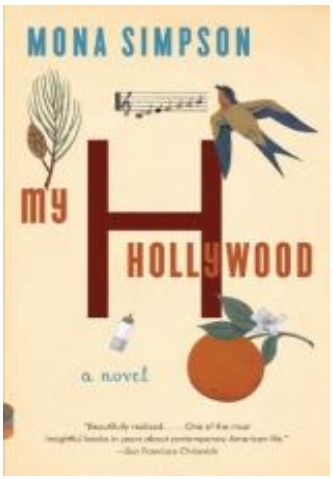
My Hollywood

by Mona Simpson



About the Book

A wonderfully provocative and appealing novel, from the much-loved author of **Anywhere But Here** and **A Regular Guy**, her first in ten years. It tells the story of two women whose lives entwine and unfold behind the glittery surface of Hollywood.

Claire, a composer and a new mother, comes to LA so her husband can follow his passion for writing television comedy. Suddenly the marriage --- once a genuine 50/50 arrangement --- changes, with Paul working long hours and Claire left at home with a baby, William, whom she adores but has no idea how to care for.

Lola, a 52-year-old mother of five who is working in America to pay for her own children?s higher education back in the Philippines, becomes their nanny. Lola stabilizes the rocky household and soon other parents try to lure her away. What she sacrifices to stay with Claire and ?Williamo? remains her own closely guarded secret.

In a novel at turns satirical and heartbreaking, where mothers? modern ideas are given practical overhauls by nannies, we meet Lola?s vast network of fellow caregivers, each with her own story to tell. We see the upstairs competition for the best nanny and the downstairs competition for the best deal, and are forced to ask whether it is possible to buy love for our children and what that transaction costs us all.

We look into two contemporary marriages --- one in America and one in the Philippines --- and witness their endangerment, despite the best of intentions.

My Hollywood is a tender, witty, and resonant novel that provides the profound pleasures readers have come to expect from Mona Simpson, here writing at the height of her powers.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with Claire recalling her first date with Paul and their agreement that for a modern couple child rearing would have to be ?fifty-fifty.? Why doesn?t this work out for them?

2. Are you a parent yourself? How do you relate to Claire?s complicated feelings about motherhood?

3. Why does Claire bring Lola along to care for Will in New York, even though it means she?ll lose money on the trip?

4. Which has more of an effect on the parent-nanny relationships in the novel --- race or class? Why? How does it work both ways?

5. Would this novel be different if Lola were a white American nanny?

6. Discuss the way Simpson plays with time. Why is the novel set in the 1990s? How does Simpson use foreshadowing and flash-forwards?

7. When it comes to the children, who has the most power in this novel, the parent or the nanny?

8. What is the role of fatherhood in this novel?

9. What is the significance of The Book of Ruth? Why do the nannies write in it?

10. Is Simpson?s novel at all similar to The Book of Ruth?

11. How does Claire?s relationship with her own mother influence her parenting? Does her childhood make her a better parent?

12. Lola left her own children to earn money by raising other people?s kids. Does this make her a bad mother?

13. How do you think Lola?s children will turn out? Do you think they?ll have emotional scars from her years away from them?

14. Why does Lola turn down Helen and Jeff?s job offer? Why doesn?t she mention it to Claire and Paul?

15. Discuss gender roles as presented in the novel. How does being male or female affect the characters? lives?

16. Which man is a better husband and father --- Paul or Jeff? Why?

17. In what ways are Claire?s and Lola?s marriages similar?

18. Examine the relationship between Lola and Lucy. Why does Lola do so much for this young woman?

19. Reread and discuss the scene in which China drowns (page 246). Who is responsible? What do we learn about the nannies from this episode?

20. Does Claire feel there is a distinction between her career and her music? Which is central to her?

21. Which character has the most regrets? Are there any central characters who have none?

22. What is the significance of the Neruda poem on page 349? What is Judith?s intention in giving Lola this poem?

23. Why does Lola return to the Philippines? What does she imagine her life will be like there?

24. What was your first thought about Claire?s surprise visit to Tagaytay? Why do you think she decided to go?

25. Discuss Lola?s final chapter. Do you think she?s happy in the end?

26. This novel examines the famous Beatles line ?Money can?t buy me love.? In a sense, Paul and Claire try to buy love for their son. Do you think love can be bought and sold?

Author Bio

Mona Simpson is the bestselling author of ANYWHERE BUT HERE, THE LOST FATHER, A REGULAR GUY, OFF KECK ROAD, MY HOLLYWOOD, CASEBOOK and COMMITMENT. OFF KECK ROAD was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and won the Heartland Prize from the *Chicago Tribune*. She has received a Whiting Writers? Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, a Lila Wallace-Reader?s Digest Writers? Award, and an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She is on the faculty at UCLA and also teaches at Bard College. In 2020, she was named publisher of *The Paris Review*. She lives in Santa Monica, California.

Critical Praise

"In her first novel since **Off Keck Road**, Simpson tells a blistering story of fractured love and flailing parents. Claire, a composer and new mother, has moved to Santa Monica, Calif., so that her husband, Paul, can follow his dreams of becoming a TV comedy writer. When Paul?s job requires late nights, Claire, already overwhelmed with balancing motherhood and career, hires Lola, a middle-aged Filipina, to help with her son, William, and soon Lola?s trying to plug holes in Claire and Paul?s slowly sinking family ship. Claire and Lola narrate in alternating chapters; fragile and sometimes fierce Claire deploys a biting wit that shreds the pretensions that permeate her social life and her marriage, while Lola is more open-hearted and eager to help people, though she also draws laughs with her observations about wealthy families. The story both satirizes and earnestly assesses the failings of upper-middle-class L.A., and Simpson?s taut prose allows her to drill into the heart of relationships, often times with a single biting sentence. Funny, smart, and filled with razor sharp observations about life and parenthood, Simpson?s latest is well worth the wait."

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Publication Date: August 9, 2011
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN-10: 0307475026
ISBN-13: 9780307475022