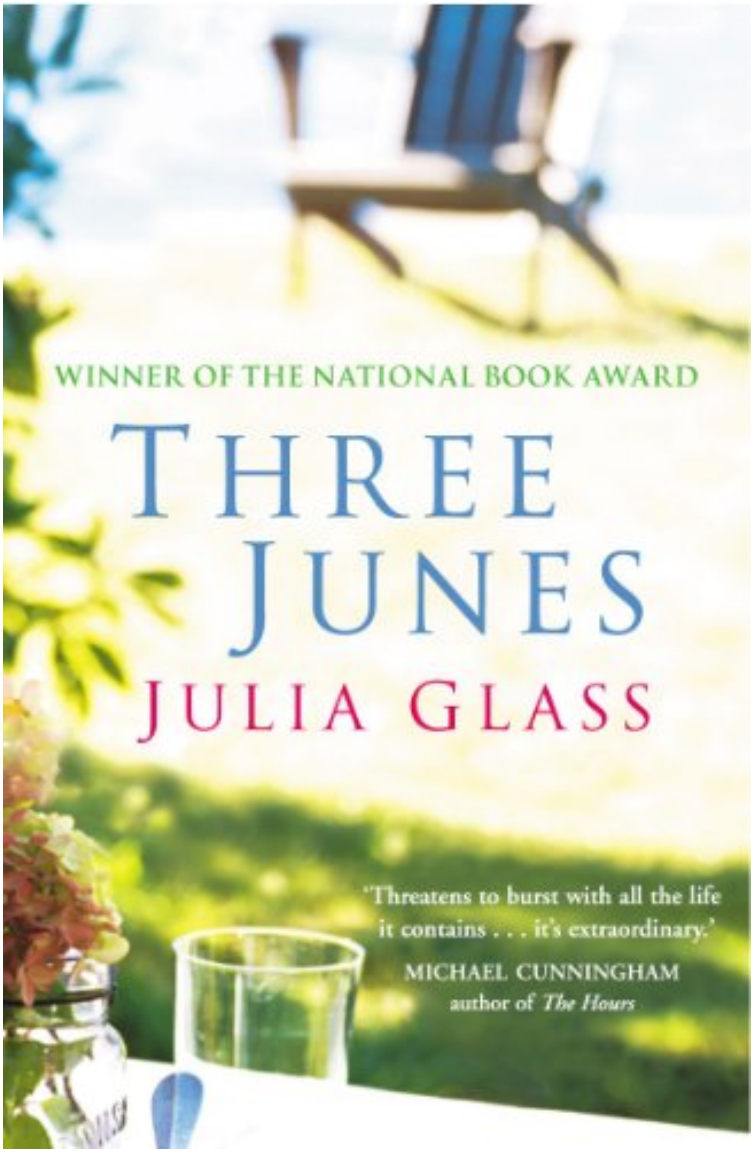
Three Junes



Par Julia Glass
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Par Julia Glass : Three Junes before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Three Junes:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn this captivating debut novel, Julia Glass depicts the life and loves of the McLeod family during three crucial summers spanning a decade. Paul McLeod, patriarch of a Scottish family and a retired newspaper editor and proprietor, is on a package tour of Greece after the death of his wife. The story of his departure from the family home in Scotland and late gesture towards some sort of freedom gives way to his eldest son's life (Fenno). Fenno protects his heart by putting himself under emotional quarantine throughout his life as a young gay man in Manhattan. When he returns home for his father's funeral, this emotional isolation cannot be sustained when he is confronted by a choice that puts him at the centre of his family and its future. Three Junes is a novel about how we live and how family ties (those that we make as

well as those that we are born into) can offer redemption and joy.ExtraitChapter 1Paul chose greece for its predictable whiteness: the blanching heat by day, the rush of stars at night, the glint of the lime-washed houses crowding its coast. Blinding, searing, somnolent, fossilized Greece.Joining a tourthat was the gamble, because Paul is not a gregarious sort. He dreads fund-raisers and drinks parties, all occasions at which he must give an account of himself to people he will never see again. Yet there are advantages to the company of strangers. You can tell them whatever you please: no lies perhaps, but no affecting truths. Paul does not fabricate well (though once, foolishly, he believed that he could), and the single truth he's offered these random companionsthat recently he lost his wifebrought down a flurry of theatrical condolence. (A hand on his at the breakfast table in Athens, the very first day: "Time, time, and more time. Let Monsignor Time do his tedious, devious work." Marjorie, a breathy schoolmistress from Devon.)Not counting Jack, they are ten. Paul is one of three men; the other two, Ray and Solly, are appended to wives. And then, besides Marjorie, there are two pairs of women traveling together, in their seventies at least: a surprisingly spry quartet who carry oversize binoculars with which they ogle everything and everyone, at appallingly close range. Seeing the sights, they wear identical, brand-new hiking boots; to the group's communal dinners, cork-soled sandals with white crocheted tops. Paul thinks of them as the quadruplets.In the beginning, there was an all-around well-mannered effort to mingle, but then, sure as sedimentation, the two married couples fell together and the quadruplets reverted more or less to themselves. Only Marjorie, trained by profession to dole out affection equally, continues to treat everyone like a new friend, and with her as their muse, the women coddle Paul like an infant. His room always has the best view, his seat on the boat is always in shade; the women always insist. The husbands treat him as though he were vaguely leprous. Jack finds the whole thing amusing: "Delightful, watching you cringe." Jack is their guide: young and irreverent, thank God. Reverence would send Paul over the edge.Even this far from home there are reminders, like camera flashes or shooting pains. On the streets, in the plazas, on the open-decked ferries, he is constantly sighting Maureen: any tall lively blonde, any sunstruck girl with a touch of the brazen. German or Swedish or Dutch, there she is, again and again. Today she happens to be an American, one of two girls at a nearby table. Jack has noticed them too, Paul can tell, though both men pretend to read their shared paperday before yesterday's Times. By no means beautiful, this girl, but she has a garish spirit, a laugh she makes no effort to stifle. She wears an eccentrically wide-brimmed hat, tied under her chin with a feathery scarf. ("Miss Forties Nostalgic," Maureen would have pegged her. "These gals think they missed some grand swinging party.") Little good the hat seems to have done her, though: she is sunburnt geranium pink, her arms crazed with freckles. The second girl is the beauty, with perfect pale skin and thick cocoa-colored hair; Jack will have an eye on that one.The girls talk too loudly, but Paul enjoys listening. In their midtwenties, he guesses, ten years younger than his sons. "Heaven. I am telling you exquisite,"says the dark-haired girl in a husky, all-knowing voice. "A sensual sort of coup de foudre.""You go up on donkeys? Where?" the blonde answers eagerly."This dishy farmer rents them. He looks like Giancarlo Giannini. Those soulful sad-dog eyes alone are worth the price of admission. He rides alongside and whacks them with a stick when they get ornery.""Whacks them?""Oh just prods them a little, for God's sake. Nothing inhumane. ListenI'm sure the ones that hump olives all day really get whacked. By donkey standards, these guys live like royalty." She rattles through a large canvas satchel and pulls out a map, which she opens across the table. The girls lean together."Valley of the Butterflies!" The blonde points.Jack snorts quietly from behind his section of the Times. "Don't tell the dears, but it's moths."Paul folds his section and lays it on the table. He is the owner and publisher of the Yeoman, the Dumfries-Galloway paper. When he left, he promised to call in every other day. He has called once in ten and felt grateful not to be needed. Paging through the news from afar, he finds himself tired of it all. Tired of Maggie Thatcher, her hedgehog eyes, her vacuous hair, her cotton-mouthed edicts on jobs, on taxes, on terrorist acts. Tired of bickering over the Chunnel, over untapped oil off the Isle of Mull. Tired of rainy foggy pewtered skies. Here, too, there are clouds, but they are inconsequential, each one benign as a bridal veil. And wind, but the wind is warm, making a cheerful fuss of the awning over the tables, carrying loose napkins like birds to the edge of the harbor, slapping waves hard against the hulls of fishing boats.Paul closes his eyes and sips his ice coffee, a new pleasure. He hasn't caught the name for it yet; Jack, who is fluent, orders it for him. Greek is elusive, maddening. In ten days, Paul can say three words. He can say yes, the thoroughly counterintuitive neh. He can wish passersby in the eveningas everyone here does himkalespera. And he can stumble over "if you please,"something like paricolo (ought to be a musical term, he decides, meaning "joyfully, but with caution"). Greek seems to Paul, more than French or Italian, the language of love: watery, reflective, steeped in thespian whispers. A language of words

without barbs, without corners.When he opens his eyes, he is shocked to see her staring at him. She smiles at his alarm. "You don't mind, I hope.""Mind?" He blushes, but then sees that she is holding a pencil in one hand and, with the other, bracing a large book on the edge of her table. Her beautiful companion is gone.Paul straightens his spine, aware how crumpled and slouched he must look."Oh no. Down the way you were. Please.""Sorry. How was I?" Paul laughs. "A little more like this?" He sinks in the chair and crosses his arms."That's it." She resumes her drawing. "You're Scottish, am I right?""Well thank God she hasn't mistook us for a pair of Huns," says Jack."Not you. You're English. But you," she says to Paul. "I can tell, the way you said little, the particular way your t's disappeared. I'm wild about Scotland. Last year I went to the festival. I biked around one of the lochs. . . . Also, I shouldn't say this, you'll think I'm so typically rudely American, but you look, you know, like you marched right out of that Dewars ad. The one, you know, with the collies?""Collies?" Paul sits up again."Oh, sorryMadison Avenue nonsense. They show this shepherd, I mean a modern one, very tweedy, rugged, kind of motley but dashing, on the moors with his Border collies. Probably a studio setup out in L.A. But I like to think it's real. The shepherd. The heather. The red phone boothcall box, right? . . . Inverness." She draws the name out like a tail of mist, evoking a Brigadoon sort of Scotland. "I'd love to have one of those collies, I've heard they're the smartest dogs.""Would you?" says Paul, but leaves it at that. Not long ago he would have said, My wife raises colliesnational champions, shipped clear to New Zealand. And yes, they are the smartest. The most cunning, the most watchful."Hello here you are, you truants you." Marjorie, who's marched up behind Jack, bats his arm with her guidebook. "We're off to maraud some poor unsuspecting shopkeepers. Lunch, say, at half past one, convene in the hotel lobby?" Paul waves to the others, who wait beyond the caf? awning. They look like a lost platoon in their knife-pleated khakis and sensible hats, bent over maps, gazing and pointing in all directions."Tally ho, Marj!" says Jack. "Half one in the hotel lobby. Half two, a little siesta; half three, a little . . . adventure. Pass muster with you?""Right-oh," she says, saluting. She winks, accepting his tease.This has become their routine: The first full day of each new place, Marjorie directs an expedition for souvenirsas if to gather up the memories before the experience. While the others trail happily behind her, Jack and Paul read in a taverna, hike the streets, or wander through nondescript local ruins and talk about bland things, picking up odd stones to examine and discard. Paul buys no souvenirs. He should send cards to the boyshe did when they were in fact boysbut the kinds of messages adults send one another on postcards remind him precisely of the chatter he dislikes so much at drinks parties or sitting on a plane beside yet another, more alarming breed of strangers: those from whom you have no escape but the loo.There's one on every tour, Jack says of Marjorie: a den mother, someone who likes to do his job for him. And Marj is a good sport, he says, not a bad traveler. He likes her. But she exasperates Paul. She is a heroine out of a Barbara Pym novel: bookish, dependable, magnanimously stubborn, and no doubt beneath it all profoundly disappointed. At an age when she might do well to tint her hair, she's taken up pride in her plainness as if it were a charitable cause. She dresses and walks like a soldier, keeps her hair cropped blunt at the earlobes. She proclaims herself a romantic but seems desperately earthbound, a stickler for schedule...From Publishers WeeklyThe artful construction of this seductive novel and the mature, compassionate wisdom permeating it would be impressive for a seasoned writer, but it's all the more remarkable in a debut. This narrative of the McLeod family during three vital summers is rich with implications about the bonds and stresses of kin and friendship, the ache of loneliness and the cautious tendrils of renewal blossoming in unexpected ways. Glass depicts the mysterious twists of fate and cosmic (but unobtrusive) coincidences that bring people together, and the self-doubts and lack of communication that can keep them apart, in three fluidly connected sections in which characters interact over a decade. These people are entirely at home in their beautifully detailed settings Greece, rural Scotland, Greenwich Village and the Hamptons and are fully dimensional in their moments of both frailty and grace. Paul McLeod, the reticent Scots widower introduced in the first section, is the father of Fenno, the central character of the middle section, who is a reserved, self-protective gay bookstore owner in Manhattan; both have dealings with the third section's searching young artist, Fern Olitsky, whose guilt in the wake of her husband's death leaves her longing for and fearful of beginning anew. Other characters are memorably individualistic: an acerbic music critic dying of AIDS, Fenno's emotionally elusive mother, his sibling twins and their wives, and his insouciant lover among them. In this dazzling portrait of family life, Glass establishes her literary credentials with ingenuity and panache.