



Long for This World

Sonya Chung

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Pushcart Prize nominee Sonya Chung has displayed her stunning talent in her award-winning short fiction and essays. Now, she renders the compelling story of a troubled family straddling cultures, fleeing and searching, in her piercing and profoundly humane first novel. In 1953, on a small island in Korea, a young boy stows away on the ferry that is carrying his older brother and his wife to the mainland. Fifty-two years later, Han Hyun-kyu is on a plane flying back to Korea, leaving behind his own wife in America. It is his daughter, Jane — a war photographer recently injured in a bombing in Baghdad and forced to return to New York — who journeys to find him in the small town in South Korea where his brothers have settled. Here, father and daughter take refuge from their demons, flirt with passion, and, in the wake of tragedy, discover something deeper and more enduring than they could have imagined.

Long for This World Details

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From Reader Review Long for This World for online ebook

Wendy says

Long for This World is bold and subtle, thought-provoking and entertaining. Page after page is filled with writing that made me think: Aha! I know that feeling, but could not articulate it (at all, let alone as beautifully), revealing the many layers that can course through a single moment.

The story of the Korean American Han's and the Korean Han's covers a panoramic distance across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Yet the story is not sprawling, it is deep and intimate, filled with the thoughts and feelings of an array of distinct and beautifully rendered characters.

As I began to reach the end of Long for This World, I wished with every turning page that there were more pages (not less) ahead. In those final pages I was not prepared for how the story had grabbed me, how much I cared for the characters and wanted to spend more time with them, and how the final events would sweep over me emotionally.

A wonderful book!

Judy says

On the surface this book is about a 65 year old doctor who left Korea as a young man to follow his dreams in the U.S. He returns to his roots, visiting his prosperous younger brother and his family in a small town in Korea.

It's also about family dynamics; how our parents influence who we become as adults passing on their strengths and weaknesses. And how the children in turn affect their parents. How effective are we at communicating? How does what we leave unsaid affect us?

The book also examines how our work ambitions and need for success can impact our personal lives and the lives of our family members.

There's a lot going on here.

Allyson says

I wrote my review under the comment section by accident. rather than copy and paste, I will try to recreate my feeling for this read which was that it is a beautifully written flowing novel. I feared with the lengthy cast of characters at the beginning I would lose track of whom was whom, but she outlines the feel of each character so well that I was able to recognize the confusing names without a problem. My only criticism would be that these people had some dramatically awful things happen in their lives which I found a little too much of a stretch to escape. One less death or major flaw would have been more believable but even with that, her story was a real gem, multi-faceted and beautiful presented.

Bookreaderljh says

The title of this book is telling. The usual phrase is "NOT long for this world". The omission of that one word helps to show that this book is not about death (though there are several deaths involved that do factor into the narrative) but more about the moments of life. At points in the novel - my interpretation of the title was that the characters longed for a certain place that they may have abandoned and their quest to return. Chung is an excellent writer of sentences and descriptions but the reader should be forewarned that the overall pace of the story is quite slow. It reflects how most of these characters are seeking a place of respite as they try to escape from various aspects of their life. The story centers around a Korean brother and his Korean-American family and how after he leaves to go back home, how his action influences family on both sides of the ocean. The story shifts in time and narrator throughout and the similar Korean names made it sometimes hard to follow (so thank goodness for the cast of character's listing). There are several different story lines - all good and well described - but the tone is more of moments in time rather than a specific defined plot. It touches on art, war, assimilation, cultures, psychology - all through one extended family. Though the Korean culture is patriarchal and the plot revolves around a man - this book concentrates on the women and their losses. The story centers on breathing - taking a moment - but ends on something happening. Life moves on after introspection and acceptance.

Sylvia says

Something very soothing in the pace of this novel. Many points of view, which can be a little disorienting at first, but ultimately makes for a rich reading experience. Complex characters, cultural differences and emotional wisdom make this a worthy read.

Yoojin Hahn says

Sonya Chung's "Long For This World" is a wonderful book. It tells the story of the extended Han family: of what happens to Han Hyun-Kyu's family in the USA and family in Korea after he returns to his old home. The book is rather complex, telling the stories of many family members at once -- the story of Jane, a war photographer who had gone through many tragedies and decides to follow her father to Korea, of her depressed brother Henry, of her mother Lee Woo-in, of Han Jae-Kyu, Han Jung-joo, and many more. I really enjoyed "Long For This World." Although it wasn't an easy novel, the way that the author described each character and their struggle to escape the harsh difficulties in their lives left a great impression on me. I also liked the way that the author often switched between different characters' viewpoints, for it almost felt as if I were looking at the photographs of each character, of the different moments in their lives. In short, I enjoyed "Long For This World" and would like to read a book similar to it later on.

Judy says

Han Hyun-Ku returns to visit his brother's family in Korea some 40 years after immigrating to America, leaving his alcoholic wife and depressed son behind but being followed by his photojournalist daughter. The

lives of various characters tangle and intersect, sometimes in tragic ways, as they each try to find their place in the family and in the world.

This book has gotten very good reviews, but I just couldn't get into it. Maybe it would have been better in print so that I could keep the Korean names straight. In the audible version, they all sound too much alike and it was hard to remember who was who until well into the story. In addition, I didn't feel very drawn to or connected to any of the characters. Their motivations remained a mystery to me.

Nashi says

W sumie to nie wiem - co ja w?a?ciwe przeczyta?am?

Jill says

Long For This World -- the freshman effort of debut writer Sonya Chung -- is mostly about survival. Time and again in this short and assured book, Ms. Chung focuses in on loss and renewal; what each of us do to survive, even when we don't know all the answers and sometimes when we don't know the questions.

The story starts in 1953 on a remote island in South Korea, where a young boy and his older brother and sister-in-law make their way to the mainland and a future. Now, decades later, the young boy, Han Jae-kyu, is a respected doctor with an efficient wife, two fine sons, and Min-yung, his pregnant daughter who is dealing with severe emotional/mental problems. His older brother, Han Hyu-kyu -- who has immigrated to America, decides to flee his cold and undemonstrative wife Lee Woo-in and make his way to his brother's door; nearly simultaneously, his older daughter Jane (a war photographer who has been injured in Baghdad) arrives as well.

As the Koreans and Korean-American families get to know each other (and strive to know themselves), the older brother ruminates, "How did they get here? A series of decisions: flight from one's home and family; immersion in a foreign world; disconnection from a set of rules or social expectations; an allowance, judgment compromised, the conception of a child; a rushed marriage...flung into a roulette of forces."

For this reader, the story soared when the juxtaposition of the two worlds (Korean and Korean American), rife with their individual choices, converged. I learned a lot about Korea and its customs and mores. A bit less successful was the focus on the American offspring; Jane (the only character who speaks in first person) and her brother Henry who is a recovering substance abuser. Some of their story is told instead of FELT; I wanted a more visceral connection with these characters and instead, I felt my mind was engaged more than my heart. (Caveat: this is my subjective reading experience and others may find a stronger connection).

Ms. Chung wants to leave us with this impression: "Some people are not long for this world. The rest of us survive. For whatever reason, we are still standing, the lasting ones. Why us and not them? No one knows and no one speaks of it." The reader will discover who the survivors are along the journey and may be able to puzzle out the "whys." This is a talented new author and she will likely keep getting better and better.

Edan says

Since both Sonya Chung and I write for The Millions, I was kind of scared to read this book--what if I didn't like it? How would I handle that? I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, and I didn't want to be dishonest either. Thankfully, I really enjoyed Sonya's novel, which read so smoothly, even as it shifted characters' perspectives, even as it went from third person to first. I love the way Chung pulled us back into the past before releasing us into a present story that felt both quiet and dramatic at once. The word that kept coming to mind as I was reading was "graceful." It's such a gracefully told novel, and although there's a lot of heavy stuff here--death, war, bitterness within a family--it's also amazingly readable. I can already think of at least 5 people who will love this one...

I'm going to be interviewing Sonya for The Millions, so stay tuned!

Esther Wenger says

Surprise, depth, and insight into the human experience, as well as Korean family dynamics and the place of harmony in modern times. Quite recommended. Audiobook narrator was like listening to a person tell a crafted yet natural storyline.

V. says

Don't hide behind your camera. There's something like a realism, antiquarian, set in stone, three generations represented in a literate voice that never questions itself. There's supposed to be a moral standing here: some sort of inflection, judgement, resolution. It's all abandoned though. We're meant to ignore the hunger for ideas and exegetical value and delve into sentimentalism (Oh my. They're not long for this world. Neither Am I. Nobody is! Oh my!) This might be comfortable to some but not to me. I want Hans that know they're types of something rather than just tokens. I don't know if Sonya Chung has attended a writer's workshop taught by Chang-Rae Lee and missed what made Aloft aloft but the scene seemed plausible when I wrote it.

Connie Kronlokkens says

Delicate relationships color this story. Not always between husband and wife, but often between more distant family members, such as a man and his sister-in-law. Direct communication between people is rare, not to be expected. The American Koreans, on a visit to Korea, do, however, ripple the calm surface of the Korean relatives' lives. At first it is welcome, but a break does come. Everyone is changed.

This story of how inner and outer lives meet is exactly what I want in a novel. The deaths that occur are, in part, due to the cultures in which the two grow up. A Korean girl cannot stand the ordered Confucian life her mother spreads around her like silk. A young Korean-American man follows his mother into alcoholism, indulged by her. Perhaps, in each case, it could have been overcome, but no butterfly bats its wing without effect in this book.

"In love - the love of a father, a mother, a lover - there must be a feeling of terror. For the other person's

being. Like a vigilance. You lose yourself in it, you lose your self. It is not effortful, it is a wave that overcomes you. That is ... how you know. In false love, in ... lust, you do not have this terror. You have a sense of power, of control. It is the opposite." Ellipsis here do not indicate absence, but rather the space left as the speaker thinks, finding the words.

Celeste Ng says

The cover of Sonya Chung's debut novel, *Long for This World*, shows a young woman gazing out over a wide ocean, raising a camera to her eye. Chung's main character is a photographer, but that's not the only reason this cover is so apt. The novel unfolds like a collection of intimate snapshots, telling a story of loss and unexpected renewal.

Read the rest of my review at Fiction Writers Review:

<http://fictionwritersreview.com/reviews/long-for-this-world-by-sonya-chung>

Jennifer W says

[her miscarriage (hide spoiler)]
