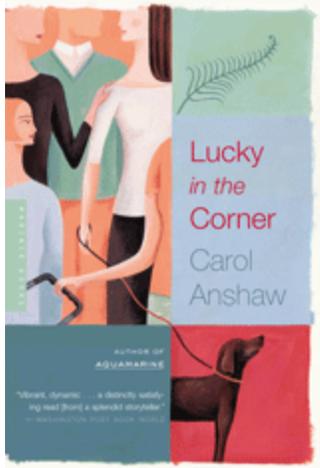


Lucky in the Corner by Carol Anshaw



Selected as a Best Book of the Year by the *Washington Post Book World* and the *Chicago Tribune*

Winner of the Ferro-Grumley Award

Finalist for the Lambda Literary Award

“Anshaw helps us laugh at and revel in the wrong turns, dead ends, and occasional triumphs we all experience as we travel, mapless, down the road of contemporary family life.” — *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review*

“With sharp humor and perception” (*O: The Oprah Magazine*), *Lucky in the Corner* shows us the way a family reconfigures itself as unexpected changes come its way — and how, no matter what shape it takes, it remains a family.

“Irresistible and inventive . . . Anshaw is wonderfully perceptive about human behavior, and her observations are startlingly universal while at the same time wholly original.” — *Newsday*

“A novel of brief and quiet strokes that captures the deep and inexorable connections between people who love one another.” — *Out*

About the Book

Nora and Fern’s relationship as mother and daughter is a tumble of love and mistrust. To Nora, her daughter is an enigma — at the same time wonderful and unfindable. Fern sees her mother as treacherous — for busting up their family to move in with her lover, Jeanne. As their lives become complicated by the arrivals of a bike-messenger boyfriend for Fern, a shadowy affair for Nora, and a baby in need of a family, and by the failing health of Lucky, their beloved dog, this mother and daughter find their way onto a fresh footing with each other.

Questions for Discussion

We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *Lucky in the Corner* for every reader.

1. When Fern is born, Nora has high hopes for their relationship. “Among the hopes Nora was pinning on Fern was that she would be the first person in Nora’s life to whom she could give herself over completely, whom she wouldn’t need to resist in any way.” Do you think Nora succeeds or fails at giving herself over to her daughter? In what ways does Fern’s resistance to her mother mirror Nora’s resistance to Fern? What is at the root of this mutual resistance, and do you think it is common to other mothers and daughters?

- 2.** How do the flashbacks to Nora’s childhood contribute to our understanding of her as an adult, in her relationships with her daughter, her brother, other women?
- 3.** Fern imagines “a world composed of two populations: one stationary, sitting in dusk-filled rooms with the radio on, waiting for the other half, a roving band out late, laughing, dancing, clinking glasses and making toasts to their new lives with no backward glances.” To which population does Fern belong? Where do other characters — Nora, Jeanne, Tracy, Harold, and James — belong?
- 4.** Tracy would prefer a non-nuclear family and wants to approach parenthood in a new way. Fern mourns the loss of her nuclear family. What does the book say about the definition of “family” beyond the nuclear model and the connections necessary to form a family?
- 5.** Trust is a major theme in the novel. Jeanne says, “What is love but trust?” How accurate is this statement? Is it possible to have love without trust?
- 6.** Do you feel sympathy for Nora in starting an affair with Pam? Do you think this choice represents a flaw in her character that she can’t help, or simply self-indulgence?
- 7.** It could be said that Nora attempts to recreate her identity through sexual relationships. What is the relationship between identity and desire? Is it possible to recreate identity through desire?
- 8.** According to Nora, “rescue was a large component” of her wandering eye. What is Nora constantly looking to be saved from? Who or what eventually rescues her? Do you suppose she will ever be able to overcome her penchant for romantic obsession?
- 9.** After learning of Nora’s affair, Harold says Jeanne is a “sitting duck.” Is Jeanne truly in the dark when it comes to Nora’s infidelity, or is she choosing to postpone acknowledging the signs? What do you think will happen between them after Nora comes through the door of the party with her bloody lip?
- 10.** Harold claims, “People like to screw up a good thing. Happiness is hard to bear.” How is this true of the characters in the novel? How is it also true in the world at large?
- 11.** Fern begins to see “dotted lines between certain people and animals, between certain events — indications that the universe is ordered, but in a way that has yet to reveal itself.” Where are the dotted lines in this novel? Do you identify with Fern’s experience? In other words, do you also find “dotted lines” in the world around you?
- 12.** As an anthropologist, Fern wants to be an “observer and student of humanity.” What has Fern learned about parenting by observing the humanity around her? Likewise, how does becoming a parent change the way Fern observes the humans around her? How does it affect her relationship with her mother?
- 13.** How separate are Harold and Dolores? What does Harold get from being able to occupy two

personalities?

14. James cannot handle witnessing Lucky's decline, and Fern sees ahead to "all the other clutches in which James wouldn't be able to be with her." Do you think James will be a lasting presence in Fern's life?

15. At the end of the book, Fern concludes, "Nora is not going to disappear on her." What has led her to believe this? Do you think Fern is right, or will Nora disappear again?

16. By the end of the novel, Fern and Nora have undergone a role reversal: in many ways, Fern has assumed the traditional motherly role and Nora has behaved like an adolescent. How do these changes in their roles allow them to accept and understand each other?

About Carol Anshaw

Carol Anshaw teaches in the Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the author of the acclaimed novels *Aquamarine* and *Seven Moves* as well as *Lucky in the Corner*; all three novels were finalists for the Lambda Literary Award. Before her novels were published, she wrote restaurant reviews, articles on a variety of topics (including barbed wire), and young-adult vampire novels. And for seven years she was the backup (to Roger Ebert) movie reviewer for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In 1990, she received the National Book Critics Circle Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. Her short stories have appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*.

A Conversation with Carol Anshaw

Q) In a review of *Lucky in the Corner*, *Publishers Weekly* noted, "The characters may be offbeat, but the novel is mainstream in its appeal, radiating energy and humor, and dispensing wisdom about the frailties of the human heart." Do you agree with the term "offbeat" to describe your characters?

A) Actually, they're pretty onbeat to me, but I think this is reviewer shorthand for saying they're interesting, not run-of-the-mill.

Q) What inspired you to write this book, and what did you want the reader to get from it?

A) I had four ideas going in. I wanted to write a character who was perfectly happy living in opposition to the current culture [Harold]. I wanted to write a mother and a daughter who were both good people, but hurting each other in spite of this. I wanted to write about the new way family is formed today. And I wanted to write about someone who sabotages her own life because of a penchant for romantic obsession.

Q) Why the title, *Lucky in the Corner*?

A) The working title I used while I was writing the book was *Canasta*, from the old card game that Dolores and her friends play, a scene that came to me in a dream. But my editor thought it was too old-fashioned a title for a new-fashioned book, and so I came up with Lucky, there in his corner, as a constant in a family undergoing great change.

Q) How did the book change from first draft to published version? Is there anything you wish you could change, even now?

A) I probably rewrite most passages between ten and twenty times. It usually takes me four years or more to write a book. With *Lucky*, I don't think there's anything I'd change. It's the best *Lucky* I could write.

Q) How much of this book came from your life, and in what ways?

A) Very little of this book came from my own experience, more from my observations of life lived around me.

Q) How did your personal sexual orientation affect your decision to place women lovers in the novel?

A) There are women lovers in all my novels because I am queer and I have a particular commitment, a social agenda, to write about the lives of gay women. But there are also straight people in my books, as there are in my world. I'm interested in writing out of the diversity of the culture.

Q) What is the significance of the characters' names?

A) My mother's lifelong friend is named Fern and I have always loved her and her name and wanted to use it in a book. Other names I just try to match to the character. For instance, I wouldn't make Pam a Persephone. Harold kind of had to be Harold. Some of this is more by feel than by active decision.

Q) Did any of the characters start out one way (in your mind) and then evolve or change into someone else?

A) Fern became bigger, maybe in the end the book's heroine.

Q) Why did you choose a character like James to be Fern's boyfriend?

A) I love James. Sometimes I make up characters I'd like to meet. Harold is also someone I wish were in my life. Lucky is based totally on my dog, Sebastian, and is the only character in the book modeled from real life.

For Further Reading

The following novels may also be of interest to readers of *Lucky in the Corner*:

[*Aquamarine*](#) by Carol Anshaw

[*Seven Moves*](#) by Carol Anshaw

[*Dupont Circle*](#) by Paul Kafka-Gibbons

[*Imani All Mine*](#) by Connie Porter