



The Diary and the Green Dress
Shelley Banks

Reading Guide

About the Book

After a painful breakup and years of emotional disappointment, Izzy is trying to rebuild her life. Purchasing an old Queenslander house in Brisbane feels like the beginning of a fresh start — until she discovers a collection of hidden diaries and a beautiful vintage green dress tucked away inside the home.

The diaries belong to Grace, a young woman writing in 1919 as she prepares to marry Martin in the aftermath of the First World War.

As Izzy becomes increasingly absorbed in Grace's story, unexpected parallels begin emerging between past and present. At the same time, revelations within Izzy's own family force her to reconsider everything she thought she knew about herself.

Across two timelines separated by more than a century, *The Diary and the Green Dress* explores the emotional lives of women, the expectations placed upon them, and the courage required to reclaim identity and happiness.

About the Author

Shelley Banks is a Brisbane-based author of contemporary women's fiction. With a background in communications and a passion for storytelling, she writes emotionally resonant novels that explore relationships, identity, and personal growth.

Her other works include:

- Finding Home
- The Long Way Around
- One Weekend

She is also the creator of September Sprouts, a blog featuring both fiction and non-fiction pieces designed to inspire readers to explore new perspectives.



Key Themes and Analysis

Women Across Generations

One of the novel's central ideas is that although society changes, many emotional struggles remain surprisingly familiar across generations.

Grace and Izzy live in completely different eras, yet both grapple with:

- expectations
- uncertainty
- loneliness
- relationships
- identity
- the fear of disappointing others.

Key Themes and Analysis

Identity & Reinvention

Izzy begins the novel emotionally stuck after years of allowing other people — particularly Jason — to diminish her confidence and independence.

Buying the house represents the beginning of reclaiming herself.

Key Ideas

- Starting over after heartbreak
- Rebuilding confidence
- Emotional independence
- Learning to trust again
- Discovering personal identity outside relationships

Marriage & Expectations

Grace's diary entries reveal the intense expectations placed on women in 1919.

Marriage is presented not only as desirable but inevitable. Grace repeatedly questions whether she will ever exist as a person separate from being a daughter, a wife, or a mother.

Key Themes and Analysis

Trauma & Emotional Survival

Although the novel is not centred on war itself, the aftermath of war heavily shapes Grace's world.

Martin returns from World War I emotionally changed, withdrawn, and difficult to understand. Grace senses his distance but lacks the language or freedom to fully explore it.

Character Analysis

Izzy

Overview

Izzy is thoughtful, kind, emotionally cautious, and deeply shaped by past disappointment. Her journey throughout the novel is one of rebuilding confidence and rediscovering herself.

Key Internal Conflicts

- Fear of vulnerability
- Difficulty trusting others
- Lingering emotional damage from Jason
- Shock surrounding Claudia
- Fear of future heartbreak

Grace

Overview

Grace is intelligent, observant, creative, and emotionally introspective. Her diary entries reveal a young woman quietly questioning the expectations placed upon her.

Key Internal Conflicts

- Marriage versus independence
- Duty versus desire
- Fear of disappointing family
- Loneliness within convention
- Uncertainty about the future

Character Analysis

Martin

Overview

Martin is quiet, restrained, hardworking, and emotionally distant following the war.

Grace often senses something unresolved beneath his behaviour.

Key internal conflicts

- Masculinity after war
- Emotional repression
- Trauma
- Responsibility
- Silence

Trent

Overview

Trent represents possibility, patience, and emotional safety — something Izzy has lacked for years.

Teresa

Overview

Teresa represents warmth, stability, humour, and emotional support throughout the novel.

She acts as both confidante and grounding force for Izzy.

Symbolism & Motifs

The Green Dress

The green dress symbolises:

- femininity
- memory
- hidden history
- creativity
- identity
- connection across generations.

It physically connects Izzy to Grace's life.

The Diaries

The diaries function as:

- confession
- memory
- truth
- emotional release
- historical testimony.

They allow Grace to express thoughts she cannot speak aloud.

Houses & Rooms

The house represents:

- renewal
- history
- hidden lives
- emotional inheritance.

Specific rooms repeatedly become places of reflection and emotional revelation.

Discussion Questions

1. Which character did you relate to most?
2. Which timeline emotionally affected you more?
3. Did your opinion of marriage differ between Grace's era and Izzy's?
4. How does the novel explore emotional loneliness?
5. Why are women often encouraged to minimise their own needs?
6. What role does friendship play in healing?
7. Was Izzy right to move slowly with Trent?
8. Which secret had the greatest impact on the story?
9. Did the novel make you think differently about family?
10. What does the ending suggest about hope and healing?

Discussion Question

11. Which scene stayed with you longest after finishing?
12. What does the green dress ultimately symbolise?
13. How does the novel explore women's inner lives?
14. What emotional truth felt most powerful to you?
15. If Grace and Izzy could meet, what would they say to each other?

AUTHOR Q&A

What inspired the idea for the diaries?

I've always been fascinated by the idea of discovering hidden pieces of someone else's life — especially through something as personal as a diary. Diaries capture thoughts people might never say aloud, and I loved the idea of a modern woman uncovering the private emotional world of someone who lived over a century earlier.

Did Grace or Izzy's storyline come first?

Grace's storyline came first. I initially imagined a young woman in 1919 quietly questioning the future expected of her while writing in secret. Izzy's story then developed as the perfect modern counterpart — another woman trying to rediscover herself and understand where she truly belongs.

AUTHOR Q&A

Which character was hardest to write?

Grace was probably the most challenging because I wanted her to feel authentic to her time while still emotionally relatable to modern readers. Balancing the restrictions placed on women in 1919 with her private thoughts, doubts, and desires required a lot of emotional nuance.

What themes were most important to explore?

The themes most important to me were identity, emotional resilience, women's inner lives, family secrets, healing, and the ways women across generations experience similar fears and pressures despite living in completely different worlds. I also wanted to explore the importance of being truly seen and understood.

AUTHOR Q&A

Why do you think readers connect strongly with dual timelines?

I think readers enjoy seeing the emotional parallels between different eras. Dual timelines allow readers to reflect on how much society has changed and how much human emotion has stayed the same. There's also something compelling about slowly uncovering connections between the past and present alongside the characters.

What do you hope readers take away from the story?

I hope readers come away feeling reflective, hopeful, and emotionally connected to the characters. More than anything, I hope the novel reminds readers that it's never too late to rediscover yourself, question the life you've settled into, or choose a different path forward. I also hope readers consider the untold stories within every family and every generation.

Themes to Explore Further

Historical Context

Australia After World War I

Grace's diary entries are set in 1919, shortly after the end of World War I.

- Many families were grieving
- Returning soldiers often struggled emotionally
- Women's roles remained highly restricted
- Marriage was viewed as central to a woman's future
- Emotional struggles were rarely discussed openly.

Family, Secrets & Claudia

The revelation that Izzy has a half-sister fundamentally changes her understanding of her family and identity. The storyline explores:

- family complexity
- emotional loyalty
- shock
- and redefining identity later in life.

Final Reflection

The Diary and the Green Dress is ultimately a story about the emotional lives women carry quietly across generations — the dreams they suppress, the expectations they inherit, the truths they hide, and the courage it takes to choose themselves.

It reminds readers that although times change, the longing to be understood, valued, and truly seen remains timeless.

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One woman's hidden past. One woman's unexpected future. Discover the story that connects them.

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