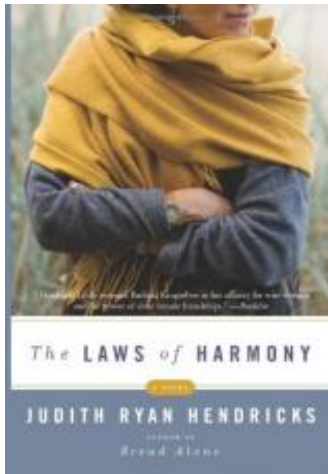


The Laws of Harmony

by Judith Ryan Hendricks



About the Book

Sunny Cooper has been running since she was eighteen --- from the New Mexican commune where she grew up . . . and from the haunting memory of the freak accident that took the life of her younger sister. Now, at thirty-two, Sunny voices radio spots in Albuquerque while struggling to hold on to a floundering relationship. But when a second tragic accident --- and the devastating truths that come to light in its aftermath --- turns her world upside down, Sunny runs again.

In the town of Harmony on San Miguel Island, she takes a new job, learns to ride a motorcycle, and makes some surprising new friends. But the past is never far behind. A startling discovery --- along with an emotional and revelatory reunion with her estranged mother --- is forcing Sunny to step out from the shadows of yesterday to embrace an uncertain future.

Discussion Guide

1. What does Sunny Cooper's flexible assortment of occupations—voice-over artist, personal errand runner, obsessive baker—suggest about her personality and her professional focus?
2. How do the suspicious circumstances surrounding Michael Graham's death and his behavior prior to his disappearance make him seem like a stranger to Sunny?
3. How do the detailed descriptions of food and cooking in **The Laws of Harmony** affect your reading experience? Which were most memorable to you and why?

4. Why does Betsy Chambliss conceal her betrayal from Sunny, and could there be any possible justification for her behavior?
5. How does the tragic death of her younger sister, Mari, factor into Sunny's feelings about growing up in the commune in Armonía?
6. Sunny can't wait to get away from Armonía, but after almost fourteen years on her own, the normality and stability she craves still elude her. Why is this? To what extent is the summer idyll with her grandparents in California responsible for her sense of living an unmoored life?
7. Why do you think the author chose to explore the strange coincidence of Sunny's having been raised in Armonía, and her having turned up in a town called Harmony? What does this convergence suggest, and to what extent do you think the names might be intended ironically?
8. How would you characterize Sunny's feelings about her mother, Gwen, returning to her life? To what extent is their relationship irretrievably fractured?
9. What does JT's reaction to the news of Sunny's pregnancy reveal about his character and their romantic potential as a couple?
10. What do you think the ending of the book suggests for Sunny, her future life in San Miguel, and her relationships with JT, Gwen, and the others on whom she has come to depend?

Author Bio

I was born in Silicon Valley when it was known as the Santa Clara Valley, or, more poetically, the Valley of Heart's Delight, because it was a lovely, bucolic place known for its orchards and sleepy small towns. Which means if you have any mathematical ability at all, you can figure out that I'm older than I act.

I had a boringly happy childhood in a middle-class suburban family with my parents, who recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary, and my younger brother. My mother instilled in me a love of reading, and I branched out from there into writing, although it took me a while to get serious about it.

The first thing I remember writing, when I was about 7 years old, was a story about a family whose Christmas tree went missing. That was followed by a few plays coauthored with my best friend, Lynn Davis, and performed in her garage to a captive audience of intimidated younger kids. The plays were mostly outer space/cowboy stories—don't ask. In junior high it was gothic romance thrillers, and high school was given over to bad poetry about the varsity basketball team.

I graduated from James Monroe High School in Sepulveda, CA, and went on to a checkered college career encompassing many schools and numerous changes of major. When I graduated with a degree in journalism from Georgia State University, I immediately began to drift from one job to another—journalist, substitute teacher, public relations specialist for the phone company and a public television station, advertising copywriter, airline computer

instructor, and travel agent.

Then, fortuitously, I landed at the McGraw Street Bakery in Seattle, WA, where I fell in love with the rhythms of baking. From that experience came **Bread Alone**, published in the U.S. in 2001. **Isabel's Daughter** (June 2003) grew out of my love for and fascination with the Southwest. **The Baker's Apprentice** (April 2005) is a sequel to **Bread Alone**, and my new book, **The Laws of Harmony** is due out in February 2009.

Because I was raised to be modest, I'm too shy to say, "My novels have been translated into 11 languages and distributed in more than 15 countries worldwide." So I let my husband, Geoff, type that part in.

We now live in Santa Fe, NM, with Blue, who is half corgi, half blue heeler, all comedian. When I'm not laughing at her, I'm baking bread or working on my fifth book.

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