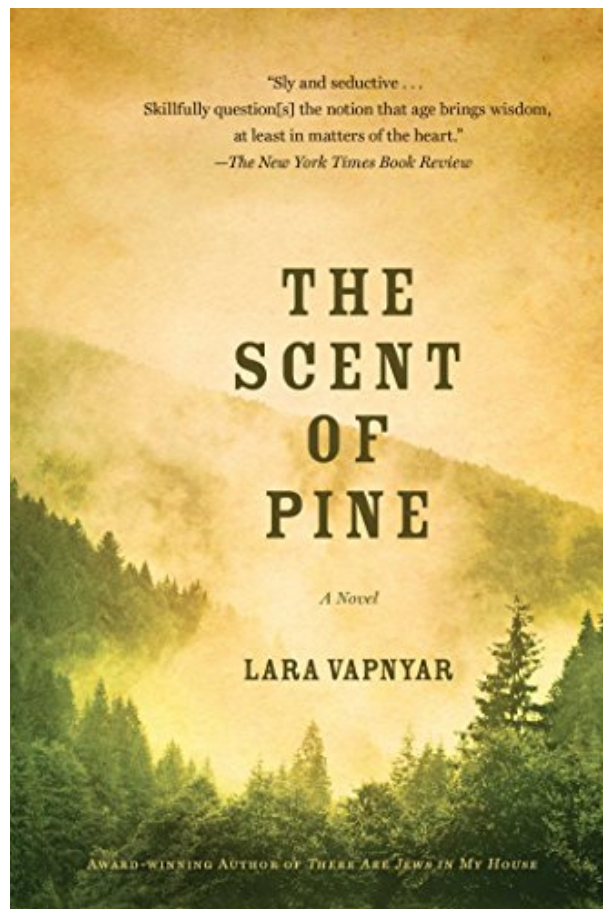
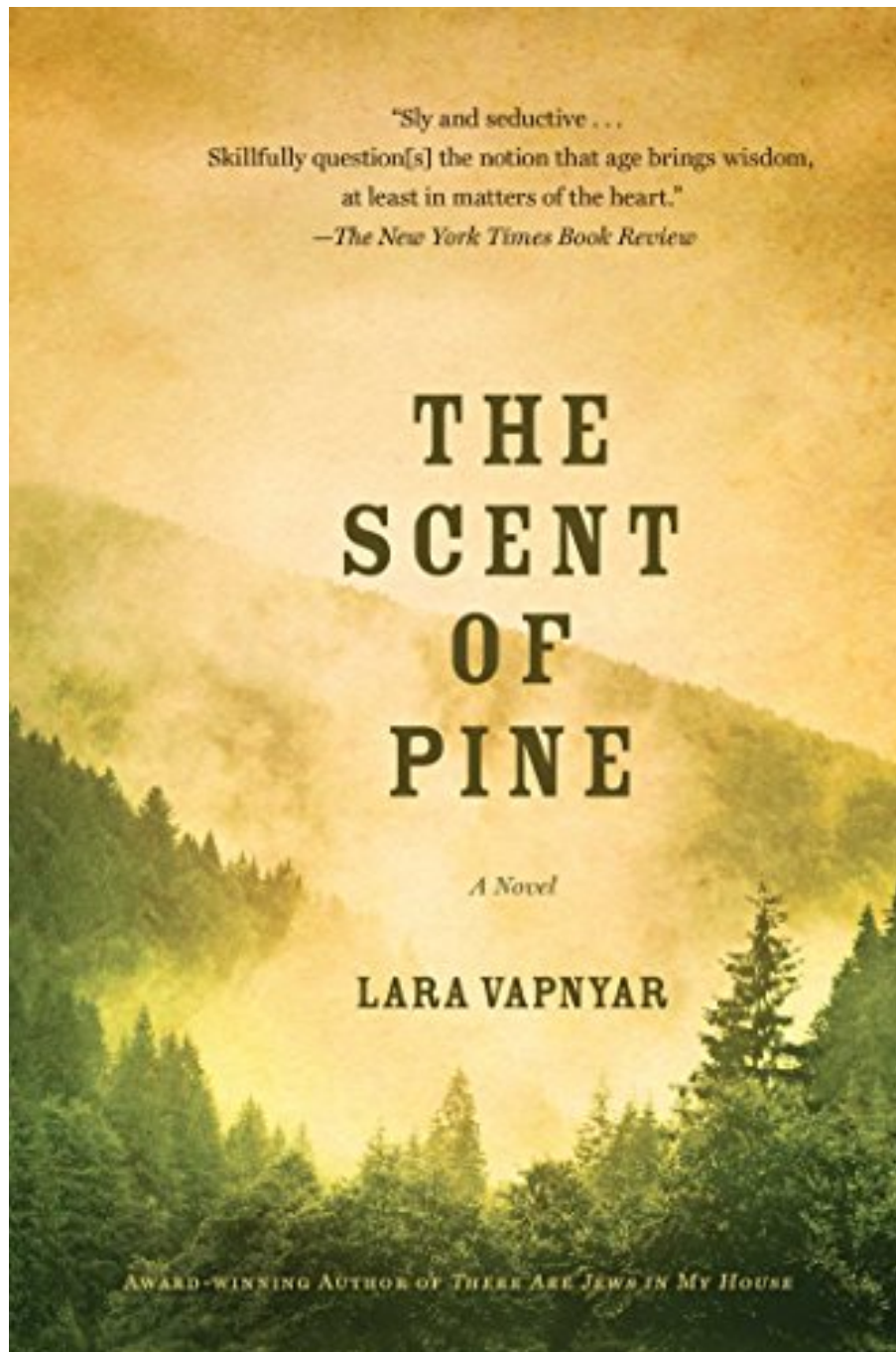


THE SCENT OF PINE: A NOVEL (FIRST SIMON & SCHUSTER HARDCOVER EDITION) BY LARA VAPNYAR



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From Booklist

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"Lara Vapnyar has always written vividly and with a droll sense of humor about personal liberty. In *The Scent of Pine* Vapnyar takes that singular voice to a new level as she examines a singular character's release from her past and her consequential sexual liberation. *The Scent of Pine* is an important novel that questions--and miraculously answers--what it really means to be free." (Jennifer Gilmore author of *The Mothers and Something Red*)

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“A compelling tale of cultural displacement and yearning” (The Boston Globe), from award-winning author Lara Vapnyar: a “sly and seductive” (The New York Times Book Review) new novel about sexual awakening and the relentless search for love.

Though only thirty-eight, Lena finds herself in the grips of a midlife crisis. She feels lost in her adoptive country, her career is at a dead end, and her marriage has spiraled into apathy and distrust—it seems impossible she will ever find happiness again. But then she strikes up a precarious friendship with Ben, a failed artist turned reluctant academic, who is just as lost as she is.

They soon surprise themselves by embarking on an impulsive weekend adventure, uncharacteristically leaving their responsibilities behind. On the way to Ben’s remote cabin in Maine, Lena begins to talk, for the first time in her life, about the tumultuous summer she spent as a counselor in a Soviet children’s camp twenty years earlier, when she was just discovering romance and her own sexuality. As Lena opens up to Ben about secrets she has long kept hidden, they begin to discover together not only the striking truths buried in her puzzling past, but also more immediate, passionate ones about the urgency of this short, stolen time they have together.

“Enchanting...vivid and rich” (The New York Times), filled with Lara Vapnyar’s characteristic empathy, deadpan humor, and striking honesty, *The Scent of Pine* weaves themes of ambition, loneliness, longing, and the fickle nature of desire into a “book of elegant writing and propulsive storytelling” (Chicago Tribune).

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- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x .60" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 192 pages

From Booklist

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Most helpful customer reviews

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Reinterpreting the stories of life

By TChris

The Scent of Pine offers the reader a slice from a woman's life. Lena (an academic who teaches at a community college) might be too dreary for some readers, but the novel offers a valuable glance at her (dreary) life. Fortunately, the novel is brief and the dreariness is partially offset by Lena's lively stories about her job in a Soviet Union summer camp.

The novel takes place over the course of a few days as Lena tries to "solve the mystery of her present unhappiness." Twenty years earlier, when Lena was a student in the Soviet Union who just met her friend Inka, happiness seemed inevitable. Now, having lived with her husband Vadim in the United States for ten years, happiness seems impossible, particularly when she attends a conference to give a talk on Sex Education in Soviet Russia that nobody attends.

Lena meets Ben at the conference. Ben offers to drive Lena back to Boston and then to his leaky cabin in Maine. Along the way, Lena tells Ben (and thus the reader) the stories of her life. In the process, she explores the nature of happiness, questions why the men in her life (including Vadim) have never made her happy and, as she starts to see her stories from Ben's perspective, begins to reinterpret her past. In turn, Ben tells his stories to Lena. But all stories come to an end and, when a comfortable intimacy begins to connect them, Lena wonders about the ending of the story of Ben and Lena.

Late in the novel, Lena learns the truth (or at least a different perspective of truth) behind some of the stories she's been telling Ben about the Soviet camp. Lena is forced again to reinterpret her own stories while the reader learns how the stories connect to her present life. The connection is meant to be surprising and it

probably is, but only because Laura Vapnyar conceals a fact from the reader (and Ben) for the sole purpose of creating a surprise near the novel's end.

To some extent, *The Scent of Pine* is a familiar love story as Ben awakens feelings in Lena that she can't recall experiencing with Vadim. The story is slight but it has the virtue of honesty. Fear of love is the novel's best theme. Lena fears love, not only because love hurts, but because it gives her the power to hurt someone else. Ben says: "practically every single thing that we do is either to distract ourselves from what is wrong with our lives, or to please somebody else, or to shield ourselves from reproaches and guilt" which causes us to live in cocoons, but emerging from the cocoon inevitably hurts someone, so we retreat to its safety and loneliness. It's a sad but not uncommon way of living and Vapnyar depicts it convincingly.

As a slice of life, *The Scent of Pine* lacks the heft of a more substantial novel. Despite its limitations and the rather colorless scenes that take place in the present, Vapnyar's prose style is graceful and the novel offers significant insight into its characters without overreaching. Those benefits make *The Scent of Pine* worth reading.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting!

By IngaKS

My review:

When Simon & Schuster offered me a review copy of *The Scent of Pine* by Lara Vapnyar, I was intrigued. Partially because the author is originally from my neighbouring country Russia and partially because of the blurb of the book. The plot seemed promising.

The Scent of Pine tells a story about Lena who is closing 40 and she has reached a point in her life when she needs to let go some parts of her past and to take a retrospective journey. Her marriage is a mess, she has difficulties with settling in at her new country and her work life is dissatisfying as well.

During a conference she meets Ben, an artist gone academic. There is an immediate attraction between Ben and Lena and when Lena is offered to take a ride back to Boston with Ben, they end up at Ben's cabin. The more time they spend with each other, the more secrets are being revealed. Lena opened up and discovers herself through Ben.

If you are looking for a book filled with wild romance and action, you will be disappointed. It's not that kind of book. It's definitely about passion and love, yes! It's also a story about intimacy. But mostly about sexual liberation and letting go of the past. It's a story about two people discovering themselves through each other. And even though the spacing is slow, it's beautiful!

The story flows like a river. The pacing is in my opinion slow, but interesting. It seems like the time stops while the intimacy of relationships are folded out in front of the reader. Of course, since I was born and raised in the Soviet Union, I might be able to relate to many things what Lena is sharing with Ben. But that's not the most important reason why I liked the book. I savoured the writing style, it was humorous and little bittersweet. Lara Vapnyar is a sharp storyteller leaving lot of thoughts in between the lines. I loved that there was space for my own thoughts while reading.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Slow and Beautiful

By Darian Burns

"*The Scent of Pine*" by Lara Vapnyar tells a story about Lena who at 40 has reached a point in her life when

she needs to let go, and to take stock, of her past. Her marriage is a train wreck, she has adjustment issues with settling into her new country and her professional life leaves much to be desired. ??While at a conference she meets Ben, an artist and academic. There is an immediate attraction between Ben and Lena. Lena takes a ride back to Boston with Ben but they end up at Ben's cabin. The more time they spend with each other, the more secrets are revealed. Lena opens up and discovers herself through Ben. ??If you are looking for a book filled with wild romance and action, you will be disappointed. It's not that kind of book. It's definitely about passion and love, yes! It's also a story about intimacy. But mostly about sexual liberation and letting go of the past. It's a story about two people discovering themselves through each other. And even though the spacing is slow, it's beautiful! ??I savored the writing style, it was humorous and little bittersweet. Lara Vapnyar is a sharp storyteller leaving lot of thoughts in between the lines. I loved that there was space for my own thoughts while reading.

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From Booklist

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