



The Unmaking of June Farrow: A Novel

By Adrienne Young

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Discussion Questions

1. Discuss June as a character. What were your first impressions of her? How did she change over the course of the novel? What would you have done differently in her position?
2. What did you think of the time travel aspect of the story? If you were to walk through a door in time, where would you hope to be transported?
3. Feminism and motherhood are major themes throughout the novel. The women at the heart of the story sacrifice so much for each other and for their family. Discuss the different women in this book—June, Susanna, Margaret, Birdie, and others—and their roles in the narrative. How is June's life shaped by these women? What lengths would you go to for the women in your life?
4. Eamon is the main love interest in *The Unmaking of June Farrow*. What do make of his reaction to June's return? Would you be able to forgive her?
5. What did you think about Caleb as a character? Did learning about his childhood make you sympathize more with him at the end of the story?
6. *The Unmaking of June Farrow* is set in Jasper, North Carolina—a fictional small town in the South. How does that setting impact the events of the story?
7. At its core, *The Unmaking of June Farrow* is about legacy and the lasting power of family history. How did this novel make you think about your own family history?
8. What did you think of the the story's ending? Were you surprised, or did you expect it? Was it what you'd hoped for?
9. Were there any readers in the group who wanted June to stay in 1951? Who wanted her to return to her life in 2023? What were the reasons you rooted for June to choose either life?
10. Who would you cast in the adaptation of the book?

Author Biography

Adrienne Young is a foodie with a deep love of history and travel and a shameless addiction to coffee. When she's not writing, you can find her on her yoga mat, sipping wine over long dinners or disappearing into her favorite art museums. She lives with her documentary filmmaker husband and their four little wildlings in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. She is the author of the New York Times bestselling Sky in the Deep duology and the World of the Narrows series.

Reviews

I have to say, when I was pitched this fantasy novel about a woman who risks everything to break an age-old curse on her family, the last thing I expected was a time travel story! That said though, there is plenty of magic in it as well—but the kind found in the emotional and existential exploration of fate, love, and impact of time on relationships rather than in what we think of as traditional sci-fi or fantasy elements.

In *The Unmaking of June Farrow*, our eponymous protagonist is a 30-something-year-old worker on a flower farm in Jasper, a small town nestled at the edges of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. All her life, June has been living in fear of the future, dreading what it has in store. That's because she knows that one day, the madness that has plagued the women in her family will come for her too—just as it did for her mother, Susanna Farrow, right before she disappeared, leaving a very young June to be raised by her grandmother.

The fear has been with June for as long as she can remember, shaping her life choices such as her decision never to have children so that the curse would die with her. And yet, despite all her preparations, the onset of the first symptoms still managed to catch her off guard. It has been a year now since June started seeing and hearing things—faint voices calling out her name, or visions of the unexplainable, like doorways appearing out of nowhere. She believes them to be signs of the madness, but she hasn't gotten up the courage to admit it to herself or anyone else just yet.

But then, her grandmother passes away, leaving behind a letter filled with cryptic messages and clues, including an old photo taken almost a century ago depicting a woman who looks exactly like Susanna Farrow. In fact, June is certain it is her mother. But how could that be possible? Might there be more to Susanna's disappearance? As these questions mount, June's hallucinations also continue, and one day, the door that materializes before her seems more solid and tangible than ever before. This time, she opens it and walks through...

While I have read several of Adrienne Young's YA novels, *The Unmaking of June Farrow* is my first experience with her adult fantasy, though this is actually her second foray into the genre. Her first one, *Spells for Forgetting*, is one that I regretfully missed, and I told myself I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice! Truly, I am so happy I decided to pick up this book. So many authors who attempt to make the jump from YA to adult often fail to capture the maturity and depth required for a different audience, but not so in this case. What we have here is a captivating narrative that is nuanced, thematically complex, and emotionally resonant.

And yet, whenever time travel is involved, things do have the tendency to get complicated. Following June's venture through the strange door, she finds herself transported to 1951, which at least provides some possible theories on why her mother would be in a photo dated back to the turn of the century. How this relates to June, and why the door and the voices have called her here, demands a lot more work untangling this web of mysteries, however. In this past timeline, June realizes she's lived another life, one that she doesn't remember because she hasn't lived it yet. And if that sentence caused some short circuiting in your brain, can't say I blame you! It took me a good long while to grasp the situation myself, and that was with the help of notes to help me map out the timelines and family trees and such.

After a while though, as the story reveals more about the quandary of the Farrow women while introducing a murder mystery and even a poignant romance, a greater clarity emerges as everything starts to come together. That we forgo any sort of attempt to actually explain the family “curse” is a good thing, really, seeing as the plot is already convoluted enough, not to mention how no explanations are necessary to appreciate the overall story.

For me, *The Unmaking of June Farrow* was a delightful departure from my experience with Adrienne Young’s YA—a surprising journey not only through time and space, but through a range of intricate emotions and familial bonds as well. While the plot may initially seem confusing, it ultimately gives way to a narrative that explores the deeper meaning of the characters’ love and intertwined destinies. I hope Young will continue to write more adult fantasy, as I eagerly await her next novel.

Read-Alikes

Starling House by Alix E. Harrow

Eden, Kentucky, is just another dying, bad-luck town, known only for the legend of E. Starling, the reclusive nineteenth-century author and illustrator who wrote *The Underland*--and disappeared. Before she vanished, Starling House appeared. But everyone agrees that it's best to let the uncanny house--and its last lonely heir, Arthur Starling--go to rot. Opal knows better than to mess with haunted houses or brooding men, but an unexpected job offer might be a chance to get her brother out of Eden. Too quickly, though, Starling House starts to feel dangerously like something she's never had: a home. As sinister forces converge on Starling House, Opal and Arthur are going to have to make a dire choice: to dig up the buried secrets of the past and confront their own fears, or let Eden be taken over by literal nightmares.

The Last Tale of the Flower Bride by Roshani Chokshi

Once upon a time, a man who believed in fairy tales married a beautiful, mysterious woman named Indigo Maxwell-Casteñada. He was a scholar of myths. She was heiress to a fortune. They exchanged gifts and stories and believed they would live happily ever after--and in exchange for her love, Indigo extracted a promise: that her bridegroom would never pry into her past. But when Indigo learns that her estranged aunt is dying and the couple is forced to return to her childhood home, the House of Dreams, the bridegroom will soon find himself unable to resist. For within the crumbling manor's extravagant rooms and musty halls, there lurks the shadow of another girl: Azure, Indigo's dearest childhood friend who suddenly disappeared. As the house slowly reveals his wife's secrets, the bridegroom will be forced to choose between reality and fantasy, even if doing so threatens to destroy their marriage . . . or their lives.