



## The Pearl Diver

By Sujata Massey  
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### Introduction

A dazzling engagement ring and the promise of a fresh start in a new country bring antiques dealer and sometime-sleuth Rei Shimura to Washington, D.C. But while she tries to play catch-up with her beautiful, politically-connected cousin, Kendall, she is commissioned to furnish a chic Japanese-fusion restaurant, and things start to go haywire. First, Kendall vanishes from the restaurant's opening-night party, and then Rei is drafted to help Andrea, the restaurant's elegant, cagey hostess, investigate the disappearance of her own Japanese mother thirty years earlier.

Rei must delve into the secret history of an ambitious presidential candidate to uncover the mystery of the vanished women. As the pieces of the puzzles come together, Rei finds that her relationship with her fiancé, Hugh, has changed from sizzle to burn. At the same time, she comes to understand some truths about herself, which will indeed change her destiny.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What brings Rei Shimura to Washington, D.C., from Japan? Does Rei seem content or conflicted with the slower pace of her life in the U.S.? What prompts her intervention in the series of unexplained mysteries that crop up around her?
2. How does Rei's inconclusive pregnancy test at the start of the novel serve as a symbol of her thoughts on maternity and marriage? Does her fiancé, Hugh, share her feelings? How does their relationship change over the course of *The Pearl Diver*?
3. What is the nature of Kendall Howard Johnson's connection to Rei, and what motivates her political involvement with Senator Harp Snowden? Why does Rei think that Kendall's abduction might be connected to the other unexplained incidents involving people associated with Bento?
4. Why do Rei and Hugh attempt to conceal evidence of their cohabitation from Aunt Norie? How does that decision impact their relationship? Were you surprised that Norie suspected the real nature of their living arrangements?
5. Discuss Rei's willingness to come to Andrea's aid. Why does she go out of her way to help her, and how does she put herself in danger by doing so? What does her behavior reveal about the nature of her character?
6. Sujata Massey describes many elements of restaurant life in *The Pearl Diver*, including the interior design of the dining room, ongoing financial pressures, negative publicity, employee squabbles, and the preparation of the food. What aspects of the day-to-day goings on at Bento did you find most interesting?
7. Discuss Rei's feelings about her ethnic heritage as a hafu == half-Japanese, half-American. How does she embrace her shared ethnic background, and what aspects of it does she outwardly reject?
8. How does a concealed incident of military atrocities against innocent civilians in Vietnam emerge as the source of most of the trouble in this story? What role does Mike "Toro" Neblett, the brooding dishwasher at Bento, play in Rei's discovery of the true events behind this incident?
9. What incident or incidents in *The Pearl Diver* did you find most suspenseful? At what point in the story does Rei's life seem to be in the greatest danger?
10. How does the theme of family resonate in this novel? Discuss the nature of the family connections between Rei and Aunt Norie and Andrea and her birth parents, Sadako and Robert Norton.

### About the Author

Sujata Massey was a reporter for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* and spent several years in Japan teaching English and studying Japanese. She is the author of *The Salaryman's Wife*, *Zen Attitude*, *The Flower Master*, *The Floating Girl*, *The Bride's Kimono*, and *The Samurai's Daughter*.