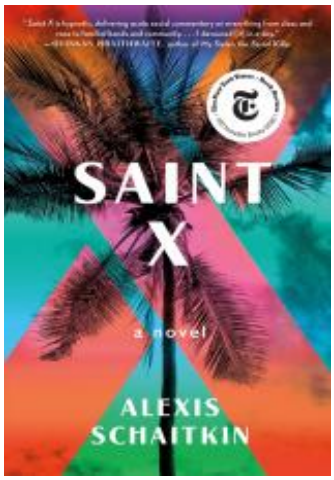
Saint X

by Alexis Schaitkin



About the Book

When you lose the person who is most essential to you, who do you become?

Hailed as a ?marvel of a book? and ?brilliant and unflinching,? Alexis Schaitkin?s stunning debut, SAINT X, is a haunting portrait of grief, obsession and the bond between two sisters never truly given the chance to know one another.

Claire is only seven years old when her college-age sister, Alison, disappears on the last night of their family vacation at a resort on the Caribbean island of Saint X. Several days later, Alison?s body is found in a remote spot on a nearby cay, and two local men --- employees at the resort --- are arrested. But the evidence is slim, the timeline against it, and the men are soon released. The story turns into national tabloid news, a lurid mystery that will go unsolved. For Claire and her parents, there is only the return home to broken lives.

Years later, Claire is living and working in New York City when a brief but fateful encounter brings her together with Clive Richardson, one of the men originally suspected of murdering her sister. It is a moment that sets Claire on an obsessive pursuit of the truth --- not only to find out what happened the night of Alison?s death but also to answer the elusive question: Who exactly was her sister? At seven, Claire had been barely old enough to know her: a beautiful, changeable, provocative girl of 18 at a turbulent moment of identity formation.

As Claire doggedly shadows Clive, hoping to gain his trust, waiting for the slip that will reveal the truth, an unlikely attachment develops between them, two people whose lives were forever marked by the same tragedy.

For readers of Emma Cline?s THE GIRLS and Lauren Groff?s FATES AND FURIES, SAINT X is a flawlessly drawn and deeply moving story that culminates in an emotionally powerful ending.

Discussion Guide

1. What does the island setting contribute to the story? What about the juxtaposition of New York City?

2. What do you think Claire?s habit of writing words in the air with her finger demonstrates about her?

3. What?s the symbolism of Faraway Cay and the woman with hooves for feet? What does that mythology add to the story?

4. Why do you think the author chose to intersperse the voices of minor characters, such as the movie actor and other vacationers, throughout the book? What effect does this achieve?

5. What does Claire?s name change to Emily signify to you?

6. Did you ever think Clive might pose a threat to Emily when he found out who she was?

7. What does Clive?s nickname Gogo indicate about his personality? About Edwin?s?

8. Emily?s world in New York becomes very small after she encounters Clive. Do you think that was intentional or unintentional on her part? What might have motivated her to turn inward?

9. What do Alison?s recorded diary entries reveal to Emily? Was Emily right to listen to them, or do you think it was an invasion of privacy? What about their mom?

10. What are the similarities between Emily?s life in New York and Clive?s? What are the differences?

11. What do you think about Edwin?s relationship with Sara?

12. Alison witnessed a pivotal moment in Clive and Edwin?s relationship. How did that shape the rest of the narrative --- Clive and Edwin?s relationship, their futures, Alison?s tragedy?

13. When Emily learns the truth, and remembers the night before Alison disappeared, what do you think is her primary emotion? Grief? Relief? Guilt? Something else?

14. Do you think Emily coming into Clive?s life was ultimately a bad thing or a good thing for Clive?

Author Bio

Alexis Schaitkin is the author of SAINT X *and* ELSEWHERE. Her short stories have been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories* and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. She received her MFA in fiction from the University of Virginia, where she was a Henry Hoyns Fellow. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband and their two children.

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