

LITTLE ONE BOOK CLUB KIT



A Letter from Olivia

Dear Reader,

When I started writing *Little One* in 2021, I felt changed. I had come to realize that I had spent the previous decade of my life on a hamster wheel of self-improvement plans, wellness trends, and elaborate exercise regimens. Finally, I decided I was done.

Each morning, I woke before the sun rose and worked on the novel, then hopped on my treadmill where I did an hour of fasted cardio. My first meal wouldn't be until 2 or 3, a plain green salad with exactly one-and-a-half hard boiled eggs. At night, I'd abandon my plans of a home cooked meal and pick up take-out, eating until I felt ill. Not only would I have told you I wasn't on a diet, I would also have told you I didn't believe in diets. This, I thought, was different. A lifestyle change.

I was very much still on the hamster wheel, of course. Deep down, I'm sure I knew that, but it felt easier to hurl myself toward "betterment" than to abandon it altogether. It didn't help that I was cheered on by society at every turn. Each year, a new health or wellness trend would arrive on my doorstep, shiny, fresh, and so much more effective than last year's.

In 2021, I could connect my patterns of restriction, binging, and self-hatred to habits and experiences of my childhood and teenage years, but I wasn't able to admit the ways I was still repeating them. To do that would be to risk too much. To me, this is what abandoning health and wellness fads feels like: A risk. Danger. In our world, it is much more comfortable to fall in line, to pursue a "good" body at any cost than to simply exist as is. It is much safer, too.

Over the years of writing *LITTLE ONE*, this is the idea I kept going back to. As I confronted my own patterns when it came to health and wellness, I felt compelled to tell Catharine's story, too. I kept thinking about the ways we marvel at cult documentaries, dismissing the victims as naive, then walk right into the cult of health and wellness: Intermittent fasting, Paleo, "cozy cardio." We opt into these trends because they promise not just change, but change that brings otherworldly peace and self-acceptance. They're built on the notion that in the future, there is a better you, and the belief that you are a work-in-progress before you are anything else.

Catharine's experience growing up in her father's cult is an exploration of just how alluring the promise of community, ritual, and rules can be, and how impossible it can feel to leave it behind.

Much like Catharine, I've walked through a great deal of life with the distinct feeling that I'm not good enough. For years, I assumed the belief was borne out of a real, factual lack. To me it was simple and obvious: I was flawed, and I needed to be fixed. I thought wellness would get me there.

But with time, I've learned that this feeling is something that has been handed to me, to women. It is created and sustained by a patriarchal, capitalist society that benefits when women give up money and power. It is sold to us, and if we stop buying it, it is rebranded as something else. Opting into these trends may provide the illusion of control, but it costs us a lot, too.

My hope is that *LITTLE ONE* offers people a moment to consider opting out, even if just in small ways. There may be danger in that choice, or loneliness, but there is freedom, too.

Olivia Muentert

Discussion Questions

- 1 How did Catharine's childhood turn her into the person she is in New York?
- 2 How did the dual timelines shape your understanding of who Catharine is? Did the structure shift your sympathy or trust in her?
- 3 What drives Catharine's father? How does he use his power to control the narrative?
- 4 What is trapping Catharine's mom despite her health issues and unhappiness? How does witnessing that impact Catharine?
- 5 Catharine's adult life is built on control over food and relationships. Her childhood revolved around those same ideas, disguised as "virtue" and "moderation." How does the line between self-care and punishment blur for her?
- 6 Do you think Reese has a specific opinion of Catharine in the beginning? In what ways does her manipulation of him change that view?
- 7 What does Linna seem to understand about the community that Catharine doesn't?
- 8 Catharine is forced to confront her past when there's a threat it may be exposed. What do you think Catharine owes to herself, other survivors, and to the public?
- 9 Is Holly entitled to make Catharine tell the truth? What does Holly have claim to in this story?
- 10 How does the novel portray the costs of speaking out versus staying silent?

Growing Tomatoes

Germinating plant conditions

- Timing: A good rule of thumb is late winter, 5 to 8 weeks from your region's final frost date.
- Avoid disease: Use potting soil and clean supplies.
- Light: Near a bright window with direct sunlight.
- Temperature: Room temperature or warmer is optimal.
- Humidity: High humidity is needed.

Planting the seeds

- Fill your container with soil, leaving a bit of space at the top
- Place the seed on top, then cover with a thin layer of soil, tamp very gently, and water.

Sprout conditions

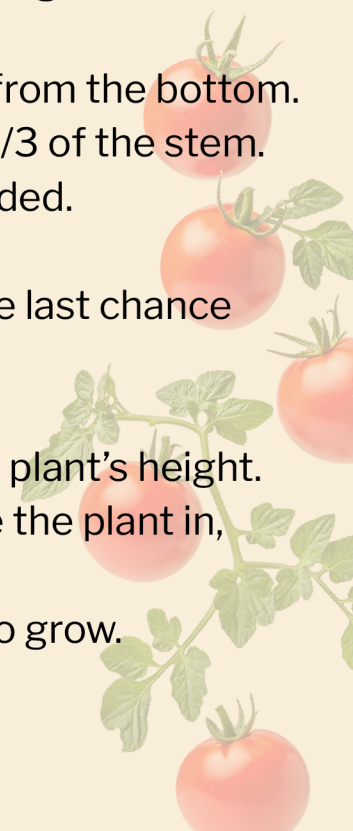
- Watering: Keep your soil moist but not waterlogged.
- Feeding: Once the seedling has leaves, fertilize sparingly.

Transplant Tomato Seedlings to Pots

- Timing: When your seedlings reach about three inches tall and have three sets of leaves.
- Choose a container at least four inches deep with drainage holes.
- Use a potting mix, not garden soil.
- Push the tomato seedling out of its original container from the bottom.
- Place the seedling in the container and cover around 2/3 of the stem.
- Fertilize and water thoroughly. Repeat this step as needed.

Plant Tomato Seedlings in the Garden

- Timing: When the plants are 10 to 12 inches tall and the last chance of frost has passed in your growing zone.
- Remove the plant by pushing from the bottom.
- Make a hole in your garden a little more than 1/3 of the plant's height.
- Fill the bottom of the hole with loose garden soil, place the plant in, and fill the rest with soil.
- Support with a tomato cage or stakes as it continues to grow.
- Water well. If the plant is drooping, it needs water.
- Fertilize until the plant begins to flower.



Mental Health Resources

This book deals heavily with issues relating to, and people struggling directly with, eating disorders and mental health. An estimated 9% of the US population will struggle with an eating disorder in their lifetime, and will often avoid treatment, making it one of the deadliest mental illnesses.¹ If you or a loved one are struggling, there is help available. Below are great places to learn, start a conversation, and seek help.

National Eating Disorders Association

Provides education and resources, connections to care, and supports research

ANAD

Provides free, peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder

The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness

Free support groups, educational resources, and advocacy initiatives.

¹ ANAD. 2023. "Eating Disorder Statistics | ANAD - National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders." Anad.org. November 29, 2023. <https://anad.org/eating-disorder-statistic/#general>.