

Pictures of the Past

Reviewed By Mary Lignor, Bookpleasures.com

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This novel is one of the most intriguing and beautiful books that I have ever read. It contains so much inspiration and love - also heartbreak and hate - that a review is almost impossible to write in order to do the author justice. It is so full of stories of people rich and poor who live through the heart wrenching horror of war and separation of families and friends. The story is an epic tale that takes the reader from Chicago to Paris to Berlin and back to New York covering the years 1937 to 2005.

The story begins in the year 2004 when Gerta Rosen a survivor of the Second World War sees a painting hanging in the Art Institute of Chicago that, she states belonged to her neighbors in Berlin, the Berger family. The plaque on the painting says that it was donated to the Institute by Taylor Woodmere, Woodmere Family Foundation, Kenilworth, Illinois. Gerta announces to one and all that this painting was stolen by the Nazis and she will go to the museum director and make sure they look up the provenance of this painting. She makes good on her threat and the accusation brings scandal to the Woodmere family.

After this, the book goes back to 1937 when Taylor is sent off to Paris to represent his family at a business conference. Of course, 1937 Europe was in a state of confusion as Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party was taking over Germany and persecuting the Jewish population, gearing up for an invasion. Taylor goes reluctantly to Paris leaving his girlfriend, Emily, behind. However once he arrives he meets Sarah Berger, daughter of a business associate of his father's and falls in love with her. A few hours before this fateful meeting he sees a painting by Impressionist Artist Henri Lebasque and buys it for his girl in Chicago. When Taylor falls for Sarah he notifies his family that he is going on to Berlin for a visit to see the factories of Sarah's father and spend more time with Sarah. When Taylor is finally called home by his family he leaves the picture for Sarah. The Bergers become trapped by the Nazis and Mr. Berger is taken away. Sarah and her mother leave and the lovers are not able to be reunited.

Back to the 1960's, Rachel Gold, a lovely Chicago girl, becomes pregnant and subsequently abandoned by her boyfriend, Court Woodmere, who is Taylor's son. She goes to New York to live with her aunt who is a Holocaust survivor, has her son, and goes on to college, where she meets Richard Stone, an instructor and eventually marries him. She also has a lucrative career working for a well-known magazine.

Years later, when the dispute over the provenance of the painting is made public, Rachel's grown son becomes disturbed, as he remembers the picture and is sure that he has seen it somewhere. It comes down to the fact that Taylor Woodmere is the only one who can explain the complicated puzzles that crop up in the lives of these people.

The ending of this book will touch your heart. *Pictures of the Past* is a wonderful work of historical fiction. The writing is first class with a look into the times right before World War II and looking into the lives and events of the era from a time filled with horror and hate. The love story of Taylor and Sarah lasts through all the years of separation.

I have to say, again, I loved this book!! The author did such a good job of keeping the characters interesting and readers will not get confused by who these people are and where they fit into the story. This is a wonderful read and will keep you enthralled until the end.