

Discussion Guide for How to End a Love Story by Yulin Kuang

1. HOW TO END A LOVE STORY features Asian protagonists navigating life in LA's entertainment industry. How does Yulin Kuang incorporate cultural elements into the story? Consider Helen's reflection on her identity, "Mom, you spent two and a half decades telling me to focus on school and work and not to think about boys. Maybe the reason I'm not married is because I'm such a guai nui."
2. Reflecting on Helen and Grant's personal growth throughout the novel, what were the pivotal moments or decisions that defined their development? Did you find their evolution believable?
3. Yulin Kuang mentions that "North and South" by Elizabeth Gaskell is a formative text for her. How do you see the influence of classic literature, particularly works like "Pride and Prejudice," in this novel.
4. Discuss Helen and Grant as characters. How does Yulin Kuang use their backgrounds and personalities to explore the love and growth, as well as vulnerability they experience between each other?
5. Helen is portrayed as a deeply introspective and sometimes self-doubting character. Did you see any aspects of yourself in Helen's personality or struggles? How did her journey resonate with your own experiences of navigating personal insecurities and growth?
6. Grant and Helen navigate a complex relationship marked by tragedy and unresolved emotions. Discuss how their past influences their present interactions. Consider Grant's sentiment, "If loving Helen—even if it was never really his right to love her in the first place—means he gets to carry some version of her with him forever."
7. Were you surprised by any plot twists, or did you find the story predictable? How did the author keep or lose your interest throughout the narrative?
8. As a writer herself, how do you think Yulin Kuang's background in film and storytelling influences her novel? Are there aspects of her writing style that stood out to you?
9. Can you identify a moment in the story where you strongly empathized with Helen's struggles or felt a personal connection to her character? How did Yulin Kuang's portrayal of Helen's internal conflicts enhance your understanding of her journey?

10. In what ways does HOW TO END A LOVE STORY distinguish itself from traditional romance novels in terms of themes and character development? Did the heavy themes and nuanced character portrayals enhance or challenge your expectations of the romance genre?
11. The novel is described as heavy and emotionally charged, particularly in its exploration of trauma and personal growth. Which scenes or moments had the greatest emotional impact on you? How did the author effectively convey these emotions through the narrative?
12. Were there specific scenes or interactions between characters that particularly moved you? How did these moments contribute to your emotional engagement with the story?
13. The novel references a variety of cultural and literary touchstones, from Nora Ephron films to French cinema. How do these references enrich the story and characters?
14. The novel incorporates nostalgic elements, such as high school memories and shared experiences. How do these nostalgic elements deepen your understanding of Helen and Grant's present-day relationship?
15. Helen's relationship with her parents, particularly her mother, plays a significant role in shaping her views on love and self-worth. How did these familial dynamics impact Helen's character development and her approach to relationships with others, especially Grant?
16. Some readers mentioned unexpected twists or soap opera-like moments in the romantic dialogues. How did these elements affect your engagement with the story? Did they add depth to the characters' relationships or detract from the narrative?
17. Yulin Kuang mentions blending realism into the romance genre. How does this affect your reading experience? Do you find it enhances the story's depth?
18. The novel shifts between different perspectives, including those of the characters and the writer's room. How does this multi-perspective narrative style affect your understanding of the story?
19. Both Helen and Grant undergo significant growth throughout the novel. How did their interactions with each other contribute to their personal development? In what ways did they challenge each other to confront their pasts and strive for a better future?

20. Explore the relationship between Helen and Grant. How does their initial "trauma bonding" evolve throughout the novel? Do you think their relationship is portrayed realistically?
21. Yulin Kuang's voice as an author is distinct and witty. How does her voice contribute to the overall tone and atmosphere of the novel?
22. The novel concludes with significant emotional resolutions for Grant and Helen. Were you satisfied with how their stories were wrapped up? Analyze the themes of closure and acceptance in the final chapters. Discuss whether the ending resonated with the characters' journeys and the overall narrative.
23. After completing the novel, how did your perception of Helen and Grant's relationship evolve from beginning to end? Did your initial impressions of the characters change as you learned more about their backgrounds and personal struggles?
24. Reflecting on your own experiences, did you find any parallels between Helen and Grant's relationship and real-life situations? How did the novel's themes resonate with your personal reflections on love, grief, and identity?
25. The novel's title, HOW TO END A LOVE STORY, suggests a reflection on closure and new beginnings. How did the conclusion of Helen and Grant's story leave you feeling? Did it provoke any thoughts about the nature of endings and beginnings in your own life?