

Illusive: Book Guide

About the book

Virginia Duan's debut novel, "Illusive," is a spicy and evocative behind-the-scenes story set in the K-pop industry. When pop singer Katie Wu returns to Seoul after escaping an abusive relationship, her longtime friends, rapper Jung Do-won and singer Kitahara Akihiro, are stunned by just how much she's changed.

Her scars run deep, but even Katie is surprised by how often her trauma resurfaces, threatening her attempts to make music and find love again. At least this time, she isn't suffering alone in secret. Akihiro's determined to prove to Katie that he's nothing like her ex while his bandmate Do-won buries his emotions, focusing on his music instead.

How will Katie overcome her dark memories and create a brighter future?

Take a peek behind the glamor of the K-pop industry, and join Katie as she fights to rebuild her life in the witty and steamy "Illusive," part of the Her Multiverse series.

For discussion

- 1) The book starts off in the SB Entertainment cafeteria where Do-won sees Katie for the first time since she's returned to Seoul after years away. Why do you think the author chose to begin the story at this moment in time?
- 2) When Woo-jin reprimands Do-won for demanding Katie's story, he says, "She doesn't owe us her life story." Why do you think Do-won wants an explanation? Do you think what Woo-jin says is true? Why or why not?
- 3) We don't find out details about the abuse Katie experienced until Chapter 7. Why do you think the author chose to withhold this information? Did knowing the details change the way you viewed Katie?
- 4) How did Katie's relationship with her father prime her for her relationship with Tony?
- 5) What function does sex and the role of sex play in both the novel and also Katie's life?

- 6) What role does friendship play in the story? How do the characters deepen and forge stronger bonds?
- 7) There are many types of love and ways to love shown in the book. How do the characters' beliefs about love impact their choices? What ways did characters use love to harm or heal themselves or others? Which characters and their actions do you relate to the most?
- 8) Why do you think Akihiro and Katie stayed in their relationship so long? Do you think they were toxic together? What do you think contributed to their unhealthy dynamic? How was the relationship between Do-won and Katie different?
- 9) The narrative spans 15 years and is not relayed chronologically. As a result, many aspects of plot and character are hidden from the reader and can cause confusion. Why do you think the author structured the narrative in this manner? What do you think the author was trying to accomplish through asynchronous storytelling? Do you think it is effective?
- 10) Knowing when to offer or ask for help is discussed a lot in the book. Was it wiser for the DOYEN members to back off of asking Katie hard questions about her life or should they have kept at it? Should Katie have asked for help earlier? Should Alton, Ha-joon, or Mina swooped in earlier to save her?
- 11) The book relies a lot on dramatic irony (where the reader knows what happens but the characters do not). Did knowing that certain events happen before the characters experience them affect your interest and experience of the story? (e.g.: Katie and Akihiro's break up, Tony's abuse) Why or why not?
- 12) Social media quotes, music review excerpts, album tracklists, music, lyrics, and album dedications play a huge role in shaping the narrative of this story. What role do these play in shaping the narrative of your story? What songs, albums, groups, or real life celebrity scandals did this book make you think of?
- 13) The gulf between a hidden inner self and a persona (the self you portray to the world) is a theme in "Illusive." How does that gap or difference both protect and harm these characters?
- 14) Characters in "Illusive" are often very hard on themselves. In what ways has this tendency served them and how has it hurt them? Is it worth the trade off?

- 15) Katie wants to protect others but often does so at the expense of herself. How does this show up in the novel? Is it right of Katie to put herself between her loved ones and danger without consulting them?
- 16) In Chapter 7, Katie is described as pursuing “healing as if it were her full-time job and her career was just a hobby.” How do you feel about this statement? How do you feel about how mental health, therapy, EMDR, and medication are portrayed in the book?
- 17) The author uses circular narrative to highlight how our past impacts our present. The characters often find themselves circling back towards the same places they’ve been in before. How do their choices reflect their growth or lack thereof?
- 18) Communication is a big theme in this book. Woo-jin repeatedly emphasizes that Katie doesn’t owe anyone her life story. Do-won demands answers. Akihiro is afraid to ask Katie questions about her life. Katie doesn’t want to be seen as a victim. How does communication and/or its lack play into the story?
- 19) “Illusive” is the first of at least 8 books set in the Her Multiverse. The author has mentioned that the series can be read in any order, and that each book will follow pop singer Katie Wu and K-pop band DOYEN through multiple timelines, exploring how Katie’s tough choices drastically change her future. What do you think that means, and who do you want to see in the next book, “Weightless”?

Bonus question

- 20) This book is actually a love letter to pivot charts. Agree or disagree?

For author visits to your book club

If your book club or library is interested in booking Virginia for a meeting, she is available for in-person meetings in the Bay Area, Calif. or via Zoom for other locations. To book Virginia, please send inquiries to virginia@virginiaduan.com and see requirements at <https://virginiaduan.com/book-club-bookings>.