



I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original)

By Young-ha Kim

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In the fast-paced, high-urban landscape of Seoul, C and K are brothers who have fallen in love with the same woman—Se-yeon—who tears at both of them as they all try desperately to find real connection in an atomized world. A spectral, nameless narrator haunts the edges of their lives as he tells of his work helping the lost and hurting find escape through suicide. Dreamlike and beautiful, the South Korea brought forth in this novel is cinematic in its urgency and its reflection of contemporary life everywhere—far beyond the boundaries of the Korean peninsula. Recalling the emotional tension of Milan Kundera and the existential anguish of Bret Easton Ellis, *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* achieves its author’s greatest wish—to show Korean literature as part of an international tradition. Young-ha Kim is a young master, the leading literary voice of his generation.

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I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original) By Young-ha Kim Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #348370 in Books
- Published on: 2007-07-02
- Released on: 2007-07-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .33" w x 5.25" l, .33 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 119 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Korean novelist Kim's tantalizing 1996 debut novel concerns a calculating, urbane young man who makes a business of helping his clients commit suicide. The narrator's favorite painting, Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat*, encapsulates his outlook—to be detached and cold, an approach reflected in his account of a recent client who was romantically involved with two brothers (called C and K). The woman, Se-yeon, is a young, spacey, lollipop-sucking drifter who first hangs out with K before bedding C. Cab-driver K and video artist C become obsessed with Se-Yeon, who looks (to them) like Gustave Klimt's *Judith*. Judith, as they subsequently refer to her, later wanders off into a snowstorm, never to be seen by the brothers again.

However, in this eerie, elliptical narrative, Judith reappears as the narrator's client. Moreover, Judith morphs into other objects of desire, such as a woman from Hong Kong the narrator meets in Vienna and an elusive performance artist named Mimi whom C films. Kim's work is a self-conscious literary exploration of truth, death, desire and identity, and though it traffics in racy themes, it never devolves into base voyeurism. (*July*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Kim's first novel reeks of 1990s South Korea, whose rising generation was the first to enjoy the freedoms and the attendant anomie of a wealthy society. There are three male and three female protagonists. The men are the narrator and brothers C, a video artist, and K, a taxi driver. The women are Judith (so-called by C, after the biblical heroine as painted by Gustav Klimt), whom K beds first (in C's apartment) but loses to C; a woman the narrator meets in Vienna; and performance artist Mimi, averse to cinematic media but willing to have C tape her. It is eventually disclosed that Judith and Mimi are clients of the narrator, who writes novels, perhaps including this one, but maintains a sideline in promotive rather than preventive suicide counseling. As bleak, chilling, and economically written as Stephen Crane's 1890s classics *Maggie* and *George's Mother*, though with characters miles up the economic scale from Crane's, Kim's deadpan, elliptical story is even more like the enigmatic love (?) stories of Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang, whose work must be watched as raptly as Kim's must be read. Mesmerizing. Olson, Ray

Review

PRAISE FROM KOREA FOR I HAVE THE RIGHT TO DESTROY MYSELF

"[Kim's] novels are fragments of his amazing imagination. With uncommon creativity, grotesque images, and stories that build on and into each other like a computer game, he perplexes his readers as much as he delights them."—LEADERS KOREA literary magazine

"Stylish Here are all the familiar tropes of the late coming-of-age novel: desire, self-destruction, boredom, and the inability of sex to extinguish all of the above. And yet this book is anything but predictable.... "I Have the Right to Destroy Myself" is also a work of resistance, but rather an existential one. Scenes wind down in an atmosphere of menacing ennui to a soundtrack of Leonard Cohen tunes.... Amazingly, this short novel never becomes a decadent love letter to suicide, or an excuse to drop a cluster of hipster signifiers. In fact, it reminds of a line written by French poet Baudelaire, himself a huge fan of "The Death of Marat," and

a clear influence on this book. "Boredom," he wrote, "is pain spread out over time." Numb into a state where they can't express their pain with words, C. and K. do nothing. Gently, this novel makes sure we feel their loss for them." -- Newark Star Ledger

(*Newark Star Ledger*)

"Kim's novel is art built upon art. His style is reminiscent of Kafka's and also relies on images of paintings (Jacques-Louis David's "The Death of Marat," Gustav Klimt's "Judith") and film (Jim Jarmusch's "Stranger Than Paradise"). The philosophy -- life is worthless and small -- reminds us of Camus and Sartre, risky territory for a young writer. Such heady influences can topple a novel. But Kim has the advantage of the urban South Korean landscape. Fast cars, sex with lollipops and weather fronts from Siberia lend a unique flavor to good old-fashioned nihilism. Think of it as Korean noir."

(*Los Angeles Times*)

"As bleak, chilling, and economically written as Stephen Crane's 1890s classics *Maggie* and *George's Mother*, though with characters miles up the economic scale from Crane's, Kim's deadpan, elliptical story is even more like the enigmatic love (?) stories of Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang, whose work must be watched as raptly as Kim's must be read. Mesmerizing."

(*Booklist*)

"Mr. Kim's writing is tense, elemental, tangy. Like Georges Simenon, his keen engagement with human perversity yields an abundance of thrills as well as chills (and for good measure, a couple of memorable laughs). This is a real find."

(author of *Fixer Chao Han Ong*)

"The interactions, thoughts and fantasies of four protagonists interweave in a dreamlike narrative that eschews chronology and sequence, examining the role of "morbid desires, imprisoned deep in the unconscious" in each's experience. [T]he author is a stylish, inventive writer who builds eerie momentum out of cryptic conversations and deliberately imprecise characterizations. The brothers are both vividly differentiated and shown to possess similarly self-destructive traits. And the woman "a kind of Eternal Feminine temptress smiling and beguiling her way to oblivion" twirls around the text like a spinning jewel, appearing as an unresponsive drifter named Se-yeon, an avatar of the biblical heroine (and murderer) Judith as depicted by artist Gustav Klimt. The book's dark doings are efficiently framed by descriptive allusions to famous paintings that celebrate death, and by the narrator's assured orchestration of its siren call. Pretty sick, but absorbing. Noir with a piquant exotic twist."

(*Kirkus*)

"Korean novelist Kim's tantalizing 1996 debut novel concerns a calculating, urbane young man who makes a business of helping his clients commit suicide. [An] eerie, elliptical narrative. Kim's work is a self-conscious literary exploration of truth, death, desire and identity, and though it traffics in racy themes, it never devolves into base voyeurism." -- PW

(*PW*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rachel Robertson:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information presently can get by anyone on

everywhere. The information can be a information or any news even an issue. What people must be consider if those information which is inside former life are difficult to be find than now's taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you buy it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen within you if you take I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original) as the daily resource information.

David Tillery:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition info. Even you love I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original), you could enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh occur its mind hangout men. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

William McClanahan:

I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original) can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in words, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original) yet doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into fresh stage of crucial thinking.

Cheryl Kirkland:

Within this era which is the greater man or who has ability in doing something more are more treasured than other. Do you want to become certainly one of it? It is just simple way to have that. What you must do is just spending your time not very much but quite enough to possess a look at some books. One of many books in the top collection in your reading list is actually I Have the Right to Destroy Myself (Harvest Original). This book which can be qualified as The Hungry Mountains can get you closer in turning into precious person. By looking right up and review this guide you can get many advantages.

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