



A NOVEL

THE
ENGLISH
MASTER
PIECE

KATHERINE REAY

PRAISE FOR KATHERINE REAY

“Both deeply moving and edge-of-your-seat suspenseful, *The Berlin Letters* is an eloquent reminder of the brutal totalitarianism of Soviet Communism and the unsung heroes who fought to tear down the Iron Curtain and free Eastern Europe.”

—Beatriz Williams, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Summer Wives

“*The Berlin Letters* is a thrilling read that has it all: secret codes, espionage, and a fascinating glimpse into the world behind the Berlin Wall. Katherine Reay always delivers well-researched historical fiction with a perfect blend of heartwarming characters and fast-paced action. Fans of historical spy novels are going to love this enthralling read!”

—Madeline Martin, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Keeper of Hidden Books

“Surrounding the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, Reay’s action-packed novel is told in dual-narrative form between a daughter with a rebellious streak and her father’s buried secrets. A story of hope and resilience, *The Berlin Letters*, is a thrilling story full of intrigue, espionage, code-breaking, and at its core, loyalty and humanity. You won’t be able to put it down!”

—Eliza Knight, *USA TODAY* and international bestselling
author of *Starring Adele Astaire*

“Both a gripping tale of espionage and a moving portrait of a family ripped apart, *The Berlin Letters* offers readers a fascinating glimpse at a fraught period of all-too-recent history and the people caught in the crosshairs of geopolitics who chose, each in their own way, to fight back.”

—Jennifer Thorne and Lee Kelly, co-authors of
The Antiquity Affair

“In her nail-biting latest . . . Reay builds an immersive world behind the Iron Curtain, full of competing loyalties and a constant, chilling sense of paranoia. Readers will be enthralled.”

—*Publishers Weekly* for *A Shadow in Moscow*

“This book is a consummately rendered and captivating espionage account of the Cold War, told from the perspective of two sympathetic and admirable women . . . Filled with surprise twists and turns, and ultimately uplifting and inspiring, I found this superlative novel an enduring gem. Five stars!”

—Historical Novel Society for *A Shadow in Moscow*

“Rich with fascinating historical detail and unforgettable characters, *A Shadow in Moscow* deftly explores two female spies who will risk everything to change the world. Katherine Reay eloquently portrays the incredible contributions of women in history, the extraordinary depths of love, and, perhaps most important of all, the true cost of freedom in her latest stunning page-turner. A story that will leave readers examining what they hold most dear and positively brimming with hope, this is an important, timely tour de force—and a must-read for anyone who has ever wondered if just one person can make a difference.”

—Kristy Woodson Harvey, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *The Wedding Veil*

“Katherine Reay’s latest has it all—intrigue, twists and turns, acts of bravery and sacrificial love, and an unforgettable Cold War setting with clever, daring women at the helm. An expertly delivered page-turner by a true master of the craft!”

—Susan Meissner, *USA TODAY* bestselling author of
The Nature of Fragile Things, for *A Shadow in Moscow*

“This riveting story of two female spies operating in Moscow during different eras has everything you could ever want in a

novel—suspense, intrigue, compelling characters, exotic settings, deep insight, and gasp-inducing plot twists. A word of advice: clear your calendar before opening *A Shadow in Moscow*. Once you start, you won't be able to stop until you regretfully reach the last page of Katherine Reay's masterfully written novel."

—Marie Bostwick, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Esme Cahill Fails Spectacularly*

"Spellbinding. Reay's fast-paced foray into the past cleverly reveals a family's secrets and how a pivotal moment shaped future generations. Readers who enjoy engrossing family mystery should take note."

—*Publishers Weekly* for *The London House*

"*The London House* is a tantalizing tale of deeply held secrets, heartbreak, redemption, and the enduring way that family can both hurt and heal us."

—Kristin Harmel, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Forest of Vanishing Stars*

"*The London House* is a thrilling excavation of long-held family secrets that proves sometimes the darkest corners of our pasts are balanced with slivers of light. Arresting historical fiction destined to thrill fans of Erica Roebuck and Pam Jenoff."

—Rachel McMillan, author of *The London Restoration*

"Expertly researched and perfectly paced, *The London House* is a remarkable novel about love and loss and the way history—and secrets—can impact a family and ultimately change its future."

—Syrie James, bestselling author of *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen*

"The town of Winsome reminds me of Jan Karon's Mitford, with its endearing characters, complex lives, and surprises where you

don't expect them. You'll root for these characters and will be sad to leave this charming town."

—Lauren K. Denton, bestselling author of
The Hideaway, for *Of Literature and Lattes*

"In her ode to small towns and second chances, Katherine Reay writes with affection and insight about the finer things in life."

—Karen Dukess, author of *The Last Book Party*,
for *Of Literature and Lattes*

"Reay understands the heartbeat of a bookstore."

—Baker Book House for *The Printed Letter Bookshop*

"*The Printed Letter Bookshop* is both a powerful story and a dazzling experience. I want to give this book to every woman I know—I adored falling into Reay's world, words, and bookstore."

—Patti Callahan Henry, bestselling author

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Dear Mr. Knightley

Lizzy & Jane

The Brontë Plot

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The London House

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NONFICTION

Awful Beautiful Life with Becky Powell

THE ENGLISH MASTERPIECE

A NOVEL

KATHERINE REAY



HARPER MUSE

The English Masterpiece

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Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.

—PABLO PICASSO

Everything is expressed through relationships.

—PIET MONDRIAN

CHAPTER 1

Lily

LONDON, ENGLAND
APRIL 9, 1973

come see me as soon as you arrive

After sliding my boss's note into my top desk drawer, I walk down the corridor and tap on Diana's door and, as usual, pause for a second or two before I open it. I used to wait until she called me in, but over the last couple of years—as we've come to work more closely together—it feels natural and efficient to simply signal my entrance rather than ask permission. After all, many times she's on the telephone. My discreetly stepping in feels more respectful than interrupting her.

As usual, this morning she's on the telephone, nodding and murmuring her agreement to something said across the line. Her face is dour, stern. Her slender shoulders curl in as if she's protecting herself. What's gone wrong so early on a Monday? I settle myself in the chair across from her desk, lay my notepad in my lap, and, pressing my pen atop it, sit ready to take notes.

The call stretches on and my thoughts and eyes start to wander. Diana is the Tate Gallery's Keeper of Modern Collections—the first female keeper in the United Kingdom at any major institution—and her office reflects her stature and her tastes. It's a beautiful space. My focus first settles upon her desk. Despite sitting across it hundreds of times, I never tire of taking it in. It's

massive, imperious, and simply stunning. It's not fluted or curved, as George IV designs aren't frilly, but its formidable bulk, wood inlays and detailing convey delicacy nonetheless. Power too. A dichotomy held in perfect balance by both this impressive desk and the woman who owns it—because she must own it. Otherwise such a valuable antique, if from the Gallery's collection, would certainly grace Director Browning's office rather than hers.

We've all heard the rumors. Family money. Old European roots. Hohenberg ties and generational estates sprinkled from east to west along the Danube. Diana has let a little of her history slip out over our five years together, but just a little. The rest I've picked up from gossip around the Gallery. A wisp from those who like and respect her; most from those who want her to fail. But it's not her history so much as her reticence in sharing it that impresses me most. Her example has taught me that if you have status, money, and power, you don't need to talk about it. Rather you wear it lightly, effortlessly, like an Egyptian cotton shift on a warm summer day.

When I started working for Diana, I thought I'd won the golden ticket, a secretarial job that fit my skills in a world that means everything to me. But it's become so much more—a career beyond my wildest dreams. Diana has not only succeeded in an industry—because make no mistake, art *is* an industry—where most women flounder, but she opened the way for me to succeed as well, promoting me to assistant keeper of the Modern Collections last December—an unheard of promotion that sent shock waves through the London museum scene.

Her belief in me has definitely engendered my loyalty to her, and I lean forward, offering my silent support for whatever has upset her so.

She nods in understanding, and my gaze again shifts, this time from her face to the crystal dish that sits to her left, as with delicate fingers, nails varnished a demure shade of pink, she reaches for the gold key she keeps there. She disappears behind the desk to open one of the file drawers that make up its two sides.

Diana emerges again and sets the folder she's retrieved in

front of her and ends the call with, “*Nosotras hablaremos pronto. Gracias.*”

Spanish. I think of the Prado and the Museo De Bellas Arts De Sevilla. I think of Gaudi, Dalí, Picasso, and Miro. I think of—

“Lily?”

“Yes?” I blink.

“Pablo Picasso died yesterday.”

I glance to the edge of her desk. The *Times* the security guard delivers every morning sits crumpled. I hadn’t read the paper yet and chastise myself for being unprepared. I had heard the great artist was ill, but I didn’t expect this news. Did anyone? The gods are immortal, after all, aren’t they? “I’m sorry.”

She offers a slight shrug. The motion accentuates the hollows beneath her collarbone. Her lithe frame always reminds me of Twiggy, not that she’d appreciate the comparison.

“That was Antonia at the Sofia. She’s pulling together an exhibit to honor him in Madrid this summer.”

I lift my pen, suspecting we’ll do the same.

But rather than race into the day as Diana usually does in our morning meetings, she sits back, and her face, always chiseled and in motion, falls slack. “Do you remember the pigeons?”

I laugh and drift into the memory. In my third year here, Picasso reached his ninetieth birthday and towns and museums all over the world conjured outlandish ways to celebrate, both to honor and to curry favor with him. Director Browning invited eighty-nine schoolchildren to line Tate’s massive front stone steps and gave each a dove to hold in homage to the great artist’s *Child with a Dove*. All the children laughed and twittered, trying to control their birds with small hands, which gripped the poor creatures much too tightly. Then Richard, holding the ninetieth dove himself, called upon the children to lift their birds high and cued the press to ready their cameras. At the count of three, ninety birds were launched into the air.

Happy Birthday, Picasso!

Chaos ensued. Children laughed, screamed, and ducked. Cameras clicked. And the Tate Gallery’s massive stone steps were

covered in so much bird poop it took Maintenance a full day to hand scrub it away. But it was also the best day ever! And to commemorate it, everyone in attendance was gifted a beautiful print of the painting. Mine still rests atop my desk.

“We, too, must do something.” Diana pulls herself straight. “We’ve got a problem and this might be our solution.”

I cringe. We don’t have *a* problem—we have several. First of all, last week I handed my boss the expenditures and projections for the American New Realism Exhibition she installed at the Tate’s Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens three months ago. It’s out of money—with four months left to go.

It’s not Diana’s fault, though she’s being blamed for it. Nor is there anything wrong with the exhibit. It’s bold, cutting edge, and it’s the Serpentine Gallery’s first international exhibition. The initial press was stunning. But labor strikes, inflation, and mounting economic fears have people tightening their belts in all sorts of ways. Donations are down, as is attendance—the exhibit has only achieved a tenth of our conservative estimations, and enthusiasm for the arts in general is waning as well. I guess such a mindset doesn’t readily welcome the new, the bold, or the American.

To counter that problem, only yesterday Diana devised an add-on for the exhibit’s final month. She hopes to lessen the American influence by promoting a British one. The British Emerging Artists Exhibition. New works and new names that will shift the focus from the Yanks and put it back here at home, with the added benefit of garnering government funds and encouraging more local support. I love her idea. I have plans for her idea. I hope to be part of it—I push away the thought.

The next problem of late is that one of our major donors, Ian Campbell, the eleventh Duke of Argyll, passed away as well. His death, just this past Saturday—I had read about that one—has put our year-end fiscal plans in jeopardy, not to mention our entire 1974 budget. Anticipating it, Diana has been devising ways to bring in new donors, but it’s proving a tough problem as some are calling the tensions and wariness of this time as dire as the days preceding the Second World War.

“Let’s use the far north gallery room and install a small Picasso exhibition. Intimate. Exclusive. Not the showstoppers. Well, some of the showstoppers. An exhibit that will focus on *his* favorites. Personal pieces with meaning.”

I start scribbling notes. “When?”

“Two weeks?” Her voice lifts in question. Part of me suspects she’s asking herself, pondering the feasibility of pulling off something of this magnitude so soon, but another part believes she’s asking my opinion as well.

I straighten in my chair. “It’s tight, but . . .” My voice drifts away because I don’t have a good answer. We need to be realistic. The logistics of such a show, even a small and intimate one, are astounding. But I also believe we can do it. Together Diana and I can do anything.

I lift my brows as I mentally list all we would need to accomplish for what she envisions to become reality within fourteen short days. “Are you wanting paintings from the Continent?”

“A few. There are a couple at the Louvre I’ll request and one or two from Spain.”

“You’ll need *Woman In An Armchair* and at least a few of the engraved plates from the *Vollard Suite*.”

“Of course.” Her face regains a touch of its usual animation. “My favorites. I also want *The Old Guitarist* from the Art Institute in Chicago. It shouldn’t be too hard, not for something like this. The Yanks always want to be the center of things.”

I feel my nose scrunch as I murmur my agreement. But I don’t truly agree. Her confidence to obtain one of Picasso’s most famous paintings from Chicago is overly optimistic. Our recent requests for loans from MoMA and the Met have been summarily—even rudely—turned down. I can’t imagine Chicago’s Art Institute will be more obliging, especially as it, too, will want to honor the world’s greatest artist.

Pencil to paper, I mark out the days. “Shipping from America will take over a week with a rush on it. Then there’s the paperwork, installation, press—”

Diana cuts me off with a wave of her hand, gold bracelets

tinkling with the quick motion. “We can’t let any of that stall us. This exhibition must make an impact, and that is as much about art as it is about timing.” She claps her hands together and leaves them in midair, palm pressing palm. “There’s a lot on the line here, Lily. For both of us.”

I swallow down all my objections. She’s right. Many would like to see her fail. She’s also right; my star rises only as hers continues to shine.

“I’ll make a few telephone calls. Return in half an hour and I’ll let you know how far I’ve gotten.” I stand, impressed with her boldness—as always. “Also, request catering menus from the café for an opening champagne luncheon. We’ll hold it in the room next to the north gallery. Tell Jeffrey I want him to clear his landscapes for a minimum of three days for setup, then he can reinstall on the twenty-fifth.”

I bite my lip, hoping she isn’t serious about me telling the keeper of the British Collections to “clear his landscapes.” He’s one who would love to see Diana fail.

She writes a quick note and hands it to me.

picasso exhibition, 1960

“Pass that to Lucy in Archives. I want everything we have on that exhibition.” She points her Montblanc pen to the notecard in my hand. “That was the ‘blockbuster’ one, first of its kind, and it changed the art world completely. We want this one to harken to that moment in history and remind people of the Tate’s pivotal role within our nation’s and the world’s relationship with Picasso.”

I glance at the card and an incongruent thought comes to me. “Why don’t you use capital letters?”

Diana blinks. “Excuse me?”

I wave the thick card stock. “Your notes. You never use capitalization.”

“I . . .” Her voice fades away. “I didn’t realize I still did that.”

“When did you start?” I drop into the bucket chair across from her desk again. Though infrequent, these are my favorite

moments with my boss. She rarely lets anything personal escape, but when she does it's always interesting.

"When I painted." She sighs. "I wanted a signature with style so I signed my first pieces with no capitals, and I suppose I carried it on from there."

"Diana Gilden." I say her name slowly and imagine each letter in my mind. "The *d*'s going up, in contrast to the dipping *g*, would have been a unique look."

"Yes. No." She shakes her head as if waking. "I mean, it was a long time ago."

"Do you still paint?"

"Never." The single word is short, sharp, and tastes bitter floating between us. Its afternotes carry a hint of regret.

The office's atmosphere, which felt amicable though somber seconds ago, strikes me with prickly, sharp edges now. I tap my pencil against my notepad to draw us back to work. "I'll start my list immediately and call catering."

"Yes. Do." She sets her pen on her desk and straightens it to lay perfectly parallel with her leather blotter. Her hand trembles. I stand and turn away before she can see I notice.

"Call Richard's secretary and ask when he's available."

I look back and watch as she blows a soft sigh through pursed lips. "If this is going to work, somehow I'll have to convince him this is his idea."

After closing the door quietly, I rush back to my desk to call the director's secretary. Diana is right—again. If Richard says no, there is no point in going one step further. But, if he says yes, we've got mountains to move in two weeks' time . . .

CHAPTER 2

Diana

MONDAY, APRIL 23

Diana opens the front door of her Mayfair home and steps into the marble foyer, noting as she always does the chessboard squares of black and white. This flooring always brightens her mood. The high mirrored shine of the black. The almost translucent pureness of the white. Only the finest marbles possess that almost water-like luminosity. The elegance. The contrast. The game.

She drops her keys into the Royal Delft bowl centered on the Louis XV table and lays her Hermès bag next to it. She then proceeds into the kitchen to the left and there she finds, lit by a single candle, her dinner. Her stomach growls as she takes in their butler's thoughtfulness, just as she smiled with pleasure the day before at the large and opulent vase of fresh-cut flowers Branford arranged in the center of the dining room table.

This evening the small plate of cheeses, grapes, apple slices, and crackers set upon the kitchen countertop, warm and welcoming, is just what she needs. It is the type of meal that can be an appetizer or a preparation for a glorious main dish. A meal that hints at more to come. And tomorrow more will come. The main dish will arrive. After a fortnight of meticulous planning and non-stop work, the Picasso Commemorative Exhibition is ready and she anticipates luxuriating in every aspect of her success. It will be glorious. It will be world-class. It will be all hers.

Diana picks up a piece of white cheddar and savors the dry crumbling cube as it dissolves on her tongue with a sharp tang. She follows it with a bite of cold apple and notes the interplay between sharp and sweet, soft and crisp. She runs her finger over the gold scalloped edge of the Spode plate, delighting in its candlelight burnish.

She stills, noting a coolness in the house. It feels too empty, too quiet. Where might her husband be? A quick circle of the entire floor confirms Heinrich isn't present. Not in the kitchen or the dining room. Not in his library reading. Not in the living room, sitting in his favorite wing chair by the fire enjoying a glass of sherry or port.

Diana slowly climbs the stairs to the first floor. From the landing she scans the openings to each of the three bedrooms before she steps towards her own and pauses in the doorway. The evening light shifted during her short time in the kitchen and her walk up the stairs, and orange turns to gold as the setting sun illuminates the room's deep-yellow velvet draperies, making them stand out in sharp relief to the reds, umbers, and browns of the ridiculously expensive Aubusson rug Heinrich purchased last year. Initially annoyed by his extravagance, she again concedes her husband has impeccable taste. While there is nothing of her taste within their house, as Heinrich makes every decision and sees to each minute detail, she can't deny its beauty.

She runs a finger across the back of a silk brocade slipper chair of the brightest yellow stripes contrasting the softest, first-blush-of-dawn pink, and she crosses to their dressing rooms. Diana slides off her heels and feels the pleasure of her feet flattening and expanding upon the wood floor. Her toes are sore from the long day. From two weeks of long days. Funny how she hasn't noticed the pain and pressure until now—once she's made it to the end.

It is truly going to be a once-in-a-lifetime show. One so meaningful it may launch her to Richard's job. Perhaps not the Tate's directorship. Richard is still fairly young and well respected, but Pullman at The National Gallery is nearing retirement and Stan-holp at the Royal Academy has gone sideways with his board.

Or the new British Museum, the crowning glory of them all, as the papers recently reported, is due to open in only a few short months. Yes, maybe a directorship there. After all, this exhibition will put her name on everyone's lips—her worth proven, her bonafides assured, her promotion, at any top institution, a foregone conclusion.

Diana pulls off her ruined silk stockings and drops them into the bin. She then unlatches her gold belt and slides her Halston dress over her head. The ultra suede feels and looks like silk puddling in her hands. It's a new fabric, only this season making real inroads into fashion, and it is the freshest lilac color. After draping it across the chair in the dressing room's corner, she pulls on a shift dress of such quality Egyptian cotton it, too, feels like silk. Leaving her feet bare, she pulls the pins from her chignon and ambles out of her bedroom back towards the stairs.

She ascends each step slowly. Is this truly the direction she wants to go? After six steps, well before the turn halfway, Wagner's dark, pounding notes fall upon her. She can't discern which opera has captured Heinrich's mood this evening, and she doesn't care. She turns and descends once more, heading towards the kitchen for her cheese, apples, and perhaps a glass of Château Margaux. She is in no mood to have her buoyancy dampened by Wagner, or by her husband, who only listens to the composer's most overdramatic operas when in such a state himself.

Warm and comfortable in the kitchen once more, with the glow of that singular candle, Diana opens that bottle of Château Margaux she craves.

"May I have a glass?"

She spins towards the kitchen door, hand to her heart. "You surprised me."

Though Heinrich is over thirty years her senior, Diana still marvels at his ability to move with catlike dexterity. Only the slight sloping of his shoulders reveals the march of time, but that is only noticeable when he's not painting. And Heinrich is always painting.

"Did you not know I was home?" He overarticulates each

word, imbuing them with a seemingly innocent curiosity.

Diana twists back to the cupboard to retrieve another glass. Heinrich will know by her eyes if ever she offers a lie. “I wasn’t sure. I hadn’t gone up yet and was going to search the house after I poured this.”

She turns back and watches his gaze travel from her bare feet to the collar of her white shift dress. “Yes,” is all he says.

“Opening day is tomorrow.” Diana pours him a glass, slides it towards him, then drinks deeply from her own. “It’s a triumph, Heinrich. After all my work, all these years . . .”

She pops another cheese cube into her mouth and purses her lips. The contrast and interplay is unexpected; the wine brings out flavors she didn’t notice in her first several bites. A very different experience than with the apple. “It’s going to be perfect, and it’s mine . . . Everything I’ve ever wanted.” She lifts her glass towards the kitchen door into the darkened house beyond. “I was even thinking I might take up painting again after this. It’s been on my mind and I’ve gotten so far in my career. Perhaps—”

She stops as Heinrich tilts his head. The motion, the expression, and the quick sharpening, then widening of his eyes tells her he has other plans, or at least that hers do not please him. *Will he tell me?*

Diana steps towards her husband. “You’re thinking something.” She pitches her voice light and playful, knowing those are the tones he responds to best. “What is it, darling?”

“Nothing.” He continues to hold her gaze. He smiles, but it’s small and tight, barely reaching the corners of his mouth, and it misses his eyes completely. “I’m simply happy for you. Let’s not take on tomorrow until it comes.”

CHAPTER 3

Lily

TUESDAY, APRIL 24

We did it!

It's an exclamation moment, a bright moment—that rare moment when everything you've wanted has happened and everything you want to happen is so close you can almost touch it. It's wonder and giddy-excitement, tempered by a startling satisfaction that it's not so unbelievable after all. We've worked for this. I've worked for this.

I reach for my tote bag, resting beside my desk, and dig out the new Salvatore Ferragamo shoes within. A pair of the “kitten heels” splashed across *Vogue* this spring, with that iconic Ferragamo bow to give them an extra dash of class. I saved them for today, only trying them on and crossing my room on the carpeted floor to avoid scuffing the soles.

I shouldn't have splurged on them. I shouldn't have splurged on the dress either—a demure beige-on-cream Thea Porter knockoff, but still expensive—especially as I didn't even wear it. Yet, despite the change in dress, the shoes are still perfection.

My dress, however, worries me a bit. Diana requested neutral colors, a dress that would highlight rather than conflict with Picasso's strong use of color. The dress I had to wear today, made from a copy of Emilio Pucci's crazy and chaotic patterned fabrics, is about as far from that as possible. On any other day, I'd love it. I adore color and how bold tones play against my pale skin and

cinnamon-colored hair. But Diana was clear about today. Pale, demure, and subtle.

I stand, smooth a few wrinkles down the dress's skirt, roll back my shoulders, and accept there's no turning back. It's time.

I stride from my office down the corridor. Rather than take the side passageway that leads directly to the row of small galleries along the north wall, I pivot and take the slightly longer route through the public spaces, specifically through the Tate Gallery's rotunda—my favorite spot in the world.

The exhibition opened minutes ago, so I have only the briefest moment to glance up, absorb, and savor the bright sunshine through the rotunda's glass ceiling. I catch that magical scent of paint, art, paper, must, wood, and history before I race on, which proves challenging in tiny heels and slick leather soles on the polished marble.

Before I turn into the room, I hear the room. Inhalations of wonder, the clinking of crystal, the soft laughter that accompanies art and aristocracy all tell me it is proceeding just as we planned. Diana charged me with being her set of loyal ears at the opening today, listening and unobtrusive. After all, she wants to know what everyone says, what they think, and what benefits she may accrue from the exhibit's success. We both do.

Her voice drifts above the melodic thrum. I hear her lilting cadence, her posh accent, the thread of pride and delight dancing in her words. My smile broadens. Again—*we did it!*

I step inside and swipe a flute of champagne from Dillon's tray. His eyes widen and his lips part in surprise. On any other day I'll concede my behavior is shocking. Not today. This exhibit is as much my triumph as it is Diana's. We did this together. We pulled off the impossible: a highly personal, highly curated farewell to the twentieth century's greatest and most famous artist—within a fortnight of his death.

I throw Dillon a smile, and rather than explain anything to him, I walk on as I lift the crystal flute and let the bubbles tickle my nose. It's not that I haven't sipped champagne before; it's just that I haven't sipped it often. People who pull the corks on bottles all the time feel no wonder in it. They don't stop and watch the

bubbles rise. They don't savor their first sip and let their eyes drift close as they concentrate on the sensation and the flavors. They walk, they talk, and they throw back mini-gulps as if it's nothing more than fizz from a Coca-Cola tantalizing their senses.

Not me. I relish the experience and let the sharp, dry taste spread across my tongue before I swallow it. Circling the room's perimeter, I note each guest in attendance. Everyone accepted Diana's invitation. And, by their expressions, we have wowed them. Lady Alexandra Bessing, last living daughter of Sir Jonathan Brookings, glows. I'm glad because that wasn't the case last week when I informed her we could *not* accept her proffered Picasso. Diana felt her 1923 work was not important enough within Picasso's oeuvre nor personal enough to his life and journey to feature within this commemoration. Even delivered with compliments and concessions, Lady Alexandra kicked up a mighty fuss.

Mr. Edward Davies, a scion of British manufacturing, laughs loudly just to my right, as well he should. Diana, despite feeling much the same about his offered work, was overruled. I gather he hopes to sell his Picasso and Richard offered to exhibit it here to drum up publicity. Davies's *Woman Laughing* hangs on the east wall.

I glance to Director Browning. Richard is laughing and looks well chuffed. I feel a sigh, long held, release within me. Though he gave his permission, tempted by the glory of this show's success, he withheld his full approval by pronouncing that such haste could be deemed poor taste. Yet his full laugh and the backslap he delivers to Mr. Davies reveals he isn't above taking credit for this "intimate moment," this exclusive farewell from Picasso's adoring elite and friends.

With my first circle of the room complete, I start again. It's time to take in the art. Since we first devised this exhibition, I've thought of nothing but these seventeen paintings. I've worked with museums across the world organizing their transport, I've sent cables and telexes to secure insurance coverage, and I've organized the printer, the caterer, the rental company, the invitations, the . . . everything. Yes, I've worked twelve-hour-long days overseeing every minute detail for this morning, and I've antici-

pated taking in the installation as it's meant to be viewed.

I catch Diana's eye as I start my second tour of the room. Something flickers within her glance, and I know it's my dress. It certainly defies her call for demure delicacy, and I make a mental note to explain—and apologize—later.

For now I take another sip of my champagne and begin at the beginning . . .

PABLO PICASSO

25 October 1881–8 April 1973

The Old Guitarist, 1903

Oil on Panel

On Loan, Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

While Diana eschewed Picasso's most famous works, the ones made into the posters and prints that grace every office and school-room, she wanted this one to open our show. It's the iconic work of his Blue Period, but also a very personal work. Picasso painted it just as he emerged from a year of poverty and pain, still struggling to make ends meet and wrestling with the death of his close friend Carles Casagemas. *The Old Guitarist* embodies Picasso's trials as the man arches over and strums his large guitar with almost skeletal fingers. There's an intimacy to the work, as if Picasso himself invites the viewer into his heart. His trials become ours.

The Old Guitarist is also one of the great artist's only works that so clearly pays homage to another—in this case, the famous Greek painter El Greco. That, in and of itself, is a peek into Picasso's heart. Yes, it is truly a masterpiece and, at thirty-two-by-forty-eight inches, one of the largest paintings in our show.

Next to the huge and iconic *The Old Guitarist*, Diana instructed the installation team to hang a series of sketches. It was a brilliant decision. After such an impressive beginning, the exhibition instantly turns more personal. It's almost as if the viewer can discern Picasso's choices, witness his process, and share in his emotions.

I take in each sketch and step into Picasso's love life, for each is a drawing of a woman in varying states of dishabille. Knowing Picasso, and I feel I do now, I sense what he felt for each as a lover or what he felt for the woman he hoped would soon become one.

As I walk on some of the works feel like old friends. Some I am truly meeting for the first time. My pulse quickens with one here, slows with another there. My gaze sweeps to the painting Edward Davies and Director Browning bullied Diana into accepting for the exhibit just two days ago. *Woman Laughing*, 1930.

Diana was furious, but I'm not sure why. The painting fits in size, structure, and subject matter. I pause. Is this woman Dora Maar or Olga Khokhlova? Picasso loved both in 1930. And this woman is interesting, she's dynamic, she's . . .

I tilt my head to study her better. In form *Woman Laughing* is a perfect execution of Picasso's surrealist period. But something feels off. I take a sip of my champagne and move on. The next offering, *Bullfight*, 1934, is also stun—

I gulp and choke, straining to control the spasms in my throat. Champagne sticks to my tongue and cloy. Sticky and sweet. Warm and wrong. I cough again and turn.

A few steps back and I again examine *Woman In An Armchair*, 1929. Diana instructed the installation team to hang right before *Woman Laughing*. It's the shocking one-dimensional portrayal of Picasso's wife, Olga Khokhlova, just as their relationship was warping, disintegrating, and ending. That means the more peaceful *Woman Laughing* can't be Olga. His emotions towards her had already soured.

I step forward and study *Woman Laughing* again, painted just a year later. I see the development of Picasso's style, his comfort in the midst of the grotesque and frenzied, and yet . . . I look beyond it to *Bullfight*, painted a few years after that.

I clamp my hand over my mouth, shocked at the obvious truth before me as I center myself before *Woman Laughing* once more. I can't pull my eyes from it. My mind reels. Then unable to think, hold back, or move forward, I call out, "That's a forgery."

The world around me stops.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Katherine Reay is a national bestselling and award-winning author who has enjoyed a lifelong affair with books. She publishes both fiction and nonfiction, holds a BA and MS from Northwestern University, and currently lives outside Bozeman, MT, with her husband and three children.

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