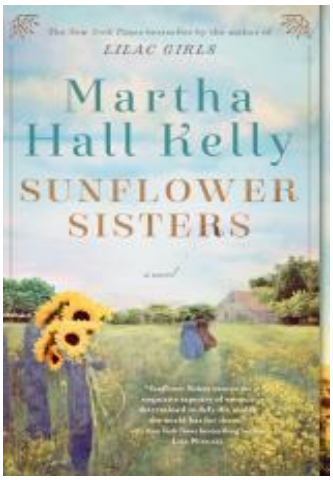
Sunflower Sisters

by Martha Hall Kelly



About the Book

Martha Hall Kelly?s million-copy bestseller LILAC GIRLS introduced readers to Caroline Ferriday. Now, in SUNFLOWER SISTERS, Kelly tells the story of Ferriday?s ancestor Georgeanna Woolsey, a Union nurse during the Civil War whose calling leads her to cross paths with Jemma, a young enslaved girl who is sold off and conscripted into the army, and Anne-May Wilson, a Southern plantation mistress whose husband enlists.

Georgeanna ?Georgey? Woolsey isn?t meant for the world of lavish parties and the demure attitudes of women of her stature. So when war ignites the nation, Georgey follows her passion for nursing during a time when doctors considered women on the battlefront a bother. In proving them wrong, she and her sister Eliza venture from New York to Washington, D.C. to Gettysburg, and witness the unparalleled horrors of slavery as they become involved in the war effort.

In the South, Jemma is enslaved on the Peeler Plantation in Maryland, where she lives with her mother and father. Her sister, Patience, is enslaved on the plantation next door, and both live in fear of LeBaron, an abusive overseer who tracks their every move. When Jemma is sold by the cruel plantation mistress Anne-May at the same time the Union army comes through, she sees a chance to finally escape --- but only by abandoning the family she loves.

Anne-May is left behind to run Peeler Plantation when her husband joins the Union army and her cherished brother enlists with the Confederates. In charge of the household, she uses the opportunity to follow her own ambitions and is drawn into a secret Southern network of spies, finally exposing herself to the fate she deserves.

Inspired by true accounts, SUNFLOWER SISTERS provides a vivid, detailed look at the Civil War experience, from the barbaric and inhumane plantations, to a war-torn New York City, to the horrors of the battlefield. It?s a sweeping story of women caught in a country on the brink of collapse, in a society grappling with nationalism and unthinkable racial cruelty, a story still so relevant today.

Discussion Guide

1. Evaluate the treatment and role of women in the novel. Discuss the various types of power (or lack of) that Georgy, Jemma and Anne-May experience. What provides, or denies, each of them access to forms of expression?

2. How might your interpretation of the book differ if the author had chosen to tell the story from a single point of view?

3. Jemma and her sister Patience communicate secretly through letters. What did you think about their story of survival and escaping the brutality of slavery under the cruel Anne-May? How did Jemma, Sable and Joseph continue their relentless pursuit of self and freedom in the face of such a brutal system?

4. Have women?s achievements in history been lost or overlooked? What do you think it takes to be a pioneer today?

5. Has your understanding of slavery been changed by reading SUNFLOWER SISTERS? What did you learn about it that you didn?t know before?

6. SUNFLOWER SISTERS takes the reader back to the roots of racism and a time of deep division in America. How has slavery left its mark in American life? To what extent has the wound been healed, if at all?

7. Are there ways in which Martha Hall Kelly?s novel can help us see our own lives differently? How is this story relevant for us today?

8. The bonds of family --- real or self-made --- play an important role in the novel, inspiring and stymying the three characters at different points along their journeys. How does each character view family? What about their traits and histories make them feel that way?

9. All three women lost their fathers tragically. However, these losses draw Jemma and Georgy even closer to their families and force them to appreciate them more, whereas Anne-May never felt close to her sister and mother. How do you think tragedy shapes us? How do you think hardships shaped the several characters in the novel?

10. The novel is set during the American Civil War, a turbulent time in history. What did you learn about this time period that you didn?t know before? Was there something that surprised you about the role and treatment of women?

11. Georgy and her family play a large role in society, and yet each has an innate calling to help others. What do you think about the trajectory of Georgy?s life and the choices she made?

12. What did you think of Georgy?s sisters and brother?

13. Was it unfair Mary Woolsey never received recognition for her work? Should her family have broken with tradition

and revealed her as the author, or was it better to let people think the poems were written by a man?

14. Anne-May was secretly working as a spy with Jubal. Were you surprised by anything in her storyline? What about her choices at the end?

15. Sally Smith was not Jemma?s blood relative, but in many ways she ended up feeling like one. Why do some unrelated relationships turn out stronger than blood ones?

16. Sunflowers were used to indicate danger on the Underground Railroad. What is the effect of using something so bright and beautiful as a symbol like this?

17. Martha Hall Kelly weaves real-life letters from the Woolsey sisters into the narrative, and while Georgy is based on the Ferriday family?s ancestors, the character of Anne-May is fictional. What is the effect of weaving together history and fiction? Why do you think the author chose to include some of these letters verbatim?

Author Bio

Martha Hall Kelly is the *New York Times* bestselling author of?LILAC GIRLS, LOST ROSES,?SUNFLOWER SISTERS, THE GOLDEN DOVES and THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD BEACH AND BOOK CLUB. Born and raised in Massachusetts, she was inspired to write this novel by her mother?s family, the Smiths, who settled on Martha?s Vineyard in 1891. She received journalism degrees from both Syracuse and Northwestern universities and worked as an advertising copywriter for many years before becoming a novelist. With more than two million copies of her books sold? and translated in 50 countries, Martha Hall Kelly lives in Litchfield, Connecticut, and Hobe Sound, Florida.

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