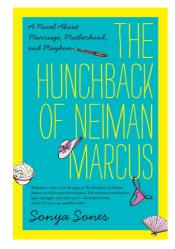# The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus

By Sonya Sones
ISBN: 9780062079084

Introduction

Say hello to Holly'a writer way behind on her deadline whose fiftieth birthday is rushing at her like a freight train. Which might not seem so bad if her hormones weren't making her feel like a Szechuan flamb', her editor wasn't calling every day to tighten the screws, and her eighty-year-old mother wasn't biting her nurses. Not to mention the fact that Holly's daughter has just begun applying to colleges (none of which are within a thousand mile radius of home) and, lately, her husband's been such an irritating, finger-pointing stinker that she's found herself dreaming of ways to spend his insurance money . . .

The Hunchback of Neiman Marcus dances effortlessly between the hilarious and the heart-wrenching, the preposterous and the painfully familiar, leaping from the page in a completely unexpected and original way.

Questions for Discussion

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

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. In what ways are Holly's experiences and her feelings about growing older universal to all women?

4. *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?

5. Throughout the novel, the tone of Sones' poems take 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? 6. 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?

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. 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?

10. 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?

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?

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?

This guide was created by Rose Brock, a school librarian and doctoral candidate at Texas Women's University.