

Girls in White Dresses

by Jennifer Close



About the Book

Isabella, Mary and Lauren feel like everyone they know is getting married. On Sunday after Sunday, at bridal shower after bridal shower, they coo over toasters, collect ribbons and wrapping paper, eat minuscule sandwiches and cakes. They wear pastel dresses and drink champagne by the case, but amid the celebration these women have their own lives to contend with: Isabella is working a dead-end job, Mary is dating a nice guy with an awful mother, and Lauren is waitressing at a midtown bar and wondering why she's attracted to the sleazy bartender.

With a wry sense of humor, Jennifer Close brings us through those thrilling, bewildering years of early adulthood as she pulls us inside the circle of these friends, perfectly capturing the wild frustrations and soaring joys of modern life.

Discussion Guide

1. Which character did you relate to most closely, and why?
2. How does Close use humor to convey character? Are the women themselves funny, or the situations they find themselves in?
3. Ambivalence --- toward jobs, men, apartments, and children --- is a recurring theme in *Girls in White Dresses*. Why do you think that is?
4. What did Isabella learn from JonBenét?
5. Several of the characters keep some pretty big secrets, such as the way Abby keeps her friends away from her hippy parents. How does this affect Abby's life? How do the book's other secrets affect the characters?
6. What is the metaphor of the peahen?
7. On page 98, Isabella thinks about her young nephew, Connor, "All he wanted was to know what to expect. His world didn't look like he'd thought it would, and she understood. How could he keep calm if he couldn't see?" Who else does this describe?
8. Why does "the ham" become so significant for Lauren?

9. Mary wonders why nobody warned her that during her first year as a lawyer, “You will be constantly afraid.” (page 120) What role does fear play in the women’s lives?
10. “Kristi and Todd stood with their shoulders touching, wrapped in the cloth. It reminded Isabella of the way that Lauren and Kristi used to huddle together, whispering and laughing at jokes that only they understood.” (page 174) Why does Isabella get so emotional during the “chuppah within a chuppah” wedding scene?
11. Connect the dots between Shannon, Dan, Barack Obama, and the contestants on “The Biggest Loser.” Why is hope so important?
12. Throughout the book, questions of identity pop up. For example, when a friend gets divorced and decides to keep her married name, Isabella thinks it may be because, “She’s afraid no one will remember who she is.” (page 249) How do these characters determine who they are? By the end, who seems to have created the strongest sense of self?
13. What is the turning point for Isabella in her relationship with Harrison?
14. Why is Lauren ready to call the turtle Mark gives her Rudy, when she wouldn’t use that name for the goldfish?
15. Discuss the last scene. How have the women changed over the course of the book? Who is the most satisfied with her life?
16. Where do you imagine Isabella, Mary, and Lauren will be in five years?

Author Bio

Jennifer Close was born and raised on the North Shore of Chicago. She is a graduate of Boston College and received her MFA in Fiction Writing from The New School in 2005. She worked in New York in magazines for many years and now lives in Washington, DC, where she teaches creative writing at George Washington University.

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Publication Date: May 1, 2012
Genres: Women's Fiction
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN-10: 0307743691
ISBN-13: 9780307743695