Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHO NAM-JOO

Cho Nam-joo was born in South Korea in 1978. She moved with her family to Seoul when she was a child. Cho loved to read as a child, though the libraries in the poor area on the outskirts of Seoul where she grew up were poorly stocked, and she could not afford to buy books herself. Cho attended all-girls' schools through high school and went on to graduate from Ewha Womans University with a degree in sociology. She worked as a television writer for nearly a decade before leaving work to raise her child. She later returned to a career in writing. Her debut novel, *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, was published in 2016 and was enormously successful. It has been translated into over 18 languages and sold over one million copies. The book's publication happened alongside South Korea's #MeToo movement and sheds light on the rampant gender inequality and misogyny at the heart of that movement, and it is credited with propelling the culture into a new wave of feminism. Cho currently lives with her family in Seoul.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 is author Cho Nam-joo's response to South Korea's culture of gender inequality and was based largely on her own experiences—after leaving work as a television writer for several years to take care of her child, she struggled to re-enter the workforce. Today, South Korea's inequality in the workforce is notably high among developed countries. Although the country's pay gap has improved since the start of the 21st century, it is still among the worst ranked countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As of OECD data released in 2022, the gender wage gap in Korea is 31.2 percent, meaning that the median earnings of men was 31.2 percent higher than the median earnings of women. In general, Korean women work lower-paying jobs than men and are statistically less likely to be promoted to higher (and higher-earning) management positions. Meanwhile, the percentage of women in the workforce has increased in the decades since the Korean War. Prior to the Korean War, the employment rate for women was less than 30 percent. In an OECD survey released in 2018, the reported employment rate for women was 56.1 percent. Industrial segregation also contributes to gender inequality in the workforce. Meanwhile, although South Korea by policy offers 12 weeks of maternity leave and ranks at the top of OECD countries for paid paternity leave, culturally, it is frowned upon to take advantage of this legal protection.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Cho has published several novels following the success of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* in 2016. Recent books of note include *Miss Kim Knows*, a collection of short stories. Like *Kim Jiyoung*, *Miss Kim Knows* sheds light on the female perspective of life in Korean culture as it examines family, responsibility, and the pressure to find success and fulfillment in life. Cho's novel *Saha* also examines similar social issues, but it takes the form of a dystopian mystery novel. Although *Kim Jiyoung* is a work of fiction, it also serves as astute social commentary on the state of gender inequality in contemporary South Korea and is credited with inspiring a new wave of feminism in Korean culture. *Flowers of Fire: The Inside Story of South Korea's Feminist Movement and What It Means for Women's Rights Worldwide* by Hawon Jung (2023) is a work of nonfiction that offers insight into recent developments within South Korea's ongoing feminist movement. *Flowers of Fire* and Cho's body of work belong to a broader genre of feminist writings, recent works of which include nonfiction books like *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay and *Men Explain Things to Me* by Rebecca Solnit. Notable recent works of novels with feminist themes include *The Vegetarian* by South Korean author Han Kang, which tells the story of a homemaker whose ethical choice to stop eating meat wreaks havoc on her social and home life; and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo, which follows the lives of 12 main characters whose lives intersect in different ways and examines themes of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982
- **When Written:** 2010s
- **Where Written:** South Korea
- **When Published:** Published in Korean in 2016; English translation published in 2020
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Seoul, South Korea
- **Climax:** A group of young male professionals scornfully condemns Jiyoung for falling asleep while drinking a coffee on a park bench, insinuating that she's a lazy stay-at-home mom.
- **Antagonist:** Misogyny and Sexism
- **Point of View:** Third Person and First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Kim Ji-young, Premiered 2019. Cho's novel was adapted into a

film in 2019. The South Korean drama stars Jung Yu-mi and Gong Yoo.

Write What You Know. Cho reportedly wrote *Kim Jiyoung* in just two months. She was able to complete the story so quickly because, according to Cho, Jiyoung's life "isn't much different from the one I have lived."

PLOT SUMMARY

A little over a year after giving birth to her first child (Jiwon), 33-year-old Kim Jiyoung begins to exhibit strange behavior: she starts having episodes in which she assumes the voice, mannerisms, and insight of different women—so convincingly that it appears to her husband, Daehyun, that she has fully become those women. Daehyun, concerned for his wife, persuades her to see a psychiatrist. The narrative then flashes back to tell the story of Jiyoung's life from childhood to adulthood in an effort to get to the root cause of her **illness**.

Kim Jiyoung was born in 1982 to her father, a civil service worker, and her mother (Oh Misook), a housewife. She has an older sister, Eunyoung, and a younger brother. The family also lives with Jiyoung's paternal grandmother, Koh Boonsoon. The father's work is mostly stable, though it doesn't generate much income. In addition to caring for the children and her mother-in-law, and running the household, Jiyoung's mother also takes on part-time work to bring in extra money. Later, she becomes a hairdresser and manages to build a thriving business.

Jiyoung formative years are filled with experiences that accustom her to the gender inequality that runs rampant in Korean culture. Her younger brother frequently receives preferential treatment. In elementary school, her male desk-mate restlessly and cruelly bullies her—and when Jiyoung finally begs her teacher to let her switch seats, the teacher minimizes the boy's behavior by suggesting that he is only playing pranks on Jiyoung because he "likes" her. And in high school, when a male classmate viciously harasses Jiyoung at a bus stop one night, her father suggests that Jiyoung's clothing or behavior may have incited the boy's inappropriate behavior.

Jiyoung graduates high school and attends college. She meets her first boyfriend, but things end badly after he initially refuses to accept her choice to break things off. Following her junior year, Jiyoung starts to prepare for employment, and she continues to experience yet more sexism. While the big companies will hire male students from her modest university, female students don't have as much luck—Jiyoung applies for countless jobs and is rejected from them all. At one point, her father suggests that she just focus on getting married—a "backward" statement that incites Jiyoung's mother's fury. That same night, fortunately, Jiyoung gets a job offer from one of the marketing companies she applied to.

Jiyoung enjoys her work and gets along well with her coworkers. Her team leader, Kim Eunsil, is the company's only woman leader. Eunsil compliments Jiyoung on her work and empathizes with the unfair challenges that women face in the workforce. Indeed, despite Jiyoung's professionalism and competency, she regularly experiences harassment from clients.

Sometime later, Jiyoung's company is in the process of putting together a planning team. Jiyoung and her female colleague, Kang Hyesu, don't make the team—their two male colleagues who have consistently worked with easier clients do. The women feel they've been robbed, especially after the men admit, over drinks one night, that they were explicitly picked for the committee because the company figured they'd be around longer. Women, the company's management assumes, will inevitably quit once they start having babies.

Jiyoung eventually meets and marries her husband, Daehyun. She enjoys married life, though her in-laws' nosiness about why she and her husband have yet to have a child irks her. More infuriating to Jiyoung is Daehyun's failure to defend her against his relatives. And even when Daehyun realizes he was in the wrong and apologizes, his proposed solution is to just have a baby sooner rather than later—a major life change that will require far more sacrifices from Jiyoung than from Daehyun.

Still, Jiyoung agrees to move forward with their plans to start a family, and she's soon pregnant. When she learns it's a girl, her mother, mother-in-law, and even women Jiyoung's age all make disparaging comments about the baby's gender. After much consideration, Jiyoung and Daehyun decide that due to their situation, one of them will have to be a stay-at-home parent—full-time care is expensive, and none of their parents is available to help. Jiyoung isn't surprised when they decide that she'll be the one to quit her job, but it doesn't make her any less depressed about it.

After a difficult labor, Jiyoung gives birth to a baby girl, Jiwon. Although she loves her baby, she has no help with Jiwon during the day when Daehyun is at work, and she's perpetually exhausted. Even after Jiwon starts daycare, Jiyoung spends most of her alone time doing household chores. She also faces harassment from ignorant young men who perceive her as a "mom-roach," a free-loading woman who sits around all day and lives off her husband's paycheck. Despite Daehyun's efforts to comfort Jiyoung, she sinks deeper into despair.

The novel's final chapter reveals that Jiyoung's story has been told from the perspective of Jiyoung's psychiatrist. The psychiatrist diagnoses Jiyoung with a "typical" case of postpartum depression—though he's still not entirely sure what's wrong with her. Drawing on his sad observations of his own unhappy wife—a former math prodigy who gave up her career to care for their son full time—he purports to sympathize with all the injustice Korean women face due to the culture's rampant sexism. Even so, he ironically concludes his

report with an ignorant attack on an employee of his who is leaving work due to a complicated pregnancy, noting, "Even the best female employees can cause many problems if they don't have the childcare issue taken care of."

CHARACTERS

Kim Jiyoung – Kim Jiyoung is the novel's protagonist. She lives in Seoul with her husband Daehyun and their daughter Jiwon. Jiyoung gave birth a little over a year before the novel's present, and she struggles to keep up with the endless and thankless responsibilities of motherhood and homemaking. Although Daehyun is loving and supportive, he fails to fully grasp the enormity of the sacrifices his wife has made, the suffering she endures, and the dehumanizing treatment she endures as a woman in South Korea. Most recently, she has been forced to quit a job she loves to stay home to care for her young daughter. In the novel's present, Jiyoung has recently developed a strange behavior of assuming the personalities of different women in her life, which prompts Daehyun to send her to a psychiatrist for therapy sessions. The narration—later revealed to be the psychiatrist's report on all that Jiyoung has told him of her life so far—follows Jiyoung from childhood to the present, piecing together the formative events that have molded her personality in order to determine the cause of her present illness. Although the psychiatrist muses that Jiyoung may be suffering from a "typical" case of postpartum depression, Jiyoung's perspective tells a different story, one that positions Jiyoung's dissociative state as the inevitable outcome of the endless mistreatment, dehumanization, and injustice she has experienced growing up in a culture plagued by rampant misogyny.

Jung Daehyun – Daehyun is Jiyoung's husband. The couple has a baby daughter, Jiwon. It's Daehyun who sets Jiyoung up with a psychiatrist after she starts exhibiting strange behavior, seemingly taking on alter-personas of various women in her life. Although Daehyun loves and supports Jiyoung, he fails to grasp how the misogyny that underpins Korean culture harms his wife and crushes her spirit, and he is also somewhat ignorant about the disproportionate amount of domestic labor that society (and even Daehyun himself) expects Jiyoung, as a woman, to perform. For instance, in their discussion of when to start a family, he repeatedly tries to reassure Jiyoung with the promise that he will "help out" with their child—a sentiment that implies that the baby is by default mostly Jiyoung's responsibility, simply because she is a woman. Another source of conflict is Daehyun's failure to defend Jiyoung against his family when they pester her with rude, nosy questions about her fertility. The novel leaves the future of Jiyoung and Daehyun's relationship ambiguous. Though the psychiatrist indicates that Jiyoung's symptoms seem to be improving, it's unclear whether Daehyun will take a more active role in childrearing going forward.

Oh Misook – Oh Misook is Jiyoung's mother. She is a housewife when Jiyoung is born but later works as a hairstylist. In addition to running the household, raising the children, and taking care of Jiyoung's paternal grandmother (Koh Boonsoon), Oh Misook is also largely responsible for the family's success in the restaurant business later in Jiyoung's life. As a young person, Oh Misook wasn't able to achieve all her dreams—she and her sister had to work to support her brother's schooling. Although Oh Misook has internalized some of her generation's sexism (she is disappointed, for instance, that Jiyoung and Daehyun's first child will be a girl), she also makes a point to defend her daughters against some of Jiyoung's father's more backward views. She also ensures that her daughters receive the educations she herself was unable to achieve.

Kim Eunyoung – Kim Eunyoung is Jiyoung's older sister. She looks out for Jiyoung growing up and serves as a positive role model for how to challenge and fight back against the unjust sexism the girls experience, both at home and in the wider world. When Jiyoung and Eunyoung's mother gives the girls' younger brother a disproportionately large serving of ramen, for instance, Eunyoung questions why such a young child deserves more sustenance than his mother, an adult woman. When Jiyoung has her first menstrual cycle—something many Korean households regard as something shameful that must be kept secret—Eunyoung provides her sister with period supplies and commiserates with her about how ridiculous it is that no adequate painkiller exists for menstrual cramps, a condition that affects half the population.

Jiyoung's Father – Jiyoung's father is employed as a civil service worker when she is born. Later, after the Korean recession of 1997 forces him out of his job, he follows Jiyoung's mother's advice and goes into business operating several franchises. One of those franchises, a porridge shop, is enormously successful for a time. Jiyoung's father embodies many of the ideals of his culture and generation. When Jiyoung is in high school, he blames her for the harassment she suffers at the hands of a male classmate. Later, when she struggles to find work after college, he suggests she focus on getting married instead. Although the social norms of his world have given him an inflated self-confidence, in fact, it's really his wife who runs the show: she runs the household, cares for her children and mother-in-law (Koh Boonsoon), and is largely responsible for the business success the family has achieved over the years.

Younger Brother – Jiyoung's brother, whom the narration leaves unnamed, is five years Jiyoung's junior. Oh Misook gave birth to him following a previous pregnancy, which she aborted after discovering it was a girl. Throughout their childhood, the younger brother repeatedly receives preferential treatment compared to his sisters—at mealtimes, he is always served before his sisters, even though he's the youngest child. Still,

there are some occasions when Oh Misook stands up for her daughters over her son, as when she demands—despite the protests of Jiyoung's father and grandmother—that her son sleep in the same bedroom as his parents so that her daughters can have their own room.

Koh Boonsoon – Koh Boonsoon is Jiyoung's paternal grandmother. She lives with Jiyoung's family in her old age. Although she boasts of the warm meals and comfortable home her son gives her, it is in fact Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook, who cooks, cleans, and cares for Koh Boonsoon—and does so, with no complaint, for 17 years. The narration reveals that early in Oh Misook's marriage to Jiyoung's father, Koh Boonsoon put immense pressure on Oh Misook to have a son, so when Oh Misook learned that her subsequent pregnancy was also a girl, she had an abortion.

The Psychiatrist – Daehyun arranges for Jiyoung to see the psychiatrist after she starts to experience episodes in which she seemingly becomes different women. At the end of the book, the reader discovers that Jiyoung's story has in fact been told from the psychiatrist's perspective, with the narration representing the report he's compiled from what Jiyoung has told him over the course of their sessions together. At first, the psychiatrist reveals, he thought Jiyoung she suffered from a dissociative disorder. Then he revised his diagnosis to a "typical" case of postnatal depression. However, by the story's end, he's still not sure exactly what's wrong with her—but he claims to want to help her get better. Although the psychiatrist claims to empathize with Jiyoung's plight and with the plight so many Korean women—including the psychiatrist's wife—face due to a culture of rampant sexism, his ironic dismissal of a female employee's struggles with a difficult pregnancy suggest that he's not nearly as empathetic or enlightened to the reality of gender inequality as he claims to be.

Daehyun's Mother – Daehyun's mother—Jiyoung's mother-in-law—reappears briefly throughout the story, often in interactions in which she subtly or overtly criticizes Jiyoung or holds her to an unreasonably high standard because of her gender. For instance, she implies her disappointment that Daehyun and Jiyoung's first child (Jiwon) is a girl, and she assumes that Jiyoung will be responsible for all the housework when her son and Jiyoung are married and living together. Her character points to how women in Jiyoung's life reinforce and perpetuate many of the stifling gender roles from which they themselves suffered.

Daehyun's Father – Daehyun's father appears only briefly throughout the story. His character represents how the family dynamics of the average Korean family reinforce and perpetuate the gender inequality and sexism that causes contemporary Korean women to suffer. During an episode in which Jiyoung assumes the persona of Oh Misook and complains about Jiyoung's in-laws not considering Jiyoung's need to see her own family over the holidays—a reasonable complaint, all in all—he admonishes Jiyoung for showing disrespect.

Kim Eunsil – Kim Eunsil leads Jiyoung's team at the marketing firm where she gets her first job out of college—she's the only woman at the firm to hold a management position. Kim Eunsil goes out of her way to praise Jiyoung's work and empathize with the extra challenges and injustices Jiyoung faces as a woman in the workforce, citing the struggles she herself endured in her early years at the company. Although she made a conscious effort to make changes to the workforce to accommodate and support pregnant employees and working mothers, she worries she hasn't given them all the help they need to thrive.

Cha Seungyeon – Cha Seungyeon is Jiyoung's college friend. She died in childbirth about a year before the novel's present. Compared to Jiyoung, Seungyeon is more vocal about her feminist views and her demand for gender equality. Seungyeon had an unreciprocated crush on Jiyoung's eventual husband Daehyun before he and Jiyoung started dated—something Jiyoung doesn't know about. Jiyoung alludes to this crush while speaking as Seungyeon during one of her episodes in which she assumes an alter-persona, and it's her apparent knowledge of the crush—something only he and Seungyeon knew about—that convinces Daehyun that Jiyoung isn't just playing a prank, and that her condition might be quite serious.

Jiyoung's First Boyfriend – Jiyoung meets her first boyfriend, a physical education major, in college. They're both happy in the relationship at first, but things take a turn for the worse after the boyfriend begins his mandatory military service and grows angry, anxious, and depressed about wasting his youth. The couple fights more and more until Jiyoung breaks up with the boyfriend. The boyfriend takes the breakup badly and refuses to accept Jiyoung's decision, and this leads to him to obsessively try to contact her for a time.

Jiyoung's Second Boyfriend – Jiyoung's second boyfriend is wrapping up his final year of college the year Jiyoung enters the workforce. He's very supportive of Jiyoung as she prepares for graduation and job interviews, knowing how stressful the process is for her. And he's understanding of the limited free time Jiyoung has her first year in the workforce. This changes one night when an important male client forces Jiyoung to drink too much, leading to her passing out and a male employee (innocently) picking up Jiyoung's phone when the boyfriend calls. Despite the employee's and Jiyoung's attempts to explain the situation, the relationship ends.

Kang Hyesu – Kang Hyesu is one of Jiyoung's former coworkers. Jiyoung and Hyesu commiserate over the mistreatment they experience as women in the workforce—both women are denied a spot on the company's planning group. They later learn that they never even had a shot—the head of the company explicitly chose not to pick any women for the group because he assumed they would

eventually leave due to pregnancy, childrearing, or other family-related reasons. After Jiyoung leaves the company, Hyesu alerts her to more disturbing news: one of the building's security guards placed a hidden camera in the women's restroom and has been uploading footage to a pornography site—which one of their male coworkers, a member of the site, has been sharing with his fellow male coworkers.

The Head of the Company – The head of the company where Jiyoung works after college remains unnamed. In his leadership role, he spearheads much of the sexism Jiyoung experiences while working there. Later, after his company is at the center of a scandal due to a hidden camera that building security placed in the women's restroom, he suggests the female victims of the crime are unreasonable to demand justice, since the publicity of the scandal will damage his company's reputation and ruin the lives of the male employees who circulated the photos.

Hyejin – Hyejin is a college classmate of Jiyoung's with whom she collaborates on several projects. As they prepare for post-college employment, Jiyoung is discouraged when Hyejin points out that big companies only hire male alumni from her and Jiyoung's school, a realization that further drives home the discrimination that women in the Korean workforce face.

The Psychiatrist's Wife – The psychiatrist's wife is an extremely intelligent and competent woman: she was a math prodigy when she was younger, and she has a successful and fulfilling career as an adult. However, after the psychiatrist and his wife's son starts to misbehave in school, the wife gives up her career to stay home with the son full time. She gradually loses her sense of purpose and control, so much so that the psychiatrist is horrified one night to see his wife compulsively completing their son's elementary school-level **math workbooks**, claiming that the problems are "fun" and engaging. She claims to like them because they give her a sense of "control" she lacks in every other aspect of her life.

Jung Jiwon – Jiwon is Jiyoung and Daehyun's young daughter. Jiyoung gives up her career to stay home with the baby. Although Jiyoung loves her daughter, she struggles to keep up with the constant demands of housekeeping and childrearing, faces constant judgment as a young mother. She struggles to find the sense of self, purpose, and fulfillment she had prior to becoming a mother.

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.

GENDER INEQUALITY

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 tells the story of a Korean woman, Kim Jiyoung, whose husband has arranged for her to start seeing a psychiatrist due to Jiyoung's **strange behavior** after the birth of her baby, Jiwon. The story then flashes backward to Jiyoung's childhood, following her all the way through her early days of motherhood. At the end of the novel, it's revealed that the story readers have just read is, in fact, a summary of Jiyoung's background compiled by her psychiatrist, who has analyzed Jiyoung's formative years and early adulthood to try to figure out what may have caused the onset of Jiyoung's bizarre behavior.

As it traces the events of Jiyoung's life, the novel reveals a pattern of sexist social norms in Korean culture that push young woman like Jiyoung to the brink of madness. Starting as early as childhood, Jiyoung is at the mercy of authority figures who enforce gendered double standards that elevate men and boys at the cost of women and girls' well-being. Young girls at Jiyoung's school, for instance, are punished for beating up a predatory male flasher and turning him in to the police. Men in Jiyoung's life—including Jiyoung's own father—teach women and girls that it's their fault if they're sexually harassed, and teachers favor male students over their more competent female peers. Even in adulthood, Jiyoung's male work colleagues are chosen for a prestigious role simply because they're men, even though the female employees have proven themselves to be more capable.

From Jiyoung's life experiences, it becomes obvious that she has been brought up in a misogynistic culture, and that the people around her have repeatedly taught her to see herself as undeserving of basic human dignity and respect. By exposing the deep-seated cultural roots of this problem, the novel suggests that gender inequality is not caused by natural, fundamental differences between men and women—instead, it is socially conditioned. In other words, gender inequality in Jiyoung's society is rooted in the culturally enshrined *belief* that women are inferior—a belief that is woven into virtually all facets of women's lives, from family to school to work.

THE DIMINISHMENT OF WOMEN

The novel repeatedly points to society's disregard for labor conventionally seen as women's work—such as childrearing, caregiving, and domestic chores—and the erasure of women's suffering that happens as a result. Throughout the book, male and female characters alike praise men for behavior that society takes for granted in women. Jiyoung's boss Kim Eunsil, for instance, is able to work long hours because her mother lives with the family and takes care of the children while Eunsil and her husband are at work. Eunsil's coworkers suggest that the husband "must be an obliging person to take in his mother-in-

law," a man willing to live with an in-law must be exceptionally self-sacrificing and patient. However, Jiyoung's own mother, Oh Misook, took in her mother-in-law (Koh Boonsoon) and tirelessly cooked, cleaned, and cared for her for 17 years. No one called Oh Misook "obliging"—they simply took it for granted that she, as a woman, was up to the task. In another instance, when Jiyoung goes to the doctor due to intense pain in her wrists, the doctor prescribes rest as a cure. Jiyoung, then a new mother, tells the doctor that this is impossible: she has to care for her baby and do all the household chores. The doctor, in response, minimizes her suffering by claiming that women today have no reason to complain, given how women centuries ago managed their housework just fine without today's technological advancements.

This continual devaluing of women's labor and dismissal of their suffering culminates in a climactic moment of irony. Jiyoung's psychiatrist, following a long passage in which he professes to sympathize with women's plight due to all the sacrifices his own wife has made, nevertheless dismisses that very plight. In response to his pregnant employee's announcement that she will be quitting due to a complicated pregnancy, he observes, "Even the best employees can cause many problems if they don't have the childcare issue taken care of." In his casual, ironic dismissal of his pregnant employee's needs as a soon-to-be mother, the psychiatrist shows how society's dismissal of women perpetuates women's suffering, even among well-intentioned men who purport to support women.

INDIVIDUALITY AND PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 begins shortly after the novel's protagonist, a young mother named Jiyoung, begins to exhibit **strange behavior**. Shortly after giving birth to the couple's young daughter, Daehyun observes his wife enter strange episodes in which her voice and demeanor change drastically, to the point that she seems to become a different person. Specifically, she "becomes" various women she has encountered throughout her life. During a holiday celebration with Daehyun's family in Busan, for example, Jiyoung speaks in her own mother's voice and firmly chides Jiyoung's in-laws for not appreciating Jiyoung enough or letting her spend time with her own family over the holidays. In another instance, Jiyoung takes on the voice of Cha Seungyeon, a college friend who recently died in childbirth.

In the novel's final chapter, Jiyoung's psychiatrist reports that Jiyoung might be suffering from a form of dissociative identity disorder, though he later revises his diagnosis to "a typical case of postnatal depression that progressed to childcare depression." The similarities he detects between the two mental illnesses symbolically point to the distortion of identity that women experience when they are forced to put others before themselves. From girlhood, Jiyoung learns to put other's needs above her own: she and her sister Eunyoung are always served food last (after their father and younger brother) and have to share treats while his brother gets his own. Many years later, as an adult, Jiyoung's family pressures her to have a child. Once Jiwon is born, Jiyoung's husband expects Jiyoung to quit her job in order to stay home with the baby. Jiyoung seems to lose an important part of her identity when she quits her job, and this is one of many examples in the novel of female characters being expected to sideline their own desires in order to please others and live up to society's expectations for women (especially mothers). Jiyoung's symptoms of mental illness can therefore be read symbolically, pointing to how society's failure to recognize women as individuals and respect their wants and needs can splinter their sense of self and prevent them from attaining personal fulfillment.

FEMALE SOLIDARITY

Throughout the novel, Jiyoung and the women and girls in her life respond to sexism in vastly different ways. Some protest their mistreatment. Jiyoung's high-school classmate, for instance, calls out the school's unfair dress code and demands that the school authorities who enforce it change their ways, even when her act of protest results in disciplinary action. To this student and to other girls like her, the personal sacrifice is worth the move toward greater equality—although the school doesn't change the dress code, it no longer polices girls' clothing as strictly following the student's stunt. Another example of a woman who protests sexism is Jiyoung's mother: in many ways she perpetuates her culture's problematically sexist views, but she also repeatedly goes out of her way to protect her daughters. She berates Jiyoung's father when he backwardly suggests, in the midst of Jiyoung's struggle to find post-college employment, that Jiyoung just focus on getting married. And she repeatedly encourages her daughters to study and improve themselves.

Other women and girls, however, fail to challenge the sexism and mistreatment they encounter on a daily basis. In so doing, they directly and indirectly perpetuate it. In elementary school, a female teacher suggests to Jiyoung that the boy who has been cruelly and relentlessly bullying Jiyoung must just "like" her. Years later, Jiyoung attends a job interview with two other female applicants. When the interview asks the women how they would respond to a "handsy" client, one applicant responds that she would consider how her own clothing and actions may have prompted the man's unwanted behavior.

The novel juxtaposes these two responses to sexism to underscore the critical importance of female solidarity in response to society's rampant gender inequality. When women and girls act on internalized sexism, putting one another down or blaming themselves, they contribute to gender equality and perpetuate the very suffering that holds them back. If they choose to defy patriarchal expectations and lift one another up,

however, they put themselves a step closer to seeing the broader social changes that will improve the quality of life for women and girls as a whole. Of course, the setbacks and injustices that women and girls continue to face despite their support for one another indicate that individual acts of solidarity ultimately aren't enough to create lasting change—without more rigorous and intentional social change, no amount of female solidarity can be enough to achieve true gender equality.

SYMBOLS

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

JIYOUNG'S CONDITION

In the novel, the odd behavior that prompts Daehyun to arrange for his wife Jiyoung to see a psychiatrist represents the usually invisible suffering that Korean women experience due to misogyny and a broader culture of gender inequality. The novel begins with a summary of the odd, uncharacteristic behavior Jiyoung started exhibiting around a year after she gave birth to the couple's first child, Jiwon. Curiously, Jiyoung would embody the respective voices and personalities of different women in her life, including her mother Oh Misook and her deceased friend Cha Seungyeon. Scared and uncertain about what to do, Daehyun sends Jiyoung to a psychiatrist. The remainder of the novel (later revealed to be a report the psychiatrist has written based on what Jiyoung has told him in their sessions together) works backward in time, telling the story of Jiyoung's life from childhood to adulthood in order to get to the bottom of what ails her.

The story of Jiyoung's life foregrounds all her experiences with sexism and misogyny, highlighting how they have shaped her personality and influenced the trajectory of her life. Ultimately, based on what Jiyoung has told him about these experiences, the doctor concludes that Jiyoung's illness isn't a dissociative disorder or postpartum depression, but rather something more complex: it points to "a world that [he] wasn't aware of." In other words, her break with reality is a manifestation of all the suffering that she—and Korean women in general—experience due to a culture of rampant misogyny and sexism.

Repeatedly, Jiyoung's story shows the reader situations in which she has been made to feel inferior to men and boys, to set aside her own hopes and dreams for the benefit of others, and to perform thankless and ceaseless acts of domestic labor simply because society tells her it's her job as a woman to do so. Crucially, she has been taught to keep quiet about her suffering and accept all the injustice society throws her way. Jiyoung's psychological condition, then, is a manifestation of all the suffering she has endured due to gender inequality—suffering she has kept bottled up inside her whole life. With the birth of her daughter and the subsequent loss of her work, her social life, and any personal identity outside her roles as a wife and mother, Jiyoung reaches her psychological breaking point—and all the psychological anguish that she has kept hidden her whole life rises to the surface and becomes visible for all to see.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W.W. Norton & Company edition of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* published in 2021.

Chapter 1: Autumn, 2015 Quotes

Then came the *Chuseok* harvest holidays. They were visiting Daehyun's parents down in Busan. […] They had lunch with Daehyun's parents immediately after they arrived, and Daehyun, tired from the long drive, took a nap. Daehyun and Jiyoung used to take turns at the wheel on long drives, but ever since their daughter was born, Daehyun did all the driving. The baby fussed, whined, and cried every time they put her in the car seat, and Jiyoung was better at keeping her occupied and happy by playing with her and giving her snacks.

Jiyoung did the dishes after lunch, took a coffee break and went to the market with her mother-in-law to shop for *Chuseok* food. They spent the afternoon boiling the ox bone, marinating ribs, prepping and blanching the vegetables to season some and freeze the rest for later, washing and preparing seafood for the next day's pancakes and fritters, making, eating, and clearing dinner.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Jung Daehyun, Daehyun's Mother, Jung Jiwon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

The above quote describes the lead-up to the incident that ultimately prompted Daehyun to seek out professional help for Jiyoung, which occurred during a visit to Daehyun's family for the *Chuseok* holidays. Starting with this incident, the novel gradually shows how Jiyoung's break from reality does not reflect anything that's fundamentally wrong with Jiyoung herself. Instead, it portrays Jiyoung's illness as the inevitable outcome of the endless mistreatment and double

standards she has been subjected to because of her gender.

In the above passage, the reader sees how Jiyoung is made to push through her exhaustion while her husband Daehyun is allowed to rest and re-energize. Daehyun gets to "nap" because he is "tired from the long drive," but Jiyoung experiences no such luxury. She spent the drive tending to her and Daehyun's new baby, but the narration implies that Jiyoung is naturally predisposed to this work because she is a woman ("Jiyoung was better at keeping [the baby] occupied") and therefore it should not exhaust her in the same way the drive has exhausted Daehyun.

The passage then describes in detail all the work that Jiyoung and her mother-in-law perform while Daehyun (and presumably also Daehyun's father) is allowed to relax. The narration gives such a detailed account of this work in order to drive home just how much physical and mental energy domestic labor—work that is traditionally performed by women—requires, but which society often disregards or takes for granted. In setting up this contrast between the ceaseless labor that Jiyoung performs and the time for rest and relaxation that Daehyun's family (and society at large) affords Daehyun, the novel introduces some of the sexist double standards that ultimately culminate in Jiyoung's break from reality.

❝ Disappointment flashed across the mother's face. "It isn't work when you're feeding your own family. The point of the holidays is to get together, make and eat food together."

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist, Daehyun's Mother (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Jung Daehyun

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place during Jiyoung and Daehyun's visit to Daehyun's family for the Chuseok holiday. Daehyun's sister has just admonished her mother for cooking food for the festivities instead of buying prepared food—the sister insists that it's too much work for Daehyun's mother and Jiyoung, a new mother, to do. This is Daehyun's mother's response to her daughter's criticism. Although Daehyun's mother doesn't disagree that all that Chuseok preparations require a lot of time and energy, she suggests that "feeding your own family" over the holidays "isn't work"—it's tradition, and it's an essential part of the holidays. Although she doesn't say so directly, her implication is that women like herself and Jiyoung shouldn't think of cooking, cleaning, and other forms of domestic labor as work—as women, she suggests, they are naturally predisposed to such work, and they should be happy to do it.

The message that Daehyun's mother communicates here is one that Jiyoung encounters again and again throughout her life, and it is both a consequence of and a means of perpetuating the flawed, sexist logic that women should be happy to perform acts of domestic labor because they are naturally predisposed to things like cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. And because this sort of work is, in society's mind, women's natural calling, it's assumed that this work isn't strenuous and exhausting in the way so-called men's work is, and it certainly isn't something society needs to compensate women for or even recognize or appreciate as labor at all. In the novel, the devaluation of work typically seen as feminine is a hallmark of a sexist, patriarchal society. Daehyun's mother's words in this passage drive home just how engrained such logic is in contemporary Korean society.

Chapter 2: Childhood, 1982–1994 Quotes

❝ It didn't occur to the child Jiyoung that her brother was receiving special treatment, and so she wasn't even jealous. That's how it had always been. There were times when she had an inkling of a situation not being fair, but she was accustomed to rationalizing things by telling herself that she was being a generous older sibling and that she shared with her sister because they were both girls. Jiyoung's mother would praise the girls for taking good care of their brother and not competing for her love. Jiyoung thought it must be the big age gap. The more their mother praised, the more impossible it became for Jiyoung to complain.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Oh Misook, Kim Eunyoung, Younger Brother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 2 takes readers back to Jiyoung's early childhood to provide context and, hopefully, an explanation for the apparent mental illness she suffers from in the novel's present (in the novel's final chapter, it's revealed that the novel's main narrative is Jiyoung's psychiatrist's report on her life so far). Chapter 2 relates the key formative experiences of Jiyoung's childhood. In particular, this part of

the narrative emphasizes all the big and small ways that her culture's social norms—and the adults in Jiyoung's life who enforced those norms—gradually teach Jiyoung and other women and girls like her to accept gendered double standards and unfair treatment.

Here, for instance, the reader sees how Jiyoung and her sister Eunyoung's mother, Oh Misook, implicitly taught her daughters to see themselves as inferior to their younger brother. Throughout their childhood, the parents repeatedly show the younger brother preferential treatment. Not only this, but they also reward Jiyoung and Eunyoung with praise for accepting this unfairness without complaint. And, as the concluding line of this passage shows, the more praise Jiyoung receives, "the more impossible it bec[o]me[s] for Jiyoung to complain." In this way, the passage shows how Jiyoung's family life conditions her to accept gender inequality as a fact of life rather than a flawed feature of a constructed, sexist culture.

"Still, I get to eat warm food my son made for me, and sleep under warm covers my son arranged for me because I had four sons. You have to have at least four sons."

Oh Misook, her son's wife, was the one who cooked the warm food and laid out the warm covers for her, not her son, but Koh Boonsoon had a habit of saying so anyway. Easy-going considering the life she'd had, and relatively caring toward her daughter-in-law compared to other mothers-in-law of her generation, she would say from the bottom of her heart, for her daughter-in-law's sake, "You should have a son. You must have a son. You must have at least two sons…"

Related Characters: Koh Boonsoon, The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Oh Misook, Jiyoung's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16-17

Explanation and Analysis

The above passage quotes Jiyoung's paternal grandmother Koh Boonsoon, who in her old age moves in with Jiyoung and her family. Koh Boonsoon gushes over her son (Jiyoung's father), praising him for the "warm food" he cooks for her and the "warm covers" he prepares for her to sleep under. In fact, it's not Koh Boonsoon's son who does all this: it's Oh Misook, Koh Boonsoon's wife, who will ultimately care for the old woman for 17 thankless years. In suggesting that Jiyoung's father is responsible for the exhausting domestic labor that her daughter-in-law actually performs, Koh Boonsoon perpetuates a sexist worldview that devalues women and the tireless work they do to keep their households—and in a broader sense, society at large—afloat.

Koh Boonsoon herself has suffered greatly due to the sexist, misogynistic culture in which she came of age, but she nevertheless passes that suffering down to her daughter-in-law, refusing to challenge the sexist norms that hold both women back. Koh Boonsoon's words thus point to how it's not just the boys and men who actively benefit from sexist double standards who subscribe to and enforce these double standards—victims of sexism can also play a role in perpetuating inequality.

When Kim Jiyoung was in elementary school, her mother was reading a one-line comment her homeroom teacher had made on her journal assignment and said, "I wanted to be a teacher, too."

Jiyoung burst into laughter. She found the idea outrageous because she'd thought until then that mothers could only be mothers.

Related Characters: Oh Misook, The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Young Jiyoung has brought home a school assignment for which she had to answer what she wants to be when she grows up. When Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook, sees that Jiyoung answered "teacher," she remarks, "I wanted to be a teacher, too." Young Jiyoung responds by "burst[ing] into laughter." This is because based on what Jiyoung has experienced in her own short life, it has never occurred to her that mothers can work outside the home. In her world, mothers stay at home and work as mothers: they have no life outside that.

Jiyoung's confusion highlights just how influential social norms are in shaping a person's perception of reality, particularly when such norms are drilled into a person's head from childhood. It's perfectly reasonable for Jiyoung to be shocked to learn that mothers can be more than just mothers since she's only ever known life with a stay-at-home mother and, at such a young age, hasn't yet been

exposed to other households that might look different from her own. She seems never to have met a working mom, for instance, or a grown woman who happens not to have any children of her own.

Jiyoung's innocent confusion sheds light on how sexist double standards take hold. When people are exposed to constructed social norms at a young age, they accept those norms at face value and don't challenge their legitimacy. In time, this leads people to mistake social norms—that is, intentionally constructed rules about how people ought to act in society—as inarguable truths about how the world actually is. This, in turn, allows social ills like gender inequality to persist unchallenged.

❝ *He likes me? He picks on me because he likes me?* Jiyoung was confused. She went over the series of incidents that she had suffered because of him, and still couldn't make sense of what the teacher was saying. If you like someone, you're friendlier and nicer to them. To friends, to family, to your pet dogs and cats. Even at the age of eight, this was common sense to Jiyoung. The desk-mate's pranks made school life so difficult for her. What he'd put her through was awful enough, and now the teacher was making her out to be a bad child who misunderstood her friend.

Related Characters: Kim Jiyoung, The Psychiatrist (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31-32

Explanation and Analysis

The above passage describes Jiyoung's reaction to her elementary school teacher's explanation for why Jiyoung's desk-mate has been picking on her: according to the teacher, the boy has been so ruthlessly mean to Jiyoung because he "likes" her. To Jiyoung, the teacher's explanation makes no sense. Even as a young girl, she knows that you don't mistreat people you care about: "If you like someone, you're friendlier and nicer to them. To friends, to family, to your pet dogs and cats." What the teacher has just told her, in other words, contradicts everything Jiyoung has been taught about how to behave and how to show respect and friendliness to other people. The teacher even implies that Jiyoung, not the mean boy, is really the person at fault in the situation, "making her out to be a bad child who misunderstood her friend." In short, the teacher it trying to teach Jiyoung that she should disregard her own feelings and comfort for the sake of her desk-mate, who apparently doesn't have to follow the same set of rules. Although the teacher doesn't say so directly, the subtext of her lesson is that this is because Jiyoung is a girl, and her desk-mate is a boy. In highlighting young Jiyoung's confusion about the lesson the teacher is trying to teach her, the passage underscores just how illogical gender norms are when they are laid out in simple terms—they are not, in other words, as natural or sensible as mainstream society would like to believe.

Chapter 3: Adolescence, 1995–2000 Quotes

❝ One time, a female student who was held up at the school gate for wearing sneakers protested that it was unfair to allow T-shirts and sneakers to male students only. The student discipline teacher explained that it was because boys were more physically active.

"Boys can't sit still for the ten minutes between classes. They run outside to play soccer, basketball, baseball, or even *malttukbakgi*. You can't expect kids like that to button their shirts all the way to the stop and wear dress shoes."

"You think girls don't play sports because we don't want to? We can't play because it's uncomfortable to play wearing skirts, tights, and dress shoes! When I was in elementary school, I went outside every break to play red rover, hopscotch, and skip rope."

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 3 follows Jiyoung through adolescence. Her home life was principally responsible for exposing her to gendered double standards in her early days of childhood, and she continues to learn these lessons when she attends school. The above passage describes an interaction between a rebellious female student and a teacher who tries to reprimand her. The student has gotten in trouble for wearing sneakers to school, in part to protest the the school's unfair dress code. It requires girls to wear uncomfortable dress clothes, whereas boys are allowed to wear sneakers and T-shirts—but the girl also wears sneakers in part because they're simply more comfortable than the dress shoes the school requires girls to wear.

To defend the school's strict dress code, the teacher

suggests that it would be unfair to make boys wear dress clothes, since male students "can't still for the ten minutes between classes," and dress clothes wouldn't allow boys to play sports, as they normally do. The teacher implies in other words, that the lax dress code for boys reflects how boys naturally behave. But the student challenges this claim, retorting that girls naturally want to run around in between classes as much as boys do—it's just that the uncomfortable clothing they wear prevents them from doing so. The student's argument flips the teacher's logic upside down, suggesting that rules and social norms, specifically those related to gender, in fact *cause* the gender differences the teacher cites—not the other way around.

> One of her friends got a bouquet of flowers from her father when she started her periods, another had a family party complete with cake. But to most girls it was a secret shared only among mothers and daughters. An irritating, painful, somehow shameful secret. It was no different in Jiyoung's family. The mother avoided referring to it directly, as if something that should not be said out loud had happened, as she offered her ramen soup.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Oh Misook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In eighth grade, Jiyoung gets her first period. Although her mother gives her a healthy serving of ramen as a subtle consolation gift of sorts, for the most part, this moment in Jiyoung's coming of age goes totally unmentioned. This, the novel suggests, is typical in Korean culture, where menstruation is seen not as a natural (if sometimes painful) bodily function, but rather as a "somehow shameful secret" that girls and women should keep to themselves, suffering in silence. This, the novel suggests, is just one of many ways that the sexist culture of South Korea (and in many other cultures, for that matter) invalidates and disregards female suffering. Much like society as a whole fails to appreciate work conventionally done by women (childrearing, domestic labor), it also refuses to recognize the physical pain that women endure during menstruation. In making women's work and pain virtually invisible, society invalidates the experiences of women and girls and devalues them as people.

> But that night, Jiyoung got an earful from her father. "Why is your cram school so far away? Why do you talk to strangers? Why is your skirt so short?" Jiyoung grew up being told to be cautious, to dress conservatively, to be "ladylike." That it's your job to avoid dangerous places, times of day and people. It's your fault for not noticing and not avoiding.

Related Characters: Jiyoung's Father, The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

On the bus home from cram school one night (a cram school is a specialized type of school where students go to learn a specific skill, most often standardized test preparation), a young man who claims to be one of Jiyoung's classmates starts aggressively harassing her. His anger flares after Jiyoung doesn't respond to his advances. Feeling threatened, Jiyoung covertly borrows the phone of a woman on the bus and texts her father to meet her at the bus stop, which he does.

Although the woman, who observed the boy's behavior, explains what happened and tells Jiyoung's father to comfort his daughter, he instead blames Jiyoung for putting herself in a bad situation. It's Jiyoung's fault, he insists, the cram school is "so far away," and it's Jiyoung's fault for "talk[ing] to strangers" (in fact, the boy approached Jiyoung, and Jiyoung did all she could to ignore him), and it's Jiyoung's fault for wearing clothing that brought her unwanted attention. The concluding lines of this passage summarize what her father's message teaches Jiyoung: "it your job to avoid dangerous places, time of day and people. It's your fault for not noticing and not avoiding." In other words, the onus is on Jiyoung—as a young woman—to modify her behavior to protect herself against violent men and boys, who have no such responsibility themselves.

It's difficult for Jiyoung to hear her own father devalue her in this way and blame her for her victimhood, but the novel implies that his words merely parrot the message that society in general teaches girls and women: that they must hold themselves to higher standards than boys and men, and if they don't, they'll be blamed for whatever pain, discomfort, or other suffering happens to them.

Chapter 4: Early Adulthood, 2001–2011 Quotes

She couldn't picture herself at the company ten years down the road and resigned after some thought. Her boss grumbled, "This is why we don't hire women." She replied, "Women don't stay because you make it impossible for us to stay."

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Hyejin

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of college, Jiyoung and her classmate Hyejin prepare to enter the workforce. Hyejin laments the extra hurdles in place for female applicants like themselves and shares with Jiyoung a story about a female graduate of their school as an example of the unjust double standards women face. The graduate experienced sexual discrimination during the hiring process at a company she wanted to work for, was able to prove it, and successfully got a job there as a result. Her experience working at the company wasn't great, though, and she ultimately decided to quit not long after she was hired. When she announced her departure, her boss grumbled, "This is why we don't hire women," as though the graduate alone was to blame for the unhappy experience she'd had working there. The graduate retorted, "Women don't stay because you make it impossible for us to stay," alluding to all the ways the sexist workplace culture made it unfeasible for her to continue working there.

Hyejin's story sheds light on the sexism that women face in the workforce despite legal measures put in place to (theoretically) ensure equal treatment. But it also illustrates a typical arguing point people use to justify their sexist behavior: they minimize their own, active role in perpetuating sexist social norms and instead claim that they are merely acting in accordance with how things naturally are. In suggesting that his company is right not to hire women because women are flaky employees, the boss ignores how the workplace culture he has cultivated make it undesirable for women to work there.

Jiyoung's lack of response to his lecture prompted the father to say, "You just stay out of trouble and get married."

This wasn't the worst thing he'd ever said to her, but it was the last straw for Jiyoung, who was holding her spoon upright. Jiyoung was attempting to take a deep breath when an ear-splitting crack, like a pickaxe on rock, rang at the table. Her mother, face crimson, had smacked the spoon on the table.

"How can you say something so backward in this day and age? Jiyoung, *don't* stay out of trouble. Run wild! Run wild, you hear me?"

Related Characters: Oh Misook, Jiyoung's Father, The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describe a tense interaction at the dinner table one night toward the end of Jiyoung's time at university. Jiyoung has been agonizing over not yet receiving a job offer. In response, her father suggests, "You just stay out of trouble and get married." With this, Jiyoung's father implies that Jiyoung's only problem is that she has no one to take care of her financially—no boss to pay her for her work, and no husband to pay the bills so that Jiyoung doesn't have to. In so doing, he implicitly robs Jiyoung of her dignity and her personhood. Jiyoung is worried about not having income, yes, but her father's statement totally disregards all the other reasons for her to be upset. With no job, for instance, she has no outlet for her professional ambition. Moreover, it's insulting to Jiyoung that no one has expressed interest in hiring her given how hard she worked at her studies.

The violence of Oh Misook's reaction to her husband's offhanded remark shocks Jiyoung, who has repeatedly seen her mother give preferential treatment to Jiyoung's younger brother at the expense of Jiyoung and her sister Eunyoung. Here, though it's a fleeting moment, Oh Misook stands her ground and puts her husband in his place, decrying his "backward" attitude and encouraging her daughter to "[R]un wild," loudly asserting the personhood her father has implicitly denied her with his remark.

> The first thing she did when she became management was get rid of unnecessary company dinners, retreats, and workshops. She guaranteed maternity and paternity leave. She said she'd never forget how proud she felt when she presented a bouquet of flowers as a welcome-back present to one of her team members, who returned from a year-long maternity leave for the first time in the company's history.
>
> "Who is she?" Jiyoung asked.
>
> "She left a few months after that."
>
> The team member couldn't help out with the frequent late nights and weekends as well. Most of her paycheck went to the babysitter, and even then she was always frantically looking for someone to watch her child at short notice, and fighting with her husband over the phone every day. She came into work with her baby one weekend and ended up throwing in the towel. When the subordinate apologized for quitting on her, Kim Eunsil didn't know what to say.

Related Characters: Kim Jiyoung, The Psychiatrist, Kim Eunsil (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100-101

Explanation and Analysis

Jiyoung has just started working at her first job out of college. Her team leader, Kim Eunsil, is the only woman in management at the company, and she becomes something of a mentor to Jiyoung as Jiyoung learns to navigate all the extra challenges she faces as a woman in the male-dominated workforce. One day, Kim Eunsil laments all the unjust treatment Kim Eunsil faced in her early days at the company, when conditions were much worse for female workers. Once she became a manager, she vowed to use her relative privilege to give women more protections and opportunities than she had when she was in their position. Kim Eunsil recalls the pride she felt when she "presented a bouquet of flowers as a welcome-back present" to one of the first female employees to take advantage of the protected year-long maternity leave.

Jiyoung is shocked when Kim Eunsil then admits that the new mother didn't last long after her triumphant return: even with Kim Eunsil's accommodations for working mothers, there were still so many work events the employee couldn't commit to due to her parenting responsibilities. Beyond this, her inability to find affordable care for her child made it not financially sound to continue working. The disappointing end to the woman's employment highlights the limitations of individual solidarity to shift the needle on gender inequality. In the absence of large-scale legal changes and major shifts in cultural attitudes toward the challenges that working mothers face as they re-enter the workforce, the support of women like Kim Eunsil does little to actually guarantee the equal opportunities that women need to succeed professionally.

> "My daughter attends the university right here. She was studying late at the library and wants me to come and pick her up because she's scared to go home by herself. Apologies all round, but I have to go. Miss Kim Jiyoung, finish that beer!"
>
> At that, a frail bit of hope inside Jiyoung crumpled. *In a few years, that precious daughter of yours will find herself exactly where I am now. Unless people like you stop treating me this way.*

Related Characters: Kim Jiyoung, The Psychiatrist (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Jiyoung works hard at her job and does well, but she continues to face extra challenges due to her gender. In the above passage, which describes an awkward client dinner she attends with Kim Eunsil and a male colleague, the client pressures Jiyoung to drink more alcohol than she's comfortable with—and she feels she's not in a position to say no without insulting the man and jeopardizing her company's business with him. Jiyoung finally gets some relief after the man announces he has to go, but the reason for his departure reignites feelings of injustice and rage in her. The man explains that he has to walk his university-aged daughter home from the library since she feels unsafe walking alone at night. In her mind, Jiyoung condemns the man's hypocrisy: can he really not see that he is the very sort of bullying, entitled, and inconsiderate man who makes young women like his daughter feel unsafe? Can he not see that his bullying has made Jiyoung feel just as threatened as his daughter feels?

Jiyoung doesn't voice these thoughts aloud, though, because she knows the man is totally oblivious to how his aggressive behavior has affected her. He, like most other sexist men Jiyoung encounters both at work and in her personal life, is totally ignorant about the suffering that he inflicts on women like Jiyoung, and about the average woman's suffering in general. Unless misogyny affects them

personally (as when the man's daughter asks him to walk her home), they remain unconvinced of its existence and unwilling to acknowledge their own complicity in it.

Chapter 5: Marriage, 2012–2015 Quotes

"Everyone fumbles in the beginning. You get better with practice. Jiyoung will handle it well," Daehyun's mother concluded.

No, I don't think I'll handle it well, Jiyoung thought to herself. *Oppa knows more about housework from living by himself for years, and he said he'd take care of everything when we get married.* But both Jiyoung and Daehyun only smiled.

Related Characters: Kim Jiyoung, Daehyun's Mother (speaker), Jung Daehyun, Kim Eunyoung

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Jiyoung and her new fiancé, Daehyun, are at a Korean restaurant with both their parents, who are meeting for the first time. The parents discuss the couple's upcoming marriage, with the mothers offering their respective predictions on how well Jiyoung will take to housework. Central to the mothers' joking and lighthearted remarks is something they both implicitly acknowledge as a given fact: that in a (heterosexual) marriage, it's the woman's responsibility to keep house. This is why Jiyoung's mother is only partially joking when she apologizes for not adequately teaching her daughters Jiyoung and Eunyoung to cook and clean.

Daehyun's mother's response to this is that it's okay for Jiyoung to be sloppy at first, since she'll "get better with practice" and ultimately "handle it well." This observation ironically reveals the flimsiness of society's perceived belief that women are naturally predisposed to childrearing and domestic labor. If this were the case, then Jiyoung wouldn't need to "practice" keeping house—she'd be naturally, innately good at it. Adding to the illogical assumption that Jiyoung should be the one to clean is the fact that Daehyun's past experience keeping house actually makes him better prepared for domestic labor than Jiyoung: unlike his fiancée, Daehyun has had experience living on his own and keeping up with chores. This fact makes it abundantly clear women aren't the ones typically responsible for domestic labor because they are naturally better at it than men: it's simply because a sexist society's norms have decided that's the way things *ought* to be.

"What's the rush? We had a wedding and we live together. Nothing will change because of one document."

"It changes how we feel."

Related Characters: Kim Jiyoung, Jung Daehyun (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Jiyoung and Daehyun have just had a wedding and are in the early days of living together. Things are going well, and Jiyoung finds that she is quite enjoying married life, but the mood shifts one day when Jiyoung comes home from work and Daehyun approaches her with a marriage license. At first Jiyoung is touched, thinks it's a romantic gesture, but her happiness fades when Daehyun explains why he wants to sign the license. "It changes how we feel," he explains. Jiyoung takes this to mean that Daehyun thinks he'll feel more committed to Jiyoung and more invested in their life together if he has a legal incentive to do so.

The revelation crushes her because this isn't how she feels at all: she wants to be with Daehyun because she loves him, and no legal document will change that. Daehyun's argument that the marriage license—a legal document that represents the values and rules of their society, particularly with regard to gender—will meaningfully alter his and Jiyoung's feelings for each other bothers Jiyoung because it implies that Daehyun is more of a believer in potentially restrictive social norms than she once thought. If Daehyun stands by what society has decided a marriage ought to be, what other social norms might he also accept without question?

As hard as she tried not to, she couldn't help feeling she was bargaining something away.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Jung Daehyun

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes after Jiyoung and Daehyun get into a big fight on the drive home from visiting Daehyun's parents. Daehyun's extended family had asked Jiyoung a lot of invasive, inappropriate questions about why she wasn't pregnant yet, and Jiyoung was upset with Daehyun for not defending her. Daehyun eventually apologizes and admits he was in the wrong—but he then suggests that they move ahead with their plans to have a baby as a solution. The casualness with which Daehyun makes the suggestion shocks and upsets Jiyoung, who (rightly) concludes that Daehyun doesn't recognize how disproportionately pregnancy and parenthood will affect her life compared to his. Ultimately, she gives in and agrees to Daehyun's suggestion—the couple planned on having a baby anyway, they just didn't have an exact timeline worked out.

Still, as the above passage indicates, Jiyoung nurses doubt about her decision, unable to shake the "feeling she was bargaining something away." Jiyoung's hesitation turns out to be warranted: ultimately, motherhood will result in her giving up her work and, in part, her identity as an individual. This passage emphasizes the anxiety and uncertainty that Jiyoung feels in anticipation of motherhood in order to show how gender inequality makes the experience of parenthood so different for men versus women. For Daehyun, becoming a parent is the easy solution to his and Jiyoung's biggest ongoing problem: having a baby will get his parents off Jiyoung's back. For Jiyoung, pregnancy and parenthood just create more problems and more unknowns.

❝ Since she became a full-time housewife, she often noticed that there was a polarized attitude regarding domestic labor. Some demeaned it as "bumming around at home," while others glorified it as "work that sustains life," but none tried to calculate its monetary value. Probably because the moment you put a price on something, someone has to pay.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Jung Daehyun, Jung Jiwon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 137

Explanation and Analysis

One day, new mother Jiyoung's overworked wrists hurt so badly that she can't move them, and so she goes to see a doctor. When the doctor prescribes rest as a solution, Jiyoung says this is impossible: she has to do the housework and care for the baby. The doctor patronizingly retorts that Jiyoung and other women her age are lazy: with all the technological advancements that exist now to make domestic labor easier (dishwashers, washing machines), housewives have no right to complain.

As Jiyoung reflects in the above passage, the doctor's patronizing advice mirrors one side of society's "polarized attitude" toward domestic labor. Some people—men like the doctor, for instance—don't consider domestic labor to be real work and think that housewives like Jiyoung are just "bumming around at home" all day. Others, meanwhile, "glorif[y] it as 'work that sustains life,'" insinuating that women ought to care for their homes and families out of love, find it fulfilling in its own right, and not expect any thanks or compensation in return.

What both attitudes have in common is a failure to recognize domestic labor (conventionally performed by women) as a critical part of the workforce—and therefore deserving of monetary compensation. The reason for this, Jiyoung concludes, is that "the moment you put a price on something, someone has to pay." Jiyoung's cynical conclusion sheds light on one of the reasons that sexist gender norms persist in contemporary society: because if society were truly to value women and the work they do, it'd have to compensate them for essential work they've been doing for free for millennia.

❝ "The fact that they have families and parents," Eunsil retorted, "is why they shouldn't do these things, not why we should forgive them."

In fact, Eunsil was scared and exhausted herself. All of them—the team leader Eunsil, Kang Hyesu and the victims standing with them—wanted this case to be resolved soon so that they could go back to their lives. While offenders were in fear of losing a small part of their privilege, the victims were running the risk of losing everything.

Related Characters: Kim Eunsil (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, Kang Hyesu, The Head of the Company, Jung Jiwon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Jiyoung has recently quit her job to stay home with Jiwon full time. Her former coworker Kang Hyesu drops by to catch up, but the conversation ultimately turns dark when

Hyesu tells Jiyoung about the ongoing scandal at the office. Hyesu explains how a security guard had installed hidden cameras in the women's restroom and uploaded intimate content of the female employees to a pornography site. To make matters worse, the male colleagues discovered the images and started passing them around among one another. Even worse, after the scandal came to light and the women demanded justice for the crimes committed against them, the head of the company accused the women of being too harsh with their male harassers, suggesting that the women should drop their case for the sake of the company's reputation and for the sake of the men, many of whom have families.

Kim Eunsil, Jiyoung's former boss, called out the company head for his blatant sexism. Her retort draws attention to the double standard applied to the male perpetrators and their female victims. The company head is essentially suggesting that the men aren't responsible for their actions, while the women should set aside their dignity and their comfort for the sake of the men. The blatant misogyny Kim Eunsil identifies in the company head's logic is horrific, but it doesn't come as a shock to Jiyoung or to any of the women who work at the company. If their lives have been anything like Jiyoung's (and the novel implies that they have), they've been conditioned from childhood to do exactly what the company head is suggesting. The scandal at the office drives home the dismal reality that deep-seated, sexist social norms can persist even despite measures the culture has taken to encourage gender equality in the workplace and in society in general.

Chapter 6: 2016 Quotes

❝ Looking at the moments and scenes in Kim Jiyoung's life that she chose to share in our sessions, I realize that I may have diagnosed her hastily. I'm not saying I was wrong, only that I've come to realize there is a world that I wasn't aware of.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, The Psychiatrist's Wife

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final chapter, the psychiatrist makes a tentative diagnosis based on Jiyoung's symptoms and background. Though he initially guesses that Jiyoung is suffering from dissociative identity disorder or postpartum depression, he ultimately suggests that her case may be more complex than that and may in fact be related to the sexism she encounters on a daily basis—sexism that most men remain oblivious to. Based on his work with Jiyoung and the situation with his own wife, who similarly began to exhibit odd behavior after quitting her job to stay home with their son, the psychiatrist now concludes that "there is a world that I wasn't aware of." That world refers to the struggles that Korean women, particularly mothers, experience as a result of unexamined, deep-seated sexism—struggles that most often remain invisible to mainstream society.

The psychiatrist's assessment strikes an ambiguous tone. On the one hand, it seems promising for the future of gender equality of that the doctor is capable of recognizing his former ignorance and trying to educate himself for the sake of his wife, patient, and women in general. On the other hand, the severity of his ignorance—he's essentially admitting his shock at discovering that women have complicated, nuanced interior lives of their own—speaks to how far Korean society has to go before it can start to create a more equal, just world for women. Moreover, as the novel's ironic concluding lines will make clear, the doctor isn't nearly as enlightened about women's suffering and his complicity in it as he'd like to think he is.

❝ Even the best female employees can cause many problems if they don't have the childcare issue taken care of. I'll have to make sure her replacement is unmarried.

Related Characters: The Psychiatrist (speaker), Kim Jiyoung, The Psychiatrist's Wife

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

This passage concludes *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*. The psychiatrist has just expressed his empathy for the plight of Korean women, like his patient Jiyoung and his own wife, and he has expressed a passionate desire to help them. At first, then, it seems as though the novel will end on a positive note: if men like the psychiatrist can admit to their ignorance about women's suffering and resolve to do better,

then perhaps there's a real chance that society as a whole can become more equal and just. However, the psychiatrist's comments about his employee Suyeon and what her situation tells him about female employees in general throws all that into doubt. Suyeon is pregnant and will soon quit to stay home with her child. Noting all the ways Suyeon's departure has inconvenienced him, the psychiatrist decides that the "many problems" that Suyeon and other women in her position create for a business make it unwise to hire women at all.

The implied message at the core of the doctor's words here makes it clear that the doctor isn't serious about wanting to help women. In fact, he is no more sympathetic to women or aware of his own gender biases than the average male. His complaints about pregnant employees who "cause many problems" makes clear that the doctor still believes it's on women—not the employer or society at large—to ensure that "the childcare issue [is] taken care of" and that workplaces take steps to accommodate working parents. His final remark—"I'll have to make sure [Suyeon's] replacement is unmarried"—makes clear that he will participate in the very discriminatory practices he earlier condemned, intentionally not giving opportunities to certain women based on the likelihood of their getting pregnant and disrupting his business down the line.

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: AUTUMN, 2015

Kim Jiyoung is 33 years old (34 in Korean years). She married her husband, Jung Daehyun, three years ago. The couple lives with their baby daughter, Jung Jiwon, in an apartment on the outskirts of Seoul. Jiyoung used to work in marketing but quit to stay home with the baby. Daehyun works at an IT company and often doesn't get home until late at night. Jiyoung doesn't get much help with the baby since Daehyun's parents live in Busan and her own parents run a restaurant.

The novel opens with details that point to the big changes Jiyoung's life has undergone in the year since she gave birth to her first child—she has quit her job in marketing to stay home with the baby. This, combined with Daehyun's late nights and the lack of help Jiyoung receives from her parents or in-laws, points to a suddenly—and perhaps overwhelmingly—isolated existence for Jiyoung. Notably, Daehyun's life doesn't appear to have changed nearly as much since Jiwon's birth. Thus, from the start, the novel lays out the gender inequality at play in Jiyoung's world.

Jiyoung started exhibiting **odd behavior** on September 8. She and Daehyun were eating breakfast when Jiyoung started talking like a much older woman—like her own mother (Oh Misook). Daehyun thought she was just joking, but when he came home from work that night, Jiyoung was sleeping beside Jiwon and sucking her thumb as though she were a baby herself. A few days later, Jiyoung claimed to be Cha Seungyeon, a college friend who died last year in childbirth. Daehyun was shocked when Jiyoung-as-Seungyeon spoke about Seungyeon's unrequited love for Daehyun (before he and Jiyoung were a couple), which Jiyoung would have no way of knowing. Then she said, "Hah dude," which Cha Seungyeon used to say when she was drunk.

It seems that the major changes Jiyoung has undergone over the past year, the immense stress she is under to keep up her household and care for her daughter, and the lack of outside help she receives have manifested as some form of mental illness. That Jiyoung's condition causes her to embody different women in her life links the condition with femininity and symbolically points to being worked to the breaking point as a universal aspect of the female experience. The casual tone with which the narration reveals that Cha Seungyeon died in childbirth normalizes female suffering and diminishes its impact to make a broader point about what little regard Jiyoung's culture has for that suffering and for women's labor in general.

Things came to a head when Jiyoung and Daehyun were in Busan visiting Daehyun's parents during the *Chuseok* harvest holidays. The family leaves for Busan in the morning. Daehyun drives, as he always does—the couple used to take turns, but they stopped once Jiwon was born since Jiyoung is so much better at keeping her happy and occupied. Jiyoung, Daehyun, and the baby arrive in Busan and immediately eat lunch with Daehyun's parents. Afterward, Daehyun takes a nap while Jiyoung and Daehyun's mother go to the market to shop for Chuseok food. After that, Jiyoung and her mother-in-law started to prepare food for the next day's meals.

The narration assumes that Jiyoung is better at keeping Jiwon happy and occupied, but there's no reason to believe this is actually true: it could be that Daehyun would be just as capable at entertaining his child if he spent more time with her and familiarized himself with her personality quirks and preferences. This scene therefore points to some of the ways Jiyoung's culture conflates social conditioning with natural traits. The detail of Daehyun taking a nap while his mother and Jiyoung go shopping and then prepare food further establishes the double standards to which men and women are held in Korean society. While it's reasonable for Daehyun to be tired from the drive and in need of a nap, it's just as reasonable to assume that the same might be true for Jiyoung—she did, after all, care for the baby all the way over. Yet while Daehyun gets the chance to rest and recharge, Jiyoung is not afforded that same luxury. She has to set aside her exhaustion to ensure that the household chores get done, and the same goes for Daehyun's mother.

The following day is Chuseok. Daehyun's younger sister Suhyun arrives with her family. When Jiyoung brings out the rice cakes she and her mother-in-law prepared, Suhyun is upset: she has already told her mother not to prepare food at home. They should order food from a shop since her mother is too old and cooking is a lot of work for Jiyoung. In response, Jiyoung smiles warmly and proceeds to speak in the voice of her mother (Oh Misook). She berates Daehyun's parents for being inconsiderate and never letting Jiyoung and her young family visit Jiyoung's parents for holidays. Daehyun's father reacts angrily to Jiyoung's show of disrespect. Daehyun, embarrassed, rushes his wife and baby out the door, trying to explain to his family that Jiyoung hasn't been feeling well lately. Suhyun says that Jiyoung is right, though, and urges her brother to show his wife that he appreciates her.

Although Jiyoung's behavior is indeed strange and perhaps a bit rude, it speaks to how little respect they have for Jiyoung's wants and needs that Daehyun's father condemns Jiyoung for her rudeness without pausing to consider that he and his family do overwork Jiyoung and are inconsiderate of her time. Suhyun in this scene acts as an ally to Jiyoung, implicitly recognizing the high standard to which Jiyoung is held and all the thankless work she is assigned, all due to her gender. Still, it's notable that she only feels comfortable admonishing her brother in private, perhaps fearing that she too will be the target of her father's anger if she speaks up in front of him.

Later, Daehyun visits a psychiatrist alone to go over Jiyoung's **strange behavior**. He schedules some therapy sessions, which Jiyoung agrees to attend. She admits that she's been feeling a bit sad lately and believes she has "maternity blues."

Notably, Daehyun only insists that Jiyoung seek help for her apparent condition once it starts to affect his life—his arranging for her to see a psychiatrist is a response to the embarrassment her episode caused him, not to the strange behavior she has exhibited, nor the "maternity blues" Jiyoung herself admits she's been feeling. This further points to society's disregard and normalization of women's suffering.

CHAPTER 2: CHILDHOOD, 1982–1994

Kim Jiyoung is born on April 1, 1982, in Seoul. Jiyoung's father is a civil servant, and Jiyoung's mother is a housewife. She has an older sister named Eunyoung and will eventually have a younger brother. When Jiyoung was a little girl, she used to sneak spoonfuls of her baby brother's powdered formula. Koh Boonsoon, her grandmother, would smack her if she caught her doing this. Even then, Jiyoung sensed that her grandmother was really angry about Jiyoung *"try[ing] to take something that belongs to [her] precious grandson!"* Meanwhile, the family always receives their dinner portions in the same order: Jiyoung's father, brother, and grandmother, and then finally the girls. If there is ever two of anything—two blankets, two treats—the girls share, and their younger brother gets his own. Jiyoung's mother always praises her daughters for taking good care of their brother.

The narration establishes Kim Jiyoung as something of an everywoman figure—her name in Korean is as common as Jane Smith in English. Her economic situation and homelife, too, establish her as ordinary and unremarkable—someone the average Korean woman reader of the novel can easily identify with (or in whom male readers can recognize women and girls in their life). In this way, then, the novel encourages its readership to look at Jiyoung's story on a broader level and to consider how the issues of gender inequality, sexism, and misogyny it broaches are present in their own life, their loved ones' lives, and in society at large.

Kim Jiyoung's father was the third of four brothers. The eldest died in a car accident and the second-born moved to the United States. Jiyoung's father is estranged from the youngest after a falling-out over their inheritance and who was responsible for caring for their aging mother, Koh Boonsoon. Koh Boonsoon worked tirelessly to support her children. Her husband didn't work, but she didn't resent him: she thought he was a pretty good husband because he didn't cheat on her or beat her. She also didn't complain when Jiyoung's father was the only one of her sons who offered to care for her. Instead, she expressed her gratitude toward the hot meals her son prepared for her—though it was actually Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook, who made these meals. Meanwhile, Koh Boonsoon incessantly nagged Oh Misook to have a son.

If the reader is to see Kim Jiyoung's family life as representative of Korean society at large, then this context about her family history emphasizes the invisibility or underappreciation of stereotypically and traditionally feminine jobs like caregiving and other forms of domestic labor: Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook, tirelessly takes care of her mother-in-law for years and yet receives no thanks (and certainly no compensation) for her work—it's just expected that she'll do it because she is the daughter-in-law. Note how not even Koh Boonsoon herself recognizes all her daughter-in-law has done for her, instead pestering her to have a son and live up to a potentially impossible, or unwanted, standard.

When Oh Misook became pregnant for a third time with a girl, she had an abortion—a common practice at the time, when abortion "due to medical problems" had been legal for the past 10 years. Eventually, though, Oh Misook did become pregnant with a boy: Jiyoung's younger brother, who was five years Jiyoung's junior.

The phrasing of this passage makes it seem as though Oh Misook had an abortion because she considered being pregnant with another girl a "medical problem[]." This further underscores the book's overarching point about South Korea's devaluation of women and girls.

As a civil servant, Jiyoung's father has a stable income. Still, the family of six struggles to make ends meet on the meager salary of a low-level government employee. Mother (Oh Misook) therefore takes on odd jobs to bring in extra money. At the time, there is a lot of work available that is designed for housewives, all labeled *ajumma* ("middle-aged married woman"), which can be done from home. Among the tasks Mother signs on to do are taking out stitches and rolling weather strips. The strips are sticky and leave behind a smelly, dusty residue. One day Father comes home from work and complains when he sees the children rolling around in the weather strips. He apologizes to Mother that he can't "give [her] an easier life." Mother quits on the spot, though she coldly reminds Father that he's not the only one working hard to provide for the family.

The ajumma *work designated for middle-aged housewives is painfully forgettable and tedious, perhaps mirroring society's broader disregard for women and what creativity and skill they're capable of. The* ajumma *work, like women's work in general, is invisible and taken for granted: the sort of work that people expect to just be done and yet only notice when it goes unaddressed. Father's apology clearly upsets Mother—it insinuates that her life would be easy, were it not for the dull* ajumma *work she undertakes to supplement his income. His apology, by omission, fails to appreciate all the unpaid work that consumes Mother's days: keeping house, caring for the children, and caring for Father's own mother.*

Later, when Mother returns the finished weather strips to the van driver, he tells her it's not so bad that she's quitting—she's too talented for such menial work and should consider going into arts and crafts instead. Mother follows his advice and enrolls in a course—in hairdressing. She turns out to be quite talented and amasses an impressive list of clients whose hair she cuts in their homes. She works hard and saves all the money she earns. Though the ladies who work in salons are initially bitter about Mother stealing some of their clients, eventually the women are able to divide up their clients organically, and everyone has enough work.

The van driver is an anomaly among men in Mother's orbit. He acknowledges her skill and encourages her to pursue work that takes that skill into account—not work that is simply convenient to her obligations as a homemaker and mother, which society thinks ought to be her main priorities. Mother heeds his good advice and finds work that is financially and personally fulfilling as a result. Also of note here is how Mother and the salon ladies decide to compromise and share clients rather than treat one another as enemies. This implicitly points to the book's larger message about the importance of women supporting one another.

Oh Misook was the fourth of five children. Her family grew rice and did well, but they fell on hard times as the economy in Korea shifted from agricultural to industrial. Oh Misook and her sisters worked long, grueling hours at a textile factory to help put their older brothers through college. After her eldest brother started to earn a living himself, he put the youngest brother through teaching school, and he was praised for working hard to support his younger sibling. It was only then that Oh Misook and her sisters learned that they would never have their turn. They had to put themselves through the company-affiliated school, working around the clock to earn their middle- and high-school diplomas.

This section gives readers insight into Oh Misook's upbringing in order to explain some of the choices she makes in raising her own children. Readers see the extent to which Oh Misook and her sisters were taught that they were inferior to males and that their work was less important. In their family, it was unthinkable that girls should—or might want—to receive an education. Instead, girls' and women's purpose was to put in hours of thankless work so that men and boys could succeed.

Years later, while helping Jiyoung with her elementary-school homework, Oh Misook comments that she used to dream of becoming a teacher. Jiyoung laughs at this idea, having believed "until then that mothers could only be mothers." By this point, Oh Misook is regretting her choice to become a mother and not do something else with her life.

This sad scene shows how society conditions people into taking certain customs as fact: because Jiyoung has only ever see mothers perform housework and raise children, she thinks that's all they can be. That's why it's almost funny to her to imagine her mother as a young person with dreams and desires of her own.

When Jiyoung starts elementary school, it's Eunyoung's responsibility to get her there on time and make sure Jiyoung has all the school supplies she needs. Jiyoung's first conflict at school involves her male desk-mate, who often plays pranks—but Jiyoung feels his antics are more akin to "harassment or violence." He hits her, and he borrows her school supplies and doesn't give them back. One day, he kicks her shoe, sending it flying to the front of the classroom. The teacher initially scolds Jiyoung, but she refocuses her anger on the desk-mate when some other students stick up for Jiyoung. Later, alone with Jiyoung, the teacher happily suggests that the boy is picking on Jiyoung because he "likes" her, which makes no sense to Jiyoung.

From a young age, Eunyoung, as Jiyoung's older sister, shares some of Oh Misook's caregiving responsibilities. This illustrates another small way that girls, from a young age, are trained to take on the traditionally feminine labor that society takes for granted. The teacher's explanation of the boy's cruelty underlines a more disturbing form of social conditioning: in this case, the teacher suggests to Jiyoung that boys may behave however they like, with no care for others' welfare, meanwhile girls must keep their feelings and thoughts to themselves for the sake of others' comfort. It also instructs girls to see male aggression or harassment as a positive—it is, per the teacher, how the boy is trying to flirt with her, the implication being that Jiyoung should be pleased the boy is paying her (possibly) romantic attention. Jiyoung's confusion at this idea underlines its fabricated, illogical nature.

In third grade, Jiyoung eats lunch at school. It's awful for her because she's a slow eater, and the teachers scold students for not finishing their meals quickly. The students are assigned numbers to wait in line to get their lunches. This means the students at the back of the line—always the girls—have much less time to eat than the boys who are assigned lower numbers. One day a girl named Yuna defiantly calls out the unfairness of the arrangement, demanding a change. To everyone's surprise, the teacher agrees to reverse the order of the numbers every month—only for the girls, though. Boys still get to go first. It's a small victory, but it still gives Jiyoung and the other high-number girls some extra confidence. Still, things aren't quite fair in school. Class monitors are always boys, even though the teachers openly say that girls are smarter.

Jiyoung's experiences at school continue to condition her to see herself and girls and women in general as worth less than boys and men. Worse still is that it's just as often women who serve as the authority figures who enforce these unjust double standards. The minimal progress that Jiyoung and the other girls see when they try to challenge these double standards perhaps sheds light on why the older generation of women is less inclined to fight back against inequality—because it's often more trouble than it's worth and doesn't end up benefiting them in the long run. Still, the fact that the girls do see some change in response to their challenge to authority teaches them the importance of asserting their self-worth and speaking out when they believe they are being treated unfairly.

When Jiyoung is in fifth grade, she and her family move to a new apartment. There are three bedrooms, and Jiyoung and Eunyoung each get their own room. Father and Grandmother protest that the girls should share with Grandmother so their brother can have a room to himself, but Mother is firm that the girls get their own—their little brother is practically still a baby and can share with his parents. He only wants to sleep with his mom, anyway.

This scene illustrates one way that Jiyoung's mother consciously acts to halt the cycle of unequal treatment she received as a young girl. Oh Misook's family gave her brothers preferential treatment. When her husband and mother-in-law try to repeat this pattern by giving Jiyoung and Eunyoung's younger brother his own room, forcing the daughters to share, Oh Misook puts her foot down to defend her daughters. It's a small thing, but it symbolically reinforces her belief that her daughters are important in their own right and worthy of their own private space.

CHAPTER 3: ADOLESCENCE, 1995–2000

Jiyoung attends middle school near her house. Eunyoung attended the same school, but by the time Jiyoung enrolls, it's co-ed. While girls have to follow a strict dress code (a skirt, a bra and undershirt under a blouse with a high neckline, dress shoes, and so on), boys aren't held to the same standard. One day, a rebellious female student speaks up about how unfair the dress code is when she's reprimanded for wearing sneakers. A teacher replies that boys "can't sit still for the ten minutes between classes." They need comfortable clothing since they run outside between classes to play sports. The girl protests they would do this too, if they could—it's only because of their restrictive clothing that they don't.

Yet again, Jiyoung's school conditions her and the other children to hold girls to higher standards than boys. When the teacher suggests that boys naturally "can't sit still for the ten minutes between classes," it switches cause with effect. Boys don't sit still between classes because they're more naturally predisposed to restlessness: it's because the rules let them wear clothes that facilitates *that restlessness. As the rebellious student retorts, were girls allowed to wear similarly comfortable clothing, it's likely that they, too, would play between classes.*

As punishment for not following the dress code, the girl is assigned to walk squats around the track—wearing her uniform, of course. She does so, and the teacher monitoring her demands that she hold her hem down, so as not to show her underwear. But the girl refuses. The teacher makes her quit after just one lap. After that, the official dress code stays the same, but teachers are much more lenient with girls from that day forward.

The student's brave challenge to authority might have landed her in trouble, but her refusal to back down in the face of adversity pays off in the long run when the teachers relent and choose to be less strict in how they enforce the dress code for female students. It's of course wrong that she was punished for calling out injustice in the first place, but the results of her efforts reinforce the importance of women and girls standing up on behalf of one another rather than clinging to unjust, patriarchal values so as not to stir up trouble for themselves.

A flasher is known to lurk around the school grounds and show female students his genitals. One day in the spring, a girl known as a "bully" sees him and gives a catcall. The other girls, even the well-behaved ones, run to the window to join her, giggling and clapping. The ruckus gets the attention of the Head of Student Discipline, who reprimands the girls for being inappropriate—even though it was the flasher, not the girls, who was the one acting out of line. The bully is irate. One day, she and some of her friends track down the flasher before school, beat him up, and drag him into the police station. That takes care of him for good, though the girls are punished and made to write a letter of apology, and the teachers say they should "be ashamed."

In punishing the girls for standing up to a man who has sexually harassed them, the school conditions its students—girls and boys alike—to believe that girls are supposed to sacrifice their own comfort for the comfort of everyone else around them and to uphold the status quo. In fact, it's the flasher who should "be ashamed"—he's harassing children, after all.

Jiyoung starts menstruating in eighth grade. As is typical in most Korean families, "it was a secret shared only among mothers and daughters. An irritating, painful, somehow shameful secret." She does get a gift from Eunyoung, though—a pouch containing six sanitary pads. The second day of her period, Jiyoung gets horrible cramps. She takes painkillers meant for "headaches, toothaches, and menstrual cramps," but they make her feel sick. She wonders why no one has invented an effective medication for menstrual cramps when half the population menstruates. Eunyoung wryly retorts, "The world wants our uterus to be drug-free. Like sacred grounds in a virgin forest."

Yet again, society conditions Jiyoung to be ashamed of something natural, all because of her gender. Half the population menstruates (and indeed, without menstruation—an essential function of the female reproductive system—society would cease to exist at all), and yet the sexist culture in which Jiyoung grows up teaches her to see it as something shameful that has no place in polite society. Jiyoung is fortunate to have an advocate and confidant in Eunyoung. But while their support for each other might alleviate some of the strangeness and discomfort of menstruation and the awkwardness of puberty, it does little to meaningfully improve things on a societal level.

Jiyoung attends a girls' high school a 15-minute bus ride from her home. Suddenly, her whole world expands, and she learns that the world is "filled with perverts." She and the other girls are regularly groped on the bus—and at school, by male teachers. It's worse for girls who take part-time work, for their employers harass them, too.

Up to this point, Jiyoung has lived a sheltered and somewhat privileged life—she has a mother who tries, at least on some level, to shield her daughters from the worst of the world's sexism. Once Jiyoung starts high school, though, she must enter the wider world—and with it, subject herself to all the awful, sexist atrocities that her society allows, like predatory male teachers and employers.

One day, the cram school where Jiyoung takes extra math classes gets out late, and Jiyoung must take the bus back at night, in the dark. At the bus stop, a boy who Jiyoung doesn't know but who claims to be in her class harasses her. Once they get on the bus, a female passenger lends Jiyoung her phone, and Jiyoung frantically texts her father to meet her at the bus stop. But the male student gets off the bus with Jiyoung and angrily accuses her of flirting with him in class and being a tease. Luckily, the woman from the bus gets off and waits with the panicked Jiyoung.

A cram school is a specialized school that trains students to achieve a particular goal, most often to pass standardized tests. Cram schools are common in South Korea, where the educational system is fiercely competitive. Due to her gender, Jiyoung can't funnel all her energy into succeeding at her schoolwork, though—she must also worry about protecting herself from male predators like the angry male classmate. The woman on the bus demonstrates solidarity with Jiyoung when she follows Jiyoung off the bus to wait with Jiyoung until her father arrives. One can surmise that the woman has experienced predatory behavior from men herself and empathizes with Jiyoung's fear.

When Jiyoung's father arrives, the woman explains to him what happened. She tells him to comfort Jiyoung, who has just been through a scary experience. Jiyoung and her father take a cab back home. Instead, he berates her for being provocative. "It's your job to avoid dangerous places, times of day and people," he tells her. Later, Jiyoung's mother calls the woman from the bus to thank her. Jiyoung later calls the woman herself, and the woman assures Jiyoung that what happened wasn't Jiyoung's fault. Jiyoung quits the cram school after this event.

Jiyoung's father, notably, neither understands Jiyoung's fear nor extends any compassion to her. He refuses to see things from her perspective and instead blames her for somehow causing the boy to harass her. In this way, he conditions—or at least tries to condition—Jiyoung to believe that she is responsible not just for her own behavior, but for the behavior of others. It's lucky that Jiyoung receives validation from the woman from the bus, but it speaks to the culture's deep-seated misogyny that Jiyoung's father would defend the actions of a predatory male stranger over the welfare of his own daughter.

The Korean financial crisis of 1997 leaves Jiyoung's father, a civil service worker, struggling to support his family. Eunyoung is in the 12th grade now, and she's maintained her grades despite the anxious atmosphere of her home. Her mother suggests she attend a teacher training college outside of Seoul, noting the lower cost of tuition, the job stability, and the summers off. "There's nothing like teaching for working moms," says her mother. Eunyoung protests that her mother wouldn't be saying that to her and Jiyoung's brother.

Jiyoung's mother might challenge her culture's sexism in some ways, but she also unwittingly perpetuates some of the inequality that set her back in life as a young person. Here, she unwittingly suggests that Eunyoung ought to plan her future career around her responsibilities as a parent—responsibilities Eunyoung will inevitably assume because she is a girl. Eunyoung is right to challenge her mother's logic—surely, Oh Misook would not suggest that her son orient his entire future around potentially becoming a parent.

In their adolescence, Jiyoung and Eunyoung's parents never tell them "to meet a nice man and marry well, to grow up to be a good mother and a good cook." They do lots of chores, but mostly just to help out their parents. It's the norm now for girls to go to school, get good grades, and achieve goals, just as the boys do. Around the turn of the century, as Eunyoung and Jiyoung are coming of age, there are various laws passed to ensure gender equality. Still, there are times when "the 'woman' stigma" still rises to the surface. Eunyoung at first challenges why her mother suggested she be a teacher, but after her mother answers honestly that she thinks being a teacher is just "a really great job in many ways," Eunyoung revises her plans and studies to become a teacher.

In many ways, Jiyoung and Eunyoung have a more progressive upbringing than other girls their age may experience—their parents teach them to be self-sufficient and responsible, and they emphasize the importance of education in its own right. Likewise, society tries to advertise its own progressive values with the passage of laws intended to protect gender inequality. All this is merely symbolic, though, if people—and society as a whole—fail to practice what they preach. Eunyoung's decision to become a teacher after her mother answers her honestly further solidifies Eunyoung as a character who values female solidarity. Eunyoung values her mother's personal interests and opinions, and she embraces the idea of becoming a teacher when she learns her mother thinks that teaching is "a really great job" in its own right, not just because it's convenient to accommodating the competing responsibilities of a working mother.

Eunyoung is accepted to a teacher training college and moves into a dorm there. When Jiyoung and Jiyoung's mother returns home on move-in day, she cries over her regrets about pressuring her daughter into doing something she didn't want to do. Jiyoung tries to comfort her, suggesting that Eunyoung would never do anything she didn't want.

Jiyoung's mother's tears underscore her good intentions. She wants to do right by her daughters, as her own parents failed to do with her. But in a society that saddles women and girls with so many unjust extra expectations, it's difficult to know how best to help her daughters. Is she helping them more to prepare them for success in society as it currently is—however unjust that may be—or should she encourage them to follow their dreams and passions at all costs?

To get access to his retirement fund, Jiyoung's father retires early from his government job. He wants to use most of the severance money to start a China import-export business, but Jiyoung's mother objects. "I know you better than you know yourself," she tells him. Jiyoung's father listens to his wife about the import-export business. Jiyoung's mother says they'll open a business together instead, and she purchases a lot on the first floor of a new commercial building. They start a few mildly successful restaurants, but most fail.

Even though she isn't considered the head of the household, this section makes clear that Jiyoung's mother is really the one running the family's affairs. And through her shrewd business sense, the family manages to stay afloat despite the horrific economic conditions. Even so, no one seems to get her credit for her major role in the family's finances.

Meanwhile, Jiyoung tries to ignore the tense atmosphere of her home to focus on studying for her college entrance exams. Jiyoung is accepted into an arts and humanities school in Seoul. Jiyoung's mother tells her the family will cover her first year's tuition, then they'll go from there. On graduation day, Jiyoung celebrates with Eunyoung and gets drunk for the first time. She gets so drunk she passes out. Though her parents scold Eunyoung for corrupting Jiyoung, they don't say much to Jiyoung about it.

Once more, although Jiyoung's mother upholds some of her culture's problematic views on gender, she tries to look after her daughters' interests and give them a life that's better than the one she was allowed to have. This is why she tells Jiyoung that the family will pay for Jiyoung's first year of college tuition—and perhaps why neither she nor her husband says a word when Jiyoung comes home drunk after graduation. Jiyoung's mother wants her daughter to live life on her own terms—at least for a while.

CHAPTER 4: EARLY ADULTHOOD, 2001–2011

Jiyoung planned to get good grades in college and earn a scholarship, but she only gets a 2.0 GPA her first semester. It's hard to succeed when college is so competitive. And she has it good compared to her peers who have no parental support—her first close friend went on a leave of absence after her freshman year because she couldn't keep up between her numerous part-time jobs, classes, and grading papers.

This section emphasizes how social and economic forces act on a person's life and affect their mental wellness. In this case, the unhealthy state of South Korea's economy while Jiyoung is in college raises the pressure for students to succeed—and creates extra barriers toward that success. The sexism Jiyoung will experience both in school and when she enters the workforce merely adds to her struggle.

Jiyoung meets her first boyfriend in college at the hiking club. He's a physical education major and takes her to baseball games and soccer matches. He points out key players to pay attention to and some rules to note, but after that he's quiet. He tells her he thinks that guys who insist on explaining everything to their girlfriends are "full of themselves." The couple goes to see movies, too, and Jiyoung always chooses what they see.

At first, Jiyoung's first boyfriend seems to be a beacon of hope for Jiyoung. His characterization of guys who condescend to their girlfriends, explaining every little detail of sporting events to them as though they're not smart enough to catch on themselves, suggests that he—unlike those other guys—sees Jiyoung and women in general as equals worthy of basic respect. That the boyfriend and Jiyoung each experience the other's interests together points to the equality at the heart of their relationship.

Meanwhile, back home, Jiyoung's mother learns that a pediatric hospital is opening across the street from their former fried chicken franchise. She insists they start a porridge shop for takeout there. Jiyoung's father is doubtful at first, but he eventually gives in, and the business is an enormous success—fortunately for them, the hospital food is very bad. One night, Jiyoung's father comes home overjoyed and drunk after a night out celebrating his success with his old civil-service friends. He throws money into Jiyoung and Eunyoung's hands. Jiyoung's mother reminds him that the porridge shop was her idea, and anyway, he didn't do all this himself—"It's seventy-thirty at the very least. I did seventy. You did thirty."

This section drives home both Jiyoung's mother's business sense—and the lack of credit she gets for it. That Jiyoung's father fails to recognize how much work his wife has put into keeping the household afloat speaks to society's general disregard for women and its failure to appreciate conventionally feminine work of childrearing and domestic labor. In his failure to recognize the major role his wife has played in ensuring the family's financial security, Jiyoung's father embodies the mindset of the average man who has been brought up in a culture that devalues women's work by default.

Jiyoung's first boyfriend enters the army after his sophomore year of college and quickly grows depressed and angry about wasting his youth. He and Jiyoung fight all the time. It gets to be too much for Jiyoung, and she breaks up with him. He badgers her for a long time after, texting her in the middle of the night and even showing up drunk outside her parents' porridge shop.

Although the first boyfriend initially seemed to view Jiyoung as an equal, his failure to respect her choice to break up betrays his true feelings about her, both as a romantic partner and as a person in general. In refusing to accept the choice, he shows that he does not value her as a person in her own right—his care for her stops once she fails to meet his needs.

Jiyoung rejoins the hiking club, though she feels awkward about it after what happened with her boyfriend. The boys patronize the girls, calling them "flowers among weeds" and giving them better rooms when the group goes out of town for hiking trips. Jiyoung's friend Seungyeon speaks out against the unequal treatment, especially the fact that the group has never had a female president. Years later, Jiyoung hears that the group finally did elect a woman president, but Seungyeon hardly reacts. "You know what they say—time moves mountains and rivers."

Sexism often takes the form of the poor treatment of women by men, but Seungyeon points out here that men's preferential treatment of women can also reflect a sexist worldview and perpetuate inequality. The male members of the hiking club, for instance, give the female members better rooms because they see them as fragile and less capable. The years it takes for the club to elect a female president reveals the disrespect that's ultimately at the heart of this preferential treatment.

On a trip with the hiking group, Jiyoung feels cold and retreats to a heated room where the new recruits are playing cards and chatting. She bundles under some blankets and falls asleep. When she wakes, she hears a group of boys—clearly unaware that she's there—gossiping about her. One describes her as "like chewing gum someone spat out." Jiyoung recognizes the voice as that of one of the older guys. She'd always gotten along with him fine, and she can hardly comprehend that he'd say something so cruel about her now. Not wanting to reveal herself, Jiyoung stays under her blankets until the boys leave. The next day, the guy who was talking about her greets her in the hallway, "warmly and calmly as ever."

The vitriol with which the older guy insults Jiyoung's appearance—regardless of the fact that he didn't realize she was within earshot and overheard everything—points to the conditional nature of his (and in the book's framing, men's in general) respect for women. Jiyoung and presumably the other women in his life are only worthy of respect insofar as he finds them sexually or romantically attractive. He does not, in other words, believe that Jiyoung deserves dignity and respect simply because she is a human being. He believes that as a woman, she must have some worth to him to have worth at all.

Jiyoung completes her junior year and starts to prepare for employment, studying hard and taking classes at a local cultural center. She and another girl, Hyejin, enter some government competitions for college students together and win a few prizes. When Hyejin voices her doubts about getting hired at a highly esteemed company, Jiyoung is surprised, since Hyejin's grades are much better than Jiyoung's. Hyejin tells Jiyoung that you have to go to a more esteemed college to get an amazing job—only male alumni from their school get hired anywhere good. Hasn't Jiyoung noticed that all the alumni at the job fairs are men?

This section makes very clear the extra barriers to professional success that South Korean women face, even in an increasingly modern and progressive culture. Whereas male students can find good jobs regardless of which university they graduated from, female students must graduate from the most elite universities if they want employers to take them seriously. This points to the broader idea that society sees smart, capable women as the exception rather than the rule. Meanwhile, it's assumed that men are basically competent.

Hyejin tells a story about a female alumna who filed a complaint against a company for not hiring her because she was a woman. When the department head responded, he told her "Companies find smart women taxing. Like now—you're being very taxing, you know?" Jiyoung realizes there's no way to win as a woman.

Hyejin's cautionary tale drives home for Jiyoung how nearly impossible it is to achieve professional success as a young woman. Companies by default don't take women seriously or see them as smart, valuable potential employees. And when a woman proves that she is indeed smart and capable, then she's considered "taxing" and unpleasant to work with. This unreasonably high standard, the book suggests, does not exist in the same way for men.

Jiyoung starts applying for jobs. She applies to over 40 large companies, but none of them hire her. Then she applies to smaller companies and still she gets no response. Finally, she sends out applications to practically every company that is hiring and finally gets a response. Jiyoung stays up late practicing the night before the interview. At the interview, she and the other two female candidates are asked how they'd respond if a client gets "handsy" with them. Jiyoung, wanting to answer in a neutral way, says she'd leave the room. The second says she'd tell the client to stop sexually harassing her or else she'd press charges. The third says she "would check [her] outfit and attitude" to see what she might have done to encourage the handsy client. In the end, none of the women get the job.

Jiyoung's consistent lack of success applying for jobs seems to suggest that Hyejin wasn't exaggerating when she warned Jiyoung about companies' sexism against female professionals. The inappropriate question the interviewer asks the three female applicants shows that women are treated unfairly even by companies willing to grant them interviews in the first place—the sexist question implicitly asks the women to prove to their potential employer that they won't be a liability to hire. It's clear that the interviewer isn't asking the question to look out for potential female employees' safety—it's to see whether the potential female employees will be willing to set aside their own dignity and comfort to protect their employer, putting up with possible "handsy" clients for the sake of business.

Jiyoung's mother and sister tell her not to get discouraged, but Jiyoung starts to panic about not being able to find a job. Over dinner one night, Jiyoung's father tells her, "You just stay out of trouble and get married." In response, Jiyoung's mother slams the spoon down on the table and tells Jiyoung's father to never say something "so backward" to Jiyoung again. Jiyoung's father is so shocked at his wife's rage that he starts to hiccup. Later that night, Jiyoung gets a call from a marketing agency she applied to work at—she's hired.

Jiyoung's father's offhanded suggestion that Jiyoung should just "get married" indicates that he does not see his daughters as valuable and worthy of dignity in their own right. His primary concern is that Jiyoung's financial needs are met—whether by her family, by her own income, or by her future husband. He does not care about Jiyoung's own wants or needs—he doesn't even pause to consider, for instance, that Jiyoung might want a job for personal satisfaction. Jiyoung's mother shows solidarity with her daughters when she berates her husband for speaking so regressively. Jiyoung's hiring that evening suggests that her luck is starting to change for the better, but for how long remains unknown.

Jiyoung graduates, and her parents meet her new boyfriend for the first time. After the ceremony, Jiyoung and the boyfriend go for a stroll together, and it starts to snow. The boyfriend catches a falling snowflake and makes a wish. When Jiyoung asks what he wished for, he says he wishes her first job is "not so challenging, not so demoralizing, not so exhausting."

Jiyoung's new boyfriend is perhaps trying to be supportive and caring when he uses his snowflake to wish her good luck on her new job. But the fact that he wishes for the absence of too many horrible things, rather than the addition of good fortune, points to the unsatisfactory working conditions for young women in South Korea at this time: it's a given to the boyfriend that Jiyoung's job will be "challenging," "demoralizing," and "exhausting"—he just hopes it won't be overwhelming so.

Jiyoung's company is on the larger side, with around 50 employees. Most of the high-ranking positions are filled by men. Jiyoung makes her team coffee every morning, exactly how they like it. Her team leader, Kim Eunsil, is the only woman leader. People have mixed opinions about Kim Eunsil—some think she's great, others say she "ha[s] a heart of stone." Her mother takes care of her children while she works. Some of the guys at work think her husband must be "an obliging person" to be willing to live with his mother-in-law. Inwardly, Jiyoung thinks about how her own mother cooked and cleaned for her mother-in-law for 17 years, yet "no one praised the mother for being obliging."

The fact that Kim Eunsil is the only woman at Jiyoung's company in a management role points to the company's sexism on an institutional level. The heavy scrutiny she receives for aspects of her personal life that have nothing to do with her ability to do her job further points to the company's culture of gender inequality and misogyny. That Kim Eunsil's mother lives with Kim Eunsil and her family in no way indicates that Kim Eunsil "ha[s] a heart of stone"—to the contrary, it suggests she is generous and warmhearted. Her employees' speculation about her personality, marriage, and home life in general sheds light on the higher standards to which Korean culture (and patriarchal cultures in general) holds working women.

One day, Kim Eunsil compliments Jiyoung on the first report she wrote. Jiyoung takes the praise to heart, beaming. Kim Eunsil also tells Jiyoung that she doesn't have to make coffee for everyone anymore. She notes how it's always the female new hires who do such tasks without people having to ask—they see things need to be done, and they do them. The male new hires never do.

Kim Eunsil acts in solidarity with Jiyoung when she comments on female employees' tendency to perform tasks without being asked. She's showing Jiyoung that she recognizes all the ways society expects more of women and how it has taught them since girlhood to look out for the comfort and welfare of others over themselves.

Kim Eunsil tells Jiyoung that she has worked at the company since it was just a small operation. She was so determined to be taken seriously that she returned to work just one month after giving birth. At first she was proud of her work ethic, but then she realized that she had more likely just made things worse for the female employees who worked under her, making them feel as if they couldn't take advantage of the benefits guaranteed them. When she became a manger, she got rid of unnecessary late-night dinners and retreats that made it difficult for working parents to succeed, and she guaranteed maternity leave. She was so proud after one of her employees returned to work from her year-long maternity leave.

Kim Eunsil's story shows how sexism puts working women in an impossible situation. It forces them to choose between protecting their own interests and safeguarding the success they've managed to achieve despite the workforce's culture of rampant sexism. Kim Eunsil wanted to be taken seriously, for instance, so she went back to work right after giving birth to prove her seriousness to her male colleagues. Kim Eunsil's later behavior—putting policies in place to protect her female employees—shows that it's never too late to advocate on behalf of other women. People can always choose solidarity.

Jiyoung asks where the woman is now. Kim Eunsil says the new mom left only a few months after—she couldn't help out with all the late nights, she spent most of her paycheck on the babysitter, she was always looking for last-minute care, and she was constantly fighting with her husband. The employee apologized to Kim Eunsil for quitting, and "Kim Eunsil didn't know what to say."

The disappointing fate of the female worker Kim Eunsil tried to support reveals the limited ability of acts of individual solidarity to meaningfully address systemic sexism. Kim Eunsil's efforts to support the woman might have been well intentioned, but good intentions do nothing to address the high cost of childcare and society's lacking infrastructure to accommodate working parents. This speaks to the culture's broader disregard for professional women. If society thought it was important for women to balance work with childrearing, then it would create more legal measures and infrastructure to help working mothers.

Jiyoung likes her job and her coworkers, and she works hard and does well. At a business lunch at an upscale Korean restaurant, though, the head of a client company notices Jiyoung order soybean paste, laughs, and says, "I didn't know you were a doenjangnyeo, too, Ms. Kim!" *Doenjangnyeo* means "bean paste woman," and it's a misogynistic slang term that's popular at the time. Everyone at the table laughs. Jiyoung can't tell if the older man knows the connotation of what he said or was just trying to be funny, but it makes her feel uncomfortable. Things like this happen frequently.

The harassment Jiyoung experiences at the client dinner highlights the additional obstacles professional women face due to sexism. It unfortunately points to the potential employer's reason for posing the sexist question to his female interviewees at Jiyoung's earlier interview (how would the women handle a "handsy" client). This scene makes clear that Jiyoung and other women in her position will encounter male clients who disrespect them—and that they'll have to sacrifice their dignity and comfort for the sake of the company if they want to keep their jobs.

At a business dinner one night, the division head of a client insists on serving Jiyoung drink after drink. She tries to dump them into empty cups on the table when he's not looking, but she still ends up very drunk. Finally, the division head announces that he must leave—his college-student daughter wants him to come get her because she's afraid to walk home alone at night. Inwardly, Jiyoung considers how people like this man are the ones making it unsafe for people like his daughter to be alone.

The division head's ignorance about his own active participation in the very predatory behavior that makes his daughter afraid to walk home from school speaks to how ingrained misogyny and sexism is in the culture. It also reaffirms the man's (conscious or unconscious) sexism that he cares about his daughter—a woman who matters personally to him—but disregards the welfare of other women like Jiyoung. Ultimately, then, his care for his daughter represents not concern for women, but rather concern for himself.

Kim Eunsil finally orders that it's time for Jiyoung and Jiyoung's young, male coworker to leave. She gets a cab for herself, saying her mother is sick. Jiyoung and her coworker stand outside a convenience store drinking canned coffee, trying to sober up. But she's so relaxed from finally being out of the uncomfortable business dinner that she passes out, right there at a picnic table outside the store. Her boyfriend calls then, and the coworker picks up. He tries to explain the situation to the boyfriend, but the boyfriend is angry. He comes to get Jiyoung and brings her safely home, but they break up after this.

The boyfriend was so supportive of Jiyoung during her job-application process and so understanding of her busy work schedule, but the moment her work impacts him negatively—it has seemingly hurt his pride to have a strange male answer Jiyoung's phone and look after her—his patience erodes. This is similar to the division head's tunnel vision about women's safety in that both men purport to care about women's welfare, but that care must be on their own terms and must not inconvenience them too much. Like the division head, the boyfriend ultimately cares about how Jiyoung's work and safety affect his own interests—he doesn't care about Jiyoung in her own right.

Jiyoung's company puts together a planning team. Kim Eunsil says Jiyoung would make a good fit, but in the end, she doesn't make the team. The team consists of two people from middle management and two male coworkers who started at the same time. Jiyoung and Kang Hyesu, the other female colleague who started at the same time as her, "feel robbed," especially since the guys have thus far handled the easier clients. A rift forms between the four coworkers after this. They used to constantly text one another in a group chat, but now they don't. Their usual bar nights have also stopped. Finally, Kang Hyesu decides to put a stop to this and forces everyone to go out for drinks together.

The fact that Jiyoung doesn't make the team, despite Kim Eunsil's belief that Jiyoung would be a good fit, perhaps speaks to Kim Eunsil's limited power in management. She might be the rare woman in a position of authority, but ultimately her opinion matters less than the men's, if for no reason other than the fact that the men outnumber her. The rift that forms between Jiyoung and Kang Hyesu and their two male coworkers speaks to how sexism harms everyone: the four colleagues used to be friends and enjoy one another's company, but management's potentially unfair favoritism toward the men destroys that friendly working relationship. This points to how sexism and misogyny are constructed features of society, created and upheld by power hierarchies—they aren't the natural state of things.

The group stays out late, though no one gets particularly drunk, and they trade confessions. One of the male colleagues admits, "I don't think I belong on the planning team." Jiyoung learns that night that the head of the company picked the team based on it being a long-term project—he wanted consistency, and he figured that the male colleagues would be around for longer and wouldn't be as concerned about childcare and work-life balance. That's also why Jiyoung and Hyesu got the high-maintenance clients: not because of their skill, but because management didn't want to tire out the male colleagues right off the bat.

Here, the male colleague makes it clear that he and his male coworker did not earn their placement on the leadership team fairly: it was a rigged game all along. He seems to have good intentions with his admission—he wants to be honest to Jiyoung and Hyesu that they are perhaps more qualified to be on the team to validate their skill and work ethic. At the same time, though, the admission also makes clear to the women that regardless of how skilled or competent they are, their efforts and successes will never be enough. Their employers and the workforce as a whole will inevitably devalue them and make extra considerations about them based solely on their gender.

CHAPTER 5: MARRIAGE, 2012–2015

Jiyoung's parents and her fiancé Jung Daehyun's parents meet for the first time at a Korean restaurant in Gangnam. Jiyoung's mother jokes about how little her daughter knows how to "keep[] a home," and both mothers talk about how their daughters spent their time studying and working. Still, Daehyun's mother assures, Jiyoung will get the hang of things in the end. Inwardly, Jiyoung thinks that won't be the case—Daehyun knows more about housework that she does, after all—he's lived alone for years.

Jiyoung's mother has demonstrated on several occasions her determination to support her daughters against society's sexism and misogyny, yet she still upholds some of the same sexist beliefs that have made her own life so exhausting and thankless. There's no reason Jiyoung should be the person in her marriage expected to "keep[] a home"—indeed, as Jiyoung points out, it's more logical that Daehyun, who has experience living on his own, would be better equipped to keep house. Nevertheless, social norms dictate that regardless of experience, Jiyoung's gender makes her better equipped to perform such work.

Daehyun and Jiyoung combine their savings to put a deposit down on a small apartment. Jiyoung didn't have to pay rent or utilities because she had lived at home, but Daehyun, who works for a much bigger company, managed to save much more. She's "a little demoralized" to realize the gap between their savings. Still, married life is pretty good. They both work long hours, but they go to see late-night movies together, and on weekends they sleep in and watch movies in bed while eating toast that Daehyun makes.

The implication here is that the gender pay gap has factored into Jiyoung's inability to save as much as Daehyun. This section shows how systemic inequality (the gender pay gap) can lead to inequality at the micro level. Jiyoung and Daehyun might think of each other as equals, but their inability to contribute equal funds to their apartment deposit introduces an element of inequality into the relationship, nevertheless. In time, these small inequalities will erode the happiness and contentment that Jiyoung and Daehyun feel in the early days of their marriage.

On the one-month anniversary of their wedding, Daehyun presents Jiyoung with a form to legally register their marriage. Jiyoung suggests there's no rush—they already had a wedding ceremony, and it's not like a piece of paper will change their feelings for each other. But Daehyun says, "it changes how we feel." Daehyun's response stresses her out—to her, the legality of their relationship doesn't change her feelings about it. But does Daehyun think he'll feel more committed to her if he signs the form? Regardless, they fill out the paperwork that night.

Symbolically—to Jiyoung and to readers—Daehyun's remark here that signing a marriage contract "changes how [he and Jiyoung] feel" about each other points to how social norms shape *people's beliefs, emotions, and relationships—they don't reflect how people naturally feel. In sharing this view of his, Daehyun unwittingly reveals that he is willing to let such norms shape his feelings—toward Jiyoung, and perhaps toward how gender roles will affect their marriage, too. Jiyoung is bothered that Daehyun actually thinks signing a marriage contract will make their love meaningfully different because it indicates that he buys into other potentially harmful social norms, as well.*

When it comes time to decide which last name their future child will take, Daehyun says he thinks his name is a good surname. Although the *hoju* system that required all family members to be registered under the father's last name was abolished in 2009, it's still incredibly rare for children to take their mother's name. Reluctantly, Jiyoung agrees that their child will take Daehyun's name, but she doesn't feel good about it.

Sure enough, Daehyun's suggestion that his and Jiyoung's future baby should take his last name reveals how willingly he goes along with patriarchal social norms. He does not question norms that don't actively harm himself. He seems oblivious—or is perhaps choosing to be willfully ignorant—about how this choice might negatively affect Jiyoung.

Jiyoung's parents and Daehyun's parents are both "waiting for 'the good news.'" After a few months pass without the couple announcing a pregnancy, they begin to wonder if Jiyoung has health problems. At a birthday dinner for Daehyun's father, some of Daehyun's extended family—whom Jiyoung hasn't even met before—explicitly say as much, suggesting she has bad circulation or an unhealthy uterus. She wants to tell them that family planning is between her and Daehyun and that it's none of his family's business, but she keeps these thoughts to herself. The couple fights on the drive back to Seoul. Jiyoung is hurt and angered that Daehyun didn't stick up for her in front of his family.

Daehyun once more demonstrates his shortcomings as a partner when he fails to validate or acknowledge his family's inappropriate, sexist attacks on Jiyoung. As a blood relative, he's in a far more privileged position to talk back to his family and call out their inappropriate remarks without causing irreparable damage to his relationship with them—yet out of either ignorance, indifference, or cowardice, he fails to use that privilege to act as an advocate for Jiyoung.

When they reach home, Daehyun finally apologizes: he agrees he should have defended Jiyoung in front of his family. Still, he says, having a kid would get his family to stop nagging—he and Jiyoung plan to have a kid anyway, so why not now? Jiyoung can't believe how casually he says this, as though asking something as unremarkable as "Let's try the Norwegian mackerel." Jiyoung's older sister Eunyoung married last year and doesn't have a child, so Jiyoung has never been around a pregnant woman or a baby, and she doesn't know what to expect. She's also concerned about how it will affect her career.

Even though he admits to being wrong, Daehyun's failure to stand up for Jiyoung in the moment more or less undermines his belated apology to Jiyoung. If he can't back his expressions of solidarity with tangible actions, then those words are ultimately useless in terms of their ability to empower Jiyoung and minimize her suffering. And his suggestion that he and Jiyoung give in to his family's pressure as a solution to the problem only reinforces how unwilling he is to meaningfully support Jiyoung and see things from Jiyoung's perspective.

When Jiyoung raises her concerns about having a baby with Daehyun, he promises to "help out." Jiyoung, in response, lists all the things she'd be giving up: possibly her career, or guilt over leaving her baby for someone else to take care of while she works. Daehyun listens to her anxieties, but he tells her that what she gains will be far better than whatever she gives up. And if it comes down to it, it's fine for her to quit her job, since Daehyun can take care of them all. Jiyoung asks Daehyun what he'll be giving up. He lists not being able to stay out with his friends as late and maybe feeling bad about attending business dinners. Jiyoung tries not to show it, but inside, she despairs at how minimal Daehyun's sacrifices seem compared to what she'd have to give up.

Daehyun yet again shows how his relative privilege as a male in a patriarchal society leaves him ignorant about the struggles Jiyoung faces as a woman. Jiyoung is right to call him out for suggesting that he can "help out" with his and Jiyoung's child—the child equally belongs to them both, and so they should share equal work in raising the child. It's not enough, in other words, for Daehyun to just "help out." The brief list of things he predicts he'll have to give up once the baby comes reaffirms his privilege and his ignorance—he seems totally unaware of how much more Jiyoung will have to give up by comparison.

Jiyoung does get pregnant, and she has horrible morning sickness until the end of her pregnancy. Her company lets pregnant employees to push their work hours back by half an hour, so when Jiyoung announces her pregnancy at work, one of her male colleagues says, "Lucky you! You get to come to work late!" Jiyoung thinks about how lucky she is to "get to retch all the time," and be in unceasing discomfort, but she keeps her thoughts to herself. Instead, she angrily declares that she will arrive at work on time. In retrospect, she wonders if she's making things harder for the younger women in the office, who might feel that they should follow her example and not use the benefits they're owed.

The male colleague's infuriating remark that Jiyoung is in fact "lucky" to be pregnant since it means she gets to arrive to work 30 minutes later than her non-pregnant colleagues further illuminates the male population's general ignorance about women's struggles. When one factors in how horribly sick Jiyoung has felt and how the birth of her child will likely negatively affect her opportunities for advancement at work and her pay, to name just a few indirect side effects that will likely result from her pregnancy, arriving at work 30 minutes late is hardly a perk.

On the tube ride home one day, the car is totally packed. One woman notes Jiyoung's pregnant body and tries to find someone to give up their seat for her—the woman would, but she sprained her ankle last week. Everyone avoids eye contact, not wanting to give up their seat. Finally, a university student gets up, annoyed. When she brushes past Jiyoung, she hisses in Jiyoung's ear about her working while being so heavily pregnant—it must mean she "can't afford a kid." Jiyoung starts to cry and gets off at the next stop. She takes a cab the rest of the way.

The two women on the train react to Jiyoung's pregnancy in opposite ways, and this contrast highlights the harm that people cause when women internalize the sexism they're immersed in in their daily lives rather than challenging that sexism to help other women. Rather than responding with empathy and compassion as the older woman does, the female university student reacts to Jiyoung's inconveniencing her by insulting Jiyoung, parroting the sexist rhetoric she's likely heard men and boys direct at women. The young female college student could well be in Jiyoung's position someday, so not only does she harm Jiyoung here when she buys into her society's sexist ideals, but she also indirectly harms her future self.

The obstetrician tells Jiyoung to "buy pink baby clothes," meaning the baby is a girl. Jiyoung and Daehyun didn't have a gender preference, but their parents did. Jiyoung's mom says, "It's okay, the next one will be a boy." Daehyun's mom says, "I don't mind." Even women Jiyoung's age say things like, "I can hold my head up high around my in-laws now that I have a boy." Near her due date, Jiyoung and Daehyun decide that one of them—Jiyoung—will have to be the stay-at-home parents due to neither of their parents' ability to help and the high cost of daycare. Jiyoung knew this is what would happen, yet she still feels "depressed." After Daehyun promises to "help out" with childcare, Jiyoung lashes out at him. How is it "helping out" when it's Daehyun's kid, too? She apologizes immediately after.

The obstetrician's directive to "buy pink baby clothes," referencing the gendered stereotype that blue is for boys and pink is for girls, is a minor detail, and hardly all that harmful compared to the other instances of sexism Jiyoung has encountered throughout her life thus far. Nevertheless, it reinforces just how engrained such stereotypes are in the culture—there's no logical reason why Jiyoung would want to buy pink clothes for her baby girl other than that it's the color society associates with girls. More harmful is the implicit disappointment Jiyoung faces from people in her life when she tells them the news of the baby's gender—even her own mother is disappointed (and she assumes that Jiyoung is disappointed too). Jiyoung experiences another setback—albeit one she expected—when she and Daehyun decide that she'll quit her job to care for their baby. Daehyun's repeated insistence that he'll "help out" with the baby shows his persistent ignorance about Jiyoung's feelings and all the extra work society—and indeed, even Daehyun himself—expects Jiyoung to take on just because of her gender.

Jiyoung doesn't cry when she tells the head of the company or Kim Eunsil that she's quitting. The first morning after she quits, she sees Daehyun off to work and then gets back into bed. She wakes up again at nine and mentally plans out her day ahead, thinking what she'll do after she gets off work—only to remember that she has no work anymore. Then she starts to cry. Her job wasn't flashy or particularly lucrative, but she enjoyed her colleagues, and it made her happy. In 2014, around when Jiyoung quits her job, one in five married women in Korean leaves work either due to marriage, pregnancy, or childrearing.

Jiyoung reaches a new low as she realizes with deep clarity just how much she is giving up to become a mother: in giving up her work, she not only gives up economic independence and an outlet for her professional ambition, but she also more or less gives up an identity that isn't wrapped up in her domestic life with Daehyun. The statistic that concludes this section shows the shortcomings of various legal measures the book has previously cited to actually achieve more gender equality in the workforce. Although measures like guaranteed parental leave have been put in place to theoretically assist working mothers, the various other ways in which Korean society has failed to protect the interests of women—cost-prohibitive daycare and regressive social norms regarding women's natural place in the home, for instance—prevents such measures from meaningfully allowing women to remain in the workforce.

Jiyoung is past her due date and doesn't show signs of going into labor, so she and the doctor agree to induce her. She has a long, painful labor, but in the end she gives birth to Jiwon, a baby girl. But Jiwon cries constantly, and Jiyoung has to do chores while holding her. Jiyoung also has to breastfeed every two hours, which means she can't get more than two hours of sleep at a time.

This section paints an unflinchingly realistic portrait of Jiyoung's experience as a stay-at-home mother. As this scene shows, Jiyoung is constantly at work, keeping house and tending to Jiwon. And her work isn't over at the end of the standard business day: breastfeeding her newborn is an around-the-clock job (and, it's worth noting, a job for which she receives no monetary compensation).

One day, Jiyoung's wrists hurt so badly she can't move them. She leaves the baby with Daehyun and goes to a doctor. The doctor explains that the joints get sore after giving birth. He tells her to rest her wrists—it's the only way for them to heal. Jiyoung protests that she can't—she has to care for her baby and do the washing and cleaning. The doctor just laughs and says that women back in the day "lit fires to boil baby clothes, and crawled around to do the sweeping and the mopping." Doesn't Jiyoung have a washing machine? Women today have no reason to complain. Inwardly, Jiyoung boils with anger. "Dirty laundry doesn't march into the machine itself," she thinks to herself. And why are technological advancements in other fields celebrated without attacking those workers for their supposed laziness?

It's illogical, ignorant, and unprofessional of the doctor to patronize Jiyoung, scolding her for complaining about all the work she has to do. First, Jiyoung has come to him about pain in her wrists—so his moralizing is both irrelevant and totally inappropriate. His moralizing makes clear his—and society's as a whole—sexist beliefs. There's no other industry in which a worker's labor is so blatantly devalued because of technological advancements made in that field. A surgeon isn't told their surgical skill is less impressive since surgeons thousands of years ago didn't have modern medicine to rely on, for instance. It's only because domestic labor is predominantly performed by women, the book implies, that the doctor is so dismissive of the physical toll Jiyoung's work has taken on her body.

Jiyoung's mother can't help Jiyoung with the baby because she's too busy with the porridge shop, but she applauds all Jiyoung's hard, tireless work. Jiyoung asks her mother how things were when she was raising Jiyoung and her siblings. Jiyoung's mother says it was awful—she did everything herself, and she had to take care of Jiyoung's grandmother, too. She was tired and in pain all the time. This is a shock to Jiyoung, who wonders why her mother never spoke up.

Jiyoung's mother's admission about how exhausted she was all throughout Jiyoung's childhood comes as a shock to Jiyoung because her mother's silence ensured all her suffering remained largely invisible to her family. This section thus points to the vital importance of women speaking up about their mistreatment and demanding change—suffering in silence only gives those in positions of relative privilege a pass to continue ignoring that suffering and not do anything to challenge the inequality that has allowed that suffering to persist.

One day, Jiyoung's former colleague Kang Hyesu comes over with onesies, diapers, and lip gloss. She explains that she's been wearing the same gloss, and since she and Jiyoung have a similar complexion, she thought it might look good on Jiyoung, too. The gesture touches Jiyoung—Hyesu isn't pressuring Jiyoung to "doll up," a message a lot of new moms hear. She just thought of Jiyoung and wanted to do something nice for her.

The lip gloss that Kang Hyesu brings Jiyoung is itself not much—it's the symbolism of that lip gloss that so touches Jiyoung. The lip gloss shows Jiyoung that Kang Hyesu still sees her as a person of value in her own right—she doesn't have to get fit and pretty after becoming a mom to earn back her worth in society's eyes. She's still the same valuable person she was before she gave birth to her daughter.

Jiyoung and Kang Hyesu order Chinese and catch up on gossip. Kang Hyesu tells Jiyoung about the ongoing office scandal: the building's security agent installed a spycam in one of the cubicles in the women's restroom. He was caught because he'd uploaded footage to a pornography website. One of the male section managers at Jiyoung's former company was a member and recognizes the ladies' room and some of the women's clothing. But instead of reporting what he saw, he shared the photos with his male colleagues.

The scandal at Jiyoung's former company reinforces the sexism that has always tainted the workplace environment there. The willingness of the male coworkers to share the intimate images of their female coworkers indicates that even before things turned criminal, the men had no respect for the women they worked with as fellow humans.

One of the men at the office, who was secretly dating a female employee, told his girlfriend to use a different restroom. She was suspicious and pressed him for details, and eventually he told her everything. The woman told Kang Hyesu, who reported it. And to top it off, the male employees have accused the women of "being too harsh with them." The head of the company wants the issue resolved as quickly as possible, so as not to "ruin this company's reputation." All the women involved in the case—Eunsil, Kang Hyesu, and the victims—are tired and just want things to go back to normal.

That the head of the company wishes to resolve the scandal because he doesn't want it to "ruin the company's reputation" implies that he cares more about the company (and the male employees that company shows preferential treatment toward) than about the safety and wellness of his female employees. The female victims' struggle for justice adds insult to injury. Whatever laws have been passed to protect them from sexual harassment in the workplace are virtually useless if their society does nothing to enforce those laws.

Jung Jiwon starts daycare when she is around a year old. She's dropped off at 9:30 a.m., then returns before 1:00 p.m. This means Jiyoung has around three hours to herself each day, and she spends most of that time doing chores. The daycare teacher says that Jiwon is good and that she might be able to nap at daycare soon, which would give Jiyoung a bit more time to herself. This excites Jiyoung and gets her thinking about starting something new.

With the possibility of Jiwon being able to spend more time at daycare, Jiyoung has the chance to fuel some energy into her own pursuits for the first time in a year—for the first time since Jiwon was born. Of course, the reader's knowledge of the mental illness that Jiyoung develops around a year after Jiwon is born suggests that Jiyoung's hopes will be dashed, though it's not clear when or how that will happen.

Jiyoung and Daehyun's rent went up recently, and they've had to take out another loan. They want to buy a place of their own, but they can't on Daehyun's salary alone. Jiyoung knows a lot of mothers who start working again once they send their child to daycare. Some do freelance work in their given field, while others work as tutors. Most often, though, they get part-time work as cashiers, waitresses, or telemarketers. Ever since the start of government-funded childcare, people have condemned young Korean moms for going out and getting their nails done or getting a coffee while their child is in daycare.

The public's condemnation of Korean mothers doing things for themselves while their children are in government-funded childcare reinforces society's broader disregard for women as people. The disgust aimed at mothers who take a moment for themselves implies a cultural assumption that women are naturally predisposed to tending to others' needs. Women who take even a rare moment for themselves are therefore seen as lazy and entitled. There's a double standard here, though: most people (i.e., men) who work outside the home are typically guaranteed breaks during the workday, something the public generally supports. Following this logic, then, one may argue that society's condemnation of moms taking some time to themselves reflects society's sexist view that conventionally female work (domestic labor, childrearing) isn't actual work.

One day, Jiyoung is walking back from dropping off Jiwon at daycare when she sees an ice cream store looking for part-time workers. "Housewives welcome," the sign reads. Jiyoung stops inside and chats with the woman whose job she'd be taking over, who has to quit because her first child is starting first grade. When Jiyoung asks about benefits, the woman almost laughs—there are none for part-time jobs. The role is very casual. The woman is lucky because her employer is paying her a small severance as thanks for being there so long. Before Jiyoung leaves, the woman remarks, "I have a college degree, too, you know."

In a sense, it would be a case of history repeating itself were Jiyoung to accept a job at the ice cream shop—a contemporary version of the ajumma *work her own mother took on as a housewife a generation before. The cashier's remark about having a college degree comments on how little society values women, effectively barring them from re-entering the workforce after taking time to stay home and care for their children. The fact that she, as a college-educated person, can only find part-time, underpaid work at an ice cream shop, indicates society's refusal to make accommodations for women looking to re-enter the workforce after having children. This in turn speaks to society's broader disregard for women's work and for women as people.*

Jiyoung and Daehyun discuss the potential job later. Daehyun asks if it's what Jiyoung wants to do—he can't suggest she do something she's not happy with. Jiyoung considers this and reasons that she "doesn't like ice cream," and the job doesn't have any discernable paths toward advancement, either. She thinks about her future career and how having to take care of Jiwon now factors into all her decisions. She returns to the ice-cream store the next day, but by then, it has already filled the position. Jiyoung decides to seize the next opportunity for part-time work she can find.

Daehyun seems to recognize that Jiyoung is only interested in taking the job at the ice cream store because it's among the few places that will even offer her a job, given the time she's spent out of the workforce. In this sense, he acts as a caring partner who is attuned to his wife's wants and needs and to society's failure to accommodate those wants and needs. At the same time, there's only so much Daehyun's sympathy can do to meaningfully improve Jiyoung's situation: ultimately, it doesn't change the fact that society mostly offers only unskilled positions to mothers looking to re-enter the workforce and that Jiyoung won't realistically be happy doing any of this sort of work.

Summer turns into autumn. Jiyoung picks up Jiwon from daycare and pushes the stroller to a nearby park to sit in the sun before it gets too cold. She picks up an Americano from a new coffee shop and brings it to the bench. She promptly falls asleep, exhausted. When she wakes, she overhears a group of male office workers criticizing her, *"I wish I could live off my husband's paycheck…bum around and get coffee…mom-roaches got it real cushy."* Jiyoung rushes out of the park and arrives at home "in a daze." She can't focus on anything for the rest of the day. When Daehyun arrives later, she tells him, "People call me 'mom-roach.'" The men were drinking the same coffee she was. They know what it cost—1500 won. She asks Daehyun, "don't I deserve to drink a 1500-won cup of coffee?" And anyway, how is it any of those strangers' business? Daehyun draws her into an embrace and rubs her shoulders.

This tense scene at the park, during which Jiyoung is the object of these ignorant young men's ridicule, seems to be her breaking point. The men's insults insinuate that Jiyoung is lazy because she momentarily falls asleep at the park in the afternoon—it doesn't even cross their minds that she's sleeping not because she's lazy but because she has worked hard at home all day and is exhausted. The existence of the slang term "mom-roach" as an insult indicates that the men's view is a common one in Jiyoung's contemporary society. These men's misogyny is not the exception—it's the rule. Daehyun's embrace shows that he sees and wants to validate his wife's struggle. At the same time, though, there's only so much his compassion can do to improve Jiyoung's situation, which is the consequence of the broader social ills of a misogynistic culture.

CHAPTER 6: 2016

The narrative switches to the perspective of Jiyoung's psychiatrist, who announces that this has been his summary of Jiyoung's life so far. She comes to him for 45-minute sessions two times per week. Her **symptoms** have decreased, but they haven't gone away. He has prescribed her some antidepressants and sleeping pills. At first he thought she might have a dissociative disorder, but then he revised his diagnosis to "a typical case of postnatal depression that progressed to childcare depression." Jiyoung takes some encouragement to open up, but eventually she shares a lot about her upbringing and her inner thoughts. Now, he realizes he may have gotten the diagnosis wrong a second time. If he were the average, middle-aged male, he might have lived his whole life without realizing his error.

Chapter 6 begins with a major plot twist: the story of Jiyoung's life that has comprised the bulk of the novel up to this point has in fact been a report penned by the psychiatrist Daehyun sent Jiyoung to in response to the odd behavior she began to exhibit following Jiwon's birth. This explains the narration's somewhat detached, clinical tone. Still, the psychiatrist's description here of Jiyoung's condition as "a typical case of postnatal depression" makes light of her suffering and somewhat invalidates her story. In calling her case "typical," the doctor suggests that there's nothing so special about Jiyoung or any of the mistreatment she has suffered throughout her life: in the sexist society in which Jiyoung has come of age, her story is quite "typical." His admission that he may be wrong about his diagnosis of Jiyoung—and that the average middle-aged male might remain obvious to such an error—suggests that the psychiatrist might be more sensitive to women's suffering than the average male in his culture.

The psychiatrist's parents live in the far south, and the psychiatrist's wife's parents live in the United States, so his wife at first got by with raising their son with the helping of nannies. But then the boy got in trouble for sticking a pencil through a classmate's hand and for lots of other vicious, bullying behavior. This shocked the psychiatrist's wife—her son would often complain about his mom having to go to work, but everyone always said what a good, polite boy he was. The teacher thinks the boy has ADHD, but the psychiatrist is dismissive. He's the psychiatrist here—the teacher hardly spends any time with him at all. The psychiatrist's wife angrily retorts to her husband that he only spends roughly 10 minutes with their son, minutes he often spends glued to his phone—the teacher should know him much better.

The psychiatrist's obstinate dismissal of the teacher's opinion suggests that the psychiatrist is really no less ignorant about male privilege and the extent of his society's sexism than any other average male. Though throughout his report on Jiyoung the psychiatrist uses language to indicate that he's actually more empathetic than most, his actions tell a different story. In fact, he is not very involved in his son's life (like the typical Korean father, the book suggests). His lack of respect for the teacher isn't necessarily because of her gender, but it certainly points in that direction.

The boy's teacher "prescribe[s] 'stay-at-home mommy'" as a cure for his misbehavior, so the psychiatrist's wife quits her job to tend to her son. At first she planned to return to work once her son's symptoms improved, but she postponed after he didn't seem to be getting better. One night that year, the psychiatrist recalls, he came home late to find his wife—a former math prodigy—solving problems in her son's elementary-school math workbook. She tells him it's "fun" and "interesting." The psychiatrist doesn't get it. When he presses his wife on the subject later, she again insists the workbooks are fun—"'Cause it's the one thing I can control these days." The psychiatrist's wife is still doing the math workbooks, and he wants her to find something better—something she really enjoys. He wants the same for Jiyoung.

The teacher's recommendation of "stay-at-home mommy" as a cure for the son's bad behavior implies that working mothers are bad for children and for society in general. It points to the sexist view that that the phenomenon of women in the workforce, not a culture that enables and encourages gender inequality, is a social ill that needs to be addressed. The psychiatrist's wife's choice to give up her work to care for her child parallels that of Jiyoung and so many other Korean mothers. Her description of the math textbook as "fun" and "interesting" speaks to the negative toll that being forced to give up her work and her identity outside of being someone's wife and mother has on her emotional welfare. The psychiatrist's wife is a former math prodigy—there's no way she legitimately finds her young son's math homework fun or intellectually stimulating. Her follow-up comment to her husband clarifies her interest in the workbooks: they give her a sense of "control" that she has lost in every other aspect of her life. The psychiatrist understandably finds this upsetting. While he claims that he wants his wife and Jiyoung to take back some of the agency that a sexist society has taken from them, he has done nothing to actually help bring about that change.

In the middle of the psychiatrist's ruminations, one of the counselors, Suyeon, enters the room and places a cactus on the windowsill. She tells him she's sorry, but she has to quit. It's Suyeon's last day today—she's pregnant. Suyeon has been an excellent employee. And she's pretty—"elegant," even—with a smart sense of style. Plus, she knows how the psychiatrist likes his coffee, and she's very friendly all the time. It's unfortunate that most of her patients have chosen to leave therapy altogether rather than transfer care to a different counselor at the clinic. "Even the best female employees can cause many problems if they don't have the childcare issue taken care of," the psychiatrist notes. He decides to "make sure [Suyeon's] replacement is unmarried."

The psychiatrist's ironic dismissal of "female employees" who are mothers "caus[ing] many problems" shows that his supposed sympathy for women like his wife and Jiyoung is ultimately insincere (though he seems to be unaware of the irony of his words). In vowing to ensure that he replaces Suyeon with an "unmarried" woman (i.e., a woman who won't be starting a family anytime soon), he participates in the discriminatory, sexist behavior that has caused his wife and Jiyoung so much suffering. The novel thus ends on a bleak note. Men like the psychiatrist who even deign to admit that sexism is a problem are in the minority, the novel suggests. But even these men fail to recognize the enormity of this sexism and their own complicity in it.

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