

Penguin  Readers

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FRANKLY

in

LOVE

'A LOVE STORY, A TREATISE ON RACISM, A PEEK INTO ADOLESCENCE,
AND A WELCOME TO KOREAN-AMERICAN CULTURE, ALL AT ONCE.'

JODI PICOULT

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CHAPTER ONE

The world of Frank Li

I have two names. My first name is Frank Li. Mom-n-Dad (Mom and Dad) gave me this name because it has seven letters. Frank Li is my American name, and seven is a lucky number in America. My second name is Sung-Min Li, and it's my Korean name. Sung-Min Li has nine letters, and nine is a lucky number in Korea. Nobody calls me Sung-Min, not even Mom-n-Dad. They just call me Frank.

Senior year has started. This is the year we take our SAT exams—all **seniors** are afraid of these exams. Mom-n-Dad want me to get a very high **score** because only Harvard is good enough for them.

My big sister, Hanna (Hanna Li, seven letters), went to Harvard. She did everything right. Mom-n-Dad told her to study hard and go there, so she did. After Harvard, she got an **amazing** job and started making a lot of money. But then she did one thing wrong. She **fell in love** with a black boy. I haven't seen Hanna for more than a year,

and Mom-n-Dad don't talk about her. I **miss** her.

I talk a lot about Hanna with Q. Q is my best friend, and I am his best friend. His full name is Q Lee. He's Lee and I'm Li—we are like two brothers from Korean and African-American mothers. Q has a **twin** sister called Evon, and she is really beautiful.

Q and I don't really talk about girls. The only time we do this is at Lake Girlfriend. Lake Girlfriend is a fountain at Westchester Mall. We go there at night when all the shoppers have gone home, and we talk. We sit next to the loud fountain, and it feels like we are talking to the water. At the end of the night, we throw coins into the fountain, but no **girlfriends** ever come out of the water.



Mom-n-Dad own a store. They work at The Store every day, from morning to evening, on weekends, holidays, and New Year's Day. The Store is in a poor part of Southern California. It takes about an hour to drive there from our home in Playa Mesa. Home is very different from The Store. Playa Mesa is in a nice part of Southern California. Lots of rich people live great lives there.

I'm at The Store now. It's hot. I help Dad on Sundays. Mom wants us to have some time together because I'm going to college in the fall.

"You eat," Dad says. "You go pizza. Next door. Money, here."

"OK, Dad," I say. I say this a lot. Dad and I don't really talk because his English isn't great, and my Korean is terrible.

I get my phone and step outside. It's even hotter out here. I see a message from Q. He wants to go out tonight, but I can't because I have a "Gathering." A Gathering is an evening meal for five Korean families, and one of those families is mine. The parents of these families all met at **university** in Seoul. They became friends and then moved to Southern California together

twenty-seven years ago. Every month, they meet for dinner at one of their houses, and we call these dinners Gatherings.

Tonight, the Gathering is at the Kims' house. The children are only here because of their parents. We have our own friends at school and only really talk at Gatherings. I call us the "Limbos."

Tonight, the Limbos are playing video games in Andrew Kim's bedroom, but one Limbo, Joy Song, is not there. I find her in another room, and she's playing with LEGO. I sit down next to her. She has changed her hair. On top it is black, but under the black I see bits of bright green.

Joy has **boyfriend** problems. But not just any boyfriend problems—she has Chinese boyfriend problems.

"Wu wants to meet my parents," she tells me. "But, of course, I said 'no,' and so we had a big fight."

Wu Tang is Joy's boyfriend. But Joy's mom-n-dad are like my parents, and they only want her to **date** Koreans. It's crazy. They came to live in America. They had their children in America.

But they only want their children to marry Korean people, because they don't want anything to change. I hate it.

"Oh," I say. "That's not good. Parents! Why do we have **racist** parents?"

Later, Mom drives us home from the Gathering because Dad's had too much to drink, and he's feeling **sick**.

"You don't drink like Daddy, OK?" Mom says.

"OK, Mom," I say. She doesn't need to worry. My friends and I don't drink. We're all good children. We're all in the top classes at school (the "AP classes"), and we don't really go to parties. I call us the "Apeys."



Dad looks out the window. "This is the Chinese part of town," he says. "Chinese people, they eating *everything*." Mom laughs.

"You two are racist," I say.

"No racist. We just **joking**," Mom says. "But you marry Korean girl, OK? Make everything easier."

"OK, Mom," I say. I want to say a lot of things, but I don't.

The next day, I'm in **math** class. I don't really like math, but math class is different. Mr. Soft gives us coffee and cakes and is always really nice to us. This morning, he gives us some homework. "You have to do it with another student," he says. I look around the classroom, but then Brit Means speaks.

"Do you want to work together, Frank?" she says. Brit Means sits next to me in math class, and she is beautiful and interesting. Her question surprises me because she usually works with her friend Amelie. Why does she want to work with me?

"Thanks you," I hear my voice saying.

Thanks you??!!
