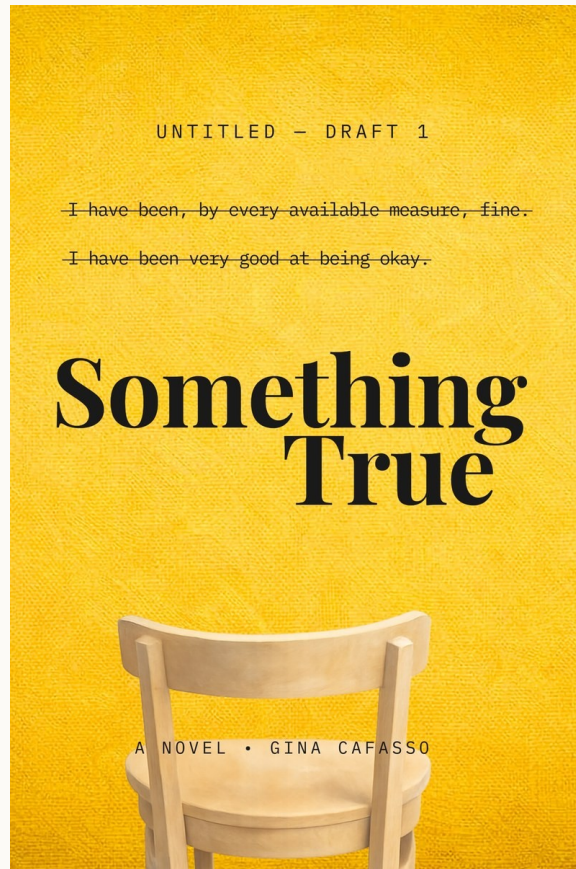


A READING GROUP GUIDE



Something True

a novel by Gina Cafasso

The difference between being adored and being chosen.

Discussion questions, themes, a lighter round, and a few ideas for hosting your night. Best read after you have finished the book.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A note from Gina

Thank you for choosing *Something True* for your group. Vera has spent a lifetime being the person everyone counts on, and she is very good at being okay. I wrote this book for the women who recognize that sentence, and for the people who love them. If a room full of readers ends up arguing about Marcus, laughing at the pelican, and then getting quiet for a minute about a letter, then the book did its job.

A word of warning: these questions assume everyone has finished the book. There are spoilers from the first page of the discussion section onward. Pour accordingly.

And if your group would like company, I join book club calls, and I am glad to visit local groups in Southern California in person. Details are on the last page. I would love to hear what you argued about.

Gina

San Diego, 2026

How to use this guide

There is no right way to run a book club, and Vera would be the first to say that the rulebook does not exist. A few suggestions:

- Pick five or six questions rather than trying to cover all of them. The best conversations usually wander off the page anyway.
- The questions are grouped by the three parts of the novel, with a final set that looks at the whole book. If your group reads in installments, each section stands on its own.
- The Lighter Round is there for when the conversation needs a breath, or when someone has just cried a little and everyone is pretending not to notice.
- Hosting ideas near the end lean on the book: a table set for six, a Meyer lemon, coffee made with no particular procedure.

I have spent twenty years writing a sentence that begins I want to write something true. This is what came after.

SOMETHING TRUE, CHAPTER ONE

About Something True

Vera is fifty-four, a grants director in San Diego, and by every observable measure fine. She is the person who knows where everything is and how to fix it, a role she has held for eleven years at work and for most of her life everywhere else. On her last day at the company, over cake and careful compliments, a colleague remarks that she never once saw Vera eat lunch alone. Vera goes home to a condo with a patio table set for six, where she is the only regular guest, and opens a blank document that begins: I want to write something true.

Her freedom starts quietly and then starts asking questions. There is Marcus, who has adored her from a careful distance for seven years without ever choosing her. There is Diane, the twenty-year friend whose phone calls are weather systems, and Nell, the oldest friend, three years unseen. There is Rosa, a young mentee who studies Vera like she has it all figured out, and a neighborhood bookshop with handwritten shelf tags, where the quiet owner, Jerome, arrives rather than approaches.

Then routine bloodwork comes back wrong, and an envelope sits in a kitchen drawer for three weeks because managing other people's crises is Vera's specialty and having one of her own is not. Clearing the never-used table for six, she finds a letter she wrote to herself at thirty-one and never opened again. It asks the one question she has spent her adult life dodging: whether she ever started the life she promised herself.

Wry, tender, and quietly devastating, *Something True* is a novel about second acts, the friendships that hold when everything else gives way, and the particular courage it takes to stop performing fine and leave a life that is only almost right.

At a glance

Published

July 29, 2026. Paperback, hardcover, and Kindle. 218 pages, in three parts with an epilogue.

Setting

San Diego, mostly. A condo in Carmel Valley with a view she never quite inhabited, a bookshop in South Park, and a Los Angeles that once chose her back.

For readers of

Elizabeth Strout, Katherine Heiny, Catherine Newman. Literary fiction about midlife, with jokes, because the alternative is crying.

Content notes

A health scare and a chronic diagnosis (not the bad kind). Grief for a life half-lived. No villains, unless you count the pelican.

The people in Vera's life

Vera set a table for six for years, for guests who never came. Here is who fills the chairs by the end, and a few who do not.

Vera

Veronica, technically, but everyone calls her Vera. Fifty-four. Grants director, then not. Useful since she was eight years old and not sure what she is without it. The narrator, and the one person she has never told the truth to.

Marcus

Seven years of adoring Vera from a careful distance. He only says the true things, which is the problem: I don't know what I would do without you is not a declaration, and it is not a choice.

Diane

The twenty-year friend. Her phone calls are weather systems. She knew something was off and let Vera redirect her, and she is still angry about it, mostly at herself.

Nell

The oldest friend, three years unseen, who gets on a plane before Vera finishes the sentence. So now I'm here.

Rosa

The young colleague who watches Vera with the reverence of someone who has found a frequency she didn't know existed. She needed to see that capable women get scared too.

Jerome

Owner of the bookshop with the handwritten shelf tags. Late forties, the kind of face that has decided to be exactly what it is. He arrives rather than approaches.

George

Vera's brother. Loud, definitely loud. Makes her promise that he is her first call, whatever it is, before she has figured out how to make it small.

Patricia

Sixty-two, impeccably put together, silver hair she stopped coloring a long time ago, and the posture of someone who stopped performing long before that.

Claire

The name that slips out mid-sentence. Vera meets her with more grace than she expected to have.

Todd

The neighbor with the leaf blower. Brief, committed, completely inexplicable at eight o'clock on New Year's Eve. Goodnight, Todd.

THREADS TO FOLLOW

Themes to watch for

You do not need these to enjoy the conversation, but they tend to be where the arguments start.

Adored versus chosen

The novel's central distinction. Marcus adores Vera and never chooses her. Vera adores a life she would not choose. The book keeps asking what the difference is, and whether Vera has been doing to herself exactly what Marcus does to her.

Usefulness as a hiding place

The first true thing Vera writes is that she has been useful since she was eight years old and does not know what she is without it. Competence becomes a costume. Being needed becomes the condition of her presence, until she has made herself a resource rather than a person.

Performing fine, and the word enough

Enough has been a word Vera uses like armor: adore is enough, the job is enough, this view is enough. The book draws a hard line between sufficiency and satisfaction, and Vera slowly learns that the distinction is the whole thing.

The table set for six

String lights, a teak table, a grill used twice. All the infrastructure of a life being performed rather than lived. The table is the novel's running image, and its meaning changes completely by the epilogue.

Time, and a letter from thirty-one

The letter Vera sealed at thirty-one is less a message than a list of promises. Write something true. Let someone see the unmaintained version. Be someone's first call. Dance the real way. Stop performing enough. The diagnosis makes the list urgent: time is not infinite, and she has been spending hers on standby.

Friendship in two registers

Diane says That's on me. Nell says So now I'm here. Two women who love Vera differently, and who both refuse, in the end, to let her make it small.

A place that chooses you back

Los Angeles grabbed Vera by the collar. Carmel Valley was where the job was. The novel treats geography as a relationship, and asks whether Vera can live somewhere that feels like it chose her back.

Discussion questions

Grouped by the novel's three parts, then a final set on the whole book. Skip freely.

Part One: The Last Day of the Rest of Her Life

- 01 The novel opens with a sentence Vera has spent twenty years trying to write: I want to write something true. What does true mean to her on page one? What does it mean by the last page?
- 02 The first true thing Vera writes is that she has been useful since she was eight years old and does not know what she is without it. Where does usefulness stop being a virtue in her life and become a hiding place? When does competence become a costume?
- 03 A colleague's farewell compliment is that she never once saw Vera eat lunch alone. Vera hears something else in it: as though being needed was the condition of her presence. Why does this land so hard? Have you ever received a compliment that told you something you did not want to know?
- 04 Vera stands on her patio, looks at a table set for six, and tells herself she is having a wonderful time. She says she understands the comedy. What are the tables set for six in your own life, the things staged for a life not quite being lived yet?
- 05 In Chapter Nine, The Unlived Life, Vera writes that people look at a woman alone and start checking her math. The questions never come from her family, whose only rule was live your life, there is no rulebook. Who gave you that kind of permission? Who did not?
- 06 Marcus says I don't know what I would do without you, and Vera notes that it is not a declaration and not a choice. Where exactly is the line between being adored and being chosen? Is Vera guilty of the same thing, adoring a life she would not choose?
- 07 Nell arrives in Chapter Ten after three years unseen. Why do you think the author gives Vera one friend who is always on the phone (Diane) and one who simply shows up (Nell)? What does each friendship give Vera, and what does each one cost her? Which friend are you?

Part Two: The Void Has a Face

- 08 Vera keeps the hematologist's envelope in a kitchen drawer for three weeks. Managing other people's crises is her specialty; having one of her own is not. Why is it so much harder for the capable person in the room to be the one who needs help?
-
- 09 Marcus is in the waiting room for the bone marrow biopsy, making her laugh because the alternative is worse. Is this the best version of Marcus, or the clearest picture of what he can and cannot offer?
-
- 10 Clearing the table for six, Vera finds the letter she wrote at thirty-one and carries it in her pocket for weeks before she can act on it. Why carry it instead of answering it? If your younger self wrote you a letter, what would it ask? Would you want to read it?
-
- 11 Rosa studies Vera as if she has it all figured out. What does being seen by someone younger give Vera that her own generation cannot? What does Rosa need from Vera that Vera almost fails to give her?
-
- 12 The Dark Night, Chapter Sixteen, is the lowest point in the book. What finally breaks the spell? Was it a decision, a person, or simply time running out?
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Part Three: To the Letter

- 13 The diagnosis is not the bad kind: chronic, manageable, ordinary. Why do you think the author chose a health scare Vera can live with rather than one she cannot? What does that choice let the book say that a tragedy could not?
-
- 14 The Meyer lemon rides home belted into the passenger seat like a guest. It will take years to fruit, Vera thinks, and that is fine. She will be here. What are the lemon trees you have planted, the slow things you are trusting yourself to stay for?
-
- 15 George makes Vera promise that he is her first call, before she has figured out how to make it small. Who is your first call? Are you anyone's?
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- 16 Vera meets Claire with more grace than she expected to have. Did that scene surprise you? What does it cost Vera, and what does it give her?
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- 17 The letter is really a list: write something true, let someone see the unmaintained version, be someone's first call, dance the real way, stop performing enough. Which item on the list would be hardest for you? Which one has Vera already done without noticing?
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- 18 Jerome arrives rather than approaches. He is built as the opposite of Marcus in almost every way. Did you want more of him? Is the book right to refuse to make a man the prize at the end?
-
- 19 Vera decides that Los Angeles had chosen her back and Carmel Valley was merely where the job was. She wants to live somewhere that feels like it chose her back. Is there a place that has chosen you? Did you stay?
-

The whole book

- 20 The novel is told in Vera's first person until the epilogue, which shifts to third person: she sets the mug down, she walks to the small tree. Why do you think the author steps outside Vera at the very end? How did the shift feel to you as a reader?
-
- 21 In the epilogue, Vera's own book is out, and she has called it *A Table Set for Six*. The table is finally full: Nell, Diane, Rosa, Patricia, George, Jerome. What does it mean that the guests are these six people and not, say, a husband and children?
-
- 22 The last words are *She got them*. The list of things she wanted at thirty-one, she got them all, in the wrong order, imperfectly, later than she planned. Did the ending read to you as a woman alone or a woman complete? Is there a difference?
-
- 23 The cover shows two typewritten lines crossed out: *I have been, by every available measure, fine. I have been very good at being okay*. Why cross them out rather than print them? What is the book replacing them with?
-
- 24 The dedication is for every woman who spent years being needed before she was known. Who did you think of when you read it? Did the book change how you think about that person, or about yourself?
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- 25 *Something True* is funny, often in the middle of its saddest scenes: the succulent already going yellow at the edges, the grandmothers turning over in their graves in unison, possibly in harmony. Why does the humor matter? Could this story have been told without it?
-

The lighter round

- 26 The pelican that lands badly on the railing and looks at Vera with the specific condescension of a pelican who has seen better benches: sentinel, judge, or just a bird? Defend your position.
-
- 27 Vera sets a table for six. Who are the five people, living, dead, or fictional, at yours?
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- 28 What line did you underline, screenshot, or read out loud to someone who had not asked?
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- 29 Funniest moment: the succulent's slow decline, the grandmothers in harmony, Todd's leaf blower on New Year's Eve, or a write-in candidate?
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- 30 One early reader said she could see this as a movie or a limited series. Cast it. Who plays Vera, and who plays Marcus? Be prepared to be overruled.
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- 31 Vera stops making coffee with any particular procedure: just water and grounds and waiting. What is the small ritual you would give up if you stopped performing for an audience of one?
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Enough had been a word I used like armor. Adore is enough. The job is enough. This view, these eight years, this version of the life, enough. I had been saying enough about things that were insufficient for so long that I had started to believe sufficiency was the same as satisfaction. It isn't.

SOMETHING TRUE, CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Hosting ideas

None of this is required. Vera would tell you the rulebook does not exist. But if you want the evening to feel like the book, here is where to start.

Set the table for six

Even if there are four of you. Especially if there are four of you. Leave the extra places set and see who ends up talking about them.

Something lemon

A Meyer lemon tart, lemon bars, a bowl of lemons in the middle of the table, or a small tree someone takes home at the end of the night. Vera's family is Italian, so limoncello is not out of the question.

Coffee, no procedure

Water, grounds, and waiting. Serve it in the good mugs at the end, the way Vera does in the epilogue.

A playlist with Heart of Glass on it

Vera dances the real way in her kitchen to Blondie. Build the rest of the list around what your group danced to at nineteen.

The letter exercise

Hand out envelopes. Everyone writes a short letter to themselves to open in one year: not goals, just a list of true things they want. Seal them. Someone volunteers to mail them next September.

A blank document

Vera's book starts with one sentence she has been failing to write for twenty years. Ask each person for the one sentence they would write if they were writing something true. Nobody has to share. Most people will.

Reading in installments

If your group meets more than once for this book, the three parts break cleanly:

- Part One, Chapters 1 to 11: the last day, the blank document, the friends, and I Adore You.
- Part Two, Chapters 12 to 18: the bloodwork, the biopsy, the letter, and Sharp Memorial.
- Part Three, Chapters 19 to 27 and the epilogue: Not the Bad Kind, the Meyer lemon, and the truth, one person at a time.

INVITE THE AUTHOR

Bring Gina to your book club

Joining book club discussions is Gina's favorite part of having written this book. She is happy to visit your group by video, or in person for groups in Southern California, for a Q&A after your discussion. Signed bookplates are available for club members by mail, and booksellers can arrange signed copies directly.

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Where to buy

Amazon (paperback, hardcover, Kindle), Barnes & Noble, Walmart, Books-A-Million, and independent bookstores by order.

If the book meant something to your group, a short review on Amazon or Goodreads is the most meaningful thank-you an independent author can receive. A sentence is plenty.

About the author

Gina Cafasso grew up in her parents' restaurant. They ran it for twenty-six years, and her father came to America from Italy believing you feed people first and explain yourself later. By trade she is a marketer, with fifteen years across life sciences, consumer goods, and hospitality. Something True is her first novel. It is not about her, though people who know her keep insisting parts of it are.

She wrote it for women measuring themselves against a timeline nobody actually wrote down. She lives in San Diego and is at work on a second novel, a prequel to this one, and a book about her parents she has been circling for years.

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