

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Alexis Schaitkin's short stories and essays have appeared in *Ecotone*, *Southwest Review*, the *Southern Review*, and other journals. Her fiction has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories* and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading*. She received her MFA in fiction from the University of Virginia. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts with her husband and their son. *Saint X* is her debut novel.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the island setting contribute to the story? What about the juxtaposition of New York City?
2. What do you think Claire's habit of writing words in the air with her finger demonstrates about her?
3. What's the symbolism of Faraway Cay and the woman with hooves for feet? What does that mythology add to the story?
4. Why do you think the author chose to intersperse the voices of minor characters, such as the movie actor and other vacationers, throughout the book? What effect does this achieve?
5. What does Claire's name change to Emily signify to you?
6. Did you ever think Clive might pose a threat to Emily when he found out who she was?
7. What does Clive's nickname Gogo indicate about his personality? About Edwin's?

8. Emily's world in New York becomes very small after she encounters Clive. Do you think that was intentional or unintentional on her part? What might have motivated her to turn inward?
9. What do Alison's recorded diary entries reveal to Emily? Was Emily right to listen to them, or do you think it was an invasion of privacy? What about their mom?
10. What are the similarities between Emily's life in New York and Clive's? What are the differences?
11. What do you think about Edwin's relationship with Sara?
12. Alison witnessed a pivotal moment in Clive and Edwin's relationship. How did that shape the rest of the narrative --- Clive and Edwin's relationship, their futures, Alison's tragedy?
13. When Emily learns the truth, and remembers the night before Alison disappeared, what do you think is her primary emotion? Grief? Relief? Guilt? Something else?
14. Do you think Emily coming into Clive's life was ultimately a bad thing or a good thing for Clive?

- <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/saint-x/guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Publisher's Weekly

Schaitkin's unsettling debut plays with the conventions of the romantic thriller to comment on the uneasy relationship between working-class residents of a fictional island in the Caribbean and the wealthy American tourists who visit it. In 1995, a couple from a New York City suburb and their two daughters, adventurous college freshman Alison and cautious seven-year-old Claire, visit a resort on the island. Alison flirts with two workers at the resort, Clive and Edwin, and takes off with them nightly without her parents' knowledge to visit a local club, where she dances, drinks, and gets high. One night, she doesn't return, and her body is soon found on a nearby island. Though suspicion falls on Clive and Edwin, they are not charged with any crime. In present-day N.Y.C., Claire, who narrates much of the novel, recognizes Clive, now a cab driver, from the back seat of his taxi. Obsessed with learning what happened to Alison, she stalks him while neglecting her work and friends. As Claire embeds herself in Clive's life, he grows increasingly wary, until he finally snaps and reveals what he knows about the final night of Alison's life. As the novel gradually shifts to Clive's point of view, Schaitkin subverts the other characters' assumptions about the lives and intentions of strangers. This is a smart page-turner, both thought-provoking and effortlessly entertaining. Agent: Henry Dunlow, Dunlow, Carlson & Lerner Literary Agency. (Feb.) --Staff (Reviewed 12/09/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 50, p).

Kirkus Reviews

/* Starred Review */ The death of a teenage vacationer on a fictional Caribbean island reverberates through many lives, particularly those of her 7-year-old sister and one of the workers at the resort." Look.

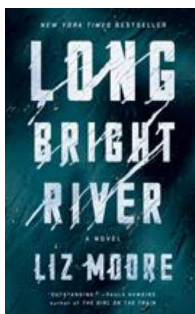
A girl is walking down the sand... As she walks, heads turn—young men, openly; older men, more subtly; older women, longingly... This is Alison." A dangerous froth of sexual tension escalates around Alison Thomas, visiting Saint X from the wealthy New York suburbs with her parents and little sister, Claire. Schaitkin evokes her fictional resort with sureness—"the long drive lined with perfectly vertical palm trees," "the beach where lounge chairs are arranged in a parabola," the scents of "frangipani and coconut sunscreen and the mild saline of equatorial ocean." After the disaster, the focus shifts to Claire, who changes her name to Emily after her bereaved family moves to California but never escapes the shadow of the event. "I knew the exact day I outlived Alison. Eighteen years, three months, twelve days." When she moves back East for a publishing job in New York City, she crosses paths with one of the resort employees her sister was partying with the night she died. These men were exonerated in the matter of Alison's death, but Clive Richardson was arrested for selling pot in the process; after prison, his life is so devastated that he immigrates to Manhattan. After Emily gets in Clive's taxicab, her obsessive desire to know more about her sister's death—which, by now, the reader fully shares—consumes her life. The complex point of view, shifting among an omniscient narrator, Emily's perspective in first person, Clive's immigrant story in close third, plus brief testimonies from myriad minor characters, works brilliantly. Just as impressive are Schaitkin's unflinching examinations of the roles of race, privilege, and human nature in the long-unfolding tragedy. Setting the story in a fictional place, collaged and verbally photoshopped from real Caribbean settings, is daring, but this writer is fearless, and her gamble pays off. This killer debut is both a thriller with a vivid setting and an insightful study of race, class, and obsession. (Kirkus Reviews, December 15, 2019).

READALIKES



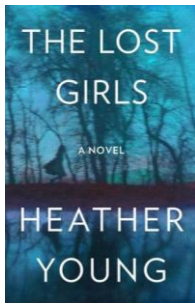
***Tangerine* by Christine Mangan**

Arriving in Tangier with her new husband only to encounter the estranged best friend she has not seen in more than a year, Alice allows her friend to introduce her to the rhythms and culture of Morocco, only to be quickly stifled by the woman's controlling nature, a situation that turns sinister when her husband goes missing.



***Long Bright River* by Liz Moore**

In a Philadelphia neighborhood rocked by the opioid crisis, Kacey lives on the streets in the vise of addiction. Her sister, Mickey, walks those same blocks on her police beat. They don't speak anymore, but Mickey never stops worrying about her sibling. When Kacey disappears-- at the same time that a mysterious string of murders begins in Mickey's district-- she becomes obsessed with finding the culprit-- and her sister-- before it's too late.



***The Lost Girls* by Heather Young**

More than half a century after the disappearance of her sister destroys their family, Lucy imparts the story of the tragedy to her grandniece, Justine, who would secure a stable home for her daughters in the family's isolated Minnesota lakehouse at the side of a neighbor who may hold the key to the mystery.