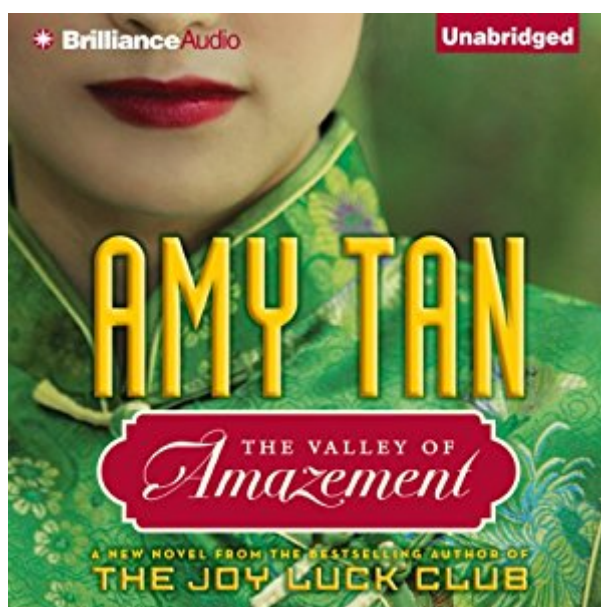


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# The Valley Of Amazement



## Synopsis

New York Times best-selling author of *The Joy Luck Club* Amy Tan brings us her latest novel: a sweeping, evocative epic of two women's intertwined fates and their search for identity - from the lavish parlors of Shanghai courtesans to the fog-shrouded mountains of a remote Chinese village Shanghai, 1912. Violet Minturn is the privileged daughter of the American madam of the city's most exclusive courtesan house. But when the Ching dynasty is overturned, Violet is separated from her mother in a cruel act of chicanery and forced to become a "virgin courtesan." Half-Chinese and half-American, Violet grapples with her place in the worlds of East and West - until she is able to merge her two halves, empowering her to become a shrewd courtesan who excels in the business of seduction and illusion, though she still struggles to understand who she is. Back in 1897 San Francisco, Violet's mother, Lucia, chooses a disastrous course as a sixteen-year-old, when her infatuation with a Chinese painter compels her to leave her home for Shanghai. Shocked by her lover's adherence to Chinese traditions, she is unable to change him, despite her unending American ingenuity. Fueled by betrayals, both women refuse to submit to fate and societal expectations, persisting in their quests to recover what was taken from them: respect; a secure future; and, most poignantly, love from their parents, lovers, and children. To reclaim their lives, they take separate journeys - to a backwater hamlet in China, the wealthy environs of the Hudson River Valley, and, ultimately, the unknown areas of their hearts, where they discover what remains after their many failings to love and be loved. Spanning more than forty years and two continents, *The Valley of Amazement* transports listeners from the collapse of China's last imperial dynasty to the beginning of the Republic and recaptures the lost world of old Shanghai through the inner workings of courtesan houses and the lives of the foreigners living in the International Settlement, both erased by World War II. A deeply evocative narrative of the profound connections between mothers and daughters, imbued with Tan's characteristic insight and humor, *The Valley of Amazement* conjures a story of inherited trauma, desire and deception, and the power and obstinacy of love.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*\*\* Warning, there are some spoilers\*\*\*It is a testament to Tan's writing that I finished this book. I do not like spending so much time with characters I do not like or respect. Violet Minturn, the daughter of a famed American courtesan mistress in Shanghai, is someone I didn't enjoy. A spoiled brat would be a good description. Violet is half American, half Chinese, a fact that she doesn't discover until she's 8 or 9. She creeps around the house spying on all the courtesans at work. Nothing her mother does is good enough and Violet never feels loved. Violet's mother decides to return to San Francisco and is tricked into leaving Violet behind. Word is sent to her that Violet has died. Violet is sold into another courtesan house as a virgin and is trained to take up the profession. Even though she knows her mother was tricked in leaving her behind and that her mother believes her dead, she is outraged her mother doesn't come back for her. Her unhappiness colors every thing. She gets involved in a relationship with an American and participates in a counterfeit identification that leads to horrendous results. I can not fathom why she does so and it is never explained. She is outraged, once again, that her duplicity is discovered. This character never seems to mature or make adult, well thought decisions. It is like she quit growing at 14. The book is overly long. There's so much discussion of furnishings and clothes that I tended to nod off. I think it could have been edited by at least 100 pages and been a better story. I can see why it took her 8 years to write it as it is so detailed. I find that as an author gets more famous that there is less editing leading to really uneven stories. Still I read it.

A dedicated Amy Tan fan since her debut novel (which, though it was published a year before I was born, I revisit every year), I traveled to the Valley of Amazement already spellbound, anticipating the same sentiments that Joy Luck delivered. I was disappointed. At the risk of publicizing my oversentimentality, I also felt betrayed. I pre-ordered the novel and waited patiently, checking my mailbox every afternoon. And though I could only read a few pages a day because of my graduate program, I kept thinking - hoping, certainly - the story would pick up, a redeeming epiphany would alter the book's tone, something would make the characters more likable, more human, more

compassionate. I waited for the language to become less tedious, the grimy details of Shanghai less depressing, the flower/sex references less tacky. Like the patrons of these courtesan houses, I spent the whole novel waiting at the cusp of this valley and searching for what I desired most. But I never found it. Just like the patrons, I found illusions, cheap embellishments, shoddy furniture, and cheap, cheap, cheap sex. At Tan's defense, I get it. Sex sells. "Fifty Shades" is a testament to that, among so many other empty "pieces of literature" that will never stand in the same light as the classics, the unrecognized talents, the Nobel Laureates, the Pulitzer Prize winners. True literary minds, true English enthusiasts, scoff at works like these - they shame us, embarrass us. To use Tan's own terminology, good literature - true, honest literature - is like a first wife. And cheap, repetitive sex scenes, empty characters, and stale plot - these are all slave girls. I am sad to admit that I finally saw the day I'd scoff at an author I idolized and admired most.

Violet was raised in a courtesan house in Shanghai run by her American mother Lulu. Lulu was not only the madam of one of the most exclusive courtesan houses, but a rich and well connected business woman. As a daughter of a powerful American woman, Violet considered herself above courtesans and Chinese people. She later found out that her father was Chinese and she was only half American. That fact added to her self identity problems. When Violet was 14, Lulu decided to leave Shanghai to go home because of the political instability. Then, Lulu was tricked by her lover, and ended up leaving Violet behind. Violet was sold to another Courtesan house and forced to become a virgin courtesan. Violet experienced many heartaches, and eventually learned to live her life as well as possible. I have read every book (except for children's books) by Amy Tan. And she is one of my favorite authors. "The Valley of Amazement" would be my 4th favorite of hers after 1) The Hundred Secret Senses, 2) The Joy Luck Club, 3) The Bonesetter's Daughter: A Novel (Ballantine Reader's Circle). These are the reasons why "The Valley of Amazement" is not my number one favorite; 1) I love Amy Tan's sense of humor. She can make you laugh while you are crying, but this novel didn't have it.

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