

BOOK CLUB NOTES

'Powerful and moving, heart-breaking and inspiring.'

TANIA BLANCHARD,
THE GIRL FROM MUNICH

AT
THE FOOT OF THE
**CHEERRY
TREE**

A SWEEPING STORY
OF LOVE AND WAR,
BASED ON AN INCREDIBLE
TRUE STORY

'A beautiful,
heart-wrenching and
heart-warming book.'

RACHAEL JOHNS,
THE WORK WIVES

**ALLI
PARKER**



DEAR READER

At the Foot of the Cherry Tree tells the story of one of Australia's most epic love stories, a love that changed the course of history. Two teenagers fell in love and, six years later, cracked the then 50-year-old White Australia Policy. Those teenagers are more than just the beginning of the end of this xenophobic immigration policy. They're also my grandparents and I am beyond honoured to continue and preserve their legacy.

My grandfather, Gordon, served in the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) after WW2 as he never had the opportunity to fight. He was expecting ruthless samurai, angry Japanese men ready to kill Australians at every corner. Instead, he found my grandmother, Nobuko "Cherry" Sakuramoto, terrified of ex-enemy soldiers and a survivor of the atomic bomb. They fell in love and soon discovered the White Australia Policy prevented Cherry coming home with Gordon as she was from a non-white, non-European background. So, he did what any 20-year-old soldier would do. He vowed to fight.

They stood in the face of incredible opposition and hatred. They refused to lose faith and hope, even when all seemed lost. Both made incredible sacrifices. Cherry lost her family, rejected by her country and community, left alone to blindly trust in a man who could've so easily abandoned her as so many other men had done to their Japanese girlfriends. She survived two home births, the atomic bomb, walking a day in bare feet from Hiroshima to Kure to find safety. Gordon stood up for what he believed in and was attacked, physically and verbally. He had to fight against his own family who weren't initially supportive, he sacrificed a career as a doctor to put his wife and child's welfare first, and continued to challenge a government still hostile even after peace agreements were long signed.

These are people who fought for each other and, in doing so, forced the world to open their eyes. My grandparents are part of a pocket of Australian history that people try to turn away from and ignore. Now, more than ever, their story needs to be remembered, as discussion of basic human rights comes centre stage once more, as though there are different subsections of society who deserve less because of circumstances outside of their control.

This book is the story of a girl who lost her mother to war and a father to pride. The story of a boy who believed what he was told then began to question the truth. The story of a love that challenged a government and changed a country forever. A story that reminds us to trust, have hope, and that love is what it means to be human.

I hope *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* makes you laugh, cry, and inspires you that it is possible to make a stand for the things you believe in and that sometimes all it takes is one person to spark genuine systemic change.

Alli Parker

ABOUT THE BOOK

Gordon Parker is an eager eighteen-year-old Australian boy desperate to fight for his country, and Nobuko 'Cherry' Sakuramoto is a sixteen-year-old girl struggling to survive in Japan in the aftermath of World War II. But when they fall in love, they change the course of history.

When Gordon arrives in Japan, he expects ruthless samurai, angry Japanese men ready to kill Australians at every corner. Instead, he finds Cherry, terrified of ex-enemy soldiers, a survivor of the atomic bomb. Against all the rules and all the odds, they fall in love. But when Gordon discovers the White Australia Policy prevents Cherry coming home with him as his war bride, he does what any 20-year-old soldier would do. He vows to fight. Leaving Cherry alone and pregnant in post-war Japan, Gordon has to convince his family to accept his marriage and wage a desperate campaign against a xenophobic and war-scarred government to allow his wife and children to come home.



A sweeping story spanning seven years and two countries reeling from the aftermath of war, *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* is a powerfully moving novel about faith, trust, and the power of a love that alters history - written by Gordon and Cherry's granddaughter, accomplished scriptwriter, Alli Parker.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alli Parker is a Japanese-Australian author and screenwriter, with a background in script editing and script co-ordinating. Her debut historical fiction novel, *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree*, is a novelisation of the true story of Australia's first Japanese war bride, Alli's grandmother. She co-wrote episodes of crime drama series *Jack Irish*, romantic thriller series *Secret Bridesmaids' Business* and mystery telemovie series *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*. Her credits as a script editor and co-ordinator include *Irreverent*, *Jack Irish* series 1, 2, & 3, *Shantaram*, *Secret Bridesmaids' Business*, *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*, *Ride Like a Girl*, *Sunshine*, *Please Like Me* series 4 and *Utopia* series 1 & 2.



BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* is set in a post-WW2 world. Did the differences between post-war Japan and post-war Australia surprise you?
2. The title *At the Foot of the Cherry Tree* comes from Cherry's Japanese name, Sakuramoto. How do you feel the imagery of trees in both Japan and Australia worked as symbols throughout the novel?
3. Cherry doesn't think she's brave throughout the book. Do you think she was brave? Or do you think she could've been braver?
4. How do you think Gordon's friendship with Toby helped Gordon in the story? Or did it hinder Gordon?
5. Does knowing Cherry and Gordon were real people change the way you feel about what happened to them in the book?
6. Gordon takes Charlie under his wing because Charlie reminds him of his younger brothers. Do you think Gordon would've felt differently if he hadn't had so many siblings?
7. Cherry finds a pseudo mother figure in Suma. Do you think Tsudo, Cherry's mother, would've been supportive of Cherry's relationship with Gordon or not?
8. Even though the war is over, there is still a strong sense of a divide between the Australians and the Japanese. Do you think an anti-fraternisation policy would have ever been successful or were men like Gordon and Toby rebels?
9. It takes Gordon four and a half years to convince the government to change their minds to allow Cherry, Margaret and Kathleen in to Australia. Do you think that's a long amount of time or a short amount of time?
10. Gordon's campaign to bring Cherry to Australia ended up changing Australian government policy. Does reading this book make you feel more hopeful that ordinary citizens can bring about sweeping change? Can you think of other examples where this might have happened?
11. Gordon is eighteen when he meets Cherry and she is sixteen years old. Would many other teenagers be so loyal and faithful to someone they met at that age or is Gordon and Cherry's resilience surprising?