

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** In the opening chapter, Emilia insists on being addressed by her full name: “No nicknames, abbreviations, or shortcuts. Even at times when it would have been easy to settle for any of those alternatives, I’ve insisted, corrected people’s pronunciation, written in the right spelling on class rosters and preprinted name tags.” Why do you think Emilia is unwilling to compromise on the use of her given name? How does this early declaration set the stage for Emilia’s journey of self-discovery and identity?
- 2.** Writing a postcard to her parents, Emilia is comforted by the fact that, in the process of reminiscing, she “can rewrite history,” i.e., keep the memories she cherishes and discard the ones that trouble her. We’re often told that memory is subjective, but have you ever intentionally tried to edit a memory, to reshape an experience into something that’s less jarring or embarrassing or painful to recall? Or do you believe it’s important to preserve the true emotional impact of a moment?
- 3.** Reinvention is introduced as a concept at multiple points in the novel. Like rewriting history, Emilia freely admits that she’s a creative liar, adding embellishments to conversations to make something more memorable: “There’s comfort in it, knowing I can reliably become more than I am.” How did this revelation make you feel? Did you appreciate her candor in this moment, or even relate to her? Or did you trust her less as a narrator? In your opinion, is Emilia’s propensity to stretch the truth—or perform—an asset or a flaw?
- 4.** When Emilia was a child, she used to pretend to be an explorer or a goddess with her father, who would also take on the persona of a larger-than-life character. How did their shared love of make-believe end up harming Emilia later in life? At what point does performance become dangerous? Do you think this led to Emilia’s revelation in Rome, that “so much of what [she’s] built on is crumbling”? Explain.
- 5.** In churches across the city, Emilia would light a candle for someone in her life—from close friends and family to “lapsed friends” and strangers—for anyone who ever made her feel “nervous or hopeful or safe.” Have you ever had a brief yet profound interaction with a stranger, someone you continue to think of? Why do you think your mind returns to this moment, despite the time that has passed?
- 6.** At times, Emilia comes across as completely in control of her surroundings and her preferences. She does admit, however, that she likes feeling “confused and upended” every once in a while by the unexpected. Do you believe this is an essential component of travel? Why or why not?
- 7.** While in Rome, Emilia tries to limit the amount of communication she has with her friends and family in New York. She hopes the solitude will help her “see more clearly,” especially when it comes to her relationships with her ex-lover and her father. Do you believe Emilia achieves the clarity she was seeking over the course of the novel? How does this quote—“Today I am alone. I am in a beautiful place. I am honest, with nothing to hide. I am better off”—relate to this idea?

8. Michael tells Emilia that “the reason we love someone is because we share [the other person’s] adjectives.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Did Michael’s description of love resonate with you, or did you prefer Emilia’s father’s interpretation, that “real love ain’t the tender moments / It’s the chaos in between”?

9. The line mentioned above—that “real love ain’t the tender moments / It’s the chaos in between”—was paraphrased by Emilia’s father from a poem Emilia wrote at age seven: “Love isn’t always beautiful / But chaos makes it real.” This borrowing becomes a major sticking point for Emilia in adulthood, which culminates in an emotionally charged conversation with John, in which he says that her father stole something precious from her. Do you believe Emilia’s father owed Emilia an apology for what he did, or do you believe that most art is inspired by the artists who come before?

10. *Six Days in Rome* is, partly, a love letter to one of the greatest cities on earth. Did the sensory details included in the novel—descriptions of wine, pasta, music, colors, the glow of candles, the expressions on faces, the texture of window boxes—succeed in transporting you to Italy? What was your favorite scene and why? How did the book’s focus on all things sensual influence your experience of it?

11. In Michael’s Beirut-based novel, the main character is described as being “unmoored and feeling hopeless,” until he meets a French woman who teaches at the university. “For a time, it seems she might be able to offer the happiness and security he’s been seeking, could possibly save him from a life in which he’s barely present.” Did you see any parallels between Michael’s relationship with Emilia and the Lebanese man’s relationship with the French woman? If so, what? How do you think the novel Michael wrote ended?

12. Martyrdom and sainthood are two concepts that the author returns to throughout the novel: “I’ve never understood any of them: the selflessness and certainty, the tolerance for pain, relinquishing all their free will, ultimately their lives, for some vague, protective cloud of faith. But maybe I should be thinking about it differently, how they sought and held on to power.” Did the latter half of this statement complement or upend your understanding of martyrdom and sainthood? Why? What do you think is so compelling about the mix of the sacred and the worldly?

13. At one point, Emilia observes that “Rome doesn’t know what to do with a woman alone,” that the “lack of a man, or anyone who might help to explain me, stands out, poses a question.” Discuss society’s prolonged anxiety regarding single women, and how female independence can still be stigmatized today.

14. After buying cheese from a local vendor, Emilia ponders whether she should eat the cheese now or bring it back to New York with her and serve it at a dinner party with friends: “This is the cheese from Rome, I’d tell them. And they’d fall all over themselves telling me how good it was, the theatrical closed eyes as they tasted it. Even the thought of it is exhausting. Or I could enjoy it now and do my best to remember it later. Not everything has to be preserved, or even shared.” What was the last thing you did just for yourself, something you chose not to share that brought you happiness? If you had been in Emilia’s shoes, what would you have done?

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANCESCA GIACCO

What inspired you to write *Six Days in Rome*?

I knew I wanted to capture the experience of traveling alone, and how it forces us to see the world and ourselves in a different, heightened way. We notice details we'd never stop to consider at home; we have conversations with strangers. Memories present themselves in a new light. I was also interested in how a trip like this could be transformative for someone, maybe even revelatory. So then, the question became: What if a few days alone in a foreign city could come to encapsulate and change an entire life? The novel is my attempt to answer that question.

Have you always wanted to be a writer?

I've been reading and writing fiction since I was very young. The sense of possibility I feel when writing or thinking about stories has always meant freedom for me, the chance to get lost in my own imagination.

Do you remember the first story you ever read and the impact it had on you?

There were many stories I read and ones my parents read to me. Those that resonated most, and continue to, were Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. His expansive descriptions, playful and intricate use of language, and close attention to the senses have deeply influenced my own writing.

When you started writing, did any particular character feel fully formed in your mind right away? Or did personalities and motivations crystallize later on in the process?

Emilia was clearest to me at first—her basic outlines and personality, at least. But she shifted and changed throughout the process, especially as other characters' motivations began to reveal themselves more and more with each draft. While she is the central character of the novel, it was important for me to remember that the people in her life exist separately from her, with their own wants and versions of events. I think that can be one of the interesting elements of a first-person narrative like this one: How much do we trust her? How clearly do we think she sees herself and those she loves?

Did writing the novel involve any research?

All Rome-related details come from my own time spent in the city, including a trip in the winter of 2019 when I was writing the first draft of the novel. I'd never been in Rome in January before, and walking much emptier streets in the cold rain gave me an appreciation for the heat that Emilia feels in July. I also researched some elements of Catholicism and art history, especially the religious art and traditions that appear in the novel. And I spent time learning about the life of Leonard Cohen, who is the inspiration for Emilia's father.

Take us through some of the significant locations in the novel. Have you personally visited all of these places? Generally speaking, how has travel informed your writing?

All locations in the novel are real places in Rome and New York that have some significance to me. I chose not to name most of them so readers could see each one individually and draw their own conclusions, though people who have spent time in either city may be able to guess. It probably comes as no surprise, having written a novel like this one, that travel is hugely important to me, in writing and in life. Going somewhere new and experiencing different lives and cultures inspire creativity and curiosity like nothing else. And it's an incredible privilege to do so.

The descriptions in *Six Days in Rome* are particularly transporting and lush. How do you approach sensory writing, and how did you go about perfectly capturing the taste of a vibrant wine or the texture of Italian coffee—writing these descriptions, perhaps, far away from Italy?

Writing sensually, with sensory details in mind, has always been what makes the most sense to me. I think it's the type of writing that's most true to life in how we experience the world, through the food we taste, the air we feel on our skin. I'm consistently paying close attention to those kinds of moments and how they create mood or shift the tone in a story. Some of the books I love most have this focus. When sensual details are understood and deployed well, I think it makes for some of the most powerful and universal language we have. There's a lot about being in Rome that affects me powerfully, and that I don't fully understand. It's always given me a deep feeling of calm and peace, more so than any other place. I think, in many ways, writing this story and getting as close as I could to my memories and experience of being there, was an exploration of that, trying to figure it out.

Self-reflection versus external relationships—between friends, lovers, and members of one's family—push and pull Emilia's decisions throughout the novel. How did you strike a balance between these two concepts?

It was important to me to capture the overlap of inner and outer worlds, all our lives living within us at the same time, and how traveling alone can bring that feeling to the surface



Photo ©: Emily Knecht

So I was committed to reflecting that on the page, as accurately as I could. Much of this was trial and error, reading and rereading and making sure that I was writing equal parts internally and externally, not lingering too long in a memory or scene. All with the hope that Emilia's voice would be strong and clear enough to carry these shifts and not lose the reader in the process.

Describe Emilia's work as an artist and the way she satirizes contemporary life. What made you decide on this career path for Emilia, and play with the ideas of connection, relatability, and "accidental anthropology" through art?

I knew from the start that she would be an artist (still creative, in a different way than her father), but wanted to explore what that meant in today's world. What it is to be an artist has changed significantly, with the rise of social media and all the different ways art can be appreciated and dismissed. The art world has always been status-obsessed and changeable, but there's no doubt that the internet has made it easier to both show your art to a huge audience and also feel rejected or dissatisfied by that response.

It can be challenging to write about technology, especially as it's come to touch every part of our lives. But I decided to embrace it, instead of dancing around it, and it gave me the opportunity to better understand how Emilia sees the world, what she values, what success and shame look like to her.

Emilia's father is loosely based on the singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen. What about Cohen inspired you to do this, and why did you want to explore a daughter's relationship with a famous father?

I'd always admired Cohen's music, but didn't know much about him beyond his most popular songs. A few years after his death, his son Adam put together a book of previously unpublished poems, drawings, and lyrics, and did some interviews about the process and his relationship with his father.

I listened to one, out of curiosity, and the inspiration grew from there. I'd always been interested in the children of famously artistic people, and knew I wanted to explore that dynamic in the novel—how talent and ambition are passed down, or not.

Around the same time, an exhibit on Cohen's life and music opened at the Jewish Museum, very close to my apartment in New York. I spent hours there, captivated. Not just by Cohen's work and history, but by his persona—how magnetic and maddening he must have been. It was a precious moment in the process of writing—my whole life seemed to open up to make room for the world of the novel. It felt like everything I saw and did fit in somehow.

Take us through some of the choices you made while writing in terms of structure, voice, plot, and scene setting.

The structure was set in my mind from the beginning: telling Emilia's story within the confines of a vacation, with pressure building as time passed. I wanted her voice to mirror the way we all tend to talk to ourselves: confessional, unfiltered, sometimes sentimental, and unreliable.

The different scenes that make up the novel were a critical element. Calibrating each one, how they build on one another, and the cumulative effect they have was essential. Any resonance or power this story has relies on that foundation.

What, in your opinion, are the most important elements of good writing?

There are so many ways to answer this question, but, to me, it's honesty, close attention to detail and language, and trust in the reader. I don't think a good story can be a good story if it's badly written.

Describe your writing space and take us through your process. Do you outline or brainstorm? Do you listen to music while writing?

Where I write and when changes all the time. There's nothing permanent or predictable in my writing space, which I find helpful, not feeling as if I have to be at a certain desk to work. However, I am strict about writing 1,000 words a day, which holds me accountable. I find it's better than working for a particular amount of time. I carry a notebook with me everywhere, and have for years. While I don't necessarily make outlines or plan the way a story will end, the notebooks provide structure. Notes taken at different times in my life made their way into this novel. While different songs influence a character's identity or how I see a scene coming together, I don't listen to music while I'm actually writing, as I find it distracts from recognizing the sentences' own rhythm.

Which books or authors have most influenced your life? Have you ever read something that made you feel or think differently about fiction? Did a particular story or novel influence the way you wrote *Six Days in Rome*?

There are far too many to name here—different books and writers have resonated for me at different moments in my life. And there are those that have surprised me, taught me new things about what fiction is capable of. For this novel in particular, I took a lot of inspiration from *The Pleasing Hour* by Lily King. It's another novel about an American abroad, but so much more than that. It taught me a great deal about building a narrative with complexity and writing characters empathetically. It's a beautiful book. This novel was also heavily influenced by film, specifically *Before Sunset* and *La Grande Bellezza*.

What do you hope readers will take away from reading your novel?

I don't think I need to convince anyone of the value of travel, of how transformative it can be, but I do hope this novel explores the idea of traveling alone in a way that's interesting or unexpected or at least thought provoking. This is a story about an observer. Emilia pays close attention to the world, to who surrounds her, and to herself. One of the lessons she keeps learning is that no one's path is fixed. People aren't necessarily what they seem, but most of us are seeking the same things—joy, acceptance, fulfillment, and love.

MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

"Music was very important when building the world of this novel in my mind. Song lyrics appear throughout and there's a reverence for the power of music that's essential to the story."

-Francesca Giacco

Official SIX DAYS IN ROME Playlist

A curated playlist for your book club, featuring music from Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits, Lana Del Rey, Amy Winehouse, H.E.R., Jeff Buckley, and more.

[Start listening now on Spotify.](#)



Follow in Emilia's footsteps on this special [walking tour of Rome.](#)



SIX DAYS IN ROME

NEGRONI SBAGLIATO

This novel has quite a few mouth-watering food references, but this popular Italian aperitivo is perfect before an evening meal. *Sbagliato* means wrong, or messed up, which is kind of perfect for this

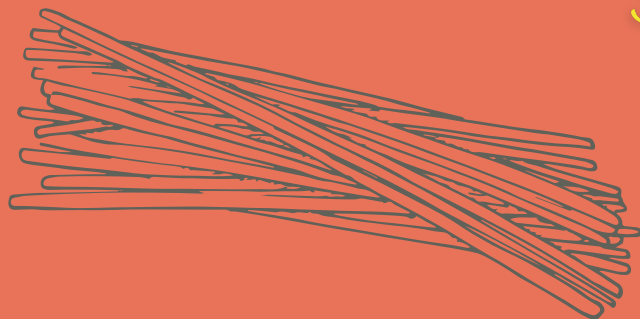
INGREDIENTS

- 1 ounce Campari
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth
- 1 ounce prosecco, or more to taste
- ice
- orange peel, to garnish



DIRECTIONS

Pour Campari and sweet vermouth into a glass, with one large ice cube, and stir. Top with prosecco, garnish with orange peel, and serve.



SPAGHETTI ALL'ACCIUGHE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound fresh fettucine
- 1/2 cup good quality butter
- 6 anchovy filets
- salt
- freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil.
2. Put 3/4 of the butter into a pan large enough to hold the cooked and drained pasta and melt over medium heat. Add the anchovies and stir till they are dissolved.
3. Once the water has been brought to a boil, add the pasta and cook until al dente.
4. Drain the pasta, reserving a cup of the pasta cooking water.
5. Over medium heat, add the drained pasta to the pan with the butter and toss well to coat.
6. Add about a quarter of a cup of the cooking water, stirring well.
7. Turn off the heat and add the rest of the butter, and a bit more of the pasta water, and stir.

SIX DAYS IN ROME

Complete Playlist - Listen Now

"I Hope That I Don't Fall in Love with You"
Tom Waits

"Some Unholy War" - Down Tempo
Amy Winehouse

"I Forgot To Be Your Lover"
William Bell

"Tower of Song"
Leonard Cohen

"One For My Baby (And One More For The Road)"
Frank Sinatra

"Worst in Me"
Dana Williams

"Hard Place"
H.E.R.

"You Can't Always Get What You Want"
The Rolling Stones

"Midnight Train to Georgia"
Gladys Knight & The Pips

"I Know"
King Princess feat. Fiona Apple

"Tell Me More and More And Then Some"
Nina Simone

"F**k it I love you"
Lana Del Rey

"Pink - Live & Acoustic"
LÉON

"Curls"
Bibio

"I'll Be Fine"
Palace

"So Long, Marianne"
Leonard Cohen

"Greek Song"
Rufus Wainwright

"I'll Come Too"
James Blake

"Fool for You"
Snoh Aalegra

"Hallelujah"
Jeff Buckley

"A Whiter Shade of Pale"
Rhye

"Suzanne"
Nina Simone

"All This Time"
Sting

"Hungry Heart"
Bruce Springsteen

"Nearer to You"
Emily Sage

"Glasshouses"
Maribou State

