



The Book of Loss

Julith Jedamus

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Set in the perfectly realized world of imperial tenth-century Japan, *The Book of Loss* is a gripping novel of sexual jealousy at court.

A renowned storyteller and lady-in-waiting to the Empress, the narrator is locked in a bitter rivalry with another woman for the love of a banished nobleman. Forced to observe the complex rules and social hierarchies of court life, she finds herself caught in a trap of her own making. Her machinations reach such a pitch that they threaten to undermine the rule of the Emperor himself. She records her plight, and her acidulous observations of courtly life, in her diary. Her voice is unforgettable--both foreign and utterly modern. Her sense of loss is unbearable, her love is all-consuming, and it will push her to the extremes of rivalry.

Offering the intimate seductions and betrayals of *Dangerous Liaisons* and *The Memoirs of a Geisha*, *The Book of Loss* takes the reader into the farthest reaches of desire, where passion rules and jealousy leads to unthinkable acts.

The Book of Loss Details

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Author : Julith Jedamus

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Anna says

I would give it another half-star at least, but the ending was not as conclusive as I'd like.

Two ladies-in-waiting in the Heian Japanese court--where noblewomen live mostly closeted indoors, hidden behind screens and fans with little to do besides choosing gowns and writing or reading poetry--compete for the same womanizing man, who has recently been exiled for seducing a princess. The older woman starts a rumor to make her rival doubt the absent man's devotion, but this one rumor unexpectedly leads to catastrophic consequences for many others. Written as the older woman's diary, this introspective novel is a very interesting study of attachment, jealousy and moving on (or not, as the case may be).

Enid says

I enjoyed reading this diary. I enjoyed the writing style of Julith Jedamus. This would make a great movie.

Aisyah Cappy says

"The Book of Loss" is set in medieval Japan during the Heian period, and it's a story of politics in court life, and how the spreading of a few whispered rumours can ruin reputations and destroy lives. It's the story of jealousy, obsession, rivalry-in-love and revenge within the royal Heian society, told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator through the pages of her diary ... so it's kind of like "Gossip Girl", but with ancient Japanese royalty instead of rich kids on 5th Avenue. :P

I cannot emphasize how much I love this book. I was SO fascinated at how complex and subtle Japanese society was during that time -- even the type of paper you choose to write your letter can convey your true intentions, more so than the actual words. One scene that really stood out for me was when the Empress was speaking to the Narrator: on the surface, the conversation was about choosing different material to wear at a festival, but the real context of the conversation was the Empress confronting the Narrator on spreading rumours slandering the First Princess without directly mentioning it.

I keep returning to this book and re-reading passages of it, and discovering new things about the psychology of the diary-writer. Was she emotionally scarred by being abandoned by her lover? Were her slanderous rumours about the First Princess justified? All-in-all, it's a great look at court politics, intrigue, heartbreak, love, obsession and manipulation, set against the beautiful backdrop of an ancient Japan on the brink of fading away.

Aria Zepellin says

"But if I read it very closely I am sure that I see, hidden in the expanse between each line, evidence that he loves me."

Books set in historical periods are many, but books as well researched and as vivid as this are far and few in between. The author fills her pages with lines upon lines of the setting, allowing one to picture the scene as they deem, to smell the story and the people, to hear the words that they whisper to each other. Jealousy, deceit and secrets are the prevailing theme behind the story, as is love (definitely) and suspicion. Personally, jealousy is a theme I hardly understand myself, being an emotion that I refuse to associate with. However, after the book, I find myself recalling the narrator's words. Weeks later, her words still resonate with me, with a clarity that I find surprising. The depth and power of her love, but also the depth and power of reputation and rumour is something that is still very much sound in today's time.

Generally, the book is highly entertaining and very captivating in its poignance and its capacity to move. I found that from time to time I did find myself getting slightly annoyed at the situation presented, but perhaps it must have been normal in the era. Regardless, her words are fluid and dynamic, and reminiscent of a time long gone. As feminine as her prose is, she paints strong characters who have their own story despite the lack of a prior introduction. Subtle hints are placed throughout the story, waiting for an observant and keen reader to pick up on them. Something that strikes very strongly is the way the female characters (the main ones) push against barriers of gender set in that period to be modern and to "rebel" against the pressures of being female. Absolutely amazing, and would read this again and again and again.

"So he is lonely, and he misses me a little. I shall write again and see if I can make him miss me more." Your thoughts, are mine.

Literary Chanteuse says

I enjoyed the writing and the story became intriguing the more I read, however the ending was very abrupt. There was a prologue which gave an insight to the characters and their fates but, by the end of the novel I needed to review it. I would have been satisfied with more of an conclusive ending. Over all not a bad book.

Kate says

The Book of Loss is one of those rare novels in which you can absolutely hate the protagonist and everything she stands for, but still like the story. That's usually a pretty difficult thing—after all, if you're too busy wanting to slap the shit out of some whiney character, then the tale itself usually falls by the wayside. Yet, author Julith Jedamus has formed a world where every character has some pretty glaring flaws; it's just a matter of shades of gray.

Jedamus's novel takes place in Heian Japan, in the muffled halls of the Imperial Court. While the world outside steadily goes to hell by way of plague and mismanagement, the interior of the female quarter is going through a war of its own. The unnamed narrator leaves us a diary that chronicles her rage as her exiled lover, Tachibana no Kanesuke, transfers his affections to her younger, prettier rival, Izumi no Jiju. Our narrator's jealousy and paranoia grows until it shakes the very heart of the Empire.

Like I mentioned before, the narrator is pitiful and rather unlikeable, not only through her actions, but through her very unreliability as a narrator. We only see within her warped little world and rarely catch a glimpse of the reactions of others in a society where emotions of the sort are taboo. Granted, she was thoroughly wronged by Kanesuke and Izumi, but we never get a firm feeling as to whether they truly

deserves the amount of rage the narrator invests in them. Jedamus has used Imperial Japan's veiled society to create a situation where the reader feels eternally off balanced and, as a result, always on her toes.

Bekii says

I chose this book because I am a big fan of novels delineating asian and ancient japanese culture, however upon beginning this novel I was confronted with a vague and disarranged prologue, not the greatest start. The confusion is only cleared up after the first few chapters and only by the pretense that the prologue hadn't happened. Continuing on with the plot, of which the environment and description was praiseworthy, I found that the characters presented were unique in such a way that every flaw and malign thought were exposed, leaving a clear image of the protagonists personality. I found this refreshing, in contrast to the too often occurring mary-sue characters of more popular novels. Unsurprisingly the romance present in the book turned more tragic than winsome, the emotions of the characters were powerfully portrayed and the feeling of the protagonists continual loss, passion and jealousy were woven through the entire book. However, despite it's merits, the novel ends in an unsatisfactory and inconclusive manner, I found myself continually putting the book down for a few days even though I liked a large proportion of what I read, for that reason I can not give the book higher than a rating of 4.5/10.

Good Points:

- Beautifully descriptive
- Refreshing characters
- Exhibits emotion above expectation

Bad Points:

- Confusing start off-putting
- Inconclusive and vague ending.

Danyel says

I enjoyed this book very much. The author is like an artist trying to paint a picture. Not a difficult read but sometimes it was hard to stay engaged.

Sarah F. says

...not too bad. Initially I thought I'd end up hating the book, but now that I've finished reading it... no, I don't really hate it. Even though I heavily disliked the first few chapters because the love portrayed was so corrupted, I eventually sympathised with the narrator. Somehow.

The characters, on the whole, were believable; except for...certain portrayals of intimacy? Somehow I didn't think lovers of that time and setting were so physically close, but I could be wrong about this. Historically, the story seemed accurate (again, I don't profess to know this very well). I liked that part of the book, because I didn't find much Asian historical fiction (written by Western authors) with the right tone (or, then

again, I could just be looking at all the wrong places).

Still, I can't exactly say I like this book in its entirety because it was confusing to get into at first and the ending didn't quite explain what happened to the narrator. Personally, I dislike the rationalisation of deceit even in an imperial court where political and social standards are high. Perhaps another reader would enjoy this book better than I do. For me, it's just okay.

Stephanie M says

I could only recommend this book to two audiences -- people who are fascinated by Heian-era Japan and desperate for more to read, and fans of romantic drama looking for something deeply introspective with a fresh, exotic setting.

The book is told in first-person as a diary, and like most diaries it is excruciatingly introspective. While there are dollops of the usual romance drama -- jealousy, scandal, betrayal, sex, and true love -- the book utterly lacks any action, any momentum, because the narrator is constantly navel-gazing. You could call it a minute examination of a passionate woman's raw feelings of love and torment, or you could call it a spiteful woman whining relentlessly about how much her life sucks. It depends on how you relate to it.

Being set in Heian-era Japan, it's an exotic setting that hasn't been done much in English-language fiction, and happily it is done well by someone who not only did careful research, but truly loves the setting and does her best to show all the lovely parts. There's an extensive glossary in the back that will probably have tidbits that will be new even to fans of the *Genji*, and that alone might warrant a permanent place in my collection.

Tocotin says

Another book about Heian... this one was well-researched, and would be really good if it contained a bit more pronounced plot and/or more poetry. (Yes, poetry... I never thought I'd say this but I'd like to see a historical book about Japan which gives poetry its proper place in the lives of the characters.)

I liked that the author chose to include a glossary, instead of info dumping - it's been a long time since I saw a glossary and I really like them. I wasn't annoyed by the constant kissing at all, it was okay. It's just... why is it that books on Japan usually take this pompous tone? Also, the plot wasn't all that clear to me, and only after reading the Acknowledgments I realized what might have been going on with the main character's mental state. And I didn't like Masato. What did he want with that woman anyway? And his name was distracting to me, not Heian-like at all. And why was there a "Vestal Virgin"? Vestals = Rome. Why not "virgin priestess" or some such?

But to be honest, I liked this book more than I expected.

Sorcha says

Two women have fallen in love with the same man who (after an affair with a 3rd woman - a royal princess and priestess) been exiled far away.[return][return]The diary of one falls into the hands of a friend of the

other, and it is through this diary that we find out her side of the story and what transpires over the following years. She believes herself to be sane, but there is a thread of increasing insanity and paranoia that creeps through the story, so you don't actually know what is true and what she is reacting to.

Bhig says

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Samantha Blake says

This isn't usually the type of books i go for but i'm glad i bought this.

The narrator started off as being annoying, constantly complaining about life, but after the first 3-4 chapters i felt her pain. To think all this pain and misery was caused because of one selfish man. Kanesuke had played two females who were once close friends and turned them against each other, making each feel that he loved them more than the other, but not hiding the fact that he was still seeing the other one. Izumi in my opinion was never a good friend to begin with, cause to become lovers with your friend lover- how does one do that? The narrator made many mistakes and though that one rumor that she had spread had ruined an innocent person life, i somehow can feel sympathy towards her. This was a woman grieving, her jealousy had gotten the better of her. From a very young age she was always losing what was close to her and i get that she was trying her best to keep the one last thing that was familiar, that gave her peace, despite how that one thing- a man, kept betraying her over and over. Love how i got the chance to see the character matured. Realizing that Kanesuke was just a snake.

We see how Izumi pretended to be the victim but she was just as deceiving and more manipulating than the narrator. I honestly wished the narrator was a bit more confident and didn't allow her insecurities to get the better of her, she shouldn't have let Izumi get to her the way she did.

She found love, real love. I was pleased by that. A real man was there doing his best to get the memories of the toxic man and past away from her. Masato, despite the warning was determined to be by her side and showed her that she was deserving of all these things.

The writing was beautiful. I learnt a lot from this book, had to Google a few things now and then.

I hated the ending though, it was a bit abrupt. Like what the hell happened? What came of the sick Kanesuke? Did he die?- Hopefully, the Vestal Izumi? the emperor? But i guess this is one of those book where you have to let your imagination loose. I would like to think she and Masato had found somewhere peaceful from all the foolish gossip.

I would recommend this book to anyone.

Jaclynn says

Julith Jedamus' first novel?? Wow, I can't wait to see what she has in store for us in the future! I loved, loved, loved this book! Spoiler...no happy endings here...or happy beginnings or in betweens. A beautifully detailed story of love, betrayal, revenge and loss. Set in 9th century Japan, the author obviously did her research into every little detail of life during the period. The glossary of Japanese terms at the end of the book came in very handy! Highly recommended, if you can stomach the heartache and tragedy!
