



Mennonite in a Little Black Dress

Rhoda Janzen

Discussion Questions

1. Rhoda's parents are deeply religious. What are some of the more notable ways their faith manifests itself? What qualities do they possess that you admire? Were you surprised by anything you learned about the Mennonite community?
2. The lover named Bob pops up with an almost incantatory persistence, like a refrain. Do you think it would be harder to be left for a man or a woman? Given that Rhoda returns to the lover's gender again and again, what do you think Rhoda would say?
3. Consider the marriages portrayed in this book. Rhoda and Nick remain together fifteen years; Mary and Si, more than forty-four years; Hannah and Phil, eleven years. Does the book make any tacit suggestions about what makes a good marriage? Do you know of any marriages that make you say, "want what they have"?
4. Consider Rhoda's family gatherings on Christmas Eve and Christmas. Would you describe this as a functional or a dysfunctional family dynamic? Rhoda and her siblings are very different from one another — do they get along better than you would expect, or not?
5. Rhoda does not explicitly state that her parents opposed her marriage to an intellectual atheist, but we may infer that with their deeply held religious convictions, they grieved for Rhoda's future. Do you think that Rhoda's parents would have opened their home to Nick, if he had wished to become a part of the family? What should loving parents do when their child chooses unwisely?
6. Rhoda announces early on in the memoir that her husband left her for a man he met on Gay.com; however, as the book progresses, she slowly reveals that her marriage had been troubled for some time, and that she knew Nick was bisexual before they were married. Does this revelation change your perspective? Can we sympathize with a woman who knowingly entered into a marriage with a bisexual man? Do you think Rhoda's piecemeal revelations mimic the way in which Rhoda comes to terms with the end of her marriage? Why do you think the book is structured this way?





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About the Author

Rhoda Janzen is an American poet, academic and memoirist, best known for her three memoirs: *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress* (2011), *Does This Church Make Me Look Fat?* (2012), and *Mennonite Meets Mr. Right* (2013). Janzen grew up in a Mennonite household in North Dakota. She earned a Ph.D. from UCLA, where she was the University of California Poet Laureate in 1994 and 1997. In 2006, Janzen's husband of 15 years left her for a man, and she suffered serious injuries in a car accident a few days later. While on sabbatical from her teaching position, she went home to her Mennonite family in Fresno, California, to heal from these crises. These experiences are recounted in her memoir *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress*. Her second memoir, *Does This Church Make Me Look Fat?*, tells the story of her experiences surviving breast cancer, becoming a stepmom, and attending her new husband's Pentecostal church. *Mennonite Meets Mr. Right* recounts Janzen's courtship with her eventual husband. In addition to her memoir, Janzen is the author of *Babel's Stair*, a collection of poetry. Her poems have also appeared in *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *The Southern Review*.

This book is available for download as an eBook and eAudiobook. For more information, please visit lpl.overdrive.com or call 519-661-4600.

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