

The Disappeared

Kim Echlin

About the book

A sixteen-year-old girl from Montreal, Anne Greves, falls in love with Serey, a student from Cambodia. As they listen to jazz and fall in love, Serey reveals he knows nothing of what has happened to his family. At the end of the genocide in 1979, Serey leaves Anne to find out. A decade later without any word, Anne sees Serey at a commemoration and she leaves everything to find him. Against all odds, Anne and Serey are reunited in a land trying to recover from genocide. Anne, who has learned to speak Khmer, meets a number of Cambodians who eventually tell their stories; Chan, an old lady who tried anything to keep her family alive; Mau, a friendly motorbike driver who had to protect his wife and child by pretending not to speak English; Serey's brother Sokha saw his mother and father shot on the first day of the genocide and became a boy-soldier. As Anne starts to realise that Serey is working against the government, she realises that the people of Cambodia have accepted they are not going to find out what happened to their lost relatives, and that it is dangerous to try.

Discussion Questions

Please note that some of these questions will act as spoilers for the book.

1. What do you make of the stories that Anne hears in Cambodia? Do you get the impression people are scared to tell their stories or do you think they just want to forget?
2. Sokha makes a brief appearance in the book. Can you understand his motivation to become a boy-soldier, and why doesn't he listen to Serey, who tries to look after him?
3. Do you think that Anne, Serey and Will are viewed as outsiders who don't understand the post-genocide Cambodia?
4. Do you get a sense that when genocide is over; the outside world considers the country to be safe and doesn't offer help to rebuild?

5. Do you think the survivors Anne meets seem to carry a sense of guilt that they survived?