

The Joy Luck Club Book Notes

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Joy Luck Club Book Notes.....	1
Contents.....	2
Author/Context.....	4
Plot Summary.....	6
Major Characters.....	8
Objects/Places.....	12
Quotes.....	13
Topic Tracking: China/America.....	15
Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters.....	17
Topic Tracking: Strength.....	19
Book 1, Feathers from a Thousand Li Away.....	21
Chapter 1, Jing-Mei Woo, The Joy Luck Club.....	22
Chapter 2, An-Mei Hsu, Scar.....	24
Chapter 3, Lindo Jong, The Red Candle.....	25
Chapter 4, Ying-ying St. Clair, The Moon Lady.....	27
Book 2, The Twenty-six Malignant Gates.....	28
Chapter 5, Waverly Jong, Rules of the Game.....	29
Chapter 6, Lena St. Clair, The Voice from the Wall.....	30
Chapter 7, Rose Hsu Jordan, Half and Half.....	32
Chapter 8, Jing-mei Woo, Two Kinds.....	34
Book 3, American Translation.....	35
Chapter 9, Lena St. Clair, Rice Husband.....	36
Chapter 10, Waverly Jong, Four Directions.....	38
Chapter 11, Rose Hsu Jordan, Without Wood.....	40
Chapter 12, Jing-mei Woo, Best Quality.....	42



[Book 4, Queen Mother of the Western Skies.....44](#)

[Chapter 13, An-mei Hsu, Magpies.....45](#)

[Chapter 14, Ying-ying St. Clair, Waiting Between the Trees.....48](#)

[Chapter 15, Lindo Jong, Double Face.....49](#)

[Chapter 16, Jing-mei Woo, A Pair of Tickets.....50](#)



Author/Context

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California, in 1952, and now lives with her husband, tax lawyer Louis DeMattei, in San Francisco. *The Joy Luck Club* was her first and perhaps most well known book. It brought her great success and made her name known around the world. The book was made into a movie by director Wayne Wang, which Tan produced and wrote the screenplay for. Tan's other novels include *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Much of the content of her books is autobiographical. Tan has said that *Kitchen* was written after *Joy* because her mother, Daisy, complained that people thought Suyuan from *Joy* was based on her. She urged Tan to write the true story of her life. Though much of the book is fictionalized, *Kitchen* does contain the details of Tan's mother's life: her twelve-year-long bad marriage (she told Amy she might even kill her first husband if she ever saw him again); her life during the war; the children she lost. In her stories, Tan blends Eastern and Western cultures, often by telling a "Chinese" story through "American" eyes, and vice versa.

This practice of combining and contrasting Eastern and Western culture began in Tan's early adulthood, when she reached a breaking point in her relationship with her mother. They had fought throughout her childhood, and Amy was bent on rebelling in whatever way she could. She gradually began to realize that one of their problems was that she did not understand her mother, who desperately wanted to be understood. Tan has said that her mother needed someone to truly listen to her, to relive her life with her. Long conversations with her mother evolved into *The Joy Luck Club*. Tan created the characters of Rose, Waverly, June and Lena to personify her own questions and concerns. She finally saw that she had to learn about her mother's life in order to understand her own history and personality. *The Hundred Secret Senses*, another book about two relatives, one American and one Chinese, highlights Tan's confusions about the two cultures she grew up in. It deals with her superstitions and beliefs in the supernatural--she has a friend who predicted his own murder, and after he was killed the names of the two killers came to her out of nowhere. She also has a history of electronic equipment malfunctioning in her presence. Though she accepts these traditionally Chinese otherworldly elements in her life, she also remembers that her mother's superstitions negatively affected Amy and her brother for a long time.

When Amy was fifteen, her father and brother both died of brain tumors. Daisy decided that their house was cursed, and that nine bad things would happen there. She insisted that they move, and they eventually settled in Switzerland, which alternately pleased and enraged Amy. She and her husband have decided not to have children because Amy remembers her childhood as very unhappy, and cannot be sure she would not make the same mistakes her mother made. In fact, Daisy's influence over Amy, both positive and negative, continued until Daisy died. Though Daisy, like Suyuan, had always had ambitions for Amy, and tried to dismiss her interest in storytelling, once Amy became a successful writer, Daisy took credit for her daughter's achievements. Though this is probably unfair to Amy, it is clear that Daisy's life and personality have been providing her daughter with her subject matter, consciously or not: women, both



American and Chinese; intersecting and conflicting cultures; and the relationships between mothers and daughters. Tan has often been praised for the universal quality of her themes. As E.D. Huntley says, "It seems fair to predict Tan will have a place in American literary history, not as an ethnic writer, but as an American writer who illuminates brilliantly and sensitively a distinctive and colorful aspect of the American experience."

Bibliography

Huntley, E.D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. London: Greenwood Press, 1998

Lyall, Sarah. "At Home with Amy Tan: In the Country of the Spirits." *New York Times Book Review*, December 28, 1995

Rothstein, Mervyn. "A New Novel by Amy Tan, Who's Still Trying to Adapt to Success." *New York Times Book Review*, June 11, 1991

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989.



Plot Summary

After her mother Suyuan's death, thirty-six year old Jing-mei (June) Woo joins The Joy Luck Club. The club, which Suyuan founded in China during the war, consists of four women playing mah jong, eating good dinners, and gambling. Suyuan created the club as a way to improve the spirits of her friends during wartime. Her first husband died in the war and she was forced to abandon their twin baby daughters on the side of a road. Soon after, she met and married Canning Woo and moved to America. There, she restarted the club with three other women her age: An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair. The four women and their daughters, who are about the same age, grow older together, and each mother/daughter relationship is full of sadness, anger and joy. June, for example, isn't sure she can replace a dead mother she hardly knew. Then she learns that her mother's other daughters have been found: they live in China, and the other women of the Joy Luck Club are sending June to meet them.

The mothers remember their childhood in China. An-mei lived with her grandmother and was forbidden to even speak her mother's name. When her mother tried to rescue her, she was sent away. Everyone tells An-mei that her mother dishonored their family by marrying again after her husband died. Still, her mother returned to nurse her own mother after she grew very sick. Lindo's marriage was arranged when she was very young. She hated the spoiled young man she was required to live with. When he wouldn't sleep with her and her mother-in-law demanded a baby, Lindo made up a story about an angry ancestor who would kill her husband if they stayed married. She was given enough money to go to America and told to keep her mouth shut about their curse. Ying-ying remembers going to a moon festival as a young girl and finding out that the magic and ceremony is often just an act.

The daughters remember growing up with Chinese mothers in California. Sometimes they felt like they weren't Chinese at all, and didn't know how to deal with the Chinese culture in their homes. Waverly was a chess champion, but she quit when she and Lindo fought and Lindo told her it was not as easy to play or not play as she believed. Now she worries that her mother will not accept her second husband. Lindo was always able to make Waverly change her mind, seeing flaws where she once saw perfection, and she doesn't want this to happen with Rich. Lena remembers her mother as a meek woman who always wondered what bad thing would happen next. She made Lena just as meek and afraid-but Lena learned from a neighbor that not every problem is the end of the world. She knows her mother can see things before they happen, so she wonders what her mother will think of her relationship with her husband: he bullies her and takes her for granted. Sure enough, Ying-ying doesn't understand Lena's life with Harold. Rose Jordan has some of the same problems with lack of confidence. Her husband asked her for a divorce recently because she could never make any decisions. Rose still feels guilty because her youngest brother died by accident when she was fourteen. She can't decide what to do about her husband. Then she realizes that her mother supports her. She sleeps for three days and then contacts her husband, telling him that she will not leave their house like he wants her to. She will fight for it. June Woo remembers that her mother was never satisfied with her: she always wanted June to be



a genius, so June was determined to waste any talent she had, just to spite her mother. As an adult, June has always felt inferior to Waverly, and believed her mother thought she was as well. During new year's dinner, she got into a fight with Waverly, and afterward her mother told her that she understood her and implied that she loved her.

The mothers think about their pasts. An-mei remembers that her mother killed herself to make a better life for her children, because in a marriage with four other wives, that was the only way for her children to have any of the benefits from her rich husband (who she was forced to marry, contrary to what her family believed). Ying-ying remembers how she gave up her strength, her will, so that she would no longer be hurt when bad things happened to her. She now realizes that in doing this she has made her daughter weak as well, and resolves to teach her daughter to be strong. Lindo remembers how she came to America, and, looking at her adult daughter Waverly, she sees how similar they are-both inside and out. The book ends with June going to China to meet her half-sisters. Her father is happily reunited with his family. June is at first nervous, but when she meets first her father's family and then her sisters, she sees that part of her is Chinese after all: her blood.



Major Characters

Jing-mei (June) Woo: Daughter of Suyuan and Canning Woo. Jing-mei always had a troubled relationship with her mother, so when Suyuan dies, she has to deal with her grief, frustration, and her many questions. She never understood why her mother was never satisfied with her. She never knew the whole story of her mother's previous life in China. She does not speak Chinese fluently, and she tried to reject Chinese culture and even, for a while, believed that she was not Chinese at all. After her mother's death, she begins to see that her mother's history is part of her, and China is part of her identity. When she finally meets her mother's other daughters in China, she feels like she has her mother back. She also begins to see that though they often fought and rarely saw eye to eye, her mother did love her and understood her, at times, even better than she understood herself.

Suyuan Woo: Mother of Jing-mei, Wang Chwun Yu and Wang Chwun Hwa. Wife of Canning Woo and, previously, Wang Fuchi. Suyuan had a troubled past--she gave up her twin daughters when they were babies and lost her first husband in the war. Though she married Canning in China and moved to California, she never forgot those babies, and spent her life trying to find them. She was at times a difficult mother for Jing-mei, and she was competitive and bullying to some of her friends. But she cared for her family, and the Joy Luck Club, so everyone misses her when she dies. Her husband and American daughter fulfill her greatest wish--finding her Chinese daughters--to try to bring her a kind of peace she could not have when she was alive.

Lindo Jong: Mother of Waverly, Vincent, and Winston. Wife of Tin Jong. Lindo's best friend is Suyuan, but they fight constantly. Lindo has always tried to take credit for Waverly's success, and because she feels close to her daughter, she tries to control her life. She gets upset when Waverly decides to marry a white man, but when he refuses to be intimidated by her, she accepts him. Lindo, like Suyuan, had a hard life in China--she was forced to marry a man she hated--but she used her cleverness to escape her fate. She received enough money from her in-laws to come to America. She is competitive and intimidating, even to her daughter and husband.

Ying-ying St. Clair: Though she was born a rich and spoiled girl, Ying-ying ends up relatively poor and meek. She believes her haughtiness cursed her. Because she thought she was too good for any man, she was forced to marry a bad man. From then on, she believed that she could see things before they happened, and she gives this power to her daughter Lena. She sees herself as still strong on the inside, but knows that she has willingly given up her strength so she will no longer cause herself such pain. She married Clifford St. Clair without really caring about him--she says she could not care about anyone, because she has turned herself into a ghost. By the end of the book, she realizes that she never should have done this: it has made her daughter weak as well. She decides to show her daughter how to be strong.

An-mei Hsu: Mother of Rose Hsu Jordan, Ruth, Janice, Mark, Matthew, Luke and Bing. Wife of George Hsu. Mother-in-law of Ted Jordan. An-mei is a mixture of strength and



weakness. Like her own mother, who committed suicide to give her daughter a better life, An-mei sometimes accepts her sorrows too easily. She acknowledges that she and her daughter Rose are sometimes too easily influenced by others. But she also has a very strong faith in her ability to make things right. When Bing dies, for a long time she fully believes she can bring him back. She learned to have faith in herself, and to stand up for herself, from her mother, who told her to have a strong identity.

Waverly Jong: Daughter of Lindo and Tin, former wife of Marvin, fiance of Rich Schields. Waverly was a proud and often spoiled girl. She was a champion chess player and liked to brag about it. However, even her strong personality was no match for her mother. Lindo made Waverly feel so bad after they fought over her chess abilities that she quit playing chess altogether. Lindo has always been able to influence her and make her see flaws where she never saw them before, so that she, like Lindo, is never satisfied. She is therefore worried that Lindo will make her dislike Rich, her fiance who she loves deeply.

Lena St. Clair: Daughter of Ying-ying and Clifford St. Clair. Wife of Harold Livotny. Lena has always known that her mother was fragile, and she spent her childhood fearing that their family could fall apart at any moment. She thus became fragile and easily frightened herself. Today, she allows her husband to bully her, but is slowly realizing how angry with him she is. She is disappointed with her mother and never understood her father very well. Even though she looks English-Irish like him, she has always felt Chinese. She seems to believe, like Ying-ying, that she and her mother have the same spirit.

Rose Hsu Jordan: Wife of Ted Jordan, daughter of An-mei Hsu. Rose often feels guilty and powerless. She sometimes thinks that she was responsible for her younger brother's death. She accepts the blame that Ted heaps on her for the failure of their marriage. She has nightmares where a traditional Chinese character chases her. At first, she believes that her mother does not understand her, and wants her to stay in her marriage even if she is unhappy. But then she realizes that all her mother wants is for her to be strong. She finally stands up to Ted and suddenly realizes how powerful she really is. Then she feels connected to her mother in a way she never did before.

Minor Characters

Canning Woo: Father of Jing-mei, husband of Suyuan. Canning is a quiet, even-tempered man who often allowed his wife to make the important decisions in their family. He never took anything as seriously as she did. He is very hurt by her death, and wishes he had better understood her need to find her other daughters. When he returns to China, Jing-mei can see he feels happy and at home the way he rarely does in America.

Popo: An-mei's grandmother. An-mei loves her grandmother and sees that her harshness is mostly a sign of love, but she abandons the love of Popo in favor of her mother. Popo never realized that her daughter, An-mei's mother, had not married her second husband willingly, so she died without forgiving her for 'dishonoring' the family.



An-mei's mother: Though she is never named, she has a profound influence over An-mei. Beautiful and stylish, yet condemned to the sad life of a Fourth Wife, she teaches An-mei both how sad life can be and the few ways one can overcome that sadness. She loves her daughter so much that she kills herself so that she can have a better life.

Tyan-yu: Lindo Jong's first husband. Spoiled and bad-tempered, from the time they are very young he tries to hurt her as much as possible. He lies to his mother, telling her that Lindo won't sleep with him, when it is he who will not sleep with Lindo. She escapes him because he is superstitious and cowardly, so when she tells him his ancestors said he would die if he stayed married to her, he was happy to let her leave and gave her enough money to go to America.

Huang Taitai : Lindo's mother in law, Tyan-yu's mother. She spoiled her son all his life, and always believed that her family was better than Lindo's because they were richer. Though she never did any work herself, she enjoys ordering other people around. Though she usually thinks Lindo is stupid, she is frightened when Lindo makes up the story of her dream about their ancestors. Believing that she and her son are in danger, she makes Lindo leave.

Clifford St. Clair: Husband of Ying-ying St. Clair and father of Lena. Though he loved his wife, he never understood her. He did not even speak her language, and had his daughter translate for him. He renamed Ying-ying Betty without a second thought. He never knew that she came from a rich family. He was always cheerful and tried to pretend there was nothing wrong, even when Ying-ying was very depressed. He died young because his arteries were blocked.

Ted Jordan: Husband of Rose Hsu Jordan. He always enjoyed having control over Rose, until he made a mistake in his surgical practice. Then he tried to force her to make more decisions in their life together, and got angry when she could not. He cheated on her and told her he wanted a divorce, trying to bully her into giving up her house. When he sees he can no longer control her, he is afraid.

Bing Hsu: Rose's younger brother, who drowned at the beach because no one was watching him. His death is the reason that An-mei lost her faith in God--she believed that Bing could not be really dead, and tried to bring him back with her faith. When she saw this could not be done, she put her bible under the table in the kitchen.

Harold Livotny: Lena St. Clair's husband. He takes much of the credit for Lena's work, underpays her, and takes her for granted. He insists they share all costs, and reminds her often that he makes more money than she does. He controls what they buy and what their house looks like. Lena wonders who hurt him so much that he rejects the intimacy that comes from sharing.

Rich Schields: Waverly Jong's fiance. He loves her for being herself, something she never experienced before. He takes care of her daughter and is not intimidated by her mother, even though Lindo at first dislikes him because he is white. He fits comfortably into her life, accepting her Chinese heritage and her American cultural background.



Shoshana Jong : Waverly's daughter with her first husband. Though Waverly hadn't planned to have Shoshana, she now loves her unconditionally. She is very pleased that Shoshana and Rich get along.

Wu Tsing : An-mei's mother's second husband. He raped mother so that she would be forced to marry him. Superstitious and selfish, he cheats on all his wives and throws his money away, but then repents of all his sins when mother kills herself.



Objects/Places

The Joy Luck Club: The mah jong club that Suyuan started in China and then continued in California. The club began as a way for the Chinese women to have fun, eat and gamble during the worst years of the war. The hope of being lucky, as Suyuan says, was their only joy at that time. She continued the club in California, expanding it to include playing the stock market and involving the women's husbands.

First Chinese Baptist Church: The church that Ying-ying, Suyuan, Lindo and An-mei and their husbands all attend. This church helps them adjust to life in America, giving their children Christmas presents and providing English classes.

Kweilin: The city that Suyuan moved to when her first husband had to leave her to fight in the war. She had heard it was a beautiful and safe place to be, but soon learned that whatever beauty used to be there was now destroyed by the crowds, filth, and fear. This is where Suyuan loses much of her hope and happiness. It is the city where she had to abandon her twin baby daughters.

An-mei's bible: An-mei keeps her bible under the leg of her kitchen table. She used to read it often, but now she no longer believes, because despite her faith, her son died by accident. She wrote Bing Hsu's name in the 'deaths' section of the bible, but she used an erasable pencil.



Quotes

Quote 1: "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine." Chapter 1, pg. 21

Quote 2: "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies." Chapter 1, pg. 26

Quote 3: "Even though I was young, I could see the pain of the flesh and the worth of the pain." Chapter 2, pg. 48

Quote 4: "I was no longer scared. I could see what was inside me." Chapter 3, pg. 59

Quote 5: "After the gold was removed from my body I felt lighter, more free. They say this is what happens if you lack metal. You begin to think as an independent person." Chapter 3, pg. 63

Quote 6: "For woman is yin, the darkness within, where untempered passions lie. And man is yang, bright truth lighting our minds." Chapter 4, pg. 81

Quote 7: "Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess." Chapter 5, pg. 99

Quote 8: "This house was built too steep, and a bad wind from the top blows all your strength back down the hill. So you can never get ahead. You are always rolling backward." Chapter 6, pg. 109

Quote 9: "I discovered that maybe it was fate all along, that faith was just an illusion that somehow you're in control." Chapter 7, pg. 121

Quote 10: "My mother had a look on her face that I'll never forget. It was one of complete despair and horror, for losing Bing, for being so foolish as to think she could use faith to change fate." Chapter 7, pg. 130

Quote 11: "I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won'ts. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not." Chapter 8, pg. 134

Quote 12: "I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride." Chapter 8, pg. 138

Quote 13: "Only two kind of daughters. Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" Chapter 8, pg. 142

Quote 14: "I began to look at all events and all things as relevant, an opportunity to take or avoid." Chapter 9, pg. 152



Quote 15: "And I remember wondering why it was that eating something good could make me feel so terrible, while vomiting something terrible could make me feel so good." Chapter 8, pg. 154

Quote 16: "Now that I'm angry at Harold, it's hard to remember what was so remarkable about him." Chapter 9, pg. 155

Quote 17: "You are busy. You want to live like mess what can I say?" Chapter 10, pg. 169

Quote 18: "I saw what I had been fighting for: it was for me, a scared child..." Chapter 10, pg. 183

Quote 19: "And below the *heimongmong*, all along the ground, were weeds already spilling out over the edges, running wild in every direction." Chapter 11, pg. 196

Quote 20: "True, cannot teach style. June not sophisticate like you. Must be born this way." Chapter 12, pg. 206

Quote 21: "That was the night, in the kitchen, that I realized I was no better than who I was....And I no longer felt angry at Waverly. I felt tired and foolish, as if I had been running to escape someone chasing me, only to look behind and discover there was no one there." Chapter 12, pg. 207

Quote 22: "Then you must teach my daughter this same lesson. How to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever." Book 4, pg. 213

Quote 23: "to not listen to something meaningless calling to me." Chapter 13, pg. 226

Quote 24: : "on the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. In my mother's case, this would be the first day of the lunar new year. And because it is the new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow." Chapter 13, pg. 240

Quote 25: "I have always known a thing before it happens." Chapter 14, pg. 243

Quote 26: "It is because I had so much joy that I came to have so much hate." Chapter 14, pg. 247

Quote 27: "I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these things do not mix?" Chapter 15, pg. 254

Quote 28: "Why are you attracted only to Chinese nonsense?" Chapter 15, pg. 259

Quote 29: "Look at this face. Do you see my foolish hope?" Chapter 16, pg. 283

Quote 30: "And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood." Chapter 16, pg. 288



Topic Tracking: China/America

Chapter 1

China/America 1: Jing-mei thinks of her mother's life in China as mysterious, and so removed that she hardly even believes it was real. She always thought of it as just a Chinese fairy tale, so she was shocked when she found out that there was still some of her mother left in China: her two younger sisters. Her mother, however, is a master storyteller. She brings the past to life with her words, making Jing-mei see it, even though she doesn't understand half of it.

Chapter 6

China/America 2: Even though Lena looks white unless someone is looking for her Chinese features, Lena identifies more with her mother than with her father. She views her father, in fact, almost across the same rift as her mother does. They understand Chinese language and superstition, he doesn't. They understand what Lena thinks of as "Chinese fears," and he seems blind to them.

Chapter 8

China/America 3: June doesn't understand her mother's "Chinese" personality traits. She hates the way her mother brags about her to Lindo Jong. She cannot understand why she has to be obedient all the time. She does not want to bend to her mother's every whim. But this is exactly what Suyuan expects from June, and she gets very angry when June doesn't listen to her.

Chapter 9

China/America 4: Lena, who has always identified with her Chinese mother more than her American father, wonders if being Chinese has given her evil powers. She and her mother talk in ways that Harold cannot understand, just as they used to talk in front of Lena's father. Lena believes she has a terrible bond with her mother: they can see bad things before they happen, but they don't know how to stop them.

Chapter 10

China/America 5: No matter how much Waverly loves Rich, and how American she is, she needs him to understand her mother's Chinese attitude, even if she herself rejects it. Rich completely fails at this: he doesn't understand the complex way to compliment someone, or how to eat at dinner, or how to be polite and yet friendly. And even though Waverly dislikes these Chinese customs, she desperately wants Rich to understand them the way she does. Whether they like it or not, their cultural backgrounds are in conflict.

China/America 6: Just as they were divided between American and Chinese culture, Rich, Waverly and Lindo connect over it. The couple decides to have their honeymoon



in China, and they are even considering all going together. Lindo needed to be reassured that the American Rich could fit into her life, and that Waverly understood her Chinese heritage. Once they understood this, their differences began to disappear.

Chapter 11

China/America 7: Rose always thought that American ways were better than Chinese ways. But now she realizes that sometimes Chinese opinions are less complicated and more understandable than American opinions. Rose was always afraid of her mother and Old Mr. Chou, the Chinese character who guarded the land of sleep. But once she realizes that she doesn't need Ted, her American husband who overly complicates things and doesn't care about her, she begins to feel closer to her Chinese heritage.

Chapter 13

China/America 8: An-mei wonders, like her daughter Rose, whether their Chinese culture might have created problems for them. Are they indecisive and weak because they were taught to accept their fates, however sad, without protest? An-mei feels that their histories are inescapable--her own mother, herself, and her daughter have all turned out this way. She wonders if, being women in Chinese culture, they had no choice.

China/America 9: An-mei draws a distinction between Western culture and Eastern culture. Americans, she implies, use psychiatrists who encourage them to talk about their suffering as a way of understanding themselves. Chinese people like her mother, however, suffered and cried because they had no choice. There was nothing to understand--they could not change their sad fates, so they cried. An-mei describes the Chinese peasants as banding together to kill their sorrows (the birds), rather than just talking about them and allowing them to continue.

Chapter 15

China/America 10: Lindo believes that only Waverly's physical features are Chinese: inside, she is "American-made." Lindo even thinks that Chinese and American culture don't mix. Yet Lindo can see how similar she and Waverly look, and she knows they have much of the same personality traits. It's obvious even to the hairstylist, no matter how much Waverly would like to deny it.



Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters

Chapter 1

Mothers and Daughters 1: Jing-mei thinks often about how little she knew her mother. She knows she disappointed her mother all the time, and they were never able to completely accept each other. The other Joy Luck mothers see themselves and their daughters in Suyuan and Jing-mei, and it scares them. They want the best for their daughters: they want them to be Chinese and American. But they worry that the daughters have rejected their mothers' ambitions for them, not caring about Chinese traditions and hating their mothers' strange customs.

Chapter 2

Mothers and Daughters 2: An-mei, who was forced to try to hate or forget her mother for most of her life, began to love her when she saw how much she loved her grandmother. An-mei understood that her mother's love was deeper than any pain Popo had caused her. It was stronger than suffering--it was in her bones. For the first time, An-mei, who was raised for the most part without a mother, understood the power of mother/daughter relationships.

Chapter 5

Mothers and Daughters 3: Though Lindo is clearly proud of Waverly, Waverly's success drives a wedge between them. Waverly feels like they are competing, instead of her mother supporting her. She thinks her mother is trying to take credit for her success. This makes her so angry that she runs away from her mother, but when she finally comes home, they cannot talk to each other and resolve their problems, because her mother coldly ignores her.

Chapter 6

Mothers and Daughters 4: Lena is ashamed of her mother, but, like Waverly, she knows she has learned a lot from her too. For Lena, however, the knowledge is almost entirely bad: her mother has taught her to be afraid, and to bend to other people's wishes. Lena hates these qualities in her mother, but she can't stop herself from adopting them.

Chapter 10

Mothers and Daughters 5: Waverly remembers every time her mother hurt her, because Lindo understands her daughter so well that she knows just which little comment or look will be most painful for Waverly. Waverly, a successful lawyer, feels defenseless against her mother, even though she is very strong in many other respects. Somehow, her mother always manages to catch her off guard, which is why Waverly feels close to her but also hates her in some ways.



Mothers and Daughters 6: Waverly and Lindo fight viciously and hurt each other often, but once they begin to see each other as people, they start to become friends. They no longer view each other in simple roles: the bullying mother and the disobedient daughter. Waverly tries to understand Lindo's past, and Lindo sees that Waverly can make her own decisions.

Chapter 11

Mothers and Daughters 7: Rose used to feel opposed to her mother, and afraid of her. She wanted to keep her out of her life, and felt more comfortable talking to her psychiatrist than to her mother. She felt that An-mei didn't understand her. But when An-mei called her to tell her that the most important thing was standing up for herself, rather than saving her marriage, Rose began to feel closer to her. She finally had a dream about her mother that was not threatening, but rather friendly.

Chapter 12

Mothers and Daughters 8: Suyuan knows how to hurt June so well that sometimes June doesn't feel like her mother cares about her at all. Suyuan often tells June things that June knows are supposed to have deep meaning, but June doesn't understand. The night of the New Year's dinner, however, Suyuan shows that she both loves and understands her daughter. When she gives her her "life's importance," she is creating a bond with her daughter that lasts even if after she dies. June knows this now because before her mother died, she never wore the pendant, but now, she finds herself wearing it every day.

Chapter 13

Mothers and Daughters 9: An-mei sees how much her mother loved her, and uses her mother's death and pain to change her own life. She feels the bond between them, not broken, but actually strengthened by her mother's death. Though everyone always told her that her mother was wicked, in the short time before her mother's death, she begins to understand who her mother really is, and how similar they are.

Chapter 16

Mothers and Daughters 10: When she finally meets her mother's other daughters, June feels like she understands herself completely for the first time. She knows what part of her is Chinese. Though she has always felt that she is nothing like her mother, when she and her two sisters stand together, they somehow seem to make up their mother. June seems to understand that part of her is American, but part of her is Chinese too, and part of her comes from her mother's history.



Topic Tracking: Strength

Chapter 3

Strength 1: On the day of her wedding, Lindo finally realizes that obeying her parents doesn't mean forgetting herself. She understands that no matter what she might be forced to do, no one can take away her identity. Knowing this, and knowing it is a secret, makes her strong and proud, even as she goes out to face what could be the worst day of her life. Then Lindo, who had always been obedient and quiet, took matters into her own hands. She blew out her husband's end of the candle. She was afraid, but not so afraid that it prevented her from doing what she wanted.

Strength 2: Lindo still thinks of herself as the young girl who was forced to marry a man she didn't like, because that was a defining time in her life. It was the time when she realized that she didn't have to accept her fate: she could change it if she wanted to. She was expected to live the rest of her life in a small village in China, but instead, she went alone to America.

Chapter 4

Strength 3: Ying-ying is a striking contrast to Lindo. While Lindo found herself, Ying-ying asked to be found. She did not have the strength to oppose the people in her life who were telling her to sit still and be quiet. Instead, she followed their orders, just wishing someone would save her from them. As an old woman, she recognizes that she gave up her identity very early in her life.

Chapter 6

Strength 4: Lena wants to avoid becoming fearful like her mother, but sometimes she can't help it. She desperately wants her life to change, but she feels helpless, until she meets her young neighbor. Teresa is effortlessly confident and brave. Lena wants to give her mother strength like Teresa and her mother have, and after her short talk with Teresa, she begins to believe she can do it.

Chapter 8

Strength 5: June thinks she is being strong and independent when she opposes her mother, but as an adult, she seems to believe that she was just being defiant. She did not want her mother to dominate her, so she tried to find her own identity. But since her identity consisted of her arguing with her mother and ruining her own pursuits (she was so mad at her mother that she never learned to play the piano), she was always unhappy. Now she seems to understand that being strong does not always mean being stubborn.

Chapter 9



Strength 6: Lena believes she has the power to kill someone with her mind, but she is not strong enough to tell Harold that she doesn't want ice cream. She understands her own strengths perfectly within her mind, but cannot explain them to anyone else. She often thinks her way into unhappiness: rather than simply deciding that Harold is too obsessed with money, she worries about what she specifically wants from him. It is partly this confusion that keeps her too weak to leave Harold.

Chapter 11

Strength 7: Rose always felt inferior to Ted, and let him push her around. So she is immensely proud of herself when she finally stands up to him, particularly because it is over something so important. He is trying to push her out of the house, forget she exists, and replace her with another woman. Rose suddenly realizes that she will not accept that. She loves the house, and is willing to fight for it, even though she is afraid of Ted. When she sees how powerful her words are, she feels even stronger.

Chapter 13

Strength 8: An-mei, though filled with sorrow, learns to find strength in her mother's death. She believes what her mother told her before she died: she was dying to give An-mei a stronger spirit than her own. An-mei stands up to Second Wife and "learns to shout." She sees that her mother's suicide was an act of great strength of will: she gave up everything so her children could have a better life than she did.

Chapter 14

Strength 9: Ying-ying willingly gives up her *chi*, her spirit, because she believes it is what brought her so much pain in the first place. She becomes, she says, like a ghost, who never objects or even lets her opinion be known. In order to avoid sadness, she decides to feel nothing at all. She marries Clifford because he is nice to her and she knows he will be a good husband. She asks for nothing from life, and seems to want nothing.

Chapter 16

Strength 10: Though June at first has no self-confidence in China, she begins to feel more comfortable. She seems to have conquered the pain of her mother's death, the frustration at never having known her, by meeting her mother's other daughters. She feels that she has fulfilled her mother's greatest wish, and has thus found her own kind of reconciliation with her mother.

Book 1, Feathers from a Thousand *Li* Away

An old woman remembers a very expensive swan she bought years ago. She sailed to America with the swan, planning to have a daughter who is just like her, but without her sadness and oppressed life. But immigration officials took the swan away from her, so she was left with only a feather. She wants to give her ignorant daughter this feather, but she is waiting until she could say what it meant in perfect English.



Chapter 1, Jing-Mei Woo, The Joy Luck Club

After Jing-Mei Woo's mother, Suyuan Woo dies of a cerebral aneurysm, Jing-Mei's father, Canning Woo, asks Jing-Mei to take Suyuan's place in The Joy Luck Club. The club is composed of three other women: Lindo Jong, Ying-ying St. Clair, and An-mei Hsu. The women, who all live in San Francisco, met in 1949, before Jing-mei (who calls herself June) was born, at a bible study group at the First Chinese Baptist Church, and Suyuan started the club. She understood that all of them had painful pasts, and knew that the idea of Joy Luck would cheer them up.

Suyuan had had the idea even longer ago, when she was first married in Kweilin, and always told Jing-mei the story when she was talking about her days in Kweilin, so Jing-mei thinks of the story of Joy Luck as her "Kweilin" story. "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine." Chapter 1, pg. 21

Speaking Chinese, her mother used to tell Jing-mei that she dreamt about Kweilin before she ever went there--everyone in China did, because it was supposed to be so beautiful. But when she finally got to go there, it wasn't for the beauty of the place. It was because her husband thought it would be safe for her and their two baby daughters. He was in the army and had to go to Chungking. The Japanese were winning the war, and everyone knew it, though the newspapers pretended it wasn't true. People of all races and classes flooded into Kweilin, looking for a safe place to stay. There was violence everywhere, and Suyuan nearly went crazy with fear and anxiety.

She decided to try to overcome her feelings of helplessness by starting a Joy Luck club with three other women. They would play mah jong and place bets, so that each week they could look forward to winning, and they could eat, gossip and joke. People thought they were crazy for laughing, and for treating themselves to what good food they could afford. But Suyuan knew that she had a choice: she could either sit quietly and wait for death, which could come at any time, or she could take happiness where she could find it. Jing-mei, listening to the story, always thought it was made up, since her mother always changed the details. Then one night her mother tells her a totally different ending to the story. Suyuan says that she was told to go to her husband in Chungking immediately. She walked with a wheelbarrow for days, surrounded by other fleeing people, until the things she carried got harder to bear and she had to discard them, one by one. When Jing-mei asks what happened to the babies, her mother simply says, "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies." Chapter 1, pg. 26

Topic Tracking: China/America 1

Jing-mei arrives late to the Joy Luck Club meeting, which is being held at the Hsus' house. She remembers how stuffy and unchanging the house has always been. She has been coming here since she was very young. She sits down, feeling



uncomfortable--how can she replace her mother?--and Mr. Hsu reads the notes from the last meeting. He formally extends sympathies to Jing-mei and her father, and that is the only mention of Suyuan's death. Jing-mei is taken aback. The club has started investing in the stock market, because some people were better at mah jong than others, but no one can be "skilled" at the stock market: it's just luck. They don't play mah jong until after midnight. Jing-mei watches An-mei make wonton (dumpling skins stuffed with meat and spices) and thinks about what her mother always said about An-mei: she could never make up her mind. She didn't think clearly. Jing-mei wonders why her mother was so critical of everyone, even people she loved, throughout her life. Jing-mei could never convince her mother to stop criticizing her.

The members of the club begin to eat a wonderful traditional Chinese meal. Everyone eats greedily. Then they begin the game, the four women playing separately from the men. The old women are very serious about whether Jing-mei will be able to take her mother's place or not. Jing-mei is nervous: she doesn't play well and worries that the other women will get angry. Lindo is aggressive and intimidating, but Ying-ying is kind to Jing-mei. They play for a while, gossiping, and Jing-mei begins to get bored. Then Ying-ying suddenly says she has a story: a neighbor's son was arrested for selling stolen TV's. An-mei sits quietly, because her son was recently arrested for selling car stereos. Lindo begins to talk about how rich people are in China, which hurts An-mei even more. She went to China a few years ago to visit relatives, bringing candy and California-style clothes. Her relatives didn't want what she brought them, but they did want her money: she ended up spending nearly nine thousand dollars on appliances, vacations, and everything in between. Lindo seems oblivious to An-mei's pain. Jing-mei recalls that Lindo and her mother were best friends and arch enemies throughout their lives. They competed through their children: Lindo's daughter Waverly was a chess champion, and it drove both Jing-mei and Suyuan crazy. Jing-mei gets up to leave, but Ying-ying tells her they have something important to tell her...from her mother. The others look upset that Ying has brought this up now. The women tell Jing-mei that her mother spent her life looking for her other daughters, and just after she died, Ying-ying, An-mei and Lindo made contact with them. The Joy Luck club wants to send Jing-mei to China to meet her sisters. Dumbfounded, June just nods to everything the women tell her. She sees that the women are afraid that their own daughters are like Jing-mei: ignorant about Chinese ways, and not interested to learn. She reassures them, and they relax a little.

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 1



Chapter 2, An-Mei Hsu, Scar

As a young girl in China, An-mei was forbidden to talk about her mother. She lived in a large house with her brother, grandmother, uncle and aunt. Her grandmother, Popo, loved her, but An-mei was afraid of her too. Popo got very sick and told An-mei fables she could not understand. Her father was dead, and she was afraid of his ghost. One day, her aunt told her and her brother that her mother had dishonored their family by marrying a rich man who had many wives and children. That was why they were forbidden to speak her name. One day when Popo was dying, An-Mei's mother returned to the house. She was reluctantly admitted, and she began to care for Popo--who would have thrown her out of the house if she had been in her right mind. An-mei saw that her mother was beautiful, foreign-looking, and curious just like An-Mei herself. Her mother brushed An-mei's hair, and when she felt a scar on her neck, she began to cry. Suddenly An-mei remembered where she got the scar: her mother had appeared one night during dinner, trying to take An-mei away with her. There was a fight, and soup spilled on An-Mei. She nearly died. Remembering years later, An-Mei explains when she began to love her mother: her mother cut a piece of flesh from her own arm to feed to Popo, hoping to save her life. An-mei understands the pain her mother feels. "Even though I was young, I could see the pain of the flesh and the worth of the pain." Chapter 2, pg. 48

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 2



Chapter 3, Lindo Jong, The Red Candle

Lindo claims that young women do not understand the value of a promise. She once sacrificed her life to keep a promise for her parents. Her parents arranged a marriage for her when she was only two. She remembers it perfectly: the women gossiped about her, and she hated it. She was engaged to Tyan-yu, who was terribly spoiled by his mother, Huang Taitai. Lindo's parents treated her as if she belonged to somebody else. When she was twelve, her house was destroyed by floods and her family moved away, leaving her with Tyan-yu's family, the Huangs. Their house was large, and built to impress others. Lindo was sent to the servant quarters, so she knew right away that she was going to be a slave there. She learned to cook and sew masterfully, and she tried to be cheerful. But she knew her future husband was awful, because he enjoyed making her cry. When Lindo was sixteen, they married in a ceremony that was far too small for Huang Taitai's pride. Though her parents had made her promise to marry Tyan-yu, Lindo was afraid and miserable. Then she realized that she was strong. She suddenly understood herself. "I was no longer scared. I could see what was inside me." Chapter 3, pg. 59 Lindo walked down the aisle, not caring that her husband was ignoring her. She watched as the marriage officials brought out a candle with wicks at both ends. If the candle burned for the entire night without either side going out, the marriage could never be broken. That meant that Lindo could never remarry, even if her husband died. That night, she stayed awake as her new husband slept, still ignoring her. She walked out into the courtyard and through a window saw a servant who was supposed to be watching the candle. The woman was asleep. Lindo saw the woman jump up and run away when she heard a thunderclap--it sounded like the Japanese were attacking. Lindo went to the servant's room and prayed for the candle to go out. She hoped so hard that her breath escaped her and she blew out the candle. The next morning the servant lied, saying the candle had burned all night.

Topic Tracking: Strength 1

At first, Lindo was afraid that Tyan-yu would try to sleep with her. But gradually she learned that he had no interest in that. Then she found out he had told his mother that Lindo was refusing to sleep with him (since everyone knew his mother wanted a grandson.) When Huang Taitai scolded Lindo, she tried to get Tyan-yu to sleep with her. Then she saw that he was afraid of her, and didn't want to sleep with any woman. Huang Taitai, still ignorant of this, forced Lindo to stay in bed all day and think about nothing but having babies. She sent a servant girl to make Lindo drink a terrible-tasting medicine every day. Lindo envied this girl, who was nice to her. She saw the girl walking freely outside, flirting with a delivery man. Huang Taitai brought in the village matchmaker to assess the situation. The old woman proclaimed that Lindo was too balanced: she needed less of one element (fire, water, earth, wood or metal) in order to have children. Huang Taitai happily took back all the metal jewelry she had given Lindo. "After the gold was removed from my body I felt lighter, more free. They say this is what happens if you lack metal. You begin to think as an independent person." Chapter 3, pg. 63 Lindo began to plan a way to escape her marriage without breaking her promise to her parents. She decided to make it look like her in-laws were the ones who wanted *her*



to leave. She pretended to have a dream in which her ancestors saw the candle burn out on her wedding night. She told Huang Taitai that her ancestors said that if Tyan-yu stayed in the marriage, he would die. She showed Huang Taitai the mole on his back for proof: she said her ancestors had told her that this mole would eat away his skin. Then she said that there was a servant girl who an ancestor had impregnated with Tyan-yu's real child--this was Tyan-yu's true spiritual wife. (Lindo had watched the friendly servant girl flirt with the delivery man, and seen that she was pregnant and didn't know what to do.) This servant girl became Tyan-yu's wife, and thought it was such a miracle that she became very religious. Lindo was sent away with enough money to go to America. Lindo still remembers the day she found the strength to follow her own desires, to free herself from the whims of other people. Now that she lives in America, she buys gold bracelets for herself every so often, to show what she is worth.

Topic Tracking: Strength 2



Chapter 4, Ying-ying St. Clair, The Moon Lady

Ying-ying says that long ago she gave herself up, so now even her daughter doesn't see her or hear her. She says that she and her daughter are similar in this way. She remembers a time when she was not quiet and submissive. She was four years old, and it was 1918, the day of the Moon Festival. It was an important day, and this was the first time she was allowed to go to the ceremony. Her nursemaid explained that she should not ask questions about it, even though she was very curious. She is told that the Moon Lady will grant one secret wish to each person on this day. She waits impatiently. The women tell her that girls should not run around or make noise. Everyone is dressed up. They board a boat, and Ying-ying is very excited at all the activity. She watches people scaling fish and killing sea animals. Then suddenly she notices she has blood all over her clothes. When her nursemaid finds her, the woman screams at her and tells her they will both be banished for this. Ying-ying is forbidden to join the festivities. In the evening, she sees the huge moon in the sky, and is just about to make a wish when firecrackers go off and she falls into the water. She quickly gets picked up by a fishing net from another boat. The fishermen make fun of her, but a woman tries to be kind, asking her where she is from. They can see she is rich, so finally they decide to just leave her on the shore to be found. Wandering along the docks, Ying-ying comes upon a play about the Moon Lady. She has been doomed to live alone on the moon, never seeing her husband, because she is greedy and selfish. Ying-ying understands perfectly and begins to cry. The Moon Lady says, "For woman is yin, the darkness within, where untempered passions lie. And man is yang, bright truth lighting our minds." Chapter 4, pg. 81 Ying-ying does not understand that this is all an act, so she runs backstage after the show and finds the Moon Lady. Just as she says her wish, she sees that the Moon Lady is really an actor---a man. Remembering this as an old woman, Ying-ying says that she had forgotten almost all the details of that night. Though she was eventually found by her family, she doesn't believe she was ever the same again. And now she remembers what she wished for: to be found.

Topic Tracking: Strength 3

Book 2, The Twenty-six Malignant Gates

A mother tells her little girl not to ride her bicycle around the corner. She says that the girl will fall--it is written in a Chinese book called The Twenty-six Malignant Gates. The girl complains, and when her mother will not tell her what the twenty-six possible bad things are, she gets on her bike and rides away so angrily that she falls down before she even reaches the corner.



Chapter 5, Waverly Jong, Rules of the Game

When she was only six, Waverly Jong's mother Lindo taught her how to have "invisible strength." She taught her that crying to get what you want doesn't always work, but being quiet and following the rules to your advantage does. This led Waverly to be a chess champion. Growing up in San Francisco, Waverly didn't think she was poor. She always had enough to eat and was comfortable. But her apartment was small and in a crowded neighborhood. She remembers the fragrant Chinese markets and the white tourists. One Christmas, her family went to a party at the church they attended, and the children were given grab-bag presents. Her brother gets a chess set, and her mother tries to throw it away because it is obviously used. Her two brothers won't let her. Eventually they teach Waverly to play, and she gets good at it very quickly. She is fascinated with the rules, with the strategies for winning. A neighbor tells her she should compete in tournaments, and her mother unexpectedly agrees to this. Waverly gets angry when her mother, who knows nothing about the game, tries to tell her how to play, and then takes credit for her successes. Her mother gives her many privileges--she no longer has to do chores, for example--but she also brags constantly about her daughter, the national chess champion. One day Waverly confronts her mother. "Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess." Chapter 5, pg. 99 She twists out of her mother's arms and runs away. She runs until she has nowhere else to go. When she gets home, her mother instructs the rest of the family to ignore her. Waverly feels like she is playing chess with her mother, and her mother is winning. She doesn't know what to do.

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 3



Chapter 6, Lena St. Clair, The Voice from the Wall

Lena St. Clair remembers Ying-ying telling her about a man who died the worst death imaginable. When Lena asked for more information, her mother got angry, asking why it mattered. Lena always thought it was important to know what the worst thing that could happen to you could be. She wants to know what she is afraid of, unlike her mother, who is afraid of everything and seems haunted, like a ghost. Lena thinks she got this same quality from her mother. Even as a child, she was afraid of everything, and was always imagining gruesome, horrible things. Lena says that while she looks like her father, Clifford St. Clair, an English-Irish man, her eyes are like her mother's. She knows her mother tells her things just to scare her, to make sure that she doesn't do anything dangerous. Lena is ashamed that her mother can't understand English, and she hates her mother's Chinese ways.

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 4

Topic Tracking: China/America 2

When her father was promoted, the family moved to San Francisco. Young Lena is happy: she wants to be around people who can live their lives happily and without fear. But her mother is unhappy, and Lena first learns this when, on the street one day, a man runs up to Ying-ying and calls her the girl of his dreams. Ying-ying is so frightened she cannot move, and she remains shaken for the rest of the day. She starts rearranging the furniture, and Lena can see that something very bad is going to happen soon. Ying-ying says she is worried that the house is out of balance. "This house was built too steep, and a bad wind from the top blows all your strength back down the hill. So you can never get ahead. You are always rolling backward." Chapter 6, pg. 109 Lena is scared, but her father just tells her that her mother is "nesting." Lena later finds out that this is true--her mother is going to have a baby. But Lena sees what her father does not see: her mother bumps against things, as if she has forgotten she is pregnant. She complains about feeling heavy and out of balance. Meanwhile, Lena can hear her neighbors, a woman and her daughter, yelling at each other. They argue, and then Lena hears someone beating someone else. She thinks someone is being murdered, but each night the arguments begin and end the same way. Lena is terrified. When she finally sees the girl in the hallway, she feels guilty for knowing all her secrets.

Lena is taken to the hospital to see her mother. Her mother is lying in bed, screaming and blaming herself for what happened. Lena's father, who has always put words in his wife's mouth when he couldn't understand her Chinese, finally asks Lena what Ying-ying is saying. Lena listens to her mother. Ying-ying screams that the baby came out with no brain, and she knew he was looking at her, knowing how she killed her other son. Lena cannot tell her father this, so she just says something about how her mother hopes the baby is happy in the afterlife. After the baby dies, Ying-ying falls apart--she cries at odd times, and stays in bed for hours. One night, the girl from next door comes over. She pushes her way into Lena's bedroom as if she owns the place. She says that her mother

threw her out, and thought she would wait in the hallway and finally apologize. Instead, she is going to climb out of Lena's window and go across the fire escape to her own bedroom. She explains that she and her mother do this all the time, and it is never serious. Lena is amazed, and overjoyed that she was wrong about her neighbors. After that day, she is changed. She imagines a girl explaining to her mother that once you have experienced the worst possible thing, there is nothing left to fear, so you can come back to life.

Topic Tracking: Strength 4



Chapter 7, Rose Hsu Jordan, Half and Half

Rose Hsu Jordan remembers that her mother An-mei used to be religious, but lost her faith long ago. She uses her bible as a support for her kitchen table leg. Today, Rose watches her mother clean, wondering how she will tell her that she and her husband, Ted Jordan, are getting divorced. She knows that her mother will tell her that whatever is wrong can be fixed, and that her mother will not believe anything else. Rose thinks about her first years with Ted: he is white, and both their mothers didn't approve. This brought them closer together. He "rescued" her whenever she was in danger, and gradually he came to make all the decisions in their relationship. But after he was sued for a mistake in his surgery practice, he tried to get Rose to make more decisions. Then one day, after seventeen years of marriage, he asked for a divorce because she could never make up her mind about anything. Rose now has no idea what to do.

Rose remembers when her view of God changed. "I discovered that maybe it was fate all along, that faith was just an illusion that somehow you're in control." Chapter 7, pg. 121 The day she realized this was also the day her mother lost her faith. Years ago, the family--Rose, her father, her mother, her two sisters and her brothers Mark, Matthew, Luke and Bing--went to the beach. Rose, who was fourteen, was required to watch Bing, who was four years old. She realized even then that she was very similar to her mother: she worried about the same things, but tried to pretend that she didn't worry, and also felt that she was lucky. She remembers that her mother showed her a book about all the different evils that could befall a young child. An-mei worried constantly about all of them. And yet, the whole family felt like they had God on their side. But Bing began to walk on a high ledge, toward his father who was fishing. Suddenly everything happened at once: Luke and Mark started a fight, An-mei yelled at Rose to stop the fight, her father caught a fish, and Bing fell into the deep water. Rose didn't know what to do. And then they all began desperately searching for Bing. They stayed at the beach for hours, and that evening, An-mei, who had never learned to swim, went out in the water to find him. She had faith that she would be able to swim just this once. She swam until the police finally pulled her out of the water. Finally, the family went home.

That night, Rose expected to be punished, but everyone was blaming themselves. An-mei informed Rose that they were going the next morning to find Bing, and that morning, An-mei seemed to have learned to drive over night. At the beach, she prayed to God, demanding that their faith be rewarded by the return of Bing. Her faith was so strong that she saw him over and over, in seaweed, in strangers walking far away, and then she threw a life preserver into the water. She threw it over and over again until it was torn apart, and then she gave up. "My mother had a look on her face that I'll never forget. It was one of complete despair and horror, for losing Bing, for being so foolish as to think she could use faith to change fate." Chapter 7, pg. 130 Rose knows that she never expected to find Bing, and never expected to save her marriage. She feels that she let both those bad things happen, even though she somehow knew they were going to. She thinks her mother still has faith, though: she knows An-mei sees the bible. Rose

picks the bible up and flips to the "deaths" section. An-mei has written "Bing Hsu" in erasable pencil.



Chapter 8, Jing-mei Woo, Two Kinds

When June was growing up, Suyuan believed that June could be anything she wanted to be, and was determined that June be a genius of some kind. At first Suyuan wanted her to be a Shirley Temple, but she didn't have the right kind of hair. June felt excited but pressured at the idea of being a great success. Her mother was constantly giving her "tests" to find out what kind of genius she was. After a while, June decided to rebel. "I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won'ts. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not." Chapter 8, pg. 134 She stopped trying to succeed. Her mother began to give up. Then one night, she saw a young Chinese girl playing piano on TV, and decided June could be that girl. She found an old man in their apartment building who was a retired piano teacher. June quickly discovered that he was deaf, and began to fake the right notes. She stopped practicing, and her teacher never noticed. Meanwhile, her mother bragged to Lindo Jong that June was a natural talent. This angered June. "I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride." Chapter 8, pg. 138 When June was asked to play in a talent show, she never really even learned the song. She never thought about what it would be like once she got onstage, and as she began to play in front of the audience, she could not stop making mistakes. Afterward, Suyuan looked shocked, and Lindo and Waverly seemed smug. June felt terrible. She assumed she didn't have to practice anymore, and when her mother tried to force her, she screamed. Her mother yelled back, "Only two kind of daughters. Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" Chapter 8, pg. 142 June screamed back that she wished she was dead, like her mother's other daughters. Her mother backed out of the room, shocked. Today, June remembers that she failed her mother many times. But a few years ago, when June was thirty, her mother offered her the piano. She hadn't played since her recital. She took it as a sign of forgiveness from her mother. Now that her mother is dead, June goes to her parents' house to organize things. She plays a song that she played at her recital, "Pleading Child." She remembers it well. Then she plays the song on the opposite page, "Perfectly Contented." She realizes that they are two halves of the same song.

Topic Tracking: Strength 5

Topic Tracking: China/America 3



Book 3, American Translation

A mother is upset that her daughter has put a mirror at the foot of her bed in her new bedroom: she believes it is bad luck. The daughter is upset that her mother is so negative and superstitious, but then the mother pulls out another mirror. She places it above the headboard, so that the two mirrors face each other. She says that this will multiply her luck.



Chapter 9, Lena St. Clair, Rice Husband

Lena believes that her mother can see things before they happen--something her mother has always claimed to be able to do. She cannot see everything, however--only bad things. She even knows their causes, and she gets upset that she never tries to stop them. Lena thinks about her mother's ability because her mother is visiting her and her husband Harold, and she wonders what her mother will see in their home. Lena knows that her marriage has problems that are so complex that she has no idea how to fix them, and her mother's visit will just make it worse. Her mother knows that their fancy house, a converted barn, is still a barn underneath. She sees the fleas, and the slanted floor. And Lena thinks that her mother must see everything else between her and Harold as well. Her mother has always had that ability: when Lena was a child, Ying-ying looked into her rice bowl and said that Lena would marry a bad man. She would marry a man who had a pockmark for each grain of rice Lena left in her bowl. Since Lena has already been leaving food behind, even if she ate everything that night, it wouldn't matter. She was already doomed. Lena suddenly knew she would marry a mean neighbor boy who had acne. She was frightened. "I began to look at all events and all things as relevant, an opportunity to take or avoid." Chapter 9, pg. 152 Then she saw a movie at Sunday school that was meant to scare the children into feeling grateful about their blessings. The movie showed people without limbs, with terrible sores, and with all kinds of frightening disfigurements. Lena reasoned that these people had spouses who had left *tons* of food on their plates. Then she realized that in order to avoid marrying her mean neighbor, she had to do just that. She tried giving him leprosy or some other horrible disease by leaving lots of food on her plate, especially if it was something she liked. Five years later, the boy died of a very rare disease. Lena was sure she had killed him, and she thinks about it to this day. The night she found out about the neighbor's death, she forced herself to eat a half-gallon of ice cream, then threw it up. "And I remember wondering why it was that eating something good could make me feel so terrible, while vomiting something terrible could make me feel so good." Chapter 9, pg. 154 Lena is still not sure whether she caused the boy's death or not.

Topic Tracking: China/America 4

She thinks that her marriage to Harold may have something to do with the death of her neighbor. Though they work together at their own architectural firm now, they used to work at the same design company, and often had business lunches together. Then they began dating, but still split the meal bill half and half, as they had done before. Lena fell in love with Harold and couldn't believe he loved her too. "Now that I'm angry at Harold, it's hard to remember what was so remarkable about him." Chapter 9, pg. 155 Lena knows that Harold has good qualities, and she nervously lists her own: she is exotic looking, and she is intuitive. She is the one who got Harold to start his own business in the first place. Harold didn't want to borrow any money from her, so he asked her to move in with him, supposedly to save money. She assumed he really wanted her to move in anyway. She tried to protest that she wanted to lend him money--she wanted to share herself with him in all ways--but she didn't know what to say. She urged him to create theme restaurants, and gradually, she became responsible for much of his



success. She designs much of the décor of each restaurant, and she comes up with many of the original ideas for themes. But Harold pays her very little money, even though she is great at her job. She tries not to think about this. She remembers that one day she was looking at Harold's things on the table and felt suddenly that she really loved him. But when she told him this and he said, "I love you too," mechanically, she decided this wasn't enough for her. Now Harold has gone out and Lena and Ying-ying sit in the kitchen together. Ying-ying sees the list they keep on the refrigerator--it divides their expenses for the week so that each will know if they owe each other money. Her mother sees that Harold lists ice cream as something they share, and Ying-ying gets upset, because she knows Lena doesn't eat ice cream. Lena can't explain why they use the list. When Harold returns, he asks if anyone wants ice cream, and Ying-ying tells him pointedly that Lena doesn't eat ice cream. When Lena admits that this is true, Harold simply says, "Oh well." Lena is irritated. Later, she takes her mother to the guest room, which has the house's bare look (Harold has chosen the decorations because he pays most of the rent.) Her mother comments on a wobbly table: Harold built it when he was a student, and it is poorly designed, but he likes it. Ying-ying wonders why they use it, and Lena has nothing to say.

Back downstairs, Harold has opened the windows, which Lena hates. He sits reading, and suddenly she jumps up, asking him why he has to be so fair all the time. He assumes she is just upset about having to pay the bills for her cat, which they have been arguing about lately. She yells that that isn't the point, but she doesn't know what the point is. What does she want from him? He claims that their marriage is based on much more than their lists of costs, but she isn't so sure. Then they hear a glass breaking upstairs. Lena goes to the guest room and finds her mother, who simply says that the table has collapsed. Lena says she knew it would happen, and it doesn't matter. Her mother wonders why, if she knew, she didn't prevent it, and Lena has no answer.

Topic Tracking: Strength 6



Chapter 10, Waverly Jong, Four Directions

Waverly took Lindo out to lunch, and Lindo complained and criticized throughout the meal. Waverly is humiliated, and realizes that there will never be a good time to tell her mother that she is marrying Rich Schields. Waverly's friends don't understand why she should be so afraid of her mother. Waverly just says it has something to do with her mother being Chinese--she knows how to hurt her daughter like no one else, with only a few words. Waverly knows that her mother has avoided meeting Rich, or even talking about him. After their lunch, she took Lindo to her apartment, hoping to let her know there that she and Rich are getting married. She knows that her mother will not be able to ignore the evidence of Rich all over the house. But Lindo does ignore it, saying only, "You are busy. You want to live like mess what can I say?" Chapter 10, pg. 169 She also insults the mink coat Rich gave Waverly. Waverly is hurt, and remembers the first time her mother wounded her this way.

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughter 5

When she was ten, Waverly was a very talented chess player, and she hated that her mother took the credit for it. When she finally told her mother this, her mother didn't speak to her for days. To teach her a lesson, Waverly stopped playing chess. But soon she missed the game, so she tried to act as if she was giving in and told her mother she would play again. Her mother screamed at her that it was not so easy. Confused and hurt, Waverly went to her room and tried to lose herself in the game. That night she had a fever, and got chicken pox. Her mother took care of her, but Waverly saw soon after that Lindo had somehow changed. She no longer cared as much about Waverly's tournaments. And soon Waverly began to lose. She hated herself for losing, so she gave up the game when she was fourteen. No one protested.

Waverly tries to explain to a friend why she cannot argue with her mother. She is afraid of her mother's power to destroy things that Waverly once thought were good. She was completely in love with her first husband, until her mother began to tell her little flaws she noticed. Soon, Waverly began to dislike and then grow bored with him. The only thing that remains of their marriage is their daughter Shoshanna, who Waverly at first didn't want but now loves deeply. She knows that Rich loves her the same way. He is kind and honest and direct, and he makes her feel loved just for being herself. But still, Waverly tries to protect herself and Rich from her mother's critical eye. Finally, she comes up with a plan to get her mother to meet Rich so she will learn how wonderful he is. She takes him to dinner at Suyuan's house, and tells Suyuan that Rich said he had never tasted such good Chinese food. Waverly knows her mother will not be able to resist the competition, and sure enough, the next day she and Rich receive an invitation to dinner at Lindo's house. Waverly makes Rich promise to tell Lindo that her cooking was better than Suyuan's. But the meal is a disaster. Lindo hates the way Rich looks, and Rich doesn't understand Chinese table manners. He takes too much food, and



does not compliment Lindo the way he is expected to. He doesn't even see how badly the evening went.

Topic Tracking: China/America 5

Waverly begins to see all the bad things her mother sees in Rich. She realizes she has to do something, so she abruptly goes to her parents' house the next morning. She breathlessly tells her mother about the engagement. Her mother tells her she already knows. When Waverly tries to ask her mother why she hates Rich so much, Lindo denies having any bad feelings toward him. She says she understands what Waverly is going through: half of her is from her father's side, honest but stingy people, and half from her mother's side, who were great warriors. Waverly begins to think that they are connecting, but then she gets the name of her mother's birthplace wrong. They both sit silently for a while, but then her mother forgives her and they begin to laugh together. "I saw what I had been fighting for: it was for me, a scared child..." Chapter 10, pg. 183 She sees that her mother is, for all her insults, basically harmless.

Waverly and Rich postpone the wedding. He and Lindo are becoming friends, and they take her advice but also keep her at a distance. They are going to China for their honeymoon, and Lindo wants to come along. Waverly partly hates the idea, and partly likes it.

Topic Tracking: China/America 6

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 6



Chapter 11, Rose Hsu Jordan, Without Wood

Rose used to believe everything her mother, An-mei, said. When An-mei said that Old Mr. Chou was the guardian of the door to sleep, Rose believed her. But she was afraid of Mr. Chou, and she often had nightmares. Once, she dreamed that she got into trouble with Mr. Chou for not listening to her mother. She feels the same today. At a funeral for a very pious member of their church, they talk about Rose's divorce. Her mother is convinced that Ted is cheating on her, but Rose thinks the idea is ridiculous. An-mei is upset that Rose talks about her problems to her psychiatrist but not her mother. Actually, Rose has been talking about Ted to everyone but Ted. She talks about how much he has hurt her, and how much she misses being with him. But she also says she is better off without him, and wants to get revenge on him. She feels like this anger is progress, but her psychiatrist doesn't seem very interested.

She had been organizing their house, deciding what to keep and what to throw away, when she received a note from Ted. He sent divorce papers for Rose to sign and a check for ten thousand dollars "to tide you over." The two documents were written in different pens. The check was written out in the pen Rose had given him a year ago. He had said he would only use it to write important things. Rose is hurt, and tries to figure out why he used the special pen to write the check. Rose doesn't know whether to sign or not, so she puts the papers away. She remembers that her mother told her why she was so confused all the time: she didn't have any wood in her character. She always bent to what other people wanted. Considering this Chinese way of thinking, Rose had always thought that the American versions of things were better than the Chinese versions. But now she sees that American thoughts offer too many options: they are confusing. Rose walks around the house, noticing that the garden Ted used to be so proud of is now falling apart. She wonders if this offers some clue as to what happened to their marriage.

Not knowing what to do, she goes to bed for three days. She doesn't dream until the very end, when she dreams again of Old Mr. Chou. He is going to crush her, and he rings a loud bell. As Rose wakes up, the bell turns into the telephone. Her mother begs her to stand up for herself. Then Ted calls. He is angry that Rose has not yet signed the divorce papers. He wants to get married again, and is impatient. Shocked and humiliated to find out that he was cheating on her, she suddenly pulls herself together and tells him to come over. She doesn't know what she wants to do, but she knows she wants him to see her. When he arrives, she saw that he really doesn't care about her. She shows him the garden, taking her time, then suddenly tells him that she is not moving out. She likes the house, and wants to stay there. He is angry and tries to bully her, but she insists, and he is afraid. She is very proud of herself. That night she dreams about her mother and Mr. Chou again. They call her over to the garden, friendly. Her mother shows her she what she has planted, saying there is enough for both of them. "And below the heimongmong, all along the ground, were weeds already spilling out over the edges, running wild in every direction." Chapter 11, pg. 196

Topic Tracking: China/America 7

Topic Tracking: Strength 7

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 7



Chapter 12, Jing-mei Woo, Best Quality

Five months ago, Suyuan gave Jing-mei a necklace that Suyuan called her "life's importance." At first, Jing-mei disliked the way it looked. But now she wears it every day. She wonders what the jewel and design mean, but knows that everyone she asks would give her a different answer. She met a bartender who wore the same sort of pendant, and when she asked him where and why he got his, he said his mother gave it to him, but Jing-mei could tell he had no idea why.

For last Chinese New Year's, Suyuan bought eleven crabs--one per person, plus one extra. Jing-mei helped her shop, listening to her mother complaining about her tenants (she and her husband owned their building) and criticizing other women on the street. She says that a Caucasian couple accused her of poisoning their cat, who has disappeared. Jing-mei wouldn't put it past her mother to do such a thing. They examine the crabs, using a pencil to see how strong the creatures' grips are. But one crab loses a leg, and when Suyuan tries to put it back, the store clerk insists that she take it. Irritated, Suyuan says it doesn't matter anyway, because this one will be extra. Back home, Jing-mei can't watch her mother cook the crabs. She remembers playing with a crab when she was eight, then watching her mother boil it alive. She cannot forget the image of the crab trying to escape from the pot.

Lindo, her husband, Waverly, her brother Vincent, his girlfriend, Waverly's daughter Shoshana, Rich, and Jing-mei's old piano teacher come to the dinner at the Woo household. Jing-mei watches as everyone picks out the best crabs, leaving her and her mother with a discolored one and the one with the missing leg. Suyuan takes the one without the leg, and Jing-mei sees her quietly smell it and then take it into the kitchen, returning with more seasonings for the table but without the crab. Waverly and Rich disdain the crab's brain, which Lindo says is the best part. Then Waverly begins to sneakily insult Jing-mei, telling her that she should get her hair cut where Waverly goes--though it might be too expensive for her. Furious and wanting to hurt the other woman, Jing-mei asks Waverly why she hasn't paid her for the copy-writing work she did for her company. Waverly looks flustered at first, but then she says that Jing-mei's work was unsatisfactory. Ashamed, Jing-mei tries to say that she can change the work to meet the needs of the company, but Waverly brushes her off. She says Jing-mei just does not have style. Then Suyuan tells Waverly, "True, cannot teach style. June not sophisticate like you. Must be born this way." Chapter 12, pg. 206 There is silence, and then finally Lindo tells Waverly to give Jing-mei another chance. Jing-mei tries to smile and declines, going into the kitchen to wash the dishes. "That was the night, in the kitchen, that I realized I was no better than who I was....And I no longer felt angry at Waverly. I felt tired and foolish, as if I had been running to escape someone chasing me, only to look behind and discover there was no one there." Chapter 12, pg. 207 Later that night, she talks with her mother. Suyuan says that she knew June would pick the worst crab--she thinks differently from the others, who always want the best. Though June doesn't understand, this makes her feel good. Then suddenly Suyuan takes off her necklace and gives it to June--it is her life's importance.



Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 8

June is making tofu for her father, remembering all this after her mother has died. She hears the tenants her mother hated so much upstairs. She hopes to cheer her father up with a good meal. Then she sees the cat from upstairs--her mother didn't kill it after all. She tries to shoo it away, but it just hisses at her.



Book 4, Queen Mother of the Western Skies

A grandmother talks with her baby granddaughter. She tells her that she too used to laugh freely and easily like her, but then she learned to be suspicious and protect herself. She taught this to her daughter, also. She wonders whether this was the right thing for the two of them to learn. The baby just laughs, and the grandmother sees that the baby is Queen Mother of the Western Skies, who has lived forever, and knows the right way to live. The grandmother listens to the Queen Mother's advice, and says, "Then you must teach my daughter this same lesson. How to lose your innocence but not your hope. How to laugh forever." Book 4, pg. 213



Chapter 13, An-mei Hsu, Magpies

An-mei laments that Rose is watching her marriage fall apart without doing anything. Rose says she has no choice, but An-mei knows that even to give up is to make a choice. An-mei knows because she is this way, just as her mother was.

Topic Tracking: China/America 8

When An-mei's mother came to An-mei's uncle's house, nine-year-old An-mei recognized her even though she didn't know her. All An-mei's relatives tell her that her mother is evil, but she doesn't look evil to An-mei. After Popo's funeral, her mother prepares to go back to the rich man she married after her husband died (this is why her relatives hate her--she married again as a widow, becoming the third wife of a rich man.) The night before she is to leave, she tells young An-mei that she used to sit by the same pond, with the same turtle in it, that An-mei plays near now. She says that when she was a child, Popo told her she couldn't play anymore, or even speak aloud. She had to sit silently and listen to others. She went to the pond to cry, and the turtle swallowed her tears. Then it climbed out and told her that it understood her pain, because it had eaten her tears. One egg for each tear fell out of its mouth, and from those eggs hatched beautiful birds: magpies, birds of joy. The turtle explained that her tears did not wash away her pain--they just created joy for others. Therefore, he told her, she should not cry. She must learn to "swallow her own tears." But when her mother is finished with the story, they both begin to cry. Young An-mei believes that she and her mother are both doomed to live with secret sadness their whole lives.

The next morning, An-mei wakes up to a fight in the courtyard. Her mother is leaving again, and she tells An-mei she can come with if she wants to, even though An-mei's aunt and uncle say that if she goes, she will ruin her own life. Her uncle tells her she will never be able to lift her head again, so she tries to lift it. Looking up, she sees her brother sobbing. Her mother cannot ask him to come too, because he is a boy, and cannot move to a different house. When An-mei sees her brother this way, she drops her head, realizing her uncle is right. An-mei and her mother travel on a boat for seven days. Her mother tells her how wonderful everything is in the city. But as they approach the city, her mother seems nervous. An-mei starts to get upset, but then her mother gives her a beautiful dress. She knows exactly what to do to make An-mei feel good, and An-mei is no longer afraid. When they arrive at the dock, her mother seems to be looking for someone but, finding no one, they take a rickshaw and arrive home, both exhausted and irritable. Her mother is married to Wu Tsing, a rich merchant whose large house amazes An-mei. There is a fancy cuckoo clock that keeps An-mei awake until she learns "to not listen to something meaningless calling to me." Chapter 13, pg. 226

An-mei is happy--until Wu Tsing returns with a new wife, Fifth Wife, who is very young. An-mei learns that her mother is not jealous because she, like many women in China, didn't marry for love, she married for position. And her position was the worst. One night An-mei, who sleeps with her mother, is awakened and told to leave. She sees Wu Tsing standing by the bed. The next morning, Fifth Wife is angry at everyone, but An-mei's



mother is even angrier. She tells her daughter that being a Fourth Wife, like herself, is even worse than being fifth. She has been dishonored by her husband's choice of a young, low-class woman as his fifth wife. Her mother angrily says that she was not always Fourth Wife--she used to be the first wife of a scholar. Soon after, Second and Third Wife return. Third Wife is ugly, and has three ugly, shy daughters. Second Wife dresses fancily, and carries a two year old boy. Second Wife gives An-mei a necklace, telling her how pretty she is. Though An-mei can see that for some reason her mother doesn't like Second Wife, she is very flattered. Later that day, An-mei's mother crushes one of the beads of the necklace, showing her that they are glass, not pearl. An-mei is shocked that she could be bought so easily, and tells her mother she understands that she was fooled. Then her mother gives her a beautiful ring. Soon, First Wife returns. An-mei expects her to be the ruler of the house, but she is a ghost of a woman, who often ignores everyone around her. An-mei learns that this woman had two daughters with Wu Tsing--one with legs of different lengths, and the other with a large facial birthmark.

After these tragedies, First Wife went on so many pilgrimages to another city that Wu Tsing bought her a house there. She only comes back to visit him twice a year. An-mei's mother decides that she too should have a separate house, and cheerfully tells An-mei that it will happen soon. During the winter, everyone stays in doors, and An-mei spends her time talking to a servant who tells her stories about Second Wife. Second Wife used to be a singer, but when she saw how rich Wu Tsing was, and how powerless First Wife was, she gave up her career to marry Wu Tsing. She knew he was superstitious, so he would believe in the idea of dead wives coming back as ghosts to haunt their husbands. She faked suicide over and over, so that each time he would be afraid and give her whatever she wanted. This was how she got control of their household. But she could not give him a son, which was his greatest desire. She then found him Third Wife, an ugly woman who was so grateful to her for arranging the marriage that she never questioned her authority. But Third Wife only had daughters, so Wu Tsing needed another wife.

An-mei presses the servant to tell her how her mother became Wu Tsing's Fourth Wife. Though the servant is hesitant, she finally explains that when An-mei's father died, her mother went to honor him in a pagoda across a lake. On the boat, her mother met Second Wife and Wu Tsing. Her mother was so beautiful that Second Wife immediately knew she had to find a way to make her Fourth Wife. She invited mother to have dinner, and then the next night they played mah jong until it was very late. Second Wife insisted that mother stay in her bed with her, but in the middle of the night she left, and Wu Tsing replaced her. When mother woke up to find Wu Tsing touching her, she tried to leave, but he raped her. Then Second Wife began gossiping about the evil widow who had seduced her husband. Mother could not protest--who would believe her? So she was forced to accept Wu Tsing's marriage proposal. She had a son, who Second Wife promptly claimed as her own. Hearing this story, An-mei suddenly sees who Second Wife really is: a cunning, cruel woman. An-mei wants her mother to yell at everyone around her for hurting her so much, but she knows that her mother cannot do that. She sees that her mother's situation is hopeless. Soon after, the servant wakes An-mei up late at night, bringing her to her mother's room. Her mother has poisoned herself, so everyone is waiting for her to die. An-mei cries until she faints. An-mei knows that her



mother planned her death carefully: "on the third day after someone dies, the soul comes back to settle scores. In my mother's case, this would be the first day of the lunar new year. And because it is the new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow." Chapter 13, pg. 240 Wu Tsing promises to raise An-mei and her brother as his honored children. An-mei shows Second Wife that she knows the necklace she gave her is worthless. Second Wife's hair begins to turn white.

Topic Tracking: Strength 8

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 9

Remembering this as an old woman, An-mei says that a psychiatrist is like one of those birds, drinking your tears and telling you to cry more. She says that her mother cried, not to understand herself, but because she had to. But people in China no longer have to do this--An-mei read something in a magazine recently. Birds had been eating the seeds peasants planted for thousands of years, drinking the tears of their labor. But recently the peasants gathered in the fields and yelled "Die!" at the birds until the birds began to fall to earth, dead. An-mei is overjoyed to read this.

Topic Tracking: China/America 9



Chapter 14, Ying-ying St. Clair, Waiting Between the Trees

Ying-ying, staying with her daughter Lena, knows that Lena thinks she knows everything, even though she has no understanding of Chinese ways of thinking. Ying-ying thinks she should have made her daughter respect her more when she was younger. Ying-ying knows that Lena's marriage will fall apart. "I have always known a thing before it happens." Chapter 14, pg. 243 Ying-ying remembers herself as a young girl. She was wild, spoiled and stubborn. She was wealthy and believed she was too good for everyone. When she was sixteen, she told her half-sisters this, and suddenly she knew she would marry a mean man who lived nearby, who was much older than she. She was amazed that she knew this, and she was absolutely sure of it. She married him, and soon came to love him. She did everything for him. When she got pregnant, she knew she would have a son. She realized her husband was cheating on her, and soon he left her for another woman. She aborted the baby out of anger at him. "It is because I had so much joy that I came to have so much hate." Chapter 14, pg. 247 Ying-ying says that her daughter does not know the strength of her anger. After her husband left, went to stay in the country with her cousin's family for ten years. After that time, she was ready to go to the city, and did so, unafraid. She went to work in a shop, and met Clifford St. Clair, who she knew instantly she would marry. She didn't like him or dislike him. She watched him court her eagerly with silly gifts, never knowing that she had been born rich. She made him wait four years, then married him. She decided that she would give up her spirit, because it had gotten her into so much trouble.

Topic Tracking: Strength 9

Ying-ying says that she was never truly able to love her husband, or let him know her. She decides that she must look at her past and give her daughter strength, because she knows Lena needs it. She knows that the vase on the table next to the bed she sits on is about to crash to the floor, and that Lena will come upstairs and not see her, where she sits in the darkness, waiting.



Chapter 15, Lindo Jong, Double Face

Lindo says that Waverly wants to go to China for her honeymoon, but is afraid that the people there will think she is one of them. When Lindo tells her that she will be instantly known as a foreigner, she gets angry. Lindo sees that Waverly thinks it is fashionable to look Chinese. Lindo thinks, "I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these things do not mix?" Chapter 15, pg. 254 Lindo reasons that people in America have ways of solving their problems that Chinese people don't have. Lindo knows that Waverly is ashamed of her, because she looks so Chinese. She insists that Lindo have her hair cut. At the hairdresser's, and the stylist talk about Lindo as if she isn't there. Lindo thinks about how Americans never really look at each other. The stylist says that Waverly and Lindo look strikingly similar, and Waverly gets very upset. They look at each other in the mirror, and Lindo remembers herself as a young girl.

Topic Tracking: China/America 10

Lindo remembers that when she was turning ten, her mother analyzed her features. She told her that they looked very similar, and described the hardships and good fortune that lay in Lindo's future. Lindo loved being similar to her mother in all ways. Lindo remembers that she paid a girl in Peking to teach her how to succeed when she went to America. The girl told her to say she was a student of theology, and told her to get married and have a child quickly--all the while telling the authorities that she would not have a child. Lindo is frustrated, thinking about what Waverly imagines her mother's life to be like. She wonders, "Why are you attracted only to Chinese nonsense?" Chapter 15, pg. 259 She wants Waverly to truly understand her, so she can understand herself. Lindo remembers when she came to America, no one questioned her the way she thought they would. Walking around Chinatown, she thought everything was cheap and silly-looking, not authentically Chinese. Lindo got a job in a cookie factory, and found a cheap apartment. Lindo met An-mei at the factory. They joked over the silly messages inside fortune cookies. An-mei tells Lindo that her husband knows a man who is looking for a wife. Lindo realizes that if she doesn't marry him, she will have to go back to China. With An-mei's urging, Lindo and Tin Jong begin dating, and soon got married. She had two sons, and then a daughter. Seeing how much her baby looked like her, Lindo decided she wanted the best for her daughter. Remembering this at the hairdresser's, Lindo watches Waverly. She suddenly sees that Waverly's nose is flawed and tells her she must have it corrected, but Waverly ignores her, telling her they have the same nose, which she likes because it makes them look devious. Lindo remembers that when she went back to China the year before, everyone knew she was a foreigner, and she didn't know why. She wonders what has happened to her, and whether it is good or bad. She decides to ask her daughter.



Chapter 16, Jing-mei Woo, A Pair of Tickets

On a train in China, June feels that her mother was right: she is becoming Chinese, even though she never thought there was anything Chinese about her. June is going with her father to visit his aunt, who he hasn't seen since he was ten. Then, in Shanghai, June will meet her mother's other daughters. When a letter from them had finally come, Suyuan was already dead--a blood vessel had burst in her brain. At first, Lindo and the others wrote a letter telling the other sisters that Suyuan was coming. Then June convinced Lindo that this was cruel, so Lindo wrote another letter telling them Suyuan was dead. In the crowded streets of China, June feels like a foreigner. She is tall--her mother always told her that she might have gotten this from her mother's father, but they would never know, because everyone in the family was dead. Everyone died when a bomb fell during the war. Suddenly June's father's aunt comes out of the crowd. She recognizes him from a photograph he sent. June meets the rest of the family, having trouble remembering any words in Cantonese. They all go to a hotel, which June assumes must be very expensive but turns out to be cheap. The relatives are thrilled by how fancy it all is. They want to eat hamburgers in the hotel room. In the shower, June wonders how much of her mother stayed with those other daughters. Was she always thinking about them? Did she wish June was them? Later, June listens while her father talks with his aunt. He says that he never knew Suyuan was looking for her daughters her whole life. Her father tells her that her name, Jing-mei, means, "little sister, the essence of the others." June asks for the whole story of how her mother lost her other daughters. Her father tells her that though her mother hoped to trade her valuables for a ride to Chungking to meet her husband, no one was accepting rides. After walking for a long time, Suyuan realized she could not go on carrying the babies, so she left them by the side of the road and wrote a note, saying that if they were delivered to a certain address, the deliverer would be rewarded greatly. She got very sick with dysentery, and Canning met her in a hospital. She said to him, "Look at this face. Do you see my foolish hope?" Chapter 16, pg. 283 The babies, it turned out, were rescued by a pious couple who lived in a secret cave near Kweilin. Several years later, when the husband died, the wife told the girls about their real mother, and began searching for her. Meanwhile, Suyuan and Canning traveled around China, searching as well. Finally they went to America, and Canning thought Suyuan had finally left the memory of her daughters behind. Years later, when Suyuan began to say that they had to go back to China before it was too late, he thought she meant she just wanted to visit, so he told her it was too late already. He thinks the idea that her daughters might have been dead killed Suyuan. Meanwhile, one of Suyuan's school friends recognized the grown-up sisters while shopping.

When June leaves her father's family at the airport, she thinks about good-byes, permanent and temporary. Hours later in Shanghai, June gets off the plane in a trance, without even knowing how she is moving. She sees a double image of her mother, then realizes she is seeing the twin daughters. "And now I also see what part of me is



Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood." Chapter 16, pg. 288 Looking again, June thinks that they do not look like her mother--and yet, in some way, they do. The women hug and cry, feeling their mother's presence. They take a Polaroid photograph and, watching it develop, see that together, they all look like Suyuan.

Topic Tracking: Strength 10

Topic Tracking: Mothers and Daughters 10