



## **A Half Forgotten Song**

*Katherine Webb*

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## **A Half Forgotten Song** Katherine Webb

A spellbinding tale about the power of love, the danger of obsession, and the unfaithful nature of memory. A Half Forgotten Song is by turns haunting, heartbreaking and joyous.

1937. In a village on the Dorset coast, fourteen-year-old Mitzy Hatcher has endured a wild and lonely upbringing, until the arrival of renowned artist Charles Aubrey-along with his exotic mistress and their daughters-changes everything. Over the next three summers, Mitzy sees a future she had never thought possible, and a powerful love is kindled in her. A love that grows from innocence to obsession; from childish infatuation to something far more complex. Years later, a young man in an art gallery looks at a hastily-drawn portrait and wonders at its intensity. The questions he asks lead him to a Dorset village and to the truth about those fevered summers in the 1930s.

## **A Half Forgotten Song Details**

Date : Published May 28th 2013 by William Morrow Paperbacks (first published 2012)

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Author : Katherine Webb

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## From Reader Review *A Half Forgotten Song* for online ebook

**Yvi says**

3,5/5

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**Anna says**

There's a really good story in this book, but it's hidden under a heap of unnecessary padding.

In the late 1930s, artist Charles Aubrey and his mistress and daughters holiday in Dorset for the summer. Long-since neglected by her mother, local teenager Mitzy befriends the girls and is flattered when Charles makes a series of sketches of her. Unsurprisingly she develops a crush on him and is bereft when the family leave. They return the following year, and over the next two summers Mitzy's crush turns into infatuation, obsession and tragedy.

In the present day, gallery owner Zach is writing a book on the life and works of Charles Aubrey. His research takes him to the little Dorset village where he meets the elderly Mitzy. She's deeply haunted by the past, still in a state of guilt, grief and confusion more than seventy years later, but as she talks proudly of Charles, Zach slowly uncovers the devastating truth of what happened that last summer. The reveals caught me by surprise - I didn't see them coming at all and actually gasped!

So the plotting was well done. The problem I had was getting to those reveals; at times I felt like I was wading through pages and pages of superfluous narrative, interrupting the intrigues of the story and my connection to it.

This is my third book by Webb and I remain torn. I rated *The Legacy* a fabulous 5 stars and *The Unseen* a very disappointing 2, and now with *A Half Forgotten Song* getting a decent but frustrating 3 stars, I really can't decide if I like her writing or not!

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**Lydia Presley says**

Finally! My faith in Katherine Webb has finally paid off. When I received an advance copy of *A Half Forgotten Song* I wondered if this would be the one, the book to finally push me past that "meh" feeling I always get at the end of Webb's novels and it pushed me... and then some.

I love a good, dark, gothic, love-lost story. The setting in *A Half Forgotten Song* immediately set the pace for the tale: a rotting cottage on a cliff in the windy, cloudy coastal area of England. The characters: a wrecked father and ex-husband about to lose it all, a somewhat crazy old lady, and an artist long dead. With a skillful touch, Webb weaves the story between the present and the past and slowly reveals bit by bit of the story that had me completely spellbound. And, even as the clues were revealed, I did not know for certain what the end result would be until I reached the end of the story - how I love it when that happens!

This book has haunted me these past few days. I've been unable to study, write, or even watch mindless

television because each of those things were encroaching on the time spent in this book. I needed a book like that to get me reading again and now that my appetite has been awakened, I cannot wait to dive into the other stories on my shelves.

I just cannot explain how happy I am that my gut feeling about Katherine Webb, and my continued faith in her, has proven to be true. I cannot recommend this book enough.

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## Nora|KnyguDama says

### KATHERINE WEBB "PAMIRŠTA DAINA"

Tikriausiai vienas didžiausių skaitytojo malonumų - atrasti gerą, ne banalų, nenusipjamą ir traukiantį romaną. Mano pažintis su Katherine ir prasidėjo nuo tokių ieškojimų. Aprašymai, recenzijos, komentarai tai žadėjo, o autorius su kaupu pildė šiuos pažadus. Vis perskaitau naują Webb knygą ir sakau - "Šita tikrai jos geriausia!". Vos perskaičius kitą jos knygą - sakau tų patį, ir taip pasaka be galo. Taigi ir vėl pasikartosiu: "Pamiršta daina" - stipriausias jos romanas (bent jau kol kas).

Kaip ir autorei prasta, istorija pinasi iš praeities ir dabarties pasakojimų. Nors man dažniausiai tai nepatinka, nes kaip taisyklė - viena iš istorijų yra neįdomi ir norisi greičiau ją praversti, šiose knygose abi pasakojimo linijos vienodai traukia. Dabartis: dailės galerijos savininkas Zakas turi nemažai garsaus dailininko Obrėjaus paveikslų. Darbai tiesiog užburia Zaką, jis nuolat jos žiūri, stengiasi sukurti istorijas ir neatsižavi jų ga sklindančia iš darbų. Ypač vienas paveikslas pakeria Zaką - jame vaizduojama jauna mergina renkanti žoleles. Paveikslas pavadintas "Mikė žoliauja". Zakas užsimoja išsiaiškinti paveikslo istorija ir keliauti jo pėdsakais.

Praeitis: Mikė - neturtinga mergaitė, gyvenanti su netikusia mama, prižiūrinti ją ir visą namą. Kartą ją kaimelė atsikrausto inteligentiška dailininko šeima su dviem dukrytėmis. Mergaitės greit susidraugauja ir du skirtingi pasauliai priversti priartėti vienas prie kito. Mikė, nepratusi prie prabangos greit ja susižavi, o dar labiau susižavi šeimos galva ponu Obrėjumi. Obrėjus taip pat atkreipia Mikę dėmesį, tačiau tik iš meninškos pusės - jis ją tapo. Toks ryšys nepatinka Obrėjaus žmonai, kuri nujaučia artėjant nelaimę.

Knyga tikrai be galo traukia. Atrodo kiekviename puslapyje glūdi vis naujos paslaptys ir netikėti istorijos vingiai. Sžiningai - man buvo sunku ją padėti šalį. Kaip ir visose Webb knygose, taip ir šioje - visų pasakojimų gaubia ypatinga aura. Lyg trapi magija ar burtai būtų švieslė tarp puslapių. Knygoje apstu visko - ir nelaimingos, liguistos meilės, paslapčių, šeimos tragedijų, švelnių jausmų. Rekomenduočiau knygą visiems mėgstantiems gerus romanus ar norintiems tokios knygos nuo kurios būtų sunku atsitraukti.

P.S Katherine Webb šiais metais lankysis Vilniaus knygų mugėje! Tad jei kas turit ar dar sigysit jos knygą, nepamirškite nunešti ir gauti autografo!

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## Sarah says

This wasn't a novel that caught me right away; the prose felt languid and dreamlike in the beginning, in keeping with the slow-to-change pacing of daily life in the seaside community in Dorset where it's set. After the first hundred pages or so, though, I found myself caught in its web and put it down only with difficulty. A

*Half Forgotten Song* tells two intertwining stories spaced over 70 years apart, and the seamless transitions heighten the sense that the past still exerts a strong hold on the present.

Zach is the owner of a failing art gallery in Bath who's feeling listless after his ex-wife takes their daughter to live in America. When he travels to the village of Blacknowle in search of material for a book on bohemian artist Charles Aubrey, who summered there with his French-Moroccan mistress and two daughters in the '30s, Zach feels he's struck gold after he meets an elderly woman, Dimity Hatcher, who was the subject of many Aubrey portraits - and who claims she and Charles once had a grand love affair. After Zach passes a test Dimity gives him, she decides to reveal some of her story (but not nearly all).

Back in the pre-war years, "Mitzy" Hatcher sees a new world open up before her when the Aubreys come to vacation in Blacknowle, attracted by its beauty and quaintness. However, what the Aubreys see as old-fashioned charm is, for Mitzy, depressing poverty. Neglected by her alcoholic mother, who crafts herbal remedies and makes extra money as a prostitute, Mitzy is already an outcast in her community and quickly latches onto the Aubreys - particularly when his artistic gaze falls upon her as a subject.

Despondent as Zach is, he doesn't run away from or even question some very odd circumstances he encounters, such as when Mitzy asks him for some things that would seem like obvious ingredients for a witch's spell. (His potential love interest, Hannah Brock, also lives in absolute squalor - there's a reason behind it, but still.) His lack of reaction requires some suspension of disbelief. However, this added creepiness sets the right tone for gradual revelations of the darkness in Mitzy's past, and a multi-layered tale of how a girlhood crush can spiral into an unhealthy, destructive obsession. The revelations at the end are unexpected, astonishing, and definitely worth waiting for.

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### **Helena Wildsmith says**

I must admit that I didn't get into this book straightaway but once I did, I was hooked! It's an incredibly dark story that had me gasping out loud and biting my nails! Definitely one that I would recommend.

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### **Barb says**

This is the third novel I've read by Katherine Webb. I really enjoyed 'The Unseen' which was new last year. The characters Webb created in that novel were life-like and engaging, and I felt invested in finding out what happened to them because I liked them. I also thought the story was interesting and the writing very good. If you are interested in reading a novel by Katherine Webb I would recommend it.

Unfortunately 'A Half Forgotten Song' was full of half-formed unlikeable and less than sympathetic characters that never really drew me in to caring about them. The first two hundred pages are very slow and I was aware of the author as she dragged the story out and manipulated the way the reader discovers the events that unfold. Another reader compared Webb's writing style to Kate Morton's and I would agree, she too tends to have a heavy hand in drawing out the story and creating suspense by switching the focus to another storyline. It's a technique that should be carefully and skillfully employed.

I was disappointed with this novel, there was too much repetition in the first hundred pages that didn't move the story forward or build on creating an atmospheric setting or realistic characters. The sea salt was in the

air and on Dimity's skin, Zach's marriage dissolved, Dimity's mother ran a less than honorable trade and Hannah was fierce and protective. Despite the descriptions all of the characters felt flat to me, they weren't fully formed or dynamic and I never cared for them. The contemporary characters even more so than the historical ones. There was a romantic relationship that had no chemistry and felt forced and rushed.

While the mystery turns out to be a good one by the time I got to page three hundred my interest in discovering what it was waning. The last one hundred pages were well done and suspenseful and I did enjoy the end of the book.

But the stretched out story and lack of likeable characters didn't leave me with a satisfying reading experience, I think this novel would have been improved upon with some tightening up and editing so that the big reveal at the end would have been something to race toward rather than slog toward thinking am I there yet?

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### **Dale Harcombe says**

Three and a half stars. While I enjoyed this story in some ways, I felt it got lost at times among unnecessary wordage. I found myself skipping bits of description. The story concerns the artist Charles Aubrey, his Moroccan mistress and their two children Delphine and Elodie when they come for a holiday to the village of Blackknowle in Dorset. In the same town lives Dimity, otherwise known as Mitzy. Abused by her mother, with a father who is absent and rejected by most of her peers, she is a prime candidate for the first person to show her any attention. Charles sees something in Mitzy and starts to draw her. This is a story about obsession and how far it can alter a person's view of reality. This story is setback in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

In the present day, to the town comes Zach, a failed gallery owner and artist, recently divorced and separated from his young daughter. Zach is writing a book on Charles Aubrey . He suspects his grandmother may well have been another of Charles' women and that he may even be a grandson to Charles. He encounters Mitzy and gets her to tell her memories of Charles. He also becomes enamoured of Hannah, a neighbour who keeps an eyes on Mitzy.

Unlike some others who have reviewed this book I didn't find most of the revelations at the end greatly surprising but had mostly already worked out what had happened. Most of the characters were unappealing, so it is a testament to the author's skill in story telling that I kept reading. Loved the cover on this book, which is why I first picked it up.

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### **Tatyana Naumova says**

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### **Irene says**

4,5

Una historia maravillosa, llena de tanta luz como el mundo pictórico en el que se inspira.

Personajes bien dibujados, y un enclave único y de ensueño.

Parecía que estaba dentro de una buena película de la narración tan cuidada y el ritmo tan bien llevado.

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### **Anne says**

Ooh, there's lots of you out there that are just going to love this one - Katherine Webb just gets better and better. I still feel a little bereft at leaving Mitzzy's story behind, a wonderful story of her obsessional love for artist Charles Aubrey and the extremes it drives her to. Zach and Hannah's modern story is equally strong, and the narrative moves backwards and forwards in time quite seamlessly with none of that wrenching away that sometimes happens in dual time stories, with the threads wonderfully tied and drawn together. The descriptions are wonderful of childhood Dorset and exotic and threatening Morocco, and the characters are some of the most strongly drawn I've come across. The story's a real emotional rollercoaster, with a great blackness about it that totally drags you in. I really loved every moment - very highly recommended.

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### **Maureen says**

It took me a while to get into this story, although once I did, the mystery of it kept me turning the pages. However, I didn't actually like some of the characters, just couldn't relate to them, so can't say it was one of my favourites.

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### **Sherene says**

This book was an entertaining read. I say entertaining because the book drew me in and kept my attention. I didn't feel that there were unnecessary tangential anecdotes and therefore chapters that were skippable. I was able to read the book in a day or so. Any book that I'm unable to put down or put down and run back to is a good one.

Yet...I wasn't able to give it more than three stars. On paper it seems to check off all the right boxes: fast-paced, historical-mystery, well-written prose, tormented protagonist etc. Still. Perhaps my dislike of the main characters kept me from giving a higher rating. This is a testament to the author's skills I suppose. She developed her characters so well that if her intention was to make me dislike them...mission accomplished! I wonder if I might have liked it better if Webb had developed Delphine's character a little more.

Other than that feeling of heaviness that I came out with, I applaud the author's ability to describe the lush landscape of the English cliff/countryside(one of my favorite things ever!). If I can feel the rush of cool cliff air through my fingers while I sit in my comfy, arm chair in hot, humid Texas, color me satisfied! Now that I think about it, even if I didn't particularly care for the human characters, the landscape's character more than made up for it.

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## **Lindsey says**

This book completely wrecked me, as only a great book can do. As I finished the last page, I felt the tears on my face. It was just so heartbreakingly well written. If anyone who has read it is interested, **I would LOVE to discuss some things with them. There are so many words in my head! I need to share thoughts and feelings. OH THE FEELINGS.**

On another note:

Mitzy is introduced as a sheltered 14 year old country girl with a lonely upbringing, devoid of any real human connections to show her love or affection. A renowned artist brings his mistress and their daughters to vacation on the English coast, and all of their lives are changed forever. This story is told parallel to a present day art gallery owner (and aspiring artist) who is trying to decide what has become of his life following a divorce, and his little girl having moved to America with her mother and new stepfather.

I definitely enjoyed the story from the 1930s better. Mitzy was so brilliantly written I could barely stand it. There were parts that were actually difficult to read, because I just wanted to shake her and all those around her; to get someone to see what was happening and \*do\* something! Celeste was the only one that noticed the danger, and in the end it just wasn't enough.

I've spoken to a few people that said they didn't "believe" the character of Mitzy Hatcher; that she wasn't real, that it was too much, not realistic, etc. This is absolutely not true, and that is what makes this book so good. I have known people like Mitzy, people that are just not right - that miss the signs and turn events around in their head to make them fit whatever they need them to fit. I have looked them in the eyes and seen the crazy, as it were. I have seen that there can be no reasoning with them, and it is scary. Katherine Webb perfectly captured that in the character of Mitzy. The obsessive, dangerous love she feels, and the actions that it brings out in her...I just couldn't stand it.

I read about 200 pages in one sitting, staying up \*well\* past my bedtime to finish. I couldn't stand not knowing how everything turned out. I will say that although I saw where the past story was heading (not knowing 'how,' but essentially 'what'), I was blown away by a reveal that happened at the end of the novel. Blown. Away.

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## **Hilde-Gunn says**

I am not quite sure how to rate this book and I'm not sure how to review it either. It is a well-written book, and the narrator in the audio version is quite good. I can appreciate the handiwork, and the way the mystery is spun, but I really did not like the book at all. The book is full of despicable and unlikable characters. Firstly there is Dimity. She is supposed to be driven by love and is depicted as a simple, poor girl from the countryside. She was half-interesting at first, but as the story plays out she became more and more selfish, self-centered and totally unlikable. She made many bad choices throughout the story, which would have been fine if the other characters had reacted to them in some way, not excused them. This makes the story totally unbelievable, that the characters don't react at all like real people would. Also, in the end the reader is supposed to feel sorry for Dimity since she has made all these sacrifices for the man she loves so much, and he won't even touch her. She is just a sad, crazy and selfish character. The more the mystery unraveled, the more I despised her.



The other main character, Zach, is my least favorite kind of man. He appears totally spineless and doesn't question the other character's decisions and actions at all, he just accepts them.

An annoying book all in all, especially since it could have been a good story.

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