

DEAR READER,

Thank you so much for choosing to read *Such Pretty Flowers*—I'm so excited to share it with you! When I stop to think about it, I realize this story may have been brewing in my subconscious since 2015. I was newly engaged that year—which of course was exciting—but I was also feeling somewhat numbed by a corporate job that didn't offer much in the name of creativity or fulfillment. When our wedding florist took us to the Los Angeles flower market, a gigantic warehouse overflowing with cut blooms, I was entranced. I spent the next couple hours wandering through a sea of flowers, snapping pictures and feeling more inspired than I had in far too long. I'd always been fascinated by the quiet power of plants; that day, it felt as if they were each offering up a personality of their own.

One year later, after I'd mustered the courage to change careers, I took my first trip to Savannah, Georgia. From the live oak trees dripping with Spanish moss, to the squares and cemeteries steeped in ghost lore, it was clear to me: this place was pure magic. *Such Pretty Flowers* is what resulted when I nurtured these two, seemingly unrelated sparks of inspiration. Then I was startled by how quickly the characters took form: a black-eyed, mercurial love interest who'd harnessed the power of plants. A protagonist feeling adrift, craving purpose and connection—much as I had back in 2015.

I'm so grateful that your book club has chosen to follow Holly on her plant-filled ride through Savannah. It's been my dream since I was in elementary school to be a published author and it's surreal to think you've chosen to spend your time with my book. I hope you enjoy the read and the book club kit we've put together. Maybe—who knows?—it will even spark something in you, too.





- 1. At the beginning of the novel, Holly is deep in grief over the loss of her brother, haunted by the what-ifs surrounding his death and determined to find answers. How does this thread of grief appear throughout the narrative? What do you think about the way Holly's motivations to investigate Dane's mental decline and death change as new information comes to light?
- 2. Discuss the sibling relationship between Holly and Dane. Given how close they were, why do you think Holly detached herself so much while Dane was struggling before his death?
- **3.** One detail about Holly is that she deals with trypophobia, the aversion to or fear of clusters of small holes or bumps. What is the importance of this detail? Why do you think the author chose to include it?
- **4.** Maura is an enigmatic character, described as enchanting, sweet, and charming, but also with a chip on her shoulder about feeling "invisible" to her family. Discuss the way in which Cerra painted the portrait of this character. What was your first impression of her? Did you suspect what was to come from her from the beginning, or did you think Holly was projecting her suspicions onto her?
- **5.** Discuss the role of flowers and botany throughout the novel. Were you surprised by the real-life dangers of some of the plants mentioned?
- **6.** How does the relationship between Holly and Maura evolve throughout the narrative? What do you think Maura's initial motivations were for welcoming Holly into her life and her home?

- 7. The obsessive, intimate relationship that builds between Holly and Maura is taboo, but Holly cannot resist seeing where it goes. Have you ever been in a relationship or friendship that others cautioned was a bad idea or unhealthy for you, but you couldn't resist? Why do you think Holly was so drawn to Maura despite knowing better?
- **8.** Discuss the dinner scene at Odette's, the aftermath of which left Holly wondering if it had been a dream. How did this evening impact Holly's journey in the novel? Why do you think the author chose to include this scene?
- **9.** After some time with Maura, Holly begins to question her thoughts and feelings. For example, Cerra writes, "It was getting overwhelming trying to process the information I was taking in at Maura's–I couldn't determine what was legitimate and what wasn't. Had I imagined the blood in the bathtub?" Did you feel that Holly was an unreliable narrator? How did you feel about this uncertainty as a reader?
- **10.** How do you feel Eric's return influenced the tenuous relationship between Holly and Maura?
- **11.** Savannah has a robust history of ghost lore that serves as a backdrop for *Such Pretty Flowers*. How does this choice of setting impact the plot? How does it shape the experience of reading Holly's story? What about the setting of Maura's townhouse
- **12.** What did you think about the ending? What do you wish had been different?

HONEYCOMB CAKE



Ingredients

FIRST GLAZE

1 large lemon, zested into strips 3 sprigs sage ¾ cup honey

FINAL GLAZE

2 tbsp. honey ½ cup confectioners' sugar 1½ tsp. fresh lemon juice Sugared sage, for serving (optional)

CAKE

Unsalted butter, room temperature, for pan 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for pan ½ cup fine cornmeal ½ tsp. baking powder ¼ tsp. baking soda 1 tsp. coarse salt ¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

1/4 cup firmly packed, finely chopped fresh sage

2 large eggs

½ cup packed light-brown sugar

½ cup honey

¼ cup milk

½ cup olive oil

1 tsp. grated lemon zest

Recipe credit: marthastewart.com/1106703/honeycomb-cake

Directions

STEP 1 First glaze: Preheat oven to 325°F. Bring all ingredients to a boil in a small saucepan. Remove from heat.

STEP 2 Cake: Butter and flour an 8-inch hexagonal (or round or square) cake pan. Whisk together flour, cornmeal, baking powder, baking soda, salt, nutmeg, and sage. Beat eggs and brown sugar on medium-high until pale and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Beat in honey, milk, oil, and zest. With mixer on low, add flour mixture in 2 batches; beat until just combined.

STEP 3 Spread batter in pan. Bake until golden and a toothpick comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Remove from oven; poke holes with toothpick all over cake. Remove zest strips and sage from first glaze; brush over top. Let cool completely in pan.

STEP 4 Final glaze: Whisk together honey, confectioners' sugar, and lemon juice. Remove cake from pan and brush final glaze over top; continue until all is used. Garnish with sugared sage. Cut into wedges with a serrated knife, wiping knife between cuts; serve.



Ingredients
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup water
Zest of blood orange
8 oz. bourbon
Blood orange bitters
Handful fresh mint
1 blood orange cut into slices
Ice

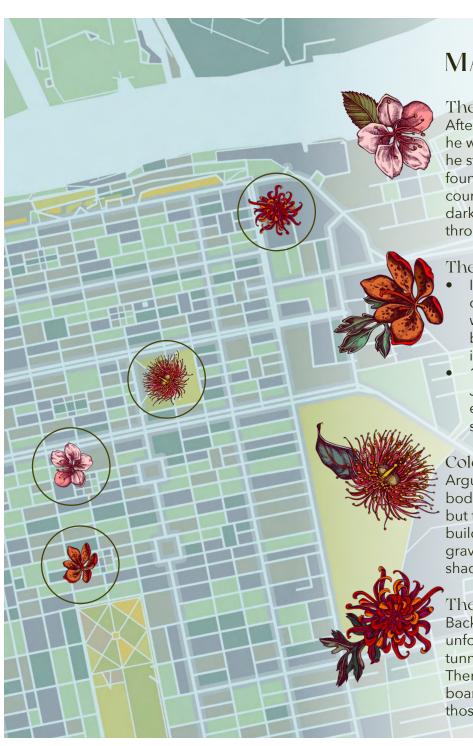
Directions

STEP 1 In a saucepan, add sugar, water, and orange zest. Bring to a slight simmer, consistently stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Remove from heat and let it cool.

STEP 2 Muddle mint and orange slices in the bottom of two glasses. Add ice, bourbon, bitters, and simple syrup. Stir to combine and serve.

Recipe credit: the curious plate.com/foodie-fridays-blood-orange-mint-julep/





MAURA'S HAUNTED SAVANNAH TOUR

The Sorrel-Weed House

After the death of his first wife, Francis Sorrel—upstanding gentleman that he was—remarried her younger sister. But his shenanigans continued and he started having an affair with one of his slaves, Molly. When his wife found out, she flung herself off the balcony, cracking her skull open on the courtyard below. Humiliated, Molly hanged herself days later. The women's dark silhouettes can still be seen wandering halls and appearing in mirrors throughout the estate . . .

The Mercer-Williams House

- In 1969, an eleven-year-old boy chasing pigeons climbed onto the roof of the vacant house and fell, impaling his head on the fence. His friend, who claimed to have witnessed this grisly death, described seeing the boy pulled, as if by some malevolent force, off the roof and straight into the wrought iron spike . . .
- 1981 saw the fatal shooting of Danny Hansford, lover of homeowner Jim Williams. Jim was tried multiple times for the murder and eventually acquitted—only to collapse from deadly heart failure in the same spot his lover had been shot. (Talk about karma.)

Colonial Park Cemetery

Arguably Savannah's most haunted site! There are rumored to be 10,000 bodies buried here, including a mass grave for victims of yellow fever... but there are under 1,000 grave-markers. Savannah has a history of building over her dead, which—combined with the desecration of these graves—gives our ghosts plenty of reason to be pissed. So if you spot a shadowy figure moving among the headstones, proceed with caution...

The Pirates' House

Back in the 1700s, sailors would drop by this tavern for a drink. The more unfortunate lads would pass out, be carried away through an underground tunnel, and wake to find themselves on a pirate's ship miles from shore. There, they'd be forced to work as part of the crew—or get tossed overboard. Listen carefully for the sound of boots against planks: echoes of those poor sailors, trying to find their way home . . .