



BOOK CLUB KIT



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

It wasn't long after I started writing a novel about plastic surgery when I had a conversation with a stranger that made me realize what *New Skin* was really about. He said that his mother had gotten a facelift when he was six years old and after that, he couldn't look at her anymore. Imagine! A young child terrified by his own mother's botched face.

This became a metaphor for my characters, a mother and daughter who don't recognize each other for who they really are, yet all they have in this world is each other. Theirs is a luminous bond, as redeeming as it is torturous. What do you do when your best friend is also your worst enemy?

I wanted to write a wild story taking readers into the bargain basements of black-market Botox and onto the sets of cutthroat reality TV competitions where the spectacle of the botched is rendered in high definition and things aren't quite what they seem. I love plots that careen into thrilling new worlds, where characters keep taking the wrong turns, a series of catastrophic decisions leaves them reckless and desperate, and the only way out is to go deeper in. People who carry secrets are doomed to repeat them.

But I also wanted to tell a story about immigrants, the undocumented, poverty, debt, class, and race; about women who work in the shadow economies of LA's suburban wastelands where I grew up. The story I've written is one I have lived to tell.

To those who wonder if *New Skin* is a true story, my answer is yes. It contains all the rage and frustration, admiration and hopeless devotion I've felt for my mother, who immigrated to America hoping for a better life and got what she never expected—in ways both extraordinary and devastating. Our lives are contained in these pages, each disaster and triumph unrelentingly chronicled. I hope you experience the same thrill of venturing into the extreme.

Yours,
Sarah Wang

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the book, Fanny risks her life and her face to have more and more plastic surgery procedures. Why do you think she's so focused on plastic surgery? What does she hope to accomplish/achieve?
2. Set against the backdrop of contemporary Los Angeles, in *New Skin* we see characters from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. In what ways do these characters measure their lives against an idea of “making it” in America? Whose standards are they using, and how fair or attainable do those standards seem?
3. The bond between Linli and Fanny is so deep, and the shared secrets between them so immense, that at times the two of them exist in a world of their own making. At the same time, their orbit intersects with that of their broader Asian community. How does the novel portray belonging vs exclusion/isolation?
4. Characters speak various dialects of English, Mandarin, and even gibberish. What do you think is the role of language in the novel?
5. Reality TV often blurs the line between authenticity and scripting. How does the book play with the tension between what feels “real” and what feels staged?
6. At the end of the novel, Linli learns some truths of Fanny's past. How does this complicate her previous understanding of her mother's personality and struggles?
7. Linli often expresses frustration and annoyance at her mother's actions, yet she's always there for Fanny when she needs her. Why does she keep coming back? By the novel's end, do you think she has forgiven her mother? Do you think Fanny's view of Linli has changed, too? Why or why not?