



Readers Group Guide

The Forever Marriage

Ann Bauer

Introduction

The Forever Marriage begins with the death of a good man named Jobe. Carmen, Jobe's wife, watches with relief as her husband takes his last breath. This is the moment she's been waiting for: unhappily married for the past 21 years she aches to be free. But after Jobe is gone, Carmen feels an inexplicable sense of loss. A loving but sometimes prickly mother, she does her best to shepherd their three children through their grief. And when Carmen herself is diagnosed with cancer just weeks after earning her freedom, she's bewildered, angry and guilty. She wonders if, perhaps, this is the universe "paying her back" for never loving Jobe.

With the help of her lover, Danny, her mother-in-law, Olive, and her best friend, Jana, Carmen begins untangling the things that went wrong in her marriage—and in her life. By sorting through her past and reviewing her many regrets, Carmen comes to a very different understanding of Jobe and the marriage they shared.

About Ann Bauer

Ann Bauer is author of a novel, *A Wild Ride up the Cupboards*, and co-author of a culinary memoir, *Damn Good Food*. Her essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Elle*, *Redbook*, and *The Sun*. From 2006 to 2010, she was a regular contributor to *Salon*. She lives in Minneapolis. Visit TheForeverMarriage.com.

Discussion Questions

1. Carmen openly wishes for Jobe to die. How does this make you feel? Can you understand the situation or does it make you dislike her? Does your feeling for Carmen change by the end of the book?
2. The children, Luca, Siena and Michael, are each affected very differently by Jobe's death. Why is this?
3. Danny, Carmen's lover, is both reliable and unreliable. Is he worthy of her—or anyone's—trust?
4. Many people in *The Forever Marriage* are unfaithful to their spouses. Do their reasons seem valid? Are there circumstances in which infidelity is an understandable response?
5. Olive causes a great deal of pain and misery with her well-intentioned meddling. Do you see her as a heroine or a villain in this story? How do your feelings for Olive change throughout the book?



The Overlook Press

6. Do you believe events such as Carmen and Jobe's marriage, and Luca's birth, were "meant" to happen? Could they have been changed?
7. How do Jobe's mathematical theories affect the characters' understanding of their lives? How, if at all, do they affect yours?
8. After he dies, Carmen, Olive and Luca all dream about or see visions of Jobe. Why did the author include this more spiritual storyline? What does it add to the book?
9. The voice in *The Forever Marriage* is "close-third," meaning it is told from Carmen's perspective and she is present in every scene. Is there any other character whose thoughts you wanted to hear?
10. What is the purpose of Luca's Down Syndrome? How does it add to the novel? Do parents of children like Luca often feel guilty and how does this affect a marriage?
11. Many other books have focused on the entrapment of a bad marriage, including *Jane Eyre* and *Rabbit, Run*. What's different about this one?
12. Does Carmen fall in love with Jobe at the end? And if so, is this enough? Does the author imply that Jobe's spirit is still around to love her back?