

## **APPENDIX**

### **Synopsis of "The Joy Luck Club"**

Suyuan, Jing-Mei Woo's mother, started the Joy Luck Club in San Francisco. It is composed of a group of Chinese women who come together to share their friendship and to play games. The real purpose, however, is to support one another and to save their Chinese culture and heritage.

At the beginning of this part of the book, Jing-Mei is thirty-six years old, and her mother, Suyuan, has suddenly died of a cerebral aneurysm. Jing-Mei's father asks his daughter to go to the Joy Luck Club in her mother's place, to honor her memory. Jing-Mei agrees to attend one of the meetings. She then tells the story of the Joy Luck Club.

Suyuan had told Jing-Mei that she began the first Joy Luck Club back in Kweilin, China. Then, when Suyuan moved to America in 1949, she formed a Joy Luck Club in San Francisco. She had chosen members for the second club from the First Chinese Baptist Church; all of the selected women had undergone suffering, much like she. When Suyuan tried to tell her daughter all about the club, Jing-Mei never really listened. As a result, all she knows about the Joy Luck Club is that the

ladies meet to play mahjong, to gossip, and to share gifts with one another.

Suyuan had also told her daughter about the soldier who had come to her house in Kweilin. He told her she must flee at once to avoid the atrocities of the Japanese invaders. She quickly packed a few belongings and left with her two small children. Little by little, she was forced to abandon her belongings. Eventually, she left her children behind as well, hoping they would be spared. Jing-Mei was shocked. She had never heard her mother's tragic story and had never known about her abandoned sisters.

Honoring her father's wish, Jing-Mei travels to An-Mei's house to attend a meeting of the Joy Luck Club. It begins with the reading of the minutes. Then as An-Mei prepares the food, the other women gossip. After supper, they play mahjong. As she is about to leave, Jing-Mei is approached by some of the women in the group. They give her \$1200 to travel to China. They explain that her mother's lifelong dream had been to locate her lost twin daughters. Because of her efforts, the daughters have been located. They want Jing-Mei to go and meet them, for it would answer Suyuan's dream.

Jing-Mei is the daughter of Suyuan, the recently deceased mother who was introduced in Section I as the founder of The Joy Luck Club. Before her death, Suyuan had always seen America as a land of hope

and fulfillment. Wanting her daughter to have every advantage in this land of opportunity, she gave her various lessons, such as piano and acting, and encouraged her to apply herself in school so she could have intellectual excellence. Jing-Mei resented her mother's interference and insistence on excellence.

It was difficult for Suyuan to save the money to buy a used piano for Jing-Mei. To pay for Jing-Mei's piano lessons, she cleaned the teacher's house. Although Suyuan insisted that her daughter practice hard to become a concert pianist, Jing-Mei showed no real talent or drive to excel at the piano. Her first recital was a flop, and she refused to play any more. When her mother protested, Jing-Mei shouted that she wished she were dead, just like her mother's two lost babies in China. Sadly, her mother put the piano up and never mentioned it again until Jing-Mei was an adult.

On Jing-Mei's thirtieth birthday, Suyuan asked her if she would like to have the piano; but Jing-Mei had no interest in it. Ironically, after Suyuan's death, Jing-Mei claimed the piano and began to play again. Surprisingly, she found out that she had some talent and that she could still play some of the old songs she had learned in her youth. The first piece she remembered was appropriate called "Pleading Child;" the second piece was called "Perfectly Contented."

Once again the chapter highlights the conflict between the aspirations of a mother and the feelings of resistance from a daughter. Suyuan, having lost two daughters in China, wants the best for Jing-Mei. She gives her a variety of lessons, wants her to excel in her studies, and tries unsuccessfully to make her a concert pianist. Unfortunately, Suyuan pressures her daughter to the point of rebellion. Jing-Mei takes no interest in the piano and refuses to practice as her mother wants. She convinces herself that she does not have to do what her mother desires. Suyuan believes in the American Dream. With hard work, she feels that Jing-Mei can be anything she wants to be in this great country. After all, her daughter will never suffer the kind of deprivation and tragedies that she had to endure in China. Jing-Mei, however, takes America for granted. A product of American culture, she is independent and resistant to Chinese heritage and traditions. She has no desire to prove herself or excel in any field. She wants to take life as it comes. In her words, "I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me." Although Suyuan allows her daughter to choose her vocation, Jing-Mei is not really interested in any field. She studies, but without dedication. Her resistance is the result of a clash of cultures; Jing-Mei resists what she thinks is the restrictive influence of her oriental background. Suyuan and Jing-Mei are opposites in their natures and attitudes. The title also refers to two pieces of music on the

piano. As a child, Jing-Mei had considered the two parts to be separate pieces, neither of which she could master.

After her mother's death, however, she takes up the piano again and discovers that the pieces are two parts of a whole. She discovers the same thing about herself. Although she is American, she is also Chinese - the product of her mother. The first two piano pieces that Jing-Mei plays as an adult are significant, for she has evolved from a "Pleading Child" to a "Perfectly Contented" woman who can understand the two cultures that have shaped her.

A few months before her death, Suyuan cooked a crab dinner for ten people to celebrate the Chinese New Year. As she and Jing-mei shopped together in Chinatown for the ingredients, Suyuan explained that the feistiest crabs are of the best quality; even beggars would reject a crab that has died before being cooked. During the marketing, Suyuan grumbled about the tenants who lived above her in the building she owned. When the couple's cat disappeared, they accused Suyuan of having poisoned it. Jing-mei wondered whether her mother did poison the cat, but she knew not to question her. While the two women were choosing crabs, the leg of one of the crabs became detached, and the grocer demanded that Suyuan pay for the creature. Suyuan thus bought eleven instead of ten, stating that the damaged crab would be extra. Back at home, Jing-mei could not bear to watch crabs being

cooked, though she knew in her rational mind that the crabs probably lacked brains big enough to realize what was happening to them.

The Jongs and their children attended the dinner. Vincent brought his girlfriend, Lisa, and Waverly brought Rich and Shoshana. Mr. Chong, Jing-mei's old piano teacher, was also invited. Suyuan had not counted Shoshana when buying the crabs, but Waverly now carefully chose the best crab and gave it to her daughter before choosing the next best two for herself and Rich. The rest of the party continued to pick the best crabs until there were two left, one of which was the crab missing a leg. Jing-mei tried to take the defective crab, but Suyuan insisted she take the better one. Suyuan then sniffed her crab, and took it into the kitchen to throw away, veiling the trip by returning with more seasonings for the table.

Waverly complimented Jing-mei's haircut and was shocked to learn that Jing-mei still went to her gay stylist. Waverly warned Jing-mei that the stylist might have AIDS and urged her to consider using her own stylist, Mr. Rory, instead. Waverly added that Mr. Rory's prices might be too high, deliberately referring to Jing-mei's less successful career. Infuriated, Jing-mei mentioned that Waverly's law firm had not paid her for some freelance work she had done, writing a publicity brochure, and after several insults from Jing-mei, Waverly replied that her firm had decided not to use Jing-mei's work, adding that she had only praised

the work to Jing-mei because she didn't want to hurt her feelings. Jing-mei offered to revise the brochure, but Waverly refused, mocking the quality of the work she submitted. Jing-mei cleared the table and retreated to the kitchen, fighting back tears.

After the guests left, Suyuan joined her daughter in the kitchen. Suyuan explained that she did not eat the legless crab because it had died before she cooked it. She teased Jing-mei for choosing the worse of the two remaining crabs, because anyone else would have taken the better one—the “best quality” available. She remarked that Jing-mei's way of thinking differed from that of most people. She gave Jing-mei a jade pendant, telling her that it was her “life's importance.” She advised Jing-mei not to listen to Waverly, whose words always “move sideways” like a crab, and explained that Jing-mei could and should move in a different direction. Now, at the time of Jing-mei's reminiscence, she is cooking dinner for her father. The upstairs tenants' tomcat jumps onto the windowsill outside, and Jing-mei is relieved to see that her mother didn't kill it—the cat is alive and well.

Jing-Mei and her father have purchased “a pair of tickets” and are on their way to China to meet the lost twins, which will fulfill Suyuan's dream. As they near the country of their heritage, Jing-Mei begins to feel pensive, sentimental, and strangely Chinese. She thinks about her mother's passing remarks about the twins and her own shock when she

learned that they had been located. She also thinks about the fact that she could not bring herself to write and tell the twins that Suyuan was dead. Instead, she asked the ladies of the Joy Luck Club to write the twins about her death.

In China, the first stop for Jing-Mei and her father is at Guangzhou to meet Jing-Mei's grand aunt. The old lady and her family come to meet them at the station and give them a

rousing welcome. The affection and warmth that they display touch Jing-Mei deeply. She quickly makes friends with her cousins and poses for photographs with them. At the hotel, everyone shares their memories, filled with joy and sorrow. Later that night, Canning Woo tells Jing-Mei all about Suyuan's painful escape from war-torn China and the manner in which she had to abandon the twins. Suyuan walked for days, trying to outrun the invading Japanese. Feeling miserable, hungry, and exhausted and with bleeding feet and hands from the journey, Suyuan felt she could not go on. Concerned for the welfare of her daughters, she tried to give the twins to someone who would protect them, but no one would help her. Finally she stuffed her few valuable possessions into the clothing of the infants and left them by the road while she went in search of food. The weak and feverish Suyuan passed out along the way; when she woke up, she was in the back of a truck filled with refugees and missionaries. The little girls



were not with her, and she would not see them again. Later, when she met and married Canning Woo, they returned to China to find the girls, but were unsuccessful.

A poor country couple found the twins on the side of the road and raised them. They, too, had often tried to find the girls' parents, but were not successful. It was not until after Suyuan's death that the connection was finally made. Canning also tells Jing-Mei that her name has special meanings. Jing-Mei literally means that she is pure and that she is a younger sister. Suyuan chose the name so that her lost sisters would be a part of her. He also explains that the name Suyuan has a special meaning; it literally translates as "long-cherished wish" or "long-cherished grudge." Suyuan's wish had always been to find the twins in order to explain what had happened to her so that they would not have a grudge. Now Canning and Jing-Mei are on their way to make the wish come true.

Jing-Mei and her father next head to Shanghai to see the twins. On the airplane, Jing-Mei feels tense and apprehensive. Upon their arrival, they are greeted by Jing-Mei's two older sisters. Jing-Mei immediately sees her mother in them. Then when she looks at the pictures of all three of them together, she realizes Suyuan's spirit is in all three, bonding them together. Jing-Mei feels complete, connected, and in touch with her heritage at last.