

## Characters

- Leigh -- grief-stricken teenager searching for peace/meaning/resolution after her mother's suicide. Speaks only English and a few words of Mandarin Chinese.
- Her dad -- Selfish (?), scholarly, practical guy who's been absent from Leigh's life for a long time due to academic business trips. Fluent in both English and Mandarin.
- Waipo (Grandmother) -- sweet, kind grandma. She speaks only Mandarin Chinese.
- Waigong (Grandfather) -- opposed to the marriage of Leigh's mom and dad because he didn't like the idea of his daughter marrying a non-Chinese. Now that he's apparently had a stroke, he's much nicer.
- Feng -- Waipo's "friend" who speaks both English and Chinese. Helps Leigh on her wild chase around Taipei for the bird. Kind and helpful even though Leigh is a bit short with her.
- Axel -- artsy love interest back home.
- Caro -- artsy best friend/sidekick.

## Setting

The story has moved to Taiwan. Leigh is still getting emails from Axel, and her dad is in Hong Kong. But the majority of the action takes place in Taipei City and a kind of parallel memory universe that exists when she lights the incense.

## Conflict and Summary

Leigh vs. her own mind (Is she going crazy or is she hanging out with ghosts for real?)  
Leigh wants to find the bird, but everywhere she goes, the bird eludes her. So, she keeps trying to solve the mystery of what her mother wanted her to remember by lighting the magic incense and tapping into her family members' memories.

## Predictions

I think Feng is the ghost of Leigh's mother's sister.

## Discussion

- When Leigh's dad left her alone with her grandparents in Taipei, what were his motivations? Was he acting like a mature adult? Is this kind of behavior a product of grief? What do you imagine the grandparents had said to him?
- Think about the box of stuff that Leigh's grandparents said they burned... but which wound up in Leigh's possession. WHAT IS THAT? It's solid. Leigh wears the necklace that used to be her mom's that was in the box. Is this some crazy ghost stuff, or is there a rational explanation?
- What do you think the author's purpose is in mixing up Leigh's memories of Axel, Caro, normal high school life, and her search for her bird-mother?

- *Hunxie* is a Chinese word that means “mixed blood” or biracial. Leigh gets noticed on the street and called a *hunxie*. How do you think this makes her feel? How does this play into Leigh’s whole personality?
- Liminality is an English word that basically means “in-between,” or “on the line between two things.” The space between the water and the land (like a beach or the banks of a river) is considered a “liminal zone.” I think that a lot of this story deals with ideas of liminality. Leigh is both Chinese and white. She is between childhood and adulthood. She is a little bit culturally and linguistically mixed, no matter how much her mother tried to leave behind her previous life. Her friends are artists and other people who have historically been considered outsiders (liminal people). Throughout the story, Leigh is moving in between the real world and a ghost world with all the memories and incense burning. She believes her mother is in a space between one life and the next. Leigh is a bridge between worlds in many ways.  
Also, in a way, grief itself is a kind of in-between (or liminal) emotion. It can have elements of sweetness or nostalgia in it -- the joy you feel that a person you loved was a part of your life -- and it has strong sadness -- the sadness of separation.  
One of the reasons I love this book so much is that it captures the essence of what it means to be a liminal person -- a person who stands between worlds -- so perfectly.

#### Signpost #1

Find one **Memory Moment**

(Pan pg#)

“Write down the full quote.”

What is the significance of this quote? How does this shape Leigh and her personality?

#### Signpost #2

Find one **Again and again**

(Pan pg#)

“Write down the full quote.”

What is the significance of this quote? Why does this keep happening again and again?