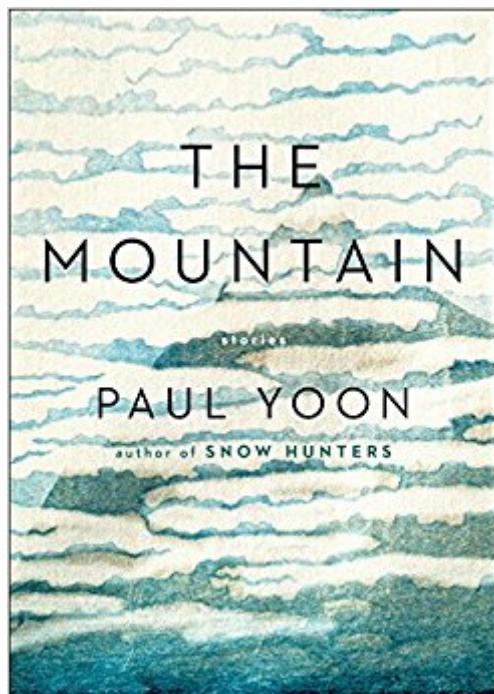


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The Mountain: Stories



Synopsis

From Paul Yoon, the award-winning and critically acclaimed author of Once the Shore and Snow Hunters, comes a luminous collection of short stories set throughout the world—from the Hudson Valley to the Russian Far East—across periods of time after World War II. In The Mountain, Paul Yoon displays his subtle, ethereal, and strikingly observant style with six thematically linked stories, taking place across several continents and time periods and populated with characters who are connected by their traumatic pasts, newly vagrant lives, and quests for solace in their futures. Though they exist in their own distinct worlds (from a sanatorium in the Hudson Valley to an inn in the Russian far east) they are united by the struggle to reconcile their traumatic pasts in the wake of violence, big and small, spiritual and corporeal. A morphine-addicted nurse wanders through the decimated French countryside in search of purpose; a dissatisfied wife sporadically takes a train across Spain with a much younger man in the wake of a building explosion; a lost young woman emigrates from Korea to Shanghai, where she aimlessly works in a camera sweat shop, trying fruitlessly to outrun the ghosts of her past. Hailed by New York magazine as a “quotidian-surreal craft-master” and a “radiant star in the current literary firmament” by The Dallas Morning News, Yoon realizes his worlds with quiet, insightful, and gorgeous prose. Though each story is distinct from the others, his restrained voice and perceptive observations about violence—to the body, the landscape, and ultimately, the human soul—weaves throughout this collection as a whole, making The Mountain a beautiful, memorable read.

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Customer Reviews

PRAISE FORÃ THE MOUNTAIN BY PAUL YOON "Believe me: This is a genuine work of art, a shadowland of survivors that is tough and elegant and true. And beautiful."Ã The Boston Globe "The MountainÃ is quiet, restrained and howling beneath the surface...a fantastic collection."Ã¢ •The LA Times "Reading The Mountain is like admiring a glowing sunset before realizing that what you're really watching is a wildfire heading your way....his sentences read like Hemingway stripped of his machismo...The Mountain is remarkable...as close as the short story can get to poetry without losing its grip on plot..."Ã The Star Tribune "Yoon proves himself a literary alchemist, transforming tragedy into beauty with deft reminders of our universal connections."Ã¢ •Library Journal (starred review) "Despite his literary austerity, Yoon's dazzling use of wordplay, pacing, and the quiet authenticity of his characters to instill emotion in his audience makes him one of the most evocative writers working today. Six little mysteries that quietly capture the breadth of the human experience."Ã¢ •Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "These stories span multiple continents and time periods to arrive at human truths about how greatly our lives are affected and influenced by our shared histories....Yoon expertly interrogates the meaning of nationhood and the universality of the migrant experience. Most often the stories are structured as montages of inner experience; moments of connection are the sparks that ignite these otherwise meditative, reflective narratives. The result is a spectacular display of intelligence and feeling."Ã¢ •Publisher's Weekly (starred review) "Both careful and confident, The Mountain shows that a classic approach to a classic form can still feel vital and relevant when in the hands of a perfectionist like Paul Yoon."Ã¢ •GQ "Radiant...Yoon uses precise, measured prose to create atmospheric narratives that lack neat resolutions. The Mountain's overall mood is one of wistfulness—a feeling that stays with the reader after the final page has been turned."Ã¢ •Bookpage "The six stories in Paul Yoon's (Snow Hunters) second collection, The Mountain, are almost shocking in their simplicity. Possessing a fable-like sensibility, each one is a quietly elegant examination of how survivors of various sorts carry on in the face of profound loss. Yoon's strikingly uninflected prose heightens both the tension and the resonance of these tales. It's impossible to separate the content of these stories from the daringly unembellished quality of Yoon's writing, where omission often

feels as meaningful as the words on the page. Yoon's unadorned prose is of a piece with the fragility of these delicate stories. Individually and collectively they comprise an exquisite and memorable work of art. "Shelf Awareness" ("The Mountain") is atmospherically so compelling, and describes so movingly the loneliness and courage of these characters. Paul Yoon mines the interstices of our experience—it's full of pregnant spaces—we are haunted by all that isn't said. This is the voice with which we speak to ourselves when no one is listening. The book is profound, in the way that W.G. Sebald's work is—like him, Yoon's voice is quiet and sincere and urgent—and that's what makes the collection so powerful, and what ties the collection together. The characters are disconnected, yet we feel deeply connected to them. It's mysterious and elusive and distinctive, a brilliant collection of stories, and a unified work of art. —Daniyal Mueenuddin, author of *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award "Paul Yoon writes as if in a state of grace. In *The Mountain*, he moves across continents and time periods with breathtaking assurance, setting minutely observed individual lives against the tidal pull of history. He tells the story of border crossings, both literal and metaphorical. We are all migrants in one way or another; *The Mountain* narrates our shared story of movement." —Katie Kitamura, critically-acclaimed author of *A Separation* and *The Longshot*

Paul Yoon was born in New York City. His first book, *Once the Shore*, was selected as a New York Times Notable Book, a Best Debut of the Year by National Public Radio and won a 5 under 35 Award from the National Book Foundation. His novel, *Snow Hunters*, won the 2014 Young Lions Fiction Award. He is a former fellow at the New York Public Library's Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, and his stories have appeared in Harper's Magazine, VQR, the PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories, and *The Best American Short Stories*. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he is currently a Briggs-Copeland Lecturer at Harvard University along with his wife, the writer Laura van den Berg.

Almost two years ago, I read Paul Yoon's novel *Snow Hunters*, a beautiful story with spare prose and lovely, ethereal setting. This collection of short stories in his *The Mountain: Stories* Six heartbreakingly lovely stories about fragile, lonely, abandoned people trying to find their way through this life. This short story collection is linked by the pain and suffering endured, across continents,

across different eras, each involving some traumatic event, traumatic pasts. Uprooted lives lived without a place to call home, each person on a quest for the peace they believed in their hearts they were worthy of, and could hope to attain. 5 stars *Willow and the Moon* Having grown up in a sanitarium in Hudson Valley, a woman relays the story of her years lived there, her father's abandonment, and a secret just shy of being taken into the grave. Set in New York and England. This was my favourite of this collection.

5 stars *Still a Fire* A post WWII story of the years 1947-48, a man, Mikel, and a woman, Karine, his nurse, and their individual battles to live to tell their tales. This takes a decidedly war-time look at pain and suffering, and includes some battles with addiction. Set in France. 4 stars *Galicia* A loving and faithful wife, meets Flix, a stranger, at a train station. Though she loves her husband, she follows this man Flix, as though under a spell, unable to bring herself to change her course of action. Set in Spain. 3 stars *Vladivostok Station* On his way home Misha sees someone he used to know, and reconnects with this old childhood friend and his father. 4 stars *The Mountain* A twenty-six year-old woman in South Korea, Faye, homeless, sitting at a bus stop, is approached about a job by a young, handsome, well-dressed man. He gives her the details of a ferryboat, the time, the pier number, the day and the time. He speaks to her in Mandarin, saying "Come back home." 4 Stars *Milner Field* A soon-to-be-divorcee, his daughter, his father, and a story the father shares with his son, one he's never shared before. A journey, a quest, soon follows to connect with this family of his father's childhood. Set in New York and England, in the present. 5 stars *Yoon* A gift is that he can turn these sad stories, each involving some heartbreak, tragedy-filled moments, and weave them quietly into lovely, poetic, breathtakingly austere works of art, paced to perfection, each deliberately chosen word, space, pause speaks volumes about tragedy and its role in this shared human experience we call life. Our hearts breaking over and over, daily it seems anymore, each act of violence, all the suffering in every corner of the world, and yet we still hold fast to our dreams, to hope. *When the silence isn't quiet* And it feels like it's getting hard to breathe And I know you feel like dying But I promise we'll take the world to its feet And move mountains We'll take it to its feet And move mountains *Rise Up*, Andra Day - Written by Cassandra Monique Batie, Jennifer Decilveo Many thanks for the ARC provided by Simon and Schuster

Please Note: I received an advance reader's copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This did not influence the opinions of my review in any way. When I requested *The Mountain*, by Paul Yoon, from NetGalley, I admit I did not realize it was a collection of short stories. This format has always been a challenge for me. I have a hard time with the brevity of the tale, and often feel that the characters are not developed enough for me to be engaged. But I was pleasantly surprised by this book. With an economy of words, the author quickly sets a tone for each story and makes the reader care about each character. The result is a group of stories that will haunt your dreams, and perhaps cause some nightmares, too.

What I Liked: Stories Connection: According to the book's description, each story is somehow associated to another in the collection. Sometimes the connection is obvious, but most of the time, I had to really think about what one story attached to another. It was a fun challenge to figure this out.

Writing: I thought the writing of the book to be beautiful in its prose. Paul Yoon was able to quickly create circumstances where these characters existed and searched for meaning and connection. Many of the settings are times and places that are dealing with the aftermath of war. As displaced people try to reestablish their lives, they seem to grasp at any memory they may have to latch on to a moment when they felt safe and happy.

What I Was Mixed About: Characters: Many of the characters in each story are wanderers who seem let random circumstances carry them from one situation to another. They seemed adrift in the world, without the usual ties of family, friends, community, or careers. This passivity was hard for me to accept. Don't most people have some intent each day, if for nothing else than to eat and find shelter for the night's rest? They all seemed to be searching for purpose, which was probably the point. But I found it hard to believe that people could be so random in major life choices.

What I Didn't Like: Lack Of Resolution: I still have problems with the short story format. While these stories were beautifully written, they were snapshots into the lives of these people. Not much was resolved. Since the author was able to create such vivid characters, I found this to be frustrating. I cared about the people in each story and wanted to see how things would be resolved. The result is that these stories are beautiful, but rather bleak.

The characters in *The Mountain* all have a connection to Korea but the settings vary—Russia, China, New York, etc. A sense of melancholy is another common denominator as is the central tragedy or sorrow that takes place previous to the story or at least it's seldom directly addressed. The characters are strong and loving...just doomed. They're survivors however and don't rail against what feels like fate, they get on with things making the best of their lives however by time the central action takes place they've resigned themselves and concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other. I know

this might sound depressing but it somehow isn't. I'm sure others have had the joy of seeing original Asian art scrolls that have a sense of peace and happiness and they often tell stories though not overtly. This is the same feeling I had while reading Yoon's stories. Thank you to the publisher for providing an e-copy.

These short stories are beautifully written - prose that is almost poetic. The stories all carry an almost tangible scent of sadness, grief, and longing. Not a 'feel-good' book by any means, but one that provokes thoughtfulness. The sensitivity of the writing makes this book well worth reading.

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