Sophie Chen Keller

(AUTHOR)

Little Wonder

(BOOK TITLE)

DATE	TIME
NOV 2 2026	**2:00PM ET**

Book Club

EST. 2019

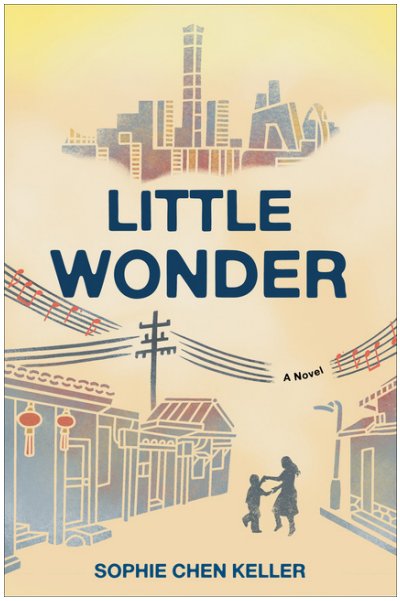
HOLLY FURTICK
BOOK CLUB



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 fifteen, 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.

BOOK OVERVIEW

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

At the age of four, he toddles to a piano and taps out his favorite song. At eight, he masters Liszt's three Liebestraume; at ten, he blazes 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 eleven, 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.

SETTING

- Northeastern Village (The Lakeyard)
- Harbin (where Song/River lived before Beijing)
- Beijing

CHARACTERS

- Song
- River
- Blue - Song's husband and River's father
- Song's family (mother, father, brother)
- Professor Li - River's initial piano teacher
- Phyllis - River's new piano teacher and guardian when he was separated from his mom
- Eight - Phyllis' husband, called River "Little Red," thinking he was his childhood friend
- White Dragon - Song's delivery driver friend and eventual lover
- Courtyard delivery drivers (Jada, Blackberry, Bubble)
- Mini - River's girlfriend, fellow piano player
- Bing - Rail station worker who let River stay with him when he got separated

THINGS I LOVED ABOUT THIS BOOK:

- I loved the strong themes of motherhood from both sides, perseverance, determination, and found family.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Favorite Character
- Favorite line or quote or theme
- What surprised you in the book?
- What parts were the most stressful?
- What parts of the book made you feel?

MEMORABLE SCENES

pg. 17 - Song's time with River in the hearth bed

pg. 26 - Blue and Song meeting

pg. 16/31 - The moment River and Song get separated at the train station

pg. 34 - River being chased once they get separated at the train station

pg. 55 - Song meeting the cleaning lady in Harbin who gets her the job once she and River leave

pg. 60 - Song's phone being stolen by the Twins

pg. 83 - River meeting Bing and living with him at the station
pg. 90- Song finding the Piano in one of her cleaning houses
pg. 94 - Professor Li agreeing to teach River
pg. 110 - Song almost gets hit by White Dragon, he lets her know about a room to rent
pg. 120 - Song decides to become a delivery driver to show pictures of River
pg. 126 - River's first bout of stage fright
pg. 158 - River meeting Mini at the competition
pg. 166 - Professor Li giving River the Beta Blocker
pg. 143 - Finding the Piano and Phyllis finding River
pg. 151 - River goes to live with Phyllis and Eight
pg. 203/210 - River meeting Mini again and then gives up playing the piano
pg. 218 - Song starts opening up to the other delivery drivers in her courtyard
pg. 251 - River decides to start playing again to find his mom
pg. 284- Song diagnosed with Cancer
pg. 289 - Blackberry finds River online and Song listens to River on Blackberry's phone, tries to get to him but can't because of COVID restrictions
pg. 298 - River overcomes his stage fright
pg. 313 - Delivery drivers find River on the bus after the competition
pg. 319- Friends create a distraction with "Biggie and Smalls" to get River in to his mom

MEMORABLE QUOTES

mother, who lowered her head, cheeks burning. Song knelt and looked her in the eye. "You're doing fine," she said. "The baby will stop fussing. You'll sleep again. One day you'll wonder, where did the time go?" (pg, 19)

"You know, this isn't the end for you. It's just the beginning, and the beginning is always the hardest part," (pg. 55)

The only medicine River took was for his lung condition and fear wasn't a condition; it was an obstacle, meant to be overcome. There wasn't anything wrong with her son..."I know you're afraid and I know you're brave. You don't have to believe it. I believe it." (pg. 128)

If your emotions overwhelm you, break something else. Not yourself."(pg. 130)

As always, it was easier to be angry. Her anger was a kind of balm, burning as it consumed, numbing as it spread. But she knew it didn't heal. She would choose, instead, to sing. (pg. 212)

For the first time, she wondered whether it was standing alone that made her strong, because here with White Dragon and the others, she didn't feel weak. (pg. 225)

He hadn't come from nothing. He had come from devotion and sacrifice and persistence and strength. He stood here because Mama had walked there and there and there.
(pg. 248)

People were made to survive hardship, because without tasting the pain of living, they would never taste the sweetness of being alive. (pg. 255)

River had seen him as the enemy but they were the same—people who could love.
(pg. 322)