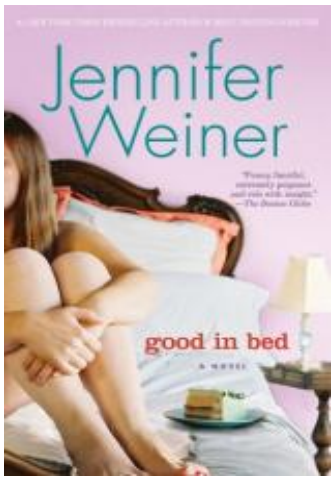
Good in Bed

by Jennifer Weiner



About the Book

For twenty-eight years, things have been tripping along nicely for Cannie Shapiro. Sure, her mother has come charging out of the closet, and her father has long since dropped out of her world. But she loves her friends, her rat terrier, Nifkin, and her job as pop culture reporter for The Philadelphia Examiner. She's even made a tenuous peace with her plus-size body.

But the day she opens up a national women's magazine and sees the words "Loving a Larger Woman" above her ex-boyfriend's byline, Cannie is plunged into misery...and the most amazing year of her life. From Philadelphia to Hollywood and back home again, he charts a new course for herself: mourning her losses, facing her past, and figuring out who she is and who she can become.

Discussion Guide

1. With **Good in Bed**, Jennifer Weiner has garnered a lot of early praise for her alternately hilarious and poignant dialogue, and also for her pitch-perfect ear in rendering the conversational rhythms of Cannie's first-person narrative voice. Looking back through the novel, what is it about the dialogue that works so well? In what ways does it serve to subtly develop each character's motivations and idiosyncrasies?

2. Discuss, in connection with the previous question, the specific tone and quality of Cannie Shapiro's voice. What techniques does Weiner employ to make Cannie's musings and descriptions come across so intimately? What sets the author's style apart from that of other contemporary authors? To which novelists would you say Weiner bears the closest comparison?

3. Cannie Shapiro is, among other things, a woman struggling to emerge from the shadow cast by her father's emotional abuse and aggressive abandonment. How successful is she, finally, in doing so?

4. In what ways do we see the painful legacy of Cannie's early relationship with her father (whom she dubs "the Original Abandoner") at work in the action of this novel, affecting the tenor of Cannie's relationships, choices, and/or motivations? To what degree can we view Bruce as a stand-in for her father?

5. "Maybe," Bruce writes in his notorious Moxie debut, "it was the way I'd absorbed society's expectations, its dictates of what men are supposed to want and how women are supposed to appear. More likely, it was the way she had. C. was a dedicated foot soldier in the body wars....C. couldn't make herself invisible. But I know that if it were possible -- if all the slouching and slumping and shapeless black jumpers could have erased her from the physical world, she would have gone in an instant." With these lines, from the novel's opening chapter, Weiner begins to lay the framework for the larger themes that temper, texture, and lend weight to the comedy and romance propelling Cannie's story. What are these themes and issues, and how are they developed throughout the rest of the novel?

6. The real-life specter of the Lewinsky-Clinton debacle looms in the background of this novel's fictional landscape. How does the Monica Lewinsky scandal -- and, more to the point, the witheringly cruel and petty reception that accompanied Lewinsky's emergence in media stories -- speak to the novel's portraits of male-female relationships in a body-obsessed culture?

7. How accurate is it to say that body fat has become, as Bruce writes in his column, "the only safe target in our politically correct world," the last "acceptable" object of societal prejudice? Where do we see this sort of prejudice at work? And in our advertising-drenched, consumer-driven society, where beauty and youth seem to be the chief signifiers of power and happiness, what are the implications and consequences of this prejudice?

8. How do Cannie's understandings of and feelings about her mother's relationship with Tanya evolve over the course of this story?

9. Are Tanya's cloying penchants for therapy-speak, rainbow flags, and "tofurkey" enough to justify the hostile attitude and relentlessly barbed humor Cannie directs toward her? Why or why not? In what way might the absence of Cannie's father be contributing to her animosity? What else?

10. Recalling a lecture from Psych 101 on the behavioral effects of random reinforcement, Cannie realizes that she's "become [her] father's rat." What is going on here? Unpack the meanings of Cannie's metaphor, and discuss how it relates to her subsequent relationships with men.

11. Look at **Good in Bed** in the context of other contemporary novels, movies, and plays about young, professional, single women looking for love and happiness in the big city. To what degree does this novel echo and reinforce certain narrative traditions you've come to expect from the genre, and in what ways does it depart from or redefine these traditions? [You might, for example, discuss Weiner's novel alongside recent works by Melissa Bank, Helen Fielding, and Candace Bushnell.]

12. "What I wanted, I thought, pressing my pillow hard against my face, was to be a girl again. To be on my bed in the house I'd grown up in...to be little, and loved. And thin. I wanted that." If we were to describe **Good in Bed** as the story

of one woman's search for a true home, what elements would make up Cannie's ideal home? And how does this ideal change during the novel?

13. If you had to distill the themes, politics, and essential storyline of Good in Bed into three sentences for a write-up in the "And Bear in Mind" section of The New York Times Book Review, what would you say?

14. In the hospital after her fall at the airport, Cannie admits only to herself that the real source of all her anger was the fact that she "had failed Joy." What does she mean?

15. Where do you see Cannie, Joy, Peter, Maxi, Samantha, and Bruce five years after the close of the book? Outline the story arc of a **Good in Bed** sequel.

16. How well do you relate personally to Cannie's perceptions of life in a culture dominated by the zillion-dollar diet, beauty, and cosmetic surgery industries? How much of yourself and/or your friends do you see in the character of Cannie Shapiro? Do you agree with all of her choices? Relate to all of her motivations? Explain.

Author Bio

Jennifer Weiner is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author whose books have spent over five years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, with more than 11 million copies in print in 36 countries.

She is the author of the novels GOOD IN BED (2001); IN HER SHOES (2002), which was turned into a major motion picture starring Cameron Diaz, Toni Collette and Shirley MacLaine; LITTLE EARTHQUAKES (2004); GOODNIGHT NOBODY (2005); the short story collection THE GUY NOT TAKEN (2006); CERTAIN GIRLS (2008); BEST FRIENDS FOREVER (2009); FLY AWAY HOME (2010); THEN CAME YOU (2011); THE NEXT BEST THING (2012); ALL FALL DOWN (2014); WHO DO YOU LOVE (2015); MRS. EVERYTHING (2019); BIG SUMMER (2020); THAT SUMMER (2021); THE SUMMER PLACE (2022); GOLDEN HILLS (2023); THE BREAKAWAY (2024); and THE GRIFFIN SISTERS' GREATEST HITS (2025).

She is also the author of *The Littlest Bigfoot* middle-grade trilogy: THE LITTLEST BIGFOOT (2016) LITTLE BIGFOOT, BIG CITY (2017), and THE BIGFOOT QUEEN (2023).

Her nonfiction collection, HUNGRY HEART: Adventures in Life, Love, and Writing (2016), was a finalist for the PEN/Diamonstein -Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay.

Critical Praise

"**Good in Bed** is a delight, a contemporary Cinderella tale told with intelligence, wit, and style."

Good in Bed

by Jennifer Weiner

Publication Date: April 2, 2002

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Washington Square Press

ISBN-10: 0743418174

ISBN-13: 9780743418171