

# Girls in White Dresses

by Jennifer Close

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## About the Book

Wickedly hilarious and utterly recognizable, **Girls in White Dresses** tells the story of three women grappling with heartbreak and career change, family pressure and new love --- all while suffering through an endless round of weddings and bridal showers.

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 doll-sized 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 at a mailing-list company, dizzy with the mixed signals of a boss who claims she's on a diet but has Isabella file all morning if she forgets to bring her a chocolate muffin. Mary thinks she might cry with happiness when she finally meets a nice guy who loves his mother, only to realize he'll never love Mary quite as much. And Lauren, a waitress at a Midtown bar, swears up and down she won't fall for the sleazy bartender --- a promise that his dirty blond curls and perfect vodka sodas make hard to keep.

With a wry sense of humor, Jennifer Close brings us through those thrilling, bewildering, what-on-earth-am-I-going-to-do-with-my-life years of early adulthood. These are the years when everyone else seems to have a plan, a great job, and an appropriate boyfriend, while Isabella has a blind date with a gay man, Mary has a crush on her boss, and Lauren has a goldfish named Willard. Through boozy family holidays and disastrous ski vacations, relationships lost to politics and relationships found in pet stores, **Girls in White Dresses** pulls us deep 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 is the bestselling author of *GIRLS IN WHITE DRESSES*, *THE SMART ONE*, *THE HOPEFULS* and *MARRYING THE KETCHUPS*. Born and raised on the North Shore of Chicago, she is a graduate of Boston College and received her M.F.A. in Fiction Writing from the New School. She now lives in Washington, DC, and teaches creative writing at Catapult.

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