

The Last Book Party

by Karen Dukess



About the Book

A propulsive tale of ambition and romance, set in the publishing world of 1980s New York and the timeless beaches of Cape Cod.

In the summer of 1987, 25-year-old Eve Rosen is an aspiring writer languishing in a low-level assistant job, unable to shake the shadow of growing up with her brilliant brother. With her professional ambitions floundering, Eve jumps at the chance to attend an early summer gathering at the Cape Cod home of famed *New Yorker* writer Henry Grey and his poet wife, Tillie.

Dazzled by the guests and her burgeoning crush on the hosts' artistic son, Eve lands a new job as Henry Grey's research assistant and an invitation to Henry and Tillie's exclusive and famed "Book Party" --- where attendees dress as literary characters. But by the night of the party, Eve discovers uncomfortable truths about her summer entanglements and understands that the literary world she so desperately wanted to be a part of is not at all what it seems.

A page-turning, coming-of-age story, written with a lyrical sense of place and a profound appreciation for the sustaining power of books, Karen Dukess' *THE LAST BOOK PARTY* shows what happens when youth and experience collide and what it takes to find your own voice.

Discussion Guide

1. *THE LAST BOOK PARTY* is the title of the book, but it is only a small part of the book. Did you expect this? Why do you think the book party is so important to Eve and the other characters? What does it represent?

- 2.** On page 16, Alva tells Eve to read *I CAPTURE THE CASTLE*, even though Eve says she has already read it. Why do you think she chose that book? What was she trying to communicate to Eve? How does *I CAPTURE THE CASTLE* parallel *THE LAST BOOK PARTY*? (If you haven't read *I CAPTURE THE CASTLE*, you can look up a quick summary, or your group could read both books and consider both narrators.)
- 3.** Place is a large part of this book. Eve has a strong attachment to the Cape and has memorized most of the environment. Why do you think this environment is so soothing for Eve? What do you notice differently about the way she thinks about Florida versus the Cape?
- 4.** Eve seems a bit naïve to the relationships and identities of many characters, but on page 43 she very clearly defines the difference between the editorial and publicity roles at the publishing house. Why do you think she can see these roles and personalities in work so clearly, but she has a harder time with people outside of work?
- 5.** Eve is treated without as much respect or understanding because she is female. Even her boss hires a young blond male to replace Ron, the editorial assistant, rather than promoting Eve to fill that position. Her parents accept her publishing interests as a holding pattern while she finds a husband. At the end of the book, when Franny calls Eve a "hiccup" and Henry looks at her as if she could be anyone, Eve realizes she really could have been anyone. Do you think the way she is treated as a female by these characters is specific to 1987, or do you think these issues are still present today?
- 6.** Eve seems aware of her limitations and people's perceptions about women, but she does not verbally advocate for herself or women. Why do you think this is?
- 7.** What other differences and similarities do you see between 1987 in the novel and today in terms of gender, career, relationships and social values?
- 8.** Eve's relationship with Danny seems to be another example of her feeling less important and less seen. Do you think this has as much to do with his excelling in his mathematics career as it does with their gender? Do you think their parents would have handled his depression differently if it had been Eve instead of Danny?
- 9.** The other book Alva gives Eve is *MR. BLANDINGS BUILDS HIS DREAM HOUSE*. How does this book inform the current story with Henry and Eve? Why do you think Alva recommends this other than to show a parallel house-building experience?
- 10.** Eve is suspicious of Jeremy from the beginning of the book until after the party. She even disregards his advice about taking the job with Henry. Why do you think she is so suspicious immediately of Jeremy when she is otherwise so non-judgmental of other characters?
- 11.** Jeremy challenges Eve's idea of being a writer and how to write. He sees it as hard work and not just dependent on the few moments when a story simply comes to you. He doesn't believe it's a gift the way that Eve and her mom describe it. Why do you think Eve created this idea of being a writer? Why does she seem surprised by Jeremy's feelings on the topic?

12. In some ways Eve seems much younger than 25 years old. How do you think Alva and Malcolm and her parents are trying to help or hinder her growth?

13. The book is structured by month until after the party. Why do you think the author chose to set Part V one year later? What was your reaction to that shift?

Author Bio

With a background in newspaper and magazine journalism, Karen Dukess spent the last eight years as a speechwriter on gender equality at the United Nations Development Programme. She is a graduate of Brown University and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and lives in Pelham, New York.

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Publication Date: July 9, 2019

Genres: Fiction, Women's Fiction

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Henry Holt and Co.

ISBN-10: 1250225477

ISBN-13: 9781250225474