

THE
CANTALOUPE
THIEF

A BRANIGAN POWERS MYSTERY

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LION FICTION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE CANTALOUPE THIEF

1. Early in the novel, Branigan recalls a quote from a homeless man that Pastor Liam shared. It turned out to be from Malachi, who said, “The worst part of being homeless isn’t being cold or wet or hungry. The worst part is being looked right through.” How does that remark set up the storyline?
2. Do you know any people who are or who have been homeless? Are any of them like the characters in this book?
3. Branigan grieves the decline in newspapers. Ironically, the terrible story she finds herself writing recalls their glory years. Would she have started this story if she’d known where it would lead?
4. Many of the characters – Malachi, Rita, Max, Vesuvius, the residents of Tent City, even Dontegan – are what we term “chronically homeless,” meaning they have lived outdoors or in shelters for years. Does it surprise you that such a class exists in this country?
5. Who is *The Cantaloupe Thief*? Is the author commenting on his casual thievery or is the nickname tongue-in-cheek?
6. What do you think of Malachi’s insistence on not begging or panhandling?
7. Confederate flags still fly in parts of northeast Georgia – as well as other parts of the Deep South. Is racial discrimination different there than elsewhere in the country? Is homelessness?
8. In an early scene, a man spills a dangerous personal secret right in front of Malachi. Rita is confident that Davison and Branigan would never recognize her from working in the mall. Why are some people invisible? What does that mean for the rest of us?
9. What do we mean when we say that addiction is the great equalizer? How does Davison’s addiction illustrate the truism?
10. Branigan and her parents have learned the language of recovery, of “empowering recovery” rather than “enabling addiction.” Do they live it out?
11. Can Branigan and Malachi have a true friendship when their differences are so great?