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Kitchens Of The Great Midwest: A Novel



Synopsis

• "People • An impressive feat of narrative jujitsu . . . that keeps readers turning the pages too fast to realize just how ingenious they are." • "The New York Times Book Review, Editor's Pick Kitchens of the Great Midwest, about a young woman with a once-in-a-generation palate who becomes the iconic chef behind the country's most coveted dinner reservation, is the summer's most hotly anticipated debut. • When Lars Thorvald's wife, Cynthia, falls in love with wine and a dashing sommelier he's left to raise their baby, Eva, on his own. He's determined to pass on his love of food to his daughter starting with purloined pork shoulder. As Eva grows, she finds her solace and salvation in the flavors of her native Minnesota. From Scandinavian lutefisk to hydroponic chocolate habaneros, each ingredient represents one part of Eva's journey as she becomes the star chef behind a legendary and secretive pop-up supper club, culminating in an opulent and emotional feast that's a testament to her spirit and resilience. • Each chapter in J. Ryan Stradal's startlingly original debut tells the story of a single dish and character, at once capturing the zeitgeist of the Midwest, the rise of foodie culture, and delving into the ways food creates community and a sense of identity. By turns quirky, hilarious, and vividly sensory, Kitchens of the Great Midwest is an unexpected mother-daughter story about the bittersweet nature of life its missed opportunities and its joyful surprises. It marks the entry of a brilliant new talent. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I knew I was going to love J. Ryan Stradal's KITCHENS OF THE GREAT MIDWEST from the very first page, where he mentions Happy Chef, a beloved diner I remember well from my years growing up in Minnesota. Stradal, a lifelong Midwesterner who recently moved to Los Angeles, suffuses his debut novel with place-specific details like this, but it's not just current or former Midwesterners who will respond positively to the book. It's about food, family, and maturing into the life you were born to live, sometimes without really knowing why. It was possibly inevitable that the daughter of an up-and-coming Minneapolis chef and a sommelier-in-training would grow up to have a refined palate and a passion for good food and wine, but Eva Thorvald largely had to come to this place without the direct aid of her parents. Abandoned by her mother as a newborn, Eva also lost her father when she was just an infant, and was raised by an aunt and uncle who preferred McDonald's hamburgers to the heirloom tomatoes and heritage pork shoulder that Eva's father hoped to introduce her to. Nevertheless, in the linked chapters that compose KITCHENS OF THE GREAT MIDWEST, Eva finds herself compelled to pursue tastes and flavors (even outrageously spicy ones) and to learn as much as she can about cooking, even from a very early age. Despite the loss of the foodie parents she never knew, Eva matures into a woman --- and a chef --- either of her parents would be proud to know and gratified to be fed by. Much like Elizabeth Strout's OLIVE KITTERIDGE, KITCHENS OF THE GREAT MIDWEST is a "novel in stories," told from the points of view of eight different characters and touching more or less obliquely on Eva's life. She appears in each of the stories but is rarely, if ever, the central character.

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