

a

# BOOK CLUB KIT

"Achingly evocative and thoroughly satisfying."

—Katy Hays, author of *The Cloisters*



ENDPAPERS

*A Novel*

JENNIFER

SAVRAN KELLY



Dear Reader,

I've always been fascinated by books as physical objects. In my very first bookbinding workshop, my classmates and I sat around a large table peeping down the spine of a book so that we could start to understand the beautiful inner workings that held it together. I was mesmerized.

Then our instructor told us something that played on my imagination for years. Back when all books were bound by hand, people sometimes hid personal letters under the endpapers—the decorative leaves pasted down to the inside covers—where unknowing recipients would likely never find them.

This struck me as a stunningly romantic and tragic gesture. Imagine taking the time to share your intimate feelings and then hiding them just out of sight of your intended audience, knowing that your letter would be right under their nose for hours as they read the book. And imagine being the recipient of the letter, holding it close, perhaps even in your lap, living with it on a shelf for years, and never knowing of the secret message it contains for you.

When I set out to write *Endpapers*, it was this idea that motivated me. What if someone hid a very personal letter under the endpapers of a book and then decades later a conservator discovered it? Who would these two people be, and what about the letter would inspire a sense of connection, or even obsession, in the one that found it?

Around that time, the rights and safety of transgender people began to come increasingly under attack. As a pansexual person who's always questioned my own gender, I felt a responsibility to come out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community—to signal to my own family, friends, and loved ones that queer is not always what it looks like and that people have more personal connections to queer folks than they might realize. In other words, I wanted to make the issue less abstract and more relevant to everyone, hoping that it would fuel more people to stand up as allies and take action.

When I joined these two ideas, *Endpapers* was on its way to becoming a story. I hope you enjoy Dawn's journey of self-discovery and that it also sparks a little awe for the book as a work of art. Thank you so much for reading!

Yours,

Jen

# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Dawn narrates *Endpapers* in the present tense. Why do you think the author made this choice? Consider where Dawn is at the beginning of the story and where she is at the end.
2. In 2003 in the United States, there were no pronouns in mainstream use for gender-nonconforming people; nor were words such as “nonbinary” or “genderfluid” in mainstream use. Therefore, Dawn does not consciously choose a pronoun for herself, and other characters in the book use she/her for Dawn. How do you think this affects Dawn’s feelings and experiences? Do you think she might have experienced life differently if her story was set in the 2020s?
3. Lukas argues that the consideration of legalizing gay marriage means that “gay people might now be allowed to live, as long as they do it like straight people.” What do you think of his position?
4. What, if anything, did you know about queer history in the United States or the Lavender Scare before you read this book? Is there anything this story makes you want to know more about? What are some current events, bills, or laws that affect or specifically target LGBTQIA+ people right now?
5. Dawn and Lukas’s shared queerness both enriches their relationship and challenges it. From your point of view, how much of their challenges arise out of their sexual orientation and gender identities, and how much does miscommunication or failure to communicate play a role?
6. Dawn spends a lot of time looking at street art because it’s both inspiring for her own work and comforting in the aftermath of 9/11. Do you notice street art where you live? If so, how does it affect you?
7. Gertrude confesses to Dawn that, as a teenager, she snuck her friends into her father’s bindery so they could replace the covers of their lesbian pulp novels with rejected covers from more culturally acceptable books. She also tells Dawn that “since those pulp novels painted such a dire picture of our futures,” she and her friends took a step further by writing their own lesbian love stories, with happier endings, and leaving them on store shelves for customers to discover. Why do you think the queer pulp novels of the 1950s were so popular, even though they painted such a dire picture of queer life?
8. After getting attacked outside Mars Bar, Dawn visits a temple and is drawn to a Shabbat meditation that reflects on how to approach an “hour of change.” Throughout the second half of the book, Dawn repeats to herself the following question from that meditation: “Shall we draw back . . . or cross over?” What do you think it means to Dawn to draw back? To cross over? Do you think she does one or the other by the end of the book? Both?

9. Alice questions Dawn's desire to collaborate with multiple artists on her project for her first gallery show, saying that she prefers to have more control over her work. Dawn responds, "It seems like a better idea to have multiple styles, like real graffiti in a real city." What did you think of Dawn's choice to collaborate, and how did you feel about the outcome?

10. Katherine tends to be blunt and judgmental, which leads Dawn to hide her true self from Katherine. Then she surprises Dawn by saying, "If you want to put on a suit and tie, put on an Armani suit. And if you want to wear a dress, then wear a McQueen. Or do something in between, but commit to it. You owe that to yourself." What do you think Katherine is trying to tell Dawn? Is it simply a statement on fashion, or is she speaking to something bigger?

11. Jae is a grounding force for Dawn until they get attacked at a bar and Jae's head injury leads to serious complications that affect him physically and mentally. Then Dawn needs to learn how to be a grounding force for him. How successful do you think she is, regardless of how Jae reacts to her from moment to moment?

12. Dawn is bothered by how casually Dr. Mink seems to accept that Jae's been attacked for coming across as gay. And Jae is bothered by Dawn's arguing with Dr. Mink about it. He tells her, "You have to stop assuming everyone's a piece of shit." Do you think this assessment of Dawn and her behavior is accurate or fair? Why or why not?

13. The book takes place roughly two years after 9/11, and one of the men who attacks Dawn, Jae, and Lukas at Mars Bar is wearing an American flag shirt. In the hospital, Jae picks up on Dawn's feelings of guilt over the attack, and Dawn tells him that they need to be more careful. Why do you think the author set the book in this time period? And how might Dawn and Jae's experiences be the same or different today?

14. In Gertrude's letter to Dawn, she says that she still blames herself for the attack on Marta in her father's bindery, because she was too bold to notice the danger her appearance and actions could lead to: "I've spent my life determined not to repeat that mistake. Unfortunately, I've learned too late that this was a terrible mistake in itself . . . when you spend all your time hiding, you do avoid danger, but you also avoid life." How do you feel about this statement? Have you ever taken a risk in order to be true to yourself? Have you ever wished you did?

15. Both Dawn and Gertrude blame themselves for the attacks that cause their friends serious injury. Do you think either of them was to blame? Why or why not?

16. Dawn spends a good deal of time wondering if it was coincidence or fate that led her to Gertrude. At the end, she decides it doesn't matter: "Both the things we need and the things that will hurt us are everywhere . . . to recognize one from the other requires only that we pay attention." How do you feel about this perspective? Have you ever experienced a coincidence that changed your life in some way?