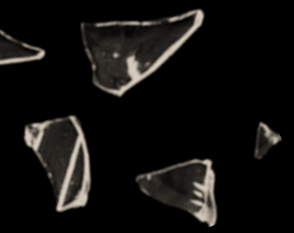


THE DINNER PARTY

Book Club Kit





Dear Reader,

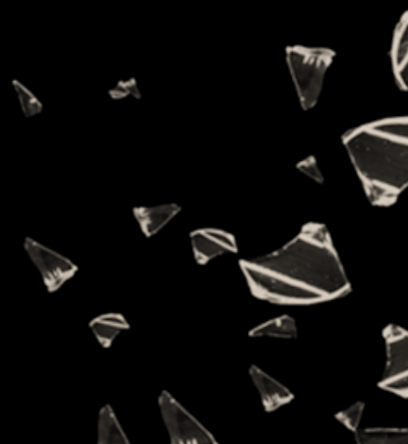
In 2017, NASA celebrated the 40th anniversary of the launch of the Voyager spacecraft. On board was a Golden Record: a selection of music, images, and natural sounds to represent life on Earth. This canon, like every canon before and since, was a product of its time and reflected not just the good intentions of the people who made it, but also their biases.

The Dinner Party found its roots here. I wanted to explore what a similar kind of canon would look like forty years later, what kind of people would send it into space, and how they would celebrate that. I wondered who would organize that party, who would shop and cook and clean for it, who the guests would be and the multitudes they might contain.

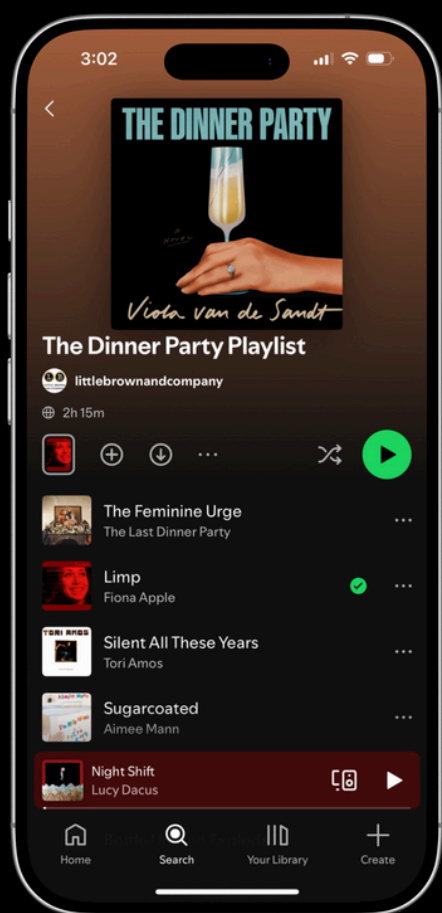
To me, *The Dinner Party* is about inclusion and exclusion, who gets heard and who doesn't, about female rage and people containing both charm and horror, and about a young woman learning to find her voice, like writing this novel has allowed me to find mine. To you, this story may mean something else entirely. I'm thrilled it's found its way to you, and I'm so curious to see what you make of it.

Thank you for reading,

Viola van de Sandt



Listen TO THE PLAYLIST



FEATURING
FIONA APPLE,
AIMEE MANN,
MITSKI,
AND MORE

*“Give me life, give me pain,
give me myself again.”*

TORI AMOS, “LITTLE EARTHQUAKES”

CHOCOLATE CAKE

Recipe

“I make a cake. The recipe says to mix the molten chocolate with the cream and spread it over the top, but the mixture I make is too thin. It pours from the cake onto the table and drips from the table to the floor.”

— From *The Dinner Party*

We were inspired by the idea of a chocolate cake recipe with a pourable glaze—the recipe below should cooperate a bit better for you than for Franca.

CHOCOLATE BLENDER CAKE

START TO FINISH: 1½ HOURS, PLUS COOLING (20 MINUTES ACTIVE)

MAKES ONE 9-INCH CAKE

FOR THE CAKE:

110 GRAMS (¾ CUP) RAW ALMONDS (SEE HEADNOTE)

1 CUP WHOLE MILK, ROOM TEMPERATURE

214 GRAMS (1 CUP) WHITE SUGAR

4 LARGE EGGS, ROOM TEMPERATURE

57 GRAMS (4 TABLESPOONS) SALTED BUTTER, MELTED AND SLIGHTLY COOLED

42 GRAMS (½ CUP) UNSWEETENED COCOA POWDER, PREFERABLY DUTCH-PROCESSED

3 TABLESPOONS CORNSTARCH

2 TEASPOONS BAKING POWDER

½ TEASPOON GROUND CINNAMON

½ TEASPOON TABLE SALT

FOR THE CHOCOLATE GLAZE AND FINISHING:

6 OUNCES (1 CUP) SEMISWEET CHOCOLATE CHIPS

⅓ CUP HEAVY CREAM

FLAKY SALT, TO GARNISH (OPTIONAL)

To make the cake, heat the oven to 350°F with a rack in the middle position. Mist a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. In a blender, process the almonds on high, scraping the jar once or twice, until the nuts have a fine flour-like texture, about 2 minutes. Add the milk, sugar, eggs, butter, cocoa powder, cornstarch, baking powder, cinnamon and salt. Blend until smooth, about 1 minute, scraping the jar as needed. Pour into the prepared pan and smooth the surface. Bake until the sides of the cake begin to pull away from the pan and a toothpick inserted at the center comes out with a few crumbs, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 1 hour, then remove the outer ring and cool completely.

To make the glaze, place the chocolate chips in the clean blender jar. In a small saucepan over medium-high, bring the cream to a simmer, then pour it over the chocolate chips. Stir to ensure the cream covers the chips, then let stand until the chocolate softens, about 2 minutes. Blend, scraping the jar as needed, until the mixture is smooth and pourable, 30 to 60 seconds. Pour the glaze onto the cooled cake, then spread it into an even layer. Sprinkle with flaky salt (if using), then let stand for about 30 minutes to allow the glaze to set.

—*Milk Street Shorts* by Christopher Kimball



Reading

GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

***Be warned, this guide contains spoilers
for the plot of *The Dinner Party* ***

1. *The Dinner Party* is told in an epistolary format, with Franca writing a letter to Harry, on the advice of her therapist, Stella. While you were reading, what was your early sense of what might have happened to Franca, and who Harry is in her life?
2. As she tries to remember what happened to her, Franca experiences episodes of dissociation and hallucination. How does her state of mind impact the way this story is told? Does having an unreliable narrator add tension and suspense?
3. Andrew expects Franca to host a dinner party for his colleagues, preparing a multi-course meal that factors in their dietary preferences and eccentricities. How does Franca playing the role of hostess contribute to the rising sense of horror in the book?

4. “I remember everything that happened in those three minutes at the beginning of the evening, him and me in the kitchen.”

The Dinner Party explores nuanced themes of trauma and consent; is Franca aware that what she is experiencing is assault? What about afterwards?

5. Franca writes, of the cat Andrew gives her: “He’s only been here for three weeks, while in the three years I’ve been living here I’ve searched in rooms he’s never been in and found only a growing sense of apprehension.” How does the setting, in an isolated house in a foreign country, add to Franca’s feelings of alienation?

6. Franca says that on the morning of the party she struggles to get out of bed. She finds herself drinking steadily throughout the day, and writes, “There’s a film over it all, one that removes me from it, keeps me at a distance.” Is there a moment you recall when Franca becomes, or feels herself to be, a more active participant in the story? A moment when she takes control?

7. Andrew and his team are preparing to launch into space a new version of NASA’s Golden Record, this time updated with their own take on the world’s fifty best paintings, sculptures, and works of literature. Over dinner, the characters debate who gets to tell their stories and how our biases might influence such a selection of “best” artistic works. Did you find yourself agreeing with any character in particular? Visit the Recommended Reading page for an exercise in creating your own literary canon.

8. How do Franca's relationships with Andrew and Harry differ from each other? What is the quality of their connection and intimacy? Do you believe she ever really loved Andrew?
9. Franca's relationship with her mother is fraught, both of them carrying the trauma of her father's death and responding to it in different ways. How does their relationship evolve throughout the course of the novel?
10. *The Dinner Party* is, in many ways, a story of survival. Did it end the way you expected? What do you think is next for Franca? What do you wish for her?



VIOLA'S RECOMMENDED READING

Not for Profit:
Why Democracy Needs the Humanities
by Martha C. Nussbaum

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

milk and honey by Rupi Kaur

Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee

YOUR LITERARY CANON

Which authors would you include in an updated literary canon for the ages? Who would you send to space for voyagers to encounter? Please share a few sentences about your choice with your book club or reading group.

TITLE

AUTHOR

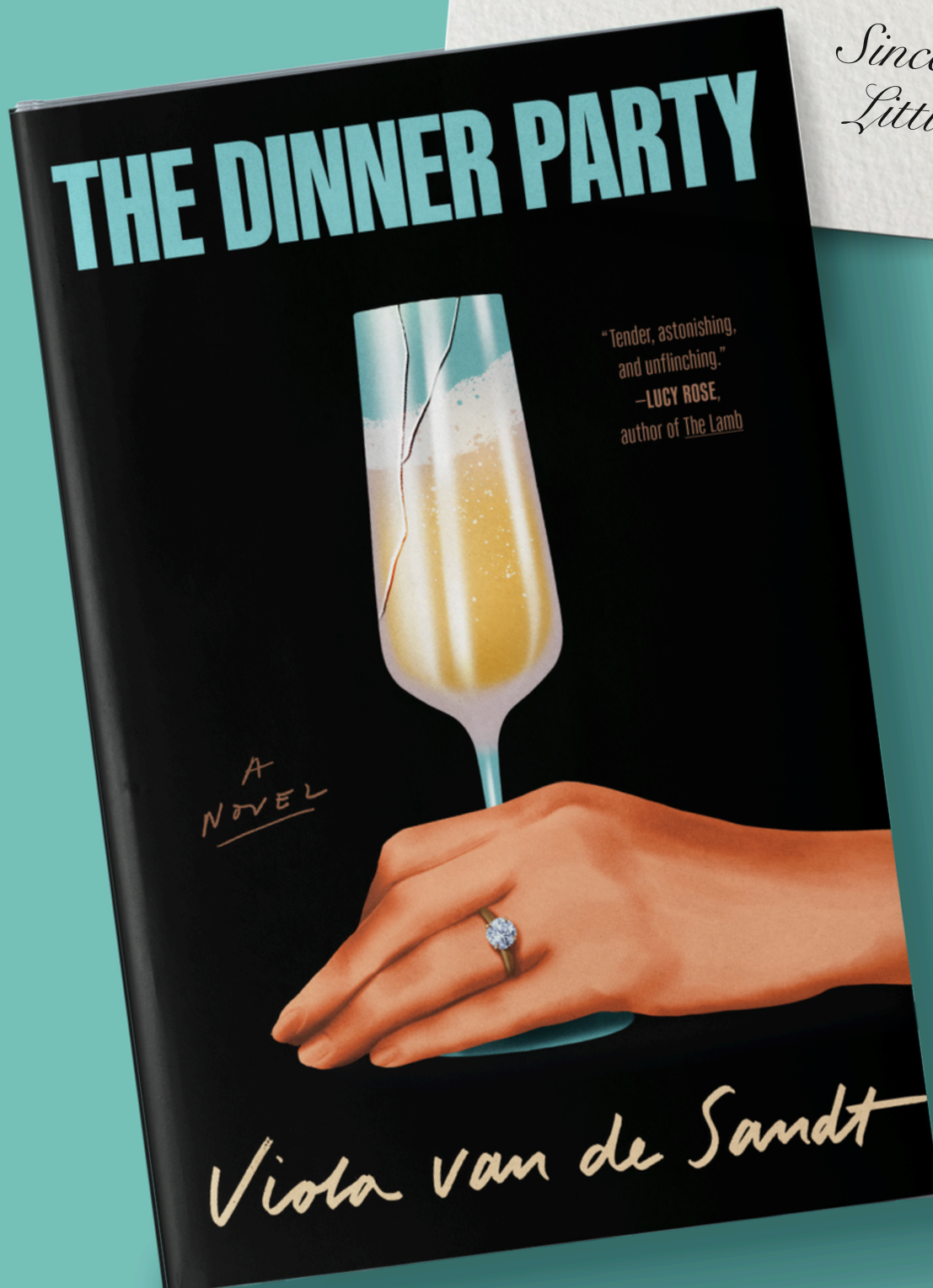
‘You can’t deny the works I’ve chosen are all great literature.’

‘I’m not denying it,’ you smile. ‘What I’m talking about is all the other works of literature which could just as creditably have been selected.’

— From *The Dinner Party*

*Thank you for joining
the dinner party!*

*Sincerely,
Little, Brown*



READ, REVIEW, AND TAG US @LITTLEBROWN | @VIOLAVANDESANDT