



READING GROUP GUIDE

DANCING ON THE SPIDER'S WEB

a novel
by Sasha Paulsen

Introduction

Sarah Glass is halfway through medical school when she bolts to San Francisco to give herself "a month to live." There she meets the free-spirited Gabriel, and together they embark on a series of adventures that take them out of the city, deeper into the country, and face to face with buried emotions, family discord, and long-sought dreams.

"A funny, joyful story of young love lost and found again in the tumultuous time of Haight-Ashbury. You'll adore Sasha Paulsen's quirky band of misfits, especially Sarah, who fears love even as she chases it. A touching debut novel that takes you back to a bygone era when seeking mattered more than finding."

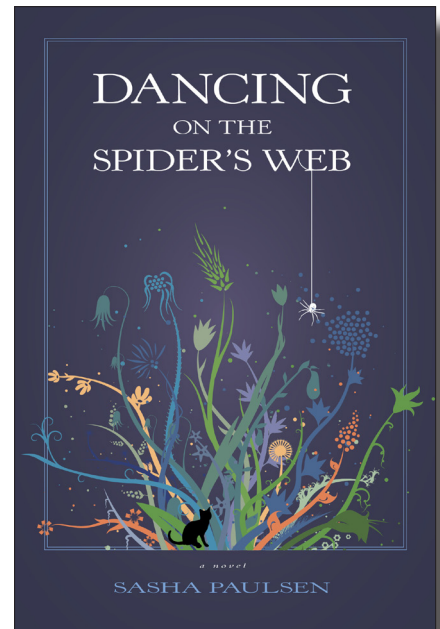
—SANDRA DALLAS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Midwife*

"In *Dancing on the Spider's Web*, Sasha Paulsen weaves her own irresistible web. Her characters are so alive in their complexity and her prose is so vivid that I began to believe Sarah, Gabriel and Rory must be living just down the street. All I wanted was to find out what they would do next. A sparkling and utterly engrossing debut."

—MARGOT LIVESEY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Flight of Gemma Hardy*

"Sasha Paulsen has set her debut novel in San Francisco, Napa and Berkeley in the pivotal '70s. She manages to deftly capture both the spirit of those times and the essence of a cast of zany, appealing characters. Highly recommended."

—JAMES CONAWAY, author of *Napa*



Dancing on the Spider's Web

Conversation Starters

- If you were in Sarah's shoes, what would you do? Finish medical school? Or stay in California with Rory and follow a different path?
- Do you think Sarah and Rory could pull off a long-distance relationship if she goes to New York for school and he stays in California with his children?
- What do you think is the attraction Gabriel Dinesen holds for Sarah, and vice-versa?
- The one stable relationship in the story is that of Rory's parents, and yet their marriage is threatened by the disclosure of something that happened twenty years earlier. Do you understand Jean McIntyre's reaction?
- Rory is good at a multitude of things. He can write, fix cars, understand physics. Do you know anyone who, like Rory, is so multi-talented, he is unable to choose a focus? Is this a blessing or a curse?
- Was there a moment in the book that made you laugh or cry? Describe a favorite scene or line that touched you.
- Why do you think there are so many spiders in the book?
- Which couples do you think will succeed in finding happiness together? Drawing from examples within the novel, support your thoughts.
- Jean McIntyre notes that the family "wasn't happy" about Rory's divorce. At the end of the book, her oldest son, the exemplary priest, is not only leaving the priesthood, but embarking on a relationship with another man. Do you think she will be happy about this? Why or why not?
- Who is more of a fantasy as a lover, Rory or Gabriel?
- Do you understand why Sarah would decide to end her relationship with Rory, when she is pregnant with his child? Do you think she is right? Do you think that Rory would have accepted her decision in the long run?
- Although she loves Rory's family, Sarah reconnects with her own family—not only her sister Cecily, but her barely acknowledged Latina roots. What difference do you think this will make in her life?

About Sasha Paulsen

Sasha Paulsen lives in Napa, California, where she is the features editor at the *Napa Valley Register*. She holds a B.A. in English from St. Mary's College and M.A. in Journalism from UC Berkeley. Aside from writing, Sasha enjoys travel, hiking, and searching for excellent food and wine. She has lived in Boston, London, Paris, and Tonga. *Dancing on the Spider's Web* is her first novel.

SashaPaulsen.com



Sasha is available to discuss *Dancing on the Spider's Web* with reading groups in person or via Skype. For more information, email anne@torreyhouse.com.

Torrey House Press

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