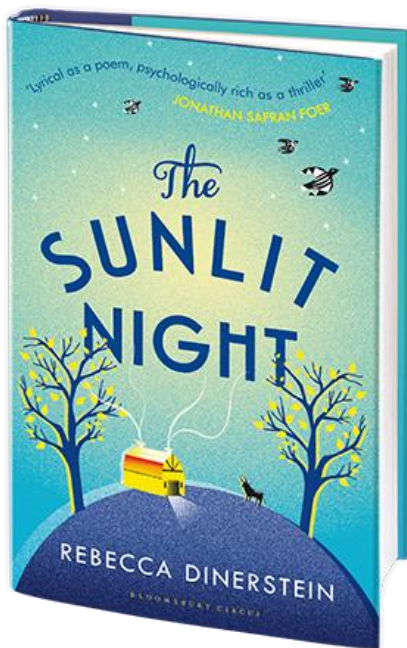


## Reading Group Guide for *THE SUNLIT NIGHT* by Rebecca Dinerstein



### About the book

***Frances had read of a man who painted with only the colour yellow. He lived in the north of Norway.***

In the beautiful, barren landscape of the Far North, under the ever-present midnight sun, Frances and Yasha are surprised to find refuge in each other. Their lives have been upended – Frances has fled heartbreak and claustrophobic Manhattan for an isolated artist colony; Yasha, a Russian immigrant raised in a bakery in Brighton Beach, arrives from Brooklyn to fulfill his beloved father’s last wish: to be buried ‘at the top of the world’. They have come to learn how to be alone.

But in Lofoten, an archipelago of six tiny islands in the Norwegian Sea, ninety-five miles north of the Arctic Circle, they form a bond that fortifies them against the turmoil of their distant homes, offering solace amidst great uncertainty. With nimble and sure-footed prose enriched with humour and warmth, Rebecca Dinerstein’s enchanting debut reminds us that no matter how far we travel to claim our own territory, it is love that gives us our place in the world

### About the Author

Rebecca Dinerstein is the author of *Lofoten*, a bilingual English-Norwegian collection of poems. She received her B.A. from Yale and her M.F.A. in fiction from New York University, where she was a Rona Jaffe Graduate Fellow. She lives in Brooklyn. Follow her on Twitter: @beckydinerstein

### Discussion

1. Why do you think Rebecca Dinerstein chose to introduce us to Frances in the context of her relationship with Robert Mason? How does she see the Masons in comparison with her ‘desperately artistic’ (21) family?
2. Examine the role of landscape in *The Sunlit Night*, from urban to wild, Brooklyn to Borg.
3. Frances says of her family: ‘The only way we knew how to be was in each other’s way’ (16). The layout of their apartment certainly reflects this reality, but in what other ways do the

# B L O O M S B U R Y

members of Frances's family intrude on one another? What seems to be Frances's role in the family, and how does that role affect her?

4. Consider Olyana's first appearance at the bakery. How did your understanding of her reason for being there change over the course of her stay? Yasha reflects on a strong memory of sharing a bar of milk chocolate with his mother. How does this memory—and her recurring association with sweets—set the tone for Olyana's character?
5. Upon meeting Nils, Frances thinks: 'Here was mankind in his original state . . . in all his innocence' (69). What do you think his impression is of her? Do they see each other clearly? Is Frances right about their 'unfulfilled romance' (164)?
6. The narration of *The Sunlit Night* switches from first person to third person as it moves between Frances and Yasha. Why do you think the author made this choice? Were you surprised to encounter Frances from an outside perspective? Why or why not?
7. Consider Vassily's funeral at Eggum. Frances claims her body is 'confused about grief . . . I'm not laughing. I'm shaking' (127). What other aspects of this ceremony struck you as unusual? What affect did they have? What do you think would have been Vassily's reaction to this ceremony?
8. Yasha thinks, 'His mother, and Frances—they did not seem tied to the idea of place. They were the anywhere sort' (140). In the world of this novel, what connects a person to place? Which characters, if any, have achieved that connection by the end? Explain.
9. Consider the use of Norse mythology in *The Sunlit Night*, from the Yggdrasil tree sculpture to Olyana's Valkyrie costume. What links can be made between the real world of the novel and the mythological one Haldor presides over at the Viking Museum?
10. While the first four parts of the novel have places for names, the fifth has a period of time: 'The Other Season' during which the narrative jumps swiftly between Frances and Yasha. How did this shift affect your understanding of their relationship and its future? Why was it important for Yasha to stay in Lofoten for part of 'the other season'?
11. A sense of professional failure weighs heavily on Frances's father. 'What does it matter if you do what you love, if what you love doesn't matter?' (12), he asks her. What conclusions, if any, does the novel reach about this question, particularly with regard to being an artist?
12. Rebecca Dinerstein's first book, *Lofoten*, is a work of poetry. Choose a passage from *The Sunlit Night* that feels especially lyrical, and discuss its poetic use of language.