

The Husbands: A Read with Jenna Pick Reader's Guide

9780385550611

By [Holly Gramazio](#)

An exuberant debut, *The Husbands* delights in asking: How do we navigate life, love, and choice in a world of never-ending options?

When Lauren returns home to her flat in London late one night, she is greeted at the door by her husband, Michael. There's only one problem: she's not married. She's never seen this man before in her life. But according to her friends, her much-improved decor, and the photos on her phone, they've been together for years.

As Lauren tries to puzzle out how she could be married to someone she can't remember meeting, Michael goes to the attic to change a light bulb and abruptly disappears. In his place, a new man emerges, and a new, slightly altered life re-forms around her. Realizing that her attic is creating an infinite supply of husbands, Lauren confronts the question: If swapping lives is as easy as changing a light bulb, how do you know you've taken the right path? When do you stop trying to do better and start actually living?

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Lauren finds that she's quite a different person in some of the versions of her life. What changes surprised you the most? Do you think that most people would change so dramatically if they were with different partners or in different jobs, or is Lauren more easily changed by her situation than you would be?
2. Do you have a favorite among Lauren's husbands? And is it the same answer if you're choosing a partner for Lauren as it would be if you were choosing for yourself?
3. Lauren sends a lot of husbands back into the attic for pretty trivial reasons. Do you have any irrational red flags like that? If you have that sort of *ugh, no* feeling about someone right away, even if it's petty, does that mean the relationship is doomed, or is it sometimes worth examining the feeling and trying to get past it?
4. If you had a day with no consequences, knowing that you could reset your life at the end of it, what would you do?
5. With each new husband, Lauren discovers that the weddings she had with these men

vary wildly from man to man. Did that surprise you? Does it ring true for you that the celebrations would change so drastically with each partner?

6. There's a moment when Lauren reflects on her unshaven legs and muses that "she has, she supposes, grown lax about shaving, a married woman. A *wife*." She is, of course, operating off some preconceived notion about what it means to be married, to be a woman who has "let herself go" ever so slightly once ensconced in the comfort of marriage. What other assumptions about marriage, being a wife, or the concept of "wifely duties" have you absorbed throughout your life? Do you find they ring true, or do they not?

7. How did you feel when Lauren met Bohai? Was there a sense of relief that she had someone who understood her predicament?

8. Lauren says she "has always hated *being wrong*, the idea of doing something that turns out to be an irredeemable mistake," and this is what prevents her from settling down with one of the husbands. When the possibility of failure or divorce is so high, how do people continue to find the faith to get married believing they are making the right decision?

9. When she's partnered with Michael, Lauren thinks that "this is the life she would design if she was drunk and trying to think through the best possible version of who she could be." What life would you design for yourself to be the best possible version of who you can be?

10. Lauren discovers a little thrill when Amos leaves their shared apartment and she finds herself with the freedom to do whatever she wants without having to consider anyone else's schedule or feelings. Is this sense of freedom ever possible within a couple? Or can it be found only when one is single?

11. Inasmuch as Lauren's husbands change, her friend Elena, neighbors Maryam and Toby, and sister Nat remain relatively unchanged from relationship to relationship, with a few exceptions. What do you think that says about the nature of Lauren's nonromantic friendships?

12. Why is it such a disappointment for Lauren when she goes in search of Carter, the one she feels got away, and there is no spark or romantic interest the second time? What do you think she was holding out hope to find with him? Was it really that good with him the first time, or was the time with Carter made rosier by the disappointing husbands who followed him?

13. How did you feel about the book's ending—both the fiery end to the apartment and its attic, as well as the man, Sam, Lauren ends up with?

14. Do you ever contemplate how your life would have turned out differently had you married a different person, taken a different job, or moved to the city you were thinking about? Is it even possible to imagine our own alternate lives, or must we view our potential life paths through the lens of our actual experience?

15. When it comes to making choices in your own life, how do you know when you're making the right decision? What's your process for trusting the decisions you make?