



The Translation of Love

A Novel

Lynne
Kutsukake

No one seems to fit in anywhere in Lynne Kutsukake's debut novel set shortly after World War II is over. Canadian citizens of Japanese descent are held in internment camps and "encouraged" to go home after having their possessions stripped away. Thus we see 13 year old Aya and her bereaved father on a boat to Japan, her mother having died while they were imprisoned by their own country. She speaks Japanese but the kids at school mostly ignore. All but Fumi, a pushy classmate who wants Aya to write a letter to General Douglas MacArthur. Fumi thinks her sister has disappeared and wants MacArthur to find her. We soon realize Fumi's sister is working in dance halls, befriending American G.I.s (and possibly doing more than befriending) to make money. It means they don't starve but she becomes a pariah anyway, with Fumi confused as to why her sister has abandoned her. Toss in a closeted G.I. who helps translate the flood of letters to MacArthur begging for help, a lonely school teacher who makes money on the side translating love letters and "Dear John" letters from Japanese to English and back again and you've got a whole disorienting world of post-war Japan. The rules have changed forever and no one is quite sure what they should do. Kutsukake balances her many characters well, giving full weight to each story. It's a solid, sweet effort that evinces an ambition that may flourish more in novels to come. -- Michael Giltz