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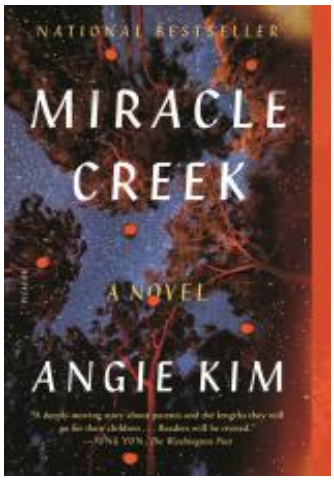
Miracle Creek

by Angie Kim



About the Book

A thrilling debut novel for fans of Liane Moriarty and Celeste Ng about how far we?ll go to protect our families --- and our deepest secrets

My husband asked me to lie. Not a big lie. He probably didn?t even consider it a lie, and neither did I, at first...

In rural Virginia, Young and Pak Yoo run an experimental medical treatment device known as the Miracle Submarine --- a pressurized oxygen chamber that patients enter for therapeutic ?dives? with the hopes of curing issues like autism or infertility. But when the Miracle Submarine mysteriously explodes, killing two people, a dramatic murder trial upends the Yoos? small community.

Who or what caused the explosion? Was it the mother of one of the patients, who claimed to be sick that day but was smoking down by the creek? Or was it Young and Pak themselves, hoping to cash in on a big insurance payment and send their daughter to college? The ensuing trial uncovers unimaginable secrets from that night --- trysts in the woods, mysterious notes, child-abuse charges --- as well as tense rivalries and alliances among a group of people driven to extraordinary degrees of desperation and sacrifice.

Angie Kim?s MIRACLE CREEK is a thoroughly contemporary take on the courtroom drama, drawing on the author?s own life as a Korean immigrant, former trial lawyer and mother of a real-life ?submarine? patient. Both a compelling page-turner and an excavation of identity and the desire for connection, MIRACLE CREEK is a brilliant, empathetic debut from an exciting new voice.

Discussion Guide

1. In the opening chapter of MIRACLE CREEK, Young Yoo narrates her version of events on the evening of the HBOT

explosion. What is the effect of this first-person narrative compared with the rest of the book, which is written in the third person? What are the details in Young?s story that create suspense? What does Young know that hints at the truth about what happened? What information is she missing?

2. Abe Patterley, the prosecuting attorney, calls Dr. Matt Thompson as his first witness against Elizabeth Ward. What dual purpose does Matt?s testimony serve? What does it reveal about Matt --- what he believes about the effectiveness of HBOT and how he came to be undergoing treatments, as well as his personal life? What is Matt afraid of divulging in court?

3. What are some of the differences between American and Korean culture that the book explores? How are these experienced by Matt and Janine? By the Yoo family? How are the Korean characters stereotyped by others? How do they defy stereotype?

4. As the trial proceeds, the defense and prosecuting attorneys attempt to re-create the time line leading to the explosion. What are some of the lies and false assumptions contained in the testimony of witnesses and experts? What is the circumstantial evidence that led to Elizabeth?s arrest? How does each of the lawyers try to influence the jury?

5. Autism is diagnosed on a spectrum with a wide variation in symptoms, as evidenced by TJ Kozlowski and Henry Ward. In MIRACLE CREEK, the mothers of autistic children are portrayed as having a wide range of beliefs about treatments for their children. What do Kitt, Elizabeth and Ruth Weiss each believe about treatments? What are the circumstances of Kitt?s and Elizabeth?s lives that influence their behavior?

6. On the day of the explosion, as well as during the trial, many of the characters make decisions that ultimately change the course of their lives. What are some of these decisions? How might things have turned out differently if, for example, Matt hadn?t bought cigarettes, or Janine hadn?t gone to see Mary?

7. Pak Young is described as a ?wild goose father,? a man who remains in Korea to work while his wife and children move abroad for better education. Pak will make any sacrifice for Mary. Who are the other fathers in the story and what are their relationships with their wives and children? What is the picture of fatherhood that emerges?

8. What is the reality of being the mother of a special needs child? How do Elizabeth, Teresa, and Kitt each cope with the daily demands of caregiving? Where do they find support? What are their relationships with each other? Elizabeth, in particular, devotes herself to Henry. What is her motivation for constantly seeking new therapies, some of which are painful and possibly harmful? How does Kitt feel about Elizabeth?s treatment of Henry? What does Elizabeth realize as she watches the video of Henry? Why does she take the drastic action she takes at the end of the novel?

9. Several small and seemingly insignificant objects are important to the development of the book?s characters and the unfolding of the plot --- for example, Janine?s wok and the balloons. What are some of the others and the purposes they serve?

10. Each of the main characters feels guilty about something he or she did or failed to do. Why is Young relieved on the first day of the trial when the judge announces, ?Docket number 49621, Commonwealth of Virginia versus Elizabeth Ward?? What are Pak and Young, Matt and Janine, hiding from Abe Patterley? At the book?s conclusion, is there anyone who can be described as completely innocent? Did any good come of the tragedy?

11. What brought Young and Pak from Seoul to Baltimore and, ultimately, to Miracle Creek? What is Young?s first impression of the United States and its citizens? How were the Yoo family?s expectations of America different from the realities? How were Young, Pak and Mary different as individuals and as a family before they immigrated?

12. As Day Three of the trial ends, Young and Matt are each determined to learn the truth about what their spouses have been hiding. What has Young discovered that causes her to doubt Pak? Why does Pak continue to lie to her? What has Matt discovered about Janine? What lies do Matt and Janine persist in telling each other?

13. On Day Four of the trial, Abe introduces as evidence ?a blow-up of notepad paper, phrases scrawled everywhere,? taken from Elizabeth?s house after the explosion. In particular, there are five phrases on the page, highlighted in yellow: *I can?t do this anymore*; *I need my life back*; *It needs to end TODAY!!*; *Henry = victim? How?*; and *NO MORE HBOT*, which has been circled several times. What was Elizabeth?s frame of mind when she wrote these notes to herself? What is the truth about the last day of Henry?s life?

14. Shannon and Abe appear to be skillful and highly ethical attorneys. In order to do their jobs, they have no choice but to believe their witnesses as they build their cases. Do either of them doubt any of the information they?ve been given? What tactics do each of them use to influence the jury? Which one of them seems closer to winning the case when Elizabeth?s disappearance puts an end to the trial?

15. What is the chain of events that turns Mary?s teenaged feelings of anger and humiliation into the actions she takes on the night of the explosion? How does Pak rationalize his plan for saving her? Should Matt and Janine have been held accountable for how they treated her?

16. Were you surprised to discover the identity of the person who set the fire? Do you view what that person did as murder? Was that person?s sentence fair? How about the sentences of the others?

Author Bio

Angie Kim moved as a preteen from Seoul, South Korea, to the suburbs of Baltimore. After graduating from Interlochen Arts Academy, she studied philosophy at Stanford University and attended Harvard Law School, where she was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. Her debut novel, MIRACLE CREEK, won the Edgar Award, the ITW Thriller Award, the Strand Critics? Award and the Pinckley Prize, and was named one of the best books of the year by *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *Kirkus Reviews* and the "Today" show. Kim lives in northern Virginia with her family.

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