

BOOK CLUB KIT

OUR ITALIAN SUMMER

JENNIFER PROBST

New York Times Bestselling Author

a novel



LETTER TO READERS



Dear Readers,

I have always been fascinated with the aspects of love, and not just the romantic kind. Female relationships amidst family members have a core of fascinating dynamics—these are the people we don't choose to be in our life but who are chosen for us, bound by blood. They are the ones who know us from childhood, share day-to-day experiences, and watch us transform with age.

Years ago, I had a unique experience that changed my life and the way I look at female family dynamics. My mother always dreamed of going to Italy, so for her seventieth birthday, I booked a fifteen-day tour from Rome to Tuscany. My fifteen-year-old niece and my godmother joined us on the trip. Three generations of women let loose to have an adventure, bringing our own unique viewpoints, issues, and experiences along with a tight-knit tour group.

This is how *Our Italian Summer* was born.

Women are complex, emotional, beautiful individuals. Add in the complicated relationships of mothers and daughters, and a story bloomed that I needed to dig into and explore.

Set against the gorgeous backdrop of Italy, from the ruins of Rome to the idyllic island of Capri, these three women will begin to not only discover who they are but find new meaning in each of their relationships with one another. By giving you three unique viewpoints, I was able to reveal layers to each of the characters and how perspective can change a situation in a brand-new way.

Come with me on this unique journey where you will meet a driven workaholic trying to balance being a single mom with her own ambitions, an eighteen-year-old girl seeking her own identity as she fights her way through adulthood, and a seventy-five-year-old grandmother desperate to heal the broken fragments of her family.

Yes, there is romance. But the men who weave themselves into the lives of the Ferrari women are special and a reminder that love in all its forms is part of the cornerstone of a full life.

I invite you to open up these pages, pour a glass of Pinot Grigio, and join the Ferrari women on a trip of a lifetime. And I urge you to discover and be open to the answers you may also find along the way while thinking of your own family dynamics and the choices you've made in your own life.

I believe a good book is a discovery not only of the characters but of ourselves. Happy reading.



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A CONVERSATION WITH JENNIFER PROBST

Tell us about *Our Italian Summer*! What inspired you to write this story?

The outline of this book was scribbled every night as I experienced my own Italian adventure with my teenage niece, my godmother, and my mother, who was turning seventy years old. As we journeyed through Rome to Florence and through Tuscany on a two-week tour, we learned so much about each other and the unique relationships we all had. I was completely inspired to create that type of discovery in a book, digging deep into the complicated dynamics of mothers and daughters. I know many writers say this, but *Our Italian Summer* is my dream book—one I'm so excited to finally see in the hands of readers.

The novel is told through three different points of view. Did you have a favorite to write? And why?

Sophia, the grandmother, was the easiest to write! But this didn't surprise me, because for my entire life I've been aching to write an elderly heroine, one who is able to look back on her life and choices and make her own peace with her decisions. I loved the fierce protectiveness Sophia experienced regarding her granddaughter and daughter, and how desperately she wanted to heal the gap between them.

Allegra was the hardest. Writing an eighteen-year-old girl is tricky, because she must be authentic without the usual stereotypes of teens. Once I began to trust myself and hear her voice in my head, I allowed myself free rein, and I love how she developed on the page.

You've traveled to Italy yourself—do you have a favorite place you visited? Why?

Yes, I've been to Italy four times now, and it will never be enough. I'd say my favorite place to go was Capri. There is something simply magical about the island—from the shops to the food to the idyllic coastline and turquoise waters. I love how hard it is to get to the island, because it makes the trip even more special when you finally set your feet on the sun-warmed pavement and look out at the sea. It's full of character and life and beauty.

There are a lot of hilarious moments in the book—are those based on experience? And do tell...

LOL! Oh, boy, there were definitely some scenes where I was laughing out loud as I



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wrote them! Yes, many of these moments actually did happen to us. I love writing my books as fiction with a twist of truth, because it adds an element of authenticity. I can't confess all my secrets, but I will share that someone did topple down the Spanish Steps, and it was caught on many cell phones. And there may have been a run for your life in the city of Rome as we were chased through the park. On the rest, I'm pleading the Fifth!

How did your writing process change, if at all, while writing this novel?

I've been writing since I was twelve years old, and I've published forty-five books, so the process itself is something I intimately love and accept. This book was a unique challenge, though, because it is my first women's fiction novel. For the first quarter of the book, I was struggling, and I didn't know why. A close writing friend reminded me I may be trying to write something that felt a certain way because that's what I believed women's fiction should be. It was like a lightbulb moment! I realized this was my story, and I needed to be true to my voice and the way I wanted it to unfold. Immediately, I fell back into the writing and quickly finished, enjoying every moment of my adventure with the Ferrari women. It was another reminder that we need to be true to our own voice and perspective, and not try to be anything we're not.

What do you hope readers will take away from this story?

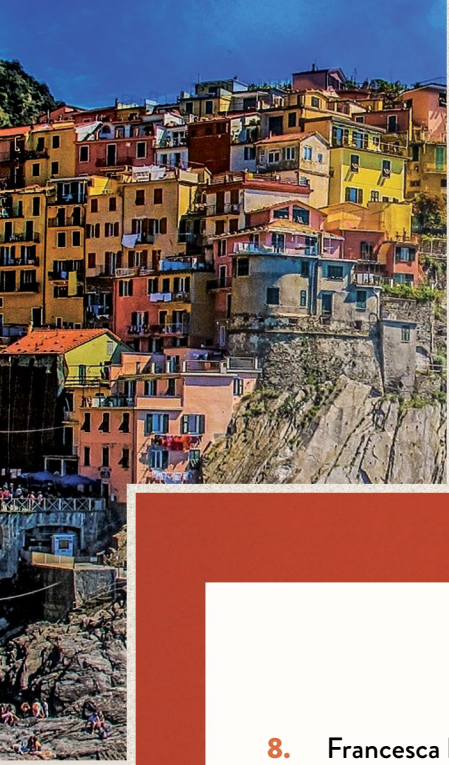
I have so many hopes for this story. My goal is to show how female relationships, especially between mothers and daughters, are full of layers, but if we can push through the complications, we will find more clarity, acceptance, and, I believe, understanding. Too many times, women are limited by their roles: wife, mother, daughter, friend, etc. We are so much more than our surface terms. Our moms were women who loved, lost, made huge mistakes, and struggled. No one is perfect, but it's so hard to crack open our hearts and allow ourselves to get to know the true person in our lives. Exploring the dynamics of Francesca, Sophia, and Allegra showed me a new perspective. That's what I want for my readers.

Oh, and I can't forget the romance! As I was writing Enzo's and Ian's characters, my stomach was filled with fluttery butterflies—I got all the feels! I want readers to finish the story and feel a sense of joy and hope. A few hours of happiness in today's world can never be overrated.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When we first meet Francesca, we discover she seems to prioritize work over family. Did you feel sympathetic toward her character and her responsibilities? Judgmental? Did she inspire any empathy for her situation, or did you believe she could have made better choices?
2. The three main characters—Francesca, Allegra, and Sophia—all have individual struggles within the family. Were you able to relate to one of them better than the others? Why?
3. Do you think it was wrong for Sophia to decide to keep her health problems to herself and not share with her daughter?
4. Italy plays an important role in *Our Italian Summer*. As they travel, the characters begin to find out more about themselves. Did you have a favorite town/setting you loved the most? Why? What was it about the scene that resonated with you?
5. The relationship between Enzo and Francesca grows gradually throughout the book. What kind of future do you envision for them?
6. Allegra struggles with her resentment of Francesca's workaholic tendencies and with feeling seen by her mother. Many of us may experience guilt over our work and careers, and trying to find balance between work and homelife. Discuss the mother-daughter roles represented and the character with whom you identified most closely and why.
7. Allegra and Sophia hold a deep bond, which Francesca seems jealous of. Is there someone you experienced a tight bond with other than your parents? What did you get out of the experience? Looking back, do you see why you bonded with that particular person?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. Francesca has always wanted to be the exact opposite of her mother and raise her daughter differently. Yet, her daughter ends up feeling more connected to Sophia, embracing her view of life rather than her mother's. What do you think of this dynamic? Do you believe that if Francesca hadn't pushed her so hard, Allegra would have embraced more of her mother's viewpoints?
9. The overall theme of *Our Italian Summer* is that our relationships to our family develop and change us. Discuss each character's growth arc and how they changed over the course of the book.
10. Allegra and Ian's relationship begins with friendship but morphs into love. Do you think her feelings for Ian change Allegra for the better? How so?
11. Ian wants to become a priest. Do you believe he should have pursued a different path after falling in love with Allegra? What do you think happens to Ian after the close of the book? Do you think Ian and Allegra will always have a relationship?
12. Do you think Allegra and Ian should have had sex if he was intent on pursuing the priesthood? Discuss.
13. The relationships the three women develop during their tour of Italy change all of them. Which character that they meet in Italy do you feel had the biggest impact on each one of them?
14. The book includes several descriptive scenes of landscapes and food. What was your favorite? What feelings did it invoke?
15. Have you ever visited Italy? What was your experience there? If you have never been, do you dream of traveling to a specific part of Italy?



ABOUT JENNIFER PROBST

Jennifer Probst is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Billionaire Builders series, the Searching For . . . series, the Marriage to a Billionaire series, the Steele Brothers series, the Stay series, and the Sunshine Sisters series. Like some of her characters, Probst, along with her husband and two sons, calls New York's Hudson Valley home. When she isn't traveling to meet readers, she enjoys reading, watching "shameful reality television," and visiting a local Hudson Valley animal shelter. Follow her at JenniferProbst.com

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