



YOUR BOOK CLUB RESOURCE

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PHOTOS *of* YOU  
READING GROUP GUIDE



FOREVER

## QUESTIONS FOR READERS

1. *Photos of You* has a highly emotional central premise. Do you think the author does this subject justice through her characters and her writing?
2. Can you talk about the role of Ava's friends in the story and the support they give her?
3. What do you think of the idea of a wedding without a groom? Do you think it's appropriate, given Ava's unique situation?
4. Bucket lists have become a popular concept in recent years. Do you think they can inform your life in a positive way?
5. How realistic do you find the notion of a national magazine offering to help Ava plan and document her wedding?
6. Can you discuss the relationship that Ava has with her family in the story?
7. Do you think James is a suitable hero for Ava?
8. Was the ending satisfying to you? Would you have wanted Ava's story to end in any other way?

## Q&A WITH AUTHOR TAMMY ROBINSON

***Photos of You* has such a strong central premise. How did you come up with the idea for the story?**

The idea actually came from an online news article that my agent sent me. It was about a beautiful young Japanese woman with a terminal illness who decided to have a big fashion photography shoot wearing a dozen or so wedding dresses. She wanted the whole pampering experience of having her hair and makeup done by professionals and feeling like a princess bride for a day, as she knew she'd never have a wedding day for herself. It got me thinking about the different things we would all wish for when faced with our own mortality.

My father volunteers for the Make-A-Wish foundation here in New Zealand, and it's hugely important to him to really talk to the children and find out what it is they'd love to do or have. Sometimes when he arrives at a house he's already been briefed that they would like a bedroom makeover or a trip to the amusement parks on the Gold Coast in Australia. But when he actually sits and talks to the child, what they would really love is something they worry might be too outrageous or unachievable, like being a mermaid for a day or being immortalized in graffiti artwork on a building.

I wanted to write about a young woman who knows what she wants and goes after it, no matter how bizarre it might seem to everyone else.

**Do you identify with any of the characters, and why?**

I recently had a health scare with my two-year-old son. We found a lump on his shoulder that turned out to be a soft-tissue tumor. An anxious few weeks passed while he underwent a variety of tests, some invasive and under general anesthetic. It was the most helpless I have ever felt, being unable to control either events or the outcome. I couldn't swap places with him no matter how much I wanted to, and I couldn't promise him that everything was going to be OK. As his mother, I feel it is my job to keep him safe and protected, and to have that ability taken away from me was just horrendous. Thankfully, to our relief and gratitude, the tumor is benign and will be removed soon. So, to answer your question, I can identify with Ava's mother. She adores her child and would do anything to change what is happening or take it away, but she can't. So instead she is throwing herself into giving Ava everything she wants for however long she has left.

**What did you enjoy most about writing this story?**

I love writing about love, whether it's between a parent and a child, best friends, or lovers. I feel like the love between Ava and her friends and family was just extraordinary, and it was an absolute joy to write.

**Were there any challenges along the way?**

It was obviously very important to get the cancer side of the story right. Both the factual side of it and the emotional side. I did a fair bit of research into both, but also had to put myself into Ava's shoes and think about how I would feel and react. It really makes you think hard about how you're currently living your life and forces you to face a few home truths. I have also lost a few friends and family members to this awful disease, so it brought back some sad memories.

**What, to you, are the most important elements of a love story?**

For me, the best love stories must be both believable and realistic. I'm a fan of love in all its guises. Love can be gentle and undemanding. Love can also be passionate and angst ridden, sacrificial, tense, and emotional. Love is imperfect and perfect at the same time. Love is a lifetime of moments; memories that make us smile and memories that make us cry. A great love story makes us fall in love with love.

**Did you always know how the story was going to end?**

It's clear from the start that Ava will pass away and the story isn't going to end happily in that regard. Sadly, there's no miracle cure, although I wish there was and hopefully one day soon there will be. I always knew that Ava and James had to end up together. As hard as it was for James to lose her, he gave her so much happiness at the end. As mentioned in the book, clichés are clichés for a reason, and James will heal with time, although he'll obviously never forget her.

### What is the message you'd like readers to take away from *Photos of You*?

I want people to finish and understand that *Photos of You* is not a story about death; it's a story about life and a reminder to live your best one. I don't believe we can truly live every day as if it were our last; it's not feasible with our work and family commitments. Sometimes it is all we can do just to get through the days and weeks. It's more about living authentically. If you don't enjoy your job or aren't happy in your relationship, either do something to fix it or change it. Don't waste years doing something that makes you unhappy. None of us knows how long we have left to live, and it really can change so quickly. My mother passed away very suddenly at age fifty-eight, and the abruptness of her being here one moment and then completely gone the next still takes my breath away. I often wonder what she would have done differently if she had known that she only had fifty-eight years to accomplish everything she wanted to accomplish. If you want to do something, do it. Don't wait.

### Are you working on anything new?

Always! I usually have the next story forming in my head before I finish the last, which is both a blessing and a curse. I am working on another unconventional love story at the moment.

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