



by Johanna Adorján
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Fiction

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An Exclusive Love

Eine exklusive Liebe

review

In this vivid and highly personal novel Johanna Adorján focuses on the lives and deaths of her paternal grandparents, a Hungarian Jewish couple who met at a musical evening in Budapest and committed suicide together in Denmark after many wartime tribulations on discovering that the husband, István (shortened to Pista), was suffering from terminal cancer. The early part of their relationship is dominated by the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944, during which two-thirds of Hungary's Jewish population were killed, many of them gunned down in mass shootings on the banks of the Danube. Pista, a surgeon, was deported to Mauthausen concentration camp, and remained silent afterwards on what he may have been forced to do there. Then came their postwar lives in Communist-dominated Hungary. The author considers the role her grandparents played in shaping her own identity, particularly in relation to questions of Jewishness and her own mixed German, Hungarian and Danish heritage. She remarks on how meticulously her grandparents planned their own deaths, and observes how many other victims of the camps also committed suicide.

A powerful, reflective and thought-provoking work, with echoes of similar recent treatments of the theme but distinct in its own right.

press quotes

'This is an intense, complex, uplifting, passionate, painful and often hilarious story of love. And a story of a quest for love. And a story of a quest for a history that is at once personal and universal. A past that is part of the present. Johanna Adorján with her highly intelligent, idiosyncratic and acute observations and perceptions tells us of a great love and a difficult history that in a sense belongs to all of us.' – Lily Brett

about the author

Johanna Adorján, born in 1971 in Stockholm and now living in Berlin, began by studying theatre and opera directing. She has worked as an editor and freelance author for various newspapers and magazines and since 2001 has been editor of the culture section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* in Berlin. She has written plays for the theatre, and a screenplay that was filmed by Ed Herzog.

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