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Short Author Bio

Avid reader and out-of-the-box thinker

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Submission Title *

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Submission Summary *

Fictional tale set in Singapore around the stolen lives of women who were forced to become comfort girls.

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A summary of the article/review (to be used as additional blurb).

Submission Content *

An enthralling read, *How We Disappeared* is beautiful in its poignancy, sadness, and empathy. It's also an engaging and informative read about a part of history often skimmed over: the abuse of women during war, and the effect of trauma lasting a person's lifetime.

Told through three different voices; there's Wang-Di's present as a recently widowed and elderly lady, Kevin a young boy who finds his grandma was keeping a secret, and most importantly a young Wang-Di as she's grabbed and forced into being a comfort woman for Japanese soldiers.

Set in Singapore, present day Wang-Di begins to regret having stayed quiet on her experiences of the war, and not learning or giving her recently deceased husband a chance to share his. This voice is sorrowful and strong, her loneliness evident to see, but so is her resilience. But more from a physical point, she works tirelessly, while her mind is unable to settle and still from the past – hoarding needless items as a way of self-protection.

Alongside this is Kevin, a shy boy who is comes to be affected by the grief of losing his grandma, and the pressure of keeping her secret – all the while trying to uncover exactly what it is and what it could end up meaning. It's in his searching for an answer that we see a young tender boy trying to do more than this, what he really wants is to fix his dad.

Too young to fully understand what depression is, the writing instead looks at Kevin's observations; his father's slow movements, shutting off from the world, a darkness on his face – which conjures stronger feelings of empathy, rather than trying to contain mental health into a fixed descriptive box. This is what the book excels at, you understand instinctively the emotions, its imagery more powerful and the weight heavier.

The voices of Kevin and the elderly Wang-Di are interesting in their own ways and show the differences in grief. It's also through these experiences that they come to find more about themselves. Trying to live with their loss by throwing themselves into a project - to discover more about the person they lost, and in turn themselves.

However, the voice that really carries the book is the young Wang-Di, her older-self losing that sense of urgency, where the former grabs you in needing to know, how did she live? You know by the fact the older one exists that Wang-Di survives, but the difference is that you don't know what horrors her life contained, and with her mind still trapped in the past – what exactly is holding her there?

The author, Jing-Jing Lee, creates an immediate sense of a bond between you and Wang-Di to the point that the other voices set in the present can often feel in the way. This is unfair however as they serve the purpose of breaking down what could be too horrific a read, and perhaps even repetitive – she was locked away for years as a comfort girl.

Yes, it's a hard read, but it's also one you want to hear about, and for the simple reason that you want her to be okay and for this you need to know what she suffered. This is of course further underlined and capitalised by the knowledge that the character's experiences could easily be a real living person's: for comfort girls existed, and because of the shame dealt on them by society at the time, and still (albeit smaller) today, these voices have, and are being lost.

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