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Nora Okja Keller

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Bridges to Memory: Postmemory in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction

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Possessing a wisdom and maturity rarely found in a first novelist, Korean-American writer Nora Okja Keller tells a heartwrenching and enthralling tale in this, her literary debut. *Comfort Woman* is the story of Akiko, a Korean refugee of World War II, and Beccah, her daughter by an American missionary. The two women are living on the edge of society—and sanity—in Honolulu, plagued by Akiko's periodic encounters with the spirits of the dead, and by Beccah's struggles to reclaim her mother from her past. Slowly and painfully Akiko reveals her tragic story and the horrifying years she was forced to serve as a "comfort woman" to Japanese soldiers. As Beccah uncovers these truths, she discovers her own strength and the secret of the powers she herself possessed—the precious gifts her mother has given her. A San Francisco Chronicle bestseller In 1995, Nora Okja Keller received the Pushcart Prize for "Mother Tongue",

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a piece that is part of Comfort Woman.

On the fifth anniversary of my father's death, my mother confessed to his murder...' Thus begins Nora Okja Keller's breathtaking first novel, which follows Beccah, a young Korean- American girl growing up in Hawaii, as she uncovers the dark secrets of her mother's dislocated past. From being sold into prostitution in the Japanese 'recreation camps' of World War II to the death of her first child and her unhappy marriage to an American missionary; Beccah understands why her mother lives in a spirit world she cannot share, and that clearly marks her as 'other'. Powerful and lucid, Keller beautifully explores the depths of anguish and love that exist in the universally complicated relationship of mother and daughter.

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Nora Okja Keller, the acclaimed author of *Comfort Woman*, tells the shocking story of a group of young people abandoned after the Korean War. At the center of the tale are two teenage girls—Hyun Jin and Sookie, a teenage prostitute kept by an American soldier—who form a makeshift family with Lobetto, a lost boy who scrapes together a living running errands and pimping for neighborhood girls. Both horrifying and moving, *Comfort Woman* at once reveals another layer of war's human detritus and the fierce love between a mother and daughter.

From *Comfort Woman*: “ We began the day with breakfast, after which we swept and cleaned our rooms. Then we went to the bathroom downstairs to wash the only dress we had and to bathe. The bathroom did not even have a door, so the soldiers watched us.

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We were all naked, and they laughed at us, especially me and the other young girl who did not have any pubic hair. “ At two, the soldiers came. My work began, and I lay down as one by one the soldiers raped me. Every day, anywhere from twelve to over twenty soldiers assaulted me. There were times when there were as many as thirty; they came to the garrison in truckloads. ” “ I lay on the bed with my knees up and my feet on the mat, as if I were giving birth. Whenever the soldiers did not feel satisfied, they vented their anger on me. Every day, there were incidents of violence and humiliation. When the soldiers raped me, I felt like a pig. Sometimes they tied up my right leg with a waist band or a belt and hung it on a nail in the wall as they violated me. “ I shook all over. I felt my blood turn white. I heard that there was a group called the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women looking for women like me. I could not

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forget the words that blared out of the radio that day: 'Don't be ashamed, being a sex slave is not your fault. It is the responsibility of the Japanese Imperial Army. Stand up and fight for your rights.' ” In April 1943, fifteen-year-old Maria Rosa Henson was taken by Japanese soldiers occupying the Philippines and forced into prostitution as a “ comfort woman. ” In this simply told yet powerfully moving autobiography, Rosa recalls her childhood as the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy landowner, her work for Huk guerrillas, her wartime ordeal, and her marriage to a rebel leader who left her to raise their children alone. Her triumph against all odds is embodied by her decision to go public with the secret she had held close for fifty years. Now in a second edition with a new introduction and foreword that bring the ongoing controversy over the comfort women to the present, this powerful memoir will be

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essential reading for all those concerned with violence against women.

The second novel from the critically acclaimed New York Times – bestselling author Chang-rae Lee. His remarkable debut novel was called "rapturous" (The New York Times Book Review), "revelatory" (Vogue), and "wholly innovative" (Kirkus Reviews). It was the recipient of six major awards, including the prestigious Hemingway Foundation/PEN award. Now Chang-rae Lee has written a powerful and beautifully crafted second novel that leaves no doubt about the extraordinary depth and range of his talent. A Gesture Life is the story of a proper man, an upstanding citizen who has come to epitomize the decorous values of his New York suburban town. Courteous, honest, hardworking, and impenetrable,

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Franklin Hata, a Japanese man of Korean birth, is careful never to overstep his boundaries and to make his neighbors comfortable in his presence. Yet as his story unfolds, precipitated by the small events surrounding him, we see his life begin to unravel. Gradually we learn the mystery that has shaped the core of his being: his terrible, forbidden love for a young Korean Comfort Woman when he served as a medic in the Japanese army during World War II. In *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee leads us with dazzling control through a taut, suspenseful story about love, family, and community—and the secrets we harbor. As in *Native Speaker*, he writes of the ways outsiders conform in order to survive and the price they pay for doing so. It is a haunting, breathtaking display of talent by an acclaimed young author.

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During the Pacific War, more than 200,000 Korean girls were forced into sexual servitude for Japanese soldiers. They lived in horrific conditions in “ comfort stations ” across Japanese-occupied territories. Barely 10 percent survived to return to Korea, where they lived as social outcasts. Since then, self-declared comfort women have come forward only to have their testimonies and calls for compensation largely denied by the Japanese government. Kim Soom tells the story of a woman who was kidnapped at the age of thirteen while gathering snails for her starving family. The horrors of her life as a sex slave follow her back to Korea, where she lives in isolation gripped by the fear that her past will be discovered. Yet, when she learns that the last known comfort woman is dying, she decides to tell her there will still be “ one left ” after her passing, and embarks on a painful journey. One Left is a provocative,

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extensively researched novel constructed from the testimonies of dozens of comfort women. The first Korean novel devoted to this subject, it rekindled conversations about comfort women as well as the violent legacies of Japanese colonialism. This first-ever English translation recovers the overlooked and disavowed stories of Korea ' s most marginalized women.

American Book Award Winner: A “ stunning ” memoir of surviving WWII Latvia—and the long journey to healing that followed (The New York Times Book Review). “ A heartbreaking yet inspiring memoir of tragedy and healing, ” A Woman in Amber tells the story of how the occupation of Latvia during World War II affected a woman ' s relationship with her mother and husband for years to come (Tim O ' Brien). Though Agate Nesaule eventually

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immigrated to the United States and became successful in her professional life, she found herself suffering from depression and unable to come to terms with its cause—until she found her voice and began to share what happened to her and her family at the hands of invading Russian soldiers. In a true story that “ draws the reader forward with the suspense of a novel, ” Nesaule reveals the effects of hunger, both physical and emotional, in stories about begging Russian soldiers for food, the abusive relationship with her first husband, and the redemption that came when she met her second (The New York Times Book Review).

During World War II more than one thousand Filipinas were

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kidnapped by the Imperial Japanese Army. Lolás ' House tells the stories of sixteen surviving Filipino " comfort women. " M. Evelina Galang enters into the lives of the women at Lolás ' House, a community center in metro Manila. She accompanies them to the sites of their abduction and protests with them at the gates of the Japanese embassy. Each woman gives her testimony, and even though the women relive their horror at each telling, they offer their stories so that no woman anywhere should suffer wartime rape and torture. Lolás ' House is a book of testimony, but it is also a book of witness, of survival, and of the female body. Intensely personal and globally political, it is the legacy of Lolás ' House to the world.

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