

READING GROUP GUIDE

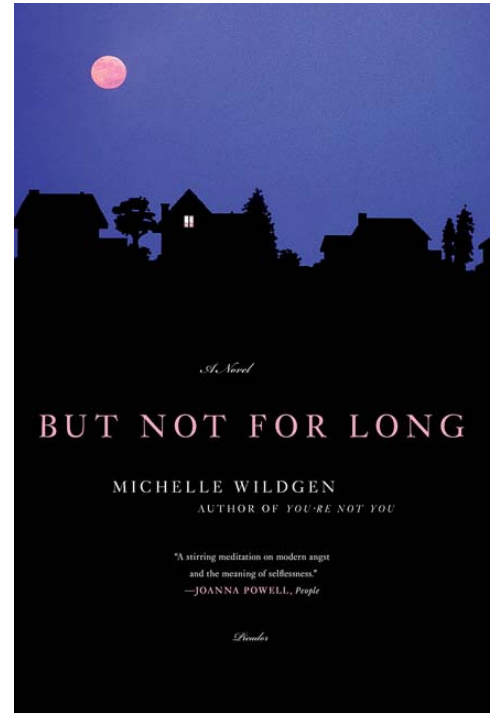
But Not for Long

A Novel

by Michelle Wildgen

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *But Not for Long* 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 *But Not for Long*.

About the Book

Greta has left her old life behind and moved into a sustainable foods co-op in Madison, Wisconsin. Just as she begins to settle in with her two housemates, the husband she left behind appears on their porch, drunk. His arrival begins a dark three-day period during which all three residents of the house will have to reckon with a disquietude lurking under the surface of their little society. A series of summer blackouts, gas shortages, and an ominous disappearance will force them all out into a larger world that seems everywhere on the verge of crisis.

About the Author

MICHELLE WILDGEN is a senior editor at *Tin House*. Her first novel, *You're Not You*, a *New York Times* Editor's Choice and one of *People* Magazine's Ten Best Books of 2006, is now in development for film by Hilary Swank and Denise DiNovi. Wildgen's work has appeared in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and literary journals including *Prairie Schooner* and *TriQuarterly*.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think draws Greta to the co-op? Hal and Karin?
2. How does the presentation and perception of community change over the course of the novel?
3. What about family? Do you think either institution, family or community, seems to be an effective source of comfort or strength to the characters, and why?
4. How does the movement of narration from one character to another affect how you see each person? Do you see Hal differently through Karin's eyes, or Greta's, than you did through his own point of view, for instance?
5. What's making these characters so uneasy? Do these uncertainties resonate with you? Do they feel like something that could happen? Already have?
6. What effect does this uneasiness have on everyone's ability to connect with one another, or with their larger community?
7. How do you feel about Will and Greta's relationship? Do you think one is more culpable than the other in bringing about their separation? Why?
8. There are several examples of alternatives to the one-family house in this novel: the various co-ops, the cheesemaker's farm with her extended family living on it. Do these seem very different from the single-family home to you? Why or why not?
9. Why do you think Karin and Greta are so tense with one another? When does that tension start and what exacerbates it? Where do you think they'll go from here?
10. How do you feel about the relationships between the co-op members—Karin and Hal, Greta and Hal, Greta and Karin? Are they any more or less difficult than family relationships? Do you think these relationships will continue to deepen?
11. Why does Hal's father retreat from his family? Why do you think that, of all his siblings, Hal is the most upset by it?

12. Who did you identify with the most? Who interested you the most, whether you could relate to them or not?

13. What do you think occurs after the novel ends?

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