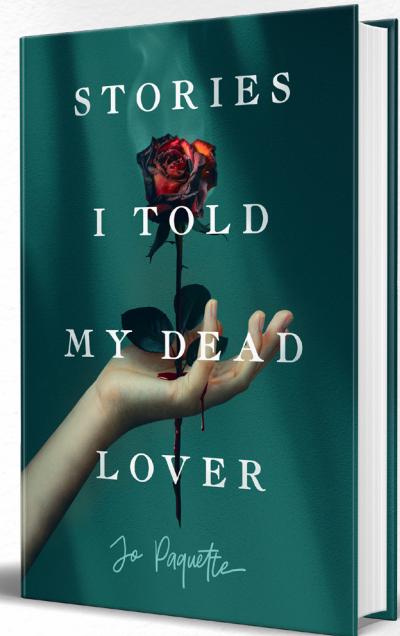


STORIES I TOLD MY DEAD LOVER

by JO PAQUETTE

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: These stories are works of fiction. That said, more than anything else I have written in the past, these carry parts of me within them. The book was written between late 2020 and 2021, a time when I was building toward and gathering my strength for some very big changes in my personal life. In each of these stories, there is (at least) one jagged shard of truth: be it a theme, an event, a situation, or an object drawn directly from my own life. In my books for young readers, I have certainly explored topics and themes that held personal relevance. But within this new medium, I was able to unfurl my mind—in all of its darkness, all of its strange, off-kilter weirdness—like never before. What a delight to follow some tangled thread down a dark hall of my psyche that I barely knew existed. What might be lurking there? What might I find? Dear reader: after all was said and done, at the end of that darkest hall, what I found was myself. I hope that you, too, may find yourself within these pages.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which story did you like most in the collection? Which did you like least? Why?
2. Do the stories share any similarities or common ground? Are there any themes that recur across the collection?
3. How has the author handled the surreal aspects of certain stories? In what way do these elements add to the telling, or provide additional depth or layers?
4. How does each story's point of view—who is narrating the events—change the scope of the story itself? How would the story be different if it were told by someone else?
5. Discuss how each main character's desperation brought them to the turning points within their stories. In what way might words, actions, or circumstances have changed their situation and resulted in a different outcome?
6. If you had to live within the world of one of these stories, which would you choose and why?
7. Which character across all the stories did you most relate to and why?
8. Is there a sentence or quote that stood out to you or lingered in your mind?
9. If you could change the ending of one story in the collection, which story would it be and what would you change?
10. Why do you think the author chose the short story format for telling these stories?
11. If the author developed one of these stories into a full novel, which do you think would best fit the longer format and why?
12. Did any of the stories, settings, or characters evoke experiences or memories from your past? If so, was that a positive or a negative thing? How or why?
13. Discuss the following terms: agency, choice, fate, empowerment, desperation, yearning, loss. How were these manifested across the scope of the stories?
14. In your opinion, does darkness most often come from without or within?