



TEMPTING FATE

by Jane Green

About the Author

- A Conversation with Jane Green

Special Extra!

- Behind-the-scenes E-mails between Gabby & Matt

Keep on Reading

- Recommended Reading
- Reading Group Questions

A
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Selection*

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ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN



A Conversation with Jane Green

Gabby is such a marvelous, modern, memorable character—a complex creation. Where did she come from? And, since readers will no doubt wonder, is she anything like you?

All my characters are a little like me, particularly the sense Gabby has of not quite belonging anywhere. I often start with a strong visual for a character, someone I either know, or have met. A few years ago I met up with an author after a long email friendship, and was struck by her look; as soon as I thought of Gabby, I pictured this woman. Having that visual makes it so very much easier to fill in the rest of the blanks. Gabby's missing England is very much how I have been feeling as I grow older, but her family is nothing like mine, and her thought process quite different.

You have become a master at mining the depths of family relationships in your fiction. How do you do it? Do your own family members ever recognize themselves in your work?

My husband always laughs when he reads my books—apparently our relationship is laid bare on almost every page. In truth, I do draw from my own relationships, then push those relationships further than I ever would in real life, creating scenarios and situations that have not, nor would not, occur.

How did you arrive at the idea for *Tempting Fate*? How personal is this novel?

There is usually a confluence of events that trigger an idea for a novel. The first flash of inspiration for *Tempting Fate* came from the number of women around me who suddenly announced, in their forties, they were leaving their husbands and had been unhappy for years. It invariably turned out they were having an affair, and most often with someone

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younger, or from a very different walk of life. At the same time as noticing this, a chance meeting at a book festival led to me receiving a few rather lovely, and flirtatious, emails. It gave me a glimpse into how flattering it is to be noticed, and how easy it might be for a woman at this stage of life to let herself be seduced by that kind of flattery.

Do you think every woman (or, mother) of a certain age goes through an episode like Gabby's, in which she feels worn out by the so-called "pots and pans" ...and fantasizes about something different for herself? What is it about this stage of life that you wish to convey to readers?

I think there comes a point in a woman's life, mid-forties, where you suddenly realize you are invisible. Walking along a street, no-one is catching your eye anymore; you are called *Ma'am* rather than *Miss*, you realize that in the world's eyes you are middle-aged. That feeling of invisibility makes you enormously vulnerable, not necessarily to having an affair, but certainly to the feeling of intoxication that the tiniest bit of male attention can give you. I don't think women fantasize about a different life unless and until one is afforded a glimpse. It's not so much thinking: 'is this it?' as 'is this what I wanted?' I believe the answer is only ever in doubt if another reality is presented, and the grass begins to look greener.

Who are some of your favorite female literary characters?

Catherine in *Brother of the More Famous Jack* by Barbara Trapido, Marigold in Jane Gardam's *Bilgewater*.

*About the
Author*

“I like people who make mistakes—always far more interesting to write than perfection.”

Can you take readers into the process of writing *Tempting Fate*. What challenges did you face in terms of plotting and structure, for example? How did you manage to create Gabby’s distinct voice? Were you ever concerned about her character’s likeability?

My characters are all flawed in some way. I very much believe we are all doing the best we can with the knowledge that we have. It is so easy to judge, but none of us is infallible, we all make mistakes, it’s all part of being human. I like people who make mistakes, who are sometimes jealous, or selfish, or ugly—always far more interesting to write than perfection. In terms of plot, I wanted to write the affair, and my genius editor came up with the pregnancy storyline. We now sit together and outline each book before I draft a synopsis. I usually bring the germ of the idea to the table, and Jen Enderlin then helps spin it out into a fully-fledged story.

What does the concept of fate mean to you?

I do believe there is a Higher Power in control of our destiny, but, perhaps dichotomously, that we have the ability to both direct, and change it.

What can your fans expect from you next?

I am just finishing up the edits on *Saving Grace*. The story of a woman who finds herself disappearing when a new assistant shows up and slowly takes over her life. I have Chronic Lyme Disease, and was misdiagnosed for some years, and put on medications for conditions I didn’t have. It was a couple of years of hell, all of which turned out to be fantastically good material for *Grace*.



Behind-the-scenes E-mail



What follows are the unpublished emails between Gabby and Matt, leading up to their fateful weekend together, while Elliott is away...

Perfectly Dangerous Gabrielle.

Well. What can I say. The prospect of proper alone time with you on a weekend is a temptation I'm definitely not strong enough to resist. I do have to be back in New York and Connecticut soon...I'm thinking I'll have to fit my meetings around that weekend.

Talking of martinis...I went out with friends last night and am nursing the hangover to end all hangovers. I'm much too old to be doing this I have realized. And before you say anything about me being young, last night has proved that I am not.

My dad always used to say he could never accept he wasn't still twenty-five. I never understood it as a kid, but I have to say, I'm beginning to realize what he meant. Especially in this industry, when I'm surrounded by teenagers and twenty-somethings, I forget that I've got at least ten years on them, and partying the way they do means inevitable suffering the next day.

So...23rd March. I will start shuffling immediately. Are you sure you want my intrusion on this rare gift of a weekend alone?

xxx

*Special
Extra!*

My friend,

What about hair of the dog? Surely a champagne cocktail would take the edge off your pain.

I haven't felt twenty-five in almost twenty years. Maybe it's a male thing. Most women I know age up rather than down. I always felt much older, which now I find sad. I wish I'd let my hair down more when I was young. I was always so self-conscious, so concerned with being 'mature,' I rather think I missed out.

As for you being an intrusion, absolutely not. I cannot wait to have the house to myself, but I think I can manage a dear friend's company for a couple of hours! So silly to think of you as a dear friend when the truth is we barely know each other, but I feel I have bared my soul in our emails, and am certain you know me better than most as a result...

Xxxx

Gabby,

I feel exactly the same way about you. Roll on March 23rd ...

xxx



Recommended Reading

What follows is a list of novels that, like *Tempting Fate*, deal with themes of love and longing, family and fidelity, “pots and pans,” and everything in between.

The Scarlet Letter

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Love Letter

Cathleen Schine

The Woman Upstairs

Claire Messud

The Hours

Michael Cunningham

Olive Kitteridge

Elizabeth Strout

The Believers

Zoë Heller

Revolutionary Road

Richard Yates

This Is Where I Leave You

Jonathan Tropper

Little Children

Tom Perrotta

...and the movie “Unfaithful” (starring Diane Lane and Richard Gere), which was a huge inspiration for *Tempting Fate*.



*Keep on
Reading*



Reading Group Questions

1. Let's start with the title of this novel. What does it mean to, quote, tempt fate? What did fate have in store for Gabby? Do you "believe" in fate? You may choose to define the term as a group, both within and beyond the world of the novel.
2. When we first meet Gabby she is feeling self-conscious about going out with the "girls." She feels old, unattractive, irrelevant. Do you feel her "condition" is a cliché of middle age, or does her dissatisfaction go deeper? Do you *like* Gabby once you better understood her needs, her history, her struggles? Or are you judgmental?
3. And then there's Matt. Were you surprised by his actions and, ultimately, the affair? Take a moment to discuss his attraction to Gabby. What was he looking for, really? How was he tempting fate by falling in love with an older, married woman?
4. Take a moment to talk about love and romance in *Tempting Fate*. Do Gabby and Elliott have "true" love? What *is* true love, both in your personal opinion and/or experience and for each of the main characters in the novel? Do Claire and her husband have it? What about Trish and Elliott?
5. Is there such a thing as right or wrong with matters of the heart?
6. Gabby realizes the mistake she's made once she assesses the damage she's done to her family. Do you sympathize with her? How did you react to Elliott's reaction, and her daughters'? Did you find Jane Green's portrayal of this family realistic? Which episodes (or even words) were most meaningful, or recognizable, to you?



7. *Tempting Fate* employs a unique narrative in which Matt's character comes to life in a series of texts or emails. Did you feel, in the end, that you *knew* him? Liked him? Does it matter, either way? Moreover, how do you envision his role in his son's life? And—just for fun!—do you think that will he and Monroe will stand the test of time?

8. How we talk about books—in or outside of book clubs—is almost as engaging as reading the books themselves. What would you say about *Tempting Fate* to someone who has not yet read it? Is it a love story? A family drama? A cautionary tale? All or none of the above? Would you recommend it to a friend, fellow parent, or loved one? Why or why not?

9. Why *do* we feel the need to share our feelings about books with other readers? Also, who in the group recommended you read *Tempting Fate* in the first place? Take a moment to discuss what your expectations were in choosing this novel. Have you read Jane Green's other novels? You may choose to talk about the themes that run through her work at this time as well.

10. Did you have a sixth sense about how *Tempting Fate* would end? Were you gratified or disappointed by how things turned out? Do you "believe" in happy endings, generally speaking? Feel free to suggest alternate endings, if you wish.