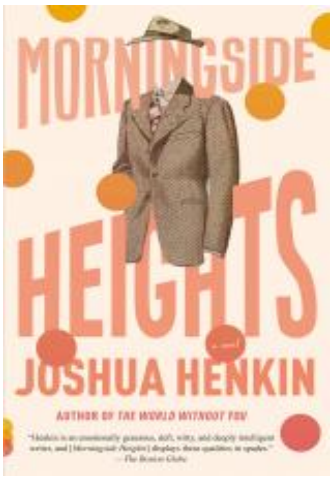
Morningside Heights

by Joshua Henkin



About the Book

When Ohio-born Pru Steiner arrives in New York in 1976, she follows in a long tradition of young people determined to take the city by storm. But when she falls in love with and marries Spence Robin, her hotshot young Shakespeare professor, her life takes a turn she couldn?t have anticipated.

Thirty years later, something is wrong with Spence. The Great Man can?t concentrate; he falls asleep reading *The New York Review of Books*. With their daughter, Sarah, away at medical school, Pru must struggle on her own to care for him. One day, feeling especially isolated, Pru meets a man, and the possibility of new romance blooms. Meanwhile, Spence?s estranged son from his first marriage has come back into their lives. Arlo, a wealthy entrepreneur who invests in biotech, may be his father?s last, best hope.

MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS is a sweeping and compassionate novel about a marriage surviving hardship. It?s about the love between women and men, and children and parents; about the things we give up in the face of adversity; and about how to survive when life turns out differently from what we thought we signed up for.

Discussion Guide

1. Explore the role that Judaism plays in Pru?s life. Why does her observance ebb and flow? At which moments in her life does she reevaluate her commitment to Judaism? Is her Jewishness a central pillar of her identity? Why or why not?

2. Discuss Ginny?s role in the Robin-Steiner household. Why does Pru decide to hire Ginny? How does Ginny relate to Spence? What sacrifices does Ginny make in her years-long service to her employers? How do Pru and Ginny each understand the financial aspect of their relationship?

3. How does Arlo?s decision to move in with Spence, Pru and Sarah alter the family dynamic? Is he embraced equally

by all? When and why do tensions arise?

4. Explore Spence and Arlo?s early relationship. How does Spence try to connect with his son? Are his attempts successful? Why or why not? How does his approach to parenting Arlo compare to his approach to parenting Sarah?

5. Why does Arlo decide to cut Sarah?s hair, and why does Sarah choose not to reveal him to her parents as the culprit? What does this incident suggest about Arlo and Sarah?s understanding of each other? How does this episode affect their relationship in the years to come?

6. Discuss Arlo?s understanding of his aunt Enid. Why does his first visit to the rehabilitation center make such an impression on him? Why does he decide to return once more, years later, after his father?s ceremony?

7. Why is Arlo so eager to organize a family reunion? What does he hope to gain from it? Does the event rise to his expectations? Why or why not?

8. Discuss Arlo?s relationship with his mother. Does he thrive in the itinerant life she provides for him? How does his time in New York affect his perception of her? Does their relationship ever reach a place of peace and understanding? Why or why not?

9. Compare and contrast Sarah?s and Arlo?s coping strategies. How does each character make sense of their father?s decline? How does his illness affect their choices and life trajectories? Does either character harbor regrets about their relationship with their father, and if so, how are these regrets manifested?

10. Consider the themes of ambition and success as they are depicted in the novel. What are each character?s ambitions, and what obstacles must they overcome in their pursuits? How does each character?s success --- or lack thereof --- impact the formation of their identity?

11. Examine Arlo?s path through higher education and beyond. Why does he lie to Sarah about his admission to Reed, and what is the true story about his time there? How does he carve out a professional niche for himself? How do you make sense of his competing desires to succeed and to reject academia entirely? Has Arlo met his father?s expectations of him?

12. Explore Pru?s attraction to Walter. What draws her to him, and what about their relationship gives her pause? How does her connection with Walter compare to the connection she shares with Spence? Do you think it?s ethical for Pru and Walter to pursue a relationship while Spence is still alive? Why or why not?

13. Discuss the final years of Spence?s life. How does Pru manage? What helps her come to terms with her husband?s fate? What insight does she glean about her husband and his early life as his decline accelerates?

14. Discuss the conclusion of the novel. How would you characterize its tone? Is this the ending you were expecting? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Joshua Henkin is the author of the novels SWIMMING ACROSS THE HUDSON (a *Los Angeles Times* Notable Book), MATRIMONY (a *New York Times* Notable Book), and THE WORLD WITHOUT YOU (winner of the 2012 Edward Lewis Wallant Award for American Jewish Fiction and a finalist for the 2012 National Jewish Book Award). His latest book is MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and directs the MFA program in Fiction Writing at Brooklyn College.

Morningside Heights

by Joshua Henkin

Publication Date: May 24, 2022
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN-10: 0525566635
ISBN-13: 9780525566632