



The Open Door

Elizabeth Maguire

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“The story is the journey, not the destination. Or so the philosopher’s say. But this is my story, and it has a beginning, a middle, and an end....”

The Open Door is a luminous and profoundly moving novel inspired by the life of Constance Fenimore Woolson, one of the most widely-read and respected American authors of the nineteenth century. Exploring themes of passion, life, death, friendship, and art, the novel is a vivid evocation of the complex forces behind literary creation.

After years of supporting her mother and a hapless brother through her writing, Constance finds herself in early middle age “hungry, ravenous to see and live as much as possible.” She sails for Europe with a letter of introduction to Henry James, the writer she admires above all others. Constance is intoxicated by Europe, Italy in particular, and she and James eventually meet in Florence. James is delighted by this highly intelligent, independent woman (whom he dubs “Fenimore” as a sign of his esteem) and makes her his confidante. For her part, Constance finds with James “the unequalled joy of never running out of things to say.”

Constance’s courageous, open nature is odds with James’s more secretive one and inevitably leads to friction, transgression, and revenge both private and public. Elegantly conceived and life-affirming, The Open Door is an unforgettable portrait of a remarkable woman who lived with passion and refused to accept the narrowing of her world.

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