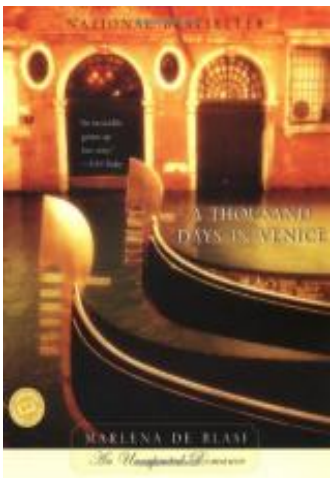
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A Thousand Days in Venice: An Unexpected Romance

by Marlena de Blasi



About the Book

He saw her across the Piazza San Marco and fell in love from afar. When he sees her again in a Venice café a year later, he knows it is fate. He knows little English; and she, a divorced American chef, speaks only food-based Italian. Marlena thinks she is incapable of intimacy, that her heart has lost its capacity for romantic love. But within months of their first meeting, she has packed up her house in St. Louis to marry Fernando?"the stranger," as she calls him?and live in that achingly lovely city in which they met.

Vibrant but vaguely baffled by this bold move, Marlena is overwhelmed by the sheer foreignness of her new home, its rituals and customs. But there are delicious moments when Venice opens up its arms to Marlena. She cooks an American feast of Mississippi caviar, cornbread, and fried onions for the locals . . . and takes the tango she learned in the Poughkeepsie middle school gym to a candlelit trattoría near the Rialto Bridge. All the while, she and Fernando, two disparate souls, build an extraordinary life of passion and possibility.

Featuring Marlena's own incredible recipes, **A Thousand Days in Venice** is the enchanting true story of a woman who opens her heart?and falls in love with both a man and a city.

Discussion Guide

1. "Even as I am drawn to Venice, so I am suspicious of her." Why did this well-traveled author deliberately shun Venice for so long? Why was she so suspicious?

2. The author's family and friends respond in many different ways to her decision to move to Venice and marry Fernando. Without the benefit of hindsight, what do you think your initial response would be to a friend or a relative planning such a drastic life change?

3. When she and Fernando first kiss, de Blasi recognizes that they "are not too old" for love. Yet her love affair inspires awkwardness, suspicion, and even embarrassment in many of those around her. Discuss the internal and external barriers to love found later in life.

4. In the midst of a quarrel with Fernando, the author wonders "why there always hovers, just an inch or two above love, some small itch for revenge." Discuss this statement. What other emotions and reactions hover just above love?

5. Throughout the novel, de Blasi refers to her partner and then husband as "the stranger." How well do you know those you love? Do you ever consider them strangers?

6. The author and her husband both struggle to keep their personal demons in check to make their relationship work. Do you agree with de Blasi that this can be easier to do later in life? Why or why not?

7. Why does de Blasi move to Italy as opposed to Fernando moving to the United States?

8. The author is forced to jettison most of her material possessions upon her move to Italy, which she finds liberating. Could you or would you do the same? If you could keep only what could be shipped overseas at a reasonable cost, what would you choose?

9. The author's friend Misha warns her that she will "neither understand nor be understood" in Italy. How does she navigate the cultural barriers that threaten to isolate and overwhelm her? What role does her love of food play?

10. In the end, do you think de Blasi has found a satisfactory means of communication in her new culture?

11. Discuss what places in the world inspire you the way Venice inspires de Blasi. Is there a culture different from your own you can imagine immersing yourself in? If you have done so, how does your experience compare with de Blasi's?

12. The author chooses to embrace the complications involving her wedding. Discuss the expectations surrounding such special events and the potential for disaster.

13. On the impact of her life-changing decision on her adult children, de Blasi muses "that their childhood was ending and?in a strange way, my childhood was beginning." Discuss the meaning of this statement.

14. Like Fernando, have you ever felt imprisoned by the expectations of others? Have you lost track of dreams you once had?

15. De Blasi makes her husband feel connected to the world. Who or what makes you feel connected to the world?

16. Cooking for a crowd, real or imagined, helps the author stave off the loneliness that plagues and frightens her. What staves off loneliness for you?

17. The author argues, "Too often it is we who won't let life be simple." Do you agree or disagree?

18. Do you think "a little suffering sweetens things"?

19. How do you think this narrative would unfold if told in Fernando's voice? How might it differ and how might it remain the same?

20. How do you think Fernando would describe his wife in his own words?

21. In the final line of her acknowledgments, de Blasi hints that another memoir might be forthcoming. Would your group be interested in reading another installment of this memoir? Do you want to learn about her life in the Tuscan village of San Casciano dei Bagni?

22. Did you find this memoir to be a satisfying read? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this literary genre?

23. How would you describe this book to prospective readers?

24. If you were to write your own memoirs, what story would you tell?

25. Is your group satisfied with this selection? Why or why not? What is your next selection?

26. Have you or will you try any of the recipes found at the end of this novel?

Author Bio

Marlena de Blasi has been a chef, a journalist, a food and wine consultant, and a restaurant critic. She is the author of two cookbooks, **Regional Foods of Northern Italy** (a James Beard Foundation Award finalist) and **Regional Foods of Southern Italy**. She and her husband, Fernando, now direct gastronomic tours through Tuscany and Umbria.

Critical Praise

"An irresistible grown-up love story."

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