


READING GROUP GUIDE



Dear Reader,


One of the wonders of moving through this world is how unpredictable it can be. You end up in places you never imagined, doing things that were never part of your plan. And sometimes it all works to your greater joy. As you read this letter, I will have been a writer of fiction for just over ten years. Before that, I was a musician and to make my living doing that was my greatest dream. But the music industry is cruel and if you find yourself crossing the threshold of age thirty without having hit it big, you may reasonably assume it won't ever happen for you. Reader, I crossed that threshold without hitting it big.



My dreams of musical stardom in a shambles around me, I began looking for something I could do that would feed my creative spirit to engage with art. So I started teaching guitar to teenagers at Tennessee Teen Rock Camp and Southern Girls Rock Camp. This experience taught me that I love the way young adults love the art that they love, full-throated, and unabashed in their fervor. It made me want to create art for them. But at that point I was old enough to be Billie Eilish's father. So what to do?

Why, turn to the one art form accommodating of my then-unforgivably advanced age of thirty-six: writing books. Over a span of five years, I wrote four books for young adults. I had a blast doing it—it made me glad I'd failed at music. However, there was a story I wasn't getting to tell in that space—one where someone plans for years on taking one path, and his dreams wither on the vine and force him to take another path that ultimately results in even greater joy. My story.

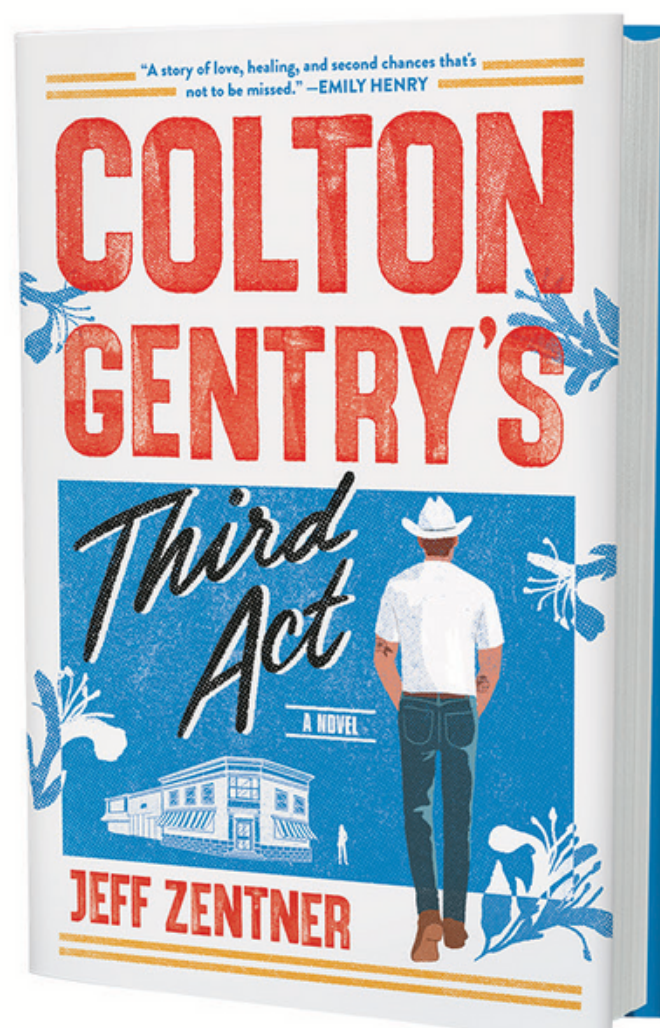
But it wasn't really my story, as I quickly found out once I started writing. It was Colton's story. And Luann's story. And Petey's story. You know how I know? Because I, as someone indifferent to football, wrote a book centering a former high school football star. Because I, as someone who's only ever previously written about misfits and outcasts, wrote a book about a grown-up homecoming king. And that's where the magic of writing fiction lies—creating characters and watching them take over, and realizing how many people face the same struggles that you yourself might feel alone in.



I hope you sense that magic reading this story of high highs and low lows; of small towns and big dreams; of sultry Southern nights and fireflies; of country music and cast iron cookware; of life's second chances and third acts. I hope you cry a little and fall in love a little more and most of all, get really hungry. I'm serious. You're allowed to hate this book, but you're not allowed to say the food in it doesn't sound good.

Oh, and in case the two footnotes don't offer sufficient reassurance, let me assure you here: Petey will not die in this story.

Love,



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Colton Gentry's Third Act, food memories are an important theme. What are some of your favorite food memories? Is there a particular dish or food that's especially meaningful to you?

2. Colton Gentry's Third Act shows Colton and Luann as teenagers and later adults. In some ways, they're the same people they've always been. In other ways, they're very different. In what ways are you similar now to how you were as a teenager and in what ways are you different?

3. Colton Gentry's Third Act shows Colton rebuilding his life after it implodes. Have you ever had a reckoning in your life where you had to start over or reinvent? What was your experience like doing it?

4. What are some of your favorite stories or examples of people reinventing themselves and coming back after a great defeat?

5. If you had to reinvent your life tomorrow, what direction would you take?

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LUANN'S SWEET CORN PUDDING

Makes 12 servings

INGREDIENTS:

2 large eggs

1 (5-ounce) can evaporated milk

6 tablespoons butter, melted

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

$1\frac{1}{2}$ (20-ounce) packages frozen cream-style corn, thawed



STEPS:

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Lightly grease a 13x9-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, beat eggs. Add evaporated milk, butter, sugar, salt, pepper, and vanilla, stirring to combine. Stir in flour and corn.
2. Pour mixture into prepared baking dish. Bake for 45 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.
3. Enjoy!



Listen to Jeff Zentner's exclusive
Colton Gentry's Third Act
playlist

== NOW ON SPOTIFY ==

My Church

Maren Morris

Break Up in a Small Town

Sam Hunt

I Still Miss Someone

Johnny Cash

I Hope You're Happy Now

Carly Pearce, Lee Brice

Cover Me Up

Jason Isbell

More Hearts Than Mine

Ingrid Andress

Clean

Ruston Kelly

Wilder Days

Morgan Wade

The One That Got Away

The Civil Wars

Lady May

Tyler Childers

Shoot Me Straight

Brothers Osborne

Break My Heart Gently

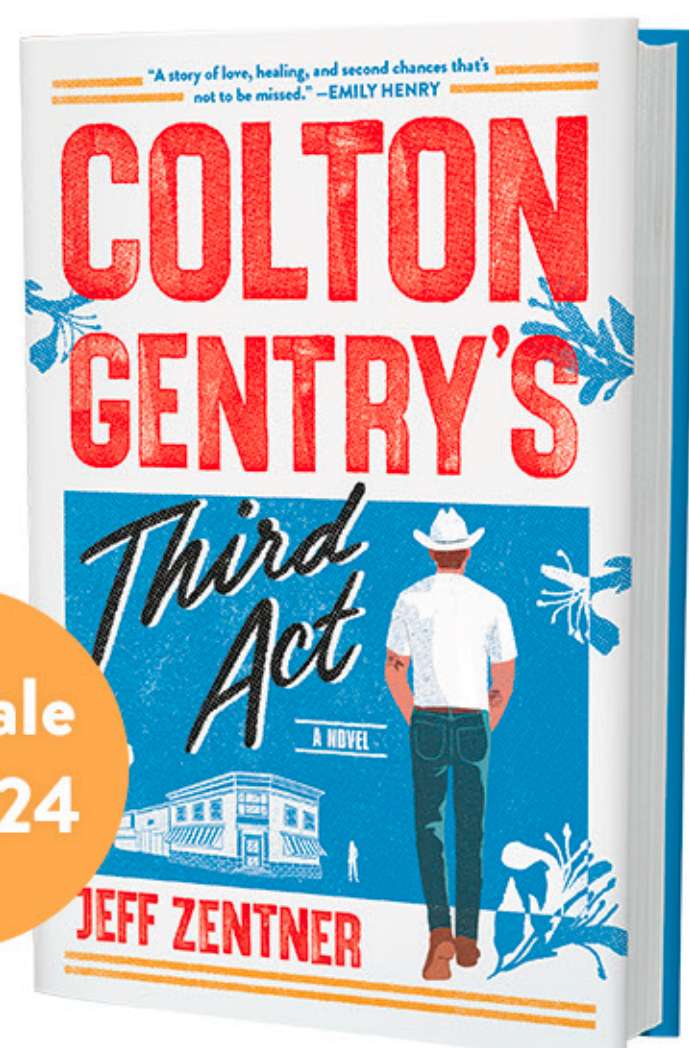
John Moreland

Before Summer's Over (Acoustic Version)

Delaney Ramsdell

Highway Don't Care

Tim McGraw, Taylor Swift, Keith Urban



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