

IF YOU LEAVE ME

William Morrow

By Crystal Hana Kim

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Introduction

“An immersive, heartbreaking story about war, passion, and the road not taken.” — *People*

“Heartrending . . . a stunning feat of lyricism.” — *USA Today*

**“One of the most beautiful and moving love stories you’ll read this year.”
— *Nylon Magazine***

An emotionally riveting debut novel about war, family, and forbidden love—the unforgettable saga of two ill-fated lovers in Korea and the heartbreaking choices they’re forced to make in the years surrounding the civil war that still haunts us today.

When the communist-backed army from the north invades her home, sixteen-year-old Haemi Lee, along with her widowed mother and ailing brother, is forced to flee to a refugee camp along the coast. For a few hours each night, she escapes her family’s makeshift home and tragic circumstances with her childhood friend, Kyunghwan.

Focused on finishing school, Kyunghwan doesn’t realize his older and wealthier cousin, Jisoo, has his sights set on the beautiful and spirited Haemi—and is determined to marry her before joining the fight. But as Haemi becomes a wife, then a mother, her decision to forsake the boy she always loved for the security of her family sets off a dramatic saga that will have profound effects for generations to come.

Richly told and deeply moving, *If You Leave Me* is a stunning portrait of war and refugee life, a passionate and timeless romance, and a heartrending exploration of one woman’s longing for autonomy in a rapidly changing world.



Questions for Discussion

1. *If You Leave Me* shifts perspectives between multiple characters. How do Haemi, Kyunghwan, Jisoo, Hyunki, and Solee's contrasting voices shape your experience reading the novel?
 2. Compare and contrast Haemi, Jisoo, and Kyunghwan. How do their different backgrounds—gender, class, family, access to education—define each of them and affect their experiences during the Korean War? How are their experiences expressed later on in their lives?
 3. Think about Haemi. Do you think she was like most ordinary Korean girls of the period? How do you feel about the choices she makes throughout the novel?
 4. What do you think about Haemi's decision to marry and stay with Jisoo? Was it about survival, or something else? Do you think Haemi would have chosen a different husband if it weren't for the events of Korean War?
 5. Discuss the idea of "home" in *If You Leave Me*. How do you think the definition of home changes for each of the main characters throughout the story?
 6. How does Haemi and Hyunki's sibling relationship change after the war? What do you make of their relationship at the end of the story? Do you think they've forgiven each other?
 7. How does *If You Leave Me* explore the topic of womanhood and gender expectations during this time in history?
 8. What do the two Solee chapters teach us about Haemi's relationship with her children? What do you make of Solee's understanding about her mother's past life? What remains a mystery for Solee at the end of the novel?
 9. Why do you think the novel is called *If You Leave Me*? How many characters does this apply to—and who leaves who?
 10. Has reading this novel given you a new appreciation of the wounds war leaves behind, even once the fighting is done? What insights does *If You Leave Me* hold for our own time?
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