What happens when everything falls away, when those you call on in times of need are themselves calling out for rescue?

In his highly anticipated second collection, Chen Chen continues his investigation of family, both blood and chosen, examining what one inherits and what one invents, as a queer Asian American living through an era of Trump, mass shootings, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Always at work in the wrecked heart of this new collection is a switchboard operator, picking up and connecting calls. Raucous 2 a.m. prank calls. Whispered-in-a-classroom emergency calls. And sometimes, its pages record the dropping of a call, a failure or refusal to pick up. With irrepressible humor and play, these anarchic poems celebrate life, despite all that would crush aliveness.

Hybrid in form and set in New England, West Texas, and a landlocked province of China, among other places, Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced an Emergency refuses neat categorizations and pat answers. Instead, the book offers an insatiable curiosity about how it is we keep finding ways to hold onto one another.
Chen Chen was born in Xiamen, China, and grew up in Massachusetts. His debut poetry collection, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*, won the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize. His work has appeared in two chapbooks and in such publications as *Poetry, Gulf Coast, Indiana Review, Best of the Net, and The Best American Poetry*. He is the recipient of fellowships from Kundiman, the Saltonstall Foundation, and Lambda Literary. He earned his BA at Hampshire College and his MFA at Syracuse University. He lives in Lubbock, Texas, where he is pursuing a PhD in English and Creative Writing at Texas Tech University.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT CHEN CHEN AT CHENCHENWRITES.COM.**
SEE CHEN CHEN IN THE MEDIA

Check out these selections featuring poet and author Chen Chen, from insightful interviews to guest blog posts to candid event conversations.

- **Writers & Books** – Chen Chen In-Conversation with Author and Poet Peter Conners
- **Shondaland** – Chen Chen’s Newest Poetry Book, ‘Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced an Emergency,’ Touches on the Poignant and Playful
- **Pen America** – The PEN Ten: An Interview with Chen Chen
- **Poetry Foundation** – On Being a ‘Serious’ Poet
- **Electric Lit** – Embracing Queer Anger as a Source of Knowledge

Chen Chen: Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced an Emergency

*Chen Chen in conversation with author & poet Peter Conners, Publisher & Executive Director of BOA Editions. Writers & Books.*

**BKLYN Book Club Kit:**
YOUR EMERGENCY CONTACT HAS EXPERIENCED AN EMERGENCY
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

1. How does the juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy throughout Chen Chen’s *Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced An Emergency* do to further the message of both his individual poems and the collection as a whole?

2. Why did Chen choose to make the image of the red truck a motif? What about the mother motif?

3. The inclusion of Chinese characters is an important feature of the collection; why does Chen choose to do this and how does it broach topics of accessibility towards an audience within literary spaces?

4. How do birds operate as symbols in the collection?

5. In this collection, there are multiple poems with the same title—"A Small Book of Questions..." and “The School of...”—these titles change slightly from poem to poem but they are undeniably linked; why did Chen use this stylistic technique, and how would the meaning of the poems change if they were not within the same sequence? Can these poems operate as standalone poems?

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BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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6. In the “A small book of questions...” there are repeated questions in almost all of the poems but different answers every time. How does the dichotomy between question and answer operate within the collection?

7. In “Chen No Middle Name Chen,” he uses only the letters in the title, so C, H, E, N, O, M, I, D, L, A. What does this constraint add to your understanding of the poem?

8. In the poem “Winter [Big Stinky Bowel...],” Chen says “Years ago, a teacher said never to use the word “Poop” in a poem.” How does Chen’s refutation of these “rules” made by the poetic establishment speak to a larger question of dictation within literary spheres?

9. What are the possible motivations behind titling the collection *Your Emergency Contact has Experienced an Emergency*?

10. The poems are written from first person perspective; are they all from the same speaker?

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Explore local poetry in Brooklyn!

- **Brooklyn Public Library poetry events**
- **Brooklyn Poets**, 144 Montague St
- **Poetry Society of America**, 119 Smith St
- **Berl’s Poetry Shop**, 141 Front St

*Photo by Helena Lopes from Pexels.*
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Did you enjoy Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced an Emergency? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- *Alive at the End of the World* by Saeed Jones
- *Judas Goat: Poems* by Gabrielle Bates
- *The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On* by Franny Choi
- *I Do Everything I'm Told* by Megan Fernandes
- *The Trees Witness Everything* by Victoria Chang

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