

Q&A for Women Writers Women's Books and Katherine Reay Of Literature and Lattes

1. What was your biggest inspiration while writing *Of Literature and Lattes*?

The mother/daughter relationship between Alyssa and Janet. It was so complex — as our relationships are and I wanted to portray the layers well. I also found a yearning for understanding and community within the pages of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* that drove some aspects of the story.

2. Which part of the book was most challenging to write about?

The mother/daughter relationship between Janet and Alyssa. :) Mother/daughter relationships are so layered, nuanced, multi-faceted... Really we can't overstate their complexity. I think what was important to me to convey within the book was also the most challenging.

3. What message do you hope readers will take from reading your book?

Hope. That whatever situation they are in — especially if they are in a place they don't want to be — can and will change. Also I hope they get a glimpse into an authentic relationship that reveals that how we see things often is colored by our own perspective rather than its objective reality.

4. Is there a character in the book whose personality most matches yours? If so, which character and why?

I am not sure there is.... But if forced to choose, I'd say Lexi, Alyssa's best friend. I think I've been through enough to gain a little of her more distanced and understanding perspective. Or maybe I've messed up enough to finally grasp that I'm not always right.

5. Does your book deal with a current trending or controversial issue, and if so, why did you choose to write about that issue?

It deals more with the timeless issue of parents and children and how we want to live well in that space. It also touches upon the Theranos scandal as I put the main character in a failed start-up that had defrauded people. I did that because I found the Theranos scandal — and the trust E. Holmes had to build to do what she did — fascinating on so many levels. In the fictional company I created, the firm preyed on people's hopes and fears, wanting answers and assurance for future health concerns. I think wanting those answers and accepting them, perhaps too easily, speaks directly to our hesitancy in resting with uncertainty in life.

6. Which 5 books are currently on your TBR (to be read) pile right now?

***The Huntress* by Kate Quinn** — I just finished *The Alice Network* and I was very impressed how Quinn never let her foot off the gas. She pushed emotions and plot and tension again and again.

***The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah** — I am so embarrassed I haven't read it, but again I know Hannah has created an incomparable story and I can't wait to dig in.

***Talking to Strangers* by Malcolm Gladwell** — I devoured Gladwell's *Outliers* and *The Tipping Point*. Really anything he writes is on my TBR list and this one is next, though *Blink* might sneak in there first.

***Never Have I Ever* by Joshilyn Jackson** — I had the privilege of doing a book talk with Joshilyn Jackson and she was funny and brilliant. I suspect anything she writes is going to be full of intrigue and wit, and move like a high-speed train.

***This Tender Land* by William Kent Krueger** — Krueger's *Ordinary Grace* was a beautifully written story and I have heard outstanding reviews for this one. My bookclub has already read it, but I was under deadline at the time and missed it. So although I skipped out on the discussion, I won't miss out on the book.

7. What is your writing process?

I start with the big points — almost like the major systems on a body. I start with the head, hips, knees and feet — where I must start and where I want to go. Then I fill in all the connections in between — the shoulders, arms, spine, etc. It's not linear, however, often I have to go back to the beginning and ground those early motivations and scenes to proceed. It's like dressing a mannequin in many ways. I don't like to plot things too firmly or I find my characters are hemmed in — and I'd rather they push at me a little and surprise me. Some of the best scenes come from those surprises.

8. Briefly tell us about your journey to publishing *Of Literature and Lattes*.

Of Literature and Lattes is my eighth book. And it is the first time I have returned to characters or to a locale. Although it is not a sequel to *The Printed Letter Bookshop*, I did have fun revisiting Winsome, the town, and the characters who live there. I also wanted to dig into what I knew was a complex relationship that was only hinted at within *The Printed Letter Bookshop*.

But as to my journey to publication... All of my books come from a remarkable beginning. In 2009, I was severely injured and the many things I did, both for my work and my family, were taken away for a brief time. During my year of recovery, my first novel, *Dear Mr. Knightley*, came to me — almost fully formed. I guess everything else had to get cleared away for a

time to get me to slow down enough to envision a story. *Dear Mr. Knightley* was published in 2013 and I've been writing ever since — and feel beyond happy to be doing so.