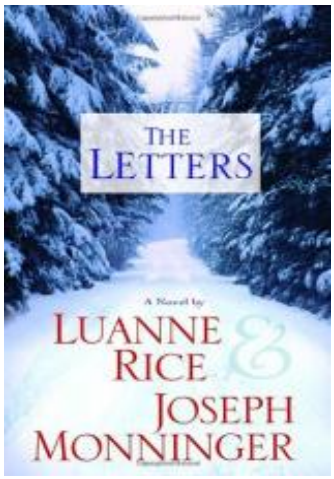
The Letters

by Luanne Rice and Joseph Monninger



About the Book

A unique novel that unites the storytelling powers of acclaimed authors Luanne Rice and Joseph Monninger, **The Letters** offers a heartfelt, intimate, and often unflinchingly candid correspondence between two parents in the aftermath of the death of their son, Paul. Compelled by a need he cannot explain, Sam has embarked on a dangerous Alaskan journey to visit the site of Paul?s plane crash. Sam?s wife, Hadley, struggles with the emptiness she feels, while trying to envision a new chapter for herself --- developing her skills as a painter and making a new home, away from the one where Paul was raised. Coming to terms with losing Paul, they also discover secrets he had kept, and the burdens they had not been able to help their son carry. As they confront the obstacles that have haunted them and truths about themselves they've never before faced, Sam and Hadley tenderly question whether their relationship, and ultimately, their marriage, will be able to survive --- and even grow.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the effect of reading a novel that unfolds as a series of letters? What do the characters reveal about themselves, and what do they hide, while writing letters? How are Sam?s and Hadley?s perceptions of the past different?

2. Discuss the two approaches Sam and Hadley take toward their son?s death. What sustains each of them? What are their greatest obstacles to healing?

3. What is the true purpose of Sam?s journey? What does he hope to gain by revisiting this terrain?

4. What makes the novel?s landscapes appropriate for Hadley and Sam?s emotional journeys?

5. Hadley rediscovers her need for solitude and a space for creating art. What other aspects of their own personalities were Sam and Hadley able to find in the wake of their son?s death?

6. How did your impressions of Paul change throughout the novel? What characteristics of his mother and father did he possess?

7. How do the book?s illustrations enhance your reading of The Letters? What moods and details are captured in these images?

8. In his letter from November 16, Sam describes Martha?s belief that everyone is part snake, needing to shed their skin in order to grow. How does this apply to Sam and Hadley? At what points in your life have you needed to ?shed your skin??

9. What does interest in other partners (Martha and Daniel) indicate about Sam and Hadley?s longings and needs? What keeps them from finding these comforting experiences in each other?

10. How did you react to the revelations about Julie? What did Paul?s parents teach him about love and relationships?

11. What is the role of faith in Hadley?s life? What does it take for her to believe in miracles, even the ones that do not come true on her terms? How does Sam?s approach to spirituality evolve throughout The Letters?

12. Would you have trusted Eileen Kilkenny? Why would Hadley, but not Sam? Would you have been able to forgive Mrs. Kilkenny, or at least to rationalize what she did?

13. What does Hadley discover about herself, and about Paul, at the monastery? What new life emerges there, from loss and heartbreak?

14. What themes of healing appear in this novel and in Luanne Rice?s previous works? What is special about her approach to hope in the face of tragedy?

Author Bio

Luanne Rice is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 37 novels, including three YA novels, that have been translated into 30 languages.

Rice?s books often center on love, family, nature and the sea. THE BEAUTIFUL LOST deals with teen depression, something Rice

Several of Rice's novels have been adapted for television, including CRAZY IN LOVE for TNT, BLUE MOON for CBS, FOLLOV

In 2002, Connecticut College awarded Rice an honorary degree. Her papers are located in the college's Special Collections Library. A profile of Rice appeared in *Connecticut College Magazine*, Fall 2014.

She was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from St. Joseph College in West Hartford, Connecticut.

In June 2014, she received the 2014 Connecticut Governor?s Arts Award for excellence and lifetime achievement as a literary artist

Rice, an avid environmentalist, is honored to be a creative affiliate of the Safina Center.

Critical Praise

"Rice and Monninger beautifully convey love and hope?taking the reading on a journey of discovery?. With each character?and each author?providing vivid descriptions of his and her surroundings and intense emotions, it?s hard for the reader to remember that she is reading fiction and not eavesdropping on personal correspondence saturated with sadness and love."

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