



## The Transformation of Things

By Jillian Cantor  
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### Introduction

What if the reality you thought you knew was nothing but a fantasy?

Jennifer Levenworth has a great big pounding headache. It could be because her husband, a judge, is indicted on bribery charges, leaving her unsure about everything in her marriage. Or it could be caused by the media, who are relentlessly covering the story. Or because the friends Jennifer thought she knew and trusted have turned their backs on her in her greatest hour of need.

And then the dreams begin. . . .

And while Jennifer sleeps, she swears she can see and hear her friends' and family's most private moments. Soon Jennifer realizes she is actually learning the truth about their lives, which is also leading her to question everything she thought she knew about herself. But when the dreams start to reveal a startling reality, can Jennifer find the strength to ultimately transform her life?

### Questions for Discussion

1. When Jen's husband Will is first indicted, she decides to stick by him, at the cost of her friendships and her country club life. Do you think she does the right thing? And why do you think she would believe in him, even though their relationship is on rocky ground in the beginning of the book?
2. How do you feel about the way the people in Deerfield treat Will and Jen after he's indicted? Are they right or wrong in doing so? Did you initially feel bad for Will when he's forced to go from judge to salesman, or did you think he got what he deserved? If you were friends with Jen, how would you have reacted to her similarly or differently than her friends in the book?
3. Jen and her sister Kelly both still feel residual aftershocks from their mother's death, even though it happened 20 years earlier. How do they handle their grief in different ways? How do you think Kelly and Jen both live their lives differently than they might if their mother had lived? Is Jen right to still be angry with her father, or do you agree with Kelly, that at a certain point she needs to let things go?
4. Why do you think Jen is afraid to have a baby? Is Will right, that she's not sure she wants to have a baby with him, or is it something else?
5. When Jen begins dreaming about her friends, sister, and husband, she begins to see that she was wrong about each one of their happiness. How does learning these intimate things about those around her begin to inform her choices about her own life? How do you begin to see the characters differently after learning more about them through Jen's dreams? Is it true that we are each flawed in some way? Do you believe that, beneath the surface, we all have something lurking there that we don't tell our friends, siblings, or even, spouses?
6. Which character do you identify with most, Jen, Lisa, Kelly, or Kat, and why? Do you agree or disagree with the choices these women make about being mothers and wives?
7. At one point in the book, Ethel tells Jen about "The Transformation of Things," about the man who dreamed he was a butterfly, and then woke up, unsure whether he was a man dreaming about being a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was a man. How does this idea inform your understanding of Jen's situation? Why is the book called *The Transformation of Things*? What are the ways in which Jen transforms herself?
8. Jen spends most of the book dreaming about other people in her life, learning secrets about them. But how did you feel when she started dreaming about herself? What did you believe to be her reality, and what did you believe to be her dream world? Did you notice any clues throughout the book that Jen might be awake when she was "dreaming" or vice versa?
9. Twice when Jen takes the train into the city, she comes across a little girl reading *Goodnight Moon* with her mother, a book Jen vividly remembers reading with her own mother. Who do you think this girl is, and why do you think these scenes are in the book?
10. How do the figurines that Will and Jen give each other act as symbols for what they want in life and with each other? Why do you think Jen finds the figurines at the end of the book?
11. Are Will and Jen right for each other? Do you think that they have both changed enough to make their marriage work by the end of the book? Why or why not?

### About the Author

Jillian Cantor has a B.A. in English from Penn State University. She received her M.F.A. from The University of Arizona and was the recipient of the national Jacob K. Javits fellowship. Her first novel, *The September Sisters*, was called "memorable" and "startlingly real" by *Publishers Weekly* and was nominated as a YALSA Best Book For Young Adults. Her second young adult novel, *The Life of Glass*, was released in February 2010, and her debut novel for adults, *The Transformation of Things*, will be published from Avon / HarperCollins in November 2010. She currently lives in Arizona with her husband and two sons.