



Portrait of a Girl

Dörthe Binkert, Margot Bettauer Dembo (Translator)

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In the summer of 1896, a grand Swiss spa hotel becomes a refuge for Nika, a penniless beauty whose tortured past has left her unable to speak. While working in the manicured gardens, she becomes a muse to the celebrated painter Giovanni Segantini, who takes her under his wing.

Although he's married, the two bond closely, and beneath his gaze Nika blossoms. She opens her heart to Segantini, serving as the muse for his luminous masterwork *La Vanità*, and through his patience recovers her voice. The secret between them is her sole material possession: a golden locket with clues to her mysterious heritage.

How will Nika learn the hidden secrets of the locket and uncover her origins? And what path awaits her once the facts are revealed? As her ties to Segantini grow ever more complex, her search for love and truth becomes as perilous as the quest for an alpine summit—and her destiny is rewritten on the journey.

Portrait of a Girl Details

Date : Published September 1st 2014 by AmazonCrossing (first published January 1st 2010)

ISBN :

Author : Dörthe Binkert , Margot Bettauer Dembo (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 364 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Romance

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From Reader Review Portrait of a Girl for online ebook

J. Williams says

Awkward and unsatisfying

The storyline was very disjointed and much of the dialogue was awkward. Perspective changed constantly. Very amateurish. It read like a poorly written first novel. I barely made it to the unsatisfying end. Very disappointing. I can't believe this was an Amazon.com Prime monthly selection.

Martha says

very slow start to the story. Glad it all tied up by the end but it really took a long time in trying to get there.

Juliana says

Meh

Perhaps it lost something in translation, but the story did not move me either positively or negatively. Hence the down the middle rating of three stars.

Karen says

I don't read a lot of Historical Fiction, unless it's about WWII for some reason. I read two of Dorthe Binkert's books this past week, neither of them are on WWII. Needless to say, I like her books. I liked Portrait of a Girl because it was a story set in the Swiss Alps in the late 19th century.

Courtney says

I got this book via Amazon's Kindle First program.

Lots of random characters are introduced, many of whom have no bearing on the story of the main character, a girl named Nika. The relationship with the famous painter, which is supposed to be the centerpiece of Nika's story, is unfulfilling and fails to get off the ground in any meaningful way. And even though Nika locates her family, even that is a rip off, because she is called a liar and a thief by her grandfather. All in all, it just fails to deliver.

Kathy Koch says

It was okay, not great. Somewhat disappointing over expectations.

Claire says

I received Portrait of a Girl as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

A tale of the intertwined lives of guests and staff of a hotel in the Swiss Alps at the end of the 19th century, including the painter Segantini and the mute young woman who becomes his muse, as well as a wealthy young woman torn between her fiance and the dashing English gentlemen she meets while receiving medical treatment at the hotel spa.

The synopsis is somewhat misleading, as it makes one think this is a love story between two people with very few secondary characters. However, that isn't the case. It's a beautifully populated world of characters from all walks of life, getting into messy romantic entanglements, and falling in and out of love. I'll grant you, some parts can seem a little melodramatic, and the stories don't intertwine very harmoniously, but it's a fun read, with a good balance of drama and lightness.

Judee says

Intriguing tale

Very nice story about a young woman seeking her family and all the other characters that she interacts with, and how their stories all blend together. It kept me interested from start to finish.

Melodie says

Complicated narrative about the goings on in a posh Swiss spa in 1896. The characters range from locals employed at the hotel to guests to hotel management to a famed artist. Love among the mountains.

I had a hard time getting through this one. Initially I was intrigued even though the pace was slow. But somewhere along the way, I was too mired in the shallow and petty to give the needed attention to the young girl who the book title was about.

The author also kept slipping in slang that was definitely not of that time period. If you're doing a period piece, better editing. I got through it, although I admit to some speed reading. I know I'm in the minority. Most reviews were absolutely glowing. Just not my cup of tea.

Alicia says

I am absolutely in awe of Dorthe Binkert's ability to ensnare me into a storyline. I won this book from a First Reads giveaway, and though I had read and loved her first book, I kept putting this one off. But once I

started it, I was hooked!

I love that both of her books that I've read have had a similar style (She Wore Only White and Portrait of a Girl). There is an overall mystery character that is at the center of her novels. In Portrait of a Girl, the main character is Nika. Nika's life is a mystery. Who is she? Where did she come from? What will happen to her? While the whole novel revolves around this central mystery, you meet many other interesting characters and follow any number of side plots that add to the overall intrigue of the story line. Eventually, the book wraps back in on itself in the most clever and unpredictable way to solve the mystery of Nika. Just an amazing read! I CANNOT wait until Binkert releases a new novel and this time I won't procrastinate!

Jennifer Gaskill says

I received this book as a Kindle free download, and the plot seemed intriguing - a mysterious girl struggling to uncover her mysterious past, set on a historical backdrop.

After the first few chapters, I still didn't feel attached to the characters, and from there I pushed myself to finish. The book was worth finishing; it was nice to know how the story ended. However, it was not a page-turner.

I think problem #1 was the extraneous storylines. I am fine with a book having many plotlines and characters, as long as there is some purpose or point to it. It took me a long time to figure out how the lives of Kate, James, Edward, and Mathilde related to Nika. They really don't interact at all. The only thing I can think of is that they parallel her search for self. However, their stories just weren't as compelling for a long time and distracted from Nika's journey. Nika didn't even observe and ponder their actions...nothing to tell me why they were there.

Problem #2, related to problem #1, was the story seemed to meander, much like the Alpine paths the characters walked. In capturing the quiet, secluded town that has become a tourist hot spot, the author created a quiet plot that didn't compel one to keep reading.

Hidden gem: I was excited to discover that the painter Segantini is indeed real, and his paintings are really as beautiful as the characters in the book describe them as. I looked him up, and enjoyed very much discovering a new artist.

Unfortunate side effect: This book is a translation, and it's been my experience so far in life that something ALWAYS gets lost in translation. There were some beautiful quotes I highlighted to look back on, but I wonder if some of the drier moments in the book aren't just due to things getting "lost in translation." If I could have read the original in German, would I have enjoyed it more?

Still, 3 stars. Good, just not GREAT...

Sarah says

The Hotel Spa Maloja, a ritzy venue high in the Swiss Alps, is the scene for life-changing encounters and romantic entanglements during the summer of 1896. In her uneven but ultimately worthwhile second novel,

Binkert sets up an interesting convergence of personalities and social classes, with a vast gap between the wealthy hotel guests, there for a health cure or to photograph the views, and the impoverished, proud locals.

The large cast includes a flirtatious Englishman and his best friend, a young woman with bad lungs, a family of mountain farmers, Italian pastoral painter Giovanni Segantini, and a bitchy American socialite who could have sprung from a Jackie Collins book. The main plotline centers on Nika, a mute stranger with striking strawberry-blond hair who endured a traumatic childhood and who's searching for her true identity. Readers follow her on her journey of self-discovery, which is alternately helped and impeded by the men who fall in love with her.

I found the novel rough going early on. The translation has some odd phrasings for a historical novel ("he didn't suck up to people"). The story jumped from viewpoint to viewpoint with abandon, and few people felt distinct. Fortunately, after enough time in the clear mountain air, they and their motives began to sharpen, and the reading became smoother. My interest was also piqued after discovering the novel imagines the backstory of a real painting, Segantini's *La Vanità* (which looks nothing like the demure image on the book's cover!).

Binkert is gifted at describing the beautiful Engadine region and evoking her characters' deep, swirling emotions. Another strong point is her depiction of a master artist at work in his preferred element, outdoors, where he can mix the perfect palette of colors and "capture the harmony of light." Overall, a good choice for readers in search of thoughtful escapism.

This review first appeared in November's *Historical Novels Review*.

Sojourner says

Portrait of a Girl by Dörthe Binkert is a delightful story set in the Swiss Alps at the end of the 19th century. Originally published as *Bildnis Eines Mädchens* in German in 2010 by Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl, it has been beautifully rendered into English by Margot Bettauer Dembo, and explores the lives of people taking shelter at a luxurious and imposing Swiss spa hotel.

Heartfelt but funny, tense but delightful, author Binkert created an eclectic and impressive cast of characters whose lives entwined at the spa, not sparing even the staff. But the main protagonist in the story is a young mute girl Nika with a tortured past which left her in the condition she is in when the story begins. She becomes the muse of a renowned painter Giovanni Segantini, and the story follows their relationship as the main thread of the book while also diverging into other threads.

Delightful, poignant and enjoyable, you will be absorbed into the story as Nika delved deep into her past to discover who she really is.

Laura says

Took me longer than normal to finish reading this book because it didn't really keep my attention but I was interested in it long enough to see what happened to the characters. I never formed an emotional attachment to the characters, and the action wasn't all that exciting. The book kept shifting the story's focus on various

characters, and I think it would have been more effective if written in the first person from each character's perspective. This is touted as a book of historical fiction, but except for one character who actually existed, this could have taken place at anytime and in any place. Violence and sexual content implied but is not explicit. (Review also posted on Amazon)

Leylan says

This is the story of a girl, Nika, and her quest to find out where she came from. Her story is entwined with other colorful characters that make up the essence of the novel. All of the characters are well written and during intervals take center stage. The story creates great scenery between the different places up in the mountains or out in the streets of Venice. It is a story with a bittersweet ending but a good look into the soul of its characters.

It was a captivating read straight from the beginning.
I received this book through a giveaway on goodreads.
