



ACTS OF SERVICE

BOOK CLUB KIT

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COCKTAILS | READING LIST

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DEAR READER,

My greatest hope for *Acts of Service* is that it will do for its readers what my favorite novels have done for me: ask us to reconsider our own lives, our own choices, and our own values in light of the lives of its characters. Where did your sexuality come from? Can you trace every thread that has gone into it, and can you feel them at work inside you when you desire something? Do you expect your desire to change in the future? Have you ever felt your desire change all at once—radically and unexpectedly—perhaps only to realize that it had not changed, you had simply misunderstood it?

I hope you will ask yourself everything that Eve asks of herself—perhaps only with deeper compassion, the compassion which, in the novel, Eve does not allow herself but which Nathan must provide for her.

Lillian

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Eve's relationship with Romi? How would you describe her when she's with Nathan and Olivia? In what ways do different characters bring out different parts of her?
2. "I think that first I have to get the thing I want, and maybe then I can figure out why I wanted it, or whether it's good." Discuss what Eve means by this.
3. What does Eve see in Olivia? What does she see in Nathan? How do these perceptions change?
4. What do each of our three main characters—Eve, Nathan, and Olivia—truly want?
5. "I wanted to run away from him and I wanted to learn to say thank you in just the way he did, as though the phrase and the many people I spoke it to belonged to me." How does Eve's description encapsulate Nathan's power and the way he interacts with the world? How would you describe Nathan?
6. Consider Nathan and Olivia's workplace relationship, or the safety net of Eve's father's financial support. How does each character use the power he or she has? How do the power dynamics amongst the characters shift over time?
7. Eve says of Olivia and Nathan: "I felt acutely that if they liked me it would mean that I was a tasteful object—the best girl in the lobby lineup." Discuss how other peoples' opinions of us can be validating or a painful rejection. Why do you think this is? Have you ever met anyone who wasn't swayed by other peoples' opinions of them? What was that person like?
8. How does the concept of jealousy play out in the novel?
9. Do you feel like Nathan truly sees Eve? Why or why not? Why is it sometimes more meaningful when someone sees you the way you want to be seen?
10. Eve often returns to an Eve Babitz quote: "Anytime I want, I can forsake this dinner party and jump into real life." The idea of "real life" is a constant theme for her: She says, "I craved and feared whatever I imagined real life was," and also asks herself, "Why did I imagine that what I saw between Nathan and Olivia was real life?" What do you think Eve's picture of "real life" is? What is your definition of it? Has it changed over time?
11. Where do you think we should draw the line between intimacy and privacy in a relationship? Consider Olivia not wanting to discuss her art with Eve, or Nathan not disclosing some key details about his personal life. What pieces of their individual lives do they owe to Eve? What does she owe to them?
12. How does the deposition force Eve to consider her relationship with Nathan (and Olivia) in a different light? What conclusions does she come to?
13. What do you think Eve means in the last line of the book about Nathan, that "his was the greatest act of service I had ever received"? What do we learn about her experience from this line?

COCKTAIL RECIPES

Featuring gin from
our friends at
Pomp & Whimsy

POMP &
WHIMSY
GIN LIQUEUR

“We were at Bar Pleiades, one of a few uptown bars—complete with leather-bound cocktail menus and deferential staff—that the two of them frequented.”

If an on-location book club meeting is possible, why not head to [Bar Pleiades](#) in New York City?

“Olivia and I ordered gin cocktails. I think we have similar taste, I ventured.”

If you'll be bartending at home, try one of these recipes:

BEE'S KNEES

Ingredients

- 2 oz. Pomp & Whimsy Gin Liqueur
- ¾ oz. lemon juice
- ¼ oz. honey

Instructions

Combine in a cocktail shaker filled with ice and shake until chilled.
Strain into a Nick and Nora glass. Garnish with an expressed lemon peel.
Optionally, add a sprig of thyme for aroma.



THREE'S A CHARM

Ingredients

- 2 oz. Pomp & Whimsy Gin Liqueur
- 2 oz. grapefruit juice
- 2 oz. tonic
- fresh rosemary (optional)

Instructions

Short shake the P&W and grapefruit juice; pour over ice in a highball glass.
Top with the tonic and a squeeze of lime. Give it a quick whirl and serve.
For a Lillian-inspired twist: garnish with a spring of rosemary.



READING LIST

Here is a list I kept while working on the book that includes some of the books and stories which were crucial to me, or which I was thinking about while writing it. —[Lillian Fishman](#)

Lena Andersson, *Willful Disregard*

Jane Austen, *Pride & Prejudice* and
Mansfield Park

Eve Babitz, *Slow Days, Fast Company*

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

Harold Brodkey, "Innocence"

Anne Carson, *Glass, Irony & God*

Andrea Long Chu, *Females*

Frank Conroy, *Stop-Time*

Leopoldine Core, *When Watched*

Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*

Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

Annie Ernaux, *Simple Passion*

Mary Gaitskill, *This Is Pleasure*

Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem*

Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*

Garth Greenwell, "The Frog King"

Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*

Lisa Halliday, *Asymmetry*

Sheila Heti, *How Should A Person Be?*
and *Motherhood*

Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying*

Miranda July, "The Metal Bowl"

Violette Leduc, *Thérèse and Isabelle*

Mary McCarthy, *The Group*

Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby*

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*

Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*
and *What Are We Doing Here?*

Sally Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*
and *Normal People*

Norman Rush, *Mating*

James Salter, *A Sport and a Pastime*

Peter Stamm, *Seven Years*

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*

Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*

