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China Girl: And Other Stories

Ho Lin

Regent Press (2017)

ISBN 9781587903847

Reviewed by Skyler Boudreau for Reader Views (11/17)

“China Girl: And Other Stories” by Ho Lin is a collection of nine short stories that range from contemporary vignettes to urban fables. The reader explores stories that range from the title piece that details a young woman’s haunting experiences while roaming Beijing, to a film treatment about four people interconnected by a fifth. Each story embraces its climate, whether it be Los Angeles, Hong Kong, or Beijing, imbuing its tale with an immersive atmosphere that sucks the reader in. Ho Lin is a master of painting miniature worlds.

The entire collection is a map of tiny collisions, spanning from Eastern versus Western culture to history versus myth. While each piece is unique, Lin’s impressive storytelling weaves them together to build a unique tapestry. His prose is simple, reading almost like a documentation written by an outside observer, and the style lends itself well to each story.

“China Girl” is the first piece to be encountered. It draws the reader in with its casual descriptions of tragedy and a strange protagonist. It is the perfect opening to the anthology and lets the reader know exactly what to expect: a dream-like journey through culture.

I had some reservations entering this anthology. I find it difficult to engage with short stories sometimes. Some are too short to leave me feeling satisfied, while others drone on without saying much of anything. “China Girl: And Other Stories” is the first to hold my complete attention in a long time. I would recommend it to anyone who has the same problems as I do.

I’ve read far too many collections of pieces that seem thrown together only because they couldn’t survive as stories individually. Ho Lin doesn’t do that. Each of his short stories holds up well on its own, and forming a collection only strengthens each of them. That makes “China Girl: And Other Stories: a perfect example of what an anthology should be.