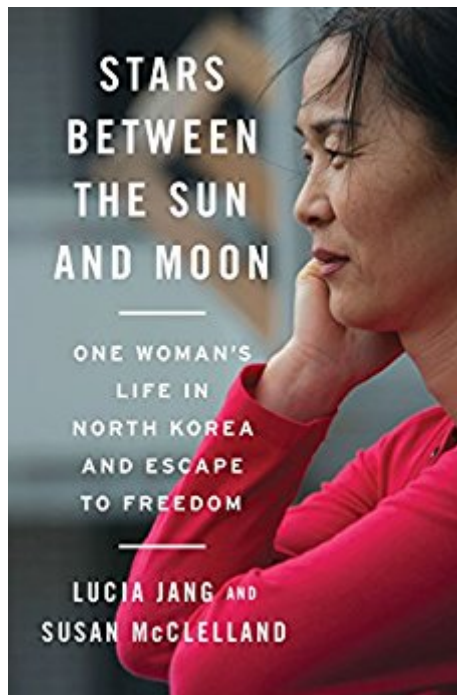


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Stars Between The Sun And Moon: One Woman's Life In North Korea And Escape To Freedom



Synopsis

An extraordinary memoir by a North Korean woman who defied the government to keep her family alive. Born in the 1970s, Lucia Jang grew up in a common, rural North Korean household—her parents worked hard, she bowed to a photo of Kim Il-Sung every night, and the family scraped by on rationed rice and a small garden. However, there is nothing common about Jang. She is a woman of great emotional depth, courage, and resilience. Happy to serve her country, Jang worked in a factory as a young woman. There, a man she thought was courting her raped her. Forced to marry him when she found herself pregnant, she continued to be abused by him. She managed to convince her family to let her return home, only to have her in-laws and parents sell her son without her knowledge for 300 won and two bars of soap. They had not wanted another mouth to feed. By now it was the beginning of the famine of the 1990s that resulted in more than one million deaths. Driven by starvation—her family's as well as her own—Jang illegally crossed the river to better-off China to trade goods. She was caught and imprisoned twice, pregnant the second time. She knew that, to keep the child, she had to leave North Korea. In a dramatic escape, she was smuggled with her newborn to China, fled to Mongolia under gunfire, and finally found refuge in South Korea before eventually settling in Canada. With so few accounts by North Korean women and those from its rural areas, Jang's fascinating memoir helps us understand the lives of those many others who have no way to make their voices known.

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Customer Reviews

This harrowing, first-person account of their struggles escaping from the oppressive North Korean regime in the face of the change from Un to Il is absolutely astonishing in its scope and shameless emotional resonance. What I have found in many accounts of the sheltered hermit kingdom is the technical specifications of its workhouses, the sheer horrific numbers of the starving and oppressed, and the bizarre antics of their government. What rarely escapes, due to fear of the punishment of the families of those who have emigrated, are the individual first-person stories and narratives that are so much more meaningful and gravitational than any data point could ever be. What I garnered from this book is the brutality, the sheer technical aspects of how people manage to escape, and what it looks like when they attempt it on an emotional, and familial level. It sounds absolutely awful, as does the actual inside narrative of the prisons and how babies are routinely used to oil the failing machine that is the government. With so many people starving, with such humiliation and utter despair, there is no question that the end of this regime will come from within in the form of a revolution not unlike that which took down the oppressive and French government in 1792, opening up a new era of health, prosperity, and fraternity. For now, however, the horrors and crimes against the people will continue until there is an organized resistance. Those crimes outlined in this book are nauseating and horrible, especially considering that the only way out is the equally deplorable human trafficking that the Chinese are having difficulty stopping. It is no wonder that the oral histories are the ones that are most punishable in terms of getting out and written down...

I borrowed this book from the library. I'm glad I didn't pay for it. I think every American should read this book. I had no idea that life was THAT bad in North Korea. The account of this woman's life is like reading a dystopian novel on the order of "1984." However, you'll have to have strong nerves and determination just to read the whole work, because it can be depressing to know that human beings are still treated this way in the 21st century. If it were a work of fiction, many readers would probably decide, "no, it couldn't happen like that," but it's a true account we're told. We follow the life of this woman from her miserable childhood till the time she managed to escape from North Korea without really knowing where she was headed. As a child, she had a seemingly unloving father and a confusing mother. As a young woman, she was stoically starving or being forced to bed someone just to get a little food in her empty belly. Once you finish the book you might feel the urge to take a

shower and watch a light comedy that will lift your spirits, because Ms. Jang, the first-person narrator of this tale of woe, seems to be always sleeping in filth, infested with lice and other bugs, bruised and battered by males in her life, half-starved and grieving over the absence of someone dear to her. There is really no comic relief in this tale of intolerable living conditions, where a quasi-religious adoration of their "eternal father," Kim Il-sung, was required, despite the abundance of sheer misery in the oppressive society. I might have offered 4 or 5 stars to rate this book, but I couldn't because of one glaring absence.

"Stars Between the Sun and Moon" is a book in two overlapping parts. The first part deals with life in North Korea. The second deals with life as a trafficked North Korean woman in China. Both parts ring true and provide the reader with the depressing details about daily realities for North Koreans both in and out of the country. Lucia Jang and Susan McClelland met weekly for a year while Jang told her story. Soohyun Nam translated for the two during their meetings and what emerged was this memoir. Perhaps this number of cooks is the reason that dialogue is somewhat stilted, or perhaps better yet, somewhat unrealistic. There are several passages where Jang and McClelland describe events happening in North Korea more pedantically than casually. In conversations, the authors slip in details about the country rather haphazardly. This might be beneficial to readers new to the subject of North Korea, but it is not enough to engage them in a meaningful way. What this book adds to our knowledge of North Korea through such memoirs is its descriptions of both the cross-border transit and the details of human trafficking. Jang crossed the border several times and sent remittances to her family, connecting herself with a network of traders and being forcibly repatriated after being caught in a raid by Chinese police. In China, Jang human traffickers and even one "passerby" took advantage of her status to transit her as one of many thousands of North Korean women sold to witting Chinese men from poor backgrounds. Jang includes some inner-dialogue that shows her conflict between leaving starvation but entering a slave-like existence as a trafficked person.

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