

READING GROUP GUIDE

NEVER LET HER SLIP AWAY BY KAY CHRISTOPHER

Please note that the book summary and discussion questions contain 'plot spoilers'

BOOK SUMMARY:

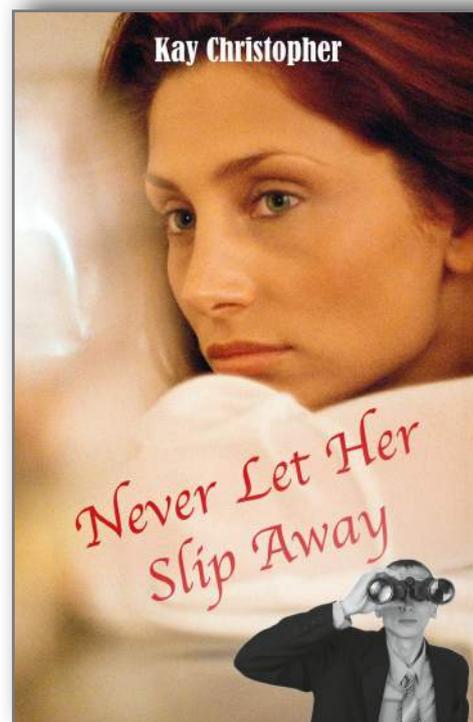
It's 1980. Barbara Blaize lives a comfortable but conventional existence in a Hampshire village. Her architect husband enjoys having a stay-at-home wife. But she feels there is something missing: a life of her own, where she can be more than just an adjunct to Andrew and a sounding-board for her needy sister, Fiona. When she enrolls on an antiques course and meets professional dealer Ian Avery, they decide to work together running antiques fairs. She enjoys an uncomplicated friendship with Ian and through his wife Cass is exposed to a set of people – artists and eccentrics – who are very different from her own middle-class background. The changes these things bring about in Barbara make Andrew angry and resentful. But Barbara has another problem. On the antiques course she also met social misfit Gilbert Smart who, through her natural kindness and good manners, she inadvertently encouraged. Gilbert, trapped in an oppressive marriage to the shrewish Myra, conceives the idea that it should be his role to protect Barbara, a role that tips over into stalking, house-breaking, sabotage and eventually attempted murder.

THE AUTHOR:

Kay Christopher grew up in Birmingham before moving to Hampshire when she was in her early 30s. She has been widely published in women's magazines. This is her first novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- * were the 1960s really the 'swinging sixties' for everyone? How true is it that if you grew up in the 1960s, your life was about flower power, free love, Carnaby Street, hippies, and overturning the social order? For Barbara Blaize, the dominant culture of her youth in the sixties was still that of the fifties and those values still govern her life in 1980. What are those values and why were they not overturned in the 1960s?
- * Barbara feels as if she is just an 'adjunct' to her husband's life, yet trying to develop an independent life of her own leads to violent objections from Andrew – and disaster for Barbara. To what extent is Barbara and Andrew's marriage typical of the time?
- * Are good manners and kindness always a virtue? It is through these that Barbara makes a serious misjudgment about Gilbert, with near-fatal consequences, yet her natural empathy means she cannot bring herself to condemn him. Did he need a harsh rejection right at the start? Or would that have tipped him over the edge?
- * to what extent are Gilbert's motives honorable – when does a desire to protect someone tip over into obsession? Is he a villain or a victim?



- * Barbara's father was a domineering tyrant, typical of many fathers of the time. How did Barbara and Fiona deal with that? Does the way they live their lives now show that they have got over their upbringing, or do they still strive for their undemonstrative father's affection and approval?
- * Barbara's parents sent their youngest daughter Sarah, who had Down's Syndrome, to live in an institution in the late 1950s – and said that visiting her would only have upset her. Barbara feels this is unforgivable, but did they have any other options in the 1950s?
- * Barbara feels fairly content with her life until she sees what she is missing, as she is exposed to people whose lifestyle is very different from her own – antique dealers, artists, sculptors – who do not seem to be hidebound by so many rules. Is that really the case, or are they just as much a product of their upbringing and class as Barbara is? Do any of the characters in the book live entirely without rules?

Never Let Her Slip Away by Kay Christopher was published by Chaplin Books on 15 October 2015. It is a 250-page paperback priced at £9.99, ISBN 978-1-909183-97-1 and is available direct from Chaplin Books, and from all good bookshops and internet book retailers. It is also available as an ebook for all ereader platforms from your preferred supplier.

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