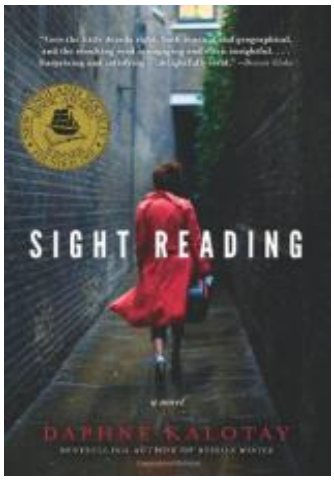
Sight Reading

by Daphne Kalotay



About the Book

On a Boston street one warm spring day, Hazel and Remy spot each other for the first time in years. Under ordinary circumstances, this meeting might seem insignificant. But Remy, a gifted violinist, is married to the composer Nicholas Elko --- once the love of Hazel?s life. It has been 20 years since Remy, an ambitious conservatory student; Nicholas, a wunderkind on the cusp of success and its challenges; and the beautiful and fragile Hazel, first came together, tipping their collective world on its axis. From Europe to America, from conservatory life to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, their lives have crisscrossed, diverged and interlaced, each discovering how the quest to create something real and true can lead to profound personal revelations --- and the unearthing of long-held secrets. As Remy and Hazel find themselves once more linked by shifting fate, SIGHT READING explores mysteries of intuition and perception while unspooling a transporting story of marriage, family and the secrets we keep, even from ourselves.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel's epigraph is a quote from Plato's SYMPOSIUM. What insights does it offer regarding the story that follows?

2. How do the varied backgrounds of Hazel, Remy and Nicholas shape the people they are? For what differing reasons are Hazel and Remy drawn to Nicholas?

3. Early in the story, Hazel believes she sees her doppelgänger. What does this portend for her? Why do you think she is seeing herself outside of herself?

4. Would Hazel and Nicholas's marriage have endured if Remy hadn't pursued Nicholas? Why do you think Nicholas takes up with Remy? What does she offer him that Hazel does not?

5. Early on, Remy wants to live "brilliantly. Freely, decadently?" How does one live freely and decadently, and what are the benefits or drawbacks of doing so? Is it possible for a cautious, careful person to truly learn to let go? Conrad Lesser advises Remy to, "Always be prepared for the unexpected," even as he helps her tap into her desire for freedom; is it possible to live a free, decadent life, yet still be prepared? How does Lesser's advice influence Remy's choices later in life?

6. When part two begins, the story has moved ahead a decade. How have the intervening years affected the trio? How does their own self-involvement color their perceptions of each other?

7. How does her medical affliction impact Hazel's self-image? Why does she still hold on to the past --- what is it that prevents her from moving on? Why is it difficult to see other people being happy when we don't feel that way ourselves?

8. How does Remy's happiness --- or the lack of it --- affect her professional life?

9. Consider Nicholas's relationship with Yoni. What are the unspoken nuances of this friendship? When Yoni tells Nicholas, "I sometimes find you careless with Remy's heart," is he correct in his assessment?

10. Does an artist have to forget, or take for granted, the outside world and even the people he or she loves for the purposes of his or her art?

11. Do you sympathize with the choices Remy makes concerning Yoni? What is your opinion of Yoni?

12. How does raising a teenager shift the dynamics between the adults in the story? How would you define Jessie's relationship with each of her parents and with her stepmother?

13. As part three of the novel opens, another decade has passed. How has the passage of time affected the protagonists and their outlook on life, love, and work? In what ways have they remained the same? Did your feelings for them change over the course of the novel? Which character do you think evolves the most?

14. Was Nicholas unfaithful to Remy? Do you think couples should be allowed to have a few secrets that they don't share with each other? Is Remy reacting to a perceived betrayal or to her own guilt?

15. There is much discussion in SIGHT READING about what makes something "art" or not. What are your thoughts on the various characters' definitions of art? How do you define "art"?

16. Early on, Nicholas says that "tempo is about more than just speed...It's about the passage of time, really. In our lives...Not just how fast or how slowly the music moves. It's about how fast and slow life moves." How is this reflected in the story? How would you characterize the tempo of the novel?

17. Besides the title's musical reference --- to playing music at first sight, when reading the notes for the first time --- what other significance does sight-reading have to the story? What can sight-reading teach us about life and how to live?

18. When the book opens, Hazel is reminded of her own theory "that what was one person's bane was another's savior and that, in the grand scheme of things, everything worked out in the end." Do you think her theory has merit? How does it play out as the novel unfolds?

Author Bio

Daphne Kalotay grew up in New Jersey, where her parents had relocated from Ontario; her mother is Canadian, her father is Hungarian. She attended Vassar College, majoring in psychology, before moving to Boston to attend Boston University's graduate program in fiction writing. She stayed on at BU to study with Saul Bellow as part of the University Professors program, where she earned a PhD in Modern and Contemporary literature, writing her dissertation on one of her favorite writers, Mavis Gallant. Her interview with Mavis Gallant can be found in the *Paris Review*'s Writers-at-work series.

At Boston University, Daphne's stories won the school's Florence Engell Randall Fiction Prize and a Henfield Foundation Award. Her first book, the fiction collection CALAMITY AND OTHER STORIES, includes work first published in *Agni*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The Literary Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Prairie Schooner*, and was short-listed for the Story Prize.

Daphne has taught literature and creative writing at Boston University, Skidmore College and Middlebury College. She lives in the Boston area.

Critical Praise

?Kalotay?s writing is clear and evocative, allowing the reader to ?hear? the music some of her characters are playing?Kalotay infuses each of the characters with total believability stemming from her understanding of classical music and her perceptions of human nature. She is a very wise writer, at least in her understanding of human behaviour, and her brilliant intuitions are augmented by her lyrical writing. She knows music and understands musicians, and that makes *Sight Reading* not only a gift to the harmonically challenged but to the rest of us.?

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