



**Title:** The Letter Writer

**Author:** Dan Fesperman

**Description:**

The first thing Woodrow Cain sees when he steps off the train in New York City on February 9, 1942, is smoke from an ocean liner in flames in the harbor. It's the Normandie, and word on the street is that it was burned by German saboteurs. "Ten lousy minutes in New York and already his new life felt as full of loss and betrayal as the one he'd left behind."

What he left behind in a small North Carolina town was a wife whod left him, a daughter in the care of his sister, and a career as a police officer marred by questions surrounding his partners murder. When he gets a job with the NYPD, he wants to believe its the beginning of a new life, though he suspects that the past is as tenacious as "a parasite in the bloodstream."

It's on the job that Cain comes in contact with a man who calls himself Danziger. He has the appearance of a "crackpot," but he speaks five languages, has the manners of a man of means and education and he appears to be the one person who can help Cain identify a body just found floating in the Hudson River. But who exactly is Danziger He's a writer of letters for illiterate immigrants on Manhattans Lower East Side "a steadfast practitioner of concealing and forgetting" for his clients, and perhaps for himself: he hints at a much more worldly past. What and whoever he really is or has been, he has a seemingly boundless knowledge of the city and its denizens. And he knows much more than the mere identity of the floating corpse. For one thing, he knows how the dead man was involved in New York City's "Little Deutschland," where swastikas were proudly displayed just months before. And he also seems to know how the investigation will put Cain and perhaps his daughter and the woman hes fallen for in harm's way. But even Danziger can't know that the more he and Cain investigate, the nearer they come to the center of a citywide web of possibly traitorous corruption from which neither of them may get out alive.

**Reviews**

[The New York Times](#)

Seeing New York through Cains eyes gives us a bracing new perspective as his efforts to identify the corpse take him from the German enclave of Yorkville in Upper Manhattan to the tenements of the Lower East Side, where a mysterious man called Maximilian Danziger performs a unique service. Old and frail but vibrantly alive in Fespermans penetrating portrait, Danziger charges a modest fee to write letters for illiterate clients frantic for news of their relatives back in Eastern Europe. Fespermans prose is almost photographic, creating vignettes saturated with color and humming with life.

[Publisher's Weekly](#)

Fesperman shows a skilled hand at creating the detail of wartime New Yorkthe vitality of the German Yorkville section, the hysteria following the bombing of the luxury liner

the *Normandie*, the influence of mobster Meyer Lansky ... the likable and well-drawn Cain will go over well with readers, especially those fond of historicals.

[Kirkus Reviews](#)

Fesperman's troop of characters, historic and fictional, makes New York come alive with conspiracy and mystery. At the center of this labyrinth is the cryptic life of Danziger, a Sherlock-like creation who knows many of the answers and hides his past by manipulating information. As his story unfolds through a police file acquired by Cain, the story kicks into thriller overdrive. Fesperman gives us a well-crafted novel steeped in the politics and street life of 1940s New York, and in the letter writer, he's created a character who will stay with you long after the last shot is fired.