

Kiss Carlo: A Novel

Harper Paperbacks

By Adriana Trigiani

ISBN: 9780062319234

Introduction

From Adriana Trigiani, the beloved *New York Times*-bestselling author of *The Shoemaker's Wife*, comes an exhilarating epic novel of love, loyalty, and creativity—the story of an Italian-American family on the cusp of change.

It's 1949 and South Philadelphia bursts with opportunity during the post-war boom. *The Palazzini Cab Company & Western Union Telegraph Office*, owned and operated by Dominic Palazzini and his three sons, is flourishing: business is good, they're surrounded by sympathetic wives and daughters-in-law, with grandchildren on the way. But a decades-long feud that split Dominic and his brother Mike and their once-close families sets the stage for a re-match.

Amidst the hoopla, the arrival of an urgent telegram from Italy upends the life of Nicky Castone (Dominic and his wife's orphaned nephew) who lives and works with his Uncle Dom and his family. Nicky decides, at 30, that he wants more—more than just a job driving Car #4 and more than his longtime fiancée Peachy DePino, a bookkeeper, can offer. When he admits to his fiancée that he's been secretly moonlighting at the local Shakespeare theater company, Nicky finds himself drawn to the stage, its colorful players and to the determined Calla Borelli, who inherited the enterprise from her father, Nicky must choose between the conventional life his family expects of him or chart a new course and risk losing everything he cherishes.

From the dreamy mountaintop village of Roseto Valfortore in Italy, to the vibrant streets of South Philly, to the close-knit enclave of Roseto, Pennsylvania, to New York City during the birth of the golden age of television, *Kiss Carlo* is a powerful, inter-generational story that celebrates the ties that bind, while staying true to oneself when all hope seems lost.

Told against the backdrop of some of Shakespeare's greatest comedies, this novel brims with romance as long buried secrets are revealed, mistaken identities are unmasked, scores are settled, broken hearts are mended and true love reigns. Trigiani's consummate storytelling skill and her trademark wit, along with a dazzling cast of characters will enthrall readers. Once again, the author has returned to her own family garden to create an unforgettable feast. *Kiss Carlo* is a jubilee, resplendent with hope, love, and the abiding power of *la famiglia*.



Questions for Discussion

1. What's significant about the particular historic time in which the story is set? What defines the United States and Philadelphia in particular?
2. How are Dom and Mike Palazzini similar or different? What causes such close brothers to place each other "on the island" for so many years? What does Mike mean by his lament that "Dom had not yet learned how to live"?
3. In what ways does the loss of his mother affect Nicky Castone throughout his life? How does his inclusion in the Palazzini family help or challenge him?
4. Do you think you could call Hortense Mooney Nicky's "third mother"? What wisdom does she possess about the Palazzini family? About life? What particular abilities help her grow and change and become so successful?
5. What might it mean that Nicky "saw beauty in the world even when there wasn't any"? How does this affect his decisions and behavior?
6. Honesty is the "most important virtue" for Nicky because he believes that "truth made life simple." In what ways is this true or not? How does he reconcile this with his impersonating Carlo Guardinfante? Where else throughout the story is honesty embraced or avoided?
7. What does Sam Borelli so value about theater that he would dedicate his entire life to serving it? What is the value of a place like the Borelli Theater to a community?
8. As a father, Sam worries about his talented artist daughter. Why? To what extent might the abilities and values of an artist potentially make life more difficult?
9. Beyond simple entertainment, in what various ways can literature be valuable in one's life? What is it about the plays of Shakespeare in particular that evoke such dedication from everyone at the Borelli Theater?
10. Working at The Borelli, Nicky realizes that "theater was the volatile, dangerous, and restless sea in the world of all art forms." What might he mean? Why might this have been so compelling to him?
11. What various motivations does Nicky have for impersonating Carlo? What complex effects are achieved by the use of impersonation and mistaken identity in many of Shakespeare's plays?
12. Eventually, Nicky makes the profound decision to "live a life that mattered." What might this mean? What does it mean for him to be "the dramatist of his own life"? Why does he come to value risk over security?
13. What is it about Mamie Confalone that heals Nicky? Why, after such a profound experience, don't they stay together?

14. How does the advent of television change and even threaten the role of the theater? What can theater provide that television cannot?

15. Hortense Mooney realizes that “destiny reveals itself when need and desire merge in the moment.” What might this mean? How does it play out with Nicky, Calla, and others in the story?

16. Why do you think that Dom and Mike finally reconcile after a rift of so many years?

17. What qualities are essential for a strong and successful family that grows and endures for generations?

18. What qualities make Nicky and Calla such a profound and inevitable match? How do they balance or complement each other? Amidst the forces of destiny and luck and hard work, what’s the value of friendship and love?