

b, Book, and Me**Kim Sagwa****Sunhee Jeong, Translator**

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The two girls central to Kim Sagwa's haunting *b, Book, and Me* face bullying, their parents' indifference, and a sense of helpless displacement. Teachers pretend not to notice what happens to Rang and b, averting their eyes or looking at the sky.

And so Rang and b wander, hoping to avoid their families, the boys who beat and molest them, and the terrifying neighborhood called the End, where "thieves, prostitutes, orphans, murderers, and insane people" live together. Their bleak South Korean town attempts (without success) to be like Seoul, flanked by an ocean that is both beautiful and dangerous.

Here, introspective Rang tries not to cry when she is attacked and humiliated, while b, whose family is poor and whose sister is quite ill, is prone to lash out. Cynical and confused, b warns her ailing sister not to expect miracles, because hope is "a damn lie."

A young man named Book is introduced as a strange, charismatic antihero. Obsessed with reading, Book drifts to and from the End, carrying books in a plastic bag and living in a ramshackle house that appears to be built from even more books. He meets Rang and b at the Alone Cafe, where the girls take refuge from their melancholy world, drinking coffee and listening to cool music.

As the girls follow Book to the End, they enjoy a brief liberation, staying at his small home and sharing confidences. Book longs to be a book, b wants to be a fish, and Rang wants to be the ocean. When a wild End gathering at an abandoned hospital becomes violent, the girls are forced to return to their families.

Surreal and luminous, *b, Book, and Me* turns a dark mirror toward teen bullying—often ignored or enabled by adults, and a shameful global phenomenon.

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