He alternates between abusive and neglectful. Young Ju's mother, Umma, dreams of the opportunities she believes her family would have in America, so she convinces Apa to write to his sister who lives in the United States. Apa's sister, Gomo, helps the family immigrate to America. Young Ju is so impressed with her parent's talk of America, Mi Gook, that she confuses it with her grandmother's descriptions of Heaven. They must travel in a plane from Korea to America, in the sky, her mother tells her. In the sky is where her grandmother has told her Heaven is located.

When Young Ju arrives in America, she finds that it is not the Heaven she expected, and decides that it is a step from Heaven. She begins school, and everything she learns she takes home to her parents. Her mother gives birth to a son after arriving in the new country, and the son becomes the center of the family. Apa loves his son, Park Joon Ho, in his own way and Young Ju is fiercely jealous. Apa lectures Joon sternly, and beats him to make him strong. Joon quickly becomes hard and withdrawn.

Young Ju develops a friendship with Amanda, a girl Apa does not like. She is too American, he says. Apa works two jobs, and Umma has at least three, so they do not spend much time with the children. Young Ju uses their absence as an opportunity to spend time with Amanda, but the girl and her parents never learn where Young Ju lives. Apa becomes increasingly fond of alcohol, earning himself a DUI and a pink slip from his cleaning job. He is absent more often with no explanations and has become more unpredictable. Since he is no longer busy working nights cleaning law offices, he sees Amanda and her parents drop Young Ju off at the library steps. Infuriated, Apa confronts Young Ju about her lies and mercilessly beats her. When Umma protests, he begins to beat her, and Young Ju calls the police.

Apa is arrested. The following morning his family waits for him to be released at the police station, but when Apa leaves the building, he ignores them. He gets into the car of another woman, and his family never sees him again.

Umma learns from Gomo that Apa is returning to Korea. Umma buys a home for her children the same year Young Ju earns a scholarship for college. Young Ju leaves for college a few months after the family moves into their new home. Young Ju makes peace with her memories of her father, and learns to appreciate the scars on her mother's hands.



Chapters 1, Sea Bubble- 3, Only God Can

Chapters 1, Sea Bubble- 3, Only God Can Summary

Young Ju leaves her home in Korea to immigrate to America. Young Ju begins the long process of assimilation in her new country while struggling against her father's insistence that she become American but not too American.

In chapter 1, Sea Bubble, Young Ju is a toddler playing in the ocean with an adult. She is asked to be a brave girl instead of giving in to her fear of the waves. The unidentified adult praises her when she conquers her fear and crests the waves, asking to do it again and again.

In chapter 2, All this Weight, Apa, Young Ju's father, comes home drunk. Halmoni, Young Ju's grandmother, and Umma, Young Ju's mother, are not happy with his behavior, but they are powerless to stop him. Young Ju's grandfather, who helped keep Apa's behavior acceptable, has passed away. Halmoni speaks to his picture asking him why he has left her to deal with this alone.

In chapter 3, Only God Can, Halmoni prays and explains Heaven to Young Ju. Halmoni tells Young Ju that if she prays and loves God, she can go to Heaven too. Young Ju wants to see her grandfather, who now lives in Heaven, so she tries her best to love God and pray. Young Ju asks God to come down to give Apa a spanking so he will be nice and Umma will make her "squeaky-shoes laugh."

Chapters 1, Sea Bubble- 3, Only God Can Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the narrator of the novel. She is a baby receiving encouragement and praise from an adult, who is assumed to be her mother from the context of the later chapters.

In chapter 2, Apa is shown as a belligerent drunk. His propensity for alcohol and violence is introduced as an established pattern. The child Young Ju already knows at her young age that it is best to hide and pretend to be asleep because if you do not, the crashing will be great.

In chapter 3, the element of Christianity is introduced. Halmoni teaches Young Ju to pray, a practice she continues most of her life. When her life is not progressing as she had once hoped, she still prays, but says she is no longer sure anyone is listening. Faith in God is a major element that plays a larger role later in the novel.



Summary for Chapters 4, Mi Gook- 6, Waiting for Heaven

Summary for Chapters 4, Mi Gook- 6, Waiting for Heaven Summary

In chapter 4, Mi Gook, Uhmma and Apa cannot stop talking about Mi Gook. When they say this word that Young Ju believes is magic, they stop fighting and their eyes light up. Gomo, Apa's sister lives in Mi Gook, and she sends Mi Gook toys to Young Ju. Young Ju hopes that they will never stop talking about Mi Gook until she learns that they are moving there. Young Ju is upset about leaving her home and friends until her mother tells her that Mi Gook is far away. They will have to fly in the sky to get there. Then Young Ju connects Mi Gook with Heaven and is happy that she is finally going to heaven to see her grandfather. Uhmma is so happy about the move that she sings, and Uhmma never sings. The song she sings is Ah-me-ri-ka, Mi Gook, and that is a magic word.

In chapter 5, Hair, Uhmma wants Young Ju to look like an American girl. She takes her to the salon to get an expensive perm. Apa does not understand why this hair style is so important to Uhmma, but Uhmma wants Young Ju to look like an American girl. Uhmma and Young Ju wear their best dresses to the salon and Uhmma talks excitedly to the ahjimma, hair dresser, about Mi Gook. Young Ju hates her new curls that make her look so different from the other girls.

In chapter 6, Waiting for Heaven, Young Ju, Uhmma, and Apa board the plane for Mi Gook, leaving Halmoni behind. Halmoni told her that Mi Gook is only for the young, which confuses Young Ju because she also said everyone can go to heaven. She does not want to leave Halmoni behind, but she wants to see her Harabugi in heaven. Uhmma assures Young Ju that Halmoni will go to heaven one day, and Young Ju believes this means that Halmoni will one day come to Mi Gook, so she is happy.

Summary for Chapters 4, Mi Gook- 6, Waiting for Heaven Analysis

In chapter 4, the themes of hope and dreams is introduced. Apa and Uhmma both have dreams for America and hopes for a better life for themselves and their daughter. They are happy and excited. The promise of this new beginning stops the fighting. However, people always bring their problems with them when the move. This constant fighting that finds relief from the daydream of a new country is foreshadowing of the more serious problems that will arise.



In chapter 5, Umma's desire for Young Ju to look American demonstrates her desire for acceptance in the new country. All her dreams and plans rest on the success or failure of this move. Young Ju does not like the way she looks with curls, believing that she looked fine before. This instance is the first of many clashing cultural traditions and beliefs, and introduces the disparity between what Young Ju believes is American and what her parents believe is American.

In chapter 6, Young Ju's confusion of heaven and Mi Gook show how high the expectations are for America. Her parents say that America is the best place in the world where everyone is happy and wealthy. Their descriptions are similar to Halmoni's many discussions of heaven, so the two places are the same in Young Ju's mind. This mistake foreshadows the disappointment that must follow when Young Ju discovers just how far Mi Gook is from heaven.



Summary for Chapters 7, A Step from Heaven- 9, Not Forever

Summary for Chapters 7, A Step from Heaven- 9, Not Forever Summary

In chapter 7, A Step from Heaven, Young Ju and her family arrive in Mi Gook. At the home of Gomo and her Sahnchun, Uncle Tim, Young Ju notices the carpeted floors and real wood doors and concludes that everyone in Mi Gook must be wealthy. She asks where Harabugi is, and only then do her parents realize that she has confused Mi Gook with heaven. Uncle Tim explains that Mi Gook is not heaven, but maybe they can say it is just a step from heaven. When she sips her first Coca-Cola, she hates how it hurts her mouth and throat. She does not care if it is a step from heaven, all that matters is that it is not heaven and she wants to go home.

In chapter 8, My Future, Young Ju enrolls in school. She must listen carefully in school and teach Uhmma and Apa when she gets home. Her family is living with Gomo and Uncle Tim. Uhmma is pregnant. Young Ju was told all American girls have curly hair, but only one boy in her class has curly hair. She hopes the other children do not think she is a boy. Young Ju has a difficult time with communicating in school since she still knows very little English, but slowly she makes progress. The first day, she does not go to lunch with the other students, and the teacher gives her gold fish to eat while she colors in the classroom.

In chapter 9, Not Forever, Apa and Uhmma argue about their living arrangement. They sit in the old, beat-up car and stare at the house they will rent. They will not have to live here forever, but the baby is coming soon and they must move out of Gomo's house. Uhmma does not want to move. She wants to stay with Gomo and save more money so they can buy a house, but Apa refuses to take any more charity from his sister. Uhmma asks for just a few more months. Apa says she is never satisfied, always wants more. Uhmma is the one who wanted to give up their life in Korea, wanted to come to America. Now she is pregnant, and it is all her fault. When she protests again about waiting to move so they can save faster, Apa slaps her face until her mouth is bleeding. Apa forces her to agree that this arrangement is not forever.

Summary for Chapters 7, A Step from Heaven- 9, Not Forever Analysis

In chapter 7, Young Ju notices and appreciates the carpeted floors and real wooden doors of her aunt's home in America. She only realizes that she is not in heaven when she is told that Harabugi is not there. Since her grandfather is not there, she wants to go



home. She only agreed to come because she wanted to see him again. Her hopes are gone.

Chapter 8 emphasises the difficulty faced by young immigrants. Young Ju has difficulty with simple communication because of the language barrier, but she is expected to learn her lessons to teach her parents.

In chapter 9, Apa displays his dominance by beating his pregnant for questioning him. He refuses to listen to Uhmma's logic because he has already made up his mind about the move. Uhmma is insignificant and as the man, Apa is in charge. The lesson is not lost on Young Ju who comes to the early understanding that men are superior to women.



Summary for Chapters 10, Park Joon Ho- 12, Being Older

Summary for Chapters 10, Park Joon Ho- 12, Being Older Summary

In chapter 10, Park Joon Ho, Young Ju's brother is born. Apa is proud of his new son in a way that Young Ju feels he has never been proud of her. Park Joon Ho can one day be president, but Apa laughs when Young Ju suggests that she could too. Young Ju is just a girl Apa says. Uhmma laughs at Apa's attempts to change Joon Ho's diaper and says that he could not even hold Young Ju when she was a baby.

In chapter 11, Burying Lies, Young Ju begins second grade. During show and tell, she tells her class that her brother died. He is dead and she is the only Park now for Apa to be proud of. The class makes fuzzy balls with yarn to make Young Ju feel better about her loss. When she gets home from school, Gomo is playing with Joon Ho on the floor. The school has sent condolence flowers to the house with a card that says sorry for your loss. Young Ju explains that she lost the spelling bee, and that is why they sent her the flowers. She buries the warm fuzzies in the yard to hide them from her parents, so they will not discover her lie.

In chapter 12, Being Older, Uhmma takes Young Ju and Joon Ho to the school fair. Young Ju is in third grade, and even though Apa said their was no money for foolishness, Uhmma takes them anyway. Young Ju complains that she does not want the pink elephant she has won; she wants a balloon like Joon Ho has. When they arrive home, Joon Ho's balloon bursts, and Joon Ho cries in the yard. Young Ju gives him her pink elephant to sooth him.

Summary for Chapters 10, Park Joon Ho- 12, Being Older Analysis

In chapter 10, the idea of masculine superiority is further expressed. The favored treatment Joon Ho receives for being a boy is difficult for Young Ju to accept. Young Ju wants to be the first son and make her father proud. When Apa rarely held Young Ju as a baby, he surprises everyone by volunteering to change Joon Ho's dirty diaper. Young Ju cannot understand why her father treats this new son so differently, but she recognizes that he does.

In chapter 11, Young Ju further notices things that Joon Ho does that she would be punished for doing. She does not realize that as a baby, she was not punished for spitting up. She does not remember how Apa and Uhmma loved her as a baby. All she understands is that they now make her work. Her jealousy of the baby inspires her lie to



her class about Joon Ho's death, and foreshadows her later troubled relationship with her brother.

In chapter 12, the sibling relationship between Young Ju and Joon Ho is further explored. Young Ju cannot overcome her jealousy, but she is also sympathetic to her little brother. She should be happy that she got what she secretly wanted when Joon Ho loses his balloon, but instead she feels sympathy and attempts to soothe her brother. Throughout the novel Young Ju is torn between wanting to help her brother, and wanting him to get what she believes he deserves.



Summary for Chapters 13, Disappearing Bubbles- 16, Rainy-Day Surprises

Summary for Chapters 13, Disappearing Bubbles- 16, Rainy-Day Surprises Summary

In chapter 13, Disappearing Bubbles, Young Ju wakes at seven O'clock on Sunday to wash the car. Apa tells her to scrub fast so the bubbles do not dry before they can get the car rinsed. Joon Ho plays with piles of bubbles while Young Ju and Apa work. Young Ju is jealous that Joon Ho can play while she must always work. Joon Ho then decides to pee outside, and Young Ju is furious. Apa just shakes his head and tells her that it is natural for a boy to pee outside. Boys and girls are different, and must be treated differently. When a neighbor boy passes, and Joon Ho has an audience, he begins to do tricks with his stream. Apa laughs at him instead of being embarrassed like Young Ju.

In chapter 14, The Blob, Young Ju describes her father on the occasional weekend mornings when he is happy and tickles them until they cannot breathe. He becomes the blob that attacks them, pins them down and tickles until they call Uhmma for help. Uhmma smiles and laughs on these mornings and the family is happy.

In chapter 15, Rainy-Day Surprises, Young Ju and Joon Ho wait in the car on a rainy day for Uhmma to finish her shift at her second job at Johnny's Steak House. When it is not raining, they can play in the alley while they wait for Uhmma, but today they are stuck in the car. Young Ju watches the door and hopes that Uhmma will come for her like she did on the last rainy day. Joon Ho was sleeping and Uhmma allowed Young Ju to come into the restaurant kitchen with her. Uhmma laughed and talked with the other employees like Young Ju never saw at home. She was a different Uhmma as they drank Shirley Temples in the steakhouse kitchen.

Summary for Chapters 13, Disappearing Bubbles- 16, Rainy-Day Surprises Analysis

In chapter 13, Young Ju is again struck with the difference in how Apa treats her and her brother. Joon Ho is allowed to run free and play, but Young Ju was working hard at his age. Joon Ho is the favored, special child, and Young Ju has a difficult time accepting that. Apa's treatment of the siblings illustrates his beliefs about the roles of men and women.

In chapter 14, Apa's character is further developed. He is shown to be a caring, loving father despite his many flaws. He is plagued with self doubt and self-destructive behavior, but occasionally, he is able to drop his guard and have fun with his family.



In chapter 15, Uhmma is shown to be a more well-rounded person than the two-dimensional character she has been up to this point. Young Ju is given a momentary glimpse into her mother as a woman instead of just the struggling, unhappy mother. Until this moment, Uhmma had been just Young Ju's mother and nothing more. Every child experiences a moment when they realize that their parent is more than just a parent, and this is Young Ju's moment.



Summary for Chapters 17, Strong is a Man- 19, One Hundred Pennies

Summary for Chapters 17, Strong is a Man- 19, One Hundred Pennies Summary

In chapter 17, Strong is a Man, Joon Ho is playing with his friend Spencer on the patio outside. Apa comes outside to tell him it is time to go to Gomo's house for lunch. Joon Ho does not want to go. He ignores Apa and continues playing. Apa asks Spencer to go home. Then Apa turns his attention to Joon Ho. Joon Ho is whining and only girls whine. Men are stronger. "Why are you acting like a girl?" Apa asks him. Joon Ho knows what is coming and a tear slides down his cheek. He has forgotten how to be a man. He shrugs his shoulders when Apa asks him why he is crying and Apa smacks his face. When Uhmma objects, she is told to shut-up. Apa says his son will not grow up weak.

Joon Ho answers Apa's questions correctly, and Apa is satisfied. When Apa turns to leave, Joon Ho relaxes. Without warning, Apa kicks Joon Ho in the stomach. Joon Ho falls to the ground, unable to breathe. Apa refuses to let Uhmma help him and simply says that he must learn his lesson. When Apa leaves, Young Ju helps Joon Ho pick up the toys so they can go to Gomo's house. She accidentally breaks a flag on one of the legos and Joon Ho slaps her making her ears ring.

In chapter 18, Harry, the children find an orphaned baby bird. They are discouraged about their situation. They keep hoping and waiting for a house of their own, waiting for things to happen the way they want. But nothing ever seems to happen that way. They name the bird Harry and take turns feeding and caring for him. The elephant from the long ago fair kept Harry company. They did their best to care for him, but despite their best efforts, Harry unexpectedly dies. Joon Ho does not cry when they bury Harry.

In chapter 19, One Hundred Pennies, Young Ju convinces Uhmma to use her change for a lottery ticket. Uhmma saves all her change, and her pennies have more than once paid for the family's food. Pennies are important Uhmma always says. Young Ju carefully selects her numbers when Uhmma agrees, and anxiously watches the TV for the lottery announcement. Young Ju dreams of what she would do if they won the lottery. They match one number in the drawing.

Summary for Chapters 17, Strong is a Man- 19, One Hundred Pennies Analysis

Chapter 17 is the strongest example of Apa's unprovoked violence and his insistence on what it means to be a man. Apa is harsh and cruel believing that he is making his son strong, but what he accomplishes is to make his son detached. Joon Ho is forced to



suppress his feelings from a young age, and this suppression separates him from those around him. If he is emotionally involved, Apa will view that as a weakness. A possibly unintended result is that Joon Ho believes it is appropriate to slap his sister, and is unable to properly control his anger.

In chapter 18, the death of Harry is the primary example in the novel of Joon Ho's detachment from his emotions. Even though he loves Harry, and the death of Harry symbolizes the death of Joon Ho's last positive hope, Apa has made it impossible for Joon Ho to cry. After Harry, Joon Ho believes that nothing will ever go the way they want again. He no longer dreams of a positive future, and has accepted his life the way it is.

In chapter 19, Young Ju's hope is still alive. She believes in a better future and has no doubt that her life will get better. The lottery ticket is a symbol of Young Ju's dreams. She is still able to envision a better life, a life where counting pennies is unnecessary.



Summary for Chapters 20, Making Sure- 22, My Best is Always Not Enough

Summary for Chapters 20, Making Sure- 22, My Best is Always Not Enough Summary

In chapter 20, Making Sure, Apa takes Young Ju to renew her green card because she is turning thirteen. She walks a step behind him into the building. He is unable to read the English signs, and does not know where to go inside the building. Young Ju reads the signs and directs Apa where to go. Frustrated, he walks a step behind her. They take a number for the information window and wait their turn. When their number is finally called, Apa rushes forward to take control and takes a new number from the lady behind the counter. Young Ju corrects him and tells the lady that they are not here for a green card but to renew her green card.

Apa is angry and confused when the lady takes the number back from him and replaces it with a new one. He fears that Young Ju is wrong and he will miss another day of work coming back to correct the mistake. At the next window, a man hands them a packet of papers. Fill out the papers and mail them back with a picture of Young Ju he tells them. Apa makes the man look over the papers again to make sure they have everything they need. He insists that he cannot come back to this office again.

In chapter 21, Reaching, Young Ju receives the news that her grandmother has died in Korea. Apa does not receive the news well, and Uhmma urges Young Ju to talk to him. Young Ju loved Halmoni like Apa did, and Uhmma hopes Young Ju will be able to comfort him. Apa condemns himself for being a worthless son because he cannot even fly back to Korea for her funeral. He could borrow the money, but Halmoni would not want him to do that.

In chapter 22, My Best is Always Not Enough, Apa comes home drunk after midnight. Uhmma is waiting in the kitchen when he arrives and asks him where he has been. He has an early gardening job in the morning and will be in no condition for working. Apa tells her that it is not her concern. The Young Ju listens to the crashing sounds from the kitchen. She hears Apa tell Uhmma that he is never enough for her. She always wants more. Then he leaves again. When he is gone, Young Ju goes to her mother and sees her swollen eye. Uhmma has been working on the checkbook, and she hides it when Young Ju notices it. Uhmma asks Young Ju to never say anything about this night to anyone. Later, Uhmma sells her wedding ring and Young Ju sees her again pouring over the numbers in the checkbook.



Summary for Chapters 20, Making Sure- 22, My Best is Always Not Enough Analysis

In chapter 20, Apa must walk behind Young Ju in the government building. He cannot read the signs, and must follow his daughter to the proper office. He attempts to reassert himself at the first window, but his error embarrasses him. Young Ju saves them time by explaining to the woman behind the desk that they are there to renew a green card, not to get a new one. Apa does not like his daughter taking control, but he has no choice. Back in the car, Young Ju sees her father clearly. He will always be a man washed in sunshine. He is not the dominate man in charge he wants her to believe he is.

In chapter 21, Halmoni's death sinks Apa further into dispair. He feels like he is a failure to his family, and a failure as a son. He has disapointed his mother, and is incapable of attending her funeral. He tells Young Ju that a son should attend his mother's funeral. He becomes further detached and more dependent on alcohol to escape his failure. He has not seen his mother in more than ten years, but he deeply mourns her passing.

In chapter 22, Apa's depression and view of himself as a failure rises to a peak. He blames Uhmma's dreams for bringing him to America. He at least owned a fishing boat in Korea and felt like he was someone there. In America, he owns nothing. He is no one and a failure. He cannot satisfy her desire for more and better, and it is crushing him. She repeatedly questions him when he comes home late, and he feels that she has no business asking for explanations from him. She makes him feel like less of a man, and he can no longer take it.



Summary for Chapters 23, The Power of Prayer- 25, Punishment

Summary for Chapters 23, The Power of Prayer- 25, Punishment Summary

In chapter 23, The Power of Prayer, Uhmma decides to take her family to church. They met a preacher standing outside the Korean market, and Uhmma has decided that they will attend his church. Apa will not go. He is staying home more often on Sundays, drinking beer and watching TV, instead of going to his gardening job. Uhmma is nervous about their first visit to Grace Church, but she is also excited. She happily hums when they leave church, and instead of going home, she takes them to the beach.

In chapter 24, Becoming Too American, Young Ju begins to spend more time with her friend Amanda. Young Ju wants to attend Amanda's birthday party at the beach, a party with boys. Apa and Uhmma refuse. American girls are disrespectful, never study, and only think about boys. Apa does not want Young Ju to be like American girls. Young Ju reveals that one day, when she did not have any lunch money, Amanda lent her some. Uhmma is angry because now Young Ju is obligated to Amanda. Uhmma says she must go to the party, and she must repay the money she borrowed. Amanda's parents give Young Ju a ride home from the party, but she does not allow them to drop her off at home. Instead she finds a nice house nearby and claims it as her own. When the car pulls away, she walks home.

After the party, Apa announces at dinner that he needs the car on Sunday. Uhmma refuses saying she needs the car for church. During the argument Young Ju asks why he needs the car. Apa makes her stand and tells her she will never question him. He hits her in the face and she falls to the floor. Apa says it is the American girl's fault that Young Ju is so obstinate, and he forbids Young Ju to see her again.

In chapter 25, Punishment, Young Ju awakens early on Saturday morning to the sounds of Gomo, Uncle Tim and Uhmma in the living room. Uhmma screams loudly until someone tells her to be quiet. Harsh, angry whispers from everyone but Apa. Apa has been arrested for drunk driving and is being severely admonished by his family. Apa is not going to his cleaning job today. He has already lost many of his gardening jobs, and Young Ju wonders if he will lose his cleaning job too.

Gomo calls the next morning wanting to speak again with Apa. Uhmma tells her he is going to church and cannot talk now. Apa reluctantly agrees to go to church so he will not have to listen to Gomo anymore. He speaks little at church, and when they return, he leaves with the car even though he is not allowed to drive. He does not return for three days.



Summary for Chapters 23, The Power of Prayer- 25, Punishment Analysis

In chapter 23, faith returns to the novel. Umma's return to the church shows that she still believes in God. After their first attendance, she says she feels like she can finally breathe again. Her dreams and faith are still strong in spite of her family's current situation of financial turmoil and domestic abuse.

In chapter 24, Young Ju is maturing and her view of being American is different from her parent's view of being American. The argument about Young Ju becoming too American is in stark contrast to Umma's early attempt to make Young Ju appear more American by forcing her to get a curly hairstyle. In their rush and struggle to fit in, Apa feels that his family is losing a bit of their Korean heritage. Young Ju asks too many questions and is not focusing on her studies because she is becoming too much like American girls. Young Ju longs for her parents to become more American. She sees the way her friend's parents laugh and joke, and wish her parents were more free with each other.

In chapter 25, Apa's DUI arrest highlights how severe his alcohol problem has become. He is losing his gardening clients and becoming more of a burden to his family than an asset. Apa quietly accepts the rebukes from his wife and sister, in contrast to the personality he has demonstrated previously. Apa has shut down emotionally and physically. He does not speak and barely moves. When he can no longer deal with his failure, he disappears. His willingness to leave the family to fend for themselves for three days shows his lack of concern and commitment to his family, foreshadowing his later complete abandonment.



Summary of Chapters 26, Daughter- 28, Patches

Summary of Chapters 26, Daughter- 28, Patches Summary and Analysis

In chapter 26, Young Ju wins an award for having the highest GPA in her class. Her parents are not there to see her accept the award. Young Ju has obeyed her father and is spending less time with Amanda. Uhmma does not mind if she sees Amanda at school. Amanda's parents are at the awards ceremony and they congratulate her on her award. When Amanda's parents offer to give her a ride home, she accepts a ride to the library.

When Uhmma gets home, she showers Young Ju in praise for her award. Apa will be proud she says. She is upset that she could not miss work to see the ceremony. She leaves the award out where Apa will see, but he does not come home all night. When he does come home, he spreads his newspaper out over the award on the table. Angry, Young Ju begins to crumple the award until she sees her fathers thumbprint on the paper.

In chapter 27, Revealing Forms, Young Ju enters her mother's room on Sunday morning to find that her mother is covered in bruises. Apa was not always like this Uhmma says. He is a prideful man. Her back and shoulders hurt so much from her beating that she is unable to braid her hair for church. Young Ju helps her mother get ready.

In chapter 28, Patches, Young Ju receives a call from Joon Ho's school about his repeated absences. Joon Ho is drawing in his room when Young Ju confronts him. He makes no excuses and tells her to mind her own business. He accuses her of being jealous that he has lots of friends and she has none. Young Ju threatens him saying that he can talk to her or he can talk to Apa. Joon Ho is unmoved, and Young Ju leaves him to his drawing.



Summary for Chapters 29, Disclosure-32, Epilogue: Hands

Summary for Chapters 29, Disclosure- 32, Epilogue: Hands Summary and Analysis

In chapter 29, Disclosure, Amanda's mom drops Young Ju off at the library. Young Ju has been slowly seeing Amanda more, becoming braver in her defiance of Apa. She lies to her parents, telling them she is going to the library. When she arrives home from the library, Apa steps out of the kitchen. He should be at his only remaining gardening job, but he is home. He asks her where she has been. When she says she has been at the library, he lunges at her, grabs her hair and pulls her to the floor. He drags her across the living room as she screams. She has lied to his face, sneaking around with that girl. She smells alcohol on his breath. He wants Amanda's number to tell her parents how worthless she is. When Young Ju refuses, he beats her until Uhmma fears he will kill her. He kicks her in the stomach, and Uhmma screams for him to stop. Worthless, common hoodlum she calls him. Apa says it is Uhmma's fault. Uhmma backs into the kitchen and Apa follows. Horrible sounds come from the kitchen, and Young Ju calls the police.

In chapter 30, Seeds of Life, Uhmma follows Apa to the police station. Her face is so badly beaten that the police force her to go to the hospital. They will not release Apa. The next morning, they are outside the police station waiting for Apa. Uhmma honks the horn when she sees him, but he never looks in their direction. He gets into the car of a waiting Asian woman, and they drive away. Uhmma tells Young Ju that this is all her fault. Uhmma now works three jobs and the children work with their Uncle Tim during the summer months. They use the money they earn for the groceries.

After a few months, Uhmma comes home early and finally speaks to Young Ju. Gomo has told Uhmma that Apa is going back to Han Gook. Gomo will borrow money so they can return with him, but Uhmma tells her that they will be fine. Uhmma apologizes to Young Ju for blaming her. They will be fine she says.

In chapter 31, A Family of Dreamers, Uhmma, Young Ju, and Joon Ho move into a new house. The house is small, but it is theirs. Better than the house they lived in all that time with Apa. Young Ju is leaving for college in a few weeks, but she is happy to be moving into this house with her family. While moving, Young Ju finds a box of pictures. She realizes that Uhmma has never told them about her family. Uhmma's family was wealthy, and Apa did not like being reminded of that. The Young Ju finds a picture of a young Apa holding her as a baby, playing in the waves at the beach. It was Apa who taught her to jump the waves. He was different back then.

In chapter 32, Epilogue: Hands, Young Ju reflects on Uhmma's rough hands and cat-tongue fingers. Hands that worked hard all her life. Hands that washed and cleaned,

that held the Bible on Sundays. Uhmma's hand worked hard to make sure her children's hand would remain smooth and soft. Uhmma succeeded.



Characters

Park Young Ju

Park Young Ju is the narrator of the story. The novel begins with Young Ju as a baby playing in the ocean with her father. The plot of the story follows Young Ju from childhood into adulthood as she immigrates from Korea to America with her family. Young Ju struggles to integrate into a new culture and learn a new language when she begins school. When she comes home from school, she is expected to teach her parents what she has learned. In her first days of school, she recognizes that she only knows a few English words, but she resolves to learn them all. By high school, Young Ju has the highest GPA in her class, and she earns a full scholarship to college.

After immigrating to America, Young Ju's parents welcome a new baby into the family. The first son and pride of the family is Joon Ho. Young Ju is jealous of the way her brother is treated. He is the favored child allowed to play while she is forced to work. Yet when her brother is harshly treated by her father, she is compassionate and attempts to help him. She loves her brother, but their father's attempts to make the boy a man harden Joon Ho and strains the sibling relationship.

Young Ju has a connection with her mother that she shares with no one else. Her mother wants more for her daughter, wants to give her daughter a better life. Uhmma, Young Ju's mother, tells her many times that a girl can be anything she wants in America. She is not limited because she is a girl. Uhmma never hesitates to praise her daughter for her hard work and good grades, but Young Ju longs for the praise of her father. Apa, Young Ju's father, never gives her the love or support that she desires. He eventually abandons his family when his drinking and physical abuse reaches its peak, and Uhmma cares for her family alone.

Uhmma

Uhmma grew up in a wealthy family in Korea. When she married Apa, she gives up her life to join his. He owns a fishing boat and works as a fisherman. The couple lives with Apa's mother in a hut in a poor village. Uhmma is a dreamer. She longs for something better. She convinces Apa to ask his sister to help them immigrate to America. Apa finally relents and writes to his sister Gomo. Gomo is able to help them come to America, and the family lives with her for a while. Tired of accepting his sister's charity, Apa moves his family to a small, basement rental. Uhmma tries to make her husband wait until they can save enough money for a home of their own, but he is finished accepting charity. Apa and Uhmma both work two jobs and save all they can, but they spend many years in the rental house. Apa grows increasingly violent and dependent on alcohol. When he loses his jobs, Uhmma must work harder to feed her family.



Uhmma is a strong woman and believes in the power of women. She supports Young Ju in her studies and often praises her for her hard work. When Apa abandons the family to return to Korea, Uhmma never falters in her resolve to care for her family. Uhmma is a dreamer who never gives up on her dream of a better life for her family. A dream she eventually realizes when the family buys their first house just before Young Ju leaves for college. Uhmma works hard and is able to see her children work with their minds instead of their hands.

Apa

Apa leaves Korea with his small family to join his sister, Gomo, in America. He goes to America at the request of his wife, Uhmma, because she dreams of a better life for her daughter. Shortly after arriving in America, Uhmma becomes pregnant. Apa decides that the time has come to leave Gomo's home and find a place of their own. Being forced to accept charity from his sister has put a great strain on Apa, and he takes that stress out on his family. He blames Uhmma for the situation they are in and blames her for making things worse by becoming pregnant. When Uhmma gives birth to a son, Apa changes. His son will be the pride of the family, he says. Apa and Uhmma both work two jobs, but they are not making progress financially. Slowly, Apa begins drinking more. He is a stern and often violent father, believing that being harsh will make his children strong. When Apa is drunk, he is indiscriminately violent and unpredictable.

Drinking heavily, Apa begins to lose his gardening jobs because of the drinking, putting further pressure on the family's finances. He is eventually arrested for drunk driving, and then sinks further into depression. He owns nothing in America, and says that the weight of Uhmma's dreams is pulling him down. He believes she is never satisfied, that he will never be able to satisfy her. After the arrest, he feels like a failure and abandons his family for three days. When he returns, he does not behave any better. Young Ju longs for her father's love and approval, but he is never able to offer her what she needs. He continues to distance himself emotionally from his family.

Apa expects his family to respect and obey him without questions. When he discovers that Young Ju has disobeyed him and continues to spend time with her only friend, he loses control. He beats Young Ju until her mother interrupts. Then he beats Uhmma so severely that Young Ju fears he will kill her. Apa is arrested and Uhmma receives stitches and taped ribs. A brief glimpse of him leaving the police station getting into the car of another woman is the last time his family sees him. He returns to Korea abandoning his family to survive however they can.

Park Joon Ho

Park Joon Ho is the first Park born in America. Uhmma becomes pregnant with Joon Ho shortly after arriving in America. Joon Ho is the first son and called the pride of the family. He is pampered and indulged as a baby, but Apa is harsh with him as he gets older. Joon Ho is expected to jump to attention when Apa gives him an order. If he does



not respond properly to Apa's questions, he is beaten. Apa says that he is making his son stronger, making him a man. Apa succeeds in making his son angry and detached from his emotions.

Joon Ho finds an orphaned bird and raises the bird with Young Ju. They name the bird Harry and this bird is Joon Ho's last glimmer of hope. When Harry unexpectedly dies, Joon Ho leaves childhood. He is unable to cry for Harry and says that things will never go the way they want. He no longer hopes for a better life, no longer works for a better future. Joon Ho accepts the way things are. When Apa leaves, Joon Ho returns to dreaming. He draws illustrations, and with the support of his sister and mother, his talent flourishes.

Gomo

Gomo is Apa's sister. She helps Apa, Uhmma, and Young Ju immigrate to America. She lets the family live with her and her husband until they are able to rent a home. After Apa abandons his family, Gomo gives Uhmma a job in her dry cleaning business. After Uhmma saves for years, Gomo loans her the remaining money she needs to purchase her first small home.

Uncle Tim

Uncle Tim is Gomo's husband. He gives the Park family a car and helps as much as he can when the family first arrives in America. Uncle Tim gives the children a job in his small ice cream shop during the summer months as a way of giving the family money after Apa returns to Korea.

Amanda Doyle

Amanda Doyle is Young Ju's best and only friend. She gives Young Ju a lifesaver in second grade after Young Ju tells her class that her brother has died. Apa believes Amanda is a bad influence on Young Ju. He does not want Young Ju to be like American girls who disobey and chase boys. Amanda is the reason Young Ju is forgetting that she is a Korean girl, and Apa forbids Young Ju to see Amanda. Young Ju obeys at first, but she has no other friends. Slowly she begins to spend more time with Amanda. When Apa discovers Young Ju's lies, he beats her in a drunken fury. He then beats Uhmma for defending Young Ju, and Young Ju calls the police. Apa is arrested, and the family never sees him again.

Mr. and Mrs. Doyle

Mr. and Mrs. Doyle are Amanda's parents. They are the example of an American family to which Young Ju compares her own family. They talk easily and joke freely with each other when her own family sits in strained silence.



Halmoni

Halmoni is Apa's mother and Young Ju's grandmother. She teaches Young Ju about God, Heaven, and prayer. Young Ju loves her Halmoni, but is forced to leave her behind in Korea when her family moves to America. Ten years after their move, Halmoni dies. The family cannot afford to return to Korea to attend her funeral, and Apa knows that Halmoni would not want him to borrow money to return. Halmoni's death is hard on Apa, and not being able to attend Halmoni's funeral makes Apa feel more like a failure.

Harabugi

Harabugi is Apa's father. He died before the novel begins, and Young Ju only has scattered memories of her grandfather.



Objects/Places

Heaven

Harabugi teaches Young Ju about Heaven and the power of prayer. She tells Young Ju that everyone who prays and loves God will go to Heaven, and that her Harabugi is waiting for her there. As a pre-school immigrant, Young Ju confuses America with Heaven. She is severely disappointed when she arrives in her new country to find that is nothing like Heaven.

Mi Gook

Mi Gook is the United States. The faces of her parents light up when the talk of moving to the new country. They get so excited that Young Ju believes Mi Gook must be a magical word. She confuses Mi Gook with her grandmother's stories of Heaven and is deeply disappointed when she finally arrives in America.

Han Gook

Han Gook is Young Ju's home in Korea. Her family leaves Korea to immigrate to the United States. After a few years, Young Ju's father decides to return to his home in Han Gook. America does not hold the same hopes and dreams for him that it does for the rest of his family, and he returns to his history in Han Gook.

Lottery

The lottery is a symbol of Young Ju's hope. She dreams of the things she will buy and the things she will do when her family wins the lottery. When they only match one number with their first ticket, Young Ju is only momentarily disappointed before she begins to plan how she will convince her mother to buy another ticket.

Henry

Henry is an orphaned bird that Young Ju and Joon Ho raise. They plan to care for him until they can teach him to fly away. Henry unexpectedly and suddenly dies taking with him Joon Ho's last shred of hope. Joon Ho is hardened and unable to cry when the children bury Harry, although he does whisper his love to the bird before leaving the grave. Harry's death marks a change in Joon Ho from a child into a hardened adolescent.



Warm Fuzzy

In second grade, Young Ju is overcome with jealousy. Her baby brother is the pride of the family, the first son. Seeking to escape the shadow of the baby, she tells her class that her brother is dead. The class makes warm fuzzies to make her feel better. A warm fuzzy is made from yarn that is rolled in the hand until it is a fuzzy mess. The project is a favorite of the class and they use the entire day working on their gifts for Young Ju.

English Language

Young Ju and her family immigrate to the United States with little knowledge of the English language. Young Ju has difficulty in the early years of school because she is unable to effectively communicate with her teachers and the other students. She is expected to learn and speak English in school, but her parents expect her to speak Korean at home. After a few years, when her English is exceptional, her father gets angry when she speaks English at home. He demands only Korean at home, which is a source of confusion for Young Ju. She does not understand why this is so important to her father.

Government Bureaucracy

Apa fears government bureaucracy after making four trips to the social security office to work out a simple problem with Young Ju's social security card. He is demanding and angry when he must take Young Ju to the office to renew her green card. He makes the man behind the desk double check the paperwork to make sure all the proper forms are there before he leaves because he has missed work and been forced to spend an entire day in this office. He refuses to come back.

Alcohol

Apa's problems with alcohol are introduced in the early years in Korea. Toddler Young Ju knows that when Apa comes home late, it is best to hide under the covers pretending to be asleep because Apa will be angry. His alcohol use and violence escalates in America over the years until he is arrested for intoxicated driving and later for battery. When Apa is not drinking, he is still stern and harsh, often beating his children and Uhmma when he feels they are questioning his authority. But when he is drunk, he is uncontrollable.

Shirley Temple

Uhmma's favorite drink is a shirley temple. Having a shirley temple in the steak house where her mother works is a special memory Young Ju has of her mother. The rainy day

when Umma invites Young Ju into the kitchen with her marks the moment when Young Ju sees her mother as a woman and not just Umma for the first time.



Themes

Equality of Women

The equality of women is an important theme in *A Step from Heaven* that is introduced in the early chapters. Umma tells Young Ju that everyone in America is wealthy and that she will have more opportunities if they move. After their arrival, Uncle Tim whispers to Young Ju that girls can be anything they want in America, acknowledging that is not always the case in Korea.

When Joon Ho is born, Young Ju is hit with jealousy that she is not the favored first son. Joon Ho is the future of the family because he is a boy. In second grade, she tells her class that her brother is dead and remarks how good it feels to be the favored child, to be the only one left to carry the Park name. Her father loves his son, and proudly proclaims that he can be president one day. When Young Ju says she could also be president, she is scorned by her father. She can never be president because she is just a girl, but Joon Ho can do anything he wants.

As the children age, Young Ju is constantly reminded that she is just a girl. She feels that Joon Ho is allowed to play, while she is forced to work to help her family. When she protests, she is often given the excuse that he is a boy and boys are different. She does not understand why boys must be treated so differently from girls. Joon Ho receives his father's acceptance and praise for doing nothing while she works hard for her father's love and receives nothing in return. Young Ju is forbidden to see her only friend because Apa believes she has forgotten how to be an obedient Korean girl, all because she asks the question why. Girls are not permitted to question their parents. Joon Ho is never forbidden to see his friends, even though he is not an honor student like his sister and has chosen to repeatedly skip school with his friends.

The end of the novel emphasizes Umma's strength and Apa's weakness. Apa cannot overcome his sense of failure as a father and as a provider. He turns to alcohol and becomes more violent as the years pass. In contrast, Umma remains strong. She continues to do whatever is necessary to provide for her family, and continues to dream of a better future. She endures her husband's brutality, and when he eventually abandons them, she never considers giving up her dreams.

Umma is given the opportunity to return to Korea with Apa, but she refuses saying that she and her children are strong. She does not need Apa to provide for her, and works to see her dream fulfilled. At the conclusion of the novel, Young Ju recognizes the strength of her mother in a description of her mother's rough, scared hands.

Masculinity

Apa wants to make his son a man. He believes that men must be strong, never cry, and never answer to a woman. From a young age, Joon Ho is lectured on what it means to



be a man. If Apa asks a question, and Joon Ho does not give the right answer, he is beaten. As evidenced by the scene on the patio when Apa kicks Joon Ho, sometimes Apa is harsh and cruel for no reason. He kicks Joon Ho in the stomach hard enough to knock him down, and when Uhmma tries to comfort Joon Ho, Apa stops her saying that his son must learn to be strong.

Apa struggles with his ideas of masculinity throughout the novel. When he is first discussing moving his family into the small rental property, Uhmma questions his judgement. She wants to remain living with Gomo so they can save the money they will be spending on rent. She wants just a little more time to save enough money to buy a house. Apa will not listen to her logic. He is the man and has made his decision. He hits her in the face until her lips swell and bleed telling her not to question him.

When Apa's drinking starts getting out of control, Apa comes home late and will not answer any questions. Uhmma demands to know where he has been and what he will do about losing his gardening jobs, but Apa beats her saying that what he does is not her business. He is the head of the house, and as a woman, she has no authority over him.

After the DUI, Apa sits quietly listening to Gomo and Uhmma tell him how disappointing his behavior has been. He does not offer any excuses and allows the women to berate him. This scene is severely damaging to Apa's masculinity, and as a result of his inner struggle, he disappears for three days. A man must provide for his family, and Apa has failed. Uhmma dreams of a better future, a future that Apa feels he cannot provide. Under the weight of Apa's view of what it means to be a man, Apa sinks further into depression and alcoholism. Apa's version of masculinity leads him to abandon his family and return to Korea.

Sibling Rivalry

Young Ju struggles with her feelings for her brother from the moment he comes home from the hospital. She wants to love her brother, but she is overcome with jealousy at how her father treats him. On several occasions, she recognizes that Joon Ho is rewarded or indulged for behavior that would have gotten her punished.

At the school fair, Young Ju receives a prize that she does not want. She plays a game for a penny and wins a pink elephant. Uhmma buys Joon Ho a balloon, and Young Ju decides that she wants a balloon too. She says her elephant is only worth a penny, but Joon Ho's balloon is worth fifty cents. The children argue about the balloon the entire way home, and Young Ju secretly wishes the balloon would fly away. When they get home, the balloon bursts. Instead of feeling happy about Joon Ho's loss, she shares her elephant with him. She helps to calm him and wants to see him feel better about his lost balloon.

On another occasion, Young Ju rushes to help her brother after her father kicks him. Uhmma was stopped when she tries to help, but when her parents leave, Young Ju



helps Joon Ho pick up his toys so they can go to Gomo's house. As she helps him, she accidentally breaks a toy, and Joon Ho hits her in the head. He never thanks her, never recognizes that she is helping him. In many ways, he feels that she is beneath him and he does not see the irony of striking her when she tries to help him.

Young Ju wants to love him, but their relationship remains strained until Apa abandons the family. When Apa leaves, the rift of jealousy and the idea of the superiority of men in the household abate. The children learn to work together and begin to develop a loving relationship.



Style

Point of View

A Step from Heaven is told in first person voice from the limited point of view of the main character, Young Ju. The story centers around Young Ju and how she receives and interprets the information around her, which is sometimes flawed. Since the novel begins with Young Ju as a baby, the details are sparse and not always accurate. How the baby interprets the conversations around her are not always reliable. The primary example of this is Young Ju's confusion of Mi Gook with Heaven. Her mother tells her that they must fly in an airplane to get to Mi Gook, and Halmoni has told her that Heaven is in the sky. Her child's mind naturally connects and combines the two places. Young Ju's perspective, as a child, is limited to her understanding, therefore limiting the reader's insight into the action.

The voice and point of view of the novel adds to the complexity of the story. The novel is about a young immigrant's transition from Korea to America, and this technique employed by the author allows the reader inside the confusion and frustration felt by the main character. The reader must piece together the few elements of the story offered by the narrator into a cohesive story, just as the immigrant child must piece together the few elements she understands from her new world and the adults around her.

Setting

The first few chapters of the novel are set in Korea. The family shares a small hut with Halmoni that has rice paper walls and doors. They live in a small, poor village and walk wherever they need to go. The second setting is Gomo's house in America. When the family arrives, Young Ju notices the wooden doors of Gomo's home and remarks that everyone in America must be very rich. Gomo's house is spacious, and the family lives there until Apa decides that they have accepted Gomo's charity long enough.

Apa moves his family into a small basement rental house in a poor neighborhood. Young Ju says that the police are not nice to the people in her neighborhood, and that they only stop to harass people. The family lives in the bottom half of the house, while the landlord lives upstairs. The house is old and worn, and the family fills it with second-hand furniture. This first rental house was meant to be temporary. The children believe that any moment their parents will tell them it is time to move. They have all their things packed in brown paper bags, ready for when the time comes. Years slowly pass, and the family never moves from their temporary house.

Shortly before Young Ju leaves for college, Umma is able to purchase her first home. The house is larger and much newer than the rental house they left. It has two bedrooms and a separate dining room. Young Ju says it is a small, squatty house, not much different from their house in Korea.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is child-like in the beginning peppered with Korean vocabulary. One-word sentences convey a remarkable amount of emotion and exposition as the child narrator attempts to express herself. After the narrator arrives in America with her family, words are often spelled phonetically. The reader must slow down to understand the meaning. The familiar Uncle Tim becomes in Young Ju's ears. This technique demonstrates the newness and the frustration Young Ju feels when working to learn a new language. She comments that Uncle Tim's mouth also has difficulty making their words.

As Young Ju ages and masters English, the vocabulary and complexity of the language used in the novel also increases. Sentences become longer and convey more advanced ideas. Fewer Korean words are used as Young Ju immerses herself in English. The vocabulary and sentence structure allow the reader follow Young Ju's assimilation into American culture. The reader is able to subconsciously see Young Ju grow from a toddler, to a child, into a teenager, and finally an adult.

The novel is written with little punctuation. Dialogue is not accentuated with quotation marks making it sometimes difficult to follow the conversation precisely. The reader is again forced to read slowly to grasp the meaning of the passage. This sometime creative use and absence of punctuation further emphasizes the struggle Young Ju faces as an immigrant child. This technique puts the reader inside the mind of Young Ju so that the reader can feel her frustration in a small but tangible way.

Structure

The novel is comprised of thirty-two chapters of one to five pages each. Each chapter is a single scene or a small time period of Young Ju's life that combine to create a story of an immigrant from a baby to an adult. These chapters are titled with the theme, realization, or a major element of the chapter, and each shows a pivotal moment in Young Ju's life that help to create her personality and shape her future.

The novel has a lack of punctuation and standard capitalization that tends to force the reader to slow down. This absence of standard language mechanics enhances the reader's connection with the main character, and further demonstrates Young Ju's confusion with her surroundings. As Young Ju matures, and grows in her understanding of English, the mechanics of sentence structure and punctuation usage increases.

The plot of the novel is simple. A young family immigrates to America with high hopes for wealth and bright futures. They work hard, struggle and learn all they can. The novel is dependent on strong characters. This novel has little action and relies on the characters to move the story forward. Like any character driven fiction, the Park family has baggage and they bring their personalities, insecurities, and history with them when they immigrate. Apa was insecure with his position in the family and with his lack of material possessions when they were in Korea, and he brings these feelings with him.



He is jealous of Umma's childhood in a wealthy family, and believes she will never find him worthy. He cannot provide for her and their family. In Korea, they were poor, but at least he owned a fishing boat. In America, he owns nothing. The baggage he has carried with him from Korea inevitably lead him back to Korea leaving his family behind. On the other hand, Umma is driven by dreams. She follows her dreams, destroying her body with labor, to realize her dreams for her children. Dreams she finally achieves.



Quotes

Because when Apa is too quiet with the squinty eye, it is better to hide until he falls asleep or else there will be breaking everywhere.

Chap. 2, All this Weight, p. 10

Halmoni says Apa needs a good spanking and there is nobody here to give him one. Could you send God down so he can be Jesus again and give Apa his spanking?

Chap. 3, Only God Can, p. 12

Even though Uhmma tells me I should always tell the truth, and Halmoni says God will be very angry if you lie, I want Uhmma to smile happy lots of teeth at me.

Chap. 5, Hair, p. 22

Thinking about Halmoni all alone in our sitting-hen house makes me want to cry louder than Ju Mi's baby sister who has no hair.

Chap. 6, Waiting for Heaven, p. 23

I know only little Mi Gook words now. But someday I will know all of them. In the future.

Chap. 8, My Future, p. 34

I close my eyes and pray fast, Our Father who lives in heaven, I know I have not prayed every day like I am supposed to, but do not let Uhmma know about the lie and I will pray every night. I promise.

Chap. 11, Burying Lies, p. 47

Because when the Blob comes and wraps us tight in his arms, holds us so close we can hardly breathe, that is when we can finally put our arms around him.

Chap. 14, The Blob, p. 61

Joon never saw it. Never got to prepare his body. The mask of glass explodes into fine shards of pain, etching his face unrecognizable, old.

Chap. 17, Stong is a Man, p. 71

And finally 23, for all the millions that will make us magically better. No more closed-door, late-night arguing over money. No more bowls loaded with fluffy white rice hiding small pieces of meat. No more saving pennies.

Chap. 19, One Hundred Pennies, p. 78

You are strangling me to death with your hopes.

Chap. 22, My Best is Always Not Enough, p. 98

Today, Uhmma says, I feel like I can take in a full breath of air.

Chap. 23, The Power of Prayer, p. 104

But I will not leave this time. Will not pretend. The sight of the dark bruises, some as big as iron across her back, lingers on the inside of my eyelids, each blink heavy with the



weight of it all.

Chap. 27, Revealing Forms, p. 130

I told Gomo that we could take care of ourselves. My strong children and I will be fine without Apa.

Chap. 30, Seeds of Life, p. 145



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the role of women in this novel, and how it changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.

Why does Apa abandon his family? What are the main factors leading to Apa's abandonment?

Was the immigration of the Park family from Korea to America ultimately a good thing for the family?

Discuss friendships in this novel. Most of the characters are shown at some point with a friend, and Young Ju's friendship leads to the climax of the novel. How are the characters different or further developed when seen in relation to their friends?

Identify and discuss Apa's version of masculinity. How does Apa view himself in relation to his view of what a man should be?

What effect does Apa's return to Korea have on the family?

What effect do Apa's lessons on how to be a man have on Joon Ho?