



BOOK CLUB KIT

The Last List

NATASHA KARIS

Discussion Guide • 29 Questions

*“We think we need all these things,
but all we need is love.”*

ERICA

A note for whoever is hosting

Two things worth knowing before you open the discussion.

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS SPOILERS

Parts One and Two assume everyone has finished the book. Part Three, on page 7, discusses the ending directly and is marked. If someone in your group is still reading, stop at the end of page 6.

ON THE SUBJECT MATTER

This novel sits with dying. Not the idea of it — the fact of it, in a room, with somebody holding a hand. It also deals with homelessness, the death of a baby, infidelity, and a stretch of a character's past when she wanted to die. It handles all of it honestly rather than sensationally, but the honesty is the point, and it lands hard.

In a group of eight, the odds are that someone has recently sat where Simone sat. They may not say so. You do not need to manage that, and you should not go looking for it. Three small things make a real difference:

- Say at the start that anyone can pass on any question, no explanation needed.
- Let the conversation stay about Erica and Kate. People speak sideways, through a character, when they are not ready to speak directly — and that is a whole conversation in itself.
- Have the resources on the last page to hand. Not read aloud. Just there.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

There are more questions here than any group needs. Pick six or seven. The ones marked with a star ✦ are the ones that reliably open a room. If your group likes to read aloud, page 9 has four passages chosen for it, each with a single prompt.

THE BOOK

About *The Last List*

Erica Morris has money, a house above the cliffs at Knockfarraig, and nobody to bring her a toothbrush. When a headache sends her to the emergency department, the scan finds something too deep to operate on.

Simone Fleming mops her floor. She is thirty-three, a single mother, and in a matter of days she and her son will have nowhere to live.

One of them needs somewhere to go. The other needs somebody to be there at the end. Neither of them says so out loud.

What begins as a bargain neither woman will admit to becomes the friendship that decides how one of them dies — and, in another bed in the same hospital, how a third woman gets to live.

ABOUT NATASHA KARIS

Natasha Karis is an Irish author based in Cork. She writes contemporary, emotional women's fiction that dives into heavy subjects — grief, abuse, addiction — but leaves the reader with hope. Many of her novels are set in the fictional coastal town of Knockfarraig, inspired by Youghal, Co. Cork. She shares her writing life with three children, a cocker spaniel and her husband.

IN THE AUTHOR'S OWN WORDS

I started writing this novel in December 2024. The story came to me in an image. A blonde woman in a hospital bed, facing a terminal diagnosis, reflecting on her life and what she wanted to leave behind. Little did I know my aunt was experiencing exactly that, a few miles away.

— FROM THE AUTHOR'S NOTE

PLEASE READ THE AUTHOR'S NOTE

The note at the back of the book explains who Grace was and why this story was written twice — once before the author knew, and once after. Groups who read it aloud after the discussion have somewhere to land. It is not a spoiler, but it is best kept for the end.

Opening the conversation

Erica, and the bargain she does not admit to.

TO START

- 1 On the very first page, Erica watches a woman in a red floaty dress run across the road below her window and thinks: *"If they could change places, she would give away everything ... even if it meant condemning the woman to her fate. Rather her than me."* Did that opening make you like her? Did it matter whether you liked her?
- 2 The novel moves between three women in hospital beds and one woman with a mop. Whose chapters did you find yourself hurrying back to — and were you sorry when it left them?
- 3 Erica leaves her bag open with a wad of fifties showing. Simone zips it shut. Later Erica admits it: *"It was a test."* She also says she would have asked Simone to stay either way. Was the test fair — and what did each woman actually learn from it?

ERICA

- 4 ♦ Erica forges Simone's signature on the hospital waiver, copying it from the flyleaf of *The Alchemist*, and tells herself: *"Anything that easy had to be a sign to continue."* She knows exactly what she is signing Simone up to. Where does the novel come down on that — and where do you?
- 5 ♦ *"It was transactional. Both sides win. Kindness implies doing something for the greater good. What I did was for my own benefit more than yours."* Is Erica right that what she did was not kindness? Does a good outcome need a clean motive?
- 6 Erica insists she is *"a liar, and a manipulator"* who would have *"stepped right over the likes of you to get what I wanted."* Simone never once accepts that version of her. Which of them do you think sees Erica more clearly?
- 7 A few days in, Erica tries to freeze them out — *"Being around you and the kid ... it's draining"* — because she has worked out that she is going to break their hearts. Simone walks back into the room and refuses it. Have you been on either side of that?
- 8 Erica's list begins: *Time. Forgiveness. Abundance. Knowledge. Health. Joy.* Then she draws a line through joy, because *"you couldn't give that to anyone. That was something someone had to choose for themselves."* Do you agree that joy cannot be gifted? What else on the list would you have crossed out?

Simone, Oscar, and Kate

A woman with nowhere to go, and a woman with nowhere left to go.

SIMONE, AND THE HOUSING

- 9 Simone's landlord gave her a full year's notice and she cannot bring herself to make him the villain. The novel puts the blame elsewhere — on forms, screened numbers, listings that vanish inside an hour, and a preference for "*four business guys who'll rent a room each rather than the single mother with a dependent.*" Did that read as true to you?
- 10 On the phone to the housing department, Simone is told her mother's floor is "*miles better than St. Enda's*" and, when she says there has been no domestic abuse, the girl mutters, "*Pity.*" What is that scene saying about how need gets ranked — and about the girl on the other end of the phone?
- 11 ♦ Oscar asks, "*Do you think I can still play with my friends if we have no home?*" Simone will not give him a false promise, so she tells him he will see his friends "*even if where we live ends up being on the side of the road.*" Was the truth the right thing to hand a seven-year-old?
- 12 "*Home is here,*" Oscar says, both hands over his heart. By the end of the book, does the novel actually believe that — or does everything that happens argue that a roof matters more than the sentiment allows?

THE HOUSEHOLD

- 13 The remembering game has three parts: the best bit of your day, someone you want to remember, and a wish for your future. Asked for her wish, Erica says, “*There’s nothing to wish for.*” What she cannot say out loud is that she wishes not to die alone. Would your group play it? What would you have said?

KATE

- 14 Simone calls food her love language, and has a ready answer for every reason not to cook professionally — the hours, the wages, the apprenticeships that pay nothing. What was actually stopping her?
- 15 ♦ Kate writes her own eulogy so that Conor will not have to find the words. She calls it more cathartic than sad. Would you want to write yours — and would you want to be handed a loved one’s?
- 16 Conor will not discuss the possibility of Kate dying: “*If we don’t entertain the notion, it can’t happen.*” Kate needs the conversation he cannot have. Was he failing her, or protecting them both? Whose way of coping would be yours?
- 17 Kate writes list after list — lasts, loves, small domestic instructions, promises for if she survives. Erica writes one list, of things to give away. What does the difference between the two women’s lists tell you about them?
- 18 Kate watches her daughters stop reaching for her and decides: “*They sense death, and it repels them. I repel them.*” Was she right about the girls? Was she fair to them?

DISCUSSION • PART THREE

The ending

Do not open this page until everyone has finished the book.

- 19 ♦ Erica drives to her sister's house, apologises, and is told to leave the way she came. Only at the bedside does Therese admit she had already forgiven her and was waiting to take her down a peg or two first: "*I thought we had time, Erica.*" Which of the two is harder to forgive?
- 20 Erica refuses to tell Therese she is dying, because sugar-coating over faeces "*still leaves the smell in the room*" and "*if she couldn't forgive me while she thought I was well, then I have no interest in her forgiveness now.*" Is that principle, or pride wearing principle's coat?
- 21 We learn very late what broke Erica: Cathal and their baby Alison, carbon monoxide, a landlord's tape left over the air vents, and a night shift that spared her. She insisted they be buried as she found them. Did knowing change how you read what she did to her sister? Should it?
- 22 ♦ Therese reads the affair back to her: "*You did it as a punishment. Not for me, but for you. It was the only way you could push me away.*" Do you accept that reading — and does Erica ever accept it herself?

DISCUSSION • PART THREE • CONTINUED

TO END ON

- 23 Simone tells Erica everything she wants her to hear, because she has read that the dying hold on when they still have something left to say. Then she lifts her hand away, because she has also read that they stay if you try to keep them. What did you make of that letting go?
- 24 Erica's last minutes are given to us from inside: the pain, then light, then "*only love remains*," and then an empty road, a school jumper, Cathal with Alison in his arms. Did you want that literally — or as the kindness the novel is doing for her?
- 25 Kate wakes with a new heart and apologises to whoever it came from: "*I'm sorry you had to die for me to live*." The book never confirms whose heart it is; Simone only notices that Kate now "*carried a lion's heart inside*." Did you need it confirmed?
- 26 Erica leaves Simone the house, the car, money, and a paid place at a cookery school — and forbids her from feeling guilty about any of it. Did the ending feel earned, or too generous to be quite believed?
- 27 ♦ In her last letter Erica writes: "*The more I got to know you, the less the list mattered ... What was I looking for anyway? Validation? Forgiveness? Love?*" So was the list ever the point — or was it the thing she needed in order to stop needing it?
- 28 The title works at least four ways: Erica's last list, Kate's list of lasts, the transplant list, and the list Simone promises to carry on after Erica is gone. Which one were you reading it as? Did that change?
- 29 Erica believed she had to build something to be worth remembering. Simone believed a life was already enough as it was. The book gives Erica her library, her scholarship, her playground and her donated organs — and still lets Simone be right. Which of them do you think it actually believes?

Four passages, four questions

When your time is limited, you tell the ones you love exactly what they mean to you. The unnecessary falls away into insignificance. All that matters stays.

ASK: WHAT WOULD FALL AWAY FOR YOU — AND WHAT WOULD STAY?

I've never understood people who fixate on death yet are scared to live ... They'll spend their days avoiding death. Staying safe. Staying alive. For what? Another boring day.

ASK: WHO DOES THAT DESCRIBE? BE HONEST ABOUT WHETHER IT IS YOU.

Love is quiet, it does not need to shout, it doesn't need to repeat the words ... It settles in the background, weaves around your life, your body, the ones you care for.

ASK: WHERE IN YOUR LIFE IS LOVE SITTING IN THE BACKGROUND, UNREMARKED ON?

Hope is ... blue skies, scanning for rainbows on a rainy day, keeping faith, waiting for a miracle, looking forward ... The day you lose hope, you lose everything.

ASK: IS HOPE SOMETHING YOU CHOOSE, OR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS TO YOU?

IF YOUR GROUP LIKES TO THEME IT

- **Soup and warm bread.** Simone's chicken noodle broth and her porridge bread are what she brings people at their lowest, and half the emotional business of this novel happens over a table. The recipes from the book are in a free companion collection from the author — an easy theme for the evening's food.
- **Play the remembering game.** Before you start on the questions, go round the table: the best bit of your day, someone you want to remember, and a wish for your future. It takes ten minutes and it changes the room.
- **A packet of pansy seeds.** Erica plants them with Oscar knowing she will not see them flower, and makes him promise to remember her when they do. One packet, split between everyone in the room, costs almost nothing and says the whole book.
- **The cliffs.** Knockfarraig is Youghal, Co. Cork. Worth two minutes looking it up together — the strand, the sea wall, the hill Kate drives to when the diagnosis is too big to hold.

Support

You do not have to be over it. You do not have to be coping well. You only have to tell one person.

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Ireland — Irish Hospice Foundation Bereavement Support Line, 1800 80 70 77, Monday to Friday 10am–1pm · hospicefoundation.ie

United Kingdom — Cruse Bereavement Support, 0808 808 1677 · cruse.org.uk

United States — findahelpline.com lists grief and loss lines by state

IF IT FEELS DARKER THAN THAT

Ireland & United Kingdom — Samaritans, 116 123, free, 24 hours · samaritans.org

United States — 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988

IF THE BOOK MADE YOU THINK ABOUT ORGAN DONATION

Ireland — since June 2025 consent is presumed unless you have opted out, but your family is still consulted — so the thing that matters most is that they know what you want. Information and the opt-out register: hse.ie. Donor cards: ika.ie

United Kingdom — NHS Organ Donor Register · organdonation.nhs.uk

United States — organdonor.gov/sign-up

For housing and tenancy advice: Focus Ireland (focusireland.ie), Threshold (threshold.ie), and, in the UK, Shelter (shelter.org.uk).

MORE FROM NATASHA KARIS

The Broken, Not Beaten series — standalone stories of broken people finding hope again, set in the neighbouring Irish towns of Knockfarraig and Crookstown. They share a coastline and the occasional face, and can be read in any order.

The Trip — an exclusive bonus story giving you a glimpse into life after *The Last List*, along with all the recipes from the book and the playlist that inspired it. Free to newsletter subscribers at subscribepage.com/thelastlist

Meet the author. Natasha is happy to join book clubs by video call where she can. Get in touch through natashakarisbooks.com and say when you are meeting.

If the book was worth the evening. Reviews are how stories like this one find the readers who need them. A single sentence on Amazon or Goodreads makes a real difference — and a book club leaving several at once makes more.

This kit may be freely printed and shared for book club and library use.

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