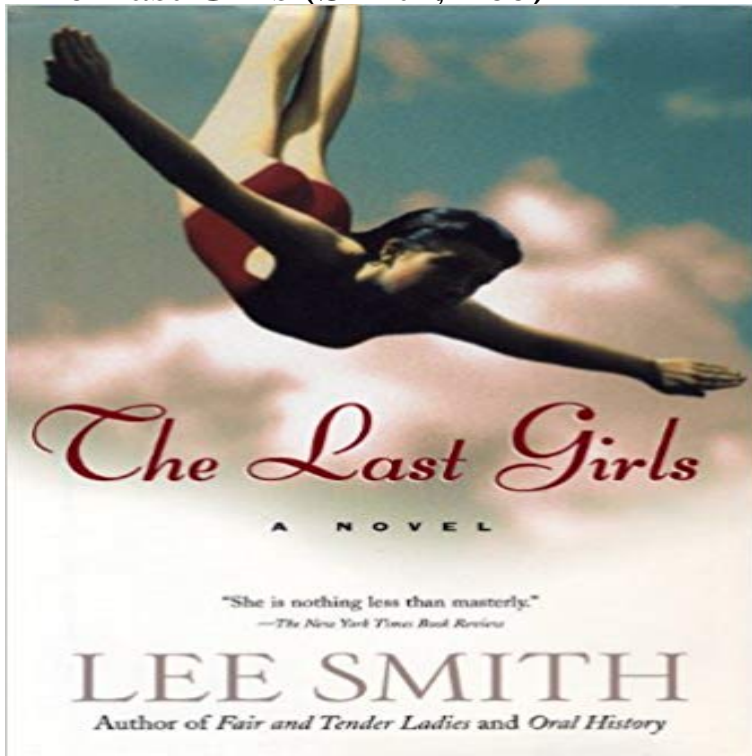


The Last Girls (Smith, Lee)



On a beautiful June day in 1965, a dozen girls-classmates at a picturesque Blue Ridge womens college-launched their homemade raft (inspired by Huck Finns) on a trip down the Mississippi. Its Girls A-Go-Go Down the Mississippi read the headline in the Paducah, Kentucky, paper. Thirty-five years later, four of those girls reunite to cruise the river again. This time its on the luxury steamboat, The Belle of Natchez, and theres no publicity. This time, when they reach New Orleans, theyll give the river the ashes of a fifth rafter-beautiful Margaret (Baby) Ballou. Revered for her powerful female characters, here Lee Smith tells a brilliantly authoritative story of how college pals who grew up in an era when they were still called girls have negotiated life as women. Harriet Holding is a hesitant teacher who has never married (she cant explain why, even to herself). Courtney Gray struggles to step away from her Southern Living-style life. Catherine Wilson, a sculptor, is suffocating in her happy third marriage. Anna Todd is a world-famous romance novelist escaping her own tragedies through her fiction. And finally there is Baby, the girl they come to bury-along with their memories of her rebellions and betrayals. **THE LAST GIRLS** is wonderful reading. Its also wonderfully revealing of womens lives-of the idea of romance, of the relevance of past to present, of memory and desire.

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