

*Woman with a Curve* is a classic tale of two friends who could not be more different. It is also a clever political satire, exploring corruption and power, greed and sex in the American nation's capital.

Author Shahzad Rizvi playfully comments on politics in Washington through his larger-than-life characters, often setting up pairs of characters that are diametric opposites. Minnie LeGrand and Maxie Little are childhood friends from small-town America. The two women are a classic "odd couple." The contrast between them is delineated from the beginning of the story: "...They never fought for the same things..." Minnie is goal driven, determined, and kind. From early in her life, she resolves to make her own fate: "I don't need to be swept away by a knight in shining armor. If I want something I'll get it the old fashioned way—I'll work for it." However, Maxie hopes for more than just success. She hopes for power and money without the hard work that goes along with it: "For her, money and power—in that order—were the most important things in life."

The juxtaposition of the two women and their lives serve as the cornerstone for the satirical story that follows. While it is Minnie and the businessman Bob Clarke who bring Maxie to Washington DC, she soon forgets them and her loyalty to them when she is offered a better deal: "I AM LEAVING THE COMPANY...I have a job offer which will pay me a million dollars a year, will you match that?" At the same time Maxie is walking away from her friendship, Bob Clarke is offering to promote her: "What do you think of Maxie as CEO?" he asks Minnie. These extremes illustrate people's very different behavior when they seek power. Whereas Maxie's love for power leads her to betray her best friend, Bob's desire to do what is right for his family causes him to overlook her actions in the hope of bringing Maxie and Minnie together again.

An interesting contrast can be seen when both women are asked to follow their hearts. Minnie follows hers, and falls in love with a man who does everything in his power to help her achieve her own success, where Maxie chooses money and lets a number of distasteful characters, including the notorious Sharpie Roach, into her life. This contrast illustrates one of the most common themes in Rizvi's novels: the value of love above all else.

Most of the disasters that befall Maxie occur only after she is torn away from Minnie. We see through this, and later events, that Minnie is the anchor in Maxie's life: "...Just when I thought I had a full handle on her, so to speak, she would take a direction which completely surprised me."

One of the most grotesquely humorous characters in the novel is Sharpie Roach. He is an ambitious and unscrupulous politician who does everything in his power to reach the top, including double-crossing people and spying, as he rises from exterminator to senator. "Sharpie Roach had never been like other kids...Even as a baby he knew how to get his mother's attention and maximize it to his advantage." But when he is on the receiving end of similar treatment, he is shocked and demands to have his name cleared: "[I demand] a presidential pardon for the incidents at the Tidal Basin. I went there to save the life of a drowning woman. I've said it over and over— I can't understand why nobody

believes me!” To Sharpie, everyone has a price; when he marries Maxie, he proves that idea to himself. He is Rizvi’s exaggerated version of an American politician, willing to do anything to get what he wants with no limits. Bad things happen to him and he is ultimately punished --“After she died, it all came out, and he was imprisoned for years.” Sharpie makes the author’s case that when people try to win at all costs, they are often left with nothing in the end.

President Jack Connolly is another cleverly drawn satire in his relationship with Maxie. Even his name is comical, where Jack is the nickname of JFK and Connolly was the name of the Texas senator who was with him when he was assassinated. Throughout the novel, he is seen as a charming playboy who uses women as though they are objects, even pushing Maxie to marry another man to be closer to him, “Look, marrying him has a silver-lining. It will provide you the perfect cover.” His relationship with Maxie is ill-fated and leads to his death. It seems to carry an echo of JFK’s rumored relationship with Marilyn Monroe, that some conspiracy theories tie to his violent death.

Satire can be one of the most influential and effective ways of illustrating a reality to an audience. By creating a fictional version of Washington DC, where all forms of debauchery and nepotism are possible, author Rizvi shines a humorous but scathing light on the men and women in politics, driven by power-hungry greed that is impossible to ignore. But at the heart of his story is a glimmer of hope; *Woman with a Curve* is a story of strong women who are capable of great things. And the moral seems to be that patience and love will ultimately triumph.

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