



## 2 A.M. at The Cat's Pajamas

*Marie-Helene Bertino*

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**2 A.M. at The Cat's Pajamas** Marie-Helene Bertino

**A sparkling, enchanting and staggeringly original debut novel about one day in the lives of three unforgettable characters**

Madeleine Altimari is a smart-mouthed, precocious nine-year-old and an aspiring jazz singer. As she mourns the recent death of her mother, she doesn't realize that on Christmas Eve she is about to have the most extraordinary day—and night—of her life. After bravely facing down mean-spirited classmates and rejection at school, Madeleine doggedly searches for Philadelphia's legendary jazz club The Cat's Pajamas, where she's determined to make her on-stage debut. On the same day, her fifth grade teacher Sarina Greene, who's just moved back to Philly after a divorce, is nervously looking forward to a dinner party that will reunite her with an old high school crush, afraid to hope that sparks might fly again. And across town at The Cat's Pajamas, club owner Lorca discovers that his beloved haunt may have to close forever, unless someone can find a way to quickly raise the \$30,000 that would save it.

As these three lost souls search for love, music and hope on the snow-covered streets of Philadelphia, together they will discover life's endless possibilities over the course of one magical night. A vivacious, charming and moving debut, *2 AM AT THE CAT'S PAJAMAS* will capture your heart and have you laughing out loud.

## 2 A.M. at The Cat's Pajamas Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by Broadway Books (first published 2014)

ISBN :

Author : Marie-Helene Bertino

Format : Kindle Edition 274 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Holiday, Christmas, Music

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## From Reader Review 2 A.M. at The Cat's Pajamas for online ebook

### Maya Panika says

I have very mixed feelings about this novel. The writing is exciting, quirky, poetic, original and touched with beautiful, poignant, throwaway observances. At times it made me think that the author was trying to write like Kerouac - and maybe that was the case, given that the rhythms of jazz pervade the narrative and the 'heroine' is a jazz aficionado and aspiring singer. The characters are unusual; not terribly likeable for the most part. There is no sole protagonist: most of the tale revolves around Madeline, a complicated, damaged, toilet-mouthed, ten year old smoker, jazz lover and aspiring singer. There are reasons for Madeline's complexities - domestic difficulties no child should have to cope with; they didn't make her likeable, but she was never boring. Other characters are much less fascinating: Madeline's lonely teacher Sarina was sympathetic but not that interesting; Lorca and Sonny and Alex, The Cubanistas and all the motley cast who inhabit The Cat's Pajamas (a jazz club fallen on difficult times) couldn't engage me and Madeline's unofficial carer, Mrs Santiago, was just plain dull - until the end, when she becomes *really* weird. I mean, what happened at the end, does anyone know? That came completely out of left field and, unless it all has some profound and clever meaning that whisked over my head (it wouldn't be the first time), it completely threw me out of the groove. It ruined the ending for me; left me feeling confused and bemused and thinking, 'that was very silly' (but not in a good way), rather than happy and inspired. All in all a bit of a curate's egg. For all its faults, I definitely recommend it; it's not just another face in the crowd and that, in a world filled with new books that feel like you've read them before, is well worth a few hours of your reading time.

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### David Yoon says

This is a pure, winter comfort read that belies the pain and loss at the heart of the story. Madeleine Altimari is living in a cockroach infested apartment with a father nearly comatose with grief after the death of his wife. Jack Lorca is on the verge of losing his jazz club not to mention the tenuous relationship he has with his son. Sarina Greene is divorced and lonely in a new city. But the language that ushers each of them, inexorably, to the Cat's Pajamas is dazzling and light. Musicians arpeggiate through the park and flurries somersault, reconsider and double back. The writing is sharp and wry and imbued with a sparkling touch.

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### Shaunterria says

This book almost lost me at first - I just couldn't get into the different storylines and the omniscient point-of-view felt kind of obnoxious. After I let my ego go, and stopped trying to predict where the story was going (because I was sure I knew EXACTLY what was going to happen next), I found myself falling in love with the characters, the plot, the city. 2 A.M. at The Cat's Pajamas is not for readers that take themselves too seriously, but it is for bookish folk that can allow themselves to be pushed pulled dragged along through a magical tale of a day and a night in the life a motherless girl, a teacher, a run-down nightclub, a dog. I needed to read this, and I am so glad I did.

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## **Lindley says**

As I was reading this book, it reminded me a bit of Love Actually. Not because of any similarities to the story lines of that movie, but more because of a sprawling cast of interconnected characters whose stories weave together around Christmas-time. Unfortunately, I feel like the massive cast works better on film, where you can put a face with a name. It took me half of the Cat's Pajamas just to keep the characters straight, and how they were all interconnected. Although the story takes place over the course of one day-- Christmas Eve eve--several of the characters flash back to earlier times, which just adds to the confusion. For awhile, I wasn't even really sure who the story was supposed to be following. So many characters were introduced that it was hard to feel much of a connection to them. However, toward the end of the book it becomes clear who the main characters are and I became more invested in their stories. I found the ending satisfying, but didn't really feel like the magical realism elements added much to the story.

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## **Lindsey Rey says**

[3.5 Stars]

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## **Diane S ? says**

For me this novel was a very mixed read. I quickly fell in love with nine year old Madeleine, a motherless child whose father is sunk into himself with grief. Madeleine is used to taking care of herself, she is foul mouthed, very determined and her only wish is to sing in public. Strange things happen when she sings and I really wish this concept would have been more fully explored.

The secondary stories and characters I did not find as compelling with the exception of the dog, whose thoughts and antics made me smile. All stories and characters are joined together on Christmas Eve.

Although set in the present day, this reminded me a bit of the old jazz novels, the discussions of music and an old guitar and a jazz club, holding on by a thread.

There is much to like in story, the prose is solid, although there were things that I felt confusing and could have safely been left out of the plot. Madeleine though, was such a vivid character she alone was worth the full price of admission. The title is brilliant and is what drew me, initially to this book. The ending was a little strange and I am not sure exactly what it is supposed to mean.

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## **Mark says**

Madeleine Altimari is obsessed with old time jazz and she wants to be a jazz singer, like her beloved Blossom Dearie. She is nine years old...going on ten. Madeline is smart, a loner, a smoker and cusses like a dockworker. Her mother recently died and her father has vanished into his own despair.

The Cat's Pajamas is a legendary Philly jazz club, but it has fallen on hard times. Barely held together, with spit and duct tape, it is owned and operated by Jack Lorca, who is on the verge of bankruptcy.

This story is how Madeline and the jazz bar, come together, on one long, serpentine, Christmas Eve Eve. There is a patchwork of engaging characters, weaving in and out of this tale, some touching upon the girl and others on Lorca. It is bright and funny and the author seems to have a genuine feel for music, which only enhances the narrative. What a pleasant surprise, this turned out to be. I hope this novel finds a wide audience.

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### **Bridgit Morgan says**

*“If you are anything other than humbled in the presence of love, you are not in the presence of love.”*

I thoroughly enjoyed the plot and found the characters well-crafted and interesting, particularly the nine-year-old Madeleine Altimari. Her dream to sing in front of a large crowd was inspiring, and her backstory was incredibly sad.

At times, I found the writing to be rather erratic and confusing, almost as if the author was unsure just what writing style she wanted to ultimately choose. This sometimes took away from my enjoyment of the overall plot.

I loved how this novel was a quick, easy read, and perfect for a day of relaxation over Christmas break. I look forward to reading more from Bertino in the future! 3.5 out of 5 stars.

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### **Michelle says**

I wanted to love this book, and there were times when I encountered certain phrases that so perfectly described a thought or an action that I felt as though the author had a lock on my experience of the world. That being said, I found this book very confusing.

There are several characters that I was interested in and felt connected to. Their stories were interlaced with other short vignettes dealing with minor players who I didn't feel advanced the story in any way. I enjoyed Madeline - the nearly ten year old aspiring jazz singer and her colorful and irreverent language and Sarina, the teacher who is unlucky enough to love an unavailable man, but I was unmoved by Lorca, the owner of the Cat's Pajamas and his son Alex who made up the other half of the story.

I don't feel the conclusion was satisfying to any of the characters. I don't think that a book has to be tied into a neat package, but the events of the magic hour at the club and what transpired were just cooky. I don't really understand if the book shifted gears and went into a dream world, if there was a metaphor I wasn't clever enough to get or if there was some magic at work that I just didn't buy or care about. The ending had me sighing in disappointment rather than content and I find that odd.

This book was provided to me by Blogging for Books to review.

For more info, please check out the in depth review on my blog. <http://thefinestdandelion.blogspot.co...>

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## Leah says

Chock-full of metaphory goodness, *2AM at The Cat's Pajamas* beautifully weaves together three storylines gravitating around a past-its-prime jazz club. The novel's Old World feel perfectly suited the smokey barroom. The secondary characters were just as intriguing as the key figures and the foul-mouthed nine-year-old at the center of it all quickly became a favorite of mine. With its catchy title and gripping characters, I can easily see this novel gaining a following, maybe not in the mainstream media, but underground - and I don't see that as a bad thing at all! This is a special novel that I'll have at the ready whenever someone asks for a solid story, but without all the hype and fanfare.

For the full review and more, head over to [The Pretty Good Gatsby!](#)

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## Celeste Ng says

Marie-Helene Bertino's novel about a 9-year-old aspiring jazz singer named Madeleine unfolds in language that's like jazz itself: lithe and liquid and surprising. Three separate storylines--one Madeleine's, one her teacher's, and one of the hard-up owner of the jazz club The Cat's Pajamas--converge at (yup) 2 AM. But interwoven with these three main plotlines are many smaller strands, like little riffs and improvisations mingling with the melody. The result is a charming confection of a book, sassy and funny and sweet.

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## Holly says

This reminded me of a certain sort of holiday movie - think *Love Actually* or *200 Cigarettes* (the 1999 movie about hipsters on New Year's Eve) that covers one day's happenings and follows the actions of a large linked assortment of characters. But then add a hyperverbal 10-year-old, lots of quirk and whimsy, several off-key notes, a few too many characters, and a very strange conclusion. There are some great sentences here (which I regretfully failed to mark). Not "staggeringly original" at all, but okay.

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## Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This book was sheer delight! I loved how the author portrayed children as having unique and strange personalities and desires, and also their own internal lives.

Madeleine was a great character, learning about life by learning from her mother but also following her own passion, despite being banned from performing at school.

I love the Lorcans and the sadness of a failing business. I love the principle and her life apart from school. I love Sauvine who reminds me a bit of Bridget Jones.

The timeline was a fun structure, and I kept reading funny bits to my husband. Even the fact that they say Christmas Eve Eve (his response: I thought that was something only we said!)

This is a great light holiday read, recommended. I read it because of a postal book swap. Actual read date for me is July 8-9, 2017, but will use a November date below since that is when the review is posted.

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## Colleen says

Do you ever wonder if, as life goes on, we're going to run out of ideas for stories? Does it seem like a lot of the books out there are too similar? I don't think that'll happen--the world is constantly evolving, which alone, will garner endless ideas. But I think the author of *2 A.M. at the Cat's Pajamas* does think we're running out of ideas...and she tries way too hard to create something original, resulting in exasperation on my part (Marie-Helene Bertino, you have the bones of a great story--you don't need to impress us with clever wordplay, weird dream sequences, confusing time flow, etc. etc.).

Come on, admit it--isn't that an enticing title? Doesn't the cover have a cool 60's vintage feel? Ok, you've got me...I'm in.

The story features three main characters and opens with Madeleine Altimari, a nine-year-old aspiring jazz singer, shimmying and scatting in her bedroom. How could you not love a character who's described in this way: "Madeleine prefers to spend this and every recess alone, singing scales under her breath, walking laps up and down the parking lot. Madeleine has no friends: Not because she contains a tender grace that fifth graders detect and loathe. Not because she has a natural ability that points her starward, though she does. Madeleine has no friends because she is a jerk." And she is, with good reason. Madeleine's mother has recently died and her grieving father refuses to get out of bed and take care of her. She takes care of herself the best a nine-year old can. Fortunately, she's surrounded by loving neighbors who promised Madeleine's mother they'd take care of her and they do. Still she's friendless and dirty, perfect reasons (to children) why her classmates should torment her. She's smart-assed and spunky and she's by far my favorite character.

The second main character is Madeleine's teacher, Sarina, who sees the aching little girl underneath her tough demeanor. She's recently divorced and hoping to connect with her high school boyfriend...the one who got away. She's decent and kind and a good teacher.

The third character is Jack Lorca and he's the owner of *The Cat's Pajamas*, a legendary jazz club where all the main characters will converge.

So far, this sounds like a story with good bones. Then, the author starts trying to get creative and clever and the whole thing goes off the rails, and now, I'm out. All three main characters are vibrant and interesting, so why does the author have to throw in chapters with a dog's viewpoint, a random conversation among people in a hair salon that has nothing to do with the story, Sarina's ex-husband, a pointless character who adds nothing to the story, and on and on? Why do they merit entire chapters? And Sarina, who the author has already established as a shy, kind person, is asked by some guys at a bachelor party to take their picture, and bam, this is how she responds: "Grab each other's cocks and let's go. Jerk each other off so this is worth my while. What I'm looking at is a bunch of worthless pussies and I wanna see cock." Excuse me, but along that vein, I say, WTF? I don't believe for one minute that Sarina would actually say that. She seems way too smart to think that might impress the person she's with (in fact, I think he's horrified). Then there are about-faces in time and weird dream sequences that are plopped in for who knows what reason, and so many minor characters popping up that I can't remember their places in the story.

Then it all ends with a very minor character bursting, then floating up into the sky and flying over the city.

Yes, you read that right. Again, I say, WTF! What is the purpose of that chapter? By the way, I don't consider this a spoiler because the story has already had a satisfying ending and this second pointless ending has nothing to do with the story.

I wish the author would go back to those good bones. The three main characters are great, the setting of Philadelphia (which really could be considered a fourth character: "Good morning," the city says. Fuck you.") is great. But, this author looks young, and I guess she thinks she needs to establish her unique voice in order to stand out from the crowd. Next time, please don't try so hard.

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### **Julie Ehlers says**

This was kind of an urban fairy tale. Lively, funny, poignant, and so original. It even made me feel a rush of affection for Philadelphia, and that almost never happens. Having now read both her books, I can safely say that in Marie-Helene Bertino's hands, you will never, ever be bored.

I received this ARC via Shelf Awareness, in case anyone is wondering.

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