



The Hopefuls

Jennifer Close

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When Beth arrives in Washington, D.C., she hates everything about it: the confusing traffic circles, the ubiquitous Ann Taylor suits, the humidity that descends each summer. At dinner parties, guests compare their security clearance levels. They leave their BlackBerrys on the table. They speak in acronyms. And once they realize Beth doesn't work in politics, they smile blandly and turn away. Soon Beth and her husband, Matt, meet a charismatic White House staffer named Jimmy and his wife, Ashleigh, and the four become inseparable, coordinating brunch, birthdays, and long weekends away. But as Jimmy's star rises higher and higher, their friendship--and Beth's relationship with Matt--is threatened by jealousy, competition and rumors.

The Hopefuls Details

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From Reader Review The Hopefuls for online ebook

Larry H says

I'd rate this maybe 4.25 stars.

The Washington, DC area gets a bit of a bad rap. Sure, there are people who work within presidential administrations and on Capitol Hill that are a little status-obsessed, and really only want to deal with those who have similar jobs. (I've attended more than a few parties in my years down here in which people literally disengaged when they found out I worked in the association management field rather than in politics.)

But this area is unique in many ways—random encounters with political figures still leave me a little starstruck nearly 29(!) years after I arrived, and you can't beat the magic of an inauguration, especially when it's a candidate you supported. (Getting stuck behind a motorcade when you're in a hurry immediately gets old, however.)

When Wisconsin native Beth Kelly uproots her cosmopolitan New York City life to move with her husband Matt down to Washington, DC, where he had accepted a job with President Obama's Presidential Inauguration Committee, she's a bit shell-shocked. It's hard to believe that the Nation's Capital can feel like such a small town (unlike the anonymity you can escape into in NYC), the pace is really slow, and all anyone talks about is politics. And themselves. And what they do working in politics. And others who work in politics.

With no real career prospects and no friends to speak of, it's a fairly lonely existence for Beth. And the other downside to living in Washington is their close proximity to Matt's family, ruled by a mother who thinks Matt can do no wrong, and who treats all of her daughters-in-law as if they are outsiders no matter how long they've been married to her sons. Beth tries to get acclimated to the city and her new life, but it doesn't seem to be working.

Salvation comes when Matt meets Jimmy Dillon, a charismatic White House staffer, and Beth becomes very close with Jimmy's wife, Ashleigh, a Texas girl who is utterly unlike Beth in every way. The two couples become very close, and when Beth gets a job on a DC-social scene website, things seem to be looking up. But as Jimmy's career seems to be rising, Matt's seems to be stalling, and his jealousy of the opportunities Jimmy is getting—opportunities that Matt believes he is more deserving of—it threatens to drive a wedge into their friendships as well as Matt and Beth's marriage.

I found *The Hopefuls* to be a really enjoyable and fun read. Jennifer Close really hits all of the right notes about the culture and interpersonal dynamics in Washington, and what it's like for an outsider looking in. Even things that may seem outlandish to those unfamiliar with the city had me nodding and even laughing out loud a time or two. (I can actually recall having a conversation with friends about how many of the Safeway grocery stores in DC have nicknames—the Social Safeway, the Soviet Safeway, etc.—so it was funny seeing that in the book.)

Close is a very engaging writer with a keen ear for dialogue. I enjoyed the characters although I found Beth to be a little too passive throughout nearly the entire book, and I kept wanting her to get angry or make a scene. I also thought that perhaps Close drew out Beth's unhappiness with the area a little longer than necessary, but it didn't really interfere with my enjoyment of the book.

If you've never lived in the DC area, you may be amazed or skeptical of the culture that Close describes in the book. It's pretty dead-on, though, but you don't have to know anything about this city to enjoy *The*

Hopefuls . It's fun (and funny), enjoyable, and well-written. It feels like a great summer book.

NetGalley and Knopf Doubleday Publishing Company provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo....>

Victoria says

It has been said that politics is the second oldest profession. I have learned that it bears a striking resemblance to the first.

Ronald Reagan

I have to agree with old Ronnie. I've never been a terribly political person, I'm an informed voter and love my adopted country, but the political power sphere held little interest. Yet, having moved so close to DC some years ago, it's hard not to become fascinated by the muck of politics, even from a distance. From time to time I've selected books that unmask this world of skullduggery, both fiction and non fiction, and admittedly my choices have been mostly satirical because it really is part theatre.

And so it is that I picked up *The Hopefuls* remaining ever optimistic that I'd find a light, fictional and humorous read and for the first part it held up. The author knows DC, the raw ambition, the eagerness for power, the city where everyone walks around with lanyards adorned with ID cards, the first question you're asked is who do you work for and where discussing security clearances actually subs for dinner party conversation. This first half is a witty skewering of all the absurdity that is this town and when the female protagonist lands a job for a website that is like 'Page Six and Politico had a baby that's not quite right in the head' you wonder how accurately this might resemble HuffPo.

The second half, when the action moves to Houston, is where it fell apart for me. Yes, she does seem to want to show us the tedium of running a campaign, but in this effort, she stopped entertaining. Friendships and marriages start crumbling, the biting humor is gone and just like the female protagonist of the story, we are left to wonder why we left DC.

I'm giving it three stars because the humor in the first half was inspired, the outsiders point of view of both DC and her husband's family (Kennedy-esque in their exuberance) made me want to quote to someone out loud. But for scathing satire and abject disgrace because it's non-fiction, I recommend Mark Leibovich's *This Town: Two Parties and a Funeral*. That was eye opening and it makes Reagan's quote too true to dismiss and this other so aptly true.

I think the so called oldest profession has an honesty that is inordinately lacking in the political classes.
Paromjit

Jessica says

I loved Jennifer Close's last novel, *The Smart One*, and was actually kind of disappointed that it has a pretty low rating here on Goodreads. It's really good, it's timely, and it's insightful. That's why I was really excited to grab a copy of this from Penguin's First to Read program. I had enough points for one book and it was

either this or the new Maggie O'Farrell. Maggie's already on hold at the library, so I quickly grabbed Jennifer.

I kinda wish I'd gone with my first instinct, though, and grabbed Maggie. This wasn't a bad book, but it just didn't shine for me.

This is a pitfalls-of-marriage novel set against the world of DC insiders. Our narrator, Beth, moves from New York to DC when her husband Matt gets a job in the Obama administration. She's a little resentful, as she loved the world she'd created for herself in New York and she finds it hard to get her footing in DC. She doesn't inhabit the obsessive political world that her husband inhabits and so she finds it hard to make friends. Eventually, she befriends another outsider named Ashleigh. Matt befriends Ashleigh's husband Jimmy, and it seems like she's finally found a fun little social network of her own. But as time goes by, Beth starts to realize new things about her husband, their marriage, and their friends—and she's not so sure she likes all of it.

One thing that Close does well is set the scene. Because I work in publishing, I live in the cheaper Maryland 'burbs and my job has nothing to do with that insider scene. So I actually rarely interact with the type of character that Close is describing here but damn if I didn't recognize it and damn if it didn't make me laugh. I loved her description of Snowmageddon, I loved recognizing the neighborhoods and the restaurants these characters inhabit. DC is an incredibly weird city with a culture unlike any other city. There's plusses and minuses that come with that, but one thing's for sure: it's *incredibly* hard to develop legit friendships in this place, especially if you're not part of that insider world. I really appreciated Beth's struggle in that regard.

Unfortunately, though, I found the rest of Beth's story pretty flat. This book never really rises above beach read and it doesn't really have a lot of depth, either in the plot or the characters. It didn't feel quite like we were building to anything specific or unique other than the kind of obvious marital tensions, and even that was a sloooooow build. It wasn't boring, necessarily, just...flat.

I found Beth kind of frustrating because she was so damn passive, just kind of letting things happen to her without putting up any kind of resistance or effort in any direction. And there's no growth or development to speak of. By the time the book ended, I felt like she was more or less in the exact same spot she'd started in. And none of the other characters—Matt, Ashleigh, Jimmy—ever became anything but a Type. The first-person narration here was done through a lens that was a little tooooo snarky, a little too lacking in empathy (Beth could be a little bitchy at times) and so I was never all that interested in them.

A pleasant enough way to spend a couple of days, *The Hopefuls* would be a great book for someone looking for something light and breezy but is likely to disappoint anyone who wants some heft and weight.

Kate says

2.5 stars. This is a weird book, because while there is something relate-able about Beth's ennui-go-with-the-flow-no-real-opinions personality, I also found it deeply frustrating. She is so passive. SO PASSIVE. I get that part of that is what the book is trying to get across - one of her friends tells her this point blank at the end. But she ever does anything to correct the things she spends the whole book complaining about. Her husband wants to leave NYC for DC, her fav city? Sure. He wants to take a job that'll be a substantial pay-cut? Ok. He wants to spend every Sunday at his family's for dinner but then still expects her to split holidays when she never sees her parents? All right. He wants to move to Texas to run a campaign? Why not. He turns into a total dickbag robot version of himself? Just sit there and take it.

Beth's relationship with Matt is the only thing in her life for most of the book - her whole world revolves around it. And it's hard to feel sorry for her in Texas because she spends the entire book telling you and showing you how great he is, how understanding. And you think...you know, if you opened your mouth even once to tell him what you wanted - if you even knew what you wanted - he might listen. I kept waiting for her to look at him in Texas and just say, "Ok, fine, you know what you can do this for a year I'm going home." Basically, I wanted to give her a good shake and remind her that her life is her own and marriage doesn't mean she has to or gets to stop living it.

And then, at the end, to somehow make all of this make more sense, we get a random aside about her honeymoon - oh, Maybe Matt isn't all sunshine and roses. But, too late. It came way too late. Basically, the first 275 pages of this book are Beth complaining and being miserable and the last 30 have things happening. Only at the end? Nothing changes. Beth still has a life that revolves around Matt, only he's back to being nice again.

I keep reading that this is a book for and about Millennials, but if it is, what the fuck is the author saying about them? Because Beth spends an entire book wandering aimlessly through her own life, with no passions or motivation or ambition, content to let people around her dictate where she ends up. She quietly judges everyone around her but never has the guts to say anything, even to stand up for herself. She just placidly accepts the problems she has to deal with and doesn't ever try to change them. And...that just doesn't scream millennial to me.

I don't know. I wanted to like this book, I did. Part of me thinks I'd like it better, find it more relate-able if it were from Matt's point of view - privileged kid being brought up to think he was special and wonderful and suddenly he's not getting everything he wanted right when he wants it and has a meltdown even as he works hard and fights for something.

I can see how this might appeal to a lot of people, but for me it was a slog.

Ron Charles says

The corruption, the graft, the waste — these are the least of Washington's irritations. Once you move to the District, what really grates is the sweaty envy, the cloying eagerness, the frantic trading of acronyms by those nerdy student council members you once mocked in high school. Now ruling the world from their nouveau Versailles, this army of civil servants jockey tirelessly for position, for the teeny-tiniest anecdotes about People in Power. Only here would a lunch companion interrupt to say in hushed excitement, "Don't look now, but that's the deputy undersecretary of agriculture!"

Jennifer Close knows this city — and your pain. Her new book, "The Hopefuls," is a hilarious gripefest about what it feels like to be caught in the gravitational pull of Washington. For you, the haters of D.C. who were dragged to the capital by spouses or necessity or mistaken idealism, here, finally, is a novel witty enough to match your. . . .

To read the full review -- and watch the video! -- go to The Washington Post:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entert...>

Also, I had the chance to interview Jennifer Close here:
<https://www.facebook.com/poststyle/vi...>

Rachel says

Based on the premise of this title, I was expecting a gossipy, salacious read but as I began reading I quickly found that this wasn't going to be the case and I was OK with that. I enjoyed the start of this story; the author began a smart novel that had me captivated in the inner machinations of the Obama campaign and in the professional political culture of Washington D.C. However I soon lost interest as the story moved forward without really taking the characters anywhere. The protagonist, Beth, was dull and the Dillon's who were introduced as charming and enigmatic became characterized, inconsistent, and just unbelievable. The story had promise but I was left pretty unsatisfied

Snotchocheez says

3.5 stars

I totally enjoyed 2/3rds of Jennifer Close's *The Hopefuls*. The story of the Kellys---narrator Beth (a Wisconsinite turned NYC denizen and writer for *Vanity Fair*) and her husband Matt (a Harvard lawyer with a political bent)--is a pitch-perfect, convincingly realistic look at the behind-the-scenes goings-on in Washington DC,

When Beth gets laid off in 2008, Matt lands a job with the Obama election campaign, relocating the couple to the epicenter of the political process. Beth, not particularly politically-minded, predictably hates the surface superficiality of the DC cognoscenti scene but dutifully accedes to the aspirations of Matt. At one of the countless obligatory parties attended by Obama campaign workers (with Matt schmoozing and networking away, and Beth feeling like a fish out of water), they meet Texans Jimmy (a charismatic co-worker of Matt's) and his trophy wife Ashleigh (also feeling completely out of place in DC). The four bond quickly and become inseparable: the men working their way up to prominence through five years of serving the Obama administration(s), the women providing their husbands (and each other) moral support to navigate DC and its clique-y/fake-y substrata.

Ms. Close, with a snarky sense of humor and a keen eye for her surroundings, provides a very realistic (yet lay person's) view of DC and the political process, and the toll it takes on married "politicos". (*The Hopefuls*' obvious (to me) locus of comparison is Curtis Sittenfeld's fictional take on Laura Bush's life *American Wife*, though from an outsider's POV). For me, this was a solid four-star read throughout, although it hiccups a bit when Close moves the proceedings away from DC to Sugar Land, Texas, to follow Jimmy and Matt's circuitous ascent up the political ladder. (I see why she took the story there, but it didn't quite work for me, despite her best intentions). The misstep dampened slightly my enthusiasm for the book, but not enough to slam it (as many of my fellow Goodreaders have). Though her first two books don't really sound "up my alley", I'm sure I'll be reading more from Ms. Close in the years to come.

(Bonus: She totally sold me on Torchy's Tacos, a Texas taqueria chain. Never been, but damn I could sure devour some fried avocado or Dirty Sanchez tacos right now! yum!)

Esil says

3.5 stars. I was in the mood for something light, but engaging, and *The Hopefuls* did the trick. *The Hopefuls* is focused on Beth and Matt, who have recently moved to Washington DC for Matt's new job at the White House following Obama's election. Matt is very ambitious and Beth -- who's character narrates the story -- is an unconvinced outside observer. This gives Jennifer Close an excuse to write about the crew of young ambitious politicians who work in DC -- the same types who are so unflatteringly portrayed in *Veep*. The story itself is about Beth and Matt's relationship with another young couple, Jimmy and Ash, and the strains and complications of relationships based on the political ambitions of Matt and Jimmy and the dislocation of Beth and Ash. The strength of the book is the peek into the world it depicts -- a world fuelled more by young raw ambition rather than true dedication to political ideas and goals. Close's tone is good humoured, but there's a bite to the humour. The weakness is that the story does take on a bit too much of a predictable relationship focus turn toward the end, which ultimately deflated some of the book's strength for me. In her acknowledgments, Close suggests that the people she knows in DC are much kinder than the people depicted. This may well be true, but even from my limited Canadian experience, I suspect that there's a fair bit of truth to the world Close depicts.

The Hopefuls was written and published before the election this year. I suspect there is a whole different novel to be written about young Democrats in DC following this most recent election. I remember reading an article written by a reporter who described walking through the streets of DC around 2 am after the election, where all the houses were lit and people could be seen through the windows openly crying. Many hopes and jobs shattered...

Thanks to Robbie for enticing me with his excellent 3.5 star review. I landed in the same place, but am glad I took the lead.

Yi-Hsuan says

I wanted to like this one more than I actually did. First, the title is misleading, at least for 95% of the book. One is not "hopeful" when all one does is complain about DC and hating DC (because wow, nothing compares to NYC! And the rats in DC are apparently so much larger! In my opinion, both statements are false. Also, yes, grocery stores suck in DC, but NYC doesn't really rank too highly on this either...). Really, all Beth does is complain. And her husband, Matt, doesn't quite give off a hopeful attitude either, given that he's constantly looking for new jobs, even though he literally just started a new one. Or maybe Close thinks that never being satisfied means that they're hopeful? In what definition...

Anyway, Beth hates DC and everyone in it, Matt hates all the jobs he has. To be fair though, Beth has a point, to a certain extent. If all the people you hang out with are political types, then obviously you're going to hate your life if you're not one of them, because they are the worst. Like, 30-year old sycophantic frat boys, pissing contests worst. Well, they meet another young couple, become fast friends... or do they??

Everyone in this book is insufferable. Every single one of them, except maybe Colleen and Bruce, but they don't show up a lot. Beth, Matt, Jimmy, Ashleigh (Ash-lay, of course), Matt's entire Kennedy-esque family, all the people in DC, etc.

Foteini Fp says

Ας μου γ?νει το π?θημα μ?θημα ?στε ?ταν ψ?χνω ?να χαλαρ? αν?γνωσμα για τις πολ? ζεστ?ς μ?ρες να δ?νω περισσ?τερη προσοχ? στην περ?ληψη. Για παρ?δειγμα: "When Beth arrives in Washington,

D.C., she hates everything about it: the confusing traffic circles, the ubiquitous Ann Taylor suits, the humidity that descends each summer." Και προγματι σιχαίνεται τα πάντα σε σημείο που ο χαρακτήρας της μοιζεί με ένα μαύρο σφνεφο που πλανιεται πάνω απ' κ'θε σελίδα δημιουργώντας σου την εντύπωση τι χεις να κνεις με ένα ιδιότροπο πεντχρονο κοριτσάκι που πεινεί και δεν χει κοιμηθε' αρκετ'. Ουσιαστικ' δεν της λειπει τ'ποτα. (Privileged people problems).

Επιπροσθ'τως το βιβλιαράκι αυτ' είναι ένας μνος στον Ομπάμα και τη γυνακα του. Καλ'ς, χρυσ'ς ο Ομπάμα αλλ' αν σε κ'θε σελίδα διαβαζεις έναν μνο στο πρ'σωπ' του θα τον βαρεθε'ς στο τ'λος. (Το πολ' Κ'ριε Ελ'ησον...)

Συνοψ'ζοντας, η Μπεθ μισε' τα πάντα και αγαπ' το ζε'γος Ομπάμα. Κι αν ξεκιν'σεις να drinking game κατ' το οπο'ο θα πνεις να σφην'κι κ'θε φορ' που θα μισε' κ'τι ? που θα εξυμνε' τον Ομπάμα θα χεις γ'νει κουδο'νι στις δ'κα πρ'τες σελ'δες.

Αστερ'κια δ'ο γιατ' ?σο κακ' κι αν είναι δεν θεωρ' ?τι του αξ'ζουν λιγ'τερα, χει εξ'λλου να πολ' ?μορφο εξ'φυλλο, έναν ιδι'τερα αισι'δοξο τ'τλο και να περιεχ'μενο που θα μπορο'σε να σε μεθ'σει σε δ'ο λεπτ'.

Shannon says

It's no secret that I tend to like pretty serious, dark books, so things get a little tricky when I'm really looking to escape. Most of the time, I find it easiest to hide out in the stable facts of nonfiction, but the craziness of late has had me seeking out something a little more light and fun. The Hopefuls came by at just the right time.

When her husband, Matt, gets a job working for the Obama administration, Beth has to leave behind New York City for Washington, D.C. Though Matt quickly adjusts to the change, Beth despises both D.C. and the people she encounters, whose lives all seem to revolve around their roles in the government. When Beth and Matt are introduced to a White House staffer and his wife, the couples become fast friends and bond over common interests, with politics and competition looming close by.

Perhaps I'm missing out on a corner of the literary world, but I feel like there aren't many books focused on the unique challenge of making and keeping friends as a couple, particularly in a new place. Close really hones in on that and teases out the things that can make it so difficult, including the snarky gossip that goes on between couples themselves. Regardless of where you live or the work you do, there's something familiar in that sour bite of envy.

The Hopefuls is stronger in the first half, as it falls into some predictable plot lines near the end, but it's an absorbing read just perfect for a bit of necessary escape.

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Emily says

I wanted to like this, but Beth was just so passive and it was a real downer. All four of the main characters were pretty unlikable. I kept thinking something really scandalous would happen and spice things up - she kept alluding that something might happen with the two couples being in such close quarters, but no such

luck. When something does finally happen near the end, it is disappointing and pretty anticlimactic.

Michelle says

Loved this for many reasons including the writing style, the believable (if not always likable) characters, the timing with the upcoming election, and that it's set in DC (where I lived/worked out of college). I was not surprised to see that the author's husband worked on the Obama campaign. It's written with such immediacy and believability it almost feels like a memoir at times. (I am not a Washington insider, have never worked in politics, so I say that from an outsider's perspective. Nevertheless, I bought it fully.) I love, love, loved living in DC and one of the closing lines about what I consider my adopted city brought tears to my eyes: "And then there's the way that people come here, earnest and full of dreams, believing they can make a difference." Yes, YES! I was not there for politics, but that sums up what I loved about the vibe of the city. I began my career (and, really, my adult life) in DC quite "earnest and full of dreams." And it was wonderful.

Leslie Ann says

I really enjoyed this one! At times it seemed to drag and parts of it probably could have been left out and made the book a little more fast paced, but it was an interesting read! I would have been happier with more of a plot... It sort of read like it was just a glimpse into the characters' everyday lives for the 4+ years the book spans over. I loved the ending though! It wasn't abrupt and I felt like everything that happened was dealt with and not left to wonder.

Malia says

The Hopefuls is a story that appealed to me when I first read about it, since it focuses on recent DC transplants, which I count myself to be, too. The couple in The Hopefuls, Matt and Beth move from NYC to DC for Matt's job in government. Beth is reluctant, and initially hates everything about her new hometown, until she and Matt meet another new couple in the same situation, Jimmy and Ash. Their friendship slowly changes who Matt and Beth are, jealousy arises, manipulation and backstabbing, all the while the veneer of friendship is maintained.

This is not really a book where much happens, despite this description. It is slow, but never dull, and told by Beth, who is much more an observer than active figure in the story, at least the way I read it. She also struck me as a fairly reliable narrator, which I enjoyed. This is my first book by Close, but I'm definitely curious to read more. She has a style that gripped me instantly and felt very accessible, for lack of a better way of describing it. I was definitely turning the pages way after bedtime. There are a few clichés, a little predictability, but this isn't really a story about plot twists, it's about observation, about nuance and characters, and on that score it delivered!

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