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Book Review-The Sisters Montclair

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Off the SHELF

The Sisters Montclair by Cathy Holton. Branwell Books, 2011. ISBN 978-1-93852-900-9 Price: \$15.99.

The hilarious dialogue between poor struggling student Stella Nightingale and rich 94-year-old Alice Whittington, who is well along in dementia, leads to a denouement which will knock the reader's socks off. Equally contributing to the novel, but much more subtle, is the comparison of the social attitudes of two very different eras, the '30s and the present time. Of the three Montclair sisters, Alice, Laura, and Adeline, Alice and Adeline survive to condemn the manners, attitude, speech, and dress of present day. Both Alice and Stella are hiding tragic secrets. Alice talks in her sleep when the demons come about the death of Laura. Stella tries valiantly to function well under the burden of stark abandonment by her mother and scarring abuse by her stepfather. The story is set in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Holton very effectively sets the tone of the strict divisions of social class of the '30s, painting with garish colors the glaring arrogance, fixation with family pedigree, and false sense of entitlement of the rich and the

well-off. The old-money rich lived on Lookout Mountain. Signal Mountain held the doctors, lawyers, and engineers: the people who ran the city. Stella, a poor student who is running out of money, is forced to apply for a job as caregiver to an old lady. The old lady turns out to be Alice. Holton makes good use of flashbacks to fill out the back-story on both central characters, always appreciated by the reader. Of the plot lines of the book, the comparison of ages, and the flashbacks of struggles for both characters, by far the most entertaining elements are the hilarious two-person dialogues between Alice and Stella. Holton will be recognized for choosing to treat the closet rebel Alice's creeping dementia as a chance for gentle, sweet comedy rather than the usual sad faced "tsk-tsking" and purse-mouthed clucking. Alice and Stella do powerfully bridge the gap between generations to once again demonstrate the power of the individual. Nevertheless, the kicker will still knock your socks off.

Malcolm Nelson, Library Supporter, Cherokee Regional Library System