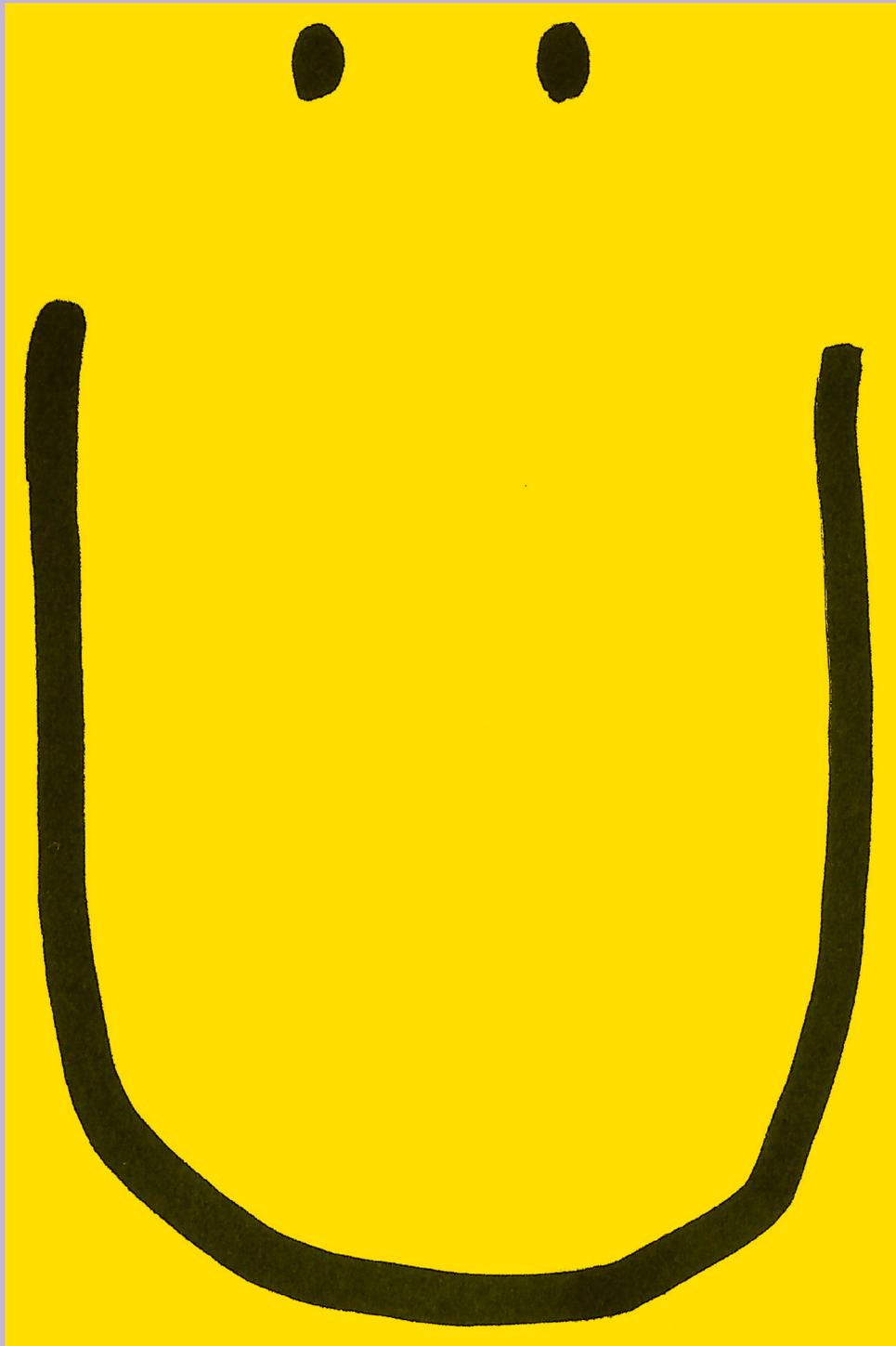


**HAPPY  
CELINA BALJEET BASRA**



**READING GROUP GUIDE**

** ASTRA HOUSE**

# BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

- 1** How does the novel's fragmented style impact the storytelling? What does the formally eclectic and polyphonic structure of the novel suggest about Happy's inner and outer worlds?
- 2** What consequences does Wonderland set in motion for Happy's journey? What structural forces does Wonderland represent to Happy and his community? What is the significance of Wonderland being a copycat of Disneyland, and what do the park's diverse offerings suggest about globalization?
- 3** In what ways is this a workplace novel? How is it the same and different from other workplace novels you've read recently? Do the conventions of the workplace novel in *Happy* provoke new considerations around the politics of labor?
- 4** What are the elements of Happy's immigration experience that feel familiar to you? What are others that feel foreign or faraway?
- 5** Media (such as film, TV, and literature) and food feature heavily in the novel as some of Happy's main preoccupations. How do they relate to the book's larger themes about cultural diaspora, immigration, labor, and human rights?
- 6** Why is it significant that Happy begins in a cabbage farm and ends up in a radish farm?
- 7** What does Zhivago represent to Happy? How does Happy's queerness affect his self-concept and aspirations?
- 8** Happy's dreams are big, but sadly he is unable to accomplish those dreams. How do you make sense of Happy's last acts? Does the ending of the novel unsettle any of your previous assumptions about Happy and his optimism?

# RELATED LISTENING, WATCHING, AND READING

## INTERVIEW

[Electric Literature](#)

## PLAYLIST

[Largehearted Boy playlist](#)

## SONGS

A.R. Rahman & Mohit Chauhan, *Masakali*, from the movie Delhi-6 (2009)

Kraftwerk, *Autobahn* (1974)

Rihanna, *Umbrella* (2007)

Loredana Bertè, *In Alto Mare*

The Animals, *House of the Rising Sun* (1964)

The Rolling Stones, *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* (1965)

Khia, *My Neck, My Back (Lick It)* (2001)

DJ Koze, *Rue Burnout* (2010)

Gigliola Cinquetti, *Non ho l'età* (1964)

Bruno Lauzi, *Ti ruberò* (1965)

## MOVIES / TV SHOWS

*Riso Amaro* (1949)

*La Dolce Vita* (1960)

*Bande à part* (1964)

*Uski Roti* (1969)

*The Way of the Dragon* (1972)

*Rocky* (1976)

*Devdas* (2002)

*Koffee with Karan* (2004-today)

*Delhi-6* (2009)

## BOOKS

Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, 1927

Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, 1941

Enid Blyton, *Five on a Treasure Island*, 1942

Saadat Hasan Manto, *Short Stories*, 1955

## **ARTWORK**

*The Necklace of Mohenjo-Daro*, unidentified artist

*The Abduction of Europa*, unidentified artist, ca. 200 CE–ca. 300 CE.

*Europe and America*, unidentified artist, 1804

*Old Woman Frying Eggs*, Diego Velázquez, 1618

*Pietà*, Giovanni Bellini, 1470–75

## **REVIEWS**

New York Times: [Behind This Novel's Cheery Facade Lies a Powerful Story of Immigration](#)

Washington Post: [The tragic exploitation that puts food on our plates](#)

Telegraph: [A zany comedy about human trafficking? This novel is genius](#)

[Booklist](#) (starred review)

[Publishers Weekly](#) (starred review)

[BookPage](#) (starred review)

[The Common](#)

[BookBrowse](#)

# LETTER FROM CELINA

Dear readers,

In the novel, our hero Happy finds himself on a radish farm in southern Italy, suffering inhumane work conditions alongside other Sikh migrant workers. But nothing cures homesickness like a home-cooked meal, and nothing nourishes hope like a workplace crush . . . Happy's love interest is the resourceful Zhivago, who, against all odds, cooks up a delicious Surinamese Chicken Curry Sandwich for his fellow farm hands on a particularly hot summer day. A true melting pot.

This sandwich—uniting both Indian and Javanese influences, amongst others—was inspired by the real life Zhivago, a dear friend of mine who is a talented cook and anthropologist. Zhivago is Surinamese Dutch. Not only has he kindly lent his name to the book, he has also agreed to share his family recipe, written down and translated into English especially for you by his mother Nelly Bakboord in Amsterdam. Like Happy, this sandwich has traveled across many borders and many tongues in order to find its way to you in the US.

Please accept this gift as a small token of my appreciation for all that you are doing for Happy. I am told that njang switi translates to something like “enjoy,” and I hope you do—both the book and the sandwich.

Thank you!  
Celina Baljeet Basra

P.S. A note on kentjur: a root similar to ginger or galangal, it is used in Balinese and Sichuan cuisine—but is more delicate, less spicy than ginger, almost perfume-y. Depending on where you live, it may be hard to procure, and its scent might waft through your house for days to come, but it's well worth it.

# SURINAMESE CHICKEN CURRY SANDWICH RECIPE

## INGREDIENTS

Chicken cut into pieces (whole chicken/drumsticks, chicken chops)  
Ketjap manis (Indonesian sweet soy sauce)  
Kentjur (or aromatic ginger)  
Laos (galangal)  
Daun salam leaf (Indonesian bay leaf)  
Onion  
Garlic  
A pinch masala  
Red pepper  
Maggi cube  
Parsley leaf  
Fluffy buns: hot dog or brioche buns

## INSTRUCTIONS

Sauté the onions (more than 1 onion) in a small layer of oil over low heat. Add the grated or crushed garlic immediately. Then add 10 pieces of whole kentjur, 5 thick slices of laos, half a cup of daun salam leaves and half a seeded and chopped pepper.

Then add three heaping tablespoons of soy sauce and simmer for 2 minutes. Do not allow the oil and spices to burn. Keep stirring all the time. Add the chicken cut into pieces and keep stirring so that all chicken meat is nicely browned. Then add a cup of hot water and let the chicken simmer until tender. Add some hot water from time to time.

Cut open the buns and generously top with the chicken. Top with a few slices of cucumber and red onions and finish with some sambal if you like.

Alternative serving suggestions:

- Put the Suriname-Javanese chicken in a nice bowl. Garnish with the small chopped flat parsley.
- Serve with rice. Green beans. Long beans. Cabbage.
- With this dish, give free rein to your creative spirit. Try using coconut oil, for example.

Njang Switi!!!

—Nellie Bakboord



**CELINA BALJEET BASRA** is a writer and cultural worker based in Berlin. She is a founder of the Department of Love, a curatorial collective. *Happy* is her first novel.

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