



A CURIOUS INTIMACY

BY JESSICA WHITE

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INTRODUCTION

Jessica White's debut novel is a story about love, independence and courage. In the 1870s two remarkable women meet in Busselton, a remote country town in Western Australia. Ingrid, a fiercely independent botanist, is travelling alone through the south-west corner of Western Australia to collect botanical specimens for a book she and her father are writing. Hundreds of miles from home, she is trying to distance herself from a broken heart after her lover, Helena, was forced to marry.

Ingrid puts her own troubles aside on meeting Ellyn, a young woman living in stark isolation and driven close to madness by the death of her baby daughter. Ellyn's husband is away indefinitely, and she's had no word from him, while the small community has turned its back on her because of her 'unseemly' grieving.

Ingrid stays with Ellyn, sees her through her grief, and the two women forge a bond that grows ever deeper. But can their intimacy find acceptance in their conventional world? *A Curious Intimacy* is a sensual and surprising novel about love and the sacrifices we make in the name of it.

'...A STORY
ABOUT LOVE,
INDEPENDENCE
AND COURAGE'



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica White grew up on a property near Boggabri, New South Wales. She studied English and creative writing at the University of Wollongong, then completed a Masters in creative writing at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is now working towards a PhD at the London Consortium (part of the University of London) on written communication between England and Australia. Jessica has been severely deaf since she contracted meningitis when she was four, which thrust her into the world of books from an early age. While deafness is not often one of her subjects, its impact on her life often influences her themes and style. In *A Curious Intimacy* for example, the ideas of independence, resilience and resourcefulness are drawn directly from Jessica's own experiences.



QUESTIONS

1. 'And yet, Ingrid, although I can see that ours was a strange affair, the feelings you aroused in me were so wondrous that I cannot think of them as in any way unnatural' (284). What is the relationship between Ellyn's gradual acceptance of her relationship with Ingrid and her attitude towards Australian plants and the bush?
 2. Can you find other botanical metaphors in the novel? Discuss what you think they might mean.
 3. 'Women should not be so ill-informed about money matters. Keeping them ignorant does them no service' (61). Does money always make the lives of women easier?
 4. 'And what's more, who is likely to believe a story about the intimacy between myself and Miss Markham – why, it cannot even be named' (282). What role does naming play in the novel?
 5. How do landscape and in particular the drought move the story forward?
 6. Find instances of curiosity in the novel. Is curiosity a good thing or a bad thing?
 7. 'It's just that some people are like sheep – you must show them the way before they'll follow' (65–66). Is this true of the people of Busselton? Is the community supportive or vindictive? Do the men react differently from the women?
 8. Why do you think that Rowan's behaviour was so extreme? What pressures might he have felt?
 9. How have Ingrid and Ellyn changed by the end of the novel? Do you think they could have a future together?
 10. What do you think is the main theme of the novel? What other themes are important? Are these themes still relevant in our more permissive modern society?
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