



Jigs & Reels

By Joanne Harris
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Introduction

Each of the twenty-two tales in this collection melds the poignant and the possible with the outrageous, the magical, and -- on occasion -- the downright eerie. Wolf men, dolphin women, aging monsters, defiant old ladies, suicidal lottery winners, suburban witches, and middle-aged manufacturers of erotic leatherwear all have a place in *Jigs & Reels*. Here, the miraculous goes hand in hand with the mundane, the sour with the sweet, and the beautiful, the grotesque, the seductive, and the disturbing are never more than one step away.

Whether she's exploring the myth of beauty, the pain of infidelity, or the wonder of late-life romance, Joanne Harris once again proves herself a master of her craft. Borrowing from such diverse literary genres as fairy tale, fantasy, western, and science fiction, the stories in *Jigs & Reels* offer an incomparable reading experience to anyone who willingly surrenders to their twists and turns.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the author's borrowing from traditional fairy tales in "The Ugly Sister" and "The Little Mermaid" complicate and enrich your reading of these contemporary stories?
2. How does the author's use of disappearing characters (for example, Juzo in "Tea with the Birds" and Judith in "Class of '81") enable each story's speaker to understand something about herself?
3. To what extent does Joanne Harris seem to offer morals or parables about the pressures of modern life in stories like "Auto da Fé" and "Come in, Mr. Lowry, Your Number Is Up!"?
4. How do the quests for physical beauty in the stories "Faith and Hope Go Shopping," "Hello, Goodbye," and "A Place in the Sun" enlarge your understanding of the different ways that women experience the fleeting nature of feminine attractiveness?
5. To what extent do the stories "Any Girl Can Be a CandyKiss Girl!" and "The Spectator" serve as commentaries on the contemporary crisis of pedophilia?
6. How do the characters in "Fule's Gold" and "Last Train to Dogtown," experience the destructive power of fiction, and what do you think was the author's intent in exposing this power?
7. How do stories like "Free Spirit," "Gastronomicon," and "Class of '81" trace the boundary between the real and the magical?
8. How do the fantasies explored in "Waiting for Gandalf" and "Al and Christine's World of Leather" hint at the darker turns these stories take?
9. How would you characterize the power of food in the stories "Fish" and "Gastronomicon," and what do you think accounts for that power?
10. Throughout *Jigs & Reels*, Joanne Harris includes brief notes that explain the process of composition behind many of her stories. How did this information affect your appreciation of the creation of the book?

About the Author

Joanne Harris is the author of seven critically acclaimed novels, including *Chocolat*, which was nominated for the prestigious Whitbread Award. Joanne's new novel, *Gentlemen and Players* will be available January 2006, and has received advance praise from *New York Times* bestselling author Elizabeth George who says *Gentlemen and Players* is "a wonderfully clever book, rich with atmosphere, crawling with fascinating characters, and packing a terrific surprise as well." Joanne's novel *Sleep, Pale Sister* originally published in the UK in 1994 was released in the US in September 2005. Her other critically acclaimed works include the novels *Holy Fools*, *Coastliners*, *Five Quarters of the Orange*, and *Blackberry Wine*, as well as *Jigs & Reels*, her first collection of short stories, and two cookbook/memoirs, *My French Kitchen*, and *The French Market* (available in June 2006). She studied modern and medieval languages at Saint Catharine's College, Cambridge, and taught French for twelve years at a boys' grammar school. The daughter of a French mother and an English father, she lives in her native Yorkshire with her husband and their daughter.