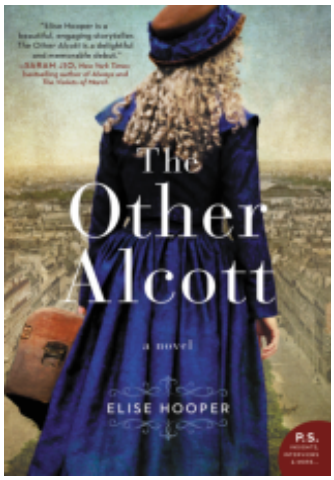
The Other Alcott

by Elise Hooper



About the Book

We all know the story of the March sisters, heroines of Louisa May Alcott?s LITTLE WOMEN. But while everyone cheers on Jo March, based on Louisa herself, Amy March is often the least favorite sister. Now, it?s time to learn the truth about the real ?Amy,? Louisa?s sister, May.

Stylish, outgoing, creative, May Alcott grows up longing to experience the wide world beyond Concord, Massachusetts. While her sister Louisa crafts stories, May herself is a talented and dedicated artist, taking lessons in Boston, turning down a marriage proposal from a well-off suitor, and facing scorn for entering what is very much a man?s profession.

Life for the Alcott family has never been easy, so when Louisa?s LITTLE WOMEN is published, its success eases the financial burdens they?d faced for so many years. Everyone agrees the novel is charming, but May is struck to the core by the portrayal of selfish, spoiled ?Amy March.? Is this what her beloved sister really thinks of her?

So May embarks on a quest to discover her own true identity, as an artist and a woman. From Boston to Rome, London and Paris, this brave, talented and determined woman forges an amazing life of her own, making her so much more than merely ?The Other Alcott.?

Discussion Guide

1. At the end of Part 1, when Alice tells May that ?a thinking woman?sounds dangerous,? what does she mean? What made a ?thinking woman? dangerous in the late 1800s?

2. How does May change over the course of the story? What moments mark critical turning points in her journey?

3. What is your perception of the relationship between Louisa and May? How did Louisa?s financial support of May

affect their feelings toward each other?

4. What were the challenges that women faced while studying art? How were these challenges different in Boston and in Europe?

5. When May marries Ernest suddenly, do you think it?s because as Louisa says, ?she?s unmoored?? What do you think contributed to May?s quick decision to marry?

6. Louisa appears to send conflicting messages about May?s marriage to Ernest --- she discourages her from doing it, but then sends a substantial check as a wedding present --- how do you think she felt about May?s decision to marry?

7. Between their beliefs on education, abolitionism, woman suffrage, amongst other causes (Bronson was also vegetarian), the Alcotts were viewed as radicals and seen as unconventional. What do you think it was like to grow up as part of this family? As the youngest family member, how difficult do you think it was it for May to grow up in this family? In what ways does she seem to forge her own identity, separate from that of her family?

8. What do you think it would be like to have a family member write a thinly-veiled account of your life? Since May doesn?t think LITTLE WOMEN was a favorable portrayal of her, how would that shape her relationship with her family?

9. Louisa struggles with the tension that exists between the success of LITTLE WOMEN and feeling trapped by being famous for something that she didn?t really want to write. Did you empathize with her feelings? What would it be like to become famous for something you resented?

10. At the end of the novel, the author provides a Postscript with more information about all of the characters. Was there anything in there that surprised you?

11. Of the two sisters, Louisa is infinitely more famous. Were you surprised by anything you learned about her in this novel? Were any of your previous impressions of her challenged by this new information?

12. Louisa remains dutiful to her family to the end and continues to write stories that the market welcomes so that she earn money to support her family while Mary Cassatt breaks from the establishment creates work that satisfies her? Which character can you relate to more? Do you understand the motivations behind both women?

Author Bio

A native New Englander, Elise Hooper spent several years writing for television and online news outlets before getting a MA and teaching high-school literature and history. Her debut novel, THE OTHER ALCOTT, was a nominee for the 2017 Washington Book Award. Three more novels --- LEARNING TO SEE, FAST GIRLS and ANGELS OF THE PACIFIC --- followed, all centered on the lives of extraordinary but overlooked historical women. Her latest book, THE LIBRARY OF LOST DOLLHOUSES, is inspired by a dollhouse that?s been in her family for five generations. Elise lives in Seattle with her husband and two daughters.

Critical Praise

?Elise Hooper?s thoroughly modern debut gives a fresh take on one of literature?s most beloved families. To read this book is to understand why the women behind LITTLE WOMEN continue to cast a long shadow on our imaginations and dreams. Hooper is a writer to watch!?

The Other Alcott

by Elise Hooper

Publication Date: September 5, 2017
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 432 pages
Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0062645331
ISBN-13: 9780062645333