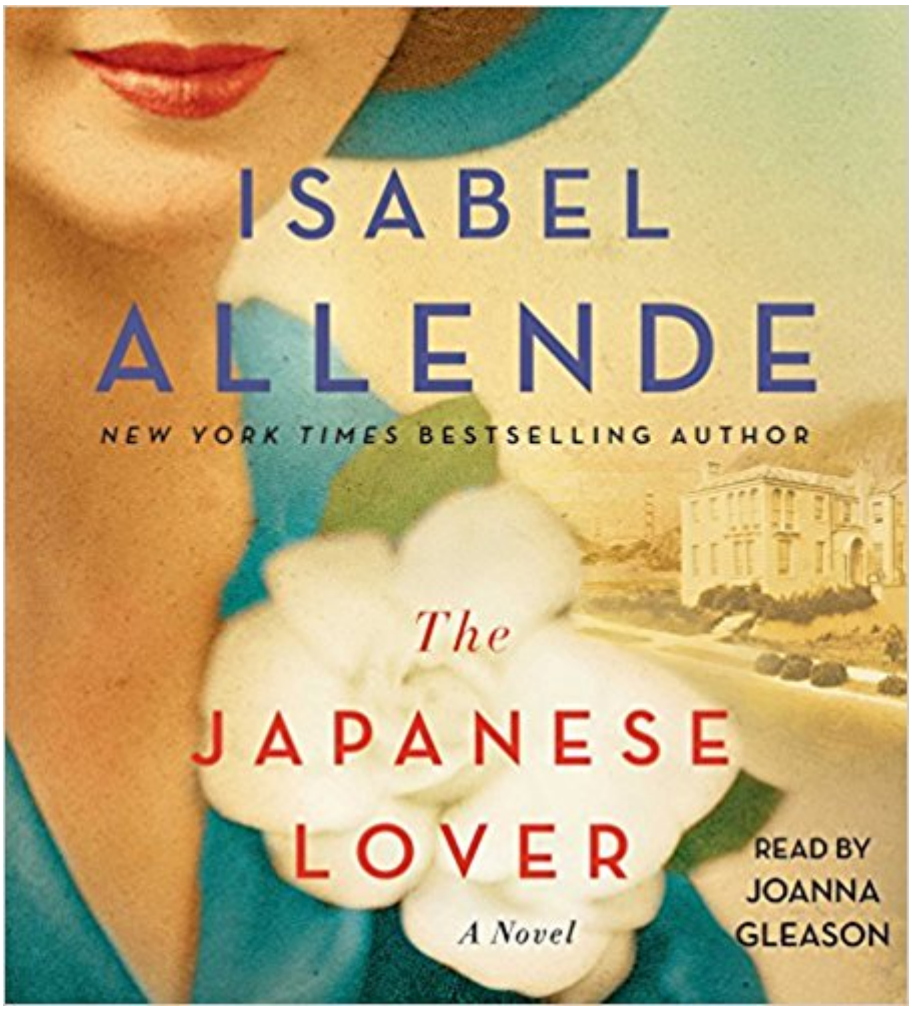
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The Japanese Lover



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Synopsis

From New York Times and internationally bestselling author Isabel Allende, an exquisitely crafted love story and multigenerational epic that sweeps from San Francisco in the present-day to Poland and the United States during the Second World War.In 1939, as Poland falls under the shadow of the Nazis, young Alma BelascoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s parents send her away to live in safety with an aunt and uncle in their opulent mansion in San Francisco. There, as the rest of the world goes to war, she encounters Ichimei Fukuda, the quiet and gentle son of the familyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Japanese gardener. Unnoticed by those around them, a tender love affair begins to blossom. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the two are cruelly pulled apart as Ichimei and his familyÃ¢â ¬â •like thousands of other Japanese AmericansÃ¢â ¬â •are declared enemies and forcibly relocated to internment camps run by the United States government. Throughout their lifetimes, Alma and Ichimei reunite again and again, but theirs is a love that they are forever forced to hide from the world. Decades later, Alma is nearing the end of her long and eventful life. Irina Bazili, a care worker struggling to come to terms with her own troubled past, meets the elderly woman and her grandson, Seth, at San FranciscoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s charmingly eccentric Lark House nursing home. As Irina and Seth forge a friendship, they become intrigued by a series of mysterious gifts and letters sent to Alma, eventually learning about Ichimei and this extraordinary secret passion that has endured for nearly seventy years. Sweeping through time and spanning generations and continents, The Japanese Lover explores questions of identity, abandonment, redemption, and the unknowable impact of fate on our lives. Written with the same attention to historical detail and keen understanding of her characters that Isabel Allende has been known for since her landmark first novel The House of the Spirits, The Japanese Lover is a profoundly moving tribute to the constancy of the human heart in a world of unceasing change.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

’Lush storytelling, with a liberal dusting of South American magical realism and a multigenerational narrative sweep ... The Japanese Lover has all the ingredients of classic Allende: love, secrecy, fate; stories within stories; the arc of history; and a certain robustness and ability for reinvention on the part of her characters’ Financial Times on The Japanese Lover ’A magical and sweeping tale ... remarkable ... heartbreaking’ Publishers Weekly on The Japanese Lover --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Born in Peru and raised in Chile, Isabel Allende is the author of a number of bestselling and critically acclaimed books, including The House of the Spirits, Eva Luna, Stories of Eva Luna, Of Love and Shadows, and Paula. Her latest novel is The Japanese Lover. Her books have been translated into more than thirty-five languages and have sold more than 65 million copies worldwide. She lives in California. Her website is IsabelAllende.com.

* I was drawn to this book’s provocative title because of three reasons: 1) I’m a Japanese-American who was born in Japan; 2) my extended family was touched by racial tensions during and after World War II, including incarceration in U.S. internment camps, and, 3) my wife is not Asian (she’s Hispanic). Noting the aforementioned, I requested and was approved to receive an advance review copy from the publisher - without committing to write a review.* When it comes to matters of love and romance - why do some of us, with just one shot at life - choose safer harbors - despite being lucky enough to meet someone who’s truly "the one"? When forced to think about the "one who got away" - obviously regrets are framed in higher relief as we pass 50, 60, 70 and - if we’re like the Polish-American matriarch in this novel (Alma Belasco) - pass age 80 and beyond.* Author Isabel Allende’s huge base of mostly female readers - just added a male fan. "The Japanese Lover," with a few exceptions, is a wonderful read, an epic romance that stretches from 1939 to 2013. It adds a wrinkle to the interracial "forbidden love" trope - by featuring a pairing between a Caucasian woman and an Asian man - which in my view, is still far less common in the U.S. today compared to pairings between Asian women and Caucasian men.* Despite the 74-year-long timeline, the writing and plotting in "The Japanese Lover" moves smartly and swiftly, combining historic events with an

international romance that endures many credible obstacles. Readers are taken from Poland to Texas to San Francisco - as the author integrates a vast array of observations through dialogue and exposition, i.e., the desperate exodus of Jews before the Holocaust - the internment of Japanese-Americans in the U.S. - the cultural differences between peoples, East vs. West - the state of interracial relations in America, then vs. now - the life-long impacts of child pornography on its victims - the working culture inside assisted living and nursing homes - the ideology behind secret suicide planning among the terminally ill - the state of gay sub-culture before the 1970s - the politics of left vs. right in liberal San Francisco - and, most crucially to this story - the socio-economic class divisions and their relationship to women who choose mates for security and comfort - vs. women who choose mates based on romantic matters of the heart, despite their adverse impact on social status and on affluent lifestyles.* This book may not be considered great literature, because the threads and pathways related to forbidden love are well-worn, e.g., the author invokes the familiar trick of using present day Millennials to inspire an old woman to "look back" - while proffering the suggestion that racial differences become less salient to romance as time marches on. And in terms of character development, the women in this tale fare better than the men - insofar that Ichimei ("Ichi") Fukuda - the eponymous "Japanese Lover" - feels mildly opaque compared to his enigmatic heroine, Alma Belasco. Veteran Allende fans have pointed out how and why this novel fell short compared to her earlier works, and they’re not wrong.* Yet "The Japanese Lover" - for the first-time Allende reader - is still entertaining and well-paced, capturing a love affair that feels neither cheap nor tawdry nor explicit - while sub-textually presenting grand themes about aging and how they affect the way we look at past relationships - which in turn conjures up the old ponderable - that romance might be just an infinite series of "what ifs?" - while everything else is "life as it all turned out." While some might feel let down by the ending, I loved it because - without giving it away - it suggests that self-deception among mature adults is common to preserve a euphoria - that we once felt would be as eternal as our own youth.* In sum, past regrets and guilt gives way to resignation - and finally - to a satisfied acceptance of a life well-lived, making the most of what’s given as we pass quickly through the universe. This book is a winner. Grade: A-.

Reviewed by Francesca and posted at Under The Covers Book BlogTHE JAPANESE LOVER is a beautiful life story about two women. One at the end of her complicated life, and one at a crossroads in the middle where she has to overcome her past. Alma Belasco, originally from Polland, came to live with her aunt and uncle in the US when she was a little girl. They gave her a lavish life catering to her every whim, raising her in a society where she never has to want for

anything. During her childhood, she becomes best friends with a Japanese boy. Although life tears them apart, that friendship marks her life and throughout the years, as their relationship changes, becomes the biggest part of who she is. Friendship turns into love, turns into loss and pain.We meet Alma when sheÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s an old woman living in a retirement home. Her only companions? Her grandson Seth and one of the caretakers at the home, Irina. The second woman we get to meet in this book and whose life becomes forever changed by this story. SheÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s young and down on her luck, having a past that tortures her every day. But itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Alma and her story, and eventually Seth and his love, that make a big difference for Irina.This is a beautifully heartbreaking story about life, love and mistakes. Love had, love lost. Love that can withstand the test of time. Love that can help heal. But also centers around prejudice and how it can break someone and get in the way of happiness. Although this story is a bit understated, and it starts off slower than I wouldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve liked, by the time it gets going you canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t help but get lost in these characters and want to know more. I felt like a little kid waiting for grandma to tell the story of her life. Her adventures. The format in which itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s told going back and forth between past and present, was perfect to show the reader how they got here. And the ending is bittersweet. This is definitely a book that surprised me by making me shed a tear on more than one occasion because the writing was so subdued, the emotions snuck up on me.As much as I enjoyed this book a lot, I have to admit I couldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t help but compare it to her other work and see it fall short of my expectations. Isabel Allende is legendary in her writing and I canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t quite see this as being up there with her classics. However, if you go into it with a clear mind or if this is your first foray into her writing, I believe you wonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t be disappointed with this story full of depth.

I have read books by Isabel Allende before and didn’t like them, but I thought I’d give this one a shot now that I’m older. I still don’t like her writing style, and find her books boring. I’m sure I’m in the minority, because she’s won a lot of awards and she doesn’t really need me as a fan, but this book was a drag.

I hope "The Japanese Lover" was not published under the genre of "literature." I don’t read romances but the novel would seem to fall in that category, when love triumphs above all else. Nothing in the bookfeels real, not the nursing home nor its inhabitants. I suggest that any potential reader skip this book. I am sorry I recommended it for my book club.

One Third of the books is composed of describing different people every other day. Many are not important to the story. The book starts at the end, goes to the middle, then the end and so on. Only in the last part of the book does the reader learn the whole story. I detest this type of novel. The most interesting part of the book is the description of Japanese lives inside and outside of the internment camp during WWII. I have Allende's books and liked them but not this one.

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