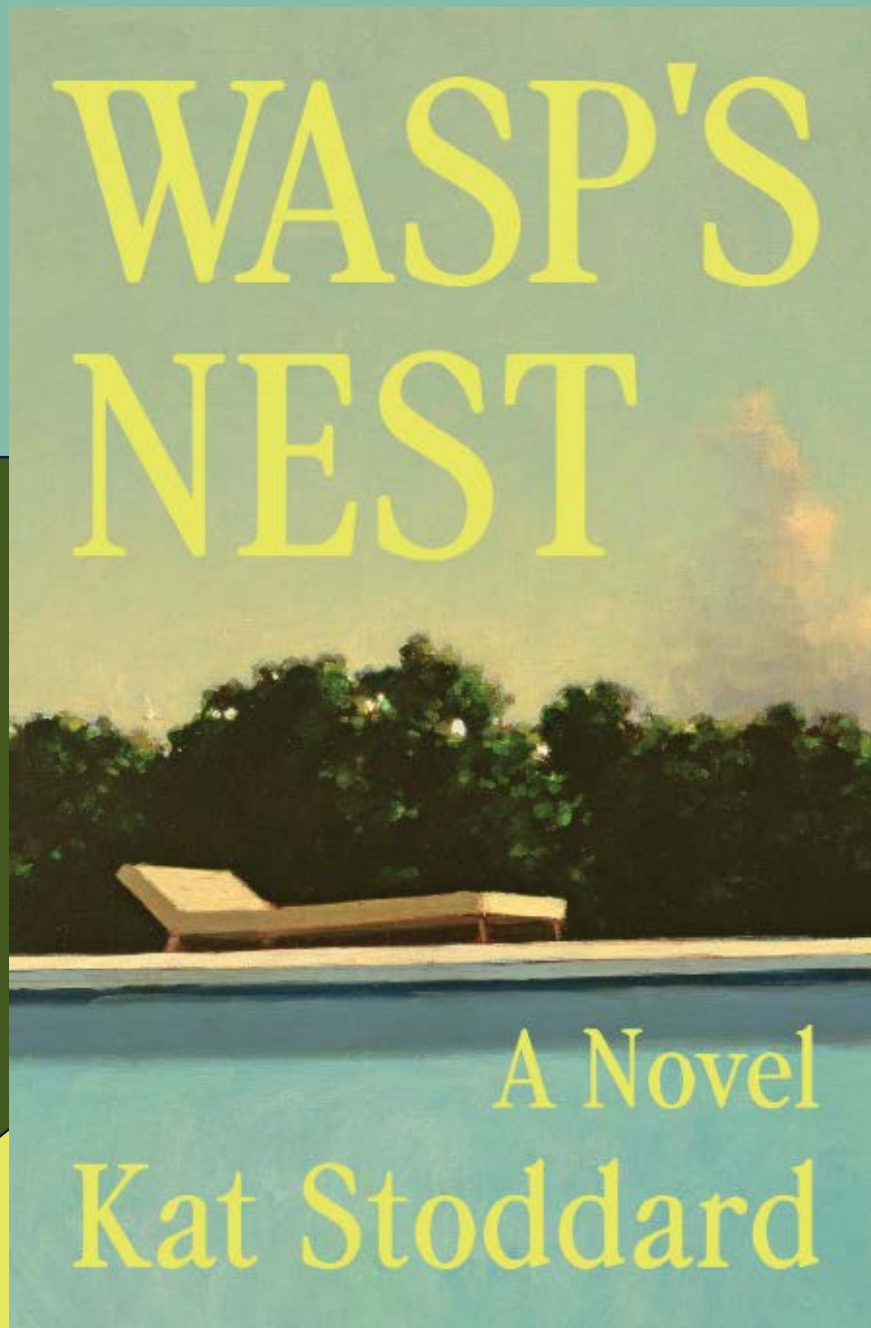


Book Club Kit



"A KEEN EXAMINATION OF LOVE IN ALL OF ITS
MODERN AND MESSY COMPLEXITIES, AND A
TREMENDOUSLY ENTERTAINING DEBUT."

—GRANT GINDER, AUTHOR OF
THE PEOPLE WE HATE AT THE WEDDING

Discussion Questions

1. Tess comes from an elite social circle and faces immense pressure to meet certain expectations. How do you think this pressure shaped Tess's decisions throughout the novel, and how did Peter and Mitch's inclusion in the wedding week shift her perspective?
2. Peter accepts an invitation to his ex-wife's wedding. What do you think motivated him most: curiosity, closure, pride, lingering love, or something else entirely?
3. Mitch enters the story as an outsider. How does his perspective shape our understanding of the other characters?
4. Which of the three central characters did you sympathize with most, and why? Which character do you think experienced the most growth during the week of the wedding?
5. Discuss the role of wealth and class in the story, and how Tess, Peter, and Mitch each relate to the themes of privilege, social expectations, and belonging. What are some of the specific moments in which you saw class differences cause tension between the characters?
6. Weddings *often* symbolize the beginning of a new chapter. How does *Wasp's Nest* subvert that and use the wedding setting to explore endings, unfinished business, and second chances?
7. How does the book challenge traditional ideas about romance, attraction, and commitment? Did queerness function in the story as a challenge—or a complement—to those social expectations?

Discussion Questions

8. Do you think people can be genuinely in love with more than one person at the same time? How does the novel address this question?
9. What does the book suggest about how—and why—we choose the people we love?
10. If you could ask one character a question after the events of the novel, who would it be and what would you ask?

AN INTERVIEW with Kat Stoddard



WASP'S NEST is a fast-paced, chaotic, and heartfelt story that takes place over one chaotic wedding week in Cape Cod with a love triangle that no one —least of all the bride— bargained for.

KAT STODDARD lives with her daughter in Baltimore. *Wasp's Nest* is her debut novel.

Congratulations on your debut novel, *Wasp's Nest*! The book opens with a line from *The Philadelphia Story*. What drew you to revisit that classic story and update it for a modern audience?

I've been a fan of the movie since I was a kid, and the dynamic between the three main characters (played by Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and Jimmy Stewart) is so rich and queer-coded. The tension is triangulated, each side informing the other two sides. Part of what fascinates Mike (Stewart) about his attraction to Tracy (Hepburn) is her past with Dexter (Grant). Dexter is delighted by Tracy's repartee with Mike. Tracy enjoys playing the men off each other, and the chemistry between the two male leads is a big part of what inspired me to lean into that relationship when writing this retelling. The movie is also a masterclass in circumventing the Hays Code, and there were critics who objected to the irreverent (read: clever and subversive) ways director George Cukor and writer Donald Ogden Stewart depicted sex, sexuality, and the institution of marriage. We're certainly in a new era of censorship and anti-queer sentiment, and I think it's important to remember that artists have always worked around the restrictions forced on them.

The story is told through three alternating characters: Tess, the bride-to-be; Peter, an artist and Tess's ex-husband; and Mitch, an aspiring writer and Peter's wedding date. Why was it important for the reader to understand these three characters' viewpoints, in particular?

I think all three of the point-of-view characters are struggling to accept something about themselves. I enjoyed playing with the tension between what they can acknowledge to themselves, what they can acknowledge to other people, and what other people can observe of them. Tess has an idea of what her life should look like, and she's trying to reconcile that image with what she actually wants. Peter has spent years in recovery, but he's entered a very stressful situation, so he's very carefully untangling his needs and his desires. And Mitch is just beginning to

figure out who he is as a person, as an artist, as a queer man. It's the combination of the three of them that sets the events of the week in motion. At a certain point, each character realizes the situation is outside their control, and they have to either make peace with that or rage against it.

The story takes place within a wealthy, WASPY setting, at a summer home on Cape Cod. How did queerness and heightened emotional connection function as a challenge—or a complement—to those social expectations?

I sent an email to my agent, Katie, during the very early stages of work with exactly this. Developing the Cape Cod house was so fun—I spent a lot of time looking at real estate listings and mapping the layout, and it became very real to me. It's a second home for Tess and her family, but it feels like a mansion to Peter and Mitch, representing a touchpoint for their divergent experiences. There's a cultural repression inherent in this WASPY setting, and the fact that many of the central characters fall outside that dominant culture (through queerness, race, and class) heightens the tension for everyone. Working-class Midwesterner Mitch is a fish out of water, and despite having been in Tess's world before, so is Peter. During their marriage, Peter could have tried to assimilate into Tess's world, but that never interested him. I think his authenticity is part of what appealed to Tess—for whom repression was a way of life—when they met. As the author, I'm occupying a similar place to Peter and Mitch, observing these people from the outside. It can be very satisfying to watch rich people behave badly (in fiction), but apart from the entertainment element, we can all relate to the dissonance between what other people expect of us and what we ourselves want out of life.

***Wasp's Nest* blends humor with emotional stakes. How did you navigate the line between satire of high society and genuine empathy for your characters? How did you explore class without reducing anyone to type?**

I have a genuine affection for so many of the characters in this book. There's a part of me in all of them, something that I can identify with from my own experience. When I'm developing central characters I never start from a place of archetypes, I start with the core relationships in this person's life. What was their relationship with their parents and their siblings like? Do they have a powerful romantic connection in their past or present? How has that shaped them as a person? Obviously things like class and money are hugely involved in those relationships as well, but it's never the full story. Warren and Peter, for example, initially seem pretty opposed. They come from different backgrounds and social classes. Warren has political ambitions, whereas Peter is driven by his need to create. But they also have a similar tenderness where Tess is concerned. I loved exploring that overlap and how it informed the difficult choices both men have to make throughout the

The book's description says that "real love triangles connect on all sides." What themes did you want to explore through this messy love triangle? What does the book suggest about how—and why—we choose the people we love?

A lot of what I wanted to explore was the possibilities that exist outside the culturally acceptable relationship boxes, which is monogamous heterosexual marriage with children. We see glimpses of several marriages here, all of which inform the way Peter, Tess, and Mitch view the prospect of their own marriages. Tess watches her older sister marry and create a life almost identical to their parents', which she sees as a very passionless and transactional relationship. She also watches her Aunt Julia find lasting love with her third husband, a man who doesn't come from their world. Peter's sobriety journey is hugely impacted by the queer community he grounds himself in, which he finds through his sponsor Eileen and her wife Laurie. We put so much pressure on our partners to be everything to us. I think that whether your relationship is traditionally monogamous or not, by cutting yourself off to other types of intimacy—platonic intimacy included—you deprive yourself of so much.

What do you hope readers see in Peter, Mitch, and Tess that they might not find in more conventional romantic narratives?

Second chances are a big thing I wanted to explore in this book. I'm really drawn to characters with established relationship dynamics and characters who reunite after time apart. Allowing space for growth, both in ourselves and others, is difficult but so crucial. There's an element of coming-of-age with Mitch specifically too, who could be considered a "late bloomer" by realizing his queerness in his twenties. It's scary and disorienting and inconvenient—but also exciting and liberating—to be on the precipice of a new life in the way that Peter, Mitch, and Tess all are. I think everyone, particularly queer people, can relate to navigating unexpected shifts in self-knowledge. It's challenging to allow yourself grace when you're focused on culturally mandated milestones. I hope readers see this book as a love letter to finding happiness at your own pace and in your own way, especially when that authenticity is hard-won and messy.