Book Description  For readers of the phenomenal bestsellers Snow Flower and the Secret Fan and Peony in Love--a stunning new novel from Lisa See about two sisters who leave Shanghai to find new lives in 1930s Los Angeles.

May and Pearl, two sisters living in Shanghai in the mid-1930s, are beautiful, sophisticated, and well-educated, but their family is on the verge of bankruptcy. Hoping to improve their social standing, May and Pearl’s parents arrange for their daughters to marry “Gold Mountain men” who have come from Los Angeles to find brides.

But when the sisters leave China and arrive at Angel’s Island (the Ellis Island of the West)--where they are detained, interrogated, and humiliated for months--they feel the harsh reality of leaving home. And when May discovers she’s pregnant the situation becomes even more desperate. The sisters make a pact that no one can ever know.

A novel about two sisters, two cultures, and the struggle to find a new life in America while bound to the old, Shanghai Girls is a fresh, fascinating adventure from beloved and bestselling author Lisa See.

Amazon Exclusive: Lisa See on Shanghai Girls  I’m writing this on a plane to Shanghai. For the last couple of weeks I’ve been thinking about all the things I want to see and do on this research trip: look deeper into the Art Deco movement in Shanghai, visit a 17th-century house in a village of 300 people to observe the Sweeping the Graves Festival, and check out some old theaters in Beijing. But as I sit on the plane, I’m not thinking of the adventures that are ahead but of the people and places I’ve left behind. I’ve been gone from home only a few hours and already I’m homesick! This puts me in mind of Pearl and May, the characters in Shanghai Girls. This feeling--longing for home and missing the people left behind--is at the heart of the novel. We live in a nation of immigrants. We all have someone in our families who was brave enough, scared enough, or crazy enough to leave the home country to come to America. I’m a real mutt in terms of ancestry, but I know that the Chinese side of my family left China because they were fleeing war, famine, and poverty. They were lured to America in hopes of a better life, but leaving China also meant saying goodbye to the homes they’d been born in, to their parents,
brothers, and sisters, and to everything and everyone they knew. This experience is the blood and tears of American experience.

Pearl and May are lucky, because they come to America together. They’re sisters and they have each other. I’ve always wanted to write about sisters and I finally got my chance with Shanghai Girls. You could say that either I’m an only child or that I’m one of four sisters, because I have a former step-sister I’ve known for over 50 years and two half-sisters from different halves who I’ve known since they were born. Is Shanghai Girls autobiographical? Not really, but my sister Katharine and I once had a fight that was like the flour fight that May and Pearl got into when they were girls. And there was an ice cream incident that I used in the novel that sent my sister Clara right down memory lane when she read the manuscript. I’m also the eldest, and we all know what that means. I’m the one who’s supposed to be the bossy know-it-all. (But if that’s true, then why are they the ones who are always right?) What I know is that we’re very different from each other and our life experiences couldn’t be more varied, and yet we have a deep emotional connection that goes way beyond friendship. My sisters knew me when I was a shy little kid, helped me survive my first broken heart, share the memories of bad family car trips, and were at my side for the happiest moments in my life. More recently, we’ve begun to share things like the loss of our childhood homes, the changing of the neighborhoods we grew up in, and the frailties and illnesses of our myriad parents.

My emotions and experiences are deeply entwined with the stories I write. So as I fly over the Pacific, of course I’m thinking about May and Pearl, the people and places they left behind, the hopes and dreams that kept them moving forward, and the strength and solace they found in each other, but I’m thinking about myself too. As soon as I get to the hotel, I’m going to call my husband and sons to tell them I arrived safely, and then I’m going to send some e-mails to my sisters.--Lisa See

(Photo © Patricia Williams)

My Personal Review:
It is 1937 and Pearl and May are two beautiful sisters who live a privileged life in Shanghai. They model for local artists and their faces are featured in local ads and on calendars. They are a bit naïve, thinking their lives are going to go on like this forever. However, the world around them is changing. The Japanese are saber rattling, will be invading soon and their father has lost the family fortune gambling. For their parents to keep their home, they must sell the girls to the young Chinese American sons of Old Louie, an American Chinese who has extensive business dealings in Shanghai and who has always coveted the girls.
The girls have a dangerous trip to America, winding up at Angel Island in San Francisco, where they spend months held by immigration until they are finally allowed to travel to Los Angeles and their new husbands. The girls' lives don't turn out at all like they'd expected as they evolve into people they never expected to be.

This is a divinely written story and it almost makes me ashamed to admit that I've never read Lisa See before. However, I'll be seeking out Peony in Love and Snow Flower and the Secret Fan straightaway. I was held captive by this book and if her other works are anything like this, I have some wonderful reading to look forward to.

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