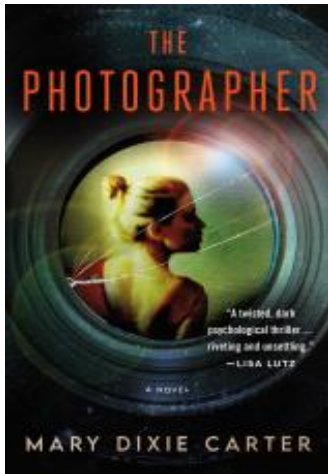


The Photographer

by Mary Dixie Carter



About the Book

Mary Dixie Carter's **THE PHOTOGRAPHER** is a slyly observed, suspenseful story of envy and obsession, told in the mesmerizing, irresistible voice of a character who will make you doubt that seeing is *ever* believing.

WHEN PERFECT IMAGES

As a photographer, Delta Dawn observes the seemingly perfect lives of New York City's elite: snapping photos of their children's birthday parties, transforming images of stiff hugs and tearstained faces into visions of pure joy, and creating moments these parents long for.

ARE MADE OF BEAUTIFUL LIES

But when Delta is hired for Natalie Straub's 11th birthday, she finds herself wishing she wasn't behind the lens but a part of the scene --- in the Straub family's gorgeous home and elegant life.

THE TRUTH WILL BE EXPOSED

That's when Delta puts her plan in place, by babysitting for Natalie; befriending her mother, Amelia; finding chances to listen to her father, Fritz. Soon she's bathing in the master bathtub, drinking their expensive wine, and eyeing the beautifully finished garden apartment in their townhouse. It seems she can never get close enough, until she discovers that photos aren't all she can manipulate.

Discussion Guide

1. In the first chapter, we're introduced to our narrator and protagonist, Delta Dawn, who says, "It was obvious to me

that you need to immerse yourself in the lifestyle if you want to fit in, if you want people to believe that you belong to their world. It's a matter of osmosis.? How does this observation inform Delta's worldview? The themes of the book itself? What does this statement tell you about Delta as a character?

2. A major theme of the book is appearance versus reality. Do you think that Delta feels pressure from society for her life to appear a certain way, or does she put that pressure on herself? What about Amelia? Natalie, even --- as she starts to form her persona?

3. At one point, Delta describes herself as a "voyeur," defined by Merriam-Webster as "a prying observer who is usually seeking the sordid or the scandalous." Do you think this word accurately describes Delta at the beginning of the novel? If so, would you say it's still true by the end?

4. What do you think it is about the Straubs in particular that makes Delta feel so close to them? What do you think they see in her? Pure opportunity and selfishness, or something more heartfelt?

5. In chapter 3, Delta asks the audience, "Who's to say that the memory I create is any less 'true' than the original?" Memory is, indeed, a tricky thing. Do you think any other characters in this novel "create" their memories to a certain extent? Can you remember a time when you yourself may have done this --- for example, a childhood moment that you and a sibling remember entirely differently?

6. Motherhood in its many forms is a major theme of THE PHOTOGRAPHER. Do you think Amelia is a "good" mother? Delta? How does the book as a whole inform your idea of the social expectations placed on mothers?

7. As Amelia sings --- and Delta herself then notes --- Delta is named after a famous Tanya Tucker song. Take a few minutes and listen to the song or read the lyrics. Do you see any correlations between the Delta Dawn in the song and the protagonist of THE PHOTOGRAPHER? Why do you think the author chose this as her main character's namesake?

8. Though Delta considers herself an astute observer of human nature, able to fit in anywhere, we as readers are given a peek behind the curtain she shows to the rest of the world. What does this discrepancy --- between the Delta we see Photoshopping images alone in her apartment and the Delta chatting and ingratiating herself with the Straubs --- say about our ability to truly know other people?

9. In chapter 16, Delta says about Natalie's proposed photography subject, "Natalie was looking to unmask." How does this indicate that Delta's and Natalie's styles of photography would be different? What do those potential differences say about their characterizations?

10. Does Delta remind you of any other characters from literature who have styled their own versions of themselves to appear a certain way to those around them? Jay Gatsby, for example?

11. What do you think of the ending? How much sympathy --- or not --- do you feel for Delta? Did your opinion of her change as you read the novel? What do you anticipate her doing next?

Author Bio

Mary Dixie Carter's writing has appeared in *TIME*, *The Economist*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The New York Sun*, *The New York Observer* and other print and online publications. She worked at *The Observer* for five years, where she served as the publishing director. In addition to writing, she also has a background as a professional actor. Mary Dixie graduated from Harvard College with an honors degree in English Literature and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from The New School. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two young children. *THE PHOTOGRAPHER* is her first novel.

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