



## The Invention of Exile: A Novel

*Vanessa Manko*

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# The Invention of Exile: A Novel

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## **The Invention of Exile: A Novel** Vanessa Manko

Austin Voronkov is many things. He is an engineer, an inventor, an immigrant from Russia to Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1913, where he gets a job at a rifle factory. At the house where he rents a room, he falls in love with a woman named Julia, who becomes his wife and the mother of his three children. When Austin is wrongly accused of attending anarchist gatherings his limited grasp of English condemns him to his fate as a deportee, retreating with his new bride to his home in Russia, where he and his young family become embroiled in the Civil War and must flee once again, to Mexico.

While Julia and the children are eventually able to return to the U.S., Austin becomes indefinitely stranded in Mexico City because of the black mark on his record. He keeps a daily correspondence with Julia, as they each exchange their hopes and fears for the future, and as they struggle to remain a family across a distance of two countries. Austin becomes convinced that his engineering designs will be awarded patents, thereby paving the way for the government to approve his return and award his long sought-after American citizenship. At the same time he becomes convinced that an FBI agent is monitoring his every move, with the intent of blocking any possible return to the United States.

Austin and Julia's struggles build to crisis and heartrending resolution in this dazzling, sweeping debut. The novel is based in part on Vanessa Manko's family history and the life of a grandfather she never knew. Manko used this history as a jumping off point for the novel, which focuses on borders between the past and present, sanity and madness, while the very real U.S.-Mexico border looms. The novel also explores how loss reshapes and transforms lives. It is a deeply moving testament to the enduring power of family and the meaning of home.

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