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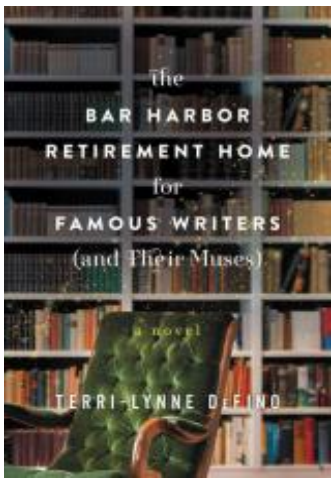
The Bar Harbor Retirement Home for Famous Writers (And Their Muses)

by Terri-Lynne DeFino



About the Book

A whimsical, moving novel about a retirement home for literary legends who spar, conjure up new stories, and almost magically change the lives of the people around them.

Alfonse Carducci was a literary giant who lived his life to excess --- lovers, alcohol, parties and literary rivalries. But now he's come to the Bar Harbor Home for the Elderly to spend the remainder of his days among kindred spirits: the publishing industry's nearly gone but never forgotten greats. Only now, at the end of his life, does he comprehend the price of appeasing every desire, and the consequences of forsaking love to pursue greatness. For Alfonse has an unshakeable case of writer's block that distresses him much more than his precarious health.

Set on the water in one of New England's most beautiful locales, the Bar Harbor Home was established specifically for elderly writers needing a place to live out their golden years --- or final days --- in understated luxury and surrounded by congenial literary company. A faithful staff of nurses and orderlies surround the writers, and are drawn into their orbit, as they are forced to reckon with their own life stories. Among them is Cecibel Bringer, a young woman who knows first-hand the cost of chasing excess. A terrible accident destroyed her face and her sister in a split-second decision that Cecibel can never forgive, though she has tried to forget. Living quietly as an orderly, refusing to risk again the cost of love, Cecibel never anticipated the impact of meeting her favorite writer, Alfonse Carducci --- or the effect he would have on her existence. In Cecibel, Alfonse finds a muse who returns him to the passion he thought he lost. As the words flow from him, weaving a tale taken up by the other residents of the Pen, Cecibel is reawakened to the idea of love and forgiveness.

As the edges between story and reality blur, a world within a world is created. It?s a place where the old are made young, the damaged are made whole, and anything is possible.

Discussion Guide

1. What do you think life in the Pen was like before Alfonse?s arrival? What changed when Alfonse arrived?

2. Alfonse tells Cecibel that ?love is not passion.... Love is sweet and good and righteous. Passion is wild and messy and dangerous.? What is the driving force behind Alfonse?s relationships with Olivia, Judith, Cornelius and Cecibel? Is it love or passion?

3. ?If you go by what the critics and sales figures say, my greatest work was *And the Ladies Sang*. A good book. One I?m proud of, naturally. Nineteen eighty-four was a powerful time for women, and the book spoke to several generations fighting the good fight. But if you?re asking which book rests most kindly in my heart, it?s *Green Apples for Stewart*.? On the strength of this, what do you think Olivia?s greatest works were about?

4. Throughout the novel, Cecibel uses her hair to conceal her scarring and to maintain a sense of ?vanity she no longer had a right to.? Does Cecibel hide her scars purely for her own vanity, or does she have other reasons for hiding her scars?

5. Cecibel serves as the muse behind Aldo and Cecilia?s story. In what ways does Cecibel inspire the characters in Alfonse, Olivia and Switch?s story? What are the parallels between Cecibel and Cecilia?

6. Cecibel thinks of herself as a monster. Is Cecibel a monster? What makes her view herself this way?

7. Finlay was sent to prison for murdering his local teacher after enduring years of abuse. Do you think Finlay deserved to go to prison for his actions? How do the other characters in the novel view Finlay in light of his crime?

8. Discuss whether Cecibel is an employee or a resident of the Pen. Are the other staff members simply employees, or are they residents?

9. ?[Cornelius] and I dreamed up this place when we were young men conquering the literary world. We took it from the greats. Faulkner, Joyce, Cather, Parker. We robbed them blind and flew their tattered flags in their faces.? Do you think the Bar Harbor Home for the Elderly lived up to Cornelius and Alfonse?s expectations?

10. What do you think happens to the characters in the years following the novel?s end?

Author Bio

Terri-Lynne DeFino was born and raised in New Jersey, but escaped to the wilds of Connecticut, where she still lives with her husband and her cats. She spends most days in her loft, in her woodland cabin along the river, writing about people she?s never met. Other days, she can be found slaying monsters with her grandchildren. If you knock on her door, she?ll most likely be wearing a tiara. She?ll also invite you in and feed you, because you can take the Italian girl out of Jersey, but you can?t take the Jersey Italian out of the girl.

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