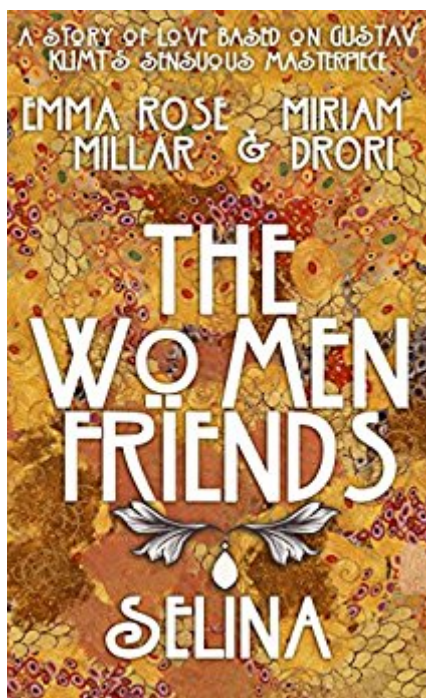


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The Women Friends: Selina



Synopsis

****FINALIST: The Chanticleer Goethe Awards for Late Historical Fiction****Who is the young woman with the haunting gaze in Gustav Klimt's 1917 masterpiece, *The Women Friends*? Selina Brunner is running from the demons of her past, cut off from her family in a sleepy Tyrolean village, and lost in the soulless city of Vienna, where everything – even one's very existence – is a lie. When, amidst growing fear of sinister developments in Vienna, an exotic stranger comes to town, Selina finds old passions reignited and her whole world turned upside down. *The Women Friends*: Selina is the first in a series of fictional tales about the women who inspired this great artist.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I highly recommend this book. I love, love loved it!!! I was sad that it had to end.

Authors Millar and Drori write: "in 1917, Gustav Klimt painted his sensuous masterpiece *The Women Friends*. Nothing is known about the two women in the painting, but it is thought they were a

real couple." Selina is one of the women. If Selina is fictional, then the authors never let us realize that, instead they breathe such life into her, we must conclude that she is real. A country girl from the Tyrol area of Austria, born at the cusp of the new century, she goes to Vienna in 1917, to become an artist's model. Although, she fails at modeling, her love affair with Gustav Klimt's female muse, Janika, inspires Klimt to paint "The Women Friends." In telling Selina's story, the authors succeed in describing the hypocrisy of bohemian life of Vienna during World War I. The artists and members of this community had a desperate need to invalidate Viennese society at the same time they desperately sought funding from that same society and its wealthy citizens. Klimt died in 1918, but Selina's story continues long after his death. In the early 1930s, she lives through the crash of the banks, hyperinflation, the rise of anti-semitism and the mass strikes, after which, she notes that: "Broken glass lay glinting in the Viennese sunshine and dogs scavenged for food," and she asks, "how had this city of opera and Sachertorte slipped so swiftly into barbarism?" Throughout the telling of Selina's story, Klimt's influence on the authors is clear, as Klimt painted with color, so Millar and Drori paint with words. The authors write that the "tragic fate of the painting itself and ominous developments in Vienna in the early twentieth-century inspired us to write a series of stories, based on Klimt's women and some of his most renowned work," and this book is the first of the series. I look forward to their future work. (In return for an honest review, I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.)

I was given the chance to read this book from NetGalley in return for an honest review. This book is perfect for fans of historical fiction, with LGBTQ characters as well as an honest depiction of the "just before" Hitler claimed Austria during WW2. It's an important read for those reasons, as well. We can all too easily forget that it did seemingly happen "overnight" because these were emotions and opinions and feelings that had been brewing in the citizens minds well before Hitler came to power, before he stepped foot into Austria. He came to power because people were already agreeing with him about everything, including the final solution. We start off with Selina Brunner who has decided to move from the countryside to Vienna in hopes of escaping the destitute conditions world war one left much of the European countryside suffering from. She has experienced sexual assault in her past, and this is immediately brought up as one of the reasons why she was so eager to move; she needed to put her past permanently behind her. She struggles with this at first and it is not until she meets Janika, a Jewish muse of Gustav Klimt's, that she is able to put action to her feelings and she falls in love with Janika. Their love is not to be, and after Janika marries a man, Selina is forced to meet other people. We see Selina meet a national socialist woman, but while

they live together for a time and she does introduce her to her parents, they do not fall in love nor do they stay together. In the end, Selina makes a choice between staying utterly true to herself and how she identifies, or marrying a Roma man to help him escape. The entire book, while simple in some areas that begged for deeper character exploration, is one that I would say is important to read, especially right now with the way politics seem to be turning. It is a lie to say that things aren't already bad; that's how things like the Shoah happen. Things that were already bad, were purposely ignored until they had no choice but to come to a head in a way so horrible, there are no words to express. The author does a wonderful job of showing that it wasn't just Hitler that caused the Shoah to happen, but the people as well. And it was also people like Selina Brunner who helped others during this dark time so that it wasn't their last; while this story is fictitious, the heart of it rings true from page to page.

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