Mrs Sen’s
Interpreter Of Maladies ~ Jhumpa Lahiri

Alex, Bronte, Jack and Kiara
Summary of Mrs Sen’s

1. Eliot’s mother hires Mrs Sen as their babysitter
2. She spends the evening cutting vegetables
3. Cleaned up before Eliot’s mum came
4. Mrs Sen picked Eliot from the bus stop
5. Mrs Sen practices driving with Eliot in the car
6. Mrs Sen received a letter from home
7. Mrs Sen got Mr Sen to pick up fish
8. Mrs Sen got upset because she was homesick
9. Mr Sen drove them to the fisherman
10. Mrs Sen refused to drive and stopped preparing meals for a week
11. Mr Sen took them to the fish shop
12. Makes Mrs Sen drive
13. Mrs Sen and Eliot catch the bus to and from the fish shop
14. Mrs Sen and Eliot take the bus to and from the fish shop
Main Characters
Mrs Sen

Mrs Sen is an Indian woman who takes care of Eliot after school in her own home. Existing only for her husband, she cooks and dresses only to spend all day alone cooking. The place they live in is small and modest and she is embarrassed when her relatives back home believe she lives ‘in a palace.’ Her fear of driving eventually leads to her losing the right to care for Eliot, getting into a crash when Mr Sen pushed her to go out of her comfort zone.
Eliot

The son of a single working mother, he is looked after by Mrs Sen after school. As she doesn't drive, he resides at her house, where he sits on the couch watching her chop veggies on newspaper on the floor everyday. The 11 year old boy is a sensitive and observant boy who accepts things even when they compromise the truth, like when Mrs Sen drives, and when he is eventually left to care for himself at the end and tells his mother it’s ‘fine’.
Eliot’s Mother

A struggling single mother, she drinks, smokes and has ‘visitors’ constantly staying over. She tries to find appropriate babysitters for Eliot, caring about his safety, but eventually decides he can cope alone. She can never be bother cooking, and often orders pizza for herself and Eliot, leaving him generally to clean up afterwards.

Mr Sen

An Indian man who won an academic post to an American university something which represents in India heights of achievement and possibility, he tries to force his wife to adapt more to American life by trying to make her drive. In the end, he refunds Eliot’s mother, the childminding fee for the month when Mrs Sen crashes the car.
Culture is a big theme in this story. Mrs Sen reminisces many times throughout the story about things back home to do with her culture. Some example of this are when she was showing Eliot her knife from India and she told him that all the women used to sit in a circle and cut up the food for dinner and gossip. “My mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighbourhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing 50 kilos of vegetables”. This is a neighbourhood culture/tradition that the Sen’s had to leave behind. Also when she mentions that in India if you yelled like you were in an emergency the whole neighbourhood would show up at your doorstep and how that would never happen in America. This would be a type of cultural relationship.
Seperation

In this story separation comes to mind because when Mrs Sen says, “When I think of you, only a boy separated from your mother for so much of the day, I am ashamed”. This is Mrs Sen in her eyes something that should never happen. It is very obvious in the story that Mrs Sen misses her family and India in general. Some examples of this are when Mrs Sen talks about the fish in India and how fantastic it was or when she says how close everyone there was with each other like when all the women would chop their 50 kilos of vegetables together.
Human Relations

Relationships between people in this story are heavily focused on. Not all the relationships are necessarily romantic relationships but rather friendships or blood bound relationships. An example of one would be the relationship between Mrs Sen and her grandpa who deceased during the story. Mrs Sen was emotionally traumatised when she was informed of the death of her grandpa showing that they had a strong relationship from continents away. Another example is the relationship between Eliot and his mother and how she doesn’t spend much time with him. This is example of a seemingly weak bond to Mrs Sen however different cultures do have different views.
She had brought the blade from India, where apparently there was at least one in every household. “Whenever there is a wedding in the family,” she told Eliot one day, “or a large celebrations of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighbourhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the rood of our building, laughing, gossiping, and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.” Her profile hovered protectively over her work, a confetti of cucumber, eggplant, and onion skins heaped around her. “It is impossible to fall asleep those nights, listening to their chatter.” She paused to look at a pine tree framed by the living room window. “Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence.”
From where Eliot sat on the sofa he could detect her curious scent of mothballs and cumin, and she could see the perfectly centred part in her braided hair, which was shaded with crushed vermilion and therefore appeared to be blushing. At first Eliot had wondered if she had cut her scalp, or if something had bitten her there. But then one day he saw her standing before the bathroom mirror, solemnly applying, with the head of thumbtack, a fresh stroke of scarlet powder, which she stored in a small jam jar. A few grains of the powder fell onto the bridge of her nose as she used the thumbtack to stamp a dot above her eyebrows. “I must wear the powder every day,” she explained when Eliot asked her what it was for, “for the rest of the days that I am married.” “Like a wedding ring, you mean?”

“Exactly, Eliot, like a wedding ring. Only with no fear of losing it in the dishwasher.”
“It was never a special occasion, nor was she ever expecting company. It was merely dinner for herself and Mr Sen…”

“Two things, Eliot learned made Mrs Sen happy. One was the arrival of a letter from her family.”

“‘When have i ever worn this one? And this? And this?’”

“‘Send pictures of your new life.’ ‘What pictures can i send?… They think i live in a palace.’”

“‘He said she was resting, though when Eliot had gone to the bathroom he’d heard her crying.’”

“By then Eliot understood that when Mrs Sen said home, she meant India.”
“Professor’s wife, responsible and kind, i will care for your child in my home.”

“Elliot didn’t mind going to Mrs’s Sens after school.”

“…the first thing she did was pore herself a glass of wine and eat bread and cheese, sometimes so much of it she wasn’t hungry for the pizza they normally ordered for dinner.”
Links to Other Stories

- Relationships
- Preparing food/ Men V’s Women’s roles
- Babysitting
- Indian family adjusting to western culture
- Driving