

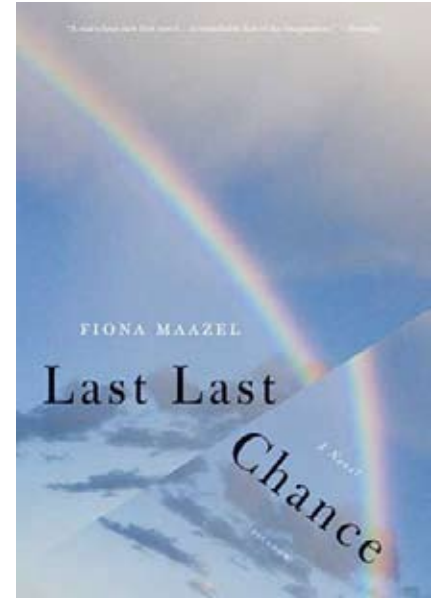


# Reading Group Gold

## Last Last Chance

A Novel

by Fiona Maazel



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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Last Last Chance* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Last Last Chance*.

### About the Book

In *Last Last Chance*, Fiona Maazel paints a darkly comic portrait of the emotional and spiritual turmoil of Lucy, a thirty-year-old drug addict about to venture her seventh attempt at rehab. As daunting as this might be under normal circumstances, Lucy's family is still reeling from the suicide of her father, formerly an esteemed government scientist now held in universal contempt after vials of an incurable "superplague" disappeared from his lab. People across the country start getting sick, panic ensues, and, as Lucy's family falls into chaos, rehab suddenly seems like the safest place to be in this gritty novel about learning to have hope in a world full of anxiety. The complexities of Lucy's story and the nuance of her wry yet vulnerable character provide many avenues for discussion.

### About the Author

Fiona Maazel, born in 1975, was the 2005 Lannan Foundation fiction fellow. She lives in Brooklyn.

### Discussion Questions

1. Lucy struggles with self-loathing and a sense of worthlessness. Why do you think she feels this way? Nature or nurture? Do you blame her neglecting parents or something else?
2. On p.35, Lucy describes how she fell in love with Eric, but that this love wasn't enough to stop or even curb her drug abuse. Why not? Why might the support and presence of someone you love not be enough to



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help a person like Lucy cope with her suffering?

3. Similarly, Lucy is convinced that rehabs and therapy—basically all the services available to people with problems—will not work for her. Why does she think so? What do you think she has to surmount before she's able to believe she can change or be helped?
4. Throughout *Last Last Chance*, the narrative gives voice to the main characters after they have died, or before they were born. How do these scenes affect the overall tone of the novel? Are they meant to give the action in the story a spiritual setting? To create some historical patterns? Do these voices help explain anything about Lucy and her family? How so?
5. A lot of the characters in the novel do awful things and behave badly, and yet you still root for them. Why? Do you root for some characters more than others?
6. At her grandmother's funeral, Lucy despairs about not being able to cry because she can't express her emotions like everyone else. Why do you think she's so withdrawn and stunted in her emotional development? What accounts for the sense of disconnect between her and the rest of the world?
7. When Lucy's mother, Isifrid, narrates her story, do you believe her explanation for why and how she became a drug addict? Can you think of other reasons why her life turned out so badly? Do you think she loves Lucy at all? Do you think that anyone could have saved her, or was her case always hopeless?
8. Why do you think Maazel chose to write a novel about a character trying to kick her drug addiction in the midst of a plague? Is there something about the panic and sickness of a plague that seems to mirror the experiences of the addict?
9. Do you think Maazel's account of what could happen in the advent of a biological attack seems realistic? Do you think you'd react and behave the way people in the novel do? If not, what might you do instead?
10. What do you think is going to happen to Hannah? Do you think she'll ever forgive Lucy? Should she? Is there a chance she could turn out a drug addict like her mother and her sister? Why or why not?
11. When Isifrid has a breakdown in Texas, Lucy is stirred to grief and wishes she could pray for her despite her reservations about God and prayer in general. How is she able to make that leap? Do you think that helping others might help Lucy overcome her own suffering?
12. Are Lucy and Stanley are a good match? What do you think they see in each other?
13. Do you think the plague will end, and things will go back to normal? Or will things only get worse? Will they ever catch the lunatic who unleashed the plague? Are we meant to have hope about the future of the world at the end? Are we meant to have hope for Lucy?
14. Have you or anyone you know ever experienced addiction or rehab? Do you think the feelings Lucy expresses are universal?