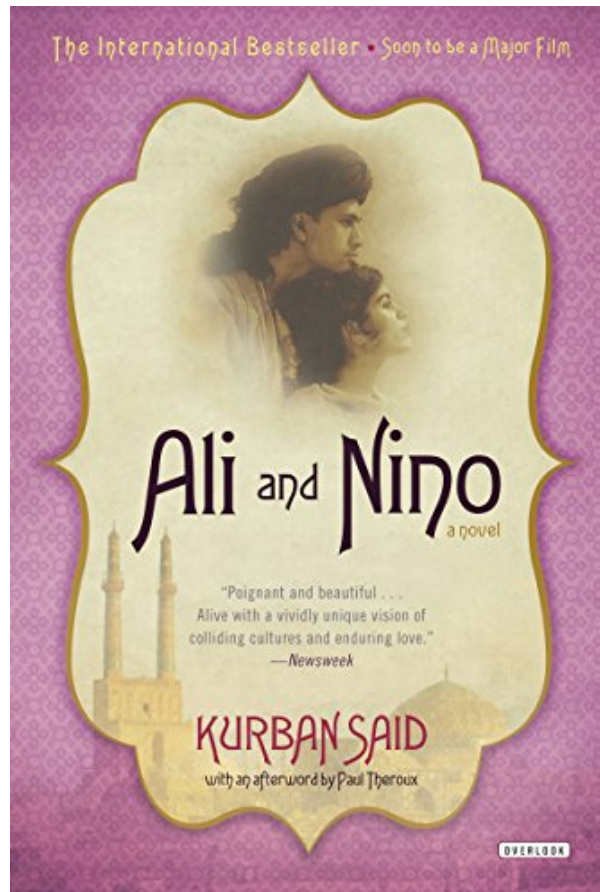
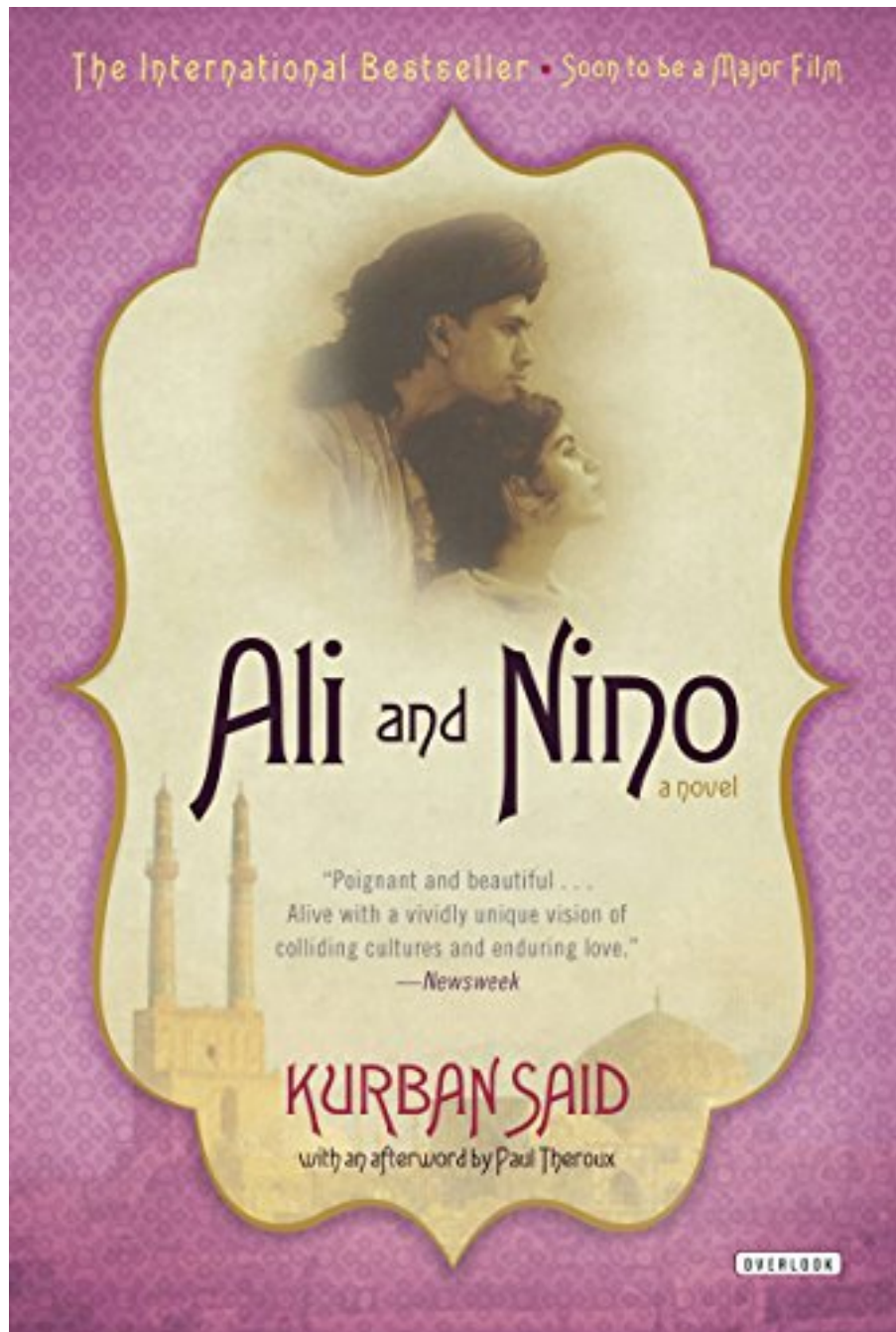


ALI AND NINO: A LOVE STORY BY KURBAN SAID



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ALI AND NINO: A LOVE STORY BY KURBAN SAID PDF

Ali and Nino is the epic novel of enduring romance in a time of war.

It has been hailed as one of the most romantic epic novels of all time. Ali and Nino, two lovers from vastly different backgrounds, grow up together in carefree innocence in Baku on the Caspian Sea. Here, where Eastern and Occidental collide, they are inevitably drawn into the events of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Torn apart by the turmoil, Ali joins the defense of Azerbaijan from the onslaught of the Red Army, and Nino flees to the safety of Paris with their child, not knowing whether they will ever see each other again. A sweeping tale, as romantic and gripping as *Gone with the Wind* or *Dr. Zhivago*, it portrays, against a gloriously exotic backdrop, the enduring love between childhood friends divided by their separate cultures.

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Most helpful customer reviews

44 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

A Gem Of A Tale Fit For Queen Shahrazad's Anthology

By Jana L.Perskie

"Ali and Nino: A Love Story" is a poignant tale of love and adventure which Queen Shahrazad would have been proud to add to her anthology. This compelling story is set in Baku, Azerbaijan, the oil rich city on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Depending on one's religion and ethnicity, Baku used to be considered either the easternmost city in Europe, or the doorway to the Orient. Many ancient, aristocratic and fabulously wealthy families, Georgian and Armenian Christians, and Persian Muslims lived here for generations. The Russian Empire, which encompassed both Georgia and Azerbaijan, maintained a tenuous peace, and, in fact, the citizens of Baku formed deep intercultural friendships which went back a hundred years, or more. However, beneath the surface, the conflict between Islam and Christianity seethed in the never-ending struggle for cultural and religious domination. The novel covers the turbulent times from 1909 to 1920, and opens on the eve of World War I, continues through the Bolshevik Revolution, and provides deep insight into the conflicts

between Eastern and Western cultures.

Ali Khan Shirvanshir, the son and heir of an ancient and noble Persian family is our protagonist and narrator. He was born and raised in Baku, Azerbaijan, in the Trans-Caucasus, at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam, modernity and tradition. Ali Khan is finishing his last year of high school as the novel begins. His forty classmates at the Imperial Russian Humanistic High School of Baku are a mixed lot, numbering thirty Mohammedans, four Armenians, two Poles, three Sectarians, and one Russian. Their Russian Professor condescendingly informs his pupils during a geography lesson that it is their responsibility to decide "whether our town should belong to progressive Europe or to reactionary Asia." He is not pleased when Ali Khan states his preference for Asia.

Ali is fascinated by the secrets, mysteries, hidden nooks and alleys of Baku, his home - "the soft night murmurs, the moon over flat roofs and hot quiet afternoons in the mosque's courtyards," the scent of sea air and the smell of oil. He thanks God that he was born a Muslim of the Shiite faith. He only wishes to live his life and die in the same street, in the same house where he was born - along with Nino Kipiani, with the flashing eyes, who eats with a knife and fork, goes about without a veil, and wears sheer silk stockings. Although young, the two love deeply, their feelings continue to grow and endure in spite of the seemingly insurmountable cultural and religious conflicts that confront them. They are both children of the Caucasus, and their friendship was born on the Caspian shores of Baku.

When Ali recounts to Nino the discussion that took place in class and how he had heatedly argued for Baku to remain Asian, Nino says bluntly: "Ali Khan, you are stupid. Thank God we are in Europe. If we were in Asia they would have made me wear the veil ages ago and you could not see me."

Ali has the soul of a desert man. A friend once told him, "The Orient's dry intoxication, comes from the desert, where hot wind and hot sand make men drunk, where the world is simple and without problems. The desert man has but one face and knows but one truth, and that truth fulfills him. The fanatic comes from the desert." This might have been true of Ali if it were not for his great love for Nino, his real life Georgian Christian princess. Their feelings for each other makes them both much more complex characters than they would be otherwise, encompassing a greater wisdom and compassion together than they would have ever been able to alone.

A pious friend tells Ali, "The woman is just an acre on which the man sows." He reminds Ali that women have "no souls nor intelligence. No Paradise or Hell is waiting for a woman. When she dies she just disintegrates into nothing." Ali does not believe this, but begins to feel confused and alienated. Then his father advises him to never forget, when he marries, his wife will live in his shadow. Meanwhile, after the couple's engagement is announced, Nino's father talks with Ali about the necessity for mutual trust and respect in marriage. "Man and wife," he says, "should help each other by word and deed. And they must never forget that they have equal rights and that their souls are their own."

The couple's relationship is at the center of the novel's events, but "Ali and Nino" is much more than a romance. The story takes the reader on a fascinating magic carpet ride to cosmopolitan Baku; irresistibly beautiful Tbilisi, capital of Georgia; the Karabakh, of western Azerbaijan, where the world's most glorious and hardy horses are bred; Teheran, the ancient, mystical capital city of Persia, and the mountains of Dagestan. We witness the consequences of love and passion; war, political and cultural turmoil, and revolution; honor and disgrace, and the impact of Islam, Christianity, and newly born Bahaimism on the times.

While reading "Ali and Nino : A Love Story," I was reminded of an old saying my grandmother used to repeat, "A bird may love a fish, but where will they build a home." Ali and Nino loved each other deeply,

were bound by a strong friendship and mutual respect, but in the period in which they lived it was almost impossible for them to find a living environment in which both of them could breathe and be who they were as individuals, as well as a couple.

This is a beautifully written novel, both lyrical and powerful in its use of language. What is most strange, is that the author's, or authors,' story is almost as dramatic as that of Ali and Nino. The novel was first published in German, in Germany, in 1937. Paul Theroux, who wrote the Afterword to the Anchor Edition, (the one I have and recommend), calls the novel, "...one of literature's foundlings." Apparently, lost and/or forgotten in the chaos of WWII and the aftermath, "Ali and Nino" was rediscovered in a secondhand bookstore in the ruins of postwar Berlin by Jenia Graman. She read the novel, and struck by the originality and beauty of the story, translated it and saw to its publication - first in England and then in the United States.

It is thought that the author, Kurban Said, is actually two people. Lev Nussimbaum was a Jew, born in Baku in 1905 whose family moved to Berlin during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. Nussimbaum became a journalist and author, and eventually converted to Islam, taking the name Essad Bey. When Hitler became Chancellor of the German Nation in 1933, Nussimbaum moved to Austria where he began an intense friendship with Baroness Elfriede Ehrenfels, also a writer. It is thought that "Ali and Nino" is a collaborated effort between the two. Whoever wrote this extraordinary novel, it is well worth your attention!

JANA

43 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

What a Hidden Jewel!

By Kelli

First, you simply must read this book. There's no way around that.

Ali and Nino is a lyrically written story of love and war, honor and country, cultural blend and clash set in WWI-era Transcaucasia (ie, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia). The novel has simply *all* the elements of greatness: well-developed characters, a vivid setting, a gripping plot, and an examination of larger themes -- all crammed into this little-known, relatively compact work.

Love in the face of cultural obstacles, in the face of war and patriotic duty. Love in its innocence, its longing, its maturity. Love between people, love for a people, and the tragedy of a lost world. It's really an incredible, incredible book -- one which, despite its age, seems more capable of tackling the issues we see in our own post-cold-war world than any other book I've read.

Read this book. It will delight and reward you.

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A true treasure

By A Customer

I remember checking this book out of the library over and over again in junior high 25 years ago and it was indeed spellbinding. A current article in National Geographic on Iran brought back memories of this lovely book and I decided to see if it was still in print. I'm thrilled it has been "rediscovered."

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