



A READING GROUP GUIDE

Zigzag Girl

a novel by Ruth Knafo Setton
*"Sometimes Magic **IS** Murder"*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1 Identity & the Zigzag Girl

Everyone here wears a mask—complicated by characters whose business is deception. Zigzag Girl, the sawing box where a body is divided into thirds and slid out of alignment yet stays whole, becomes the novel's central metaphor: identity as something slippery, elastic, cut apart and reassembled into a new shape. How does this play out in Lucy? When did you feel the pieces finally line up—when she became herself?

2 Atlantic City

The novel treats Atlantic City like "a dame in film noir"—glamorous, dangerous, past her prime and all the more magnetic for it. How does the city function as a character? What surprised you about it, and why was it the perfect setting?

3 Magic & Misdirection

The book is built like an illusion—misdirection, red herrings, timed reveals. Were there moments when you realized you'd been looking in exactly the wrong direction? Looking back, can you spot the move that fooled you?

4 The Black Rose

The black polyester rose recurs across decades and crime scenes. What does it symbolize, and how does its meaning shift as the novel unfolds?

5 Women & Magic

Lucy, Stormie, Van, and Cleo perform in a tradition where women have been the assistant—the body in the box, the object of the trick rather than its architect. How do they redefine magic when they design the illusion? Does it look different when a woman holds the wand?

6 Trust

In a story built on deception, how did you decide whom to believe? Who did you trust, when did that trust shift—and were you right?

7 Roots & Wings

Beneath the crime story runs a quieter current of freedom and flight. It surfaces in Elvis's seagull illusion—a bird "trained, not tamed"—and his invocation of Houdini, the Jewish magician who taught that no lock can hold you. The image grew from a real memory: a child painting homing pigeons with her Moroccan-Jewish grandfather, watching them rise, "a rainbow in the sky." How do these hidden roots run beneath the surface? Do you have to know they're there to feel them?

8 The Past Rising

The characters learn the past can be buried but never quite stays down. How does the weight of history—personal and collective—drive the heart of this story?

9 The Speculative Edge

The uncanny—a witch, a ghost, a slip through time—sits alongside a hard-boiled crime story. What does the supernatural let the novel say that pure realism couldn't? What would be lost if those elements were stripped out?

10 Noir, with Hope

Setton describes Zigzag Girl as "noir, with hope." Is that a contradiction? Where does the hope live in this story—and by the end, does it feel earned?