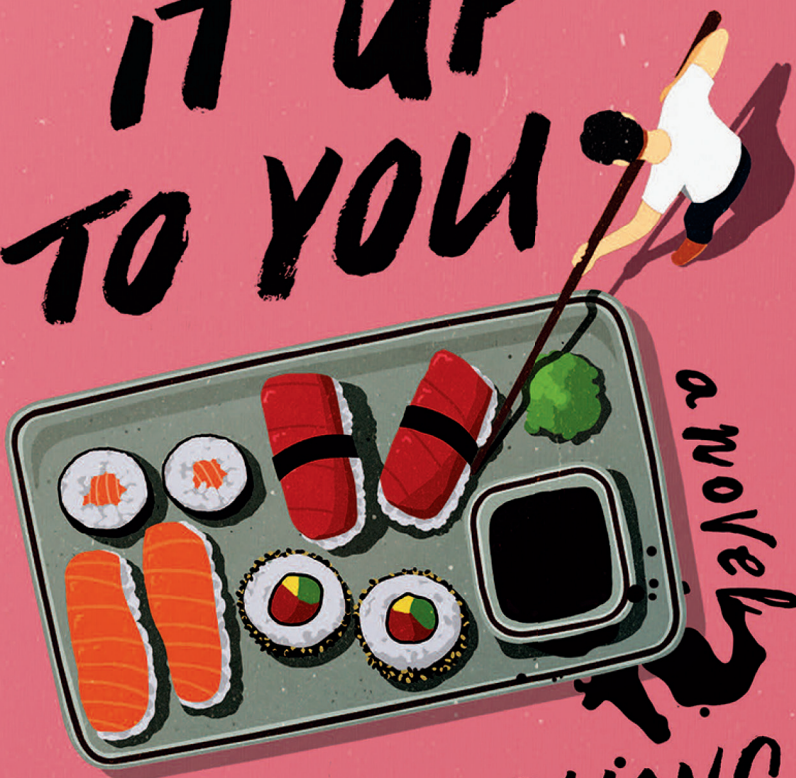


I LEAVE
IT UP
TO YOU?



a novel

JINWOO CHONG
AUTHOR OF FLUX

BOOK CLUB KIT

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

There are a number of things I do to try and separate the time I spend writing books from the rest of life: I make up a quiet, isolated place at home (it tends to change from month to month) from which I can work; I eat clean and avoid exciting things like parties or popular restaurants in order to try and stay focused; I avoid reading or watching anything altogether. My will to become as boring as possible is never stronger than when on deadline.

For all my efforts, however, life bleeds in. I wrote *I Leave It Up to You* during a tumultuous period of change. My first novel was being politely declined across the board from almost every editor who read it, Covid-19 was in its ebb-and-flow phase in which we googled incidence rates and decided whether that trip or wedding was going to be worth getting sick, and I was a handful of dates into my first real relationship and wondering whether the whole thing was going to come tumbling down from under me as most first real relationships tend to do. Writing this book became a refuge. I began to find comfort in scrolling through my growing Word doc's pages, skeptical that it—or the first book I'd spent years working on—would ever find their way out into the world. Even if I couldn't write a single word, I could be happy reading and rereading some of my favorite parts.

The tale of my first novel has a happy ending, as does this book. When I read it, I'm reminded of all the fear and disappointment I poured into it, trying to fall back in love with writing, trying to remind myself that this was the only thing I'd ever wanted to do since I was ten years old. The result is the happiest novel I've ever written, a reflection of the joy I was looking for.

There are a couple ways to describe this book that a few kind writers, reviewers, and readers have already used: a family drama, a romantic comedy, a food diary, a queer love story. To me, it will always be the book I wrote while falling in love with my husband, Bram, who I can't help but see everywhere in its pages. If there is anything you take away from *I Leave It Up to You*, I hope it's love: the various and beautiful kinds of love that exist between people. I hope, also, that it makes you hungry.

Best,

Jinwoo Chong



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Jack Jr.'s coma and subsequent awakening serve as a catalyst for his transformation? In what ways does his character evolve throughout the novel?
2. Discuss the complexities of Jack Jr.'s relationship with his family. How do his parents and brother react to his return, and how do these relationships develop over the course of the story?
3. How does the setting of the Korean American enclave in Fort Lee, New Jersey, influence the characters and their interactions? In what ways does Jack Jr.'s cultural heritage play a role in his journey of self-discovery?
4. The idea of second chances is central to the novel. How do Jack Jr. and other characters navigate the opportunities for redemption and renewal presented to them? Are there any moments where a second chance is particularly poignant or transformative?
5. Joja, the family's sushi restaurant, is more than just a setting—it's a character in its own right. How does the restaurant symbolize the family's struggles and hopes? What role does it play in Jack Jr.'s reconciliation with his past?
6. Explore Jack Jr.'s romantic journey, particularly his relationship with Emil Cuddy, the nurse who took care of him. How does this relationship contribute to his healing process, and how does the love story intersect with the broader themes of the novel—cultural identity, family expectations, second chances, forgiveness, etc.?
7. The novel highlights the tensions between different generations within the family. How do these conflicts manifest, and what do they reveal about the characters' values and aspirations?
8. Jack Jr. grapples with the desire for a self-determined path versus familial obligations. How does he reconcile these conflicting desires, and what does his journey suggest about the nature of personal identity?
9. Food and cooking are recurring motifs in the novel. How do these elements contribute to the narrative and the characters' connections with each other? Are there any specific scenes involving food that stood out to you?
10. Despite its serious themes, the novel is full of joy, humor, and absurdity. How does the author balance these elements with the more poignant aspects of the story? Can you identify a moment where humor provided a deeper understanding of a character or situation?
11. How does the author's narrative style and voice contribute to the overall tone and impact of the novel? Are there particular passages or techniques that stood out to you as especially effective or evocative? How do these choices enhance your connection to the characters and their journeys?
12. What did you think of the novel's ending, particularly the lack of closure on what had caused Jack Jr.'s accident originally—were you satisfied with the true to life element or not knowing?
13. The title *I Leave It Up to You* refers to the phrase used in sushi restaurants (omakase), but also suggests themes of choice and agency. Discuss the various meanings of the title. If you were to suggest an alternate title, what would it be?
14. Did you as a reader take away any messages from reading *I Leave It Up to You* and, if so, what were they? How would you describe this novel to a friend?



PLAYLIST

This playlist is available to listen to on Spotify @randomhousebooks.

SOMEBODY - DAGNY

SYMMETRY - COLOURING

BE SWEET - JAPANESE BREAKFAST

LOVERS - ROOSEVELT

ISSUES / HOLD ON - TEYANA TAYLOR

HOW I WANT YA - HUDSON THAMES

NEW WAY - RENFORSHORT

EMPRESS - SNOW PATROL

CHANGES - LAUV

STUPID DEEP - JON BELLION

MY LOVE MINE ALL MINE - MITSKI

BOYS - FLOWER OF LOVE

BUTTER - BTS

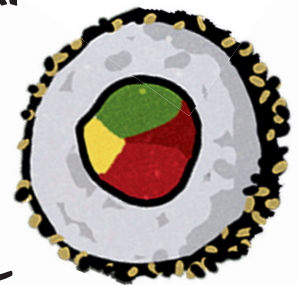
YEAH RIGHT - JOJI

SAY SOMETHING - KYLIE MINOGUE

BABY, YOU MAKE ME CRAZY - SAM SMITH

MUSIC FOR A SUSHI RESTAURANT - HARRY STYLES

LOVE IS A GAME - ADELE



RECIPE

KIMCHI JJIGAE

The soup that JJ makes for himself and Appa on the morning of his first fish run post wake-up.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups kimchi (sour, allowed to ferment further in refrigerator instead of fresh)
1 lb. pork belly, thinly sliced
½ cup white onion, chopped
½ lb. firm tofu, sliced into bite-size portions
1 scallion, chopped
1–2 tbsp pure white sugar
1 tsp. soy sauce
2 cloves garlic, minced
1–2 tbsp. sesame oil

DIRECTIONS

Brown pork belly together with sesame oil in pot.

Slice kimchi into bite-size portions and add to pot.

Add garlic, soy sauce, sliced onions, and stir fry for 2-3 minutes.

Add 3 cups water (can substitute anchovy broth, chicken broth, or leftover juice from kimchi, boil 8–10 minutes).

Top with sliced tofu and scallions, boil another 5 minutes.

Serve with white rice.



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