



## **84 Ribbons: A Dancer's Journey**

*Paddy Eger*

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Seventeen year old Marta Selbryth realizes her dream of becoming a professional dancer when the Intermountain Ballet Company in Billings, Montana invites her to join their 1957 season. As Marta's new life unfolds, she must learn to face not only the successes of dancing in the corps de ballet, but the challenges and setbacks that might crush the dream she's had for so long.

After a couple of mishaps, Marta settles into life in a boarding house located near the ballet company. Her landlady, Mrs. B., is friendly, reduces her rent when Marta's offers to bake for the boarder and later allows her to use the basement as a practice studio. The two male boarders are supportive; Carol, a fellow boarder, ignores her.

Marta spends her free time practicing when she's not spending time with her new friends Lynne and Bartley, her fellow corps dancers. Their time together becomes an important lifeline through their first year.

Madame Cosper, the artistic director, is a demanding woman. Marta begins their association poorly when she makes a disastrous choice. Expecting expulsion, Marta receives a second chance in the form of dancing the unpopular character roles during the fall and winter performances. Marta determines to dance every role with confidence in hopes of proving to Madame that she's up for every challenge.

Steve, a young college man and a reporter, spots Marta when he's assigned to write an article about ballet for the local paper. He's attracted to her and begins his pursuit. Over the months ahead, he becomes her tour guide of the area and attempts to convince Marta to be his girl. But her steadfast focus is ballet and some of her adventures with him lead to problems with Madame Cosper.

Shortly after Christmas, everything changes for Marta, Bartley and Steve. Significant events permanently influence their lives. Each must deal with exhilaration and heartbreak as well as frustration and changes that test their ability to cope.

## 84 Ribbons: A Dancer's Journey Details

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Author : Paddy Eger

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## **From Reader Review 84 Ribbons: A Dancer's Journey for online ebook**

### **Clare O'Beara says**

Following a young ballet dancer as she sets her heart on joining a corps and dancing her way up to solo, 84 Ribbons is immersive and strong.

Aged 17, Marta from Seattle has few life choices in 1957, so dancing is not only her passion but her way out of the humdrum store clerk jobs. With her mother's full support she takes the brave step into the unknown. Life is vigorous and tough as dancers need to train every day. Girls may not get tall and well-developed - not mentioned is that the men would be unable to lift them. Rather the girls are told that costumes are fitted once a year and the audience would not like to look at hefty dancers. So this amounts to a life of discipline, responsibility, and living alone, with body image issues and near starvation as well as autocratic trainers. No wonder the pressures mount up.

Paddy Eger is bringing her own experiences to the page and we have no doubt that this is how it felt to be a young dancer. Teen readers and interested adults will find this memorable book a fine read, with much of relevance to our current lifestyle.

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### **Sara Beary says**

really truly enjoyed this book. I liked observing Marta, she's driven, talented, and intelligent. She is so focused on her goal that she refuses to let anything be more important than dancing. It's why she makes some of the decisions that she does. Because she need to have some semblance of control, when it seems like everything is going wrong.

This book talks about addiction, and weight issues in a very real way. It shows that anyone can have problems. Even if someone insists that they're fine, they may not be, if you never see them eat.

I received this book from NetGalley in exchange for my free and honest review.

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### **Paula Phillips says**

One of the themes that I love to read about in Books is Ballet and Dance. When I saw that I had 84 Ribbons to read and I was in the mood for a ballet novel, I opened it up on my kindle and started reading. The book starts with Marta auditioning for a part in an International Ballet Troupe and finally after many rejections , she finally gets accepted and moves to the Billings, Montana where she has been given a spot at the Intermountain Ballet Company. At first, I was under the impression that this book was contemporay set but it wasn't until I saw the line-up for the ballet performances throughout the year that I discovered I was reading a historical set novel. 84 Ribbons is set during the time period of 1957-1958. Marta's dream is to earn her 84 Ribbons which represent the amount of ballet shoes she has worn out as she once read that once someone has reached 84 ribbons, you are now considered a professional ballet dancer. During this time, Marta finds herself at odds with the Ballet teacher known as Madame Cosper and she wonders if she will ever be able to

achieve her dreams as for some reason, the Madam has it in for her. This year though, will open Marta's eyes into a new world - a world where diet pills are considered an option to stay thin as no-one wants a fat dancer , a life where she will discover dating and what it's like to have someone love you no matter what and friends and foes - what its like to live with people who either love you or hate you. This book does touch on the dark side of Ballet and what some girls do in order to win. In 84 Ribbons, when tragedy strikes Marta not once but three times , she must face the hardest decision in her life - to dance or to simply move on and face reality that she may never reach her goal of becoming a famous ballerina .

If you love Ballet Novels , then 84 Ribbons is the perfect book to have you "reading" in circles.

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## Trish at Between My Lines says

Ballet books are like crack to me! As soon as I get a sniff of a ballet storyline, I'm one-clicking as fast as I can. But all too often the book doesn't deliver. Often there isn't enough actual ballet in the story or an insta-love ruins it or it's clichéd. But 84 Ribbons delivered exactly the kind of ballet book I love.

First Line of 84 Ribbons:

"Marta circled the narrow corridor outside the Olympic Hotel's Grand Ballroom."

My Thoughts on 84 Ribbons:

I read this on a sunny Saturday afternoon in my back garden, with Clair de Lune playing on my ipod and it was a perfect timeout after a hectic week. This book is set in 1957 which I hadn't realised before I started but was something I really enjoyed. It added to the nostalgic, old fashioned charm that just jumped off the pages of this book.

This isn't a fast paced book and it took a little while for me to really get a feel for the main character Marta. But when I did, I thought she was full of vitality and I admired her tenacity and dedication to her beloved dance world. She isn't without her flaws though and this helps her feel really developed as a character.

The ballet setting is spot on. This isn't just a book with token ballet shoes on the front, this is a realistic look at the ballet world and how it demands blood, sweat and tears if you are to ever succeed. It is also a coming of age book as Marta (age 17) has moved away from home and is learning to survive on her own in a new town where her ballet company is located.

It portrays all the fears and insecurities that dancers must feel. At times even when Marta is making short-sighted, dubious decisions, I could totally understand why she was choosing to make them. I didn't agree but I did empathise with how she felt. The themes of fear of rejection, pushing your body to its limits, injury and the expectation for perfect bodies are all well explored and I felt I lived through the persistent pressure that Marta was under.

To balance that out, there is a lovely warm family feel to the book. Marta is close to her mother despite the physical distance between them and she also builds up sweet relationships with her soft-hearted landlady and the other borders in the house. She does feel isolated and alone at times but in reality she has a huge support cast.

One problem with ballet books is that they tend to focus on the competitiveness and inevitably there is one spiteful ballet person out to get the main character. It was refreshing not to have that stale storyline delivered here. Instead we got to see a close bond between three of the new ballet members. And most of Marta's competitiveness was shown through her dedication to her work and her excessive high standards for herself.

There is also a romance in the book. It isn't a huge part of the storyline but it is always present in the background waiting for its time to flourish. Like the book, the romance is old-fashioned and engaging and overtime I was a believer in it.

Overall, this book was a pleasant surprise. It is the best ballet book I have read in a long, long time and I'm excited to see that Paddy Eger has a follow up planned as I'm keen to see what happens next.

Who should read 84 Ribbons?

I'd highly recommend this to all who love books with a strong ballet setting and also to those who like an old-fashioned nostalgic feel from their reads. If you liked the Drina books by Jean Estoril or Girl in Motion by Miriam Wenger-Landis; then I'd also recommend this book to you.

Thanks to Netgalley for giving me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest, unbiased review.

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### **Marjorie says**

Given To Me For An Honest Review

84 Ribbons by Paddy Eger gives us a great coming of age story set in the world of ballet. It tells us about addiction and weight issues. Showing everyone that we all have problems. The main character is Marta. Marta will do anything will do anything to reach her goal. In doing this, she finds herself making some big mistakes. Many young people will be able to relate to Marta's struggles. I enjoyed reading this book and I think others would too. I recommend it. I look forward to more from Paddy Eger.

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### **Tania Godwin-evans says**

What young girl doesn't want to be a ballerina but does not realise all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes well this book deals with the trials and tribulations of an aspiring ballet dancer.

The dancer encounters an acerbic ballet mistress and is unprepared for the stress of constant classes and/or rehearsals resulting in over work. There are also the issues of competition for roles, the need to be the best and the need to push one's body to its limits. The author shows how this one particular dancer deals or rather does not deal with stress, disappointment and overwork. All this is set in the back drop of the 1950's – a simpler time. This is also the ideal setting for a budding romance between a potential news reporter and a budding dancer. The dancer has to question her loyalty – her beau, her health or the dance. The ending felt unfinished and this reader will not be purchasing the second or any subsequent instalment.

The author is courageous enough to deal with two taboo subjects - related to a dancer's world – depression and eating disorders which both occur following a silly injury the protagonist encounters. The author handles these subjects on the correct level for the audience of this book. She deals with the subject sensitively but without going into too much detail.

Although aimed at a female audience this book should not be ruled out by aspiring male dancers too.

I found it difficult to like the main character in this book and thought the story line lacked real depth. I think this is why I had to stand back before giving my review of this book or even to decide the rating. The book is targeted at young adults who may appreciate the level of this book but this reader requires more depth to her characters and story-lines.

Full Disclosure: I received a free copy from Netgalley for an honest review

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### **Kristi Bernard says**

Marta Selbryth has been dancing ballet since she was 5 years old. At the age of 7 her ballet teacher told her about a famous ballerina and how she wore out hundreds of pointe shoes in her first 12 years of her career. Marta decided right then that she would save the ribbons of every worn out pair of pointe shoes starting with the very first pair she just received. Her goal was to collect 84 ribbons. Marta had calculated and decided that 84 would be how many she needed before she was ready to earn a solo at the dance company she would be dancing for.

Marta is now 17 and has finally been accepted to the intermountain dance company in Billings, Montana after many rejection letters from other companies. Leaving home for the first time she is learning that not everything goes as planned. Her baggage didn't make the trip with her, She can't seem to get a hold of the greeter in charge of helping her settle in, her acceptance letter had the wrong information on it, which caused her to be several days late showing up at the dance company and now she has to struggle to make up for the lost time. This dance company is her only chance to fulfill her dreams of dancing for a professional company and earning a solo and so far it's not looking good for Marta. Having secured a home for herself, Marta is still completely alone without her friends or mother's guidance to help her through this journey she will have to face life head on or fail and go home.

What else could go wrong for Marta? Does she really have what it takes to be a professional dancer? What other obstacles stand in her way of her dreams?

Author Paddy Eger takes readers into the real life world of ballerinas. Young readers will get a first hand look at the excitement, hard work, and sacrifice it takes to reach their dreams. The characters are also right on the edge of starvation to maintain a certain weight. This book may seem to be directed at an all female audience but young men who are aspiring to dance may also be interested. Vivid imagery fills these short chapters with character and emotional that will keep any reader engaged and connected.

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### **Paddy Eger says**

As the author, I'm excited to learn what readers think of Marta's story. She's a teenage dancer who realizes her life long dream: to dance professionally. Marta steps into the world of ballet and her first year of

independence. She works to balance her career with a budding romance, and to deal with successes, mishaps, misunderstandings and injuries along the way.

Much has changed since the 1950s setting of the novel yet many life situations remain the same across the decades. Step back in time. Follow Marta's journey. Let me know what you think.

Thanks!

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### Alex says

Meh.

I love ballet books but I just couldn't get into this one. The dialogue reads as fake and forced, the plot unconvincing. The ballet itself in the book is pretty well written, at least the author did her homework there, but neither the stories nor the characters made me want to find out what happened next. There was too much telling, not enough showing, and it was just, sorry to say, kind of boring.

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### Cheryl says

Seventeen year old Marta Selbryth accomplishes a lifelong goal when she is offered a position with a dance company. She leaves home and moves to Billings, Montana to pursue her dream. Once there, she must deal with the intense physical and emotional stress of a dance career while attempting to maintain a personal life as well.

Author Paddy Eger realistically portrays the daily life of a professional ballet dancer in this wonderful coming of age novel. The setting of 1950's America adds to the appeal of the story. Challenges, setbacks and joys combine to make this a book that is hard to put down. Adults and young adults who are interested in dance would enjoy reading this novel.

Thank you to Net Galley and Tendril Press for providing me with the opportunity to read the advanced copy of 84 Ribbons.

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### Kelly says

This could technically be a DNF review but I ended up skimming the last hundred or so pages so I knew how it ended.

Three words to describe this book. Monotone. Tedious. Boring. Everything is awash with superfluous descriptions of Marta's daily life and activities.

The book is, in short, a fantastic description of **every menial task a person will perform in a day**.

Want to know what Marta does when she wakes up? How about every single freaking date that she has with

Steve? What about her dinner? What about the amount she sews? You get everything and it's **too much**.

Marta is without a doubt, the most flat character I have ever read about. I can't even begin to try to describe her *well* because I have no concrete idea of what her personality is like. I can try with the words whiny, weak, and defensive. But her solution to everything is to whine, rock, cry, or starve herself. She isn't realistic in any way. She doesn't act like a teenager chasing her dreams. The love interest, Steve, is the same in terms of development. He's portrayed as a Gary Stu, a "perfect" boyfriend that Marta can't accept.

They have no chemistry. The entire time I was reading the book, they felt more like acquaintances than anything else.

The dialogue is also extremely unrealistic.

Clearly, this is a book about anorexia and the hardships of a "professional" ballet dancer (Marta is NOT a pro). But everything is glossed over. The blame for Marta's struggles in the dance company is placed on Madame, a lady who is strict and gives Marta the character roles (often comedic roles with more acting than dance). Apparently Marta thinks that she can waltz into the studio and get a solo. I think not. Her anorexia is treated as no more than a fit or a refusal of food. I never felt the desperation of losing weight or always feeling like you aren't good enough. By the end of the novel, the focus wasn't on dance, but on Marta's struggles with anorexia. The problem with this is that this part of the plot was already flimsy.

I also feel like this isn't an accurate portrayal of dancers. I guarantee you that I haven't met a single person who substitutes *derriere* for butt in everyday conversation. Some of the ballet technique was also wrong although I will credit Eger with the correct use of the terms. However, the idea that 84 ribbons is enough to get a solo is also laughable.

84 Ribbons = 21 Pairs of pointe shoes

The # of pairs of shoes a ballerina will go through in one year at a pro studio = 21+ pairs of pointe shoes

Let's be honest. Some professional dancers go through 1-2 (or more) pairs a week. Multiply that by four and they use anywhere from 4-6+ pairs per month. Divide 21 by that and you get 4-5 months. There is no way that a corp newb would get a solo in half a year or less.

My face when I read that 84 ribbons equated a solo.

Rookie dancers almost never get solos within a year of dancing in the corps. The industry just *isn't that easy*.

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### **Holly says**

84 Ribbons is one of the best books I've read in a while. I love ballet and think it is beautiful so I thought this would be a light summer read. It wasn't but it was a really beautiful, heartbreakingly beautiful story.

The book is set in the 50's and Marta is a very dedicated and quite mature 17 year old perusing a ballet

career. Her dream since a young girl. She is not your average teenager wanting to go to the mall. Her commitment and love for ballet is serious. She chases a dream and goes to extreme lengths pushing herself to her limit to get what she's been wanting forever. Keeping herself slim and purposely dieting to look like a true ballerina. Hitting some small bumps along the way and a few major ones, she still keeps her dream in sight. This is an inspirational, educational, beautiful story. It's also sad. It made me smile, laugh and almost cry a few times. It made me sigh from the beauty of the visions of her dancing but then had me huffing over her misfortune. Marta is a strong young woman. I was always keeping hope up for her.

I needed some time after reading this to sit back and think. Not because I didn't know how to rate it but because it made me really think beyond "that was good". I could see the whole thing unfold in front of me like a movie. Beware this is not a fairy tale with a happy ending but that's part of what makes it so real. It gives a backstage look into a dancer's life and their outrageous expectations. Despite that it is sad and I felt bad for Marta, as I've grown to like her character, it was a coming of age type of book and the end kept me thinking. I see there are more books following this one that continues this story and one that focuses on Lynne, a friend she made at the Intermountain Ballet Company. You better believe I will be reading both of them as soon as they are available. I will continue to think about this story for a good while, it's just one of those books.

I was given a copy of this book by Netgalley in return for an honest opinion.

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### **Isis Ray-sisco says**

I received this book free from NetGalley for an honest review. This does not influence my opinions or the review of the book.

84 Ribbons by Paddy Eger is a great contemporary read. It isn't in my normal reading comfort zone but it sounded good so I decided to give it a try. I am glad that I did because I enjoyed it thoroughly. The author paints a vivid behind the scenes picture of the ballet world. I loved the cast of players and the plotline of the story. 84 Ribbons is Marta's story. It is about her struggles, triumphs, and the in between.

Marta is a young ballet hopeful who doesn't have all that many resources. She is thrilled when she gets the invitation to join the Intermountain Ballet Company, a boarding school for dancers. The only thing that isn't so great about it is the fact it will take her away from her mother and the only home she has ever known. She must learn to navigate her new world on her own. She doesn't start off too well especially since she shows up late. She was unaware of the change made in their schedule. To make matters worse she is caught imitating one of the instructors. Things seem to calm down except for the fact that she is given all the parts that no one wants. Things get more complicated when she meets Steve and he wants to use her as one of his sources. She must navigate the school, both her and her instructors' expectations, a budding romance, and the friendships she has made. When life gets tough she is going to have to rely on more than just her strength to get through. Will her dreams be realized? Or will she end up falling flat on her face?

I really liked 84 Ribbons and I look forward to reading more books more of Marta's story in the future. I liked the fact that this wasn't a rags to riches or emerging dancer gets her big chance and rises to fame and fortune quickly. I liked that there was a true struggle and one that the reader could identify with even if you are not immersed in the dance world. I liked the characters especially Marta. I like how she rises to the occasion or buckles down when she needs to. She is tenacious and isn't going to let her dream go. I also like that there is struggle there it shows the nasty underbelly of the world. It shows a dancer's struggle to remain

perfect in every aspect of their lives. It even touches on the struggle to be a certain weight. It has some true to life examples of dieting, anorexia, diet pills, and bulimia. There is joy and triumph, sadness and pain, and everything in between. I found 84 Ribbons to be an engaging read. I would highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys a good contemporary read

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### **Anna Elizabeth says**

I have joined the Net Galley world! I'm love with it! Check it out!

84 Ribbons was my first accepted book request. I can honestly say it was an absolute pleasure reading this book!

84 Ribbons is about 17 year old, Washington State native Marta traveling to Billings, Montana to fulfill her dreams as a professional ballerina. While there she makes life long friendships, finds love, loses herself and begins the journey of finding out who she is. As a child she figured that it would take her 84 worn pointe shoe ribbons for her to be ready to dance her first solo piece professionally. The story takes you through her many trials and tribulations in an attempt to meet this goal.

There are 3 things that this book contained that I personally thoroughly enjoyed.

1. Ballet. I myself danced a number of years as a child. Though I stopped taking lessons I continued to dance in school musicals. I have always been fascinated and enjoyed the world of ballet. Paddy did an exquisite job of helping her readers enter the prestigious ballet world. The physical and mental struggles as a dancer as well as the interpersonal struggles that can occur when stakes are high and everyone is vying for their place center stage.

2. It's a time period piece. I know the late 50s really weren't that long ago as far as time period pieces go HOWEVER it did make an impact on the overall feeling of the book. Everything from the cars to the fashion were subtly mentioned. 84 Ribbons could have easily been written from a current point in time. I thoroughly appreciated the bit of extra time and effort into making it a time period piece.

3. It was relatable. Again, this book could have been written from a current time point of view. I think removing it from now made it more relatable. One of those moments where you realize that in many cases, people struggle and succeed today just as people decades ago. One of the big focuses of the book is weight issues. As ballerinas it is their job to be thin, toned and beautiful. No one wants to watch a fat dancer on stage. What's more is Paddy Eger did not shy away from the realities of such struggles, but took them head on. I loved "watching" the relationship between Marta and Steve blossom. The friendship between Marta and her two best friends Bartley and Lynne was reminiscent of my own friendships. The relationship between Marta and her mother was one very near and dear to my heart, being that my mother and I are best friends. :)

Overall I would definitely recommend this book. It was a relatively easy read. I know a number of my students that would enjoy this book. I can't wait to read the next 2 installments of the series as it follows Marta and Lynne on their continuing journeys!

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## **Stacie says**

84 Ribbons is an alluring story about the roller coaster known as life and the struggle to find that special niche that ends in happiness.

Marta is a ballerina and has been dancing since she was a little girl. She has dreamed of the chance to dance as a professional. Now, at the age of 17 she is given the opportunity of a lifetime, she has been selected to travel to Billings, MN to dance with the Intermountain Ballet Company. Marta is eager and nervous as she begins the next chapter of her life. Marta finds a place to live, begins her rigorous dance practices, meets a handsome journalist, and makes two new best friends. Her life seems to be unfolding better than she had hoped. But, life has a funny way of taking it's own path and Marta soon discovers that the best laid plans don't often end the way we had hoped. Will she ever earn the 84 ribbons she longs for?

84 Ribbons is a well written coming-of-age story that delves into the demanding world of dancers. Set in the 1950's, readers learn of the struggles dancers face to stay on top, the stress they encounter in being chosen for roles, and the often times unhealthy self-images they develop of themselves as they strive to achieve perfection. I have never danced, nor do I know much about the ballet, but I was immediately drawn to Marta and her struggles to achieve her dream. Paddy Eger has a gift and the rhythm of her story elegantly flows across the pages just as a beautiful ballerina flows across the stage. I like the realism of the story, in that life is filled with disappointment, but the story also reminds us that we have a choice and we don't have to let failure cloud our future. As Marta eventually learns, the show must go on.

I highly recommend picking up a copy the the young adult story, 84 Ribbons.

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