

## Rebellion

Harper

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### Introduction

A sweeping debut that crosses continents and generations, *Rebellion* tells the story of Addie, Louisa, Hazel, and Juanlan: four women whose rebellions, big and small, are as unexpected as they are unforgettable.

At the heart of the novel lies a mystery: In 1900, Addie, an American missionary in China, goes missing during the Boxer Rebellion, leaving her family back home to wonder at her fate. Her sister Louisa—newly married and settled in rural Illinois—anticipates tragedy, certain that Addie’s fate is intertwined with her own legacy of loss.

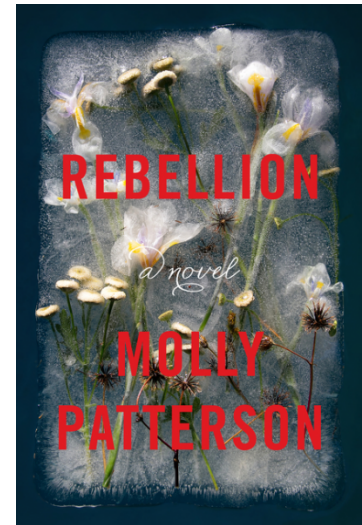
In 1958, Louisa’s daughter Hazel has her world upended by the untimely death of her husband. It’s harvest time, and with two small children and a farm to tend, she is determined to keep her land and family intact. Yet even while she learns to enjoy her independence, Hazel realizes that the tradeoff for some freedoms is more precious than expected.

Nearly half a century later, Juanlan has returned to her parents’ home in Heng’an. With her father ill, her sister-in-law soon to give birth, and the construction of a new highway rapidly changing the town she once knew, she feels pressured on every side by powers outside her control. Frustrated by obligation and the smallness of her own dreams, Juanlan at last dares to follow desire, only to discover an anger that cannot be contained.

Moving from rural Illinois to the far reaches of China, *Rebellion* brilliantly links through action and consequence the story of four women, spanning more than a century. From the secrets they keep and the adventures they embark on, to the passions that ultimately drive them forward, the characters at the center of this electric debut dramatically fight against expectation in pursuit of their own thrilling fates.

### Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways do each of the main characters—Addie, Louisa, Hazel, and Juanlan—rebel? What are they rebelling against?
2. Both the opening and closing chapters are distinctive in presenting self-contained stories. How do the “Driving” sections relate to the book’s themes, characters, or plots?



3. The novel's storylines concern more than a century of relations between China and the West. Previous to reading the novel, what did you know about missionaries in China, the Boxer Rebellion, or America's 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade? How did that knowledge (or lack of knowledge) affect your reading?
  4. Each of the central characters changes over the course of the novel. Which character do you think changes the most?
  5. In the past, Juanlan was never close with her sister-in-law, Lulu. Why do you think the two become fast friends upon Juanlan's return to Heng'an? What prevented them from being close before, and what allows them to come together now?
  6. In what ways is the relationship between Addie and Poppy shaped by the time period and culture in which they live? Do they share the same motivations for leaving Lucho Fu?
  7. The book opens with an elderly Hazel losing her independence after decades spent living alone on the farm. When the book introduces her again several chapters later, we meet her as a much younger woman, at a very different period in her life. How does knowing where she ends up color your impression of the story that unfolds? Did you find yourself thinking back to "Driving, 1999" as you read Hazel's later chapters?
  8. The novel presents several marriages over a period of time: Addie and Owen, Louisa and Bert, Lulu and Zhuo Ge, Lydie and George. Would you consider any/all of them "good marriages"? What makes a good marriage?
  9. The novel never makes clear whether Lydie knew of the affair between Hazel and George, and Hazel never confesses. What are the obligations of friendship? Does Hazel's caring for her friend at the end of her life atone for Hazel's betrayal?
  10. Juanlan is initially put off by Director Wei. Why does she eventually start up a relationship with him?
  11. How does the book portray different types of female friendship (Addie and Louisa, Addie and Poppy, Juanlan and Lulu, Hazel and Lydie)? Which pairing do you relate to the most?
  12. After returning to Heng'an, Juanlan interacts very differently with her mother than she does with her father. How does her attitude toward each reflect the tension between obligation and independence?
  13. Throughout the novel, characters feel responsible for outcomes they didn't cause: Louisa makes a bargain with God to spare her child's life in exchange for her sister's, and Addie wonders if leaving her husband and sons led to their death at the hands of the Boxers. Is such a feeling logical? Is there any value in the burden of guilt?
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14. In what ways is Poppy atypical of missionaries—and women in general—during the late 1800s?
  15. Zhuo Ge sees the building of a highway from Heng'an to Chengdu as a positive development, while Juanlan worries that her parents and the hotel will be left behind. In a rapidly changing society, what are the costs of swift modernization? What are the benefits?
  16. Addie burns the last letter she writes to Louisa. How would Louisa's life have been different if she had received this letter?
  17. Though the book suggests that Addie disappears into isolated regions of China, and signs of her presence are still apparent a century later, we never learn exactly how she lives out the rest of her days. What do you think becomes of her? Why do you believe she chose to leave her fate unknown, even to those closest to her, Poppy and Louisa?
  18. In "Driving, 1951" Edith recalls her brief childhood meeting with the woman we recognize as Poppy. Why do you think this moment has stayed with her? How are the two women representative of the times in which they lived, particularly with regards to their sexual identities?
  19. At the end of the book, we see Louisa losing her grasp on the present; more and more frequently, she is transported into the past. Some of her memories are accurate, while others are altered. Given the many losses and tragedies she has suffered over the course of her life, do you consider this final state a sad or a happy one?
  20. The opening chapter presents the Illinois farmhouse as it is cleared out and prepared for sale. At the close of the novel, Louisa returns in memory to an earlier version of the house, when it was just a small cabin and she was a young newlywed. What is the significance of the house on the farm? What does it represent for Louisa and Hazel? What story does it tell?
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