



The Painted Girls

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1878 Paris. Following their father's sudden death, the van Goethem sisters find their lives upended. Without his wages, and with the small amount their laundress mother earns disappearing into the absinthe bottle, eviction from their lodgings seems imminent. With few options for work, Marie is dispatched to the Paris Opéra, where for a scant seventeen francs a week, she will be trained to enter the famous ballet. Her older sister, Antoinette, finds work as an extra in a stage adaptation of Émile Zola's naturalist masterpiece *L'Assommoir*.

Marie throws herself into dance and is soon modeling in the studio of Edgar Degas, where her image will forever be immortalized as *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. There she meets a wealthy male patron of the ballet, but might the assistance he offers come with strings attached? Meanwhile Antoinette, derailed by her love for the dangerous Émile Abadie, must choose between honest labor and the more profitable avenues open to a young woman of the Parisian demimonde.

Set at a moment of profound artistic, cultural, and societal change, *The Painted Girls* is a tale of two remarkable sisters rendered uniquely vulnerable to the darker impulses of "civilized society." In the end, each will come to realize that her salvation, if not survival, lies with the other.

The Painted Girls Details

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From Reader Review The Painted Girls for online ebook

Morana Mazor says

Kada sam prvi puta ?ula za ovu knjigu odmah sam se oduševila jer su Pariz, Belle Epoque, umjetni?ki krugovi i sl. neke od mojih omiljenih tema o kojim volim ?itati pa sam s nestrpljenjem o?ekivala objavljivanje knjige! A onda kada sam je uzela u ruke; onako sjajnu, glamuroznu, pravu ljepoticu u prekrasnom, "zrcalnom" uvezu s malom balerinom na naslovnici, mojoj sre?i nije bilo kraja... I onda sam krenula s ?itanjem.... kad tamo, nešto potpuno druga?ije...ni "g" od glamura niti svilenih, šuštavih haljina dama pariške elite... Mogla bi se sada upotrijebiti ona stara izreka "ne sudi knjigu po koricama", ali nije tako... Jer sjaj korica ove knjige apsolutno se može "opravdati" sjajem pri?e koju nam je autorica napisala nakon iscrpnih priprema i istraživanja likova i perioda opisanih u knjizi.

Dakle, iako je pri?a smještena u pariško "zlatno doba" naši likovi nisu bonvivani, ne posje?uju razuzdane zabave ve? jedva preživljavaju na marginama društva; to su siromašne djevoj?ice koje se bore za egzistenciju, pralje, zlo?inci, kurtizane, a u ve?ini slu?ajeva radi se o stvarnim povijesnim osobama koje su, na ovaj ili onaj na?in ostavile svoj trag u vremenu.

Radnja prati tri sestre van Goethem, Antoinette, Marie i Charlotte. Upravo je Marie svjetsku slavu stekla poziraju?i Edgara Degas za njegovu skulpturu "Mala ?etrnaestogodišnja plesa?ica" koja se danas ?uva u pariškom Musee D'Orsay. Marie i njezine sestre, nakon smrti oca, žive u siromaštvu, u iznajmljenoj sobici, s majkom praljom koja se odala pi?u i jedinu šansu za, donekle, bolji život vide u pariškoj Operi gdje idu na po?etni?ki te?aj baleta, nadaju?i se uspjehu.. Iako, i taj uspjeh ima svoju cijenu jer siromašnim djevojkama, ako i jesu talentirane balerine, treba bogati pokrovitelj takozvani "mecena" ili, današnjim rje?nikom "sponzor"; a znamo da sponzori za svoje "sponzoriranje" tako?er traže nešto zauzvrat, a to "nešto" uvijek se, na ovaj ili onaj na?in, svodi na seksualno zadovoljenje sponzora. To u knjizi prolazi i malodobna Marie sa svojim mecenom, a ?ak i slikaru Edgara Degas povremeno pozira gola što ?etrnaestogodišnjoj djevoj?ici sigurno nije ugodno, ali Marie je bolno svjesna svoje siromašne egzistencije te šutke trpi sve što je potrebno da bi preživjela.

Pratimo i pri?u najstarije sestre, Antoinette, koja se tako?er okušala kao balerina, ali sada je pralja i povremeno statistica u kazalištu, i koja se upušta u strastvenu vezu sa Emileom Abadijem. Abadie je tako?er stvarna povijesna li?nost tj. osu?eni zlo?inac koji je, zajedno sa svojim prijateljem, bio umiješan u tri ubojstva te osu?en na smrt, a o kojima je autorica ?itala i istraživala povijesne materijale.

Abadie je tako?er prikazan na Degasovom djelu "Zlo?ina?ke fizionomije" (portreti osu?ivanih zlo?inaca) koje je bilo izloženo 1881 god. istovremeno kao i skulptura "Male ?etrnaestogodišnje plesa?ice" (skulptura je tada smatrana ružnom te su kriti?ari ocijenili da djevoj?ica ima lice u kojemu je "otisnut nagovještaj svakog poroka").

U to je vrijeme bila aktualna teorija Cesarea Lobrosa, koja se spominje i u knjizi, o ?ovjeku- zlo?incu prema kojoj su ljudi odre?enih tjelesnih osobina (osobito glave) "ro?eni" zlo?inci. Ukratko, tipi?an zlo?inac divlja?ki je ružan, a tu su teoriju prihvatali i Degas i Zola, oboje sporedni likovi u knjizi. Sve ove ?injenice zainteresirale su autoricu da podrobnije istraži i likove i teorije i pozadinu odre?enih umjetni?kih djela pa je tako spajaju?i povijest i fikciju, napisala "Djevojke sa slika".

Prisutno je tako?er, i njezino osobno iskustvo sa satova baleta jer su baletne figure, kao i patnje mlađih balerina tijekom vježbanja, jako vjerno opisane.

I da ja sada više ne duljim o sadržaju i detaljima opisanim u romanu, re?i ?u vam još samo da je ovo jedno ozbiljno i slojevito djelo koje stilom poprili?no podsje?a na Balzaca i njegov realizam ili ?ak i Zolu i naturalizam.. Likovi su opisani bez uljepšavanja u (siromašnim) sredinama iz kojih potje?u i u kojima žive te kako sve to utje?e na njihove postupke kao i na njihovo poimanje života.

Naravno, tako?er su tu i opisi snage ljubavi (prije svega one sestrinske) kao i opisi požrtvovanost i sre?e u

malim stvarima jer su, usprkos razdoblju "Belle epochea" životi likova ove knjige (kao i ve?ine žitelja tadašnjeg Pariza) u potpunoj suprotnosti od zna?enja toga naziva.

A kako završava pri?a sestara von Goethem saznati ?ete, ako pro?itate ovu knjigu jer naš osobni "belle epoche" ipak najviše ovisi o nama samima....

Wendy Pearl's Picks says

I'm a sales rep for Penguin Group in Northern California and had the priveledge to read this as a manuscript. I'm completely over-the-moon about this book! Marie, Charlotte and Antoinette got a hold of my heart from the first pages and never let go. Set against the always fascinating backdrop of 1880's Paris, the plight of these three sisters and what they do to survive results in an incredibly compelling and heartfelt story. Add to that the characters and famous artwork of Degas, the Paris ballet, and a real-life murder trial and you have all the makings of a big, fat bestseller. *The Painted Girls* is the very best kind of historical fiction, right up there with *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, and even *Year of Wonders*. Oh, and I totally loved the ending!!

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Three sisters live in poverty. Their father is dead and their mother is addicted to absinthe.

They have to find a way to feed themselves. The Paris Opera is an option, but ballet is expensive. There's lessons and clothing to buy.

And whatever money they do manage to scrape together, there's no guarantee their mother won't use it to buy another bottle to feed her addiction.

The Painted Girls is about the haunting specter of abject poverty and addiction, but it is also about phrenology, a now-defunct science wherein experts believed they could judge the character of a person based on the shape of their head and face.

Marie, one of the girls in this story, frets because she has a low forehead and a jutting jaw. In her early religiously-based education, she was taught that outer beauty is a reflection of the soul. She fears her destiny is predetermined as hell bound because of her face.

Antoinette, the eldest of the sisters, wants to be adored and appreciated for how she holds her family together while her mother drugs herself into oblivion. But, she's too aggressive and out-spoken to hold onto jobs for long and men can't see past her outer shell to the aching heart within.

Plus, she sees herself as a hard worker, not a whore. Until she meets Émile Abadie and he takes her out for an evening of wine and oysters...

The Painted Girls is about art, power and the blindness of love. It is also about sisters and the love family members hold for each other.

It is a work of historical fiction for girls who actually existed. Cathy Marie Buchanan takes the time to sort the real from the fictional at the end of the story.

I felt despair for the family in this book but also hope; that they could rise out of poverty despite everything holding them back.

Because, as society now knows, it doesn't matter what you look like on the outside. What matters most is who you love and what you chose to do each day, each moment and for what reason.

This story has possible triggers for anyone who was sexually or physically abused as a child.

Carrie Mansfield says

What did I miss?

Why is this book getting so many rave reviews? This book is cold and clinical. The author does nothing to make us care about Marie or Antoinette. Their mother and Charlotte are so one dimensional that there seems to be little reason for them to even exist except to use them as foils (Charlotte, the one good girl who makes a life for herself with the Opera) or to point to the fate that the two elder seemed doomed to.

I was intrigued by the premise of the interactions with Degas, but we got no real insight there. When Marie attracts an arbonné you can't see why, the girl is always so down on her self that it's impossible to figure out what the other man sees in her because her negative view of herself poisons our own.

As for the plot...it exists? Kind of. Sort of. It's nothing memorable and nothing to write home about. It was. I get that that was deliberate, because it was supposed to be character driven. But when you fail to develop the characters that all falls apart.

And finally - the endless POV switching got real tiresome, especially at the end of the novel when each sister was getting less than a page between switches. Was that truly necessary?

This book ultimately forgettable for me. On to the next.

Orsolya says

“The Painted Girls” has all the elements which would seemingly hold my attention: ballet, art, history, and some drama. Sadly, my long-awaited excitement for Cathy Marie Buchanan’s novel was popped with a vengeance. After only page 31, I merely can’t go on.

“The Painted Girls” starts off with a slow pace and tempered storyline. Although other reviews make note of this slow start and indicate that the novel improves with time; I simply don’t have the patience to wait that long as nothing caught my attention in the mean time.

“The Painted Girls” relishes in telling a story from two points of view (sisters Marie and Antoinette --- am I the only one bothered by that?) which **does** work in the novel’s favor as Buchanan successfully makes each heroine characteristically her own and standout. Simply, the reader will never confuse the two and can pick a favorite. However, the characters are too juvenile in both their actions and storytelling which makes sense as they are children in the story, but this causes the whole “feel” of “The Painted Girls” to be better suited as a YA novel.

Buchanan’s prose and writing style is average and could use more literary language, less dialogue, and more historical flair. Although the descriptions are strong; they *still* feel too modern losing authenticity and in turn: reader attention.

Page 31 was my breaking point with Antoinette’s raunchy, road-side, but child-like sex scene. I barely felt like I even knew her as a character and she was already engaging in such behavior. It felt forced, unnecessary, and bluntly: gross. I couldn’t continue further.

“The Painted Girls” seems to be enjoying rave reviews (although highly promoted books always have a certain level of suspicion) and therefore, maybe I am the one to blame. I would suggest trying it for yourself. Maybe I am just crazy but I did not click with it despite my excitement when the book was announced.

Megan Baxter says

I have been making a self-conscious effort to keep reading some bestsellers, mixed in among my other lists. I like knowing what people are reading, and increasing my chances of being able to discuss books with anyone I meet. Given that a lot of what I also read is obscure, classics, or science fiction, it seems like a necessary ingredient in my overall reading mix.

It has also, on occasion, been disappointing. I've read those books that make me arch an eyebrow and go "Wait, this is a bestseller? Why?" There have been others that have been passable, but really nothing special. Well, I have to tell you, this is one of the best bestsellers I've read in a while.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Angela M says

I found this book to be sad and disturbing for most of the story. It definitely does not depict the prosperous time of peace and prosperity of the Belle Epoque. Rather, it depicts the seedier side of Paris ,as the story of Antoinette and her sister Marie is told. There is no prosperity here for these sisters, their younger sister and their widowed mother, addicted to absinthe. These people are starving and can barely pay the rent, and Marie will do what she has to in order to survive.

The author in a note indicates that the book is based on the real lives of these girls and that while the murder

story that is meshed here with their story is also true, there is no evidence of any historical connection. I found the opera, the ballet, and the parts about Degas to be fascinating. The author's web page included images of Degas' works that are incorporated in the story and I found it worth looking at after I read the book (www.cathymariebuchanan.com/art).

While it was sad and disturbing, I gave it 4 stars because there was not a minute that I wasn't interested in knowing the fate of these girls.

Marita says

Not very long ago I attended an exhibition of Edgar Degas' work, with the centre piece being the little statuette of the 14 year old ballerina, modelled by Marie van Goethem. I was absolutely delighted by this novel which provides an insight into the lives of Marie and her family. The author describes the harsh realities of that era, and what life must have been like for the dancers of the Paris Opera. News items of the time are woven into the tale, and there are cameo appearances of famous people such as the author Émile Zola whose book *L'Assommoir* has a prominent role in this novel. The author bases this novel on fact, but skillfully fictionalises various aspects of the story. It is beautifully written, and compassionately told. It had me scurrying to my Art Authority app to once again view Degas's masterpieces.

Nancy says

I was fortunate to get an ARC of **THE PAINTED GIRLS**. It is a brilliantly written historical fiction set in Paris in the 1880's. A story about the lives of sisters trying to make their way through life under less than ideal circumstances. Do the girls have control over their destiny or is it fate that delegates their position in life? Intertwining the tale of the sisters' lives and true facts from historical documents, paintings, ballets, plays, sculptures, murder trials and more this notion is explored. A true page turner! This book filled with sister love and rivalry had me hooked from beginning to end. A wonderful read! Due to hit the shelves January 10, 2013.

Diane S ? says

3.5 Paris in 1873, but not the beautiful Paris filled with beautiful people, but the people trying to survive. The washerwomen, those who take in sewing, those who are hungry and those who will do anything to feed their families. Three sisters, a mother addicted to absinthe, and the girls using ballet as a means to make a little money and hopefully a way to better themselves. This was the part of the novel I liked best, the way the sisters tried to take care of each other. Marie, the middle girl, end up modeling for Degas, makes a little extra money and makes some very bad decisions. The sights, sounds and yes even the squalor of Paris are wonderfully emoted by the author. Degas, the arts, ballet, theater are all added bonuses. The tone is dark, this is the darkside of the glamour we think of when we think of dance, theater and art. There is a murder trial, many societal changes and we get a front row seat while reading this atmospheric novel. ARC from publisher.

lucky little cat says

At first I was simply delighted that a fictional backstory for Edgar Degas' model for "Little Dancer, Fourteen Years" exists.

This novel mixes facts from Degas' life plus lots of historically-based insight into the career prospects of *les petite rats de l'Opera*, those skinny little teen waif dancers. (Prospects were poor: the tiny dancers were impoverished, underfed, overworked, and especially vulnerable to exploitation by male "patrons.") But ultimately the novel is disappointing because the fictional conclusion is so very predictable. Don't give us a story we could guess for ourselves.

Saleh MoonWalker says

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♥ Marlene♥ says

Wow. I really loved reading this book and afterwards it felt like it had been a long time since I really managed to escape because I was so into a book.

Picked this book thanks to goodreads. I thought I was in the mood for a historical fiction and looked at the lists around here. Found a good list where I noticed this book and a few others. Did not know much beforehand, cause lately I prefer not to know a thing before I read a book, but that is quite hard because I do want to know I'm not reading a western or porn for that matter.

(nota bene) I am sure porn can be good too. *-*

So yes, you have to read a little bit of the description but sometimes there are benefits of being so forgetful and that comes with my reading. I can re read a book easily and read part of a description and the next day I will have forgotten. ;)

Anyway. I discovered I was in Paris back in the days, 1880's and I had 2 sisters and we all had talent for ballet. My mum is a drunk and we are poor.

Well I can tell you this is where it starts and yes it might be called depressive by people who did not like this book, but I do like a dark book. Heck yeah! I am a true crime reader, Don't you forget it. haha.

Anyway, I highly recommend if you enjoy a good written dark historical fiction book.

4.5

Vincent Lam says

This is a magnificent and magical book, which I have been privileged to see in proof form. You will never see Degas' dancers the same way after you read this book.

Susan Vreeland says

Here are excerpts from my review in the Washington Post, Jan. 22, 2013:

Edgar Degas's wax-and-fabric statuette "Little Dancer Aged Fourteen" has held the curiosity of millions in its 28 bronze reproductions, but far fewer know the heart-rending history of the model, Marie van Goethem, and her sisters. In "The Painted Girls," a historically based work of fiction rich with naturalistic details of late-19th-century Paris, Cathy Marie Buchanan paints the girls who spring from the page as vibrantly as a dancer's leap across a stage.

Living in the slum of lower Montmartre, the girls aspire to be dancers at the Paris Opera Ballet, a resource for urchins to save themselves from life on the streets by turning their legs out, balancing en pointe, leaping and spinning. Practicing long hours and fighting exhaustion and malnutrition, they could earn a meager income if they remain at the lowest rank of petit rat, but they could lead lavish lives if they climb to stardom. Such was the dream of the van Goethem sisters.

When the novel opens, 17-year-old Antoinette has been dismissed from the ballet school for willfulness and belligerence. Marie, unattractive and exceptionally skinny, is harder-working, achieves short-lived success and poses for Degas's statuette at age 14. But Charlotte, 7, self-absorbed, pretty, craving bright sashes, is the natural dancer.

Alternating Marie's point of view with Antoinette's, the novel contrasts the sheer pleasure of dancing with sharp depictions of brothels, prisons and the guillotine. Despite their grace and achievement (Marie executes 16 breathtaking fouettes en tournant, similar to pirouettes, thus winning a place on stage), the two oldest sisters are bound for calamity. Through their bad decisions, lying, thieving and prostitution of one sort or another, one reads on, compelled by love for these girls whom Buchanan describes so compassionately....The novel poses the question: Is a descent into wretchedness inevitable?

Integrating three actual murderers with the three girls' histories is another brilliant act of imagination that drives the novel, producing a compelling story of yearning for love in the face of ugliness and brutality. Wheeling out of control, the two older girls descend from their pretty pirouettes to misery, their mutual affection torn apart for a time. Nevertheless, Buchanan makes us feel they are good at heart. "The Painted Girls" is a captivating story of fate, tarnished ambition and the ultimate triumph of sister-love. In short, I found it fascinating.

Jenn says

I was fortunate to receive an advanced reading copy of this book at a conference I attended. This was one of my "I have to stay up and finish reading this at all costs" books. I was drawn into 19th Century France and the beauty of the ballet. When you read a book and feel satisfied and content at the way things turned out, that is my definition of a great book. I was drawn immediately to the characters and the setting and loved them. I loved the author's use of two characters to share two different (and yet not so different) views of some of the same events. I found myself spending hours staring at a photo of the sculpture "Little Dancer of Fourteen Years" by Edgar Degas, upon which this book is based. I appreciated the way reviews of the sculpture from when it was first exhibited were woven into the book. When reading historical fiction, I don't expect complete historical accuracy but details that make it plausible greatly enhance the reading experience.

Cameran says

To be quite honest, I have been sitting on my review of *The Painted Girls* for a few hours as I attempt to collect my thoughts so I can put into words why this book was such a disappointment in my eyes. Set in the late 1800s in Paris, the details of the life, the smells, the streets, the art, and the Opera are stunning; they are the kind of words that can transport a reader to another place in time, so I give Buchanan plenty of praise for that. Then, there are two sisters named Marie and Antoinette -- the book follows them both as they try to cope with a life of near poverty. Antoinette finds work as a laundress or as an extra on the stage, but nothing is enough to take her mind and body away from a lover who makes bad decisions. Being younger, Marie is sent to train as a ballet dancer in the Opera, where she soon catches the attention of the artist Edgar Degas and becomes a model for some of his famous work. What did I expect from all of these components? Was there a masterpiece in the making?

I don't know.

I feel as if this book left me not knowing much of anything other than the fact that I did not like it. I felt no connection whatsoever to the characters. The plot unraveled and left me with no suspense. More often than not I felt as if I were coasting through the book, often checking the page numbers to see when I would just be *done* with it. Sure, there is plenty of scandalous activity that is fitting for the times. Yes, there is a true story behind the muse and artist relationship between Degas and Marie. But I did not buy into it; I felt as if I were an outsider. I want a story that will sweep me away not only with details of location but into the hearts and souls of the characters. *The Painted Girls* did not accomplish that.

Barb says

I was eager to read Cathy Buchanan's most recent novel and was excited to find it offered through the Vine program. I received an Advanced Reader Copy of her previous novel 'The Day the Falls Stood Still' as the first item I ever chose through the Vine. I loved the book and was thrilled to be able to meet the author when she came to my local Barnes and Noble for a reading.

This novel is very different from 'The Day the Falls Stood Still'. Marie van Goethem, was the model for Edward Degas's famous sculpture 'Little Dancer Aged Fourteen'. 'The Painted Girls' centers around Marie van Goethem and her older sister, Antoinette who live with their mother and younger sister Charlotte, all of

them working hard to put food on the table. Fortunately all three sisters have been blessed with the talent to dance. Buchanan takes the reader back to the Paris of the late eighteen hundreds with a look at lives full of want and struggle but also gives us a thread of hope that hard work and dedication can pay off.

I have to be honest, I wasn't immediately pulled in by the beginning of 'The Painted Girls'. I had a difficult time with the alternating narration and wasn't exactly sure where the story was going. I set the book aside several times and read something else before coming back to it and I confess I thought about abandoning it all together. I felt the alternating narration worked against the cohesiveness of this story in the beginning, but I think it was perfect for the unfolding of the end of the story. Another issue I had that prevented me from initially being pulled into this story was that I disliked the older sister Antoinette's choices and didn't feel I knew her well enough to sympathize with her and understand her perspective.

For me the story really picked up in the last third of the novel, I felt like the ending of the book really redeemed the beginning of it and I was so glad I didn't give up reading this story. I kept coming back to look at all the glowing reviews of this book and thought perhaps there was the chance that if I finished the book I might feel the same way about it. I loved the relationship the author created between the sisters and thought the ending was perfect.

Wendy says

The Painted Girls by Cathy Marie Buchanan is a combination of fiction and non-fiction with the characters of the 3 sisters and Edgar Degas, of course, being real people.

This is not a happy book but one filled with rich details of the time period and the every day lives of the two oldest sisters, Antoinette and Marie. Their struggles are heart-breaking, they are both so different yet so bonded, and they are unforgettable in their love for one another.

The book contains some salacious scenes used to depict the degradation of young Parisian girls used in beastly manners by men.

I thought The Painted Girls was enchanting and heart-breaking!

Melissa says

This book starts with a quote from Le Figaro, 1880 "No social being is less protected than the young Parisian girl--by laws, regulations and social customs." And the author goes on to prove that true.

This book melds together a sensational murder and trial with the beauty and love of ballet, the masterpieces of Edgar Degas as well as other period artists, along with the extreme hardships suffered by poor sisters in the 1880s. It tells of these sisters need to be loved by others as well as each other. It is about passion for one's craft, as well as the search for love and acceptance. It is at times heart breaking and yet victorious!

This historical fiction follows the real murders and subsequent newspaper articles of two people. It also follows the real model for Edgar Degas work "Little Dancer Aged Fourteen". They are linked in some expected ways but also some unexpected ways. Most importantly it is a story of sisterly kindness and love.

