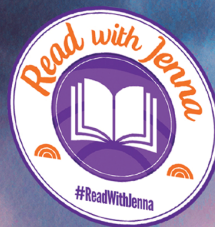


"Fierce and complex, *Valentine* is a novel of moral urgency and breathtaking prose. This is the very definition of a stunning debut."
—ANN PATCHETT

ELIZABETH WETMORE

VALENTINE



A NOVEL

BOOK CLUB KIT



HARPER

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the Texas landscape as it is richly described throughout the novel. What varying moods does it create? How does it affect the characters and their stories?
2. Why does Gloria change her name to Glory? What's powerful about the names we use?
3. Gloria's Tío Victor claims that "every story is a war story." What might he mean?
4. When throughout the novel does listening prove powerful and transformative? When is a failure to listen to someone's story harmful?
5. In what ways is a violent, misogynistic man like Dale Strickland entitled and empowered by others, his town, and the culture at large?
6. What smaller, daily harms are done with impunity to the women in the novel? How does such behavior—often dismissed as harmless—reflect and affect larger value systems?
7. Mary Rose Whitehead is criticized by her own husband for helping Glory. Why is this? How is it that her decision to help and protect an abused girl and later testify in court is so offensive to many in the town, even the Ladies Guild?
8. How does Corrine Shepard address her grief over Potter's death? What significance do you make of the cat that keeps "coming into [Corrine's] backyard and killing everything"?
9. Why do you think Corrine initially refuses to help Mary Rose? How and why does her attitude change?
10. What is valuable for each in the secret friendship between Debra Ann and Jesse Belden? What do they understand about each other?
11. In what ways is the bookmobile important, particularly to Debra Ann? What might Debra Ann mean when she tells Jesse that "Every book has at least one good thing"?
12. Ginny's grandmother told her many stories about women who died trying to do all that was expected of them? What is the value or burden of such narratives? What story is Ginny trying to write, and is it connected to her decision to leave Odessa? Did you expect her to return?
13. One lesson Suzanne Ledbetter imparts to her daughter is to "never depend on a man to take care of you...not even one as good as your daddy." Why is this so important? What are the obstacles to economic power for women in the novel? Which of those still exists in some form today?
14. What is valuable to Corrine about the occasional "misfit or dreamer" present in her high school English class over her thirty years of teaching? What might she mean when she emphasizes to them that "stories save lives"?
15. Corrine vehemently expresses to Potter how unfulfilling stay-at-home motherhood is for her. What does a fuller life look like for her and the other mothers in the novel?
16. Jumping from the high dive at the YMCA pool for the first time, Aimee and Debra Ann feel like they "can do anything" and "their faith is rooted in their bodies, the muscle and sinew and bone that holds them together and says move." How is this different from what is so often expected of the bodies of girls and women?

17. What are the significant themes in the story Debra Ann tells Jesse about the old rancher's wife and her extraordinary garden?
18. What explains the profound and unjust ruling in Dale Strickland's trial? What are the potential emotional effects of such injustice? What are the most effective ways to respond and survive?
19. Karla Sibley's experience waiting tables at the bar suggests that to speak up against the generational legacy of male entitlement, violence against women, and racism "would require courage that we cannot even begin to imagine." What then is to be done about such oppressive forces? How does Karla respond to them?
20. Tío Victor eventually decides against vengeance on Dale Strickland because "nothing causes more suffering." What might he mean? Is Dale sufficiently punished by the novel's end, in your opinion?
21. In what ways has Glory begun to heal? Though her scars "tether her to a single morning," what is her relationship to her body as she drives toward her mother in Mexico? What will it take for her to continue to heal?

"AT DUSK CORRINE WALKS ACROSS THE STREET AND WE SETTLE IN WITH A FULL PACK OF CIGARETTES AND A BOTTLE OF VODKA. I MAKE A PITCHER OF SALTY DOGS AND CORRINE GRABS AN ASHTRAY. WE TURN OUT THE PORCH LIGHT AND LEAVE THE PATIO DOOR

The Odessa Salty Dog

2 oz Vodka
4 oz Grapefruit juice
Pinch of salt

Rim a highball glass with salt.
Shake the vodka and grapefruit juice.
Pour over ice.

CRACKED OPEN, SIT OUT IN THE BACKYARD UNDER THE DARKENING SKY. TONIGHT IT IS TINGED PURPLE, A SIGN THAT THERE MIGHT BE A DUST STORM COMING OUR WAY."





A CONVERSATION WITH ELIZABETH WETMORE

HOW DID YOU BEGIN WRITING VALENTINE?

Valentine began as a short story that I could not leave alone. I grew up in West Texas, so I was familiar with the terrain, and a couple of the characters' voices were clear to me from the beginning. I had been hearing those voices my whole life. But it turns out that knowing those voices doesn't necessarily mean knowing the characters in ways that are complicated enough to tell their stories—and growing up in a place doesn't necessarily mean that you can see it.

WHAT WAS YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE?

It took me a lot of years, and a lot of miles, to see where I was from. At some point it occurred to me none of this was worth doing if I wasn't willing to risk failing miserably, to tell the stories and let the chips fall where they may. For me, that meant learning more about where I was from, and it meant being willing to follow my characters wherever they led me—however rocky that terrain might be. In the end, I wanted to write something beautiful and true for Glory and Corrine and Mary Rose, Suzanne and Karla, Ginny and Debra Ann Pierce. Theirs are the stories I wanted to tell. These women, these girls. I hope I've done them justice.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO WRITE?

Sixteen years. But like many artists, I must also account for the months and years when I hardly wrote at all, focused as I was on paying the bills, being a friend and a lover, raising my son, confronting my own demons—in other words, the stuff of a life that I apparently had to live before I could write *Valentine*.

★ ★ ★
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