

Before the Conversation



Until After Eleven

A novel by Elise Fenlow

An alibi for one evening. A friendship of twenty-two years. A daughter who no longer wants to drive.

Begin without spoilers

1. What do Nora's work routines tell you about the kind of person she believes she is?
2. What makes a favor difficult to refuse before anyone knows its full cost?
3. Which detail in the first chapter first made you doubt someone's account of the evening?

The following pages discuss the whole novel, including its ending. This guide offers questions, not a single correct interpretation.

After Reading

1. Nora's professional skill depends on recording what she can see. When does she apply a different standard to the people she loves? Where does she begin to recognize that difference?
2. Dana and Nora have a history of care, money, and favors. Which acts express generosity, and which create obligations neither woman can name comfortably?
3. Evie's location appears to offer Nora reassurance. How does the novel distinguish knowing where someone is from knowing what they are doing or feeling?
4. Jo is both a grieving sister and a teacher. When do those roles help her see clearly? When do they make demands she cannot reconcile?
5. How do Kit's choices complicate the idea of protecting someone? Find a moment when help carries a cost for the person supposedly being helped.
6. Which scenes outside legal settings changed your judgment of a character? Consider paid work, bread, school, transport, and caring for a parent.
7. Does the novel make responsibility the same as punishment, repayment, forgiveness, or acceptance? Where do those ideas separate?
8. The last chapter gives Evie several ordinary actions. Which matters most to you, and how does it change the meaning of earlier acts of watching, helping, or speaking for someone?

Return to the Words

Chapter One

“I write what I can see. Most of this was here in August.”

How does this professional rule change when Nora must apply it to herself?

Chapter One

“Nobody is asking you to lie in a courtroom.”

Why does the second speaker’s reassurance increase rather than settle the reader’s unease?

Chapter Fourteen

“I’m not telling you that so you’ll feel better. I’m telling you so you know what you did. All of it.”

What does Jo insist on separating here, and why does that separation matter?

Chapter Seventy-Four

“She let go, and let the handle up, and it shut with the sound those boxes made.”

How does an ordinary physical action make the final chapter’s responsibility visible?