



## **Ink and Ashes**

*Valynne E. Maetani*

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Claire Takata has never known much about her father, who passed away when she was a little girl. But on the anniversary of his death, not long before her seventeenth birthday, she finds a mysterious letter from her deceased father, addressed to her stepfather. Claire never even knew that they had met.

Claire knows she should let it go, but she can't shake the feeling that something's been kept from her. In search of answers, Claire combs through anything that will give her information about her father... until she discovers he was a member of the yakuza, the Japanese mafia. The discovery opens a door that should have been left closed.

So begins the race to outrun his legacy as the secrets of her father's past threaten Claire's friends and family, newfound love, and ultimately her life.

## **Ink and Ashes Details**

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Author : Valynne E. Maetani

Format : Hardcover 386 pages

Genre : Mystery, Young Adult, Contemporary, Fiction, Thriller, Romance, Realistic Fiction, Teen,  
Mystery Thriller, Cultural

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## From Reader Review Ink and Ashes for online ebook

### Jacobe D. says

Claire's parents have hid a secret from her and her brothers that could do more than hurt them; it could kill them.

Claire's father died of a heart attack when she was very young. All she has is good memories of him and a box of some of his things that she is "borrowing" from her mother. When his death date comes along, she is in a sour mood. While going through her box of his things, a letter falls out of his journal. This letter is written in Japanese, and even with her roots, Claire can't make any sense of it. All she can read are the names; a letter addressed to her stepfather from her father. What is going on?! This is not right. They never knew each other. Claire would know... right?

When Claire starts digging deeper into the mystery of her two dads, she finds a series of clues unlocking more questions instead of answers. Her parents deny, deny, deny. Her brothers and her best friend think she has gone crazy. And worst of all, one phone call or one letter could be a death sentence in disguise. Claire has just found an answer; one that she wishes she never had. She is informed that her father was in the yakuza; a Japanese crime committee. One that does things unimaginable. What has happened to the man Claire once knew? Not only that, but is there a chance that her dad didn't *really* die from a heart attack? Suddenly things have gone too far. Everywhere Claire goes there are black vans following her. She is receiving "presents" that symbolize death. She has pictures stolen from her locker. She is accused of cheating by some anonymous person, making her temporarily suspended from the soccer team. Claire no longer knows who to trust. To make matters even more complicated, Claire might be in love! Who is behind all of this torture? Why are they doing it? Claire's father's past has come back to haunt her; for she was born into a legacy she wishes she never knew existed....

Ink and Ashes was fabulous! I was so interested; I couldn't put it down! Oh my gosh, I could just feel that I was there; watching everything lay out. The beginning was a little bit slow; but the story will redeem itself towards the middle. I honestly felt a little scared at some points. But then I would feel splurges of anger towards the "villains" or sadness to what the characters had to go through and loose. Of course, I also felt happiness toward the love the characters had for each other. I will say that this book is, at some points, very romantic. Nothing too extreme, but I just wanted to let you know. Ink and Ashes reminded me of the fighting/friendship in books like I Become Shadow and The Darkest Hour. I would totally recommend this book!

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### Tanner says

I really like this one. A very good amount of action and mystery, but it was the friendship the characters shared that was my favorite part.

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### Amy says

This book promised me yakuza. It gave me Utah. I feel let down.

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## Jasmine from How Useful It Is says

About: Ink and Ashes is a young adult mystery written by Valynne E. Maetani. It was published on 5/13/15 by Tu Books, an imprint of Lee & Low Books, hardcover, 386 pages. The genres are mystery, thriller, and young adult fiction. This is the author's debut.

My Experience: I started reading Ink and Ashes on 6/28/17 and finished it on 7/7/17. This book is an excellent read! I love the Nancy Drew vibe where the main character goes snooping around, breaking into locks to seek for info, and always asking questions. I love the mystery and suspense. I love learning Japanese culture and Asian superstitions in this book. The characters and plot win my attention and keep me turning the pages.

“I’m mad because I feel like everyone thinks I can’t take care of myself. I’m tired of not fitting in because I’m a girl. And I’m tired of not fitting in with girls because I’m always with boys.” p81

In this book, readers will follow the point of view of Claire Takata, an only girl who is never satisfied with the answers she received about her father and intended to dig as much info as she can including picking locks from her family’s drawers. She’s the middle sibling between an older brother Parker and a younger brother Avery. Their best friends are Forrest, Nicholas, and Fed who are neighbors next door and down the block. Nick and Parker are seniors, Forrest and Claire are juniors, and Fed and Avery are sophomores. Claire along with her brothers and guy friends are very close. They carpool together to school, have sleepovers, jujitsu training, and even have a group name for when they need to have a get together to discuss. Their teamwork mostly due to Claire’s theory that something is going on and she needs them to help either to distract her parents or someone so that she can sneak around to complete her tasks. This book started out with celebrating Claire’s father’s death almost a decade ago. The ceremony is very traditional with incense and prayers. Then Claire discovered a letter from her father written to her step Dad before his death. This occurrence started a chain of events where Claire does her detective work to uncover what’s going on. There are a lot involved in the plot, the most exciting is the Yakuza aka Japanese mafia.

“Both of us are suffering because of decisions my father made. We had no choice regarding the consequences of his actions, but we have a choice now. I refuse to believe his poor judgment defines the kind of people we become.” p349

This book is very well written. I love following Claire’s train of thoughts. She’s careful, curious, and determine. I love the friendship. I love the humor. The romance is cute. I love how protective her step dad is and how protective her brothers and friends are to her. I like Claire’s family and how the guys often stayed over for dinner and how her dad helped to review Nicholas’ college applications. I like the self defense trainings. I couldn’t guess the outcome and I’m glad to read a mystery that is less dark and wicked than other books I have read. Overall, this book is a fantastic read and I highly recommend everyone to read it!

Pro: family dynamic, friendship, Nancy Drew vibe, adrenaline rush, fast paced, page turner, Japanese culture, cover, humor,

Con: none

I rate it 5 stars!

\*\*\*Disclaimer: Many thanks to Lee & Low Books for the opportunity to read and review. Please be assured that my opinions are honest.

xoxo,

Jasmine at [www.howusefulitis.wordpress.com](http://www.howusefulitis.wordpress.com) for a detailed review

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### **Victoria Law says**

What a pageturner! I read the entire book in one day (staying up till 3 am because I just couldn't put it down).

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### **Kels says**

I'm slightly over 100 pages in this book, and seriously nothing is making me want to finish it. Not even the mystery or suspense of Clair finding out about what happened with her father's death (and I'm a big sucker for not ending a book until I get answers!)

I was ecstatic when I first picked this up, because 1) LOOK at THAT COVER and 2) The main character is ASIAN!! (YAY for DIVERSITY!) But unfortunately, the writing is just not there. The execution is suffering big time, the characters aren't properly introduced nor developed, there is no flow in the text which makes the writing feel stilted, and so far the book has been filled to the brim with cliches and is highly predictable. *Ink and Ashes* has an interesting premise and lots of unmet potential, and as much as I want to love this novel I don't think I can bring myself to finish it.

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### **Sue (Hollywood News Source) says**

#### **A FIVE STAR READ!**

This is a cause for celebration, because I say so.

#### **I didn't know, I needed Ink and Ashes...then it happened to me.**

I'm still trying to form coherent reasons why you should pick this book up. And I guess for now, this will do:

The family dynamics is everything, I want and *more*.

The friendship and sibling love.

Bestfriend turned into lovers. **My favorite trope ever.**

Japanese Family. Japanese heroine. The culture is alive in the story.

It's a character driven book.

Humor. You can expect lots of snorting and laughing will ensue.

Swoon.

I have so much love and adoration for Ink and Ashes. I am imploring everyone, this is certainly worth your time! Review to come.

Note: There's plenty of testerones but over all. I am completely besotted.

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## **pink (not just another shade of red) says**

Look at this book

It looks like

My next best read

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## **Valynne Maetani says**

KIRKUS STARRED REVIEW:

Claire's parents are keeping secrets that could kill her.

Sixteen-year-old Claire Takata is a spirited, inquisitive amateur locksmith and sleuth. Claire and her brothers have always believed their father died of a heart attack 10 years ago and that their mother met their stepdad after he died. But when Claire finds an old letter in her father's journal and pictures locked away in her stepdad's desk that reveal otherwise, she is determined to find out the truth. Why have her mom and stepdad lied to her? Why does her mom never want to talk about her father? And what really happened to him? Through letters Claire has written to him over the decade since his death, Claire's father has served as her confidant, an outlet for her grief, frustrations, and longings. The author also makes smart use of these letters, interspersing them between chapters to deliver important back story. Claire's grief and sense of loss are compounded when she eventually discovers that her father had been a member of the yakuza, transnational Japanese organized crime syndicates—and then her sleuthing attracts the attention of someone tied to her father's past....The romantic tension between Claire and her best friend, Forrest, plays out authentically in a subplot, and the novel's twists and turns will keep readers riveted and guessing even after they finish the book.

This fantastic debut packs a highly suspenseful blend of action, intrigue, and teen romance. (Thriller. 12 & up)

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-re...>

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## **Tora Nishimiya says**

Valynne E. Maetani's mystery/thriller debut novel, *Ink and Ashes*, is the book I wish I could have read when I was growing up. After consuming this novel within 24 hours of starting it, I would give this book a rating of 4.5 out of 5.

On the surface, *Ink and Ashes* explores the power of friendship, family, and love as a group of teenagers confront a family secret, which may have dire consequences in the present. Maetani provides a number of potential suspects and twists to keep a reader guessing throughout the book. While the first few chapters may have dragged a bit, the overall pacing was perfect and kept me engaged and interested.

Besides being a well-written mystery, Maetani incorporates diversity in her characters by centering *Ink and Ashes* around the Takata family—a family of Japanese-American ancestry. I love that I was reading a book with characters who looked like and behaved like my own friends and family. Japanese traditions and values are seamlessly weaved into Maetani's character's lives, but at the same time the three teenaged children of the Takatas—Parker, Claire, and Avery—act like any other teenager you may run into at a local high school. As much as *Ink and Ashes* highlights Japanese-American culture, it also shows how similar we all are despite ethnicity as well.

Being born and raised in Hawaii, I may have a different appreciation of Maetani's allusions to island culture. Sometimes in TV shows and movies, Hawaii culture and traditions come off as campy and cheesy, but Maetani's references about local landmarks, food, and language are worthy of praise. I found myself thinking, more than once, that my own students would love seeing parts of their lives mentioned in a book without it feeling forced, fake, or misrepresented.

I was originally attracted to this book because of the book's blurb: Japanese- American characters? Cool. Problem centered around the yakuza? Cool. Mystery/thriller? Cool. However while reading *Ink and Ashes* I came to realize what an accomplishment Maetani achieved through this book. It's gratifying knowing my own children will be able to pick up this book and see themselves in the characters of *Ink and Ashes* one day. I believe the ending leaves room for potential sequels and I look forward to following along on future adventures of the Takatas, Langfords, and Russos.

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### **AO says**

I loved this! The ending was killer (pun intended). Also, I want my own Forrest (not a forest, but I want one of those too). Read this book! It has: Mystery! Suspense! Boys! Japanese culture! Friendship! More things!

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### **Claire (booksoffeeandrepeat) says**

The mc is named Claire so I know I have to read it. I rarely come across a protagonist with my namesake. Claire is usually a fictional side character who is meant for death. Yes, I've come across ya books where all the Claires die in the first few pages.

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### **Beth says**

If you like rampant paranoia and wild speculation that all turn out to be correct, you will like *Ink and Ashes*.

This book also has: stilted writing, the least believable seventeen-year-old I've read in a while, the least believable romantic relationship, an overprotective father composed of cliches, an indistinguishable cast of brothers, and a prosthetic finger.

It was not my thing.

## Olympe J says

*Ink and Ashes* is about a girl named Claire Takata. Claire's father passed away when she was seven and as her 17th birthday approaches Claire finds a letter addressed to her stepdad from her real father. Claire knows that she shouldn't try to find more about it but she does anyway. As Claire finds more about her father she finds out he was part of the Japanese mafia Yakuza. With the help of friends and family she finds secrets she never should have known. This book is really good and I would recommend it to any one who loves a good mystery. This book reminds me a little bit about my friend who once found a paper that I don't think she should have seen. So my friend asked her mom about it and she responded that it wasn't something that she should have looked at.

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## Brandon Sanderson says

### Ink and Ashes

(Note: For an explanation of my Goodreads policy, please see [here](#).)

This excellent YA book sits carefully nestled between several genres. The packaging lists it as a thriller, and that's not a bad way to present it. The opening chapters focus more on mystery, by my definition, than thriller. (They are more about the characters discovering secrets than they are about people being in danger.) However, as the story escalates, it does move into thriller territory.

However—and few books manage to pull this off as well as *Ink and Ashes*—it's also a slice of life drama, mixing family dynamics, friendships, and romance. While many books use these themes as seasoning, I believe that Valynne successfully creates a straight-up hybrid. I was impressed by how well she balanced the growing tension with a girl struggling through day-to-day challenges. Often when someone tries this, one of the two (either the daily life or the mystery) ends up feeling perfunctory. Not so here, and I thoroughly enjoyed the blend.

I can sincerely say this was one of the best books I've read this year, and might even be in the top spot. An artful blend of Japanese culture, solid mystery, interesting characters, and an excellent use of viewpoint. I particularly enjoyed how the writer turned a major trope—the single girl in a cast of mostly guys—on its head by making it a feature of the story.

I highly recommend the book to anyone who likes Young Adult fiction.

### For Writers

The first thing I'd highlight for you to examine is how Valynne juggles the genres, and expectations for them, as mentioned above. Pay attention to the solid mystery hook, followed by balancing family life, then the escalation of discovery into true danger. Valynne is very good with promises; watch how she eases the reader through the transitions between family/school life and the action scenes.

I'd say the book's second strong feature is its use of viewpoint. Many first-person narratives rely on snark from the protagonist to give them personality and make their narrative more engaging, but Valynne goes a different direction, making the character powerfully inquisitive, and reinforcing this with the careful use of questions, curiosity, and impulsiveness from the main character. Valynne is excellent in her use of emotion,

and the scenes of tension in particular popped for me—I truly felt that I was in the head of someone who was on the brink of panic, trying to keep herself together. This was done through deft manipulation of the first-person (first-person immediate, as I often call it) narrative.

Also pay attention to the pacing, which is very interesting in this novel. It occasionally uses thriller style (short chapters, end on a moment of tension or cliffhanger that you resolve quickly in the next chapter) but often mixes more of a mystery style (end with a tease about a cool secret or clue to pull the reader along) and more of a traditional style (full arc within a chapter, ending on a short bit of falling action to give closure to issues raised early in the chapter). These help with the transition between action and drama, and vary the storytelling style to allow payoffs and different types of subplots to play out.

### **The Short Version**

An excellent, fast-paced YA mystery/thriller with an engaging character narrative and a nice mix of action, romance, and family drama.

### **Rating Notes**

I noticed no content in this book requiring specific warning.

### **Bias Notes**

I'm very good friends with the author's editor, Stacy Whitman at Tu Books.

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