

Brother's Keeper

Julie Lee

Holiday House (Jun 16, 2020)

Hardcover \$17.99 (304pp)

978-0-8234-4494-6

In North Korea in 1950, twelve-year-old Pak Sora sees her father only when he arises from the hole the family of five has dug for him in the backyard so that he can avoid being conscripted into the army. The family cowers in place as friends disappear and the Communist fervor lathers into war. Julie Lee's harrowing novel is a sobering reminder that even the youngest citizens pay the tolls of war.

Pak Sora and her family flee in the night, joining hundreds of others as they make their way south, toward freedom. When a bomb falls, Sora and her eight-year-old brother Youngsoo are separated from their family and try to make their way, alone, to safety. Snow, starvation, sickness, enemy soldiers, and even strangers interfere; the two children have only each other.

Sora also bears the knowledge that, as a daughter, her great importance lies in saving her brother, the treasured, first-born son. Her existence is subjugated to his. Her education ended so that she might watch over him and his brother. Repeatedly, what little opportunity Sora might have is lost to honor her brothers, which complicates her relationships with them and with her mother.

The narrative makes a painful reality of the deprivation that people faced when fleeing their homes, from rummaging through deserted homes for grains of rice or spoiled kimchee to scratching at lice until they bled. Sora strengthens as she makes her own decisions; these are amplified by quick flashbacks that juxtapose the rosy past with the daunting present.

At its heart, *Brother's Keeper* is about families and how they overcome hardship and loss. The Korean War and Korean culture act as a powerful setting for this work, and the strength and sorrow of Sora and Youngsoo are haunting.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (May / June 2020)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.