

BOOK CLUB KIT



BERKLEY

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR, ROSIE STOREY

Dear Reader,

Don't let the title of my debut novel fool you—*Dandelion Is Dead* is a story about life.

A few years before I started writing this book, in the dusk of my twenties, my best friend died. She was, and remains, the brightest, most radiant person I've ever met. *Dandelion* is not based on my friend, just as the character of Poppy is not me, but it's the experience of grief that I hoped to capture—of coming to terms with losing someone too good, too young.

Although I wasn't going to be able to give Poppy back her sister, I could show her that she could still be surprised by the heat and humor of her own life. In *Dandelion's* wake, Poppy finds Jake, and a lustful type of hope sparks within her—albeit from a place of great deceit. I love to write about desire and dating, and as much as I am fascinated by the pressures on women in society (*ticktock, ticktock*) I also wanted forty-year-old Jake to be struggling with pressures of masculinity and his place in the world, as well as his role within his own family.

In 2020, it wasn't hard for me to write these characters approaching midlife who are still not totally clear on who they are meant to be and how they are meant to deal with their losses and personal failings. A couple of years previously, I'd kissed goodbye my corporate career and trotted into the darkness, naively believing I was about to become a novelist. I went on to write nine drafts of a book that would never be pub-

lished. Slightly broken, totally broke, I let that first book go. Watched it float up into the Google Cloud. I was intent on giving up writing, like a bad lover—it had taken from me. But in the evenings, on weekends and stealing moments on my commute into Central London, *Dandelion Is Dead* breathed herself into life. This story opened up in my mind like a wildflower.

Just as Poppy and Jake find their way to somewhere hopeful by moving through the warping nature of grief, I believe it's the more challenging times I've experienced during the writing of this book (and this book's older and quite dead big sister) that have introduced me to the surprising beauty of my own life. Towards the close of this story, on a walk along the ragged coastline of her childhood, Poppy's father tells her, "With distance the outlines change." I wholeheartedly agree.

This is a story about truth, lies, lust, and love.

About getting it wrong. About getting it right.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT LIFE.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Both Poppy and Jake have lost the most important person in their lives and are still reeling in their own ways, in their different stages of grief. Is grief the catalyst that unites them? Why do you think they fall in love?

2

Poppy essentially catfishes Jake. Can you empathize with her actions? If you were on the receiving end, would you be able to forgive her once you found out the truth?

3

Forgiveness is a central though subtle theme in the book. Near the end of the story, Poppy's mother tells her: "The best advice I ever received is *to forgive*. Regardless of if the other person is sorry. Or whether they've apologized, or ever will apologize. Forgiveness is something we must do because our own souls deserve that peace."
Do you agree with this notion?

4

When Poppy is deciding whether or not to tell Jake the truth of what she's done, she wonders if he "might understand that not all lies are terrible, and sometimes they are a way of getting closer to the truth. Sometimes, lies are necessary to stay alive." Do you think society's definitions of truth and lies are too binary? Are lies always "bad"?

5

At her engagement party, Poppy reflects on romantic love: “Love . . . wasn’t passion, romance, laughter, or lust. It wasn’t happiness, or Jake, or other people’s relationships on social media, or at the cinema . . . Love could be boring and was, ultimately, uncertain.” How do you feel about her reflections? Do we ever really know what love is? Does it even exist?

6

Poppy grapples with the expectations of women in society, particularly marriage and motherhood. She is not sure if she wants to get married and have babies because that is what she truly wants, or because that is what is expected of her. Can you relate to this complex feeling of pressure and uncertainty?

7

Dandelion defies convention and does not display traits that are typically thought to be “feminine.” She is sexually liberal; she can be aggressive; she does not want to be a mother. She doesn’t care what people think of her; she has no shame; she is provocative and she is prepared to do the worst thing to the person she loves the most. How do you feel about Dandelion? Would you want to be friends with her?

8

Near the end of the book, Sam says to Poppy: “You know that if you walk away from us, you’re kissing goodbye to your chance of having children, right . . . I don’t want to sound like the world’s biggest dickhead, but we all know what it’s like for women once they get to a certain age.” Can you see Sam’s point, either here or elsewhere? What would Sam and Poppy’s life have been like if they’d stayed together?

9

Jake cheated on his ex-wife and is still grappling with whether or not he can be a good man, despite doing a bad thing. When he admits “his greatest shame” to Poppy, he says: “It was once. I’ll regret it forever. And although I *did* cheat, I don’t want *to be* a cheat.” Do you think Jake is a good man? Can he be trusted?

10

Outside of Poppy and Jake, do you have a favorite character? Perhaps Jetta, Stefan, Jake’s dad, Yan, Zoe, Poppy’s parents, or even Billy? What does this character add to the story? How has the author used this character to further plot, or perhaps add color to the characterization of Poppy, or Jake?

11

At the end of the book Poppy and Jake are in love. What do you think their future holds? Can you imagine and describe a photograph of them in five years’ time, either together or separately?