

Divine Toys: Book One

Thistle Brown

CreateSpace (Jun 24, 2013)

Softcover \$18.00 (378pp)

978-1-4775-3787-9

Thistle Brown writes a smart, sophisticated story steeped in literature and music.

Divine Toys: Book One is a remarkable story steeped in literature and classical music that takes the reader from the poor countryside of Arkansas to the culture and sophistication of Chicago in the early 1900s.

Harriet Clark, at only four years old, has a gift: She can play the piano and sing. Delighted when her mother acquires piano lessons for her, Harriet, nevertheless, is confused and pained by her mother's sudden frigid attitude. At age nine, with skills that transcend even her teacher's own abilities, Harriet is referred to Jed Thorne, the Episcopal priest, for further development of her talents. For nine years, he gives her lessons in music and culture as Harriet endears herself to his family. When he realizes he has taught her all he has to offer, he finds her a couple in Chicago to live with in order to further her studies, in exchange for teaching their two young daughters.

Chicago, with its sophisticated culture and endless opportunities, becomes an instant attraction for eighteen-year-old Harriet, who is experiencing a world away from home for the first time. Taking to the Norwood family immediately, especially their two daughters, Harriet, still young and innocent, finds herself in a world that is full of challenge, opportunity, and enticement. As Chicagoans meet and fall under the spell of the enchanting singer and pianist, Harriet herself falls under the spell of Paul Marsh—a married father of two—and soon finds her world collapsing around her.

Divine Toys brings a new level of culture to the reader's bookshelf. A story rich with touches of Latin, German, and Italian, it also explores the world of classical music by way of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann sharing information about writers and musicians: "Beethoven's dear friend Schiller, a poet so revered that there's a bronze statue of him in Lincoln Park that I bet you've seen, wrote a poem called 'An die Freude.' In English it's called 'Ode to Joy.'" Though the book is filled with such information, it is interesting enough to maintain readers' complete attention even as it enhances the narrative.

Thistle Brown, pen name of author Nancy Dent Eckert, writes with thoughtful prose in a novel that demonstrates both a personal knowledge of music and literature as well as a talent for research. She captures her characters vividly: "The Rev. George Craig Stewart was accessible, however prepossessing. At his height, he should have been mildly comical, but his power, and the ability to touch people's hearts, and his charisma, were undeniable." Moments such as these make it easy for readers to become immersed in the story.

Despite the plainness of the cover, *Divine Toys* is a remarkably well-written book. Due to some sexually explicit content, it may be best suited for adults.

TAMMY SNYDER (September 11, 2013)

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