

★ **The Liberators****E. J. Koh**

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A Korean family learns to live with their difficult history in E. J. Koh's novel *The Liberators*.

Insuk and her newborn son, Henry, left Korea in the early 1980s to join her husband in California. But Korea will never leave them: Insuk's father was murdered during a dictatorship, and news from home keeps leaking into the everyday moments of their lives. Haunted by their nation's past as well as their own, Insuk's family seeks a way to accept their painful memories without being ruled by them.

From the brutality of World War II to failed twenty-first-century attempts at reunification, Korea and its people underwent countless traumas. These shock waves are reflected in miniature by Insuk and Sungho's distant marriage, Insuk's fraught relationship with her mother-in-law, and Henry's reluctance to commit to his relationship with a North Korean girl. Sparse, elegant prose conveys the depths of the devastation each person feels over everything they've lost, from people to beloved pets.

Here, inner turmoil causes people to pull away from the few others who can understand what they have gone through. It is a wonder that approval, affection, and a nation just a few miles away can be so out of reach. A family friend, Robert, cannot cope with this reality and pays a heavy price. But Insuk, Sungho, and Henry prove that not everyone has to suffer the same fate. Sometimes, with time and effort, old wounds can be healed, even if they are never forgotten. And sometimes, it is possible to learn from the past and start building bridges rather than walls.

Spanning nearly seventy years, *The Liberators* is a soaring multigenerational saga about learning to accept the past without letting it overshadow the future.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2023)

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