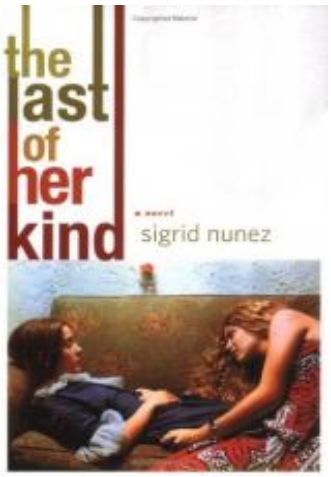
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Last of Her Kind

by Sigrid Nunez



About the Book

The Last of Her Kind introduces two women who meet as freshmen on the Barnard campus in 1968. Georgette George does not know what to make of her brilliant, idealistic roommate, Ann Drayton, and her obsessive disdain for the ruling class into which she was born. She is mortified by Ann's romanticization of the underprivileged class, which Georgette herself is hoping college will enable her to escape. After the violent fight that ends their friendship, Georgette wants only to forget Ann and to turn her attention to the troubled runaway kid sister who has reappeared after years on the road.

Then, in 1976, Ann is convicted of murder. At first Ann's fate appears to be the inevitable outcome of her belief in the moral imperative to "make justice" in a world where "there are no innocent white people." But in searching for answers to the riddle of this friend of her youth, Georgette finds more complicated and mysterious forces at work.

As the novel's narrator, Georgette illuminates the terrifying life of this difficult, doomed woman, and in the process discovers how much their early encounter has determined her own path, and why decades later, as she tells us, "I have never stopped thinking about her."

Discussion Guide

1. The Last of Her Kind is partly about the special bond that can form between young people who meet when they leave home for college. In what ways is the relationship between Georgette George and Ann Drayton typical of such friendships? In what ways is it different? Are there characteristics about it that seem to you to belong specifically to friendships between women? How well do you feel Georgette and Ann understand each other as friends?

2. Issues of race and class are major themes in this novel. As you read about the big fight that ends Georgette and Ann's friendship, did you find yourself taking sides? Do you believe, as Ann does, that Georgette's comment about Kwame's blue eyes is racist? Does this final rupture seem inevitable to you, or do you see a way the friendship could have been

saved?

3. After Ann's murder trial, one juror remarks: "She just did not seem to like white folks." What is your view of Ann's obsession with "white skin privilege," and how has it shaped her life? What do you think her parents could have done to help her come to terms with her burden of guilt as she was growing up? What would you say they did wrong?

4. When Georgette is raped, she deals with it in a way that is described as not unusual for the era, the late sixties, in which it occurred. Years later, when she talks about that experience to a group of young women, they appear shocked by her attitude and suggest that she's in denial about the violence done to her. What is your assessment of Georgette's behavior at the time of the rape and later, when she looks back on it?

5. Consider the attorney Lester Prysock's arguments in Ann's defense. How forceful do you find them? How persuasive do you think he is when he uses Ann's childhood to explain aspects of her adult behavior? According to Georgette's friend Cleo, Ann "just wanted to kill someone." Do you believe this? How persuasive do you find the defense's argument about the role of "the N word" in this crime?

6. Georgette insists that it's wrong to compare Ann with Patty Hearst, as so many people in the novel do. Why does Ann herself vehemently reject the comparison? How do you imagine she would distinguish herself from Hearst or from other political radicals, such as the Weathermen? What does she have in common with such people?

7. It is undeniable that Ann was in an extremely difficult position when she shot at the police officers. Can you imagine how you might have felt in her place? What do you think would have been the right thing to do? Can there be any justification for the shooting? Do you think the punishment Ann receives is just? How does Ann's prison mate's story help illuminate the mystery of Ann's extraordinary character?

8. Georgette speaks of her guilt at having turned her back on her home and family. Is this guilt justified? Under what circumstances do you think a person is justified in abandoning his or her family? Do you think Georgette sees her own past clearly? How do you see Georgette's relationship with her sister, Solange?

9. Do you think Turner and Georgette have a moral obligation to tell Ann about their love affair? How do you view Turner's reasons for leaving Georgette and the way he goes about it?

10. Ann's life story has been described as "tragicomic." What do you think this means? Many people would say that she had ruined or wasted her life. Do you agree? Discuss the ways the various characters in the novel set about searching to make "a good life" for themselves. How does each one define this goal? Which characters seem to you to have been most successful in finding what they were looking for?

Author Bio

Sigrid Nunez is the author of nine novels, including THE FRIEND, WHAT ARE YOU GOING THROUGH and THE VULNERABLES. She is also the author of SEMPRE SUSAN: A Memoir of Susan Sontag and the short story collection IT WILL COME BACK TO YOU. She has received the National Book Award, the Whiting Award, a Berlin Prize Fellowship, the Rosenthal Family Foundation Award, the Rome Prize in Literature, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a

Windham-Campbell Prize. Her work has been translated into 35 languages. She lives in New York City.

Critical Praise

"Sigrid Nunez once again creates characters of such depth and situations of such vivid moral complexity that reading these pages is like living them. Only as I closed the book did I sadly realize that Georgette and Ann weren't my neighbors. But happily I can revisit them again, and again, in this beautiful and absorbing novel."

The Last of Her Kind

by Sigrid Nunez

Publication Date: December 27, 2005
Hardcover: 384 pages
Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
ISBN-10: 0374183813
ISBN-13: 9780374183813