

## The Prince of Mournful Thoughts and Other Stories

**Caroline Kim**

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Caroline Kim's masterful short story collection captures myriad voices with nuance and insight.

Their subjects impressive in their breadth, the stories focus on characters young and old, both women and men, and across cultures and eras. These include a jaded teenage girl; a father who's overwhelmed with emotion at the prospect of losing his daughter and granddaughter in California; a melancholy widow wandering Paris; and a child about to emigrate to America without understanding what that means.

In "Mr. Oh," a Korean immigrant struggles to express himself in English and understand his Americanized children in a society where he's achieved success yet feels empty. In "Arirang," the Korean War transforms a woman's bleak prospects when she meets an American soldier who's from Montana. The hilarious satire "Therapy Robot" includes blistering commentary on American consumer culture through the diary of a suburban woman.

The stories are energized by their diverse settings. In "Lucia, Russell, and Me," a young immigrant witnesses American poverty and abuse and transcends their limited opportunities, only to lose a sense of community. In "Seoul," a boy and his family escape North Korea on foot during the war and struggle to retain their humanity while surviving on the gritty streets of a war-torn city. "The Prince of Mournful Thoughts" reimagines the short, tragic life of Prince Sado, who lived in eighteenth-century Korea. Told like a fable, it reveals the disastrous implications of misinterpreting another's actions and acting in a rash way because of a wounded heart.

Worth savoring, the stories of *The Prince of Mournful Thoughts* are intimate, often wistful portraits set amid the stifling and conflicting expectations of families and cultures.

WENDY HINMAN (September / October 2020)

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