



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Fake Plastic Love

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Fake Plastic Love*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Fake Plastic Love*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Discuss the title, which comes from the Radiohead song “Fake Plastic Trees.” How does the idea of “fake plastic love” resonate throughout the novel?
2. *Fake Plastic Love* contains several allusions to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novels, especially *The Great Gatsby*. Does Jeremy remind you of Gatsby? How do Belle and Chase compare to Daisy and Tom? Do you think the novels share similar themes and styles?
3. M. believes that she is part of a “bifurcated generation,” the Romantics versus the Realists: “If you steeped something with enough personality—papered it with enough monograms and inscriptions and engravings and dedications—maybe, just maybe, they believed, you could make it live forever. . . . I had always believed in streamlining and trying my best to avoid the balls and chains of sentiments and stuff.” Do you think the bifurcation that M. is describing is specific to millennials, or is every generation similar? Are you a Romantic or a Realist? What about the characters in the novel?
4. At the December Bender, Scott claims that the partiers in 1920s costumes are obsessed with nostalgia because they’re “scared as hell. . . . Putting on a show keeps you safe. In a way, it makes you untouchable.” Do you think the portrayal of nostalgia in the novel is on the whole positive or negative? Has the digital age heightened people’s longing for the past, or does it make people more preoccupied with the present?
5. Belle’s credo on La Belle Vie is “everything you can imagine is real.” Do you agree? How are imagination and reality portrayed in this novel?
6. M. is taken aback when she hears Jeremy describe Belle as “authentic”: “In my friendship with Belle, I had always viewed myself as the authentic one, the honest and reliable one, while with time she’d become the chameleon, the crowd-pleasing flatterer. I relied on my position as the introverted foil facing off against her unending quest for positive reinforcement, for universal popularity.” Do you agree

that M. is more authentic than Belle? What does this novel have to say about the nature of authenticity, especially in terms of social media and working in an industry like finance? Who do you think is the most authentic character in the book?

7. When M. first meets Scott at the December Bender, she is impressed that “he was entirely comfortable standing in his own brogues, in his own time, in his own skin.” Does Scott serve as a foil for Jeremy, his generation’s “Last Great Romantic”? Or do you think Chase—who Belle says is as sturdy as “a wall of New Hampshire granite”—is more of Jeremy’s foil?
8. Jeremy’s personal motto is “handle with great care,” a sentiment he applies to objects as well as to people. But is his care sometimes too great? Would his relationship with Belle have been stronger if he wasn’t so afraid of hurting her?
9. When M. watches Belle reunite with Chase at their five-year college reunion, she credits the power of shared youth: “They had been young together, in some way, shape, or form, and I realized then that shared youth was an ace so beautiful it was virtually impossible for anyone, no matter how heroic their devotion, to trump it.” Do you think sharing history and being young alongside another person has a particular power? What do you think draws Belle back to Chase time and time again?
10. M.’s friendship with Belle is similarly tied to college: “As our lives continued to diverge like the fixed flight paths of two chartered planes, one bound for snow and the other for sand and sun, I sensed she wanted to prop our friendship up largely for the sake of the past. . . . We weren’t charting new territory or building anything new together.” Have you had a similar experience with a friend? Are some friendships largely nostalgic and unsustainable, and if so, does that make them less real or important?
11. The theme of flight—and aborted flight—is threaded throughout the novel. Discuss these references and what you think they symbolize.
12. Belle admits to her chronic uncertainty when she says, “When I’m in New York, I can’t help but dream of being somewhere far away and foreign. But whenever I’m there, I only dream of being back in New York. Neither ever seems to be enough.” M. replies, “I think the trick is to pick one thing and really commit to it.” But M.’s staunch commitment to *The Brothers* ends up holding her back. Do you think it is more difficult to stay fixed and be committed—to jobs, places, and even people—given the mobility and pace of our hyper-connected world?
13. Jeremy tells M, “I’m sure I did all of the right things—everything I was supposed to. But it didn’t add up to what I was told it would add up to.” She replies, “That may be the great tagline of our generation, you know.” Do you agree? How is the millennial generation portrayed in this novel, and does that portrayal resonate with your own experiences?

14. New York City itself plays a very important role in *Fake Plastic Love*, sometimes romanticized and sometimes criticized. Jeremy tells a group of tourists, “You can find every kind of magic in this city.” Do you agree? What kind of magic is each character trying to find? Is there a dark side to New York’s magical promise?
15. While Belle worries that her life running La Belle Vie isn’t exactly the “epic quest” she imagined when she was a girl, later in the story the achievement-oriented M. credits her with “build[ing] something for herself, in her own name, however superficial and trifling. What had I actually created? What had I actually done? I, who had wanted to accomplish so much?” What do you think both women have accomplished in their respective pursuits?
16. When Belle breaks up with Jeremy, she tells him, “Can’t you see how dangerous it is when two people are too similar? I think that was always the big problem with us. We’re too much alike. We both build worlds out of a whole lot of nothing.” He replies: “Nothing? But, Belle—that’s everything.” What does he mean? And do you agree with Belle that she and Jeremy are too similar? Do you think M. is drawn to both of them for the same reasons?
17. In Belle’s last meeting with Jeremy on the snowy West Village street, she seems to deliberately suspend their relationship on an ambiguous note: “I think we’ll just have to see. It will be prettier that way, don’t you think?” In the bridal suite before her wedding, M. shares her theory that Belle is “keeping [Jeremy] at a distance as her prettiest untouchable dream.” Do you agree with M.? How do you think Belle feels about Jeremy by the end of the novel?
18. At the five-year college reunion, M. describes twentysomething life as “an attempt at recapturing, reclaiming something—taking a second swing when you knew the real magic in life was hitting that first pitch straight out of the ballpark.” With her No Mulligan Policy, she doesn’t believe in second chances, until she admits to Scott that she is wrong, that “sometimes we need them.” How do you feel about second chances? Do you think magic can happen in life when you take a second swing?
19. In the novel’s last line, we finally learn M.’s real name. Why do you think Kimberley Tait chose to end there? How does M. change over the course of the novel?