

IF YOU LIVE IN A SMALL HOUSE
A novella by Sandra Park
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Brief description

It's the early 1950s in Hawaii. A multigenerational Korean-American family crams into a house in the Coconut Grove suburb of windward Oahu, across the mountains from Honolulu. With too many in too small a space, dreams either shrink-to-fit or seek escape—father recalls his wartime romance, sister-in-law Gloria yearns for a husband, son Ezra sows the seeds of homesickness even as he plots to leave home. Sandra Park's novella captures the pent-up desires of family and an endless fascination with strangers. House, island, world—it's a story that sings like a radio tune, familiar to anyone struck by longing and homesickness. *Photo: A. Chaverri*

Historical background

The tenor of the story is one of war fatigue bearing down on a desire to think positively, to walk on the sunny side of the street, to be a good American. In WWII, Hawaii residents enlisted in record numbers, even though the islands were under martial law after the Pearl Harbor attack. In the Korean War, Hawaii's soldiers fought an enemy who physically resembled themselves—Chinese, Japanese, Koreans—but in U.S. uniforms.

The story is a miniature set in the great Pacific. In spite of public messages of optimism, this Korean-American family is sagging under the weight of daily necessity, missing the coattails of the American Dream. It's a small house and a small world, full of the particulars of immigrant family life—hot and spicy Korean food, how neighbors grudgingly get along, how a boy mentally packs his bags long before leaving home.

Early praise for *If You Live in a Small House*

Park's modernist story *If You Live in a Small House* is an important and beautiful chronicle of American lives too little known to us. Park's stunning novella is capacious as is the story's tender heart.

—Min Jin Lee, author of *Free Food for Millionaires*

The authenticity of Park's characters, their food, their clothes, their expressions, brings immigrant family life in Hawai'i poetically alive. Most poignant is the father with his WWII memories and losing his friends to suicide missions, and his fear that his son will be sent to Korea to fight enemies who "look like him." A compelling reading experience.

—Kiana Davenport, author of *Shark Dialogues* and *House of Many Gods*

A hauntingly beautiful prose poem that opens the door to a hidden world and a forgotten moment, *If You Live in a Small House* is thoughtful, tender, and not to be missed.

—Patricia O'Toole, author of *The Five of Hearts* and *When Trumpets Call*

Sandra Park blends action and reverie to evoke the texture and mood of postwar Hawaii...Reading *If You Live in a Small House* is like standing in Keaniani Lane after dark, peeking through the windows of the “funny kind house.”

—Mary Helen Stefaniak, author of *The Cailiffs of Baghdad, Georgia* and *The Turk and My Mother*

Completely avoiding the trappings of noisy, multigenerational family melodrama, this rich psychological narrative instead delves into the private longings of these characters. Beautifully told, *If You Live in a Small House* is the work of a truly gifted writer.

—Chris McKinney, author of *The Queen of Tears* and *Bolohead Row*

Mesmerizing. Park’s language is magical—her precise, yet fable-like descriptions draw the reader into a world both new and familiar.

—Shawna Yang Ryan, author of *Water Ghosts*

A captivating portrait of an island family whose troubles and loves are a spicy mix of heartbreak, hilarity, and pure intoxication...

—Steve Stern, author of *The Wedding Jester* and *The Angel of Forgetfulness*

Sandra Park writes with a generosity and clarity of vision that is both great-hearted and splendidly unsentimental. Nothing escapes her gaze. The writing is fresh and urgent, the language lyrical, the characters alive and kicking on the page. ... an auspicious debut for one of America’s most promising new writers.

—Alice LaPlante, author of *Method and Madness: The Making of a Story* and *Do Not Go Gentle* (2011)

About the author

Sandra Park’s fiction and poetry have appeared in the *St. Petersburg Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *New American Writing*, *Five Fingers Review* and in two anthologies, *Honolulu Stories* and *Oakland Out Loud*. Born and raised in Hawaii, Sandra Park now lives in California, teaching at Ohlone College and other Bay Area schools. She received her BA from the University of Hawaii, an MA in English and MFA in creative writing at San Francisco State University. An excerpt of this novella appeared in *The Iowa Review* as a fiction award runner-up. She received an AWP Fellowship in Prague, Czech Republic and SLS Scholarship in St. Petersburg, Russia.

“Growing up,” Park recalls, “I remember checking the box “other” for ethnicity; there didn’t seem to be as much of an aggregate of Koreans. Our dad used to say that the Koreans were the Irish of the East, hard-drinking and hot-tempered, and that Korea was like Poland, constantly getting run over and occupied by outsiders. All this a set-up for why Koreans are so sly and stubborn—always in survival mode.”

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