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The characters who appeared villainous at first were given their own sympathetic traits. Lisa See clearly had her research and experience she was describing felt authentic. I would have been willing to forget the inherent problems all over the middle and even a terrible, awful start, if not a terrible, awful end. Unfortunately, this book is too flawed to be forgiven. And what are these problems you ask for? 1. I Hate Everyone at this Bar I despise the three main characters, i.e. Pearl, May, and Joy. So much for a sympathetic look at women's point of view. Women are jealous!!! Women back-stab and have a rivalry!!! Women complain a lot!!! Women sleep with each other's crush!!! Women get raped!!! Women's entire sense of self-worth is centered around where they can take children!!! Women are completely selfish and have no concerns about the feelings of others!!! Are we sure that a person does not write this book? Well, the Shanghai Girls gets a little free pass in terms of focusing on marriage/children/women working at home/etc. because it's about 1930s-1950s Chinese culture. China is a more traditional society even today, with limited role for women and great emphasis on family and hierarchy in the family. This, along with the period of time, makes him fixation to get a good husband and having male children accurately. However, this does not justify how completely infuriating they are in the characters. Pearls jealous over your sister is understandable, but very quickly got old. She spent a lot of books complaining about something or another, then being chewed out by another character/realizing she was wrong and was moving towards complaining about something else. It is a cycle that repeats over and over and becomes frustrating. This means that she is the most enjoyable of the three. Her rape and her trauma over it are handled well, and after the 100-page mark her complaints are mostly focused racism or their racist as immigrants. However, most of the plot is still just things that happen to her, not hers having some agency of her own. Her only goal, by the end of the year, is to survive. You have to give me more. We see very little Joy character wise. For most of the books she is a child who does not get much dialogue and is described as a perfect, quiet, obedient Chinese girl. Then in the end she spontaneously becomes rude and insensitive by faith and there is only to offend her parents and spout from the political nonsense she clearly does not understand. ... Hell, I guess I'll give them points for accuracy for the average American teenager, but didn't she like the opposite of that until now? She has never been given a picture where she behaves in a way that is sympathetic, so I have no sympathy with her. Yes, yes, go find your real father in Shanghai, whatever I could do less. It's not like the man you thought your father died all his life yesterday. No, just leave. I'm not going to miss you. And now we come to May. Dear God in heaven I hate this character. I could go on for days about how much I hate him. I could write my college thesis about it. I could fill out an encyclopedia of that page and still have more to say. If you allow me to write down every nasty feeling this woman fills me with strips of paper it would be long enough to circle the ground several times. Selfish, shallow, silly, insensitive and blunt, inconsistently characterized, constantly playing victim, refusing to take responsibility for anything, may be quite perhaps the most terrible person ever to walk in the face of the earth. It is impossible to repent of her, even with her difficulties, because she makes it impossible. Everything is someone else's fault, or someone else's responsibility. Pearl's complaints are never true in her mind, they're just evidence of her selfishness and her doesn't appreciate May enough when she does nothing but that. So many of the bad things that happen are the result of her doing something stupid or selfish and not telling anyone else about it. She makes me want to slide my head against the wall. So, a book that seeks to provide women with perspective on immigration to America during World War II and years after nothing but I wish I was reading about male characters instead. Aivars, John, You are a truly feminist hero. 2. The show didn't tell and my Kingdom for some Character Development When I said writing was clunky, it was mostly what I wanted. Lisa See leaves nothing to interpretation. Every last thought or view that characters have set out clearly, often with repeats, with increased melodism and false emotionalism, on 300 pages. For this reason, character development is all over the place, especially pearl's. The pearl is from her sister. Now she finds out it's wrong. Now she's jealous again. Now she's modern. Now fifty pages later she realizes that it was stupid without the kind of transition in between. Now she hates Sam. Now she likes him. Now she is traumatized over being raped. Now she's over it. Now she's traumatized again. Features and development arise and disappear as they become comfortable plot. Personality changes are recognized as a change of importance. Characters learn the same lesson over and over whether Pearl points out their weaknesses over and over. The first person narrative is part of the problem, but overall Lisa See just seems confused over what her characters are supposed to be feeling and what it means, or what's wrong and what isn't. What brings me: 4. I have a better relationship with the stale cereal I ate this morning than May and Pearl is with the other piece of this book is supposed to turn around the relationship between these two sisters. They are in the spotlight, and every positive review I've seen describes the incredible bond between them. Except... there is no bond. It's not to say that they don't do things about each other- Pearl is being raped by Japanese soldiers to spare her sister, may give up her child, both of whom are incredible victims. But both of these things happen early in the story. The rest and most books are spent in conflict, and it all ends with a screaming match. They constantly bicker and back-stab each other, fighting for control of their families and more for Joy. Pearl often says things like me and can get along... until the next time we fight or even if she is terrible and I hate her we love each other so much, really. Lisa See wants us to feel how close these sisters are, but from what I see, they have nothing in common and it's in no way a choice for each other's company if they aren't connected. But Pearl continues to insist that May be her best friend, and they always stand with each other unless they don't. It's just stupid rivalry and pettiness, over and over and over. Wow, what a bond. 5. Lisa See doesn't care about any of the other characters again, we've told things about the characters and their relationships that we'll never get to see. We are told that Pearl and Sam love each other, but they only get a few short scenes together. We are told that everyone came to love Father Louis, but we don't see the relationship developing after his confession of his false citizenship. We are told that Sam and Pearl love Joy, but Joy is barely present as a character. We were told that Mama and Baba didn't love pearl, and then later we were told they did. May and Pearl are the only characters who have been given real attention, and the rest of the book is simply rattling at the events of tragedy after the tragedy. 6. It's a Damn Ending tragedy after tragedy after tragedy, Father Louie dies, Vern is bedridden, Joy joined a group of commie students, Sam hanged himself and May was ZQ's baby years ago. That too much to pick up right away? Well, too bad because it's all happening over the last 30 pages. Very emotional and interesting events go by with the blur, all rushing to the squabble between May and Pearl that made me physically angry to read, and Joy deciding she is just going to rush off to Communist China to find some guy her aunt/birth mother had sex with twenty years ago, right after her adoptive father died and her adoptive mother/aunt is in a state of hysteria. That too much to pick up right away? Well, too bad, it was the last five pages. The revelation about S.Q. being Joy's father was shocking, by which I thought I saw it coming 200 pages ago, and it only gave me another reason not to like May. I waited for Joy to know about her parents for a while, but the fact that I don't know anything about Joy as a character and that the book ends with Pearl simply deciding to go after her meant that there was no emotional punch to the revelation or any kind of resolution about it. It's like the whole book just exists to create a sequel. Or that Lisa See meant to keep going and got bored. I don't have a damn idea, but I'm sure one thing- I won't be reading the result. If I have to hear the phrase husband-wife thing one more time, I think it would kill me. ... More... More

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