



A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA

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BOOK CLUB KIT



Dear Reader,

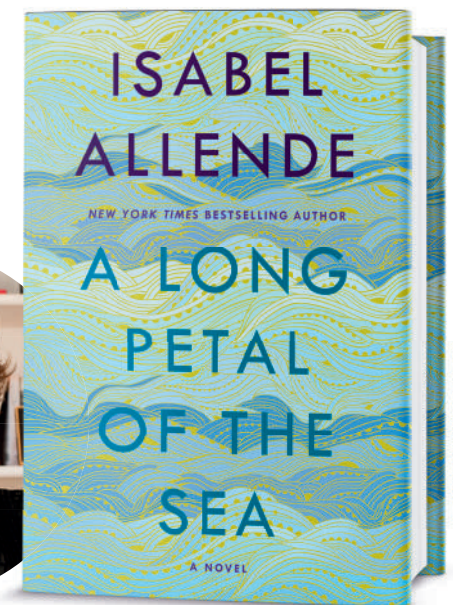
This is a story of displacement and love, of sorrow and hope, of a couple trying to find their place in a world in shambles, torn apart by violence. It starts in 1939 at the end of the Spanish Civil War, when half a million refugees escaped Franco by walking from Spain to France. There they were held in concentration camps by the French authorities. Thousands died.

Faced with this tragedy, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda commissioned an old cargo ship—the SS *Winnipeg*—and transported two thousand people to Chile, where the ship docked on the day the Second World War broke out in Europe. The hearts of the Spanish refugees were wounded by loss and separation, but their eyes were set firmly on the future. Despite the anti-immigrant rhetoric they faced, they embraced their new land with gratitude and greatly enriched it.

My grandfather was one of the many that welcomed the immigrants, so I heard of the ordeal of the *Winnipeg* in my childhood. But it was not until I met one of the passengers, in Venezuela, that the story truly gripped me. His name was Victor. He lived in Chile for thirty-four years until, like me, he became a political refugee after Chile's 1973 military coup and the ensuing regime of terror.

I have been a foreigner all my life, first as the child of diplomats, then as a political refugee, and now as an immigrant in the USA. Maybe that's why a sense of place is so important in all my writing. Where do I belong? Where are my roots? Is my heart divided or has it just grown bigger? These are the questions faced by my protagonists in *A Long Petal of the Sea*—the title of which comes from a poem by Neruda. His poetry has always accompanied me in my nomadic existence.

My friend Victor returned to Chile in 1989, when General Pinochet stepped down from power and the country recovered its long-lost democracy. At 103 he was more lucid than ever, and we were constantly in touch. He helped me with details of life during the Spanish Civil War, of some of the battles, the exodus to France, the concentration camps, the voyage on the *Winnipeg*, the arrival in Chile, and his relationship with Neruda and President Salvador Allende. He died recently, six days before I could send him the final manuscript of this novel, which is dedicated to him and to other navigators of hope.



A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

DALMAU FAMILY

Marcel Lluís Dalmau

Dalmau patriarch: A composer and passionate professor of music who created and conducted the Barcelona Youth Orchestra.

Carme Dalmau

Dalmau matriarch: Daughter of a stevedore and a charity pupil of the nuns who was preparing to join the order . . . until she became Marcel's wife.

Victor Dalmau

Eldest son: A man of few words who always had a book in his hands, a student of medicine who joined the Republican army in 1936.

Guillem Dalmau

Youngest son: A cheerful, boisterous, impulsive giant who embraced the revolution like a lover.

Roser Bruguera

Marcel's music student: His most outstanding pianist, who came to be part of the Dalmau family as easily as if she were a blood relation.

DEL SOLAR FAMILY

Isidro del Solar

Del Solar patriarch: a short-tempered and successful Chilean businessman with a preternatural talent for making gobs of money.

Laura Vizcarra

Isidro's devout, melancholy wife: She shied away from glamorous social functions, often envying her younger sister's cloistered life.

Felipe del Solar

Eldest del Solar son: An intellectual—a self-professed “incurable rationalist”—who always seemed to be sparring with his father.

Ofelia del Solar

Pampered daughter: Sensuous and sheltered from the ugliness of the world. Until she wasn't.

Juana Nancucheo

Del Solar family nanny of indeterminate age: In charge of the household since time immemorial—rough in manner and steadfastly loyal.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Matia Eyzaguirre

An agreeable young gentleman and Ofelia's eternal fiancé, who was carving out a career for himself in the diplomatic corps.

Aitor Ibarra

Ambulance driver: An “immortal Basque” who was constantly singing to himself and laughing out loud to mock death.

Elisabeth Eidenbenz

A Swiss nurse with the soul of a missionary, a compassionate volunteer for the Aid Association for Children in War.

Pablo Neruda

Chilean artist and humanitarian, considered best Spanish-speaking poet of his generation, and a champion of refugees, particularly those from Spain.

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TIMELINE: SPAIN

JUL
1936

The military rises up to overthrow the government. Later that year, Victor Dalmau, an aspiring doctor, joins the Republican army to fight the Fascist forces led by General Francisco Franco.

1938

Victor's brother, a soldier, dies in the epic battle of the River Ebro, leaving behind his pregnant girlfriend, Roser Brugeura, a pianist, who will not be told of her loss until the following year.

JAN
1939

Franco's troops advance, and in Barcelona thousands of wounded souls—including Victor, his elderly mother, and Roser (still pregnant)—make the treacherous trek to the French border.

LATE
JUL
1939

Victor meets with Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in Paris. With his home country's backing, Neruda plans to transport a select group of Spanish exiles to Chile aboard the SS *Winnipeg*. But, in order to qualify, Victor and Roser (now with a newborn son) must enter into an arrangement.

AUG 4
1939

More than two thousand Spaniards set sail from France to Chile, a country that, years later, Neruda refers to as "*the long petal of sea and wine and snow . . .*"

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TIMELINE: CHILE

SEP 3
1939

On the day of the Spanish exiles' arrival in Chile, the Second World War breaks out in Europe.

1940

Victor enrolls in the university to complete his medical studies, but also seizes a business opportunity—and enters into a dangerous affair.

NOV
1941

President Pedro Aguirre Cerda, champion of the refugees, dies of tuberculosis. The poor people in Chile, who benefited from his reforms, mourn deeply while Cerda's right-wing enemies believe that his democratic spirit was a dangerous precedent that cannot be repeated.

FEB
1948

Accused of slander, Neruda is stripped of his post as senator and hunted by police. He and his wife are shepherded from house to house, hidden by supporters, including Victor and Roser.

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TIMELINE: VENEZUELA & CHILE

MID
1960s

VENEZUELA

In Caracas, after years of work, Roser and a former Venezuelan ambassador see (and hear!) their passion project come to fruition: the Ancient Music Orchestra, comprised of musicians from different countries, precious antique instruments, and unknown scores.

SEP
1970

CHILE

Salvador Allende wins the presidency in a close three-way race. He nationalizes the copper industry, and transfers companies and banks to state ownership. Chaos follows.

SEP 11
1973

CHILE

The military, supported by the United States, stages a coup and storms the presidential palace. Later that day, Allende shoots himself with an AK-47, a gift from Fidel Castro. Augusto Pinochet will assume power, and repression is instantaneous and brutal.

SEP 23
1973

CHILE

After the seizure of his beloved country, Neruda dies. Chileans now live “in the midst of lies, omissions, and euphemisms, in grotesque exaltation of the blessed fatherland, brave soldiers, and traditional morality.” Victor is arrested, and spends 11 months in a concentration camp.

1974

CHILE

After Victor’s release, he and Roser reconnect, and share evenings of confessions, memories, and secrets.

A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA

TIMELINE: SPAIN & CHILE

NOV 25
1975

SPAIN

Franco dies after a long illness. Victor and Roser watch the funeral on television. Crowds pay homage: weeping women on their knees, the Catholic Church with its pomp and ceremony, politicians and dignitaries in strict mourning—with the exception of the Chilean dictator in his imperial cloak. All the while a question hangs in the air: What is going to happen to Spain?

1983-
1991

CHILE

The lives of Victor and Roser change once again, along with their adoptive country as it moves from dictatorship to a democracy.

1994

CHILE

On his eightieth birthday, just past seven in the evening, Victor receives an unexpected visitor, and a shocking surprise.



COCKTAIL FROM SPAIN

TINTO DE VERANO

INGREDIENTS

3 to 4 ice cubes
½ cup red wine
½ cup lemon-lime soda,
such as Sprite or 7-Up
Slice of lemon

INSTRUCTIONS

- Place ice cubes in a tall (20 oz. or more) glass.
- Add red wine and soda.
- Garnish with lemon slice.

NOTES

You can use any Spanish red wine.
For a less sugary version, replace soda with citrus-flavored tonic water.



Courtesy of The Spruce Eats

COCKTAIL FROM CHILE

PISCOLA

INGREDIENTS

2 oz. pisco
Ice cubes
Cola
Lime wedge

INSTRUCTIONS

- Pour pisco into a highball glass filled with ice.
- Top with cola, stir and garnish with lime wedge.



Courtesy of Supercall

PEBRE

(CHILEAN CHILI PEPPER SALSA)

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 tablespoons red chili pepper paste (or to taste, or
2–3 tablespoons finely minced fresh chili peppers, green or red)
- 1 tablespoon red wine (or red wine vinegar, or to taste)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of ½ lime
- ½ cup cilantro leaves
- Salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

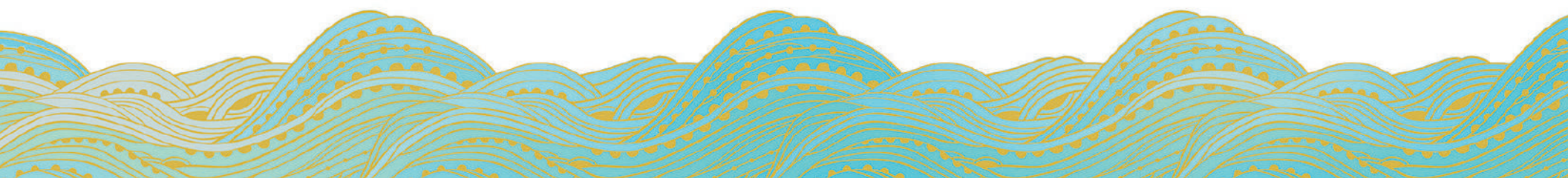
- Peel and finely chop the onion and place in a bowl.
- Mince the garlic and add the onion. Finely chop the cilantro and add to the bowl.
- Stir the red chili pepper paste into onion and garlic mixture. Add the olive oil and red wine (or red wine vinegar) to taste.
- Season mixture with salt and pepper and add lime juice to taste.
- Store pebre in the refrigerator for up to one week. It will taste spicier the day after you make it.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Each chapter begins with a quote from the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. How do these frame the chapters? Was there a particular quote you liked best? Did your attention to these quotes change when Neruda became a character in the novel?
2. Discuss the significance of the title, *A Long Petal of the Sea*. What do you think it means?
3. Which character did you feel most drawn to and why?
4. One page 41, Allende writes, “Despite this, the American officer still believed in the triumph of socialism. To him, equality was not only possible, but inevitable, and he practiced it like a religion.” How are ideals like socialism and equality represented? What other big concepts are examined?
5. What were your first impressions of Victor Dalmau and Roser Bruguera? How did your impressions change as the characters themselves changed throughout the course of the novel?
6. When first asking Roser to marry him in order to secure a spot on the ship ferrying refugees to Chile, Victor asks if affection and respect can be enough for her. Do you think those two feelings are enough for any relationship, whether platonic or romantic? In what circumstances?
7. At the book’s beginning, Allende writes about the many thousands of terrified refugees escaping to France—where a campaign of fear and hatred awaited them—about how nobody wanted these “filthy fugitives” or “repugnant beings who were going to spread epidemics, commit robberies and rape, and stir up a communist revolution.” Do you think the same or similar sentiments towards refugees exist today? Why do you think refugees are so often stigmatized in history and in the present day?



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

8. Each of the main characters experiences love at some point in the story—Roser, Guillem, Victor, Ofelia, etc. What did you think of their different love stories? Which did you find the most realistic, heartbreaking, or compelling? In what ways does love drive the plot of the book?
9. What role does politics play in the novel? How does Allende use conversations between characters—like Juana, Felipe, and Isidro—to portray the tumultuous political climate during this time? Why do you think these characters had different political opinions? Do you think different generations are destined to have conflicting opinions?
10. What do you think of Ofelia's storyline? How did you feel about her decision to keep the baby and her family's deception in telling her it died during childbirth? How was her life shaped by the decisions of men, from her father to her eventual husband Matias? What would have happened to her if Matias hadn't married her?
11. How did you feel about the ending of *A Long Petal of the Sea*? Was it what you expected or hoped would happen? If not, how would you have ended it?
12. What did you learn from *A Long Petal of the Sea*—about this period in history, about Chilean culture, or about human nature?

