



PRESENTS

# TREELESS MOUNTAIN



OPENS APRIL 22 AT FILM FORUM IN NEW YORK  
NATIONAL EXPANSION TO FOLLOW

**Written & Directed by:** So Yong Kim

**Produced by:** Bradley Rust Gray, Ben Howe, Lars Knudsen, Jay Van Hoy, So Yong Kim

**Running Time:** 89 minutes

**Rating:** Not Rated by the MPAA

**World Premiere:** Toronto International Film Festival, 2008

**DISTRIBUTOR CONTACT:**

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## - SYNOPSIS

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When their mother needs to leave in order to find their estranged father, seven-year-old Jin and her younger sister, Bin, are left to live with their Big Aunt for the summer. With only a small piggy bank and their mother's promise to return when it is full, the two young girls are forced to acclimate to changes in their family life. Counting the days, and the coins, the two bright-eyed young girls eagerly anticipate their mother's homecoming. But when the bank fills up, and with their mother still not back, Big Aunt decides that she can no longer tend to the children. Taken to live on their grandparent's farm, it is here that Jin comes to learn the importance of family bonds in this beautiful, meditative, and thought-provoking second feature from So Yong Kim, the acclaimed director of *IN BETWEEN DAYS*.

Variety's Robert Koehler said of Kim's film: "drawing out beautifully natural performances from her child actors, Kim once again has a distinct way of letting her camera observe her characters with kind thoughtfulness, allowing for a quiet mood to wash over the scenes."

## - STATEMENT FROM DIRECTOR - SO YONG KIM

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TREELESS MOUNTAIN is inspired by events from my early childhood in Pusan, Korea. My mother divorced our father and left us with our grandparents on a rice farm. She immigrated to America in order to find a better life for herself and to build a future for her children. At the time of these events we were too young to understand and our mother did not tell us what was happening. I began writing the film to search for certain lost memories from this period of my life and also as a letter to my mother.

As the story began to take shape, Jin, the main character, took on her own distinctive personality and blossomed. As the writing progressed, the story and the characters began to separate from actual events from my life. Jin's emotional and physical journey became the main force of the story. As in the case of the Aimie character in IN BETWEEN DAYS, I used my personal memories and experience as the starting point to develop Jin, and then allowed her to dictate her own journey.

TREELESS MOUNTAIN is a simple story about a six-year-old girl, Jin, and her journey to early maturity. Jin's sensitivity and the complexity of the emotions stem from her desire to have her family life back. She must let go of everything she has known in order to persevere. In this sense TREELESS MOUNTAIN is an intimate portrait of a young girl and a classic coming-of-age story. I wanted to tell the story of Jin in order to celebrate her resilience in life.

# - NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR - SO YONG KIM

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## ABOUT THE CAST

The most important and difficult task in making the film was finding the two leads.

In order to cast Jin, we visited 14 elementary schools and kindergartens in Seoul City. When I first met Hee Yeon Kim, who plays Jin in the film, I had this gut feeling that she was the one. When I approached her in the school's cafeteria, she told me it was her dream to have a younger sister. After that she corrected my poor Korean. I fell for her completely.

While casting, we took our 7-month-old daughter with us to the schools since we couldn't afford a full-time babysitter. This ended up being a benefit to the film. It turned out that the only reason we got permission from Hee Yeon's mother to use Hee Yeon for the film was because when she saw our daughter with us she thought we were decent parents. Afterwards, she trusted that we would take good care of Hee Yeon.

In June of 2007, Song Hee's picture was e-mailed to us by our assistant who was working on a community project for her university which involved visiting orphanages in the out-skirts of Seoul. When I saw the photographs I wanted to meet Song Hee because of her amazing smile. We drove three hours from Seoul to meet her at Wonjoo Children's House. We auditioned Song Hee along with her housemates.

Song Hee, despite being the youngest in a group of girls, was the most focused and intuitive. She did not shy away nor did she try to impress us. In addition to her bright smile, her face portrayed an intensity rarely seen in a five-year-old.

The two girls met for the first time a week before we started shooting in Seoul at a noodle restaurant. They became fast sisters, sharing and fighting throughout the production.

Grandma, played by Boon Tak Park, was cast from a local farmer's market at the location two days before the scenes were to be shot, where she was selling an upset-stomach remedy out of a plastic bag. Her physique and mannerisms reminded me of my grandmother. It turned out that Boon Tak was born in Hunghae and married when she was young. Her husband passed away suddenly while she was in her early thirties and she supported her three children by farming and doing manual labor for various farms and families in the village.

The mother and Big Aunt are played by seasoned actors: Soo Ah Lee and Mi Hyang Kim respectively. Korean director Lee Chang Dong recommended them for their roles. Soo Ah Lee was just returning to the Korean screens after many years of absence. She connected to the story in a personal way and I was impressed by the sympathy she had for the character. The actress Mi Hyang Kim's background is in the theater. I was won over by her honesty and dedication to her craft. She was a force during production, winning over the two lead girls and the crew with her wisdom and enthusiasm for the project. I am indebted to her for her interpretation and realization of Big Aunt.

## **LOCATIONS**

Big Aunt's town and Grandma's farm are both located in and around my hometown, Hunghae. It was my dream to shoot the film there. We found the farm through a distant aunt who still had connections in town. Our line producer helped us secure Big Aunt's house. We found the rest of the locations and the extras while we were shooting. The cast and crew lived in the town for three weeks.

## **PRODUCTION AND POST-PRODUCTION**

I wanted to keep the crew size to a bare minimum because it was important to keep the set quiet for the girls. The crew of TREELESS MOUNTAIN was only twelve people, half from the States and the other from Korea. The film was shot on Arrri Super-16 and we shot over 40 hours of footage.

Before we began production I decided that I would talk with the girls during each take. They didn't read the script and didn't know the details of the scenes until the moment we were shooting. I usually fed them lines and asked them to do specific things while the camera was rolling. This process helped to keep them engaged. Although some of the scenes required multiple takes and few were heavily scripted, I tried to capture the two girls' spontaneous interactions and natural moments as much as possible. Due to this particular nature of working with the young cast, the most challenging part of the post-production was cleaning up the sound. It was very difficult to edit my voice out of all the tracks.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

I dreamt of making TREELESS MOUNTAIN even before my first feature, IN BETWEEN DAYS. Five years ago, when I first started writing the story, I felt that I didn't have enough skills as a filmmaker nor the confidence to begin. Also, because of the film's intense personal nature, I needed more time to de-personalize the story and to develop the characters more. In the meantime I saw two films with young non-actors playing lead roles: PONETTE and NOBODY KNOWS. These films made me think that making TREELESS MOUNTAIN with young girls would be possible. I finished the first draft of the script in 2005.

The most amazing thing that happened in our lives since making IN BETWEEN DAYS was that we had our baby daughter, Sky. For some reason, after I became a mother, I wanted to tell this story even more.

Each film for me is a privilege to make. I try to gain as much knowledge as I can from each project and to learn something about my self and the environment that we live in. It is my hope that this search is shared with the audience.

## **- FILMMAKER BIOS**

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### **SO YONG KIM – WRITER/ DIRECTOR**

TREELESS MOUNTAIN is So Yong Kim's second feature film. The script received support from the Cannes L'Atelier Program, the Sundance Institute's Writers and Directors Labs, and the Pusan Promotional Program.

Kim's first feature, IN BETWEEN DAYS, was acclaimed by critics and won the Special Jury Prize at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival along with the International Critics' Prize at Berlin. It was also awarded an LA Critics Prize and Best Film and Best Actress Prizes at Buenos Aires. Kino International and the Sundance Channel released the film in North America, and With Cinema released the film in Korea.

So Yong Kim was born in Pusan, South Korea and immigrated to the US when she was twelve. She studied painting, performance, and video art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she earned her MFA. She has made several experimental short films including A BUNNY RABBIT, shot by renowned cinematographer Christopher Doyle. Kim also produced Bradley Rust Gray's award-winning Icelandic feature, SALT, in 2003. In 2006, Kim was featured as one of the "25 Filmmakers to Watch" in Filmmaker Magazine.

### **BRADLEY RUST GRAY – PRODUCER**

Bradley Rust Gray produced So Yong Kim's IN BETWEEN DAYS. He recently completed production on his second feature, THE EXPLODING GIRL, starring Zoe Kazan and Mark Rendall.

Gray's first narrative feature, SALT, was filmed in Iceland and won the Caligari Film Prize for Innovative Filmmaking at Berlin in 2003. It was selected for over 20 international film festivals and won three more international awards. The film was released on Sundance Channel in the US. Gray's short film HITCH won an award at Sundance in 2000 and was selected as one of the "Best Films of the Year" in Film Comment Magazine.

Gray is a Fulbright scholar who has received graduate degrees from both USC and the British Film Institute in London. His undergraduate work focused on architecture, sculpture, and experimental filmmaking, with a degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

### **JAY VAN HOY & LARS KNUDSEN – PRODUCERS**

PARTS AND LABOR is a company dedicated to director-driven, collaborative filmmaking. Lars Knudsen and Jay Van Hoy established the company in 2004. The producers have completed seven feature films with an additional three films currently in post-production and two films lined up for a Fall/Winter '08 shoot while keeping several other features – documentaries and narratives – in active development. In addition to producing, Knudsen and Van Hoy are consultants to Scott Rudin, one of the American film industry's most prolific producers; they inform and advise him regarding new talent and groundbreaking filmmakers from around the world.

Knudsen and Van Hoy produced Kelly Reichardt's OLD JOY, Cam Archer's WILD TIGERS I HAVE KNOWN, Steve Collins' GRETCHEN, and Spencer Parsons' I'LL COME RUNNING. In addition to TREELESS MOUNTAIN, their most recent projects include Nik Fackler's LOVELY, STILL, Cruz Angeles' DON'T LET ME DROWN, David Barker's UNTITLED, and Cam Archer's SHIT YEAR.

Knudsen and Van Hoy made Variety's "10 Producers to Watch" list in 2008. In 2006, they were singled out in Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film." Paste Magazine also included them on their 2006 Top 10 List of "Arthouse Powerhouse Producers."

### **BEN HOWE – PRODUCER**

Ben Howe is an independent producer based in New York City. Along with TREELESS MOUNTAIN, his recent credits include Matt Wolf's documentary WILD COMBINATION: A PORTRAIT OF ARTHUR RUSSELL, which premiered at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival, and will be distributed theatrically by Plexifilm in September 2008. Ben has also produced three features currently in post-production: Cruz Angeles' DON'T LET ME DROWN, an untitled thriller directed by David Barker, and Bradley Rust Gray's THE EXPLODING GIRL.

## **CREW**

Written and directed by So Yong Kim  
Producers Bradley Rust Gray  
Ben Howe  
Lars Knudsen  
Jay Van Hoy  
So Yong Kim  
Executive Producers Ian McGloin  
Jamie Mai  
Charlie Ledley  
Director of Photography Anne Misawa  
Editors So Yong Kim  
Bradley Rust Gray  
Production Designer See Hee Kim  
Sound Eric Offin/Tandem Sound  
Composer of Original Score Asobi Seksu

## **CAST**

JIN Hee Yeon Kim  
BIN Song Hee Kim  
MOM Soo Ah Lee  
BIG AUNT Mi Hyang Kim  
GRANDMA Boon Tak Park