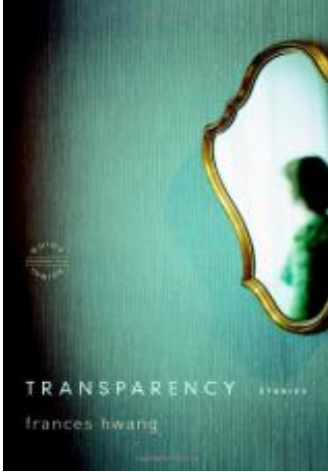


Transparency: Stories

by Frances Hwang



About the Book

From a prizewinning young literary talent come these ten gripping tales about the intimate, often bittersweet experiences of immigrants and their American-born children as they negotiate the divide between Eastern and Western cultures: struggles to honor one's personal history or to break free of the weight of the past, to find permanence amid the flux of modern life, and to form lasting ties even while holding on to secrets kept in plain sight.

In the stunning title story, Henry Liu, convinced that he is dying, receives a second lease on life. In "Garden City," a weary Chinese couple, struggling to evict their deadbeat tenant, find themselves forced to confront the aftermath of their teenage son's death. And in "The Old Gentleman," a woman becomes alienated from her father when he finds love-or what he thinks could be love-in his old age.

This powerful debut collection-reminiscent of acclaimed works by Gish Jen, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Lara Vapnyar-showcases Frances Hwang's myriad gifts as a storyteller as it announces the arrival of an exciting new voice in American fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. Agnes loathes her father's new wife, Lily, in the story "The Old Gentleman." Did you feel any sympathy for Lily? Why or why not?
2. In "A Visit to the Suns," June is asked to encourage her cousin Helen to leave the oppressive religious group that Helen recently joined. In the end, though, June doesn't push Helen to change her ways. Should she have?

3. The characters in "The Modern Age" sit around a table telling one another "persecuted ancestor stories." Are there any similar stories in your family's history? If not, what other types of family stories have been passed down to you?
4. In "Intruders," Susan discovers a note from Andrea written in her diary and tears the page out because she says she doesn't want Andrea's thoughts to be mistaken for her own. Do you think Susan resembles Andrea in any way? How are they different from each other?
5. In "Garden City," Mr. Chen ultimately evicts his tenant, Marnie Wilson, from her apartment. Should he have acted differently? How would you have responded in his situation?
6. Do you see any parallels in plot or character in "Transparency" and "Garden City"? What cultural and familial misunderstandings arise in both stories?
7. The protagonist in "The Modern Age" says at the end of the story, "As for my boyfriend and me, we had been together for over a year, yet not once had the word love been spoken between us. Our hearts seemed too small for such a word to pass between our lips." What was your reaction to this statement? Do the relationships described in Hwang's collection seem familiar to you? Why?
8. "Sonata for the Left Hand" is composed of three sections, each part taking place in a different city and among different characters in the narrator's life. What did Hwang accomplish by writing this story in the way she did? Did the three parts of the story come together for you by the end?
9. What do the stories in *Transparency* say about solitude? Is it a cross to bear, a choice that encourages personal strength and freedom, or a bit of both? Is solitude something you seek in your own life, or do you try to avoid it?

Author Bio

Frances Hwang is a graduate of Brown University and the University of Montana. She has been the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer's Award and has held fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and Colgate University. Two of the stories in **Transparency** were selected by Joyce Carol Oates and Francine Prose to appear in two different volumes of **Best New American Voices**. Hwang's fiction has appeared in *Tin House*, *Subtropics*, and *Glimmer Train*, among other magazines. She lives in Berkeley, California.

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