

“Deliciously readable...Stratman writes deftly about the complexities of lust and love, wellness and deprivation, responsibility and freedom.”

—Rachel Khong, author of *Goodbye, Vitamin*

# CHEAT DAY

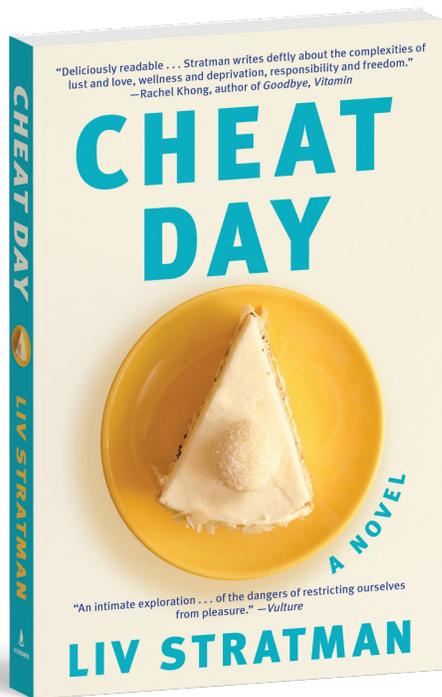


A NOVEL

“An intimate exploration...of the dangers of restricting ourselves from pleasure.” —*Vulture*

## LIV STRATMAN

READING GROUP GUIDE



This reading group guide for *Cheat Day* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

## Introduction

Kit and David were college sweethearts. Now married and in their thirties, they live in Kit's childhood home in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. While David has a successful career, jetting off on work trips to exciting destinations, Kit is stuck in a loop. She keeps quitting her job managing her sister's bakery to seek a more ambitious profession, but fear of failure always brings her back to Sweet Cheeks. Kit finds a fraught solace in cycling through fad diets, which David, in his efforts to be supportive, follows along with her. Their latest program is the Radiant Regimen, an intense seventy-five-day cleanse, and Kit is optimistic about embarking on a new chapter of clean eating and self-control.

Hungry in more ways than one, she soon falls into a flirtation with a carpenter named Matt, who is building new shelves for the bakery kitchen. Unable to resist their mutual attraction, Kit and Matt soon begin a passionate affair. Kit suppresses her guilt by obsessing over her diet, pushing herself to greater extremes.

## Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. What does the phrase “cheat day” bring to mind? What expectations did you have based on the title before you began reading?
2. Radiant Regimen founder Diana Spargel is described as “glowing in her glossy author photo, with a golden-brown suntan and loose waves of beachy blond hair...a ‘naturopathic healer and nutrition expert’” (page 3). Why is Kit drawn to Spargel and the Radiant Regimen?
3. Kit’s grandmother calls Kit’s tendency to escalate matters her *intensificazione* (page 8). Why might Kit have developed this response to arguments and pressures? Does anyone else in the novel exhibit *intensificazione*?
4. When Kit returns to work at Sweet Cheeks, she meets Violet. Discuss Kit’s first impressions of Violet. What does Violet represent for Kit? What is her significance in Kit’s life over the following months?
5. On page 41, Kit meets Matt, a carpenter. Why is she so immediately taken with him? What is she looking for that he might provide?
6. As Kit embarks on the Radiant Regimen—“It made me feel better to think how I would be changed after a few weeks....I’d just started something great. Something I could control” (page 37)—she also begins an affair—“I couldn’t believe what I had: the pleasure of knowing I wanted something, wanted to consume it whole, and just doing so, putting it directly into my mouth. I didn’t feel hungry anymore” (pages 108–9). How do these two changes in her life play into and off of each other?
7. When Kit sees a baby on the subway, she feels a “familiar longing” and turns to look at David: “I watched him fail to notice my gaze; I watched him fail to see me wanting something from him; I felt myself failing to name precisely what it was” (pages 92–93). What stops Kit and David from connecting in these moments?
8. Kit thinks to herself that “if I had a life like the one Violet showcased on Instagram—or, even better, the skills and self-efficacy to make my life look a certain way—I imagined I’d be more comfortable talking about myself” (page 159). Discuss the importance of appearances in Kit’s life. Why would just appearing a certain way be better?
9. Why are Kit’s fights with David on the day of Nonna’s funeral (pages 249–50) and during the Altmann’s seder (pages 260–63) linked so closely in her mind? What are the parallels? What is Kit feeling during both fights?
10. After her last night with Matt, Kit imagines David moving out, “all his clothing and books were now packed in boxes...ready to go. No more choices for me to make. This new fear swirled in my mind. I didn’t want him to go. There was my

answer, and in it, an ugly, terrible truth about who I was. I'd wanted it all, just for another night" (page 272). What is Kit realizing about herself here?

11. The morning after that, Kit buys a loaf of bread, feeling the presence of her grandmother while she's in the *forno*. What do the bread and the traditional *forno* symbolize? Why does Kit associate them with Nonna?
12. Melissa advises Kit to keep the affair to herself; patch things up with David and never tell him. Do you agree with Melissa's advice? What would you say to Kit if she were your sister?
13. Kit says, "I don't believe any person alive is ever fully satiated" (page 11) and "Nothing's ever enough, and you never get away from yourself" (page 189). What does it mean to be satisfied? What might that look like for Kit, if she could feel satisfied?
14. Imagine Kit and David a year out from the end of the novel. What does that look like? Is Kit still working at the bakery?

## Enhance Your Book Club

1. Identify some real-life Diana Spargels and discuss the images they project. How do they make you feel? What are the pros and cons of the lifestyles they represent?
2. Bake Kit's favorite cupcakes—Black Forest cupcakes with chocolate chips and whipped vanilla buttercream—or substitute with some of your favorite treats. What is the appeal of bakeries and baked goods? What is comforting about them?
3. Go phone-free for the group discussion—everyone turns their phones off and puts them away. After the conversation, retrieve your phones and spend a few minutes checking your most recent Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and/or other feed updates. If you're comfortable sharing, talk about the topics, products, and people who appear in front of you, and why.