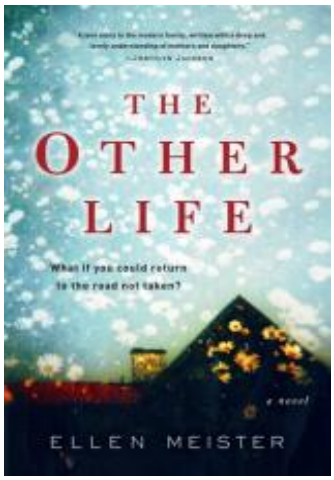
The Other Life

by Ellen Meister



About the Book

If you could return to the road not taken, would you?

Happily married and pregnant, Quinn Braverman has an ominous secret. Every time she makes a major life decision, she knows an alternate reality exists in which she made the opposite choice --- not only that, she knows how to cross over. But even in her darkest moments --- like her mother?s suicide --- Quinn hasn?t been tempted to slip through?until she receives devastating news about the baby she?s carrying.

The grief lures her to peek across the portal, and before she knows it she?s in the midst of the other life: the life in which she married another man, and is childless. The life in which her mother is still very much alive.

Quinn is forced to make a heartbreaking choice. Will she stay with the family she loves and her severely disabled child? Or will an easier life --- and the primal need to be with her mother --- win out?

Discussion Guide

1. When Quinn wants to talk to her mother, she talks to her paintings. Does Nan ever talk back? Has Nan ever tried to communicate with Quinn through her paintings? What do they tell her?

2. Quinn thrives on being needed: by her 6-year-old son, and previously by her emotionally unstable mother and her needy ex-boyfriend Eugene, whose dependence on Quinn was childlike in its totality. Nan tells her ?If a man isn?t desperately needy, my little caretaker, you have no use for him.? Where does Lewis fit into this system? Does his independence and generosity make their marriage stronger? What does it mean that Quinn repeatedly chooses him?

3. Why do you think Nan really told her daughter she was ?destined to be with a man who was an emotional siphon??

What was she trying to achieve in telling Quinn this? Who are the other emotional siphons in Quinn?s life?

4. Early on, Quinn accuses Lewis of wanting her to have a miscarriage, to which Lewis responds that he doesn?t know what he wants. Quinn, folding her arms, tells him that he?s ?not being honest?. A few days later she flat-out tells him ?I don?t want to have an abortion?, and once again Lewis tries to deflect. Subsequently, Quinn gets upset when Lewis decides to talk to his mother, his sister, and their next-door neighbor about the situation, but not to her.

Is this a fair response? Is Quinn is being honest when she tells us the reason she?s upset is not because of what Lewis is feeling, but rather ?the thought that he could open up to everyone but her?? Is Quinn being completely honest with Lewis?

5. Later, Quinn specifically turns down Isaac?s pleading that she read to him, choosing instead to attempt to slip through the portal to visit her mother. She remembers his words, I want mommy, and her response is ?Me, too.?

Is this a question of who needs her more, or is this primarily about what Quinn needs?

6. Why does Quinn allow her meeting with Eugene at the party become intimate? Why does she kiss him? Does this seem out of character for her, or not? What role does Eugene play in Quinn?s ?other life??

7. In one of Quinn?s last conversations with her mother, Quinn says to Nan: ?I want you to admit that it drives you crazy seeing me in a normal, stable relationship,? referring to her decision to choose Lewis over Eugene. Nan responds with ?I never said I didn?t think you should. I said I didn?t think you could.? Later, Quinn is convinced her mother killed herself because Quinn married Lewis.

Why would Nan kill herself because Quinn chose Lewis? Why is Nan still alive in the life where Quinn is still with Eugene?

8. How would you compare the choice Nan has to make in the prologue with Quinn?s decision not to terminate her pregnancy?

9. Sitting in the doctor?s office, Quinn remembers being asked, during her interview at Batson?s Books, what her biggest regret was. ?Quinn answered that she didn?t believe in regrets, explaining that she always learned from her mistakes?.Now, though, she had to ask herself whether she regretted leaving Eugene. Had she made a mistake? Was that the life she was supposed to have??

Which life would you have chosen, if you were Quinn? What pivotal choices have you made in your life, and how would your life be different if you?d made a different decision?

10. What do you think happens to Quinn, her baby daughter and the rest of her family? What does the closing of the portal in the basement mean for them?

Author Bio

Ellen Meister is a novelist, book coach, screenwriter and creative writing instructor who started her career writing advertising copy. Her novels include

DIVORCE TOWERS, TAKE MY HUSBAND, THE ROOFTOP PARTY, LOVE SOLD SEPARATELY, DOROTHY PARKER DRANK HERE, and FAREWELL, DOROTHY PARKER, among others.

Meister?s essays have appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, the *Wall Street Journal* blog, the *Huffington Post*, the *Daily Beast*, *Long Island Woman*, *Writer?s Digest* and *Publishers Weekly*.

Career highlights include appearing on NPR, being selected for the prestigious Indie Next List by the American Booksellers Association, having her work translated into foreign languages, and receiving a TV series option from HBO.

Meister lives in New York and publicly speaks about her books, fiction writing and America?s most celebrated literary wit, Dorothy Parker.

Critical Praise

"Ellen Meister makes a big leap toward the literary in **The Other Life**, a book where ?What if? becomes the most powerful question in the world. This is the thinking woman?s beach read, a love story to the modern family, written with a deep and lovely understanding of mothers and daughters and the sacrifices they?ll make for each other."

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