



White Houses

Amy Bloom

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The unexpected and forbidden affair between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok unfolds in a triumph of historical fiction from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Away* and *Lucky Us*.

“I never envied a wife or a husband, until I met Eleanor. Then, I would have traded everything I ever had, every limo ride, every skinny dip, every byline and carefree stroll, for what Franklin had, polio and all.”

Lorena Hickok meets Eleanor Roosevelt in 1932 while reporting on Franklin Roosevelt's first presidential campaign. Having grown up worse than poor in South Dakota and reinvented herself as the most prominent woman reporter in America, “Hick,” as she's known to her friends and admirers, is not quite instantly charmed by the idealistic, patrician Eleanor. But then, as her connection with the future first lady deepens into intimacy, what begins as a powerful passion matures into a lasting love, and a life that Hick never expected to have. She moves into the White House, where her status as “first friend” is an open secret, as are FDR's own lovers. After she takes a job in the Roosevelt administration, promoting and protecting both Roosevelts, she comes to know Franklin not only as a great president but as a complicated rival and an irresistible friend, capable of changing lives even after his death. Through it all, even as Hick's bond with Eleanor is tested by forces both extraordinary and common, and as she grows as a woman and a writer, she never loses sight of the love of her life.

From Washington, D.C. to Hyde Park, from a little white house on Long Island to an apartment on Manhattan's Washington Square, Amy Bloom's new novel moves elegantly through fascinating places and times, written in compelling prose and with emotional depth, wit, and acuity.

“Amy Bloom knows the urgency of love,” wrote *The Washington Post* about Bloom's acclaimed bestseller *Away*. The same could be said of *White Houses*, an unforgettable novel about the power of passion and the endurance of love.

White Houses Details

Date : Published February 13th 2018 by Random House

ISBN :

Author : Amy Bloom

Format : Kindle Edition 241 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Lgbt

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From Reader Review White Houses for online ebook

Cheri says

!! NOW AVAILABLE !!

*"In many dreams I've held you near,
Now, at last, you're really here.
"Where have you been?
I've looked for you forever and a day
Where have you been?
I'm just not myself when you're away"*
-- Where Have You Been lyrics by Kathy Mattea

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was campaigning to become the 32nd President, Lorena Hickok was one of many reporters covering his campaign. Through this, she meets, and is befriended by Eleanor Roosevelt, despite their vast differences, economically and scholastically. Where Lorena Hickok, or "Hick" as she was called, was raised in an impoverished part of South Dakota, among the poorest of the poor, sexually abused, physically abused, and always, always hungry. Eleanor was raised without need. Hick worked in a man's world, and could be brash and sometimes vulgar. Eleanor was the poster woman for compassion and endurance.

Their friendship may not have been rooted in conventional backgrounds, but their friendship blossomed, nevertheless. After FDR's election, her status as "first friend" was a well known, if not openly acknowledged, state of affairs. And as this relationship deepens into more than just infatuation, more than just friendship, their bond becomes something seemingly unbreakable.

Amy Bloom gives us a glimpse into the private lives of these two public women, and the love they shared behind closed doors. What Bloom does bring to this is a wonderful insight into the times, and how these two women met and were irresistibly drawn to the other, seeing in each other the pieces that were missing in their lives. How their love changes over time. It is a love song, with a lifetime of verses.

Throughout, this story is relayed with a bit of veneration for their beautiful life-long love, a wonderfully imagined and told story of love. The writing seems subtly perceptive, if not consistently elevated, but there are moments, most notably the final chapter, which were so beautifully written that it took my breath away.

Pub Date 13 Feb 2018

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Random House Publishing Group - Random House

Elyse says

The writing by Amy Bloom in "White Houses" is beautiful.....soooo lovely!!!

We learn a lot about Lorena Hickok, American journalist: her troubled childhood in South Dakota of sexual abuse - abandonment- poverty - and starting out on her own from an early age.

Lorena also disclosed her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. — All from Lorena Hickok's perspective. Sure feels real to me... but it's written as fiction. Amy Bloom did tremendous research - she went through three THOUSAND letters alone - plus diaries - etc.

We get history - read a little about Eleanor's marriage - her children - the loss of her baby - living in the White House - Franklin's death and funeral - her daughter Anna - Amelia Earhart....and the women Franklin had affairs with: Lucy Mercer and Missy LeHand.

I found myself looking up all the female - relations - to both Eleanor and Franklin on Google — just to see if there was anything new I might learn. The storytelling got me interested to know more. The sign of a good book.

This thin - very intimate novel was easily imagined....and emotionally felt.

At times I felt so sad - other times happy for the moments of blissful private hours these two women share together.

Amy Bloom eloquently constructed a meditation on the power of love! This is a gorgeous love story — as much as any I've ever read!!!

This is a magnificent excerpt:

“Every women’s body is an intimate landscape. The hills, the valleys, the narrow ledges, the riverbanks, the sudden eruptions of soft or crinkling hair. Here are the plains, the fine dry slopes. Here are the woods, here is the smooth path to the only door I wish to walk through. Eleanor’s body is the landscape of my true home”

Thank You Random House, Netgalley, and Amy Bloom

Michael says

This fictional portrayal of the love relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and a journalist who joined the White House staff as her PR writer, Lorena Hickok, was fun to read. Told from the perspective of Lorena (known as “Hick”), we get a “fly on the wall” window into Eleanor’s personal life in the early period of FDR’s presidency, a long period of separation, and a renewal of close relations after Franklin dies. Hick comes off as a straight-shooter in honesty to all her friends, often sprightly and comic in her ways of expressing herself, though sometimes snarky or bitterly sardonic, but warm hearted and forgiving of human weaknesses throughout.

The tale comes off as a series of vignettes of the development of their friendship and growth of a mutual devotion. Hick first got to know Eleanor through working as a leading Associated Press reporter during the campaign. We see how Hick helped Eleanor get beyond her emotional isolation and develop her voice through public speaking and writing a column, and courage enough to lead progressive activities to benefit poverty, discrimination, and labor injustice. As their friendship grew, Hick found she had to sacrifice that job because she could no longer be objective. Given her writing skills, it made sense for Eleanor to bring her into the White House staff for PR work. Staying close to Eleanor in this assistant role and as a traveling companion turned out to be risky for exposure as a lesbian relationship, especially given Eleanor’s general

tendency to show affection in public.

I couldn't pose successfully as her aide-de-camp because in public, she would take my hand, sometimes, or press up against me, and in spite of myself, I had to tell her not to.

“...I like it. Jesus, Eleanor, I love it, and that’s the problem. We do not look like the dearest of friends. Trust me.”

“I wonder if we aren’t, really, the dearest of friends. Deep down.”

Consequently, Hick takes a position in a project to work with Harry Hopkins on researching the impact of federal relief programs on the underserved victims of the Depression. Eventually, the pain of accepting that Eleanor would and should never leave FDR led Hick to move away from D.C. and pick up the pieces of her disrupted career and life. This skeletal outline is covered well already in Doris Kerns Goodwin’s biography, “No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt—The Home Front in World War II.” But no matter how much historians pile up facts and perspectives on significant figures, it always takes a leap of imagination to form a life-like conception of them. That’s where biographical fiction like this has a draw for me, putting people on a stage with invented dialogue and revealing how personal motivations and feelings might have come into play behind the public scenes of their important roles and actions. Goodwin read the thousands of letters between these two, but despite all the tenderness and affection in them had to pause in concluding their relationship was sexual, honoring doubts expressed by Eleanor’s friend, a former Roosevelt Library Director, and Hickok biographer Doris Faber. Even recently, a respected biographer of Eleanor Roosevelt, Blanche Wiesen Cooke, is quoted as saying she had no doubts of a mutual ardent loving relationship, but as for its sexual nature she can only say “Well, the fact is, we can never know what people do in the privacy of their own home. The door is closed.”

In this story, the deep love between them is all that counts, and the presumption that it was a sexual relationship more of a minor presumption and not exploited for reader thrills. We don’t spend a lot of time with FDR, but what incidents are portrayed suggest a mutual acceptance of an open marriage, though that is left a bit ambiguous. We do see Hick joining forces with Eleanor in supporting FDR’s first mistress, office manager Missy LeHand, due to her honest devotion to her boss, but together they despise socialite Lucy Mercer whose affair with Franklin appears borne of calculating, mercenary ambitions.

To help you decide if you want to read this, I now share a few examples of Bloom’s craft in making Hick and Eleanor so vivid. Here is a sample of wit and empathy in Hick’s mind about Missy, who needs help after a stroke:

In twenty years, Missy sometimes had too many drinks, which was mostly her wish to keep up with her boss, and also, and I have no high ground here at all, her wish to periodically forget that he was the whole world to her and she was a delightful little village for him.

With the following I felt some relief for Hick to allow bitter regret and jealousy about Franklin to seep to her mind’s surface after years of separation from Eleanor:

Every couple has the same five arguments in their lifetime, which is really just the one, over and over, until people die or divorce. ...Franklin said, Love me, without criticism or condition, and Eleanor said, Be worthy of my love. Or maybe Eleanor said, Make life matter, and Franklin said, Make life easier.

After FDR’s death, an even more critical outlook comes to her mind:

...I always had eight dinner plates in case I went crazy and threw a couple. The day Franklin died, I walked to the beach, without the dog, and broke all I had. He was the greatest president of my lifetime and he was a son of a bitch every day. His charm and cheer blinded you, made you deaf to your own thoughts, until all you could do was nod and smile, while the frost came down, killing you where you stood. He broke hearts and

ambitions across his knee like bits of kindling, and then he dusted off his hands and said, who's for cocktails? If Missy's strokes hadn't killed her, Franklin's cold heart would have.

Overall, this was a touching account of an enriching love and friendship courageously carried out just barely out of the public eye and sadly doomed by the prejudices of the times. It is not a masterful take on history with a capital H, such as a got from Vidal's "Lincoln" in its full liberty taken portraying the impact of his grief over his son's death and of dealing with his wife's madness. But I do admire her skills, which I already experienced in her book "Away", which give us an odyssey of a women in the 19th century across the U.S. and Alaska in search of a stolen child.

This book was provided by the publisher for review through the Netgalley program.

JanB says

This is a fictionalized account of the friendship, and probable lesbian relationship, between Lenora Hickok ("Hick"), a journalist, and Eleanor Roosevelt. The author tells the story through Lenora's eyes and what I enjoyed the most are the historical details: the Lindburgh kidnapping, the camp the Roosevelts founded for victims of polio, the marriage between Franklin and Eleanor, FDR's affairs, the Roosevelt children...and more.

I enjoyed Hick's voice and the details of her abusive childhood gave even more insight into her character. The book is beautifully written but I have a problem with fiction based on real people. I find myself wondering how much of it was the imagination of the author, and more often than not, would have rather read a non-fiction book on the subject. Readers who aren't bothered by the same questions will find much to enjoy in this slim book.

The author had access to many of the letters the two exchanged, but I had a hard time reconciling the historical Eleanor with the one depicted in these pages. Although all agree that theirs was a close friendship, historians are divided on whether the two had a romantic relationship. I've since read some excerpts from the letters and admit the case is compelling. But I can't help feeling it would have been better to let Eleanor and Hick rest in peace.

•I received a copy of the e-book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

Esil says

White Houses is a fictionalized account of Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with Lorena Hickok. The novel is narrated from Hickok's perspective. It's more of a character study than a story. Hickok recounts part of her childhood, and moves back and forth in time, always coming back to the few days following FDR's death. What made this worth reading to me were the writing and the sharply drawn personalities of these characters. Bloom makes it easy to understand what drew these women together and pulled them apart. And the last chapter was beautiful and heartbreakin.

White Houses is a beautifully written impressionistic depiction of two women caught in a particular time in history. I knew nothing about this relationship and very little about Eleanor Roosevelt. It's always hard to know how true a work of historical fiction is to the characters or events it depicts. In this case, it's hard to tell but Bloom's depiction of these women has a convincing air of reality. I'm left wanting to read more about them -- especially Eleanor -- which is not a bad thing.

A note of caution to anyone who is sensitive about child abuse and animal cruelty. There are a few difficult scenes early on dealing with Hickok's childhood.

Another lovely monthly buddy read with Diane and Angela! And thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Toni says

Just started listening to the audio; the narrator is perfect!!!

This has to be Amy Bloom's best and most beautiful book yet. She left her heart on its pages, especially the heart of Lorena Hickok. Most of us know what an incredible woman Eleanor Roosevelt was as First Lady to FDR and later in her own right, stepped out from behind her husband's shadow. Eleanor was a tireless giver, to her family, her husband, her children, the people of this country, and even the world. She fought for the downtrodden, the poor, civil rights, hunger, women, worker's rights, etc. She hardly accepted or even received affection from her family, husband or children. If any part of this beautiful historical novel is true, and I'm sure the relationship is, I'm so pleased that Eleanor had such happiness in her life. Whatever is imagined here let Eleanor have received its bounty.

Thank you Netgalley, Amy Bloom, and Random House.

Debbie says

3.5

I forgot, folks, I forgot!

I forgot I don't like historical fiction that's based on famous people. Why was my memory snoozing when I picked up this book? I remember (of course, too late) that I swore off reading such books after I finished Twain's End and suddenly thought Mark Twain was a jerk. I used to like Mark Twain, but after reading that book, where it shows how he ruined his mistress's life, I hate his guts. I even researched the facts a little, and yep, it appears he really was a bastard. But I didn't want to know that! Erase, erase, erase that reading experience!

You see, when I finish reading a fictional book about a famous person, my head insists on thinking that I've just read the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That the characters' personalities, words, and actions are the exact same as those of the real people. Beep! This is not right! How to get my head to just stop that?! How to explain to my head that the story may resemble history but could be embellished and exaggerated bigtime? How much was added for the sake of drama? And how much of the story is from the author's

imagination?

Luckily, this story is based on a fact that isn't disputed: Eleanor Roosevelt and a female journalist, Lorena Hickok (called Hick), had a prolonged love affair. The book doesn't create a negative image of either woman; its purpose is just to illuminate their scandalous love affair. The fact that Hick and Eleanor came from such opposite backgrounds makes their love story even richer.

Oh, and before I bring out the Joy Jar and the Complaint Board, I need to say wow, people other than the president's family get to live in the White House?? Does that still happen these days? Hick lived there five years! I actually checked out that fact and it appears to be true. Hick must have been shaking her head, moving from the depths of squalor to the heights of luxury. How bizarre that must have been!

Joy Jar

The language is smart and pretty. It was smooth sailing and I'd stop now and then just to admire a phrase.

I like that it's first-person narration. Hick is the one telling the story. To me, first-person narration always makes the story more believable and it usually makes me feel cozy with the storyteller. (Ha! I like that the story was more believable, yet we're talking about a fictional character resembling a real person. See what I mean about my not being able to separate a fictional character from the person it is based on?!)

No over-the-top drama and no smut. Tasteful and eloquent. No graphic sex, no drama for drama's sake. Even in the first half of the book, where Hick is describing her tough past, the story never veers into high-drama land. The concentration is on how much they cared about each other and how they had to keep their relationship a secret—as much as they could. This was an era when being gay was not accepted, of course, so secret was the name of the game.

Really got a sense of the era. And I also got a sense of the lives of the rich and famous. I was at times fascinated, at times bored, with the details of the good life. The life of the filthy rich equals vacations, flowers, comfort, multi-coursed meals, tea, maids, country houses, high ceilings, gardens, gold trimming, abundance, fanfare, elaborate everything.

First half of the book is boiling. It's intense and powerful. We learn about Hick's incredibly brutal life—sexual abuse, poverty, and neglect were mainstays. Oh, and she had a stint in a circus, which is completely fascinating. As is true of the whole book, her life story is handled without over-the-top drama, which is impressive.

Complaint Board

The second half of the book fizzles. I was all jazzed up after reading about Hick's early life, but the second half of the book made me go still. The story never seems to boil again. It's sort of the same thing over and over. It's clear that there is lots of love between them, but the descriptions seem somewhat monotonous and flat.

Timeframe madness. Well, I'm making that sound all dramatic when it really isn't. I think there were three timeframes and we had to jump from one to the other without much help. I got confused; the jumpiness made the story seem a little scattered.

Passion coated in Xanax. It was a low dose, okay? This was a general feeling I had, which I couldn't

exactly pinpoint. I think maybe it's because Hick described what she loved about Eleanor, but we never hear from Eleanor and we never see a whole lot of interaction. It's mostly Hick describing how much she cares for Eleanor. Come to think of it, maybe that is a problem with first-person narration. But the toned-down passion kept me at a distance. I didn't ever feel like I was in the same room with them and I didn't really feel much sympathy.

I didn't particularly like Hick. She seemed too tough and self-centered. I'd also describe her as abrasive, unfriendly, and somewhat stoic. Maybe that's another reason I felt distant from her and the story. It's easy to understand her tough veneer, given her brutal childhood, but I just didn't like her much.

I liked Amy Bloom's writing enough that I would definitely read another of her books. I'm rating this one 3.5. A good read, but too many entries on the Complaint Board to grant it 4 stars. When I was done reading, I uttered a meh.

Thanks to NetGalley for the advance copy.

Karen says

This book is a work of fiction based on the relationship of Eleanor Roosevelt and her long time friend and companion, Lorena Hickock. Lorena's voice narrates this story.

They both seemed to be lost souls that found together, what they both never had in life, and it was written in a beautiful and intimate way.

Thank you to NetGalley and Random House for the advanced copy!

Marialyce says

4.5 strong written stars

Eleanor Roosevelt...what person does not know that name? Wife of the longest serving president, humanitarian, mother to six children and wife to a philanderer of a husband. Speaking out as first lady, she became a woman working for the good of the poor, the downtrodden. She spoke out against racial discrimination. She was a paragon of virtue, intelligence, often using mass media to publicize the plight of many. She was also, as stated by this book and through her various letters written to Lorena Hickok (Hicks), in love with another woman.

This relationship to Lorena is the impetus behind this wonderfully written novel. Lorena was a poor young girl, born in rural Wisconsin, raped by her father, and for a time worked in a circus where it seems her homosexual tendencies were awakened. In 1932, now a reporter for Associated Press, she is assigned to cover Eleanor as the new first lady. They meet and their life and love take off from there. Eventually, Lorena moves into the White House and her affair with Eleanor blooms as they revel in their love and their need for one another.

This was a beautiful love story told in the voice of Lorena. Over their many years together, there were separations, heartaches, and tragedy, but they always seemed to find one another. Lorena was often

photographed with Eleanor but was most times cut out of the picture for there could be no scandal worse than being a homosexual in those days. Imagine the scandal to be had if the press found out about this relationship!

Lorena knows Eleanor, she knows that no matter what how many affairs, how many slights, how many indiscretions Franklin Roosevelt had, she will never leave him. Lorena had much respect for Franklin, she also had much jealousy of the hold he had over Eleanor.

This novel's words are tragically beautiful. Ms Blooms's ability to show us the beauty of a relationship that so few would know of until well after the death of Eleanor, is amazing. She opens up to us a world where love is the driving force and life can be wonderful when you love the right person. Tragically, these women never got the opportunity to be together for a lifetime. Eleanor once said "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Her dreams for a time were realized in the moments that she and Lorena shared.

Thanks you to Amy Bloom, Random House, and NetGalley for providing an ARC of this most tragic and poignant novel.

Liz says

This book details the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and "first friend" Lenora Hickok. The book is written from Hick's point of view. It's not told in a linear fashion, but more as a series of memories.

When Hick focuses on her opinion about others, I loved it. The comments about Lindbergh, Wallis Simpson and even the Roosevelt children are priceless. In these paragraphs, her ability as a newspaperwoman comes shining through. She captured Eleanor's character to the point you felt you could have been in the room with her. But it had a tendency to get overly mushy at times and that got old pretty fast. Flip side, she paints FDR in a harsh light, especially how he treats Missy LeHand.

Bloom does a good job of distinguishing between the acceptance of FDR's affairs and the lack of the same for Eleanor and Hick. It definitely wasn't an attitude of what's good for the goose...

This is a good book for showing the difference between the public and private personas of the first couple. They were lucky to have at least lived in an age when they were allowed to have a private persona that the press was willing to keep hidden.

It's a beautifully written book. Hick's, or should I say Bloom's, descriptions are spot on. An aging FDR's face as an "aristocratic Jesus, hanging off the cross". In fact, Bloom has done such a great job that never once did I think it was anything but Hick's voice I was hearing.

My thanks to netgalley and Random House for an advance copy of this book.

Brenda - Traveling Sister says

White Houses has been sitting on my shelf for some time and finally, I grabbed it off my shelf and found a grassy, shady spot to hide in a coulee till I finished reading this story

Amy Bloom beautifully captures the hidden love between Eleanor Roosevelt and journalist Lorena "Hick" Hickok. She does a fanatic job creating a compelling picture of the relationship between these very different women from different backgrounds. Though Hick's perspective she brings to life their relationship while giving us Hicks' take on Franklin Roosevelt and life in the White House. We see some history as well through Hicks' eyes that really added to the story.

Hick makes an interesting and compelling voice and she really steals the show here in this story for me. She is tough with brass knuckles who is funny and opinionated and I really enjoyed learning their story through her.

White Houses was a very interesting read for me as it pulled into the story yet at times I found myself uninterested in parts but still completely drawn into the emotional depth of this brilliantly written story. I highly recommend.

Thank you to NetGalley, Random House and Amy Bloom for a copy to read and review.

Review written and posted on our themed book blog Two Sisters Lost In A Coulee Reading.

<https://twosisterslostinacoulee.com>

Coulee: a term applied rather loosely to different landforms, all of which refer to a kind of valley.

***TUDOR^QUEEN* says**

This is a work of historical fiction about first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her romantic relationship with American journalist Lorena Hickok (nicknamed "Hick"). Born in Wisconsin, Hickok triumphed over a disastrous childhood to eventually become a reporter for the Associated Press (AP). She was assigned to cover Franklin D. Roosevelt's first presidential campaign when she established a close friendship with the future First Lady.

I had an unusual experience reading this book in that I tore through the first third of the book during a short evening, it was so riveting. This occurred while reading about Hick's horrible childhood. Ironically enough, once I transitioned to the next two thirds of the book covering Hick's existence while living amidst the Franklins, I found it much less interesting. While I had an emotional investment in the trevails of Hick's wretched youth and admired her triumph over adversity, I didn't feel that connection to the adult version of her character. I'm not sure if it comes down to her not being likeable or a lack of depth to the writing. Perhaps the sheer poignancy of her upbringing was enough to lure me in, but the rest of the book (sadly) left me wanting.

Thank you to the publisher and NetGalley for providing this advance reader copy in return for my honest review.

Roman Clodia says

I said that the Potsdam diner was a delight. She said that after the funeral there was corned beef and cabbage and homemade beer. She said the service was Irish Catholic and heartfelt. I hung up my coat and made a show of taking out my notebook and doing my job, and asking about her husband's ambitions.

Lordy lord, if you can manage to read such flat, 'told', random prose then you're more tolerant than I am. I'm really intrigued by this relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and 'Hick', a lesbian journalist who moved into the White House during FDR's presidency - but this book didn't work for me at all.

Firstly, the prose just doesn't flow: there are whole paragraphs where every sentence begins either 'I' or 'I've' ('I've done the flowers... I got stock and snapdragons... I've put a vaseful... I've straightened up the four rooms... I've gone to the corner grocery... I hope... I bought' - all from just the first page!) which makes the reading stilted and dull.

On top of this, the whole story feels shallow and superficial: there's no sense of history, the White House could be any suburban home, and there's little attention to the politics and causes which consumed Eleanor Roosevelt in real life. Even the lesbian affair is normalised and made boring: 'We came back from our northern holiday more in love than when we'd left. People could see it a mile away' - is that really how a sexual relationship between two women, one of them married to the President, would have been regarded in the 1930s?

Characterisation, too, is paper-thin, and there's no chemistry or heat between our lovers. I learned more about the complicated ways in which Eleanor Roosevelt negotiated ideas and ideals of womanhood and wifeliness from a chapter in *What She Ate: Six Remarkable Women and the Food That Tells Their Stories* than I did in this whole novel.

There's a great story clamouring to get out but sadly this novel doesn't do it justice.

Thanks to the publisher for an ARC via NetGalley.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

5 starting-my-new-year-in-reading-with-an-absolute-BANG ? ? ? stars to White Houses ? ? ? ? ?

My grandmother had a saying that what you were doing when the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve is what you will be doing all year long. I always thought it was some kind of scare tactic. ? I shared that with some of my book friends, and they were told a similar saying, but instead it's what you do on New Year's Day. I'll take that and run with it because I was reading *this* book on *that* day, and you know what that means?! I'm in for a bang-up reading year! ?

Amy Bloom knows how to weave a story. I don't even think it took me a full paragraph to become immersed. *White Houses* is told from Lorena Hickok's point of view, as if she's talking right to you and

telling you the story. What a life she has to share with the reader. She had a tough childhood infused with abuse and abandonment, but wow, did she ever come out swinging as a journalist for Associated Press asked to cover FDR's first run for president.

This book is about Lorena Hickok's life, but even more than that, it's a tale of friendship, devotion, and love; love between Lorena and Eleanor Roosevelt. This is a work of fiction, and I had to remind myself of that repeatedly. It truly reads like the most fascinating memoir. While I now know there are a large number of letters available between Lorena and Eleanor, there's a lot left to interpretation, which historians have long-debated. In this book, whether it's true or not, it was genuine and immersive. I was mesmerized by their love for each other- hook, line, and sinker.

I want to be careful, though, and say that this book is NOT a romance, nor is it a historical romance. It's most definitely historical fiction with a strong backdrop of early 20th century life- from The World's Fair, the Lindbergh kidnapping, and FDR's presidency (and his affairs...). It just so happens that an alluring companionship between Eleanor and Lorena unfolds within these pages.

Thank you a million times to Amy Bloom, Random House, and Netgalley for the early copy. **White Houses will be published on February 13, 2018.**

Angela M says

Whenever I read fictionalized accounts of famous people I always wonder about what really happened. I especially wonder about their conversations and I have to keep reminding myself that I'm reading a work of fiction. Amy Bloom in this wonderfully written book, imagines the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lenora Hickok, an AP reporter who becomes Eleanor's "first friend" and actually for a time moves into the White House. While I did wonder here what actually happened and what was imagined, what their relationship was really like, the story definitely has a real feel to it and almost reads like Lorena's memoir as it is told from her point of view. The two could not have come from more opposite backgrounds and while we get glimpses from their conversations of the privileged, upper crust family that Eleanor was raised in, we get more details about Lenora's sad childhood of poverty and abuse.

The narrative moves back and forth from the 1945, just after FDR died as Eleanor summons Lenora to her side. They have not been together for a long time, but their beginnings and past relationship is told by Lenora and we get a better understanding of what these two women meant to each other. The joyful descriptions of their trips together as well as other times spent together in the White House depict a loving relationship. I couldn't help but be thankful that Eleanor had Lenora as her solace, while FDR carried on his extramarital affairs in the White House and their children always seeming to favor their father. Another aspect of the book that I really liked was how through their story, the time and events around them are depicted such as the Depression and some interesting things about The Lindbergh kidnapping.

I was hoping that Bloom would have included sources. Since what I read is an advanced copy, I hope that in the final version they will be listed . I did enjoy it for sure. It's 3.5+ stars for me and that reflects my own dilemma with this type of book, based on real people, but I have to move it up to 4 stars because the writing is not to be missed.

Thanks once again to Diane and Esil for another terrific read together, which we have made into a monthly event.

I received an advanced copy of this book from Random House Publishing Group - Random House through NetGalley.

Darlene says

"No love like old love."

-'White Houses' by Amy Bloom

Much has been written about the Roosevelt family over the years; in particular, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor. And much has been written about the Roosevelts' marriage. President Roosevelt's extramarital affairs have been whispered about, scrutinized and have also been the subject of various books. But what about Eleanor? Eleanor Roosevelt, being an intelligent, independent and outspoken fighter for her husband's policies and social justice, has never inspired the public to think of her as long-suffering. In recent years, a book entitled 'Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair that Shaped a First Lady' by Susan Quinn presented Eleanor in a way that many in the American public had never imagined.. an Eleanor Roosevelt who had a 'secret' love of her own with former Associated Press reporter, Lorena Hickok. This discovery of the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok was made at the Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. Although Lorena Hickok destroyed hundreds of letters that had been exchanged with Eleanor Roosevelt, she saved about 3,000 letters, which she donated to the Roosevelt Library upon her death. Amy Bloom, the author of this novel, White Houses, spent many hours reading these letters and was inspired to write this imaginative and poignant fictionalized account of their love affair... a relationship which reached its peak from 1932-1936, but would also continue to be a deep and caring friendship and love which would last until Eleanor's death in 1962.

White Houses begins after President Roosevelt's death in April 1945. The story is told entirely in the voice of Lorena Hickok, moving backward and forward through time and weaving together her personal story with the years her life intersected with the life of Eleanor Roosevelt. From the very first paragraph, Amy Bloom masterfully sets not only the scene but also the mood. The story begins with Lorena Hickok's palpable feelings of nervous anticipation, sadness and longing. Eleanor's husband, the president, has just died and to further complicate the sorrow associated with his death, she also learns that Franklin had not been alone at the time of his death, but with his mistress. Lorena is aware of Eleanor's complex feelings and she is aware that she has been summoned to meet Eleanor in New York BECAUSE of her understanding and awareness of how Eleanor feels about her husband. But she is also nervous and excited... the two had parted ways long ago and had not seen each other, but those persistent feelings she had held close for Eleanor have resurfaced and she is struggling for control.

"I sit down on the living room couch to wait. I used to be able to read Eleanor's heart, when I saw her face, and I worry that I can't anymore. I expect to see her gray with Roosevelt suffering, the kind that must not only be borne but must be seen to be borne, elegantly, elegantly, showing her great effort to be patient with everyone's sadness.... That's what I am expecting , but I hope that in the mix of her feelings for Franklin, sorrow at his death and grief for her children and for the country, she'll be glad to see me. I want her to feel that with me, she's home, like it used to be. She sent me away eight years ago, and I left. Two days ago, she called me to come and I came."

Through Lorena Hickok's voice, we learn of her early life.. growing up in grinding poverty in a small town in South Dakota, with a weak and ineffective mother and a cruel and abusive father. After her mother's death,

Lorena (who was 13), was exiled from the family home by her father and was sent out into the world with her few possessions to make it on her own. Through her shared snippets of memory, we begin to form an impression of this woman... intelligent, capable and street smart. Eventually, she becomes a reporter for 'The Milwaukee Sentinel' where she learns to fit in with the 'newspapermen'... covering Big 10 football, hanging out in bars and drinking scotch with the 'guys' and listening sympathetically to their troubles with girlfriends and wives. 'Hick' (as she was called by her fellow reporters), learned how to survive and thrive in a 'man's world' and I was struck later in the book that perhaps this was one of the qualities Eleanor Roosevelt found so appealing.

Hick was sent to Albany, New York to interview Eleanor Roosevelt during Franklin Roosevelt's first campaign for the presidency. The two saw each other every week of the campaign and became friends. It was perhaps Eleanor's dignity and poise in the face of her struggles with her philandering husband, and her sometimes entitled and disappointing children, which made Hick take notice. Regardless, wherever Eleanor went, Lorena was beside her. A trust grew between the two and in 1932, their romance blossomed.... a romance that would be an 'open secret' in the White House. (I have to mention that it was startling to discover that this very intimate relationship between these two women, one of whom was the First Lady of the United States, could have continued for so long and not become public knowledge. This certainly could not happen in 2018.)

I loved the way Amy Bloom wrote the story of the love affair between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok. On the surface, both were intelligent and capable women and yet, both women seemed to recognize an insecurity, sadness and loneliness in each other. These qualities drew them together and they found in each other someone to laugh with and someone to trust. Eleanor and Hick were not young; nor, were they beautiful. In fact, they frequently joked with each other about their appearance, saying....
"Eleanor and I were not conventional beauties. That's what we'd say and we'd laugh to underscore conventional, as if maybe we were some other kind."

One of the things that appealed to me most about how Amy Bloom told this love story was that she wove the story around the idea that love CAN and DOES develop in middle age... the idea that these two women could find beauty in each other at a time in life when some women often struggle with the realization that they have become invisible in a society which seems to only value youth is irresistible to me. And Lorena Hickok's memories of her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt are written with a sensuality that I found breathtakingly beautiful... and I read some of those passages over and over. Sitting alone after she learns of Eleanor's death in 1962, Lorena is caught up in her memories of the times she shared with Eleanor; and her memories are vivid and crisp, even though it had been years since the two had seen each other. She recalls... It's been seventeen years and I can still smell her own scent, salt and cucumber.... We sleep naked as babies, breasts and bellies rolling toward each other, our legs entwined like climbing roses. We used to say we're no beauties because it was impossible to tell the truth. In bed, we were beauties. We were goddesses. We were the little girls we'd never been: loved, saucy, delighted, and delightful."

I loved, LOVED this novel! I was drawn into Lorena Hickok's memories from the first page. Amy Bloom created a beautiful story which stripped away all the extraneous trappings of societal norms, social class and the illusion of power... and didn't REDUCE these characters, but instead lifted them up. And what we, as readers, are left with is so simple and yet so often elusive... love. Although it perhaps sounds trite, this is a novel about love... in all of its bittersweet glory.

Diane S ? says

3.5 A fly on the wall, that is how I felt reading this novel. Told from the viewpoint of Hick, we are privy to intimate glimpses of her relationship with Eleanor, as well as glimpses into the secrets of those living in the White House. Roosevelt and his harem, as Hick calls them, the way his polio was hidden, and the relationship he and Eleanor had with their children.

The book opens a short time after Roosevelt's death, and circles back to this period often. This is very much Hicks story though, so we also learn details of her early life, which doesn't make for pretty reading. She had a hard beginning, and in one part, though it is short lived there is some horrific happenings with a few animals, and sexual abuse. Difficult to read, and is easily skimmed over, but an important part of Hicks story, letting the reader understand what a determined individual she was, willing to fight for those she loved. Her determination to not give up let her to a life far above her beginnings.

A poignant glimpse into her and Eleanor's relationships, the ups and downs, the need for secrecy, always aware of how others perceived their relationship. Amazing how many things were not written about back then, not reported, seems much easier to hide things then in current times. We also see history happening through Hicks eyes, the personality of Eleanor, and how she felt about what was happening in the world.

The prose is wonderful, clear and concise, one of those books where not a word is wasted. I do think readers who love history, or the lives of Eleanor and Franklin, will like this book best. It is very well done.

This was the December buddy read for Angela, Esil and myself. As always enjoyed our shared thoughts.

ARC from Netgalley.

Jennifer Blankfein says

I haven't stopped thinking about this gem of a book, the powerful telling of an unconventional love story by author Amy Bloom. White Houses is historical fiction, based on research and letters exchanged between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok, a journalist who was invited to live in the White House in an adjoining bedroom to the first lady's room during FDR's presidency. A story of soulmates – two, independent, bright and powerful women in a lesbian relationship – a hidden secret to the world yet happening right in front of everyone's eyes and seemingly accepted, by Eleanor's known to be philandering husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and their close social circle.

Lorena Hickok grew up in poverty in South Dakota and became a well known reporter. She met Eleanor in the early 1930s while covering the Roosevelt campaign and the two women develop a friendship that flourished into a more intimate relationship. Hick was a protector and admirer of both FDR and Eleanor and was forced to quit her high profile job at the Associated Press in order to stay true to them both. The middle aged women's relationship was challenging, complicated and on again off again, and with Eleanor in the public eye, there was pressure to withhold affection and then steal time away privately to be together. FDR and Hickok had a friendship and an understanding, and Eleanor had loyalties to them both.

The complexities of this enduring love between this unlikely twosome is intriguing and author Amy Bloom has created a compelling story with a strong voice and beautiful writing. Don't miss this one!

Please follow my blog <https://booknationbyjen.wordpress.com> for all reviews, recommendations and the occasional giveaway!

Larry H says

Fifty-five years after her death, and more than 70 years after she left the White House following her husband's death, Eleanor Roosevelt remains one of the most intriguing women in history. She certainly was a role model for trailblazing women not interested in being confined to the boxes in which society wants to contain them, but rather working to bring about change wherever it is needed.

While much is known about her public persona, her personal life has always remained more of an enigma. More and more, it is understood that her marriage to FDR was more one of convenience than romance, and while his affairs were the stuff of gossip, hers, with women, were kept more secret.

Perhaps Eleanor's most notable relationship was with Lorena "Hick" Hickok, once the most prominent female reporter in the U.S. Hick and Eleanor met in 1932 when Hick was covering FDR's campaign for president. Instantly smitten although the two come from vastly different worlds—the patrician Eleanor was both enchanted and horrified by Hick's rough-and-tumble exterior—after spending some time together their friendship deepens into intimacy.

Hick moves into the White House and becomes known as Eleanor's "first friend." Their relationship is as talked about within White House circles as FDR's are, but the president seems content if his wife is, and he gives Hick a job within the administration. And while it is clear both women love each other, Eleanor is conflicted about her feelings for Hick, her role as First Lady, and whether she should continue to enjoy her relationship, or whether she isn't a suitable match, and if she should set Hick free.

Amy Bloom's *White Houses* is a fictionalized account of the decades-long relationship between two women who have seen so much, yet still find wonder in each other, even at a time where such relationships could mean ruin. It's a story about how the power of love isn't always enough to see you through, but the strength of a friendship can power a relationship. It's also a story of a woman who grew up poorer than poor finds herself in the midst of a life she couldn't even begin to dream of, yet she can't have everything she wants.

"I wasn't in love with Eleanor. We had agreed that 'in love' had burned out after four years for us, the way it does for most of us, in two months or two years and, I guess, never for some lucky people. Instead of a trail of fire roaring through, those people get small candles steadily lighting the way home until death do they part, and only the young are stupid enough to think that those two old people, him gimping, her squinting, are not in love. I got by. I lived amputated, which sounds worse than it felt. I learned to do all kinds of large and small tasks, with part of me missing, and I feel pretty sure that the people who watched me in the world thought that I was entirely able-bodied."

White Houses follows the two women through three decades of their relationship, and flashes back to Hick's hardscrabble childhood and young adulthood, where she learned how to fend for herself. Although it moves a little slowly at times, it's a poignant love story and a look at history that I found fascinating, moving, and thought-provoking. Hick is brash and confident, yet she has a tender, vulnerable side that Eleanor often brings out in her, while Eleanor had two faces—the public woman bent on saving the world, and the private woman who just wanted to be loved but didn't know if she was worthy.

I have been a big fan of Amy Bloom's for a number of years and find her writing absolutely dazzling. This book is beautifully written, and while I didn't completely warm to Bloom's last few historical novels, preferring her more modern fiction, I really enjoyed this one. Her words conveyed the emotional conflict, the longing, and the protectiveness both women felt, and brought so much depth to this story.

NetGalley and Random House provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

Stacey says

White Houses is a timely read which I don't think Amy Bloom could have predicted. In response to a recent immigration border policy separating children and parents, First Ladies from past to present spoke out. If Eleanor Roosevelt was still alive, her voice might be the loudest. Secondly, June is Pride month and I can't help but think how Lorena would relish that with Eleanor and her linking arms.

The narration of White Houses is Lorena Hickok's point of view. There is the backstory of Lorena's youth, how she grew up poor and was forced to work at age eleven as a maid after her mother passed away. Drifting from job to job she found herself as a secretary where she learned to type. Using that skill, she worked her way up to be the most known female writer of the Associated Press. Lorena meets Eleanor when she was on assignment writing about Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign for president. After he wins the presidency, it becomes apparent that Franklin and Eleanor's marriage is one of convenience not passion. Franklin has his mistresses and Lorena has her own room in the White House. For three decades we follow the ups and downs of the relationship between these compassionate women.

Eleanor having debutante status and Lorena a hardscrabble youth, they couldn't be more opposite, but find solace in their "friendship". When a mutual friend tries to blackmail Lorena with going public about her affair with the First Lady, her brash personality is uncompromising leaving the blackmailer with nothing. It saddens me that Lorena takes a backseat in family affairs where she is hardly acknowledged, but in public she is referred to as the "first friend" and she is always by Eleanor's side. It feels like an unstated acceptance of their relationship.

At its very core, this is a love story about the deep, intimate feelings that First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok "Hick" had for each other. It's touching and beautiful.

Thank you NetGalley, Random House, and Amy Bloom for the opportunity to read the arc.
