



Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet

By Jamie Ford

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In the opening pages of Jamie Ford's stunning debut novel, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, Henry Lee comes upon a crowd gathered outside the Panama Hotel, once the gateway to Seattle's Japantown. It has been boarded up for decades, but now the new owner has made an incredible discovery: the belongings of Japanese families, left when they were rounded up and sent to internment camps during World War II. As Henry looks on, the owner opens a Japanese parasol.

This simple act takes old Henry Lee back to the 1940s, at the height of the war, when young Henry's world is a jumble of confusion and excitement, and to his father, who is obsessed with the war in China and having Henry grow up American. While "scholarshipping" at the exclusive Rainier Elementary, where the white kids ignore him, Henry meets Keiko Okabe, a young Japanese American student. Amid the chaos of blackouts, curfews, and FBI raids, Henry and Keiko forge a bond of friendship—and innocent love—that transcends the long-standing prejudices of their Old World ancestors. And after Keiko and her family are swept up in the evacuations to the internment camps, she and Henry are left only with the hope that the war will end, and that their promise to each other will be kept.

Forty years later, Henry Lee is certain that the parasol belonged to Keiko. In the hotel's dark dusty basement he begins looking for signs of the Okabe family's belongings and for a long-lost object whose value he cannot begin to measure. Now a widower, Henry is still trying to find his voice—words that might explain the actions of his nationalistic father; words that might bridge the gap between him and his modern, Chinese American son; words that might help him confront the choices he made many years ago.

Set during one of the most conflicted and volatile times in American history, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* is an extraordinary story of commitment and enduring hope. In Henry and Keiko, Jamie Ford has created an unforgettable duo whose story teaches us of the power of forgiveness and the human heart.

"Sentimental, heartfelt....the exploration of Henry's changing relationship with his family and with Keiko will keep most readers turning pages....A timely debut that not only reminds readers of a shameful episode in American history, but

cautions us to examine the present and take heed we don't repeat those injustices."-- *Kirkus Reviews*

"A tender and satisfying novel set in a time and a place lost forever, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* gives us a glimpse of the damage that is caused by war--not the sweeping damage of the battlefield, but the cold, cruel damage to the hearts and humanity of individual people. Especially relevant in today's world, this is a beautifully written book that will make you think. And, more importantly, it will make you *feel*."

-- Garth Stein, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Art of Racing in the Rain*

"Jamie Ford's first novel explores the age-old conflicts between father and son, the beauty and sadness of what happened to Japanese Americans in the Seattle area during World War II, and the depths and longing of deep-heart love. An impressive, bitter, and sweet debut."

-- Lisa See, bestselling author of *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*

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Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet By Jamie Ford Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #5981 in Books
- Brand: Ballantine Books
- Published on: 2009-10-06
- Released on: 2009-10-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .70" w x 5.20" l, .55 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 301 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Ford's strained debut concerns Henry Lee, a Chinese-American in Seattle who, in 1986, has just lost his wife to cancer. After Henry hears that the belongings of Japanese immigrants interned during WWII have been found in the basement of the Panama Hotel, the narrative shuttles between 1986 and the 1940s in a predictable story that chronicles the losses of old age and the bewilderment of youth. Henry recalls the difficulties of life in America during WWII, when he and his Japanese-American school friend, Keiko, wandered through wartime Seattle. Keiko and her family are later interned in a camp, and Henry, horrified by America's anti-Japanese hysteria, is further conflicted because of his Chinese father's anti-Japanese sentiment. Henry's adult life in 1986 is rather mechanically rendered, and Ford clumsily contrasts Henry's difficulty in communicating with his college-age son, Marty, with Henry's own alienation from his father, who was determined to Americanize him. The wartime persecution of Japanese immigrants is presented well, but the flatness of the narrative and Ford's reliance on numerous cultural clichés make for a disappointing read. (Feb.)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Henry Lee is a 12-year-old Chinese boy who falls in love with Keiko Okabe, a 12-year-old Japanese girl, while they are scholarship students at a prestigious private school in World War II Seattle. Henry hides the relationship from his parents, who would disown him if they knew he had a Japanese friend. His father insists that Henry wear an "I am Chinese" button everywhere he goes because Japanese residents of Seattle have begun to be shipped off by the thousands to relocation centers. This is an old-fashioned historical novel that alternates between the early 1940s and 1984, after Henry's wife Ethel has died of cancer. A particularly appealing aspect of the story is young Henry's fascination with jazz and his friendship with Sheldon, an older black saxophonist just making a name for himself in the many jazz venues near Henry's home. Other aspects of the story are more typical of the genre: the bullies that plague Henry, his lack of connection with his father, and later with his own son. Readers will care about Henry as he is forced to make decisions and accept circumstances that separate him from both his family and the love of his life. While the novel is less perfect as literature than John Hamamura's *Color of the Sea* (Thomas Dunne, 2006), the setting and quietly moving, romantic story are commendable.—Angela Carstensen, *Convent of the Sacred Heart*, New York City

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From [Booklist](#)

Ford vacillates between a front story dominated by nostalgia and a backstory dominated by fear. The front story struggles to support the weight of the backstory, and the complexity Ford brings to the latter is the strength of this debut novel, which considers a Chinese American man's relationship with a Japanese American woman in the 1940s and his son in the 1980s. Although Ford does not have anything especially novel to say about a familiar subject (the interplay between race and family), he writes earnestly and cares for his characters, who consistently defy stereotype. Ford posits great meaning in objects—a button reading "I am Chinese" and a jazz record, in particular—but the most striking moments come from the characters' readings of each other: "Henry couldn't picture bathing with his parents the way some Japanese families did. He couldn't picture himself doing a lot of things with his parents. . . . He felt his stomach turn a little. His heart raced when he thought about Keiko, but his gut tightened just the same." --Kevin Clougher

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Fabiola Gaylor:

Now a day those who Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by match the internet and the resources inside it can be true or not involve people to be aware of each info they get. How individuals to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Examining a book can help folks out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet book since this book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it everbody knows.

Carlos Terrill:

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Dennis Winters:

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