

# **The Sun Is Also a Star Study Guide**

**The Sun Is Also a Star by Nicola Yoon**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Sun Is Also a Star Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Pages 1 – 74.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Pages 75 – 143.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Pages 144 – 210.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Pages 211 – 281.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Pages 282 – 344.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>

# Plot Summary

Note: Citations in this study guide refer specifically to the 2016 Delacorte Press First Hardcover Edition of *The Sun is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon.

*The Sun is Also a Star* is a young adult romance novel by Nicola Yoon which delves into questions of God, love, and fate, as Jamaican-American Natasha meets and falls in love with Korean-American Daniel on the day she is due to be deported. Each section of the novel is titled by the name of the character who narrates the section, with several interspersed sections narrated by a third-person narrator who is presumably God.

When the novel begins, seventeen year-old Natasha leaves her family's apartment to try to find a way to prevent their deportation. Their deportation has been brought on by a DUI her father received after drinking following a theater performance in which he acted, wherein he told the police he and his family were in America illegally. At the same time, 17-year-old Daniel heads out to get his hair cut and go to an interview with a Yale college alumnus. Daniel is under heavy pressure by his Korean-native parents who insist upon the meeting as Daniel's brother Charlie has been forced home from Harvard for two semesters on probation.

Natasha heads to U.S. Customs and Immigration Services to see what can be done about her family's situation, but is held up by Irene, a lonely security guard who is set to commit suicide that day. Natasha misses her appointment, but ends up meeting with another USCIS agent instead, who directs her to meet with immigration lawyer Jeremy Fitzgerald. While Daniel is on the way to get his haircut, the subway conductor, who has found God, urges his passengers to find God. Daniel decides he will look for Signs from God, and therein discovers Natasha. She has a shoulder tattoo that reads DEUS EX MACHINA (God from the machine) and heads into the record store *Second Coming*. Daniel takes this as a Sign and begins speaking with her. They immediately hit it off, though Natasha has other things on her mind. They are attracted to one another, but they are very different. Natasha is reliant on reason, science, and logic, while Daniel is faithful, creative, and passionate.

As the day unfolds, the two spend every moment possible together. They learn more about one another and begin to change each other's lives for the better. For example, Daniel considers he does not have to do what his parents want him to do, while Natasha wants to find passion in her life like Daniel has. While Daniel considers their meeting an act of God, Natasha does not believe in God—though she desperately wants to believe in things like love. As the day wears on, she and Daniel realize they have fallen in love with each other. Natasha calls USCIS to leave a message of thanks for Irene. Daniel's interview turns out to be with Jeremy Fitzgerald, who is ultimately unable to help Natasha. In the end, Natasha and her family must board a plane to return to Jamaica. Daniel and Natasha try to stay in touch and promise to pursue their romance, but time and distance cause them to fall apart.



Ten years pass. Irene, who did not commit suicide thanks to Natasha's thank-you message, sees Natasha on a plane where Irene now works as a flight attendant. Irene thanks Natasha for the message all those years before. Natasha introduces herself, which catches the attention of Daniel, who is unknowingly sitting a few seats away. Natasha and Daniel recognize one another instantly.



# Pages 1 – 74

## Summary

In the Prologue, an unnamed narrator points out Carl Sagan's observation that, in order to make an apple pie, one must first invent the universe.

The first section is titled "Daniel," and is related from Daniel's first-person perspective. Korean-American teen Daniel's older brother, Charlie, has been required to withdraw from Harvard for two semesters, which has caused their parents great embarrassment among the Korean-American community, as Charlie is supposed to become a doctor. Daniel almost feels bad for him.

In the next section, "Natasha," which is related from her first-person perspective, Natasha's mom and dad are preparing for the family to be deported to Jamaica, even though their youngest son, Peter, has been born in New York. Only Peter, who has never been to Jamaica, looks forward to going, assuming things will be better there. The family lives in a small, cramped apartment. While Peter has packed, Natasha struggles to carry on as normal by leaving to do homework, which Natasha's mom says is futile. In reality, Natasha also wants to find someone who can help the family find a way to stay in America. She intends to go to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Natasha does not believe in fate but says she is desperate for anything.

In the next section titled "Daniel," Daniel lists reasons why he believes that Charles "Charlie" Jae Won Bae is an asshole, including that he has always been good at everything (before Harvard); that he is cocky and overconfident; that he is tall, handsome, and muscular; that he is a smug bully; and that he does not like Daniel.

In "Natasha," at the guard at USCIS, Irene, checks over Natasha's things at security, taking a long time as usual when she regards Natasha's phone cover, which depicts the album art for the band Nirvana's "Nevermind." To Natasha, Irene must consider her only as an "applicant," or someone who merely wants something from America.

In "Irene: A History," an unidentified narrator (perhaps God or the universe) steps in to say that Natasha is wrong about Irene. It is explained that Irene loves and needs the job because it is usually the only human contact she has. She deliberately takes her time checking people through in order to see them. Irene is incredibly lonely and is transfixed by the Nirvana image of a baby underwater because Irene feels as if she is underwater.

In "Daniel," Daniel reflects on Charlie pushing him aside when they were getting older as children to be around boys his age—a kind of popularity that would follow Charlie through high school.

In "Charles Jae Won Bae: A Future History," the unnamed third-person narrator explains that Daniel is right about Charlie being an asshole and that in the future, Charlie will



become a corrupt politician; will change his name to Charlie Bay; and will cheat on his wife, but that he will also do one final good thing for Daniel.

The narrator in “Family: A History of Naming” describes Charlie and Daniel’s parents, Dae Hyun and Min Soo, who moved to New York many years before after falling in love and getting married in order to have a better life. Min recalls agonizing over choosing good first names for her children, as in America, first names come before family names while in Korea, family names come before personal names. She reflects on deciding to choose both American and Korean names for her children so that they would both know where they came from and also where they were going.

In the next section titled “Natasha,” Natasha is late for her meeting with Karen Whitney because of Irene’s delay, and she is refused by the waiting room receptionist who says that Karen is already with another applicant. When Natasha demands to be seen, a tall, thin black man named Lester Barnes agrees to see her. Lester explains that Natasha’s family’s last appeal regarding deportation was rejected, and that they will have to leave the country by ten o’clock that night. Natasha wants to cry and thinks about her best friend, Bev, who was hopeful Natasha would still be in America by the time Bev and her family got back from touring colleges in California. Lester tries to comfort Natasha by speaking about his visit to Jamaica, but Natasha calls him out for never leaving the resort, using the word “irie,” and experiencing true poverty. Natasha is also angry that her father’s single DUI led to them being discovered as being illegal immigrants (having gotten by with stolen social security numbers before that point), and she is angry that she must pay for the mistake of her father. She begins asking what she will do because she will not fit in in Jamaica, and because she has a future planned for herself in America. As she goes to leave, Lester tells her to wait.

In the section titled “Irie: An Etymological History,” the narrator explains that the word “irie” is Jamaican Rastafarian and gained global popularity through Bob Marley. To be irie is to be in a perfect place of contentment between God and the world. Since word of deportation, Natasha’s father has been using the word frequently, trying to make it appear as if everything is fine when it is not.

In “Daniel,” Daniel explains that his typical conversations with his mom have to do with his grades and focusing on college. He assures her, yet again, that he is doing well in school and has an interview with a Yale alumnus. Stunningly, Daniel’s mother tells him not to be like Charlie just as Charlie walks in the room. Charlie pretends not to have heard, getting a drink of water and leaving. Daniel knows their parents have constantly been on Charlie for what has happened, even when Charlie is working at the family store. Their mom believes either something must have happened to Charlie to make him fail or that America has made them too soft. Daniel heads out to his interview.

In “Natasha,” it is related that Natasha’s parents have strong faith in God, believing that everything happens for a reason according to His plans. Natasha is a realist, believing that things don’t happen for a reason, but just happen. However, Natasha now ponders this idea as, if she had not been late to her appointment, she would not have met Lester



Barnes who would not in turn have given her the long shot chance of calling Jeremy Fitzgerald. Natasha has the urge to thank Irene, but Irene is busy.

In the section titled “Irene: A Tentative History,” Irene downloads and listens to Nirvana’s album “Nevermind.” In it, she senses great pain and emotion and decides she will kill herself that day.

In “Natasha,” Natasha calls Jeremy Fitzgerald’s law office, revealing her situation and asking for an appointment with Jeremy. With time to spare, Natasha decides to go to the record store on the way to the office.

In the section “Samuel Kingsley: A History of Regret, Part 1,” the narrator reveals that Samuel moved to America two years before his wife and Natasha; he then took on work as a security guard on Wall Street when his dreams of acting did not pan out.

In “Daniel,” while taking the train to get a haircut before his interview, Daniel and the other passengers are surprised to hear the driver of the train speak about how God found him and saved Him, about finding God, accepting God into their lives, and doing so before they reach their final destination. The driver tells the people they will find God if they look for Him. Daniel knows that finding God is not on anyone’s schedule.

In “Natasha,” Natasha hopes for a miracle even though she does not believe in God.

“The Conductor” relates that the train conductor has had difficulty since his wife divorced him because she told him she no longer loved him. Having recently found God and having found joy and happiness in his life, the Conductor, now a born-again Christian, is called upon to share that love, joy, and faith. He has chosen to do so through broadcasts on the PA system on the train.

In the next section titled “Daniel,” Daniel decides to let the universe dictate what goes on in what he considers to be his final day of childhood prior to his meeting, so he heads around looking for God. He can find no Signs of God. Instead, he sees a teen girl with an afro and a tattoo that reads DEUS EX MACHINA (meaning “God from the machine” in Latin) listening to music as if she is completely happy going into the music store Second Coming Records. Daniel takes this as his Sign from God, and decides to see where the Sign will take him.

In “Natasha,” Natasha heads into Second Coming. There, she finds her ex-boyfriend Rob making out with Kelly, the girl he cheated on her with. Natasha watches as they use the cover of their kissing to steal records. It is then that an Asian guy in a gray suit and bright red tie (Daniel, whom she comes to nickname “Red Tie”) appears beside her, equally stunned that the two are stealing records. They consider turning in Rob and Kelly, but instead, Daniel loudly asks why they are stealing things. The commotion causes store employees to confront Kelly while Rob flees the store. Kelly gives up the stolen records and then flees herself. Daniel introduces himself and shakes Natasha’s hand before she heads out, telling Daniel to have a nice life.



In “Daniel,” Daniel mentally chastises himself for not being more suave or romantic with Natasha. He knows Charlie would have done this.

In “Natasha,” outside the store, Natasha sees Rob trying to console a crying Kelly who is upset with him for abandoning her. Natasha wonders why Rob chose to cheat on her with Kelly rather than breaking up with her and then dating Kelly.

In the section titled “Half-Life: A History of Decay,” the narrator explains that the half-life of a substance is the time it takes for something to lose one half of its initial value. Natasha thinks that love, like everything else, does not last forever.

In “Daniel,” Daniel heads down the street after Natasha, believing he is not following her but that she is going the same way he is. He pulls her out of the way of a BMW that runs a red light when Natasha is not paying attention. Both fall to the ground, during which time Natasha’s pink headphones are damaged. To stop Natasha from crying, Daniel offers to buy her a new pair. She thanks him for saving her life and says she has been having the worst day.

In the section titled “Donald Christiansen,” Donald is introduced as the driver of the car that has almost hit Natasha. He is still in grief even two years after losing his own daughter to a driver who was texting. The grief has cost Donald everything in his life, from his marriage to his ability to sleep. It has also turned him into a drunk. He realizes that almost hitting the girl is a sign that all of one’s future histories can be destroyed instantly.

In the next section titled “Natasha,” Natasha is saddened by the loss of her headphones which had been given to her as a gift by her father when she was young. The headphones symbolized the family’s longing for the American Dream as well as hope for the future. Natasha used to worship her dad. Now, she does all she can to stay away from him.

In “Daniel,” Daniel finds Natasha to be utterly beautiful, and he feels as if he has met her before. In an instant, he can see their lives play out with them living in their old age.

In “Natasha,” Daniels assures Natasha he has not deliberately been following her, and Natasha notices how he gazes at her as they are speaking. She introduces herself, and Daniel tells her about his college interview. Natasha agrees to get something to eat with Daniel, telling him he does not want the life she has.

In “Daniel,” Daniel and Natasha go into an independently-owned coffee shop. Natasha buys him coffee in thanks for what he did, and the two sit in awkward silence for a few moments. While Natasha goes to the bathroom, Daniel works on a poem he is writing. When she returns, she is amused to find he is a poet. Daniel asks Natasha what she would do with a time machine. She explains she would go back in time. Natasha then talks to him about the grandfather principle of time travel, in which one cannot go back in time to kill a parental ancestor because one could never have existed in the first place to go back in time to do it. Daniel finds Natasha even cuter because of her nerdiness





and intelligence. Daniel feels himself falling in love with Natasha, realizing that he will indeed come to love her. He does not believe Natasha feels the same way.

## Analysis

The structure of Nicola Yoon's novel *The Sun is Also a Star* remains constant throughout as it does at the beginning. The majority of the chapters alternate between the two major characters, Daniel and Natasha. Yoon not only makes a case for love at first sight, but also suggests that love requires two, and two become one in love. Daniel is Natasha, and Natasha is Daniel, just the way the sun is a star, and a star can be the sun. Yoon presents a Christian approach to love with the idea that two become one wholly in love—but the two remain individuals in that union of love as well. Because of this, she allows both Daniel and Natasha to narrate their own chapters, while a third narrator—which can be seen as God, a less personal divine intelligence, or the universe—fills in occasional chapters that do not fit the alternative Daniel-Natasha narration.

The very subject of God, faith, love, and other intangibles divides Daniel and Natasha. In many ways they are very much opposites. Daniel's character is presented as not only believing in God, but in God's plan, whereas Natasha does not believe (though later in the novel, she admits she does want to believe in intangible things). Whereas Daniel is passionate, creative, and warm, Natasha is logical, scientific, and cool. Both characters are confronted with the future—Daniel's pending college interview and college career, and Natasha's pending deportation to Jamaica. Neither is particularly happy with their family (for good reason), while both love New York and love America. Their futures put them on a collision course but whether this is chance or something greater (God's plan) remains to be worked out through the novel. To this end, readers should pay careful attention to Irene (which in turn sounds nearly identical to the Jamaican word "irie," meaning everything is good).

While Daniel is on the train, he has his own encounter with God by way of the conductor who urges everyone to seek out God. If you seek out God, the conductor argues, you will find Him. This becomes a thematic mantra for Daniel and becomes a subtle theme in the novel that reappears in critical places. When Daniel sees Natasha, he is floored by her beauty and by her composure. But what truly lures him in is that her shoulder (ironically) bears a symbolic tattoo that from Latin translates to "God in the machine" while she heads into a record store with the name *Second Coming*—symbolic for the return of Christ.

These signs are coupled with Daniel saving Natasha from being hit by Donald Christiansen (a hallmark moment for Donald in which he finds God—note his last name bears Christ—and realizes he will ruin any chances he has for the future if he continues on in his present state). The cracking of Natasha's pink headphones, given to her by her father as a demonstration of the possibility of the American Dream, now symbolically signals the beginning of a new kind of dream. For Daniel, this is God's intervention.



Natasha considers their encounter to be only chance, based on a number of happenstance decisions or situations. Still, they decide to get lunch together.

Another thematic argument presented by the author in this section of the novel is the idea that not only is true love possible, but that true love can weather any storm. Daniel believes in love at first sight and he believes he is already falling in love with Natasha. He has visions of their future lives together and living into old age, while Natasha only skeptically considers Daniel every step of the way. Natasha's skepticism is a major obstacle to Daniel, for two are required to love—and if one is not committed, then true love is not possible. Daniel is not immediately deterred by Natasha's cool—and even condescending—skepticism. Rather, he looks at it as a challenge of sorts—not in the sense that he is looking for a victory or the ability to prove he is right—but that he seeks the ability to prove that true love is possible and that Natasha could be blessed by this.

## Discussion Question 1

Early on, readers see that Daniel and Natasha are in many ways opposites in how their characters have been drawn. Compare and contrast Daniel and Natasha. Despite their differences, what brings them together?

## Discussion Question 2

What prompts Daniel to seek out God following his train ride? What ultimately brings Daniel to meet Natasha? Do you believe Daniel's finding Natasha is indeed a Sign from God, or do you believe it is merely coincidence or even chance? Explain.

## Discussion Question 3

How does Natasha view her encounter with Irene, with Lester, and with Daniel? Does she consider these things to be chance or fate? Why? Why does considering these things in such a way even matter to Natasha?

## Vocabulary

temporary, futile, abject, confiscate, irie, colloquial, misuse, obsolete, archaic, berates, patois, pestilence, incredulous, maimed, paradox, insurmountable



## Pages 75 – 143

### Summary

In the next section titled “Natasha,” Natasha recognizes that Daniel is looking at her like he loves her. Natasha does not believe anyone should fall in love with her, not only because she is due to be deported that night, but also because she does not believe in love and does not believe she is capable of loving another because she did not feel love with Rob. Natasha startles Daniel by telling him not to fall in love with her because she is not going to fall in love with him. She tells him love does not exist because it cannot be scientifically studied, and because whatever emotions people confuse as love do not last. Daniel disagrees, gently and humorously calling her deluded. Natasha realizes she is enjoying the back-and-forth rapport she shares with Daniel. Daniel asks Natasha what she would do if he said he could get her to fall in love with him scientifically. Natasha says she would scoff.

In the section “Multiverses: A Quantum History,” the narrator presents Hugh Everett’s theory of multiple universes existing side by side in which any number of outcomes are possible. Natasha knows that in any of these universes, she can or cannot fix her father’s issues and the deportation situation. She does not know in which universe she currently exists.

In “Daniel,” to prove love is possible, Daniel cites a scientific study in which strangers were forced to stare into each other’s eyes after asking each other intimate questions. Some fell in love and got married. Daniel likes to think of love as more mysterious than scientific, but is not above using science to make his point. He decides to bring up the 36 questions asked in the study.

In “Natasha,” Natasha recognizes how earnestly Daniel believes in love and finds him to be incredibly cute. She repeats that she is not going to fall in love with him. Daniel urges her to give him one day. She tells him it is not a challenge and gives him one hour instead. It is the amount of time she has until her appointment, she explains, but she will not tell him about the appointment.

In “Daniel,” Daniel shows Natasha the questions and they select some to ask each other. These questions range from who they would choose as a dinner guest to how their relationships are with their mothers, which leads to Natasha wondering why so many people blame mothers rather than fathers for how children turn out. Natasha suddenly decides she needs to leave, spilling her coffee in the process. Daniel heads out with her, determined to follow through scientifically with the questions like an experiment. This gets Natasha to smile.

In “Natasha,” Natasha recognizes that Daniel using science against her is smart but finds Daniel too optimistic and too earnest. She also realizes he is a hopeless romantic, especially when he talks about how poetry can save many lives. As they continue on



their way toward Fitzgerald's law office, Natasha thinks about the multiverse and all the possible ways her day could be going differently. Daniel removes his suit jacket and Natasha agrees to put it in her backpack. They consider the question of death. Natasha says that black women in America are most likely to die in their late seventies of heart disease, while Daniel wants to die doing something noble or heroic. The conversation becomes humorous when the two talk about swimming and how Natasha, who grew up on the island of Jamaica surrounded by water, cannot swim.

In "Daniel," Daniel assesses all he knows so far about Natasha as though he were a scholar. He knows she is intelligent—smarter than he is probably—as well as a geek who likes angsty music, that her fingers are long and feel good in his hands, and that she is worried about something related to her unexplained appointment. Natasha asks about Daniel, who in turn explains he has a Yale interview that afternoon that was insisted upon by his parents; and that his parents are very strict and expect him to become a doctor. Daniel does not know what he himself actually wants. Natasha reveals that she wants to become a data scientist, to analyze data to discern patterns, make conclusions, and create recommendations. Daniel finds this very practical while Natasha explains fate has no hand in this. Natasha believes that chasing dreams is foolish and is annoyed that Daniel does not seem to care his parents are looking out for him by insisting on his education. Daniel passionately defends the idea of dreams—of aspiring to do big, wonderful things and not settling for the mundane. Natasha is stunned, offers her hand to Daniel, but then walks on instead.

In "Natasha," Natasha feels her heart, which she calls non-practical, pulling her toward Daniel even though she tries to fight it. This is why she closes her hand and walks on.

In the section titled "Love: A Chemical History," the narrator asserts that scientists believe there are three stages of love, each controlled by chemicals or neurotransmitters in the brain: lust, attraction, and attachment. This information, which helped Natasha to get over Rob, now fails her with Daniel. To her, Daniel feels like something more than just chemical reactions.

In "Daniel," Natasha and Daniel have been walking in silence since "The Moment" when she nearly took his hand and wanted to touch him. Daniel knows he must leave soon for his interview. They arrive at Natasha's appointment, and she says this is where they must say goodbye and go their separate ways. Daniel is disappointed, agreeing they should part. This appears to surprise and disappoint Natasha as well, but Daniel is not convinced. He knows she must want something between them both as well as he does, but she does not seem to want anything from him at all.

In "Natasha," Natasha is not expecting Daniel to so easily agree to their goodbye. They decide to hug, and Natasha can feel that Daniel wants her in the way he holds her. She cannot stop thinking about him as she goes to Jeremy Fitzgerald's office. There, she learns that Fitzgerald has been in a car accident, is okay, but won't be in until the afternoon. For now, Natasha fills out forms and paperwork to be given to Fitzgerald later on. The young female paralegal and secretary encourages Natasha to expand on some of her answers, such as why she wants to stay in America and how she can make



America greater. When Fitzgerald calls the office, Natasha realizes that the way in which the secretary speaks to him means she is in love with him. When the secretary takes the forms from Natasha, she tells Natasha that Fitzgerald never loses, and that she thinks Natasha will be okay. Natasha suddenly feels hopeful. She begins thinking about chance and hope again, which in turn leads her to think about Daniel. She now wishes she had gotten his phone number and had been nicer to him because she admits to herself there was something big between them, and that she deliberately ignored it.

In the section titled “Hannah Winter: A Fairy-Tale History, Part 1,” the third-person narrator describes Hannah as having loved Jeremy Fitzgerald for a long time despite his being married with two children. It is not until this day that she realizes he loves her too.

“Jeremy Fitzgerald: A Fairy-Tale History, Part 1” is also related from the perspective of a third-person narrator. After nearly being hit by a drunk driver in a BMW and suffering only minor injuries in the incident, Fitzgerald has spent the day thinking about life and death—and has realized he is in love with Hannah. He also realizes what loving her will cost him in his own life.

In the next section titled “Daniel,” Daniel calls to reschedule his appointment, surprisingly learning that the alumnus’s secretary was going to be calling Daniel to reschedule as well. The appointment is now set for six that evening. Daniel now waits on Natasha in the lobby of the law offices building into which she has gone. He wonders what kind of legal services Natasha could need, and watches as she searches the lobby, then the street outside, for someone she does not find. Daniel hopes it is him.

In “Natasha,” Natasha feels defeated when she cannot find Daniel. She suddenly has the strange urge to have a final look around and then sees Daniel.

In “Daniel,” Daniel can see Natasha is happy to see him, though she is trying to force herself to look expressionless. Instead of saying anything like this, Natasha asks about Daniel’s interview. Daniel explains that he rescheduled it to spend more time with Natasha. Daniel asks how things went for Natasha. She explains that she has to come back at three-thirty. Natasha asks Daniel what makes him think she’s so worth his time. He replies that instinct does. She asks him what they should do. He asks her if she is up for a trip to Harlem, for he must deliver a pouch and deposit slips to his dad at the store as well as getting his hair cut. Natasha agrees to go along.

In “Natasha,” Natasha is surprised to discover that Daniel’s family owns a store called Black Hair Care. Daniel seems embarrassed and thinks Natasha might want to wait outside. Natasha thinks this is because he worries what she will think of his family, but then she thinks it might be because Daniel worries about what his family might think of her. Natasha considers that America is not a melting pot, but a divided plate.

In the section “Hair: An African American History,” the narrator relates that hundreds of years ago, Africans considered hairstyles not only markers of identity, but also a way to interact with God, as hair is at the highest part of the body. Slavery brought about the



shaving of heads and the loss of this identity. After slavery ended, African Americans sought to model their hair after European styles. After this, African Americans took to wearing their hair differently for different reasons ranging from politics to statements of beauty. Natasha wears her hair in an afro because it makes her feel beautiful but her mother worries it makes her seem too black.

In “Daniel,” Daniel realizes he has made a mistake as soon as he has asked Natasha to wait outside because he knows he is caving in to his father’s racism.

In “Natasha,” Natasha does not mind having to wait for Daniel and wants desperately for him to prove her wrong about things like God and true love.

In “Daniel,” Daniels asks Natasha if he can try that again. She gives him a big smile.

In “Natasha,” Natasha goes into the store with Daniel. Natasha sees Daniel’s father working at the register. Natasha selects a box of pink dye for her hair, at which time Daniel tells her he thinks she would look beautiful with pink in her hair. Natasha is delighted with this compliment. It is then that Charlie confronts them. Natasha immediately does not like Charlie due to the way he carries himself and speaks down to Daniel. She really does not like him when Charlie finds out she is a friend of Daniel’s, and not a shoplifting customer because she is black. Charlie is delighted to see that Daniel and Natasha seem to be romantically into each other because it will take the parental pressure off him. Natasha calls him an asshole, and the two turn toward Daniel’s father, who has seen Daniel and Natasha holding hands.

In “Daniel,” Daniel describes his hatred of Charlie, especially when Charlie starts arguing with their father over school, but this in turn leads to their father playing a good store owner and telling Natasha she can take anything she wants from the store. He suggests hair relaxer because her hair is too big. Natasha says she likes it big and Charlie tells her she’d better get a different boyfriend, making a sexual innuendo about the size of Daniel’s penis. Daniel shoves the hair relaxer back at his father, and he and Natasha hold hands and leave.

In “Natasha,” Natasha is not disturbed by the experience at the store but ends up laughing about it. She does however express disappointment in the racism and sexism on display by Daniel’s family. Natasha ends up laughing again, saying that tragedy is funny. Daniel apologizes for the world and all the racism in it, even when Natasha tells him it isn’t his fault. Natasha tells him he is not his dad, but most people believe they are a product of their parents and the history of their parents.

## Analysis

Daniel quickly comes to realize that Natasha is more of a challenge than he expected. He does not know why Natasha is deliberately fighting him—and there are many reasons, prime among them being the fact that, within mere hours, she will no longer be a resident in the United States. It is in this section of the novel that the rising action the plot begins and tensions begin their steady development toward the narrative climax.





Daniel will attempt to prove to Natasha that true love exists, while Natasha will deny it, even as both are falling in love with each other. Learning about one another and simply being with one another help lay the groundwork for this. Daniel and Natasha get to know one another as people, and as opposites, they attract. Daniel believes there is something greater to love than mere chemical reactions while Natasha believes science explains away love—though she admits she wants Daniel to prove her wrong about such things. Whichever way they arrive at love, however, they still arrive.

Getting to know one another also means getting to learn about things that the other is not exactly proud of. Family represents an aspect of their lives that Natasha and Daniel share in common in being not exactly proud of. Yet, even family is a storm that true love can weather. Readers are introduced to Daniel's family in ways unlike before—just as Natasha is introduced to Daniel's family for the first time ever. Despite the racism and strictness of Daniel's father and the racism and cruelty of Charlie, the reader correctly surmises that there is an underlying root cause for these things. These causes will be explored in more detail later in the novel, but their appearance here demonstrates that no one is ever as two-dimensional as they might seem. This is critical not only for readers to understand, but for Natasha and Daniel to understand with respect to each other as well. True love forms one from two, though each remains distinct.

Yoon also takes this opportunity to begin exploring the thematic idea of assimilation in depth. Just as true love makes two from one, so too does immigration make two from one. Yoon begins to lay the groundwork for the idea that assimilation without forgetting one's roots is critical for immigrants. While Daniel and Charlie are thoroughly American, their parents retain their Korean identity despite living in America. They want the opportunities of America without surrendering their Korean identity. Charlie wants to reject his Korean identity completely, while Daniel is proud to be both American and Korean. Natasha, interestingly, has rejected her Jamaican roots for a new world in America. She is desperate to avoid returning to Jamaica because she no longer considers it to be her home and because her whole world now exists in America. Natasha does not want to have to un-assimilate.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Daniel so embarrassed by Natasha meeting his family? Do you believe he is right to be embarrassed? Why or why not? How does Natasha respond to the encounter? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the encounter Natasha has with Daniel's family—from the family owning a black hair care store to Daniel's father's opinion about black hair—have to say about culture? What do such things say about the importance of assimilation, especially in a place like America?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Daniel seek to prove to Natasha that true love exists? How does Natasha respond to Daniel's conviction to prove true love? Why?

## Vocabulary

scientific method, deluded, scoff, ixnay, exasperation, philosophical, benevolence, incompetently, mundane, soliloquies, saunters, mischievous, raison d'être





## Pages 144 – 210

### Summary

In the section titled “Hair: A Korean American History,” the third-person narrator states that in the 1960s, the African American demand for wigs made from Korean hair exploded, leading to raw hair exports being banned in South Korea. Meanwhile, the United States banned wigs made from Chinese hair, ensuring that only South Korean wigs could be made in South Korea and exported to the United States, and also ensuring that South Koreans cornered the market on African American hair products.

In “Daniel,” Daniel is grateful that Natasha does not hate him because of his family. Daniel asks her to lunch, and then decides to return to the questions. When Natasha leans in close, he smells her hair. She asks him about this and he tells her that her hair smells good, like the air after a spring rain.

In “Natasha,” Natasha tries to remain unaffected but she is enchanted and moved by Daniel’s description of her hair.

In “Daniel,” Daniel realizes he is continuing to fall in love with Natasha. The next questions have to do with intimacy. The first deals with their relationships with their mothers and fathers. Daniel admits he does not like his father, even though he loves his father. He describes their relationship as one where they can see each other but cannot hear each other. Daniel explains his relationship with his mother is better and that she is artistic and paints. Natasha gives her relationship with her mother a thumbs-up, while she gives her relationship with her father a thumbs-way-way-down.

In “Natasha,” Natasha explains to Daniel that it is hard to love someone who does not love her back. Natasha knows this because her father himself told her so.

In the section titled “Samuel Kingsley: A History of Regret, Part 2,” Samuel wonders why God would give him so much talent and nowhere to showcase it. Samuel remembers ducking into a clothing store in Montego Bay, Jamaica, before an audition where he met Patricia, who worked as a store manager. He wonders how his life would have been different if he had not stayed on to talk to Patricia.

In “Daniel,” while heading to get food with Natasha, Daniel considers how Charlie prefers American food but their parents always insist on eating Korean. Daniel also considers that one day may not be enough time to make Natasha fall in love with him, so his new goal becomes getting her to want to see him again the next day. They decide to get Korean food for lunch. Natasha asks for a fork, but the waitress tells Daniel his girlfriend should learn how to use chopsticks. Daniel orders soon-dubu for them both, which Natasha finds delicious. Natasha asks why Daniel calls himself Korean if he was born in America. He explains that it is because people never take American as a real answer and want to know where he is “really” from. He says that his parents think he is



not Korean enough, while many others believe he is not American enough. As Natasha enjoys her food, Daniel wonders how someone so passionate can be so strongly against passion.

In the section titled “The Waitress: A History of Love,” the waitress reflects on how her son dated a white girl and at first she agreed with her husband that this was not acceptable. Eventually, she came to miss him. When her son got engaged, he invited her to their wedding but because her husband said no, she said no. Now, she follows her son’s life on Facebook. She blames America for taking away her son. She hates to see mixed couples in the restaurant because she sees it as America taking away everything.

In “Natasha,” Daniel insists they go to a norebang, a style of karaoke place in which singing takes place in private rooms among friends rather than the American/Japanese version wherein a person sings before an entire room full of people. There, they order dessert and Natasha comes to the realization that she likes making Daniel happy. Daniel begins by singing, removing his tie and unbuttoning his top shirt button to do so. This excites Natasha. The machine scores Daniel with a 99% for his singing. He then hands the microphone to Natasha, and tells her to bring it.

In “Daniel,” when Natasha bends over to choose a song Daniel is given a glimpse of her thighs, which excites him. Natasha’s singing is awful, but she is passionate about it. Daniel grabs Natasha by the hand and pulls her to him. He kisses her lips, and she kisses him back. He can tell she wants him and knows that what has happened between them is more than just chemistry. They look at each other, and then resume kissing.

In “Natasha,” Natasha is amazed and feels as if she desperately needs Daniel and to keep kissing him. Natasha does not believe in magic but feels she and Daniel are magic.

In “Daniel,” Daniel feels overwhelmed.

In “Natasha,” Natasha is overwhelmed.

In “Daniel,” Daniel is turned on by Natasha and wants to have sex with her, but not in the norebang. However, he knows if he keeps kissing her he will want to have sex with her in the norebang.

In “Natasha,” Natasha cannot stop touching or kissing Daniel. She puts her hands on his butt and then on his shoulders to slow them down. She knows what has happened will make later even harder.

In “Daniel,” Daniel can feel the hesitation in Natasha now as she begins to cool down and back away. Still, Daniel believes everything that has happened today has led him to this moment and to the rest of the life he will share with Natasha. He owes it all to the theological train conductor and the search for God. Daniel tells Natasha they are meant to be, but then she pulls away. She apologizes for being hot and cold toward Daniel.



Daniel asks her to tell him about her father. Natasha explains that she feels her father's primary emotion is regret, as if he has made all the wrong choices in life. She appears as if she will cry, so Daniel begins speaking about his mom's artwork. He goes on to explain that he writes poetry because it makes him feel good about himself—just the way Natasha makes him feel. Natasha then kisses Daniel again.

In "Natasha," Natasha kisses Daniel again in order to get him to stop talking because she knows if he keeps talking, she will fall in love with him.

In "Daniel," Daniel plans to write an ode to kissing one day.

In "Natasha," the return of the waitress prompts them to stop kissing. Back outside the norebang, reality returns quickly to Natasha. What is going on with Daniel now seems like pretend to Natasha.

In "Daniel," on the train, Daniel can feel Natasha distancing herself from him. He asks her what she is so afraid of. He needs to know that she wants him; he needs to hear the words.

In "Natasha," Natasha pretends not to know what Daniel is asking about.

In "Daniel," Daniel tells Natasha they are meant to be. Natasha goes and stands by herself at the train doors. When Daniel and Natasha leave the station, she tells him not to tell her what to feel. Daniel has had enough of being pushed away, so he challenges her, asking what her problem is. Natasha says that meant-to-be does not exist, and then reveals that she is an undocumented immigrant set to be deported. Daniel is stunned.

In "Natasha," Natasha blames herself for what has happened, knowing she should have never let things go so far.

When the narrative next returns to "Daniel," Daniel is upset, telling Natasha she could have told him sooner. Natasha says she tried to warn Daniel, but Daniel counters she did not actually try hard enough to do so. Natasha says it is not her fault that Daniel did not listen to her about not falling in love with her. She does not believe Daniel can actually be falling for her, saying it is stupid. Daniel is stung deeply by this. Natasha tells him that he is selfish like her father, thinking the whole world revolves around his dreams and his feelings. Daniel counters that people are put on Earth to dream and do good things. Natasha shoots back that people are on Earth due to evolution and the instinct to survive. Natasha calls Daniel naïve, to which Daniel responds that he would rather believe in something than nothing—or only in the things right in front of his face like Natasha does.

In "Natasha," Natasha tells Daniel he should go. Natasha accuses him of waiting for someone to save him, telling him if he does not want to be a doctor, he should not be a doctor. Daniel tells her it is not so easy. Natasha tells him she hates poetry, that they have no future, and to stop waiting for someone to save him. She tells him to save himself.



In “Daniel,” Daniel is brokenhearted and disenchanting as he watches Natasha walk away. Daniel now no longer believes in a greater plan and divine goodness, and believes that thinking there is a reason for everything is just a story.

In the section titled “Fate: A History,” the narrator indicates that the concept of fate can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, where both man and god were subjected to fate. In modern times, some people accept fate as a way of comforting themselves about things which they do not know. Natasha’s mother is one such person. Natasha believes choices and actions lead to outcomes. Daniel exists somewhere between both now. He considers that maybe he and Natasha were or were not supposed to meet, but the love ignited between them once they did meet was unavoidable.

In “Natasha,” Natasha goes to the museum and then to her favorite exhibit—the Hall of Meteorites. There, she looks at her favorite meteorite, Ahnighito, a section of the much larger Cape New York Meteor. Natasha is always amazed to consider the meteorite is from outer space and that it contains the origins of the solar system. It is the closest Natasha has ever come to believing in God. Natasha thinks about how falling in love does not compare to the formation of a universe because in reality, a human life does not matter on a galactic scale.

In “Daniel,” Daniel writes a poem about staying on his own side.

In “Natasha,” Natasha recalls being close with her father long ago and how when she was younger, she believed in his dreams of being a famous actor and bringing the family along for the ride. She recalls how, after years of her father’s promises and dreams, the family’s situation never improved which led to her mother and brother giving up on her father because they wanted a better life and living conditions. She recalls how her father lost his actual job and then went on to say he would focus on acting, only to never get any parts while insisting he was trying. Natasha remembers how, in reality, he was not actually trying but merely staying at home acting for an audience of himself. Natasha then remembers how, two months before the deportation, her father finally landed a role in a production of *A Raisin in the Sun*—but rather than being happy for him, their mother wanted to know how much it would pay. Natasha recounts how she did not blame her mother for not having time for dreams anymore. Natasha does not have time for dreams anymore, either.

In the section titled “Samuel Kingsley: A History of Regret, Part 3,” Samuel is a little afraid of Natasha, knowing she has outgrown him in every possible way. Samuel wants her to be his sweet daughter again, yet also resents her for wanting more from him. He has given up his dreams for her and this does not seem to be enough.

In the next section titled “Daniel,” Daniel is feeling angry and bitter, and thanks the universe for nothing. He considers the universe to be like Charlie. Daniel thinks he has nothing left to lose that day.



## Analysis

Nicola Yoon's back-and-forth narrative structuring continues unabated in this section of the novel. Readers see Daniel and Natasha both as one true love, and as distinct and wholly separate characters that are finally joined in a physical expression of that love by way of kissing. Readers continue to learn more about their lives, the people in their lives, and chance encounters with other characters. The racist undertones of the Korean waitress's chopsticks comment emerges from her own heartache in life—thanks to her own choices. As a result, the waitress both earns sympathy while at the same time deterring an outpouring of sympathy exactly because of her own choices. Her refusal to assimilate has consequences. Assimilation for Daniel and Natasha, culturally, is irrelevant: they are assimilating to one another through true love.

The reader is also given expansive understanding of Natasha's own formation as a character, thanks in large part to her father. Her father is very much like Daniel—a dreamer—but very much unlike Daniel in that he is a failed dreamer living in regret. Samuel has taken his own failures out on his children and his wife, which is completely unfair. Because of Samuel's inability to provide for his family, Natasha does away with her belief in passion and dreaming in exchange for a rootedness in practical living. Despite the foundations of Natasha's distaste for intangible things like love and dreams in the present, she is still just as desperate for Daniel to prove her wrong. She is, after all, falling in love with him—and this is dangerous given her seeming situation with respect to deportation.

The will of God—which essentially becomes synonymous with fate and the universe in this section of the novel—is also explored further through God as the third narrator. Natasha's apparent rejection of Daniel leads Daniel to question whether or not God truly does have a plan for everyone that, through their own choices, people tap into. Natasha's apparent rejection of Daniel brings her to a museum of science, wherein her consideration of a meteorite is the closest she comes to believing in God because the meteorite contains the blueprint for all of creation within—just as Daniel would believe God is responsible for that blueprint. The outcome is that Daniel becomes temporarily bitter and angry with the universe for the way things have turned out. But as the reader suspects, the universe is not yet finished. Daniel is now the skeptic, while Natasha is the burgeoning believer.

## Discussion Question 1

What ultimately explains why Natasha rejects dreaming and dreamers so categorically? Do you believe Natasha is right to be so skeptical based on her experiences? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

What does Natasha's rejection of Daniel cause Daniel to consider regarding God and a universal plan? Why? Do you believe Daniel is correct to consider things in this way? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Natasha, despite her opinion of dreams, dreamers, and love, and despite her pending deportation, give in to kiss Daniel? What changes between them as a result? Why is this so?

## Vocabulary

mortified, stoic, prescient, adamantly, infectious, pantomimes, volition, haggardly, inevitable, determinism, nebulous, monologue

## Pages 211 – 281

### Summary

In “Natasha,” Natasha meets with Jeremy Fitzgerald. Natasha explains her situation to him, beginning with the night her father ruined her family’s lives.

In the section titled “Natasha Kingsley: A Daughter’s History,” Natasha explains that the theater where the production of *A Raisin in the Sun* was to be staged could only hold forty people, and that there were no complimentary tickets for family. Natasha says that her mother was so mad about her money being used to buy tickets for the family to attend that she refused to go. Natasha reveals that only she and her brother attended the show and that her father performed incredibly, demonstrating that he belonged on the stage and not in a family.

In “Daniel,” Daniel heads to the family store to ask Charlie why he is always an asshole to him. Charlie says he is smarter, stronger, and better than Daniel. Daniel asks why Charlie ended up back at the store out of college if he is smarter. Daniel guesses it is because Charlie was not the best at Harvard, just like he is not the best at home. Charlie says he hates Daniel because Daniel is just like their parents and that Charlie is not even from Korea. Charlie begins to berate Daniel about his life, but when he starts in on Natasha being black, Daniel punches Charlie in the face. Charlie stumbles but does not fall. He goes after Daniel, punching him in the stomach and the face. Daniel then knees Charlie in the groin, causing Charlie to fall to the floor. It is then that their father intervenes.

In the next section titled “Natasha,” Natasha reveals that after the performance, her father went out with his acting friends, drank too much, and drove into a parked police car. Confronted by the police, Natasha reveals that her father went on to give the police his life story and the story of their family, including that they were in the country illegally. Fitzgerald cannot understand why he would do this, but Natasha says she knows.

The section “Samuel Kingsley: A Father’s History” is presented as though it is a play. Samuel and Patricia argue about the DUI and the immigration situation, with Samuel saying they need a good lawyer and Patricia wondering how they will pay for a good lawyer. Patricia is also angry and bitter, telling Samuel he is a good actor for making her believe in him. Samuel blames Patricia and the children for holding him back from his dreams. Samuel says he rues the day he met her, because otherwise, his life would be better.

In “Natasha,” the novel returns to its standard form of prose. Natasha retraces the legal situation of her family, from Homeland Security’s Notice to Appear wherein they sought to file for Cancellation of Removal, and that with Peter being born in the United States, the family should be allowed to stay. However, it could not be proven that removing Peter from the country would cause any extreme hardships, meaning they would be





deported by way of Voluntary Removal. Because of this form of deportation, the family would have the chance to legally return to the United States. Fitzgerald tells Natasha he will go and see a judge friend of his to have the Voluntary Removal reversed, which will buy time to appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals. Natasha suddenly feels hopeful once more.

In “Daniel,” Daniel’s father orders him to get some ice for his bleeding lip and then to return to face him. Daniel does this while his father yells at Charlie for hitting Daniel. Daniel hates that he allowed fate and ideas of love to distract him from his day and wonders if he really was waiting for someone to save him. Daniel’s father tells him that he and Daniel’s mother want him to be a doctor and to be successful so that he will never have to work in a store like they do. They want Daniel to achieve the American Dream, and they do not want him to throw away the future for the here-and-now. He tells Daniel that Daniel has no idea what it is like to be poor. He tells Daniel that Daniel does not have to go to Yale and become a doctor, but if this is so, then Daniel must go to college and pay for it himself. He tells Daniel it will never work out between him and Natasha, but that Daniel must do the right thing. This is the most Daniel’s father has ever said to him or revealed about himself.

In the section titled “Dae Hyun Bae,” Dae, father of Daniel and Charlie, worries that it is his fault his sons are the way they are because they do not understand that happiness and money are related. Dae’s own childhood was spent in poverty, scraping by through his father’s crabbing business. Dae also remembers feeling horrible about the crabs who struggled in vain to get free of the traps.

In “Natasha,” Natasha calls Rob and asks him why he cheated on her. He explains that it was because he wanted both Natasha and Kelly. She asks him if he believes in true love. He says he does not, and he knows Natasha does not either. Natasha tells him not to cheat on Kelly. Rob says he won’t. Natasha then thinks about how she might not believe in true love, but she wants to.

In “Daniel,” outside the store, Daniel hears a female violinist playing music and decides the music matters to him so he tips her. Daniel is determined to find Natasha again and so goes to the building where her lawyer’s office is.

In “Natasha,” Natasha sees a blue-haired couple arguing, obviously no longer in love.

In “Daniel,” Daniel takes the subway and a flash mob appears to dance. It puts everyone around them in a good mood for thirty seconds before they return to their own worlds as strangers.

In “Natasha,” Natasha also sees the dance mob. She takes a few pictures. Natasha wonders if the dancers don’t have something better to do, and knows Daniel would say that maybe this is what they are supposed to be doing to bring a little wonder into the lives of people. Natasha realizes that such a thing would be as real and valid a purpose as any other.





In “Daniel,” as Daniel leaves the subway, he sees a blue-haired couple passionately kissing, and hopes their relationship lasts forever.

In “Natasha,” Natasha heads to Daniel’s family’s store. She comes across the violinist and tips her, as the violinist has a sign that requests money to pay back a pawn shop loan shark. The shark appears, takes the violinist’s earnings and her violin, refusing to promise he won’t sell it.

In “Daniel,” at the office building, Daniel wonders where to begin looking. With his meeting only an hour away, he decides to check the meeting’s location, hoping it will be far away and that will be his excuse to ditch it. Instead, Daniel is stunned to find the address of the meeting is the building in which he currently stands.

In “Natasha,” Natasha enters Daniel’s family’s store. Charlie is at the counter with a red, swollen eye. Charlie wants to know if Natasha has come back for him. Natasha tells him she wants Daniel’s number. Charlie says guys like Daniel are a dime a dozen. Natasha then realizes that Charlie hates Daniel because Daniel does not hate himself the way Charlie hates himself. When Natasha tells Charlie that her dating Daniel will cause problems, Charlie gives her Daniel’s number.

In “Daniel,” Daniel is stunned when Natasha calls him and surprised to learn how Natasha came by his number. Both are surprised to learn where the other currently is. Daniel apologizes for being a jerk while Natasha tells him she should have told him about her situation.

In “Natasha,” Natasha arrives at the office building. Natasha feels gleeful to see Daniel. When she sees his face, she realizes that he and Charlie were in a fight. Natasha also realizes the fight must have been about her. Natasha puts her head on Daniel’s shoulder and tells him about her day. Daniel is happy to learn about what Natasha’s lawyer has said and wants to go celebrate. Natasha realizes this moment would not have been possible without Irene, so she calls Lester’s office and leaves a voicemail telling Lester to thank Irene.

In “Daniel,” Daniel tells Natasha that his interview appointment is in the very same building as Natasha’s lawyer’s office. Natasha is stunned, while Daniel says it is proof they were meant to meet. Surprisingly to Daniel, Natasha does not argue with him. Daniel leads Natasha up to the roof so they can make out, but there, they find an elderly security guard who tells them they cannot be up there. The security guard is then seized by a coughing fit from his smoking. Natasha demands his cigarettes. He hands them over, telling them that life does not always go as planned. As he leaves, he tells Daniel and Natasha to stay away from the edge of the roof.

In the section titled “Joe: A Planned History,” Natasha reminds the security guard, Joe, of his wife, Beth—direct but sweet. Joe knows Natasha and Daniel will not do anything dumb, but only want to be with each other. Joe thinks about how Beth has been dead for six months after a battle with cancer. All of the plans and saving they did to travel and see the world in retirement came to nothing. Daniel and Natasha remind Joe of he



and Beth when they were younger. He thinks maybe he will give up smoking and form new plans in life.

In “Natasha,” Daniel and Natasha kiss on the roof even though it hurts Daniel’s lip from the fight with his brother. Daniel asks if Natasha is in love with him yet, but she says she is not. Daniel says it is okay, because there is still time to make it happen.

In “Daniel,” Daniel reads the question about who they would each invite to have dinner with them. Daniel chooses God, and says that the connection between everyone (even bad people) on Earth is also God. Daniel believes that everyone, even bad people, are capable of doing at least one good thing in their lives. Daniel believes that the connection between all people has a consciousness, and that consciousness is God. Natasha does not believe in the Biblical God, but does believe in science. She believes science is enough, and speaks about the beauty of things like dark matter, an attracting gravitational force that can’t be seen. Daniel compares dark matter to love and Natasha is unable to argue the point, merely calling Daniel a poet. Natasha admits to feeling scared about the future and not knowing what is coming. She does not want to stare into each others’ eyes yet, though. They talk about the past and realize their favorite memories are with people they now like the least.

In the section “Eyes: An Evolutionary History,” the narrator says science theorizes that eyeballs began as light-sensitive spots on the skin of ancient creatures that developed for the purposes of survival, only later to be crucial to love—such as the idea of love at first sight. Seeing allows a connection.

## Analysis

The basic structure of Yoon’s novel and plot remains unchanged through this section of the book. Chapters are alternatively given to Daniel and to Natasha, while occasional chapters are given to the narrator or to other characters. This creates a true dimensional nature to minor characters (who all turn out to be utterly important) and also ensures that the true love Daniel and Natasha share comes by way of them recognizing one another as wholly individual persons. This occurs amid Daniel’s continued attempts to prove that true love exists, his attempts to make Natasha fall in love with him, and Natasha’s warming up toward Daniel and his intangibles.

The themes of interpersonal connections and assimilation are explored in this section of the novel through Daniel’s heart-to-heart talk with his very strict, very practical father. The reader sees that much of his father’s racism comes from the fact that Daniel’s father has attempted to live as a Korean in America without embracing Americanism and all its ideals—and while refusing to see his son as an American. Daniel’s father’s history of poverty makes his strictness and focus on the future of his children make perfect sense—and also demonstrates that Natasha was right in this regard: that Daniel’s parents only have his best interests at heart. There are many reasons that immigrants come to the United States, and the reader learns why Daniel’s parents have done so. Their refusal to assimilate, however, only hurts them in the end.



When Natasha takes the tremendous step of reaching out to Charlie to get Daniel's number, Daniel begins to wonder if perhaps God is not absent after all. As Daniel (and the reader) considers it, everything that has happened has led Natasha and Daniel back together. Clearly, choices have been made consistent with God's plans for them, because what they have together is so good. Natasha is still skeptical, explaining she does not believe in the Biblical God, though she believes in things that are not necessarily seen. Though Natasha states this in reference to the invisible world of science, it is a major admission of faith in something. With faith in something, Natasha can have faith in something else—like true love. Indeed, the reader should note that the very idea of true love—and God's role in true love—seems further defined by the fact that Daniel's appointment is in the very same building as Natasha's. Also notable is one other very important act Natasha undertakes: she calls to thank Irene. This demonstrates that Natasha is warming up to the idea of true love even more, but it also symbolizes a good deed that is part of God's overall plan (as the reader will come to learn).

## Discussion Question 1

What ultimately prompts Natasha to seek out Daniel once again? Why does Natasha go through such lengths—such as dealing with Charlie—to reconnect with Daniel? What does this mean to Daniel? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Given the recent slate of evidence—including both Daniel and Natasha having appointments in the very same building—do you believe Daniel and Natasha are meant to be together? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What specifically has caused Natasha to reconsider her opinions on true love, dreams, and even things like faith? How have these reconsiderations affected her in the present—especially in how she behaves toward, and deals with Daniel? Why does this matter (especially to Daniel)?

## Vocabulary

ritualistic, transcendent, appeals, fluttering, relinquishing, monstrosity, quizzical, refutable, erudite, explanatory, alliteration, notwithstanding



## Pages 282 – 344

### Summary

In “Daniel,” Daniel learns that his interview is with Jeremy Fitzgerald. When he arrives in Fitzgerald’s office, he meets Hannah, who is crying and preparing to leave. She tells Daniel that Fitzgerald is the most wonderful person she has ever met, and she cannot stay.

In “Natasha,” Natasha texts her mom to let her know that she will be home soon. She decides to wait around the building for a call from Fitzgerald.

In the section “Samuel Kingsley: A History of Regret, Part 4,” Samuel reflects wryly on the fact that his critically-acclaimed performance in *A Raisin in the Sun* in Jamaica ten years before prompted his move to America to pursue acting, and that his American performance in *A Raisin in the Sun* has prompted his deportation. Samuel considers that he told the police about his immigrant status due to being done with America. In Jamaica, he could get an audience, while in America, he cannot.

In “Daniel,” Daniel sees Natasha’s file folder in Fitzgerald’s office. He instantly makes the connection and tells Fitzgerald that he met Natasha just that day. Fitzgerald is in disbelief when Daniel tells him that Natasha is the one. Fitzgerald then asks Daniel why he has come to the interview—between looking like he has been in a fight to being late for the meeting. Daniel says his parents made him come and that he owes it to them for the life they have given him in America. Fitzgerald tells Daniel to get his screw-ups out of the way when he is young because it gets more difficult when one gets older. Daniel asks about the paralegal, to which Fitzgerald explains his affair began and ended that very day with her. Fitzgerald says he will have to let his paralegal go, while Daniel will have to let Natasha go because he was unable to get Natasha’s Voluntary Removal blocked. Daniel becomes angry, telling Fitzgerald he has not tried hard enough, but Fitzgerald insists he has. Daniel wants to be the one to tell Natasha but Fitzgerald tells him it is his job to do so. Daniel asks what would happen if Natasha and her family just stayed anyway, but Fitzgerald does not recommend this professionally or personally. Fitzgerald encourages Daniel to give Yale a chance for the opportunities it could provide. Daniel then heads out to be with Natasha, saying time counts.

In the section “Jeremy Fitzgerald: A Fairy-Tale History, Part 2,” it is revealed that Fitzgerald could not get the Voluntary Removal reversed due to the fact that he missed the court appointment because he was in a hotel room with Hannah instead. The narrator reveals that within the month, Fitzgerald will leave his wife, will be with Hannah, and that this will affect the lives of his children in tremendous ways. His son will never marry, have children, or forgive his father for the betrayal. Fitzgerald’s daughter will marry her first girlfriend, Marie, and then having anticipated and caused the end of the marriage, will do the same thing two more times. Meanwhile, Jeremy and Hannah’s own



children will grow up unafraid to love, and will have happy lives. Love changes everything.

In the next section, “Hannah Winter: A Fairy-Tale History, Part 2,” Hannah and Fitzgerald live happily ever after.

In “Natasha,” Daniel tells Natasha he loves her twice, while telling her not to answer her phone which begins to ring. Daniel tells her that Fitzgerald was his interviewer. He explains the situation, which both angers and stuns Natasha. The voicemail Fitzgerald leaves for her confirms it.

In “Daniel,” Daniel writes a poem about hearts in that they do not break, but only stop working.

In “Natasha,” Daniel holds Natasha’s hand and holds her head against him. Natasha says she should leave, but asks about Daniel’s interview. Daniel explains that Fitzgerald said he would recommend Daniel for admission. Daniel offers to go with Natasha, but Natasha says it would not be a good idea. Daniel tells her they are not going to argue; that they will be with each other until they cannot; that he will go and meet her family; and that he will accompany her to the airport. He asks if it will all be okay with her.

In “Daniel,” Natasha says yes. As they head out, Daniel sees Natasha’s DEUS EX MACHINA tattoo again and wishes God would intervene. Daniel begins to wonder if his belief that he and Natasha were meant to be was just hopeful thinking.

In “Natasha,” as Daniel and Natasha take the subway train to her home she tells Daniel all she knows about Jamaica—from it having the sixth-highest murder rate in the world to the fact that it is still a ceremonial member of the British Commonwealth. Daniel brings out the questions again, coming to one about sharing embarrassing moments. Natasha admits the encounter with Rob at the record store was pretty embarrassing. Daniel asks Natasha if her parents ever minded her dating a white guy, but Natasha tells him they never met Rob. Natasha realizes she never wanted Rob to see all of her, but that she wants Daniel to see all of her. Natasha also knows she will always compare every city she ever visits to New York, while she will compare every boy to Daniel.

In “Daniel,” Daniel admits that his own most embarrassing moment ever was Natasha meeting his father and brother. Neither Daniel nor Natasha, however, would want to do away with their families despite their problems.

In “Natasha,” Natasha is glad it is so dark out so that Daniel cannot see how run down her neighborhood is, but she is ashamed for thinking such a thing. People stare at them as they walk by, but Daniel is not overly bothered by it. He says he does not care because he thinks talk of culture clash is bullshit. They enter Natasha’s building and come to apartment 3A. She warns him it will be messy. Daniel is nervous, but Natasha tells him he does not need to be nervous. They immediately see Natasha’s mom, and Patricia immediately sees Daniel. She asks who he is.



In “Daniel,” Natasha introduces Daniel to her mother as a “friend.” Natasha’s mom does not look happy, but shakes Daniel’s hand when he offers it. Daniel shakes Peter’s hand as Peter says Natasha has never brought a guy home before. Patricia says she needs to talk to Natasha privately, but Natasha refuses, saying Daniel is her boyfriend. It is then that Natasha’s father arrives. He is incensed that Natasha has been out all day with a boy instead of helping to pack, but Natasha retorts that she has been trying to fix her father’s mistakes. Patricia tells Natasha to calm down, but her father insists on hearing what Natasha has to say.

In “Natasha,” Natasha tells her father that she heard her father telling her mother they were her biggest regret after the play and the DUI. Natasha tells him she is sorry life did not give him all he wanted. He says it was just talk he didn’t mean, but Natasha tells him he was wonderful in the play. She tells him there are no do-overs in life, and that he does not get to regret his family. By now, he is crying. Natasha tells him that when they return to Jamaica, he must be better to Patricia and he must pursue acting for real.

In the next section, titled “Daniel + Natasha,” Natasha’s parents and brother leave for the airport in one cab, while Daniel and Natasha take a second cab. Natasha admits that she now believes she and Daniel would have worked out. She tells him not to be a doctor. Natasha does not know if she will be a data scientist anymore because she would like to find something to be passionate about. She then asks Daniel about the final questions. The last one has to do with whose death in the family they would find most disturbing. Natasha chooses her father, because he’s not done yet. Daniel chooses Natasha, as both an answer and a statement of love. Natasha then confesses she loves Daniel. Daniel says he already knows.

In “Four Minutes: A History of Love,” for four minutes Daniel and Natasha stare into each other’s eyes, which is the final part of the question experiment. The day flashes before their eyes, with Natasha thinking about the day relating to the past while Daniel thinks about the future. They kiss when their time is up, and promise to keep in touch and come and see one another.

In “Natasha,” Natasha’s mom tells her everything will be all right as the plane takes to the sky. The city lights become pinpricks of light below, like stars. Natasha thinks about something Daniel told her—that stars are not just stars, but that they can be navigated by.

In “Daniel,” Daniel’s parents have called him yet again and he knows they will be angry with him for being out so late. Daniel, meanwhile, thinks about how a year from now, he will be in another place. He knows it will not be Yale, but he does not know if he is making a mistake or not. He tries to imagine seeing the light from Natasha’s plane in the sky, but the light from the city makes it impossible. Still, he knows the light from the plane is still there.

In the section titled “Time and Distance: A Measured History,” Natasha and Daniel keep in touch by phone, e-mail, and text, but over time, their communication fades out as life, time, and distance get in the way. Natasha attends school and lets go of Daniel to avoid





being ripped apart between two worlds. Slowly, she comes to love Jamaica. Daniel graduates, declines Yale, and attends Hunter College part-time to study English while working his way through school. Daniel struggles to hold on to Natasha, but feels her slip away. Natasha's mother dies a few years later after getting sick. Peter thrives in Jamaica, and will in the future come to marry and have a family. Natasha's father comes to act in Jamaica and realizes he did not choose wrongly the day he met his wife. Daniel's parents sell the store years later and divide their time between New York and South Korea. They stop expecting their sons to be Korean, recognizing they are Americans. After Charlie graduates college, he barely speaks to his family again. From the day spent with Daniel in New York, Natasha comes to value passion in her life. Daniel takes the day as proof that things are meant to happen according to God's plans. He also does not count out the future.

In the final section, "Epilogue: Irene: An Alternate History," the message Natasha left for Irene moves her deeply and causes her to refuse to commit suicide. Ten years pass, but Irene never forgets the message. Irene becomes a flight attendant and one day sees Natasha on a plane. She speaks to Natasha, thanking her for the message. When Natasha introduces herself, an Asian man looks over his seat. Natasha recognizes Daniel instantly.

## Analysis

The final section of the novel maintains Yoon's structure of storytelling to the very end—with chapters alternating between Daniel, Natasha, and others—until one chapter where Daniel and Natasha are written together. This demonstrates that the two have become one, even in the symbolic title of the chapter: "Daniel + Natasha" (one plus one; from two, one). Unfortunately, Natasha cannot be helped and will be deported. It would appear, at first, as though God perhaps was not involved at all and that the meeting between Daniel and Natasha was nothing more than random chance. However, upon examining the evidence, this turns out not to be the case. Daniel and Natasha have both learned from one another. Daniel is more independent after meeting Natasha, while Natasha is more passionate. The things they have learned from one another will sustain them through their separation by Natasha's deportation. There are countless reasons immigrants come to the United States—and there are countless reasons they sometimes leave. For Natasha and her family, it is the illegal process they used to enter the country. They have legally chosen to leave because this leaves open the possibility that they may return. The situation, however, allows Natasha to confront her father—and to reconnect with him.

Yoon ends the novel on an important note regarding the themes of connection, fate, and God's will. In the end, it can be argued that things do turn out for the best after all. If one seeks God and His signs, one will find God. Therein, God indeed does have a plan for everyone, even if that plan is not what people first imagine it to be. The reader learns that, thanks to the symbolic voicemail of thanks Natasha left for Irene, she saved Irene's life. Irene does not kill herself but becomes a flight attendant instead, reinventing her life and finally becoming happy. This alone would be enough to justify the meeting of Daniel



and Natasha as planned—but God takes things one step further. Daniel just also happens to be on that plane, unknowingly of course. Had not Natasha saved Irene’s life, Irene would have never found Natasha while Irene was working on a plane carrying both Natasha and Daniel. This would have never allowed Natasha to be thanked and to introduce herself—or to be overheard by Daniel.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Natasha’s deportation cause Natasha and Daniel to rethink their love for one another? How does it cause them to rethink their ideas about life, about chance, about God, and about love? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

While Irene is a minor character structurally, she turns out to be both a critical and tremendously important character in terms of the plot itself. Why is this so? How does Irene come to affect the story so deeply?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that life is a series of random chances and occurrences, a fate or plan ordained by God, or something in between? Explain.

## Vocabulary

mutable, light pollution, proficiency, acrophobic, agoraphobic





# Characters

## Daniel

Daniel Jae Ho Bae is a long-haired 17-year-old Korean-American boy who passionately believes in love and romance. Poetic, creative, intelligent, and expressive, Daniel believes in God, and in Signs from God, which in turn compel him to seek out Natasha when he sees her on the street. His faith in God also helps him to believe in love at first sight, though he must endeavor scientifically to win Natasha's heart. Daniel ultimately succeeds in doing so, but he also grows as a person due to his time with Natasha. He becomes stronger and more independent as a person. Nevertheless, he is heartbroken by her deportation and does not see her again for ten years.

## Natasha

Natasha "Tasha" Kingsley is a 17-year-old Jamaican girl who loves the United States and does not want to be deported to Jamaica. She does not believe that she is capable of loving another person because she did not love her first boyfriend, Rob. Considering herself a rational realist, Natasha does not believe in God. Her sole purpose on the day that the novel focuses on is to ensure that she finds a way to stop her family from being deported to Jamaica due to her father's DUI, but she fails in this respect. She is distracted by Daniel, with whom she begins to fall in love but fights it every step of the way. Because of Daniel, she becomes a more passionate person. Her reaching out to thank Irene ensures that Irene does not commit suicide, but also ensures she meets Daniel on a plane ten years later.

## Irene

Irene is a minor but crucial character. Irene works as a security guard at United States Customs and Immigration Services. Irene is sad and lonely, so she does her job to have what limited contact she can with other people. Her slowness in bringing Natasha through security sets off a chain of events for Natasha, for which she later calls and leaves a voicemail of thanks for Irene. This message in turn causes Irene to decide against committing suicide. Thus, Irene goes on to work as a flight attendant, becomes genuinely happy, and comes across Natasha many years later on a flight. When Irene thanks Natasha and the two introduce themselves, they are overheard by Daniel.

## Charlie

Charles "Charlie" Jae Won Bae is the older brother of Daniel. Charlie is described as an asshole by Daniel—a description that Natasha comes to share. Charlie is overconfident, cruel, and bullying, though he used to be close with Daniel as a child. Charlie has earned the ire of his parents for being sent home from Harvard for two semesters.



Natasha comes to realize that Charlie is the way he is because he does not love himself, and that he hates Daniel for Daniel not hating himself. Charlie's solitary act of good in the novel is to give Natasha Daniel's phone number.

## Peter

Peter is the younger brother of Natasha. Although born in America, Peter has idealized Jamaica through the rest of his family's stories and roots in Jamaica. Peter, unlike Natasha, cannot wait to go and live in Jamaica. When Natasha brings Daniel home, Peter embarrasses her by telling Daniel that he is the first boy Natasha has ever brought home.

## Jeremy Fitzgerald

Jeremy Fitzgerald is an immigration attorney who fails to help Natasha because he is sleeping with his paralegal instead. Fitzgerald is also the Yale alumnus who meets with Daniel and recommends him to Yale. Fitzgerald's decision to pursue his paralegal results in the observation that love changes everything—sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worst.

## Samuel

Samuel Kingsley is the father of Natasha and Peter and the husband of Patricia. Samuel is a dreamer who blames his inability to be a famous actor on his family, though he later contends he did not mean this when he said it. Samuel's first American role leads to Samuel drinking too much, hitting a police car, and confessing that he and his family are in the country illegally. Samuel thus becomes the root of the problems Natasha and her family face as they are due to be deported.

## Patricia

Patricia Kingsley is the wife of Samuel and the mother of Natasha and Peter. Patricia has had to become a very practical, reasonable woman who is oriented toward work due to her husband's irresponsibility and unfulfilled promises. Patricia ensures that Natasha sees the importance of practicality—but also strives to instill in Natasha a faith in God's plan. It is Patricia who tells Natasha that everything will be all right when they are deported.

## Lester

Lester Barnes is a United States Customs and Immigration Services agent who meets with Natasha when Natasha is late to her own appointment. Lester is the one who

directs Natasha to meet with Fitzgerald. It is also Lester who relays Natasha's message of thanks to Irene.

## **Third-person narrator (God)**

The third-person narrator, presumably God (or the divine intelligence of the universe), narrates chapters that are not narrated by Daniel and Natasha. God fills in important contextual details about things being discussed, such as eyes or fate, and also expands upon the characters beyond the periphery of Daniel and Natasha, such as Christiansen and Irene. God allows readers to see beyond Daniel and Natasha, both in the present, and in the future—and demonstrates that God does have a plan for everyone.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Nirvana phone case

Natasha's Nirvana phone case featuring art from the album "Nevermind" symbolizes human loneliness and unexpected consequences. The album art features a baby underwater behind a dollar bill attached to a fishing hook and line. The phone cover featuring this art is owned by Natasha, and is studied by Irene each time Natasha visits USCIS. Irene dwells on the cover because she is lonely and needs human contact. Doing so allows her to be in the company of Natasha for at least a few moments—but it also unexpectedly ensures that Natasha will meet Lester, who will in turn refer her to Jeremy Fitzgerald. It also ensures that Irene will download the album "Nevermind," which will in turn help her decide to kill herself.

## DUI

The DUI (or ticket for Driving Under the Influence of alcohol) that Natasha's father receives represents tragedy. After finally securing a part in a play, Natasha's father performs incredibly well and then goes out drinking with his actor friends. On the way home, he runs into a parked police car and ends up confessing to the police that he and his family are in the country illegally. Not only does he receive a DUI, but immigration services are called. The DUI is a matter of tragedy, for it ruins what chances the family has in America.

## Conductor's message about God

The subway train conductor's message about finding God symbolizes God's plan and His hopes for people. While on the train, Daniel overhears the conductor telling people to find God, as the conductor himself has recently found God and become overjoyed with life. Daniel decides to travel around the city to find God—and seeing Natasha with a DEUS EX MACHINA tattoo going into Second Coming records proves to be the Sign Daniel is seeking. This leads him to meet Natasha.

## Pink headphones

Natasha's pink headphones symbolize the American Dream, hope, and love. They were purchased for Natasha by her father when she was young as a way of alluding to the coming American Dream the family would have. Hope was in their future, her father argued, and the headphones became symbolic of hope and love as a result. The headphones are Natasha's constant companions for years until they are cracked when Daniel saves her life. When they are cracked, this can be taken as a sign of irony that Natasha's American Dream may be ending (the shattering of the headphone is the



shattering of the Dream), but in reality, it simply signals the beginning of a new kind of dream.

## Daniel's notebook

Daniel's notebook is symbolic of the ability to love. Daniel keeps a notebook with him to write poetry, which is a pure expression of his emotions. Natasha recognizes this as a sign of Daniel's ability to love, and to fall in love. It is in part because of this notebook that she tells him not to fall in love with her.

## The 36 questions

The 36 questions from the love study symbolize the potential of scientifically being able to study love. The questions were posed to one another by participants in the study, who had to look into one another's eyes as well. Some of the couples in the experiment did fall in love and chose to get married. Daniel uses the 36 questions to prove to Natasha that love can be studied scientifically. The questions get Daniel and Natasha to open up more about themselves—and help plunge them into love.

## Norebang/music

Norebang/music symbolizes the utter expression of emotion, and by extension, love. While out singing norebang, Daniel and Natasha end up kissing as their emotions are on clear display through the music. This thrills Daniel, who realizes in that moment that what he has with Natasha is real love, not mere science or a chemical reaction. It is a transformative moment that changes everything.

## Dreams

Dreams, for Daniel, symbolize the promise of potential and doing great things while for Natasha, dreams symbolize waste and stupidity. Daniel, who has great faith that everything happens for a reason, and is also a creative, feeling person, believes dreams are what inspire people to do great things and make the world a better place. Natasha, whose life has been upended by her father's failed dreams, considers dreams to be a waste of time and energy and believes they are ultimately stupid because they do not come true and hurt people when they don't.

## Daniel's phone number

Daniel's phone number symbolizes Natasha's desire to believe in love. Realizing she wants to be with Daniel, Natasha manages to convince Charlie to give her Daniel's phone number. Natasha realizes that she wants to believe in love, and having Daniel's



number—both literally, to call him, and symbolically, to be his girlfriend—makes such a thing possible.

## **Natasha's thank-you message for Irene**

Natasha's thank-you message symbolizes the importance of doing good and the intervention of God. The thank-you message is left for Irene on Lester's phone. Natasha extends her thanks because if Irene had never held her up, Natasha would never have met Lester or had a meeting with Fitzgerald—before which she met Daniel. The message is a good deed and prevents the suicide of Irene, which in turn leads to Irene thanking Natasha on a plane ten years later—and unknowingly paving the way for a reunion between Daniel and Natasha.



# Settings

## New York

New York is the main setting for the novel. It is a city unlike any other, Natasha explains, and it is a city to which she will ever after compare all other cities. Daniel harbors similar romantic views about the city, wherein he may find Signs from God about life and his purpose in life. It is in New York that Natasha and her family have come to live following their illegal entry into the United States, and they have lived there for years. New York is where Daniel's parents immigrated, and where Daniel and Charlie were born. New York is the place where Daniel and Natasha meet and fall in love during her last day in America.

## USCIS security station

The United States Customs and Immigration Services security station is where Irene works and delays Natasha. Lonely, Irene has taken the job because it allows her limited contact with other people. Her decision to unintentionally delay Natasha by looking at Natasha's phone case for what seems the thousandth time results in a series of events that prevent Irene from committing suicide.

## Daniel's family's store

Daniel's family's store demonstrates the cultural clash and racism that inevitably occur when immigrants do not assimilate. As Koreans owning a black hair care store, their customers are almost always black. Because of this, and because of Korean stereotypes regarding black hair, Daniel's father insists that Natasha's hair is too big and needs some relaxer. This humiliates Daniel, but it also underscores the importance of immigrants in America assimilating without losing their own cultural identity. One can be accepting of others in America for their differences.

## Jamaica

Jamaica is the homeland of Natasha and her family, and the place to which Natasha does not want to return because she has come to consider America her home. Natasha spends the majority of the novel attempting to find a way to avoid her family's deportation to Jamaica. Meanwhile, Peter, who has been born in America, has come to idealize Jamaica because of his family's past there and cannot wait to move. Eventually, Natasha comes to love Jamaica and to consider it home, ultimately deciding that this is where she will build her life for at least ten years.

## Airplane

The airplane is the final setting in the novel. The airplane becomes symbolic of new beginnings and new possibilities—new destinations, new journeys, and new dreams. The flight is being overseen by Irene, now a flight attendant, who notices Natasha as a passenger. Irene and Natasha introduce themselves to one another, which is in turn overheard by Daniel, unknowingly on the same plane. A new future is possible between Daniel and Natasha because of their encounter on that plane.



# Themes and Motifs

## Immigration and the American Dream

There are countless reasons immigrants come to the United States, as demonstrated in *The Sun is Also a Star*. The novel relies heavily on the immigrant experience in America, as do the lives of Daniel, Charlie, and Natasha. The families of each have their own reasons for immigration.

The reader comes to know both families in turn. While Daniel and Charlie were both born in America and consider themselves to be American first and foremost, their mother and father were both born in, and emigrated from, Korea. Their parents came to the United States because they were chasing the American Dream, wanting a better life for themselves and their future children. This was inspired by the drudgery and poverty that their father faced when he worked with their grandfather doing crabbing.

Meanwhile, although Natasha and her parents were born in Jamaica, Natasha's younger brother Peter was born in America. Natasha's father came to America to pursue his own American Dream. He wanted to become a famous actor but after two years of no successes, his wife and Natasha immigrated. Natasha's mother came over because she believed in Samuel's dreams at that point—but she soon realized that she had to provide for her family because Samuel would not.

Being born elsewhere, Natasha has come to fall in love with the United States and she does not want to leave after having immigrated there. Peter, who was born in America, has come to idealize and idolize Jamaica as his parents' homeland, and as such cannot wait to immigrate there. Daniel and Charlie, both born in America, love being Americans. But whereas Daniel can appreciate being an American with Korean ancestry, Charlie is ashamed by it.

## Assimilation

Assimilation is explored thematically in *The Sun is Also a Star* as an aspect that is critical in moving to a new country. Immigrants to any country, no matter what that country is, have obligations as newly-minted citizens to adapt to their new circumstances. They must become citizens of the new country and must adopt their customs and culture, though this does not mean they have to forget their own.

This was the intention of Daniel's mother as she named her sons using both American and Korean customs. Daniel's mother and father, despite their refusal to assimilate into American society—though they want to benefit from living in America—want their children to both honor their present and their past. Daniel and Charlie are both proud of being Americans. But whereas Daniel respects his Korean past, Charlie hates it because his parents have never even tried to become Americanized.



Within ten years, their parents have sold their store and spend half the year in Korea and half the year in America. It is clear that they are torn between the world they knew and the American world they have come to live in through legal processes—but tried to avoid becoming full-fledged parts of. They are contrasted with Natasha's parents who worry their Jamaican accents will hold them back in America. They want to live as Americans in America.

The same is true of Natasha, but Natasha has different ideas about what that means. For example, Natasha's mother believes relaxed, straightened, and elegantly-styled hair will help Natasha to fit in, while Natasha prizes her American individualism and desire to look beautiful by growing an afro. Nevertheless, despite the attempts the family makes to assimilate, it is Peter—the only American-born member of the family—who styles his hair, clothing, and attitude as if he were actually from Jamaica. Despite the attempts of Natasha and her parents to Americanize, they must leave America because they are in the country illegally. Natasha, upon returning to Jamaica, comes to assimilate to Jamaican culture once more—even returning to her former accent.

## God's Plans

One of the central themes and arguments presented in *The Sun is Also a Star* is the idea that everything happens according to God's plans. This idea is discussed at great length throughout the course of the novel. Initially, Natasha rejects the idea that there could be a higher purpose or intelligence involved in human affairs at all (she does not believe in God), but eventually, she comes around to thinking otherwise.

Daniel has long believed that God operates in human affairs. Humans have the choice as to whether or not they will fulfill God's plan for them, but if they seek Him, they will find His signs and things will make sense as they unfold. When Daniel listens to the conductor of his subway train urging people to seek out God, Daniel takes it as a sign to do so. He allows fate to take him where it will, during which time he first sees Natasha. He accepts this all as a part of God's plan.

Natasha believes her meeting with Daniel is merely circumstantial. But between Daniel's earnestness, faith, and the number of what would otherwise be considered chances or coincidences pile up, Natasha reevaluates things by tracing her own events. If she had never been delayed by Irene, she never would have been referred elsewhere by Lester, and therein she never would have met Daniel—who happens to have a meeting in the same building on the same day as she does with the same lawyer.

When Natasha must leave America, both she and Daniel begin to question God's plan. They both wonder if maybe the reason for them meeting one another was not chance instead, or if the reason had nothing to do with true love. Ten years pass, and Natasha and Daniel unknowingly end up on the same plane—with Irene as their attendant. When Irene thanks Natasha for her thank-you message which saved Irene's life, Daniel overhears the conversation. It is not by chance that they meet again, and this is left up to the will of God.



## Signs from God

The author presents the argument in the novel that if one seeks God and His signs, he or she will find Him. Daniel, who has always believed in God, takes this advice to heart. It is because of Daniel's faith in God and God's plans that the novel can arguably be said to happen at all.

Daniel is receptive to the theologically-minded subway train conductor who urges passengers to seek out God. Daniel does just that, allowing God, fate, and the universe to guide his journey. It is during this time that he first notices Natasha. His initial attraction to her beauty and confidence is transformed by his belief in God.

On Natasha's shoulder, Daniel sees a tattoo which, from Latin, translates to "God from the machine." He watches as Natasha goes into a record store called Second Coming. Moments after meeting her, he saves her from being hit by a car driven by a man with the last name Christiansen—with the man himself deciding he needs to turn around his life after what has happened.

Beyond these initial signs, Daniel can feel in his heart that he is meant to be with Natasha. He can also envision himself with Natasha into their old age. These feelings are cemented by additional signs which include the fact that Daniel and Natasha both have appointments with the very same lawyer in the very same building on the very same day. Though Daniel and Natasha must part for a decade, they are reunited ten years later on a plane with the very woman who began their journey ten years before—a clear sign from God.

## True Love

True love, however it may be arrived at, can weather any storm, as illustrated in *The Sun is Also a Star*. True love is something in which Daniel fervently believes, and which Natasha dismisses at first. Daniel devotes his day to making Natasha believe in love, and to making Natasha fall in love with him. Their love proves to be true and to last over a decade.

It takes the course of the day for Natasha to admit that she has indeed come not only to believe in true love, but to admit she has fallen in love with Daniel. Natasha, who has had bad experiences with dreamers thanks to her father, and who faces deportation, is understandably concerned about giving her heart away to someone like Daniel. Yet even so, the way in which Daniel and Natasha approach love is different.

Daniel and Natasha approach love based on their character construction. Natasha, ever the scientific rationalist, believes love is nothing more than chemical reactions in the human body. Daniel, the romantic, believes that the feelings, emotions, and understandings of love defy pure science and truly exist independently of mere chemical reactions. Regardless, the love that Daniel and Natasha come to share is true.



Their love is put to the test when Daniel and Natasha must be separated when Natasha and her family return to Jamaica. Natasha and Daniel do their best to keep in touch with each other, promising things like visits and never falling out of touch, though they eventually do fall apart. Ten years pass, but the spark between them remains. It is reignited the second they see one another on a plane, reunited by the woman who brought them together in the first place—Irene.



# Styles

## Point of View

Nicola Yoon's novel *The Sun is Also a Star* is related from both the first-person and the third-person points of view. The first-person points of view, told from the perspectives of her two primary protagonists, Daniel and Natasha, are related in the present-tense as the plot unfolds. The third-person narrator, seemingly God (or a divine intelligence of the universe) speaks not only in present-tense, but also past-tense when dealing with the past and in future tense when speaking omnisciently about the future. Chapters told by God provide important contextual information about events, objects, ideas, and people—such as readers learning that Charlie will forever be a bad person. This gives the reader not only a personal view of events—through the eyes of Daniel and Natasha—but also the wide-ranging, overarching perspective of God in those chapters. The different perspectives of Daniel and Natasha reinforce Yoon's concept that true love pulls together two distinct individuals into one while maintaining their own identities. It also allows the reader intimate glimpses into the lives of Daniel and Natasha before the other becomes aware of them. This creates a complex and detailed dimensionality to the characters, making them very real and very much human.

## Language and Meaning

Nicola Yoon relates her novel *The Sun is Also a Star* in language that is alternatively considered and educated, and poetic and passionate. This is done primarily for the reason that the majority of the novel is told from the perspectives of either Natasha or Daniel. Each character approaches the story with his or her own worldview—and this determines their language. Natasha, the realist, rationalist, and scientist, has an impressive command of large words and scientific topics which range from black matter to the consideration of love as a chemical reaction. This authenticates her characterization as someone wholly driven by practical, evidence-based logic. Meanwhile, Daniel, the creative and faithful dreamer, speaks poetically, sometimes even speaking by way of actual poems. He does not hesitate to talk about things like romance, true love, God, fate, and similar passionate ideas, thus authenticating his own characterization and making him someone very much believable. Both characters' sections of the novel are told in the present-tense, creating the effect that the story is happening in real-time before the reader's very eyes.

## Structure

*The Sun is Also a Star* is divided into unnumbered chapters told from the points of view of Daniel, Natasha, and God accordingly. The narrator of the chapter is denoted in the title of chapters told by Daniel and Natasha, while the omniscience of the third-person narrator in chapters dealing with other characters, ideas, and situations is surmised as



God. The majority of the chapters are told by Daniel and Natasha, as they form two sides to the same story, and as they form two separate and independent entities that together form true love. This merging of their characters through love reflects the title of the novel, as the sun is both a star and the sun. True love is and is not two people combined in one. Step by step, hour by hour, and thought by thought by way of Natasha and Daniel alternatingly, the novel is formed. Two lives must make up true love, for one alone cannot.



## Quotes

My mom says it's time for me to give up now, and that what I'm doing is futile.

-- Natasha (Natasha)

**Importance:** Natasha, in denial about having to be deported to Jamaica, decides to continue doing homework as usual. Her mother tells her what she is doing is useless. Still, Natasha insists on normality, and seeks to find a person, a way, or to appeal even to something like fate for a way for her and her family to stay in New York. This is Natasha's primary focus early on.

You can't always see God's plan.

-- Natasha's dad (Natasha)

**Importance:** Natasha admits her parents' belief in everything happening for a reason according to God's plan is not something which she believes. However, her experiences at USCIS begin to challenge her assumptions about things happening just because. Had Irene not made Natasha late, she never would have met Lester who never would have put her in touch with Jeremy Fitzgerald.

I don't think I've ever noticed anyone the way I'm noticing her.

-- Daniel (Daniel)

**Importance:** Here, Daniel describes his reaction to Natasha. He not only finds her beautiful, but also has a déjà-vu like experience. He also has a vision of the two of them in their old age. It is another sign that Daniel was meant to meet Natasha.

Don't fall in love with me, Daniel.

-- Natasha (Natasha)

**Importance:** Here, Natasha ironically tells Daniel not to fall in love with her. Apart from not believing in love, Natasha does not believe she is capable of love. But by then, Daniel is already falling in love with her. Natasha herself is, also ironically, romantically weakening toward Daniel.

So why does Daniel feel like something more?

-- God (Love: A Chemical History)

**Importance:** When Rob broke up with Natasha, she rationalized everything and got over him by ascribing emotions to chemical reactions. Now, she attempts to do the same thing when confronted with Daniel, but is unable to do so. To her, Daniel feels like something more than facts and evidence and chemical reactions. This is because Natasha is falling in love with him.

I don't care what she says about love and chemicals. This will not fade away. This is more than chemistry.



-- Daniel (Daniel)

**Importance:** While out singing norebang, emotions get the better of Daniel and Natasha. They end up kissing as a result. In this transformative moment, Daniel realizes that there is serious romance between them leading to love. Natasha is amazed, and only wants more of Daniel.

We're not meant to be, Daniel. I'm an undocumented immigrant. I'm being deported. Today is my last day in America. Tomorrow I'll be gone.

-- Natasha (Daniel)

**Importance:** Daniel has had enough of Natasha being hot and cold toward him, so he challenges her and asks her what her problem is. Natasha at last admits what her situation is. She explains she is in the country illegally, and will be deported that very night. Daniel is stunned.

Hope is the thing with feathers. I feel it fluttering in my heart.

-- Natasha (Natasha)

**Importance:** When Natasha meets with Fitzgerald, she explains her situation to him. Fitzgerald agrees to help and to do all he can. He believes things will turn out for the best. For the first time in hours, Natasha begins to hope again that everything will work out after all.

My logic is completely refutable but she doesn't refute me. Instead, she slips her hand into mine and smiles.

-- Daniel (Daniel)

**Importance:** When Daniel and Natasha meet up again at the end of the afternoon, he tells her that they were meant to be together. Natasha does not argue with him this time, which surprises Daniel. Natasha does not argue with Daniel because she feels hopeful and wants to be with him, and because she wants to believe in love.

Love always changes everything.

-- God (Jeremy Fitzgerald: A Fairy-Tale History, Part 2)

**Importance:** The narrator reveals that, in a month's time, Jeremy Fitzgerald will leave his wife and marry Hannah. Jeremy's first children will grow up wrecked by the betrayal, while the children Jeremy has with Hannah will grow up unafraid of love, and happy in their lives. The narrator refuses to say whether Jeremy's actions were right or wrong in leaving his wife for Hannah, but does say that love changes everything. This is as true for his life as it is for Daniel and Natasha.

Everything will be alright.

-- Natasha (Patricia)

**Importance:** When Natasha's plane takes to the sky, she is heartbroken. Her mother





proves an unexpected source of comfort, telling her that everything will be okay. Natasha does not believe so, but eventually, things do turn out alright.

My name is Natasha, and I remember you.  
-- Natasha (Irene: An Alternate History)

**Importance:** As the novel comes to a close, Irene finds Natasha on a plane. She decides to thank Natasha for saving her life with her thank you message ten years before. When Natasha introduces herself, it catches the attention of David, who also happens to be on the plane unknowing Natasha is so close by.