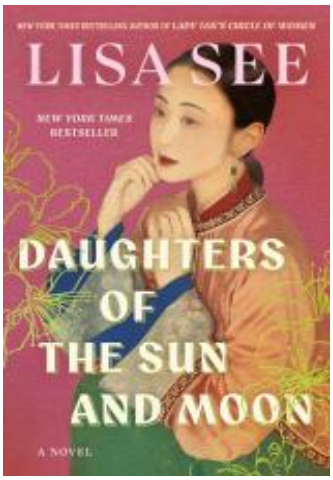
Daughters of the Sun and Moon

by Lisa See



About the Book

From beloved *New York Times* bestselling author Lisa See comes the story of three Chinese women whose unexpected friendship helps them survive and, despite the odds, thrive in the turmoil of post-Civil War Los Angeles.

In 1870, three Chinese women arrive in the small, dusty and violent pueblo of Los Angeles.

Dove, the bound-footed daughter of an imperial scholar, is entrancing and innocent. These characteristics should bring her great rewards, beginning with her arranged marriage to a much older merchant. Petal, the big-footed daughter of peasants, has grown up hungry and with dirt between her toes. In a moment of desperation, Petal?s father sells her to buy money for rice seed, and she is loaded onto a ship to the Gold Mountain --- America --- where she is once again sold. Moon is married to a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine. She is educated, speaks fluent English, and has been endowed with a face of great beauty, yet her failed footbinding as a child has left her with a limp that lessens her value in the eyes of many.

Each woman has her own desires. Dove wants to love and be loved, Petal desires freedom, and Moon seeks justice. Together they face a larger society that wishes them not one ounce of good will. Anti-Chinese sentiment is strong in Los Angeles, and this eventually leads to the Night of Horrors during which all three women are challenged in ways they could not have imagined.

Brought together by hardship and heartbreak, they must use their bravery, endurance and ability to ?eat bitterness? to discover their voices, find freedom, and connect through solace and friendship. Together they are daughters of the sun and moon.

Discussion Guide

1. The book begins with a newspaper excerpt from the *Los Angeles Gazette* that immediately reveals the deep-rooted racism toward Chinese individuals in California at the time of the novel. How does this help set up the story, and what purpose do the excerpts serve as they continue to appear at the beginning of each of the book?s five parts?

2. Within the first chapter, we discover the importance of a person?s Chinese zodiac sign and how the year they were born in contains characteristics that are intrinsic and innate to who they are. In your group, discuss each person?s Chinese zodiac sign and if, like Dove, they ?carry within [themselves] the qualities of that creature.?

3. Dove is described in the author?s note as ?a young wife, seen in the present as an object but from afar,? and she?s the only character whose story is told in the third person. Why do you think it was important to Lisa that Petal?s and Moon?s stories be told actively/reflectively through the first person, but Dove?s story is told from afar? (You might consider the kidnapping, when she is moved around like a package.)

4. Each part begins with lines from the philosopher and poet Lao Tzu. What do you think Lisa intended for the reader to take away from these words?

5. Moon writes, ?Dove wanted to love and be loved, Petal craved freedom, and I sought justice. But I could be wrong. Maybe I?m the one who longed for love, while Petal looked for justice, and Dove needed to find freedom? (page 25). Could there be a third way to see the women --- that Dove wanted justice, Petal wanted love, and Moon wanted freedom?

6. Sex is described in different ways: ?the husband-wife thing,? ?bed business,? and ?clouds and rain.? Who uses which term, and does that change over time?

7. Discuss some of the aphorisms about women: ?*Noodles are not real food, and women are not real human beings*? (page 43). ?*An educated woman is a worthless woman*? (page 51). ?*Let three women sit together and disaster will fall within three days*? (page 72). ?*A woman without a husband is like a house without a roof beam*? (page 80). And that?s just in the first 80 pages! What are some others in the novel, and what?s your reaction to them? In what ways do Moon, Petal and Dove adhere to or totally ignore these strictures about women?

8. How is the English language learned or not learned by the characters in the novel? What opportunities does knowing English give? How do we see this today?

9. Discuss the friendship that develops between Moon, Petal and Dove. When do you think true friendship forms? What do each of them gain from the other two? How does their connection change the trajectory of their lives?

10. Dove has bound feet, Petal?s feet were never bound, and Moon has a deformed foot from an infection when she was young. How do feet serve as a symbol for wealth and class in the novel? What are some ways today that women alter their appearance to signify these same social factors?

11. On page 164, Moon tells Petal, ?*Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.*? What is Moon trying to tell Petal? How might this aphorism apply to other characters in the novel?

12. Newspaper accounts of the day reveal that Doctor Tong gave his wife a white poodle, and that it was one of the survivors --- although injured --- of the Night of Horrors. Moon wonders where her husband got the puppy. She even uses this question as a conversation starter at the New Year?s party at Dove?s apartment (page 181). This question fascinated Lisa from the first moment she read about the dog. How do *you* think a white poodle got to Los Angeles in 1870?

13. In the novel, the Four Great Beauties are held up as paragons of womanhood. What is beauty? How do Moon, Petal and Dove see themselves? What about Silver Shimmer? How do others see these women? Does this change over the course of the novel?

14. Discuss the women who work in the Midnight Garden. Did your opinion of them change as you read the novel? What are your thoughts about Auntie Fong? How is the second group of women who come to work in the Midnight Garden the same or different from the first group?

15. Dove, Moon and Petal each has a gift or talent. What are they? How do these talents help them and/or help others?

Author Bio

Lisa See is the *New York Times* bestselling author of DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN AND MOON, LADY TAN'S CIRCLE OF WOMEN, THE ISLAND OF SEA WOMEN, THE TEA GIRL OF HUMMINGBIRD LANE, SNOW FLOWER AND THE SECRET FAN, PEONY IN LOVE, SHANGHAI GIRLS, CHINA DOLLS and DREAMS OF JOY, which debuted at #1. She is also the author of ON GOLD MOUNTAIN, which tells the story of her Chinese American family?s settlement in Los Angeles. See was the recipient of the Golden Spike Award from the Chinese Historical Association of Southern California and the History Maker?s Award from the Chinese American Museum. She was also named National Woman of the Year by the Organization of Chinese American Women.

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