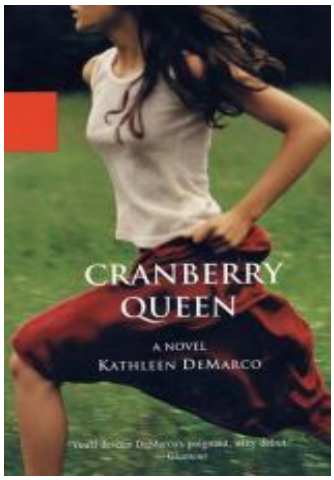
Cranberry Queen

by Kathleen DeMarco



About the Book

"The butterfly flutters past, its white wings flashing, sprinting toward the lake. I look up and see another one, orange-and-black wings, alighting for an instant on a tuft of green spindly weeds, until it flies away in front of me, until it goes out of sight. I check my watch. I am far away from everything I know. The Fates have (finally) intervened and thrown me here?"

It should not take a tragedy to put life in perspective. As **Cranberry Queen** opens, Diana Moore, a thirty-three-year-old single woman living in Manhattan, is despairing over an ex-boyfriend and obsessing about her dot.com job. She is consumed with the prospect of attending a wedding the following day where her ex and his new girlfriend will also be guests and sees this as a defining moment in her life. Diana is right that the day will be life-altering, but not for the reason she believes. Instead a tragedy occurs that unravels Diana's world and redefines it.

After months spent trying to cope with her grief, Diana tires of the well-intentioned interference of family and friends. She walks out on her life, driving aimlessly through the back roads of New Jersey. She reaches a destination by default when she has a minor car accident, landing in the Pine Barrens in a rural corner of the state. It is here in this oasis of simple living, cranberries, and tradition?and where she tells no one of the tragedy she has endured?that Diana is temporarily free of the confines of her life. Here she can be "someone else, someone new and different. Diana Moore, adventurer."

Embraced by a group of strangers, Diana is asked to stay for the upcoming cranberry harvest and celebration. She meets Rosie, a woman who is dying of cancer yet determined to live life to the fullest; Louisa, Rosie's beautiful and abrasive granddaughter who is hiding out in the Pine Barrens for reasons of her own; Jack, who touches Diana's fragile heart in the most unexpected of ways; and Sam, a mysterious man who gives Diana the chance for a new beginning. In this hidden landscape of intoxicating beauty, and with these newfound friends, Diana is finally able to explore the possibilities of change and renewal.

Cranberry Queen is a poignant and mesmerizing debut novel about life's most complex contradictions?hope and despair, love and loss, life and death. Kathleen DeMarco's vivid prose, laced with sharp wit, a sardonic sense of humor, and compelling candor, brings to life the bittersweet story of a woman's resilience in the most adverse of situations.

Discussion Guide

1. The first person narrative allows the reader to view the story entirely from Diana's perspective. What do you think of the narrative style? Were you comfortable being inside Diana's head the entire story?

2. At one point in the story, Diana says of her family and friends, "I pretend to everyone that I am okay, the Super Recoverer, and then, at night, I am infuriated that everyone believes me. Are they dumb? Or do they just not care?" (pg. 17). What do you think of this statement? Is Diana being fair to them? Is she justified in having these feelings?

3. A turning point for Diana happens when she hits Rosie with her car, an incident that is eerily reminiscent of what happened to Diana's parents. Why do you think the author chose this occurrence as the catalyst for Diana remaining in the Pine Barrens?

4. In one instance Diana says, "No wonder I have no boyfriend; I say awful things. I think awful things. I'm trying for that gallows humor, and instead I'm churlish and unfunny" (pg. 11). Do you agree with Diana's assessment of herself? Does her self-image change as the story progresses? How does she appear to the people around her?

5. Why does Diana allow Rosie, Louisa, and the others to believe that she is distraught over the breakup with her boyfriend? Why doesn't she tell them the truth?

6. How would you characterize Louisa? At times Louisa is cruel to Diana. Why does Diana remain in the Pine Barrens given these circumstances? How did you react to Louisa's motivations and behaviors? Did you empathize at all with Louisa?

7. When Sam tracks down Diana in the Pine Barrens, why does she at first rebuff his offer of kindness and support?

8. Do you think the author has effectively portrayed the emotions of someone who has suffered a tragedy? How about the actions of the people around her?

9. During their first encounter in the woods, Diana sees Jack only from a distance and yet she feels an instant attraction to him. What is about Jack that attracts her to him? Why does Diana reveal the truth about her family to Jack when she hasn't told the others?

10. Diana seeks refuge with her new friends in the Pine Barrens for her own reasons, but how does she in turn help and influence the people that she meets?

Author Bio

Kathleen DeMarco is a screenwriter and producing partner of John Leguizamo at Lower East Side Films. She attended the University of Pennsylvania and has written for HBO, NBC, ABC, and CBS. Kathleen grew up in New Jersey and holds the prestigious title of 1982 New Jersey Blueberry Queen. She lives in New York City.

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