

# BOOK CLUB KIT

## MADWOMAN

"The rare kind of book that lives in your bones . . .

Emotional suspense at its best."

—Ashley Audrain, author of *THE PUSH*

A NOVEL

author of *HEARTBROKE* and *GODSHOT*

## CHELSEA BIEKER

# DEAR BOOK CLUB READER,

In second grade my teacher asked us to share our favorite movie. When it got to me, I said without hesitation, “Sleeping with the Enemy.” I remember my teacher raising her eyebrows, looking uncomfortable, and moving on. I would tell this story as I got older, aware of the inherent dark comedy of an eight-year-old reporting their favorite movie was an early nineties Julia Roberts film depicting her character’s harrowing escape from her violent husband. But it was true. I’ll never forget watching it with my mother, stealing glances at each other, almost in disbelief. Because we knew exactly how Julia felt as she packed quickly, as she planned and schemed her escape, and then, as she lived a life of terror waiting for her husband to find her. We knew he would find her. And we knew what would happen when he did.

It was the first time I’d seen a story depict my reality, the particular dance of living with my father, a man who beat my mother, who I was sure would kill her one day. But who also played Mario Brothers with me on the floor, who took me to Baskin Robbins most weeks, who would play basketball for hours and who could charm anyone with his smile. I kept a box hidden in my closet packed with a change of clothes, some toys, and a book. I knew to be ready to go at any moment, waiting always for my mother to decide it was safe to run.

My mother was a waitress and didn’t have much money, and no savings to speak of. Like the mother and daughter in MADWOMAN, we lived in terror on the thirty-third floor of a high rise in Waikiki, the question of the lanai always threatening. Would my father one day finally push her off? Mostly, our escapes were short lived. We’d spend a few nights at the Salvation Army and then find ourselves back home, my father ever-more repentant, ever-more ready to change. The cycle would begin again. We lived in a warped reality that revolved around the ebb and flow of his violent outbursts; when they would come, how we could prevent them, the aftermath of recovery, of hiding out, of lying to everyone when the truth was clear. When we finally left, it took almost no time for me to realize we had not truly escaped, and never would. My mother would replace my father with more men like him. The abuse had changed her brain. Simply getting away was not enough. Combined with poverty, alcoholism, and no access to therapy, frankly, she didn’t have a chance in hell.

I’ve long been fascinated and frustrated at the way the energy of violence never dies, how it can live on to infect future generations, how its echoes resound even in the quiet space of safety, of peace. This was never more evident than after I had children of my own. Once I became a mother, despite my very different, very safe circumstances at home, I felt the effects of my father’s violence in the room. It became my job, my burden, and ultimately my salvation to figure out how to confront the truth of the past and release the long pent-up generational shame that came with it, knowing still it will never be enough. It will never raise my mother from the dead. Yet there resounds a certain type of redemption in the truth.

MADWOMAN is the novel I was always meant to write. When I saw “Sleeping with the Enemy” as a child, a power awakened in me. In the movie, the protagonist wins. I’ll never forget my mother and I cheering in the final scene, our faces slick with tears. We need stories about domestic violence, an insidious disease that infects entire families, but the effects are not contained inside the home—as we know, they are far reaching into communities, rupturing lives on a global scale. And while much of this novel is funny, and thrilling, and surprising, and equal parts dark and light, I tell you all of this to convey the beating heart of it. My desire is to reflect this shared experience that too many will know in their lifetime, often in shame and in secret, and offer the most medicinal piece of all: the power of recognition, yes. But also what my mother never had in her lifetime: hope.

Thank you so much for reading,  
Chelsea Bieker

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Clove consistently strives to better herself through wellness practices, whether it be earthing, drinking turmeric shots, or surrounding herself with the correct crystals. Why is Clove drawn to spirituality and wellness practices?
2. What do grocery stores symbolize in the novel?
3. Why does Clove feel compelled to shop online, and to hide it from her husband?
4. When Clove meets Jane, Clove is immediately and inexplicably drawn to her. As their relationship deepens, the boundaries between them blur. What types of female friendship does the novel portray? What does it say about those friendships?
5. Does Clove love her husband? Do you think their marriage can survive her secrets?
6. The novel places significance on names, with some characters remaining nameless and others (Clove, in particular) changing names at different stages in life. What importance do names play in establishing characters?
7. What styles of motherhood are portrayed in the novel? Discuss what mothers and motherhood mean to the plot and characters.
8. Who is the antagonist of Madwoman?
9. Clove often narrates as if she were speaking to her mother. How does this impact the story itself?

# QUEEN HEALER BREAD

When Jane makes bread at Clove's, this is the one - from the **Moon Juice Manual**.

"Give me Queen for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, toasted and topped with ghee, please. It's dense and not too sweet, and stays moist on the counter for days. I really love this one; please make her! Ashwagandha, cordyceps, epimedium, and mucuna would also work well here." -Amanda Chantal Bacon

## Serves 8

1 ½ cups almond flour  
1 cup cassava flour  
¼ cup cacao powder  
3 tablespoons reishi  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 tablespoon raw vanilla bean powder or vanilla extract if you can't find raw powder  
Pinch of pink salt  
½ cup maple syrup  
2 tablespoons ground flaxseeds or 2 large eggs

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a 9 X 5-inch loaf pan with parchment paper and set aside.
2. Combine the almond flour, cassava flour, cacao, reishi, baking powder, vanilla, and salt in a bowl of a food processor and pulse until combined. Add the maple syrup and either the flaxseeds plus 6 tablespoons of water or the eggs. Pulse until a dough forms. Transfer the dough to the prepared loaf pan. Bake for 25 minutes, until firmed up.
3. Allow the bread to cool, and either slice warm or rewarm in the toaster to order. Anoint with butters and/or honeys of choice.



# CLOVE'S FAVORITE THINGS



The perfect dress to make you feel like nothing's wrong  
Christy Dawn

## THE CLASS

For screaming it out  
The Class

The local Portland favorite!  
Blueberry Dry Kombucha



Anti-inflammatory goodness  
Golden Moon Milk



If it's good enough for Gwyneth...  
Seed Probiotic



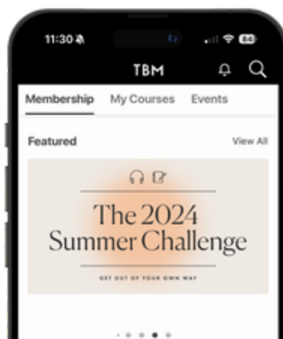
Keep away the preschool germs  
Liposomal Vitamin C

## NOIHSAF

Online shopping much?  
noihsaf bazaar

Eco Spanish Wool Sweater  
babaá

For inner child healing self hypnosis  
To Be Magnetic



An attempt to wind down that nervous system  
Moon Juice Magnesi-OM

