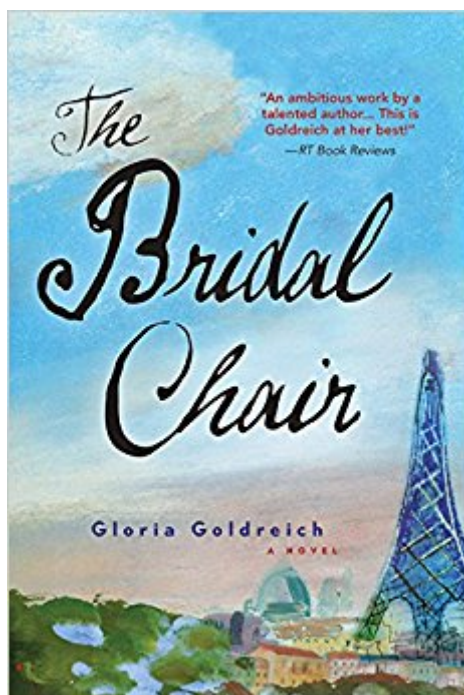


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The Bridal Chair: A Novel



Synopsis

An exquisite, haunting exploration of the complex mind of Marc Chagall through the eyes of his daughter — great for fans of Mrs. Poe and The Paris Wife. Filled with fascinating details about the art world and colorful real-life characters, this novel may appeal to historical fiction fans who enjoyed Natasha Solomons's The House at Tyneford and Tatiana de Rosnay's Sarah's Key.

Library Journal: An exquisite, haunting exploration of the complex mind of Marc Chagall through the eyes of his daughter — great for fans of Mrs. Poe and The Paris Wife. Beautiful Ida Chagall, the only daughter of Marc Chagall, is blossoming in the Paris art world beyond her father's controlling gaze. But her newfound independence is short-lived. In Nazi-occupied Paris, Chagall's status as a Jewish artist has made them all targets, yet his devotion to his art blinds him to their danger. When Ida falls in love and Chagall angrily paints an empty wedding chair (The Bridal Chair) in response, she faces an impossible choice: Does she fight to forge her own path outside her father's shadow, or abandon her ambitions to save Chagall from his enemies and himself? Brimming with historic personalities from Europe, America and Israel, The Bridal Chair is a stunning portrait of love, fortitude, and the sharp divide between art and real life. "Only Gloria Goldreich could write a novel so grounded in historical truths yet so exuberantly imaginative. The Bridal Chair is Goldreich at her best, with a mesmerizing plot, elegant images, and a remarkable heroine who...will remain with you long after the last page."

— Francine Klagsburn, Jewish Week columnist and acclaimed author of Voices of Wisdom

"In prose as painterly and evocative as Chagall's own dazzling brushstrokes, Gloria Goldreich finely evokes one of the most significant masters of modern art through the discerning eyes of [his] loyally protective daughter."

— Cynthia Ozick, award-winning author of Foreign Bodies

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Customer Reviews

"Only Gloria Goldreich could write a novel so grounded in historical truths yet so exuberantly imaginative. *THE BRIDAL CHAIR* is Goldreich at her best, with a mesmerizing plot, elegant images, and a remarkable heroine who shines through the whole. Ida Chagall will remain with you long after you've read the last page of her story. And her father's art will never seem the same." - Francine Klagsbrun, acclaimed author and columnist for *Jewish Week*"In prose as painterly and evocative as Chagall's own dazzling brush strokes, Gloria Goldreich finely evokes the days and nights of one of the most significant masters of modern art. Through the discerning eyes of Ida, Chagall's loyally protective daughter, we see his peril as a Jew in Nazi-overrun Europe, his heated competitiveness, his contentiousness as husband and father, his consuming immersion in his work. Here is history as story-telling, and story-telling as intimate portraiture, as poignant and arresting as Chagall's own airborne and dreamlike figures; and here also is a question to tantalize readers: Must the artist's character match the enchantments of his art?" - Cynthia Ozick, award-winning author of *Foreign Bodies*"An ambitious work by a talented author... It is a story of quiet power and provides a fascinating look into the dynamics of a family. This is Goldreich at her best!" - RT Book Reviews, 4

Stars"Goldreich's portrait of a major artist and his daughter is fascinating." - Booklist"Filled with fascinating details about the art world and colorful real-life characters, this novel may appeal to historical fiction fans who enjoyed Natasha Solomons's *The House at Tyneford* and Tatiana de Rosnay's *Sarah's Key*." - Library Journal

Chapter One She is gripped by a terror she cannot name, but she is certain that she is in danger, grave danger. Her breath comes in labored gasps. She is running, racing. The taps on the heels of her patent leather shoes clatter against the cobblestones, and her heart beats wildly as though struggling to match her frantic pace. Her parents grip her hands-her mother's sharp nails dig into her right palm, and her father's grasp on her left is painfully tight. "Faster, Idotchka. Faster." They speak in unison. She trembles at the fear in their voices. Their pursuers draw closer, booted feet beating in tympanic hate, horses' hooves pounding ominously. She cannot go any faster. She feels her energy draining, her legs faltering. Tears streak her cheeks. How angry they will be with her if she should fall. She does not want them to be angry, her mamochka, her papochka. And then, suddenly, their race is over, and they are lifted to the heavens. They are soaring, the three of them, hands linked, hearts lightened, flying skyward. Her parents' arms have become wings that scissor their way through a sky no longer draped in velvet darkness but wondrously studded with rainbow-colored flowers. A vagrant wind plays with her auburn curls, and she laughs as the thick tendrils tickle her cheeks. Her pinafore billows out into a great puff of whiteness that will surely keep her afloat. She glances at her mother, who glides so easily through the air, a blackbird of a woman, her hair a cap of polished ebony, the velvet dress that hugs her slender body the color of night. She turns her head to the left and she sees that her father's beret has fallen and his fine silken hair frames his elfin face; stray strands briefly veil his bright blue eyes. He smiles; his daughter's hand is so light and trusting in his own. He is at home in this flower-strewn heaven. He will paint these skies, she knows, when they are safe and out of harm's way. But for now, their flight continues. They float, the three of them, like zephyrs borne on soft breezes, cushioned by gentle clouds, high above the burning villages and the dark columns of soldiers tramping the country they had once called their own. Mother Russia has cast them out. They are orphaned refugees, rootless and rejected, but they are winging their way to a safe haven. They do not speak, because language is lost to them. The quiet settles over them in a soothing coverlet embroidered with hope and promise. Wordless, soundless. Still half asleep, safe in her bed, she stretched languidly and opened her eyes to the golden light of early morning streaming through the wide window of her bedroom. A bird sang with plaintive sweetness and she hurried to the window. The solitary warbler teetered on a fragile branch of the lemon tree

and then soared off into the cloudless summer sky. "Au revoir," she called softly and looked down at the garden where her parents sat opposite each other in their wicker chairs, talking softly as they sipped their morning coffee. Their voices drifted through the open window as their spoons clinked musically against their china cups. She watched them for a moment and then turned, stripped off her white nightgown, and stood naked before her full-length mirror. She studied the curves of her body, the fine-boned contour of her face. She lifted her mass of bright hair and allowed it to fall again to her shoulders. Her reflection reassured her. She passed her hands across the tender fullness of her breasts and felt the power of her nascent womanhood. She was no longer the frightened small girl of her nightmare. The dream was banished. The painful past was behind her. She had no need of a celestial haven. She willed herself to triumph over the sadness that too often lingered in the aftermath of her haunted sleep. She turned her head, glanced at herself in profile, practiced a smile, practiced a frown. Am I pretty? she wondered. Am I beautiful? Will Michel find me much changed? There was an impatient knock at her bedroom door; her name was called once and then again. "Mademoiselle Ida! Mademoiselle Ida!" The harsh voice of Katya, the Polish maid, irritable and accusatory, pierced her reverie. "It is very late. Your parents are waiting for you." "Tell them I'll be down in just a few minutes." A grunt and then heavy footfalls retreated in reproach. Ida shrugged. She knew that Katya did not like her, did not like being a maid in a Jewish home. But that was of no importance. Katya, as her mother frequently pointed out, was lucky to be working for the Chagalls. They were kind employers, Katya's wages were paid on time, she ate the same food as the family, and transport to church on Sundays and festivals was provided. She dismissed Katya from her thoughts, splashed her face with cold water, and dressed quickly, choosing a pale blue, pearl-buttoned dress of a gossamer fabric that slipped off easily and would let her swiftly disrobe. Her father had told her that he wanted her to pose for him before she left for the alpine encampment so that he might complete the series of nude studies he had begun months earlier, alternating at whim between watercolor and gouache, charcoal and oil. Her father had used his brush over the years to create a visual journal of her life, chronicling the days of her playful childhood, her moody adolescence, and now her emergent young womanhood. The title of each effort was scrawled in his looping script across the back of the work, a claim of ownership and provenance. There was *Ida on the Swing*, a portrait in motion, painted swiftly as she thrust herself skyward, her chubby legs vigorously pumping, the wind burnishing her cheeks. He had taken more time in painting *Ida at the Window*, capturing her as she stared dreamily through the shimmering glass while the sun sank over their Montchauvet home, setting the waters of the Seine on fire. "What are you thinking about, Idotchka?" her father had asked that day as his brush flew across the canvas, his eyes narrowed in

concentration. She had thought then to share her recurring dream of frantic flight with him so that he might paint that nocturnal fantasy into a tactile reality, but she had remained silent. The dream was her own, not to be co-opted by his brush and palette. She took a perverse pleasure in keeping it secret. She had, after all, so few secrets from her parents. They had laid claim to every aspect of her life, keeping her close from the day of her birth. Sometimes she thought that they monitored the very breaths she took and seized upon her moods, saddened by her sadness, joyful in her joy. She choked on their vigilance; she resented their obsessive insistence that they possess every aspect of her being and then felt a disloyalty that shamed her. She was fortunate to be their daughter, the beloved legatee of their fame and fortune and unconditional love. And she loved them deeply in return. She understood that their concern for her was born of the uncertainty and the suffering they had endured. Of course they were frightened. She accepted their fear, submitted to it. She allowed them to believe that they were the conservators of her life. But her dreams, her beautiful and terrifying nocturnal odysseys, those were her own, as was the secret she had held so close within her heart throughout the year. It thrilled her that she had managed to refrain from telling her parents about Michel. He belonged only to her. Michel. Her Michel. She loved the very sound of his name. She had thought of his fine-featured face, of his soft and thoughtful voice, as the long months of their separation drifted slowly by. Her anticipation of their next meeting had intensified during these last sultry days of summer as she posed for her father, hour after hour, never stirring when he left his easel to more closely examine the dark areolae of her nipples, the tangled rise of the russet curls between her legs. The intensity of that gaze never unnerved her. He was Marc Chagall, and he looked at her neither as man nor father but as an artist in the throes of creation. It was Michel who saw her with a lover's eye, Michel whom she would see in only a few days' time after the long year of separation. She smiled at the thought, threaded a blue ribbon through her hair, and glided, barefoot, through the sunlit house to join her parents at breakfast in the walled garden. The French doors slid open and they turned to her at once, their faces bright with pleasure. "Ah, our Ida." Her father rose and kissed her on both cheeks. She knelt before her mother, felt Bella's soft hands gentle upon her head. This was, as always, their morning greeting, a coming together after a single night as though they had been long parted. It was as though they saw each day of their togetherness as a gift, her presence in their lives, and perhaps their lives themselves, as a miracle. She wondered if they ever dreamed of desperately fleeing danger and despair and flying into freedom. Perhaps their dreams, like her own, were embroidered with dark-threaded memories of the lost land of their birth, the village of their youth. Did the faces of family and friends, long vanished from their lives, drift above them in the darkness of the night, like the celestial flowers of her own

dream? But of course, they would not share such thoughts with her. She was their pampered virginal daughter, to be vigilantly protected against the harshness of life. They had never even sent her to school because they so feared any threat and danger. Other children were cruel. Crowded classrooms bred disease. Broad avenues and narrow streets were haunted by unknown strangers, speeding vehicles. They could not risk exposing their Ida to danger. She was the repository of their past, their hope for the future, the source of their joyous present, her mother's student, her father's model, an enchanting and exuberant daughter. And she in turn worked hard to please them, to amuse them, to evoke the admiration of their friends. "Such a bright child." "Such a creative girl." "So charming." Always they had beamed and collected her accolades as though they themselves had earned them. Her effervescence delighted them; her laughter trilled through their home. Their wonderful Ida, so happy, so beautiful, and yes, perhaps even talented. The drawings of her adolescence were clever, and her paintings showed promise. They allowed her to begin classes at a small neighborhood art school, although Bella stood at the window, awaiting her return home. Always she saw the lines of tension on their faces ease when she entered, her voice lilting as she invited their amusement, telling them of the absurd tramp she had seen, wearing one red shoe, one blue shoe; the ridiculous boy in her class whose beret fell over his eyes; or the *maître* who patrolled the studio singing "Sur le Pont d'Avignon." She had an ear, she had an eye, their Ida, they agreed. She played her role even as she slowly and determinedly forged her way free of the cocoon of their anxiety and laid claim to her life as she wished to live it. She had campaigned for their permission to join in a program geared to the young adult children of Russian Jewish *migrants*, held in a French alpine encampment. It would be their gift to her on her seventeenth birthday. "It will make me so happy, Mamochka, Papochka. Don't you want your Ida to be happy?" She had danced toward them, her arms outstretched, and they had smiled, charmed by her charm. Of course they wanted her to be happy. They were pledged to her happiness. They made inquiries. The encampment was well chaperoned, and the young participants were immersed in Russian language and culture and imbued with love for the life and literature of Mother Russia. Such exposure would bring their Ida even closer to them. She would have a new understanding of their past. And most important of all, she would be happy. They agreed and paid her tuition, purchased her train ticket. Excitedly, during that first journey on her own, she had peered through the windows of her first-class carriage as it sped through the mountains. Shyly, she formed her first tentative friendships with other young Russian Jews. Joyously, she had locked eyes with tall and slender Michel Rapaport who spoke all the languages of her heart. She soared on the wings of her new freedom, wandered barefoot with Michel through the waving alpine grass, sat beside him at the

blazing bonfires as they sang Russian folk songs and lilting chansons. He was a reluctant law student, a devoted son who helped his parents in their small Paris shop, determined to ease their lives by becoming a successful avocat. He and Ida were mutually constrained by familial obligations. They acknowledged that it would be impossible to meet during the ensuing months. But they were not discouraged. They would see each other at the next retreat. They were young. Oceans of time stretched out before them. In the intervening months, he sent her books of poetry and she sent him her drawings. Their intimate, innocent exchanges, packets of hope and love wrapped in brown paper, arrived by post and were easily explained away. "A gift from a friend," Ida told her mother. The months had passed, and Ida counted the days. Soon, she would count the hours and then she would board the train and travel southeast to the alpine hamlet where Michel would await her, his face bright with love. Seated with her parents in the garden on this sunlit morning when the branches of the fruit trees were heavy with golden pears and carmine cherries and the air was thick with the scent of rosemary that clung to the stone walls, she was suffused with contentment. She smiled at her parents, smiled even at sulky Katya who poured her coffee. Her father plucked up a piece of toast, crunched it noisily, and wandered into the garden, stretching out beneath the shade of an ancient olive tree. "Did you sleep well?" her mother asked as she spread Ida's croissant with the raspberry jam she made herself, following the instructions of the cook who had reigned over her parents' kitchen in faraway Vitebsk, the village that had been home to both Marc and Bella. "Very well, Mamochka. And you?" "We were up early. Your father didn't want to miss the first light. He is still working on the wedding studies." "Are they almost finished?" Ida asked. "You look tired but oh so beautiful." Bella wore a wide-sleeved, many-layered dress of sheer white organdy; white lilies crowned her dark hair, and pale blue circlets of kohl shadowed her eyes. The dress was familiar to Ida. Bella wore it often enough, posing as a bride beneath a wedding canopy and then as a corpse in a satin-lined casket. Marc never tired of painting her. Bella and Ida both, he claimed, were ideal models, born to his brush. They laughed at his claim, but there was pride in their melodic laughter. They were willing accomplices to the tyranny of his art, a tyranny that was occasionally arbitrary. Ida remembered complaining to her father that he never asked her to pose in bridal finery, nor in the winding linen of a shroud, her mother's frequent roles. Bella had looked at her warningly and Marc's blue eyes glinted in anger. "Foolish girl," he had said. "Foolish Idotchka. I will not paint you like that because I don't want to lose you. Not to death. Not to marriage. Not yet. Perhaps not ever." "But why do you paint Mamochka like that?" she had persisted mischievously. "Ah, your mamochka, my Bella. I will never lose her. She is mine forever, in life and in death." Bella had turned pale then, as though frightened by the fierceness of his words. Ida took note of that

familiar pallor beneath her mother's carefully rouged cheeks. It was, she knew, a mark of her fatigue, a precursor of the terrible headaches that too often assaulted her. "I thought Papa planned to paint me this morning," she said. "That would have given you a chance to rest." "He will paint you now," Bella assured her. "He is full of ideas today." She smiled with subdued pride at the precocity of the elfin-faced artist with whom she had fallen in love when she was a teenager, no older than Ida. Ida poured herself another cup of coffee as Marc sprang to his feet, strode across the garden, cut two sunflowers free of their long stalks, and placed a canvas on his easel. His renewed energy did not surprise her. Her father was a man who was refreshed by the briefest of naps, endlessly propelled by an explosion of fantastic visions. He had no time to lose, no time to waste. Reality and illusion collided, and the brilliance of his imagination impelled him to action. "Are you ready, Ida?" he asked. "Of course." Swiftly she glided into the garden, stood beneath the lemon tree, slipped out of her dress, and tossed it onto the grass. He held the sunflowers out to her. "Stretch out beneath the tree. Just so. The flowers between your breasts. Comme *Ça*. One leg over the other. Yes. Like that. Just like that." His hands were deft as he arranged and rearranged her limbs, removed the ribbon from her hair, and draped her long, copper-colored hair over her shoulders. She remained silent as he squeezed the tubes of oil onto his palette, mingling blues and greens, vermilion and acid yellow, and then lifted his fine-haired sable brush and began to paint. Bella draped Ida's dress carefully over a chair as Katya beckoned to her. She hurried into the house but turned to look at her husband and her daughter, as though to memorize this sunlit moment of their togetherness. Ida lay still as her father worked steadily, his avian features relaxed, a smile playing at his lips. It was safe to talk to him now, to ask him questions, to coax forth his laughter, and to tease out tales of his youth. "What will you work on when I am away?" she asked. "I think I will return to painting scenes of my village. My Vitebsk. Do you remember Vitebsk, Ida?" She laughed. "Papochka, be serious. I was only four years old when we left Vitebsk. How could I remember?" In her mind, Vitebsk was the fairy landscape of his paintings where he and her mother, poor boy and rich girl, had met, walked across the bridge that spanned the Western Dvina River, and fallen in love staring down at their own reflections. Vitebsk was a mystical hamlet where everyone, even the animals, spoke a Yiddish threaded with humor and sweetness. It was Russia, she remembered in all its actuality, the Russia they had fled when she was six years old, a country of frightening enormity, grim and cold. That was the haunting dreamscape of her troubled sleep in which her parents' hands gripped her own. She would not tell her father that she had vague and not so vague memories of their harrowing journey from Vitebsk to Moscow, where they slept on the hard, cold floor of the Moscow Jewish Theater. There he had created the sets for a production of the stories of Sholem Aleichem as her mother

sewed the costumes and he painted the heavy fabrics as though they were canvases. She would not share her memory of their respite in the Jewish orphanage at Malakhovka where Marc taught art and Bella wept and she herself feared that she might one day share the fate of the pale, parentless children with whom she shared toys crafted of twigs and stones. How cold she had been and how hungry. She shivered at the recollection, knowing she had not imagined that cold, that hunger, nor had she imagined the heat of her mother's tears when she pressed her face to Ida's as they lay together in the narrow bed allotted to the three of them. She could still taste the Comice pears plucked from a wild tree that briefly sated her and then caused her to vomit. She had locked those frightening memories away, but they escaped as she slept and became that recurrent dream, of triumphant escape, an airborne journey into the golden warmth that drifted across her naked body as her father's brush sailed so effortlessly across the canvas. "Soon no one will remember Vitebsk," he said sadly. "That is why I must paint it. My village. My home." Ida closed her eyes and thought of her father's paintings of his vanished world. She listened as he spoke wistfully of the hamlet of his childhood, of his family, of his brother David, killed in the Crimea, of his beautiful sisters whose fates were unknown, of the sheltered graveyard where his parents were buried. "Vitebsk." He intoned the name of the village, whispered it as in prayer. She thought it strange that although he sketched the small synagogue where he had celebrated his bar mitzvah and painted bearded rabbis wrapped in prayer shawls and wearing phylacteries, he never went to synagogue, not even on the anniversaries of his parents' deaths. She knew that he considered Jewish holidays to be an annoyance, although he reluctantly accompanied Bella and Ida to Passover seders at the home of Yaakov Rosenfeld, Bella's brother, their only family in Paris. Although her father spoke affectionately of his sisters, he made no effort to discover their whereabouts. Such inconsistency puzzled her, but she dared not speak of it. Vitebsk and his childhood were the sacred territory of his past, the landscape of his imagination. But there was no tenderness in his graphic re-creation of that landscape. Ida perceived violence and chaos in his phantasmagoric canvases on which barn animals leapt over rooftops, a green violinist perched precariously on a parapet, a graceful church spire towered over the tiny crouched homes of the Jews. His depiction of a milkmaid who pressed the udder of a cow improbably positioned in the head of a large-eyed goat frightened her although she knew that such canvases were coveted by the sophisticated collectors who haunted Parisian art galleries, that art critics analyzed them in turgid essays tracing their symbolism. She much preferred his paintings of her mother, especially the one he had painted when he and Bella were newly engaged, a whimsical rendering of himself as a lover, flying toward his beloved across a room, his arms laden with a gift of flowers. Thinking of that painting now, she smiled and imagined Michel

flying toward her, a bouquet of edelweiss in his hands. She sighed. The sun was hot and she longed to shift position. She did not want to hear about Vitebsk or listen yet again to stories of the grandparents she would never know, the aunts, uncles, and cousins she would never meet. She moved ever so slightly and one of the sunflowers slipped from the valley between her breasts onto the grass. She stretched her arm out to retrieve it. Marc shook his head warningly and waved his brush as though it was a baton and he a conductor summoning the crescendo that would conclude his visual symphony. Until then, all movement was forbidden to her. He paused at last. "Good, my Ida. It is finished. Come look at what we have accomplished." She stood, stretched, and slipped into her dress. Still buttoning those tiny pearl buttons that she imagined Michel unfastening oh so slowly in a few days' time, she approached the easel and smiled appreciatively. He had captured the soft golden tones of her sun-burnished skin, almost matching them to the hue of the fallen wide-petaled flower. He had painted her face in repose, her eyes closed, copper-colored lashes brushing her cheeks. "But I wasn't sleeping," she protested. "No. But you were dreaming." She did not ask how he had known that but watched as he removed the canvas from the easel, holding it carefully so that the fresh, glistening oil paint would not smear. Without looking back, his mind already racing toward his next project, he carried it into the shed that served as studio and storage area. She knew that within its dimness, he would prepare a fresh canvas while he listened to the news on his small radio. He had in recent months become obsessed with broadcasts from Germany, the rantings of Adolf Hitler. "A dangerous man," he muttered, although all their friends asserted that the mustachioed maniac would surely be thrust from power within weeks. "Maniacs have great endurance," he insisted. "Particularly evil homicidal maniacs." He gave voice, Ida knew, to his instinctive pessimism. Always he anticipated encroaching darkness. Threatening clouds hovered over even his brightest landscapes. She sighed, relieved that she was free to study the leather-bound copy of Eugene Onegin that Michel had sent her. He had urged her to memorize at least four of Pushkin's quatrains. So far she had managed only one, but she was sure that Michel would forgive her. She would smile and he would forgive her anything. As would her father. As would her mother. Ida had great confidence in the power of her smile. She lifted her arms skyward and felt a surge of happiness. It was glorious to be her parents' daughter, glorious to be in the country as summer swept its way across field and meadow, gilding lavender and sunflowers, silvering the leaves of olive trees and the fronds of stately palms. It was glorious to know that as the days grew shorter, she and Michel would walk again through mountain glades hand in hand, at a distance from their too vigilant parents. They had spoken of their dearly beloved and overly concerned mothers and fathers, haunted émigrés, enmeshed in their memories of the land

they had fled, forever polishing their battered samovars, speaking Russian softly, studying sepia-tinted photos of relatives they would never see again. They were history's orphans, her parents and Michel's. "My poor mother, my poor father," Michel had murmured, lifting her hand to his lips as they lay sprawled across the grass, her head resting on his chest. "And my poor mother. My poor father." She echoed his words, matching sorrow for sorrow, thinking of her mother who wept as she filled copy book after copy book with graceful Yiddish script that recounted the vanished days of her pampered childhood, the byways of her beloved village. And of course there was her father, his brush as heavy with paint as his heart was heavy with sorrow. He raced after the past in dizzying strokes and wild bursts of color. She trembled as she thought of his stark etching of his father's grave, the grave that he would never see. Tears had streaked her cheeks and moistened Michel's shirt. He had kissed her fingers one by one. They were children of exile both, offering each other the comfort of tenderness. Suffused with those memories, she glanced toward the wild garden and saw her mother kneeling beside a bed of lavender, a basket of cherries on the grass beside her. Bella had changed into the loose cotton robe that Marc had bought for her in the Arab marketplace of Jerusalem. He had chosen it for the subtlety of its color, a melding of pale blues and greens achieved by skillful dying. Ida remembered how he had asked the Arab vendor for the secrets of his formula and the toothless merchant had shaken his head. He would no more share the secrets of his craft than Marc would share the mystery of his palette. Bella stood and waved to Ida. The robe exposed her slender body, her small firm breasts, her narrow hips. Her mother's fragility of form always startled Ida. When she was younger, she had often pondered the mystery of delicate Bella giving birth to a daughter as lusty and chubby as Ida, a naïveté that caused her to smile. "Do you want help, Maman?" she called, setting aside the volume of Pushkin. She wandered through the tall grass toward her mother, who was adding clumps of the star-shaped azure flowers to her basket of cherries. "You've picked so much lavender," she said reprovingly. "Not that much. I need it for the fresh sachets I am making for your trunk. The scent will remind you of us." Bella added yet another floral cluster, tucking it beneath the long-stemmed, ruby-colored fruit. "Do you think I could so easily forget you?" Ida asked playfully, lifting the basket and inhaling the fragrance of the blossoms. She popped a cherry into her mouth and spat the pit onto the grass. "When you unpack, scatter the sachets in your drawers and I'll tie strings around some of them so that you can hang them in your wardrobe. And of course, I'll make salts for your bath. Just toss them in when the water grows warm," Bella advised. "Mamochka, I'm not a child," Ida protested, struggling to overcome her irritation. She would indulge her mother. She would soon be on her own, remote from her parents' suffocating anxiety, their protective instructions. "I'm

eighteen years old," she continued. "I know how to unpack and guess what-I even know how to prepare my bath." "All right. You're eighteen. Not a great age, Idotchka." "When you were eighteen, you were already engaged to Papochka," Ida retorted. Bella nodded. "Yes. But I understood the world. I had studied drama in Moscow. I knew how to take care of myself, how to live among strangers, how to prepare my own food and manage my own money. Your life has been very different." "Because you made it different," Ida countered. The lightness of her tone masked her latent bitterness. She remembered the days she had stood alone at the window of their Paris apartment and watched girls her age walking home from school in their uniforms, their arms linked, their heads bent close as they exchanged secrets and laughter. She had no school mates. She was taught by her mother or by the sad-eyed tutors who sat beside her at the dining room table. "We tried to do what was best." Bella's voice was lightly tinged with regret. "You are so precious to us. Ah, Ida, we had seen so much danger, so much suffering. We wanted to protect you. That is what we still want." "I understand that. But now you must let me grow into my own life." She spoke soothingly, but her cheeks were flushed. "I know." Bella smiled thinly. "After all, you are eighteen years old." Together they walked back to the veranda where Katya had placed tall glasses of freshly squeezed lemonade on the wrought iron table. They sat opposite each other, Bella taking tiny sips, Ida draining her glass and tilting it so that the last granules of sugar slid across her tongue. "You're so like your father. Sweets and more sweets. The first time he came to my parents' home, he ate every cake on the table and sucked three lumps of sugar." Bella laughed at the memory, but almost at once, her expression changed. "Of course that was because there were never any sweets in his own house. They were so poor, his family, always struggling. There was barely enough food on the table. Oh yes, herring. Always herring because your grandfather Chagall worked for the herring merchant." She wrinkled her nose, as though she remembered stink of the herring soured the air of their beautiful garden. She reached for another cherry and lifted the sunflower the maid had placed on the table. "Do you know what I noticed today, Idotchka?" she asked as she plucked one petal after another. "I saw that sunflowers turn their faces away from the sun when they reach full bloom. Isn't that curious? I would have thought they would derive their strength from the sun and seek out its warmth." Ida smiled. "But I am not turning my face away from you, Mamochka," she said softly. "I am just trying to grow up, to become my own person." "You will. And all too soon. Life will see to that," Bella replied. "Come. Let us see how Katya is managing with the lunch." As they left the garden, Marc Chagall emerged from his studio and stared after his wife and daughter, their colorful skirts swinging about their legs. He saw them as graceful sylphs, gliding through rays of sunlight toward the wide-windowed house.

The author has made a moving and surprisingly engaging story of a small family; Marc Chagall, his wife, Bella, and their daughter, Ida. It's surprising that it's so engaging because none of the three is a hugely sympathetic character. It's possible to be a very great artist without being a narcissist, but narcissism is his single most dominant trait, followed by dependence upon other people to take care of him and self-pity. Bella is more sympathetic but finally awfully detached from everything but her conviction that she is married to a great artist; she seems to have no interests, no real friends, and no occupation. Ida, once she realizes the limits to her parents' love, devotes herself to removing every burden from her parents, making it possible for her mother to seclude herself from the world and for her father to paint and to wonder at his splendid talent, which doesn't seem quite so splendid to me as it does to him. Goldreich raises a number of interesting issues but lets readers make their own minds up about them. Is it just fine for an adult daughter with rather large breasts to pose in the nude for her father regularly? Is it right for people to sacrifice their own happiness in order to accommodate an artist? Is the moral center of the novel Ida's first, neglected husband, and if not, who is? It's a shame that the book can't be fully illustrated so that readers can look at Marc's works as Goldreich describes their creation and consider their own reactions to it. I came away feeling that I understood Marc Chagall's work much better, which is a fine accomplishment for a novelist writing biofiction. I also came away feeling very glad I wasn't caught up in the Chagall family circle.

The family of the famous artist, Marc Chagall, is examined in this semi-fictional biography. After a pogrom, Marc Chagall flees Russia, with his family, to Paris, the nightmares of which haunt his young daughter, Ida, for years. The book focuses primarily on Ida as an adult, and of the entangled, and at times, inappropriate and bizarre relationships she shared with her parents, particularly, her father. The author uses a mix of historical as well as fiction characters. The storyline drags at times, bogged down in tedious detail and repetition.

I loved *The Bridal Chair*. This was a great story based on real events. It was an interesting look at the artist Marc Chagall and his family. It was also an interesting look at WWII in France and the U.S, the world of art during 30's through the 60's, and culture during that time period. It was an amazing look at the complicated relationship between an overbearing father and a desire for a daughter to please him. This was a very worthy read.

An insightful galloping read from a moment of joyful innocence to despairing survival and final fulfillment Ida Chagall is the narrative vehicle of this interwoven story of Russian and European Jews in the art of her father Marc Chagall. Except for the weak, if at all necessary love scenes the author felt she must embellish, the writing is dripping with color, texture, ego and blind oppression of a great painter.

The story was captivating from the first page. It took you through decades of the life of Marc Chagall and his family. It was interesting and kept you eager to turn to the next page! Wonderful read by a wonderful author!!

This is one of the best books I have read in a long time. I think all of the historic facts were intertwined into a captivating, emotional and believable story about a famous man and his family. The personality of Chagall is depicted and honest fulfilling the reader's understanding about who he was and how he could create such stimulating beauty. We purchased a Chagall print on a cruise recently. It was "The Bridal Chair" so now this print means even more to me because I know its origin. Well written by the author...I like her style very much. Thank you.

Loved this book, learned about Marc Chagall and his family, as well as, his devotion to the arts along with his self centered personality. Although a great artist, he was so self absorbed, there really was no room in his life for anyone or anything that did not meet his personal needs. The story unfolds very gradually is historically correct, even if the personal conversations are fabricated

Thoroughly mesmerising book , historically accurate, on the Chagall family. From Russia to Paris, to the States and back, escaping the death camps and arriving in New York as Marc Chagalls artwork took him to greater and greater heights. A loving, yet enmeshed family, Ida , Marc and Bellas only very beautiful daughter, taking a major role in the families decisions and representing Chagalls art internationally. A book woven with sadness, great love, disappointments and so much more! And the bond of family and memories!

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