



LITTLE WONDER



A Novel



SOPHIE CHEN KELLER

Book Club Kit

Q&A with the Author

What was your inspiration for the novel?

I was born in northeastern China in a rural area, a lot like Song's. My great grandparents were farmers, fishermen; my grandparents were technicians and teachers; my aunts and uncles were food cart vendors and taxi drivers. When I was four years old, I moved to the US with my parents, but every few years I would go back to China and spend the summer with my relatives in the Northeast.

Those summers made a deep impression on me. I still remember long, slow afternoons playing cards with my grandfather. I remember watching Chinese dramas in the evenings with my cousins and giggling over our crushes. I like writing about that region I come from and about the people I come from. They are the foundation of modern China, but so few stories are written about them. I hope this book lets them know that they are seen, and I hope that everyone reading it will live with them, as I have, and will miss them and remember them long after saying goodbye.

When did you know *LITTLE WONDER* was a story you had to write?

The idea specifically of a food delivery worker came in 2019. I had just become a mom and when my son was a few months old, we moved to Beijing. The version of China I found as an adult in 2019 was very different from the China of my childhood memories. The city was so modern and beautiful, and at the same time the air pollution was so thick you could see it, like a heavy fog. I saw a lot of very rich people living parallel lives to lots of very poor people, and regardless of their socioeconomic status, everyone did everything on their phones. Society was virtually cashless; I remember seeing a beggar collecting change not in a Styrofoam cup, but with a QR code that you could scan and send money directly into their mobile wallet.

And as we settled into our new lives and routines there, I would take my son out on long afternoons walks while he napped, and for those two hours I would observe everything around me. I was struck by how many food delivery workers there were. I found myself wondering if they'd made their deliveries on time. I wondered where they had come from and what their lives were like. And that was my first inkling of who Song would be.

At its core, this is a story about a mother and her son. Can you talk about becoming a mother and how that influenced the book?

For my first two years of being a mom, I was consumed by mothering—by love, by worry, by exhaustion. I was only sleeping in two-hour chunks at night, and I spent most of my days bouncing my son on a yoga ball. It was the only thing that consoled him! I had no time to myself, not even to take a shower or finish a cup of coffee. But as it turns out, every hard phase passes. My son grew older, and eventually he started daycare, and I once more had time to myself. That's when I started writing *Little Wonder*. I wanted to explore motherhood, especially in those first weeks and those first years. I wanted to write about a love that could conquer time, distance, uncertainty, fear, even death. And the process of writing all of that—it was like building a bridge that connected who I had been as a writer with who I had become as a mother.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** The novel follows Song and River and the lives they lead before and after their separation in Beijing. How does the structure—moving across time and distance—shape your emotional experience of their story?
- 2.** How does the idea of “wandering to other keys” (a musical metaphor in the novel) reflect the narrative journey of the characters?
- 3.** Song sees herself as “a nobody,” while River is considered extraordinary. How does this contrast shape their identities and choices, as well as where their lives ultimately take them?
- 4.** How does motherhood define Song’s actions—and where does it limit or empower her?
- 5.** In what ways does River’s experience without his mother shape his sense of self and belonging?
- 6.** How does the story explore the idea of “home”? Is home a place, a person, or something else? How do the characters find “home” as the novel progresses?
- 7.** The novel portrays both biological family and “found family.” How do these different forms of connection compare?
- 8.** Music is central to River’s identity and how he experiences the world. How does music function beyond talent—as language, connection, or survival?
- 9.** Do you think River’s gift is a blessing, a burden, or both? How does it shape his opportunities and hardships?
- 10.** What role do class, opportunity, and systemic barriers play in the characters’ lives? Does River’s talent provide him with the opportunity to move upward or is it just good luck?
- 11.** How does the novel depict the experience of being “invisible” or overlooked in a large, fast-moving society?
- 12.** The central event—losing her child in a crowded train station—hinges on who Song is and her position in society. How does the novel explore social inequalities and how that can determine life outcomes?
- 13.** How do small acts (kindness, decisions, missed moments) ripple across the characters’ lives?





Playlist

Listen to the playlist [here](#).

“Rondo Alla Turca”

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Klára Würtz

“Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No 1”

Liberace

**“Chopin: 12 Études, Op. 25:
No. 11 in A Minor, ‘Winter Wind’”**

Frédéric Chopin, Leif Ove Andsnes

“Arabesque No. 1”

Claude Debussy, Hikaru Shiroso

**“Nocturne No. 2 in E-Flat Major,
Op. 9 No. 2”**

Frédéric Chopin, Vladimir Ashkenazy

**“Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6
in D-Flat Major, S.244/6”**

Franz Liszt, Martha Argerich

**“Beethoven: Symphony
No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67:
I. Allegro con brio”**

Ludwig van Beethoven, Kurt Masur,
New York Philharmonic

“Für Elise”

Ludwig van Beethoven

**“Piano Sonata in D Major,
Hob.XVI:4: I. Allegro”**

Joseph Haydn, Denis Kozhukhin

“Pathétique 1st Movement”

Ludwig van Beethoven, Marioverherer

“Flight of the Bumblebee”

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Isaac Stern,
Milton Katims, Columbia Symphony Orchestra

“Moonlight Sonata 3rd Movement”

Ludwig van Beethoven, Marioverherer

“Fantaisie Impromptu, Op. 66”

Frédéric Chopin, Rousseau

**“Prelude in G Minor, Op. 23, No. 5
Live at Philharmonie, Berlin, 2018”**

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Yuja Wang

“Polonaise in A-Flat Major, Op. 53, ‘Heroic’”

Frédéric Chopin, Vladimir Horowitz

“Minute Waltz”

Frédéric Chopin

**“Piano Sonata No. 21 in C Major,
Op. 53 ‘Waldstein’:
I. Allegro con brio”**

Ludwig van Beethoven, Daniel Barenboim

“Rigoletto Paraphrase”

Adam Gyorgy

**“Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16:
I. Allegro molto moderato - Remastered”**

Edvard Grieg, Arthur Rubinstein,
RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra,
Alfred Wallenstein

**“Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat Minor,
Op. 23: Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso”**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Van Cliburn,
Kirill Kondrashin

“Un sospiro”

Franz Liszt, Van Cliburn



Playlist

“Liebestraume, S541/R211:

No. 1: Nocturne in A-Flat Major”

Franz Liszt, Jenő Jandó

“Liebestraume, S541/R211:

No. 2: Nocturne in E-Flat Major (2nd Version)”

Franz Liszt, Jenő Jandó

“Liebestraume, S541/R211:

No. 3: Nocturne in A-Flat Major”

Franz Liszt, Jenő Jandó

“Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23”

Frédéric Chopin, Krystian Zimerman

“Nocturne No. 13 In C Minor, Op. 48 No. 1”

Frédéric Chopin, Maurizio Pollini

“Nocturne No. 3 In B, Op. 9 No. 3”

Frédéric Chopin, Maurizio Pollini

“Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52”

Frédéric Chopin, Krystian Zimerman

“12 Études, Op. 10: No. 5

in G-Flat Major ‘Black Keys”

Frédéric Chopin, Maurizio Pollini

“Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20”

Frédéric Chopin, Benjamin Grosvenor

“Waltz in A-Flat Major, Op. 42”

Frédéric Chopin, Audrey Abela

**“Tempest Sonata 3rd Movement
(Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor,
Op. 31, No. 2: III. Allegretto)”**

Ludwig van Beethoven, Kassia

“Prélude in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 3, No. 2”

Sergei Rachmaninoff

“Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor,

Op. 30: I. Allegro ma non tanto”

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Vladimir Horowitz,
Eugene Ormandy

“4 Impromptus, D.899 (Op. 90):

No. 4 in A-Flat Major. Allegretto”

Franz Schubert, Krystian Zimerman

“Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 2

in G Minor, Op. 16: I. Andantino - Allegretto”

Sergei Prokofiev, Evgeny Kissin,
Vladimir Ashkenazy, Philharmonia Orchestra

“Chopin Etude Op. 25

No. 6 in G-sharp ‘Double Thirds”

Frédéric Chopin, Oleksandr Domanskyi,
DOMANSED

“La Campanella”

Franz Liszt

“Reflets dans l'eau”

Claude Debussy

“La Legieriezza”

Franz Liszt

“The Stars and Stripes Forever”

Vladimir Horowitz

