

# Talking Stories for Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

by Terry Hong

Short-story collections can be uneven, but readers will be consistently impressed by these extraordinary, resonant, and exhilarating debuts by a dozen diverse writers.

**Afterparties.** By Anthony Veasna So. 2021. Ecco.

So's nine electrifying stories magnificently create an interconnected Cambodian American community. So's death in December 2020 at just 28 was heartbreakingly tragic, but this exuberant debut ensures bittersweet posthumous fame.

**Apsara Engine.** By Bishakh Som. Art by the Author. 2020. Feminist Press.

In words and art, Som's richly hued, gorgeously lettered, exquisitely detailed graphic collection presents a brave new world of diverse women while living among friends, lovers, and chimerical creatures in familiar cities and faraway landscapes, balancing the expectantly mundane with the marvelously fantastical.

**Are You Enjoying?** By Mira Sethi. 2021. Knopf.

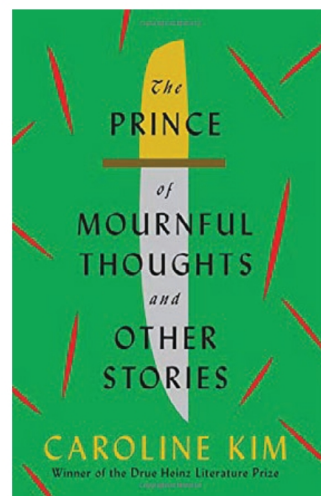
Already an established actor and journalist, Sethi presents six loosely interlinked stories set in her native Pakistan, each confronting various power dynamics. With nuance and precision, Sethi both exposes and enthralls.

**Each of Us Killers.** By Jenny Bhatt. 2020. 7.13 Books.

Peripatetically spread across continents, Bhatt's characters are often caught between expectations, desires, and boundaries.

**Hao.** By Ye Chun. 2021. Catapult.

Bilingual Chinese American writer, poet, and translator Ye displays her enviable linguistic prowess in a prodigious



debut featuring women on both sides of the globe, many defined and confined by and reliant on motherhood. Each of Ye's dozen stories astounds.

**How to Pronounce Knife.** By Souvankham Thammavongsa. 2020. Little, Brown.

Born to Laotian parents in a Thai refugee camp and raised and educated in Toronto, Thammavongsa parses her own culturally amalgamated heritage. Aficionados of pristine short fiction will want to read this collection.

**Land of Big Numbers.** By Te-Ping Chen. 2021. Mariner.

*Wall Street Journal* reporter Chen emerges as a fiction powerhouse, each of her 10 stories an immersive literary event. Traversing continents and cultures, moving effortlessly between China and the U.S., Chen deftly presents everyday lives that entertain, educate, and resonate.

**The Prince of Mournful Thoughts and Other Stories.** By Caroline Kim. 2020. Univ. of Pittsburgh.

The disconnect between generations, cultures, and histories looms in Kim's stupendous Drue Heinz Literature Prize-winner. Her dozen stories vary in location (Korea, California, France) and time periods (eighteenth century to the future).

**The Secret Lives of Church Ladies.** By Deesha Philyaw. 2020. West Virginia Univ.

Philyaw's first book, a National Book Award finalist, offers nine superb stories of mothers and daughters, friends and lovers, careless cheaters and lonely singles.

**Skinship.** By Yoon Choi. 2021. Knopf.

The characters in Choi's stories are caught in between cultures, families, generations, even life and death. Especially stupendous are her Korean immigrant women-in-flux.

**We Two Alone.** By Jack Wang. 2021. HarperVia.

Wang's magnificent seven-story collection traverses North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, pausing at pivotal moments over a century of history, each presented through a peripatetic Chinese lens.

