



# Reading Group Gold

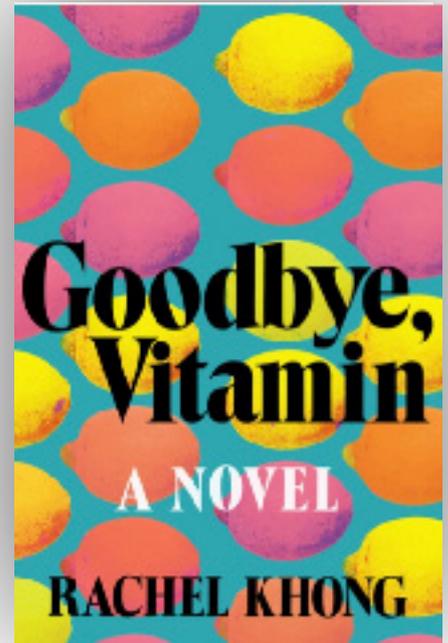
## Goodbye, Vitamin

A Novel

by Rachel Khong

### About This Guide

Freshly disengaged from her fiancé and feeling that life has not turned out quite the way she planned, thirty-year-old Ruth quits her job to aid her mother, Annie, with the care of her father, Howard, a prominent professor recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Ruth arrives home to find the situation more complicated than she realized. As Howard's condition intensifies, the comedy in Ruth's situation takes hold, gently transforming the family's grief into tenderness. By debut author Rachel Khong, *Goodbye, Vitamin* builds with vulnerable insight and a lighthearted wit towards its devastating end. The questions below are intended to facilitate your book group's discussion.



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### Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. *Goodbye, Vitamin* is essentially a story about a father and daughter. Discuss the many layers of Ruth and Howard's relationship.
2. As Ruth finds a new love interest she reflects on her heartbreak with Joel and the failed relationships in between. How is the cycle of breaking, hurting, and healing portrayed?
3. "A few weeks after the engagement someone asked what I was looking forward to, about marrying Joel, and I thought: *the clarity*. But that was kind of pulled out from under me" (page 10). Can there be clarity when things fall apart? Does Ruth find clarity?
4. Howard keeps a notebook of letters to Ruth that he's collected since her childhood. Which notebook entry did you find most resonant?
5. Ruth says, "I think what it is, is that when I was young, my mother was her best version of herself. And here I am, now, a shitty grown-up, and messing it all up, and a disappointment" (page 131). Ruth is slowly coming to terms with how she envisioned



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her thirties. Discuss this dichotomy between our expectations and reality.

6. What roles do patience and forgiveness play in Annie and Howard's marriage?

7. Annie clears the house of all food she deems harmful that might exacerbate Alzheimer's. Ruth and Howard become mesmerized by a Ronco rotisserie. Howard develops a routine of taking a handful of pills every night, "Hello, water... Goodbye, vitamin" (page 172). One could look at their preoccupation with food as a means of maintaining a sense of normalcy. Talk about the theme of food in *Goodbye, Vitamin*.

8. Theo and Ruth convince Howard that he is still teaching despite being placed on administrative leave. All is going well until they are found out, causing Howard to feel humiliated and betrayed. Do you feel their dishonesty was justified?

9. *Goodbye, Vitamin* explores the nature of human connection: husbands, wives, daughters, sons, friends, coworkers, lost loves, new loves, and passing strangers. Of all the relationships, which ones stood out the most for you?

10. "It's a terminal disease, all the literature keeps saying. But isn't everything terminal? is what I say to nobody, out loud" (page 138). How do you think *Goodbye, Vitamin* handles mortality?

11. Before reading *Goodbye, Vitamin*, what did you know about Alzheimer's disease? Did this book change your preconceptions about those living with the disease and the effects on their loved ones?

12. The stigma associated with Alzheimer's disease has a significant negative impact on the lives of both Alzheimer's sufferers and their caregivers. Do you think *Goodbye, Vitamin* dispels some of the stigma associated with Alzheimer's, other diseases, and even mental illness?

13. Would you describe *Goodbye, Vitamin* as a humorous book? How did you respond to Khong's voice?

14. What did you like or dislike about *Goodbye, Vitamin* that has not already been discussed?



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## About the Author

Rachel Khong grew up in Southern California and holds a degree from Yale University and an MFA in fiction from the University of Florida. From 2011 to 2016, she was the managing editor then executive editor of *Lucky Peach* magazine. Her work has appeared in *Joyland*, *American Short Fiction*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Believer*, *California Sunday*, and more. She lives in the Bay Area.

Guide written by Samantha Rose