**Kitchens of the Great Midwest  
by J. Ryan Stradal**

**About the Book**

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 puréed 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.

**About the Author**

J. Ryan Stradal edits the fiction section of The Nervous Breakdown and works as an editor-at-large at Unnamed Press. His writing has appeared in The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, The Rumpus, and the Los Angeles Review of Books among other places. Born and raised in Minnesota, he now lives in Los Angeles, where he cohosts a culinary-themed reading series called Hot Dish. He has also worked as a TV producer, notably for Ice Road Truckers and Deadliest Catch. He is currently at work on his second novel, also set in the Midwest.

**If you enjoyed *Kitchens of the Great Midwest***

* *Lily and the Octopus* by Steven Rowley
* *Voracious: A Hungry Reader Cooks Her Way Through Great Books* by Cara Nicoletti
* *Delicious! by* Ruth Reichl
* *Tomorrow There Will Be Apricots* by Jessica Soffer
* *Burnt Toast Makes You Sing Good: A Memoir of Food and Love from an American Midwest Family* by Kathleen Flinn

**Discussion Questions**

1. From an early age, Eva is obsessed with food and cooking. What influences shape her interest?
2. How would you characterize the Midwest as Stradal paints it in this book? What makes the setting unique and important in this particular story?
3. Stradal structures the novel as a collection of smaller stories from many different points of view. What are the advantages of this narrative style?
4. Throughout the novel, characters and stories intersect in unexpected ways. Which of these connections surprised you the most? Which is most important to Eva’s story?
5. Food takes center stage in this book. How does it bring people together and how does it keep them apart?
6. Eva Thorvald is the heroine of the novel, but in some ways she is still quite mysterious. What is it about Eva that draws people to her?
7. From Lars to Eva to Pat, Stradal’s characters have their own prejudices about food and the way it should be made. What are some of their ideas, and which ones do you agree or disagree with?
8. Cindy has always claimed she would never be a good mother. Why does she insist on this and do you believe her?
9. The recipes prepared in Eva’s feast serve as a walk through her memory. How do foods or recipes play a role in your own memory or life story?