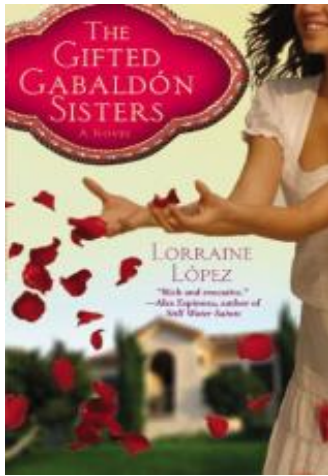


The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters

by Lorraine Lopez



About the Book

Having lost their mother in early childhood, the Gabaldón sisters consider Fermina, their elderly Pueblo housekeeper, their surrogate Grandmother. The mysterious Fermina love the girls as if they are her own, and promises to endow each with a "special gift" to be received upon her death.

Mindful of the old woman's mystical ways, the sisters believe Fermina's gifts, bestowed based on their natural talents, magically enhance their lives. The oldest sister, Bette Davis Gabaldón, always teased for telling tales, believes her gift is the power to persuade anyone, no matter how outlandish her story. Loretta Young, who often prefers pets to people, assumes her gift is the ability to heal animals. Tough-talking tomboy, Rita Hayworth believes her gift is the ability to curse her enemies. And finally, Sophia Loren, the baby of the family, is sure her ability to make people laugh is her legacy.

As the four girls grow into women they discover that Fermina's gifts come with complicated strings, and what once seemed simple can confuse over time. Together they learn the truth about their mysterious caretaker, her legacy, and the family secret that was nearly lost forever in the New Mexican desert.

Discussion Guide

1. The Gabaldón sisters lose their mother at an early age, and much of the book is about trying to regain her through recovering her memory. It is also about their attempts to find out who their late housekeeper/servant Fermina was. What dilemmas are faced by the sisters in seeking secrets from the dead? And in what ways do the dead speak to the living in this novel?

2. The WPA reports about Fermina appear as interchapters in the novel. These are written by a fieldworker who apologizes to her superior for not writing "correctly." How does this unauthorized history work to provide connective

tissue between the chapters that chronicle the sisters' lives?

3. With the exception of Rita, the sisters are happier and stronger when they are without male partners ? husbands and/or boyfriends ? in their lives. In fact, Rita theorizes their ?magical gifts? are diminished when they fall in love, as though men draw strength and wisdom away from the women. Bette and Sophia even perform ?visitation,? helping raise one another's fatherless children. What shapes their belief that they are better off without men? And what is gained and/or lost by this conviction?

4. The novel suggests that love is being seen for who one is in the context of family. One's traits ? strengths and weaknesses ? show up only because these are what the others don't possess. Family isn't about getting along; rather, family is the source of self- definition: the brain, the angry one, the caretaker, and the clown. How is the Gabaldón family a microcosm of the larger cultural tensions explored in the Los Angeles area of the girls' youth and the historic Southwest of Fermina's past?

5. The novel reveals the horrible and hilarious ways in which siblings betray each other. They collude, create factions, and intentionally drive one another out of their minds. How do the multiple perspectives affect the complex and ever-shifting strands of familial connection and disconnection?

6. Much of the conflict in the novel arises from misunderstanding related to the idea of a ?gift? or ?legacy.? Attached to the idea of receiving a gift is responsibility or obligation. What does this responsibility entail for each sister?

Author Bio

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