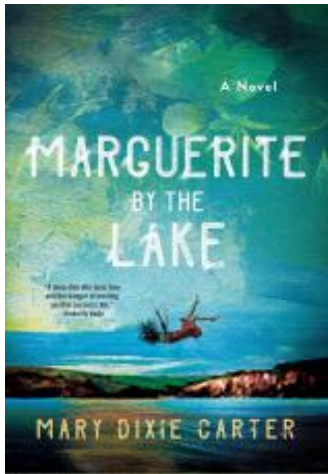


Marguerite by the Lake

by Mary Dixie Carter



About the Book

From Mary Dixie Carter comes an atmospheric, tense novel about the death of a glamorous garden designer, a widower trying to keep his secrets buried, and the beautiful young gardener who finds herself entangled in their lives.

Marguerite Gray is a lifestyle icon known for her garden parties, high-end business ventures, and being the muse behind the famous Serge Kuhnert painting, *Marguerite by the Lake*. Her presence is overpowering, and her taste is legendary. For the last few years, Phoenix has been the gardener on the famed Rosecliff grounds, home of the Gray family: Marguerite and her husband, Geoffrey. Phoenix came from humble beginnings, and now she works hard to craft the landscape that underpins Marguerite's brand.

When a storm threatens the launch party for Marguerite's latest book, it's Phoenix who spots the danger to the guests and rushes to Geoffrey's side to save him from a falling tree. Geoffrey is grateful --- perhaps too grateful. Marguerite is...jealous. Phoenix senses the danger of being drawn deeper into their lives but can't resist the attention, becoming embroiled in an affair that could destroy her career.

But soon after the affair begins, Marguerite falls to her death, from the same high point at Rosecliff where she posed for *Marguerite by the Lake*. Now Phoenix has another secret, one that haunts her even as Geoffrey invites her to move into the manor with him. A secret that Detective Hanna and Marguerite's daughter --- her spitting image --- are circling closer and closer to. Phoenix tries to put it all behind her and find her rightful place at Rosecliff. But as every gardener knows, nothing stays buried forever.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel begins with Marguerite's celebration party for her new book. Just as she is making her speech, the weather

takes an unexpected turn, and it begins to rain heavily. Phoenix notices that an old spruce tree is on the brink of collapsing and urges everyone in attendance to evacuate, but Marguerite is insistent on keeping the show going. What do you think Marguerite's lack of concern reveals about her character? How did you feel about her here, and did your opinion of her change as the story developed?

2. Themes of nature and gardening are woven into the novel throughout. How do you find these themes enhanced the plot and its characters?

3. What are your thoughts on the nature of Phoenix and Geoffrey's blooming relationship? Were there any early hints of what was to come that made you suspect they would continue to grow closer?

4. Throughout the novel, we see that Marguerite and Geoffrey's marriage is not as perfect as they try to make it seem. Do you think the importance they attribute to their image and reputation impacts their relationship? If yes, how so?

5. How would you describe Phoenix as a narrator? Does she appear to be trustworthy or unreliable? Are there any specific moments that made you feel this way? How does her first-person narration and her feelings toward the main characters impact your perception of them?

6. Phoenix's brother, Curtis, crops up throughout the story as a supporting character. Based on what is revealed about him, how would you describe his relationship with Phoenix? How does his presence in her life influence the events of the novel?

7. Taylor reacts extremely negatively to Phoenix's presence and relationship with her father after her mother's passing. Do you feel this response was justified? How did Taylor's reaction make you feel about Phoenix?

8. Rachel's suspicion toward Phoenix is immediate. Based on the evidence and testimonies Rachel is able to gather, what do you think held her back from connecting Phoenix with Marguerite's death right away?

9. As the story unfolds, we learn that Serge's history with the Gray family is deeply rooted. Do you believe he has any ulterior motive for being close with them, or is it purely out of affection? Later, a letter Phoenix finds reveals that Geoffrey once harbored feelings toward Serge. How do you think this complicates their relationships with one another, both prior to and after Marguerite's death?

10. The novel ends with Phoenix approaching the smallest maple tree on the drive of the Grays' house. As she continues studying the trees, they appear to shift before her eyes --- the leaves and branches subtly twisting away from her. The trees, which she has poured her heart into, seem to be shutting her out. What do you think this symbolizes?

Author Bio

Mary Dixie Carter is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *THE PHOTOGRAPHER* and her latest, *MARGUERITE BY THE LAKE*. Her writing has appeared in *TIME*, *The Economist*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The New York Sun*, *The New York Observer*, and other print and online

publications. She worked at *The Observer* for five years, where she served as the publishing director. In addition to writing, she also has a background as a professional actor. Mary Dixie graduated from Harvard with an honors degree in English Literature and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from The New School. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children.

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