



Dearest Reader,

I'm so grateful for the passionate support so many librarians have given over the years to my novel *The Lost Wife*, and it's my pleasure to share with you my latest novel, *The Velvet Hours*. I hope you will enjoy reading the story of Marthe de Florian as much as I enjoyed writing it.

A few years ago, I read about the discovery of an apartment in Paris that had mysteriously been shuttered for over seventy years. When the apartment was finally opened, it resembled a time capsule. A thick veil of dust covered precious antiques and gilded mirrors. Most striking of all was a magnificent portrait of its original owner, an elusive courtesan by the name of Marthe de Florian.

The portrait was painted by the famous Italian painter, Giovanni Boldini, a friend and colleague of John Singer Sargent. In the portrait, Madame de Florian is painted in sumptuous, rich brushstrokes, her dress falling languidly over her shoulders and an exquisite set of pearls encircling her neck. Love letters tied with satin ribbon written by the artist and other suitors were also discovered inside her vanity—suggesting that Madame de Florian enjoyed a lifetime of admirers.

After de Florian passed away in 1939, the apartment was inherited by her granddaughter, Solange, who fled Paris just prior to the German occupation. Although she never returned to Paris, she paid the maintenance on the apartment until her own death in 2010, leaving it as a shrine to her late Grandmother.

I immediately became intrigued by the mystery behind this apartment. Who was Marthe de Florian and how did she come to be painted by Boldini? Who had given her the delicate pearl necklace so prominently displayed in the portrait? And why did her granddaughter, an aspiring writer, decide to close the apartment and never return, yet pay the maintenance on it for so many years?

The novel takes you deep in the world of beauty and pleasure of the women of the Belle Époque, as well as the tumultuous days at the start of WWII. I imagined the relationship between Marthe and her granddaughter Solange at the outset of WWII. As Marthe tells Solange the story of her life, we also follow Solange as she is drawn into the Parisian world of Jewish Booksellers, and holds in her possession a rare Spanish Haggadah that, much like her Grandmother's pearl necklace, contains a multi-layered story all its own.

The Velvet Hours weaves together the true story of this Parisian apartment, and imagines the fascinating lives of the women who lived there. At its core, the novel examines how it isn't our possessions that are the most valuable things we have at the end of our life, but rather the stories they hold.

Happy Reading!

Alyson

From the international bestselling author of *The Lost Wife* comes a story—inspired by true events—of two women pursuing freedom and independence in Paris during WWII.

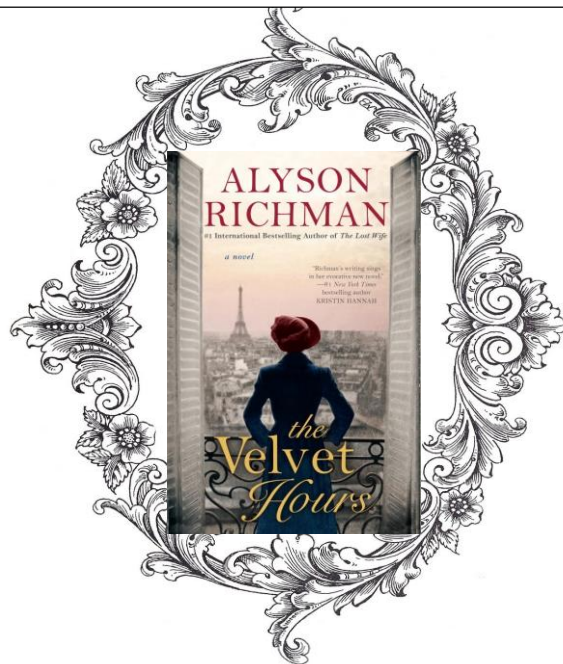
Reviews

"Alyson Richman's writing sings in her evocative new novel set in Paris at the dawn of World War II. *The Velvet Hours* is a beautiful and compelling portrait of two women facing their unknown past and an unimaginable future as their world begins to crumble."—Kristin Hannah, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Nightingale*

"Richman deftly weaves fact and fiction to create . . . a carefully wrought story of love, of what the heart chooses to give up, and what it chooses to keep. Highly recommended to readers who enjoyed Kristen Hannah's *The Nightingale*."—*New York Times* bestselling author Karen White

"A book as full of treasures as the Paris apartment that inspired it . . . A masterful mix of the glamour of the Belle Epoque and the shadows of impending war."—*New York Times* bestselling author Lauren Willig

"Richman develops an enthralling saga of two women—alternating between the late 1800's and 1930's—based on an actual Paris apartment. The lush atmosphere of the Belle Epoque and the stress of the coming war, the wonderful relationship between the women along with the fascinating historical backdrops draw readers into a lavish, beautifully written novel. It's nearly impossible to put down and so moving that fans of *The Nightingale* and WW II novels will be enthralled and delighted."—*RT Book Reviews*



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