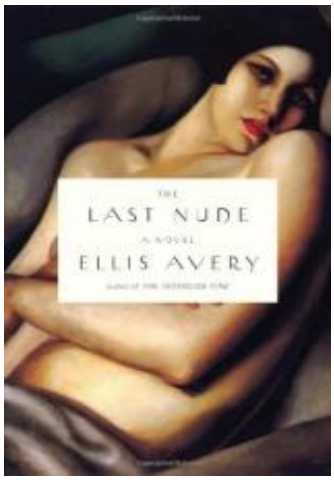
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The Last Nude

by Ellis Avery



About the Book

A stunning story of love, sexual obsession, treachery, and tragedy, about an artist and her most famous muse in Paris between the world wars.

Paris, 1927. In the heady years before the crash, financiers drape their mistresses in Chanel, while expatriates flock to the avant-garde bookshop Shakespeare and Company. One day in July, a young American named Rafaela Fano gets into the car of a coolly dazzling stranger, the Art Deco painter Tamara de Lempicka.

Struggling to halt a downward slide toward prostitution, Rafaela agrees to model for the artist, a dispossessed Saint Petersburg aristocrat with a murky past. The two become lovers, and Rafaela inspires Tamara's most iconic Jazz Age images, among them her most accomplished-and coveted-works of art. A season as the painter's muse teaches Rafaela some hard lessons: Tamara is a cocktail of raw hunger and glittering artifice. And all the while, their romantic idyll is threatened by history's darkening tide.

Inspired by real events in de Lempicka's history, **The Last Nude** is a tour de force of historical imagination. Ellis Avery gives the reader a tantalizing window into a lost Paris, an age already vanishing as the inexorable forces of history close in on two tangled lives.

Spellbinding and provocative, this is a novel about genius and craft, love and desire, regret and, most of all, hope that can transcend time and circumstance.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you think Rafaela made the right decision in eluding her grandmother and going to Paris?

2. How does Tamara change Rafaela's life? How does Rafaela change after they first meet? After she finds out the truth about Tamara's intentions?

3. How do Gin and Rafaela's relationships (with Daniel and Tamara) mirror each other?

4. What kind of an artist is Tamara? Rafaela? Anson?

5. How does each character (Rafaela, Tamara, Anson, Gin) support him or herself? To what extent do Rafaela and Tamara's means of financial support affect the choices they make?

6. Has Tamara changed in the second half of the novel? If yes, how?

7. Which woman needs the other more? Why? Does this change over the course of the novel?

8. The paintings that appear in this book serve different functions. How do you think Tamara's Duchesse de la Salle portrait, *La Belle Rafaela*, and *The Dream* serve the story? How does Vermeer's ?The Lacemaker? serve it?

9. The last line in the book is "This time, I have painted your eyes open." What is Tamara trying to say? How did you respond to this ending?

10. How does Rafaela's relationship to Anson evolve over the course of the novel? Did your view of him change at all?

Author Bio

Ellis Avery is the author of a novel and a memoir. Her first novel, **The Teahouse Fire** (Riverhead, 2006), set in the tea ceremony world of 19th century Japan, has been translated into five languages and won three awards, including the American Library Association Stonewall Award. Avery teaches fiction writing at Columbia University and lives in New York City. You may visit her website at www.ellisavery.com.

Critical Praise

?**The Last Nude** is a remarkable novel: at once a seductive evocation of Lost Generation Paris, a faithful literary rendering of Tamara de Lempicka's idiosyncratic and groundbreaking art, and a vibrant, intelligent, affecting story in its own right. It's also smoking hot.?

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