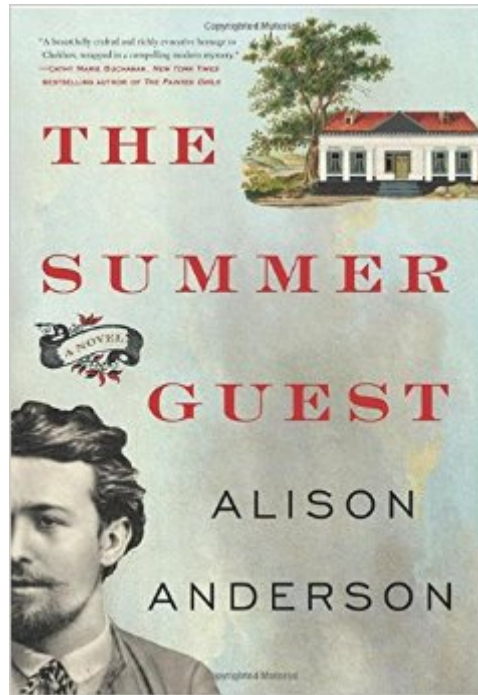


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The Summer Guest: A Novel



Synopsis

What if Anton Chekhov, undisputed master of the short story, actually wrote a novel—and the manuscript still existed? This tantalizing possibility drives *The Summer Guest*, a spellbinding narrative that draws together, across two centuries, the lives of three women through the discovery of a diary. During the long, hot summer of 1888, an extraordinary friendship blossoms between Anton Chekhov and Zinaida Lintvaryova, a young doctor. Recently blinded by illness, Zinaida has retreated to her family's estate in the lush countryside of Eastern Ukraine, where she is keeping a diary to record her memories of her earlier life. But when the Chekhov family arrives to spend the summer at a dacha on the estate, and she meets the middle son Anton Pavlovich, her quiet existence is transformed by the connection they share. What begins as a journal kept simply to pass the time becomes an intimate, introspective narrative of Zinaida's singular relationship with this doctor and writer of growing fame. More than a century later, in 2014, the unexpected discovery of this diary represents Katya Kendall's last chance to save her struggling London publishing house. Zinaida's description of a gifted young man still coming to terms with his talent offers profound insight into a literary legend, but it also raises a tantalizing question: Did Chekhov, known only as a short story writer and playwright, write a novel over the course of their friendship that has since disappeared? The answer could change history, and finding it proves an irresistible challenge for Ana Harding, the translator Katya hires. Increasingly drawn into Zinaida and Chekhov's world, Ana is consumed by her desire to find the "lost" book. As she delves deeper into the moving account of two lives changed by a meeting on a warm May night, she discovers that the manuscript is not the only mystery contained within the diary's pages. Inspired by the real friendship between Chekhov and the Lintvaryov family, landowners in the Ukraine, *The Summer Guest* is a masterful and utterly compelling literary novel that breathes life into a vanished world, while exploring the transformative power of art and the complexity of love and friendship.

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Customer Reviews

Three women's lives intersect, bridging the past and the present, crossing the borders of time. One woman is long deceased, but what she left behind could alter the destiny of the other two. Katya Kendall, a Russian émigré married to a Brit, is trying to save her small, financially troubled publishing house, as well as a static marriage. She's contacted Ana Harding, a reclusive American translator, living in France (on the border of Switzerland), to translate a century-old Ukrainian diary into English. Ana's career and personal life have stagnated; this could be an opportunity to engage with something fresh and inspiring. Two women, reaching in the past--to secure a future. In 1888, a 30-year-old Ukrainian doctor, Zinaida Lintvaryova (Zina), blinded by a terminal illness, chronicled her friendship, over the course of two summers, with a young literary artist on the cusp of fame--Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. Moreover, the diary suggests the potential discovery of an unpublished Chekhov novel, (he was known only for short stories and plays). For Ana and Katya, a dead, blind woman could open their eyes to success and redemption. The revelation of an unpublished Chekhov novel would have large-scale significance. When Chekhov was 28, he and his family spent two summers at the Lintvaryova estate in Luka, a lovely, peaceful countryside by the river Pysol. The two cultured families enjoyed each other's company, with boating, fishing, lively dinners, music, and spirited conversation. Zina felt renewed. "The voices of the Chekhov brothers as they laugh and prepare their lines for fishing, little suspecting that it is somewhere deep inside me that they cast their lines. They pull me up toward an even brighter light. I can almost see it glinting on the surface."

This is a luminous, well-written, well-plotted novel to immerse a reader in time and place. The core story is a diary begun in 1888, by Zinaida Lintvaryova, whose family estate in eastern Ukraine is a summer vacation spot for the Chekhov family, notably Anton Chekhov, just on the cusp of fame for his plays and short stories. Zinaida is an intriguing personality, whose sensitivity, love of life and intelligence shines through her diary; a doctor like Anton, but blind because of an advancing illness, and feeling a deepening attraction with Anton as the first summer progresses. Two other stories intertwine with Zinaida's: Katya Kendall, who has discovered this diary and has a financial -- and

personal -- interest in seeing it published before her London publishing firm goes under, and Ana (Anastasia) Harding, Katya's translator, who falls in love with Zinaida and the circumstances around the diary. As these three stories advance, the emotional depth -- and several mysteries -- advance with it. Katya and Ana's stories -- set in 2014 -- are bound up in with the new crisis in Ukraine, as there's no more market for Katya's travel books about former Soviet places as the war begins, and Ana feels compelled to risk a wartime visit to see the site of Zinaida's home. The plots, the mysteries, accelerate and twist as the stories progress. Zinaida's references to a hitherto-unknown, unpublished novel by Anton Chekhov, fascinating as it is, is but one of the mysteries. This is a marvelous novel: its prose is warm, luminous, and the three women are compelling, with backstories that develop and emotions that engage the reader. (The diary is first-person; the other two stories third-person).

This novel, putatively based on an actual diary written by a young Ukrainian woman whose family were hosts to Anton Chekhov and his relatives during summers spent in a rural Ukrainian community, conforms to a format that has become familiar. In this case, a translator is asked to consider writing a translation of a diary written by a person who is not famous in herself, but was closely tied to a famous writer, of interest to many readers. The translator has a history of her own, and the publisher asking her to do the translation is trapped in a difficult relationship--a marriage that may be failing at the same time that the publishing house she and her husband have founded may be going under, a victim of the declining sales for literary fiction and other print materials. So, the narrator (or central consciousness) is based on the life of a minor character in the life of a major author, who tells of their encounters, perhaps a growing (or in this case, stunted, but rich and meaningful) relationship, and implicitly, we are to learn more about the major character while also learning to appreciate the discerning thoughts and feelings of a person who plays a role, important or fleeting, "behind the scenes" of the great man's (or woman's) life. And in case the reader might miss it, the possible (or obvious) contemporary relevance of this story of frustrated love and courage in the face of inevitable early death, is elaborated and embedded into the stories of the 21st century characters. The narrator is an intelligent and serious young woman doctor, who lives with her family in rural Ukraine after losing her sight (and therefore her professional role and her ability to read, among other sighted activities) because of the effects of a malignant brain tumor.

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