ReadingGroupGuides
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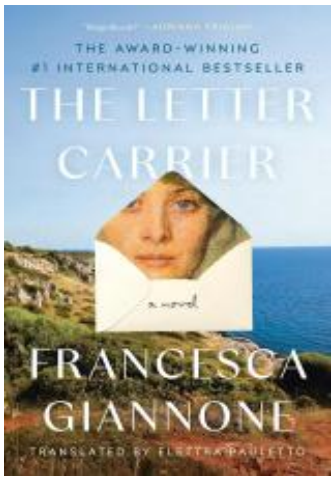
The Letter Carrier

written by Francesca Giannone, translated by Elettra Pauletto



About the Book

What would happen if you finally met your soul mate --- but they were married to someone else?

In a novel that has become a bestselling phenomenon in Italy, THE LETTER CARRIER shows how a little town in southern Italy might be just like every town --- with women and men, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, all trying to navigate the world while staying true to their hearts.

Salento, Italy, June 1934: A coach stops in the main square of Lizzanello, a tight-knit village where everyone knows each other. A couple gets off: The man, Carlo, a child of the South, is happy to be back home after a long time away; the woman, Anna --- his wife --- is a stranger from the North. Carlo?s brother is there to meet them, and he and everyone else can?t help but notice that Anna is as beautiful as a Greek statue.

But Anna is not like the other wives. She doesn?t gossip or attend church. She reads books no one else has ever heard of, exploring ideas that some find threatening. She even wears pants, just like a man, and thinks a woman should have rights, just like a man.

There aren?t many options for a woman with Anna?s sensibilities, so when she learns that the post office is hiring, she leaps at the opportunity. A female letter carrier? It is unthinkable! But Anna passes the postal exam and soon becomes the invisible thread connecting the town as she delivers letters between clandestine lovers, families waiting to hear news of loves ones away at war, and even helping those who can?t read.

Letters connect people, and they convey information and emotion. But for some in Lizzanello, letters are too little and too late.

THE LETTER CARRIER taps into the universal feeling of connection --- and what happens when that connection perhaps comes at the wrong time.

Discussion Guide

In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is sometimes necessary to reveal certain aspects of the storyline. If you have not finished reading, you may want to do so before reviewing this guide.

1. ?She looked at the empty square, the strange straw-yellow buildings, the faded shop signs, the gray castle tower looming above: the new backdrop to her life, so different from what she?d always known.?

This is one of the first thoughts our protagonist, Anna, has as she steps into Lizzanello for the first time. How does place help to define a person? How does this set up who Anna is to you, as the reader?

2. THE LETTER CARRIER features parallel characters, who seem to be in conversation with each other, showing the alternate paths each could have taken. Anna and Agata appear to be opposites, with Agata being a happy housewife and mother, and Anna wanting to pursue fulfillment outside of the home. And then there is Carlo and Antonio, one brother having ventured outside of their hometown; the other loyal to its streets. How does the juxtaposition of these characters color your impression of them? Does the author paint one as happier than the other or seem to take sides about which lifestyle choices seem more fruitful?

3. At one point, Anna and Giovanna are labeled ?the madwoman and the outlander? by a townsperson. How have the narrow views of the roles that are acceptable for women changed since 1934, when the novel opens? How have things remained the same?

4. Agata tells her husband that ?love can be learned.? Do you believe this is true? Does THE LETTER CARRIER paint this as possible?

5. Daniele?s grandfather declares he needs to ?cut his teeth and learn what it means to work hard, to prove his mettle and character, to become a man,? declaring that his father ?is not good at teaching him anything manly.? We see Daniele hide his workshop from his family, embarrassed of his love of sewing. How have the roles we find ?acceptable? for men changed? How have our ideas of ?manliness? evolved since the 1930s?

6. As the townswomen get ready to vote for the first time in 1945, Lorenza expresses her disinterest. Anna says to her, ?If you don?t come, you insult yourself most of all.? What does she mean by this?

7. On Carlo?s first birthday since his passing, Anna declares, ?No place I shared with Carlo can give me peace. His absence leaves nothing but a great void.? Who do you believe is Anna?s true love --- Carlo or Antonio?

8. Lorenza makes a seemingly unthinkable decision by the end, leaving her daughter behind to follow her heart. Having watched her over the almost two decades the book transpires, were you surprised by this decision? Why do you think the author decided that this is how Lorenza?s story would end?

Author Bio

Francesca Giannone has a degree in communication science and studied in Rome at the CSC, the oldest European film school. She has published various short stories in literary magazines, both in print and online. Giannone currently lives in Milan, but her heart is still in her native Lizzanello, a seaside town in the Salento region. She hopes to live there again one day.

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