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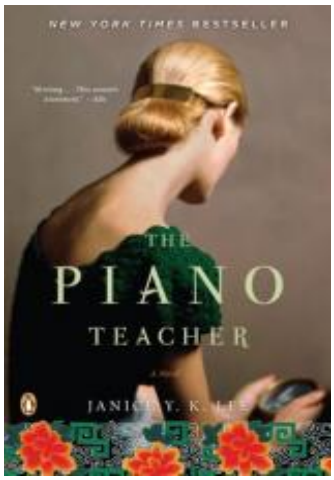
The Piano Teacher

by Janice Y. K. Lee



About the Book

Set in Hong Kong during the outbreak of World War II, and its aftermath 10 years later, **The Piano Teacher** alternates between the lives of two vastly different women whose destinies are linked by the events of the war. In 1952, Claire is a provincial newlywed from England, recently arrived in the flourishing colony of Hong Kong. She is hired by the Chens, a wealthy Chinese couple, to give their daughter piano lessons. She soon becomes involved with Will Truesdale, an enigmatic expatriate whose visible and emotional injuries raise questions about his past. Through the Chens and her new love, she discovers a world of colonial decadence that is shadowed by the recent events of the war.

Discussion Guide

1. Why does Claire steal from the Chens? Why does she stop doing it?

2. Part of Claire?s attraction to Will is that he allows her to be someone different than she had always been. Have you ever been drawn to a person or a situation because it offered you the opportunity to reinvent yourself?

3. The amahs are a steady but silent presence throughout the book. Imagine Trudy and Will?s relationship and then Claire and Will?s affair from their point of view and discuss.

4. Trudy was initially drawn to Will because of his quiet equanimity and Will to Claire because of her innocence. Yet those are precisely the qualities each loses in the course of their love affairs. What does this say about the nature of these relationships? Would Will have been attracted to a woman like Claire before Trudy?

5. What is the irony behind Claire?s adoration of the young Princess Elizabeth?

6. Were Dominick and Trudy guilty of collaboration, or were they simply trying to survive? Do their circumstances

absolve them of their actions?

7. Mary, Tobias?s mother, and one of Will?s fellow prisoners in Stanley, does not take advantage of her job in the kitchen to steal more food for her son. Yet she prostitutes herself to preserve him. Is Tobias?s physical survival worth the psychological damage she?s inflicting?

8. Did Trudy give her emerald ring and Locket to Melody? How much did Melody really know?

9. How do Ned Young?s experiences parallel Trudy?s?

10. Did Will fail Trudy? Was his decision to remain in Stanley rather than be with her on the outside --- as he believes --- an act of cowardice?

11. Would Locket be better off knowing the truth about her parentage?

12. What would happen if Trudy somehow survived and came back to Will? Could they find happiness together?

Author Bio

Janice Y. K. Lee was born and raised in Hong Kong. She received a BA in English and American Literature and Language from Harvard College. A former editor at *Elle* magazine, Lee lives in New York with her husband and four children.

Critical Praise

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