

Fortunes of Jaded Women Discussion Questions & Interview with the Author

1. The story starts with the beginnings of a curse and predictions from a psychic—how do both the curse and psychic set up the rest of the story?
2. Discuss the similarities and differences between each generation of women. Are any of the daughters like their mothers?
3. Thảo references her “Asian-daughter guilt” (page 74), when talking about being away from home for as long as she has. Do you think the idea of mother/daughter guilt is a universal concept?
4. Why was jade such an important symbol to the family, specifically through jewelry?
5. Although they all have various frustrations with one another, the **Dương** sisters and their daughters clearly love each other. What are some ways they demonstrate their affection, albeit in perhaps untraditional manner?
6. Setting plays an important part in the novel. What feelings are invoked when in Seattle, Saigon, or Orange County? Discuss how the different neighborhoods and houses play a pivotal role in the characters’ lives.
7. There are many funny scenes in the novel, in addition to its humorous tone. Which moments made you laugh, and how did they make you feel about the characters?
8. Mark, Andy, Daniel, Anh and even Dr. Hak all have their roles to play as the men in the lives of the **Dương** sisters. Discuss how these relationships are all woven together and the significance of each of these characters.
9. “Pass this necklace on to your oldest daughter, and when your oldest daughter is of age, the necklace will help her bear the children she wants. She will continue passing down the necklace, throughout the generations, and the necklace will always reveal their real desires in their children” (page 240). Why was this revelation important? How does it change everything the sisters have ever believed about their family?
10. Discuss how the novel is organized and broken into five parts—“The Predictions,” “The Funeral,” “The Pregnancy,” “The Wedding,” and “The Grandson.”
11. Each character brings something different to the story—did you relate to any of them? If so, please explain who and why.
12. When the novel ends, we see Priscilla go see the psychic to learn about her daughter. Given that she is someone who “always relied on numbers as the source of truth in the universe” (page 19), why do you think she continues this tradition?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. So much of the story of the **Dương** sisters centers around the family curse that has been passed down from generation to generation. Are there any curses or folklore tales in your family (that you know of)? If you feel comfortable, consider asking the source of the story to tell it to you again. Perhaps you will find new details emerge that you couldn’t have known as a child.
2. Little Saigon neighborhoods are all across the United States. See if there is one in your area to explore, or find a Vietnamese restaurant in your area and try the cuisine!
3. To learn more about Carolyn Huynh, read reviews of *The Fortunes of Jaded Women*, and learn about her events, visit Carolyn’s official site at www.carolynhuynh.com.

A Conversation with Carolyn Huynh

Q: *The Fortunes of Jaded Women* is both heartfelt and laugh-out-loud hilarious. Did you set out to write a funny novel, or did the characters you created inform its tone?

A: I've always thought Vietnamese people—especially Vietnamese mothers—are unintentionally funny. Most of the lines that came from the three mothers in the book are real lines my mother has said in real life. My mother believes in cash, is deathly afraid of taxes, and often told me growing up that flip-flops cause cancer. (Don't ask me to explain anything.) I created my characters to be unintentionally funny, because I knew they were being serious (which only makes it funnier!).

Q: Mother-daughter relationships and those between sisters are evergreen topics in literature. What dynamics in this relationship were you interested in exploring?

A: I'm fascinated with misunderstandings, miscommunications, and misbehaving women—and mother-daughter relationships are ripe with those. Especially when it comes to saying “I'm sorry” and “I love you” between a mother and daughter. The lengths we go to to avoid those two little phrases when all we want to do is shout them from a mountain is something so universal, it will never stop being written about.

Q: You've spoken about how the psychic, Auntie Hũa, is based on a real person. Tell us about your inspiration for the novel and how this person played a part in that.

A: The psychic is definitely a tall tale within the Vietnamese community—everyone knows who she is! I saw this woman myself five years ago, and it has haunted me ever since. I grew up with my mother going to our family fortune-teller for everything and I used to resent her for doing it, but when I grew up, I understood the intention behind why she did it. Having this psychic as the opening was so integral to the story because I wanted to highlight the lengths a mother would go to to try to protect their children from the unknowns—even if the psychic is *probably* wrong.

Q: Was there a character that was your favorite to write about? If so, why?

A: Rosie and Christine! They are my Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. I'm obsessed with the Gen Z ABG (Asian Baby Girl) generation, and I wanted to write about two characters who stood the most chance of being able to heal from generational trauma. Because if they choose to have children of their own one day, the probability that those children will be able to end the cycle is high.

Q: What novels were you drawn to growing up?

A: I'm proud to say I consumed a lot of comic books, manga, and fanfiction as a child, and as a result addiction for commercial fiction and Korean dramas has manifested as an adult.

Q: Why was it important to you to set the novel primarily in Orange County, CA?

A: Aside from Orange County being where I was born and raised, I wanted to write about it in a way that actually reflects the diverse population. It always surprised me how one-note its depiction in the media is. The Little Saigon area is a reflection of the resiliency of Vietnamese people. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was Little Saigon. The Vietnamese survived twice: once from the war, and again resettling in a new country. What better way to honor that resiliency than by setting the book in the biggest Vietnamese enclave outside of Vietnam itself?

Q: As a writer, what do you hope readers take away from your novel?

A: I'm the least positive person alive, so even I'm surprised I wrote a novel that has so much levity and healing. Even though this is a very Vietnamese American story, I wanted readers to be swept away with that warm, fuzzy feeling of hopefulness. In order to love, you have to have hope. Hope that things will get better (which they will). This is now your reminder to call the mother-figure in your life and tell them you're sorry and that you love them.

Q: Do you have a next project in mind? And, if so, what is it?

A: My heart refuses to stop writing about unhinged family dynamics, the Vietnamese diaspora, and messy women who never learn from their mistakes. My next project centers around Houston's Little Saigon and the Trần family. It's about four sisters who have been pitted against each other by their eccentric, self-made father to win back their inheritance. They just have to get through the first-born son, the second wife and her team of shark lawyers, oh, and do it all before their father passes. Think of it as *House of Ho* meets *Succession*. It's another bighearted story about rediscovering one's roots, familial legacy, and finding one's place in a divided country.