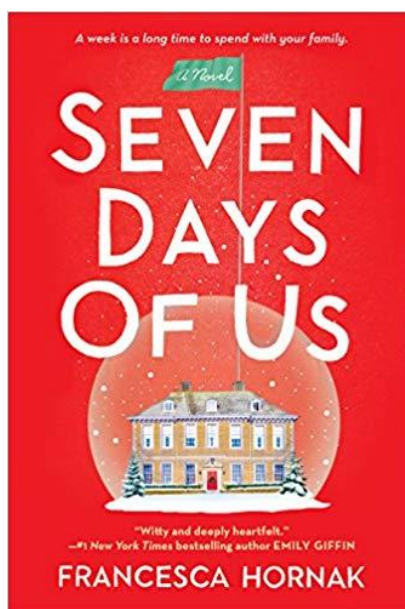


## A Reader's Guide

### Seven Days of Us

Author: Francesca Hornak

Subject: Contemporary / Humor / Sisters (Fiction)



### Summary

*Only the most extraordinary circumstances can reunite the Birch family for the holidays...*

It's Christmas, and for the first time in years the entire Birch family will be under one roof. Even Emma and Andrew's elder daughter--who is usually off saving the world--will be joining them at Weyfield Hall. But Olivia, a doctor, is only coming home because she has to. She's just returned from treating an epidemic abroad and has been told she must stay in quarantine for a week...and so too should her family.

For the next seven days, the Birches are locked down, cut off from the rest of humanity, and forced into each other's orbits. Younger, unabashedly frivolous daughter Phoebe is fixated on her upcoming wedding, while Olivia deals with the culture shock of first-world problems.

As Andrew sequesters himself in his study writing scathing restaurant reviews and remembering his glory days as a war correspondent, Emma hides a secret that will turn the whole family upside down.

In close proximity, not much can stay hidden for long, and as revelations and long-held tensions come to light, nothing is more shocking than the unexpected guest who's about to arrive...

## Conversation Starters

1. Is there one character you relate to more than any other in this story? If so, why?
2. How well do you think Francesca Hornak captures the family dynamic of a week in quarantine over the holidays?
3. Do you think it was better/right for Andrew to conceal his one-off infidelity with Jesse's mother? Or should he have spoken up and told Emma at the time?
4. Why did Olivia stay away from her family for so long? Have you ever experienced the feeling of not being able to be yourself with your family?
5. Discuss the sibling rivalry between Olivia and Phoebe. Why do you think we, as adults, fall into old roles when home with family? Have you experienced this?
6. What do you think kept Phoebe and George together for six years?
7. Did you empathize with the way each character reacted to Jesse's surprise arrival? Did you empathize with Jesse?
8. Is there a moral lesson that each character takes away with them at the end of the story? If so, what is that lesson?
9. What are the main themes in the story?

10. Do you like the way the story is told from multiple points of view?
11. The end is tinged with tragedy and hope. How did the ending affect you?
12. What do you imagine or hope would happen next for each of the members of the Birch family after the closing pages of the book?

## About the Author

**Francesca Hornak** is a journalist and writer, whose work has appeared in newspapers and magazines including *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Red*. *Seven Days of Us* is her debut novel.

## Interview with the Author

**Q: When you were a teenager, what did you think you'd be when you grew up?**

A: I thought I'd go into advertising. I loved commercials (I have an embarrassingly short attention span) and I liked the idea of making up little songs and stories about new detergents or ice creams or whatever. Then when I graduated I had an interview at Saatchi & Saatchi and they asked me to analyze a particular cell phone brand, and I had nothing to say. I know now that the reality isn't quite my *Mad Men* fantasy.

**Q: Which talent do you wish you had?**

A: I'd love to be an amazing dancer. That always serves you well, I think. Sadly it wasn't meant to be.

**Q: What time of day do you love best?**

A: I used to love very early morning, because nobody else was awake except me. Now I have two small children and I love 11pm for the same reason.

**Q: What are the hardest and easiest things about your job?**

A: The hardest thing about writing fiction, having been a journalist, is letting go of knowing every word of a piece of writing – or at least having a sense of each paragraph. I'd compare the change to a gardener, accustomed to pruning a small flowerbed, being put in charge of a forest. The easiest thing is getting to 'work' in cafes, and wearing athleisure every day.

**Q: Do you have any phobias?**

A: Vomit. God knows what possessed me to write a novel about an epidemic whose primary symptom is nausea.

**Q: Talk about one book that made an impact on you.**

A: *Notes on a Scandal* by Zoe Heller. I love books with creepy, unreliable narrators – I don't need to like a protagonist. I think *Lolita* is a brilliant book, for the same reason.