Native Speaker

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHANG-RAE LEE

Chang-Rae Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1965, but his family emigrated to the United States when he was three years old. He grew up in Westchester County in New York, where his father opened a psychiatric practice. When he was a teenager, he attended Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, obtaining a prestigious education that eventually led him to Yale University to study English literature. He graduated in 1987 and went on to work very briefly as an analyst on Wall Street before attending graduate school at the University of Oregon. His first novel, *Native Speaker*, served as the thesis for his Master of Fine Arts degree and was published in 1995, ultimately winning him the PEN/Hemingway Award for best first novel. He has since gone on to win many other literary awards, and his 2010 novel, *The Surrendered*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in fiction. He has also taught creative writing at widely respected institutions like Princeton University and Stanford University.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Native Speaker takes place in the 1990s, a period during which the United States' immigrant population was on a steady incline. The number of undocumented immigrants peaked in the year 2007 and then tapered down again, contrary to the common assumption that immigration to the United States has seen a consistent increase in the last 30 years. The 1990s therefore saw a somewhat unique influx of migration and, consequently, a mixed response about whether or not the nation should increase or decrease the number of immigrants coming the country. Polls have shown that the majority of Americans in the early 1990s were more hesitant to welcome immigrants than they were in the early 2000s, perhaps because many people stopped fearing that an increase in the immigrant population would make work harder to find. However, the general attitude that the immigrants in *Native Speaker* face is decidedly unwelcoming, as evidenced by the fact that many of John Kwang's undocumented constituents get arrested and face deportation at the end of the novel. In a way, then, *Native Speaker* predicts the controversy surrounding immigration and deportation that eventually came under the political spotlight of the 2010s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In addition to *Native Speaker*, several of Chang-Rae Lee's other novels touch on immigration and identity. *A Gesture Life*, for instance, examines an immigrant's attempt to seamlessly assimilate into American culture in much the same way that Henry Park does in *Native Speaker*, though the two characters have different reasons for wanting to do this. Other contemporary novels that explore the ins and outs of immigrant life in the United States include Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Refugees*, and Nicola Yoon's *The Sun is Also a Star*. Lee has also publicly praised Hohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, a novel about migration that he believes tells an important and timely story about what it's like to move from one culture to another. More broadly, *Native Speaker*'s story of an outsider struggling with his identity while making his way through New York City recalls Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, and both books consider the ways in which racism and prejudice can make people of color feel "invisible" in their own cultures.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Native Speaker
- **When Published:** 1995
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Immigrant Fiction
- **Setting:** New York City
- **Climax:** While lounging in bed at a hotel on Staten Island, Henry and Lelia watch the news and learn that John Kwang's headquarters in Queens has been bombed.
- **Antagonist:** Dennis Hoagland, but also racism and xenophobia

EXTRA CREDIT

Comfort Food. When his mother was dying, Chang-Rae Lee spent a year learning how to cook the Korean meals she used to make him when he was a child—an experience he recounted in his *New Yorker* essay "Coming Home Again," which was adapted as a short film in 2010.

PLOT SUMMARY

Henry Park is a Korean American man who lives in New York City and works as a spy of sorts. His job is to go undercover in a variety of contexts and gather information about a specified target. His boss is a man named Dennis Hoagland, whose firm gets hired by outside clients to gather information about "people working against their vested interests." In general, the people Henry spies on are usually wealthy immigrants who secretly support insurrections or revolutions in their home countries.

Most recently, Henry was assigned to gather information on a Filipino therapist named Emile Luzan. It's normally easy for Henry to stick to his invented backstory, but he had a hard time doing this because life was in shambles: his wife, Lelia, had recently gone to Italy alone. Her departure was tied to the fact that their son, Mitt, died at the age of seven.

Lelia felt alone with her grief because Henry never talked about it, but Henry just isn't a very expressive person. This is thanks to his Korean upbringing. His family moved to New York City from Korea when he was young, and his father worked hard to open grocery stores in the city. He did this with money from a **ggeh**, or a Korean "money club." After Henry's mother died when he was 11, his father moved Henry to a wealthy neighborhood north of the city and didn't dwell on his wife's death. Henry eventually became accustomed to his father's silent, stoic ways.

These days, Lelia has returned from Italy but hasn't moved back in with Henry. She's still angry about the way he mourned Mitt's death, which happened when they were staying with Henry's father during the summer. Mitt eventually wound up becoming close friends with the white children in the neighborhood, but during a rowdy pig pile at a birthday party, Mitt was crushed beneath the weight of the other boys and died.

Back in the novel's present, Henry has been avoiding his company's office because he doesn't want to talk to Hoagland about what happened during his Luzan assignment: Henry developed a real therapeutic relationship with Luzan and planned to warn Luzan to be careful. But two of his coworkers appeared and took Luzan away before Henry could say anything. One of those coworkers was Jack, an older Greek man who's a mentor to Henry. Now, Henry has been put on a new assignment, and Hoagland has instructed Jack to oversee it.

Henry is supposed to gather information about a Korean American city councilman named John Kwang. The fact that both Henry and Kwang are Korean Americans living in New York City is supposed to make the job easy for Henry, whose task is simply to work at Kwang's new political headquarters in Queens as an intern. He's supposed to write periodic reports about Kwang's activities and send them to Hoagland. But he's slow to get started, since he's preoccupied with what's happening in his relationship with Lelia. Henry turns to Jack for advice on how to fix his marriage, knowing Jack had a happy marriage before his wife died. In turn, Jack not only acts as a professional mentor, but also as a friend and confidante—and yet, it becomes increasingly clear that his advice to Henry about how to handle the Kwang case comes directly from Hoagland.

In the first weeks of his internship, Henry notices how much the other volunteers respect Kwang. They see him as a unifier who's representative of New York's immigrant communities. One volunteer, a young man named Eduardo, stands out as being especially devoted to Kwang. Eduardo is a 23-year-old—though he looks older—college student who has become close to Kwang. As for Kwang himself, he has a magnetic presence and hasn't yet confirmed or denied whether or not he'll be running for mayor. The current mayor, De Roos, is clearly nervous that Kwang will make a run for the position, so he has been criticizing him in public.

As Henry works his way into the Kwang organization, he manages to reestablish contact with Lelia. He does this by asking if he can borrow tape recordings she has of Mitt, saying he wants to hear their son's voice. This leads to a late-night conversation at their mutual friend's apartment—a conversation in which Lelia makes it clear that she left Henry because she'd had enough of his silence and secrecy, she hates that he never talks about Mitt, and she also dislikes his commitment to his job. After this, Lelia and Henry begin to see each other more regularly.

Slowly but surely, Henry endears himself to Kwang, who takes an interest in him because he's Korean American. Henry likes Kwang because he reminds him of a younger version of his father. The closer Henry works with the councilman, the more Kwang takes him under his wing, which only makes Henry feel worse about sending information about him back to Hoagland. Jack pays him several visits and encourages Henry to do his job, indicating that Hoagland is getting impatient.

Around this time, Lelia moves back in with Henry. They've been on good terms ever since a trip to clean out his father's house (his father died not long after Mitt). On this trip, Henry finally opens up to Lelia about his feelings. He even tells her about his difficulties at work, explaining that he's under pressure to dig up dirt on Kwang. He also implies that Hoagland might want him to make something up if he can't actually find anything scandalous about Kwang. But Henry's hesitant to do so because he knows Kwang might get hurt; after all, he recently learned that Luzan was killed in an alleged "accident" while traveling.

One night, Lelia and Henry are watching the news and discover that Kwang's headquarters have been bombed. Two people died: a custodian and Eduardo. Henry immediately contacts Hoagland and Jack, but they claim to have had nothing to do with the bombing. After this, Kwang's political operation moves to his house in Queens, where Henry starts working late and taking on many of Eduardo's duties. Everyone on the team is tense: Kwang still hasn't made a statement about the bombing and refuses to be seen in public. He's unraveling. Late one night, he comes downstairs and drinks with Henry. There have been rumors in the news that Eduardo was secretly renting an expensive apartment in Manhattan. People think Kwang was bankrolling him, but they don't know why. When Henry tries to broach the subject, Kwang gets angry, and their conversation devolves into an argument in which Kwang shouts at Henry. Henry backs down, and then Kwang declares that they're going

out together.

It's almost four in the morning when Kwang tells Henry to drive him into the city. They stop to pick up Sherrie, Kwang's PR coordinator. They then go to a Korean after-hours club where the waitresses shower the (mostly male) clientele with flirtation and physical affection. Henry can tell that Kwang and Sherrie have been here together before; they're clearly having an affair. Once inside a private room, Kwang tries to pair Henry off with the waitress. Noticing that Henry is very uncomfortable, Sherrie decides to leave—but the door is locked. Kwang jumps up and physically restrains her, so Henry defends her by tackling Kwang. Sherrie slips out of the room, and then Kwang turns his rage on Henry. He's quite drunk, and he claims that everyone is against him. Even Eduardo was against him, he says, explaining that Eduardo was stealing information. When Kwang found out, he says, he hired a Korean gang to take care of the matter, though he claims he didn't know they'd bomb the headquarters. Henry is speechless and leaves as Kwang sits back for a lap-dance from the waitress.

Around this time, Jack meets Henry in a diner and urges him to give Hoagland information. One of the duties Henry took over from Eduardo is organizing Kwang's "money club," which Kwang has styled after the traditional Korean *ggeh* to empower his community of immigrants. Henry is in charge of keeping track of all the people who contribute to the *ggeh*, and now Jack tells him that Hoagland wants a copy of the list of names. After some hesitation, Jack delivers the list.

Kwang is arrested the following day. Kwang returned to the club the previous night, got drunk, and crashed his car while driving with one of the waitresses, a 16-year-old Korean girl. His entire political team is thrown into chaos, but not just because of the scandal—there's also a report that the Immigration and Naturalization Service has gotten its hands on a list of people participating in Kwang's "money club." Most of the people in the club are undocumented immigrants, and by the time Henry is watching the news broadcast, the director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service reports that they have all been arrested and will be deported. Henry is devastated. He feels as if he has betrayed his own people, and he refuses to ever work for Hoagland again. He now knows Eduardo was another of Hoagland's operatives.

Henry quits his job and spends his days walking through Queens. He sometimes passes by Kwang's old house. Kwang himself has moved back to Korea with his family, but Henry still thinks about him. Otherwise, he spends time with Lelia and helps her in her job as an ESL teacher, going into classrooms and helping children work on their pronunciation—an activity that at least makes him feel like he's helping the immigrant community instead of hurting it.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Henry Park – Henry is a Korean American man living in New York City. The novel's narrator, he works as a spy for Glimmer & Company, a company that gathers information about people for anonymous clients. Most of the people Henry spies on are wealthy immigrants with ties to revolutionary groups in their home countries, but he generally tries not to think about how the information he gathers will be used. Instead, he focuses on inhabiting his invented backstory, which is normally easy for him because he's used to fitting into his surroundings; he feels particularly well-suited to this role because of his multicultural identity, which has taught him how to manage multiple modes of self-presentation. However, his job also requires a lot of secrecy, which puts a strain on his relationship with his wife, Lelia. To add to this strain, Henry and Lelia already have a fair amount of tension in their relationship because of their different ways of responding to their son's death. Their son, Mitt, died at the age of seven, and while Lelia wants to talk about her grief, Henry remains mostly silent about his feelings and simply wants to move on. Feeling alone with her sorrow, Lelia leaves him to be on her own for a while. Around the time she comes back, Henry starts a new assignment as an intern at the political headquarters of a city councilman named John Kwang. Like Henry, Kwang is Korean American, and Henry can't help but identify with him—Kwang even reminds him of his father. Although Henry has spent the majority of his life cultivating the American aspects of his cultural identity, he now gets in touch with his Korean cultural values, admiring Kwang's ability to put those values to use as a prominent public figure. As he works with Kwang, he repairs his relationship with Lelia by opening up about his feelings. In turn, he gradually transforms throughout the book from a secretive, guarded spy to someone who's more open and who wants to empower his fellow immigrants instead of conspiring against them.

Lelia – Lelia is Henry's wife. Originally from Massachusetts, she works as a speech specialist who helps people learn English and improve their pronunciation. When she first meets Henry at a party in Texas, she tells him that she can tell he's not a "native speaker"—not because he has an accent, but because he looks very concentrated when he's speaking, as if he's carefully listening to himself to make sure he doesn't make any mistakes. They end up getting married and having a little boy named Mitt, who dies in a freak accident at the age of seven. The tragedy puts an enormous strain on Lelia's relationship with Henry, mostly because his stoic way of dealing with his grief makes her feel like she has to handle her sorrow all by herself. She doesn't want to just move on from their son's death; in fact, she doesn't even feel *capable* of doing such a thing, since merely listening to tape recordings of his voice makes it impossible for her to even move for days at a time. Henry, on the other hand, silently

wrestles with his sadness while telling everyone that both he and Lelia are doing fine. His unwillingness to talk about his emotions aligns with the fact that he has to keep so many secrets about his job. Lelia knows that he is some kind of spy, but he will never tell her any details. In short, she feels cut out from his life, so she leaves him and travels to Italy for several months, where she has an affair before returning to New York City and living with one of her and Henry's friends. Gradually, however, Henry starts to open up to her more and more, and this makes it possible for them to repair their relationship. By the end of the novel, Lelia feels less alone with her grief, even if the tragedy of Mitt's death still weighs heavily on her.

Henry's Father – Henry's father was a Korean immigrant who came to the United States with his wife and son (Henry), settling in New York City and opening a grocery store. A disciplined man of few words, he was a hard worker who earned a master's degree from one of the most respected schools in Korea. When he came to the United States, though, he essentially started over, working long hours to become the successful owner of multiple grocery stores throughout the city. He never talked about work at home, and his wife never asked him about his day. When Henry started asking about his father's job one evening, his mother pulled him aside and told him not to talk about the grocery stores, explaining that such talk was beneath his father—after all, he had graduated from a highly respected institution in Korea and was only working as a grocer to give Henry a better life; instead of making him talk about the stores, then, Henry should simply keep his father company during his few hours of relaxation. Later, Henry's mother died when he was only 11, but his father didn't spend much time mourning their loss—instead, he announced that he and Henry would be moving to a wealthy suburban neighborhood north of the city. Henry hated the idea of this, but his father didn't care: he thought it was what was best for Henry. Plus, moving into a bigger house in the suburbs was his image of what it meant to succeed in the United States. Not long after they moved, his father hired a young Korean woman—whom he and Henry called Ahjuhma—to care for the house, and though he never showed any feelings for her when Henry was still a child, Henry realized when he was in college that his father and Ahjuhma had become companions and romantic partners. He died shortly after Mitt, but Henry thinks about him often, especially because John Kwang reminds him of the old man.

John Kwang – John Kwang is a Korean American city councilman in New York City. Henry is assigned to infiltrate his political organization and gather whatever information he can about Kwang, but he ends up identifying with the councilman and developing an admiration for him. Much like Henry's father, Kwang is a self-made immigrant from Korea who has managed to become successful in the United States. He's charismatic and is able to make people feel seen and understood, which is why he's able to unite a diverse group of constituents throughout his home borough of Queens. But he also faces political obstacles. The current mayor of New York City, Mayor De Roos, is threatened by him and criticizes him often, since it's rumored that Kwang might run for mayor. The more Henry gets to know Kwang, the more he connects with him about their shared Korean cultural values. He sees Kwang as an elder worthy of respect. but Kwang frequently transcends this dynamic by inviting Henry to treat him like a peer, However, it's always clear that Kwang holds the power in the relationship—on the surface, that is. In reality, Henry's the one who holds the power because he's a spy, which is apparently a dangerous position to be in, considering that Kwang has Eduardo killed after discovering that he's a spy. After the bombing of his headquarters, Kwang begins to spiral and lose hold of his power. He eventually gets arrested for drunk driving and crashing his car on the way home from a Korean after-hours club with an underaged waitress (who is possibly a sex worker). Around this time, Henry steals a list of participants in a "money club" (or **ggeh**) that Kwang has organized, and that list is eventually used against Kwang and his supporters, as the government rounds up the many undocumented immigrants who participate in the "money club." Even though Kwang was just trying to empower the immigrant community, then, American society villainizes him, and Henry deeply regrets the role he has played in the councilman's undoing.

Eduardo – Eduardo is a young Latino man who works for John Kwang. When Henry first meets him, he's told that Eduardo is a college student studying political science and helping Kwang's organization when he's not studying. He strikes Henry as a very devoted volunteer, though he also looks older than his purported age of 23. Kwang, for his part, is very fond of Eduardo and lets him handle the "money club" (or **ggeh**) that he has established to help financially empower his constituents. After discovering that Eduardo is actually a spy, though, Kwang hires a Korean gang to handle the situation, and the gang bombs the Kwang headquarters while Eduardo is working late one night. Eduardo dies in the blast, attracting controversy and media attention to Kwang's entire political operation. At first, Henry doesn't know why Eduardo was killed and fears that his own company, Glimmer & Company, had something to do with it. But Kwang eventually tells him the truth while drinking one night, and Henry realizes that Eduardo must have been working for Glimmer & Company, too—perhaps to make sure Henry didn't mess up the Kwang assignment.

Jack – Jack is a Greek immigrant who works alongside Henry at Glimmer & Company. He serves as something of a mentor for Henry, since he's been a spy for a very long time and is thus very knowledgeable about the trade. In fact, he no longer works undercover like the rest of his colleagues, having informed Dennis Hoagland that he didn't want to do so anymore. However, because Jack is such a valuable asset, Hoagland has

forced him to stay on as a consultant of sorts, asking him to oversee the other operatives, all the while dangling the promise of full retirement as a way of keeping Jack invested in the job. The reason Hoagland sees Jack as so valuable is because of Jack's past as an operative for the CIA in Greece, where he was often in dangerous situations, meaning that he's quite experienced—and that he has seen and done some very violent things. Nonetheless, Henry likes Jack and frequently asks him for relationship advice, since Jack had a long, happy marriage until his wife died of cancer. Despite their close relationship, though, it becomes increasingly clear over the course of the novel that Jack will remain loyal to Hoagland by pressuring Henry to do various things he doesn't want to do. Jack doesn't *like* making things difficult for Henry in this way, but he'll do seemingly anything to make sure he'll be able to retire soon. He thus pressures Henry into stealing the list of people who contribute to John Kwang's "**money club**," which is the vital information that Glimmer & Company has apparently been hired to obtain.

Dennis Hoagland – Dennis Hoagland is Henry's boss at Glimmer & Company. He's a control freak who claims to care about his employees' well-being but, in reality, only cares about them insofar as they're able to successfully complete their assignments. For instance, he frequently calls to check up on Henry in the period after Lelia leaves him to be on her own, but Henry can tell that Hoagland doesn't legitimately care about Henry's emotional state—he just wants to make sure he'll be able to complete his next assignment. To that end, Hoagland frequently sends Jack to check on Henry's progress as he works to gather information about John Kwang. When Henry has trouble transmitting sensitive information about Kwang, Hoagland senses his hesitation and sends Jack to put some pressure on him. On the whole, both Henry and Lelia see Hoagland as an unpredictable, somewhat dangerous person, which is why Henry doesn't simply quit his job in the middle of the Kwang assignment: there is, after all, no saying what Hoagland might do to him if he were to do this.

Emile Luzan –Emile Luzan is a Filipino immigrant living in New York City and practicing as a therapist. Because he supports a controversial cause in the Philippines, Glimmer & Company has been hired to scrounge up information about him. Henry is assigned to learn more about Luzan by posing as one of his clients, and though Henry is normally good at sticking to his invented backstory, he finds himself unable to stop talking about his *real* life in his therapy sessions with Luzan. There's a kindness and openness to Luzan that makes Henry want to be honest with him—there's also the fact that Henry is still mourning the death of his son. Plus, he goes to Luzan while Lelia is abroad, so he's lonely has a lot on his mind. Eventually, it becomes clear that Henry has lost sight of his assignment. He goes to Luzan for a final session and plans to tell him to be careful, wanting to say that Luzan should be cautious about traveling and when he's around strangers. But when Henry steps out of Luzan's office for a drink of water right before telling him this, he finds Jack and another colleague, who physically force him to leave the building. Shortly thereafter, Luzan dies in an alleged accident while traveling, and Henry gathers that he was killed for political reasons—perhaps by the very same people who hired Glimmer & Company to spy on him.

Ahjuhma/The Woman – Ahjuhma is a young Korean woman who moves to the United States when Henry's father hires her to work as a housekeeper in the wake of Henry's mother's death. Henry doesn't know much about her, since she seems to spend the vast majority of her time in the kitchen. When he comes home from college, though, he realizes that Ahjuhma and his father have developed a close relationship and sometimes sleep together, though their bond has more to do with companionship than romance. Later, Henry visits his father's home every summer with Lelia and Mitt, and Lelia takes an interest in Ahjuhma—whose real name isn't actually "Ahjuhma." One night, Lelia asks Henry what her name is, and she's appalled to learn that he doesn't know. She sees this as a sign that Henry doesn't think his father's housekeeper is worthy of respect, but the real reason he doesn't know her name is that there would never be a context in the Korean language for him to call her anything but "Ahjuhma," which means "aunt" or "ma'am" and is what Korean people call women who aren't related to them. Ahjuhma's presence in the novel serves as a reminder of the differing cultural values between Korean and American society.

Sherrie Chin-Watt – Sherrie Chin-Watt is a Chinese American woman who runs PR for John Kwang's political organization. She's married to a successful businessman, but he's seemingly always away on business, and she appears to have devoted herself to Kwang's campaign. As Henry gets closer to Kwang, he realizes that the councilman is having an extramarital affair with Sherrie, though Sherrie later distances herself from him when he suddenly becomes engulfed in scandal.

Janice –Janice is a young white woman who works as John Kwang's schedule manager. She also handles responsibilities like scouting out the best place for Kwang to make public appearances. She works closely with Eduardo and Henry, training them to make sure that the cameras can always see Kwang when he appears in public. Out of all Kwang's supporters, volunteers, and employees, Janice is perhaps the most dedicated to Kwang's burgeoning political movement, as evidenced by the fact that only she and Henry stick around once he's surrounded by scandal and negative media attention.

Mayor De Roos –Mayor De Roos is the mayor of New York City and one of John Kwang's political opponents. De Roos is actually a Democrat just like Kwang, and he even helped the councilman at the beginning of his (Kwang's) career. Now, though, he's worried that Kwang will run for mayor, so he subtly

criticizes him in the media. His main tactic is to imply that Kwang uses illegitimate tactics to organize the immigrant community, accusing him of paying people to support him.

Pete – Pete is one of Henry's coworkers at Glimmer & Company. At the end of his time with John Kwang, Henry gives Pete and their other coworker, Grace, a list of everyone who has contributed to Kwang's "**money club**." The list ends up being used to identify and deport undocumented immigrants.

Mitt –Mitt was Henry and Lelia's son, who died in a tragic accident at a birthday party when he was seven years old. His death puts an enormous strain on Henry and Lelia's relationship, and it isn't until Henry finally opens up about his own grief that they're able to mend the tension between them.

Henry's Mother –Henry's mother was a Korean woman who immigrated to the United States with Henry's father. She died when Henry was just 11 years old, and he didn't have time to mourn her death: his father quickly moved on with life and made it clear that he and his son shouldn't dwell in sorrow.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Grace – Grace is one of Henry's coworkers at Glimmer & Company. Along with Pete, she collects a list from Henry that names everyone who has contributed to Kwang's "**money club**"—a list that leads to the mass deportation of many undocumented immigrants.

Stew –Stew is Lelia's father, a successful businessman who has racist ideas about Asian people, though he assures Henry that he likes him.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IDENTITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

Throughout *Native Speaker*, Henry Park explores the complexities of his own identity, as he feels simultaneously connected to and estranged from his Korean roots. As a Korean American man raised in New York City by Korean immigrant parents, he's intimately familiar with Korean culture, but he doesn't have the same relationship with this culture as his mother and father do. His father, for example, remains entrenched in his Korean identity even as he lives out the quintessential "American Dream" by seizing new opportunities and becoming a successful business owner. Henry, on the other hand, has spent the vast majority of his life in the United States, so his cultural identity is both Korean *and* American. In turn, this hybridized identity gives him a multidimensional view of life.

However, Henry also has a hard time reconciling the two sides of his own identity. For example, he and his American wife, Lelia, clash over the fact that he doesn't know the name of his family's longtime Korean housekeeper—he only calls her Ahjuhma, which in Korean is similar to "ma'am" and is what people traditionally call Korean women who aren't related to them. When Lelia gets angry at him for behaving in a way that seems rude from her own American perspective, Henry finds himself pulled between the two poles of his multicultural life, as each culture holds him to different standards. Furthermore, Henry's career as a spy dramatizes the tension between the two sides of his identity. The implication is that he's particularly well-suited to this job because of his practice assimilating into different cultures. However, when Henry's new assignment brings him into close contact with John Kwang, a successful Korean American city councilman who reminds him of his father, he suddenly finds himself resonating more than usual with the Korean aspects of his own identity. As a result, he can't stay unbiased and feels conflicted about informing on Kwang, because it would feel like double-crossing his own father—and, by extension, betraying the whole Korean side of his identity. The novel implies that compartmentalizing different parts of one's identity in this way is impossible. But it also suggests that immigrants to the U.S. often struggle with this kind of self-erasure as they try to stay true to their cultural and familial roots while developing their own American identities.

SILENCE, LANGUAGE, AND COMMUNICATION

Native Speaker is a novel that considers the ways people communicate with one another, and how those modes of communication impact their relationships. When Henry first meets his future wife, Lelia, she says that she can tell right away that he isn't a "native speaker," despite the fact that he has a perfect American accent, because of how his face looks when he's talking. It's as if he's carefully listening to himself to make sure he doesn't make a mistake or say something with a Korean accent. Her observation hints at the great lengths Henry has gone to present himself as fully assimilated into American society, but it also suggests that communication can be very complex—there are, it seems, modes of *nonverbal* communication that can reveal things about people that words themselves might not reveal on their own.

To that end, Henry views silence as a useful form of communication because he was raised with traditional Korean values that present silence as respectful and honorable. When confronted with hardship, for example, he's raised to remain silent; when it comes to suffering, he's taught, "the quieter the better." In his adulthood, though, he recognizes that Korean Americans might "depend too often on the faulty honor of

silence" and "use it too liberally." For instance, after Henry and Lelia's son, Mitt, dies at the age of seven, Lelia is the only one who ever brings him up, and Henry's silence on the matter makes Lelia feel like she's dealing with the loss on her own. This tension creates a divide in their relationship, and the divide gets increasingly worse until Lelia finally leaves Henry. It isn't until she returns that he finally starts opening up to her about his feelings, talking not just about Mitt but also about the confidential aspects of his job as a spy. His newfound openness transforms their relationship and enables them to heal as a couple, emphasizing the benefits of honest, free-flowing communication. And yet, the novel doesn't condemn the use of silence as a form of communication. Rather, it simply suggests that there's a time and place for silence and that, because of its ambiguity, it can be interpreted differently depending on cultural context.

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Native Speaker highlights the intolerance many immigrants of color face in the United States. Henry Park is an American citizen, but he still experiences bigotry because he's Korean. While working in his father's store as a teenager, he hears a white woman make a racist comment about him. This experience makes him feel invisible, since she clearly assumes he can't understand her—or doesn't care. The same woman later bites an apple and puts it back, but Henry's father stops him from saying anything, noting in Korean that she's a "steady customer." Henry thus sees the difficult societal position his father occupies: in order to be successful, he's forced to tolerate mistreatment from wealthy white people who think they're above him. To make it in the United States as an immigrant of color, the novel implies, often means having to navigate and put up with bigotry.

It's perhaps because Henry witnessed American society's mistreatment of his father that he later respects John Kwang, a Korean American councilman whose success stems from his engagement with New York City's immigrant community. Kwang's base is made up of immigrants from many different countries, including—or perhaps *especially*—Korea. The fact that he has so much influence over New York politics is significant to Henry, since it means Kwang has harnessed the political power of a largely nonwhite demographic. In other words, he has risen to a position of power not by acquiescing to racists but by mobilizing a previously disenfranchised segment of the population. This trajectory stands in stark contrast to the way Henry's father gained success by quietly tolerating racism.

However, the novel hints that Kwang might have underestimated the intensity of the racism and xenophobia he faces as a public figure. The mere fact that Henry has been hired to spy on him is an indication of how suspicious certain people are of immigrants of color who rise to power. Henry steals a list of Kwang's supporters involved in a "money club," which isn't *technically* illegal—but that's not the point, since whoever hired Henry's company just wants to arrest and deport the undocumented immigrants supporting Kwang. It's clear, then, that many white Americans in positions of power are hesitant to let people like Kwang join their ranks, and their hesitancy is mainly a reaction to what he represents: namely, a broad and diverse coalition of new Americans.

LOVE, LOSS, AND MOVING ON

Native Speaker investigates the difficulty of navigating loss alongside a loved one. More specifically, the novel looks at the immense strain that grief can put on a relationship, which is what happens after Henry and Lelia's son, Mitt, dies at age seven. This loss isn't the first one Henry has experienced in his life, since his mother died when he was only 11 years old. When that happened, though, his father responded very stoically by simply moving on with his life. In fact, he saw her death as a perfect time to make the major change of moving with Henry from a Korean neighborhood in New York City to a wealthy, white suburb north of the city. This method of accepting the loss and moving on from it infused his and Henry's relationship with tension, though, since Henry wasn't ready to pick up and leave everything behind. He thus came to resent his father for deciding to wrench him from his old life—a life that was intertwined with memories of his mother.

Given that Henry has been forced in the past to deal with loss by silently moving forward, it's perhaps unsurprising that he later adopts this same approach in the aftermath of Mitt's death by putting on a brave face and telling everyone that he and Lelia are doing well. Lelia, however, doesn't want to just move on with their lives. To the contrary, she clings to the past by listening to tape recordings that Mitt made when he was still alive, even though this deeply upsets her. Their different ways of grieving make Lelia feels alone; even though Henry is still processing Mitt's death, he doesn't know how to grieve *alongside* Lelia. The result of this insular, hidden grief is that Lelia leaves him for a while, and their relationship doesn't fully heal until Henry learns how to share his sorrow with her. In the end, they manage to bond over their loss instead of letting it drive them apart, indicating that even the most harrowing emotions can still form the basis of a strong and healthy relationship—if, that is, both people are willing to openly share their grief.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GGEH (THE "MONEY CLUB")

In *Native Speaker*, the concept of a *ggeh*, or a Korean "money club," symbolizes the power that can arise when community members come together and support each other. Henry's father, for instance, is able to open his first grocery store because he belongs to a small *ggeh*, to which he and other Korean men contribute money on a rolling basis with the knowledge that—at some point—they will receive a large amount for themselves. This system enables Henry's father and his fellow Korean immigrants to fund their business ventures and become successful in the United States—something they might not have been able to do without the communal approach to funding.

As somebody who understands how powerful and productive it can be to unite a community in this way, John Kwang establishes a large-scale *ggeh* for any of his constituents who want to participate, thus bringing the Korean tradition to other racial and ethnic groups living in Queens. At first, it works quite well, giving his constituents something resembling financial stability in times of need. However, the *ggeh* soon attracts suspicion from the government, which disapproves of the concept because it doesn't report earnings to the tax authorities. Through Glimmer & Company (and, in turn, through Henry), the Immigration and Naturalization Service ends up obtaining the list of people who belong to the *ggeh*, and it uses this list as a way of identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants. The *ggeh* therefore comes to represent not just the power of unity and communal support, but also the unfortunate fact that Americans in positions of power are often deeply suspicious of foreign practices and traditions that empower new Americans.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Riverhead Books edition of *Native Speaker* published in 1996.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ And then others—the ones I always paid close attention to—came to her because they had entered the first grade speaking a home language other than English. They were nonnative speakers. All day she helped these children manipulate their tongues and their lips and their exhaling breath, guiding them through the difficult language.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Lelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Henry describes the students who come to work on their English with Lelia, who is an ESL (English as a second language) teacher and speech therapist. There are many different kinds of students who come to see her: some with physiological challenges that make it hard for them to speak or properly pronounce their words, and some who come from families that don't speak English as their first language. Henry is particularly interested in the students who aren't "native speakers," since he himself was raised by people who spoke English as a second language. As a result, he has worked very hard to banish any trace of an accent when he speaks, meaning that he's quite familiar with how to "manipulate [his] tongue[] and lips[]" and regulate his breath in ways that make it possible for him to perfectly speak the "difficult language" of English. This passage appears very early in the book, ultimately establishing the novel's interest in language as something that is often taken for granted but that is worthy of great consideration, since so many people go to great lengths to perfect the way they speak.

❝ But I wasn't to be found anywhere near corporate or industrial sites, then or ever. Rather, my work was entirely personal. I was always assigned to an individual, someone I didn't know or care the first stitch for on a given day but who in a matter of weeks could be as bound up with me as a brother or sister or wife.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Lelia, Emile Luzan , John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the first years of their relationship, Lelia thinks Henry is some kind of corporate spy hired by big companies to keep an eye on day-to-day operations and make sure its employees aren't stealing industrial secrets. Henry lets Lelia think this, but the truth is that his job doesn't have anything to do with business, at least not in the way Lelia thinks it does. Instead of infiltrating "corporate or industrial sites," he spies on specific people. The fact that he doesn't "know or care the first stitch" about them indicates that he never knows why, exactly, he has been assigned to spy on them. Rather, he just does his job without asking questions, getting close to these people and gathering information

about them. However, while his motivation for spying on these subjects might be quite impersonal, the fact remains that his job requires him to become "bound up" with these people, and it is exactly this personal element of the relationship that eventually makes it difficult for Henry to keep doing his job, as he begins to identify and sympathize with his subjects (specifically Emile Luzan and John Kwang). This suggests that maintaining an emotional distance from people while getting close to them is harder than it might seem.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"People like me are always thinking about still having an accent," I said. […]

"I can tell," she said.

I asked her how.

"You speak perfectly, of course. I mean if we were talking on the phone I wouldn't think twice."

"You mean it's my face."

"No, it's not that," she answered. […] "Your face is part of the equation, but not in the way you're thinking. You look like someone listening to himself. You pay attention to what you're doing. If I had to guess, you're not a native speaker. Say something."

Related Characters: Henry Park, Lelia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

When Henry and Lelia first meet at a party in El Paso, Texas, they find themselves talking about language, speech, and pronunciation. It's only natural that their conversation would turn toward such matters, since Lelia makes a living working with language and helping people learn to speak English. And Henry, for his part, has made a great effort to perfect his English, so he doesn't take language for granted like other people do. However, Lelia points out that it's obvious he's not a "native speaker," though not because he has an accent or a limited vocabulary. Rather, it's the way he presents himself while he's talking—his face shows a certain level of concentration that most native speakers simply don't apply to their conversations, revealing that he's paying close attention to himself as he speaks. Lelia's observation touches on the efforts Henry has made to fully integrate into American culture. No matter how hard he tries to leave behind his Korean roots, the novel suggests, he will never move through the world in a strictly American way—he will always, as he suggests here, worry about having an accent (that is, sounding obviously Korean because of the way he speaks). To that end, his identity is decidedly multicultural, meaning that he's neither solely Korean nor solely American—he's both.

We worked by contriving intricate and open-ended emotional conspiracies. We became acquaintances, casual friends. Sometimes lovers. We were social drinkers. Embracers of children. Doubles partners. We threw rice at weddings, we laid wreaths at funerals. We ate sweet pastries in the basements of churches.

Then we wrote the tract of their lives, remote, unauthorized biographies.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry delves even more deeply into detail about the requirements of his work as a private investigator and spy for Glimmer & Company. The core of his work involves getting close to a person for an extended period of time so that he can report back on their lives, their economic activities, their political affiliations, and their connections to their home countries. Henry compares these reports to "unauthorized biographies," a comparison that hints at just how much information he gathers about his subjects: enough, it seems, to write an entire biography. He therefore has to get quite close to them, integrating himself into their lives in a way that allows him to understand them without raising any suspicion. Noting that the biographies are "remote," however, suggests that Henry and his colleagues also remain emotionally aloof and separate from the people they spy on—part of the job, he implies, is keeping his emotions in check as he gets close to people. As the novel progresses, it will become increasingly clear that Henry sees himself as uniquely qualified for this job because of his multicultural upbringing, which has taught him how to assimilate and blend into seemingly any environment.

Chapter 4 Quotes

I know over the years my father and his friends got together less and less. Certainly, after my mother died, he didn't seem to want to go to the gatherings anymore. But it wasn't just him. They all got busier and wealthier and lived farther and farther apart. Like us, their families moved to big houses with big yards to tend on weekends, they owned fancy cars that needed washing and waxing. They joined their own neighborhood pool and tennis clubs and were making drinking friends with Americans. […] And in the end my father no longer belonged to any *ggeh*, he complained about all the disgraceful troubles that were now cropping up, people not paying on time or leaving too soon after their turn getting the money. In America, he said, it's even hard to stay Korean.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Henry's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

When Henry's parents came to the United States, they turned to the local members of the Korean community in New York City for emotional and financial support. Being in a *ggeh* allowed Henry's father to raise the funds needed to start a business, but it also provided him with a sense of community and solidarity. Henry's parents seem to have benefited from engaging in this robust community of Korean immigrants, which uplifted them financially while also easing the pain of leaving their home country behind. And yet, the novel suggests that financial success in the United States can be a lonely thing, as everyone in the Korean community in New York City gradually gets wrapped up in the long, never-ending process of making money. Of course, most if not all of the people in this community of immigrants came to the United States for the express purpose of finding new financial opportunities, so it makes sense that they would focus on becoming successful at the expense of all else. And yet, it's also clear that Henry's father felt an acute shift when he and his friends began to grow apart, ultimately experiencing a loss of home and culture that is, in some ways, similar to losing a loved one.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"So what's her name?" Lelia asked after a moment.

"I don't know."

"What?"

I told her that I didn't know. That I had never known.

"What's that you call her, then?" she said. "I thought that was her name. Your father calls her that, too."

"It's not her name," I told her. "It's not her name. It's just a form of address."

It was the truth. Lelia had great trouble accepting this stunning ignorance of mine.

Related Characters: Lelia, Henry Park (speaker), Ahjuhma/The Woman, Henry's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

While staying at Henry's father's house one summer, Lelia takes an interest in a Korean woman Henry and his father call Ahjuhma, who works as the family's housekeeper. Lelia becomes uncomfortable when she learns that Henry knows next to nothing about Ahjuhma, despite the fact that she has lived in his father's house ever since he was 10, having come to work for the Park family shortly after Henry's mother died. What really appalls her, though, is that Henry doesn't even know the woman's real name—"Ahjuhma" is just a Korean address that people use for women who aren't related to them; it's similar to "ma'am" in English. As far as Leila is concerned, the fact that Henry doesn't know Ahjuhma's name suggests that he doesn't care about her as an individual, since in American culture it would be extremely rude to never learn a person's name, especially after living with them for years. Lelia clearly thinks that Henry and his father have an unkind, elitist outlook when it comes to their relationship with Ahjuhma, but that's not actually the case. As Henry later tries to explain, there is no occasion in Korean culture for him to call Ahjuhma by her real name. After all, even his parents always called each other "spouse," and he often has to stop to think of his parents' names because he usually calls them "mother" or "father." It's not that he doesn't respect Ahjuhma, then, but simply that it would be unusual in Korean culture for him to call her by her name. Nonetheless, the argument that this leads to between Henry and Lelia highlights the various challenges and complexities of navigating a multicultural relationship.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ We perhaps depend too often on the faulty honor of silence, use it too liberally and for gaining advantage. I showed Lelia how this was done, sometimes brutally, my face a peerless mask, the bluntest instrument.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Lelia, Janice

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In a conversation with Henry, Janice talks about how she once dated a Korean man. She felt strongly for him, but they ultimately broke up. Heartbroken, she poured her emotions out for him, but he remained silent, and Janice interpreted this as a sign that he didn't care about her. When Henry hears this story, he recognizes that Janice most likely misread the situation—there might have been a lot more to her boyfriend's silence than she ever would have assumed. In Korean culture, he reflects, silence is seen as an honorable way of responding to difficult situations. However, he also suggests that this cultural embrace of silence can sometimes be overused, leading people to rely too much on "the faulty honor of silence," which can help them "gain[] advantage" over people during arguments and other difficult conversations. He himself has used silence as a way of gaining the upper hand in hard discussions with Lelia, simply fixing an emotionless expression on his face and waiting for Lelia to keep speaking. In a novel that so closely examines the ways people use language, this passage underlines the fact that not all communication is verbal—just because Henry often resorts to silence doesn't mean he doesn't still convey a certain message with his reticence to speak. The problem, though, is that silence can be misinterpreted, especially in multicultural relationships.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ "Just think about it. You haven't said his name more than four or five times since it happened. You haven't said his name tonight. Maybe you've talked all this time with Jack about him, maybe you say his name in your sleep, but we've never really talked about it, we haven't really come right out together and said it, really named what happened for what it was."

[...]

"It was a terrible accident."

"An accident?" she cried, nearly hollering. She covered her mouth. Her voice was breaking. "How can you say it was an accident? We haven't treated it like one. Not for a second. Look at us. Sweetie, can't you see, when your baby dies it's never an accident. [...]"

Related Characters: Lelia, Henry Park (speaker), Mitt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

When Lelia returns from Italy, she moves in with her and Henry's mutual friend. After several weeks of giving her space, Henry finally makes contact with her, and she lets him come into the apartment so they can talk. Eventually, the conversation turns toward Mitt, as Lelia explains the primary reason she had to leave Henry was because she felt alone with her grief, since he never talks about Mitt's death. She thinks it's important to "name what happened," but they've never really discussed the matter. Instead, Lelia has spent her time mourning in private while Henry puts on a brave face. In this moment, Henry tries to suggest that there isn't much to name: Mitt died in a "terrible accident." But Lelia is very attuned to the importance of words, and she feels that this is an inadequate way to talk about Mitt's death. Instead, she suggests that she and Henry are somehow at fault for what happened. The novel implies that though this is perhaps an overly harsh way of looking at things, Leila also seems to feel that it's a better way of describing the undoubtedly complicated feelings both she and Henry have experienced in the aftermath of losing their son. After all, as she explains, the complicated thing about losing a child is that the grief isn't just a straightforward kind of sorrow, but also a lingering feeling of regret for not having been able to protect the child from harm.

Chapter 9 Quotes

"And if they do not have the same strong community you enjoy, the one you brought with you from Korea, which can pool money and efforts for its members—it is because this community has been broken and dissolved through history. […] Know that what we have in common, the sadness and pain and injustice, will always be stronger than our differences. I respect and honor you deeply."

Related Characters: John Kwang (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Henry starts working for John Kwang's political organization, he attends an event where Kwang meets with church leaders in the Black community and then addresses the crowd. This passage is from the speech Kwang delivers, in which he sets forth a message of unity, hoping to smooth over tensions that have recently arisen between the Black and Korean communities of Queens and Brooklyn. In particular, he tells his fellow Korean Americans to recognize the systemic racism that Black people face in the United States, pointing out that not everyone has the kind of financial support that many Korean Americans have benefitted from. He mentions the Korean tradition of establishing a *ggeh*, or a "money club" used to financially support and empower everyone in the community who chooses to participate. In the United States, Kwang reminds his listeners, Black people have been disenfranchised, meaning that the "community has been broken" many times. The implication is that this has made it that much harder for Black Americans to come together in the same way that the Korean American community has. By underlining this fact, Kwang attempts to inspire his fellow Koreans toward empathy, hoping that this will ease the strife between the two groups of constituents.

Chapter 11 Quotes

I steadily entrenched myself in the routines of Kwang's office. […] I had to show the staff that I possessed native intelligence but not so great a one or of a certain kind that it impeded my sense of duty.

This is never easy; you must be at once convincing and unremarkable. It takes long training and practice, an understanding of one's self-control and self-proportion: you must know your effective size in a given situation, the tenor at which you might best speak.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

As Henry settles into his assignment to spy on John Kwang, he "steadily entrenche[s]" himself in the daily patterns of the councilman's headquarters, recognizing that this kind of blending in is the best way to get closer to his target. Although it might sound "easy" to engrain oneself in the day-to-day operation of an office, Henry notes that it's not as straightforward as one might think. He needs to catch the eye of his superiors at the headquarters so that he'll be able to get closer to Kwang, but he can't stand out *too* much—in fact, he has to fly somewhat under the radar, otherwise he won't blend in. And if he doesn't blend in, then he'll never be able to get anything out of anyone, since people have to be comfortable with others before they let their guard down. Therefore, Henry employs his "training and practice" in the art of fitting in. This is a skill he has honed not just throughout his time as a spy, but also throughout his entire upbringing, since growing up with a multicultural identity means learning to navigate a multitude of different situations and figuring out how best to assimilate into them.

We joked a little more, I thought like regular American men, faking, dipping, juking. I found myself listening to us. For despite how well he spoke, how perfectly he moved through the sounds of his words, I kept listening for the errant tone, the flag, the minor mistake that would tell of his original race. Although I had seen hours of him on videotape, there was something that I still couldn't abide in his speech. I couldn't help but think there was a mysterious dubbing going on, the very idea I wouldn't give quarter to when I would speak to strangers, the checkout girl, the mechanic, the professor, their faces dully awaiting my real speech, my truer talk and voice.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

One of the first times Henry spends time with John Kwang, he pays close attention to the way the councilman speaks. Kwang is a bit older than Henry, and he didn't grow up in the United States. As a result, Henry has assimilated into American culture a little more seamlessly than the older man, simply by virtue of the fact that it's easier to become fluent in a language as a child than it is to learn the language as an adult. What's interesting, then, is that Kwang is somewhere between Henry and Henry's father when it comes to how much he has entrenched himself in American culture. Whereas Henry's father spoke halting English with a very heavy Korean accent, Kwang's English is very good—but not *quite* as good as Henry's. For this reason, Henry feels like he can pick up on the subtle nuances in Kwang's pronunciation that Henry himself is so careful to avoid.

Henry also gestures to his experience with presumably white Americans who expect nonwhite immigrants to sound less fluent—to use their "real speech," or their "truer talk," by which Henry seems to mean accented or halting speech that more resembles how his father spoke. That Henry is doing much the same thing to Kwang as his professors and strangers have done to Henry also highlights how much more integrated in white American society Henry is than Kwang.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ I have always known that moment of disappearance, and the even uglier truth is that I have long treasured it. That always honorable-seeming absence. It appears I can go anywhere I wish. Is this my assimilation, so many years in the making? Is this the long-sought sweetness?

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang, Sherrie Chin-Watt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

When Henry goes to dinner with Kwang for the first time, Sherrie arrives unexpectedly. Henry quickly notices an easy intimacy flowing between Kwang and Sherrie, even though they're just talking about work-related matters. As they converse, Henry sits back and watches the way they immerse themselves in a deep, intimate kind of conversation, and he knows he can just stay there and become almost invisible. He admits to himself that he *likes* the feeling of "disappear[ing]" in plain sight, using his silence to simply blend into the surrounding environment in a way that allows him to observe everything going on around him. Thinking this way, he wonders if *this* is what his "assimilation" into American culture has amounted to: an ability to disappear. And on one hand, Henry enjoys being able to disappear—but noting that admitting to liking it is an "ugly truth" suggests that Henry also feels ashamed of his desire to hide and by hiding, move more easily through the world. By thinking these thoughts, he underhandedly connects his experience with cultural assimilation to his experience as a spy, ultimately implying that his multicultural identity and upbringing are what make him uniquely good at his job.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ I felt I should leave him a gift. Honor him with some fraction of the truth. He nodded and said he would wait. I had already decided that I was going to advise the doctor to be careful in his future dealings, that he should be wary of unfamiliar invitations, strange visitors to his home or office, as well as chance meetings with other Filipinos, especially when he vacationed or traveled. I was prepared to reveal whatever was required for him to take me seriously, which would have probably been significant given how tattered and desperate he thought I was.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Emile Luzan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

During Henry's last session with Luzan, he decides to warn him that there are powerful people watching him. He feels like he should "leave him a gift" by imparting this information to him, and this desire to warn him emphasizes just how grateful Henry is to Luzan—and, in turn, just how badly he needed someone with whom he felt comfortable sharing his feelings. Of course, Henry came to Luzan to spy on him, but he ended up legitimately engaging in the therapy sessions, which is a testament to his great need to unburden himself of his emotions. He's so thankful to Luzan,

then, that he wants to help keep him safe by warning him that he might be in danger. What's tricky, though, is that Henry doesn't *know* what kind of danger Luzan is in, since it's never his job to do anything other than gather information about a person. All he knows is that somebody is interested in knowing more about Luzan—somebody motivated enough to hire an independent firm to spy on him. In the end, Henry is unable to warn Luzan because Jack and another colleague wrestle him away from the office before he can say anything. Shortly thereafter, Luzan dies while traveling, suggesting that Henry was right that he was in danger.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ I took her and we lay down on the carpet. Before I could do anything else to stop myself I told her his name. John Kwang. I could almost see her turning the words inside her head. Of course she knew who he was, that he was Korean. He was appearing on the broadcasts almost nightly because of the boycotts. She didn't say anything, though, and I could see that she was trying her very best to stay quiet, to think around the notion for a moment instead of steaming right through it. Ten years with me and now she was the one with the ready method. […] And now her voice brooking in my ear, in a voice I hardly recognized. "You just say what you want. Please say what you want."

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Lelia, John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

While cleaning out Henry's father's house, Lelia asks Henry about his job. She knows that something must be troubling him at work, since she recently spoke to Jack, who seemed concerned about him. In years past, Henry would never reveal anything about his job to Lelia. When she used to ask, he would just say that the information was too "sensitive" to talk about. Now, though, he lies next to his wife and tells her that he has been assigned to spy on John Kwang. The fact that he says this before he can "do anything else to stop" himself is interesting, since it suggests that he has to actively override the impulse to be secretive. He is, after all, accustomed to resorting to silence in the face of difficult conversations. Now, though, he feels as if he and Lelia have swapped roles: the more he talks, the quieter she gets, perhaps having learned from him that silence can be a useful way to get somebody else to keep speaking. Henry's openness in this scene paves the way for him and Lelia to fully mend their relationship, thus highlighting how restorative honest communication can be to otherwise strained romantic partnerships.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "Everyone's got a theory. Mine is, when the American GIs came to a place they'd be met by all the Korean villagers, who'd be hungry and excited, all shouting and screaming. The villagers would be yelling, *Mee-gook! Mee-gook!* and so that's what they were to the GIs, just gooks, that's what they seemed to be calling themselves, but that wasn't it at all."

"What were they saying?"

"'Americans! Americans!' *Mee-gook* means America."

Related Characters: Henry Park, Lelia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

Henry and Lelia discuss the origins of the slur "gook," which is a racist term sometimes used to refer to Asian people (and particularly Korean, Filipino, or Vietnamese people). Henry suggests a popular theory, which is that American soldiers misunderstood the term "*Mee-gook*," which in Korean means "America." When the soldiers heard Korean people yelling "*Mee-gook!*" at them, they thought the Korean villagers were identifying themselves. In reality, though, Henry believes the villagers were identifying *the soldiers*. The idea that this racist slur comes from a linguistic misunderstanding is quite fitting, since it emphasizes the sort of ignorance that usually comes along with racism and bigotry. It also underscores a certain inability to see things from different perspectives, since the American soldiers apparently didn't stop to consider that the Korean villagers weren't even speaking English—instead, the soldiers tried to superimpose their own language onto the villagers' words, revealing a narrow-mindedness and a failure to pay other cultures any thought and consideration.

"That's perfect," Lelia says, shaking her head. "I better ask Stew."

"Don't harass your father," I tell her. "He won't know anything. It's funny, I used to almost feel good that there was a word for me, even if it was a slur. I thought, I know I'm not a chink or a jap, which they would wrongly call me all the time, so maybe I'm a gook. The logic of a wounded eight-year-old."

Related Characters: Lelia, Henry Park (speaker), Stew

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242-3

Explanation and Analysis

When Henry tells Lelia his theory about the origins of the racist term "gook," she's delighted, recognizing how fitting it is that such an inconsiderate term is rooted in a simple linguistic misunderstanding—which, of course, highlights the ignorance that normally revolves around racism and bigotry. Henry, for his part, doesn't seem all that offended by the term itself. In fact, he admits that he used to "almost feel good that there was a word for [him]," noting that the racist slurs "chink" and "jap" specifically refer to people of Chinese and Japanese descent, respectively. Henry is Korean, but he grew up in the United States and spent his adolescence in a predominantly white suburb, so there weren't many other Koreans around him. It makes sense, then, that he would gravitate toward anything that might help him define his cultural identity by grouping him in with other Koreans—perhaps even if that thing is a racist slur. Of course, even Henry acknowledges that it's certainly not healthy for a child's self-image to resonate with a hateful, bigoted term, but that's not the point: his thought process in this regard was simply the "logic of a wounded eight-year-old."

"If I had heard that one redheaded kid say even one funny word to Mitt! God! I would have punched his fucking lights out! I would have made him scream!" Her chest bucks, and she almost starts to cry, strangely, as if she's frightened herself with a memory that isn't true.

Related Characters: Lelia (speaker), Mitt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

As Henry and Lelia discuss the racist terms that many Asians encounter in the United States, Lelia makes it clear that she would have been enraged if she ever found out that a neighborhood bully used a slur to refer to Mitt. She becomes suddenly animated, as if the idea of this hypothetical situation has completely overtaken her and made it impossible for her to think about anything else. The fact that this thought so thoroughly overwhelms her without any warning is a good reminder for Henry that strong feelings of grief often lurk just beneath the surface of his wife's consciousness. Henry and Lelia weren't talking about anything related to Mitt, and yet, their dead son is now the only thing Lelia can think about. To make things even more complicated, she seems to know—on a certain level—that she obviously wouldn't have "punched [the bully's] fucking lights out," since this would be a very serious thing for an adult to do to a child. And yet, she needs to feel like she would have protected Mitt this ferociously, perhaps because she feels guilty for failing to have protected him from death (this is a harsh self-assessment, but one Lelia has hinted at by previously suggesting that Mitt's death was her and Henry's fault).

Chapter 16 Quotes

And I think she's saying it perfectly, just like she should. When you're too careful you can't say anything. You can't imagine the play of the words in your head. You can't hear them, and they all sound like they belong to somebody else.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Eduardo, Mitt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

After Eduardo dies in an explosion at the Kwang headquarters, Kwang's team sends Henry to bring an envelope containing $10,000 to the young man's family. He intends to simply deliver the money and leave, but Eduardo's mother invites him in and starts showing him pictures of her son, speaking proudly about Eduardo and talking about how he was destined to do great things. Her first language is Spanish, and she's not very good at English, but Henry gets the overall gist of what she's saying. To that end, he's struck by how willing she is to talk about her dead son. Though her sentences aren't always grammatically correct, he thinks she's "perfectly" saying what she needs to say. Henry knows from experience that "when you're too careful you can't say anything," an idea that relates to his

own inability to talk about his feelings after Mitt died. Knowing how emotionally damaging it can be to keep such feelings in, he admires Eduardo's mother for freely expressing herself, rather than doing what Henry tends to do: keep his emotions inside, while also carefully modulating his speech to cover any signs that he isn't a native English speaker.

Chapter 19 Quotes

He is no longer moving in his customary way. He looks old and weary, like he's standing still. He decides to make a brief appearance for the media in the foyer of the ruined offices (against the repeated warnings of Janice, who hates the shot—all that shadowy wreckage and defeat), and with the barrage of questions and arc lights and auto winders he actually falters. Perhaps for the first time in his public life he mumbles, his voice cracks, and even an accent sneaks through.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang, Janice , Eduardo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

After a bomb goes off at his headquarters and kills Eduardo, Kwang refuses to appear in public for a long time. Everyone around him urges him to make some kind of public statement, but he doesn't want to, claiming to Henry that he knows the media will turn the tragedy into an opportunity to talk about division between the various racial and ethnic groups living in New York City. But Kwang's hesitancy to talk to the media is most likely tied to something else: namely, the fact that he's responsible for what happened, since—as he later reveals to Henry—he told a Korean gang to deal with Eduardo after discovering that Eduardo was spying on him. Of course, nobody knows this when he finally makes an appearance before cameras, but his guilt seems to weigh on him, as Henry notices that he no longer seems to possess the charm that earned him so much popularity. He now looks "old and weary," suggesting that the secret of what really happened is weighing on him, forcing him into a kind of silence that has started eating away at him.

"[…] He worked for me for nothing, the same as you. For *nothing*, except for what I might show him about our life, what is possible for people like us. I thought this is what he wanted. Was I crazy? I would have given him anything in my power. But he was betraying us, Henry. Betraying everything we were doing. […] I loved him, Henry, I grieve for him, but he was disloyal, the most terrible thing, a traitor."

Related Characters: John Kwang (speaker), Henry Park, Eduardo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

Kwang speaks these words to Henry after revealing to him that he's responsible for the bombing that killed Eduardo. Having found out that Eduardo was spying on him and reporting information to somebody, Kwang hired a Korean gang to take care of the situation. He now tries to justify his decision by talking about how much he used to care about Eduardo. He thought he could trust him, thinking that Eduardo was a young man who simply wanted to learn about "what is possible for" immigrants in the United States. In other words, Kwang saw himself as something of a role model to Eduardo, which is why it hurt so much when he realized that Eduardo was actively working to undermine him. Kwang feels as if Eduardo was "betraying" not just him, but the entire immigrant community—he was a "disloyal" "traitor" because he was sabotaging an immigrant-led movement based on unity and mutual support. Kwang's words are particularly cutting in this passage because Henry is *also* spying on him, so when Kwang calls Eduardo a "traitor," Henry surely feels the impact of his anger, too.

Chapter 20 Quotes

If anything, I think my father would choose to see my deceptions in a rigidly practical light, as if they were similar to that daily survival he came to endure, the need to adapt, assume an advantageous shape.

My ugly immigrant's truth, as was his, is that I have exploited my own. […] This forever is my burden to bear. […] Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my American education.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Henry's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 319-320

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after sending Hoagland stolen information about Kwang's organization, Henry thinks about what his father would have thought about his profession. It's evident that Henry feels somewhat guilty about the many "deceptions" he's forced to make in his line of work, but he also thinks that his father would see them for what they are: "practical" necessities in a broader struggle to succeed in the United States. To that end, Henry recognizes that he has "exploited [his] own" by working to undermine fellow immigrants like John Kwang, but he also notes that his father did something similar, perhaps alluding to the fact that the old man used to treat his employees very harshly and justify his behavior by suggesting that such treatment is simply how people learn to do business in the United States. In other words, both Henry and his father have made things more difficult for other immigrants. And this, Henry thinks, is his "burden to bear" and the entirety of his "American education," implying that nothing is more American than striving ceaselessly and relentlessly toward prosperity—no matter the cost.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ For so long he was effortlessly Korean, effortlessly American. Now I don't want him ever to lower his eyes. I don't want to witness the submissive dip of his brow or the bend of his knee before me or anyone else. I didn't—or don't now—come to him for the occasion of looking upon this. I am here for the hope of his identity, which may also be mine, who he has been on a public scale when the rest of us wanted only security in the tiny dollar-shops and churches of our lives.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang, Janice

Related Themes:

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

After John Kwang is arrested for driving drunk with an undocumented minor in his car, Henry and Janice try desperately to figure out how, exactly, to move forward. They're the only people who haven't given up on Kwang, but there's not much to do but wait and see what happens, especially since he disappears for a while after being released on bail. As they wait, Henry and Janice go to a Chinese restaurant and watch the news, and as they do so, Henry realizes that he doesn't want to see Kwang appear onscreen, since he knows that any kind of public appearance would most likely force the disgraced councilman into a "submissive" stance. And Henry doesn't want to see Kwang like that. Henry still sees Kwang as a powerful figure who deserves respect, a strong and ambitious Korean immigrant who believes in the value of unity. Despite Kwang's mistakes, then, Henry is still rooting for him, and his allegiance spotlights his desire to see somebody like himself—or somebody like his father—assume a position of power in American society. Seeing someone like Kwang become successful, Henry implies, would make the less powerful immigrants in the community, the ones who just want to feel secure as they go about their everyday lives, feel more secure—something he frames as not that much to ask. However, the fact that Kwang has so dramatically fallen suggests that it is, perhaps, too much to ask in this context.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ She would have called John Kwang a fool long before any scandal ever arose. She would never have understood why he needed more than the money he made selling dry-cleaning equipment. He had a good wife and strong boys. What did he want from this country? Didn't he know he could only get so far with his face so different and broad? He should have had ambition for only his little family.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Henry's Mother , John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of the scandal surrounding John Kwang, an angry mob gathers outside his house, waiting for him to be taken home by the authorities. Most of the people in the mob are white Americans nursing a xenophobic rage about the fact that Kwang created a "money club" that helped support a number of undocumented immigrants. Henry stands in the midst of this mob and thinks about Kwang and what he stands for as a public figure. He knows, of course, that the xenophobic mob sees Kwang as a threat to the white power structures in the United States, but what Henry's really interested in is what his own mother would think of Kwang. She would, he believes, think he was a "fool" for being so ambitious. Henry knows his mother thought immigrant success in the United States entailed making enough money to support a family—and not much more.

Kwang's ambition would therefore have struck her as strange: why would he want so much from a country that is so clearly hostile toward immigrants? And yet, it's clear that Henry doesn't feel the same way, which is why he has been rooting for Kwang this whole time: he wants to see someone like Kwang in a true position of power.

And when I reach him I strike at them. I strike at everything that shouts and calls. Everything but his face. But with every blow I land I feel another equal to it ring my own ears, my neck, the back of my head. I half welcome them. And at the very moment I fall back for good he glimpses who I am, and I see him crouch down, like a broken child, shielding from me his wide immigrant face.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

When Kwang arrives at his house, police officers try to escort him through a crowd of angry xenophobic protestors, all of whom eventually start pushing toward him and trying to attack him. Henry is in this crowd and tries to fight his way toward Kwang, defending him against the prejudiced mob by "strik[ing]" at whoever comes near. But it's no use: every time he lands a punch, another person strikes him. It's significant that he tries to stand with Kwang in this way, making one last show of loyalty for this powerful figure who ended up meaning so much to him. And yet, the futility of this attempt to protect Kwang functions as a metaphor for the broader struggle that immigrants of color—like Henry and Kwang—face in the United States, a place where many people lash out at newcomers instead of welcoming them to the country and uplifting them in ways that would help them give back to the nation. This is the final glimpse of John Kwang in *Native Speaker*, and the scene is one of complete chaos and division: an apt representation of the community Kwang once tried to steer toward unity.

Chapter 23 Quotes

When we're done she asks if I'm interested and I point out that she hasn't yet mentioned who used to live in such a grand place.

Foreigners, she says. They went back to their country.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 346-347

Explanation and Analysis

When John Kwang is arrested for drunk driving with an undocumented minor in his car, his political reputation is ruined. What's more, the Immigration and Naturalization Service uses a list of people in Kwang's "money club" (a list that Henry himself stole) to identify and deport undocumented immigrants, and this sparks outrage amongst a white, xenophobic contingent of New York City. In the midst of all this scandal, Kwang effectively disappears from public life completely, so Henry starts walking around Queens thinking about him. He even goes by his house on occasion and, at some point, realizes that it's for sale. He makes an appointment with a real estate agent to view the property, just wanting to go inside one last time, and when he asks her who lived in the house, she says the previous family was made up of "foreigners" who "went back to their country." The term "foreigners" is noteworthy here, since it sounds dismissive and somewhat insensitive, as if the real estate agent is implying that Kwang and his family never belonged in the United States in the first place. What's interesting, though, is that she uses the word "foreigners" in front of Henry, thus tapping into the American side of his identity and ignoring the fact that he himself is an immigrant. Further, saying Kwang and his family "went back to *their* country" implies that the agent doesn't accept that the United States was ever Kwang's country—she only associates him with his country of origin, Korea. This highlights the difficulty immigrants face in the United States, even for those like Kwang who enjoy success in the United States and even in American politics: there are still people, like this real estate agent, who refuse to see them as Americans.

Now, she calls out each one as best as she can, taking care of every last pitch and accent, and I hear her speaking a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are.

Related Characters: Henry Park (speaker), Lelia, John Kwang

Related Themes:

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

After John Kwang moves back to Korea, Henry quits his job at Glimmer & Company. He spends his days walking through the city or helping Lelia with her students. Sometimes, he accompanies her to the public schools where she teaches ESL classes, and he's always moved and inspired by watching young immigrants learn English—something that he himself did as a young boy. At the end of each session, Lelia makes a point of saying goodbye to each student and using their names as she does so. This is something of a challenge, since the students don't have American names, but Lelia never stumbles: she pronounces "each one as best she can, taking care of every last pitch and accent." When Henry listens, what he hears is "a dozen lovely and native languages." Given that he admired Kwang because he was a great unifier of the immigrant community, it's likely that Henry finds it meaningful to watch children from so many different cultures come together in Lelia's class. This, it seems, is the kind of unity that John Kwang tried and failed to establish in New York City. By helping Lelia with the ESL classes, then, Henry can actually give back to the immigrant community instead of working to undermine it, thus allowing Henry to feel like he's making up for all the years he spent spying on people like Kwang.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

On the day that Henry Park's wife, Lelia, leaves him, she gives him a list she has compiled. The list is a running account of who he is. It's not comprehensive, he knows, but rather a collection of "snapshots" of his true identity. She has been traveling periodically in the year leading up to this departure, frequently zipping off to small towns in upstate New York or other random destinations without telling him why she's going. He tries to let her have this space, only ever wanting to know where she'll be and whom she'll be with.

From the very beginning of Native Speaker, *it's clear that the novel will explore the depths and nuances of Henry Park's identity. The fact that his wife has made such a concerted effort to characterize him suggests that she has had trouble in the past fully figuring him out—her need to make a list in the first place hints that she has been thinking for a long time about who he really is. In turn, the novel's opening implies that Henry is a somewhat enigmatic person, even to the people who love him.*

One day, Lelia tells Henry that she's beginning to feel burned out. She freelances as a speech therapist for children, often working in public schools or in her and Henry's apartment, where parents bring their children to work on their speaking abilities. Some of these children need help for physical reasons (like because they have cleft palates), but others come to work with Lelia because English is their second language. They need help as they work on their pronunciation. Henry is particularly attuned to these children when they come to the apartment, since he himself is a "nonnative speaker."

Henry pays close attention to language throughout the novel. His interest in this regard is evident early on, since the mere fact that he takes note of Lelia's foreign-language students hints at his own experience of learning to speak English as a Korean American. The implication is that Henry recognizes himself in Lelia's "nonnative" students, potentially recalling what it was like to work so hard on his pronunciation as a child.

When Henry hears that Lelia is burning out, he tells her to take time off from work—they have enough money, so she can take a little break. But then she says she wants to travel abroad, and she has already told the public school she won't be available to work. What's more, she wants to travel alone. She might try to get back into writing, hoping to throw herself into her poetry again.

Henry tries to help Lelia, but it turns out that she has already helped herself *by making arrangements to take time off work. However, she didn't tell Henry she'd be doing this, suggesting that she has embraced a somewhat independent mindset that hints at a growing rift in their relationship.*

Lelia decides to go to Italy, planning to be there for all of November and December. Walking her to the departures counter in the airport, Henry tries to help her with the luggage, but she insists on carrying the heaviest bags herself. He asks if she needs any money, but she assures him that her savings will support her—she doesn't refer to them as *their* savings, but as *hers*, and this catches Henry off guard. Then she hands him a folded piece of paper and tells him not to read it until he's in the car again. She awkwardly accepts a kiss on the cheek, and then she slowly walks away.

It's clear that Lelia has decided to distance herself from Henry, though it's not yet clear why she would want to do this. The fact that she felt compelled to write a list (presumably, the list mentioned in the novel's opening) trying to somehow grasp his identity or personality suggests that she already feels like he keeps her at a remove. This implies that her decision to slowly distance herself has to do with her feeling of already *being estranged from him.*

Henry thinks the list is a poem at first, since it's written in an odd, almost off-handed style. "You are surreptitious," it begins. "B+ student of life." Phrases like this continue down in a straight column, as Lelia notes that Henry is an "illegal" and "emotional alien." She also writes the phrases "Yellow peril: neo-American," "poppa's boy," "stranger, "follower," "traitor," and—finally—"spy."

The terms Lelia uses to describe Henry are wide-ranging and somewhat strange, making it difficult to fully understand what, exactly, she's trying to say about him. And yet, it's arguable that this ambiguity is the point of her list: she herself doesn't know how to categorize or grasp Henry's identity, which is why she tried to write the list in the first place. The phrase "Yellow peril" refers to the racist belief that an influx of Asian immigrants into Western countries would pose a serious threat to Western culture at large. That Lelia uses this term is somewhat startling. However, it may simply indicate that Henry has to constantly deal with this kind of xenophobia and racism as a Korean American living in the United States.

Henry manages not to get too hung up on the list, deciding not to see it as an insult. But then he finds another piece of paper underneath his mattress. "*False speaker of language*," it says. The note makes him think about his and Lelia's relationship. In particular, it makes him think about all the ways he has kept his professional life hidden from her. To a certain extent, she knows what he does, but not because he has told her. At first, he simply let her think that companies would hire him to come to their business, ingrain himself in the daily activities, and eventually reveal the employees who have been sharing company secrets. But this isn't what he does.

It slowly becomes clear that Henry works as a spy of sorts, though it's not yet apparent what, exactly, this means. Lelia seems to have assumed that he's some kind of industrial spy whose job it is to help companies protect themselves from employees who might leak industry secrets. But this isn't the case, and the fact that Henry still hasn't told Lelia what he really does—even though they've been married for a while—once again emphasizes the lack of open communication in their relationship. Although Lelia is the one to leave, then, it seems that Henry's largely responsible for the rift in their relationship.

Henry never infiltrates big companies, instead spending his professional time getting to know specific individuals and becoming close with them—so close that he eventually knows all the intimate details of their lives. Whenever Lelia asks him about work, he tells her that the information is too "sensitive" to talk about, and she calls his avoidant remarks "Henryspeak." Now, though, he's willing to tell her everything, and he thinks his disciplined father would be proud of him for finally owning up to who he is. And who is he? Well, he's a kind, affable man who has a knack for figuring out how to make people feel good about themselves—and when people feel comfortable in front of him, they give up all their secrets.

It's still unclear what Henry does for a living. He's some sort of spy, but it hasn't yet been revealed what this means on a practical level. Instead of clarifying the specifics of his job, Henry simply explains why he's well-suited to the life of a spy, ultimately implying that he has a natural talent for getting people to open up to him. As the novel progresses, it will become increasingly clear that his knack for blending into his surrounding environment is connected to his upbringing as an immigrant accustomed to simultaneously navigating both Korean and American culture.

CHAPTER 2

The book flashes back to when Henry first met Lelia in El Paso, Texas shortly after finishing an assignment. They're at a party and hit it off. He can tell she's curious to know his ethnicity—and sure enough, the conversation eventually turns to the origins of his last name, which is Park. She knows about certain Asian names from an old friend, who told her that names like Chung, Cho, and Lee can either be Korean or Chinese, but not Japanese. Henry affirms that this is true, and then he guesses by her last name—Boswell—that she's from Massachusetts, which is correct.

Henry and Lelia's conversation in this scene plays with the idea that certain cultural identifiers can tell strangers a lot about a person. Although their playful banter suggests that something like a name can send a message about where someone is from, the novel will ultimately complicate this idea, as Henry experience of drifting between Korean and American culture becomes rather complex. While it's possible to guess a person's ethnicity or birthplace, then, the novel suggests that perfectly breaking people up into various categories isn't straightforward—or even possible.

Henry and Lelia continue to talk at the party in El Paso. Lelia explains that she delivers food to immigrant families, many of whom don't speak English. As she unloads the truck, she talks with some of them and gives them impromptu language lessons, so she has started teaching English at nights, and her classroom is always packed with immigrant families.

There's an emphasis on language in Native Speaker, *since the novel explores how different modes of communication impact the way people interact with and perceive of each other. It's significant, then, that Lelia teaches English to immigrant families trying to learn the language—a service that Henry's own parents might have benefitted from when they first came to the United States.*

Eventually, Lelia and Henry decide to go outside to continue their conversation. Henry notes that people like him are constantly worrying about whether or not they have an accent, and Lelia says she can hear this in his voice—he speaks perfectly and without any trace of an accent, but his face makes it obvious that he's listening closely to himself. He's paying such close attention, she says, and this reveals to her that he's a "nonnative speaker." But Lelia herself speaks in the same careful, deliberate way because, she points out, it's her job to do so.

Lelia's observation about the way Henry speaks suggests that she's a very attentive listener—someone who picks up on all kinds of clues that might be lurking deep inside the way another person communicates. In Henry's case, nonverbal cues make it clear to Lelia that English isn't his first language. The fact that she notices this suggests that there are modes of communication that transcend spoken language. And yet, Henry and Lelia's relationship will later come under strain because of a lack of open communication. Just because Lelia can read Henry's nonverbal cues, then, doesn't mean she's capable of guessing his secrets.

Henry and Lelia end up kissing at the party. Their connection is strong—so strong that Henry stays in El Paso for an entire week, even though he was supposed to leave the following day. In the present, though, he wonders if he and Lelia overlooked certain personality traits in each other, rushing into their relationship because it was so electrifying. These days, he walks the streets of New York City and thinks about what she's doing in Italy. He thinks about the list she left him, wondering what it means and eventually coming to see it as a list not just of his own shortcomings, but of Lelia's, too.

There's an implication here that it's possible for people to feel very close and connected while also remaining at an emotional remove from each other. Lelia and Henry jump headlong into their relationship because they establish an immediate bond, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're compatible. Lelia is clearly someone who speaks her mind and likes to be straightforward, whereas Henry is reserved and introspective. Although this difference might not have mattered in the very beginning of their relationship, it ultimately leads to tension later on.

At work, Henry asks his older colleague, Jack, to tell him about life in the Mediterranean, hoping to get a better sense of what Lelia is doing there. A Greek man, Jack specializes in anything that has to do with the Mediterranean. He tells Henry to go after Lelia, but Pete—another one of his coworkers—points out that Henry isn't the kind of person to chase after his wife. Rather, he's the type who would send someone to "tail" her.

At this point in the novel, it's still unclear what, exactly, Henry does for a living. He's some sort of spy, but the details remain hazy—just as hazy, it seems, as his job probably seems to Lelia, who perhaps tired of trying to break through Henry's protective barriers and finally left to branch out on her own. When Pete suggests that Henry's the kind of person who would send somebody else to "tail" Lelia, he hints that Henry is unlikely to put himself out there to find out what Lelia's doing, which is yet another indicator of Henry's guarded, reserved nature.

Pete talks about how best to follow a woman in public, noting that it's harder to follow women than it is to follow men, because women are already on alert when they're in public. As he talks this way, Grace—Henry's only female coworker—listens but doesn't chime in. The boss of the company, Dennis Hoagland, then interrupts the conversation. He's a boisterous man who looks perfectly healthy, but Henry always has the sense that his health is failing. Hoagland is the one who originally recruited Henry for the job, which Henry now describes as a form of spy work, though neither he nor his colleagues think of themselves as spies. Hoagland told him to think of himself as someone who simply "even[s] things out."

Even though the narration now gives a little more insight into the nature of Henry's work, his actual job is still quite mysterious. Hoagland's suggestion that Henry should think of himself as someone who "even[s] things out" is rather cryptic, but it perhaps suggests that Henry ultimately goes undercover to exert some kind of influence or somehow subtly change things. All in all, the ambiguity surrounding his job sheds light on why Lelia was frustrated enough by Henry's secrecy to leave him.

Henry and his coworkers mainly keep track of immigrants who have come to the United States. Each operative concentrates on different groups of people: Jack focuses on the Mediterranean and the Middle East, two other coworkers focus on Central America and Africa, Pete focuses on Japan, and Henry focuses on Korea. Hoagland founded the organization in the 1970s, when there were many immigrants coming to the country—he recognized an opportunity to specialize in a certain kind of surveillance, and now the company gets hired by large corporations, foreign governments, and powerful people.

It now emerges that Henry's job is at least somewhat related to his background as a Korean American, considering that he specializes in spying on people from Korea. His cultural identity therefore factors into his career, as he draws on his knowledge of both American and Korean culture to do his job—a dynamic that is sure to cause some internal tension or conflict, since it requires Henry to essentially work against Korean immigrants who are like his own parents.

Dennis Hoagland's company gives its clients valuable information about "people working against their vested interests." This information includes contextual details about their lives, psychological assessments, and general intelligence about their daily routines. The people in question are usually wealthy immigrants fueling and supporting revolutions taking place back in their home countries, which sometimes simply means helping to establish various organizations in the United States. Henry and his peers become involved in these organizations and, in doing so, get close to the subjects, endearing themselves to the marks and gleaning whatever information they can from them.

It's now a bit clearer what, exactly, Henry does as a spy: he simply gathers information about people whom his company's clients want to know more about. However, there's still a lot of ambiguity surrounding who the company's clients are, other than that they're interested in spying on people who are "working against their vested interests." Considering that most of the subjects Henry spies on are immigrants, there's a certain level of xenophobia at play here, suggesting that the company's mysterious clients distrust immigrants and are unwilling to simply let them live in peace in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

Lelia has returned from Italy, but she hasn't moved back into her and Henry's shared apartment. Not wanting to be away in case she comes home, Henry has been spending less and less time in the office, which is just north of the city. Hoagland doesn't like his absence, so he calls him at strange hours, ringing him up in the middle of the night to ask how he's doing. He acts like he cares about Henry's personal life, insisting that he wants his employees to be happy. In reality, though, Henry knows Hoagland is monitoring him closely because he messed up his last assignment.

Hoagland's false sincerity hints that he's untrustworthy. Given that Henry's job seems a bit nefarious to begin with, it's especially noteworthy that Hoagland is the kind of person who has ulterior motives, since this suggests that he's someone Henry should be wary of—a fact that will later become quite clear. Henry also continues to keep Lelia at a distance despite wanting to be close to her, even as she's returned to the U.S.

When Lelia was still in Italy, Henry was put on assignment to find out information about a therapist named Emile Luzan. To get close to him, he posed as a client. As with any of his assignments, he'd built up an entire backstory and was using a fake name, claiming to be a businessman dealing with depression for the first time in his life. But Henry found Luzan disarming and kind, and he began mixing his own life into his invented backstory. He started talking to Luzan in earnest about his life, even telling him about his dead son. As he got more and more wrapped up in the therapy sessions, he stopped trying to get information out of Luzan, for whom he developed a legitimate fondness.

It's now revealed that Henry and Lelia had a son who died, which adds some context to why Lelia decided to leave for Italy. After all, tragedy often strains otherwise close romantic relationships. To add to this, Henry is a rather quiet, reserved person, so it's likely that he and Lelia (who is outspoken about her feelings) mourned the loss of their son in different ways, with him mostly keeping his feelings to himself. And yet, the novel implies that he, too, yearned for some kind of emotional outlet, which is why he eventually opened up to Emile Luzan in therapy.

Eventually, Hoagland sent Jack to take Henry off the Luzan case. Now, Henry knows, Hoagland is monitoring him because he lost his sense of purpose while working on Luzan. For this reason, Hoagland has given him what's supposed to be a very simple job monitoring a Korean city councilman named John Kwang. Kwang is a little younger than Henry's father would be right now if he were alive. He's rich and "self-made," and the Democratic Party wants him to run for mayor. The job is supposed to be extremely easy for Henry, but he finds himself putting off the actual work, instead wandering around the apartment in an aimless, haunted fashion. There's something about the apartment that troubles him—it's too big, and it's hard not to think about how he used to live there with Lelia and their son, Mitt.

Work isn't Henry's first priority right now, since his personal life is—to a certain extent—derailing. The reason he was unable to properly spy on Luzan is that the assignment gave him an opportunity to speak privately about his life. Not only has he lost a son, but he's seemingly in danger of losing Lelia, too. And given that he opened up to Luzan, it suggests that Henry yearns for some kind of emotional support. But he now has to focus on work, since he has to make up for his failure. The problem, however, is that he identifies with his new target, John Kwang, who reminds him of his own father. This suggests that it will be harder to actively undermine him, despite Hoagland's assumption that the job will be easy for Henry.

Henry thinks about what it was like to live in his and Lelia's large apartment when Mitt was still alive. Mitt used to run around and yell, and they would often bathe him in the large tub they'd inherited from Lelia's uncle. One time, Mitt slipped on the tiles and smashed his head on the floor. For a moment, his eyes fluttered, and then he started yelling. They took him to the emergency room, but everything was fine by the next day. Now, Henry's not sure he and Lelia will keep the apartment, though he hasn't talked to her about it because she has yet to come by—even though she's back from Italy. He suspects that she's staying at a friend's apartment, so he often goes to a coffeeshop nearby and looks for her.

Henry is all alone with his memories of Mitt—memories that are somewhat disturbing, as he rehashes stories like the one in which Mitt slipped and bashed his head on the tiles. Haunted by these thoughts of his beloved son experiencing pain, Henry has trouble living in the family apartment all by himself, clearly longing for Lelia's support and companionship, which he seems to have taken for granted before she left. Still true to form, Henry remains at a distance from Lelia and waits for her to come to him.

Henry goes to the company's office in Westchester because he wants to see Jack. He and Lelia used to visit Jack's house in a wealthy neighborhood north of the city, and Jack would make them beautiful meals while his stunning wife talked to them. Lelia loved Jack and his wife, who died not long ago from cancer. Jack took time off to care for her, and it was during this period that Hoagland told Henry about Jack's past working for the CIA. He told him a story about how Jack was abducted by insurgents while working in Cyprus in 1964. He was viciously beaten and would have been killed, but then a car crashed into the building and his captors went to see what happened. When they left, Jack managed to kill the young guard still watching over him.

Henry has a close relationship with Jack, who acts as a caring mentor and friend. And yet, there's no denying that Jack has an ominous past and, as such, might be a dangerous person—he has, after all, murdered people. Whereas Henry is a small-time spy who simply gathers information, Jack is more of a serious, old-school operative. The mere fact that he works at the same company as Henry suggests that the entire organization is perhaps more sinister than it might otherwise seem. Nonetheless, Henry seems to trust Jack, turning to him for support because he doesn't have anyone else right now.

The company Henry works for operates under the name Glimmer & Company. The office is in a nondescript building full of doctors' offices, and nobody ever visits their floor. The elevator door opens onto a small lobby, in which Hoagland has installed a hidden camera to monitor new arrivals. Today the office is relatively empty, but Henry knows Hoagland must be lurking around somewhere—he's always likely to turn up when people least expect him.

The secrecy surrounding Glimmer & Company solidifies the ominous nature of Henry's job. What's more, Hoagland's unpredictability is unsettling, giving Henry—and, in turn, readers—the impression that he's constantly monitoring everything related to the company. There is, then, a sense of paranoia at play in the novel, as Henry deals with a subtly hostile environment at his own job.

In the office, Henry sits with Jack and eats olives while talking about Lelia. Jack advises him to give her space, saying that she clearly needs time to think. Henry is inclined to listen to his older colleague, since he had such an admirable relationship with his late wife. Changing the topic, Jack asks about Henry's progress on the John Kwang case, and Henry admits that he hasn't spent much time looking over the file in preparation. He senses that Dennis Hoagland has urged Jack to check up on him, wanting to know how he's coming along. But Jack won't admit this—he just says that Henry should do his job, since Hoagland has given him an easy task this time around.

Henry sees Jack as a kind older friend, but he can also tell that he has an ulterior motive—that is, Jack is happy to offer Henry advice about Lelia, but he also intends to subtly prod Henry into doing the work Hoagland wants him to do. In turn, it becomes clear that Jack is something of a puppet for Hoagland: his first priority is to make sure everything goes according to Hoagland's plan. It's unclear, then, whether or not Henry can fully trust Jack, though Henry himself doesn't seem too worried about this.

Henry thinks about how easy Jack is with his emotions. He can imagine Jack's Greek parents and their willingness to burst into grand displays of feeling—something that starkly contrasts his own parents' behavior. Henry's mother was reticent and thought that showing emotion was akin to revealing some kind of personal failure. His father was similar, though he was also the only person who could elicit a smile or laugh or cry from her.

The novel begins to dip into Henry's upbringing in this section, as he thinks about his parents and the way they handled or thought about their own emotions. It's evident that they both embraced a stoic attitude when it came to their feelings—an attitude that valued quiet resilience over all else.

Henry and Jack talk about work politics, and Henry mentions that Lelia doesn't trust Hoagland. She does, however, love Jack. In fact, she really doesn't mind anyone at Henry's work except for Hoagland, and Jack agrees that this is because all of them are quite likable—other than Hoagland, who is certainly "troublesome." That said, though, he insists that it's good Henry came into the office today so that he can put Hoagland's mind at ease, insisting that their boss has been worrying about him.

Once again, the novel presents Hoagland as a rather sinister character. Even Jack, after all, calls him "troublesome," though he also changes the topic, subtly siding with Hoagland by suggesting that Henry should talk to him—a clear sign that Jack will continue to work on behalf of Hoagland, regardless of what he actually thinks about his boss.

As Jack talks, he cleans olive pits off a picture of a woman he once seduced as part of the job. The fact that he still has this picture even though the case has been closed for so long makes Henry wonder about how Jack lives with the things he has done. Even for a seasoned professional like Jack, it must be hard to forget certain things—like, for instance, murdering a young man in Cyprus. But this, Henry thinks, is simply the nature of the job: all of them lead double lives. One version of Jack killed the guard in Cyprus, but another version of him seduced the woman in the picture on his desk. And still another version, it would seem, had a long and rewarding relationship with his beloved wife.

Henry's thoughts about his and his colleagues' double lives sheds light on the way he has previously approached his relationship with Lelia. Instead of opening up to her and being completely honest about what he does, he has kept his work life separate from his home life—or so he thinks. In reality, breaking up his life like this has just driven Lelia from him, since it just makes him seem emotionally unavailable. The novel thus spotlights how complicated it can be for people to successfully compartmentalize their own lives; in the end, it seems, the many different aspects of a person's life or identity converge into one messy whole.

Henry and Jack move into the privacy of the office's microfiche room to look at various press snippets about John Kwang. He has already been attracting quite a bit of attention as an inspirational figure in the city's Democratic Party. He's been on the city council for two years, and everyone is talking about how he should run for mayor, though he himself has denied that this is his intention. Still, the current mayor, De Roos, is clearly nervous about Kwang's ascendancy, so his associates have been subtly trying to make Kwang look bad by villainizing his interest in giving people tax vouchers to pursue a bilingual education. De Roos's people want the city's Latinx constituents to think that Kwang would cut institutionalized bilingual programs from the schools in favor of his new approach.

De Roos's efforts to hurt Kwang's popularity have xenophobic undertones, since he's ultimately using Kwang's interest in cultural unity and widely accessible language programs against him. Although Kwang is very popular, then, it's clear that he's not without some enemies—enemies who will gladly portray him as a threat because of his strong multicultural political message.

Kwang is a formidable opponent because he's so likable. Jack thinks Henry might look like Kwang in 15 years or so. At this point, the councilman is a "media darling" who seems somewhat unbeatable, but the fact remains that Mayor De Roos is an experienced politician who knows how to compete. Because the press likes Kwang so much, De Roos hasn't been overtly trashing him. Instead, he frequently expresses his admiration for him while adding subtle asides that misconstrue or villainize the councilman's intentions or beliefs. Henry, for his part, notes that the polls indicate an overall hesitancy to embrace "bilingualism" among New York City constituents—something Henry sees as a sign that people don't want to give "anything more to immigrants."

The challenges that Kwang faces as a politician underscore the broader challenges that many immigrants face in the United States. Henry recognizes a certain unwillingness to accept people from other cultures, even in very diverse places like New York City. The fact that Henry has a multicultural identity himself means that he likely understands what Kwang is dealing with in a way that his boss probably doesn't, ultimately hinting that he might find it difficult to work against the councilman.

It's clear to Henry that Jack has already done quite a bit of research on Kwang. Jack shares that Kwang is very closely connected to his core base of constituents, the majority of whom are grocers and dry cleaners who frequently hand him donations in envelopes after seeing him at local church services. Hearing this detail, Henry wonders aloud if his own father ever donated to Kwang. "Let's hope not," he hears behind him, turning to see Hoagland standing there and observing him. Hoagland informs him that he will be placed in one of Kwang's new headquarters, which is opening in Flushing, Queens. He'll pose as an intern who found the organization through a temp agency.

When Henry wonders aloud if his father ever donated to Kwang's political organization, he acknowledges the overlap between his and Kwang's backgrounds: they're both Korean Americans, meaning that they're familiar with the same immigrant community in New York City—a fact that will only make it harder for Henry to undermine Kwang as a spy, since doing so might feel like working against people like his own father. Hoagland's response, meanwhile, is extremely ominous, as it implies that he expects Henry to keep his personal life separate from his work—something the novel implies is, perhaps, impossible.

Henry will primarily work for Kwang's head of PR, Sherrie Chin-Watt. Sherrie is a Chinese American lawyer in what seems to be an unhappy marriage to an investment banker. She met Kwang years ago, when she was still in law school, but she has only recently joined his political team. Hoagland says that she's not yet romantically entangled with Kwang, but he insinuates that this is almost sure to change.

Hoagland is clearly interested in digging up dirt about Kwang. Before Henry has even set foot in Kwang's headquarters, Hoagland is already filling his head with Kwang's possible downfalls and transgressions. His eagerness to find a scandal serves as a good reminder that Henry will be actively working against *Kwang as he tries to get closer and closer to him.*

Hoagland motions for Henry to step into his office alone. He then urges him to be diligent as he formulates his backstory for the Kwang case. Everyone, he insists, is rooting for Henry after his unfortunate experience with Emile Luzan. Hoagland claims that everyone has gone through a similar thing as Henry did, but he also tries to make him feel better by suggesting that he had Luzan in the perfect position—he could have squeezed any information he wanted out of him. But Henry's not so sure Luzan *had* anything valuable to reveal. He thinks Luzan was a good man, but Hoagland doesn't care about that.

For Hoagland, the purpose of Henry's job is clear: he's supposed to find out secrets about other people. But for Henry, things aren't quite so clear-cut. He's capable of recognizing when his subject is a good person, but this ability to empathize with his targets only makes the job harder. After all, forming a genuine connection with Luzan is what made Henry unable to complete his assignment. It remains to be seen, then, whether or not he'll be able to remain in an unbiased position while spying on Kwang—a man who comes from the same culture as Henry and even reminds him of his own father.

Henry thinks back to his dealings with Luzan, who was a Filipino-American who supported Ferdinand Marcos (the former president of the Philippines). Luzan's advocacy for Marcos in the United States attracted negative attention to him, but nothing he did was violent or sinister. Henry learned not long after he left the case that Luzan died shortly thereafter while at a conference in the Caribbean. Henry called his house to offer some kind of explanation for why he suddenly stopped going to therapy, but Luzan's wife answered and informed him of the news.

It's unclear if Luzan's death was an accident or if it had something to do with his ties to the former president of the Philippines. Given that Henry was hired to spy on him, it's clear that some organization (or individual person) was keeping a close eye on him, so it seems likely that he died under nefarious circumstances. And now that he knows about Luzan's death, Henry is left to grapple with the fact that he was hired to actively work against a man he genuinely came to respect.

Before Henry leaves the office, Hoagland tells him not to mess this assignment up. What happened with Luzan cost the company—"and not just money," he says, adding that "people are talking." Henry responds by pointing out that Luzan himself *can't* talk, but Hoagland pushes back against his implications: sometimes people simply drown, even people with suspicious ties to secretive political plots. Hoagland insists that evil doesn't truly exist; the world is just the way it is, and there's nothing more to it than that. In other words, things happen, and people have to deal with reality as best they can.

Hoagland denies—in so many words—that Luzan was murdered. And yet, the mere fact that he goes out of his way to emphasize the supposed randomness of Luzan's death suggests that he's hiding something. When he insists that evil doesn't exist and that reality has nothing to do with right and wrong, he makes a heavy-handed attempt to convince Henry that what their company does isn't inherently bad or immoral. By saying this, he essentially urges Henry to focus on his assignment without considering any moral implications or the sinister things his actions might lead to.

CHAPTER 4

Henry's father died a year and a half after Mitt's death. He was a serious man who wouldn't have understood the kind of vacation Lelia took in Italy. The point of life for him was to work hard and steadily rise through society, and his only beliefs revolved around the power of Jesus Christ and capitalism. When he had his first stroke, Henry and Lelia moved in to care for him. A week later, he had a second stroke that made it impossible for him to speak. Henry took advantage of his silence and his inability to do anything but listen. He sat up late with his father and spoke nonstop—part of it was a form of personal confession, but another part was intended as a kind of "emotional torture."

Henry clearly resents his father, though it's not yet clear why. All the same, the fact that he seized the opportunity to speak nonstop to his father as a form of "emotional torture" suggests that he wanted to get back at the old man for something. At the same time, though, it also indicates that he was eager to express himself. To that end, Henry has a tendency to open up in situations in which there's no chance that his words will be used against him, as evidenced by the way he also spoke freely in therapy sessions with Luzan.

But nothing Henry said to his father could really hurt him, since his father knew that he had done exactly what he intended to do in life. He'd raised Henry in a foreign country, become a successful businessman, and would even have had enough money to help Mitt have a good life. In short, he made it possible for Henry to avoid the hardships he himself faced. And yet, Henry's father wasn't successful because of some kind of natural talent or cleverness. Rather, he was successful because he "refused to fail."

The novel explores the work ethic Henry's father clung to as he fought to sustain himself in a foreign country. He appears to have believed that failure simply wasn't an option, which makes sense, considering that he and his wife came all the way from Korea to live in the United States—having made such an effort, Henry's father "refused to fail." The novel implies that this is a rather common attitude for immigrants to embrace, since many people leave their homes for the exact purpose of gaining new opportunities to work hard.

Henry's father got his start in business through something known as a **ggeh**, which is a Korean "money club." Members of a *ggeh* all contribute to a big pool of cash, and at some point each of them will get to take the money for themselves. The members pay into the *ggeh* each week with the knowledge that they will eventually be the ones to benefit from this collective effort. The members of Henry's father's *ggeh* were a tightknit bunch of humble businessmen whose families spent time together in public parks. His father used the money to open a green grocery store that became quite successful. But as everyone in the *ggeh* slowly earned more and more money, they grew apart, and they stopped spending so much time together.

Henry's father got his start as a businessowner in the United States by engaging with the immigrant community in New York City, ultimately using a Korean tradition to finance his pursuit of the so-called "American Dream." In this way, he benefited from the intersection of two cultures. And yet, the novel implies that it's easy to get wrapped up in American society, especially after gaining some success. After all, the Korean Americans in Henry's father's ggeh *end up drifting apart once they make money and achieve their original goals, indicating that it can be hard to stay connected to one's own cultural roots while living in another country.*

Eventually, Henry's father moved the family to a wealthy neighborhood in Ardsley, New York. He commuted into the city to oversee his multiple grocery stores, and Henry suspects that his father never felt completely comfortable in his own posh neighborhood in Ardsley, which was full of white families. His mother also seemed to want to fly under the radar, never wanting to borrow anything from their neighbors or ask anything of anyone. Henry didn't understand why this was the case, bemoaning the fact that his mother seemed so afraid of what people thought of them.

Henry's parents came to the United States for opportunity, but Henry suspects that their success came at a certain cost. At first, his father was very connected to a tightknit group of other Korean immigrants, but his eventual success as a businessowner seems to have catapulted him (and the rest of the family) into a very different lifestyle—one in which everyone around him is white and unknowledgeable about Korean culture. There are, of course, different ways to respond to this transition, and Henry's mother chose to simply mind her own business as a way of blending in. Henry, however, was just a child, so the idea of downplaying his personality seemed strange.

During his childhood and adolescence, Henry worked at his father's grocery stores. The ones in affluent neighbors on the Upper East Side of Manhattan were full of white women who hardly even seemed to see him. These women would even make racist comments right in front of him, assuming he couldn't speak English. Once, a wealthy older woman picked up an apple, took a bite, and then put it back. Henry started toward her, but his father stopped him, telling him in Korean that she was a frequent costumer.

When the old woman makes a racist comment in front of Henry, he's forced to confront the fact that many white people have no respect for him or his family. His father is a fairly successful businessowner, and this white woman patronizes his grocery store, but that unfortunately doesn't do anything to combat her racist worldview. And yet, Henry's father is primarily concentrated on never losing his customers, thus implying that he sees this kind of bigotry and mistreatment as the cost of doing business in the United States.

Henry's father was strict with his employees, but he refused to run things any other way. Dealing with this kind of strictness himself, he claimed, was how he learned business, and it would be how his employees would learn business, too. When he came home, Henry's mother wouldn't ask him about work—she would just comment that he must be hungry because he worked so late and so hard.

Henry's father is an incredibly hard-working, disciplined man. As a result, he has high expectations of his employees, and it's implied that he holds Henry to the same standards. At the same time, though, he seems to want to keep his work life separate from his home life, at least according to Henry's mother, who makes a point of never asking about his day. In turn, a certain silence hovers around his life as a businessowner, as if it would be crass to talk about such things at home.

One night, Henry decided to ask his father about how things were going at the stores, but his mother quickly pulled him to the side and asked why he was bothering his father with that kind of talk. His father, she told him, earned a degree from the best college in Korea, and the only reason he worked as a grocer was to give his son a better life—talking about it at home, though, would only "shame" him.

Henry's mother sheds light on why she or his father never talk about work. Henry's father made a great sacrifice by leaving behind his life in Korea, where he was seen as a distinguished person who was highly qualified for nearly any kind of work. In the United States, though, none of this mattered. Nonetheless, he still *made something of himself by becoming a successful businessowner. His success, though, doesn't change the fact that he thinks his work as a grocer is beneath him. This dynamic illustrates the economic and cultural difficulties of moving from one country to another, which often means giving up social status in the name of gaining new economic opportunities.*

Henry's father didn't know what Henry did for work, but he didn't seem to disapprove of his lifestyle. To Henry's surprise, he legitimately liked Lelia, and Henry began to suspect that his father was pleased he'd married a white woman—his father seemed to think Lelia would make it easier for Henry to succeed in the United States. But it was always hard to tell what, exactly, he thought. He was not a talkative man. Henry was 10 when his mother died, and his father took the tragedy in stride without saying much. He went on with life, and to this day Henry has no idea whether or not his father suffered internally from this loss.

Henry has been raised to keep his emotions to himself, since this is exactly what his father did. When Henry's mother died, his father didn't open up to his son or grieve alongside him—he simply moved on. His reaction ultimately emphasizes his highly practical, unsentimental attitude, which is the same attitude that made him a successful businessowner in a foreign country. Similarly, the fact that he thinks Lelia will help Henry succeed in American society underscores his pragmatic approach to life, suggesting that he tends to think more about success and prosperity than love and emotions.

CHAPTER 5

Henry thinks back to the period after his mother died. It's 1971 when his father brings home a young Korean woman from the airport. He doesn't introduce her to Henry, simply telling him to go help her with her bags. After setting the woman up in the extra bedroom, he comes out and tells Henry that the woman has come to help him with the house and with raising Henry. Henry resents his father for not saying something earlier, but his father knew Henry wouldn't have liked it, so he decided not to mention it. Henry's father also reveals that they will be moving to a wealthy neighborhood outside the city. When Henry voices his outrage, his father switches from English to Korean, firmly telling his son that he has no say in the matter.

Henry's father wastes no time moving on in the aftermath of his wife's death. Instead of taking time to grieve Henry's mother, he forges forward by deciding to move to the suburbs. He believes this is simply what one does when confronted with tragedy: keep going. Henry, though, is just a young boy, so the idea of embracing an entirely new life is undoubtedly daunting, especially when doing so means accepting even more change after his mother's death.

The young Korean woman lives in a small bedroom near the kitchen and pantry at Henry's new house in Ardsley. Henry hardly knows anything about her, as her entire life seems to revolve around keeping the house in order and making sure there's always food. His white friends make fun of her, calling her "Aunt Scallion" and snickering about how she always smells like fish and garlic.

Although Henry's white friends aren't explicitly making fun of him, *their comments convey a racist sense of intolerance when it comes to other cultures. What's more, Henry and the housekeeper are both Korean, so his friends' insults partially apply to him, too—a sign that, though he has found acceptance in the white suburbs, he still faces a casual, unexamined kind of everyday racism.*

Years later, Henry and Lelia start spending the summers in Ardsley with Mitt, staying in a large room above Henry's father's garage. Lelia takes an interest in the Korean woman and asks Henry about her one night while they're lying in bed. She wants to know if the woman has any family, but Henry can't say—he has never heard her talk about having any close relatives, nor has he heard her communicating with them on the phone. When Lelia asks if the woman is friends with Henry's father, Henry says no, but he admits (when she asks) that they might be lovers. Finally, she asks him to tell her the woman's name, but he can't—he doesn't know it.

Even though the housekeeper has been in Henry's life for a long time, he knows basically nothing about her. For an American like Lelia, his lack of knowledge in this regard is somewhat astounding, since it suggests that Henry doesn't care about the housekeeper as a person. In the context of American society, then, Henry's relationship to the housekeeper is rather hard to understand, but the novel will go on to explore this relationship in the context of Korean culture, in which such a relationship isn't so unheard of.

The fact that Henry doesn't know the Korean woman's name deeply upsets Lelia. He simply calls her Ahjuhma, but that's not her name—it's a formal address that literally translates to "aunt." He has a hard time helping Lelia see that not knowing the woman's name isn't necessarily a sign that he doesn't care about her. She doesn't understand that there's no context in which he would ever call her by her actual name, nor does she understand that he often has to stop to think about his father and mother's names. They always called each other "spouse," and when someone asks him his parents' names, he always takes a moment before answering, searching for a desperate moment before coming up with the response.

The novel suggests that it's common in Korean culture to call people by various titles, whether those are formal or informal. For instance, Henry's parents always called each other "spouse" instead of using each other's names. Similarly, Henry has always called his and his father's housekeeper Ahjuhma, which is a traditional address similar to "ma'am." The fact that he doesn't know her name therefore isn't necessarily because he doesn't care about her, but simply because of the cultural customs by which he, his father, and Ahjuhma abide.

Henry and Lelia's conversation about the Korean woman's real name puts them at odds with each other. Lelia avoids him for the next few days. Finally, she decides to reach out to Ahjuhma on her own, making an effort to endear herself to the older woman. But Henry has to act as a translator. When they seek her out in the kitchen, she tells them to go away—the kitchen needs to be cleaned, and she has no reason to talk to Henry's "American wife."

Interestingly, Ahjuhma seems to have a certain amount of power, at least within the domain of the house's kitchen. Although Henry's family employs her, she feels unobligated to take time out of her busy day to talk to Lelia. Her unwillingness to engage with Lelia subtly suggests that Lelia's efforts to get to know her are misguided. Lelia thinks she's being kind, but—in reality—she's just making things harder for Ahjuhma, who seemingly has no problem with the way things work in the Park household. By superimposing her own cultural beliefs about what's polite and what's impolite, Lelia misreads the situation and ultimately exacerbates whatever tension might have already existed between Ahjuhma and the Parks.

Eventually, Lelia finds Ahjuhma folding laundry and tries to help her, but Ahjuhma keeps bumping her out of the way. Undeterred, Lelia tries to fold as quickly as she can. Ahjuhma ends up trying to push her out of the room, at which point Lelia accidentally elbows her in the ear. Both women yell and run out of the room. Lelia fetches Henry and tearfully tells him what happened. When he goes to investigate, Ahjuhma yells at Lelia, calling her a "nasty American cat!" Henry reacts strongly to this insult, telling Ahjuhma that she can't talk to his wife that way. Ahjuhma instantly bows her head and leaves. The sudden exchange upsets Lelia all the more, as she's horrified by Henry's ability to force Ahjuhma into such a submissive position.

Lelia's efforts to show Ahjuhma kindness ultimately backfire. It's quite clear that Ahjuhma doesn't want *Lelia's compassion or help—she just wants to do her job and go about her life unbothered by outsiders like Lelia. What's more, it's possible that Lelia's attempt to help Ahjuhma with the laundry is an insult of sorts, perhaps suggesting to Ahjuhma that Lelia thinks she can't do her job well on her own. Either way, it's evident that Lelia misreads the situation because she tries to place it within the context of American culture, in which it's impolite for people in positions of power to completely ignore others. However, everyone else in the Park household abides by Korean cultural values, so Lelia's American viewpoint is out of touch with the true reality of the situation.*

Still thinking about his upbringing, Henry recalls conversations in which his father made him second-guess his own position in society. When Henry announced that he was going to a high school dance with a white girl, his father insisted that she didn't actually like him and was just using him to get a free ticket to the dance. But there are also fond memories, like when he used to help his father wash windows with a hose. His father would give him the hose and then bend over in front of him, purposefully tempting him to spray his butt. As they laughed and played like this, Henry's mother would watch, and none of them would ever have suspected that she would die of cancer very soon.

Henry's relationship with his father was varied and complex. Sometimes his father was scornful and went out his way to teach Henry a rather dispiriting message: namely, that he shouldn't expect that white Americans will ever fully accept him. At other times, though, his father was playful and loving. This balance has undoubtedly shaped Henry's overall feelings about his father, a man he still thinks about with great frequency, almost as if he's still yearning for the old man's approval.

When Ahjuhma first arrived, she made an effort to take care of Henry, but he pushed her away. Ever since then, they simply went about their lives in parallel, coexisting as she made meals and ran the house. Once, Henry came home from college and caught Ahjuhma sneaking into his father's bedroom in the middle of the night. The next day, he looked out the window and saw them gardening side by side, and the way they worked quietly next to each other hinted at a shared contentment and intimacy. Ahjuhma ended up dying not long before Henry's father—she suffered from certain pneumonia-related complications, but she never even told Henry's father, working diligently until her very last day on Earth.

When Henry saw Ahjuhma and his father developing an intimate bond, he perhaps realized that love comes in many different forms. It's unlikely that his father and Ahjuhma ever developed a straightforward romantic relationship, but they did *seem to establish a strong sense of companionship with each other—a bond based on a shared lifestyle and shared cultural values. Their quiet intimacy also suggests that there are ways to connect with people without using words, though not everyone is well-suited to this kind of bond; Lelia, for instance, clearly needs her partners to open up to her and share their feelings. For people like Henry's father, though, an unspoken feeling of connection is enough.*

CHAPTER 6

Henry goes to John Kwang's headquarters in Flushing, Queens. Everyone in the community loves Kwang—there are buttons and posters with his face on them. One of Kwang's most loyal staff members delivers a short talk at the headquarters about how Kwang decided to run his city council term as if he were still on the campaign trail. Constituents seem to like the idea of Kwang as mayor, but he still hasn't come out and said that he'll run for the position. Instead, he just hints at this possibility. Regardless of his plans, though, it's clear that he's well-liked. Violent crime has gone down and school test scores have gone up since he was elected as a councilman.

In many ways, John Kwang is—as a political figure—a bastion of hope. His community clearly sees him as a very positive leader, and the fact that violent crime is down and test scores are up undoubtedly reinforces the confidence his constituents have already placed in him. And yet, the fact that Henry has been sent to spy on Kwang indicates that there are powerful people out there who don't want him to succeed, perhaps because of a xenophobic unwillingness to let immigrants occupy positions of power in the United States.

Early in Henry's time at Kwang's headquarters, he catches the eye of his superiors by successfully quelling a small protest. There's a group of Peruvians outside the headquarters with signs about how unfairly their Korean employers have been treating them at the local grocery stores where they work. Realizing that the protest will soon attract cameras, Henry invites them all inside and shows them the offices, all the while hearing their complaints and assuring them that Kwang will be informed of their discontent and do what he can to influence local Korean businessowners. The protestors are pleased and readily accept Kwang merchandise on their way out, so that the cameras waiting for them simply encounter a content group of constituents carrying Kwang bumper stickers.

Despite Kwang's popularity within Queens and the broader immigrant community, he hasn't yet won over all of his constituents. When the Peruvian protestors arrive at his headquarters, they make it clear that there are factional tensions at play in Queen's immigrant community. Their anger at Kwang also suggests that they see him not as a representative of their entire borough but solely of the Korean population—an idea that Henry helps counter by welcoming the protestors into the headquarters. By doing this, though, he also endears himself to powerful people in the Kwang organization, thus getting that much closer to the information he needs to spy on Kwang.


Henry's savvy handling of the protestors attracts the attention of Janice, who serves as Kwang's scheduling manager—among other things. It's her job to scout out good locations for his public appearances, so she takes Henry and a college volunteer named Eduardo to check out a location in Brooklyn, where Kwang will be meeting with church authorities and then delivering a short speech. It will be Henry and Eduardo's job to make sure nobody gets in between Kwang and the many cameras that will surely be at the event.

Henry seems to have made his way deeper into the Kwang organization by attracting attention to himself after mollifying the Peruvian protestors. The fact that he, like Kwang, is Korean American helps justify his interest in the entire political movement, making it that much easier for him to work toward getting to know Kwang so he can spy on him.

After scouting the location in Brooklyn, Janice takes Henry and Eduardo to a diner. Henry studies Eduardo, who looks older than 23. He's muscular and wears glasses, which he frequently adjusts. He's a political science major and is deeply devoted to John Kwang. Over breakfast, Janice asks Henry about what he does for a living, forcing him to start drawing from his invented backstory. He claims to be a freelance magazine writer and that he wants to do a profile on Kwang. But Janice is skeptical: she's sure he's working on something else, too—perhaps a novel. She then jokingly outlines a hypothetical political thriller based on Kwang's career.

At first, Janice's suspicion is probably unsettling to Henry, since she suggests that he's not being completely honest about why he has come to work with the Kwang organization. When she guesses that what he's hiding is that he's a novelist, though, it becomes clear that he hasn't been found out—in fact, this conversation illustrates just how unsuspecting the people in Kwang's organization are, perhaps because they don't think anyone would want to work against someone as charming and popular as Kwang.

Later, Henry stays with Janice while Eduardo goes back to the office. They drive through the southern neighborhoods of Queens in search of potential locations for Kwang to make an appearance. They talk about how there's yet another grocer boycott going on in the city, but then the conversation shifts and Janice starts talking about a Korean boyfriend she had when she was in college. They had a falling out, and Janice was offended that his parents didn't seem to know anything about her. Henry suspects that they just acted this way. He also suspects that her boyfriend's silence when she yelled at him in their final argument was "more complicated" than she could have understood. Koreans, he thinks, might depend too much on silence, which can give a person a certain advantage. He himself has used this unfairly against Lelia.

Henry's thoughts about silence shed light on how he feels about his own parents' hesitancy to openly voice their feelings and opinions. He suggests that this hesitancy aligns with Korean cultural values, which present silence as an honorable, respectable way of responding to surprises or hardships. Janice comes at things differently, though: her Korean boyfriend's silence made her feel like he didn't care about their relationship. The entire interaction somewhat resembles the argument Henry and Lelia had about Ahjuhma: in both cases, cultural differences and misunderstandings led to tension. At the same time, though, Henry also recognizes that silence isn't *always honorable, perhaps acknowledging to himself that Lelia ended up feeling like she was suffering alone with her grief because he refused to speak honestly about his feelings after Mitt died.*

CHAPTER 7

Henry and Lelia's son, Mitt, died at the age of seven. He had a close relationship with Henry's father, who was patient and attentive to him. Mitt had a good time with the old man each summer, when the family would travel north of the city to live for the hottest months of the year. When the other children in the neighborhood called Mitt racist names, Henry and his father went around to their houses and spoke to their parents.

Mitt is the first person on his father's side of the family to spend his entire childhood in the United States. Of course, Henry came to the country when he was very young, but he grew up in a household in which Korean culture was very strong, since his parents moved to the United States after decades of living in Korea. Mitt, on the other hand, grew up with a native-born American mother and a Korean American father, so he's deeply entrenched in American culture—and yet, he still faces racism from the children around him, which underscores how hard it is to escape bigotry in a nation that is so unwelcoming of immigrants.

This experience reminded Henry of what happened when *he* was a kid and other boys called him racist names: his father went around to the houses of the boys who called Henry names, but he acquiesced to their parents and quickly accepted their apologies. When the same happened to Mitt, though, Henry's father lost his temper and started yelling on the doorstep of one boy's house. As he was shouting in Korean, Henry wanted him to stop—but he didn't interfere, wanting to let his father do this for Mitt's sake.

Henry clearly wishes that his father stood up for him a bit more when he was a child dealing with his racist peers. In his adulthood, then, he appreciates watching his father finally take a stand on Mitt's behalf. For such a reserved man to yell like this is a sure sign of his love—love that he was never quite able to express so clearly for Henry.

Despite the initial problems with the other children in Ardsley, Mitt soon became friends with everyone in the neighborhood. The accident happened at a birthday party—Henry had just come back from the store with more candy and soda, and there was a terrible commotion. He ran to the backyard and found Lelia cradling Mitt's head. Apparently, there had been a dog pile, with the kids all jumping on one another and having fun until they realized Mitt had been crushed at the very bottom. Mitt was already dead.

The novel has already explored the terrible aftermath of Mitt's death, but now it reveals how, exactly, he died. There's a certain metaphorical element to his death, since he was suffocated by white American children, perhaps representing the crushing influence of American culture on Korean Americans. The novel has previously considered the many ways in which it's hard to stay closely connected to one's own culture after acclimating to life in the United States, and Mitt's death ultimately aligns with this idea.

After Mitt's death, Henry would stay up late. When he'd finally go to bed, he would pull Lelia on top of him, feeling her body weight pressing down. They'd often have sex like that, but in the morning they would go their separate ways. Lelia would leave before he woke up, and then he'd spend the morning in deep thought.

Dealing with the terrible grief of Mitt's death, Lelia and Henry only seem to have connected at night, when Lelia was mostly asleep. And though they were physically connecting by having sex, the novel suggests that this physical connection isn't a substitute for talking about their grief. Mitt's death thus pushed them each into their own separate worlds, ultimately driving a wedge between them and making it harder to cope with their loss.

Mitt used to play with a tape recorder from Henry's work. He liked saying things and playing them back, but he also liked catching snippets of life. Henry knows Lelia still has the tapes of Mitt's voice. She's back from Italy, so he calls her at their mutual friend's apartment (where she's been staying). They've already planned to meet the following week, so Lelia tells him he can fetch the tapes while she's not there, not wanting to deviate from their original plan. He agrees and spends the day listening to the tapes. Most of the recordings are of conversations between Lelia and Mitt. One, however, is a recording Mitt and Lelia made for Henry on his birthday. They each say "I love you," causing Henry to think about how he himself has never been comfortable declaring his love.

Henry's desire to listen to the tapes of Mitt's voice suggests that he's ready to think about the tragic loss. Before this, it seems, he was reluctant to do anything but move forward with life, as evidenced by Lelia's frustration with him and her decision to leave. His response, however, makes sense within the context of his upbringing, since his father modeled stoicism and silence in the face of hardship. Nonetheless, Henry has now decided to recognize that he's hurting, and instead of throwing himself into work or somehow figuring out a way to think about something else, he listens to the recordings of Mitt.

That night, Henry goes to the apartment of his and Lelia's mutual friend. He stands outside the window until Lelia opens it and tells him to come up. It's late, but their friend isn't back yet from a date—in fact, it looks like she won't be back at all. Lelia chastises Henry for not sticking to their original plan of meeting the following week. He's always catching her off guard, she says, accusing him of doing so intentionally. Whenever he calls, for instance, she has always *just* walked in the door. But she forgives him. She has recently cut her own hair, and though he insists that it looks good, she knows he's lying—it looks terrible.

Lelia's comment about Henry always catching her off guard spotlights the trouble she has reading him. She seems to have a hard time predicting what he might do, and though this might seem like a failure on her part, it's more likely related to the fact that Henry is a very private, insular person. He is, after all, a spy, and even his wife appears to find him somewhat mystifying—a dynamic that has caused tension in their relationship.

Henry tells Lelia that he has listened to the tapes of Mitt. She herself hasn't listened to them for a while, since doing so always means she has to lie down for days on end, unable to do anything. But it used to be worse. She used to sit on the windowsill with her legs dangling in the air, not caring if she looked like she was going to jump. Henry admits that this always terrified him, but Lelia just laughs—he should have seen what she was like when he *wasn't* home. He was lucky, in that way, since he had something to do. He could always escape and spend time with Jack.

Lelia's remark about how Henry could always escape to spend time with Jack is a subtle critique of Henry's tendency to disappear when faced with emotional hardship—whether that disappearance is literal or metaphorical. While Henry kept his feelings inside and went on with his life, Lelia did the exact opposite: she allowed her sorrow to be on full display, even sitting on the ledge of her window so that everyone could see just how little she cared about her own life anymore.

Lelia and Henry start drinking. They're still talking about Mitt, but in roundabout ways. Lelia feels bad about how she treated the people in her life after their son's death, but Henry says she was just in pain—and so was he, he adds. Lelia, however, points out that he hid his pain very well. He kept calm and always assured people that they were doing fine. Meanwhile, Lelia was unraveling with grief.

Lelia explicitly states what the novel has already implied—namely, that Henry hid his grief and put on a brave face in front of everyone else, refusing to let his sorrow show. And by keeping his feelings bottled up, he inadvertently made Lelia feel like she was dealing with their loss on her own.

The conversation slowly shifts to other matters, as Henry asks how Lelia's parents are doing. Her mother lives alone and is something of a shut-in. Her father, Stew, is an alcoholic businessman who has known great success. Early in Henry and Lelia's marriage, he told Henry that he didn't approve of their relationship at first because of the fact that Henry is Korean. But he insisted that he'd changed his mind, saying that he liked Henry and urging him to have babies with Lelia very soon. He said he didn't care what the kids would look like—he just wanted grandchildren.

Stew's statement about not caring what his grandchildren look like is problematic, despite the fact that he says it to prove that he has an enlightened, inclusive worldview. That he would even think to say such a thing makes it quite clear that he would rather his grandchildren be completely white. This sentiment aligns with his initial dislike of Henry, which was based on nothing but Henry's race and cultural background. The tricky thing, though, is that Henry is expected to simply take all of this in stride. Because Stew now claims to like him, he expects Henry to not take offense at these racist thoughts. The entire interaction thus serves as a good example of the kind of casual, everyday racism that is so prevalent in the United States.

It's now two in the morning. Henry and Lelia are lying next to each other, but they're not touching. He asks if she has been writing, and she says that she's only been composing letters—a comment that sparks some tension, as Henry desperately wants to know who, exactly, she's communicating with. The conversation snakes its way toward her time in Italy, with Henry begging her to tell him the name of the man she surely became involved with in Italy. But she refuses. It won't do any good. Plus, she insists, the other man is unimportant, at least to their relationship.

Lelia refuses to say anything about her time in Italy, but she doesn't deny that she had an affair. Instead, she simply says that it would only do harm to her relationship with Henry if they talked about what happened in Italy—a clear indication that she had an extramarital affair. Henry, interestingly, desperately wants to know about the affair: while he doesn't normally have a problem keeping secrets from people, he's very unhappy now that Lelia is keeping a secret from him.

Henry presses Lelia for more details. He wants to know what she told the other man about him, so she explains that she said she was separated. The man assumed this meant she was divorced, and she didn't correct him. She also told him that she never knew how Henry felt about anything. She *still* never knows what goes on in his head. She also doesn't know what he needs out of life. She spent a lot of time in Italy thinking about his job and all of the things she doesn't know about his professional life.

Again, Lelia very clearly outlines the main thing that came between her and Henry: that is, his insular, secretive way of moving through the world. Seemingly every aspect of his life is blocked off from her, since he won't talk about his emotions and can't even tell her much about his job. As a result, she finds it increasingly difficult to connect with him as a romantic partner.

The secrecy surrounding Henry's job still troubles Lelia. She doesn't like that he can spend the day pretending to be someone else and then casually come home and act like he's simply reentering his actual life. It makes her feel cut off from important parts of him, and that causes her to question who he really is. As she explains this, Henry isn't sure what to say. The truth is, he feels deeply grateful for Dennis Hoagland, who recruited him for a job that has allowed him to find his "truest place in the culture" of the United States.

Henry comes from a family (and culture) that generally values silent resilience in the face of hardship, whereas open communication tends to be emphasized more in American culture. Essentially, Henry just isn't in the habit of expressing himself in the way Lelia wants him to. And for all of his misgivings about Hoagland, Henry can't help but feel grateful that his boss gave him a job that has allowed him to occupy a societal position that is familiar to him—namely, the in-between, transitional life of a spy, which, the novel implies, shares some similarities with Henry's experience of navigating his own multicultural identity.

Henry insists that the only thing Lelia needs to know about him is that he wants to be with her. *She* is his real life. But she isn't so sure. She's disoriented by the fact that Henry never says Mitt's name and never talks about what happened. He says that what happened to Mitt was nothing more than a horrible accident, but she objects—it was so much more than that. It couldn't have been an "accident," because, as she puts it, "when your baby dies it's never an accident." She's crying now, but Henry doesn't touch her. Instead, he lies next to her and experiences what it feels like to be so close that he can feel the heat of his own skin reflecting back at him from hers.

The conversation Henry and Lelia have in this scene is the kind of difficult, emotionally raw discussion Lelia has been waiting so long to have. It's not that the conversation solves anything: as Lelia makes quite clear, there's no way to fix what happened to Mitt, and Henry still doesn't seem to entirely understand where Lelia is coming from. Still, though, the mere act of finally talking about these difficult feelings is cathartic, effectively clearing the air between Henry and Lelia.

CHAPTER 8

A week after starting at the Flushing office, Henry sees John Kwang in person. He makes an unexpected visit to the office, and Henry instantly understands why everyone is so drawn to him. He's magnetic and makes a point of recognizing everyone in the room—even Henry, whom he intently studies for a moment as he passes. He seems to recognize something in Henry, and his look is one of acknowledgment. It's similar to the way Luzan used to look at him. For the most part, though, Kwang pays attention to Eduardo, shadowboxing with him because they're both boxers.

Henry finally makes contact with Kwang, though this first encounter isn't all that substantial. Still, he gets close enough to recognize Kwang's magnetism and overall appeal. His success as a public figure is all the more significant to Henry because he—like Henry's own father—is a Korean immigrant who has managed to do very well for himself in the United States. Henry's father also found success, but not on the same scale as Kwang, so Henry perhaps understands how hard the councilman worked to get where he is.

John Kwang makes Henry think of his father. He's confident that his father would have admired Kwang, who—like him—is clearly a hard worker. But Kwang is different from Henry's father, too. They're certainly similar because of their Korean backgrounds and their determination to succeed, but Kwang has managed to work his way into American life to a degree that Henry's father never quite reached. Henry's father was successful, but he didn't go beyond owning a number of grocery stores. Kwang, on the other hand, is a kind of Korean man whom Henry has never "conceived of" before—a successful public figure whose influence has reached beyond the confines of the Korean American community.

Henry's father was, like Kwang, a Korean immigrant who found success in the United States, but Kwang has done so on a much bigger scale. Whereas Henry's father's success was primarily monetary, Kwang has managed to rise to a position of power in American society by becoming a councilman. In turn, he has gone far beyond what Henry ever would have expected a man like his father to do, a fact that illustrates just how many challenges people like Henry's father face as they try to attain upward mobility in the United States.

CHAPTER 9

Henry becomes ingrained in the day-to-day operations at Kwang's headquarters. Constituents from seemingly every ethnic background come to the offices in Flushing and are heartily welcomed by the volunteers, all of whom are following Kwang's example of inclusivity. Part of Kwang's political success has hinged on the fact that he and his campaign hit the streets and devoted themselves to registering voters. The process involved offering potential constituents a dollar to "help" them out.

Kwang has made a concerted effort to reach out to the immigrant population in Queens. This strategy makes sense, since he himself is an immigrant and is therefore a prominent figure in the community. He also knows how meaningful it is to give immigrants an opportunity to take part in the election process, which is why he empowers his potential constituents by giving them a dollar—a good indication that he's interested in supporting them.

Kwang's volunteers are all very committed to him—especially Eduardo, who's his favorite. Kwang often takes the staff out to dinner and holds forth for the entire night, frequently calling on people to express their opinions. Henry makes a point of sitting far from Kwang so that he won't ask him to speak, but he can't fully avoid his attention because there's a certain connection between them. This connection mostly has to do with Kwang's recognition of Henry as a kindred person, or someone who comes from a similar cultural background and understands what it's like to be a Korean American.

Slowly but surely, Henry gets closer and closer to Kwang. And yet, it doesn't seem like he's even trying all that hard to get on Kwang's good side. Instead of sitting next to him at the team dinners and doing whatever he can to endear himself to the councilman, he sits far away and tries to escape Kwang's notice. His hesitance in this regard is a possible sign that he's reluctant to do his job by spying on Kwang, perhaps disliking the idea of betraying someone with whom he identifies so closely.

Despite his popularity, Kwang *does* face some challenges in Brooklyn and Queens. He has been trying to negotiate with Chinese and Korean gangs, hoping to establish peace between them. But these talks came to a sudden halt when the police unexpectedly arrested a Korean gang member right after one of Kwang's meetings. The leader of the Korean gang is now threatening Kwang and saying that he double-crossed the gangs. The issue has clearly been weighing on Kwang, who is normally relaxed and confident. One day, Henry watches from afar as Kwang screams at his wife while sitting in the car. The yelling goes on for a full 10 minutes before he gets out and she drives away.

The more time Henry spends in Kwang's general vicinity, the more he learns about him—even if he's not actively trying to get as close to Henry as Hoagland might like him to. Even from a slight distance, Henry can see that there's a dark underside to Kwang's otherwise affable and inspiring personality. When he yells at his wife for 10 minutes in the car, it becomes clear that he has a temper and, in turn, that he's not somebody to cross. In certain situations, he's willing to lord his power over someone less powerful, rather than lifting them up.

Henry is supposed to send Hoagland periodic updates about his time with Kwang. But he hasn't sent anything yet. He has multiple files of writing about Kwang, but he can't bring himself to send them to Hoagland because it feels like an unforgivable thing to do, like reporting on his own father or mother.

Henry identifies strongly with Kwang because of their shared Korean backgrounds. As a result, it's difficult for him to do what he was sent to Kwang's headquarters to do—that is, spy on the councilman and transmit secret information that will surely be used against him. To do this, it seems, would feel like a betrayal of Henry's own Korean roots.

Mayor De Roos has been subtly attacking John Kwang by criticizing his involvement in the grocer boycotts happening throughout the city. He has also been voicing skepticism about Kwang's methods of registering voters, claiming that his team uses too much "street money" and has too many "underage volunteers."

When Kwang ran for city council, he mobilized his core base by making sure everyone in his community registered to vote. As a way of supporting these unregistered voters, he gave them a dollar to help them with the process. From one perspective, this tactic simply underscores how much Kwang cares about supporting his constituents. Mayor De Roos, however, paints Kwang's use of "street money" in a sinister light. De Roos does this because Kwang's mobilization of a largely nonwhite, immigrant demographic poses a threat to his power as a mayor whose supporters are probably predominantly white. If Kwang is able to tap into a whole new segment of New York City's voter population, he might actually be able to beat De Roos—and De Roos knows this.

The day has come for Kwang to make his appearance in Brooklyn (the one Henry helped Janice scout). There's a huge crowd, but before he addresses the people, he goes into a church to speak with local priests in the Black community. Afterwards, Kwang and the priests address the crowd, and Kwang gives a speech about two people who recently died because of tension between the Black and Korean communities. He emphasizes the importance of unity, and he urges the Korean community to consider the systemic racism that Black Americans face. Unlike many of the proud Korean grocers who have built their businesses from the ground up, Black people don't have the same chances because many banks won't grant them loans to start their own businesses.

Kwang isn't exclusively interested in uplifting the Korean community in New York City. Rather, he strives for a broad sense of unity between the many different groups that live alongside each other in the city. He therefore makes a point of recognizing the systemic disadvantages Black Americans face—disadvantages that often don't apply to Korean immigrants, even if Korean immigrants have their own set of challenges to overcome in the United States.

When Kwang finishes his speech, Henry tries to hold the crowd back. But things get chaotic. Suddenly, there's a loud pop—then another one. In the commotion, Henry tries to make his way to Kwang, who's now surrounded by loyal volunteers. Eduardo jumps toward Kwang and shields him, moving him through the mass of bodies toward a car. Henry finds his way to them and helps get Kwang into a car, which drives quickly away. Once he's inside, Kwang looks out the window and mouths *Thank you* to Henry in Korean.

Even though Kwang's speech is about the importance of unity, it's clear that he's still dealing with a divided community. There is, in other words, still work to be done in terms of bringing New York City's many demographic groups together, as made quite clear by the threat of violence at this rally.

CHAPTER 10

Henry goes to an apartment that Hoagland rents for the company in the city. Its windows are covered, and there are workstations where operatives like Henry can write reports about the people they're trailing. The purpose of the apartment is to give them a safe hideaway to transmit intelligence back to the headquarters in Westchester. Henry has sometimes gone there to sleep after big arguments with Lelia. Now, he goes there and finds Jack on one of the sagging couches. They make small talk, with Jack asking how things are going with Lelia. Henry tells him things are fine. They've been seeing each other several times a week—she even stayed over one night, but Henry was careful not to make things too romantic.

Henry's relationship with Lelia is slowly returning to what it once was, perhaps because he finally opened up to her on the night after he listened to the tapes of Mitt's voice. Given that she originally left him because she felt like she was already alone with her grief, it's significant that they finally talked about Mitt's death, which seems to have opened the door to more contact between them.

Jack talks about how Henry has clearly chosen a life of relative solitude—he could be at home in bed with his wife, but instead he's in a dark apartment with Jack. He naturally gravitates toward the line of work he found himself in. Jack's comment makes Henry think about his initial dealings with Hoagland, who approached him outside a career services office a few years after he'd graduated college. Hoagland told him he could come work for a "research services firm" as an analyst. When Henry asked what the firm researched, Hoagland said, "People."

Hoagland's initial pitch about Henry's future job was extremely vague, since it's not at all clear what it would mean to work at a firm that researches people. At the same time, though, this description most likely appealed to Henry because he spent his childhood learning to fit in to an array of different cultural contexts—something that undoubtedly required him to closely study the people around him. Researching people, in other words, is what he feels he has been doing for his entire life.

Eventually, it becomes clear that Jack didn't come to see Henry just to chat. He has a message from Hoagland, which is that Henry needs to be in contact with the firm a bit more. Hoagland wants to hear more about what's going on with the Kwang case. Jack urges him to go to the office more often, or at least transmit more information. Hoagland has become quite flustered and anxious, so it would be a good idea for Henry to put him at ease a little.

Although Henry sees Jack as a friend and confidante, the truth is that Jack has ulterior motives for visiting Henry: he's there on behalf of Hoagland to make sure Henry does his job. In turn, he comes to seem a bit sinister, and though Henry seems to trust him, the novel leaves subtle hints suggesting that he's a rather ominous figure.

Jack points out that Henry didn't even send back word about the incident outside the church in Brooklyn. Henry claims that he didn't say anything because he's still trying to figure out what happened, but Jack insists that the small explosive sounds were clearly just smoke bombs set off by teenagers who wanted to play a prank on the audience. Henry, however, doesn't agree—he thinks there was something more sinister going on, and he insinuates that Hoagland himself might have been wrapped up in it. But Jack dismisses this idea and simply tells Henry to do his job.

The fact that Henry didn't report the small explosions at the Kwang rally underscores his overall hesitancy to report important information about Kwang. Jack makes it clear that something so eventful would be of interest to Hoagland and, in turn, to the client who hired the firm to gather information about Kwang. And yet, Henry has withheld this information, suggesting that he hasn't yet wrapped his head around working against Kwang by acting as an informant watching his every move. His silence on the matter also hints at his suspicion of Hoagland, as he thinks it's possible that Hoagland might have had something to do with the unrest—a good illustration of how little he trusts his own boss.

Jack thinks Henry should have left the firm after what happened with Luzan. He's not in the right state of mind anymore for this kind of work. He should therefore finish the Kwang job by simply giving Hoagland what he wants: information. Perhaps, Jack suggests, there's something going on with Kwang's "money operation." But Henry doesn't think so—all he wants to know is if there's a possibility Kwang might get hurt as a result of this secret investigation. Jack, however, says that this concern is "rookie" behavior on Henry's part.

Jack's comment about how Henry isn't in the right state of mind suggests that their jobs require them to maintain a certain level of emotional detachment. By keeping themselves at an emotional remove, they can ignore any moral reservations they might have about transmitting private information about a subject to a potentially malicious third party. To that end, Jack says that Henry's worry about Kwang getting hurt is a "rookie" concern, implying that it will be impossible for him to do his job if he thinks about such things.

CHAPTER 11

Regardless of his feelings about Hoagland or his job, Henry can't deny that he's the perfect person for the Kwang assignment. He fits right into the Kwang organization, taking notes for Kwang as constituents visit the office. Kwang likes to keep a running register of everyone who gives money to his team, printing out long lists of names and taking them home each night to memorize them so that he has a firm understanding of his base. Henry makes copies of these lists for him. One evening, Kwang finds Henry copying out the lists and studying them himself. But he doesn't seem unsettled by Henry's apparent interest in them. Instead, he's pleased that Henry is "learning the business," and he invites him out to a nice restaurant.

Kwang's success is built on how much he interacts with and engages his core base of constituents. He isn't an absent politician who overlooks the value of reaching out to his own community. It is perhaps because of his genuine devotion to his constituents that Henry seems to admire and respect him, though this respect also clearly comes from their shared cultural backgrounds. Still, the fact that Henry starts studying the donor lists himself suggests that Jack has gotten through to him and convinced him to start finding out valuable information about the Kwang organization.

On their way to the restaurant, Henry and Kwang pass an argument unfolding on the sidewalks. It's between a Black man and a Korean vendor. Kwang gets out of the car and asks what's going on. Apparently, the Black man bought a defective watch from the vendor and now wants to return it for credit. The vendor is refusing this request, and both parties are very upset. The vendor says racist things about the Black man, so Kwang takes him inside for a quick chat. Meanwhile, the Black man tells Henry that he often stops at the vendor's cart to buy his wife jewelry—it's cheap, but his wife likes it. He should have known better, he says, than to buy a watch. In the end, Kwang returns with the vendor, who gives the customer a better watch and a pair of earrings.

As a politician whose primary message revolves around unity, Kwang has his work cut out for him in Queens. Although there are many different racial and ethnic groups living side by side in his borough, that doesn't mean everyone gets along. In particular, the Black and Korean communities have been clashing, which is why Kwang spoke at the church in Brooklyn with Black priests and community leaders. Now, though, he takes this opportunity to serve as a mediator in a disagreement between a Black man and a Korean vendor. It's unclear what he ends up saying to the vendor, but he manages to convince him to treat the customer with kindness, perhaps using his own influence in the Korean community to talk the vendor into striving for peace and harmony instead of tension and strife.

Confused, the customer is about to refuse the vendor's offer, but Kwang interjects. He tells the Black man that the watch and earrings are a gift from the vendor and that he should accept them. The customer then shakes everyone's hands and leaves with the gifts. When Henry and Kwang get back in the car, they can see the vendor's poorly concealed fury, as he slams merchandise down and seethes about what just happened. But Kwang doesn't mind, saying that whatever benefits the campaign will also benefit the vendor in the long run—even if it enrages him now. Nonetheless, Henry thinks about how the vendor will surely stay open extra late tonight in an attempt to make back the money he lost today by giving away the watch and earrings.

The way Kwang handled this situation sheds light on just how important he thinks his own political movement is. He thinks the vendor's financial sacrifice is worthwhile because it will help create a sense of unity amongst his constituents. Henry, however, recognizes that this doesn't change the fact that the vendor now has to somehow make up for the money he lost in this interaction—a harsh reality that most likely reminds Henry of all the personal sacrifices his own father made in order to stay afloat and become successful as an immigrant in the United States.

CHAPTER 12

At the restaurant, the waitress and manager treat Kwang with the utmost respect, acting as if he's a celebrity. They give Henry and Kwang free drinks, and the manager lingers awhile before finally leaving, at which point Kwang and Henry talk about politics. Specifically, they discuss Kwang's feelings about running for mayor. He's not sure what he wants to do—everyone wants him to mount a campaign, but it's hard for him to decide if that's actually what he wants to do. It's hard to say no to the idea, since it's such a compliment. Plus, Kwang adds, Koreans are raised to avoid seeming inconsiderate or rude. For this reason, he has stayed silent on the matter, but he recognizes that this decision isn't necessarily in line with the kind of silence he learned from his parents.

Kwang is an important political figure, but he reveals here that he doesn't necessarily want *to run for mayor. Rather, he feels a certain obligation to do so, realizing that it's what everyone around him wants him to do. To attain the kind of success he has attained is a very significant thing in the immigrant community, so it's difficult for Kwang to turn away from the possibility of further advancement and upward mobility. To add to this, he notes that Korean cultural values have taught him to always avoid rudeness. Not wanting to look ungrateful to his community, then, he has had trouble turning away from his peers' rallying cry, which could potentially be seen as an entitled, inconsiderate thing to do.*

Henry and Kwang continue to eat and drink. They're getting a bit drunk, but Henry is enjoying their conversation, which revolves around what it's like to be Korean American in New York City. In general, Henry knows better than to drink the same amount as the people he's spying on. He usually makes sure to always be more sober than the other person, but tonight he doesn't pay attention to this rule of thumb. Instead, he gets tipsy and chats with Kwang, and together they even start flirting with the waitress.

Henry seems to have lost himself in conversation with Kwang, thoroughly enjoying himself with this man who reminds him vaguely of his own father. Instead of keeping his wits about him, then, he lets himself relax, warming up to Kwang's charm and generally putting work out of his mind—a clear sign that he doesn't want to undermine or betray someone with whom he so closely identifies.

Sherrie Chin-Watt arrives and sits with Kwang and Henry at the table. Henry instinctively falls quiet so that they can talk, but he doesn't take this opportunity to get information out of them. He realizes that the situation would be perfect for picking up new details about the entire Kwang organization, but he's uninterested in doing so. Instead of trying to steer the conversation, then, he sits back and watches as Kwang and Sherrie talk about office matters, picking up on a certain intimacy between them. At one point, he sees Kwang slip his hand beneath Sherrie's blazer and let it rest on her back. Seeing this, Henry decides it's time for him to leave.

When Hoagland first told Henry about Sherrie Chin-Watt, he subtly hypothesized that Kwang and Sherrie would eventually begin an extramarital affair. It now seems he was right, given that Henry picks up on some romantic chemistry between them as he sits back and watches them talk. Hoagland would most likely want to hear about this development, which confirms his suspicion and might be of use to the anonymous client who wants to know Kwang's secrets. However, it seems unlikely that Henry will actually say anything to Hoagland about this, since he seems generally uninterested in actually doing his job by transmitting information about Kwang back to Hoagland.

CHAPTER 13

Henry obediently writes his logs about Kwang, reporting his daily activities and transmitting them to Hoagland. But he suddenly has trouble describing Kwang, as if he has lost his understanding of the man he's been assigned to trail. To make up for this strange difficulty, he writes pages and pages of information, but none of it is useful to Hoagland. The entire exercise reminds him of his sessions with Luzan, when he'd often lose himself in long, rambling stories about his childhood. Luzan always let Henry go on at length, encouraging him to say more. The last day Henry saw him, they went over their allotted time, but it didn't matter—Luzan cancelled all of his other appointments so Henry could keep talking.

Henry's willingness to talk to Luzan about his life is noteworthy, since he's otherwise such a quiet, private person. In fact, he's so unforthcoming that Lelia left him for several months, unable to stand the way he kept his emotions bottled up inside. But the fact that Henry spoke so openly with Luzan indicates that he desperately needed an outlet, ultimately suggesting that holding in strong feelings can be very difficult to do in the long run.

During their last session, Henry informed Luzan that he wouldn't be coming back. Breaking off the relationship wasn't an easy thing to do. Henry felt, after all, like Luzan had truly saved his life. He kept talking and talking, wanting to somehow thank Luzan for all he'd done. He got up to get a drink of water in the hall, and he told Luzan that when he returned, he would tell him something important about the "great circumstance" of their relationship. His intention was to be honest with Luzan. Maybe he wouldn't tell him everything, but he would at least warn him to be careful, especially when meeting new people or traveling. He didn't actually know what kind of danger Luzan might be in, but he wanted to help keep him safe.

It now emerges that Henry was prepared to not only speak openly with Luzan about his own life but also alert him to the fact that he (Luzan) was under surveillance. Even if Henry didn't tell Luzan everything about his assignment to spy on him, simply warning him to watch his back would have been a very bold thing to do, considering that his job is to always stay undercover. His willingness to break the rules thus stresses just how connected he felt to Luzan, who somehow got him to open up about his life and, in doing so, majorly unburdened him of his pent-up sorrows.

When Henry stepped out of Luzan's office for some water, her came face to face with Jack and another person from work. Jack told him it was time to go, and the other man sedated him by putting an ether-soaked cloth over his mouth. They then dragged him to a car and drove him away.

This story confirms that Henry can't—or shouldn't, at least—fully trust Jack. Even though Henry sees him as a close friend, it's overwhelmingly clear that Jack is perfectly willing to work against Henry on Hoagland's behalf. In this case, he silences his "friend" before Henry has a chance to tell Luzan the truth.

CHAPTER 14

Henry meets Lelia in Ardsley to start clearing out his father's house. Lelia has already started the task, since she went up shortly after Henry's father died. Henry was working out of state at the time, and she jumped at the opportunity to get out of their apartment. Now, Henry cooks her favorite dinner in his father's kitchen. It's a meal they used to have all the time when they were first married. They used to start making it and then have sex while it was cooking, always looking forward to eating it after they were finished. This time, though, they don't have sex. They do, however, talk relatively easily and share some wine before getting to work.

Henry and Lelia used to have a very intimate bond. But then Mitt's death put a terrible strain on their relationship, and Henry's tendency to withhold his emotions drove them apart. Now, though, they slowly work their way back to each other, largely because Henry finally managed to open up about his feelings after listening to the tapes of Mitt's voice. Their newly honest and open communication style, the novel suggests, is helping them heal.

As Henry and Lelia sort through old family photos, Lelia asks him how he's doing at work. The question surprises him, but he soon learns that she talked to Jack recently. He told her that Henry is getting hung up on his current case—actually, he didn't say anything specific, but Lelia could tell that he was worried about Henry. He kept bringing him up, so Lelia asked what was going on, and Jack simply said that she should talk to him herself. She therefore urges Henry to tell her what's going on. In fact, her desire to have this conversation is the main reason she suggested they come up to Ardsley for the weekend. They can clean whenever they want, but she knew this would be a good way to get him talking.

It's unclear what Jack's motivations were for alerting Lelia to the troubles Henry is having at work. On the one hand, it's possible that he's genuinely worried about Henry and knew that telling Lelia would make it possible for her to help and support him. On the other hand, though, he might have told her simply as a way of motivating Henry to start taking the job more seriously. Either way, his conversation with Lelia gives Henry a chance to be honest with her—and considering that he often seems to need a push to start talking about his troubles, he may actually open up.

Henry admits to Lelia that he's struggling. She wants to know what, exactly, Hoagland expects of him, and he explains that he needs to deliver something "damning" about Kwang (though he doesn't actually say his name). But he doesn't *have* anything damning. If that's the case, Lelia insists, then Henry should call Jack right now and tell him there's nothing to report. But Henry knows doing that wouldn't make a difference—Jack isn't the person who cares what happens. It's Hoagland who's calling the shots. When Lelia suggests that Henry should quit, he explains that he can't leave in the middle of an operation. Nobody has ever done that before, and doing so could be dangerous, since there's no predicting what Hoagland might do.

The way Henry talks about his job indicates that there's some real danger involved—not because he's in danger as a spy, though, but because the very people he works for are unpredictable and manipulative. Hoagland can't be trusted, and though Henry has seemingly enjoyed his job until the last two assignments, he is now more or less trapped in his role, basically unable to do anything but carry out Hoagland's commands. And yet, Henry doesn't want *to work against Kwang, with whom he identifies so closely. Plus, there's not much to report: Kwang is running what is, in Henry's mind at least, a very clean, above-board organization. On another note, the mere fact that Henry tells Lelia about his predicament suggests that he's getting used to speaking more openly about his life—something that will likely help strengthen their relationship.*

Understanding the difficulty of Henry's situation, Lelia suggests that he should just give Hoagland what he wants—that is, he should dig up some dirt about Kwang. But Henry says that "someone could get hurt" if he were to do that.

Henry finds himself unable to look for dirt on Kwang because his conscience won't let him. After all, he knows that Luzan died shortly after Henry stopped seeing him, and though the circumstances of his death remain unclear, it's implied that the people who hired Hoagland's company (Glimmer & Company) are responsible for what happened. In turn, Henry can't bring himself to give Hoagland anything that could be used against Kwang, especially since he feels so connected to him as a fellow Korean American.

The conversation comes to a sudden halt when Lelia spills a glass of wine on the rug. Desperately trying to blot it up, she says that she doesn't *care* what Henry does, as long as he doesn't get hurt. This outlook might make her a bad person, she says, but that's simply how she feels. Henry then lies down next to her on the carpet and tells her that the person he's spying on is John Kwang. After a moment of silence (which surprises Henry), she tells him to say whatever he wants to her. Later that night, they have passionate sex in the room above the garage.

It's no coincidence that Henry and Lelia have sex on the very night that he opens up to her in a way he never has before. Until now, he has never told her any details about his job or his various assignments. Tonight, though, he tells her everything, thus demonstrating a new willingness to let her further into his own internal world. As a result, it's possible for them to rekindle their romantic flame, which had only been snuffed out because of their inability to connect in the aftermath of Mitt's death.

CHAPTER 15

Lelia moves back into her and Henry's apartment. Despite Henry's difficulty with the Kwang operation, they enjoy a relatively happy period together. Lelia starts seeing students in the apartment, working with children who have trouble speaking English for various reasons. The students that stand out most to Henry are two Laotian cousins whose immigrant parents drop them off so they can work on their pronunciation. The boys remind Henry of himself when he was a child. He had one teacher who was particularly strict, slapping his hands with a ruler when he mispronounced words. When the Laotian boys get picked up one day, Henry talks to their fathers, who barely speak English. Still, they recognize that he's Korean and enthusiastically voice their support for Kwang.

By speaking openly about his troubles at work, Henry has come a long way in mending his relationship with Lelia. They not only have sex on the night he embraces this honesty but also move back in together. Perhaps for the first time since Mitt's death, then, they're relatively happy and are able to coexist in a pleasant way in the same apartment. Meanwhile, Kwang's reputation continues to soar in the city's immigrant community, as evidenced by the way the Laotian men praise Kwang when they find out that Henry is Korean.

After the Laotian boys leave, Henry and Lelia decide to take a ferry trip to Staten Island, where they'll stay in a small hotel. On the ferry, they talk about what it feels like to leave home on a boat, which leads to a conversation about Lelia's father's time in World War II. He's never mentioned it to Henry, but he fought in Korea. But Henry isn't surprised—Stew has the look of a white man who might call a Korean a "gook." Lelia has never understood that term, so Henry explains that it came from a misunderstanding. When American soldiers arrived in Korea, villagers would yell, "*Mee-gook!*" The Americans thus thought they were calling themselves "gooks." In reality, though, "*Mee-gook*" means "American."

The word "gook" is a racist term for people of Asian descent. Despite Henry presenting his story as fact, there's no historical consensus that this is actually how the term rose to prominence. Still, it is the case that miguk *(pronounced "mee-gook") is the Korean word for America, so it's quite possible that Henry's story is correct. For a novel interested in language and communication, this is an especially fascinating story, since it highlights the difficulties of misinterpretation—difficulties with which even Henry and Lelia are familiar, since they've had to navigate the complexities of differing cultural norms.*

Lelia laughs at the ignorance of American soldiers like her father. But then she says she would have lost her mind with anger if any of the neighborhood kids in Ardsley had called Mitt a "gook." She erupts into fury, but then she chokes back a cry, suddenly unable to contain her emotion.

This conversation between Lelia and Henry isn't particularly heavy in an emotional sense, but it takes a turn when Lelia mentions Mitt. Suddenly, she can't hold back her emotion, suggesting that this kind of grief is always lurking just beneath the surface, liable to rise up at any moment.

That night, Henry and Lelia stay at a rundown hotel. They have sex while corny spy movies play on the television. Later, they switch to the news and learn that something terrible has happened: the Kwang offices have been bombed. Henry knows that Kwang himself is in D.C. tonight, so he's safe. But it's unclear whether or not anyone was in the building at the time. Lelia is overwhelmed by the news, understanding that Henry could have been there when the bomb went off. She runs to the bathroom and throws up, and then she comes back to bed and lies next to him, asking questions about who could have planted the bomb. But he has no idea. All he knows is that he's frightened.

It's now quite clear that Henry's assignment to spy on Kwang isn't something he should take lightly—after all, Kwang clearly has powerful enemies. Henry therefore has to consider the possibility that he's *in danger whenever he's around Kwang. Perhaps even more disconcerting, though, is the possibility that Henry is actually working* for *Kwang's enemies. Indeed, it's feasible that the client who hired Henry's company is also the person (or organization) who planted the bomb at the Kwang organization.*

CHAPTER 16

Henry goes to the bombed-out Kwang office the next day. Janice and Sherrie are there, both of them desperately trying to keep things in order as investigators pick through the rubble and people crowd around to see what happened. Two people died in the explosion: an older woman who worked as a custodian, and Eduardo. He was working late when the bomb went off. As soon as he can, Henry slips away and tries to contact Jack, but he can't reach him. Finally, he calls Jack at the office and Hoagland picks up before passing the phone to Jack, who already knows about the bombing.

The fact that Jack already knows about the bombing is somewhat suspicious, possibly suggesting that he—or at least Glimmer & Company—had something to do with the attack. At the same time, though, he might just know because he works for Hoagland, who has a reason to keep tabs on Kwang. And that reason is that he clearly doesn't trust Henry to do his job. Either way, the entire event is shrouded in silence and secrecy, leaving Henry to piece everything together on his own.

Henry wants to know what happened, worried that Hoagland and Jack had something to do with the bombing. But Jack insists that this isn't the case—there would be no good reason for them to do it. Frustrated with Jack, Henry demands to know what Hoagland thinks, asking him directly because he's assuming that Hoagland is listening in. But Jack reminds him that Hoagland doesn't *need* to listen in, since Jack will tell him everything himself. Before hanging up, he tells Henry to "look closer to home," since sometimes that's the best way to find answers.

What Jack tells Henry in this conversation is a good indication of where his true loyalties lie: with Hoagland. Although he's happy to listen to Henry's problems and even offer him advice, the unspoken fact is that he's devoted to doing his job—in fact, this reality doesn't even go unspoken in this moment, since Jack says quite clearly that he will report everything Henry says back to Hoagland. In turn, it's quite evident that Henry can't trust Jack.

After talking to Jack, Henry returns to the office, where Sherrie tells him that Kwang's entire operation—the whole team—will be moving to Kwang's house. She also gives Henry a thick envelope and asks him to deliver it to Eduardo's family. He follows her instructions, taking the envelope (which contains $10,000) to the bereaved family's small apartment in a tenement building. While he's there, Eduardo's mother brings out a photo album and shows him pictures of Eduardo, talking at great length about him in broken English. Henry admires the way she speaks, thinking that she's saying everything "perfectly," because if "you're too careful" with language, "you can't say anything."

Henry's thoughts about language suggest that he doesn't necessarily endorse the kind of reticent silence that he himself tends to model. Although he's often hesitant to express his feelings in moments of hardship, he admires the way Eduardo's mother speaks openly about her dead son—something Henry has struggled to do in his and Lelia's conversations about Mitt. Whereas everything he says about his sorrow is "careful" and calculated, Eduardo's mother speaks without reservation, thus enabling herself to genuinely express something meaningful about her lost son.

CHAPTER 17

It's several days after the bombing, and Kwang still hasn't emerged from his office on the top story of his house. The volunteers are busy at work on the ground floor of the house—he wants them gathered there together, but he doesn't feel the need to see them. He just wants everyone to be united in this time of sorrow. But the press won't leave him alone. They're eager for some kind of statement. Meanwhile, rumors are flying about who planted the bomb. People blame different groups, including those from the Black, Indian, and Chinese communities. Each accusation makes Henry think of something Kwang once said in a speech: "*If you beat your brother with his stick, […] he'll come back around and beat you with yours.*"

The media wants to blow the bombing out of proportion by pitting various racial or ethnic groups against each other. Kwang is therefore hesitant to say anything in public about the incident, perhaps fearing that anything he might say would just fuel the fire of division and hatred already besieging his community. At the same time, his silence is in keeping with the kind of silence that Henry embraces in moments of hardship, suggesting that the two men respond to such difficulties in similar ways.

Among the many rumors, there's one circulating that the bombers specifically wanted to kill Eduardo. Henry considers this possibility. If somebody wanted to antagonize Kwang, killing Eduardo *would* be a good way to do it, since he liked the young man so much. Whether or not this is what happened, there's no denying that Kwang has been deeply impacted on an emotional level. Sherrie is worried about how he's responding to the disaster—the fact that he hasn't made a public statement yet concerns her. When Kwang's wife tells Henry that Kwang wants to see him in the next day or two, Sherrie pulls him aside and tells him to be delicate with the councilman: don't get him worked up, she insists.

Because of Kwang's silence about the bombing, everyone is left to guess at how he's feeling and what might have happened. Even the people closest to him aren't really sure what he's thinking. And yet, Sherrie still tries to manage the chaos by telling Henry to be gentle in his upcoming conversation with Kwang. Kwang's wife's warning also recalls how Henry's mother scolded Henry to not speak to his father about the grocery stores, another way the novel draws similarities between Kwang and Henry's father.

The next day, Henry visits Kwang in his room at the top of the house. They drink whiskey and talk for a while. Kwang tells a story about watching his eldest son get berated by a racist white kid. Instead of interfering, he let the scene play out, curious to see what his son would do. Finally, his son punched the other boy in the face. Kwang's son broke into tears only when Kwang stopped the fight and got him into the car.

Kwang's story most likely reminds Henry of his own experience as a father trying to figure out how to support Mitt when he encountered racism. Yet again, then, the novel reminds readers of how just how much Henry and Kwang have in common—which, in turn, makes it that much harder for Henry to do his job by secretly undermining the councilman as a spy.

When the conversation finally turns to the bombing, Henry subtly urges Kwang to make a statement. But Kwang angrily refuses. He says it doesn't *matter* who's responsible for the act of violence. What everyone wants, he thinks, is for him to turn the entire ordeal into a "matter of race." He thinks that speaking about what happened would only play into the growing narrative that Americans are deeply divided from one another—a message he's unwilling to push.

Kwang's entire political approach revolves around uniting his constituents, regardless of what racial or ethnic group they belong to. Therefore, he doesn't want to address the media, knowing that reporters will surely spin his words into a larger narrative about the division at play in the very community he's working to unify.

Kwang talks about how much he trusts Henry. He can see that Henry has made his way into the organization and that everyone likes him—so much, in fact, that nobody even thinks about his initial reason for joining them, which was to write an article. Kwang himself often forgets this detail. Still, though, he doesn't mind because he suspects that Henry has come to genuinely believe in their cause. He then takes out a piece of paper with Eduardo's handwriting on it. It's a long list of names and corresponding personal information. Kwang explains that this is what Eduardo was working on at the time of his death. It's also what Kwang wants Henry to take over. But before he looks at it, Kwang says, he'll have to agree to come onboard full-time.

Henry has reached the last hurdle before fully entering the circle of John Kwang's close confidantes. This was, of course, his initial goal, or at least the goal he was supposed to be working toward as a spy infiltrating the Kwang organization. Even though he hasn't been trying particularly hard to get close to Kwang, he has ended up doing so anyway, which is a possible testament to just how much he's drawn to Kwang on a personal level because of their similar cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER 18

Henry takes over Eduardo's job, which involves receiving money from all kinds of community members. Kwang has organized a huge version of the Korean **ggeh**, compiling large amounts of cash with the intention of dispersing it in a rotating fashion to the people in his "money club." Henry often thinks about his father while doing this work, knowing that he would have found it insane to create a *ggeh* with people outside the Korean community. But Kwang views his enormous *ggeh* like a family in and of itself.

Kwang draws from the same cultural values that Henry's father had, but he also embraces a new outlook. In turn, he's able to use Korean traditions—like the ggeh*—in an American context, essentially cherry-picking the best aspects of both cultures. The novel suggests that this kind of flexibility and latitude is part of what it means to be multicultural, as Kwang harnesses a Korean practice to empower his constituents in New York City.*

In this period, Henry spends the days with Lelia and then goes to Kwang's house to work through the night. Things are going well with Lelia—so well, in fact, that they're flirting with the idea of having a child. But they're not sure if they'll actually do it, worrying that it would just be an attempt to fill a hole in their lives. And yet, it's possible that they were trying to do exactly that when they first had a child, but the end result was Mitt, and he was so wonderful that Henry could never regret his initial reasons for having him.

One of the main threads in Native Speaker *focuses on the difficulties of moving on from the horrible loss of a loved one. Henry and Lelia have already more or less sorted out the relational troubles that arose for them in the aftermath of Mitt's death, but now they face a different kind of problem—that is, how they might be able to legitimately move forward in their lives. Until now, they've been stalled out by their grief. Since they're back on good terms and relatively happy again, though, they're starting to think about the future.*

Henry meets Jack at a diner one night. Jack is sick with the flu, but Hoagland insisted that he speak to Henry in person. Jack no longer does his own fieldwork, so Hoagland forces him to "tail[] unreliables" until retirement (which will only come about when Hoagland is satisfied with his work).

The fact that Jack can only retire after Hoagland is finally satisfied with his work helps explain why Jack is so focused on doing his job—and, in turn, on making sure that Henry does his *job. It also becomes clear in this moment that Hoagland sees Henry as an "unreliable[]" employee—which, to be fair, is somewhat true, considering that Henry can't help but identify with his target and try in subtle ways to protect him from harm.*

Jack says that Hoagland is pleased with Henry once again. The reports he has been writing, Jack says, are once more satisfactory—except, that is, for the report he wrote about the bombing, in which Henry suggested that Glimmer & Company (Hoagland's firm) itself was responsible for the bombing because it wanted to create reasons for its clients to fund further "research." Hoagland didn't appreciate the idea, but Henry doesn't care. He knew it would be taken out of the report, but he included it simply to rankle Hoagland.

By suggesting that Glimmer & Company was involved in the bombing, Henry implies that Hoagland wanted to purposefully trick his client into thinking that it's necessary to keep spying on Kwang—in other words, he accuses Hoagland of trying to fabricate a reason for the client to keep paying Glimmer & Company to "research" Kwang. Although Henry makes this somewhat outlandish, combative accusation, he also finally starts sending information back to Hoagland, suggesting that he has—to a certain extent—given up on trying to protect Kwang.

Even though he has already said that Hoagland is pleased with Henry's work, Jack now reveals that their boss thinks Henry could be including a bit more information in his reports. But Henry doesn't care—he's only going to be working for the firm for two more weeks, and then he has no intention of coming back. Still, Jack urges him to listen to him: he should end the job on a good note. He has a chance to make a good retirement. Jack himself notes that he had the same chance once, but he stuck around too long and now will "retire with too many memories." The statement makes Henry think about his suspicion that Jack is under great pressure from Hoagland and that he's no longer working with Henry's well-being in mind.

This is the first time that Henry seems to fully recognize the fact that Jack isn't someone he can trust. Until now, Henry has seen Jack as a mentor and friend. But it's now quite clear that Jack just wants to please Hoagland so that he can finally retire. In a way, then, Jack and Henry are in a similar position, since Henry also wants to leave the job after this assignment. And yet, Henry has a conscience when it comes to betraying people like John Kwang, whereas Jack seemingly just wants whatever will be best for himself.

Hoagland wants one last thing, Jack says. He wants Henry's full report, of course, but he also wants a copy of the long list of members in Kwang's money club. Henry doesn't understand why. He has already explained that the entire operation is like a Korean **ggeh** and that it's completely legitimate. Jack, however, reveals that there were some government officials in Hoagland's office recently, suggesting that the money club might be of interest to the IRS. It's possible, he guesses, that Kwang—who has lost quite a bit of money in various business ventures—is running *multiple* money clubs and siphoning off cash without notice. Of course, the idea of handing over this information—which is like a list of Kwang's close family members—is dizzying to Henry, but Jack sternly advises him to do what Hoagland wants.

The ggeh *is central Kwang's entire political approach, since it represents the power a community can harness if everyone comes together and advocates for each other. It is, in short, an empowering thing for community members to contribute money toward a collective pool of cash with the knowledge that they will greatly benefit from this very same service at some point in the future. However, it's now clear that American authorities are suspicious of this kind of financial setup, thus illustrating the kind of suspicion and distrust that immigrants like Kwang often face in the United States.*

CHAPTER 19

John Kwang has lost his confident charm. He looks tired and overworked, but he finally agrees to speak before television cameras, choosing to do so from the ruins of the office—a decision Janice advises against, since it suggests defeat. During the appearance, he speaks without confidence. He does, however, manage to end the press conference before the reporters ask the question that is on everyone's mind: namely, how a young college student like Eduardo managed to pay for an expensive apartment in Manhattan that even his family didn't know about. News of this detail has spread through the papers like wildfire, as people want to know what he was up to.

The new detail about Eduardo's secret apartment is somewhat mystifying. It's unclear why Kwang would finance an apartment for Eduardo in the city, but it's also unclear why—or how*—Eduardo would pay for the apartment on his own as a college student without much money. Either way, the detail hints that there's more information about Eduardo lurking beneath the surface—information that perhaps has to do with why he was killed in the bombing.*

Henry, for his part, wonders if Eduardo was stealing money from Kwang. He goes through all of the records, but he can't find any evidence of this theory. The only thing he discovers is that Eduardo kept impeccable records. Meanwhile, Kwang's approval ratings nosedive, and even his most loyal workers begin to distance themselves from him. He sends his wife and children upstate so that he can weather this period on his own, though he's not completely alone because Henry continues to visit his house.

Kwang's popularity suffers because of the rumor circulating about Eduardo's secret apartment, but also because of his failure to appear before the public in the aftermath of the bombing. His community looks to him for leadership; by staying out of the spotlight, then, he ultimately undermines his own position. It doesn't seem to matter that he justifies his silence by claiming that the media would weaponize his words and use them to spread a divisive message.

Late one night, Kwang comes downstairs in his pajamas. His hair is messy from sleep, and he tells Henry to stop working so that they can drink together. As they get drunk, he insists on singing Korean folk songs, but Henry doesn't know very many—his Korean isn't very good, and he can't remember most of the songs.

Henry is now in a perfect position to get information out of Kwang. After all, the councilman is in an emotionally vulnerable state, so one might think it would be easy to get him to give up some sensitive details. And yet, it's unlikely that Henry will take this chance to ply Kwang, since he has been so hesitant to do so throughout the entire novel.

After singing, Kwang explains the lyrics of one of the songs, which is about a young man who hates farming for his parents, so he leaves his family to make it on his own in a nearby city. He becomes a successful businessman who sells fine silks. One day, a customer orders funeral clothes for someone who died in the young man's old village. When he asks who died, the customer says his mother's name. After crying a bit, he decides to visit home for the first time in nine years. When he gets there, he asks to see his father, and a young woman takes him to a field and points at a hillside. "Where is he?" asks the young man, and the woman explains that she's pointing at the place where all of the village's poor people are buried.

The song Kwang sings illustrates one of the most challenging potential realities of leaving home to seek out new opportunities. In the song, the young man leaves his family in the hopes of finding more lucrative work—much like Henry's own father did when he left Korea even though he studied at the country's most respectable college. Like Henry's father, the young man in the song finds success, but the song makes it clear that this success comes at a certain price: he had to give up his entire past, ultimately estranging himself from his family and home. Similarly, Henry's father and John Kwang both had to make sacrifices to gain upward mobility in the United States.

Henry and Kwang talk about what it's like to be Korean American, and Henry gradually realizes that he's impulsively "searching out the raw spots in him." It's simply part of his training to find Kwang's weak spots. With this in mind, he asks how Kwang's wife and children are doing. His question hits a nerve. Kwang asks Henry to answer his own question, so Henry suggests that Kwang's children probably miss him. The response puts Kwang in a combative mood, telling Henry to go ahead and ask him about Eduardo and the secret apartment—he is, after all, the only person who hasn't asked.

Even though Henry hasn't tried very hard throughout the novel to find out secret information about Kwang, he now finds himself doing exactly that—he can't help it, he thinks, ultimately suggesting that he normally feels as if spy work is a second-nature talent. In this case, he doesn't necessarily want *to betray Kwang by spying on him, but he's so accustomed to doing this work that he finds himself rooting around for Kwang's weaknesses. He perhaps feels like he's betraying a part of himself by subtly undermining a fellow Korean American in this way.*

Kwang mocks Henry for sounding too formal even in moments of tension, so Henry asks what Kwang *wants* him to sound like. Kwang suddenly switches to Korean, and Henry yells, "Aayeh!" Kwang likes the turn the conversation has taken, telling Henry to yell at him more—he doesn't have to treat him like an elder. He is, after all, not Henry's father, nor is he Henry's friend. They're now standing inches apart from each other. After a moment, Kwang says, "*Watch out, boy*," and slowly backs away. They sit in silence for a long time. It's almost four in the morning when Kwang finally gets up. He tells Henry to be ready in half an hour—they're going out.

Kwang is a little unpredictable. In some moments, he's a kind and affable leader willing to shower his constituents and campaign workers with support. In other moments, his temper comes out and he inadvertently reveals a certain egotistical way of moving through the world. Right now, for instance, he urges Henry to stand up to him by suggesting that he's not an elder, but this is more of a challenge than anything, as if he's subtly implying the opposite: that he is *in a position of power over Henry. Although there might not be the same Korean hierarchal norms surrounding their relationship (norms that both men grew up with), it's clear that Kwang is in the dominant role, as made abundantly clear when he says, "Watch out,* boy."

Henry brings the car around, and Kwang gets in the back. They drive through the empty, sleepy streets, and Henry can tell that Kwang is thinking about the grand plans he had to become a powerful politician who would unite the city's many immigrants. As they make their way into Manhattan, Kwang gives Henry an address and explains that it's Sherrie's. Henry doesn't respond, but he obediently drives Kwang to see Sherrie, who eventually comes out and gets in the car. Her husband is away, and Henry can tell that this isn't the first time this kind of late-night meeting has happened.

Although Henry and Kwang have just had a very tense conversation in which Kwang asserted his dominance, the exchange seems to have cleared the air—at least for Kwang. He now seems even more *willing to let Henry into his private life, showing no reservations about revealing to Henry that he's in an extramarital relationship with Sherrie. In a way, then, their confrontation has only made them closer, though it's unclear if Henry feels this way. Henry, though, is perhaps the only person willing to challenge Kwang or stand up to him, and Kwang may read this willingness as a kind of respect.*

With Sherrie in the car, Kwang directs Henry to a Korean night club. Henry knows that at these kinds of bars the bartenders are all young Korean women who will flirt with and even kiss the customers, though they're not sex workers. Upon arriving at the club, Henry can tell (once again) that Kwang and Sherrie have been here together before. The three of them take a private room and are joined by a young Korean waitress. It quickly becomes clear that Kwang wants the waitress to preoccupy Henry while he and Sherrie become intimate in the very same room. Kwang even addresses her in Korean, saying, "*Young lady, please earn your money tonight*."

It's obvious that Kwang is in a downward spiral. Having lost his political popularity, he's acting erratically and impulsively, ultimately living the life of a wild, fun-loving celebrity instead of comporting himself like a widely respected politician. It's almost as if the media's attempt to villainize him has turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more everyone doubts him, the more Kwang plays into their expectations, abandoning his identity as a self-made politician devoted to cultural unity and embracing a rougher persona.

As the young waitress touches and massages Henry, Kwang comments on how formal and uncomfortable he looks. Finally, Sherrie tells Kwang to stop, saying, "John, he's not Eddy. He doesn't like it." But Kwang tells her to be quiet. Sherrie gets angry and starts yelling, demanding to know why, exactly, Henry is even here. When Kwang orders Henry to take Sherrie home, Sherrie tells him not to bother—she's taking a cab. But when she gets up, the door is locked. She bangs on it, but it doesn't open. Meanwhile, Kwang comes up behind her and physically restrains her. Seeing that he's hurting her, Henry tackles him. Just then, the door opens, and Sherrie manages to slip out while Kwang and Henry fight.

Although Henry backed down when Kwang challenged him earlier, he now acts out against the councilman, spurred on by the rough way Kwang handles Sherrie. It's quite clear at this point that something inside Kwang has snapped—ever since the bombing, he has totally transformed. He used to be a charming and respectable politician, but now he acts like a defeated yet domineering man hell-bent on living a life of vice and indulgence. This transformation is quite startling, ultimately suggesting that it can be hard for people to maintain their true sense of self while occupying positions of power. What's more, American society's apparent unwillingness to accept Kwang—a political outsider—as a leader also might have played into his demise, indicating that immigrants who work their way to positions of power face even more challenges than the average American citizen might face in the same position.

Kwang yells at Henry for getting in his way. They stop fighting, and Kwang downs another drink, claiming that Sherrie is the one hurting *him*. Everyone, he says, is against him and doesn't understand what he's trying to do. Even Eduardo was like that, he says, prompting Henry to suggest that Eduardo must have been stealing. The suggestion confuses Kwang, who goes on to explain that Eduardo was betraying him in a different way. He was collecting information from Kwang's entire operation and reporting it to someone. Kwang thinks he was probably spying on behalf of Mayor De Roos. Kwang decided to let the Korean gang deal with Eduardo, though he claims that he didn't know what they would do.

Kwang now reveals that he's to blame for the bombing, though he insists that he didn't necessarily know the gang would bomb the headquarters. It remains unclear whether or not he knew Eduardo would die. Either way, what's evident is that Kwang has no tolerance for people who betray him. Moreover, it appears that Eduardo was doing pretty much the same thing Henry has been assigned to do, meaning that Henry has reason to fear for his own safety—if, that is, Kwang finds out that Henry is spying on him.

Kwang waits desperately for Henry to say something, hoping he'll offer something supportive. But Henry is silent. After a while, Kwang tells him to go to hell and then picks the young waitress off the floor. She apologizes for how drunk she is, but he doesn't care. Henry leaves as she gives Kwang a lap dance. On his way out, he leaves the car keys on the private room's small couch.

Throughout the novel, Henry has harbored respect for Kwang, even though his job is to spy on him and, in doing so, effectively undermine his efforts. Now, though, he seems to have lost that respect, having just learned that Kwang is responsible for Eduardo's death. Despite the fact that he identifies with Kwang as a Korean American, he no longer seems to want to help him. This is why he leaves the car keys on the couch, basically giving up his role as Kwang's protector and leaving the councilman to his own devices.

CHAPTER 20

Henry is set to meet with Pete and Grace to give them the records of Kwang's **ggeh**. He's a little paranoid about when they might appear, constantly asking Lelia if she sees them across the street or on the other side of the subway platform. He hasn't told her that Kwang was the one responsible for the bombing. But his silence on the matter has nothing to do with secrecy. Rather, he doesn't tell her as a way of keeping her safe. If she *did* know vital information, she could be used against him when he finally stops working for Hoagland. However, Henry has already made Hoagland and Jack agree not to involve Lelia if anything goes wrong with the Kwang case. Plus, Hoagland knows Henry wouldn't tell his wife deep secrets because of his tight-lipped nature and upbringing.

Henry's thoughts about using secrecy and silence to protect *Lelia underscore his awareness that he's in a potentially dangerous situation. Although he has started opening up to Lelia more as a way of mending their bond, he now recognizes that his silence might be a good way of keeping Lelia safe. On another note, the fact that he gives Pete and Grace the records of Kwang's* ggeh *shows that he has given up on protecting Kwang, who seems to have lost Henry's respect and loyalty by admitting to his responsibility for the bombing that killed Eduardo.*

All the same, Henry has decided not to tell Hoagland that Kwang is responsible for the bombing. He sees this decision as his "final honoring" of Kwang. He doesn't doubt that Hoagland will still somehow find out what happened, but it won't be from him. To that end, he's now quite sure that Eduardo was a second operative working for Hoagland. When he finally meets with Pete and Grace and gives them the file, he briefly feels remorseful. But then he recognizes that this feeling is little more than the same "burden" his father bore when he was alive. His "ugly immigrant's truth," he thinks, is that he has "exploited [his] own" people—just like his father did.

Henry feels guilty for spying on Kwang and handing over the information that Hoagland—or, rather, Hoagland's anonymous client—wanted. His guilt stems from the fact that he identifies with Kwang, so betraying him feels like betraying his own people. But this kind of betrayal, he recognizes, is a common part of the immigrant experience. His own father, for instance, treated his employees harshly and constantly squeezed as much work out of them as he could, and though this behavior certainly isn't the same as spying on Kwang, it does *indicate a certain willingness to prioritize one's own success over all else.*

CHAPTER 21

Kwang is arrested the night after Henry left him in the Korean night club. He was at the same club and left with one of the young waitresses. He then crashed the car, and though he's all right, the young woman is in critical condition. His blood alcohol level was very high, and the waitress turned out to be just 16 years old. The media runs wild with the story, and everyone around Kwang—except Janice—starts trying to distance themselves from him, realizing there's no way he'll come back from this disgrace.

Kwang has now completely spun off the rails, ensuring that he'll never be able to make a political comeback. Having been villainized by the media, he effectively abandons his image as a positive, inspiring leader and embraces the chaos of someone who has become caught up in his own power. That the waitress is underage highlights how drunk on power Kwang is: he's abusing someone with almost no power compared to him.

Kwang is released on bail, but nobody knows where he is. Henry wakes up to the news, and though he no longer has any official reason to involve himself in the matter, he can't help but rush to Kwang's home. But Kwang isn't there. Henry therefore goes back to Janice's apartment, where the two of them make calls trying to figure out where Kwang might have gone and what they should do next. After working for hours, they decide to go pick up some Chinese food at Janice's favorite local spot. As they watch the news in the restaurant, Henry hopes that Kwang doesn't turn up onscreen—he doesn't to watch as a powerful Korean man is brought to shame in such a public arena.

The fact that Henry rushes to Kwang's house after hearing of his arrest suggests that he hasn't fully cut emotional ties with the disgraced councilman. Although he decided to betray him by giving Hoagland the list of names in Kwang's ggeh, *he clearly hasn't fully written Kwang off for what he did to Eduardo. This is likely because Henry still feels a strong connection to Kwang, who is not only Korean American but also reminds Henry of his own father.*

A report runs on the news about the "money club" Kwang was running. The news notes that the **ggeh** isn't registered with any official "banking commission," nor does it adhere to tax regulations. The director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service is the one to deliver this information, which seems strange to Henry—until, that is, the director explains that many of the people in the *ggeh* are undocumented immigrants. The news anchor asks if it's unwise to reveal this information; won't doing so give the undocumented immigrants time to go into hiding? But the director isn't concerned: all of the undocumented immigrants on the *ggeh* list were taken into custody that very morning.

Henry now realizes why Hoagland's anonymous client wanted to spy on Kwang: not necessarily to find out information about Kwang himself, but to get closer access to the immigrant community he represents. Considering that Jack saw government officials at the Glimmer & Company office, it's reasonable to assume that the anonymous client was the Immigration and Naturalization Service and that it wanted to find the names of undocumented immigrants in New York City. In turn, it truly is *the case that Henry has betrayed his own community, at least insofar as his work has caused trouble for other immigrants. Those immigrants will now most likely be deported and thus removed from their families and lives in the United States.*

CHAPTER 22

An angry mob gathers outside of John Kwang's house. It's mostly made up of white people yelling about undocumented immigrants, asking how many people in Kwang's "**money club**" have "stolen" jobs from Americans. Kwang himself is set to arrive at any moment, having just been questioned by federal agents.

The backlash to the news about Kwang's "money club" highlights the xenophobic intolerance that many immigrants face in the United States. Although Kwang was quite popular before this scandal broke, it's clear that there are many white constituents who are eager to villainize him as some sort of threat to American society, despite the fact that the only point of the ggeh *was to harness a community's sense of unity to empower people as they strive toward success.*

As Henry waits in the crowd, he imagines what his mother would have thought of Kwang. He's sure she would have found him foolish for trying to create such a large **ggeh**. Why would he want to do something so enormous when he could have focused on his own affairs and contented himself with his own success? Henry's mother surely would have pointed to his father as the perfect example of a successful Korean man, celebrating the sacrifice he made by giving up his education in Korea to provide for his family in the U.S.

Even though Kwang comes from the same cultural background as Henry's parents, his ambition extends beyond what the novel suggests most older Korean immigrants envision when they think of success. For Henry's parents, for example, it was enough simply for his father to become a successful businessowner with enough money to move out of the city and support his family. Kwang's broader, more ambitious dream would therefore have seemed foolish to Henry's parents, perhaps because they never would have believed that it'd be possible to use Korean traditions (like the ggeh*) in the context of American society. In other words, they didn't fully embrace the multicultural outlook that Kwang and even Henry have embraced.*

Henry now understands that the **ggeh** list must have been the only thing Hoagland was interested in when it came to Kwang. Neither Hoagland nor the client who hired his firm ever cared about Kwang as an individual. Rather, they cared about what he represented and the information he might lead them to. But Henry also understands that Kwang himself never would have thought to view the formation of a *ggeh* as something malicious or illegal. He didn't know which community members were undocumented, since such a matter didn't seem important to him.

Kwang saw the ggeh *as simply a way to empower his constituents. It was a communal effort to help people—nothing more. As a result, he didn't think about how the* ggeh *might be viewed from the outside, failing to recognize that immigrants like himself in positions of power tend to attract all kinds of suspicion and scorn from American authorities who are hesitant to welcome outsiders into society's power structure.*

Henry is still in the crowd outside Kwang's house. That morning, he left Lelia in the apartment to go to Hoagland's office for the final time. As soon as he got onto the street, he encountered Jack, who said he'd give him a ride. On the way, Jack admitted that he knew Eduardo was a spy, but he didn't know this until after the bombing. He seemed apologetic, but he emphasized that he'd gained nothing from the entire affair. Hoagland has, he said, but Hoagland *always* wins. As for Jack himself, he can finally retire now, but he doesn't know what he'll do with himself. Still, he told Henry to be well, urging him to forget all about everyone at Glimmer & Company and to enjoy the rest of his life.

In the end, Jack isn't such a terrible friend—he certainly isn't someone Henry can fully trust, but it's also clear that he has a certain fondness for Henry. Throughout the Kwang case, he has been doing whatever Hoagland tells him to, but only because he's desperate to retire. In this moment, it seems that he genuinely wants the best for Henry, which is why he urges him to move on with his life in the aftermath of this chaotic episode with Kwang.

Finally, a police car pulls up, and Kwang emerges. The crowd swarms around him, trying to get close. People scream, but Kwang doesn't seem to care. In fact, Henry realizes that he's deliberately walking slowly, as if to taunt the crowd—as if to show them that they can't rankle him. As soon as the angry mob realizes this, though, they try even harder to get at him, swarming him as best they can. In response, Henry fights toward Kwang and finally gets close to him, at which point he starts fending off the angry white people, fighting them so they can't get at Kwang. But it's no use, because for every blow he lands, another one comes back. And then he makes eye contact with Kwang, who sees Henry and immediately looks down "like a broken child."

By trying to fight off the angry mob, Henry aligns himself with Kwang one last time. His clash with the angry white protestors is, in many ways, a metaphor for what it's like to be an immigrant of color in the United States. In the same way that Kwang tried to empower the immigrant community by pushing a message of unity, Henry now stands with Kwang to fend off the xenophobic protestors. But when he looks at Kwang, he realizes that their relational dynamic has changed; whereas Kwang used to be the powerful, dominant one in their conversation, he now looks down in shame when he sees Henry, thus acknowledging how far he has fallen.

CHAPTER 23

These days, Henry spends his time walking around New York. He loves the city and the many different languages swirling throughout the streets. He often goes to Kwang's house, simply wanting to walk by it. He even manages to enter it once by posing as a potential buyer. A real estate agent shows him around, and when he asks her who lived there before, she says the previous owners were "foreigners" who "went back to their country."

The fact that Kwang and his family returned to Korea illustrates how hard it can be for immigrants to find success in the United States, a country that is often quite hostile toward newcomers. Even Kwang, who managed to become quite powerful and successful, ended up having to leave the country, thus suggesting that even the most impressive and hardworking people often face extremely difficult challenges after arriving in the United States.

Sometimes, though, Henry doesn't spend his days walking around. Instead, he'll help Lelia as she goes to teach ESL at public schools. He dresses as a Speech Monster who slowly dies as the children correctly pronounce old nursery rhymes and songs. The kids love it, and Henry truly enjoys the job. In particular, he loves hearing Lelia say each child's name as she says goodbye to them one by one at the end of the class. As she speaks the foreign names, Henry delights in hearing his wife pronouncing the different languages, "calling all the difficult names of who we are."

Henry and Lelia's relationship has undergone a complete transformation throughout the course of the novel. They no longer dwell in silence on their shared loss, instead channeling their grief into new avenues—like, for instance, Lelia's job as an ESL teacher. Her job (and Henry's assistance with it) not only brings them together but also gives Henry a chance to give back to the immigrant community after having unwittingly betrayed that community.

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