



Girl in Hyacinth Blue

By Susan Vreeland

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This luminous story begins in the present day, when a professor invites a colleague to his home to see a painting that he has kept secret for decades. The professor swears it is a Vermeer—but why has he hidden this important work for so long? The reasons unfold in a series of events that trace the ownership of the painting back to World War II and Amsterdam, and still further back to the moment of the work's inspiration. As the painting moves through each owner's hands, what was long hidden quietly surfaces, illuminating poignant moments in multiple lives. Susan Vreeland's characters remind us, through their love of this mysterious painting, how beauty transforms and why we reach for it, what lasts and what in our lives is singular and unforgettable.

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Girl in Hyacinth Blue By Susan Vreeland Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

There are only 35 known Vermeers extant in the world today. In *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, Susan Vreeland posits the existence of a 36th. The story begins at a private boys' academy in Pennsylvania where, in the wake of a faculty member's unexpected death, math teacher Cornelius Engelbrecht makes a surprising revelation to one of his colleagues. He has, he claims, an authentic Vermeer painting, "a most extraordinary painting in which a young girl wearing a short blue smock over a rust-colored skirt sat in profile at a table by an open window." His colleague, an art teacher, is skeptical and though the technique and subject matter are persuasively Vermeer-like, Engelbrecht can offer no hard evidence--no appraisal, no papers--to support his claim. He says only that his father, "who always had a quick eye for fine art, picked it up, let us say, at an advantageous moment." Eventually it is revealed that Engelbrecht's father was a Nazi in charge of rounding up Dutch Jews for deportation and that the picture was looted from one doomed family's home:

That's when I saw that painting, behind his head. All blues and yellows and reddish brown, as translucent as lacquer. It had to be a Dutch master. Just then a private found a little kid covered with tablecloths behind some dishes in a sideboard cabinet. We'd almost missed him.

By the end of "Love Enough," this first of eight interrelated stories tracing the history of "Girl in Hyacinth Blue," the painting's fate at the hands of guilt-riddled Engelbrecht *filis* is in question. Unfortunately, there is no doubt about the probable destiny of the previous owners, the Vredenburg family of Rotterdam, who take center stage in the powerful "A Night Different From All Other Nights." Vreeland handles this tale with subtlety and restraint, setting it at Passover, the year before the looting, and choosing to focus on the adolescent Hannah Vredenburg's difficult passage into adulthood in the face of an uncertain future. In the next story, "Adagia," she moves even further into the past to sketch "how love builds itself unconsciously ... out of the momentous ordinary" in a tender portrait of a longtime marriage. Back and back Vreeland goes, back through other owners, other histories, to the very inception of the painting in the homely, everyday objects of the Vermeer household--a daughter's glass of milk, a son's shirt in need of buttons, a wife's beloved sewing basket--"the unacknowledged acts of women to hallow home." *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* ends with the painting's subject herself, Vermeer's daughter Magdalena, who first sends the portrait out into the world as payment for a family debt, then sees it again, years later at an auction.

She thought of all the people in all the paintings she had seen that day, not just Father's, in all the paintings of the world, in fact. Their eyes, the particular turn of a head, their loneliness or suffering or grief was borrowed by an artist to be seen by other people throughout the years who would never see them face to face. People who would be that close to her, she thought, a matter of a few arms' lengths, looking, looking, and they would never know her.

In this final passage, Susan Vreeland might be describing her own masterpiece as well as Vermeer's. --*Alix Wilber*

From Publishers Weekly

As Keats describes the scenes and lives frozen in a moment of time on his Grecian urn, so Vreeland layers moments in the lives of eight people profoundly moved and changed by a Vermeer painting a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Vreeland opens with a man who suffers through his adoration of the painting because he inherited it from his Nazi father, who stole it from a deported Jewish family. She traces the work's provenance through the centuries: the farmer's wife, the Bohemian student, the loving husband with a secret

and, finally, the Girl herself Vermeer's eldest daughter, who felt her "self" obliterated by the self immortalized in paint, but accepted that this was the nature of art. Descriptions of the painting by people in different countries in various historical periods are particularly beautiful. Each section is read by a different narrator, some better than others. Several add dimension to the story and writing, while others are so intent on portraying the book's ethereal qualities they make the listener conscious of the reader instead of the language. Still, this is a delightful production. Based on the MacMurray & Beck hardcover (Forecasts, July 12, 1999).

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From [Booklist](#)

Reading Vreeland's new book is like opening up a Chinese box: each chapter reveals a new layer of meaning and import. The "novel" follows the trail of an "unknown" painting by the Dutch master Vermeer--*The Girl in Hyacinth Blue* from the time of its creation in seventeenth-century Holland to the present day. In each of the eight independent but chronologically linked chapters, the painting shows up as a prop in the lives of different owners, and in telling the circumstances under which these people acquire or lose the painting, Vreeland gives the readers a sense of the evolution of Dutch social history. The first chapter opens with the discovery of the painting in the basement of a mathematician. It turns out that he inherited it from his father, who was a Nazi looter in Holland during World War II. The second chapter features the circumstances of the Jewish family from whom the painting was stolen. The remaining chapters take the readers further back into Dutch history until the final, or rather the original, moment when Vermeer decided to paint the portrait of his daughter, a young girl dressed in hyacinth blue. True to the spirit of Vermeer, Vreeland uses art as a vehicle for capturing special moments in the lives of ordinary people; true, too, to Vermeer's legacy, she creates art that brings a unique pleasure into the lives of ordinary readers. *Veronica Scrol*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Regina Laporte:

Reading a guide tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Together with book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire their own reader with their story or even their experience. Not only situation that share in the publications. But also they write about the ability about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors these days always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some research before they write on their book. One of them is this Girl in Hyacinth Blue.

Henry McMahon:

Girl in Hyacinth Blue can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort that will put every word into pleasure arrangement in writing Girl in Hyacinth Blue although doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource info that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information could drawn you into fresh stage of crucial pondering.

Mark Malek:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to obtain information. The information will make someone to understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information much easier to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You can observe that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. Typically the book that recommended to you personally is Girl in Hyacinth Blue this e-book consist a lot of the information in the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The language styles that writer use for explain it is easy to understand. The particular writer made some study when he makes this book. That is why this book acceptable all of you.

Christopher Hendrick:

Is it a person who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day by watching television programs or just lying down on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Girl in Hyacinth Blue can be the solution, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

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