

## READER'S GUIDE

1. Of Katya's romantic relationships in the book, is there one that you connected with most? Are there particular moments within the relationship that speak to experiences you've had or heard about?
2. "I thought that comedy," says Katya, "a very dark comedy, a comedy so dark that it made you cry, was the only form that would allow me to write with all honesty." What do you perceive as some of this book's most darkly comic moments? Is it possible to classify this as either a comedy or a tragedy?
3. In your opinion, what's the most embarrassing thing a character in this book does for love?
4. What function does math play in this novel? In what ways does it feel personal?
5. How would you characterize Katya's relationship with her mother? How does it change as Katya grows older?
6. What effect did the "notes to readers" have on your reading? Why do you think author Lara Vapnyar included them?
7. As a mother herself, Katya says, "Warning note to cool parents. Being a cool parent usually means that you are not parent enough." Do you agree?
8. How does Katya's desire to be a writer inform her decisions throughout the book? How do you think Vapnyar's real-life experiences as an author might have influenced her character?
9. In what ways does Katya's move to the US impact her and her family? What might have been different about their lives had they stayed in Russia?
10. Cynthia Sweeney calls this book "absolutely timely and perfectly timeless." What truths and lessons in this book, in your opinion, stand the test of time? Are there aspects of the story that connect to the present moment in which you read it?