

Isabelle and Alexander

Rebecca Anderson

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Though love often blooms in adversity, an arranged marriage, class differences, and a sudden devastating accident all act as impediments to intimacy in Rebecca Anderson's sweet clean romance novel, *Isabelle and Alexander*.

Isabelle comes into her own in the era of England's Industrial Revolution. She is not of aristocratic birth, but her family does have money. Her husband, Alexander, is a self-made man who owns mills in Manchester, the heart of industrial England. Though his rise left him rich, he's uncertain of himself in social circles. Isabelle was untutored and unprepared for a reticent man; she finds it difficult to draw Alexander out. Just when it seems that they might overcome their differences, an accident derails their progress.

The book builds a world around its characters, drawing tension from history and including period details, as of how little was understood regarding medical diagnoses. It illustrates the social supports available to women, which are integral to their successes in life and marriage, by focusing on Isabelle's friends and housekeeper. Such women also help Isabelle to assert her independence, and her authority as wife and lady of the house. Also because of their interactions, Isabelle transitions from an unaware, leisure-class woman to a more enlightened spouse and supporter of the working class.

Intimacy and romance develop between Isabelle and Alexander because of simple gestures, like a long look or a thoughtful gift, and their conversations. Their slow, stately courting is reader appropriate for any age or audience. Manchester also gets its due as a place of grit and incredible production. Descriptions of bustling mills reveal their impact on the couple's family and its fortunes.

Isabelle and Alexander is an intimate and touching romance novel that focuses on women's lives in the business class of industrial England.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (May / June 2021)

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