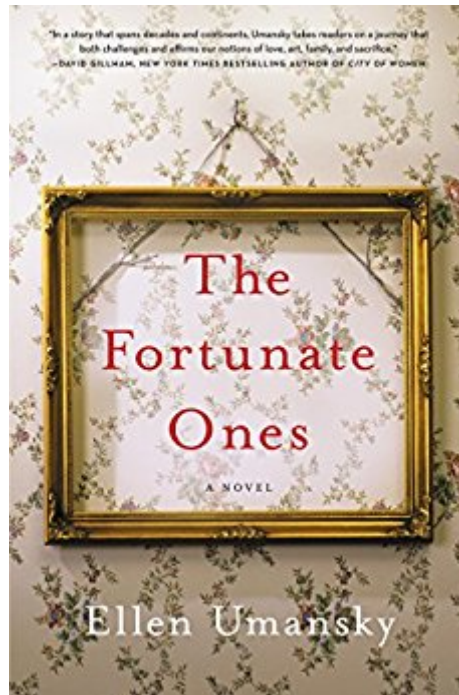




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The Fortunate Ones: A Novel



Synopsis

One very special work of art—a Chaim Soutine painting—will connect the lives and fates of two different women, generations apart, in this enthralling and transporting debut novel that moves from World War II Vienna to contemporary Los Angeles. It is 1939 in Vienna, and as the specter of war darkens Europe, Rose Zimmer's parents are desperate. Unable to get out of Austria, they manage to secure passage for their young daughter on a kindertransport, and send her to live with strangers in England. Six years later, the war finally over, a grief-stricken Rose attempts to build a life for herself. Alone in London, devastated, she cannot help but try to search out one piece of her childhood: the Chaim Soutine painting her mother had cherished. Many years later, the painting finds its way to America. In modern-day Los Angeles, Lizzie Goldstein has returned home for her father's funeral. Newly single and unsure of her path, she also carries a burden of guilt that cannot be displaced. Years ago, as a teenager, Lizzie threw a party at her father's house with unexpected but far-reaching consequences. The Soutine painting that she loved and had provided lasting comfort to her after her own mother had died was stolen, and has never been recovered. This painting will bring Lizzie and Rose together and ignite an unexpected friendship, eventually revealing long-held secrets that hold painful truths. Spanning decades and unfolding in crystalline, atmospheric prose, *The Fortunate Ones* is a haunting story of longing, devastation, and forgiveness, and a deep examination of the bonds and desires that map our private histories.

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Customer Reviews

Well written and a familiar story concerning world war II and stolen artwork. A fast read.

Very good read keeps you interested through out !

The Fortunate Ones was a very different book than I thought I was going to be reading. I love art and art mysteries so I was geared up to read that type of book. Instead, The Fortunate Ones is more a tale of loss, family bonds, and betrayal with a side story about a painting. While it was not what I was initially hoping for, I did like the book and felt that it was both entertaining and well-written. The story takes place in two time periods, Europe in the 1930s and 1940s and Los Angeles in the 2000s. I much preferred the story involving Rose Zimmer in the 1930s and 1940s. As her story begins, Rose and her brother Gerhard are living in Austria with her parents. They are Jewish, and Hitler is preparing to annex Austria. Her forward-thinking parents secure passage for their children to England on a kindertransport to save them from Hitler's reign. After the war is over, Rose spends years trying to determine what happened to her parents and their belongings, particularly her mother's favorite painting, The Bellhop. The second story takes place in Los Angeles in the 2000s. Lizzie Goldstein has returned home for her father's funeral. At the funeral, she meets Rose who now lives in L.A. Years previously, The Bellhop was purchased by Lizzie's dad and subsequently stolen on Lizzie's watch. Lizzie and Rose develop a friendship that leads Lizzie to discover devastating secrets about her family. Lizzie is a tough character to like; she is very needy and insecure. As her friendship with Rose blossoms, Lizzie becomes somewhat more likeable, but I felt generally like she detracted from the second story line. Ellen Umansky's portrayal of Rose's experience after the war and finally learning what terrible ends so many European Jews including her parents met was very powerful. While any reader today already knows the horrific things that happened to so many Jewish people at the hands of Hitler and

his thugs, the author very effectively conveyed how it would have unfolded for Rose and many others as they slowly and painfully learned what happened to their family members and friends. This part of the story has stayed with me. I am still thinking about how truly unbelievable it must have been to learn that about the unthinkable and tragic treatment and abuse of relatives and friends. I enjoyed reading *The Fortunate Ones*. Thanks to LibraryThing for the chance to read this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

This book combines the stories of two women - Rose, now an old woman who, as a child, was put on a train at night by her parents and sent through Kindertransport to London to escape the Nazis in Germany, who never saw her parents again. Lizzie, the other, was a younger woman who had lost her mother to cancer in her childhood and recently lost her father in an automobile accident. They combine as they search for a painting, the Bellhop, which played a pivotal emotional role in each of their lives and was twice lost - once stolen by the Nazis, the second time stolen during a party which Lizzie disobediently threw as a teenager. Rose's story is powerfully told - especially at the end. It is breathtaking and incredibly moving - a bewildered child, waiting in England for parents left behind in Nazi Germany who finally realizes they will never return, making her own way in the world with the fear and weight of aloneness on her back. This history was obviously painstakingly researched and the story was shown, not told, in a way that touches the readers' deepest emotions. I had heard of Kindertransport, but this story explores the bewildered emotions of children severed from their parents and taken to a new land, and the emotional burden they must carry for life. Rose's final reaction to the painting was powerful and moving, a perfect ending. Unfortunately, like many historical fiction authors, this author felt compelled to throw a modern story in and try to tie the stories together. It worked a little, but the chapters about Lizzie felt intrusive and more like an interruption than an addition to Rose's story. Rose wasn't perfect, but I felt a strong sympathy for her and felt myself rooting for her. Lizzie, in contrast, felt like a spoiled entitled little brat, even though she was an adult. Also, the Lizzie story felt like the author was telling it, not showing it, unlike the Rose story which was shown in disquieting color. I would find myself caught up in the Rose chapters, then a Lizzie chapter would appear and I would have to slog through it. I tried to skip the boring Lizzie chapters but then it was hard to keep track of the story. Lizzie could have been brought in at the end, to help find the painting, but I wish that most of the book had focused on Rose's life without the interruption of Lizzie, so that I could have lost myself in the compelling story of Rose.

The Fortunate Ones is a deeply compelling, moving novel. It intertwines the stories of two fascinating women, in two very different times, both obsessed by the theft of the same enigmatic painting. Not only are the emotional connections and insights beautifully articulated, but the plot is masterful. It builds to one of the most surprising and stunning endings I have ever read. This book is both deeply magical and deeply human, and Ellen Umansky is writer whom I would follow on any journey. I'm blown away!

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