

Characters: IF YOU LIVE IN A SMALL HOUSE

Mother and Father, local Koreans, raising four children and supporting an extended family of twelve under one roof. Father, a World War II veteran, misses his overseas mistress and goes fishing. Mother's capacious heart absorbs family members into their Kailua house, one by one.

Grandmother and Grandfather, Mother's parents who immigrated from Korea. As Grandmother serves Grandfather's every whim, she remembers her first husband, a dreamer who escaped their plantation life.

Gloria, Mother's middle-aged, unmarried sister. Longing for a husband and her own house, Gloria fixes her fantasies on Dante, the rubbish man, on his weekly pick-up runs along Keaniani Lane.

Dante, rubbish man by day, popular musician by night, love object among the neighborhood women. He mourns the loss of his brother in the war and misses his mother with deep, undying attachment.

Shorty and Fatso, Mother's and Gloria's brothers. Shorty, the smart one in the family, pursues a never-ending courtship with Eunice in Honolulu. Fatso is loyal to Shorty above all, while he rues a string of missed opportunities and that elusive Lady Luck.

Rene, a young bachelor cousin. Drifting from his family house to this one, he dreams of becoming an entertainer, a smooth-talking crooner.

Lana and Liz, eleven and ten years old, thought of as twins by the family. Lana directs their pretend play and Liz gladly submits to her sister's gift for drama—what lurks beneath the veil of domesticity.

Ezra, seven. The only boy, he is the designated golden child. Although far too young for service in the Korean War, he inherits an idea of valor that leads to mischief and, then, to a world away from home.

Lucy, a toddler—a sturdy child, affectionately passed around like a sack of rice.

Chapter Outline: IF YOU LIVE IN A SMALL HOUSE

Prologue

Time and place: early 1950s in Hawaii. Relief that WWII is over, fatigue and private doubts about Korean War. Father stands apart from his neighbors, a skeptic amid post-war optimists.

1 Bread on the Driveway

Preparing “bread bombs” as bait for mullet, his son Ezra working alongside him, Father remembers army service in Italy and of his war-time romance. Tenor of his marriage is tender but frustrated by the reality of too many people in a small house.

2 Inside a Cedar Chest

Sisters Liz and Lana watch Auntie Gloria apply cold cream, sitting on top of her hope chest, good linens saved for marriage and escape from this small house. Gloria looks forward to seeing Dante, her neighborhood rubbish man and musician, from her bedroom window.

3 From the Hedge to the Street

Gloria prepares for Dante. She dreams of a life together with him. Other women in town dream the same dream, looking for Dante.

4 Why This Boy

Dante plays music at weddings and birthdays with his brother. He misses his mother, his true love.

5 Black Hair, White Wings

Father recollects war in brooding terms, as a game of chance. Grandmother remembers her first and second husbands, how she slapped around her boys and temporarily gave up her girl to a neighbor.

6 Slippers at the Door

Grandmother’s funeral club meets at the house. More memories of friends and family crowd the room.

7 Going to Honolulu

The girls, Liz and Lana, beg to go along with Auntie Gloria and Uncle Shorty to Honolulu but the family doesn’t want them to become familiar with soldiers and strangers in town. Norman Vincent Peale preaches positive thinking to the gathering crowd.

8 Civil Alert

Going around authorities, Father arranges for a city and county road crew to pave Keaniani Lane. Neighbors chip in and their lane is much improved. Door-to-door salesmen come by. School drills for nuclear attack and tsunami warnings.

9 Another Warning

Tsunami evacuation. Ezra wanders among the crowd of evacuees. Ezra is missing overnight, then is returned by strangers; although a small child, he now knows what it feels like to leave home.

10 Love a Stranger

More public promises are made post-tsunami. More cars and people in town. Ezra leaves. Gloria stays. More family members are expected to move into the house.

