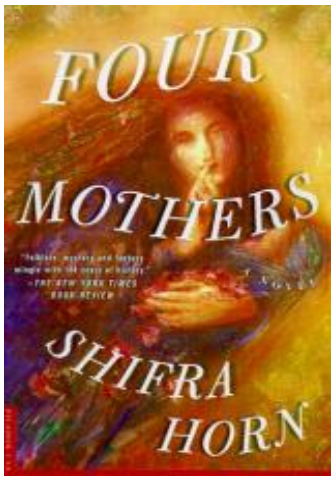
Four Mothers

by Shifra Horn



About the Book

In the tradition of Isabel Allende?s **The House of the Spirits** and Amy Tan?s **The Joy Luck Club**, Shifra Horn?s beautifully imagined and lavishly told debut novel tells the story of four generations of women in one family against the background of 100 years in Jerusalem.

The story begins at the end, with Amal, the fourth generation, whose husband deserted her after the birth of their first-born son. Her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother are overjoyed because the birth of a healthy boy means that the curse against the women of their family has been broken: there is no daughter to inherit it. ?Come, listen,? they say to Amal, ?listen to the story of the family?s ?four mothers? and the story of the curse that foreshadowed each father?s disappearance. Be comforted by your foremothers in blood and in spirit.?

There is Mazal, the orphan, whose ill-fated marriage initiates the curse; her daughter Sara, the most beautiful girl in the village whose golden hair becomes a symbol for her mysterious ability to heal; Sara?s daughter Pnina-Mazal, the unwanted child whose talent for knowing others? thoughts brings her both joy and sorrow; and her daughter Geula, Amal?s mother, whose razor-sharp intellect and idealism is both her gift and her cross to bear.

Epic in scope, mysterious, rich in the magical realism of fable and the folklore of legend, **Four Mothers** is a masterpiece of storytelling to be cherished.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you believe in the curse Dvora describes?

2. What does the author achieve in the narrative through the use of magical realism? What is the difference between magic and superstition for the villagers? Is it an actual difference or a perceived difference?

3. What does the ritual of visiting the mikveh symbolize, both for the neighborhood women and within the context of the narrative?

4. Horn makes extensive use of natural and physical phenomenon, as symbols of life and death and as portents of good and evil. What symbols are most effective and what are their meanings? How does the author use things like women?s hair and physical features, plants and flowers, animals and bugs?

5. What are the tokens of affection in the novel, both romantic and between generations?

6. What is the changing nature of the institution of marriage in the novel? What about the notion of true love?

7. How does the novel characterize motherhood and the relationship between mothers and daughters in the book? How is it different from fatherhood and the relationships between fathers and sons or mothers and sons? How do the relationships change from generation to generation?

8. How does each woman rely on or get misled by the artifacts of her ancestors? Consider actual items that are handed down, such as photographs and other objects, but also the oral tradition passed on by each woman to her daughter.

9. What role does the nature of communication and language play in the novel?

10. How important is religion in the lives of this family? Cultural tradition? National identity?

Author Bio

Shifra Horn was born in Tel Aviv and lives in Jerusalem. She has a B.A. in Biblical Studies, Archaeology and Communications. Horn has worked as a journalist and lecturer, TV host, and spokesperson for the Israeli Ministry of Absorption, and currently runs her own public relations firm. **Four Mothers**, her first novel, was a national bestseller in Israel and the winner of Israel?s Book Publishers Association?s Golden Book Prize.

Critical Praise

?Shifra Horn, one of Israel?s most popular and original writers, has written a magnificent book which explores the lives of four generations of women with humor, compassion, and deep understanding. A joy to read, **Four Mothers** is an unforgettable literary experience which should not be missed.?

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