



★ **Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982**

**Cho Nam-Joo**

**Jamie Chang, Translator**

Liveright (Apr 14, 2020)

Hardcover \$20.00 (144pp)

978-1-63149-670-7

Credited with igniting Korea's next feminist wave, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* censures patriarchal cultures with its rage-inducing stories of everyday abuses.

One ordinary night in his ordinary home, Daehyun notices that a change has come over his wife, Jiyoung, who speaks in the voice of her deceased mother. Days later, she assumes the personality of a college friend who died in childbirth. The trend continues: "Jiyoung became different people from time to time ... all of them women she knew."

Trapped at home by convention, Jiyoung tries on these different women's lives, only to discover that all women are wronged. Her mother, who relinquished a brilliant future to support men, found her childhood hopes reduced to a family punchline. Jiyoung fares little better.

In childhood, Jiyoung witnesses a teacher's daily assaults on a classmate; she's followed home by a boy who's certain that she led him on. After college, she winds up underpaid and overworked; she has to give up even this dubious privilege to start a family. "The world had changed a great deal," the book reflects, "but the little rules, contracts and customs had not, which meant the world hadn't *actually* changed at all."

The novel is a flint, naming inequality from statistical and narrative vantages and urging stands against it. Its women are dumped, used, and forced into boxes. Its "good" men are revealed to be far from faultless: secretly recorded in the bathroom, Jiyoung's indignant former coworkers are shamed, told that "The accused male employees have families and parents to protect, too. Do you really want to destroy people's lives like this?"

In the novel's background, the early wail of a wronged girl redoubles; it is joined by a chorus, encompassing all women and giving all an outlet. Perennial in its relevance, Cho Nam-Joo's novel shows that patriarchy remains powerful because it is such a banal foe.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2020)

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