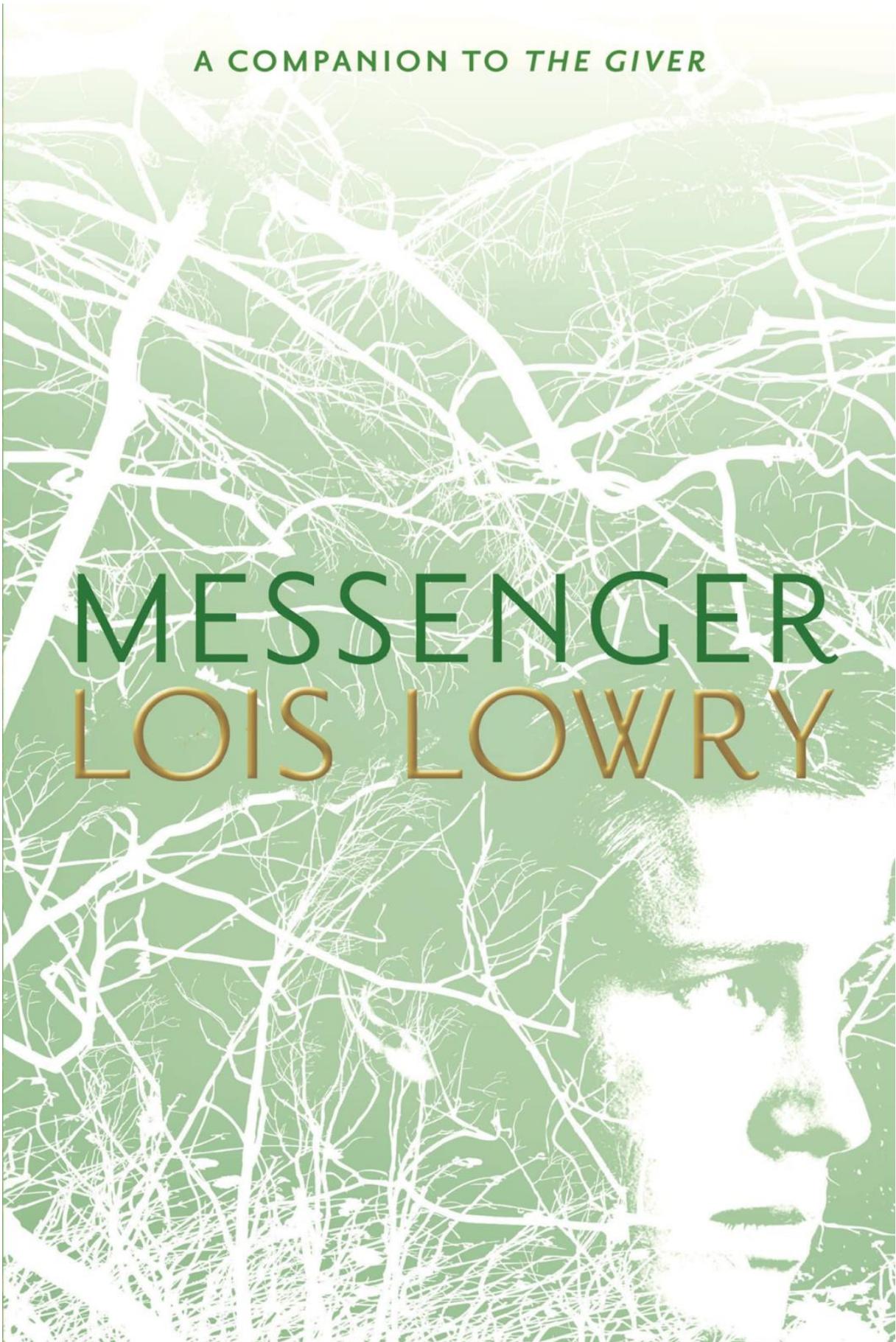


A COMPANION TO *THE GIVER*

MESSENGER
LOIS LOWRY



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Messenger

Messenger is a novel written by Louis Lowry. This book is the third installment of the “Giver” quartet. Written by Louis Lowry in 2004, it was nominated in the 2008 Young Hoosier Book Award. Messenger takes place 8 years after the events of Giver and six years after the events of Gathering Blues.

The book’s setting is the isolated community simply known as “village”. We explore the setting along problems that arise there. The book primarily focuses on Matty, the protagonist. He is a character who functions as the messenger of the village, befriending the very forest that serves as a death sentence for others. He has a magical power to heal.

The novel has numerous symbols scattered throughout the plot. One of the symbols was the forest itself.

“Were you scared of Forest?” Matty asked him. So many people were, and with good reason. “No. It’s all an illusion.” Matty frowned. He didn’t know what the blind man meant. Was he saying that fear was an illusion? Or that Forest was? [...] Maybe, Matty thought, everything was an illusion to a man who had lost his eyes. “We start with this statement from Seer, which tells that the forest is an illusion. Then, we have an account by Matty saying that maybe seer said this because he was blind. Any new reader might discount the weightage of this statement thinking simply that the author wants to bring some mystery into the story, after the depiction of the forest as a deadly force. This is not the case, as we realize a crucial thing in the last chapter, while he dies saving the village. While this happens, he realizes that it was an illusion all along.

“He saw Forest and understood what Seer had meant. It was an illusion. It was a tangled knot of fears and deceits and dark struggles for power that had disguised itself and almost destroyed everything. Now it was unfolding, like a flower coming into bloom, radiant with possibility.”

This statement shows how he realized at the last moment about what Seer meant and this also points the reader’s attention to what the forest actually is. We can find that the forest is a symbol, but more so a literal depiction of the problems in the village. As we start reading the plot, we are greeted with forest as a dangerous place, but it does not stay constant. As we progress further, we find that the problems in the village increase, along with the thickening of the forest. The evil that resided in the village had disguised itself and almost destroyed the village, as the author said.

This same link makes us decipher more than one theme. The statement says “deceits and dark struggles for power”. This symbolizes the trading we see. People trade their souls for personal gains here. This has a big implication in the story and in the real world as well. This is the driving factor for the problems faced in the plotline. The idea about trade made me think about it in general and if we do the same thing, and if the author wanted to decipher something else from the trading. In the plot characters such as mentors trade their inner selves, for a personal/ general gain. The mentor trades his inner self, his soul for the stock tender’s widow. They trade their personality, or themselves for personal gain. This has a wider implication in the real world. Trading is the reason for the problems in society. After trading, the people of the village become more secretive, and less compassionate towards others who enter the place, both of which were against the rule that there should be no secrets, and the helping nature that made the community stand out from the crowd.

Trading causes selfishness, which is the cause of a lot of real life problems we see. Selfishness can be immensely destructive for an individual and if there are selfish people leading a group, it can crumble very fast. I think this is the same thing depicted here. Because of selfishness, the forest is thickening and becoming more violent towards the people.

The theme of individualism against groupism was present as well. As the story progresses, we get to hear from people who escaped the outer communities, such as Matty and Leader, about how the other world actually was. In places like the one depicted in *Giver*, marks and failings would guarantee a death sentence, or in children's literature, departure from the community. But here in *Village*, marks and failings were not considered flaws at all. They were valued. The blind man had been given the true name Seer and was respected for the special vision that he had behind his ruined eyes. This shows us individualism was not oppressed here, as it was in the other books such as *Giver*, where having even the slightest differences could get you kicked from the community. *Village* has a museum that houses things that people bring with them from elsewhere, such as Leader's red sled, that also function as reminders of what the wider world is like.

I think the plot was very flexible towards the characters and the magical powers they have. Let's take the example of Matty and his potential. The novel does not go over what power he has or how he can use it. There is no explicit description of how his powers work, and what he can accomplish. Maybe this was supposed to be a mystery that you would solve by yourself throughout the novel. This could be an attempt to keep people speculating what power he had long after they had read the book, but here it was too flexible which made everything seem a bit unmanaged. Say for example you're watching spider-man. The Spiderman plotline has explicitly shown how the character got their powers and what constraints are kept on them. There is nothing of that sort here. The constraint on power is never shown. This lets the author get away with an ending like the one here, where we don't know the literal power of our character, so you could make him do anything to save the crumbling village.

This is the same reason many people might have thought the ending was anticlimactic. Additionally, there are many questions left unanswered. I understand forest and trading, but how could they be linked together so seamlessly? What is the Trade master's actual power, and how did he find himself in the village of all places? These are just some questions that arise while critically analyzing the plot. Looking at the bigger picture, everything makes sense but as we delve deeper into the specific details, the connections and messages we decipher start to crumble. Being honest, I could not explain all the links that I've made from the plot alone.

The message delivered by our messenger, Matty, is the distinction between selfishness and selflessness. The pandemic that the village found itself in was due to the selfish nature of the villagers, some of which traded their soul for personal gains. All of this was eradicated by the selfless nature of him, who ends up losing his life to save the village. If we look at villages, we are not greeted with fundamental problems such as a scarcity of food, which you would think could be the reason for conflict in the society.

And might I add, depicts how easily a community can be corrupted. Look at Nepal today. Aren't the politicians doing the same to us, they are trading their humanity for monetary gains, and like the forest thickening, the society is looking at a grim future that creeps ever so slightly towards us. The only thing that can save us is something as selfless as Matty did. Although it gives a grim insight, where the solution will cost lives, the book also provides light at the end of the tunnel showing an individual's power to stop corruption.