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In Order To Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey To Freedom



Synopsis

Yeonmi Park was not dreaming of freedom when she escaped from North Korea. She didn't even know what it meant to be free. All she knew was that she was running for her life, that if she and her family stayed behind they would die - from starvation, or disease, or even execution. *In Order to Live* is the story of Park's struggle to survive in the darkest, most repressive country on earth; her harrowing escape to South Korea through China's underworld of smugglers and human traffickers; and her emergence as a leading human rights activist - all before her 21st birthday. Park was born to a family of civil servants in the North Korean city of Hyesan, along the Chinese border. She grew up in a society in which the regime controls everything you do, everything you learn, where you go, what you say, even what you think. In this warped world, famine was a way of life and minor offenses, such as watching foreign videos, could prove fatal. Park's family was relatively privileged until her father, a party member, was arrested for smuggling. After that, life in North Korea became a ceaseless battle against starvation. Escaping with her mother, Park began a long journey of unspeakable hardship and degradation through China and Mongolia, which finally yielded her freedom in South Korea. Today, Park is an influential leader of the younger generations of Korean dissidents and an internationally recognized advocate for human rights around the world. In the end, *In Order to Live* is about the resilience of the human spirit and the transcendent power of love to overcome the most ghastly horrors and the most hopeless circumstances. "I had to learn how to love others," says Yeonmi Park. "And now I am willing to die for them."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At university when I was studying modern Chinese history, I always shunned history books with their bare, empty facts and their clinical indifference to what's written inside them. In my opinion, history is best told in stories of the people who live through it, so I did most of my research through autobiographies. I came to this book with the expectation of doing much the same - of reading someone's story and learning more about North Korea and what life is still like for the people living there. What I didn't expect was the level of depth and meaning in the story inside. I watched Ms Park's One Young World speech (and cried along with her), and I was expecting the book to be emotional, and in particular I was looking forward to the parts when she was reunited with her family members. It wasn't emotional - but after I'd finished the book and realised it wasn't, it made perfect sense. We are taken step by step through someone's quest to survive. The lengths she's had to go through, and someone who has been starving for half her life, repeatedly raped, brutalised, lost people dear to her, and seen awful, awful things (hopefully she has managed to overcome her initial indifference to the idea of counselling!), there's too much to cope with to even know where to begin addressing any emotions. It would be disingenuous for the writer to have made this an emotional book; Ms Park hardly had time or energy for emotions. Every moment she was either trying to survive herself or trying to help her family members. There was no excess energy to be used for anything except whatever she needed to do to make it through the obstacles she was facing. And, boy, did she have to do a lot of awful things in order to survive.

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