

Praise for *Holly Hernandez and the Death of Disco*

“A teen mystery set in an elite public school in 1970s New York City. The novel alternates between Holly’s and Xander’s perspectives as the danger mounts and the two investigate the case in parallel. This fast-paced, skillfully developed murder mystery offers equal billing to both characters, their separate lives and their individual problems while also examining gender inequality and social injustice and providing an interesting look at the history of disco as a safe place for queer people and people of color. A fun murder mystery with a side of disco fever.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Readers will find plenty of action and suspense, a complex mystery, as well as humor and a slew of interesting characters. The 1979 setting—with the absence of current technology such as cell phones and laptops—sets a refreshing stage where the characters use other methods to uncover information. Readers will appreciate the detailed world created, enriched by the addition of appendices following the story which give additional insight to some of the characters. VERDICT: A complex, exciting mystery that will leave readers hoping for a sequel.”
—*School Library Journal*

“This twist on the classic whodunit brings to life the end times of disco as two early ’80s–New York City teenagers attempt to unravel a cryptic murder that has rocked their high school. As the clock winds down and the killer prepares to strike, Narvaez expertly juggles several parallel plots. From glittery discotheques to strange passages between classrooms, mystical mysteries are infused into a fun, historical murder case that takes a fresh approach to teenage angst, anxiety and the need to belong.”
—*Booklist*

HOLLY
HERNANDEZ
AND THE
DEATH
OF
DISCO

RICHIE NARVAEZ



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*This is for my teachers. I hope I won't
be graded on this.*

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1

VICISSITUDE

The body lay on the pink rug in the pink room. Brown skin, teen-aged, barely more than a boy, really. Head slightly askew, arms and legs splayed out. Green checkered shirt, blue jeans, black Pro Keds, very dirty. That explained the stains on the pink rug.

“A gun or knife would leave a wound,” said Holly Hernandez, adjusting the tinted, tortoise shell, oversized glasses on her nose, “depending on the caliber or size of the weapon.”

“Of course.”

“Nothing on the victim’s front side. We would have to turn him over to see if he was shot or stabbed there.”

“I’m not turning him over. That would be dangerous.”

“Agreed.”

On the pink walls were posters of ponies, *The Wiz*, Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman, Shaun Cassidy, Jimmy Carter, the Periodic Table of Elements and the FBI’s most wanted.

Holly bent down to look closer at the victim. “If the killer used a wrench or a candlestick, the head would be cracked open.”

“Like an egg. Koosh!”

“There would be blood all over the floor. And brains.”

“Grrross.”

Holly stood up and crossed her arms. “That’s the reality of this kind of work, Melissa. You’re going to have to accept that, if you really want to be a police detective.”

“Columbo never has brains all over the place.”

“That’s because Columbo is not real. Now, a rope would leave gross ligature marks around the neck. But all this body seems to have is a big ol’ hickey.”

“He wishes!”

Holly giggled, and Melissa snorted, which caused the corpse on the floor to finally lose its composure.

“That’s not funny. I could totally have a hickey.”

“From who?” Melissa said, lisping through her braces. “Daisy Duke? In your dreams. Holly, you should see the poster he has on his wall of her. It’s obscene.”

Marcelo the corpse moved to get up, which made Bandit, Holly’s Doberman Pinscher, get up too and begin licking his face.

“Holly! Get your rabies dog away from me.”

“You’re supposed to be dead already. Rabies can’t kill you if you’re already deceased.”

“I don’t like this way of playing Clue,” Marcelo said, lisping through *his* braces and nudging the dog away.

The twins were alike in skin tone and hair color but most of all in the way they laughed, big, opened-mouthed laughter, which Holly knew she would miss. They had all graduated junior high school the Friday before. She feared they would never see each other again.

“I thought the game would be more interesting this way,” Holly said. “With three people, it’s too easy to guess who the killer is. I thought some forensic pathology would be neat.”

“Okay, Quincy, ME. Can we play some tunes now?”

“Yes, Marcelo,” Holly and Melissa said at the same time.

“Sweet!” He jumped up and went over to Holly’s record collection, sorted by category and then alphabetical order, with the albums in one and the singles neatly stacked above them. “You need some new records,” he said. “There’s almost nothing from before 1976. No Donna Summer. No Bee Gees?”

“Marcelo!” his sister said.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry. Say, how about ‘We’ve Only Just Begun?’”

“I love that song, but,” Holly said. She flopped down on the floor and put her legs on top of her Funky Junk Trunk, which had belonged to her dad in the war.

Melissa flopped next to her and did the same. She said, “Maybe we heard it enough at graduation and all the rehearsals?”

“Agreed,” Holly said. “How about John Denver?”

“But he always makes you cry.”

“Does not.”

“Does too,” both twins said.

“I already feel sad.”

“But we’re going to visit,” Melissa said. “It’s not like California is on the other side of the world.”

“Just the other side of the country,” Holly said, “which is actually a considerable distance.”

“We’ll come back for Christmas. Our parents promised we would.”

“ABBA!” Marcelo took a vinyl single out of its sleeve, popped in a plastic adapter and threaded it onto the spindle of the record player. He turned the player on and there was a burst of static from the speakers. As the 45 began to spin, he set the needle at the start of the record.

Melissa got up to dance and sing with her brother. Holly watched her friends from the floor. They knew she didn't like dancing, hadn't danced for a long time anyway.

Eight 45s later, Marcelo sat on the floor. Bandit immediately sat next to him, placing his head in Marcelo's lap. "You should be psyched you get to go to a new school. Flatbush Tech! You'll get to be with a lot of other brainiacs like you."

Melissa snorted at that. "Yeah, so how did snot-faced Brandy Vega get in?"

"Brandy's smart," Holly said. "She might be mean and sarcastic, but she did do better in math than I did. She won that award at graduation."

"I beat she cheated!" Marcelo tried to push Bandit away, but the dog just moved closer.

Flatbush Tech was the best specialized school in the city, and students had to take a difficult entrance exam to get in. Holly wanted to go to Flatbush Tech because that was where her father had gone. Her plan was to study science, like her father did, to become a scientist just like her dad.

"How are you going to avoid her, Holly? She hates you to pieces."

"A million people must go to Flatbush Tech," Marcelo said. "She probably won't even see her once, if she's lucky."

"Eight thousand. But it doesn't matter. I don't care about Brandy. I'm just sad that you two won't be there. I won't even get to spend the summer with you because you have to move this week."

"Think of it this way," Melissa said. "No one will know anything about you, about your past. They won't think of you a certain way, you know? And a new school means you'll have a chance to make new friends and have new adventures."

“My mother said the same exact thing to me this morning! Using the same exact words!”

“So did ours!” the twins said.

They laughed for a while. Then Melissa put on the *Grease* soundtrack she had bought for Holly. They all sang along, Marcelo doing his best John Travolta imitation.

Hours later, after the twins had left to go home to finish packing, Holly’s room felt gigantically empty, cathedrally hollow. All the light, all the life had been sucked out of it. Holly plopped back on the floor, scooted next to Bandit, and cried.