

Book Review: What We Left Unsaid
By Winnie M Li

Thanks to NetGalley and Atria Books for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "What We Left Behind" has an expected publication date of August 19, 2025.

I love books whose storyline pulls me in right at the start. "What We Left Behind" does that.

Unfortunately, it loosens its grip a bit too often thereafter.

The three Chu siblings – Bonnie (the oldest), Kevin and Alex, first generation Americans born to Taiwanese parents – haven't seen or spoken to each other in years. That changes when their mother, living in southern California, suffers a mini stroke. She makes an unusual request via a Face Time group call. Thirty years ago, the family had set out on a road trip to the Grand Canyon, only to turn around following an unusual incident just an hour from the historic site. She wants her children to meet up, drive to the Grand Canyon, then continue for a family visit in California.

The logistics are challenging. Bonnie lives with her husband and three sons near Boston; Kevin with his wife and two children in Chicago; and Alex lives in London with her expectant wife Nya, who's black.

Still, they agree to make the trip. But their resentment toward each other, as well as their parents, is evident. No one tries to hide the animosity they feel, partly toward each other, but also themselves, because each of the siblings has their own set of challenges in their personal lives to address. And much of that stems from the mystery surrounding why the family vacation was suddenly cut short thirty years ago.

From that positive premise, the tightly wound narrative begins to unwind into a travelogue of the U.S., with contrived situations thrown in to bring to the surface the

personalities and backstory of each sibling. Some of the scenarios are a bit unrealistic, but they do help in understanding what the siblings are up against.

The climax is not much of a climax, and the great mystery is one easily deciphered from the periodic chapter flashbacks to the family's trip thirty years ago. So, there are no surprises. But it is interesting seeing how each of the siblings not only gradually reconciles their respective differences with each other, but also within their own lives.

"What We Left Unsaid" is a quick and easy read, but the air does come out of the balloon little by little as the narrative moves forward. Three-and-one-half stars for an interesting but flawed family saga.