

BOOK CLUB KIT



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** What is your understanding of the term “Jezebel”? How is Christina claiming this identity throughout the book?
- 2** Which items of Christina’s Jezebel List have you checked off in your lifetime? Which ones do you wish to check off in the future? Which items would you add?
- 3** Christina fears that she cannot hear or trust her inner voice because of her previous environment of shame and control. Have you ever been in environments or situations that made you question or suppress your inner voice? How do you know you can trust yourself?
- 4** Why do you think the author chose to engage with the heavy topics of religious and family trauma in a cozy contemporary romance? How do the serious themes and the happily-ever-after genre affect one another?
- 5** Danny’s non-stop dedication to righting wrongs leaves him disconnected and burned out. How can we fight injustices in the world while still making room for joy and self-care?
- 6** Christina realizes sharing her Jezebel List is how she can turn her trauma into a gift. What does it mean to you to turn trauma into a gift? What are the risks? What are the rewards?
- 7** Why is Hilltop University a significant part of this story? How would the story be different if Christina had waited to start her list *after* graduation?
- 8** Danny learns to find the magical in the ordinary. How can we likewise learn to find the magical in the ordinary? What does it mean to be present in each day?

- 9** In the final documentary, Christina claims that truth is more profound than the categories of subjective or objective. Do you agree or disagree?
- 10** Danny recognizes that Christina's books were part of how she was able to cultivate a broader perspective than how she was raised. What books have been foundational in forming your worldview?
- 11** Christina navigates many complicated emotions toward her father throughout the book and even within their single interaction. Were you surprised by her emotions at any point? Can compassion and frustration co-exist?

AUTHOR Q&A

- Q** How much of this book is based on your real life experiences?
- A** The narrative of the Jezebel List and a hot documentarian filming the journey of checking it off is all fictionalized. However, like Christina, I am a pastor's daughter from the Evangelical South, and I attended a university exactly like Hilltop. All the little anecdotes and descriptions of this culture are from my own life. The backstory of her father's fall from grace is also largely autobiographical, although the timeline is different (the scandal happened when I was seven, and I didn't complete EMDR therapy until I was thirty-one). But what I most pulled from my life for this story are the descriptions of why each item is on the Jezebel List and then how it felt to indulge in that activity. I didn't check these items off systematically like Christina, but I experienced each one across the whole of my twenties. In the book, I attempted to capture the feelings of joy and danger and freedom that I felt whenever I got to enjoy one of these activities that I was always told would damn me.

Q Why did you choose to write about religious trauma in a cozy contemporary romance?

A Because of the guaranteed happily-ever-after, romance is this incredibly special genre that can handle hard topics by wrapping them in a blanket of hope. It's like it's a safe space to explore tough themes in a romance because we know it's going to turn out okay. To me, the heart of religious trauma is not being known or loved for exactly who you are—and romance is where characters are known and loved for exactly who they are. Romance was the one place I could make the trauma right and be happy at the same time. Religious trauma is so ugly; I wanted people to feel seen and validated in their experiences without more ugliness. Just like Christina's Hilltop painting, I wanted to turn the hurt into something beautiful.

Q Some might find this a bold or even radical debut given the subject matter. What are your thoughts?

A I am beyond proud for *The Jezebel List* to be my debut novel. I am surely not the only one with this story. The message of *The Jezebel List* is one of embracing radical inclusion, being worthy just as you are, and choosing the life you want without any shame or external control. It took years of struggle to cultivate those values against the backdrop of my upbringing, and I will stand by those values any and every day of the week. An ARC reader who has similar religious trauma as Christina (and me) messaged me the other day and said she burst out crying just reading the list. She had never seen this collection of activities as ones worthy of celebrating and embracing without guilt. Even if she is the only reader who feels seen, empowered, and loved by this novel, the entire process will have been worth it.

Q What was your writing process like for this book?

A I am a follow-the-characters kind of writer. I do not outline in the least bit. I am just constantly asking myself, *What happens next? How would Danny respond? How would Christina respond?* I didn't even know I would be putting the dad on the page until Christina threw Danny's jeans at him and told him to get in the car so they could go confront her father. I remember, at the beginning of each chapter, I knew what emotional beats needed to happen next for the overall story, so I would scroll back to the Jezebel List and try to choose an item that would best allow me to build a scene to explore that emotional beat. Dual POV is my favorite romance to read—I love being in both characters' heads and watching them fall in love. It is sometimes hard to switch in the drafting process, though, which I do almost every other chapter; it really does feel like becoming someone else! I keep a notebook beside my laptop at all times because I often have to revert to handwriting if I get stuck or need to work an idea out, so I've got notebooks filled with little brainstorming notes. When I revisit them now, it's wild to see how I was trying to work things out and then what actually ended up in the book!

Q What advice would you share with writers looking to publish?

A Write your favorite book. Publishing is a long journey, and you have to simultaneously be open to feedback and have unwavering confidence in what you've written. But if you love your book—if you wrote what only you could in what could only be your voice—then you can stand by it through the ups and downs. You can read it one million times and never get tired of it. You can get excited by the feedback that will help you better reach your vision and ignore the rest. All those other authors and stories already exist. We don't need another [insert favorite author]; we already have them. What we don't have is *you*. So don't be worried if your writing doesn't sound like anyone else or if it does things differently. That's a good thing. It might be a little harder to break into publishing, but you'll have a space that's yours once you do.

Q What is your favorite item from the Jezebel List?

A Ooo, good question. I'll answer this on a few levels. I think my favorite item to research was the pagan festival. I had so much fun learning about the Full Wolf Moon, and as soon as I found the cord-cutting ritual, I knew that had to be Christina's opening beat. My favorite item to write was probably the pornography scene. I got giddy putting Danny and Christina on that couch together as they tried to watch the clips objectively. The turn to erotica was so squeal-worthy, and it was very cathartic to write through Danny's and Christina's reactions to it. As far as my favorite item from my own life, I would have to say it's the adult superstore. My best friends in grad school drove me out to an adult superstore for the first time when I was twenty-six. I don't know if I've ever felt so free and in control of my own sexuality.



COZY ROOM READING LIST

- ☐ *An Immense World*, Ed Yong
- ☐ *You Could Make This Place Beautiful*, Maggie Smith
- ☐ *Red, White, & Royal Blue*, Casey McQuinston
- ☐ *Why Fish Don't Exist*, Lulu Miller
- ☐ *The Cruel Prince*, Holly Black
- ☐ *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, Jennette McCurdy
- ☐ *The Roommate*, Rosie Danan
- ☐ *Bad Feminist*, Roxane Gay
- ☐ *The Kiss Quotient*, Helen Hoang
- ☐ *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer
- ☐ *Red String Theory*, Lauren Kung Jessen
- ☐ *Legendborn*, Tracy Deonn

MOVIE CHURCH SELECTIONS

- ☐ *Burlesque* (2010)
- ☐ *Moonlight* (2016)
- ☐ *Little Women* (2019)
- ☐ *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018)
- ☐ *The Mummy* (1999)
- ☐ *You've Got Mail* (1998)
- ☐ *Get Out* (2017)
- ☐ *O, Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000)
- ☐ *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)
- ☐ *RRR* (2022)
- ☐ *Spotlight* (2015)
- ☐ *Moonstruck* (1987)
- ☐ *Arrival* (2016)
- ☐ *Oldboy* (2003)
- ☐ *Little Miss Sunshine* (2007)