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Cooking For Picasso: A Novel



Synopsis

For readers of Paula McLain, Nancy Horan, and Melanie Benjamin, this captivating novel is inspired by a little-known interlude in the artist's life. The French Riviera, spring 1936: It's off-season in the lovely seaside village of Juan-les-Pins, where seventeen-year-old Ondine cooks with her mother in the kitchen of their family-owned Café Paradis. A mysterious new patron who's slipped out of Paris and is traveling under a different name has made an unusual request—to have his lunch served to him at the nearby villa he's secretly rented, where he wishes to remain incognito. Pablo Picasso is at a momentous crossroads in his personal and professional life—and for him, art and women are always entwined. The spirited Ondine, chafing under her family's authority and nursing a broken heart, is just beginning to discover her own talents and appetites. Her encounter with Picasso will continue to affect her life for many decades onward, as the great artist and the talented young chef each pursue their own passions and destiny. New York, present day: Céline, a Hollywood makeup artist who's come home for the holidays, learns from her mother, Julie, that Grandmother Ondine once cooked for Picasso. Prompted by her mother's enigmatic stories and the hint of more family secrets yet to be uncovered, Céline carries out Julie's wishes and embarks on a voyage to the very town where Ondine and Picasso first met. In the lush, heady atmosphere of the Côte d'Azur, and with the help of several eccentric fellow guests attending a rigorous cooking class at her hotel, Céline discovers truths about art, culture, cuisine, and love that enable her to embrace her own future. Featuring an array of both fictional characters and the French Riviera's most famous historical residents, set against the breathtaking scenery of the South of France, *Cooking for Picasso* is a touching, delectable, and wise story, illuminating the powers of trust, money, art, and creativity in the choices that men and women make as they seek a path toward love, success, and joie de vivre. Advance praise for *Cooking for Picasso*—Intrigue, art, food, and deception are woven together in a tale of love and betrayal around the life and legacy of Picasso. Touching and true, this well-written narrative made me long for my mother's coq au vin and for the sun of Juan-les-Pins. —Jacques Pâpin, chef, TV personality, author —Camille Aubray has created a vividly imagined tale of a young French woman's life-changing encounter with the most unconventional artist of the modern age. Intriguing and insightful, the sensory details alone will have you thinking you're reading the pages seated at a seaside café in the South of France. —Susan Meissner, author of *Secrets of a Charmed Life* —Takes the reader on a heartfelt journey to the South of France . . . In prose that is wise, atmospheric, and plain fun, Aubray expertly blends fact and fiction to create a rich and memorable tale. —Michelle Gable, New York Times bestselling author of *A Paris Apartment*

“Aubray brings Picasso brilliantly to life. Her intriguing intertwined narratives are utterly spellbinding and deeply touching” as rare as a page-turner with soul. — Anne Fortier, New York Times bestselling author of *The Lost Sisterhood* and *Juliet* “A warm and spicy combination of art, family intrigue, food, and romance, set in sun-drenched Provence.” — Erica Bauermeister, bestselling author of *The School of Essential Ingredients* From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I received a free copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads in exchange for a fair review. I was lost in the story and enjoyed reading this book so much that I could hardly put it down. Although I don't care for stories going back and forth in time, two parallel time lines expanding from 1936 to 2016, covering the lives of four generations of women, great grandmother, grandmother, mother, and the daughter, is done so skillfully and personality traits of each woman are portrayed so intimately, one feels like living events in the lives of the characters instead of reading them in the pages of a book. What is so exceptional is the way the complexities of the characters' personalities and the twists and turns of their lives are written. Normally the real life is so complex

and so unpredictable that most novels don't come close to capturing the complexities of real life, unlike this book which does an amazing job of doing just that. The story telling, the intricate details of the feelings of the characters, and psychologically consistent personality descriptions make this book a pleasure to read. While reading, I felt transported in time and place living the events right along with the characters in the book.

I just finished this and really liked it. Read the whole book in 2 days. Not sure how authentic the history of Picasso and his lineage is, but loved reading about France, food, and art. This is a great "get away" book. Doesn't use a lot of brain cells, but kept me entertained. Great gift for someone who loves art and/or food

Cooking for Picasso is an engaging generation spanning story set on the French Riviera. A young woman on the brink of losing her mother, returns to France to look for her grandmother's legacy, and finds the legacy is more all-encompassing than she ever expected. This was a wonderful summer vacation read, and will appeal to historical romance fans.

2.5 I want to start my review by saying that I expected to love this book. I loved the last series that this author wrote, writing as CA Belmond, starting with A Rather Lovely Inheritance. I also have a great fascination with art and artists so I fully expected that this would be the book for me. However, sadly it was not. The story takes place across the decades, the modern story completely in 2016 and the historic part starting in 1936 until shortly before the main character in 2016 is born. Both women are weak and not very likeable. Celine, the main character in 2016, cannot even stand up to her step siblings and lets them ferry her own mother away (step mother to the step siblings) with hardly a word and no action. Meanwhile she goes to France with her aunt on a trip the sick mother was supposed to take. Huh?! Meanwhile back in the 1930s, Ondine vacillates between being free spirited as she engages in a relationship (if you can call it that) with Picasso and silly and lacking a backbone. Another part of the story that did not ring true for me was the dialogue between Picasso and Ondine. It was awkward and stilted, and I just can't believe he spoke that way. Picasso was not portrayed kindly, and that viewpoint I did find more realistic. He struggled in his personal life, and the author portrays this accurately. I am sorry I did not like this book more. Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read it in exchange for an honest review.

"Cooking for Picasso" is a fascinating blend of fact and fiction. The author's imagining of what

occurred during Picasso's stay in the French Riviera in the spring of 1936 felt compellingly real. Those few months had a lasting impact on Ondine, the seventeen-year-old who cooked for him, and the generations that followed. Although the parts about Ondine were my favorite, it was also a delight to read about her granddaughter's quest to find out more about Ondine's life. The characters were vividly realized and are still fresh in my mind after finishing the book. The scenery and the food were also deliciously portrayed. Readers will want to book a trip to Juan-les-Pins after reading this book! "Cooking for Picasso" is a sumptuous feast featuring France, food, and family -- an unforgettable combination. [I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher but was not obligated to write a review. All opinions are 100% my own.]

Somewhat reminiscent of *The Book of Lost and Found* by Lucy Foley, *Cooking For Picasso* weaves a tale rooted in the mother-daughter relationship, with mystery, heartbreak, and romance in lovely Mediterranean landscapes all blended together in an entertaining tale. I liked the parallel structure of the book, switching back and forth in time from the modern-day part of the story in which the granddaughter, Céline, is dealing with her mother's poor health, her conniving half-siblings (characters who come up just short of comic-opera levels of villainy), and a search in the French Riviera town of Juan-les-Pins for a mysterious bequest from her grandmother Ondine. The book is somewhat uneven in structure and execution, trying just a little too hard at times to sustain the edge and the mystery, casting one too many stumbling blocks in the way as Céline delves into her mother's and her grandmother's pasts, and delving a time or two into some quite frankly erotic scenes which, while not offensive were rather graphic, and a bit out of character with the rest of the book. All those things having been said, this book is a delightful read, over all, which has me pining for a Provençal vacation!

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