

# **This Burns My Heart: A Novel Study Guide**

**This Burns My Heart: A Novel by Samuel Park**

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# Contents

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <a href="#">This Burns My Heart: A Novel 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="#">Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2.....</a>        | <a href="#">5</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part 1: Chapters 3-5.....</a>                     | <a href="#">7</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part 2: Chapters 6-7.....</a>                     | <a href="#">9</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part 2: Chapters 8-9.....</a>                     | <a href="#">11</a> |
| <a href="#">Part 3: Chapters 10-12.....</a>                   | <a href="#">13</a> |
| <a href="#">Part 3: Chapters 13-16.....</a>                   | <a href="#">15</a> |
| <a href="#">Part 4: Chapters 17-20.....</a>                   | <a href="#">17</a> |
| <a href="#">Characters.....</a>                               | <a href="#">19</a> |
| <a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>                           | <a href="#">23</a> |
| <a href="#">Themes.....</a>                                   | <a href="#">25</a> |
| <a href="#">Style.....</a>                                    | <a href="#">27</a> |
| <a href="#">Quotes.....</a>                                   | <a href="#">29</a> |
| <a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>                    | <a href="#">31</a> |



## Plot Summary

This *Burns My Heart* is a novel by writer Samuel Park. In this novel, Soo-Ja marries a man who she believes will take her to Seoul and allow her to become a diplomat. However, Soo-Ja quickly discovers after her wedding that her husband has no intention of breaking with tradition, but instead plans to live with his parents whom it is his responsibility to care for as they age. Soo-Ja is miserable in her life with her new husband, a misery made worse by the knowledge that the man she really loves is living the life she could have had with another woman. *Burns My Heart* is a novel of love and loss, but it is also a novel of self-discovery and strength that will inspire all who read it.

Soo-Ja is the twenty something daughter of a factory owner. Soo-Ja has delayed getting married because she dreams of traveling. Unfortunately, Soo-Ja becomes aware that she cannot put off her marriage much longer. Soo-Ja's mother advises her to marry a weak man she can boss around. With this in mind, Soo-Ja chooses Min, the wealthy son of a business man whom she believes has dreams similar to her own and will allow her to dictate their future. Soon after the wedding, however, Soo-Ja learns that Min tricked her into marrying him to prove to his father that he could win a woman of substance.

Soo-Ja finds herself, three years later, married to a weak man who allows his parents to walk all over him and the mother of a small daughter. Soo-Ja is forced to serve her parents-in-law and submit to their belittling and outrageous treatment of herself and her child. Soo-Ja is often reminded that she failed to provide a male grandchild to the family and that she is simply another mouth to feed in their household. Later, Soo-Ja learns that her father-in-law owes a great deal of money on his business that he cannot pay back. The father-in-law has gone an added step by signing the business over to Min, making Min responsible for his father's debts. This means Min will go to jail if a suitable amount of money is not procured to cover the debts.

After speaking with Min, Soo-Ja decides against asking her own father for the money that her husband owes. To avoid being arrested, Min runs away and hides near Pujan. On a visit to see Min some months later, Soo-Ja sneaks away to see an old beau, the man she might have married. While gone, Soo-Ja's sister-in-law loses Soo-Ja's daughter in the busy marketplace. Soo-Ja spends the night alone searching for her child, finally receiving help from her former beau, Dr. Yul Kim, helps her in her search. Eventually they have success and find the child, but their happiness is tempered when they are forced to part ways.

Many years later, Soo-Ja finds herself managing a small hotel in Seoul while her husband blames an old back injury on his inability to provide for his family. Min's parents have moved to America and he and their daughter, Hana, dream of joining them. Unfortunately, there is not enough money. Yul and his wife, who are moving to Seoul, come to stay at Soo-Ja's hotel, both complicating and bringing joy to her life. Soo-Ja



fights off Yul's advances reluctantly, determined to stay true to her wedding vows despite what her heart wants.

After Soo-Ja makes a successful real estate investment that pays off, thanks to Yul's help, Soo-Ja returns to her hometown to bury her father. In her absence, Min steals Soo-Ja's money and goes off to America with their daughter. Soo-Ja follows, swallowing her pride and agreeing to work for her miserable father-in-law. However, Min finally sees what his parents are doing to his beloved wife and what they could possibly do to his daughter. Min sends Soo-Ja and Hana back to Seoul, giving Soo-Ja the freedom to marry Yul.



# Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2

## Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Summary

Samuel Park is a college professor who lives in Chicago.

Soo-Ja watches her husband moving around their marriage bedroom and thinks that he is a liar who tricked her.

Soo-Ja and her friend, Jae-Hwa, when they become aware of a man following them. Convinced the man means them harm, Soo-Ja leads both him and her companion on a maze through the city, finally coming out in front of a police station where a cop knocks the man to the ground. The man confesses that he simply thought Soo-Ja was pretty and he was following her in hopes that she would lead him to her home so he might ask her on a date at some future date. Soo-Ja laughs and refuses to give him her name.

When Soo-Ja arrives home, her father is angry with her because she applied to become a diplomat without telling him. Soo-Ja's father refuses to allow her to attend diplomat school in Seoul. Soo-Ja goes to bed and lies awake, crying. Soo-Ja hears a sound outside and goes to check it out. Soo-Ja is surprised to discover that the boy from the police station, Min Lee, is outside with a group of friends from college. Soo-Ja flirts with him, but again turns him down for a date.

The following day is Seollal. All of Soo-Ja's relatives have come to celebrate. Soo-Ja overhears a couple of her cousins making fun of her desire to be a diplomat. Later, Soo-Ja's mother suggests that if she wants to be a diplomat and see the world she marry a man she can control.

Soo-Ja goes to see Min as he works out in the college gym. Min tells her that he is going to Seoul to join in the political protests taking place there. Soo-Ja is excited by the idea and wishes she could go as well, but knows her parents will not allow it. While Min is gone, he writes to her often, though she never writes back. One day Soo-Ja's father finds the letters and tells her that Min is not appropriate for her.

Another letter from Min asks that Soo-Ja meet with the leader of their student resistance group in order to speak to the mother of a young boy from Daegu who has gone missing. Soo-Ja jumps at the chance to do something exciting. Soo-Ja and the leader, Yul, meet on a city bus. Yul speaks to Soo-Ja about what they are about to do. Soo-Ja feels an immediate connection to Yul.

When they arrive at the home of the missing boy, the mother refuses to speak to them out of fear of reprisals from the government. However, Yul comes to realize that the mother is hiding her son's beaten and drowned body in the house. Yul leads a procession into downtown that includes the mother, Soo-Ja, and a group of student protestors. As they approach the government buildings the police open fire on the



protestors. Yul saves Soo-Ja's life by motioning for her to get down seconds before the firing begins.

## Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Analysis

In the first two chapters of the novel, the reader is introduced to the two men who will make an impact in Soo-Ja's life. The first is Min, a rich young man who follows Soo-Ja through town in the hopes of getting a date with her. Soo-Ja finds this attention both bothersome and flattering. In time Soo-Ja befriends this young man and becomes impressed with him as she discovers that he is both weak and terribly in love with her, as well as courageous in that he has joined the student protestors protesting the policies of the current president of their country. Soo-Ja wants nothing more than to travel the world and see exotic places, which is why she has applied to become a diplomat. Since her parents will not allow her to go to diplomat school, Soo-Ja begins to look toward a weak husband as a way to get to Seoul and diplomat school.

While corresponding with Min, Soo-Ja is given an opportunity to participate in the student revolt by helping a protest leader speak to the mother of a missing boy. When Soo-Ja meet Yul, she finds him intelligent, charming, and interesting. The connection between Soo-Ja and Yul is immediate. However, Yul is far from weak. The reader comes to understand that Soo-Ja is falling quickly in love with Yul, but her desire to travel the world continues to be so strong and her mother's advice still so fresh that it is uncertain if Soo-Ja will allow herself to choose a strong man like Yul. The prologue gives the reader a hint as to Soo-Ja's choice, by suggesting the man she marries is not honest wither her during their courtship. The only question that remains is it whether she marries Yul or Min.



## Part 1: Chapters 3-5

### Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Summary

Min returns from Seoul and immediately asks Soo-Ja to marry him. Soo-Ja now sees Min as a hero and quick to agree to his proposal. Soo-Ja's father is reluctant to give his permission, reminding Soo-Ja that Min is an eldest son which means that he will take on the responsibility of caring for his parents and young siblings when he is married. Soo-Ja insists she does not care, content in the knowledge that her in-laws are wealthy business owners and will not need to rely on Min so early in their marriage. Later that night, Min sneaks into Soo-Ja's room and she allows him to make love to her, content in the knowledge that their shared passion will insure their marriage. A short time later, Soo-Ja and her family hold a ceremony in which Min officially makes an offer of marriage.

Yul comes to see Soo-Ja in her art classroom weeks after she becomes engaged to Min. They speak for a few minutes and Soo-Ja teaches Yul how to draw the four gentlemen flowers. Soo-Ja then draws a picture of plum flowers for Yul to take home. Yul politely prepares to leave soon after. Soo-Ja quickly follows after him. On the street, Yul asks why Soo-Ja wants to marry Min. Yul suggests that Min is not the kind of man to marry. Yul then asks Soo-Ja to marry him. Soo-Ja considers this proposal, but is afraid to tell him that she has already given her body to Yul. For this reason, Soo-Ja refuses Yul even though she suspects that she will regret her choice.

Soo-Ja and Min are married in a traditional Korean ceremony. Soo-Ja spends her first three nights as a married woman with her parents. On the fourth night, Soo-Ja goes to Min's home where he lives with his parents. Soo-Ja is shocked when Min barely offers her welcome and does not turn on any lights so that she might see her new room. As Soo-Ja prepares their bedding, Min tells her that he has more brothers and sisters than he had originally revealed. Min tells Soo-Ja that he lied about his family because he did not want her to turn down his proposal. Min says that his parents thought he would end up with some factory girl, but he managed to win over the daughter of the factory owner.

### Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Analysis

Min returns to Daegu in these chapters and quickly asks Soo-Ja to marry him. Soo-Ja has convinced herself that someone like Min would allow her to live the life she wants, to travel the world and see everything she has always wanted to see. Min adds to this idea by promising her that he will allow her to attend diplomat school as soon as they are married. For this reason, Soo-Ja gives herself to Min completely despite her father's hesitation at giving his permission for them to marry. In fact, Soo-Ja's father points out that by marrying an eldest son, Soo-Ja will be obligated by tradition to care for her husband's family for the rest of her life. Soo-Ja dismisses this, seeing Min as less than traditional because of his participation in the student rebellion against the president of



their country. However, Soo-Ja will soon learn that not only did Min lie about allowing her to go to diplomat school, but he also lied about the size of his family and his family wealth.

Before the wedding, the protest leader, Yul proposes to Soo-Ja. Soo-Ja clearly takes this proposal seriously and would accept it if she had not already given herself to Min. Soo-Ja, even though she seems willing to go around tradition, is a traditional girl. Soo-Ja has already committed her body to Min and does not want to change Yul's affection for her by telling him what she has done. Due to the fact that she has already shared her bed with Min, and could possibly already be pregnant by him, she does not want to expose her less than proper behavior to the man she loves. Although she knows she will regret her decision, Soo-Ja turns down Yul's proposal, leaving the reader curious how long it will be before she truly comprehends her mistake.





## Part 2: Chapters 6-7

### Part 2: Chapters 6-7 Summary

Several years have passed. Soo-Ja now has a three-year-old daughter. Soo-Ja is unhappy in her life. She and Min continue to live with his parents where Soo-Ja is treated no better than a common servant. On this day Soo-Ja's mother-in-law asks her to leave the house because they are expecting the first potential match for Min's younger sister from the matchmaker. Soo-Ja protests because it is cold outside, but afraid her mother-in-law will take her daughter, Hana, from her, Soo-Ja agrees. On the way out of the yard, Soo-Ja discovers no one has taken the fish from the pond in the yard. Soo-Ja struggles to take them from the pond by hand so that they will not freeze in the expected storm. As she finishes, Na-yeong's potential husband arrives. The man mistakes her for Na-yeong and then insists that she join the meeting. Under protest, Soo-Ja joins the meeting and is horrified when the potential husband pays attention to no one but her.

That night, Soo-Ja discovers someone has stolen her makeup bag from her room. When Soo-Ja confronts her mother-in-law there is an argument and the mother-in-law physically attacks Soo-Ja. When the father and Min walk in, the mother-in-law accuses Soo-Ja of attacking her when it was really the other way around. Min drags Soo-Ja to their room and threatens to hit her, but stops when she accusing him of being worse than his father. Min tells her that his father once had a room specifically to beat his wife. Min then tells her that Na-yeong's suitor chastised him on his treatment of Soo-Ja.

Father-in-law comes into Soo-Ja's room while she is ironing and tells her that her living in their home is costing them money and that her dowry has run out. Father-in-law insists that Soo-Ja ask her father for more money to cover her growing expenses. Later Soo-Ja goes to visit her parents after a trip to the market. Soo-Ja is debating whether or not to ask for the money when she learns that her childhood friend, Jae-Hwa, is being abused in her marriage. Soo-Ja goes to Jae-Hwa and helps her leave her husband. That night, Soo-Ja tells Min about his father's request for money. Min explains that his father borrowed large amounts of money for his business, but is unable to pay it all back. Not only this, but his father transferred the company into Min's name, making the debts Min's responsibility. Now Min is facing possible jail time. However, Min tells Soo-Ja he does not want her to ask her father for the money. This makes Soo-Ja proud of Min and as though she could still love him.

By December, the police have come for Min several times. Min is hiding with an uncle in Pusan. Min sends letters, expressing his loneliness. After several months, Soo-Ja decides to visit him. When she tells this to her father-in-law, it is decided the entire family will go. Soo-Ja is shocked by Min's thinner façade and his overwhelming loneliness. Soo-Ja spends as much time with him as she can with their daughter in tow. Soo-Ja is even more in shock by the lack of concern on behalf of Min's parents. They do not even seem to want to see him.



On the final day of their visit, Soo-Ja decides to go into the city to see Yul who is now practicing medicine in a small practice near the market place. Soo-Ja finds his address and leaves Hana with Na-yeong, unwilling to drag her through the busy market place. When Soo-Ja arrives at the office, she waits a long time for an opportunity to see the doctor. However, when it is her turn Soo-Ja learns that Yul is off skiing with his wife. At home, Soo-Ja arrives only to learn that Na-yeong lost Hana. Soo-Ja drags Na-yeong out of the house and insists she show her where the child was lost. Soo-Ja is shocked to learn that Na-yeong followed her to the doctor's office and lost Hana in the busy market place. Soo-Ja searches the marketplace for hours, long after everyone has gone home. Finally Soo-Ja, cold and miserable, knocks on the door of the doctor's office in hope of some help, only to have her knock go unanswered.

## Part 2: Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Three years have passed and Soo-Ja is now the unhappy wife of Min and the mother of Hana. Soo-Ja is miserable in her home life because her in-laws treat her like a servant and her husband does not have the backbone to protect her from their cruelties. It is clear to the reader that Soo-Ja's in-laws are jealous of her beauty, her wealthy background, and her backbone.

Soo-Ja's complaints about her in-laws seem valid enough in the beginning of this section, but become so much clearer as the novel progresses. When the reader learns that Min's father made a mistake with his business and then set up Min to take the fall, the true nature of these people becomes clear. It continues to become clearer when they try to blackmail Soo-Ja into getting the needed money from her father and then refuse to express guilt or to be helpful to their son after placing him in such an unhappy situation. These are clearly self-absorbed people who do not care who they hurt with their whims.

Soo-Ja still thinks of Yul and it becomes clear that she regrets her choice when she attempts to go see him. However, this journey is fruitless except in highlighting all the things Soo-Ja could have had had she made different choices. At the same time, Soo-Ja learns that her desires have left her child in peril when her sister-in-law loses the child while following her into town. Now Soo-Ja is about to lose the only thing that still truly matters to her.



## Part 2: Chapters 8-9

### Part 2: Chapters 8-9 Summary

Soo-Ja is rescued from the snow by a nurse in the doctor's office. The nurse removes her clothes and warms her up. Soo-Ja asks to be awoken before Dr. Kim comes, but she is still asleep when he arrives. Yul knows about Soo-Ja's situation and offers to help her search for Hana. Soo-Ja reluctantly accepts his help. All day they search the market place. Soo-Ja is too distracted to speak to Yul much, but he remains at her side anyway. Finally they run into an old woman who saw a man pick Hana up off the street and take her to a sul-jib, a kind of bar. Soo-Ja and Yul quickly go to the sul-jib. At first they are unsure how to proceed. Then Soo-Ja calls out Hana's name and the little girl comes running out of a back door of the business, naked. Yul opens the gate and pulls the girl out. A man comes outside and argues with them. Yul threatens the man, but Soo-Ja insists they let things go. As they leave, however, the man questions their claim to Hana. The man's eldest son suggests he walk home with them to be sure they are who they say they are. It is a nice walk home where for a few minutes the four of them can pretend things are different, that they are a family. However, the walk comes to an end. Yul and Soo-Ja talk for a minute, both admitting that they are still in love with one another, but there is nothing they can do as long as they are each married to someone else.

Soo-Ja walks triumphantly into her uncle-in-law's house with Hana in her arms. Hana is greeted by everyone, including Min who has come to help in the search. For once Soo-Ja can see the potential of love in this family. Later, while everyone sleeps, Soo-Ja gets up to use the bathroom and finds Na-yeong still awake. Na-yeong is filled with guilt and wants forgiveness, but Soo-Ja refuses to give it. Back in Daegu, Soo-Ja goes home to tell her parents what happened and discovers that her father-in-law had gone there while Hana was missing and asked her father for the money he needed in her name. Soo-Ja is angry, but her father assures her that it is something he wants to do in order to care for his daughter. When Soo-Ja returns to Min's house, she confronts her father-in-law. Father-in-law tells her that her father is a fool to part with so much money, but that he feels he would be a fool not to take it. Clearly the man feels no regret and no shame.

Min comes back to Daegu. Soo-Ja has been staying with her parents. Soo-Ja meets Min in a restaurant and tells him that she feels it is time for them to separate. The laws in Korea state that a divorce must be the man's decision, therefore Min begs her to give her a divorce on any grounds he wishes. However, Min tells Soo-Ja if she leaves him, he will take Hana from her. Min threatens to allow his mother to raise Hana. Aware of the kind of life this will be for her child, Soo-Ja caves and agrees to remain married to Min.



## Part 2: Chapters 8-9 Analysis

Soo-Ja is left alone to search for her child; a search that is made even more painful by the fact that no one is willing to help, not even the police. In fact, people in the marketplace laugh at Soo-Ja, suggesting she is insane and that Hana never really existed. Only Yul remains by her side, offering as much emotional and physical support as she will accept. It is a difficult situation for Soo-Ja that is made lonelier by the fact that not even her husband has come to help. However, the child is finally located and Soo-Ja is able to return to her life. The only question is, does she really want to return to that life.

Seeing Yul again has only underscored the love that Soo-Ja feels for him and the life she could have had had if she married him. This makes the horror of her current situation even more clear. When she learns that her father-in-law has taken a large amount of money from her father, Soo-Ja is horrified and determined to end her marriage. However, Min still loves her and refuses to let her go, going as far as to threaten to steal their child if she refuses to stay with him. This places Soo-Ja in the unhappy situation of being in a loveless marriage in order to protect her daughter from the same upbringing that has made her husband spineless.



## Part 3: Chapters 10-12

### Part 3: Chapters 10-12 Summary

Nine years later finds Soo-Ja still married to Min. They have moved to Seoul in the aftermath of Min's parents moving to America. Soo-Ja manages a hotel in Min's name while Min refuses to work because of a previous back injury. However, Soo-Ja has dreams of making a great deal of money in a real estate deal not only to provide for her family, but to pay back her father the money he gave to her father-in-law. Soo-Ja learns that the money she has saved for the investment is not enough, but the business man gives her a month to come up with the rest. When they return to the hotel, Hana gives Soo-Ja a note from the businessman that suggests he will help her make the investment if she will become his lover. Soo-Ja outright refuses even as her daughter suggests it might not be a bad idea. Soo-Ja is shocked at her daughter's worldliness and feels sad that their relationship has become more adversarial since Soo-Ja became the breadwinner for the family.

As Soo-Ja checks out some guests, she is recognized by a lady who remembers her from Daegu. Soo-Ja is embarrassed by her current lack of wealth and denies her own true identity. A short time later a new guest comes in and Soo-Ja realizes it is Yul and his wife.

Yul's wife, Eun-Mee, is clearly unhappy with the low class hotel until Yul greets Soo-Ja and she realizes that the hotel is being run by an old friend and his wife. Eun-Mee proves to be quite demanding and insists on viewing the rooms before choosing one for herself. Yul will stay in a separate room. Eun-Mee explains that she and Yul are building a house in Seoul and will be staying at the hotel until it is ready.

The following day Soo-Ja is kept busy with the constant arriving of Eun-Mee's large amount of stuff. When Yul calls the front desk, Soo-Ja goes personally to see what he wants. Yul wants only to speak to Soo-Ja for a few minutes. Yul is horrified that Soo-Ja is working in such a place and suggests that her husband is not taking good care of her. Soo-Ja refuses to speak badly of Min despite his laziness and the unhappiness he has brought her. Yul then admits that he is still in love with Soo-Ja, but she refuses to admit the same, aware that she cannot betray her marital vows in that way.

One night Soo-Ja and Hana are preparing to go to a gye party when they run into Eun-Mee in the hallway. Eun-Mee quickly invites herself to attend the party as well. This meeting is very important to Soo-Ja. At gye parties the participants pay a due and the money is pooled together and given to one member each month as a type of loan that will continue to grow as the parties continue to be held. Soo-Ja is hoping to win the pot this month to help her with her investment. Upon arriving, however, Eun-Mee begins making friends will all present, even making fun of Soo-Ja's shoes in an amusing show of wit. During dinner, Eun-Mee campaigns, trying to get people to vote her for the pot.



Soo-Ja sends Hana to spy on her and is confronted by Eun-Mee. In the end, neither of them win the pot.

### **Part 3: Chapters 10-12 Analysis**

Nine years have passed, but Soo-Ja's life has not changed much. Soo-Ja is still a slave to her family although she has escaped the discomfort of living with her ungrateful in-laws. However, Soo-Ja's in-laws have moved to America with the money that her father gave them, leaving Soo-Ja feeling obligated to pay the money back to her father to mend a perceived rift in their relationship. To this end, Soo-Ja has worked hard to put money away so that she can make a real estate investment that she hopes will allow her to not only pay her father back, but to provide a good life for her family. This shows the reader that Soo-Ja is still a strong, determined woman who still believes and maintains tradition and morality.

Then Soo-Ja finds herself face to face not only with the man she loves, but his wife. Soo-Ja is a proper woman and she attempts to keep a barrier between herself and Yul, but finds herself in a situation in which she must be friendly to his wife. Eun-Mee is a gregarious woman who is selfish and self-centered. Soo-Ja finds it difficult to deal with Eun-Mee who keeps pushing herself into Soo-Ja's life and making fun of her at the same time. Soo-Ja is already mortified to have fallen into such a life after growing up wealthy and it only makes matters worse when people like Eun-Mee point out just how far she has fallen.



## Part 3: Chapters 13-16

### Part 3: Chapters 13-16 Summary

The following day Soo-Ja argues with a group of teenage girls over their bill only to learn that Min has told them they do not have to pay. Angry, Soo-Ja goes into their room and removes their belongings. Back at the desk, Soo-Ja is confronted with a drunk man who wants to have sex with her. Soo-Ja refuses, but the man forces himself on to Soo-Ja. Soo-Ja struggles and several guests try to help her, all to no avail. Then Yul comes into the hotel lobby, pulls the man from her, and beats him severely until Soo-Ja pulls him away. Later, Soo-Ja speaks with Yul as he cleans his wounds. Yul again confesses his love and asks her to leave her job and to leave her husband. Soo-Ja refuses, afraid of losing Hana.

Min returns later and insists on finding the drunk and getting revenge for him hurting Soo-Ja. Soo-Ja tells him not to go. As they continue to talk, the teenage girls return. They demand to know where their baggage is, but Soo-Ja refuses to say until pay their bill. As the girls are about to give in, they notice Min sitting nearby. The leader points out that Min said they did not have to pay. Min agrees and tells Soo-Ja if she makes them pay it will reflect badly on him. Min throws a glass jar against the wall and storms off. Shamed, Soo-Ja retrieves the girl's belongings. The girls pay before leaving.

Soo-Ja goes to see the businessman and tells him she still wants the land. Still unsure of how she will get the money now that she missed out on the gye, Soo-Ja sees it as fate when Jae-Hwa calls. Jae-Hwa has married a rich businessman. Soo-Ja thinks she might ask her for money over lunch. However, Eun-Mee invites herself to go to lunch with them. Over lunch, Eun-Mee tells the story of how her husband had a name and number on his desk and she learned by this that he is in love with a woman he once knew. Soo-Ja knows that Eun-Mee is talking about her and is telling the story in a sort of warning. Upset, Soo-Ja goes to the bathroom to calm herself. When she returns, Eun-Mee is gone. Soo-Ja tells Jae-Hwa about her investment and asks for her to give her a loan for the amount she is short. Jae-Hwa refuses, admitting that she has just given Eun-Mee a sizable loan. Later, Jae-Hwa calls and explains that she refused the loan, not because she could not afford it, but because she did not think Soo-Ja capable of paying it back. This shows Soo-Ja that their friendship is over due to class differences.

That night, unable to sleep, Soo-Ja meets up with Yul in the lobby. They have tea together and talk. The following night they meet again and go walking through the streets despite curfew. Soo-Ja begins making lunch for Yul, leaving it outside his door each morning. Then one day he is gone. At the same time, Soo-Ja learns that someone has bought the land for her as a silent investor. Soo-Ja knows it was Yul.

A few weeks later, on the Korean New Years, Eun-Mee invites Soo-Ja and Min to her new house for tea. On the way they run into a parade. Yul stands behind Soo-Ja and holds her hand as Eun-Mee and Min run off to dance with the drums. Then, at Eun-Mee





and Yul's house, as they settle down to tea Eun-Mee begins making remarks about Soo-Ja's personality, calling her a prostitute. Soo-Ja is horrified, but Min does not come to her defense, Yul does. When Yul and Eun-Mee lock themselves in the bedroom, Min begins stealing all the food out of the cupboards before taking Soo-Ja home. That night, Min expresses his fears of losing Soo-Ja. Then, to punish her, he refuses to allow her to go home for the Seollal holiday.

Soo-Ja learns that the government wants to buy her land. Soo-Ja has just turned a five hundred thousand won investment into a five million won investment. When she tells Min and Hana, Hana immediately suggests they use the money to move to America. Instead Soo-Ja insists they give the money to her father. Shortly afterward, Soo-Ja gets the news that her father has died. Soo-Ja rushes home for the funeral. Soo-Ja then decides to stay for a week even though Min and Hana return to Seoul immediately. While at home, Soo-Ja learns that her father's loss of all his money, a fact she blamed on herself due to what her father-in-law did, was really because of her father's alcoholism. Then Soo-Ja gets a call from the hotel maid and learns that Min and Hana have gone off to America.

### **Part 3: Chapters 13-16 Analysis**

Soo-Ja continues to live a life in which every moment is a struggle. Due to Min's inability to be a proper husband, Soo-Ja finds herself constantly struggling, constantly in danger. Yul once again comes to her rescue as he has done before, but Soo-Ja continues to refuse to leave Min in fear of losing her daughter. Instead Soo-Ja continues to fight for what she wants on her own, but it seems that she is sabotaged at every step. Eun-Mee sabotages her chances of getting a loan from Jae-Hwa because she knows the truth about Soo-Ja and Yul and thinks that by hurting Soo-Ja, she can keep her husband. In the end, however, Eun-Mee can see Yul moving further and further from her, causing her to be cruel to Soo-Ja, comparing her to a prostitute for having an affair with her husband.

Min is a pitiable character in this novel. Min is lazy and refuses to work. Min is also a drunk and he is having an affair behind Soo-Ja's back. However, Min clearly has self-esteem problems that stem from his childhood and a never ending fear of losing Soo-Ja. Min loves Soo-Ja, he simply cannot be the man she needs him to be.

In the end, Soo-Ja learns that everyone she cares about has lied to her in one way or another except for Yul. Soo-Ja's father lied about the blow the money he gave to her father-in-law presented to his finances and let her believe that that loan caused his financial ruin. In truth, Soo-Ja's father simply allowed her to believe that so he would not have to face the fact that his own alcoholism ruined his life. This frees Soo-Ja from guilt, but really changes nothing except that she no longer has to part with the fortune her investment has made for her. However, Min still holds all the cards, especially when he takes Hana to America without Soo-Ja's knowledge.





## Part 4: Chapters 17-20

### Part 4: Chapters 17-20 Summary

Soo-Ja returns to the hotel to learn that Min has taken Hana to his parents in America and left her the money required to follow. Min claims he has also taken the money. Soo-Ja asks Yul to take her to the airport. Yul tells her that he can no longer continue to be refused by her and if she leaves, she should not expect him to wait for her.

Soo-Ja arrives in Los Angeles on mother-in-law's birthday. There is a party taking place at the house when she arrives. Hana is happy to see her, but also clearly content with life in L.A. Soo-Ja and Min talk briefly before joining the party. Soo-Ja is told by a relative that she should be happy that Min's parents are so willing to welcome her and that America is a better country than Korea. Soo-Ja finds herself defending her country. Later, Soo-Ja and Min talk. Min insists that he believes America and a close family are what is most important for Hana. Soo-Ja argues, but finally tells Min that if this is what he wants, she is willing to stay and be a dutiful wife if it means being near her daughter.

After the party, Soo-Ja's father-in-law calls her into the living room and explains her job. The family now owns a sports clothing warehouse where people can buy clothing in bulk. Soo-Ja will be forced to learn both Spanish and English so that she can man the main counter. Soo-Ja will be expected to work long hours with few to no breaks. Soo-Ja will also not be paid for her work, but will be allowed to live in the family home. Soo-Ja agrees to everything. Later, when they are alone, Min wants to know why Soo-Ja did not argue with his father. Soo-Ja tells him she does not want to cause trouble for fear of causing her to lose Hana. Early the next morning, Min wakes Soo-Ja and tells her to dress, that he is sending her and Hana back to Korea.

Soo-Ja and Hana settle back into their familiar life in Seoul. Min sends divorce papers quickly. Soo-Ja continues to work at the hotel even though Min also returned her money to her. One day Soo-Ja had Hana take an envelope with the money owed to Yul in it to his house. A day later Eun-Mee arrives at the hotel and tells Soo-Ja that Yul moved out and she should not send things for him to the house. Soo-Ja goes to Yul's office and learns that he is about to move back to Pusan. Soo-Ja begs him not to go, telling him that she is now divorced and free to be with him. Yul agrees.

### Part 4: Chapters 17-20 Analysis

Soo-Ja rushes to America to be with her daughter, placing her daughter before all else. The reader is reminded that Hana is the reason that Soo-Ja remained with Min all these years and is the most important thing in her life. When she arrives, Soo-Ja agrees to everything, finally broken by the things that are out of her control. Soo-Ja has fought for her freedom and her life all this time and has finally come to the conclusion that no matter how hard she fights she cannot have what she wants. It is a sad ending for a

woman who is so fiercely independent. However, Min surprises Soo-Ja by finally seeing what he is doing to his daughter and allows her to go back to Korea with Soo-Ja.

Soo-Ja has finally gained her freedom and her daughter. However, her life remains unfulfilled until she learns that Yul has left his wife. Soo-Ja can finally have the one thing that she has been denied for so long. The book ends on a happy note, leaving the reader satisfied.



# Characters

## Soo-Ja Choi

Soo-Ja is the main character of the book. When the book begins, Soo-Ja is a young woman who has dreams of seeing the world. To meet this goal, Soo-Ja has applied to train as a diplomat for her country. Soo-Ja is accepted into the program, but her father refuses to allow her to go because he believes it would look bad for him to send his unmarried daughter to the big city alone. Soo-Ja's mother suggests she marry a weak man so that she might manipulate him into taking her to the city to attend diplomat school. For this reason, Soo-Ja gives herself to Min Lee, a man she sees as both weak and heroic and someone who might understand her desire to see the world. Unfortunately, Min is a weak man who allows his father to bully him.

Soo-Ja spends the early years of her marriage under the thumb of her in-laws, unable to live her dreams and living a life dictated for her. This causes Soo-Ja great sorrow and she tries to leave her husband, but he threatens to take their child away and allow his detested mother to raise her. For this reason, Soo-Ja remains married to Min for more than twelve years before finally being granted a divorce. During that time, Soo-Ja continues to dream of a different life and of a man she loves but was unable to commit herself to. In the end, Soo-Ja finally gets all she has desired, even if what she desires is not what she thought she wanted.

## Min Lee

Min Lee is the son of a wealthy business man who begins to court Soo-Ja at the beginning of the novel. At first, Soo-Ja sees Min as a simple man who is in love with her, but who is also weak and capable of being manipulated. When Min goes to Seoul to join the student protests there against the president, Soo-Ja sees him as something of a hero and a courageous man who will not allow tradition and culture to shape his life. However, after they are married, Soo-Ja quickly learns that it is she who was manipulated. It turns out that Min has lied about the size of his family and his plans for after their marriage.

Min's father is abusive both physically and emotionally. Min's father uses the power he has as the head of the family to manipulate his children into catering to his whims. When Min's father gets into financial trouble with his company, he transfers the company into Min's name and leaves him vulnerable to criminal prosecution. This is just one example of the abuse Min's father heaps on him. For this reason, Min is a weak man. In the end, however, Min proves that he is not totally bad. Min lets Soo-Ja go and he allows her to take their daughter with her.



## Yul Kim

Yul Kim is the leader of the student protestors when Soo-Ja meets him. Yul is an intelligent and gentle man who quickly wins Soo-Ja's affections. They are drawn to one another quickly, but Yul hesitates in showing his affections to Soo-Ja, giving her the time necessary to solidify things with Min. When Yul finally asks Soo-Ja to marry him, she rejects him because she is afraid of having to explain to him why she gave herself to Min outside of marriage. The reader also suspects that perhaps Soo-Ja already knew she was pregnant and did not want Yul to be faced with marrying not only a woman with loose morals, but a woman who will be giving birth to another man's child.

Yul leaves Daegu in fear of running into Soo-Ja and having his heart broken. In the years they are separated, Yul becomes a doctor and practices in Pusan. Soo-Ja sees him once on the day her child goes missing and Yul helps her find the child. Yul also confesses his love for Soo-Ja, but they are both married by this point and cannot act on their affections. When they see one another again nine years later, the passion is just as intense, but they still cannot act on them no matter how desperately they want to. In the end, Yul and Soo-Ja find themselves both separated from their spouses and available; making it possible for them to explore the affection they feel for one another.

## Hana Lee

Hana is Soo-Ja's daughter with Min. Soo-Ja loves her daughter more than anything in the world, but lives constantly under the fear of losing her. Due to the fact that Soo-Ja lives with her husband in her in-law's house, they have the right to take the child from her at any point under Korean law. Once Soo-Ja's mother-in-law took her child from her for a full day. This leaves Soo-Ja in constant fear of angering her in-laws and losing her child again. When Hana is three, her sister-in-law loses her in the busy marketplace of Pusan. Soo-Ja spends the whole night and most of the next day searching for her child alone without any help from her husband or his family. When she threatens to leave her husband, he retaliates by threatening to take their daughter, thus forcing Soo-Ja to remain in an unhappy marriage.

Hana becomes Soo-Ja's reason for not running away and for not finding a way to be with the man she loves. Unfortunately, Hana does not respect her mother and she treats her badly, even suggesting that they would be better living apart. However, when Min sends Soo-Ja away, he sends Hana with her. Hana comes to understand her mother and to live with her peacefully.

## Woon-Gyu Choi

Woon-Gyu Choi is Soo-Ja's father. Soo-Ja's father is a traditional man, but he is also a man who loves his daughter deeply. When Soo-Ja's father-in-law comes asking for money from her father, he gives it gladly with the idea that he should be able to do anything possible to make his daughter happy despite her age and status as a married



woman. Later, however, Soo-Ja's father loses all his wealth and must move in with her brother. Soo-Ja feels guilty for this, believing the money her father-in-law took was the beginning of the end for her father. For years Soo-Ja fights to make the money to repay her father only to have him die just as she is successful. After his death, Soo-Ja learns that her father's downfall was not her fault, but his own alcoholism.

## **Father-in-Law**

Soo-Ja's father-in-law is a cruel and selfish man. The father-in-law threatens to throw Soo-Ja out on the streets if she does not ask her father to pay for her stay in his house. Father-in-law also sets his son up to go to jail for his own mistakes. Father-in-law also goes behind Soo-Ja's back to get money from her father, claiming that he went to him in Soo-Ja's name. In the end, father-in-law suggests that Soo-Ja and Min work for him without pay with the understanding that they will have a roof over their heads and food in their bellies, plus they might one day inherit his business. Soo-Ja knows that inheriting the business is a lie, he would never give the business to them. This is simply another example of father-in-law's cruelty.

## **Mother-in-Law**

The mother-in-law is also a cruel woman, but her cruelty comes more from experience and jealousy than selfishness. The mother-in-law was beaten as a young wife and suffered greatly at the hands of her husband. The mother-in-law is not a beautiful woman and the fact that Soo-Ja is causes her a great deal of jealousy, causing her to send Soo-Ja away when men come to meet her own daughter and to steal Soo-Ja's makeup kit. Mother-in-law is also a timid woman who will not stand up to her husband and in this way, supports his cruelties.

## **Eun-Mee**

Eun-Mee is the wife of Yul Kim. Eun-Mee was once a beauty contestant and she still dresses and acts as though she expects to be judged. Eun-Mee is selfish and loves expensive things. When Eun-Mee moves into Soo-Ja's hotel, she comes with so many clothes and shoes that she needs an extra room to keep it all in. Eun-Mee is charming, however, and most people who meet her find her pleasant, liking her immediately. Eun-Mee goes out of her way to intrude on Soo-Ja's life, but also goes out of her way to make fun of Soo-Ja in front of her peers. Eun-Mee also convinces a good friend of Soo-Ja's to give her a loan even though she knows Soo-Ja is about to ask for a loan of her own. Eun-Mee is aware of her husband's affections for Soo-Ja and it this that causes her to be so rude to Soo-Ja.



## Jae-Hwa

Jae-Hwa is a childhood friend of Soo-Ja. When they are both young women, both find themselves in difficult marriages. Jae-Hwa's husband beats her. When Soo-Ja learns this, she rushes to Jae-Hwa's rescue, saving her from the abusive husband and helping her find a new job. Eventually Jae-Hwa remarries a rich businessman who provides her with a good life. Soo-Ja believes that their friendship is strong enough that Jae-Hwa should not balk at giving her a substantial loan. However, Jae-Hwa refuses the loan on the basis that she does not think Soo-Ja can pay her back. This ends the friendship in Soo-Ja's eyes.

## Na-yeong

Na-yeong is Min's younger sister. Na-yeong is the spoiled daughter of the Lee's, their favorite child for some unknown reason. Na-yeong is a homely young woman who is quiet and timid, often unpleasant. When a suitor comes to visit Na-yeong, the young man is so taken with Soo-Ja that he does not even look at Na-yeong. This causes a great deal of tension in the family. Later, when Soo-Ja asks Na-yeong to watch her young daughter so that she might run some errands, Na-yeong follows Soo-Ja into town and loses the child in the busy marketplace. Na-yeong was hoping to get some information on Soo-Ja to hurt her, but instead lost the one thing that matters to Soo-Ja. In the end, Na-yeong failed to tell anyone where the child was lost and therefore no one ever came to help Soo-Ja to find her.



## Objects/Places

### Letters

Min sends Soo-Ja multiple letters while he is in Seoul on behalf of the student protests against the government. It is one of these letters that leads to a meeting between Soo-Ja and Yul Kim.

### Plum Blossoms Drawing

Soo-Ja creates a drawing of plum blossoms for Yul the day that he asks her to marry him. Soo-Ja later learns that Yul has hung the picture in the home he has built for himself and his wife, Eun-Mee.

### Four Gentlemen Flowers

Soo-Ja shows Yul how to draw the four gentleman flowers in her art class on the day he asks her to marry him. These flowers represent the four virtues of a gentleman. These are the orchid, the chrysanthemum, the plum blossom, and bamboo.

### Makeup Kit

Soo-Ja's mother-in-law steals Soo-Ja's makeup kit when she disrupts Na-yeong's first visit with a possible husband.

### Shoes

Eun-Mee makes fun of Soo-Ja's shoes at the gye meeting because she finds them old and worn out.

### Luggage

Soo-Ja takes the luggage of a group of teenagers living in the hotel out of their rooms and keeps it when they refuse to pay for their room.

### Gye Pot

Soo-Ja hopes to win the money pot at her gye meeting so that she can make an investment in some land, but loses out to a woman whose store was damaged in a fire.



## Hotel

Soo-Ja runs a hotel in Min's name in Seoul. The hotel is small and cheap, but Soo-Ja and her family are able to live on the premises. Yul and his wife come to stay at the hotel while waiting for their new home to be ready because Eun-Mee found Soo-Ja's name and the number of the hotel in his office.

## Land in Seoul's Gangnam Neighborhood

Soo-Ja wants to buy a parcel of land in Seoul's Gangnam neighborhood because the land is undeveloped and she hopes that sometime in the future the government will want to buy it to build more buildings or housing. Soo-Ja tries to get the money, but fails. In the end, Yul makes the purchase in her name and the investment pays off quickly, making Soo-Ja very rich.

## Los Angeles

Min's parents relocate to Los Angeles where they buy a sports clothing business. Min goes to his parents after Soo-Ja's investment pays off with their daughter, forcing Soo-Ja to follow.

## Daegu

Daegu is the name of the town where Soo-Ja lives with her parents at the beginning of the novel.

## Seoul

Seoul is the name of a much larger city in South Korea that Soo-Ja dreams of seeing one day. This is where the diplomat school Soo-Ja wants to attend is located. In an ironic turn of fate, Soo-Ja comes to live in Seoul in the latter years of her marriage to make a living for her family in the aftermath of a back injury that her husband uses as an excuse not to work. Seoul is also where Soo-Ja meets Yul again after nine years.

## Pusan

Pusan is a fishing village in South Korea. Pusan is where Soo-Ja's family took refuge during the war in the 1950s. Pusan is also where Yul moves in order to be away from Soo-Ja and to pursue his medical career. While visiting Pusan, Soo-Ja's daughter disappears and she spends a full twenty-four hour period searching for her.





# Themes

## Unrequited Love

The major theme of this novel is unrequited love because much of the plot deals with the love affair between Soo-Ja and Yul that remains unfulfilled for much of the novel. Soo-Ja feels a connection with Yul from the moment they meet and he even saves her life, but by the time Yul allows her to know how he feels about her, she has already given herself to Min. When Yul finally asks Soo-Ja to marry him, she has already given her body and soul to Min so she refuses him even though she knows this could be the biggest mistake of her life.

Soo-Ja and Yul meet again three years later, but by then they are both married to other people. Yul still loves Soo-Ja deeply and admits to her that he left Daegu in order to avoid seeing her on the streets. Yul tells Soo-Ja that he still loves her and he wants to be with her, but Soo-Ja knows that she cannot walk away from her marriage. Despite this knowledge, Soo-Ja does ask her husband for a divorce, but he promises that he will take their daughter if she leaves him. Soo-Ja has just experienced the pain of having her child ripped from her arms for a full twenty-four hour period. She will not willingly put herself through that pain again and so she stays in her unhappy marriage.

Nine years later, Soo-Ja meets Yul again when he finds himself checking into her hotel with his wife. Soo-Ja finds it more difficult than ever to deny the desire in her heart. However, Soo-Ja finds that she cannot stay away from Yul and they spend several nights talking together. Despite their clear desire for one another, Soo-Ja continues to refuse to fulfill their desires because she is afraid of losing her child. Soo-Ja loses her child anyway, temporarily, but is finally given the freedom that she desires. It is only then that Soo-Ja agrees to be with Yul.

## Traditions

This novel is about Korean people and their way of life. For this reason, the author describes the beautiful ceremonies they conduct when they are engaged and married, as well as some of the traditions specific to their holiday celebrations. These ceremonies and celebrations add a great deal of color and understanding to the novel, allowing the reader to also comprehend some of the other traditions that come with this culture that led to conflicts in the novel's plot.

The main conflict in the plot of this novel is the fact that Soo-Ja cannot leave her husband to be with the man she loves. Soo-Ja initially turns down her heart's desire because she has already given her body to another man. This lapse of morality could lead to pain and misunderstanding, something Soo-Ja does not want to inflict on the man she loves. Later, after she is married and her lover continues to beg for her heart, Soo-Ja continues to deny her own desire because she knows if she leaves her husband he



will have the right to take their child from her. Soo-Ja loves her daughter deeply and cannot allow herself to be separated from her or to have her husband's horrible family raise her. It is for this reason that traditions constitute a major theme of the novel.

## Family

Family is a theme of the novel for several reasons. The first reason that family is a theme of the novel is that Soo-Ja's relationship with her father that causes her to make some of the choices she makes at the beginning of the novel that lead to her unhappiness later in life. Soo-Ja's father will not allow her to travel the world and to become a diplomat as an unmarried woman. For this reason, Soo-Ja follows her mother's advice to marry a weak man so that she might manipulate him into allowing her to go to diplomat school. However, this plan backfires when Soo-Ja learns that her husband lied to her. Later, when her father-in-law takes money from her father, leading to her father's financial ruin, Soo-Ja blames herself because she knows her father only did it out of love for her. This causes a rift in Soo-Ja's relationship with her father and her drive to make the money to pay him back.

Another reason that family is a theme in this novel is because of the impact Min's family has on Soo-Ja and her marriage. Min's parents are cruel and selfish people who act in such a way as to place Min's basic freedoms in danger. This leads to difficulty in Min and Soo-Ja's marriage, as well as simply unhappiness in Soo-Ja's day to day life. At the same time, the traditions of the country make it possible for the in-laws to take Soo-Ja's beloved daughter from her, causing her great fear every day of her life.

The most important reason family is a theme of this novel Hana, Soo-Ja's daughter. Hana is a beautiful and precocious young child at the beginning of part two. When Hana goes missing in Pusan, Soo-Ja is devastated and she spends a full twenty-four hours doing nothing but searching for the child. When she finds her, Soo-Ja is determined to never lose her child again. Therefore, when Min threatens to take Hana away and allow his mother to raise her, Soo-Ja agrees to stay in the miserable marriage. Later, when Min takes Hana to America, Soo-Ja follows even though it could mean the end of any possibility of being with Yul. Hana is the most important part of Soo-Ja's world and she will stop at nothing to be with her. It is this love that finally convinces Min to release both his wife and his daughter.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the third-person and omniscient. The author uses his main character, Soo-Ja, as his narrating character. Soo-Ja begins the novel as a naïve twenty-something girl and ends it as a wizened thirty-something woman who has finally gained her heart's desire. The author remains faithfully inside Soo-Ja's head, but occasionally adds a bit of information that suggest to the reader that the narrator is looking back on her own story from some point in the future and is telling it with some foreknowledge of how it will all turn out.

The point of view of this novel is a classic style that has been used in many bestselling novels. The author remains with one character, eliminating any confusion as to whose head the author is in at any one time. The author uses his tight point of view to create a great deal of sympathy between the reader and the main character, causing the reader to care a great deal what happens to Soo-Ja at the end of the novel. For these reasons, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot and the main character.

## Setting

The novel is set in Korea during the 1960s and early 1970s. Korea of this time period is still recovering from a war that left many of its cities devastated and its government in an upheaval. In the early section of the book, the narrator discusses the unhappiness many students felt with the government and the protests that developed during that time period. In fact, several of the main characters took part in these protests. As the novel progresses, the political climate calms, but the old traditions and cultures of the country continue to have an impact on the main characters.

The setting of the novel is crucial to the plot of the novel for several reasons. The setting of the novel, including its locations and time period, allow for the writer to include several traditions centering on marriage that create conflict in the plot, keeping the main character from fulfilling her heart's desire. The setting also opens the door to traditional ceremonies and holiday celebrations that the author uses to highlight the culture of the characters in his novel. Finally, the setting of the novel is important to the plot because it creates a situation in which the main character is put in a position in which she must make a choice between her devotion to her country and her devotion to her family, and her desire to be with the man she loves. It is an interesting conflict that would not be possible without the setting of the novel, making the setting crucial to the plot of the novel.



## Language and Meaning

The majority of the language in this novel is simple English. The novel is written in such a way that even young modern readers should have little trouble comprehending it. However, because the novel is written about a place and culture that speaks in a foreign tongue and has its own way of addressing one another, the language includes interesting forms of address as well as foreign words the modern reader might not immediately recognize, but should be able to decipher from its use in the novel.

The language of this novel is both simple and easy to comprehend as well as authentic to the characters in the novel. The author does a brilliant job balancing his use of English with the traditional grammar and forms of address common to the characters he has populated his novel with. The novel is easy to read, is not full of uncommon grammar or difficult foreign words, and poses little in the way of awkward dialogue to impede a reader. However, the author is true to his characters in other ways, making the language of this novel appropriate to the plot.

## Structure

The novel is divided into four parts. Each part is given the title of a flower that is traditionally used to symbolize the characteristics of a gentleman in Korea. The reader suspects, however, that the author intends these characteristics to represent his main character Soo-Ja as well. Each part of the novel includes several chapters. There are a total of twenty chapters and each chapter describes events in the plot that propel it toward its conclusion.

The novel contains one main plot. The main plot takes the reader through twelve years of Soo-Ja's life in which she finds herself in an unhappy marriage, forced to hold at arm's length the only man she has truly ever loved. In the end, Soo-Ja discovers that the man she married is more like the admirable man she had wanted but thought she had never found. In the end, Soo-Ja gets her heart's desire.



## Quotes

"'You tricked me,' she said, lying over a silk mat on the gold-colored floor, her husband next to her." (Prologue, pg. 11).

"Soo-Ja knew about the stranger. The one following her for the last four blocks." (Part 1: Chapter 1, p. 14).

"Chu-Sook would not make his way to his savior that night; he chose to stay with the others, becoming one more in a sea of bodies." (Part 1: Chapter 2, p. 46).

"At that moment, Soo-Ja felt like her own life had never mattered more, her body jolted by the rush that must be the addict's first thrill. She'd never felt more powerful. Her father was wrong." (Part 1: Chapter 3, p. 55).

"This was the moment, she knew, to which she would go back to in memory and say, You fool, you simpleminded fool. This was the moment she would think back to and decide, That was the night my life began, and I stopped being my father's daughter, and earned my own name." (Part 1: Chapter 4, p. 65).

"Soo-Ja thought of herself as a mother first, but for the rest of the world, she was a daughter-in-law." (Part 2: Chapter 6, p. 73).

"Chamara is an incantation, and if she listens to its sound, she believes that she can do it, that she will push through this sadness. And if she is strong about it, she'll be rewarded in the end. It is a way of saying, I know, I feel it, too. This burns my heart, too." (Part 2: Chapter 8, p. 133).

"Min's motto literally meant 'eat and live', or in other words, if you have enough to it, be content, for it's enough." (Part 3: Chapter 10, p. 147).

"The woman's identity was unmistakable as she came into the hotel and was followed by her beloved Yul himself. Soo-Ja felt the earth stop spinning as she found herself face to face, for the first time, with Yul's wife." (Part 3: Chapter 10, p. 158).

"When they arrived at the restaurant, Eun-Mee had Soo-Ja introduce her to everyone she knew, and Soo-Ja discovered the first of Eun-Mee's many magical charms: the ability to make strangers instantaneously fond of her." (Part 3: Chapter 12, p. 169).

"For a while they stood still, exchanging breaths. She could feel the warm air come into her mouth from his, and though they did not kiss, she could feel his tenderness surround her, and she let it fall over her skin, like a silk sheet." (Part 3: Chapter 13, p. 187).

"She could feel him try to find the hole in her heart, try to heal it." (Part 4: Chapter 20, p. 271).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Soo-Ja? What is a diplomat? Why does Soo-Ja want to be a diplomat? Why do her parents refuse to allow Soo-Ja to go to Seoul to train as a diplomat? What advice does Soo-Ja's mother give her if she wants to be a diplomat? How does Soo-Ja act on this advice? Does it turn out well for Soo-Ja? Explain.

Who is Min Lee? What kind of a person does Min appear to be in the early chapters of the novel? Why does Soo-Ja initially refuse to date Min? Why does Soo-Ja later agree to accept letters from Min? What do Min's letters imply about his personality? What does Soo-Ja get from his letters? Why does Soo-Ja agree to marry Min? What happens when her father refuses his blessing of their marriage? What does Soo-Ja do? Why does she do this?

Who is Yul? How does Soo-Ja meet Yul? Where do they go together? Why? How does Yul save Soo-Ja's life? How does Soo-Ja feel about Yul? Why does Yul ask Soo-Ja to marry him? How does Soo-Ja respond? For what reason? What is Soo-Ja's fear in marrying Yul? What happens after her marriage? What does Soo-Ja learn about Yul? How might her life have been different had Soo-Ja married Yul?

Who is Soo-Ja's father-in-law? How does he treat Soo-Ja? Why? Why does father-in-law ask Soo-Ja to ask her father for money? What does he plan to use this money for? What does Min tell her the money is for? Why does Min tell Soo-Ja not to ask her father for the money? What happens to Min when they cannot get up the money? How does Min feel about this? How does Soo-Ja react to this?

How does Hana go missing? Whose fault is it? For what reason does this person allow Hana to go missing? How does Soo-Ja respond to this situation? Why do so few people offer to help Soo-Ja? What does this say about Korean culture? What does this say about Soo-Ja's character? Where is Hana finally found? What happens afterward? What does Yul tell Soo-Ja when they part that night?

Why does Soo-Ja not leave Min although she is clearly unhappy in their marriage? What does Min threaten to do if she ever leaves? Why does Min fear Soo-Ja will someday leave him? What does this say about Min? Why does Min take Hana to America? Why does Min not consult Soo-Ja about this decision before he does it? Why does Soo-Ja follow Min and Hana to America? What does she find there?

Why does Yul leave his wife? What impact did seeing Soo-Ja have on this decision? Why does Yul not tell Soo-Ja this before she leaves for America? Why does Yul decide to return to Pusan? What does he say when Soo-Ja begs him not to go? What is implied in the final scene of the novel? How does Hana react to Soo-Ja's changed situation in the final pages of the book?