

About Once Our Lives



Once Our Lives is the remarkable true story of four generations of Chinese women struggling to survive war, revolution, sexual and political oppression, and the seemingly unshakable power of an ancient superstition that plagues two families until the eerie conclusion of the story.

The book opens with a strange family legend about a boy who is born into a prosperous family but whose life is changed forever when he is entered by the unlucky spirit of a wandering beggar – dooming him to a fate he struggles against his whole life. At the same time, a girl from a remote seaside village is torn from her family and forced into a life of unhappy luxury in cosmopolitan Shanghai, surrounded by round-eyed devils, acts of startling kindness and cruelty, and a newfangled magical device called . . . radio. When their paths unexpectedly cross, the result is anything but a typical love story.

The book takes the reader on an epic journey from glamorous 1930s Shanghai to China's dusty and dangerous Wild West and is filled with stories of luxurious banquets, lost jewels, babies sold in opium dens, kidnappings by pirates, and brushes with death – seen through the eyes of a man for whom honesty would spell disaster and an unwanted girl with three identities.

Once Our Lives shares a wealth of colorful but largely overlooked Chinese history, and gives an intimate, heartbreaking, and poignantly hopeful look behind the greatest headlines of the 20th Century by portraying the lives, deaths and everlasting loves of ordinary people living in extraordinary times.