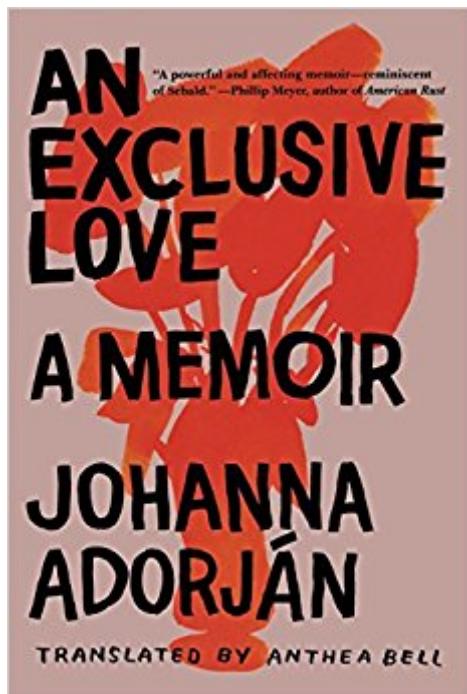


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# An Exclusive Love: A Memoir



## Synopsis

"A powerful and affecting memoirâ "reminiscent of Sebald." â •Phlipp Meyer, author of American Rust Chain-smoking, peculiarly stylish, stubborn, and eccentricâ •Vera and IstvÃ¡n were anything but ordinary grandparents. Sixteen years after their death, Johanna AdorjÃ¡n fills the gaps in their story. An Exclusive Love is a brilliantly constructed memoir and a gorgeous romance, a tale of two people who died as they lived: inseparable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a striking debut, AdorjÃ¡n mingles past, present, memory, and imagination to find meaning in the dual suicide of her charismatic grandparents in October 1991, when the author was 20. Noting the suicides of other concentration-camp survivors like Primo Levi, Arthur Koestler and his wife, and many others, AdorjÃ¡n asks, "Is it typically Jewish to kill yourself after you have survived the Holocaust--so then you determine for yourself how you want to die?" Effectively she re-creates the deaths of a still-glamorous couple; her grandmother, a woman in her early 70s whose enduring beauty recalled film stars such as Elizabeth Taylor, and her cigarillo-loving 82-year-old grandfather. Both survived the Mauthausen extermination camp after being deported from Hungary along with 600,000 other Jews. The author's search for the life experiences that led to such a haunting end takes her to Budapest, Israel, Paris, and Copenhagen and forms a living history of a passionately devoted couple that embodies much of 20th-century European Jewry. The pedantic details of the author's repetitive yet lyrical imaginings of her grandparents' last day are heartbreakingly poignant. Ending her book with excerpts from the police report may not have been the most poignant conclusion, but it is

the most complete. (Jan.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Johanna Adorján's grandparents, Vera and Pista, were Holocaust survivors who fled their native Hungary during the revolt of 1956, subsequently finding refuge in Denmark. Many years later, with Pista's health terminally declining, the two decided to take their own lives, leaving little explanation behind their final act beyond a small handwritten note. Shifting between myth and reality, past and present, Adorján's compelling debut attempts to piece together the layered story of her grandparents' lives. The book's focal point is Adorján's imagined account of their last day alive, with their final hours spent taking care of seemingly menial tasks; Vera bakes a cake, Pista listens to music. Intertwined with this vision is Adorján's journey to uncover the details of her grandparents' past, for which she relies on the fading recollections of surviving friends and family, along with her own childhood memories. As Adorján tries to understand her grandparents' death, she also confronts her own feelings about her sense of heritage and identity. Blending history, memoir, and imaginative writing, Adorján's nonlinear procedure creates a poignant narrative of unwavering love. --Leah Strauss --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Johanna Adorjan's grandparents committed a dual suicide, shocking everyone in the family. In the words of Adorjan: "This book tells the story of Vera and István, Hungarian Jews who survived the Holocaust, fled during the 1956 uprising in Budapest to Denmark and in 1991 in Copenhagen took their own lives. They were found in their bed, hand in hand. It is the story of an unusual love. The story of my grandparents." (www.wwnorton.com) That makes it sound so dangerous and romantic! Unfortunately, this book is anything but, which makes sense, because who wants to condone or aggrandize suicide? But this is the stuff of a Shakespearean-scale tragedy (hello, Romeo and Juliet) and yet the story is stale and I know it's a memoir but self-centered without informing on the author. Johanna Adorjan is a well-known journalist, and I expected her writing to be topnotch. To my disappointment I found the writing very dry-some of that may have to do with the fact that it was translated. An Exclusive Love had so much potential for a fictional tale of grand proportions, but as a memoir it was less interesting. At the end of the story, we know virtually nothing about Adorjan except that even years after her grandparents' death she is sad and feels betrayed. To Adorjan's credit, she attempts to come to terms with her grandparents' feelings about suicide, which is the most interesting part. She recognizes her grandmother's deeply rooted insecurity-despite her

outward queenly appearance-and the desperate need to never be alone (even if it means death). These speculative bits of insight are truly compelling.I would have liked to see more information on Vera and Istvan's history in the Holocaust and immediately thereafter. However, Adorjan claims that it was impossible to get them to talk about it.

Writer succeeds in writing about her own need and sentimentality in understanding her grandparents who survived in different but hard ways the excesses of the Nazis in Hungary on one side and the unsentimental personas of these Jewish grandparents. The story is the story of her grandparents last day, their planned suicide, the reasons, the way they go about this day and why they do it the way they do it. The why leads to the birth, circumstances and history of the grandparents, their friend's' account of them, their ambitions and their relationship. The main reason I really liked this book is that the writer has not made her grandparents too lovable,too cute, too understandable, hasn't tried to excuse,pry open and interpret these people or demonize anyone. It feels as close as it may be possible to talk about grandparents like these. Their Jewish heritage, Nazism, camps, science, love of music, Hungarian uprising, immigration and an exclusive marriage. Life that begins in the Hungarian world and ends in a neat tidy house in Denmark.

A person is made of many facets. The reader is challenged to make sense of all the parts that makes a person whole.

I read lots of Holocaust books and this was came from an interesting perspective as the granddaughter tries to piece together how her grandparents survived the Holocaust and led their lives.

Amazing

This is a beautifully told love/family tale in a well presented and compelling historical context.Told by the granddaughter who is very clear about what she absolutely Knows and what she doesn't.The author, and translator, speaks in an evocative and clear voice.I would definitely recommend this slim memoir. It's a great read. does a really good job of making customer recommendations based on past selections.I LIVE IN SEATTLE, WA. HAVING MOVED FROM ALAMEDA,CA

"On 13 October 1991 my grandparents killed themselves," the first sentence of An Exclusive Love, a

memoir by Johanna Adorján grabs the reader and does not let go until the end. Reported without emotion - but not without beauty - as a news reporter does best, (Adorján is a cultural journalist), the reader immediately knows the ending but not the infinitesimal details, so worth paying attention to, of the path that leads one there. Shocking to the reader, still reeling from the harsh beginning, is presented succinctly but no less forceful when Adorján recounts the final entry in the official folder of the suicide. One last punch before the book closes is from the Danish police file is the bill from the locksmith who opened the door of her grandparents' home - \$297 kroner. The reader sees the door open and imagines the scene beyond it. Grandparents are an enigma. The tales they tell are often about our parents when they were young as if the near past was more important than decades that came before. In *An Exclusive Love* we are privy to not only the author's memories but also the intimate thoughts of people from each stage of her grandparents' (Vera and Istvan) life. The recent passing of Dr. Jack Kevorkian evokes the polarizing discussion of "death with dignity." Some called him "Dr. Death" and opposed his methods. Some called him the "angel of mercy." The Federal Government has recused itself from the conversation and handed the reins to each state to determine if and when assisted suicide is legal. A private matter and a private choice, Vera and Istvan did not ask permission from anyone but each other. *An Exclusive Love* is a painful and engrossing detail of the day that Adorján's grandparents acted on their suicide pact. Throughout the memoir, the author stays gently in the background allowing her grandparents their contemporaries and family members to re-construct the days, hours, and minutes leading up to their mutual suicide in 1991. Timing is everything and Adorján graciously inserts herself into the story calling forth her conversations and experiences with her beloved, mysterious forbears. In the early 90s the Hemlock Society was operating covertly in the United States and its book, *Final Exit* was impossible to find except via the Internet. Founded in 1980 by Derek Humphry, The Hemlock Society's mission was to help people like his wife Jean and reform the laws about doctor-assisted suicide. Aware of the book, Vera locates it, reads it and the suicide pact is in place. Planned and painless at the end, quietly so that nobody would attempt to intervene, Vera and Istvan slip into the next realm together as they have been for decades. A graceful shift into dialogue between her grandparents on the Sunday morning that is the focal point of the story shows a couple who have lived with and loved each for 50 years. They survived the Holocaust and reconstructed their life - not obliterating the past - once settled in Copenhagen. "She goes into the kitchen to wash the ashtrays she has collected from the guestroom and the front hall. Everything must be neat and tidy. She doesn't want to cause any hassle. No one must find her decision a nuisance." The grandmother's internal dialogue continues to rend the readers' heart. Page after page the reader finds another

snapshot of the day that causes tears to flood the page. "You must say goodbye to each other now," says Adorján's grandmother. The grandfather holding Mitzi, their dog, kisses her nose, strokes her head and squeaks out goodbye. The beauty of *An Exclusive Love* is the twofold - the memory of the event and the words carefully selected to convey it. In the tradition of Joan Didion's 2007 memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, this intensely personal telling of exceptional love and loss is one to read over and over again reminding us why we read. To find ourselves through the stories of others, find out why we are here and what we ultimately want for ourselves. Adorján resides in Berlin and is an editor of the *Allegemeine Zeitung*'s culture section. *An Exclusive Love* is her first book. Based in the U.K., Anthea Bell is an award-winning translator of a range of work including W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* and the *Inkworld* trilogy by Cornelia Funke.

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