

Daria Bignardi talks about her latest novel

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Two women (Alma and Antonia), a city (Ferrara), and a mystery. These are the ingredients of **Daria Bignardi's** new novel, ***L'amore che ti meriti*** (The love you deserve), published by Mondadori. The story runs through the events of an unwittingly happy family that is shattered by the death of the son, Maio. Only when her daughter, Antonia, becomes pregnant does Alma reveal her secret, arousing in the young woman a desire to investigate and discover the truth.

***L'amore che ti meriti* is the story of a "normal" family, who don't know they're happy (although they'll understand when they no longer are), who are destroyed by a tragic event. Is happiness somehow always unconscious?**

"I believe it is, especially when you're very young, when you still haven't experienced an irretrievable loss. Alma and Maio take their happiness for granted until they lose it. It also happens with people."

The novel is set in the late 1970s, which was an important historical period; on the one hand, the punk culture, dark and rebellious, on the other the more frivolous and superficial culture of the sandwich bars. Why this choice?

"For different reasons. I wanted a plot set in the present and another one set in a past, not yet distant, but not too recent either. And then, certain punk influences have a lot to do with the personality of one of the main characters, Alma: impatient, drastic and manipulative."

The Italian province serves as the backdrop to the story. A characteristic province, full of charm and history. How important is the province in this story and in Italian history?

"In this story, a lot, and I think also in Italian history. We're almost all provincial, even

when we've travelled and moved; it's a condition of the soul. The province can either protect or suffocate, depending on our character."

Ferrara is the third character in the novel, that is able to hide the secret of Maio's disappearance very well; does it most resemble Alma or Antonia?

"Ferrara is more like Alma, mysterious and closed, but also elegant and full of charm, timeless. It's a place that's still and silent."

"L'amore che ti meriti" is a novel about truth. Hidden truth and sought truth. How much courage does it take to hide the truth and how much to seek it stubbornly as Antonia does?

"I think the hardest thing is to hide it. Sometimes you do it out of fear, but the opposite can also happen, you might need to have the courage not to share a secret."

Alma will never seek the truth, unlike her daughter, and prefers to escape. Is she afraid of not being ready for the truth? Can the truth be unbearable?

"For Alma, the sense of guilt, and the fear that her new family might disintegrate, like her original family, predominates. This feeling is so strong that it becomes a kind of great strength."

In her journey, Antonia even finds things she's not looking for, things she couldn't even imagine. She starts an adventure without knowing how it's going to end, driven by something irresistible, that she can't fight. She makes an instinctive choice that will help her solve the mystery; how much "instinct" do we need in life?

"Well, what we call instinct is something mysterious, perhaps a capacity for deeper contact with ourselves and with others."

The title of the book is lovely and very strong. Do we really deserve love, or is what Milan Kundera said true, that "there's no deserving in love, true love is free?"

"All of the characters in this story have a different relationship with the love they are either able or unable to give, and either able or unable to receive. I still haven't figured out whether love is something deserved or not, but I think it would be more romantic if it was free, and maybe even foolish."

Daria Bignardi, who will be in Varese on Tuesday, November 11, at the "Aspettando Glocal" event, was interviewed by Marco Giovannelli.

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