

**CLEYVIS
NATERA**

NERUDA ON THE PARK

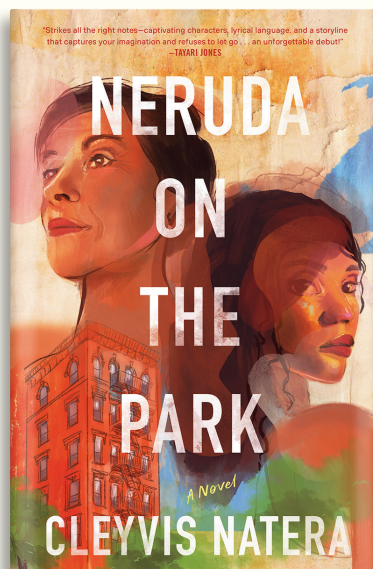
**BOOK
CLUB
KIT**



Dear Book Club Members,

Remember back in the day when the club we were most excited to attend was a dance club? Maybe this just applies to me but in my early twenties, fresh out of a college from an upstate NY school where the most happening party on weekends took place in the campus Chapel . . . I was ready to let loose in New York City's wild nightlife. I spent many nights sweating to the latest beats of Bachata, Merengue, and Hip-Hop. In those smoky rooms (remember back when people could smoke indoors?), my girlfriends and I let go of the stress of adult life, of the boys who either ghosted us or seemed at best non-committal, or were hellbent on rushing us to the altar, of bills that needed to be paid, of workplace dynamics we had no clue how to navigate, of family members who looked upon us and didn't quite know what to make of us as we grew and changed and became altogether different people.

So much has changed! I can't remember the last time I was in a night club. Today, the highlight of most months is my book club meetings and I love them so much I attend three every month. Come to think of it, nearly the exact number of nights-out each month as my club-hopping days. Each of these book clubs presents an opportunity that is hard for me to explain to my husband, who is convinced the book club is just an excuse to gather with friends and drink wine. There is, for sure, some of that, but what I find most heartwarming about the groups I am part of is how central they are to finding support and navigating my life. Through them, my friends and I manage the stress of being mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, friends, and professionals. We act as resources on navigating school challenges for our school-age kids. Have been pillars of support when any number of us illness (or our spouses or parents) has had a serious illness or been confronted with the financial catastrophe of unexpected job loss—or floundered under the heartbreak of divorce. We stand hand in hand as we celebrate the big joys that come along with parenthood, of managing home and work life, of finding love again, of reminding each other it's all a lie, that belief, the one that we're supposed to have it all and stay sane.



And of course, there are the books! The book clubs are a way of escaping our lives by way of fictitious stories that carry us to faraway places, or that sometimes help us understand our own lives all the better for how characters face issues that confront our own families. Books are gateways that enable us to have difficult conversations, that help us articulate difficult ideas, that give us the courage to voice opinions that may not always be popular.

Months before the pandemic, as I was undergoing yet another revision of my own novel, *Neruda on the Park*, I finally gave in to my book club's request to let them read it. I was apprehensive and nervous. It is one thing to read a book that's been edited and published, and another to read a Word document by a friend who's been struggling to get it right for over a decade. My book club members had heard me speak of the book and had asked to read it many times before. They knew that in *Neruda on the Park*, I wanted to explore the relationships between women through various lenses: the intimacy of mothers and daughters, the strained mentor-protégé dynamic, and the fraught relationships between childhood friends. It is largely a book about love, and romantic relationships play a big role as well; it is about the exhilaration of a new romance, what it costs us to compromise in long-term relationships, to not deal with grief, whether it is at all possible to attain personal liberation. I believe literature does its best work when it is engaged in the exploration of issues that strike the heart of the writer and, for me, those issues are community, family, belonging, and love. I was fortunate that my very sophisticated book club members not only loved my book but provided some of the most helpful feedback I'd received to date, which I know helped me get this copy into your hands today. When they each said they couldn't put the book down, it was as thrilling as I'd ever expected—because I knew how tough they are on bad books!

As I consider the ways in which the relationships with my own book clubs have helped me grow as both a person and as a writer, I extend to each of you my warmest gratitude for creating spaces where writers and books can be celebrated (or thrashed, let's be honest). I also want to applaud you in carving out time for community and conversation as I believe the spaces, we create with each other are sacred and make us each better equipped to deal with every other role we must undertake.

With deep gratitude,
Cleyvis Natera



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which character did you relate to the most, and why?
- How are Luz and Eusebia similar? How are they different?
- Eusebia says: “The world is a harsh place. Why do you think only Dominican people live here? We stay close to each other not just to belong, but to be safe.” Discuss the role of community in Northar Park and the novel.
- Luz reflects that “home [. . .] could be a place, a person, a feeling; at times, a profession, the end result of a long pursuit. A fluid thing, for sure, but precious.” Do you agree? What does home mean to you?
- There are many important themes in *Neruda on the Park*: family dynamics, friendship, romance, community and belonging, gentrification, to name just a few. Discuss some of themes that you thought about most while reading the novel.
- Beyond the mother-daughter dynamic, women’s relationships play a central role in the narrative. Consider Luz’s relationship with Angelica and Raenna, as well as Eusebia’s relationship with Cuca and the Tongues. How do these relationships fortify and challenge the main characters? Discuss how your own relationships with mentors and friends have nourished and challenged you.
- Many of the female characters in *Neruda on the Park* feel pressure to conform to what Luz considers an impossible standard of beauty. How do you see the standard of beauty changing? What else can people do to challenge existing standards of beauty?
- Hudson plays a key role in both Luz and Eusebia’s story. Did you think Hudson could have been Luz’s happily ever after? Why or why not?
- What did you think of Eusebia’s plot to save Northar Park? Were you surprised by how events unfolded? Where would you have stopped on the list?
- Vladimir is a loving husband and supportive father, but would you say he deceived Eusebia or do you believe his motives were more love-inspired than his own, possibly selfish, desires?
- How did you feel once reaching the end of the novel? Do you wish anything had ended differently?
- Talk about the novel’s structure. Why do you think the author chose to separate the novel into Part I (Demolition), Part II (Excavation), and Part III (Grounding)? How did these sections influence the experience of reading this story?
- In what ways will *Neruda in the Park* leave a lasting impact on you?



RECIPES

Mami's Habichuelas con Dulce

Some of my sweetest memories of childhood are of enjoying this sweet cream of beans. It is as unusual as it is delicious with its Caribbean flavors of beans, milk, and warm spices. It is also decadent, so limit to a once-a-year treat! Dominicans usually have this treat the Friday before Easter, which for us marks Viernes Santo—a celebration of the end of Lent.



PREP:

For best results, use dry beans and boil them yourself. To do so: combine 1 lb. of beans, 5 whole cloves, and 1 cinnamon stick in a pot with 6 cups of water. Bring to a boil for about 45 mins (or until the beans are soft). Let them rest until the beans cool before blending them.

Place the beans (and the water in which they boiled) in blender and puree.

BOILING:

In a large pot combine the beans, sweet potatoes, coconut milk, evaporated milk, whole milk, 5 whole cloves, 2 tablespoons of vanilla extract, 1 teaspoon of salt, 1 lb. of sugar (or to taste), 2 sticks of cinnamon, and 1 teaspoon of nutmeg. Turn the pot to low-medium heat.

15 minutes into cooking, add the raisins.

Once it begins to boil, let it cook for an additional 20 minutes on low heat or until the sweet potatoes are cooked through. Taste as you go to figure out if you'd like to add more sugar. This dessert requires frequent stirring to keep the liquid from boiling over or sticking to the pot so don't go too far away from it.

Remove from heat and allow to cool before serving. Garnish with the milk cookies when served.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb. boiled kidney beans
- 6 cups water, from boiling the beans
- 1 lb. sugar (or to taste)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ lb. batata (sweet potatoes) —peeled and cubed
- Galletitas de Leche Guarina (milk cookies)
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 10 whole cloves
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 can carnation milk
- 1 can coconut milk
- 4 cups whole milk
- 6 cups of water



Luz's Favorite Mango Bellini

This refreshing drink transports to the Caribbean no matter what time of year!



PREP:

Put the mango in a blender or food processor, blend until puree. Add 1 tablespoon of agave nectar and one tablespoon water to help blend.

Spoon one or two tablespoons of the puree to the bottom of a champagne flute. Pour the champagne to fill the glass.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 mango, peeled, seed removed, flesh chopped
- 1 tbsp. agave nectar
- 1 tbsp. water
- Cold bottle of Champagne or sparkling wine
(Recommend: Champagne Lanson Le Black Label Brut)



PLAYLIST

This playlist from Cleyvis Natera is available to listen on Spotify at
Spotify – Neruda on the Park by Cleyvis Natera.

Enseñame a Olvidar – Aventura

No Tengo Suerte en El Amor – Yoskar Sarante

Viene de Mi – La Yegros

Hasta Que Salga el Sol – Ozuna

Ahora Contigo – Tito Rojas

Candela – Buena Vista Social Club

Llego El Amor – Salsa Version – Gilberto Santa Rosa

Idilio – Willie Colón

Me Va Extrañar – Yiyo Sarante

Robarte un Beso – Carlos Vives, Sebastián Yatra

Burbujas de Amor – Juan Luis Guerra y 4.40

Llorarás – Oscar D'Leon

A Pedir Su Mano – Juan Luis Guerra y 4.40

Quédate Conmigo – Zacarias Ferreira

Loca (feat. El Cata) – Shakira, El Cata

Uptown Zoo – HoZ

Merengero Hasta la Tambora – Radio Version – Johnny Ventura

Vamos Hablar Ingles – En Vivo – Fefita La Grande

Linda – Tokischa, ROSALIA

I Like It – Cardi B, Bad Bunny, J Balvin

Calabria 2007 – Radio Edit – Enur, Natasja

