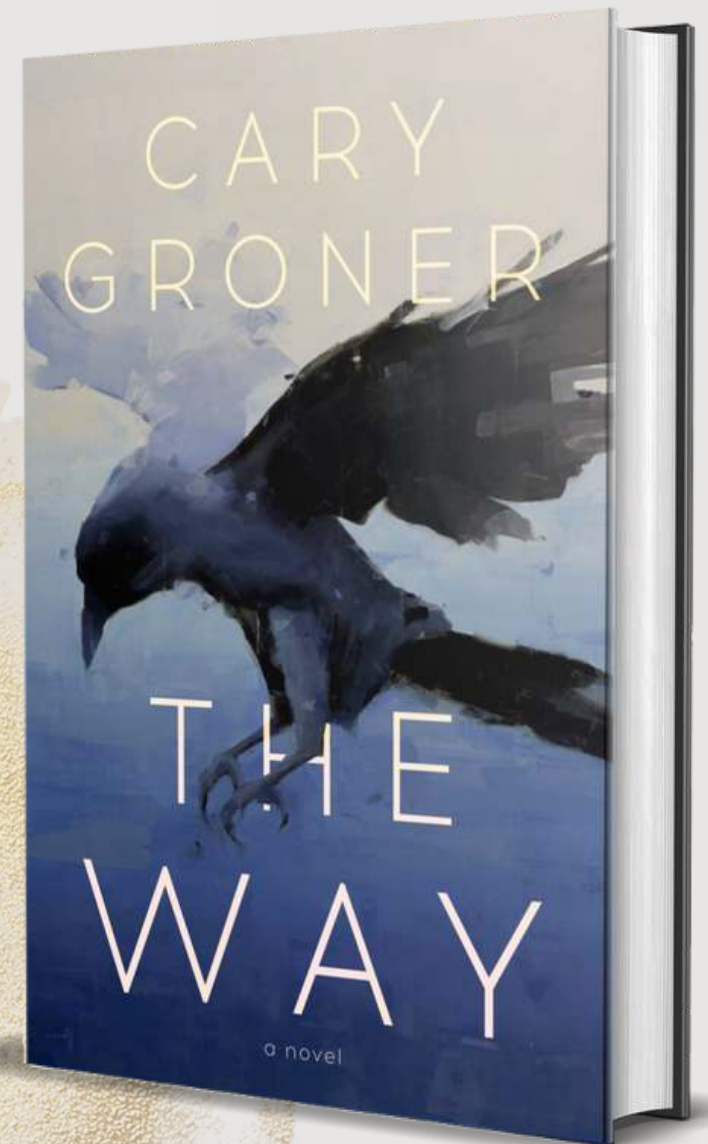


Book Club Kit



“Part page-turner, part love story, partly a plea for respect of both human and animal life, *The Way* heightened my appreciation for what I too often take for granted.”

—Roland Merullo, author of *Breakfast with Buddha*

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Readers,

I've always loved reading my stories to small groups of friends and family, almost as if I were tucking everyone in at bedtime. I feel deeply connected to the ancient tradition of oral storytelling, and I've never felt that a story is truly complete until I've read it aloud. I can't visit every book club that's reading *The Way* and do this, alas, but I very much like the feeling of community and sharing I get when I think of all those people reading my book at the same time, then discussing it together. It's an honor.

Increasingly, the world is changing at a rate it's hard to keep up with, presenting ever new uncertainties. I'm often both intrigued and vexed by the challenges of living a harmless life in a dangerous world. Such concerns are central to living as a Buddhist, but they're also important to many people regardless of any spiritual inclinations they may feel. All of us make choices, large and small, about such ethical matters every day. In creating the character of Will, I hoped to show that even in extremis we can usually find our way to a solution to our problems that involves as little collateral damage to the rest of the world as possible. Will is a flawed protagonist, certainly, as all interesting characters are; who can relate to perfection? That said, I hope his story, along with those of Sophie and Eva, will strengthen your belief in the power of forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

Warmly,

Cary Groner



A MEDITATION FROM CARY GRONER

Find a comfortable sitting position, either in a chair, on a cushion on the floor, or on a small meditation bench if you have one. Just find a spot that allows you to relax, inside your dwelling or outside (though if you're outside it's best to find a private space where people can't see or disturb you).

As you settle in, leave your eyes open and gaze gently at an object in front of you. It could be anything—a vase, a rock, a plant, whatever's easy and at hand. The ideal placement of the object is a little below the horizon line, so that your gaze is slightly lowered, but not aimed too far downward. Ideally you'll hold your back fairly straight, but don't force it to the point of discomfort.

Now, as you allow your gaze to rest softly on the object, pay attention to your breath. You don't need to do anything with it; just allow yourself to inhale and exhale naturally, watching the breath as it comes and goes.

Continue this for ten or fifteen minutes, then gradually soften your gaze even further so you're not really watching the object in front anymore. You're seeing, but you're not focused on anything in particular.

After a few minutes of this, become aware of other sensations, even as you continue to watch the breath. There's the pressure of your body on your seat; how does that feel? You may hear nearby sounds—of birds or cars, or just the wind in the trees. Allow yourself to notice these sounds, over time, but don't reach your mind out to them; it's as if your mind is a still lake, now, and all these things that arise are simply reflected in its surface.

Rest calmly there, watching the breath, and just allow all the sensory sensations to reach you, without any need to do anything. If you begin to feel a little sleepy, just be aware of it, and gently bring yourself more into wakefulness. At a certain point you may find it more interesting to just notice the sounds and sensations that arise, rather than continuing to watch the breath. Either way is fine.

You can rest in this state for as long as you like. Eventually, when you're ready to end the session, allow your gaze to focus on the object in front again, and gently rouse yourself. Move your feet a little and wiggle your fingers. Finally, make an aspiration that all beings find happiness and joy in life.



WILD CHICKEN SOUP

If you've read the book, you'll understand the importance of wild chicken soup to the story. You may not have wild chicken easily available unless you live in the country (or in certain parts of Hawaii), but most natural food stores have a pretty good free-range approximation.

Chicken soup is a traditional remedy for colds and other virus infections. Cooked chicken broth contains important amino acids, and vegetables such as garlic, onions, and leeks contain phytochemicals with a variety of healthful characteristics. And speaking of health, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw poultry.

Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken, ideally wild or free-range
- 3 carrots
- 1 onion
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 leek
- 2 stalks of celery
- A dash of salt
- A dash of pepper

OPTIONAL

- 2 potatoes (if you like your soup thicker)
- Chicken broth

Directions

Makes 4 to 6 servings

- Fill a pot with water, chicken broth, or some combination of the two.
- Remove the innards of chicken, wash it, and add it to the pot.
- Boil the bird for 60–90 minutes, until the meat is loose and falling off the bones.
- Cut up the veggies, then add them to the pot about a half hour from the end of the cooking time.
- Remove the chicken, discard the bones and skin, then cut or shred the meat and put it back into the pot with the vegetables.
- Season to taste, then keep at a simmer until ready to serve.



GINGER AND LEMON TEA

Ingredients

- 1 Ginger root
- 1 lemon
- 2 cups of water

Directions

Makes 2-3 servings

- Peel a bit of ginger root; it should be a couple of inches long and about an inch in diameter. (Depending on the root, it can be easier to use a sharp paring knife than a potato peeler.)
- Dice the ginger.
- Slice the lemon into wedges.
- Bring water to a boil, then add the ginger.
- Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for about 10 minutes.
- Squeeze in fresh lemon to taste.



THE WAY PLAYLIST

“Night Ride Home”

by Joni Mitchell

“My Hometown”

by Bruce Springsteen

“Alexandra Leaving”

by Leonard Cohen

“Darkness on the Edge of Town”

by Bruce Springsteen

“Fields of Gold”

by Eva Cassidy

“Free Man in Paris”

by Joni Mitchell

“Gabriel’s Oboe”

by Lucia Micarelli

“Stable Song”

by Gregory Alan Isakov

“New World Symphony”

by Antonin Dvorak

“Come Healing”

by Leonard Cohen

“Gymnopedies”

by Erik Satie

“Little Green”

by Joni Mitchell

“Take It With Me”

by Tom Waits

“California”

by Joni Mitchell



Listen on Spotify by scanning the code to the right with your mobile device.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** A central theme in *The Way* tackles the ability to live a nonviolent life in increasingly volatile times. How does Will confront this throughout the novel? Do you think it's possible to survive in a world like *The Way* has created and avoid causing harm to others?
- 2.** To cope with the stress of his travels, Will writes letters to his former lover, Eva, whom he presumes to be dead. What role do the letters play in Will's emotional life, and how do they affect the story's ultimate outcome?
- 3.** Cassie and Peau prove themselves to be not only vital to Will's cross-country mission but also to be excellent companions that help Will fend off loneliness in isolating times. If you could fully communicate with your animals, what would you like to tell them? And if they could reply, what do you think they might tell you in return? How might that relationship change as a result?
- 4.** How does Will's relationship with Sophie evolve throughout the course of the novel? How do they help each other change and grow, both as individuals and in how they relate to each other? Is there a particular scene where you felt their relationship shift?
- 5.** Discuss this quote from *The Way*: "In a hundred years, I suspected, people would look back at us, at the world of ease and plenty we'd enjoyed, and shake their heads in similar bewilderment: How did they not see it coming?" What parallels do you see with the world we're currently living in?

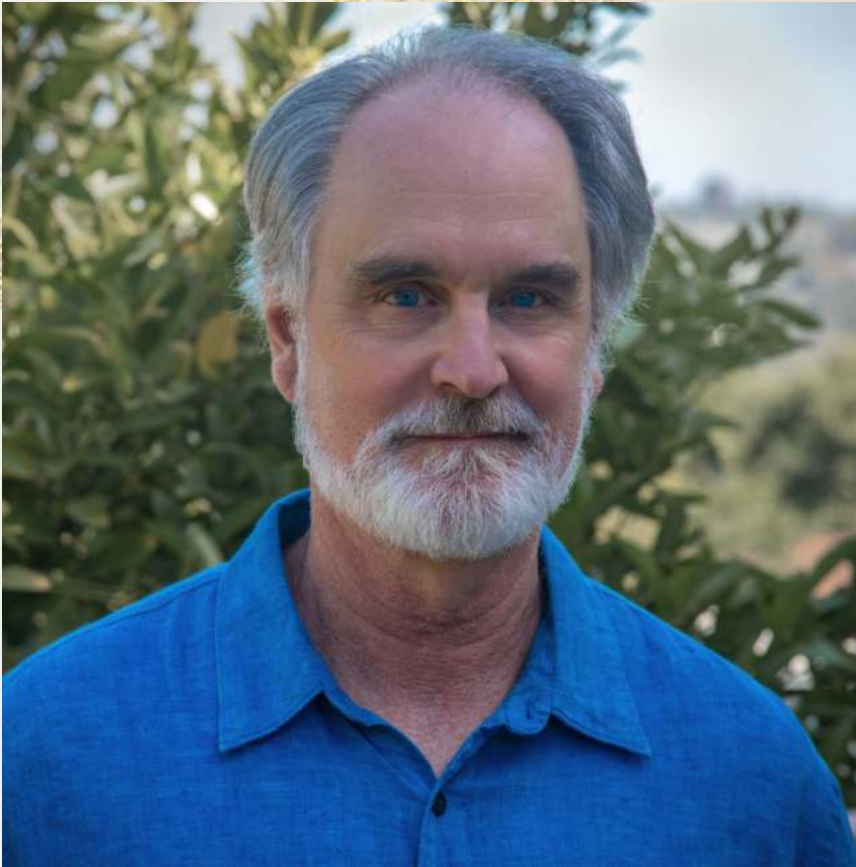


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

6. *The Way* has the classic signs of a post-apocalyptic tale (a world ravaged by a lethal virus, cities and infrastructures destroyed), but it also has an unusual take on that world in that the natural world reclaims the landscape, with herds of wild camels roaming the American West and crocodiles that glow neon green lurking in the rivers. Does this perspective differ from other dystopian books you've read, and in what ways has the the apocalypse benefitted the planet at large? Do you find these changes hopeful or frightening?
7. What was your reaction to finding out Flynn's reason for tracking down Will on his journey to California? Were you surprised? Was there more than one motivation at play?
8. How might the world look different with a potential cure for Disease X? Given how much the world has changed, how would society shift once it begins to expand its population, especially accommodating more older people?
9. At the end of the novel, Will revels in the possibility of a new family unit, thanks to an unexpected twist. What do you think the future has in store for him and his newfound family?



LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH



Cary Groner's debut novel, *Exiles*, published in 2011, was a *Chicago Tribune* favorite book of the year. His award-winning stories have appeared in publications including *Glimmer Train*, *Salamander*, *Sycamore Review*, *American Fiction*, *Southern California Review*, and *Mississippi Review*. He lives with his wife in the San Francisco Bay Area. You can follow him on Instagram [@carygroner](https://www.instagram.com/carygroner).



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