



A Piece of the World

Christina Baker Kline

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INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"Exquisite. A must-read." — Kristin Hannah

This paperback edition includes a color reproduction of Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*, along with a Q&A with bestselling author Kristin Hannah and a bonus short story, "Stranded in Ice."

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the smash bestseller *Orphan Train*, a stunning and atmospheric novel of friendship, passion, and art, inspired by Andrew Wyeth's mysterious and iconic painting *Christina's World*.

"Later he told me that he'd been afraid to show me the painting. He thought I wouldn't like the way he portrayed me: dragging myself across the field, fingers clutching dirt, my legs twisted behind. The arid moonscape of wheatgrass and timothy. That dilapidated house in the distance, looming up like a secret that won't stay hidden."

To Christina Olson, the entire world is her family farm in the small coastal town of Cushing, Maine. The only daughter in a family of sons, Christina is tied to her home by health and circumstance, and seems destined for a small life. Instead, she becomes Andrew Wyeth's first great inspiration, and the subject of one of the best-known paintings of the twentieth century, *Christina's World*.

As she did in her beloved bestseller *Orphan Train*, Christina Baker Kline interweaves fact and fiction to vividly reimagine a real moment in history. *A Piece of the World* is a powerful story of the flesh-and-blood woman behind the portrait, her complicated relationship to her family and inheritance, and how artist and muse can come together to forge a new and timeless legacy.

A Piece of the World Details

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From Reader Review A Piece of the World for online ebook

Lori says

4.5 stars. I loved The Orphan Train and, happily, I enjoyed this just as much. 'Christina's World' is a work of art that has been made more special to me after learning the story behind it. I don't know that I particularly liked Christina, but at the same time I felt a deep connection to her. We can all be tied to anchors and while some are able to pull themselves free, others let it pull them under. I think in the end Christina found her world and, I hope through it all a bit of contentment. My recommendation... grab a blanket, a cup of tea and enjoy this beautifully poignant novel.

Suzanne Leopold says

Andrew Wyeth spent his summers in Cushing, Maine with his family. It is here where he first met Christina Olson who later becomes the inspiration for his painting "Christina's World". Christina lived a tough life along with her brother Al on the neighboring farm. Their dilapidated home lacked modern day conveniences and had fallen into disrepair. Andrew encounters the Olsons through their neighbor Betsy and he decides to express their lives via a painting. As Andrew puts paint to canvas, the details of the Olson's hardships come to light.

The story unfolds with Christina's as a young girl. A childhood illness left her with difficulty walking and no cure for her bone disease. As she grew older, the effects worsened leaving her crippled making her farm chores difficult. A bright student, the opportunity to further her studies to become a teacher were dismissed early by her parents. Her future only left her with two choices, to marry or maintain the farm. Sadly, she had very few opportunities to make romantic connections leaving her with no escape. Christina is not the most likable character, but by reading the book you become sympathetic to her disposition. Andrew Wyeth developed a relationship with her over many years and was able to capture a different side of her in this painting.

Andrew Wyeth painted the portrait, but the author writes a beautiful story by bringing it to life. Intertwined in the story is how she met Wyeth, who through his masterpiece, shows the world her softer side of someone having suffered so much both internally and externally. The author showcases a very moving and impactful novel.

Book giveaway on my blog until 2/24 <https://www.facebook.com/suzyapproved...>

Marilyn C. says

"What she wants most - what she truly yearns for - is what any of us want: to be seen."

Christina Olson lived her life mostly as a shut in, born with a degenerative disease that will take the use of her legs in childhood. The famous painter Andrew Wyeth befriends her, and will use her home and land to paint some of his most famous works, including the painting that now resides in the Museum of Modern Art,

"Christina's World".

A story told through Christina's eyes as she bravely deals with the hardships of her disease and the effects it takes on her life. She was a strong and determined woman, who through the progression of her disease would use just her arms to pull herself along the floor. I was obviously heartbroken for her, but as the story progressed I became frustrated with her inability to accept help, as she even declined a wheelchair and the way she treated her family and friends.

This was a very intriguing and well researched story that historical fiction readers and art enthusiasts will enjoy. For those of us who like to know the background or "story" of a particular piece, Christina Baker Kline writes an in depth story about Wyeth and Christina's friendship and how the painting came into fruition. I will never be able to view "Christina's World" again without thinking back to this novel.

Marita says

“LATER HE TOLD ME HE’D BEEN AFRAID TO SHOW ME THE PAINTING. He thought I wouldn’t like the way he portrayed me: dragging myself across the field, fingers clutching dirt, my legs twisted behind. The arid moonscape of wheatgrass and timothy. That dilapidated house in the distance, looming up like a secret that won’t stay hidden. Faraway windows, opaque and unreadable. Ruts in the spiky grass made by an invisible vehicle, leading nowhere. Dishwater sky.”

So begins this novel by Christina Baker Kline. The painting she refers to is **“Christina’s World” (1948)** by eminent artist **Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009)**. The thought quoted above is expressed by the fictional Christina Olson, the main character of the novel. Her character is based on **Anna Christina Olson (1893-1968)**, the subject of the painting, whose family lived in Cushing, Maine. The house in which they lived which is shown in the painting now belongs to the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland. Her maternal ancestors (the author Nathaniel Hawthorne was one of these relatives) had left Salem, Massachusetts as a result of the notorious witch trials (1692-1693), and they resettled in Maine.

Olson House (Wikipedia*)

The plot focuses on Christina’s life, her hopes, her dreams, her thoughts and feelings. The author imagines what Christina’s life might have been. The real Christina suffered from a degenerative disease that is now thought to have been Charcot-Marie-Tooth, and so does the fictional Christina. This is a main factor in the novel, as the debilitating disease affected every aspect of her life. From the pages of the book emerges a character who is hard-working, fiercely independent, stubborn, a young woman who shares the hopes and dreams of her peers. However, due to her handicap she faces many challenges, and she comes to resent people she suspects of being sorry for her. She often feels that she is being judged, and in the process she sometimes becomes judgmental herself. She feels trapped in her body and trapped by her life on the farm. She is angered and frustrated by people who pity her, who deliver dinners and who generally intrude in her

life and thoughts. She is often brusque to the point of being plain rude. She yearns to simply be accepted for who she is. She just wants to be, and not to be talked about. And she fears losing her independence and having to become reliant on others.

It is Andrew Wyeth, the artist married to her young friend Betsy, whose artist eyes see the real Christina: *“People are always concerned about you, worried about you, watching to see how you’re getting on. Well-meaning, of course, but—intrusive.”* Of him she says: *“Andy doesn’t usually bring anything, or offer to help. He doesn’t register alarm at the way we live. He doesn’t see us as a project that needs fixing. He doesn’t perch on a chair, or linger in a doorway, with the air of someone who wants to leave, who’s already halfway out the door. He just settles in and observes.”* And it is Andy who paints her as he sees her. *““You showed what no one else could see,” I tell him.”*

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The Painting

This is what the author writes about “Christina’s World” in her Author’s Note:

“In Wyeth’s painting she is resolute and yearning, hardy and vulnerable, exposed and enigmatic. Alone in a sea of dry grass, she is the archetypal individual against a backdrop of nature, fully present in the moment and yet a haunting reminder of the immensity of time. As MoMA curator Laura Hoptman writes in *Wyeth: Christina’s World*, “The painting is more a psychological landscape than a portrait, a portrayal of a state of mind rather than a place.””

Christina’s World (Wikipedia**)

This painting is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City.

Here is what the fictional Christina thinks of the painting (between spoiler tags):(view spoiler)

###

*By lcm1863 - originally posted to Flickr as ME18 Olson House, Maine, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index...>

**By <http://www.moma.org/collection/object...>, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?...>

Liz says

3.5 stars

Unlike most people, I was not a huge fan of Orphan Train. So, I wasn't sure how I'd like Kline's latest book. And the beginning was so slow and dry I thought, well, here we go again. But stick with it and you will be rewarded.

The main character is Christina, the subject of Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*. It seemed to take forever before I felt invested in Christina. Not until her relationship with Walton did she come across as three dimensional.

The meat of this book is all in the second half, as Christina's condition worsens, her parents fail and all her siblings but Al move away. I wish there had been more interaction between Wyeth and Christina as what there was constituted my favorite parts of the book. He is one of the few that appreciates her for who she is and how she lives her life, without pity.

So, while I would only give the first half a 2 ½-3, the second half is a solid 4.

Cheri says

"Over the years, certain stories in the history of a family take hold. They're passed from generation to generation, gaining substance and meaning along the way. You have to learn to sift through them, separating fact from conjecture, the likely from the implausible. Here is what I know: Sometimes the least believable stories are the true ones."

Their home at Hathorn Point in Cushing Maine was on land claimed by three men, two brothers, Samuel and William Hathorn, and William's son Alexander. They packed their belongings and fled Salem, Massachusetts for Maine in the middle of winter. At Hathorn Point, they built a tent made of animal skins to see them through the winter months. Log cabins followed, and eventually a house. A house and land that would be handed down from Christina's grandmother Mamey, to her mother, and then to their children. A place that would, indeed, become Christina's world.

Betsy James is 9 years old the first time she appears at Christina's, and from that day on she remains a recurring, and welcome presence in Christina's life, and in her home. Betsy acknowledges Christina's physical barriers as one would acknowledge that her eyes were green, it is simply the way she was made. Christina feels at ease with young Betsy. Now 17, Betsy arrives one day at Christina's door, and mentions that her friend Andrew would like to paint a picture of her house. It doesn't surprise Christina that Betsy is there or has brought her friend Andrew, the son of N.C. Wyeth, the famous illustrator, artist, of such books as *Treasure Island*.

We all know the picture, *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth, or enough people know it that according to Andrew's son Jamie Wyeth (also a well-known artist), the two most popular questions at the Museum of Modern Art are 'Where is the ladies room?' and 'Where is Christina's World?' It was the first painting I ever loved, and it remains my favourite. For me, it represents the yearning for some elusive home, to belong to something bigger than ourselves, and yet hesitant, timid, afraid to try for something that is right there and simultaneously seems so out of our reach. A wistfulness. A desire restrained by uncertainty; a tug on our heartstrings for home, the pull of our longing for more.

"He did get one thing right: Sometimes a sanctuary, sometimes a prison, that house on the hill has always been my home. I've spent my life yearning toward it, wanting to escape it, paralyzed by its hold on me. (There are many ways to be crippled, I've learned over the years, many forms of paralysis.) My ancestors fled to Maine from Salem, but like anyone who tries to run away from the past, they brought it with them."

Something inexorable seeds itself in the place of your origin. You can never escape the bonds of family history, no matter how far you travel. And the skeleton of a house can carry in its bones the marrow of all that came before."

Christina was born with a degenerative disease, which hampered her mobility even as a young child, leaving her frequently stumbling and falling. Eventually it would progress from occasionally stumbling to the point where it was easier not to try to walk. Some believe she had a form of polio, more recent studies indicate it might be Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, however she was never diagnosed during her lifetime. Needless to say, it made life on a farm difficult even in her younger years. Perhaps it made her dreams as a young woman more fragile. Her wish to be seen for herself, a woman with wants and desires, and not simply for her misshapen, unreliable body.

Christina Baker Kline has woven together a story based on some facts, much research, and with *A Piece of the World* delivers a tender, poignant account of the story behind the painting that rings true. What Andrew Wyeth wrought on canvas, Christina Baker Kline has portrayed with her prose.

*The night I fell in sorrow
I knew I was alone
A dozen good-time friendships
But my heart is still unknown
I couldn't reach for rescue
I hid myself from you
I couldn't stand to see me
From your point of view*

*I knew I'd disappoint you
If I showed to you this child
Who is crying out inside me
Lost in the wild*

*I feel you behind me
Laughing in the water
Wash away the tears
I feel you behind me
But how did you find me here?*

David Wilcox - *How Did You Find Me Here?*

Brenda says

Born in 1893, Christina Olson became ill at a young age, and from that day forward, her debilitating illness continued unabated. Doctors had no idea what was wrong with her, but over the years she continued to get worse. Her life was centred around the home she'd been born in – the family farm in Cushing, Maine. Christina lived with her mother, father and grandmother plus three brothers, and the duties of keeping the farm running increasingly fell on her shoulders. Made to leave school by her father at twelve years of age,

Christina's yearning to become a teacher fell by the wayside at her father's demand that she was needed on the farm...

When Christina was forty-six, she lived with her brother Alvaro on the farm, and through her friend Betsy, she met a young Andrew Wyeth. Andy was an artist and his desire to paint and sketch Christina's home led to him spending days on end upstairs, engrossed in his work. His eventual painting of Christina, which was named *Christina's World* was much against her wishes – but Andy by that time was a good friend; little was she to know how well-known that painting would become. Over the years, Christina became Andy's inspiration – she felt that finally, someone understood her.

A Piece of the World by Christina Baker Kline is a beautiful blend of fiction and non-fiction about Christina Olson's life, and the inspirational and historical painting by Andrew Wyeth called *Christina's World*. The Author's Note at the end of the book is fascinating where she explains how she came to research and write this novel. She says "Ultimately, *A Piece of the World* is a work of fiction. Above all else, I hope I have done this story justice." And to my mind Ms Kline, you most certainly have. A thoroughly intriguing and enjoyable read which I highly recommend.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for my digital copy to read and review.

Sonja Arlow says

I was very excited to see this book as I really enjoyed *Orphan Train*. When the description mentioned that this is fictional story weaved around a true figure in a well know painting I was even more excited because I was hoping it would be as interesting as *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

But sadly, this was just not my cup of tea.

I get that Christina suffered. She was a perfectly healthy child deformed by a disease – which to my untrained ears that sounded like polio – and for the rest of her life she was trapped in a useless body.

But the plot was just too thin on the ground, the characters unrelatable and the pace painfully slow.

Christina went from a lonely and stubborn child to a lonely and bitter woman who even begrudged her own siblings a life of their own. There was no hint of hope in the story, just more loneliness and bleak disappointment to look forward to. I didn't feel engaged with the story and doubt that I will remember any of it in a month's time.

It would have perhaps helped if I was a big fan of the famous painting *Christina's World* by Andrew Wythe but I had to Google it before I knew what it looked like.

There was nothing wrong with the writing or the audio narration but not all books are for all readers and this one was not a good fit for me.

Erin says

Over the years, certain stories in the history of a family take hold. They're passed from generation to generation, gaining substance and meaning along the way. You have to learn to sift through them, separating fact from conjecture, the likely from the implausible. Here is what I know: Sometimes the least believable stories are the true ones.

Well, I'm extremely grateful that I don't wear mascara because I'm a blubbing mess right now. This absolutely mesmerizing fictional memoir of Christina Olson, the real life woman in American artist, Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World" is unforgettable. Highly engrossing, I just couldn't put the book down. Even though I was sometimes frustrated with Christina's actions, never have I read a book that unveils the very centre of a person's soul.

Forgive me for my ill written review, words seem to be completely inadequate to how deeply I'm feeling about this book.

Elyse says

At times I thought of Helen Keller....wishing Christina Olson - [of this story] - had half the opportunities Helen Keller did. I was aching at times for Christina.

This was a gut wrenching sad story. I shed tears a couple of times - and found myself thankful for a relief of the 'smallest' gesture-of-expression-of sibling-love. The touch of a hand between Christina and her brother, Al, was one of the most beautiful moments in this novel to me. There were a couple other 'golden box' beautiful scenes that helped balance the grief & bitterness.

Author Christina Baker Kline created a highly imaginative FICTIONAL MEMOIR. This would make an excellent book club pick (Sara and I are buddy- chatting this together), as there is so much the reader wants to talk about. - Many themes to explore:

.....A discussion about the famous painting: "Christina's World", by Andrew Wyeth

.....The history of the Hathorn/Olson house in Cushing Maine

.....Christina's lifelong suffering - possibly Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease - affected EACH family member. Shame, resentment, lost dreams, family challenges, social class, are some of the themes & issues explored. This novel grapples with real questions that are difficult to answer.

"I think of my mother opening her front door to a Swedish sailor, the stuff of fairytales: Repunzel letting down her hair, Cinderella sliding her foot into the glass slipper, Sleeping Beauty awaiting a kiss. All were given one chance to step into a happily ever after -- or at least must've seemed that way. But was it the prince who attracted them, or merely the opportunity for escape?"

A very emotionally charged novel! Real & Raw! 5 strong stars!!!!

Pamela says

"Sometimes a sanctuary, sometimes a prison, that house on the hill has always been my home. I've spent my life yearning toward it, wanting to escape it, paralyzed by its hold on me."

Hauntingly beautiful and deeply felt in the complex ways of human strength, tenacity, weaknesses, flaws and vulnerabilities. A Piece of the World is so atmospherically rich and utterly transporting, I didn't want leave Christine's World at book's end.

"Do our natures dictate the choices we make, I wonder, or do we choose to live a certain way because of circumstances beyond our control? Perhaps these questions are impossible to tease apart because, like a tangle of seaweed on a rock, they are connected at the root."

Stark but honestly true, literary rich and deeply humanistic - this novel truly exemplifies why I love to read.

"I wonder, not for the first time, if shame and pride are merely two sides of the same coin."

FIVE ***** Literary Fiction of Haunting, Transporting Richness and Beauty, Exploring the Art of a Life Tenaciously Lived in the Framework of Adversity *****

Margitte says

Don't you wonder sometimes who the people in paintings were? Like Mona Lisa. She was the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, who commissioned the painting by Leonardo Da Vinci. But what do we really know about her?

It was the same mystery behind the artist Andrew Wyeth's famous painting, titled *Christina's World*, which draw me to this book. The book has ..kind of.. this painting as a cover. But when I realized that this novel was written by Christina Baker Kline, the author of *Orphan Train*, one of my favorite books ever, I was hooked and booked.

So this is the biographical, fictional tale of Chistina Olson, the real person in Wyeth's painting. It is also the history of both 1)the descendants of the notorious John Hathorne, one of the chief magistrates at the Salem Witch Trials between 1692 and 1693, 2) and the Olson House in Cushing, Maine.

Despite her undiagnosed muscular deteriorational disease, which gradually paralyzed her lower body, Christina was once in her twenties, the Persephone of Walton Hall. However, Persephone did not survive. Not in Christina's body and not in Maine. Walton Hall left his goddess of the harvests and of spring behind without a second thought. Was it the curse?

Bridget Bishop, an innkeeper accused of stealing eggs and transforming herself into a cat, put a curse on the Hathorne descendants. According to Mamey, Christina's beloved grandmother, it was not exactly a curse, more of a warning. Using the only power she possessed, Bridget Bishop instilled the fear of God into this cold-hearted, cruel man when she was sentenced to death. Some folks in Cushing suspected that the family, despite changing their name, and already almost two centuries later, have brought the witches with them. Their house was haunted. John Hothorne was still in their genes. The disability was genetic, it was later discovered.

Christina Olson, born in 1893, was a tough, proud and stubborn women. Not only was she a descendant of the Witch Trials magistrate, but also from a poor Swedish peat-farming clan, the Olausons. Johan Olauson would change his name to John Olson in America. She would become the embodiment of some of the Americans' distinctive traits: *rugged individualism, quiet strength, defiance in the face of obstacles, and*

unremitting perseverance.

This is the story of the two Olson siblings, the last descendants living in the Olson house, and the painter who made their home his studio and them his subjects.

Here we are, the two of us, not partners but siblings, destined to live out our lives together in the house we grew up in, surrounded by the phantoms of our ancestors, haunted by the phantom lives we might've lived. A stack of letters hidden in a closet. A dory in the rafters of the shed. No one will ever know, when we're gone to dust, the life we've shared here, our desires and our doubts, our intimacy and our solitude.

Told in beautiful prose, and with an atmospheric infusion, this book is a MUST READ.

Linda says

"I wanted to show.....both the desire and the hesitation."

You know it well. It's the famous painting by Andrew Wyeth in which a young girl's image is set within the Maine landscape of house, of barn, and of an ocean of endless grass. Wyeth seems to reveal nothing as he casts her likeness from behind. Yet, her thinly posed arms are stretched outward in familiar motion. This is, indeed, Christina's World.

Generation after generation of the Hathorne clan have lived and farmed on this plot of land in the small rural town of Cushing, Maine. History and family lore tell us about the original family's journey from Massachusetts to leave behind the dark pall of the Salem witch trials. Living on the coast of Maine brings with it death and drownings and the lack of a male heir. The Hathorne's have been "daughtered out" until Christina's mother marries a Swedish sailor who happened to be iced in during a terrible storm. Change steps in and with it comes the reference to the now "Olson House".

Christina suffers through relentless fevers that affect her muscles and mobility as a child. We pull back the curtain and experience the first episodes of Christina's stubbornness laced with the clutches of fear. Her father bundles her up and takes her on a long journey to a doctor who may be able to help her. Christina refuses to even subject herself to examination. The stage is now set and the spotlight focuses on her lifetime as a solo act no matter how many move in cadence alongside her.

The artist, Andrew Wyeth, and his young wife, Betsy, become taken with the land that Christina and her brothers own. Christina invites more than just two unexpected individuals into this world of hers. He and Betsy weave in and out of the storyline as he creates his renowned painting. Wyeth, although not the main focus here, has a jagged backstory as well.

Christina Baker Kline presents a splendid perspective on the life of Christina Olson. Kline opens the window within and shines light on the thought that there is much complication, depth, and intensity to a life even in the most simple of environments and surroundings. What appears on the surface of oils and canvas or classrooms or church pews or back seats on buses are voiceless souls seeking a word of validation. Kline reveals that complexity through Christina.

Beautifully written, A Piece of the World speaks of simpler times. But in actuality, the progression of time reveals but one thing.....the desire to matter and the desire to make a difference one day at a time.

Phryne says

I had read several good reviews for this book by people whose opinions I trust so I expected that I would like it too. I was surprised by how much I liked it and how very readable it was! I found it very hard to put down.

I was not familiar with Andrew Wyeth or his famous painting entitled Christina's World but it made for an excellent story. Poor stubborn Christina with her deformed limbs and constant pain was nevertheless a wonderful character. As the book progressed I began to wonder how on earth the author was going to arrive at any conclusion without completely devastating the reader. The author turned out to be much cleverer than me:)

My copy of this book came from my library and I was the first person to borrow it. So I read from a nice shiny copy with a beautiful cover depicting the house from the story. And then right at the very end there was a picture of the painting "Christina's World" and I could see for myself what all the fuss was about.

Beautiful - the painting and the book!

Diane S ? says

Andrew Wyeth, his painting Christina's World would immortalize this young woman and her life. In fact many of his paintings would feature this farm, where he would visit and paint in the summers for twenty years, a farm that Christina's family had owned and lived in for generations. Cushing, Maine, how the family came here and whom their ancestors were is an interesting back story in itself.

Although Wyeth makes an appearance here and there, for the most part this is the story of Christina, her family and her life. After almost dying as a child of an undiagnosed illness, her legs would never be right, twisted, making her stumble as she walked. As she aged the effects of this illness, maybe undiagnosed polio, would get much worse leaving her with a shrinking world.

Wonderfully written we are immersed in the life of this farm, the changing seasons, the never-ending chores and into the heart of a young woman. At times Christina is hard to like, having had a slim chance of a life outside of the farm, it is taken from her by an act of cowardice, something she resented and could never forget. She is often bitter, frustrated, and often seems too proud. Struggling though she is, she does not want anyone's pity nor their help. Going back and forth we see how a young Betsy, who will become Wyeth's wife, is introduced into her life, later bringing Wyeth. Wyeth will bring bit of color and life into Christina and her brothers Al's world on the farm.

Another fantastic, and touching story by this author. Bringing to life the story behind a painting and the life of a young girl who always wanted more than she was given, but accomplished so much despite her handicap. Someone who, would eventually make peace with her handicap and grow to appreciate the beauty of the place she lived. Memorable and moving.

ARC from publisher.

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