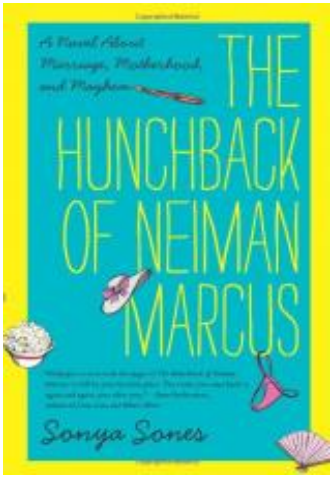
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The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus: A Novel About Marriage, Motherhood, and Mayhem

by Sonya Sones



About the Book

My name is Holly.

This story is about me --- a writer who's way behind on her deadline.

But, honestly, how can I concentrate on my work when my 50th birthday's rushing at me like a freight train, my hormones are making me feel like a Szechuan flambé, and my 80-year-old mother's biting her nurses?

Not to mention the fact that my daughter's just begun applying to colleges (none of which are within a 1,000-mile radius of home), and lately my husband's been such an irritating, finger-pointing stinker that I've found myself dreaming of ways to spend his insurance money?

My name is Holly. This book tells my story --- a coming-of-middle-age story.

Discussion Guide

1. Describe Holly. Is she the type of person you'd want to be friends with? Does she remind you of anyone you know? Does anything about her remind you of yourself?

2. In the poem, "But Now --- I'll Never be Pregnant Again," Holly says, "My biological clock has ticked its last tock. And the finality of this fact, the that's-thatness of it, hollows me like a gutted pumpkin." Although Holly and her husband don't want any more children, when she finds out her baby-making days are over, she feels despondent. Why do you think this is?

3. During a visit to Neiman Marcus's "Last Call Sale" with her daughter Samantha, Holly realizes that her youthfulness is fleeting. How does this incident continue to shape Holly's sense of self? In what ways are her experiences and her feelings about growing older universal to women?

4. In **The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus**, fear both motivates and incapacitates Holly. What is Holly afraid of? Are her fears justified? How does Holly deal with her fears? Do you have similar fears? How do you deal with them?

5. Alice's reemergence into the world of dating teaches her and Holly that the rules of courtship have changed. In what ways is dating in this modern age easier/harder than it has been in the past? How does Holly help "market" Alice for the digital dating world? If you had to sell yourself on Match.com what would your profile say?

6. How would you characterize the relationship between Holly and Michael? How does their relationship change over the course of the novel? What brings about this change?

7. Even before Samantha leaves for college, Holly's marriage is, at times, very rocky. When she worries that her husband is having an affair with Brandy, she decides not to confront him because he thinks that "jealousy is a useless emotion." Is jealousy a useless emotion? Is it best to discuss these kinds of issues with your spouse, or are some things better left unsaid?

8. In what ways is the loss of the family's beloved pepper tree symbolic of the changes occurring in the lives of the main characters?

9. The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus is told in verse. Do you think that if the story had been told using ordinary prose it would have had the same emotional impact? How does the fact that this story is written in poetry affect your enjoyment of it?

10. Throughout the novel, the tone of Sones' poems continually shifts back and forth between heavy and light, taking you on an emotional rollercoaster ride. Were there any poems that made you cry? Any that made you laugh? Was there one poem in particular that resonated with you? If so, what was it that felt familiar to your own experiences?

11. Given how Holly feels about Dr. Hack ("he has about as much bedside manner as an alarm clock") why is she so tempted by him in the elevator? Is it simply due to "chemistry" or is it more complicated than that? Have you ever been attracted to someone you didn't like? Do you think Holly made the right decision when she chose not to give in to Hack's advances? If the lights hadn't come back on when they did, what do you think might have happened?

12. The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus is a story about loss and acceptance. What does Holly lose during the course of the story? What does she find? How does she reach a place of acceptance about the changes that occur in her life?

13. When we first meet Holly, she's desperately trying to slam on her brakes while her fiftieth birthday "rushes at her like a cinderblock wall." By the end of the story, Holly has turned fifty-one. How has this year changed her? Is fifty the new forty?

Author Bio

Sonya Sones is the author of four acclaimed novels for teens: **Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy**; **What My Mother Doesn't Know**; **One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies**; and **What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know**. She lives in California with her family and only shops at Neiman's when it's having a sale.

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