

I'll Go On

Hwang Jungeun

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Hwang Jungeun's *I'll Go On* brings to vibrant life one of the most vexing human dilemmas: how does a person go on after devastating loss?

Sisters Sora and Nana are haunted by their father's gruesome death and their mother's resulting neglect. Rotating among first-person narrators, the novel begins with Sora as an adult learning that Nana is pregnant. As she reels from the news, she looks back at their unsettled childhood, spent in a gloomy basement with Naghi, who grows up to be their closest friend, and his mother, who kept them fed when their own mother, Aeja, was deep in mourning and depression.

The novel's strength lies in character development. The few plot events that occur are made more meaningful because Sora, Nana, and Naghi are fully realized. Aeja is a powerful presence. Even characters of lesser importance, including Sora's work colleagues and Nana's boyfriend, are memorably sketched and lively.

The novel's mood is dark, but the subtlety with which Jungeun explores themes of loss and the sometimes debilitating power of family history offers a counterbalance. The narration is broken up into short sections, each one a glimpse into a character's mental state or a telling anecdote from the past, all of which form an evocative picture.

Among the narrators, Sora's voice is the strongest. She captures Aeja's despair and its lingering aftermath most powerfully. Later sections provide the pleasure of seeing how other characters perceive the same events in a markedly different manner, though Nana's narration jarringly shifts into the third person.

I'll Go On is a powerful and challenging literary novel.

REBECCA HUSSEY (November/December 2018)

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