



The Translation of Love: A Novel

Lynne Kutsukake

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An emotionally gripping portrait of post-war Japan, where a newly repatriated girl must help a classmate find her missing sister.

After spending the war years in a Canadian internment camp, thirteen-year-old Aya Shimamura and her father are faced with a gut-wrenching choice: *Move east of the Rocky Mountains or go “back” to Japan.* Barred from returning home to the west coast and bitterly grieving the loss of Aya’s mother during internment, Aya’s father signs a form that enables the government to deport them.

But war-devastated Tokyo is not much better. Aya’s father struggles to find work, compromising his morals and toiling long hours. Meanwhile Aya, born and raised in Vancouver, is something of a pariah at her school, bullied for being foreign and paralyzed when asked to communicate in Japanese. Aya’s alienation is eventually mitigated by one of her principal tormentors, a willful girl named Fumi Tanaka, whose older sister has mysteriously disappeared.

When a rumor surfaces that General MacArthur, who is overseeing the Occupation, might help citizens in need, Fumi enlists Aya to compose a letter asking him to find her beloved sister. The letter is delivered into the reluctant hands of Corporal Matt Matsumoto, a Japanese American serving with the Occupation forces, whose endless job is translating the thousands of letters MacArthur receives each week. Matt feels an affinity toward Fumi but is largely powerless, and the girls decide to take matters into their own hands, venturing into the dark and dangerous underside of Tokyo’s Ginza district.

Told through rich, interlocking storylines, *The Translation of Love* mines this turbulent period to show how war irrevocably shapes the lives of people on both sides—and yet the novel also allows for a poignant spark of resilience, friendship, and love that translates across cultures and borders to stunning effect.

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