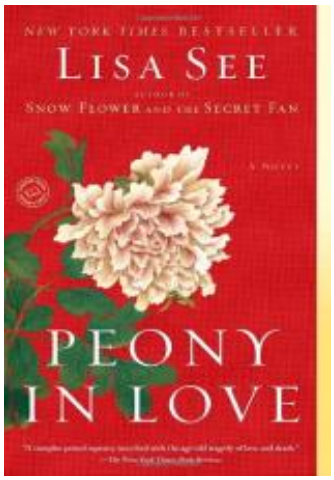
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Peony in Love: A Novel

by Lisa See



About the Book

I finally understand what the poets have written. In spring, moved to passion; in autumn only regret.

For young Peony, betrothed to a suitor she has never met, the lyrics from The Peony Pavilion mirror her own longings. In the garden of the Chen Family Villa, amidst the scents of ginger, green tea, and jasmine, a small theatrical troupe is performing choice scenes from this epic opera, a live spectacle few girls, even women, have ever seen. Like the heroine in the drama, Peony too is cloistered and from a wealthy family, trapped like a good-luck cricket in a bamboo-and-lacquer cage. Though raised to be obedient, Peony has dreams of her own.

Peony's mother is against the production: ?Unmarried girls should not be seen in public.? But Peony's father prevails, assuring his wife that proprieties will be maintained. Women will watch the opera from behind a screen to hide them from view. Yet through its cracks, Peony catches sight of an elegant, handsome man with hair as black as a cave -- and is immediately overcome with too many emotions.

So begins Peony's unforgettable journey of love and destiny, desire and sorrow -- as Lisa See's haunting new novel takes readers back to 17th century China, after the Manchus seize power and the Ming dynasty is crushed. Steeped in traditions and ritual, this story brings to life another time and place -- even the intricate realm of the afterworld, with its protocols, pathways, and stages of existence . . . a vividly imagined place where one?s soul is divided into three, ancestors are worshiped, misdeeds are punished, and hungry ghosts wander the earth.

Based on a true story, **Peony in Love** uses the richness and magic of the Chinese afterlife to transcend death and explore the many manifestations of love. Ultimately, it?s about universal themes: the bonds of female friendship, the power of words, the desire all women have to be heard, and finally those emotions that are so strong that they transcend time, place, and perhaps even death.

Discussion Guide

1. First and foremost, **Peony in Love** is about love. What are the different kinds of love that Peony experiences? How does Peony?s love for Ren change through the years? Have you had similar experiences in your life?

2. In what ways is mother love explored? How does it change from a mother?s or daughter?s perspective? Do these things still hold true for mothers and daughters today?

3. What does Peony learn about mother love and in what ways does she experience it herself?

4. One thousand years ago, the poet Han Yun wrote, ?All things not at peace will cry out.? What do you think he meant by that? And in what ways does this inspire Peony and the other women writers in the novel?

5. In what ways does Peony long to be heard? Do you think women today are really heard for who they are? In what ways have you tried to be heard?

6. What are the parallels between the lovesick maidens and girls with anorexia nervosa today?

7. We see a difference in Peony?s actions after Ze marries Ren and again after Ze dies. Do you see redemption here for Peony?

8. Could you sympathize with Peony?s actions in the years immediately following her death? Which of the three wives do you sympathize with the most, and why?

9. What are the differences and similarities between the Chinese afterworld and western concepts of heaven and hell? Which seem better? Which would you prefer ? for yourself and for your loved ones?

10. How does what happened during the Cataclysm change depending on who?s telling the story?

11. How do Peony?s experiences as a living girl and then as a hungry ghost parallel Liniang?s experiences in ?The Peony Pavilion??

12. In what ways do you feel Peony?s eyes were opened to the reality of her father?s real character?

13. Compare the actions of Peony?s mother and grandmother after they meet in death with their actions when they were alive.

14. Peony in Love shows the strength of women and women?s companionship, but in what ways does it also show the dark shadow side of women whether in the women?s chambers, between a mother and daughter, between wives, or even between friends?

15. The novel looks at the Chinese veneration of ancestors as well as the desire to have sons. How are these two beliefs connected?

16. Lisa has written before about footbinding. What?s the importance of footbinding in this novel? What does Peony learn about life and love through her experiences of footbinding? What do you think caused the change in Peony?s ability to assist in footbinding?

17. What role does the plum tree play in the opera of ?The Peony Pavilion? and in **Peony in Love**?

18. How are jealousy and envy addressed in the novel?

19. Were you surprised to hear about the women writers in China in the 17th century? Do you think it?s important that we know about them today?

20. Compare the roles of women in China in the 1600s to the roles of women in the United States in the same period.

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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