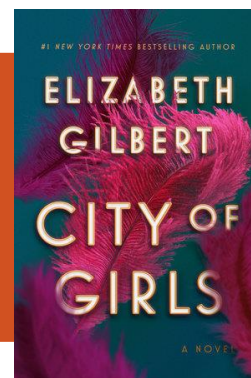




City of Girls

Elizabeth Gilbert



Author Background

Elizabeth Gilbert was born in Waterbury, Connecticut where she grew up on a small family Christmas tree farm. Elizabeth attended New York University where she studied political science. During her early years in New York, Elizabeth worked as a journalist for publications such as GQ and The New York Times Magazine. In 2000, she published her first novel *Stern Men* – a story of territory wars between two remote fishing islands off the coast of Maine. In 2002, Elizabeth published *The Last American Man* – a true story about woodsman Eustace Conway.

Elizabeth is best known for her 2006 international bestselling memoir *Eat Pray Love*, which described her journey around the world after a difficult divorce. The book sold 12 million copies worldwide and was made into a film starring Julia Roberts. In 2010, she published a follow-up memoir called *Committed* – a book that explored her ambivalent feelings about marriage. The book was an immediate #1 New York Times Bestseller.

In 2013 Elizabeth published *The Signature of all Things* – a take of 19th century botanical exploration, which was a New York Times Bestseller. In 2015 she published *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* a book that captures the joyful spirit of adventure.

Elizabeth's latest novel *City of Girls* tells a story set in a New York City theatre during the 1940s.

Book Summary

City of Girls is a unique love story set in the New York City theatre world during the 1940s. The story is told from the perspective of an older woman as she looks back on her youth, exploring themes of female sexuality, promiscuity and true love.

In 1940, nineteen-year-old Vivian Morris has just been kicked out of Vassar College. Her affluent parents send her to Manhattan to live with her Aunt Peg, who owns a flamboyant, crumbling midtown theatre called the Lily Playhouse. There, Vivian is introduced to unconventional and charismatic characters, from the fun-chasing showgirls to a sexy male actor, a grand-dame actress, a lady-killer writer, and no-nonsense stage manager. But when Vivian makes a personal mistake that results in professional scandal, it turns her new world upside down in ways that it will take her years to fully understand. Ultimately, though, it leads her to a new understanding of the kind of life she craves-and the kind of freedom it takes to pursue it. It will also lead to the love of her life, a love that stands out from all the rest.

Now eighty-nine years old and telling her story at last, Vivian recalls how the events of those years altered the course of her life – and the gusto and autonomy with which she approached it.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How do you think the story benefits from being told in the voice of 89-year-old Vivian, looking back?
- ❖ How does her time at the Lily shape Vivian's ideas about sex, love and desire as a young woman, and how do these ideas sustain and evolve later in her life? How typical do you think Vivian's attitudes would have been for someone of her age and time?
- ❖ Consider Vivian's friendship with Celia Ray, how much does this friendship influence what happens next for Vivian?
- ❖ How does Vivian's later friendship with Marjorie compare with her friendship with Celia Ray?
- ❖ Consider the different male characters in the book and their different ideas and expectations of women. What accounts for the differences between these men and how they relate to women? In what ways does Vivian meet their expectations or challenge / change them?
- ❖ Think about how Edna treats Vivian after Vivian's betrayal is revealed. Do you think Edna is justified in her behaviour?
- ❖ Were you surprised by the kind of life that Vivian builds with Marjorie and Nathan? In what ways can you see it growing out of her experiences at the Lily Playhouse in her twenties, and the lifestyle and values she adopts during and after the war?
- ❖ Do you think Vivian ever wants more than the life she attains?
- ❖ What kind of love does Vivian have for Frank, and how does this love change the course of her life? How does Vivian's love for Frank differ from her youthful love of Anthony?
- ❖ On page 377, Vivian states: "I could have spent the rest of my life trying to prove that I was a good girl—but that would have been unfaithful to who I really was. I believed that I was a good person, if not a good girl." What does this quote mean to you? Is there a difference between being a good girl and being a good person?

References

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