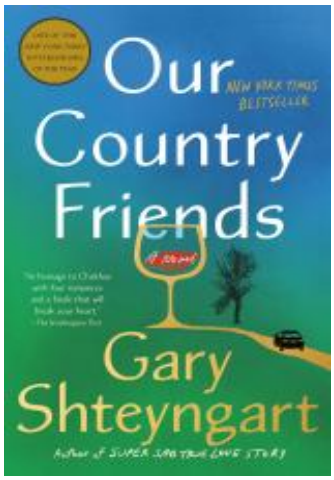
Our Country Friends

by Gary Shteyngart



About the Book

Eight friends, one country house, four romances and six months in isolation --- a novel about love, friendship, family and betrayal, a book that reads like a great Russian novel, or Chekhov on the Hudson, by a novelist *The New York Times* calls ?one of his generation?s most original writers.?

It?s March 2020, and a calamity is unfolding. A group of friends and friends-of-friends gathers in a country house to wait out the pandemic. Over the next six months, new friendships and romances will take hold, while old betrayals will emerge, forcing each character to reevaluate whom they love and what matters most. The unlikely cast of characters includes a Russian-born novelist; his Russian-born psychiatrist wife; their precocious child obsessed with K-pop; a struggling Indian American writer; a wildly successful Korean American app developer; a global dandy with three passports; a Southern flamethrower of an essayist; and a movie star, the Actor, whose arrival upsets the equilibrium of this chosen family.

Both elegiac and very, very funny, OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS is the most ambitious book yet by the author of the beloved bestseller SUPER SAD TRUE LOVE STORY.

Discussion Guide

1. How did you come to OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS? What was your overall impression of the story, the writing, the style? If you have read Gary Shteyngart before, how does this novel compare to his others? How is it different?

2. The catalyst for the story is the pandemic. What was your experience when a huge swath of the nation went into lockdown? If you created a pod with neighbors and/or extended family or friends, were there any particularly charged dynamics at play?

3. The milieu of the novel is Chekhovian: a group of family and friends at a country estate. Which characters resonated most with you and why?

4. Next to the rusted antique bathroom mirror in The Writer?s Cottage is a framed James Baldwin quote: ?Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.? What does this quote mean to you, and how does it relate to OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS?

5. Couplings, hook-ups, crushes: OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS is full of desire. Were there any romances or lustful encounters that were unexpected? Was there a pair you wished had gotten together? If so, who and why?

6. The Actor falls hard for Dee after experiencing Karen?s app, Tröö Emotions. Do you believe in love at first sight? What have been your experiences with finding The One? When it comes to love, do you believe in soulmates or serendipity, or something else entirely?

7. When Sasha first encounters the mysterious black pick-up truck, what did you think it was or what did it represent?

8. There are betrayals in this novel, but the biggest is between Sasha and Vinod involving the latter?s manuscript. What does it say about their friendship that Vinod stayed after learning of Sasha?s treacherous act? ?They continued to assemble for dinner, [but] a new quiet reigned...mostly brooding silence as the bungalow residents absorbed what their host had done against their most kindly member.?

9. Sasha muses: ?There?s a Russian term: krutista, meaning ?to spin around.? To spin around from one thing to another trying to make ends meet. That?s the human condition for most of us.? What do you think of this observation? Passion, regret, mortality. In this novel, which themes about the human condition moved you?

10. What did you think of the ending of OUR COUNTRY FRIENDS? If you could suggest an alternative ending, what would it be?

Author Bio

Gary Shteyngart was born in Leningrad in 1972 and came to the United States seven years later. His debut novel, THE RUSSIAN DEBUTANTE'S HANDBOOK, won the Stephen Crane Award for First Fiction and the National Jewish Book Award for Fiction. His second novel, ABSURDISTAN, was one of the *New York Times Book Review*?s 10 Best Books of the Year. His novel, SUPER SAD TRUE LOVE STORY, won the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize and became one of the most iconic novels of the decade. His memoir, LITTLE FAILURE, was a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist. His books have been published in 30 countries. He lives in New York with his wife and son.

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