



On Such a Full Sea: A Novel

By Chang-Rae Lee

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“Watching a talented writer take a risk is one of the pleasures of devoted reading, and *On Such a Full Sea* provides all that and more. . . . With *On Such a Full Sea*, [Chang-rae Lee] has found a new way to explore his old preoccupation: the oft-told tale of the desperate, betraying, lonely human heart.”—Andrew Sean Greer, *The New York Times Book Review*

“I’ve never been a fan of grand hyperbolic declarations in book reviews, but faced with *On Such a Full Sea*, I have no choice but to ask: Who is a greater novelist than Chang-rae Lee today?”—Porochista Khakpour, *The Los Angeles Times*

From the beloved award-winning author of *Native Speaker* and *The Surrendered*, a highly provocative, deeply affecting story of one woman’s legendary quest in a shocking, future America.

On Such a Full Sea takes Chang-rae Lee’s elegance of prose, his masterly storytelling, and his long-standing interests in identity, culture, work, and love, and lifts them to a new plane. Stepping from the realistic and historical territories of his previous work, Lee brings us into a world created from scratch. Against a vividly imagined future America, Lee tells a stunning, surprising, and riveting story that will change the way readers think about the world they live in.

In a future, long-declining America, society is strictly stratified by class. Long-abandoned urban neighborhoods have been repurposed as highwalled, self-contained labor colonies. And the members of the labor class—descendants of those brought over en masse many years earlier from environmentally ruined provincial China—find purpose and identity in their work to provide pristine produce and fish to the small, elite, satellite charter villages that ring the labor settlement.

In this world lives Fan, a female fish-tank diver, who leaves her home in the B-Mor settlement (once known as Baltimore), when the man she loves mysteriously disappears. Fan’s journey to find him takes her out of the safety of B-Mor, through the anarchic Open Counties, where crime is rampant with scant governmental oversight, and to a faraway charter village, in a quest that will soon become legend to those she left behind.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, January 2014: Chang-Rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* is a fascinating read, in part due to the dueling instincts of the novel. The world-building is first-rate, but there is an overall feeling of allegory to the book. There is brutality in nearly every chapter, but Lee writes with such grace and skill that I often found myself just reading for the pleasure of his words. Set in a dystopian future America, where "New Chinese" have populated certain urban centers like Baltimore and Detroit, *On Such a Full Sea* is the story of Fan, a gifted diver who abandons the relative safety of her city to search for her disappeared boyfriend in the more lawless parts of the country. The story is narrated by a nameless voice from Baltimore (or B-Mor, as it is called in the novel), and that conceit allows the author to interject observations and commentary into the story that might otherwise seem phony. As we journey with the unassuming but strong-willed Fan, and as details are deftly revealed, Chang-Rae Lee succeeds in weaving a mesmerizing tale while revealing truths about such wide-ranging subjects as social stratification, technology, estrangement, and the reasons we tell stories. --Chris Schlupep

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Lee (The Surrendered, 2010), always entrancing and delving, has taken fresh approaches to storytelling in each of his previous four novels, but he takes a truly radical leap in this wrenching yet poetic, philosophical, even mystical speculative odyssey. B-Mor is a rigorously ordered labor settlement founded in what used to be Baltimore by refugees from impossibly polluted New China. They grow stringently regulated food for the elite, who live in gated "charter" villages, surrounded by "open counties," in which civilization has collapsed under the assaults of a pandemic and an ever-harsher climate. In a third-person plural narrative voice that perfectly embodies the brutal and wistful communities he portrays, Lee tells the mythic story of young, small, yet mighty Fan, a breath-held diver preternaturally at home among the farmed fish she tends to. When her boyfriend inexplicably disappears, Fan escapes from B-Mor to search for him, embarking on a daring, often surreal quest in a violent, blighted world. She encounters a taciturn healer bereft of all that he cherished, a troupe of backwoods acrobats, and a disturbing cloister of girls creating an intricate mural of their muffled lives. Lee brilliantly and wisely dramatizes class stratification and social disintegration, deprivation and sustenance both physical and psychic, reflecting, with rare acuity, on the evolution of legends and how, in the most hellish of circumstances, we rediscover the solace of art. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Literary best-seller Lee will reach an even larger readership with this electrifying postapocalyptic novel as he tours the country in conjunction with an all-points media and publicity drive. -- Donna Seaman

Review

"Watching a talented writer take a risk is one of the pleasures of devoted reading, and *On Such a Full Sea* provides all that and more. . . . Lee has always been preoccupied by the themes of hope and betrayal, by the tensions that arise in small lives in the midst of great social change. His marvelous new book, which imagines a future after the breakdown of our own society takes on those concerns with his customary mastery of quiet detail—and a touch of the fantastic. . . . With *On Such a Full Sea*, he has found a new way to explore his old preoccupation: the oft-told tale of the desperate, betraying, lonely human heart."—Andrew Sean Greer, *The New York Times Book Review*

"I've never been a fan of grand hyperbolic declarations in book reviews, but faced with *On Such a Full Sea*, I have no choice but to ask: Who is a greater novelist than Chang-rae Lee today?"—Porochista Khakpour, *The Los Angeles Times*

"In his latest and boldest novel, *On Such a Full Sea*, Lee's characters are Chinese immigrant workers in the United States—specifically Chinese workers from a long-elapased China toiling in a fast-declining America a century or so from now. For Lee's heroine, Fan, the issue is not acclimatization but self-discovery. The adventures of this feisty yet wary protagonist, together with a bleak but arresting vision of the future, keep the reader rapt and concerned for the fate of both beleaguered character and battered brave new world."—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"Now with *On Such a Full Sea*, one of our most silken storytellers, Chang-rae Lee, has imagined how it all goes wrong in the darkest installment of this literary night terror yet. The menace of Lee's book derives from how closely it resembles reality. The haves and have-nots in his world are neatly balkanized. Cities produce, suburbs consume, and only the rich can afford the health care that keeps them alive. . . . With this strange and magically grim book, Chang-rae Lee has allowed us to leave the familiar behind, all so we can see it more clearly."—*The Boston Globe*

"[*On Such a Full Sea* is] not just a fully realized, time-jumping narrative of an audacious young girl in search of lost loved ones, but an exploration of the meaning and function of narrative, of illusion and delusion, of engineered personalities and faint promises of personhood, and of one powerful nation's disappearance and how that indelibly affects another."—*Chicago Tribune*

"The most striking dystopian novels sound an alarm, focus our attention and even change the language. *The Handmaid's Tale* crystallized our fears about reproductive control; *Fahrenheit 451* still flames discussions of censorship; and *1984* is the lens through which we watch the Obama administration watching us. Chang-rae Lee's unsettling new novel, *On Such a Full Sea*, arrives from that same frightening realm of total oversight and pinched individuality. . . . A brilliant, deeply unnerving portrait."—*The Washington Post*

"Should every talented novelist have a go at dystopia? Probably not, but we can thank the gods of chaos that the trendy genre fell into the hands of Chang-rae Lee. Over four novels, Lee has mastered the art of lyrical realist portraiture, breathing life into immigrants at sea in modern America. Taking a bold turn with his fifth, *On Such a Full Sea*, he's equally deft at envisioning a failed America. . . . As Fan's wild journey takes her across the socioeconomic strata, Lee's novel brilliantly satisfies the genre's prime directive, which is to reveal the awful present by means of the terrible future."—*GQ*

"[The] haunting *On Such a Full Sea* . . . recalls the work of Cormac McCarthy and Kazuo Ishiguro. Here Lee weaves multiple plots into an ambitious epic showcasing a fearless fish-tank-diver heroine as she treks across a devastated landscape. . . . With its appealing protagonist as narrative glue, *On Such a Full Sea* layers stories within stories, building to its final, resonant catharsis."—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

"Chang-rae Lee . . . is best known for realistic fiction about displaced characters of Asian descent. He sets his latest work, *On Such a Full Sea*, in a chaotic, dystopian America, but I'm happy to report that at its heart it's still very much another deeply soulful Chang-rae Lee novel. . . . The dystopia of *On Such a Full Sea* isn't showy. As in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, there's a welcome absence of sterile white laboratories and grand displays of oppression. Instead Lee relies on specific, indelible images—a family of toothless acrobats who feed humans to their dogs, a group of anime-eyed girls held captive in a wealthy Charter woman's home—and his usual perceptive writing to get at the warped morality that can drive a world into decline."—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Chang-rae Lee's *On Such A Full Sea* is so elegiac that it almost collapses into a morass of sorrow, yet it's so well crafted it's impossible not to see the story to its end. With his latest novel, Lee creates a world far into the future, where the boundaries between countries have frayed and a semi-dystopian state has arisen.

Although Orwellian themes linger in the background, the book itself is really about one woman, and the symbol she becomes to the village she leaves behind.”—A.V. Club (A)

"[A] moving new novel."—*Vanity Fair*

"[A] riveting story . . . Lee's brilliantly rendered dystopia resembles our America."—*More*

"Lee's prose is sumptuous and at times discursive, and for that reason, this is a novel that demands the reader's full engagement. The rewards for that commitment are considerable; *On Such a Full Sea* is an elegiac and often unsettling glimpse of a future that could be closer than we'd like to think."—*Bookpage*

"It's an engrossing read, and Lee's skills as a world builder of the finest order are evident in every chapter."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Lee, always entrancing and delving, takes a truly radical leap in this wrenching yet poetic, philosophical, even mystical speculative odyssey. . . . Lee brilliantly and wisely dramatizes class stratification and social disintegration, deprivation and sustenance both physical and psychic, reflecting, with rare acuity, on the evolution of legends and how, in the most hellish of circumstances, we rediscover the solace of art. Electrifying."—*Booklist* (starred review)

"The title alone is an astonishing feat of encapsulated genius from the inimitable Lee. . . . Brilliant . . . A heart-thumping adventure."—*Library Journal* (starred review)

"A harrowing and fully imagined vision of dystopian America from Lee. . . . The potency and strangeness of [his] characters never diminish the sense that Lee has written an allegory of our current predicaments, and the narration, written in the collective voice of B-Mor, gives the novel the tone of a timeless and cautionary fable. Welcome and surprising proof that there's plenty of life in end-of-the-world storytelling."—*Kirkus* (starred review)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Helga Lever:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to be aware of everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim or maybe goal; it means that book has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They can be reading whatever they have because their hobby is reading a book. How about the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, man feel need book if they found difficult problem or even exercise. Well, probably you will need this *On Such a Full Sea: A Novel*.

Brian Faber:

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Lisa Thomason:

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