

## *The Care of Strangers* Readers Group Guide

1. *The Care of Strangers* is largely set in a hospital, but do you consider it a hospital story? How do you think the story would change if it was set in a private hospital?
2. Medical care in *The Care of Strangers* is an undeniably intimate act. Characters are constantly being physically touched by doctors and nurses, but it doesn't always seem like the doctors recognize their humanity. Sima differs in that she is most moved by the human side of the patients and their stories. Did this book change anything about the way you think about the practice of medicine?
3. There are a lot of social dynamics at play in this novella but they are not explicitly commented on. For example, the orderlies, nurses, and patients are mostly people of color, but the interns and doctors are white; Mindy and the other interns are more privileged than the mostly low-income patients; and Sima is described as an "invisible immigrant" as compared to the Caribbean nurses and orderlies. Did you think about these dynamics as you were reading? Do you see similar dynamics in your life?
4. Sima's father died in Poland, Mindy's father and Mr. Strom died from heart attacks, and Mars Peabody died due to heart failure. What do you think is the significance of dead fathers in this book? Is it important that three of them died due to bad hearts?
5. Sima's mother is a Holocaust survivor haunted by the anti-Semitism she experienced in Poland. In what ways does her past color her interactions with Sima? Did her past trauma make her a more sympathetic character?
6. Both Sima and Mindy start the book as passive characters, but eventually start to assert themselves. In what ways do Sima and Mindy's journeys mirror each other? Do you think they would have grown in the same ways without each other?
7. Should Sima have written the death note for Mindy? Was there a "correct" action for her to take? What would you have done in that situation?
8. What role do you think Sima and Mindy's Jewishness plays in the story? Do you think they would have become friends if they didn't share this part of their identity?
9. *The Care of Strangers* is peppered with one-off stories of patients Sima encounters over the course of a year. Was there a particular patient whose story stood out to you? If so, why?

10. Many characters in this book receive second (or third) chances. Do you think they all deserve them? Do you think they make the best of them?
11. How did you interpret the title *The Care of Strangers*? Can you think of times in your life where vulnerability was a show of strength?
12. Ellen Michaelson previously worked in a Brooklyn public hospital. Did you know that when you started reading? Do you think it made the story more credible?