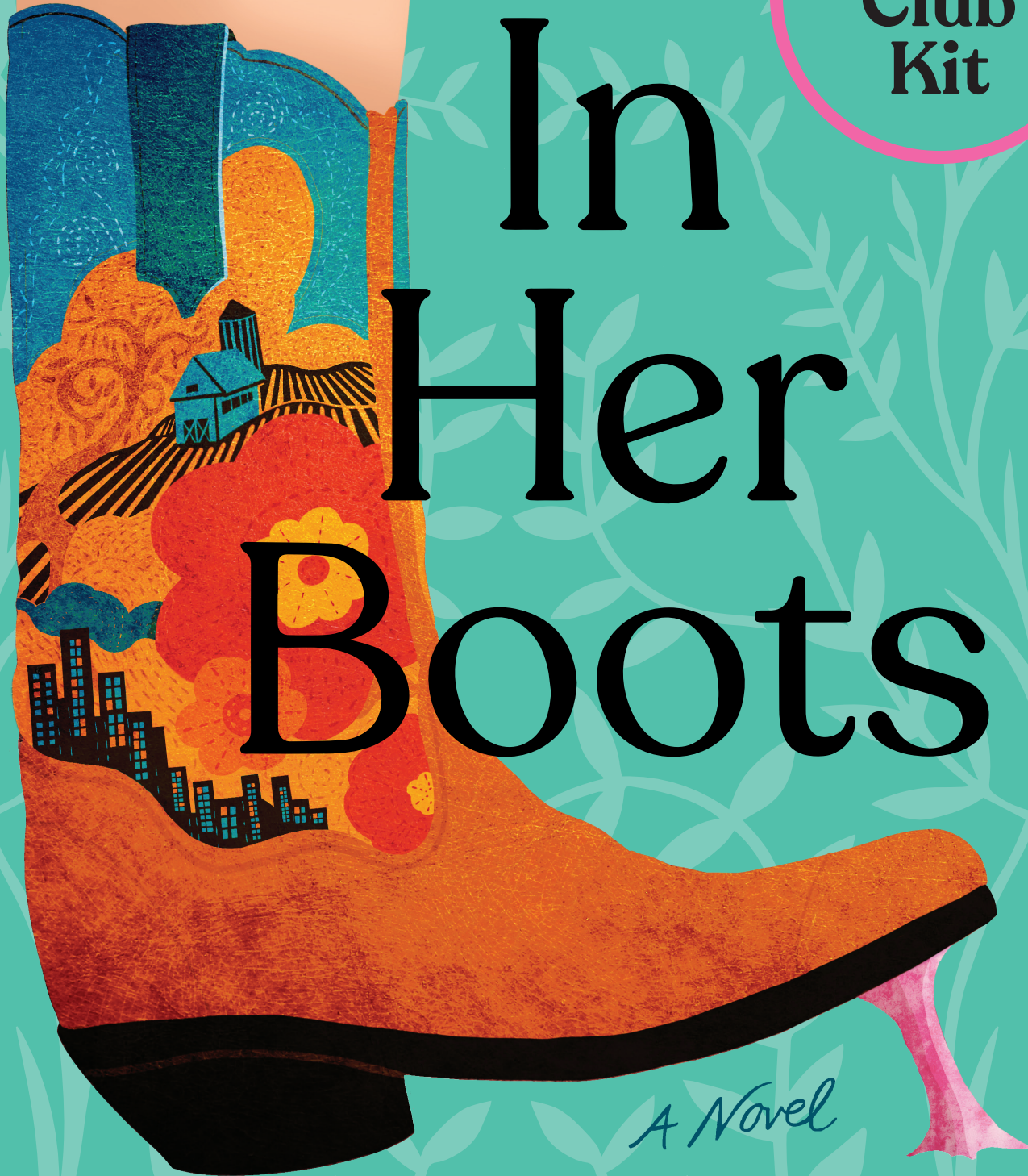


Book
Club
Kit



In Her Boots

A Novel

KJ DELL'ANTONIA

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A Conversation with KJ DELL'ANTONIA



What inspired you to write this story?

I'm hampered in answering this by knowing that my mother's book club will surely read it! I was inspired by two things: First, I love reading memoir, and I love following certain authors on social media because they at least appear to be so willing to share their vulnerability—but I always wonder about the reaction they get from their friends and family, and how it might sometimes feel easier to share something sensitive with strangers, who aren't going to come knocking on your door with soup or call you up in a panic just when you're starting to feel better. Second, I do have a little farm—and my parents think I'm nuts. So the idea that Margaret would want Rhett to do something different probably came from that.

How was writing *In Her Boots* similar to or different from writing your first novel, *The Chicken Sisters*? Do you have a favorite part of the writing process?

Well, both times I wrote way too much and then had to figure out what the real story was, so that seems to be a thing I do, although I'm trying to learn to do it a little differently. And both times I came to “what the story was really about” at the end, not the beginning. I think it would be easier to do it the other way around but I'm not sure I can.

My favorite part of the process seems to be whichever part I'm in—except maybe the deciding-on-an-idea part. I find that stressful, landing on something that I'm going to spend a year-plus working with. There's always this period when I'm like, no, wait! Here's a better idea! But once I'm in it I like the constancy of the demand to write or revise pretty much daily. It gives me a sense of routine that I really like. As long as no one else is making me do it.

How did you craft Rhett's character? Are any of the characters inspired by real people?

Rhett came from the question, Who would write a book like *Eat, Pray, Love* and then really, really wish she hadn't? I just kept writing her and writing her and writing her until I understood why she would do that—and then I had to switch the point of view in the book from third person to first, because it was really hard without that to let the reader in on her thought process. She's not based

on anyone real—no one in this book is, although Jim Bailey talks with a very local accent and is kind of a blend of several pillars of my community in New Hampshire, in what I hope is a very loving and respectful way.

The farm setting is very atmospheric, and the many hilarious animals add such fun color to the read. Do you have a personal connection to farm life? Do you have any animals of your own, such as a temperamental llama named Teddy?

I have an escape-artist mini-pony named Brownie, and he has a buddy named S'mores. We have a largish horse farm on our property that is entirely run by someone else who lives there now, but at different moments in my life I've done morning and night chores and I'm very, very aware of how hard it is for any agricultural endeavor to be self-supporting. (You do not want to get me started on insurance.) I've thought about a llama, but I have the only kids in the world who start screaming in protest when I suggest another animal. They know it will just end in my forcing them to go out in the dark on a miserable February night to figure out whether there's a hole in the fence.

***In Her Boots* is such a thought-provoking read about the different relationships one juggles in life—from friendships and romantic relationships to the complexities of mothers and daughters. Why did you choose to write about these dynamics in particular? Are any of them derived from personal experience?**

Probably all writing about relationships comes from personal experience to some extent, but I have a great relationship with my mother, and most of my core of people at the moment is family oriented and so pretty different from Rhett, who's really finding her way and figuring out where she fits in with other people still. But I think we can all identify with that—no matter how solid our relationships appear, there's always this background sense of; But who does she think I am? Am I that person? Or am I someone else?

Who was your favorite character to write, and why?

Probably Louisa. She's so nice and willing to just burn it all down, mostly because she doesn't know how hard it is to build it back up.

What do you think lies at the heart of Jasmine and Rhett's sisterlike friendship? Why do you feel it was important to incorporate this female friendship into the story?

I think it's the friendship we all want. I am lucky enough to have more than one Rhett or Jasmine in my life—

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I hope we all end up thinking about whether we really are who we show to the people around us, and HOW WE CAN SHOW UP MORE TRULY—AND HOW THAT MIGHT HELP OTHERS TO DO THE SAME, and let us all see and understand each other in new ways.

call them “team bury-a-dead-body”—but the thing Rhett and Jasmine get is to stay together. Life doesn’t pull one of them to the East Coast and one to the West, or give one a day job and the other a night job, or one a kid who’s needs make maintaining her friendships harder—all things most of us deal with.

Rhett and Jasmine have been apart but now they’re back and they get to choose to stay that way.

What do you want readers to take away from *In Her Boots*?

I hope we all end up thinking about whether we really are who we show to the people around us, and how we can show up more truly—and how that might help others to do the same, and let us all see and understand each other in new ways.

Without giving anything away, did you always know how the story would end?

I did not! It had a couple of other endings over the process, in particular around Jasmine, but they didn’t really fill that need for everyone to become more intensely themselves. My editor (who’s the best) kept saying, but readers will love Jasmine. I’m not sure this is what people will want for her until I figured out where she would really want to be and why.

What’s next for you?

I’m already working on another novel. It’s early days to share much, but I think, given *In Her Boots* and *The Chicken Sisters*, that it will once again be about how ridiculously hard it is to figure out what makes us happy.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout the novel Rhett has a love-hate relationship with her hometown. Discuss your connection to the place you grew up, and how you feel that shapes the decisions you make as an adult. How is it similar or different to Rhett's feelings and choices?

2. Who was your favorite character in the novel, and why?

3. Rhett and Jas have an almost unshakable friendship that is tested at different points in the novel. What do you think each woman emotionally provides for the other? Do you think they're good for each other?

4. *In Her Boots* is a story about finding yourself again, but also a fun novel about the ups and downs of farm life. What was your favorite scene in the novel pertaining to the farm or animals? Did you learn anything about tending to a farm that you didn't know before? Does this lifestyle appeal to you?

5. What was your favorite scene in the novel, and why?

6. The relationship between mothers and daughters is a special and multifaceted one, especially for Rhett and Margaret. Discuss how Rhett and Margaret are both similar to and different from each other. Do you ultimately think Margaret was a good or bad mother to Rhett, and why? How does Rhett and Margaret's relationship compare to your own relationship with your mother?

7. If you had a superhero alter ego, what would its name be? What qualities would it have?

8. If you were placed in Rhett's boots, how would you have reacted upon learning Margaret was going to be on the *Today* show with you minutes before the interview? If you were Jas, would you have taken your friend's place?

9. Margaret and Rhett have very different opinions when it comes to attending college, and how that choice sets you up for the future. What is your opinion on the matter? How did you navigate this choice, and what did you ultimately decide? If you had the opportunity to change the past, would you?

10. Both Emily and Mike want Louisa to follow a specific path for her future, similar to what Margaret had wanted for Rhett. Was Rhett wrong not to bring Louisa's plans to her parents' attention? What is the line you draw between interfering in someone else's parenting and looking out for what you believe to be the good of a child?

11. Mike accuses Rhett of running from her problems—is this a fair accusation? Did she owe it to him—or herself—to confront him over what she'd heard way back then? Or now, when she re-met him?

12. What are your thoughts about the ending?