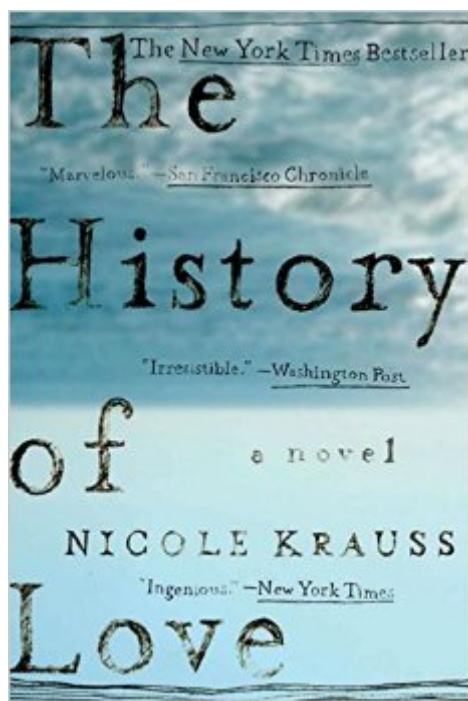


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# The History Of Love



## Synopsis

ONE OF THE MOST LOVED NOVELS OF THE DECADE. A long-lost book reappears, mysteriously connecting an old man searching for his son and a girl seeking a cure for her widowed mother's loneliness. Leo Gursky taps his radiator each evening to let his upstairs neighbor know he's still alive. But it wasn't always like this: in the Polish village of his youth, he fell in love and wrote a book. Sixty years later and half a world away, fourteen-year-old Alma, who was named after a character in that book, undertakes an adventure to find her namesake and save her family. With virtuosic skill and soaring imaginative power, Nicole Krauss gradually draws these stories together toward a climax of "extraordinary depth and beauty" (Newsday).

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars See all reviews (727 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Nicole Krauss's astonishing novel about a manuscript that survives the Holocaust, a flood, broken friendships, a plagiarist, misunderstanding, and obscurity has all the heart and intelligence of the best fiction being published today. Elderly Leo Gursky is afraid of dying unnoticed, and he plans his days so that people will see him and remember him. Among other schemes, he makes a scene in Starbucks and poses nude for a drawing class. Leo wasn't always this lonely. Decades before, in a small town that was then part of Poland, he fell in love with a girl named Alma. He wrote a book about her before the two fled at different times and circumstances to safety during World War II. Despite the disappointments in his life, Leo continues to write, convinced that he will die when this next book is finished. Meanwhile, a teenager also called Alma, named after a character in a book titled *The History of Love* by a Chilean named Litvinoff, finds herself in the heart of a mystery: her

mother is hired by a mysterious man named Jacob Marcus to translate *The History of Love* from Spanish. Since Alma's father passed away years before, her mother has been overcome with sadness, and Alma sets out to find Jacob Marcus as a possible suitor. Oblivious to Alma's quest, her brother Bird has decided he is one of thirty-six holy men, a "lamed vovnik", and might even be the Messiah. And then there's Litvinoff himself, in the past, with his personal story and connection to the manuscript and to Alma and to his own beloved Rosa. The stunning coup of this novel is how Krauss brings these diverse elements into a single, concluding moment. Krauss has complete command of a story that could get away from a lesser novelist. Witty, sometimes sadly funny, with unforgettable off-beat characters, the novel draws in the reader from the first page, although its true strength isn't evident until the last hundred pages. The comparison of *The History of Love* to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is inevitable, since the two authors are married and both books were published in 2005. While the two works echo each other in parts, use similar postmodern techniques, and concern themselves with related themes, Krauss and Foer are too good to be lumped together. Still, these seem like companion books. *The History of Love* is every bit as inventive and as emotionally riveting as Foer's novel - and vice versa - but it (as does Foer's novel) seems to wink at readers who have read both. Readers familiar with Foer's book will smile as Leo reveals that he is a retired locksmith who can open any door he wants. And the set-up of a young person, missing his/her dead father and searching New York for clues to solve a mystery will seem familiar. Beyond that, however, these books stand alone as remarkable works about people, both immigrants and natives, who are adrift in contemporary America. This exceptional novel deserves a wide readership. Highly recommended.

This book is very similar in both content and tone to Jonathan Safran Foer's latest book, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. It's interesting to note that Foer and Krauss are husband and wife. Summary, no spoilers: This novel is told from the point of view of several narrators. The first, and best narrator, (the parts that feature him are brilliant), is Leo Gursky. Leo lives by himself in New York. He was born in Poland, and fell in love with a girl named Alma. They vowed to spend their lives together. Due to the war, Leo and Alma were separated, and Leo has spent his life alone, pining for Alma. The other main narrator is a young girl also named Alma, who has lost her father to pancreatic cancer and lives with her young brother and mother. All have been terribly damaged by his death. Although we occasionally get other narrators, the story is essentially told by these two wounded individuals. Alma tries to find the woman for whom she was named, and Leo tries to become a part of the living world, and become a part of his son Isaac's life. And all of this centers

around a mysterious book entitled The History of Love. This is a gorgeous book. Like Foer's novel, this book is funny, sad, and quirky. At times a bit too quirky. I thought the chapters involving Leo were terrific. The book starts out with Leo's narration, and hence the book starts out on a powerful note. Although I enjoyed the character of young Alma, the chapters involving her were often odd, and sometimes slowed the pace of the story. Still, this book is worthy of 5 stars, and it would make a wonderful book club choice...there is a lot to discuss. So who has the better book, Foer or Krauss? My vote goes to Krauss, who wrote a page turner that has a better flow, and is more accessible than the Foer's work. Recommended.

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