

★ **The Passenger: How a Travel Writer Learned to Love Cruises & Other Lies from a Sinking Ship**

**Chaney Kwak**

Godine (Jun 8, 2021)

Hardcover \$18.95 (160pp)

978-1-56792-697-2

On a placid cruise along the Norwegian coast to gather material for a magazine feature on the Northern Lights, travel writer Chaney Kwak's boredom turned into terror. The *Viking Sky* sailed into treacherous waters, assaulted by a furious storm. *The Passenger* is his story, as it happened.

With screams piercing his cabin walls, and water glasses flinging themselves against the door as if possessed, Kwak confronted not only his own mortality, but his family history, his failing relationship, and the meaning of his life and work. Under a bruise-colored sky, the ship, carrying 915 passengers and 458 crew, pitched through sixty-foot waves, lashed by horizontal rain driven by eighty-seven-miles-per-hour winds. Floors and walls became indistinguishable as the ship heaved and dropped, until sudden silence gave notice that all four engines had stalled, leaving the ship at the mercy of the sea's muscular undertow. When a powerful swell hit the ship high and hard, the sea rushed in, leaving it floundering a mere half mile from the jagged shoreline. Kwak voice-messaged his parents, Koreans who survived their own hell. He said nothing about the danger.

When rescue finally came, the cruise line's CEO promised everyone another Viking cruise, free of charge. Kwak declared there was "no way in hell" he'd get on another cruise, but the book makes it obvious that he left the *Viking Sky* a changed man—still funny, still conflicted about the future, but aware that he had choices, and that he had the courage to make them.

*The Passenger*, with its bare-bones honesty and dry, cynical humor, reveals that when all is said and done, it's the little things that matter: small acts of courage and kindness, words of love, and gratitude for the gift of another day.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2021)

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