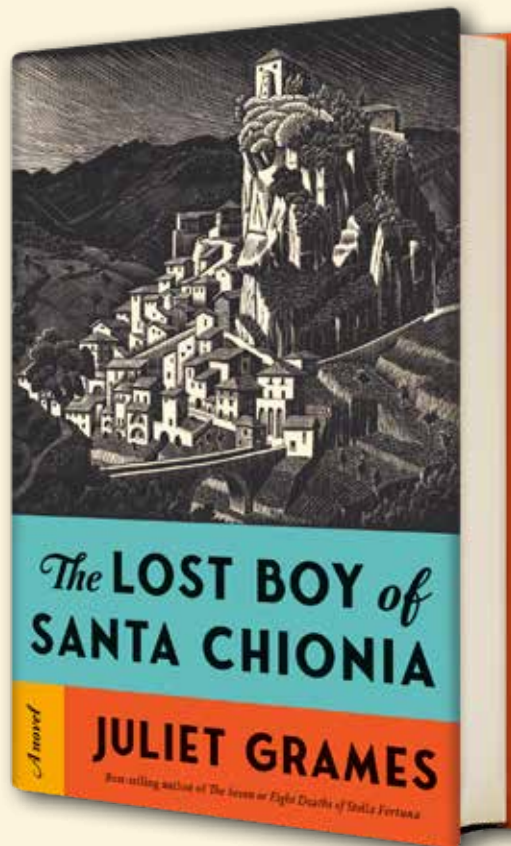


A Book Club's **DINNER PARTY GUIDE**



Enter the world of Juliet Grames's
The **LOST BOY** *of*
SANTA CHIONIA

Here you'll find the perfect dinner party guide for hosting your book club's discussion of the literary mystery.



Dear Reader:

Thank you for choosing *The Lost Boy of Santa Chionia* for your book group. Nothing delights me more than being able to share this story with you over a big meal. In my Italian immigrant family, an enormous dinner always calls for some dramatic storytelling—or maybe it's the other way around.

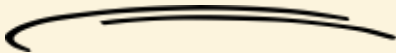
As I was researching this novel, I had the great privilege of visiting the lush, remote Aspromonte mountains in Southern Calabria, the region of Italy where my grandmother was born in 1920. Nestled in these mountains are hidden villages so inaccessible that no road to them was ever built. They're home to a 2500-year-old Greek-speaking enclave, to a fascinating folk musical tradition, and to some of the most delicious flavors that can be wrestled from the earth.

They are also home to the 'Ndrangheta, the deadly Calabrian mafia. The stories to tell over an Aspromonte dinner are dramatic ones, for sure—if you're not operating under a strict omertà code of silence, that is!

Thank you for letting me take you to 1960 Calabria with me.

I hope you enjoy the trip!

Juliet Grames



The Menu:

- CALABRIAN ANTIPASTO
- FENNEL SALAD
- PASTA WITH MUSHROOMS
- BUFFEDDI

CALABRIAN ANTIPASTO

Calabrians exult in spreads of tasty appetizers. Here are some suggestions for an appetizer spread for your Santa Chionia book club discussion.

MEATS

Salami: Calabrian pork is famous, and a staple. Pork salami is a crowd-pleaser at any Calabrian dinner party.

Soppresata: Calabria's regional specialty salami, soppresata is Italy's spiciest cured meat, packed with chili peppers.

'nduja: a true Calabrian delicacy: 'nduja is a spicy spreadable sausage made of pork, roasted or dried chili peppers, and fresh chili peppers, for two different flavors of heat.

CHEESE

Ricotta: the population of Santa Chionia have been goat herders for a thousand years; their chief market commodity is goat milk and cheese. Ricotta cheese, which can be made from fresh milk and ready to eat in a few hours, is the main source of protein in their mountain diet.

Ricotta salata: dried salted ricotta is an excellent contrast to the fresh, soft ricotta

Parmigiano: in Santa Chionia, Francesca samples the most delicious cheese she's ever tasted, a cheese that has no name because it is found nowhere else in the world. Unfortunately, you can't have that cheese at your party. But you can put in a delicious parm or other hard Italian cheese!

VEGETABLES

Olives: an absolute must!

Mushrooms: after the October flood rains—the same ones that uproot suspicious skeletons—the Aspromonte mountains bloom with porcini and other kinds of mushrooms.

Cured eggplant or artichoke: other popular Aspromonte antipasti vegetables

Lupini: this bean, which is related to the lupine flower, is a Calabrian specialty—you might be able to find a jar, cured in salt water, in your Italian goods isle at your supermarket

BREAD, CRACKERS

In Santa Chionia, where wheat flour is scarce, the traditional bread is made out of ground lentils (and, in times of hardship, acorns). Luckily, you have the option to put out crackers or bread instead!



FENNEL SALAD

The fennel bulb is an undersung hero of an Italian dinner spread. It's tasty and fresh, and Cicca would inform you that fennel is also immensely good for the digestion. But most importantly, fennel is the very first vegetable that's ready to eat in the spring, at the time when subsistence farmers would have very little left of their winter stores.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS:

2 fennel bulbs

2 large oranges

Extra virgin olive oil

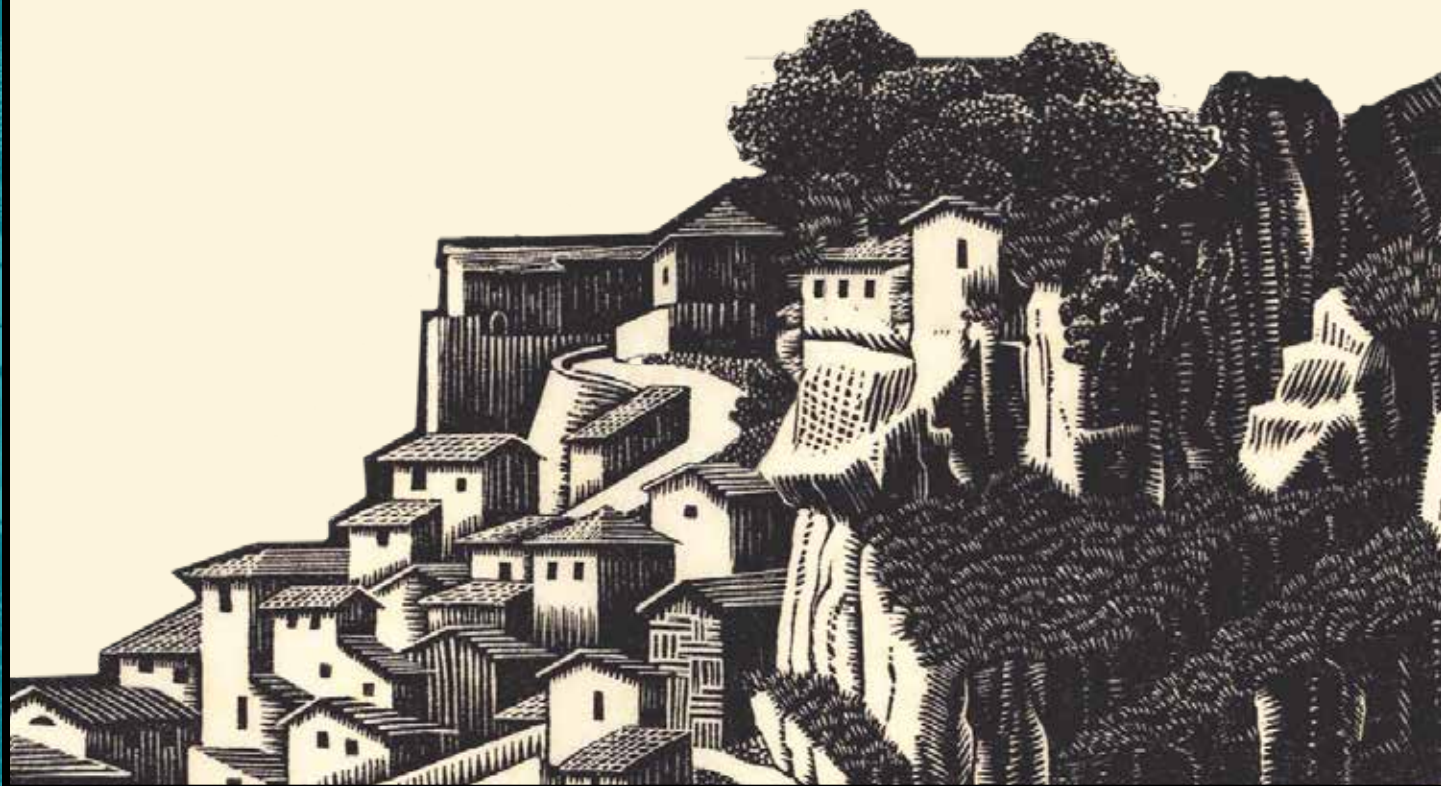
Balsamic vinegar

Salt and pepper

Wash the fennel bulbs, peel the outer layers, including any damaged leaves. Chop or julienne the fennel (Cicca prefers bigger chunks, but this part is up to you) and put them in your serving bowl.

Peel the oranges, then slice into wheels (against the grain of the segments). Slice the wheels into 6 wedges each. Put in the fennel bowl.

Drizzle olive oil over the fennel and oranges, then, more lightly, drizzle balsamic vinegar. Toss gently until the salad is lightly coated. Sprinkle salt and pepper to taste and toss again. Serve.



PASTA WITH MUSHROOMS

TIME: 30 MINUTES + 2 HOURS INACTIVE

INGREDIENTS:

3 oz. dried porcini mushrooms

Olive oil

Salt

2 large bunches of parsley

5 cloves of garlic, peeled and smashed

1 cup white wine

Butter (to serve)

Parmigiano cheese (to serve)

1 pound of pasta of your choice (*Cicca recommends tagliatelle, or another long, flat pasta. She also recommends you make your own, but we don't all have time for that.*)

Put the mushrooms in a saucepan, cover in hot water, and soak for 2 hours. When you're ready to cook dinner, use a strainer to remove the mushrooms from the water and set them aside. Don't throw away the mushroom water—you're going to use it to cook the pasta.

Place the saucepan of mushroom water on high heat and bring to a boil. Once it reaches a boil, turn it down to simmer. At the same time, fill a stock pot with enough water to cook the pasta. Salt the water and bring it to a boil.

Finely chop the parsley. Set aside.

Heat a skillet over medium heat. Add a quarter cup of olive oil or so—enough to generously cover the bottom of the skillet. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and let it fry for 2-5 minutes.

Add the mushrooms and sprinkle with salt to taste. Cook, stirring, for 2-3 minutes.

Add the wine and let cook for 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally. When the sauce starts to dry out, add a half a cup of the mushroom water.

Time to cook the pasta—but only for half the cooking time. At that point, transfer the pasta into the mushroom sauce skillet, adding two cups of the hot mushroom water. Stirring constantly, finish cooking the pasta. Add more hot mushroom water if you need to as you stir.

When the pasta is done cooking, take the skillet off the heat. Stir in the parsley and butter to taste, perhaps 2-3 tablespoons. Serve with freshly grated parmesan cheese.

BUFFEDDI (SWEET POTATO DESSERT DUMPLINGS)

TIME: 1 HOUR

MAKES: 3 DOZEN

INGREDIENTS:

4 large sweet potatoes, peels on

3 teaspoons honey

½ teaspoon cinnamon

Pinch ground clove

4 cups all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

3 medium eggs

½ cup white wine

¼ cup corn oil, plus additional for frying

Confectioner's sugar for dusting (optional)

Prepare potatoes for the filling: Bring a pot of water to a boil, then place the sweet potatoes in the boiling water and cook until they are soft (about 20 minutes).

While the potatoes are cooking, make the pastry dough. In a bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and eggs. Add the ¼ cup corn oil and the wine, kneading until you obtain a dough that is soft enough to roll with a rolling pin—add a bit more oil or wine if necessary. Cover with a kitchen linen and let it rest in a cool dark place for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, finish the filling: drain the sweet potatoes and peel while they are still hot. Mash them with a fork. Add the honey, cinnamon, and clove. Mix until it is a smooth, creamy consistency.

Cut the dough into quarters and place one chunk on a lightly floured surface. With a rolling pin, roll the dough to ¼ inch thick. Use a cutter or a drinking glass to cut circles of 3-4 inches in diameter. The dough will be quite springy; you will roll each circle again a second time after cutting and before filling.

Place a spoonful of sweet potato cream in the center of a dough disk. Fold the dough in half, forming a half-moon dumpling, and seal the edges well (you may use the tines of a fork or pinch with your fingers).

In a skillet, heat half an inch of corn oil to frying heat (to test, stick the handle of a wooden spoon in the oil; small bubbles should float up from the wood). Place the 4-5 dumplings gently in the oil and fry until they are golden (30-45 second per side). Use a slotted spoon to remove them from the oil and drain them in a colander or on paper towels. Dust with confectioner's sugar and serve.

Discussion Guide

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation of Juliet Grames's literary mystery, *The Lost Boy of Santa Chionia*, which follows a young American woman turned amateur detective in a small village in Southern Italy.

1. Who do you think the skeleton under the post office belonged to? In your opinion, does the victim's identity matter?
2. The unknown fate of disappeared immigrant men is a major theme throughout the novel. Through the very different stories of Leo Romeo, Mico Scordo, and Ceciu Legato, we see the diverse ways and reasons men might go missing. The novel is also interested in the ways the trauma of those disappearances can ripple through families for generations. Do you know of any stories in your own family history where a forefather or uncle immigrated to another country and was never heard from again?
3. Over and over, residents of Santa Chionia tell Francesca there is no such thing as a mafia there. What is the manifestation of organized crime in Santa Chionia? What are some of its activities? Its rules? How would you characterize the different criminal enterprises of Rocco Alvaro, Tito Lico, and Santo Arcudi, and how do you imagine men like Turi Laganà and Pascali Morabito fit in? What about men like Officer Vadalà or Pino Pangallo?
4. Francesca comments with irony on the distinction between a shepherd and a gangster, which isn't always clear. What do you think it means to be a "shepherd" in Santa Chionia? Why do you think unlawful activities are so ubiquitous in this town? Why do you think there is so little police presence?
5. Who do you think the "lost boy" in the title of the book is referring to?
6. Cicca insists that Don Pantaleone Bianco is the "savior" of Santa Chionia. Given Francesca's revelations about him, what do you make of Cicca's good opinion? Knowing what you do about him, does any of Don Pantaleone's work have merit, or is it all suspect because of the way he abuses his power?
7. In your opinion, what is the real reason Francesca doesn't go to Milan with Ugo when he suggests she leave with him?
8. Francesca often struggles with the question of how to do the right thing in a situation where her own personal morality does not apply. For example, whether to tell someone that Vannina Favasuli is in possession of dangerous firearms or whether to require potentially illiterate villagers to fill out the nursery school application form her organization requires. Do you think she learns any lessons over the course of the book about the difference between being a good person and doing the right thing?
9. We see a number of troubled marriages in the book: Isodiana and Santo Arcudi's is one example; Francesca's own marriage is another. Neither woman believes they have the option of divorce available to them. How do you imagine those two marriages evolving after the book ends? Women in 1960 Italy experienced many financial, social, and legal barriers to equality in their marriage.

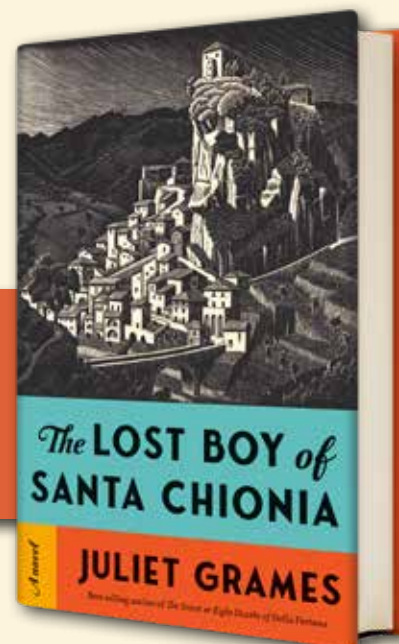
To what degree do you feel those barriers are still present in modern-day North America?

10. Santa Chionia is located in the heart of Area Grecanica, the “Greek” zone of the Aspromonte mountains, where the Greco language, a fusion of Byzantine Greek and Calabrian Italian, is still spoken today. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, many linguistic minority communities like Santa Chionia were dismantled all over the world, including in North America.

In addition to enduring prejudice for their language, the Greci of Calabria suffered tragedies like being removed from their ancestors’ family land and having their children taken away to be raised by other people, ones who could purportedly offer them better opportunities. In Santa Chionia, where has the town’s linguistic and cultural identity been a factor in the town’s isolation or hardships? What challenges are there to preserving cultural heritage in marginalized communities? What kinds of traumas can be incurred by a community that is forced to abandon their cultural heritage?

11. Ugo tells Francesca, “It is too late to correct Santa Chionia’s course,” and “The problem is that when you are so isolated, to defend against the monsters outside you have no defense from the monsters within.” Do you agree with him? Is Santa Chionia a hopeless cause? What is a society’s responsibility to a situation as difficult as Santa Chionia’s? How could the government have managed things differently? If you were a resident of Santa Chionia in 1960, would you have felt a responsibility to stay and try to improve conditions there, or would you have sought a different fate elsewhere, like so many immigrants?

12. Francesca Lofffield narrates the story of what happened to her in 1960 from the perspective of many years later. How would the story be different if she were telling it in real time? What impact could the intervening years have on how she tells the story or how you receive it?



**“A BEAUTIFUL NOVEL,
FILLED WITH RICHES...”**

—Dan Fesperman, AUTHOR OF *Winter Work*

Dining Playlist

A dinner party isn't complete without the perfect playlist. Author Juliet Grames has put together a list of songs, with fascinating explanations below, to help enhance your discussion. The playlist is available to listen on Spotify here:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2adgzHjC9jaODCw6TLh8i9?si=37aff34c305945de>

FRANCESCA PRESTIA "PANAGHIA MAVRI"

This a capella song, entirely in Greco, is an ode to the Black Madonna, whose rite is celebrated in Greek Orthodox Greco traditions.

MIMMO CAVALLARO "ELA, ELAMU CONDA"

A Greco folk classic, recorded by a Calabrian folk legend--a love song about a boy from down on the coast who is trying to coax a girl from the green mountains to come down to the coast and marry him.

ITZHAK PERLMAN TARTINI'S "DEVIL'S TRILL," PART I

This is the sonata Sandro Cenedella plays on his violin when he is angry. However, he gave up his violin studies in order to become a journalist, so he never mastered the extremely difficult rest of the sonata, only the relatively manageable first movement.

OTELLO PROFAZIO "TARANTELLA CANTATA"

The Calabrian singer Otello Profazio, whose recordings have inspired me through the writing of two novels now, was a great advocate for folk music and popularizing dialect recording. He passed away in 2023 at age 88, still performing and recording up until the end of his life. "Tarantella Cantata," one of his classics, was first performed on Italian RAI television in the early 1960s.

FRANCESCA PRESTIA "BALLAD OF LEA"

The Calabrian singer Otello Profazio, whose Prestia's prize-winning anti-mafia song tells the story of Lea Garofalo, murdered by the 'Ndrangheta for trying to extract her daughter, Denise, from their imprisonment within their own family. Lea Garofalo's story, as well as those of several other Calabrian women executed by their own families for trying to exit the abusive mafia lifestyle into which they had been reared and trapped by marriage, were important subtext for me while I was writing *The Lost Boy of Santa Chionia*.

FRANCO CARUSO "U LUPU D'ASPRUMUNTI"

This song, "The Wolf of the Aspromonte," is considered one of the classic 'Ndrangheta ballads. A young man is walking through the Aspromonte mountains on a cold, starry night, and is stopped by a police officer, who tells him he shouldn't be walking at night, doesn't he know there are wolves? The young man replies, Officer, don't you know it's best to mind your own business? My father taught me to take care of myself, he concludes ambiguously, and I don't dream of being a criminal, so best you stay well away from me.

"I LOVE LUCY" THEME

Even though she has been living in Europe for several years, Francesca can't escape American tv. She teases her landlady Cicca with Desi Arnaz impressions.

PAOLO SOFIA
“L’ALBERO DI MORE”

This Aspromonte-themed album, released in 2019, was co-written by Gioacchino Criaco, the Africo native and author of the classic Calabrian novel *Black Souls*. This song was inspired by Criaco’s novel *Maligredi*, about the jasmine-pickers.

DOROTHY DANDRIDGE
“THAT’S ALL”

Dorothy Dandridge was the first African American ever nominated for an Academy for a leading role, in 1955 (as Francesca references on 209). In 1960, the year the book is set, Dandridge’s last movie, *Malaga*, was being withheld from international release because in it she kissed her white co-star. Meanwhile, she was still creating the soundtrack of middle class America, as illustrated by this recording of “That’s All” is also from 1960 on the Ed Sullivan Show. (Ed Sullivan, too, is a thread in Francesca’s European life; Zuzu, the toy monkey she gives out to prospective students, is a knock-off of the Zippy monkey from the show.)

FRANCESCA PRESTIA
“MO SUGNU BRIGANTESSA”

Calabrian folk singer Prestia, who records in Calabrian and Greco languages as well as Italian, wrote this song, “I Am a Brigand,” for her 2016 album *Mare Nostrum*. Against the wail of bagpipes, four historical Calabrian and Campanian women, Generosa Cardamone, Francesca La Gamba, Filomena Pennacchio, and Michelina De Cesare, fed up with violence and abuse, sing with rage about their life stories.

EUGENIO BENNATO
“RITURNELLA”

This Calabrian folk song has a particularly fascinating history. It was “discovered” in the Calabrian village of Cirò in the 1970s by ethnomusicologist Antonello Ricci.

An octogenarian, Mancifulina Pirito, who remembered all the words of the otherwise lost song from her own childhood; after she produced it for Ricci, it was recorded many times (the Bennato recording, from 1978, is the most famous). Its title ostensibly refers to a swallow who flies away and returns--the singer is sending a love message and to someone far away--and is thought to contain an anti-war subtext, but in the 20th century its lyrics have taken on the yearning of the Italian immigrant diaspora. Its throbbing rhythm and minor key are typical of the taranta style of native mountain folk music.

Although the rediscovery of this song post-dates Francesca’s 1960 sojourn in Calabria, the song’s spirit inspired me throughout my writing process: both the incessant, obsessive yearning of the rhythm, an energy that must underpin any missing immigrant story, but also the fact that the keeper of this precious bit of culture was an old woman no one was paying attention to but who knew everything.

BILLIE HOLIDAY
“ALL OF ME”

On the feast of San Silvestro, New Year’s Eve, when Francesca witnesses her first Aspromonte tarantella, “not a dance, but a duel between men,” she wishes wistfully that she might ever have the chance to dance with one particularly charismatic Aspromonte shepherd her way, instead, cheek to cheek at a dimly lit club to some Billie Holiday.

