



Tree of Heaven.

Binstock, R. C. (author).

Aug. 1995. 224p. Soho, hardcover, \$22
[\(1-56947-038-3\)](#).

[REVIEW](#). First published [August, 1995](#)
[\(Booklist\)](#).

Binstock, acclaimed author of *The Light of Home* (1992), has written an exquisitely restrained and deeply affecting tale of love under duress. Its reigning metaphor is the tree of heaven, which flourishes in the harshest of environments. For Binstock, this hardy tree is emblematic of our ability to endure and transcend such evils as the barbarity of the Japanese. Binstock focuses on two individuals: Kuroda, a reluctant officer in charge of a remote Japanese outpost in China, and Li, a half-starved woman he rescues from soldiers hell-bent on rape and murder. Impressed by Li's self-possession and knowledge of Japanese, Kuroda offers her protection in exchange for her work as a servant. Li is a prisoner, even a slave, but her dignity and intelligence, and Kuroda's strong moral sense, elevate their relationship far beyond the expected parameters. But even as they marvel at the miracle of their love, they must recognize its impossibility. Binstock's taut and devastating drama achieves a resonant universality.

— Donna Seaman