

A Novel

BLONDE
DUST

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BOOK CLUB KIT



GRAND
CENTRAL



Dear reader,

For quite a while, I'd been toying with the idea of writing a book about Marilyn Monroe, one of my idols. I've loved her movies since I was a teenager, but there are already so many books concerning her that I felt compelled to imagine something completely different.

That's when I had the idea: the heroine of this book wouldn't be Marilyn Monroe herself but a young woman who gets to know her by chance—intimately, because she sees her every day. So who is Pauline Bazelet? Well, to begin with, she is French, like me! And she moved to America as a child, just as I did when I was seven. And like me, she fell in love with the new country that welcomed her. The difference being that Pauline goes to live in Nevada, and I grew up in Boston.

Why Nevada? That's another important part of my story. For the first time ever, I wanted to write about the West, the wilderness, the immensity, the beautiful mustangs. And about *The Misfits*, Marilyn Monroe's final movie, filmed in Reno, in 1960. I wanted everything to happen in the secret of the hotel suite where Marilyn stayed during the shooting, and where Pauline works as a chambermaid. So the Mapes Hotel, which really did exist, is also a key part of the novel and I want you to feel as if you are there as well.

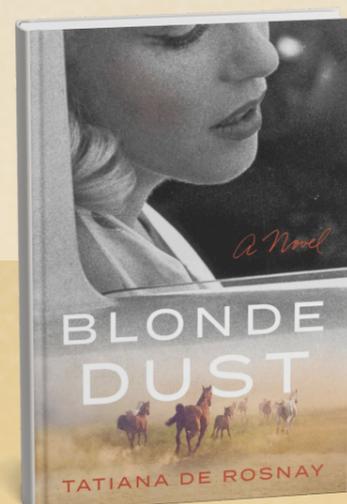
I chose Pauline's point of view because I want you, my reader, to see "Mrs. Miller" through her eyes. I want you to become close to Pauline, to get to know her intimate story, her background, her passion for horses, her family. At the beginning of this book, Pauline is stuck in a dismal life, under the thumb of a domineering, toxic man, but everything will soon change because she learns to stand up for herself at last.

To me, what the young chambermaid and the movie star share is not a friendship—that would be too easy and not completely credible. They share a form of sisterhood, a complicity. The woman in the limelight notices the girl in the shadows, and that kindness will give Pauline her wings.

I hope you enjoy the Nevada décor, the wild horses, the Mapes Hotel, and reading about how a chance meeting can change a young girl's life forever.

Love from Paris,

Tatiana de Rosnay



BLONDE DUST

Reading Group Guide Questions

Contain Spoilers

- 1.** The novel opens at the moment Pauline hears the news of the Mapes hotel's demolition. Why do you think the author chose to start the novel there?
- 2.** When asked how she felt about the Mapes Hotel demolition in the beginning of the novel, Pauline responds by saying, "I can't help feeling emotional. That hotel was like an entire world to me." Were you familiar with the history of this hotel? Are there buildings or places where you grew or live now that have had a formidable impact on your life like the Mapes did for Pauline, Marilyn, and others?
- 3.** Marcelle is one of the many war brides that made their way from France to the United States after WWII ended (and one of the lucky brides who was not deserted by her soldier). Were you aware of this part of history, prior to reading this novel? Would you be willing to take the leap of faith and move to a new country for your partner?
- 4.** Marcelle and Pauline left France for a new life in the United States. Examine the similarities and differences in their immigrant experiences, and how their ages and personalities may have affected their ability, and willingness, to assimilate.
- 5.** Discuss the roles that the various locations (the Mapes hotel, Marcelle's hair salon, the Double Lazy Heart, etc.) and settings (Paris, Nevada, California) played in the lives of different characters. Were they more than just places to them? What purposes do you think they served?
- 6.** Discuss the characteristics of Marilyn Monroe and Commander, both of whom made a significant impact on Pauline's life, along with the effects they had on the lives of those around them.

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Reading Group Guide Questions

Contain Spoilers

- 7.** Were you familiar with Marilyn Monroe and her life prior to reading this novel? Did reading this novel expose you to a different side of this Hollywood legend or change your perspective of her?
- 8.** Marilyn has a select group of people that she calls her “Happy People” in the novel. How do you think each member of her Happy People contributed to her life and her work? Who would be part of your Happy People group?
- 9.** Marcelle and Pauline were both, for periods of time, single mothers with young daughters. Examine how their circumstances may have influenced their parenting choices. Do you think this affected their relationship with one another? Did this change over time?
- 10.** Analyze Pauline’s relationship with her stepfather, Doug. Why do you think their relationship was so different compared to Pauline’s relationship with her mother?
- 11.** After Pauline receives her note and check from Marilyn, she thinks of her mother, “the hopeful war bride for whom the American Dream had gone so wrong.” Discuss the differences in the outcomes Marcelle and Pauline had in their pursuits of the American Dream.
- 12.** Discuss the factors that contributed to Pauline’s relationship with Kendall Spencer. How did their levels of power and status impact their dynamic? How did Marilyn help her change that?
- 13.** Pauline was first introduced to wild mustangs on the train ride to Reno, and again at the Double Lazy Heart Ranch where she met Billie-Pearl. How did working with the wild mustangs change Pauline’s perspective when thinking of the future? Did Billie-Pearl and Marilyn also affect her in the same manner?



MARILYN MONROE COCKTAIL

Sip alongside your *Blonde Dust* read and toast to secrets, stardom, and second chances.

INGREDIENTS

3/4 ounce apple brandy
1 teaspoon grenadine
3/4 cup champagne or sparkling wine
2 maraschino cherries



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Measure the apple brandy and grenadine into a cocktail shaker.
2. Add enough ice to cover the liquid and shake for 30 seconds to ensure the brandy and grenadine are very cold.
3. Strain into a martini glass and top up the glass with chilled champagne or sparkling wine.
4. Skewer one or two maraschino cherries and place them into the glass. Serve immediately.

MEET THE CAST



Pauline Bazelet

A 21-year-old French transplant working at the Mapes Hotel, stuck in a life she never planned—until one morning changes everything.

Kendall Spencer

The charming yet cold assistant director of the Mapes Hotel. Feared by staff, he's kept Pauline under his thumb for years with empty promises. But this summer, everything shifts.



MEET THE CAST



Mildred Jones

The stern head of housekeeping at the Mapes Hotel, Mildred keeps her staff in line with sharp eyes and stricter rules.



Marcelle Hammond

Pauline's stylish, sharp-tongued mother. She brought Paris to Reno, but the American dream she chased –wealth, status, a perfect life–never arrived.



Doug Hammond

Pauline's kind-hearted stepfather from Nevada. He opens her world to the wild beauty of the desert—and the people who will change her life.

BLONDE DUST PLAYLIST

CATHY'S CLOWN – THE EVERLY BROTHERS

I'M SORRY – BRENDA LEE

STUCK ON YOU – ELVIS PRESLEY

T'AIMER FOLLEMENT – DALIDA

LES FEUILLES MORTES – YVES MONTAND

THE MAN I LOVE – ELLA FITZGERALD

MELODIE D'AMOUR – THE AMES BROTHERS

WHAT'D I SAY – RAY CHARLES

THE TWIST – CHUBBY CHECKER

ONLY THE LONELY – ROY ORBISON

WALKING TO NEW ORLEANS – FATS DOMINO

HE'LL HAVE TO GO – JIM REEVES

AUTUMN LEAVES – FRANK SINATRA

EVERY DAY I HAVE THE BLUES – B.B. KING

TONIGHT YOU BELONG TO ME – PATIENCE AND

PRUDENCE

LISTEN TO THE PLAYLIST HERE!

