



HAPPINESS FALLS

A NOVEL



ANGIE KIM

AUTHOR OF *MIRACLE CREEK*



BOOK CLUB KIT

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

We didn't call the police right away.

When this sentence first came to me over three years ago, I knew immediately who the *we* was. For ten years, the Parkson family had been with me. A biracial family living in northern Virginia, like mine, with a Korean immigrant working mom, a white stay-at-home dad, college-aged twins (Mia and John) with very different looks and personalities, and 14-year-old Eugene, who has a rare genetic condition and cannot speak. I'd written stories about them and fallen in love with them over time, and I saw what happened to them in my mind: The father and Eugene go for a walk in the nearby woods one morning, and only Eugene returns home, frantic, upset, and bloody, throwing the family into crisis.

Where is the father? What happened to him? What will happen to Eugene when the police get involved? I had no idea, and I holed myself up into my writing closet (yes, I literally write in a closet!) for the better part of the following three years to find out. And finally, it's here: *Happiness Falls*, my second novel, the story of how this tight-knit, quirky family comes together to try to find their beloved father—and, in the process, learns to truly connect and communicate with one another.

This book is so special to me, as it's rooted in the most formative experience of my life: immigrating to the US when I was eleven. I didn't speak any English, and I went from feeling like a smart, talkative, and happy (albeit very poor) girl in Korea to being bullied, feeling stupid and ashamed. It was the first time I realized: there's a deep-seated assumption I think most of us have, including me: we equate verbal fluency, especially oral fluency, with intelligence. So much of that experience has informed my ideas, studies, and passions throughout my life—for philosophy, racial and gender dynamics, happiness theories, and language—which form the heart of this novel.

Thank you so much for reading *Happiness Falls*. I hope reading this book leads you to think about what happiness truly means for you and your family, how you define it, the lengths you'll go to achieve it, and what assumptions each of us makes—about nonspeakers, people with disabilities, immigrants, people of color, our family members, and ourselves.

xoxo,
Angie

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were your first impressions of each member of the Parkson family? How did your perceptions evolve over the course of the novel?
2. How would you describe Mia's voice as a narrator? Is she "reliable"? How would the book be different if Angie Kim had written it in the third person?
3. How did the structure of the book, including footnotes and charts, influence your reading experience?
4. Discuss the relationships between the Parkson siblings—and among the three of them. What do they learn about one another? How do you envision their relationships evolving after the events of the book?
5. Do you think it can be more difficult to see the people closest to us as they really are? Why or why not?
6. As Kim explores in *Happiness Falls*, we tend to equate oral fluency with intelligence (and vice versa). How did the character of Eugene challenge your assumptions about nonspeaking people?
7. How does race—including the perceived race of mixed-race characters—play into the novel? What biases and stereotypes must each character contend with?
8. Discuss Adam's Happiness Quotient project. Do you agree with his theories? What do you consider your baseline? Do you think it needs adjusting? Do you think it's possible to intentionally lower it? If so, do you think that would make you happier?
9. Do you think Adam was right to keep Eugene's progress from the rest of the family? Why or why not?
10. What did you think of the ending? What do you think really happened—did Eugene repeat parts of John and Mia's conversation, either subconsciously or intentionally? Was the note real? Do these answers matter?

MEET THE PARKSONS

A biracial (Korean and white American) family living in northern Virginia. The kids' last name, Parkson, comes from the combination of Parson (Dad) and Park (Mom).



MIA PARKSON

Our narrator: A 20-year-old studying philosophy and music in college. Smart, funny, hyperlexic, with a tendency to overthink and overanalyze. Knows she can come across as aloof, arrogant, and annoying (and is working on that!) but loves her family and is fierce in wanting to protect her little brother.



JOHN PARKSON

A psychology major and summer intern at Henry's House, Eugene's therapy center. Mia's twin and happy-go-lucky, optimistic counterpart to Mia's pessimistic cynic. Generally a joy to be around. Presents as white, unlike Mia, who presents as Asian.



EUGENE PARKSON

A 14-year-old with a dual diagnosis: autism and a rare genetic disorder called mosaic Angelman syndrome, which means he can't talk, has motor difficulties, and frequently smiles and laughs, which most people interpret as being mindlessly happy. Believed to be the last person to see their father alive.



HANNAH PARK (MOM)

Stay-at-home-turned-working parent of the Parkson household. Immigrated from Korea as a college student, holds a PhD in applied linguistics, and currently works full-time as a Korean-English translator.



ADAM PARSON (DAD)

Former management consultant who became a stay-at-home dad and Eugene's primary caretaker four years ago. Obsessed with happiness theories and trying to quantify happiness. Currently missing; last seen with Eugene at River Falls Park.

WHAT IS ANGELMAN SYNDROME?

- Angelman syndrome is a rare neurogenetic disorder that occurs in one in 15,000 live births or 500,000 people worldwide.
- People with Angelman syndrome have developmental problems that become noticeable by 6-12 months of age. In early childhood, other common symptoms appear, like walking and balance disorders, gastrointestinal issues, seizures, and little to no speech.
- Despite these symptoms, people with Angelman syndrome appear to have an overall happy demeanor, with a combination of frequent laughter and smiling and an easily excitable personality.
- Angelman syndrome shares symptoms and characteristics with other disorders including autism, cerebral palsy, and Prader-Willi syndrome. These similarities mean misdiagnosis occurs often.
- It is believed that there is a high chance of finding a cure for Angelman syndrome, due to the fact that scientists know what causes AS and have been able to reverse it in mouse models. Individuals with AS will require lifelong care, but can live long, happy lives.

Visit [Angelman.org](https://www.angelman.org) for more information

THE SIGNATURE KIMCHI MARTINI

I thought of the idea for the kimchi martini the day I got my second Covid vaccination. I really wanted a drink (I had had a long and tiring day), but my friends said they read something about avoiding alcohol right after the vaccine. As I was pondering this, my mom texted, reminding me to have lots of kimchi for its natural health benefits. I thought, Aha! I can put kimchi in the martini to cancel out the alcohol! It was delicious, and it's become one of my go-to drinks at home.

It's easy to make; take your favorite dirty martini recipe, either gin or vodka (I've tried both, but I'm a vodka person), and substitute in kimchi juice in place of olive brine. Garnish with kimchi instead of olives. That's it!

Here's my favorite recipe:

Ingredients

2 ½ oz. vodka
½ oz. dry vermouth
½ oz. kimchi juice

Directions

Add the ingredients to a cocktail shaker filled with ice, shake until well chilled, and pour through a strainer into a martini glass (preferably chilled, although I usually forget to put it in the freezer like you're supposed to!). Garnish with kimchi. I prefer pickle kimchi (oi-sobagi or oi-kimchi) or cubed radish kimchi (kkakdugi), but the cabbage kimchi you can find in any grocery store is fine, too. I use whatever we happen to have in the refrigerator. Here's to your health!



SNACK REC!

The spiral in the cover of *Happiness Falls* was partially inspired by Trader Joe's Crunchy Curls—a tasty lentil and potato snack!

A note from the cover designer:

"The manuscript of *Happiness Falls* immediately captivated me and I was so excited to get to design the cover. The design was inspired by a pivotal line in the book "I can't because he doesn't believe, and he doesn't believe because I can't", which I put in my notes as I was reading. I was thinking about vicious circles, the anxiety spirals that the characters go through, and the winding paths that the investigation takes over the course of the book. After we showed the author this cover option, she noted that the spiral connects to even more themes in the book—the shape of DNA, the duality of twins, the balance of light and dark, and so much more. However, my partner jokes that the true inspiration for the shape comes from my favorite snack, Trader Joe's Crunchy Curls! I eat so many of them that they have invaded my subconscious. I'm still thinking about this story and the characters, and I can't wait for everyone to get to read it!"

—Cassie Gonzales, Senior Designer at Random House

