



After I'm Gone

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Questions for Discussion

1. We begin the novel with Felix Brewer's point of view as he goes on the lam. Yet we don't return to Felix until the very last chapter, in which we see Felix through the eyes of his housekeeper, Consuelo. Why do you think the author chose to begin and end the story this way? Is this novel about Felix? Why or why not?
2. Young Bambi describes herself as a prize, and she certainly knows how to manage the game. What is it about Felix that draws her in so quickly and completely? Do you think his absence for much of their adult life influenced her feelings for him positively or negatively?
3. When Sandy reminisces about his first date with his departed wife, Mary, he recalls, "He was poised, as if on a tightrope, and things were either going to go very wrong or very right, no in-between." (p.

34) Do you think this kind of perspective is borne out by the events of the novel? Use examples to support your opinion.

4. On page 39, as he investigates the location where a dog-walking couple happened upon Julie Saxony's body, Sandy notes that everything seems too coincidental. He finds it odd that the location is so near Bambi's childhood home; that her disappearance occurred on the tenth anniversary of Felix's disappearance; and, finally, that her body "wasn't supposed to be found." He deduces that the killer wanted "people (not cops)" to think Julie had run off with Felix. In the end, for what "people" did the killer set up that assumption and why? What were the consequences of this choice?
5. One of the benefits of a novel with multiple point-of-view characters is that we get to see how each person's views of each other and of certain circumstances vary. Compare Felix's perspective of his relationships to Bambi and Julie in the first chapter to the reality these women express through their own perspectives. How else does the author use this technique to explore the complexity of the characters' relationships and of Julie's mysterious murder?
6. This novel revolves around two "father figure," older male characters: Felix, whose absence anchors the story, and Sandy, around whose investigation the story unfolds. Though he did it through criminal activity, Felix provided well for his family and valued his role as a father...until he left town. Sandy is a policeman, but looking back over his life he sees little more than a string of failures, especially regarding his son, Bobby, and his wife, Mary. Discuss these two characters and your opinions of them. What do you think the novel has to say about the total of our successes and shortcomings at the end of life?
7. Like any good mystery, the investigation of Julie Saxony's case is anything but straightforward. What clues did you pick up along the way, and which red herrings distracted you the most? On page 118, Sandy says, "Ruling stuff out was a kind of an answer." What does he rule out as he pursues Julie's killer?
8. Crow tells Sandy that his wife, a private investigator, "says money is the thing that drives people. Money and pride." (p. 142) Money—who has it, who doesn't—indeed plays a major role in this story. Identify some of the ways money influences the decisions made by characters in this novel. Was Julie's murder really about money in the end, as Sandy believes, or something else? How does pride factor into the events surrounding Julie's murder?
9. On page 145, Sandy admits with some surprise that "the things [he] thought he remembered best were the things he was getting wrong." But he also wonders if, as long as they were loving (particularly regarding Mary), it really mattered whether his memories were inaccurate. What do you think? How else do memories play a role in the mystery of *After I'm Gone*?
10. Sandy Sanchez, our detective, frequently expresses irritation that so many *norteamericanos* assume his nickname comes from his appearance. They are unaware, he explains with frustration, that fair hair and blue eyes—such as his own—are quite common in Cuba. Identify other characters in the novel who struggle with stereotypes. Who defies the stereotypes that others put on them? In what ways do some characters seem to support their stereotypes?
11. When Bambi almost offhandedly remarks that she's going to confess to Julie's murder, what did you think? Was it immediately apparent to you—as it was to the police—that she was lying? Why would she do this? What secrets did you unravel or fail to catch along the way to the big reveal?
12. After the truth is revealed, Bambi muses aloud to Bert, "It would be nice if at least one of us got what we wanted in this world. At least our kids seem to have. There's some comfort in that." (p. 312). What do you think—do any of the characters in *After I'm Gone* get what they want? At what cost?
13. In addition to the suspense of unraveling a murder mystery, this novel explores what happens to the Brewer women and Julie in the aftermath of Felix's disappearance. As we ride along on their journey, with glimpses into their most private thoughts and sometimes those of their closest friends, what did you come to think of these five women? Did your opinion of them, and their actions, change throughout the novel? If so, how? If not, why not?
14. Discuss the significance of the title, "After I'm Gone." In what ways does it refer to Felix? To what other characters and situations

might it also apply?