



## Shaken to the Core

*Jae*

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Jae

## Shaken to the Core Jae

Kate Winthrop, the only child of a wealthy shipping magnate, has the course of her life charted for her by her parents. She's expected to marry well and produce a successor to the Winthrop empire. But Kate has a very different path in mind. Her true passion lies with photography—and with women.

Alone in the city after losing her brother, Sicilian immigrant Giuliana Russo starts working for the Winthrops as a maid. Despite their different social status, Kate and Giuliana become friends, much to the dismay of Kate's parents.

As the connection between the two women grows, a devastating earthquake hits San Francisco and ignites fires that sweep through the city for three days and nights.

Will the disaster shatter their tentative feelings for each other, or will they find the courage to save each other's lives—and their hearts?

Join Kate and Giuliana on a journey of danger and discovery in the action-packed historical romance *Shaken to the Core*, set against the backdrop of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Length: 126,000 words

Themes: 1900 · adventure · class differences · disaster · earthquake · lesbian · San Francisco

## Shaken to the Core Details

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Author : Jae

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# From Reader Review Shaken to the Core for online ebook

## Dee says

I didn't read the blurb when I picked this book up so for the first 20% of the story I had no clue how the title came about, now though its crystal clear. And, as per the title the plot revolves around a disastrous earthquake and the ensuing aftermath.

Back tracking, from the very beginning this story sucked me into the era. Jae has a vivid way of bringing the characters and their surroundings to life. The story is told in third person and from both Kate and Giuliana's POV's. It begins with Giuliana and her brother, when he ends up ill life takes a turn for the worse and Giuliana finds herself seeking work, no easy feat for a girl from Sicily who has never learned to read. But she's a clever cookie in other ways and finds employment with the Winthrops. As frowned upon as it is, her and Kate quickly become friends.

Obedience the current maid feels threatened and her nickname Biddy is more apt as she's a meddling old biddie. Events unfold that see Giuliana once again out of work. While staying at a boarding house an earthquake hits. Kate's family home holds up relatively well, but Giuliana finds herself trapped under debris with fire licking at her heels.

If anyone wants an insight into how it is to live through such a disaster this is as close as you'll get to it without actually experiencing it. I live in New Zealand so I know firsthand the fear and devastation.

Doctor Lucy Sharpe is a wonderful side character, I loved her appearances and wise words.

I have to admit the middle of the story lagged for me. I know it takes days, weeks, even years to rebuild lives after a disaster, but pages upon pages about such got old and a little repetitive.

Kate's plight to break into a man's world, working as a photographer, showcased how far we've come from the mentality of a woman's place being in the home. Her parents were uptight and consider themselves above others for most of the story.

So we have a young lady from wealth and another with barely a dollar to her name. Right up until over the 90% mark the reader is left to wonder if these two will ever forge their way together, or if it's even possible. Because up until that point, the earthquake and recovery overshadowed pretty much everything else.

And of course, I'm not going to disclose the ending. I will say the story is vivid in its story telling, well edited and will appeal to many readers who enjoy historical fiction.

*Copy provided in exchange for an honest review*

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## Pin says

If you liked Jae's historical romances *Backwards to Oregon* and *Hidden Truths*, *Shaken to the Core* is a must

read for you.

Writing about two very different young women in the event of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Jae has made a great effort to be historically accurate, just like in the two aforementioned novels. Kate Winthrop and Giuliana Russo are typical representatives of strong female characters for which Jae is known and appreciated. Fans of the Hamilton family will be pleasantly surprised because the third strong female character represents the third generation of that family -- Dr. Lucy Hamilton Sharpe. Fans of Jae's *Damage Control* will be too — this story is, in fact, Lauren's script from that book.

Women breaking boundaries, three young women and their sincere friendship, a tender young love, and a lot of action, is, in short, what this not-so-short novel is all about. I liked it and recommend it!

I would like to take this opportunity to recommend another great book from this time period and with a similar atmosphere -- *Galveston 1900: Swept Away* by Linda Crist.

\*ARC provided by publisher via NetGalley\*

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## **Just a man's point of view says**

With this romance, Jae offers us a detailed picture of San Francisco during the great earthquake of 1906, followed by violent, devastating fires, an event that caused thousands of fatalities. Enrico Caruso, the renowned Italian tenor who was in San Francisco that fateful April 18th, performing *Carmen* until the night before, vowed to never come back to that city, after trying to escape from the place first by boat and then successfully by train.

More dangerous still than the damages caused by the earthquake shake were the vast fires raging wild after it.

In this historic scenery, the novel shows us the love story of two young women, the rich Kate, daughter of a merchant industrialist, and the very poor sicilian immigrant Giuliana.

What touched me most is the naivety of both the protagonists discovering their own sexuality. The community of the time was so totally closed about homosexuality that even thinking it was taboo, let alone talking about it.

They will get help from the extraordinary Lucy Hamilton, tireless and heroic physician, linked to the Hamiltons of Jae's Oregon series, and hopefully the main character of a future book.

I loved Giuliana, immigrant from a Sicilian fishermen's family, undervalued maid in Kate's home, for her sweetness, and her enjoyable way of speaking mixing sicilian words to her English. Her Sicilian, by the way, is accurate, as everything Jae does. She's generous, combative, and she always has a sort of inner nobility.

On the other side we find Kate, a character who fights to free herself from the social chains imposed by her family, in order to become a professional photographer, in a world thinking that the women should not work, but only care for home and children. She's a kind of adventurer, sometimes hastily risking too much, but also motivated in the right direction.

The hardships of the earthquake will help both of them to grow up.

It is a story about friendship and love, that explores the theme of female emancipation in a moment of history that was getting ready for its awakening.

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## M says

Okay, hats off to Ms. Jae, she can write an interesting and authentic seeming historical novel set in the early 1900's.

While the historical content of the book was completed with gusto and provided all of the detail that we would expect from a committed researcher, for me it lacked the spark of romance between the two main characters that characterised her previous historical novels *Backwards to Oregon* and *Hidden Truths*.

My take on this novel has been heavily influenced by another book set in a virtually the same timeframe and featuring a very similar plot point of a cataclysmic natural disaster, that is the excellent *Galveston 1900: Swept Away* - I was constantly reminded of the similarity of the main plot and as a consequence this threw into sharp relief the definite lack of chemistry between the protagonists.

I found myself much more interested in the secondary character of Lucy Sharpe (enjoying the connection to the Jae's previous historical novels) and wanting to find out more about her journey both before and the after the events in this book.

Please don't take this as a massive criticism of this book, I certainly enjoyed the writing and learning about an event that is quite unfamiliar in the UK. However, if the choice was re-reading this novel or *Galveston 1900: Swept Away*, it would be *Galveston* every time.

All the best

Mags

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## Lexxi Kitty says

*I received a copy of this book from Netgalley and Ylva Publishing for an honest review.*

This is, I believe, the 17th or 18th 'thing' that I've read by Jae. There's a mix of short stories, slightly longer than short stories, and full length novel in the total number.

This specific book is an historical fiction novel set back in 1906 San Francisco and involves a young woman named Giuliana Russo (of Sicily) and Kate Winthrop (of . . . um . . . San Francisco?).

### Setting and History

To help people immerse themselves in this world, a few moments are taken to note a few things: **Women** of 1906 are, to a large extent, something along the lines of second class citizens. Women did not gain the right to vote in the USA until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (14 years after this book). Though some individual states had state level voting before then. But hey, at least there was legal voting by 1920, eh? Women didn't have the right to vote in Saudi Arabia until 2015.

**LGBT.** I'm not going to give a history lesson, just note that, while throughout history there have been people involved in same sex relationships, it was not a concept necessarily widely known by everybody in 1906; and, in practice, took a US Supreme court ruling in 2003 to basically decriminalize homosexuality in the

USA (Lawrence v. Texas). And Radclyffe Hall's "The Well of Loneliness" did not get published until 1928 (which I mention as a 'famous' lesbian book published 22 years after the time of this book's setting – one that was judged obscene in Britain (for allowing the possibility that two women might have spent a little time together based on the words "and that night, they were not divided").

### **1906 earthquake**

An earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.8 hit struck at 5:12 a.m. on April 18 1906. It was not the 'strongest' earthquake to occur in modern times on US soil (the earthquake that occurred on March 27 1964 in Alaska had a magnitude of 9.2), nor the largest in this specific fault zone ('largest recorded earthquake in California was the 1857 Fort Tejon earthquake, with an estimated magnitude of 7.9'), but the earthquake, and aftereffects, destroyed 80% of San Francisco and 'the death toll remains the greatest loss of life from a natural disaster in California's history.' The exact point, the epicenter of the quake, is still not known, and the exact death total is also still uncertain today. The amount of damage, in terms of dollars is estimated to be roughly the equivalent to \$6.19 billion in 2015 dollars.

### **Characters**

There are two main characters and two points of views in this book.

#### **Main Characters**

*Kate Winthrop* is from a wealthy San Francisco family, is youngish (early 20s?), and expected to find a husband so that he can continue the family shipping business (Kate's brother died, and obviously you can't leave your business to a woman; they don't even have the right to vote! Just not done to leave your business to a woman). Kate, though, doesn't particularly want anything to do with men, or finding a husband, but would rather have a career. That's one of her many 'radical' notions. Another sign of her radical rebellious nature is those occasions when she wears, as Giulana put it 'a shockingly short skirt'. So short, so scandalous, that it is 'barely able to cover a pair of slender ankles' (note, her ankles are covered – her feet are in shoes, there's not actual skin on display). Scandalous! That's her 'driving outfit' – the outfit that she wears when she drives around in the Packard (another scandalous thing, that – driving around in a car, a Model N Packard to be exact).

Scandalous 'shockingly short skirt' driving outfit:

Right, so, career. The beginning stages of the book are filled, when in Kate's point of view, with attempts to become a professional photographer with the local newspaper. One of the three local ones. This being the time when newspapers were so important and financially successful that they flung up massive skyscrapers. The paper she attempts to find work with is the one that's for the women getting the vote. And there is at least one famous woman photographer out there with her pictures in newspapers (though not specifically a San Francisco paper), so it's not completely unheard of. The editor wouldn't even look at her sample photos.

A book about a woman who wishes to be a professional photographer should have a few photos, eh? Kate's family lived on Nob Hill. Here are two pictures of that location. The large classical building in both pictures is the Fairmont Hotel. The one from 1905 is, if I'm understanding the information in the book correctly, actually looking up the street that Giulana uses to go to work at the Winthrop mansion.

1905 Nob Hill

1906 Nob Hill

**Giuliana 'Julie' Russo** is a young woman, potentially somewhere in her early 20s, who came over to, as she puts it 'Merica', with her brother Turi. Times are tough in their native Sicily, and with pops dead, and a large family to support, Turi comes up with the idea of going to America for a year to make some money as a fisherman. He could have remained and worked as a fisherman in Sicily, but people are having less and less money to pay for fish in Sicily.

That was the plan. One year in America. But the book opens five years after their arrival, with no sign that they will be returning home any time soon. Then Turi drops dead. Giuliana now has to find some means of supporting herself in America and some way to continue supporting her extended family back in Sicily. One option is to return to Sicily, but woman just don't do that in Sicily – support family's though working. So, Giuliana goes to work as a maid at the massively large Winthrop mansion. And, at the same time, gets the name Julie as Mrs. Winthrop seems to either have heard her name as Julie, or be unable to either say, or accept the name Giuliana. Giuliana does not like being called Julie. But she wishes to keep her job and so . . . accepts being called that.

### Side Characters

There are many characters; I include a few of the more important side characters.

**Dr. Lucy Sharp** is a doctor in the hospital in city hall. Is a woman, shocking to everyone who runs into her, and a lesbian.

**Obedience 'Biddy' NoKnownLastName** is a bitter jealous woman who is Mrs. Winthrop's maid. While seemingly doing as little work as she can get away with (maybe maybe not, that's the vague feeling left), she is also jealous of others, especially if she thinks they might be after her job.

**Mrs. Winthrop** is a rich woman, the mother of Kate, and wife of . . . whatever Mr. Winthrop's first name might be. She's a bigot and full of class responsibilities (as in, no mingling with the lower orders, and always looking proper). She comes across as the type who, in later films (later than 1906), would be the kind who would get a pie in the face.

**Mr. Winthrop** is Kate's father, wealthy shipping magnate, and – at times – somewhat willing to allow his daughter certain freedoms. Within limits.

### **Overall**

I rather enjoyed the book. Every aspect was, to a certain extent, handled a lot more realistically than expected. From the interactions between the two lead women, to the interactions between Kate and her family, to the interactions between Kate and attempting to find work - interactions with news people, and to the giant enormous rats.

A thoroughly enjoyable book on every level. For those who have read a Jae book before, you know what to expect re: graphic depictions of sex. For those who have not - the full length books tend to be somewhat less enthusiastic towards displaying graphic details, while at the same time Jae does not shy away from such things - she just puts them in short story sequels (or was that just the once? I've a vague feeling that happened more than once). Well, regardless, there are no graphic displays of a sexual nature beyond kissing.

And occasional touching.

I rather enjoyed seeing through the eyes of someone from Sicily, an immigrant to the USA. Hmm. Immigrant is not the right word, since Giuliana hadn't come to the US to live permanently. Migrant worker? Expatriate? Well, a convincing portrayal regardless of whichever word should be used here to describe Giuliana.

One last thought - I did not know until after the book was over, until I read a note after the end of the book, a certain issue. It's one of those things that might enhance or detract depending on how a person normally reads books, so I'll put it behind spoilers.

(view spoiler)

As mentioned, I enjoyed the book. A full 5 star novel.

The newspaper put out by the San Francisco papers after the earthquake. Behind spoiler tag for it's size.  
(view spoiler)

June 2 2016

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## **Margaret says**

Detailed score: 4.5

Lesrom storytelling done just right.

Well researched historical detail without being overwhelming.

Well paced. Well balanced.

I loved all the call backs to other Jae works.

A sweet, believable, typical Jae slow build romance.

Hoping for a bonus chapter with a pwoar scene sometime in the future but it was right that there wasn't one in the story itself.

Really really hope Jae has plans for a follow up book with Dr Lucy Hamilton. One of the most compelling secondary characters I've ever read.

Quality stuff. Bravo Jae.



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### **angie says**

I think because I love this book so much I am having trouble writing about it, if that makes sense...it is just so sweet and so endearing and special that I want to do it the best of justice. If only more lesfic were this amazing and focused (as Shaken to the Core does) on the heart and soul and the deep emotions of romance and caring. Everything you could want in a book is here: wonderful characters, gripping plot and an emotional connection between the two leads that will stay with you a long, long time. If you like gentle and old-fashioned charm in your romances, this is for you!! :)

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### **Corporate Slave says**

Let me start off by saying Jae is one of my favorite authors! Having said that, I expected so much from the book.. I think the main problem is that I discovered this genre is not for me. I basically don't have any complaints from the book but rather I have issues with the setting itself. It felt to me that I was reading a book about an earthquake in San Francisco and that was it for me. I couldn't relate to the struggle of the main characters on their feelings and how much of a taboo it was. Of course I understand in this setting I'm sure this is how it felt but I just wasn't into the story or the confusion they felt! My favorite character was actually Lucy the doctor and it goes back I think to the fact that she knew exactly what she wanted from the beginning.. Overall I'm sure if ur into this genre u will love the book because it's Jae at the end of the day and her writing is brilliant!

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### **Alex says**

This book is not just a sappy romance, it is so much more; its about humanity during crisis, and the difference between the rich and poor. The story revolves around an historic natural disaster in 1906 and the author makes sure you can imagine being there. Set during a time when modesty meant not showing your ankles and women were only expected to be wives and mothers. Its a touching story with a strong theme of women with ambition rebelling for free reign over their lives, rather than meeting the confined expectations of society.

The slow buildup of connection between poor Giuliana and privileged Kate is amazing. Since it's an historic read there is a lot going on, but the bonding is neatly intertwined with events that transpire strengthening their ever-growing friendship into something more. Nearly melted by the cuteness of these two, its so sweet how they're both trying to figure it all out. My only complaint is that it didn't last longer, I would devour a follow up to this, just about their mundane everyday lives.

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### **lov2laf says**

This is a solid, historical read that transports us in time to San Francisco in 1906. Jae successfully brings the devastation of the 1906 earthquake to life while delivering a sweet love story between Kate, a well to do society girl, and Guiliana, a poor Sicilian immigrant.

As her trademark, Jae doesn't skimp on the development of the relationship between our two leads. We get plenty of back story and engagement between them to get a strong sense of who the characters are and why they are drawn to each other. As a bonus, we also get to meet the electric character Dr. Lucy Hamilton Sharpe, the granddaughter of Nora and Luke Hamilton from *Backwards to Oregon*.

The research behind the history is felt and, even having familiarity with the San Francisco area and the historical earthquake myself, Jae really hit home just how horrific the event was for the people of the time.

I think what kept the book from being stellar for me was a certain amount of super-hero affect the characters had once the earthquake hits. They endure a lot, one thing after another, but somehow aren't flattened by the experience. I'm stiff and nearly crippled after a physically exerting day in real life so these two continually plowing forward even with injuries pulled me out a bit...that's just me, though.

The balance of a disaster and burgeoning love story is slightly awkward to meld together but it's successful enough to believe. The characters take a long time for mutual recognition and acknowledgement of what they mean to each other but that made sense to me due to the time period. I appreciated Jae's approach.

Overall, a very good read especially if you want some historical meat with your story.

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## **Tiff says**

I am a huge fan of Jae's work. I wholeheartedly believe she is one of the best at creating well rounded stories and interesting characters. Her newest novel is no exception. Set in San Francisco under the backdrop of the California earthquake of April 18, 1906. This earthquake ranks as one of the most significant earthquakes of all time, and thus caused ninety percent of San Francisco to catch fire. The historical aspects of this novel are riveting, but what really makes this story jump off the pages is the characters of Giuliana Russo and Kate Winthrop. Their interactions, their story, their adventures just felt real, they grabbed your heart and just would not let go.

Giuliana Russo is a migrant of Sicily. Giuliana and her older brother left their homeland to seek a better life. They didn't dream of coming to California to become rich or famous, no they just want to provide enough money to send home so their mother and young siblings have enough food to eat. Work a few years in America, save up and then head back to their homeland. Her older brother, Turi, works the boat and Giuliana helps him sell his catch. Unfortunately their plan for a better life and a chance to return home is destroyed when Turi become deathly ill and suddenly passes away. Giuliana is now alone, and forced to find any work she can, and that is where she will meet Kate and becomes the maid to the Winthrop family.

Kate Winthrop is seriously wealthy. Her family owns a large shipping company and Kate has never wanted for anything that money can buy. She does however want her freedom. Kate is not happy buying fancy dresses, or entertaining the fancies of a suitor. No, this independent, spirited woman wants to make her own mark on the world. Photography is her passion, and she is dead set on working for a newspaper. Her photographs will speak for themselves no matter her gender.

Kate and Guliana become fast friends and allies. Both women are struggling to find their place in the world and they see that in each other. They also see beyond the veneer of poor immigrant and rich socialite. As their friendship takes off, so does the raging fire. These two women are thrown into perilous situations and adventures that are heart-pounding and quite frankly scary as hell. Their relationship is breathtakingly beautiful, timid but also very brave.

You cannot go wrong reading this one. This book is amazing! The historical aspect, the adventure and the romance are all done marvelously. Jae hits it out of the park with this one!

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### **Anja says**

What am I missing? Some more romance, the book ends where the real romance begins (feels like there will be a second part). Otherwise it's a good story, likeable main characters and lots of drama.

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### **Kate says**

I've said it before and I'll say it again I love historical books. It's so nice to jump back in time to an era when things were so different to what we're used to now. The clothes, the cars, the general attitude to women and to a time when being LGBT was often unheard of. I ended up researching this earthquake and the areas Jae was describing (that's when you know you've got me)

This story is a case of opposites attract, Kate Winthrop is from a wealthy family, she is expected to marry a respectable man, have kids and be a good wife. She has other ideas, she wants to work for a newspaper as a photographer and she's not afraid to go for it.

Guiliana Russo is in America with her brother to help provide for their family back in Sicily. She becomes a maid for the Winthrops and forms an unlikely friendship with Kate.

A devastating earthquake hits San Francisco affecting everyone's lives in drastic ways. Both women are forced on a journey which they probably could never have imagined. Kate and Guiliana are both extremely strong women who go against a lot of the norms which are expected of them.

ARC received from publisher via NetGalley

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### **Jem says**

I'm a big fan of historical romances and Jae has written two of my all time favorites: 'Backwards to Oregon' and 'Hidden Truths'. Shaken to the Core is part of the same universe, 2 generations down the line. But it can easily be read as a stand-alone. Set in San Francisco, 1906, the book traces the lives of two women who can't be more different in terms of family background and means, caught in the midst of the catastrophic earthquake that devastated the city.

Giuliana is from Sicily. Eldest of a big brood of children born to a fisherman. After her father was lost at sea, Giuliana and her brother were forced to go abroad, all the way to 'Merica', to support the family. A cruel twist of fate sees her brother dying from illness. Illiterate and with no other feasible means of income and no savings, Giuliana is forced to work as a maid for the wealthy Winthrope family.

Kate Winthrope, only daughter and heiress of a shipping magnate, is of an age when most women of her time and standing are seriously scouting for a suitable husband. But marriage is furthest from her mind. She has a

passion for photography and is considering working for a newspaper, something her parents think is completely beneath her.

Their respective struggles alone, one for dignity and survival and the other for independence, fulfillment and recognition, already lend themselves to such rich storytelling opportunities. Add surviving a natural disaster and finding love among the ruins to that potent mix and you have all the ingredients for a gripping historical romance.

My enjoyment of the book is mixed though, and almost completely divided along the lines of pre and post-earthquake. Pre-earthquake, we are introduced to the main characters and their respective situations. I didn't have a problem with the immigrant, Giuliana's story. Hers was always the more compelling, the more 'reader-empathetic' tale. But I didn't really like the rich girl Kate. Her earnestness is admirable but she's also eye-rollingly naive, especially when compared side by side with the awesome supporting character who is introduced here and who will probably get her own book (because what's the point of tantalizing us with such an inspiring character, right? ;) ) The first half is also dragged down by the leisurely pace of the book. But stick with it because things will get better once the Big One hits. Way better. I know it's weird to be clamoring for the quake, but in this book, it's a watershed moment. The book just comes alive afterwards. Mundane daily living suddenly turns into a battle for survival every minute. The playing field is literally levelled as rich and poor alike go homeless. Scenes of bravery and selflessness mix with those of cruelty and opportunism. What's more important though is that Kate literally and figuratively undergoes her baptism of fire. The Kate that emerges is exactly the kind we need our book heroines to be. Giuliana undergoes her own transformation, her own journey to enlightenment. And just as the new San Francisco rose proudly from the ruins, so do these two brave ladies blossom into their own after the quake. Equally important for romance readers, the author takes great care to make the romantic development believable and progress naturally, with an occasional nudge from an 'expert' on non-conformity. Note that it is 1906 and women have no idea about all the different variations of love.

The realism that characterized all of Jae's historical fiction is very evident again here. It would have been nice to have some kind of an appendix at the end of the book to see what parts of the book had in fact really transpired. I'd also have loved to read about real events or acts that might have inspired some fictional ones in the book. The author Justine Saracen does this in her historicals and I love how it enhances the whole reading experience. It gives a whole new depth and realism to her characters, who are often composites of real life figures. I'd also have loved to see pictures of that era, and San Francisco in particular, before and after the quake. While this information may be easily searchable online, adding an appendix lets the reader see the authors unique perspectives on historical events. (and totally pampers lazy readers too). Check out Lexxi Kitty's review [here](#) for some excellent background and pics.

The book is not without its flaws, though they're not very significant in the overall scheme of things. The first half dragged somewhat although this was probably from my irritation with Kate. I would have liked a bit more exploration of Giuliana's diaspora. She came over to the USA as an adult, but seemed too easily disconnected from her past (view spoiler). Kate's relationship with her father seemed more complicated than it was shown in the book. I think there were some missed opportunities there. Some plot points felt awfully convenient. The heroics seemed too...heroic. All of which could have been dispelled if we'd had some sort of idea that they did in fact occur, and that sometimes truth is stranger and weirder than fiction.

Waffling between 4.35

ARC from Netgalley and BEP/Ylva

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## **MJS says**

Received from NetGalley in return for an honest review.

I don't read a lot of historical romances, as they're not usually my favourite genre. I had read Jae's *Backwards to Oregon*, but none of its sequels, and I assume there's some connection between it and this book due to Lucy's name and the mention of her Aunt Amy, but I didn't need the connection to enjoy this.

It's a solid story with two interesting leads, and the setting also provides some added intrigue, as it adds some plot points. Jae's full length novels are usually longer than most lesfic, and honestly, this could have probably been a bit shorter, but it's a well-written story, so it held my interest, even when the drama felt like it was dragging a bit. The characters spend a lot of time together, get to know each other as friends first (as you would expect given the time period) and the story is a nice slow burn romance, set against a dramatic backdrop.

To be honest, I actually was more intrigued by Lucy's character than either Kate or Giuliana, though both are lovely, fully fleshed out characters. If there's a sequel to this where Lucy gets the girl, I wouldn't mind reading that one too.

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