

If I Stay
Gayle Forman
The Penguin Group
Fiction
234 pages
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What Would You Do If You Had To Choose?

By Emily R.

The catastrophic, enthralling novel, *If I Stay*, by Gayle Forman, is full of love, hope, and tragedy. It will surely intrigue young adults hungry for an emotional rollercoaster as they follow seventeen year old Mia.

Narrating the novel herself, Mia begins, “Everyone thinks it was because of the snow. And in a way, I suppose that’s true,” a hook that instantaneously grabs the attention of readers, leaving them asking many questions. The audience is eager to read on in order to seek the answers. This quote refers to the tragic car accident that leaves Mia in critical condition and her family dead. In a split second, her current life is abruptly taken from her. Her existence, in limbo, is suddenly caught between two worlds, life and death. Mia must make the heart wrenching decision to leave the physical world, or stay, without the three people closest to her. The book’s title immediately becomes apparent as Mia ponders what will happen if she stays.

The gruesomeness of the opening scene may prove too gory for some readers, leaving them in despair. They may consider abandoning the book, but the eloquent language and Mia’s strongly developed character will entice readers to continue. Forman’s word choices are simplistic but descriptive, making the scenes easy to visualize through vivid imagery.

Mia’s decision to choose life or death is the compelling force that moves the plot. She has an out of body experience, finding herself staring down at her own wounded body as she is

transferred from the accident to the hospital. Revealing her confusion, Mia thinks to herself, “*Am I dead?* I actually have to ask myself this. *Am I dead?*” She then wanders through the hospital unseen, but able to see and hear everything, though in actuality, she remains unconscious. Mia spends a day in animated suspension contemplating her future. She weighs the pros and cons of living and dying, while trying to fully comprehend what has ensued.

Mia runs the show. Her family, friends, and the doctors are left waiting and their actions depend on her choice. Her out of body experience reassures her that she will be alright without her parents and brother and that she still has much to live for. Their presence allows Mia to ultimately make her decision. This concept is different from most fictional books and may send a tingling feeling up readers’ spines.

Mia flashes back multiple times to noteworthy events throughout her childhood. Each chapter is divided into two sections, one from Mia’s current state and one from a previous event. The novel is not arranged chronologically, making it more engaging. This stylistic choice, aimed to lure readers, is different and appealing. However, some may find this style of writing confusing, deterring them from finishing the novel.

Although writing the book was an emotional struggle, Forman composed the novel with ease, using her personal experiences, tragedies she’d heard about, her imagination, and her curiosity to create Mia’s character. Forman felt bound to write a story to “Answer the question that had been living in [her] for years: *What would you do if you had to choose?*” Mia’s fictional town and the prevailing motif of music, reflects the author’s life and her musical friends. Creating characters based on dear friends allowed Forman to feel their presence, as if they were with her as she wrote. That is why she says, “That’s how we manage to survive loss. Because love, it never dies, it never goes away, it never fades, so long as you hang onto it.”

The predicament Mia faces requires much contemplation on her behalf and is thought-provoking for readers. It poses the questions: *Can this actually happen?* and *What would you do in this situation?* Readers delve deeply into these sophisticated questions, learning things about themselves in the process.

A reoccurring theme apparent throughout *If I Stay* is the importance of love and its ability to make one immortal. Other renowned novels authored by Forman with similar themes include the sequel to *If I Stay*, *Where She Went*, *Sisters in Sanity*, *Just One Day*, *Just One Year*, and *You Can't Get There From Here*.

For readers who enjoy atypical ideas, *If I Stay* is a must read that will easily earn a five star rating. High school students will definitely want to read this fast and enjoyable novel that deals with life and death stakes. It allows them to consider what really matters in life as they empathize with Mia. Forman scrapes the surface of a scary topic, a zone that is unthinkable for many teenagers: death. This innovative novel is recommended for those who want to suspend reality and conventional thinking, becoming captivated while transported into a world of suspense and unimaginable events.