



How to Be a Revolutionary

C. A. Davids

Verso Fiction (Feb 8, 2022)

Softcover \$19.95 (304pp)

978-1-83976-087-7

In C. A. Davids's novel *How to Be a Revolutionary*, two people from opposite ends of the world connect and are separated by political and personal secrets.

Beth, a South African haunted by her turbulent youth and failing marriage, escapes to a diplomatic post in China. There, she strikes up an unlikely and unusual friendship with Zhao, an older man who lives in the apartment above hers. When Zhao vanishes without warning, Beth is left to piece together the dangerous mysteries he left behind, not realizing the extent to which she has changed Zhao's life—or that he will continue to change hers from afar.

Beth and Zhao are bound by the revolutions that color their countries' histories and their personal lives. Beth became politically active at a young age, joining the fight for racial equality and suffering traumatic consequences; Zhao, a journalist, saw first hand the devastation wrought by China's Great Leap Forward, but said nothing for years, not even after his starving mother disappeared and he witnessed child soldiers beating adults and children alike.

Whether silent or outspoken, the keeper of secrets always faces risks. Zhao and Beth spent years grappling with guilt and grief before meeting, not quite by chance, in Shanghai. The city's own history, which is fraught with secrets born of necessity, becomes a part of their shared story, both literally and symbolically. Despite the extreme situations the characters end up in, the self-doubt, fear, and hypocrisy they wrestle with are familiar to anyone who has ever devoted themselves to a cause—and the clear-eyed determination that each discovers by story's end is to be envied.

How to Be a Revolutionary is a novel about the costs of remembering the past and the far more dire consequences of forgetting it.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2022)

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