

Nero Book Club Notes

TITLE: Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum

AUTHOR: Georgia Madden

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SUBJECT: Fiction

Book description

Successful hubby? Tick. Facebook-worthy baby? Tick. Bikini-body six weeks after giving birth? Um . . . not so much.

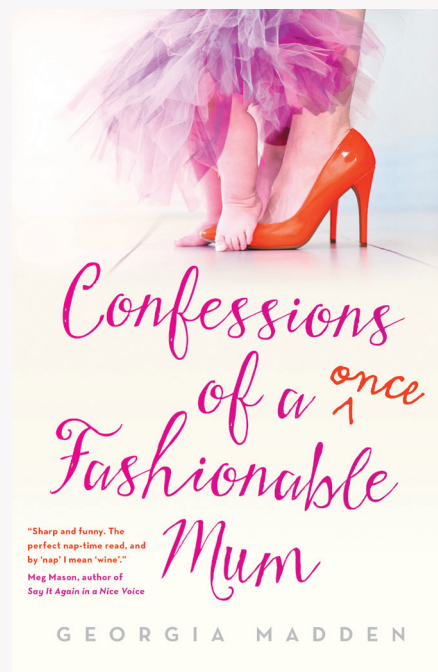
Fashion PR exec Ally Bloom got her happy ending. Okay, her marriage might be showing the odd crack, her battleaxe mother-in-law might have come to stay, and she might not be the yummy mummy she'd imagined, but it's nothing a decent night's sleep and a firm commitment to a no-carb diet won't fix.

But when Ally returns to work and finds she'll be reporting to a 22-year-old airhead, she decides to turn her back on life as a professional fashionista and embrace her inner earth mama instead. So it's out with the Louboutins and champagne and in with the sensible flats and coffee mornings with the Mummy Mafia.

From attending her first grown-up dinner party only to discover that placenta is top of the menu to controlling her monster crush on local playgroup hottie Cameron, Ally must find her feet in the brave new world of the stay-at-home mum.

A reader's introduction

Many mums feel the pull between work and home, but for Ally Bloom the two seem totally incompatible. On maternity leave from the PR job she loved, now depressed and despairing, she finds herself at a mothers' group filled with women who are the



exact opposite of the yummy mummy that Ally imagined she would become. She wanted to be #FashMum; they're wearing sandals and crochet. She decides to go back to work and reclaim her life and all its fashionable trappings. But things do not go to plan.

Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum starts with Ally as a clueless newbie mum who is desperate to fit the yummy mummy stereotype. When that doesn't work, she decides to conform to another stereotype – the earth mother. Still clueless, she decides that her future and her marriage will revolve around imitating the other mums in the Happy Mummies playgroup. By the end, Ally is a more self-aware woman who has realised the benefits of the community that supports her and has in return contributed to that community. Along the way, she also comes to appreciate her husband again, and, to some extent, her mother-in-law.

Ally has always adored her daughter, and that doesn't change throughout the novel. What changes about motherhood for Ally, apart from her clothes, are her expectations, and her understanding of how she might be a mother beyond the stereotypes she herself has set up. And despite her misgivings about her mothers' group when she first finds herself leading a sing-along, she even makes a real friend.

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Praise for Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum

'Sharp and funny, Madden's novel captures the realities of new-mummyhood. The perfect nap-time read, and by nap I mean wine.'—Meg Mason, author of *Say It Again in a Nice Voice*

Nothing wrong with extreme exaggeration in pursuit of a good laugh. I'd love to see Madden doing stand-up.'
—Country Style

'Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum will make you giggle as you fly through the pages. I enjoyed it so much, I binge read it and knocked it over in a day.'—Woogsworld

'Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum is a highly enjoyable read that reads like The Devil Wears Prada, but with dirty nappies and Happy Mummies groupies and the odd piece of fashion advice. 4/5 stars.'—Never Ending Bookshelf

'Every now and then I read a book and I think, "Damn, I wish I wrote that!" That's totally how I feel about Confessions of a Once Fashionable Mum. I'm only halfway through, but her novel is already so witty, entertaining and ... relatable ... it's so nice to read a funny book that chronicles the joys of motherhood in such a humorous and honest way.'—Summer Land

'[a] hilarious satire about modern motherhood'—Practical Parenting

'slick, smart and skilful'—Debbish

About the author

Georgia Madden is an interiors journalist and a frequent contributor to a range of home and lifestyle magazines in Australia and the UK. She lives in Sydney.

Questions for discussion

1. Is the novel an argument for being a stay-at-home mum?
2. Ally imagined that having a baby would mean plenty of time to 'catch up on my reading and laze around in all the great new cafés I'd been hearing about' (page 9). Matt thought it would bring them closer together. Both of them are wrong. If you aren't a parent yet, what are your expectations of how your life will and

won't change? If you are a parent, how unrealistic were your expectations?

3. Matt's skundies are the symbol for all that Ally feels is wrong with her marriage. But she comes to realise the value of her marriage and how much she loves Matt, after kissing Cameron. At that moment, she recognises that she and Matt have just moved on to a different relationship stage (page 219). Does marriage necessarily mean checking your partner's nose hairs have been properly clipped (page 233)? How much disappointment should you put up with? What does, and should, the 'next stage' look like for married couples?

4. Matt decides to accept Ally's infidelity, while Nikki isn't sure what she should do about Cameron's long-lasting affair. Should Nikki leave Cameron? Did Matt make the right decision? Why? Are your answers consistent for Matt and Nikki?

5. If you are a parent, were you a member of a mothers' group or a playgroup? Was it like the Happy Mummies group?

6. Ally often lacks self-awareness. At what points do you think she gains insights? Is the process gradual or sudden?

7. For most of the novel, Ally sees motherhood as a part to be acted. Later she realises 'it was time to just be' (page 245) How easy is it to 'just be'? How much do stereotypes influence the way people act as parents?

8. Ally gets huge satisfaction from running the Made with Love craft fair. Was this a one-off effort that just serves to prove that she is still capable, or is it a sign that women need more in their lives than being SAHMs?

9. Ally resents having Judy in the house. But how does the novel present Judy? Is she a font of wisdom or an annoyance? Would you want to have her in your house? Did Matt make the right or wrong decision in inviting her?

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10. Ally talks about ‘the motherhood conspiracy’ because no-one told her about ‘saggy belly overhang’ (page 19). Is there a conspiracy to hide the negative aspects of mothering – whether saggy bellies or something else – from women who have not had children?

11. Ally clearly loves Coco, but she doesn’t love motherhood. How does she resolve this? Is this true for some or most women? If you are a woman, is it, or do you imagine it will be, true for you?

12. Ally thinks of herself as being ‘incompetent’ and ‘crap at this whole motherhood thing’ (page 59): ‘If the Mummy Mafia knew the real me, I’d probably have child protection services knocking on the door’ (page 11). Judy, though, tells her she’s a much better mother than she thinks (page 107). What do you think of Ally as a mother? Is it fair to judge other mothers?

13. Ally wants a ‘safe and steady continuity’ for Coco (page 104). Is it harder to find community for children than in ‘the good old days’?

14. After running away from Jenna’s placenta surprise dinner party, Ally tells Matt that she’s different from the other mothers in Happy Mummies. Later she realises she might have more in common with them than she thought (page 140). What are the similarities and differences? Is motherhood enough of a basis for friendships? Do you think the other mums think they don’t fit in either? What does Ally end up getting out of being part of the group?

15. Judy advises Ally to stop trying to control the parenthood journey and ‘hold on tight and enjoy the ride’ (page 107). What do you think of this advice?