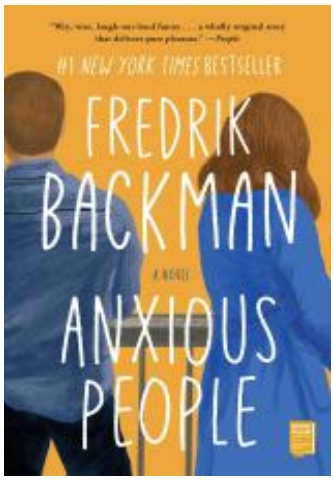
Anxious People

by Fredrik Backman



About the Book

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of A MAN CALLED OVE and ?writer of astonishing depth? (*The Washington Times*) comes a poignant, charming novel about a crime that never took place, a would-be bank robber who disappears into thin air, and eight extremely anxious strangers who find they have more in common than they ever imagined.

Looking at real estate isn?t usually a life-or-death situation, but an apartment open house becomes just that when a failed bank robber bursts in and takes a group of strangers hostage. The captives include a recently retired couple who relentlessly hunt down fixer-uppers to avoid the painful truth that they can?t fix their own marriage. There?s a wealthy bank director who has been too busy to care about anyone else and a young couple who are about to have their first child but can?t seem to agree on anything, from where they want to live to how they met in the first place. Add to the mix an 87-year-old woman who has lived long enough not to be afraid of someone waving a gun in her face, a flustered but still-ready-to-make-a-deal real estate agent, and a mystery man who has locked himself in the apartment?s only bathroom, and you have the worst group of hostages in the world.

Each of them carries a lifetime of grievances, hurts, secrets and passions that are ready to boil over. None of them is entirely who they appear to be. And all of them --- the bank robber included --- desperately crave some sort of rescue. As the authorities and the media surround the premises these reluctant allies will reveal surprising truths about themselves and set in motion a chain of events so unexpected that even they can hardly explain what happens next.

Rich with Fredrik Backman?s ?pitch-perfect dialogue and an unparalleled understanding of human nature? (*Shelf Awareness*), ANXIOUS PEOPLE is an ingeniously constructed story about the enduring power of friendship, forgiveness and hope --- the things that save us, even in the most anxious times.

Discussion Guide

1. The man on the bridge tells the boy, ?Do you know what the worst thing about being a parent is? That you?re always judged by your worst moments.... Parents are defined by their mistakes.? Do you think this statement is true? Does social media make it more likely to be the case these days? In what ways are people critical of other?s parenting choices? Is the bank robber a bad parent?

2. In ANXIOUS PEOPLE, the author writes, ?If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans? and ?The worst thing a divorce does to a person isn?t that it makes all the time you devoted to the relationship feel wasted, but that it steals all the plans you had for the future.? Do you make plans for your life, or do you let life guide you? Even if our plans often don?t turn out as we?d hoped, is there a benefit to our making them? Discuss these questions with your group.

3. Zara tells her psychologist, ?your generation don?t want to study a subject, they want to study themselves.? Is she speaking of millennials? Why are boomers and millennials so critical of each other? How do they see the world differently?

4. Nadia (the psychologist), James (the police officer), Zara and Estelle all have stories tied in some way to the bridge. What does the bridge represent to each of them? Has the bridge?s meaning changed for them by the end of the book? If so, how?

5. Anna-Lena compares her and Roger?s marriage to a shark that can?t breathe unless it is moving the whole time: ?People need a project...if we didn?t keep moving, our marriage wouldn?t get any oxygen. So we buy and renovate and sell.? Why does Anna-Lena think that a project is the one thing keeping their marriage from falling apart? What surprised you about their history as individuals and as a couple? How have they underestimated each other, despite having been together for so many years?

6. How did you feel when the identity of the bank robber was revealed? Were your assumptions challenged? How does the author manage to keep this a surprise?

7. Zara appears to be very cold and distant to other people. Is Zara?s attitude toward people a defense mechanism? Do you agree with the psychologist that Zara isn?t depressed, just lonely? What is it that Zara can?t forgive herself for?

8. Estelle says her book-swapping moments with her neighbor were ?an affair.? Do you agree? What counts as an affair if there?s no physical relationship involved? What book would you give as a present to a crush?

9. While on the apartment balcony, Zara starts to open up to Lennart. Why is he the person to whom she is able to open up?

10. At the start of ANXIOUS PEOPLE, the author tells us, ?This story is about a lot of things, but mostly about idiots.? In what ways are these characters acting like idiots? At the end of the book, do you think that?s still a fair description of them? Are we all, by virtue of being human, inclined to act like idiots from time to time?

11. Jim and Jack, the father and son policemen, have a difficult relationship that is made worse by their working so closely together. What is it that annoys them about each other? What did you make of Jim?s role in resolving the bank

robber?s predicament? Should he have told Jack what he was doing sooner? Why didn?t he?

12. ANXIOUS PEOPLE is very much a character study. How did your feelings about these characters change over the course of the book? Who is your favorite character and why? Which character surprised you the most and why?

Author Bio

Fredrik Backman is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of A MAN CALLED OVE, MY GRANDMOTHER ASKED ME TO TELL YOU SHE'S SORRY, BRITT-MARIE WAS HERE, BEARTOWN, US AGAINST YOU, ANXIOUS PEOPLE, THE WINNERS and MY FRIENDS, as well as two novellas and one work of nonfiction. His books are published in more than 40 countries. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.

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