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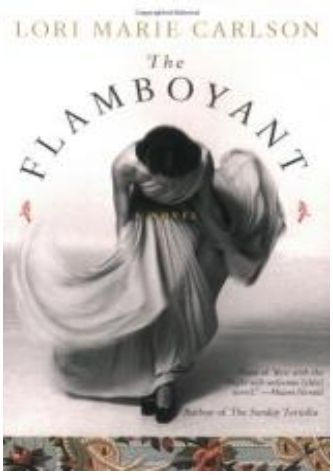
The Flamboyant: A Novel

by Lori Marie Carlson



About the Book

Set in the 1920s and 1930s, **The Flamboyant** tells the life story of Lenora Demarest, an American beauty intent on achieving fulfillment as the first aviatrix in her adopted country of Puerto Rico. Born in 1900, on the cusp of sweeping change in American society, Lenora grows up in a quaint lakeside village in western New York State in the company of her adoring parents and their intellectual friends. After her mother's untimely death, she accompanies her grief-stricken father, Dr. Henry Demarest, to a lush hacienda on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. Over the next decade, they turn their tropical estate, La Sardinera, into a successful grapefruit plantation, and Henry remarries Milady, a native Puerto Rican from a neighboring village.

Meanwhile, Lenora is courted by a dashing American aviator who awakens in her a passion for flying, and a gentle, wealthy Puerto Rican entrepreneur who stops at little to win her affection. In love with both men, Lenora nevertheless confounds her family and friends by her reactions to these very different suitors. She befriends Amelia Earhart and is determined to define her own life not by her status as wife but by her own aspirations.

Inspired by the life of a historical figure, and set against the vibrant backdrop of colonial politics, **The Flamboyant** traces the inner life of a quintessential modern woman -- spirited and determined to live out her dreams. In language that captures the great natural splendor of rural New York as well as the Caribbean, it also evokes, in exhilarating colors, the magic of early aviation and pays tribute to an American heroine ahead of her time.

Discussion Guide

1. What tragic event prompts Lenora Demarest's move from Chautauqua County to Puerto Rico? Who accompanies her? Who is George Hanson, and where does Lenora Demarest first meet him? What excitement does he communicate to her at that time?

2. Who is Ignacio Portelli? What brings about his initial visit to their plantation, La Sardinera? How does he feel about Lenora? What extravagant gift does he give her shortly after meeting her?

3. Who is Milady García? What conditions bring her from her home in Mayagüez to the Demarests? How does her role at the plantation change over the course of **The Flamboyant**?

4. What did you think of the portrayals of the Demarests and their workers? How would you characterize their treatment of their employees? What are some of the ways in which they support the locals in their region, and the workers on their farm?

5. What stimulates Lenora's interest in jewelry? What decision does she make about her own collection? How does she educate herself about jewelry? Did any of her descriptions of jewels intrigue you?

6. When George Hanson takes Lenora up in a plane for the first time, how does she react? How does George encourage Lenora to pursue aviation? What role does he play in her instruction?

7. How do Henry Demarest and Milady García reveal their engagement to Lenora? Does she suspect their relationship? How does she feel about her father's remarriage? Do those feelings undergo any change as the date of the wedding approaches?

8. Who is Janet Rowan? How does she factor into Lenora's experience of flying? How does Lenora come to know Amelia Earhart? What shared struggle defines their connection? How does Earhart feel about the institution of marriage? Compare and contrast Earhart's views with Lenora's feelings about becoming a wife.

9. What is the name of Lenora's first plane? What does the previous owner try to get Lenora to promise? How does she feel when she flies? Would you characterize her feelings about flying as more powerful than her feelings for George and Ignacio?

10. How did you interpret the afterword of the book? Were you surprised by the trajectory of Lenora's life? What aspects of her life did you find especially intriguing? How would you describe her character?

Author Bio

Lori Marie Carlson was born and raised in Jamestown, New York, in Chautauqua County. She has an extensive background in Latin American literature and has taught Spanish and translation at several universities. Carlson is also the author of seven books for young adults, including the acclaimed **Cool Salsa**. She lives in New York City.

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