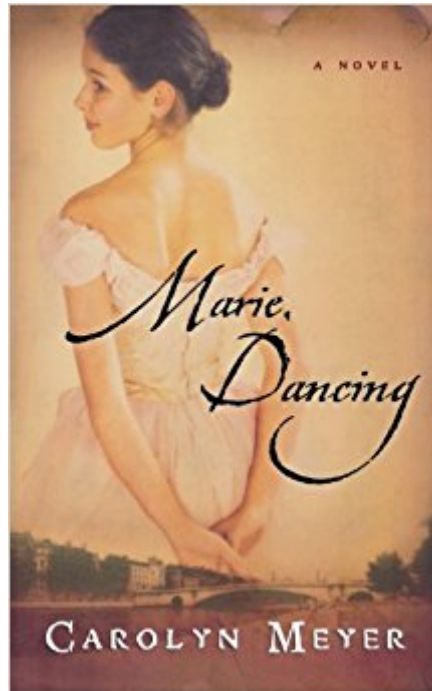




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# Marie, Dancing



## Synopsis

Marie van Goethem, a fourteen-year-old ballet dancer in the famed Paris Opéra, has led a life of hardship and poverty. For her, dancing is the only joy to counter the pain inflicted by hunger, her mother's drinking, and her selfish older sister. But when famed artist Edgar Degas demands Marie's presence in his studio, it appears that her life will be transformed: He will pay her to pose for a new sculpture, and he promises to make her a star. As Marie patiently stands before Mr. Degas each week, she dreams about supporting her family without being corrupted like most young dancers. She dreams about a life as a ballerina on the stage of the Opéra. And she dreams about being with her true love. In this deeply moving, historically based account, Carolyn Meyer examines the life of the model for Edgar Degas's most famous sculpture, *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. Includes an author's note.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

Grade 6-8 — This is a fictionalized account of the inspiration for Degas's famous statue, *The Little Dancer*. Young Marie van Goethem and her two sisters are students at the Paris Opera Ballet. Their mother envisions this as their only hope to get out of their destitute life. The oldest sister, Antoinette, is soon being wined and dined by wealthy men who often pursue the young dancers. Marie, the responsible one, is trying to deal with her mother's alcoholism and care for her younger sister, Charlotte. When Degas chooses Marie to pose for his sculpture both in the nude and

costumed, the extra money is only a temporary solution. Eventually Antoinette and Marie are dismissed from the Paris Opera for failing to adhere to the strict rules. Charlotte continues and, with Marie's support, succeeds. Marie finds contentment as she marries and finds joy in her younger sister's success. This is a fairly realistic look at the difficult lives of poor French girls who had few ways to escape their poverty and often discovered that the pursuit of their dreams was fraught with dangerous choices and obstacles. The introduction of Degas and Mary Cassatt enriches the historical interest of this well-written story. Marie's determination and resilience make her an appealing character, and her willingness to try to keep her family intact and support them through their difficulties is believable and admirable.

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Gr. 6-9. In this historical novel, readers meet a character humbler than the noblewomen of Meyer's Young Royals series but iconic in her own way: the dancer who modeled for Degas' statuette Little Dancer--14 Years Old. Building on facts known about Marie van Goethem, Meyer imagines Marie as the most levelheaded of three sisters, Paris Opera dancers all. Marie vows never to sink to courtesanship, as her frivolous elder sister does, nor to abuse absinthe like her mother. By the time the sculpture is unveiled, four years after she models for Degas, her innocent dreams of stardom have been compromised by family obligations. Readers drawn to historical fiction for lavish, romantic costume drama more than gritty realism may find the story a bit harsh, but the novel scrupulously adheres to the "truth is beauty" philosophy that inspired Degas to sculpt a gangly, somber dancer and call it art. Phrases in French are smoothly integrated, and an author's note separates fact from fiction. A photo of the sculpture appears on the back of the jacket. Jennifer Mattson

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This book is an excellent book. Carolyn Meyer does a great job of portraying Marie's life, and joy for dancing. The characters really seem to come alive in this book. The book has many experiences in which could be related to real-life. This book would be an excellent read, especially for those who are interested in dance as an art form.

I purchased this book for my 11 year old daughter who is an avid reader. Her complaint was the "French language was a bit difficult for her to understand and slowed her reading. She did enjoy the

story and is passing the book around her class, so she obviously thought others would enjoy it as well. Great find for a young girl!

Marie, Dancing is a novel about Marie van Goethem, who is the model of Edgar Degas's sculpture, Little Dancer Aged Fourteen. Marie is a dancer at the Paris opera. She hopes one day to be the star. When she is approached by Edgar Degas to be the model for his new project, she is flattered. She hopes that this model will help her become internationally famous. While Edgar Degas is working passionately on his new piece of artwork, Marie struggles with poverty and has to make tough decisions and sacrifices to save her family. In the beginning, Marie is optimistic, and is full of ideals, hopes, and dreams. After Degas no longer needs her for his artwork, Marie struggles with poverty and her broken family. Her mother does not care about her children. Her older sister, Antoinette, is selfish. The only person whom she is close to is her younger sister, Charlotte. She takes Charlotte under her wing, and does everything she can to support her, including sacrificing her own happiness. I've read Carolyn Meyer books in my young teens, and it is because of her that I love historical fiction. Carolyn Meyer has been one of my favorite authors, and I cherished every book I read of her. When I read this book, I expected that I would love it as I did her Young Royal series. However, this book was a big disappointment for me. The beginning of the book started out well when Edgar Degas approached her to be his model for a sculpture, but after Degas and Marie stopped interacting, it became a tough read for me. It had very little plot, and the story became dry. Overall, this book is about family, sacrifice, and acceptance. The message of the book is that if one door closes another opens. Marie finds that not everything happened the way she wanted to, but she finds happiness and contentment in her own circumstances. I recommend this book to art lovers. However, I believe that there are better books out there about Marie van Goethem. I felt that this was not Carolyn Meyer's best work, and I feel that this book is quite forgettable.

I've been enjoying Carolyn Meyer's Young Royals series. I have book three of the aforementioned series lined up for a read, but decided to give Marie, Dancing a whirl this time. This wonderful novel is based on the Victorian work of art of Degas's controversial sculpture called The Little Dancer. This tells the story of a penniless French family and the daughters whose only hope and happiness in life is that they are students at the Paris Opera Ballet. For Marie van Goethem, being part of the Paris Opera Ballet is the best thing in her life. At home, she has an alcoholic mother and shattered dreams due to their impoverished conditions to look forward to. Her dreams of success will come

with many obstacles, including endless suitors and a proposition to pose for a sculpture in order to put food on the table, but Marie will be content if at least one of her sisters, Antoinette and Charlotte, realizes her dream of becoming a dancer. There are some twists in the novel. This is a moving and compelling story of a young woman who will do anything to help her family and get them through their difficult times. Marie is such a fighter for someone so young. The descriptions of their conditions and the struggles with an alcoholic mother are quite vivid here. Marie's outcome is a realistic one that makes the reader wonder if a person of limited means could rise above the social and financial obstacles and succeed in life or if you're destined for a life of misery or mediocrity at best. It also makes the reader wonder if, despite the aforementioned obstacles, you can succeed in changing your life if you put your mind and determination to it. Meyer took a quite a famous and controversial sculpture (or at least it was controversial when it was first exhibited in 1881) and created a warm, poignant, albeit hopeful story that is beautiful and compelling as well as eloquent and enthralling. This is a young adult book set during the Victorian era targeted for teens between the sixth and ninth grades, but adults could enjoy this as well. I know I loved it! The author has great talent with historical novels and I shall continue to give her stuff a whirl and then pass her work to my niece so that she could read a good story and learn something at the same time.

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