Harry and Dean are twentysomething roommates just starting their adult lives in New York. An encounter with Raquin, the person who was forcibly evicted from the apartment they now rent, illuminates the trauma of gentrification. The characters each seek to be heard and understood in a modern world that is indifferent to the human condition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Roommates Harry and Dean each have a private side that they keep hidden from family, friends—and each other. Is the gap between how we act in public and behind closed doors shifting or changing in today’s society? If so, is that shift generational?

2. Harry struggles with how to act around Raquin. What does Baker’s story say about our ability to connect across social divides and cultural differences?

3. How does the manner in which we inhabit public space (parks, subways, sidewalks, etc.) and private space reinforce or break down the larger divisions in American society?

4. Across the United States, rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and rising housing costs are pushing people out of their homes. How can we revitalize our communities in ways that improve health for all our neighbors? Does improvement need to result in displacement?

5. Together, “Brief Exercises in Mindfulness” and “Paradise” illuminate how destructive racism is. What can we all do to identify racism and work toward a more equitable, healthy society? Do you see signs of hope in these stories?