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# ISABEL

Author of *Inés of My Soul*

# ALLENDE



*A Novel*

# DAUGHTER OF FORTUNE

"An extravagant tale by a gifted storyteller whose spell brings to life the nineteenth-century world."

—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

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## Daughter of Fortune by Isabel Allende

"You have English blood, like us," Miss Rose assured Eliza when she was old enough to understand.

"Only someone from the British colony would have thought to leave you in a basket on the doorstep of the British Import and Export Company, Limited. I am sure they knew how good-hearted my brother Jeremy is, and felt sure he would take you in. In those days I was longing to have a child, and you fell into my arms, sent by God to be brought up in the solid principles of the Protestant faith and the English language."

The family servant, Mama Fresia, has a different point of view, however:

"You, English? Don't get any ideas, child. You have Indian hair, like mine." And certainly Eliza's almost mystical ability to recall all the events of her life would seem to stem more from the Indian than the Protestant side.

As Eliza grows up, she becomes less tractable, and when she falls in love with Joachin Andieta, a clerk in Jeremy's firm, her adoptive family is horrified. They are even more so when a now-pregnant Eliza follows her lover to California where he has gone to make his fortune in the 1849 gold rush. Along the way Eliza meets Tao Chi'en, a Chinese doctor who saves her life and becomes her closest friend. What starts out as a search for a lost love becomes, over time, the discovery of self; and by the time Eliza finally catches up with the elusive Joachin, she is no longer sure she still wants what she once wished for. Allende peoples her novel with a host of colorful secondary characters. She even takes the narrative as far afield as China, providing an intimate portrait of Tao Chien's past before returning to 19th-century San Francisco, where he and Eliza eventually fetch up. Readers with a taste for the epic, the picaresque, and romance that is satisfyingly complex will find them all in *Daughter of Fortune*.

The House of the Spirits  
Of Love and Shadows  
Eva Luna  
The Stories of Eva Luna  
The Infinite Plan  
Paula  
Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses  
*Daughter of Fortune*

ISABEL ALLENDE

Daughter of Fortune

A NOVEL

Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden

HarperCollins Publish Contents k ;

PART ONE

43-1848

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FIRST EDITION

Designed by Barbara DuPree Knouoles, BDK Books Map copyright t 1999  
by Anna Karl &Jxm Kemp

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publicanon Data Allende, Isabel.

[Hija de la fortuna. English]

Daughter of Fortune: a novel / Isabel Allende p. em.

ISBN 0-06-014941-X 1. Title.

PQ8098.1.Ls4Hs 5 l 3 1999 863--dc21

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## PART ONE

1843-1848

i w. M. Eliza

- n very one is born with some special talent, and < Eliza Sommers discovered early on that she had l J two: a good sense of smell and a good memory.

She used the first to earn a living and the second to recall her life-if not in precise detail, at least with an astrologer's poetic vagueness.

The things we forget may as well never have happened, but she had many memories, both real and illusory, and that was like living twice. She used to tell her faithful friend, the sage Tao Chi'en, that her memory was like the hold of the ship where they had come to know one another: vast and somber, bursting with boxes, barrels, and sacks in which all the events of her life were jammed. Awake it was difficult to find anything in that chaotic clutter, but asleep she could, just as Mama Fresia had taught her in the gentle nights of her childhood, when the contours of reality were as faint as a tracery of pale ink. She entered the place of her dreams along a much traveled path and returned treading very carefully in order not to shatter the tenuous visions against the harsh light of consciousness.

She put as much store in that process as others put in numbers, and she so refined the art of remembering that she could see Miss Rose bent over the crate of Marseilles soap that was her first cradle.

"You cannot possibly remember that, Eliza. Newborns are like cats, they have no emotions and no memory," Miss Rose insisted the few times the subject arose.

Possible or not, that woman peering down at her, her topaz colored dress, the loose strands from her bun stirring in the breeze were engraved in Eliza's mind, and she could never accept the other explanation of her origins.

"You have English blood, like us," Miss Rose assured Eliza when she was old enough to understand. "Only someone from the British colony would

have thought to leave you in a basket on the doorstep of the British Import and Export Company, Limited. I am sure they knew how good-hearted my brother Jeremy is, and felt sure he would take you in. In those days I was longing to have a child, and you fell into my arms, sent by God to be brought up in the solid principles of the Protestant faith and the English language."

"You, English? Don't get any ideas, child. You have Indian hair, like mine," Mama Fresia rebutted behind her pa trona back.

But Eliza's birth was a forbidden subject in that house, and the child grew accustomed to the mystery. It, along with other delicate matters, was never mentioned between Rose and Jeremy Sommers, but it was aired in whispers in the kitchen with Mama Fresia, who never wavered in her description of the soap crate, while Miss Rose's version was, with the years, embroidered into a fairy tale.

According to her, the basket they had found at the office door was woven of the finest wicker and lined in batiste; Eliza's nightgown was worked with French knots and the sheets edged with Brussels lace, and topping everything was a mink coverlet, an extravagance never seen in Chile.

Over time, other details were added: six gold coins tied up in a silk handkerchief and a note in English explaining that the baby, though illegitimate, was of good stock--although Eliza never set eyes on any of that. The mink, the coins, and the note conveniently disappeared, erasing any trace of her birth. Closer to Eliza's memories was Mama Fresia's explanation: when she opened the door one morning at the end of summer, she had found a naked baby girl in a crate.

ElizaA

"No mink coverlet, no gold coins. I was there and I remember very well. You were shivering and bundled up in a man's sweater.

They hadn't even put a diaper on you, and you were covered with your own caca. Your nose was running and you were red as a boiled lobster, with a head full of fuzz like corn silk. That's how it was.

Don't get any ideas," she repeated stoutly. "You weren't born to be princess and if your hair had been as black as it is now, Miss Rose and her brother would have tossed the crate in the trash."

At least everyone agreed that the baby came into their lives on March 15, 1832, a year and a half after the Sommers arrived in Chile, and they adopted that date as her birthday. Everything else was always a tangle of contradictions, and Eliza decided finally that it wasn't worth the effort to keep going over it, because whatever the truth was, she could do nothing to change it. What matters is what you do in this world, not how you come into it, she used to say to Tao Chien during the many years of their splendid friendship; he, however, did not agree. It was impossible for him to imagine his own life apart from the long chain of his ancestors, who not only had given him his physical and mental characteristics but bequeathed him his karma. His fate, he believed, had been determined by the acts of his family before him, which was why he had to honor them with daily prayers and fear them when they appeared in their spectral robes to claim their due.

Tao Chi'en could recite the names of all his ancestors, back to the most remote and venerable great-great-grandparents dead now for more than a century. His primary concern during the gold madness was to go home in time to die in his village in China and be buried beside his ancestors; if not, his soul would forever wander aimlessly in a foreign land. Eliza, naturally, was drawn to the story of the exquisite basket--no one in her right mind would want to have begun life in common soap crate but out of respect for the truth, she could not accept it. Her bloodhound nose remembered very well the first scents of her life, which were not clean batiste sheets but wool, male sweat, and tobacco. The next smell she remembered was the monumental stench of a goat.

Eliza grew up watching the Pacific Ocean from the balcony of her adoptive parents' home. Perched on the slopes of a hill overlooking the port of Valparaiso, the house was meant to imitate a style then in vogue in London, but the exigencies of landscape, climate, and life in Chile had forced substantial changes and the result was an unfortunate hodgepodge. At the rear of the patio, springing up like organic tumors, were various windowless rooms with dungeon like doors where Jeremy Sommers stored his company's

most precious cargo, which tended to disappear from the warehouses in the port.

"This is a land of thieves. Nowhere else in the world does the company spend so much on safeguarding the merchandise as here.

Everything gets stolen, and everything we save from the rabble is soaked by winter floods, scorched in summer, or smashed during one of their ungodly earthquakes," he said every time the mules brought new bundles to be unloaded in the patio of his home.

From sitting so long at the window overlooking the sea to count the ships and the whales on the horizon, Eliza convinced herself that she was the child of a shipwreck and not of an unnatural mother capable of abandoning her and leaving her exposed to the uncertainty of a March day. She wrote in her diary that a fisherman had found her on the beach amid the debris of a beached ship, wrapped her in his sweater, and left her at the finest house in the English colony. As time passed she concluded that this story wasn't bad at all: there is a certain poetry and mystery about what the sea washes up. If the ocean should draw back, the exposed sand would be a vast, damp desert strewn with sirens and dying fish' John Sommers used to say. He was the brother of Jeremy and Rose and had sailed all the seas of the world, and he would vividly describe how the water gathered itself in sepulchral silence and roared back in single monstrous wave, sweeping away everything before it. Horrible, he maintained, although at least that gave you time to run toward the hills, while with earthquakes the church bells clanged, announcing the catastrophe as everyone was scrambling through the rubble.

At the time the baby appeared' Jeremy Sommers was thirty years old and was beginning to forge a brilliant future with the British Import and Export Company, Ltd. In commercial and banking circles he was known as an honorable man: his word and a handshake were as good as a signed contract, an indispensable virtue in a transaction, since letters of credit took months to cross the ocean. For Jeremy Sommers, lacking a fortune, his good name was more important than life itself. With sacrifice, he had achieved a solid position in the remote port of Valparaiso, and the last thing he wanted in his well-organized life was a tiny baby to disturb his routine, but when Eliza turned up on their doorstep he had to take her in because his resolve

crumbled when he saw his sister, Rose, clinging to the babe as if its mother.

Rose was only twenty, but she was already a woman with a past, and her chances for making a good marriage were minimal. In addition, she had totted up her possibilities and had decided that marriage, even in the best of cases, was a dreary business. With her brother Jeremy she enjoyed the independence she would never have with a husband. She had her life in order and she was not daunted by the stigma attached to spinsterhood; just the opposite, she was determined to be the envy of all wives despite the current theory that when women deviated from their role as mothers and wives they grew a mustache, like the suffragettes; but she had no children and that was the one affliction she could not transform into a triumph through the disciplined exercise of imagination. Sometimes she dreamed that the walls of her room were covered

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with blood, that blood soaked the carpet, spattered the walls up to the ceiling, and that she was sprawled in the center, naked and as wild-haired as a madwoman, giving birth to a salamander. She would awake screaming and spend the rest of the day disoriented, unable to rid herself of the nightmare. Jeremy watched her, worrying about her nerves and feeling guilty for having dragged her so far from England, although he could not avoid a certain smug satisfaction with their mutual arrangement. As the idea of matrimony had never passed through his heart, Rose's presence solved all his domestic and social problems, two important aspects of his career.

His sister compensated for his introverted and solitary nature, and that was why he bore her shifts of mood and unnecessary expenditures with good humor. When Eliza appeared and Rose insisted on keeping her, Jeremy did not dare oppose her or express niggardly doubts, and he gallantly lost all his battles to keep the baby at arm's length, beginning with the first: giving her a name.

"We will call her Eliza, after our mother, and she will have our family name," Rose decided almost as soon as she had fed, bathed, then wrapped the baby in her own little blanket.

"We will do no such thing, Rose! Whatever would people say?"

"I'll take responsibility for that. People will say you are a saint for taking in a poor little orphan, Jeremy. There is no worse fate than not having a family. Where should I be without a brother like you?" she replied, conscious of her brother's horror of the least hint of sentimentality.

Gossip was inevitable, but Jeremy Sommers had to resign himself even to that, just as he accepted that the baby would have his mother's name, sleep all her early years in his sister's bedroom, and create an uproar in the house. Rose spread the implausible story of the lavish basket left anonymously at the office of the British Import and Export Company, Ltd." and no one swallowed it, but since they could not Eliza^

accuse her of a misstep--they saw her every Sunday of her life singing in the Anglican service and her tiny waist was a challenge to the laws of anatomy--they said that the baby was the product of Jeremy's relation with some loose woman and that was why they were bringing Eliza up as one of the family. Jeremy made no effort to defend himself against the malicious rumors. Children's irrationality in general upset him, but Eliza managed to enchant him. Although he would not admit it, he liked watching her play at his feet in the evenings when he sat down in his easy chair to read the newspaper. There were no demonstrations of affection between them; Jeremy went stiff just shaking a human hand, and the thought of more intimate contact sent him into a panic.

When the tiny newborn appeared at the Sommers' home that March fifteenth, Mama Fresia, who served them as cook and housekeeper, argued against keeping her.

"If her own mother abandoned her, it's because she is cursed, better not to touch her," she said, but she could do nothing to dent her pa trona determination.

The minute Miss Rose picked up the baby, Eliza started screeching at the top of her lungs, shaking the house and grating on the nerves of everyone in it. Unable to get the infant to stop crying, Miss Rose improvised a cradle in a dresser drawer and pulled a cover over her while she rushed out to look for a