



The Painted Sky

Alice Campion (Pseudonym)

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Alice Campion is the pseudonym for five members of a Sydney book club who challenged themselves to write a '21st Century Thorn Birds'. The result is a captivating rural novel, brimming with romance, mystery and suspense.

Nina never knew what happened to her father, the celebrated artist Jim Larkin. One minute he was her devoted dad, the next he'd disappeared without trace. Seventeen years later, she's still haunted by the mystery.

Until a call from outback Wandalla changes everything.

At first, Nina's inheritance of a waterless property and a farmhouse stuffed with junk seems more like a burden than a gift. But this was her father's childhood home – and possibly her last chance to discover the truth.

So what is the local solicitor, Harrison Grey, not telling her as he hands over the keys? Why does the area's wealthiest resident, Hilary Flint, seem to hate her so much? What is the significance of the gold locket with cryptic engravings that Nina always wears?

And why, on top of everything, is she inexplicably drawn to her soon-to-be-married neighbour, Heath Blackett?

The Painted Sky Details

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From Reader Review The Painted Sky for online ebook

Donna Usher says

Ever Read a Book Written by Five Different Women?

Well? Have you?

I hadn't either until I read The Painted Sky by Alice Campion. Alice Campion is actually five women who belong to a writing group. Together they have crafted a warm and wonderful novel about a Sydney girl, Nina, who inherits a farm in Wandalla from her estranged Uncle. The imminent sale of the property causes her to once again question the long-ago disappearance of her father. She travels to her farm for one last trip to rekindle memories and search for new evidence. What she gets is far more than she bargained for.

Where did her father disappear to? What was the double life he lived? What is the deal with the gold locket? Why is her neighbour, Hilary, so keen to get her hands on Durnham House? These are just a few of the many questions that Nina has to unravel. Add to this her complicated feelings towards her childhood friend, the very-engaged Heath, and you have a story that will keep you flicking the pages till the very end.

I have to admit that I offered to review this book purely out of curiosity. How could five different people breathe coherent life into a story? How could they remain true to their character development and weave us seamlessly into their tale? I thought it might be awkward. I thought it might be clunky. What I hadn't expected was a rich tapestry of life to spring forth from their pages.

The storyline ducked and weaved, keeping me on my toes the whole way. I fell in love with the countryside and the people, wanting my own Moira and Deborah and Olivia. (I already have my own Heath or I would have wanted him too!) The only criticism I have is that the bad character (I won't give you any names cause I don't want to spoil it for you) was too bad. She acted irrationally from the very beginning and I felt her character was a bit irregular. By the end I understood why she behaved as she did, but even then I thought perhaps a bit more subtlety in the development of her antagonism would have made the trip smoother.

Claire says

4.5***** I can't believe this was written by 5 women, the story is seamless. What a great read, plenty of mystery and twists, some romance and plenty of different relationships and secrets going on in a small country town. I found it hard to put down and look forward to their next collaboration.

Christine says

This was a stereotypical melodramatic romp with plenty of twists and turns but few surprises. Alice Campion is a novelty and the only reason I can think of for this book to be published. A fine example of mediocre writing. I couldn't wait to finish it. And not in a good way.

Heather Gallagher says

I was intrigued by this book because I knew it was written by a gaggle of women in a book group - a premise close to my heart (love my book group buddies!) I also liked the canny way they went about marketing - they chose the name Alice Campion thinking 'C' would be at eye-level in the book shops and of course, they milked the girl's weekend brainstorm for all it was worth (I heard an interview with a couple of the women on RN which piqued my interest).

The women set out to write a modern day *Thornbirds* and even though it is at least twenty years since I read Colleen McCullough's romance, I could certainly see the parallels. I loved the depictions of outback Australia contrasted with inner Sydney. I also liked the notion that country towns are hot breeding beds for dark family secrets.

But, I have to say there was one scene in this book which really disturbed me. The protagonist, Nina, is depicted as a feisty 20-something living a chic but empty inner-city lifestyle. She ends up going bush after her uncle bequeaths her his farm. She has an annoying inner-city boyfriend who she hooks up with on her return to the city. She holds a dinner party for her friends but the boyfriend is randy. Rather than spoil the dinner and make a fuss, she lets him - let's face it - rape her (from behind) while she's preparing the meal. He does his business, she is annoyed but that's it. After the dinner they do spectacularly break up - but still! Call me a prude but if this is what modern women do - I guess I'm not a modern woman!

Jenny says

The Painted Sky is about jealousy, greed and love. Nina Larkin inherited a rural property from her Uncle and still haunted by the disappearance of her father Jim Larkin decided to go and visit her father's childhood home to find answers and put the property on the market. However, this discussion will change Nina Larkin beliefs in her family and will change her life. The readers of *The Painted Sky* will continue to follow the twist and turns in Nina Larkin quest for answers in the disappearances of Jim Larkin. Also, the readers will be surprised by the ending of this book.

The Painted Sky is written by five members of a Sydney Book Club under the name of Alice Campion, and I enjoyed reading it even though at times it made me cry. The *Painted Sky* was well written and researched by Jane St Vincent Welch, Jenny Crocker, Denise Tart, Jane Richards and Madeline Oliver. I love the way they portrayed their characters and intertwine them with each other.

The readers of *The Painted Sky* will start to understand the importance of water for rural communities. Also, the readers will learn about running large rural properties and training horses.

I recommend this book.

Karen says

Met four of the five delightful authors at a conference and picked this up. I enjoyed reading about the Aussie outback, the small town characters and landscape. It's a quick read with interesting characters and there are no over-the-top sex scenes or purple prose, but like a lot of romances, the plot is fairly predictable. None of the big discoveries by the main character were surprises by the time I got to them.

Lisa says

Although I didn't really find this anything like *The Thorn Birds*, other than the Australian setting, I did find it to be a very good book. Although it is collaboratively written by five different individuals, the story flows quite seamlessly and is well-paced and engaging, including vivid descriptions of rural Australia, colorful characters, an interesting mystery with some good twists and turns. The main character, Nina, was appealing and relatable. As others have stated, my one complaint would be that her 'nemesis' was a bit over the top, and one particular showdown between the two veers into 'bad 80s soap opera' territory. Overall, though, this was a fun and entertaining read and a great success for these five writers. I wouldn't hesitate to read more from them in the future.

Alys says

Reviewed on my blog agirlwhoreads.com

Nina never knew what happened to her father, the celebrated artist Jim Larkin. One minute he was her devoted dad, the next he'd disappeared without trace. Seventeen years later, she's still haunted by the mystery. Until a call from outback Wandalla changes everything.*

Even after 14 years in Sydney I am a country girl at heart. This can sometimes make me a harsh critic. Far too many of those tales end in Sydney-bashing and "I have no idea why I ever left the country is so amazing" rants but I am delighted to say that Campion never did that. You can feel the confusion for our heroine Nina as she realises that her lives in each place are so different, but they are both good.

Alice Campion is the pseudonym for five members of a Sydney book club who challenged themselves to write a '21st Century *Thorn Birds*'. So I am sure that I like many read with a critical eye to see if you could see when it shifted between authors. Sorry to disappoint but it was seamless, the transition from one author to another just happened.

I read this book curled up on my couch, on a hot dry summer's day that ended with a huge storm. It could not have been a better day. By the end of this book I totally felt the pull of the Australian outback; but also how hard farming can be in the hot, dry land. The ladies went to a lot of effort to be true to the country; the detail they use could only be known by someone who loves the bush (seriously my grandparents do actually ask how I enjoy the big smoke) and really was at the heart of why I so enjoyed the book.

If you have even the tiniest glimmer of a country girl in your soul you must grab a copy online or wherever good books are sold.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For book club: Since this book was written by a book club I think it has to be a book club book – to talk about how these 5 women managed to write a book as a team and also whether we would be up to the same challenge.

For your parents: I feel like if I gave this book to my mother she would use it to convince me to move back

to the country. Solely on the desire not to be badgered with this conversation again I will not be gifting this to my mum (though if you are not in danger of a lecture then by all means I think parents would enjoy the book)

For the young: For teenagers yes I could see them enjoying this and there isn't really much that would be inappropriate for them. Perhaps the end will need a little explaining but that's ok, the information is provided with respect and honesty.

For the ladies: Strong women, romance, art, horses really there is a lot in here for us ladies and I would have no hesitation giving this book to any of my female relatives/friends (whether they be in the country or the big smoke)

For gentlemen: The men are portrayed here as hardworking, honest, decent people and that can be hard to find in books for women so if you are after a touch of country you may enjoy this book.

For yourself: It was a glorious way to spend a hot Sunday afternoon. Get yourself comfy and dive into this well written, well researched, heartfelt book.

marlin1 says

Nina is still getting over the death of her mother when she is reminded by a solicitor that she is the sole beneficiary of her Uncle Russell's estate 'The Springs', in Wandalla which is a 10 hour drive from Sydney. This was her father's childhood home, Jim Larkin was one of Sydney's celebrated artists many years ago but he mysteriously disappeared in 1997 when Nina was young. Nina has never gotten over her beloved father's disappearance and she travels to Wandalla, hoping to try and find some answers. But somehow she finds more questions than answers.

I can't believe this book is a collaboration of five different women from a book club. They have told a fantastic story and in such a seamless way. It really has a bit of everything....romance, mystery, suspense, deception, treasure hunt. The story had a number of gentle twists and turns, that had me guessing which way things would go. I enjoyed Nina's character as she struggled with trying to find her place, especially since she was now alone without family. I found this a thoroughly enjoyable story that I couldn't wait to get back to, immersing myself into Nina's life.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for a copy to read and review

Laura says

Life is short, avoid this book

Brenda says

When Uncle Russell left the old, rundown property at Wandalla, part of rural outback New South Wales to Nina Larkin, she was more than a little surprised. Never having been close to him, she hadn't been back to

the property since she was a girl. She had grown up happily with her Mum and Dad at Wandalla, but when her father, celebrated artist Jim Larkin disappeared when she was eight years old, her Mum had made their permanent home in Sydney. But six months previously her Mum had passed away – devastated and grieving, Nina decided now was the time to find her father; find out what had happened to him all those years before.

The local solicitor, Harrison Grey didn't seem to want her there though. Nina couldn't work out his reluctance; also his push for her to sell the property to wealthy landowner Hilary Flint. But she was determined to stay on her land, at least until she found what she sought; dilapidated and falling down though it was, Nina needed to go through her uncle's belongings to see if she could find any reference to her father. She needed answers...

Nina's shock and sadness at the state of the old farmhouse shook her – what had Uncle Russell's last few years been like? With her faithful little dog Bach by her side, she began to clean first the kitchen then the other rooms. Meeting up with friends she hadn't seen since she had played with them in the schoolyard was a little strange too – brothers Ben and Heath Blackett were men now; but what had happened to them? And now Heath was engaged to be married – she shouldn't feel those same flutters in her tummy that she'd had as a girl – surely that childhood crush was gone by now!

When Hilary first spoke to Nina, she was vindictive; nasty – but when she spotted the gold locket Nina wore around her neck she went ballistic. What on earth was wrong with her? Why did she seem to hate Nina – she had only just met her? Would Nina discover the truth she so desperately craved, or would she be driven back to Sydney once again?

I thoroughly enjoyed *The Painted Sky* by Alice Campion (the pseudonym for five members of a Sydney bookclub). The blend of mystery and suspense, along with a touch of romance and intrigue made for an excellent rural romantic suspense novel which is fresh and entertaining. I have no hesitation in highly recommending *The Painted Sky* to all.

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

Regina says

The Painted Sky is a very fun and entertaining read. It gets 4 stars purely for the entertainment it provided.

I was worried that as the book was actually written by five members of a book club, that the novel wouldn't be very cohesive. I was wrong to worry, it was cohesive from start to finish. There were quite a few cheesy, corny and cliche moments throughout this book and everything was all wrapped up ever so nicely (not a fan of that), but I overlooked all of that when giving this book 4 stars.

An Aussie TV miniseries could be based on this novel. The Painted Sky has 'Aussie' all over it (even Newcastle and The Newcastle Herald got a mention) with some romance, mystery and secrets (oh the secrets!) thrown in.

The Painted Sky is fairly substantial in size at over 380 pages, but by gosh those pages flew. Really good fun.

The authors of this novel wanted to challenge themselves to write a '21st Century Thorn Birds', I can't

comment on if they achieved that goal or not as I haven't read *Thorn Birds*, but I know I will be *Thorn Birds* now.

Thank you to Netgally and Random House Australia for the chance to read and review this book.

Sally Thomson says

I really enjoyed the book. I've spent a fair deal of time in country NSW and the city and understood Nina's view point. Great to see so many indigenous characters and some gay. A great tale demonstrating the massive social change that's occurred in the last 30 years or so.

Rochelle Pitcher says

OMG this book has me crying.....cant remember ever crying over a book!!!!

Kitvaria Sarene says

So much fate, secrets, problems and drama in this one - it shouldn't be good.
But somehow it is! ;)

I liked how there were so many twists, and everytime you though something was revealed or solved, there would be the next mystery waiting right around the corner.

Yes it is quite predictable in it's love interests, but in books like this I don't really mind. In a way it is what I want in a book like this - a feel good ending, that will make you sigh and feel like all is right with the world at last.

I only give 4 stars as I thought (as almost always) the sex scenes were simply eye roll material, and also some things were a bit too easy peasy.

All in all I enjoyed it really much, and am happy I got this as a present, as it is't a book I wouldn't have picked up myself.
