

Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel

By J. Ryan Stradal

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2016 INDIES CHOICE BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD - ADULT DEBUT WINNER

"An impressive feat of narrative jujitsu. . . that keeps readers turning the pages too fast to realize just how ingenious they are."--*The New York Times Book Review*, Editor's Pick

"Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is a terrific reminder of what can be wrested from suffering and struggle - not only success, but also considerable irony, a fair amount of wisdom and a decent meal."--Jane Smiley, *The Guardian

As seen on *The Skimm*: "Warning: this will make you hungry. . . . You won't be able to put it down. And it will up your kitchen game."

"A sweet and savory treat." --*People*

One of 2015's Great Reads, and a "Staff Pick" - *NPR.org*

A top 10 book of the year - Chicago Public Libraries

A top 10 book of the year - *Library Reads*

One of 2015's top 15 novels - *Daily Mail*

One of the top 30 books of the year - *Book Page*

A "Best Fiction of 2015" pick - *Kansas City Star*

A top book of 2015 - *Detroit Free Press*

One of the 20 best fiction books of 2015 - *Business Insider*

A top 12 book of the year - *Los Angeles Magazine*

A top 100 book of the year - Amazon.com

A top 20 book of the year in Literature & Fiction - Amazon.com

A top 12 Fiction book of the year in the Goodreads Choice Awards

Kitchens of the Great Midwest, about a young woman with a once-in-a-generation palate who becomes the iconic chef behind the country's most coveted dinner reservation, is the summer's most hotly-anticipated debut and already a *New York Times* bestseller.

When Lars Thorvald's wife, Cynthia, falls in love with wine--and a dashing sommelier--he's left to raise their baby, Eva, on his own. He's determined to pass on his love of food to his daughter--starting with puréed pork shoulder. As Eva grows, she finds her solace and salvation in the flavors of her native Minnesota. From Scandinavian lutefisk to hydroponic chocolate habaneros, each ingredient represents one part of Eva's journey as she becomes the star chef behind a legendary and secretive pop-up supper club, culminating in an opulent and emotional feast that's a testament to her spirit and resilience.

Each chapter in J. Ryan Stradal's startlingly original debut tells the story of a single dish and character, at once capturing the zeitgeist of the Midwest, the rise of foodie culture, and delving into the ways food creates community and a sense of identity. By turns quirky, hilarious, and vividly sensory, *Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is an unexpected mother-daughter story about the bittersweet nature of life--its missed opportunities and its joyful surprises. It marks the entry of a brilliant new talent.

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Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel By J. Ryan Stradal Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of August 2015: Get ready for the jokes. I'd wager you'll be hearing that J. Ryan Stradal's *Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is "delicious" and that he has "cooked up" a great story about food and foodies, a story that will leave you "satisfied, not hungry for more." I would try not to make such lame jokes here, but what can I say? This debut novel is as tempting as a piece of Key Lime pie, so perfect is its ratio of tart-to-sweet. The ingredients: a misfit Midwestern girl whose special gift happens to be a golden palate; single-parented by a large and lovable father/chef, she can taste a spice in a trice, and manage the hottest sauces west of the Mississippi. Never mind that Eva is shy and sort of weird looking, she knows she's got the secret sauce and she grows more confident by the day, thanks to such concoctions as the simplest pan sautéed Walleye and original, perfect Caesar salad (which, if you don't know – and I didn't – was not an invention of Julius Caesar but rather that of one Italian-born chef named Caesar Cardini). No one, least of all, Eva, is surprised when she becomes a superstar chef in our food-obsessed culture. Eva knows that people do not live by even home baked bread alone – and her quest in this novel is for sustenance of the emotional kind. Whether and where and how she finds it is the book's special treat. And yes, you will devour it. – *Sara Nelson*

From School Library Journal
Stradal's novel chronicles the young life of Eva Thorvald, beginning with her birth to a woman who would rather become an expert sommelier than a mom and who leaves with no forwarding address. Her father dies shortly after of a heart attack. The narrative then moves on to three key moments in Eva's life: in her preteens, her teens, and her 20s. Each section ends in a suspenseful way and many of the characters reappear in later sections. Eva's teen years are crucial to the other parts of the narrative. Her arrival in a new high school brings romance with a boy who is awkward but smitten. Meanwhile, she works in a restaurant to help her ailing uncle and guardian pay the bills. In the restaurant, she learns about food and acquires a reputation for her marvelous palate, preparing the way for Eva's 20s, when her dinners, given as private reserved affairs, bring her fame and satisfaction. There is much to love here for readers of all ages. Stradal's gentle humor pokes fun at such Midwest customs as calling any cold food a salad and satirizes a few young foodies, too. The plot moves quickly, and the unusual and stimulating structure allows readers to think about what may have happened during the gaps. And teens will enjoy seeing a girl who cannot finish high school nevertheless become a success. VERDICT A very special novel most readers will hate to see end.—Karlan Sick, Library Consultant, New York City

Review

"An impressive feat of narrative jujitsu. . . that keeps readers turning the pages too fast to realize just how ingenious they are."**—*The New York Times Book Review,* Editor's Pick**

"This is a book that made me want to have a more full and colorful life, a life with cookbooks and a well-used kitchen, and to delight at all the goodness that can be put in front of us."—***Los Angeles Review of Books***

"A sweet and savory treat." **—*People***

“The author's gentle skewering of foodie snobs (from county fair doyennes to the vegan/gluten-free/soy-free police) is spot on, and the blend of humor, warmth, and longing that he uses to portray family relationships make the book insightful and endearing. Savor it page by page.”**—Oprah.com**

“Kitchens of the Great Midwest is a terrific reminder of what can be wrested from suffering and struggle – not only success, but also considerable irony, a fair amount of wisdom and a decent meal.”**—Jane Smiley,** *The Guardian*

"Warning: this will make you hungry. . . . You won’t be able to put it down. And it will up your kitchen game."***—The Skimm***

"Garrison Keillor’s got nothing on [J. Ryan Stradal]!"**—'Here and Now', NPR**

“A tender coming-of-age story with a mix of finely rendered pathos and humor.”***—Washington Post***

“Stradal’s debut novel tackles foodie culture with all the finesse of a pastry chef…Reading *Kitchens* is all pleasure.” ***—LA Magazine***

"[A] captivating debut novel. . . as surprising and satisfying as a great meal."***—Tampa Bay Times***

“Foodies and those who love contemporary literature will devour this novel that is being compared to Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge*. A standout.” ***—Library Journal*** (starred review)

“*[Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is] the first novel about the emergence and current state of foodie culture… Fundamentally, [it’s] about what happens when opposing personalities coexist: those who bake with real butter versus those who don’t, those who obsess over heirloom tomatoes alongside those who don’t even know what they are. It uses these categories as a way to look at one of the most confusing, liberating truths there is, which is that often the people we think we’re the least like are the ones we end up needing the most.” ***–Book Forum***

“[A] delicious debut from Stradal.. . Food and family intertwine in this promising debut that features triumph, heartbreak, and even recipes.”***—Kirkus***

“Stradal’s first novel is a refreshing and brisk read, with a sophisticated sense of such glories of foodie culture as open-pollinated heirloom corn, pan-seared Walleye and Caesar Cardini’s original Caesar Salad.”—**BBC.com**

“Stradal’s debut is charming, rife with hardy, self-deprecating humor, but in Kitchens of the Great Midwest [Stradal] really proves his mettle as a novelist to look out for.”**—Bustle.com**

“*Kitchens of the Great Midwest* is a big-hearted, funny, and class-transcending pleasure. It’s also both a structural and empathetic tour de force, stepping across worlds in the American midwest, and demonstrating with an enviable tenderness and ingenuity the tug of war between our freedom to pursue our passions and our obligations to those we love.” **—Jim Shepard,** author of *Project X* and National Book Award finalist *Like You’d Understand, Anyway*

“Tender, funny, and moving, J. Ryan Stradal's debut novel made me crave my mother's magic cookie bars...and every good tomato I've ever had the privilege of eating. *Kitchens of the Great Midwest* manages to be at once sincere yet sharply observed, thoughtful yet swiftly paced, and the lives of its fallible, realistic,

and complicated characters mattered to me deeply. It's a fantastic book."— **Edan Lepucki**, bestselling author of *California*

"In *Kitchens of the Great Midwest*, a charming, fast-moving round robin tale of food, sensuality and Midwestern culture, Mr. Stradal has delivered one extremely tasty, well-seasoned debut in what is sure to be a long and savory career."—**Janet Fitch**, author *White Oleander*

"From the quite literally burning passions of a lonely eleven-year-old girl with an exceptional palate, to the ethical dilemmas behind a batch of Blue Ribbon Peanut Butter Bars, J. Ryan Stradal writes with a special kind of meticulous tenderness—missing nothing and accepting everything. A superbly gratifying debut."—**Meg Howrey**, author of *The Crane's Dance*

"An impossible-to-put-down, one-of-a-kind novel. The prose is beautiful, the characters memorable, and the plot is surprising at every turn. I have never read a book quite like this—and neither, I'll bet, have you. This stunning debut announces J. Ryan Stradal as a first-rate voice in American fiction. This is a wildly creative, stunningly original, and very moving novel. I can't wait to see what Stradal does next."— **Rob Roberge**, author of *The Cost of Living*

"A Great American Novel in the fullest sense of the term. Everything you want a book to be."**—Ben Loory**, author of *Stories for Nighttime and Some for the Day*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anne Hahn:

What do you in relation to book? It is not important along with you? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what the ones you have problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy individual? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is gives you the sense of being bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? All people has many questions above. The doctor has to answer that question due to the fact just their can do that will. It said that about reserve. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is appropriate. Because start from on guardería until university need this particular Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel to read.

Janet Warren:

Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in words, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort that will put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel yet doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource information that maybe you can be among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into fresh stage of crucial imagining.

Bernice Martinez:

Many people spending their moment by playing outside having friends, fun activity using family or just watching TV the entire day. You can have new activity to shell out your whole day by studying a book. Ugh, think reading a book can really hard because you have to take the book everywhere? It okay you can have the e-book, taking everywhere you want in your Smartphone. Like Kitchens of the Great Midwest: A Novel which is having the e-book version. So , why not try out this book? Let's see.

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