ReadingGroupGuides
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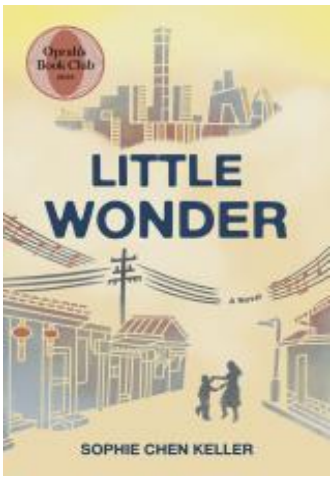
Little Wonder

by Sophie Chen Keller



About the Book

A musical prodigy and his mother spend years searching for each other in this ?tender, heartfelt novel about love, loss, and the enduring power of a mother?s love? (Kristin Hannah, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of THE WOMEN).

Song is a nobody --- just a food delivery worker from a village in Northeastern China --- but her son, River, is a little wonder.

At the age of four, he toddled to a piano and tapped out his favorite song. At eight, he mastered Liszt's three Liebestraume. At 10, he blazed through the complete set of Chopin's études. And at every step, through the valleys of loss, illness and poverty, Song is there to light his way --- until finally, at the age of 11, River is invited to study with a preeminent teacher in Beijing.

But in the chaos of Beijing Railway Station on the busiest day of the year, Song faces every mother's nightmare. She loses her grip on River?s little hand and is unable to find him after a desperate, harrowing search.

Over the next days, weeks and, eventually, years, Song and River fight to forge a path back to each other as they carve out new lives that carry them farther apart. An evocative exploration of a mother?s love and a son?s yearning, LITTLE WONDER takes us on an extraordinary journey through a modern Beijing that pulses with the music of humanity and its impossible --- and impossibly brave --- hopes.

As every musician knows: You start in one key. You wander to other keys, strange and distant places. But in the end, you always come back home.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel follows Song and River and the lives they lead before and after their separation in Beijing. How does the structure --- moving across time and distance --- shape your emotional experience of their story?

2. How does the idea of ?wandering to other keys? (a musical metaphor in the novel) reflect the narrative journey of the characters?

3. Song sees herself as ?a nobody,? while River is considered extraordinary. How does this contrast shape their identities and choices, as well as where their lives ultimately take them?

4. How does motherhood define Song?s actions --- and where does it limit or empower her?

5. In what ways does River?s experience without his mother shape his sense of self and belonging?

6. How does the story explore the idea of ?home?? Is home a place, a person or something else? How do the characters find ?home? as the novel progresses?

7. The novel portrays both biological family and ?found family.? How do these different forms of connection compare?

8. Music is central to River?s identity and how he experiences the world. How does music function beyond talent --- as language, connection or survival?

9. Do you think River?s gift is a blessing, a burden or both? How does it shape his opportunities and hardships?

10. What role do class, opportunity and systemic barriers play in the characters? lives? Does River?s talent provide him with the opportunity to move upward, or is it just good luck?

11. How does the novel depict the experience of being ?invisible? or overlooked in a large, fast-moving society?

12. The central event --- losing her child in a crowded train station --- hinges on who Song is and her position in society. How does the novel explore social inequalities and how that can determine life outcomes?

13. How do small acts (kindness, decisions, missed moments) ripple across the characters? lives?

Author Bio

Sophie Chen Keller is the author of LITTLE WONDER and THE LUSTER OF LOST THINGS, which was also released in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Her first publication came at the age of 15, with a short story in *Glimmer Train* literary magazine. A classically trained pianist, she was born in China and raised in California. After graduating from Harvard, she lived in New York City and Beijing before moving to Germany, where she currently resides with her husband and two children.

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