

ERIN VAN DER MEER

**READING
GROUP
GUIDE**



a novel

"A darkly funny, satirical peek into late-night tabloid journalism and the chaos of our times."

—**NATALIE SUE**,
bestselling author
of *I Hope This
Finds You Well*

**THE
SCOOP**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Francesca starts as an idealistic magazine journalist but ends up as a night editor at a clickbait tabloid. At what point in the novel do you feel she crosses a moral line she can't easily come back from—or does such a point never really arrive? How did your sympathy for her change over the course of the book?
2. Class and privilege are a constant undercurrent—between Francesca and Audrey, Francesca and “Miss America,” and even in how different characters are able (or not) to walk away from bad jobs. How does class shape who gets to keep their ideals intact and who is forced to compromise—not just once, but over and over?
3. The novel suggests that audiences share responsibility for tabloid cruelty (“the subscribers,” in the Kierkegaard epigraph). As a reader and media consumer, did this book make you think differently about clicking on certain stories, reading certain outlets, or sharing outrage online?
4. If you had to describe what the novel is “really about” in one sentence—beyond “tabloids” or “media”—what would you say? What questions about work, ethics, friendship, or identity are you still thinking about after finishing *The Scoop*?
5. “Project Black Lagoon” (digging up old offensive Halloween costumes) is both darkly funny and deeply disturbing. What did you think this subplot was really “about”—cancel culture, archives that never die, journalistic responsibility, or something else?
6. Francesca feels both betrayed by Audrey (personally and professionally) and deeply envious of her career. Do you think Audrey is unfair, justified, or something in between in how she treats Francesca—including that exposé? How much did you sympathize with each of them by the end?
7. We see a whole spectrum of burnout: Steve’s breakdown, Chris’s checked out cynicism, Jocelyn’s pills and armor, Yenay’s exit, Francesca’s insomnia and rage rooms. Which character’s breaking point felt most real or disturbing to you as a picture of work and mental health? Did any of it remind you of work cultures you’ve experienced or seen up close?
8. The dinner and later meetings where Amanda confronts Francesca flip the usual script: the “subject” has done research on the journalist and calls her out directly. How did those scenes change your sense of who has power—and what “informed consent” looks like—in media relationships?
9. At the end, Patti organizes a street level protest while Francesca leaks the recording and posts the fake apology from inside Johnson News. Taken together, what do you think the novel is saying about different strategies for change—public activism, insider sabotage, or staying put to “work from within”? Which of these approaches felt most convincing or realistic to you, and why?
10. Francesca’s final act of whistleblowing is also a personal breaking point that sends her out of the industry altogether. Do you read what she does as hopeful resistance, self destruction from burnout, or a messy mix of both? How did the epilogue—her new life, her conversation with Audrey, and what she hopes for Yenay—shape the way you judge where she ends up?

ESPRESSO MARTINI

Ingredients

1 ounce espresso or cold brew coffee
2 ounces vodka
1 ounce coffee liqueur, such as Kahlúa
1/2 ounce simple syrup
Ice
Garnish options: coffee beans, finely ground coffee, or instant espresso

Instructions

If using espresso, prepare and let 1 oz cool to room temperature, or refrigerate before using. Place a martini glass in the refrigerator or freezer for at least 5 minutes to chill.

Place the espresso or 1 ounce cold brew coffee, 2 ounces vodka, 1 ounce coffee liqueur, and 1/2 oz simple syrup in a cocktail shaker. Add enough ice to fill the shaker halfway. Seal the shaker and shake vigorously until very cold and outside of the shaker is frosty, about 20 seconds. Pour through a strainer into the martini glass and garnish if desired.

Garnish Options

Decoratively place 1 or 3 coffee beans directly on top. Finely grate coffee beans with a Microplane over the top. Pour finely ground coffee beans or instant espresso into a fine-mesh strainer and dust over the top. You can use this method with a piece of paper over half the cocktail to dust only one half for a more dramatic presentation.

