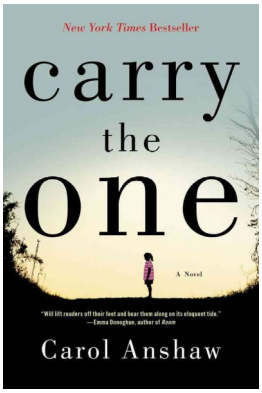
Carry the One



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ISBN:
9781451636888

Violence changes everything that happens after. This interesting novel covers family and friends in Chicago after a tragic event occurred at the end of a Wisconsin wedding. In 1983, a carload of friends and siblings leaves a wedding party in the middle of the night. Their car crashes into a ten-year old girl, killing her. Most of the 20-somethings were high that night from either drugs or alcohol. The driver, Olivia, gets a jail term; the rest suffer through a lifetime of guilt.

In *Carry the One* Anshaw presented herself with a hard task: introducing five or six characters and following them over the course of 25 plus years: their relationships, their passions, their fears, their daily occupations. Luckily, she has mastered creating authentic and interesting characters. First there are the three siblings: Carmen, Alice and Nick. It's Carmen's wedding that they are celebrating that fateful day. Carmen is the political one: she runs a women's shelter, later loses half an ear during a march against rape. In the ebullient 2000s, she cannot hold her tongue when friends rant about the hardships of their kitchen renovation. Carmen has spent her life helping poor women, and she can't stand the hypocrisy of people who inflate the seriousness of their problems.

At the beginning of the book, Alice, her younger sister, is a struggling artist, but as the years pass, she achieves fame, a mixed blessing. A lesbian, she falls hard at the wedding for Maude, a love that rules her life for many years and for too long stays one-sided.

Carmen's and Alice's kid brother, Nick, is a passionate and extremely talented astronomer but unfortunately one with major drug issues. In fact, at the time of the accident, Nick was stoned. He saw the young girl walking alongside the road but gave no warning because he was enjoying it as though he were watching a movie. Alice was probably the only sober one, yet she did not offer to drive even though she realized Olivia was too impaired to be behind the wheel. Instead, Alice climbed in the back and flirted with Maude--they had just met.

For years, Alice paints vivid paintings of the young dead girl, imagining her as she aged. These paintings are the best of her life, but for obvious reasons, she feels she cannot show them. Nick is the only one in the family who keeps in touch with the dead child's family. This brings him two broken noses over the years and a missing tooth.

Two folksingers also rode in that car that early morning: Jean and Tom. Jean probably has the most interesting job, recording folk singers of the past before they disappear. Tom is married but continues a years-long affair with the patient Jean. Even before the police showed up that night, he hoisted his guitar strap over his shoulder and scurried away from the accident scene.

What I liked best about this psychological novel is Anshaw's treatment of siblings. Very few

modern novels explore the adult sibling relationship, especially at this depth. Carmen and Alice not only take care of each other, but they challenge each other to become better people. Because of his addiction issues, Carmen and Alice repeatedly "rescue" Nick. When their mother Loretta becomes very ill, Anshaw writes, "Loretta's illness had brought Alice and Nick into a closeness that, for once, didn't have anything to do with his troubles. It was a free, floating sort of intimacy, like they were sitting inside one of the rainy-day card table tents of their childhood." Anshaw covers pivotal historical events in this novel: the Bush election, 9-11, and Katrina's blast at New Orleans, among others, but the focus remains primarily on this handful of flawed human beings living their lives both together and apart, trying to forgive each other and themselves for a major wrong turn in the past. This book is an inspiring book that will keep you turning the pages.
Two other literary novels that follow characters over a long time sweep of time are Stewart O'Nan's *The Good Wife* and Julia Glass's *Three Junes*. The latter one also deals with the aftereffects of a tragedy.
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Posted by Dory L. on Sep 4, 2012

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