

# Green's latest takes readers down *Dune Road*

By Elizabeth Keyser

Jane Green's life isn't perfect. Like many of her characters, Green lives in Fairfield County's "culture of perfectionism." But like Kit Hargrove, the former discontented Wall Street Widow in Green's latest novel *Dune Road*, Green's new contented life rests upon extended family, friends, a balance of community and the solitude she needs to work.



JANE GREEN

"I'm very fortunate to have come through divorce and found something wonderful. Right now I live a peaceful life," she says, sipping a Starbucks tea on a park bench overlooking the Saugatuck River in Westport. Her promotion tour for *Dune Road* will start at Westport's Barnes and Noble Tuesday, June 16.

Dressed in a white peasant blouse, an off-white scarf that matches the glass beads in her earrings, white jeans and sandals, she's definitely not the designer-wearing, jewelry-laden status-conscious women that populate her novels set in the fictional town of Highfield, Conn.

The successful London-born author, who turns out a novel a year, says that her life is not glamorous.

"My life is really or-

dinary. I get to do some fun things. I get to go to fun parties and meet interesting people I might not otherwise meet. But 98 percent of my life, I'm a mum. A wife. You can usually find me in my garden. Or ferrying my children back and forth. Cooking dinner for hundreds of people. Many other best-selling authors lead far more glamorous lives."

Green is credited as being one of the founders of "chick lit." Thirteen years ago, her first novel, *Straight Talking*, was published shortly after Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary*, and a genre was born. Green defines "chick lit" as being about real women. "They are romantic comedies in a real way. They have emotional honesty."

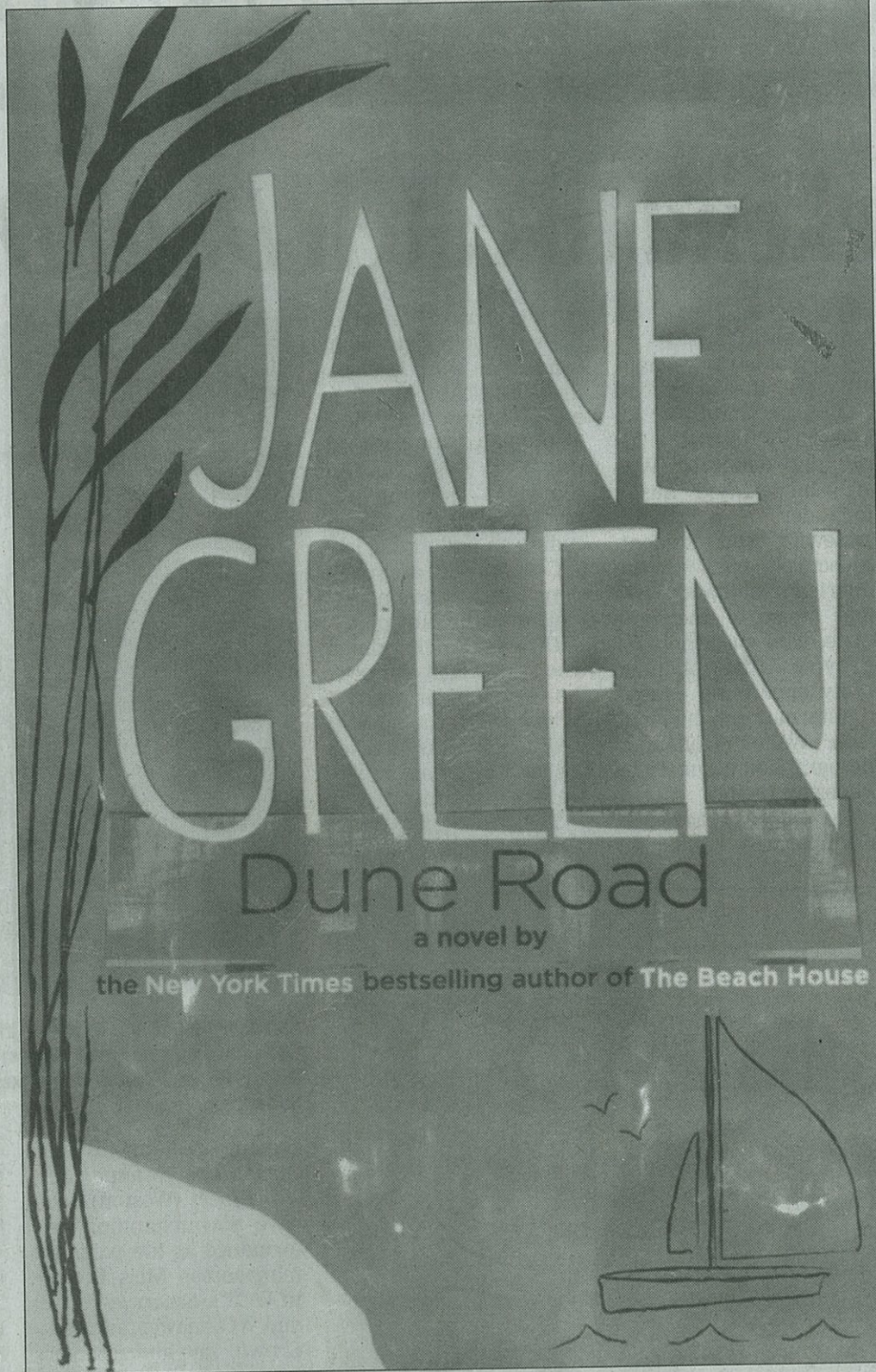
Her novels reflect her journey through life, from London career girl, dating the wrong men and trying to meet the right one, through marriage, mother-in-laws, children, divorce, grief, and finding love and contentment.

Green lives in Westport. But Highfield, the town in which *Dune Road* takes place (as did *Swapping Live* and *To Have and To Hold*.) isn't exactly Westport. "It's all the towns," Green says, "Ridgefield, New Canaan, Westport, Greenwich. There are elements from each."

Highfield is full of Wall Street widows who live in enormous, perfectly designed houses. Many are caught up in a cycle of shopping, competition and status. But it doesn't leave them happy.

Green knows from experience that seeming to have it all isn't having it all.

"I was living in a big house. I appeared to have



everything. But I was terribly unhappy," she says, in her soft English accent.

Like Kit in *Dune Road*, Green separated from her husband and moved to a small house. Green's

small house, however, was by Compo beach and through it she met the man she would marry next, Ian Warburg, a native Westporter. She also discovered a community of like-minded people.

"Old Westport is still here," she says, "You just have to look for it."

She and Warburg have an "extremely blended family." Together, they have six children ranging from 13 to 6-year-old twins.

She describes their life as being chaotic and "a lot of fun. Our house is the house everyone loves to come to. I love cooking.

Every weekend I'm cooking for 25 people."

Visitors include exes and in-laws, with step kids and step grandparents as close as blood relatives. Step-parenting is eased by Warburg spending two days a week in the city with his children, and Green spending two days with her kids in Westport. "They get our undivided attention," she says.

The Green-Warburg clan is now renting a house in Westport while they build a new one on the site of a torn-down 1950s ranch. They are working with architect Brooke Girty, who is

drawing up plans to recreate the Italianate Victorian house Warburg grew up in on Compo Parkway. And while the architectural details and proportions of the house will be just right, the inside won't be perfect.

"I do think we are all far too caught up in the culture of perfectionism, and nowhere is it more apparent than in our homes," she says, "A house can be beautifully decorated, but if it's too perfect, it's not a home. I've been into some stunning houses here, but wouldn't want to live there. If homes are a reflection of who we are, they should be filled with things we have collected throughout the years. Art we love. Books we have read. A little clutter is a wonderful thing. Give me a big squishy sofa over a formal French one any day of the week. My favorite saying is: A house is made of wood and stone, but homes are made of love alone."

What's next for the prolific author? "I'm gestating," she said. "I think I want to write about sisters, or siblings. I have a title, *The Practice Marriage*, but it doesn't go with the theme. It might be written from a man's point of view. I've written too much about women."

Young women are discovering Green's early books. Her original audience has grown with her, and can relate to the 40-ish characters in *Dune Road*. Older readers discovered "The Beach House," Green's previous novel, whose main character, Nan, was in her 60s.

"When I did book readings, the audience was filled with women in their 60s and 70s. They told me, 'We didn't know you wrote for us.'"

Could her future audience include men?

"I have a very active imagination," she said, "I create stories about everyone's lives."

Green will appear at the Westport Barnes and Nobles for a reading and book signing Tuesday, June 16, at 7 p.m. She will appear at the Fairfield Borders, June 30, at 7 p.m.

## Aspiring actors invited to workshop

The last time a non-member could attend an official Theatre Artists Workshop acting class was 1984. Now, for the first time in 25 years, non-member actors can join Workshop members in a special Theatre Artists Workshop class taught by

Reuben, Reuben and Silkwood, directed by Mike Nichols.

In addition to her private classes, workshops and seminars, Kerr has taught at Yale, Sarah Lawrence, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Playwright's Horizons Theatre School

Kerr's book, *The Four Keys to Brilliant Acting*, \$9.95, provided at the class, is required reading.

Admission is based on personal interview with Kerr. To schedule an interview, send an e-mail with your phone number and a brief description of what