Dear Missing Friend

by Susan McGuirk

About the Book

Sag Harbor, New York, 1840s: Catherine McGuirk leaves Ireland and a shipboard proposal behind, determined to forge a new life in America.

Amid the bustling height of the whaling era, she marries a dashing sailor who vows to give up life on the sea. But when he vanishes westward in pursuit of gold, she is forced to chart her own course as a governess in Manhattan society.

Torn between her ambition, the vanished whaleman she married, and the now-wealthy suitor she refused, Catherine must navigate love, loss, and the tides of a changing world.

Discussion Guide

1. Is there a character you would befriend, and why?

2. Did letter writing play a comparable role in the book to emails and texts today?

3. What role did books play in the characters? lives? Who were affected by them, and in what way?

4. Did the characters have expectations for their lives that were in line with their circumstances? Did they expect too much or settle for too little?

5. Sisterhood is a theme in the book even though most of the women characters do not have sisters. Can the experience be duplicated in a friendship or as an in-law through marriage?

6. How did needing, seeking and finding employment steer individual lives in the book?

7. Losing family members of all ages was common in the mid-1800s. Did the characters move past loss differently than we do today?

8. When did Cath ask for permission, and when did she not?

9. Did Cath have regrets? If given the chance to start over, would she have made different choices?

10. What might Cath have done had she lived past the age of 46?

11. Did the fact that the story was based on real people make a difference?

Author Bio

Susan McGuirk posts about heroines of historical fiction on her free newsletter, ?The Storied Sisters Society,? on Substack. While working at HBO, she honed her writing skills composing hundreds of in-house film reviews. She also worked at Anthology Film Archives, a historical film museum. Besides Substack, follow Susan on Bluesky, Instagram and Goodreads.

Critical Praise

?Fans of historical novels will find much to like in McGuirk?s debut. An ambitious work of historical fiction.?

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