

# Rules for Saying Goodbye: A Novel

by Katherine Taylor

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## About the Book

In this deliciously affecting debut novel, Katherine Taylor is both the muddled heroine and the author, allowing fiction to wink at real life in each alluring chapter. By turns bittersweet and comic, **Rules for Saying Goodbye** features a family rife with quirks; Kate's mother, named Elizabeth Taylor, believes her daughter can find hope only in a life far removed from their Fresno, California, community. Spending her adolescence at an East Coast prep school, Kate is introduced to a scene where the cocaine is "so good it's pink" and a friend's Manhattan grandmother believes girls are never too young to experience cocktail hour. Propelled into quasi-adulthood in the 1990s, Kate copes with unsuitable men, exasperating jobs, and the constant, tantalizing yearning that plagues her generation. Blending the brio of Melissa Bank with the wickedly funny candor of Nick Hornby, **Rules for Saying Goodbye** brilliantly captures a seductive, endlessly entertaining world.

## Discussion Guide

The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Katherine Taylor's **Rules for Saying Goodbye**. We hope they will enrich your experience of her wry and witty coming-of-age tale.

1. How were you affected by the fact that the author's name is the same as the narrator's? Does the line between fact and fiction, memoir and novel, matter very much?
2. What is at the root of Elizabeth's fear regarding Fresno and life in general? What unfulfilled dreams is she working through by sending Kate away? How does Kate's concept of the future compare to her mother's dreams for her? Did your parents try to foist any odd visions of fulfillment on you?
3. What distinctions separate a girl's coming-of-age story from a boy's? Who are Kate's greatest role models in shaping her identity as a woman? In what ways do her parents treat sons and daughters differently?

4. As a prep school, what did Claver promise to prepare its graduates to do? For Kate, what were the best and worst aspects of life there? Was she prepared for the world after she completed high school?
5. Page and Clarissa were raised in very different households. How much influence did their families have over their lives? Did the girls make it safely to adulthood because of or despite the way they were raised? Who were the most memorable parents you encountered among your friends when you were growing up?
6. How would you characterize Kate's Claver friendships? What did it take to gain and keep friends there? Was her circle similar to yours, in terms of loyalty, disobedience, or other factors?
7. Doris feels safe in hospitals, surrounded by caretakers who are the opposite of sadistic Aunt Lou. How was Kate affected by the presence of Doris and Lou in her family? What harm existed in both Kate's and Doris's households?
8. Discuss the cross-country road trip Kate and her mother took. What new perspectives did Kate gain about Elizabeth, now that Kate had reached adulthood? How would you and your mother have gotten along on a trip like this one?
9. Is having wealthy parents a boon or a curse in Kate's life?
10. How does Kate's existence with Ethan in New York compare to her days on the West Coast? How does her life in Europe compare to her time in the United States? Where does Kate feel the least homesick?
11. At the end of chapter eleven, Kate encounters an aging Mrs. Burns, who is gleefully watching Jonas and Ethan roller-skate. What liberating lessons had Mrs. Burns taught her more than a decade ago?
12. In what way was climbing Le Dom with Henry and Oliver similar to the other challenges Kate faced --- in dating, coping with her mother, keeping a job?
13. Chapter fourteen gives the novel its title. How could Kate's rules have improved some of your departures? Who has said goodbye to her at various points in her life, and vice versa?
14. What aspects of Kate are represented in the novel's four parts? What is the effect of the way the author blends humorous and wrenching moments in her storytelling?
15. In the closing scenes of chapter nineteen, Delia leaves the city after "she had made us believe, for a little while, that we had been missing something." How did Delia develop such a hold over her friends? Did you envy any aspects of her personality or her life?
16. At the summer house in Michigan, Clarissa is both recovering from a frightening illness and getting used to the prospect of motherhood. How did your impressions of her shift from the beginning of the novel to this point?
17. "I no longer needed to be reminded that a lot of girls would have stayed," the author writes in the novel's final line. Would you have stayed with Lucas?

## Author Bio

Katherine Taylor won a Pushcart Prize and has published essays and short fiction in *Details*, *Shenandoah*, *Ploughshares*, *Confrontation*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Southwest Review*. She lives in Los Angeles, where she is at work on her second novel.

## Critical Praise

“This story tumbles through decadent days and nights, through ranks of soulful and magnetic characters. Taylor can wink like Dorothy Parker and move through worlds like Christopher Isherwood. After you read the last page, your shirt-cuffs will be stained with wine and perfumed with cigarette smoke, and you will be giddy and exhausted from this bittersweet, intimate, lovely party.”

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