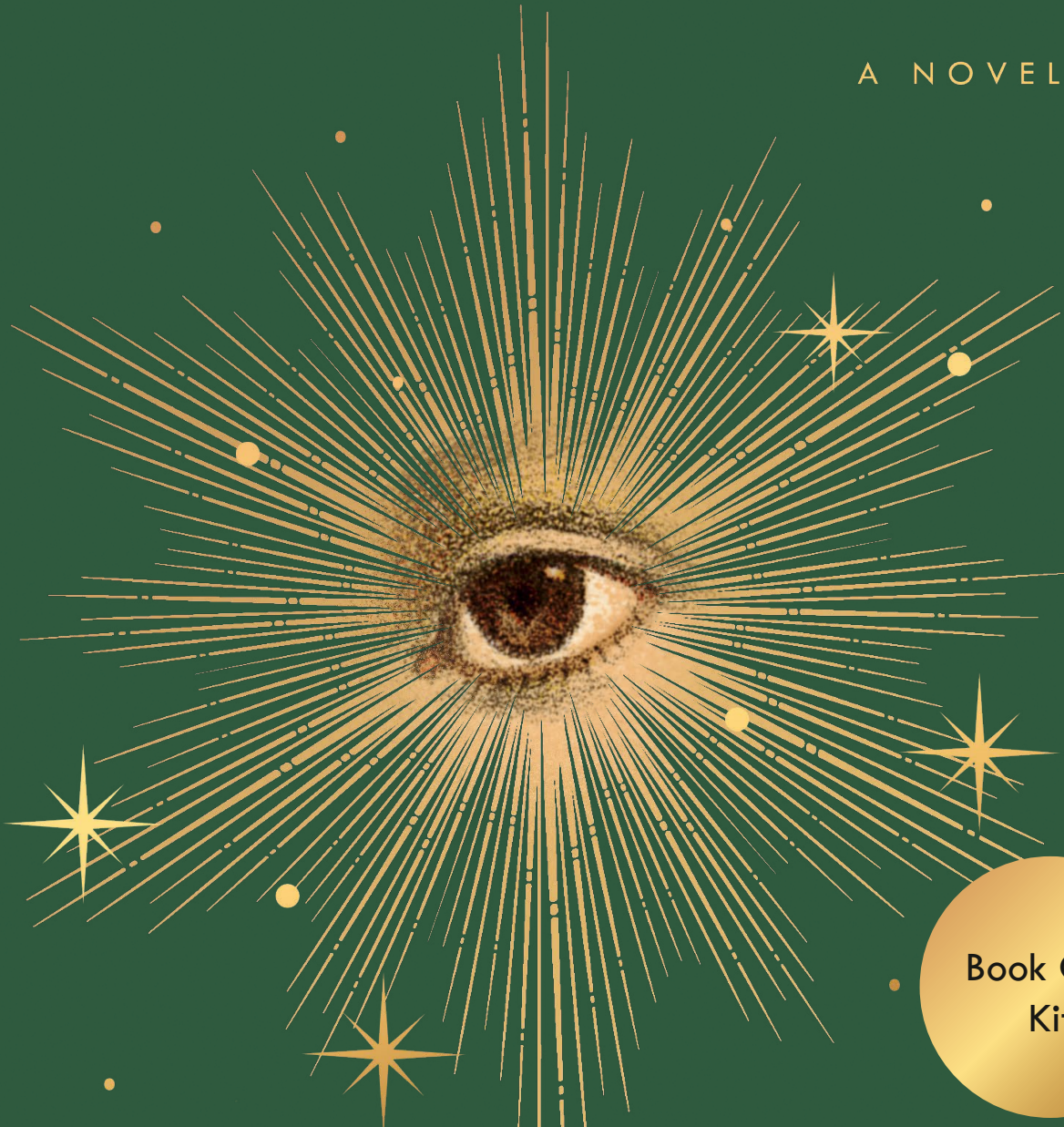


CATALINA

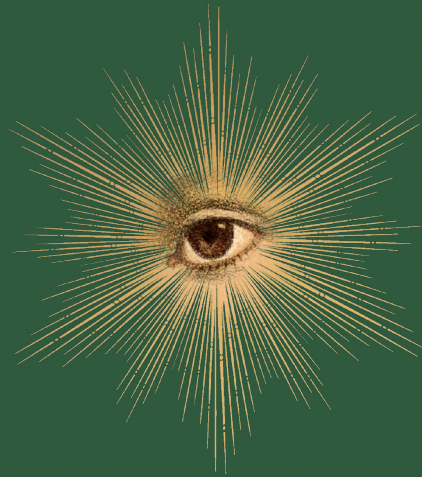
A NOVEL



Book Club
Kit

Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD
FINALIST *THE UNDOCUMENTED AMERICANS*



Dear Readers:

It is with great and terrible excitement that I introduce you to *Catalina*, my first novel.

I wanted to accomplish many things in this book—

I wanted to write a book that could both impress and destroy Philip Roth.

I wanted to disturb the ghost of Salinger and challenge him to a duel.

I wanted to write about a low-income immigrant kid in elite spaces where imposter syndrome doesn't come up at all.

I wanted to write a coming-of-age story about a girl in which there is no rape.

I wanted to write a book that made me feel like I was getting away with something.

In my first book, *The Undocumented Americans*, I wrote about the day-to-day lives of regular undocumented people, not the blessed few. Still, the elephant in the room was always there. I was, to put it politely, Miss American Dream. I couldn't stop people from wanting to talk about Harvard. So one day I thought, why not just give America what it wants?

Catalina is my humble submission to the category of the campus novel. It is also an example of be careful what you wish for.

Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

Discussion Questions

1. What were your first impressions of Catalina as a character? How did they change over the course of the novel?
2. What does *Catalina* have in common with other books in the “campus novel” genre? In what ways does it stand out?
3. *Catalina* is full of cultural references, from “lowbrow” nods to music and pop culture to highbrow citations of the Western literary canon. How did these references influence your reading experience?
4. How does Catalina relate to—and feel separate from—her fellow Dreamers?
5. Discuss Catalina's relationship to Ecuador. How does it compare to her relationship with America?
6. “The problem with being an object of beauty, a beautiful object, is that you exist only when you're looked at . . . It feels like soul death when their eyes are off you,” Catalina says. How does it affect Catalina's sense of self to be constantly objectified by those around her? How does she begin to see herself as a subject? What were the major turning points in this journey?
7. Catalina has her share of struggles, but she never doubts that she belongs in the Ivy League alongside her peers. What was it like to experience life through the eyes of a character who doesn't struggle with impostor syndrome?
8. What does Catalina want from Nathaniel? What does he want from her?
9. What is Catalina's relationship with her grandparents like? How do their expectations of her affect the relationship?
10. Discuss the documentary Catalina works on with Byron. Where does this go wrong? How, if at all, do you think the project could have succeeded?
11. What is the significance of the khipu in the novel?
12. What do you think happens to Catalina after the novel ends? What feelings were you left with about her future?
13. If you could ask Karla Cornejo Villavicencio anything about *Catalina*, what would you ask?