

Love at Six Thousand Degrees

Maki Kashimada

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An unhappy housewife learns to cope with loss and trauma in Maki Kashimada's novel *Love at Six Thousand Degrees*.

One day, for no apparent reason, a woman leaves her child at the neighbor's and runs away. Her morbid fascination with atomic bombings draws her to Nagasaki, where she starts a diffident affair with a much younger man. Though she began her journey with the intention of exploring death and chaos, she ends up finding a way to express feelings that have long eluded her.

In between spending time with the young man and visiting local sights, the woman falls prey to morose, rambling thoughts about religion, literature, and her past, including those of her abusive mother, her alcoholic brother's suicide, and her unsatisfying relationships with men. Nagasaki itself, with its still-visible signs of tragedy, fuels her inner darkness. Generational and personal traumas meld to create a jaundiced, unhealthy view of life that drives her to drink and despair—and, ultimately, to run away from home. Reflecting her sense of isolation and disconnect, almost none of the characters are named. They are little more than anonymous specks in an unfair world.

The affair, based on mutual suffering rather than affection, withers even before the woman is ready to return home. Yet she is not unaffected by the fleeting nature of the relationship. Even if her home life remains the same, she has changed: she has learned that words, as limited and imperfect as they are, give her a weapon against bleak thoughts and obsessions. Simply giving voice to her experiences is enough to take away their power and to give her an identity of her own.

Love at Six Thousand Degrees is a novel about learning to acknowledge bad memories rather than hide them away.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2023)

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