

PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

Shelter: A Novel

by Jung Yun

ABOUT THE BOOK

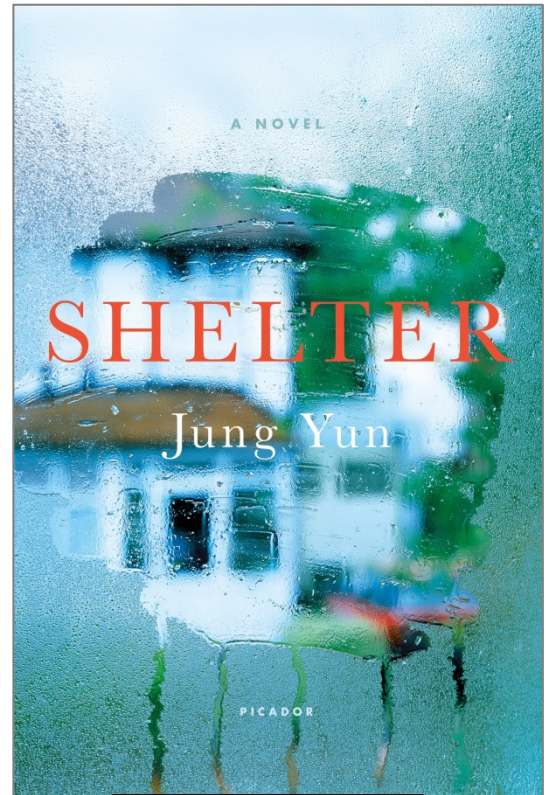
Kyung Cho is a young father burdened by a house he can't afford. For years, he and his wife, Gillian, have lived beyond their means. Now their debts and bad decisions are catching up with them, and Kyung is anxious for his family's future.

A few miles away, his parents, Jin and Mae, live in the town's most exclusive neighborhood, surrounded by the material comforts that Kyung desires for his wife and son. Growing up, they gave him every possible advantage—private tutors, expensive hobbies—but they never showed him kindness. Kyung can hardly bear to see them now, much less ask for their help. Yet when an act of violence leaves Jin and Mae unable to live on their own, the dynamic suddenly changes, and he's compelled to take them in. For the first time in years, the Chos find themselves living under the same roof. Tensions quickly mount as Kyung's proximity to his parents forces old feelings of guilt and anger to the surface, along with a terrible and persistent question: how can he ever be a good husband, father, and son when he never knew affection as a child?

As *Shelter* veers swiftly toward its startling conclusion, Jung Yun leads us through dark and violent territory, where, unexpectedly, the Chos discover hope. *Shelter* is a masterfully crafted debut novel that asks what it means to provide for one's family and, in answer, delivers a story as riveting as it is profound.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were your initial impressions of Kyung Cho in the opening scene of the novel? How did your understanding of him as a father, husband, and parent change as you read on?
2. Financial debt plays a major role in Kyung and Gillian's lives. What other kinds of debts are present in this novel? And how do these obligations influence the ways in which the characters interact with each other?



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3. How do the various houses in *Shelter* reflect their owners' personalities? In what ways do they provide a sense of security for their owners (or reinforce their insecurities)?
4. As first generation immigrants, Jin and Mae came to the U.S. to pursue their idea of the American Dream. As a “1.5 generation” immigrant (someone who immigrated at a very young age), how is Kyung’s version of the dream similar to, or different from, his parents’?
5. Kyung thinks of his mother, Mae, as someone “who never believed she was capable of anything.” In what ways does your perception of Mae align with or contradict his image of her?
6. Gillian suggests that it would have been understandable if Kyung had simply ended his relationship with his parents. Why might it be difficult for adult children of abusive and/or neglectful parents to simply relinquish their caretaking responsibilities?
7. Which parent does Kyung seem to resent more? His father, who was the source of such trauma during the first eighteen years of his life? Or his mother, who influenced many of his choices during the last eighteen years?
8. Kyung notes that Jin treats his grandson, Ethan, very differently than he treated Kyung as a child. Is this a selfish act on Jin’s part? Or a selfless one?
9. Both of Kyung’s parents seem drawn to religion for different reasons. What are some of those reasons? And why does Kyung reject the church and the people associated with it so strongly?
10. Connie says that he knew “not even five minutes after meeting [Kyung]— that nothing was ever going to make [him] happy.” How does the idea of happiness differ for each character? And how do characteristics like race, gender, religion, age, and class influence those differences?
11. In the final scene, Kyung begins to see his father in a more sympathetic light. In what ways is that sympathy earned or not earned?
12. What do you hope for the main characters by the novel's end?

Guide written by Jung Yun



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