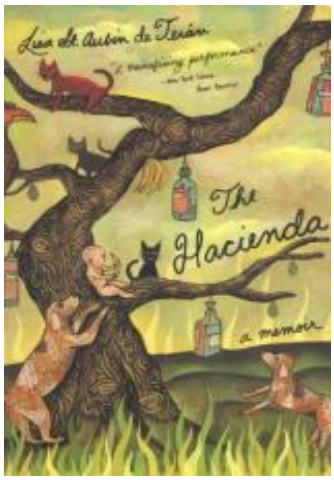
The Hacienda

by Lisa St. Aubin de Teran



About the Book

Lisa St. Aubin de Terán was a romantic seventeen-year-old when she married Don Jaime, a South American aristocrat twenty years her senior. Quickly seduced by tales of his ancestral home, she left England for his family's vast sugarcane and avocado plantation, deep in the Venezuelan Andes. There the fantasy life she had imagined met with an almost unbelievable reality?the plantation was in shambles, and her dashing husband turned out to be an international fugitive, suffering from hereditary madness.

In her first days on The Hacienda, Lisa found herself virtually abandoned in the wilderness, with only a pet vulture, two pedigreed beagles, and la gente?the estate's illiterate, feudal people?for company. But during the tumultuous years that followed, Lisa evolved from bewildered child bride to powerful matriarch. The Hacienda tells the sometimes hilarious, sometimes harrowing story of how Lisa courageously restored the plantation, miraculously gave birth to her first child, and, perhaps hardest of all, won the respect of la gente. She discovered an untapped reservoir of personal strength and, in the end, was forced to use it to save her own life.

The Hacienda describes an adventure so eccentric it often assumes the dreamlike quality of magical realism. But this is a deftly handled true story--of a woman learning to adapt and thrive, and of a writer finding her imaginative roots. Tremendously atmospheric, Lisa St. Aubin de Terán's memoir brilliantly evokes the unique confluence of time, place, and people that shaped this powerful writer.

Discussion Guide

1. It is easy to see Lisa's maturity grow as the book gains momentum. You can almost feel it in the writing. Watching her come of age as she did, did you find yourself envying her the adventure? Or pitying her the dire circumstances?

2. Lisa clearly thrives on this primitive landscape. At first bewildered by her situation, she rose to the occasion as few

would or could. Did you see her courage come gradually, or did you feel there was a definite turning point? If so, what was it?

3. During the first few months when her dreams are shattered and she realized she had no bed, no food, and barely a husband, why didn't she run away? Was her loyalty to her husband, or her mother?

4. On the hacienda, "losing face" was considered criminal among la gente -- their pride was of paramount importance. Lisa seems to arrive on the hacienda with some measure of her own pride. How does she exercise it, and, in this regard, do you think she had more in common with la gente than anyone would have suspected?

5. Lisa's relationship with her mother would probably be described as healthy. What role does her mother play, voluntarily or not, in her daughters' extraordinary circumstance?

6. The plumbing, transportation, medical supplies, standard of living -- all of these things took the reader a step back in time. What things did Lisa choose to cling to from her past. What did she connect with to get her through?

7. When the stranger (p.315) addresses her with the informal "thou" used only for animals, Lisa was deeply offended. What did this illustrate about her self-image?

8. We hear very little of her father. Is this an omission of importance?

9. Except for the somewhat passionate remembrance of fruit Lisa shares with the local vet, she never recollects missing things European. The people, the dress, the weather, the food, the landscape ... all were very different and surely would have been cause for home sickness. Again, what do you make of these omissions?

10. Lisa's pregnancy, the death of Capino, her decision to start dispensing medicine ... all of these things contributed to the trust between her and la gente that she needed to survive. What or who else contributes?

Author Bio

Lisa St. Aubin de Terán is also the author of two memoirs of her years in Italy, seven novels, a poetry collection, and a collection of stories. Her first novel, Keepers of the House, won the Somerset Maugham Award, and her novel The Slow Train to Milan won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. She currently lives in London and Italy.

Critical Praise

" Astonishing. "

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Publication Date: May 3, 1999
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: Back Bay Books
ISBN-10: 0316816884
ISBN-13: 9780316816885