



Early Leaving

By Judy Goldman
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Introduction

As Kathyne Smallwood waits for morning and her son's fate, she searches her memory for details of his life and her own, and wonders how she could have prevented the unspeakable act that her eighteen-year-old son has committed. Kathyne must now face a horrifying realization—the hardest part of parenting is learning when to let go.

Goldman presents a wise, sharp-eyed invitation that explores the nature of family, marriage, and parenting.

Discussion Questions

1. The title, *Early Leaving*, is literally what this book is about. How is *Early Leaving* metaphorical for Kathyne's feelings about her child's departure from her life?
2. Kathyne asks herself, "Is it possible for a mother to love her child too much?" Do you believe this is possible?
3. "My mother adored my father...and he adored her" is how Kathyne describes her parents' relationship. How does her relationship with her husband Peter mirror her parents' relationship? How does it differ?
4. Kathyne listened in on Early's phone conversations, went through his pockets, and read his letters. Was she right to do so, especially given the trouble Early ultimately gets into? Why or why not?
5. Though she didn't know the full extent of Early's illegal activities, Kathyne knew more than her husband Peter did. Why did she feel she had to protect Early from Peter?
6. Whenever a question of Early's integrity arises, Kathyne defends him. She believes everything he tells her. What are some indicators that Early may be different from what Kathyne believes he is?
7. From the start, Early's relationship with Chip troubled Kathyne, yet she did nothing about it. What can parents do when they disapprove of their child's best friend?
8. To a certain extent, affluence allows Kathyne to live what appears to be the "perfect" life, while in fact, her life is not perfect. If Peter and Kathyne had been less fortunate, would Kathyne have been forced to face their problems? How would their relationship have been different?
9. Peter has an affair and tells Kathyne about it. Was Peter right to confess to her? What else besides confessing his guilt was he trying to tell her?
10. How does Kathyne's job as a movie reviewer—someone who analyzes "make-believe" life—compare to how she is in "real" life? How are movies used to punctuate emotion and plot throughout *Early Leaving*?

About the Author

Judy Goldman's first novel, *The Slow Way Back*, won the Sir Walter Raleigh Fiction Award, the Mary Ruffin Poole First Work of Fiction Award, and was a finalist for the Southeast Booksellers Association's Best Novel of the Year. She is also the author of two books of poetry. Her work has been published widely in literary journals, and her commentaries have aired on public radio. She lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.