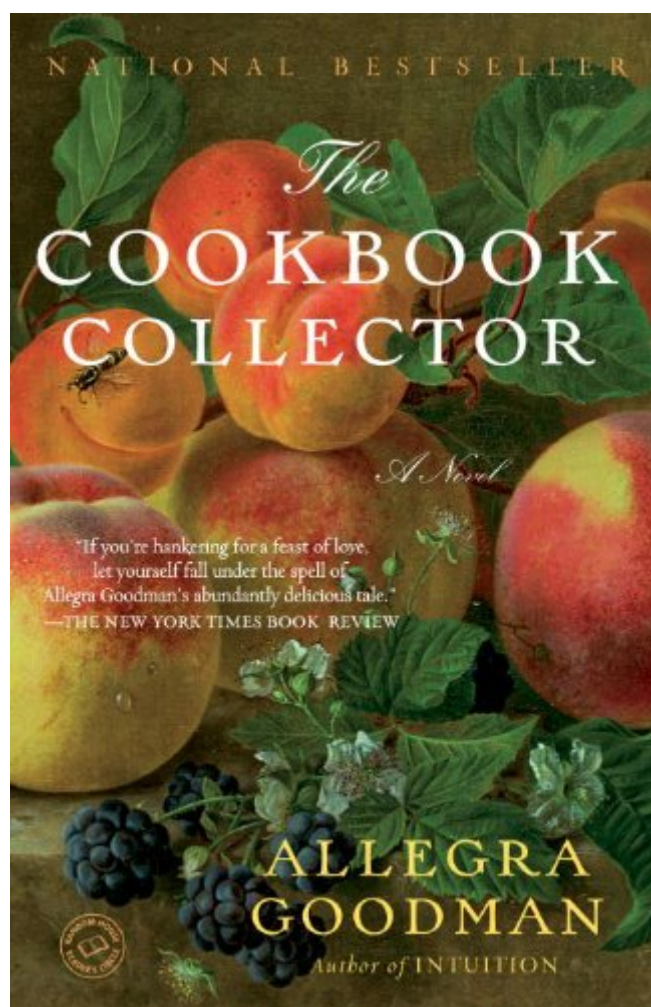


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The Cookbook Collector: A Novel



Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER Emily and Jessamine Bach are opposites in every way:

Twenty-eight-year-old Emily is the CEO of Veritech, twenty-three-year-old Jess is an environmental activist and graduate student in philosophy. Pragmatic Emily is making a fortune in Silicon Valley, romantic Jess works in an antiquarian bookstore. Emily is rational and driven, while Jess is dreamy and whimsical. Emily's boyfriend, Jonathan, is fantastically successful. Jess's boyfriends, not so much. National Book Award finalist and a New York Times bestselling author Allegra Goodman has written a delicious novel about appetite, temptation, and holding on to what is real in a virtual world: *love that stays*. Look for special features inside. Join the Circle for author chats and more. RandomHouseReadersCircle.com

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Customer Reviews

I don't write a lot of reviews but wanted to comment on this book. When I came to the review page and saw how thoroughly and how well both the good and the bad about the novel had already been covered, I wasn't sure I had much more to contribute. But maybe I'll add just a few thoughts/points. I found the Goodman's writing style quite engaging, and lovely at times. And I got involved with the

main characters --though some of them were not very likable, they were very human -- and cared about their stories. I agree with those who have said she tried to cover too many characters and story arcs, and to pull together too many themes and ideas. There were many threads left hanging, and for some of those that were tied up in the denouement, we didn't learn enough about how things came to pass. It seems like there was enough going on here for more than one book. Some of the story lines and ideas worked together, and some felt out of place. Some were over-developed, and some under. I also agree that some of the coincidences strained credulity, and felt unearned. Who doesn't know their mother's maiden name, for example? This detail comes up early in the book, and only someone who has never read a novel wouldn't figure out what is being set up. And as a Bay Area native, some inaccuracies really bugged me. On their date at Greens, George "had the fish?" Only if he brought it and cooked it himself. And polenta at this restaurant, chosen because Jess is a vegan, would be packed with butter and cheese -- vegetarian but not vegan. Maybe this seems like too small an issue to criticize, but much is made of Jess' veganism. The book is full of detail about Berkeley. And it's also, in part, about cookbooks, and about food and the meaning of food.

Forget the Austen comparison. Nothing compares to Austen anyway, and it obscures the many real virtues of this broadly scoped novel. Allegra Goodman has always mixed romance, work, and Jewishness in her novels and this one follows the pattern. She's got a contrasted pair of sisters who become more like one another as the novel goes on. She's got a beautifully drawn June-November romance (neither half quite qualifies as May or December). She's got a dead mother whose life conceals a mystery, and she's got a set of quick views of different types of Jewishness - including one rather unexpected type that I don't want to spoil for you by revealing here. Her picture of bookstore life in Berkeley is fun to read, too, and if you like to read about collectible books you'll get a bellyful - semipun intended. Best of all, she gets the tech startup stuff right. Both of the startups she depicts are familiar to this veteran of two tech startups. Some of her programmers even talk like programmers, and she paints the startup highflyer response to technical crisis just right. And she avoids the pitfall of writing overly explicit dialog for her programmers, so she doesn't get that wrong. Good judgement on her part. Her Bay Area details are right. I don't know enough to judge her Boston details. And she manages to include 9/11 without bathos. I hope we see more books that incorporate 9/11 without exploiting it or centering on it. There ARE some faults here. A few characters get short shrift in the shifting romances. Goodman probably tries to do too many things in one novel. There are too many up to the minute brand and culture references for a novel that has a

chance of surviving and being read after this decade or century is past.

As a Janeite, it is impossible ignore the siren call when an author announces to the book buying world that her new novel THE COOKBOOK COLLECTOR is "a SENSE AND SENSIBILITY for the digital age." Whoa! My first reaction was "this is literary suicide." Why would anyone want to equate themselves to a beacon of world literature such as JANE AUSTEN? It is impossible to know her personal motivations, but after a bit of online research, I can't entirely blame Allegra Goodman for starting this avalanche. She seems to be the darling of the literary world ready to be embraced as "a modern day Jane Austen." Booklist, Library Journal, Publishers Weekly and Kirkus all gave her starred reviews, and even those highbrow literary bluestockings The Washington Post and the New York Times beamed. Swept up in the momentum of online praise I succumbed to the unthinkable. I imagined, no, dare I say I hoped, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before" that my favorite author could be reincarnated in the modern day world and I could continue to read new works infused with Austen's style, deft observations and biting wit. I will attempt to disarm reproof right up front. I read a lot of "popular" fiction written by women. Yep, that stuff that is sadly overlooked by the good folks at The New York Times. This book is technically classified as literature which is really out of my depth as a book reviewer, so I will review it through the prism of a Janeite. Set in northern California between 1999-2002 Goodman has mirrored elements in Austen's novel SENSE AND SENSIBILITY including two sisters, Emily and Jessamine Bach, polar opposites in temperament and interests struggling with love, money and fulfillment in different ways.

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