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## The Gown DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1 Miriam and Ann face different heartrending traumas in the book, which they both carry alone until they are able to open up to each other. Discuss how the book deals with trauma. How does the power of friendship and speaking their stories change things for the two central characters?
- 2 The book in one sense revolves around the royal wedding, but this event operates primarily as the backdrop against which Miriam and Ann's stories play out. How does the novel add to or complicate your understanding of the postwar period? Why do you think the author chose two embroiderers as her protagonists to tell this story?
- 3 People were (and still are) so fascinated by the royal family. How do you think the royal wedding affected the people of England—especially those who were living in such harsh conditions, oftentimes worse than they were during the war? Was it a sign of hope and escapism? Did it remind people of what they didn't have?
- 4 Dating was both markedly different 70+ years ago—when men and women met at dance halls like the one that Nan and Miriam attended—and in some ways similar to today. Discuss what did or did not drastically change over the years and why you think that might be.
- 5 Ann makes boot liners from the wool of an old sweater she had from her Nan at one point in the story, and reuses old tea leaves repeatedly to make tea. During wartime people learned to ration everything they had. Is this something you think people knew how to do before the war, or was it something they learned by force? How do you think people in today's society would react to rationing?
- 6 Later in the novel, we see that Miriam has become a famous artist but remains a private person, shying away from most public events and interviews, and lets her embroideries speak for themselves. Why do you think it is so important to Ann that Miriam finishes her embroidery? Has art ever helped you heal from a difficult time or experience?
- 7 What do you think about Ann's sentiments toward the royal family versus the sentiments of Milly or Miriam toward the royals—especially early in the novel? What are your own sentiments toward the royals? Are there any parallels to discuss regarding the royal family for those in England versus celebrity obsession in the United States?
- 8 Discuss Ann's versus Miriam's experience in the war and how that informs their postwar actions or demeanor.
- 9 We learn that Ann never contacts Miriam again once she's in Canada, and is extremely secretive about her past. Why do you think she did that? Would you do the same?
- 10 Discuss Heather's storyline in the book, and the conflict she feels about digging for the truth of her Nan's past. Was she right to go searching for answers that Nan kept hidden while she was alive?
- 11 Despite some trauma and major setbacks along the way, this book is tied up rather nicely with happy endings. What did you think about the conclusion of each character's story? How did the endings make you feel?

