

The Lioness of Boston



About the Author

Emily Franklin is the bestselling author of more than twenty books, including a poetry collection, *Tell Me How You Got Here*. She grew up partially in Boston and partially in the United Kingdom.

Prior to becoming a writer, Franklin worked as an English teacher and a chef, and has even published a cooking memoir. Her bestselling books have been reviewed positively and featured by many media outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and National Public Radio. *The Lioness of Boston* is in its ninth printing.

About the Book: (from Goodreads)

A deeply evocative novel of the life of Isabella Stewart Gardner, a daring visionary who created an inimitable legacy in American art and transformed the city of Boston itself.

By the time Isabella Stewart Gardner opened her Italian palazzo-style home as a museum in 1903 to showcase her collection of old masters, antiques, and objects d'art, she was already well-known for scandalizing Boston's polite society. But when Isabella first arrived in Boston in 1861, she was twenty years old, newly married to a wealthy trader, and unsure of herself. Puzzled by the frosty reception she received from stuffy bluebloods, she strived to fit in. After two devastating tragedies and rejection from upper-society, Isabella discovered her spirit and cast off expectations.

Freed by travel, Isabella explores the world of art, ideas, and letters, meeting such kindred spirits as Henry James and Oscar Wilde. From London and Paris to Egypt and Asia, she develops a keen eye for paintings and objects, and meets feminists ready to transform nineteenth century thinking in the twentieth century. Isabella becomes an eccentric trailblazer, painted by John Singer Sargent in a portrait of daring décolletage, and fond of such stunts as walking a pair of lions in the Boston Public Garden.

The Lioness of Boston is a portrait of what society expected a woman's life to be, shattered by a courageous soul who rebelled and was determined to live on her own terms.

Suggested Reads:

- *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict
- *The Art Forger* by B.A. Shapiro
- *Clara and Mr. Tiffany* by Susan Vreeland

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Discussion Questions

1. Isabella is rejected early in her Boston life. How does this rejection influence her character? Are there ways this rejection helps her?
2. What draws Isabella to Jack? What do you think she's looking for in a friend, or in a romantic relationship? Do you think she finds it? Who — or what — is Isabella's greatest love?
3. Isabella isn't an artist, yet she does have an artistic vision. How do you see this vision throughout the book, prior to the opening of the museum?
4. Is there a scene that resonated most for you personally? If so, why?
5. What did you learn about Boston history or world history that you did not know prior to reading this novel?
6. Isabella says that we collect all that we are. Is there an object in your own home that tells a story about you? Or a collection?
7. How does Isabella's older voice looking back differ from the voice in book 1 – 4?
8. What story elements surprised you?
9. Isabella was the first woman to open a museum in the United States. She decided in her will to state that nothing be moved. Why?
10. Were you compelled to look up any works of art or details from the novel? If so, which ones and why?
11. Why do you think The Lioness of Boston is the title of this novel?