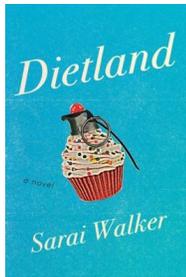


Books by the Stack



Dietland by Sarai Walker

A fresh and provocative debut novel about a reclusive young woman saving up for weight loss surgery when she gets drawn into a shadowy feminist guerrilla group called Jennifer – equal parts Bridget Jones' Diary and Fight Club.

Why you'll like it: *Feminism, body image, fast-paced, revenge fantasy.*

About the Author: Sarau Walker received her M.F.A. in creative writing from Bennington College. As a magazine writer, she had articles appear in national publications, including Seventeen and Mademoiselle. She subsequently served as an editor and writer for Our Bodies, Ourselves before moving to London and Paris to complete a Ph.D. She currently lives in the New York City area. Dietland is her first novel.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who is the “messenger from another world” (page 4) who seems to be following Plum at the start of the story? Plum says that the girl has come to “wake [her] from [her] sleep” (page 4). What does she mean by this? Would you say that the girl was successful?
2. Plum confesses that when she thinks of her life “back then” she “saw [herself] as an outline...waiting to be filled in” (page 5). What did she feel was lacking or missing in her life at that time? What does she believe will allow her to feel complete? Is she correct?
3. Plum responds to those who write to the advice column of a teen magazine. What kinds of questions do the girls ask? What do the people who write in seem to have in common? What kind of advice does Plum give them? What does Plum mean when she says that “people could be deleted, switched off” (page 10)?
4. Why does the girl who follows Plum write the word “Dietland” on Plum’s hand? What does Plum initially think this means? What does her response reveal about her character? Is she correct? What is Dietland?
5. When Plum and her mother are living at Aunt Delia’s house, people often stop to take photographs. What does Plum believe they are taking pictures of? What are these people actually taking pictures of? How does this detail tie in with the major themes of the novel?
6. What is Plum’s real name? How did she get her nickname and what does she see as the difference between the two identities? How does this change over the course of the story? What other characters could be said to have—or have had—more than one identity?
7. How does Plum’s mother respond to her daughter’s weight-loss efforts? Why do you think that she responds in this way? What kinds of things does Plum try in her attempts to lose weight? Are any of the methods successful? What does Plum mean when she says that she was a Baptist?

- 8.** What is Calliope House? Who runs it? Who lives there, and why do they live there? How did the house get its name? How does the history of the house tie in with the major themes of the novel? What purpose does the house ultimately seem to serve?
- 9.** Who is dropped out of the plane? Who are the Dirty Dozen? What do the people who are murdered have in common? What would you say is the link among all of them? Are their murders shocking?
- 10.** What is the New Baptist Plan? What steps does it include? How does it differ from the other plans she has tried? What results does the plan seem to have? Would you say that it is successful for Plum?
- 11.** How does Marlowe meet or defy Plum's initial expectations of what she will be like? What does Marlowe say was the best day of her life and why? What does Marlowe mean when she says that "Being a woman means being a faker" (page 145)? Do you agree with her point of view? Explain.
- 12.** Why does Plum go underground at Calliope House? What does this entail? How does the experience ultimately affect Plum? Is she different after her reemergence? If so, how has she changed?
- 13.** What does Plum identify as the major benefit of being fat? What is she able to do as a result of her weight that slimmer women cannot? How does this help her?
- 14.** Why does Plum avoid using the word "fat" early in the novel (pages 88 and 105)? Is it significant that she starts using it proudly later on (pages 196–7)? Why is reclaiming this word important in Plum's transformation?
- 15.** How is Jennifer portrayed in the media, and how do people respond to these reports? What is the "Jennifer effect"? What role does the media seem to play in the way that Jennifer is portrayed and understood? Plum says that people "talked about what was happening as if it were a Western" (page 212). What does she mean by this? How does this tie in with the way that we relate to the media today?
- 16.** How does Sana's relationship to other young women influence or change Plum's relationship to the young women who write to her for advice? What common trauma does Plum ultimately realize all of the women share? How is this trauma defined? Is there a way for this trauma to be avoided?
- 17.** Who is Jennifer? Is Jennifer a single person or a group of people? What is Soledad's relationship to Jennifer? Do you believe that Soledad's actions and the actions of Jennifer are justifiable in some way? Discuss. What motivates the actions that Jennifer is responsible for?
- 18.** What kinds of confrontations does Plum face as she undergoes her transformation? Who initiates these confrontations, and what causes them? How does Plum handle each one? Are these confrontations surprising? Could they have been avoided? If so, how?
- 19.** Does Plum ultimately go through with the weight-loss surgery? Do you think that she made the right decision? Does she ultimately succeed in transforming herself in the way that she had hoped?
- 20.** Why does Verena say that "Virginia Woolf once wrote that it's more difficult to kill a phantom than a reality" (page 292)? What do you think she means by this? Do you agree?

(Questions by publisher)

