



The Music Lesson: A Novel

By Katharine Weber

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"She's beautiful," writes Irish-American art historian Patricia Dolan in the first of the journal entries that form *The Music Lesson*. "I look at my face in the mirror and it seems far away, less real than hers."

The woman she describes is the subject of the stolen Vermeer of the novel's title. Patricia is alone with this exquisite painting in a remote Irish cottage by the sea. How she arrived in such an unlikely circumstance is one part of the story Patricia tells us: about her father, a policeman who raised her to believe deeply in the cause of a united Ireland; the art history career that has sustained her since the numbing loss of her daughter; and the arrival of Mickey O'Driscoll, her dangerously charming, young Irish cousin, which has led to her involvement in this high-stakes crime.

How her sublime vigil becomes a tale of loss, regret, and transformation is the rest of her story. The silent woman in the priceless painting becomes, for Patricia, a *tabula rasa*, a presence that at different moments seems to judge, to approve, or to offer wisdom. As Patricia immerses herself in the turbulent passions of her Irish heritage and ponders her aesthetic fidelity to the serene and understated pleasures of Dutch art, she discovers, in her silent communion, a growing awareness of all that has been hidden beneath the surface of her own life. And she discovers that she possesses the knowledge of what she must do to preserve the things she values most.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Patricia Dolan defines herself by her job as an art historian and her identity as an Irish American. When she is 41, the combination of the two proves explosive, leading her to a rough cottage in West Cork. In Ireland she has for company only her own words, one elderly neighbor, and "The Music Lesson," a beautiful Vermeer executed on wood. As she anticipates the arrival of Mickey, her distant relative and lover, Patricia slowly, tantalizingly reveals the events that have led to her isolation. Before Mickey had appeared one day outside her office at New York's Frick Museum, she had become inured to loss and death, a high-functioning depressive. But her 25-year-old third cousin once removed reawakens her. Alas, his interest is both personal *and* political, and she is soon involved in a plot to kidnap and ransom the Vermeer, property of the Queen. The painting, she tells herself fervently, "is an instrument of magic. Perhaps now it is also an instrument of change, a talisman, the charm that will force powerful people to pay attention and take decisive action at last."

The Music Lesson is far from your everyday, action-packed IRA saga. Instead, Katharine Weber's second novel is very much like the intimate portrait her heroine so lovingly describes--an exquisite miniature in which images, ideas, and deep emotions keep coming out of the woodwork. --*Kerry Fried*

From Publishers Weekly

After her very promising debut with *Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* (1995), Weber offers a complete, but equally delightful, change of pace in this emotionally involving thriller that is propelled by psychological intensity. New York art historian Patricia Dolan is so swept away by the distant Irish cousin, Michael O'Driscoll, who seeks her out for her expertise but quickly becomes her lover, that in no time she is living in a remote cottage on the west coast of Ireland and is part of an IRA-inspired plot to kidnap a Vermeer painting (titled *The Music Lesson*) from the British royal collection and hold it for ransom. Patricia, alone in a wet winter with no company but the cherished Vermeer, keeps a journal that is the basis of the novel. She is by turns sprightly and funny about her Irish neighbors, reflective on the nature of art and of Vermeer's supreme genius, ecstatic about the sexual awakening Michael has given her and anxious about the odd position in which she finds herself. Is she being watched? Did her old neighbor lady see the picture by accident? Where is Michael? The situation is eventually resolved with brutal suddenness, and though it is difficult to see how else Weber could have ended the book, the final paragraph seems rather facile after all the warm and civilized writing, and the convincing creation of a winsomely offbeat heroine, that precedes it. But Weber remains a writer to be cherished, with the added, and quite rare, virtue of never writing a word too much. Regional author tour.

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Review

"A wonderful book." --*Washington Post*

"As intricate as an acrostic....Weber's skill is such that her puzzle engages the reader's attention throughout."--*The New Yorker*

"Throughout Weber's tricky, tension-filled plot, double-crosses, murder, and art forgeries dramatize the deeper themes of love, refuge, and loss."--*Entertainment Weekly*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rosemarie Pickett:

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Franklin Richter:

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Daniel Adams:

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Sandra Brown:

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