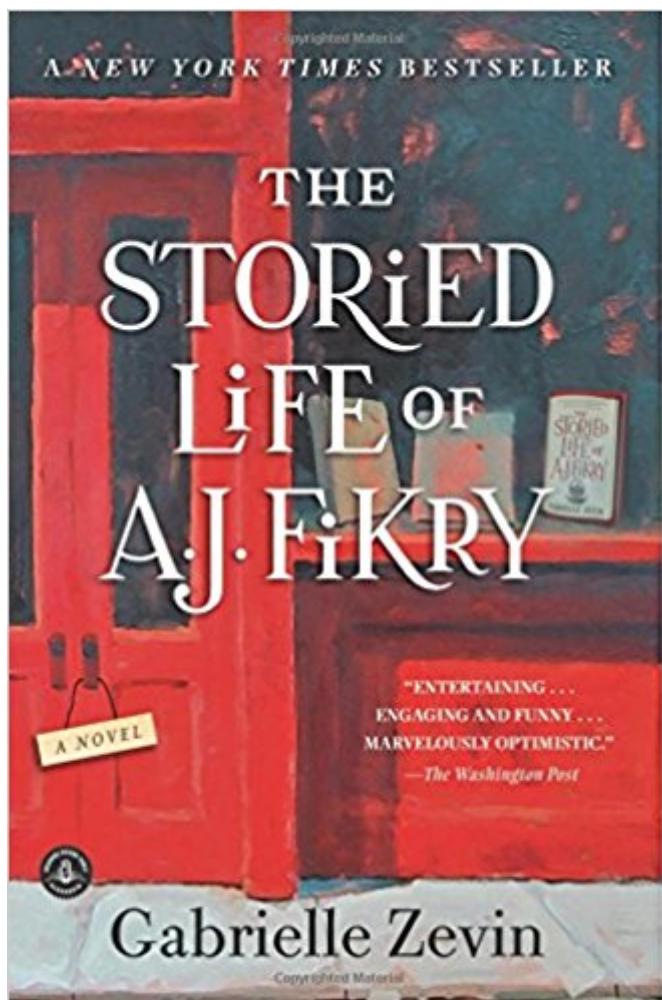


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The Storied Life Of A. J. Fikry: A Novel



Synopsis

"Funny, tender, and moving, *The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry* reminds us all exactly why we read and why we love."^{*} A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. He lives alone, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. But when a mysterious package appears at the bookstore, its unexpected arrival gives Fikry the chance to make his life over--and see everything anew. "This novel has humor, romance, a touch of suspense, but most of all love--love of books and bookish people and, really, all of humanity in its imperfect glory."[•] Eowyn Ivey, author of *The Snow Child* "Marvelously optimistic about the future of books and bookstores and the people who love both."[•] *The Washington Post* "You won't want it to end."[•] *Family Circle* "A natural for book groups."[•] *Richmond Times-Dispatch* "A reader's paradise of the first order."[•] *The Buffalo News* "A fun, page-turning delight."[•] *Minneapolis Star Tribune* "Captures the joy of connecting people and books . . . Irresistible."[•] *Booklist* "A wonderful, moving, endearing story of redemption and transformation that will sing in your heart for a very, very long time."[•] Garth Stein, author of *The Art of Racing in the Rain* "Readers who delighted in *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, and *Letters from Skye* will be equally captivated by this novel."[•] ^{**}*Library Journal*, starred review

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Customer Reviews

I absolutely loved this novel. A.J. Fikry is the owner of a small, independent bookstore on the small Alice Island in the Northeast. He is cynical, cranky, and depressed...and not without reason. The

recent death of his beloved wife has left him a widower at the age of thirty-nine. Their shared love of books seems to have died with his wife and A.J. is left behind with only bitterness. Enter an absolutely delightful cast of secondary characters who populate the island and A.J.'s life. You're bound to love at least one - if not all - of them. Next we have the unexpected hope and redemption of A.J. I'm not giving any spoilers here. Yes, it's a feel-good book. But it's more than that: it's a love letter to the power books have in our lives. If you have ever felt changed by a book, this novel will speak to you....you'll "get" it. And if you loved "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society" or "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand" you'll find lots to love here, as well - not because the plots are similar, but because of the similar feel to the novels that comes from a good cast of eccentric townsfolk, a small community, and a sense of closeness among the characters. So I'll leave you with this: if you love reading books, do not miss this one. (I wouldn't be at all surprised to see it made into a movie!)

Lots of fiction works incorporate books or bookstores as central to their plots. Some make good use of both; I'm thinking here of works like "Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore". Most, though, use a book as a sort of MacGuffin and it could just as easily be a butter dish. Or, the action takes place in a nice atmospheric bookstore that could just as easily be an auto repair shop. "Fikry", though, is different and belongs to that small category of works that really have something to say about books and bookstores and, in this case, booksellers. And that's great. Fikry is not just a bookseller. He filters his experiences, his thoughts, even pretty much how he lives his life by reference to his favorite books. Everything he perceives has some analogue in a book he once read, and when he isn't living his life he is thinking about or talking about books. It is no accident that the first major character we meet here is a publisher's rep who begins to play a larger and larger role in Fikry's life. And, because Fikry's opinions are strong and well-informed, the book is interesting enough even if you don't care for the plot at all. This book has been heavily promoted as "in the spirit" of "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society". That's probably good marketing - "Guernsey..." is a well-loved book, although I thought it was a little bland and flabby. But, this book is a lot better, or at least more appealing to me, in one particular regard. A.J. Fikry is a prickly character with a lot of strong opinions and a not entirely likeable or appealing world view. This is not some grand multi-generational saga; it is more of a character sketch, focused on an unusual character. More important - on a thought provoking and sometimes difficult character. So, no spoilers here. The blurbs give you a good idea of how this story develops. What is important is simply to note that Fikry is interesting and what he says and thinks about books is interesting. Bottom line - if you like

amiable shaggy dog life stories, or if you don't usually but you do like reading about interesting people thinking about interesting books, then you might very much enjoy this. I did. Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book in exchange for a candid review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.

There is nothing wrong with this book. I'll begin by saying that. It is decently written. It moves along at a fair pace. The characters are somewhat interesting for the most part. I have nothing particularly negative to say about the story. I didn't, however, especially like the book. I didn't dislike it either. It was a nice story. It was a safe story. It was gentle and sweet and cozy and predictable. For many readers, those are all excellent qualities. But if you, like myself, prefer books with at least a few edges, a few uncertainties, a little darkness, a little messiness, and some deeper character development, then this isn't the book for you. It's simply a matter of preference.

OK. My review now has a spoiler alert! Do not read this review if you do not want to know what is going to happen in the book. This book started out strong with good witty dialogue and fast flowing thoughts. It slumped about a third of the way through with nobody saying anything interesting. Nobody's character developed much. The introduction of these characters sounded interesting but they didn't go anywhere. Half way through the book I lost interest. AJ is depressed, cynical, sardonic. He regrets being mean to the book rep. But there's no cogitating on his part about her, no reflection. Just fast forward five years and he takes steps to get to know her. By this time she's engaged to someone else, but-hey good luck! She breaks up with him. That was convenient. But it also makes human lives expendable. Just throw people out of the way so the protagonist, whom we're all rooting for, can have his romance. But is it romantic? They have sex before they even know each other. Is that a throw away action as well? I thought that was supposed to be the culmination of two people's intimacy toward each other. After that I stopped caring. Maya is supposed to be interesting but, as someone who worked in preschool for several years, she wasn't very real to me. I've never met a three year old like that. Finally, the supporting cast had all the hackneyed traits: divorce, adultery, blah, blah, blah. I'm not saying those things don't really happen but they seemed so perfunctory. I can tell by the reviews most people loved it. Just not me.

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