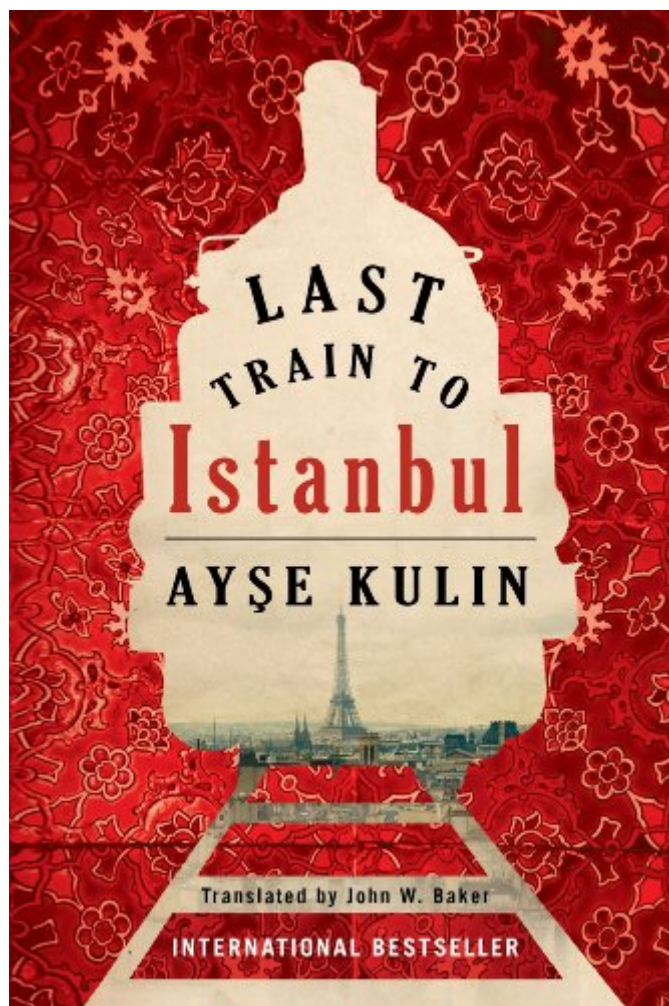


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Last Train To Istanbul: A Novel



Synopsis

International bestseller by one of Turkey's most beloved authors As the daughter of one of Turkey's last Ottoman pashas, Selva could win the heart of any man in Ankara. Yet the spirited young beauty only has eyes for Rafael Alfandari, the handsome Jewish son of an esteemed court physician. In defiance of their families, they marry, fleeing to Paris to build a new life. But when the Nazis invade France, the exiled lovers will learn that nothing—not war, not politics, not even religion—can break the bonds of family. For after they learn that Selva is but one of their fellow citizens trapped in France, a handful of brave Turkish diplomats hatch a plan to spirit the Alfandaris and hundreds of innocents, many of whom are Jewish, to safety. Together, they must traverse a war-torn continent, crossing enemy lines and risking everything in a desperate bid for freedom. From Ankara to Paris, Cairo, and Berlin, *Last Train to Istanbul* is an uplifting tale of love and adventure from Turkey's beloved bestselling novelist Ayşe Kulin.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a interesting book. Those who don't like it (see their 1 star reviews) take issue with the

writing style. I would say the style is journalistic. The psychological and character exploration tends to be somewhat subtle - similar to an impressionist painting where messages and information are sometimes hinted at -- without allowing the reader to delve deep and identify with the characters. But this is not a flaw - unless the reader is expecting a different writing style. So, this fault is rather the fault of the reader's own expectation. The story is very captivating and educational. It's great to read and learn about the WW II experience and actions of a country other than England, France, Germany, and the US. Turkey deserves a great deal of admiration for its efforts to protect its citizens regardless of religious beliefs. It's to be hoped that this book will inspire the country to remain true to its commitment to its citizens of all faiths -- something that can't be taken for granted today. As to the story, it's principally about 2 sisters who took different paths in life - one with a traditionally-accepted marriage with social prestige and the other who chose a Jewish man and was disowned by her family. The one with the traditional marriage suffers from the guilt borne of her own jealousy of her younger and taller sister - despite her own celebrated beauty. Her deep seated guilt turned her into a cold wife and mother. With the help of a psychiatrist - who actually fell in love with her - she may be able to rise out of that long unacknowledged jealousy and guilt and save her own motherhood and marriage. The other sister is somewhat opaque from the psychological angle. She is intelligent, strong-willed, and compassionate - something of a superwoman. She moved with her husband to France hoping to establish a life far from ostracism of the families but instead found herself in occupied France, where the noose of danger was tightening around Jews of all nationalities living in France. Her struggle is not a psychological one like her sister's but the real and physical danger and degradation based on her husband's faith.

Interesting story. I "read" the audio version, and I had some difficulty with the narrator's reading inflection ... not his words, which were very clear and easy to follow, but the dictionary's definition of inflection: a change in the form of a word (typically the ending) to express a grammatical function or attribute such as tense, mood, person, number, case, and gender. synonyms: stress, cadence, rhythm, accent, intonation, pitch, emphasis, modulation, lilt, tone. The story is about Turkish citizens and their quest to get back to Istanbul (and the reasons why) from their residences in Paris during WWII. It speaks well of the Turkish government and their struggle to remain neutral ... not just in war matters, but in matters of religion. Turkey was a very secular country at that time, and it made no difference what kind of religion a person had. In WWII, obviously, that meant trouble because some of the citizens who wanted to get back to Istanbul were Jewish. Germany had already advanced into Paris at the time of the story and was leaning hard on anyone, no matter what nationality, who was

Jewish. I really enjoyed the audio book. The story sticks to its point - "Last Train to Istanbul" - and the development of the story concerns how the passengers on that train got there, the people who joined with them on this trip, the difficulties they had in collecting this group, and the further difficulties they had once they were on the train. The story could have held more drama, but was entertaining and educational nonetheless. Most situations were resolved quickly, and in a good way. We know that didn't always happen in these situations for real people. I don't usually associate Turkish people with WWII because the history we hear most often is about Japan, Germany, our allies, and the final end of the war. Good book, easy read.

I wanted to love this book, I really did. I finished it because I kept hoping to like it. But in the end I feel like the author's limitations got in the way of what could have been a good story. I was taught at university that good writers show the story and average writers tell the story. This was all tell, and not with enough emotional depth or detail to in any way breathe life into it. Also, it read like the author had a checklist of things to accomplish in the story. A huge example was the rape - it did nothing to advance the story, showed nothing much about the characters, and seemed like a pat way of saying, "War is hell and soldiers rape women." I was also annoyed at wives throwing tantrums when their husbands don't behave the way they want, as if the women are too simple and selfish to notice there is a war going on and their men are in the thick of it, trying to serve many. Again, I think the purpose was to show women pushed to the breaking point, but they all acted like 12-year-olds and their husbands responded like 12-year-olds and it all just felt demeaning.

Honestly there are just so many fascinating stories on WWII - and this is one I knew nothing about. I'm glad I tried it, but I was disappointed by the kind of Mills & Boon aspects to the fiction part which really is the vehicle for the shocking historical narrative. There was hardly an adjective in sight, and in parts read childishly. Maybe this was a translation defect? Still, if you don't know the story, and you like simple language, you'll get a lot out of this. If you like to be swept along by the narrative and emerge breathless - then this is not for you. I'm now going to look for other books on this little known story. I need some questions answered... was Turkey really the only country willing to take its Jewish citizens fleeing France? This aspect of Turkish history was tantalising - but simply not explored enough.

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