

Moses, Jennifer Anne. *The Man Who Loved His Wife*. Woodstock, NY: Mayapple Press, 2020.

Reviewed by Merle Eisman Carrus, Hollis, NH, USA

The Man Who Loved His Wife is a book of short stories written by Jennifer Ann Moses. Short stories are a little harder to write than a novel. The author must capture the reader's attention quickly, keep their attention while building the plot of the story, then reach a conclusion in a limited amount of time and pages. Enticing the reader, making them feel emotions for the characters and stay engaged with the storyline is something that Moses does very well throughout this book.

Each of the stories uses a dark comedic style to show the real lives of Jewish people living in many locations; New Jersey, Israel and the southern United States. Stories of immigrants and survivors. The stories grab the reader, pulling them into the character's lives and end leaving the reader with an uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty of what happens next in the protagonist's life. Adolescent love, marriage and infidelity, true love are all scrutinized. Jewish rituals and customs are explored through stories of funerals and sitting *shiva*.

A Jewish family on Sabbatical in England travels around Europe. The mother has been diagnosed with cancer. She wants to experience as much as possible before she cannot travel anymore. When the family encounters a German man, she convinces him to give her young son his socks because her son's socks are wet. Her husband, father of the young boy, is mortified and cannot believe she did that. Here the story explores subjects of family dynamics, a reaction to a cancer diagnosis and the German, Jewish interaction. Each short story integrates multiple challenges, similar to a person's actual everyday existence. This story is titled, "The Story of My Socks."

A family's experience during the Holocaust is presented in the way an elderly man assuages his guilt by connecting with his dog. In the opening story, "The Uncircumcised," Felder, now an elderly man was able to escape death during the Holocaust because his parents never had him circumcised. Now his adult daughter has brought him a dog to keep him company in his one-bedroom apartment. He renames the dog Esther after his sister who died at Bergen-Belsen. He

believes that her spirit has come back to spend time with him through the dog. The dog speaks to him in Yiddish and they tell each other about their experiences during the years they were apart. Family dynamics are presented in all the stories. The reader can either identify with the someone in the story or as an onlooker may judge the family members in the stories. The relationship between parents and children. Some of the plots are about young children. “The Fire” tells the story of a family that moves to Long Island to a new larger house with a fireplace. In this coming of age tale, the nine-year old son decides to take advantage of the recent fire the family had while learning to use the fireplace to attract a girl at his new school. As his imaginative stories grow he embellishes his life at home and eventually the story gets him in a heap of trouble when the police come to school to find out if there is really trouble at home.

Annie just wants her mother to die in the next story, “Next of Kin.” Some of the stories explore the relationship between adult children and their elderly parents. Sometimes parents do not know how to relate to their children and as they all age, the relations are strained. But watching your spouse or parent get old and die is always difficult. Annie’s mother does not recognize her anymore even though Annie does not think they had a good relationship even when she was growing up. Her mother was stubborn and difficult. Now she doesn’t know who she is and sometimes thinks she is a witch. Annie is also dealing with her own health issues and feels the weight of life pressing in. Her husband brings out the picture albums, reminding Annie that as they are aging, he also doesn’t remember much from their children’s childhoods. Annie realizes it’s true, she does not remember the feel of a baby, what it was like to nurse or kiss a child goodnight. It is hard to remember what your children wore to school or their prom or on their wedding day.

In the title story, “The Man Who Loved His Wife,” Martin is so in love with his wife that when she is dying she asks him to give her a Christian burial. Even though she is Jewish, she thinks in the weeks before she dies that Jesus came to her and she has accepted him as her personal savior. To soothe his angry in-laws, he arranges to have both a Rabbi and a minister perform the funeral. Because, Martin said, “I loved her more than I loved my own life.”

Thirteen stories in all, which in the Jewish religion is a lucky number, but in other situations can have a sinister connotation. Difficult topics dealt with in unusual dark humorous ways that leaves the reader unsettled. The range of emotions these stories bring out for the reader are like a roller coaster ride.