



The Sixth

Avery Hays

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Welcome to the gaslit, cobblestoned streets of Paris, 1910.

Florbela Sarmentos, 21, knows what she wants: art, romance, and to free her father from the prison of Portugal's despotic King Manuel II. Born in Lisbon, educated in London and at a painting academy in Cherbourg, France, the cosmopolitan Florbela moves to Paris and takes up residence in the wildly bohemian enclave of La Ruche, there to pursue a creative life.

Some of the yet-to-be-discovered artists living in her building are Diego Rivera, Amadeo Modigliani and Marc Chagall. By day she paints, and by night she attends parties with the residents of La Ruche, who introduce her to collectors and creative spirits in Paris's fabled Sixth Arrondissement. Along the way, Florbela attracts several hot-headed admirers, two of whom become so inflamed with jealousy that they become each other's deadly enemies.

But Florbela's fledgling artistic and social life is soon eclipsed, when she can no longer escape the political shadow of her father, a Portuguese writer imprisoned in Lisbon for criticizing the corrupt monarchy.

Florbela tries to find news of her father through Portuguese political exiles and sympathizers in Paris — with alarming results. When she contacts a friend of her father, Professor Almeida, he turns up dead, killed by an assassin from the pro-monarchist society Ordo Crucis Incendio — the Order of the Burning Cross. Professor Almeida's dying words lead Florbela to a secret, encrypted painting that might save her father and overthrow the king. Now, Florbela is the assassin's next target.

With the help of Armand, a dashing French rebel, Florbela fights to bring the secret painting to the Portuguese resistance fighters. It just might save her country... and her life.

The Sixth Details

Date : Published October 31st 2013 by Diadema Press (first published October 28th 2013)

ISBN : 9780985418243

Author : Avery Hays

Format : Hardcover 383 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, France, Romance, Historical Romance, Fiction, Literature, 20th Century

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From Reader Review The Sixth for online ebook

Ionia says

3.5 stars for this enthralling novel. If you are looking for a book that has a wonderfully described setting, Avery Hays has written the book for you. This book is full of vibrant description that makes you want feel as though you are living every footstep of the character's journey.

This is a heavily atmospheric novel where the main character becomes someone that you feel as if you know personally. I enjoyed all of the mysterious elements of this book.

There were times when I felt the pace could have been a little faster, but it was still enjoyable and I would definitely recommend it to other readers. The historical research was immaculate.

This review is based on a digital ARC from the publisher and provided by Netgalley.

Diane says

The Sixth by Avery Hays

Challenges read for: Goodreads, Historical Fiction, Immigrant Stories, Ebook, Women Authors

Book cover: Very beautiful--a little Audrey Hepburn, a little Leslie Caron

I enjoyed this book quite a lot, not only for its historical references to Portugal's turbulent history of the time, but also for the description of what life may have been like in Paris in 1910 surrounded by such a colorful, artistic set of characters!

After completing her artistic training in Cherbourg, young Florabela arrives in Paris determined to begin her painting career. She acquires a roommate, meets some of the most infamous painters of that time, and falls into a pattern of painting by day and partying with her friends at night. All of this, however, does not dull the pain of knowing her father lies in a prison cell in Lisbon. His incarceration finally reaches into Florabela's own life, threatening her quiet, bohemian existence.

A mysterious painting, two suitors (well, actually 3), and a dangerous journey straight into Portugal add a wonderful dimension to this story. A little history, a little romance, a little art, and a little bit of Paris make this Avery Hays novel absolutely delicious!

Julian Froment says

This book was wonderful. I found it fascinating. I would definitely describe it as a page turner, keeping me fully engaged, wanting more, right to the last page.

I loved the beautifully presented accounts of Paris life at the turn of the twentieth century. I was enthralled by the wonderfully descriptive passages that revealed the creative and artistic lives of characters that were to

eventually become household names, and of the region known as the sixth and its surrounding environs. My personal knowledge of the art world is severely limited piqued my interest in gaining a greater familiarity with these people and their world.

The main character Florbela Sarmentos, whose father was a revolutionary imprisoned in Portugal, was also a fledgling artist, struggling to find her place in the art world. It was a story of intrigue, romance and mystery.

The main premise behind the story was that of the revolution in Portugal, although this often seemed to take a back seat to her romantic liaisons with three different suitors. The discovery of a secret coded message that could aid the revolution and gain freedom for her father resulted in the involvement of the freemasons in aiding in the translation of the code and ultimately in uniting two of her previously antagonistic suitors.

The action ranged from Paris to Portugal, with Florbela and Armand, the third suitor and her self-appointed protector, pursued doggedly by the legendary assassin Onca do Papa. Finally finding safety amongst the revolutionaries the story comes to a satisfactory conclusion, tying together the loose ends very neatly.

I really enjoyed this book and would certainly recommend it to others, especially if you want a story with romance, intrigue and mystery. The use of historical characters from the art world, not limited just to the artists, but also their benefactors, meant that I was able to learn a lot from this book, in addition to the sheer pleasure obtained from the story. Definitely a book I would recommend to others.

This review is based on a digital ARC provided by Netgalley and the publisher.

Bobby T says

I'd actually give this a 4.5 stars if I could.

I absolutely loved this book. I studied art history in college and felt that Hays really brought the characters to life--much more so than I ever remember in art class. Florbela was a great protagonist: she is feisty, independent and goes through realistic struggle as she tentatively sets out on her own as an artist. Her fascinating friends and charming romances set the backdrop for what turns out to be a serious adventure. I also found the author website which had some great stuff including an afterword that explains what happens to all the major characters in the novel. My only suggestion would be to include this in the book.

Tony Parsons says

Monsieur Castell, Irene, Alfred Boucher, Angelina, Amedeo Modigliani, Diego Rivera, Robert Delaunay, Leo & Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Professor Bierhoff, Armand Jacques Marie Fontaine, Paulo, Marc Chagall, Mr. Grimm, Maurice & Josephine Fontaine Moishe Shagalov, Sonia Delaunay, Fernand leger, Brian, Pope Clement XI, King Joao V, Barbade, Wilhelm Kostrowicki, Guillaume Appollinaire,

Set in 1910, Florbela Sarmentos (Lisbon, Cherbourg, artist, 21, Leaozinha) led a somewhat sheltered life but enjoys art & is quite the romantic. Her goal is to free her father from a prison in Portugal ruled by the tyrant King Manuel II. Her father Hermes de Sarmentos had criticized the corrupt leader.

Armand (Sabot) & Paulo Quieroz (Caramba) members of a group called Bande Liberte du Monde (Les

Sourer Trempes, Soggy Mice) brought Florbela a letter from her father. After reading it she is to burn it, which she does.

Florbela moves to Paris. At this time several renowned artist lived in her building La Ruche (La Sixieme Arrondissement). She is quite the party girl, & meets 2 fellows who are extremely jealous of each other, & they become bitter enemies.

As Florbela takes off on a mission to free her father she contacts a friend of his Professor Almeida. He of course turns up dead. He was assassinated by a member of the Order of the Burning Cross (Ordo Cruces Incendio). As he was dying he revealed to the assassin about a secret encrypted painting that could save her father's life. Florbela might be on someone's hit list also. Armand a French rebel offers to help her interpret the secret painting. It could solve a lot of problems.

What will Florbela uncover about the Order of the Burning Cross (Ordo Cruces Incendio)?
What will Florbela uncover find out about the secret painting? Will she fall in love?

A very awesome book cover (old school), great font & writing style. A very well written kind of historical cloak & dagger fact filled romantic, mystery book. It was very easy to read/follow from start/finish & never a dull moment. No grammar errors, repetitive or out of line sequence sentences. Lots of exciting scenarios, with several twists/turns & a great set of unique characters to keep track of. This could also make great early era foreign movie, or mini TV series. There is no doubt in my mind this is a very easy rating of 5 stars.

Thank you for the free Autographed book
Tony Parsons MSW (Washburn)

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Set in 1910 Paris, *The Sixth* is a romantic adventure historical novel, in the vein of Donna Russo Morin or Kate Mosse (or perhaps Dan Brown or Steve Berry, without the contemporary parts), featuring artwork encoded with ciphers, Freemasons, expats, romantic entanglements, attempted murders, and political intrigue.

Fresh from her classical arts training in England, twenty-one-year old Florbela Sarmentos arrives in Paris with the address of an artists boarding house. Her father, a famed Portuguese writer, is a political prisoner at the hands of Portugal's infamous King Manuel II, and immediately upon her arrival at La Ruche, she is thrown into chaos, drama, and danger. Her new neighbors include artists Diego Rivera, Angelina Beloff, Amadeo Modigliani, and exiled politico Vladimir Lenin; her new roommate is a waifish and odd teenaged sculptor. Waiting for her are two revolutionaries acting as messengers for Florbela's father, with a message from him: an assassin is out for her, and she must seek out a British Freemason to help her, and thus, him.

While there's a sense of everything-but-the-kitchen-sink in terms of plot at the start, the story settles down from breakneck to simply racing, populated with a wild cast of characters familiar to those who enjoy modern art and narrated by a loyal, wide-eyed young woman.

The opening sentence -- *On the fifth of April in the spring of my twenty-first year, all the world was turning nervous eyes toward my native Portugal, gazing aghast as she teetered giddily between the abyss of anarchy on the one hand, and that of totalitarianism on the other.* -- gives a taste of Hays' writing style which was reminiscent to me of some Victorian-ish literature: a little ornate, a little wordy, very melodramatic. Our

narrator Florbela is remarkably innocent, protected by guardians most of her life, and her account of the events are touched with wonder, determination, and optimism.

There were moments when I found the book veered a little into Mary Sue territory, as Florbela is credited with styling Russian painter Moïse Shagalov as Marc Chagall while painter Fernand Léger is among her impassioned, devoted suitors. Still, I was charmed by her, and the narrative style felt 'true' to Florbela's character. She, thankfully, doesn't go from innocent to vamp in a matter of chapters, but remains a composed young woman plunged into a froth of decadence and danger.

On her website, Hays has a letter written by Florbela from the 1960s that acts as a kind of Afterword, which I enjoyed, but the novel doesn't lack anything by its lack of inclusion, and readers are left with a nice, satisfying (if not dramatic) conclusion.

Lori says

Very well written!! I just love it when I begin reading a story and the author has so effectively communicated the setting that the visualization plays effortlessly in your mind's eye. Excellent opening, interesting characters and good supporting characters that add width and depth to the story.

I really liked the book. The only reason I didn't give it five stars is because I reserve that extra star for stories that leave a lingering mark, a concept that will stay with me long after the story is over or a character that personally inspires me. This story did not provide that for me, however, I would definitely recommend it to my friends. It was a great read!!

Brenda Ayala says

(I received this from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.)

There were parts of this that I absolutely loved, and parts that I disliked. Luckily for me the good outweighed the bad by a wide enough margin I felt no inclination to give this lower than a 4 star rating, although I'll admit there were times I considered 3 stars.

The descriptions are magnificent. This was a time period I haven't read too much about in a novel, so for that alone I thoroughly enjoyed this. Florbela's walks through the blocks of Paris, despite having little action, were pleasant and interesting because of the descriptions. The descriptions of the couriers and the cab stations were something I'd never considered before, and served to enlighten me about a time period I'm vague about.

I absolutely loved all of the historical characters. Diego Rivera and Irene Curie were particularly my favorites. I did a report on Marie Curie back in third grade, and since then I've held a loyalty to her. The first woman to win the Nobel Prize! And while I know almost nothing about her daughter (my report was on her

research, not her family) I still had a special delight in reading her parts of the story. Diego, on the other hand, I have no nostalgic connections to. I just really love his work and loved that his character was so robust and rambunctious. I know only a little about art--what I've learned meandering through museums and what I remember from elementary school--but I really admired how well-integrated all of the artists were into the plot.

The overarching plot dealing with the Portuguese revolution was a bit distant, though. For a good majority of the book it took a backseat to Florbela's dates with three different men and trying to keep Irene away from Pablo Picasso. It eventually tied together with some bits of this, but I found myself forgetting Florbela's father several times while reading simply because his story wasn't in the forefront. Luckily for me I found the secondary plot interesting enough that I didn't feel as if I was being drawn wayward.

I also enjoyed the Masonic lodge being present. I know a bit of their history, so again I had a bit of satisfaction reading about an organization I knew something about already. I love learning new things and this book helped me to develop the knowledge I already has as well as bringing something new to the table for me.

Overall it was a very beautifully rendered piece of work. The pace slowed a bit in the middle and drew away from the overall plot a little too much for my taste, but I still enjoyed reading about Florbela's experiences in Paris.

Gabriella Gricius says

Why Read: Besides the fact I'm already interested in books that center around Paris, whether it be the early or late past, NetGalley seemed to have a great sense that it was a book I would enjoy. They were not wrong.

Review: I expected to enjoy the book, *The Sixth*, and whether it was my misplaced expectations or just the book – I really did love it. Florbela is a great main character that has a streak of independence tamed by her acceptance of the bigger forces at play. The plot is exciting, to the point where I was up until 1am reading last night!

Whether it be the main character or Armand, the guitar-playing protector, each person has their own ideas, their own backstory, and their own motivations. It's similar to political thrillers that cycle through today's world, but rather than spy agencies attempting something – it's conspirators that identify with different groups, like the Freemasons. Although the Irene line was a bit strange and didn't add much to the story, nevertheless – I enjoyed her as a character.

Looking at the plot, I was certainly originally disappointed at the big reveal of the painting, but once they got around to decrypting and explaining it – I felt like an absolute idiot for doubting the book. Whether Florbela be running through the countryside with Armand or flirting with the artistic community of the Sixth, the sense of barely hidden danger is palpable.

Some points I particularly loved were this book's use of artistic characters from history within the plot, like Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall, and how there was really no right answer to what Florbela should do. She could have chosen any number of options, and while I figure her way was best – certainly it was not the only way. The book carries a secret chapter at the end of the book, and if you enjoy romance - you'll enjoy it.

So yes. If you can't tell already, I massively enjoyed this book. It's written in a manner that's suitable for almost anyone, and with characters that appeal to the sensibilities and not-so-sensible tendencies in us all. A

book for my historical fiction love shelf, I recommend it highly!

Rating: 4.7/5 Stars

April says

The Sixth was a delightful mix of history and mystery that had me on the edge of my seat at times. The plot was clever, the protagonist was likable, and the backdrop very interesting for someone like me, who is interested in art and art history. I found it quite fascinating to see the way that Florbela interacted with the unestablished painters of the time, like Diego Riviera and Marc Chagall. Those names are almost household names now -- or close to it, I should think -- but the way that Hays describes them makes them seem like people that would never become famous, but she does so in a charming way. They are also quite likable, but not the "type of people" one would assume become famous. (Then again, I am reminded of what my 10th grade English teacher used to tell us about the word "assume"... "it makes an *ass* out of *u* and *me*." XD)

Although it took me awhile to get around to reading The Sixth due to school and other life stuff getting in the way, I'm glad that I did read it, and I highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys a relatively light/easy read about espionage and secrets as well as art and art history.

Amanda says

Cross-posted to <http://off-the-book.org>.

In The Sixth, a young Portuguese woman, Florbela Sarmentos, moves to the Sixth Arrondissement turn-of-the-century Paris to pursue her dream of becoming a painter. However, she isn't just an aspiring artist - she is in political exile from her native country, where her father is held prisoner. This book is both a deftly written political thriller and historical romance.

The "revolutionary" aspect of the storyline, with Florbela's mission of saving her father from his wrongful imprisonment, is thoroughly exciting. After contacting her father's friend, Professor Almeida, he is assassinated by the Ordo Crucis Incendio, or the Order of the Burning Cross. Florbela makes the daring decision not to go into hiding. When an encrypted painting is found with alarming and important information, she fights to protect it and bring it to the Portuguese resistance. Meanwhile, Florbela also ventures into the famous circle of artists living in La Ruche. Some of the famous residents include Modigliani, Rivera, and Chagall - who somehow all manage to be some of Florbela's closest friends. A critique would be that it seems a bit of a stretch - although they were truly all friends with each other.

Florbela is a gutsy, if naive and overconfident character. That characterization is refreshing and realistic, and her persistence to avoid living in fear is especially admirable. There are plenty of twists that keep the reader on their toes.

One thing that is rather frustrating in recent fiction is the consistent love triangle - was it really necessary for Florbela to be longed for by both Armand, a "dashing French rebel" and a handsome socialite. Another criticism would be the disjointed nature of some of the novel; in some chapters, Florbela thought only of her art and her roommate, and then it would rapidly switch over to the assassin, her father, and the risk to her life.

Overall, however, it was a well-written, energetically paced storyline that both history and art buffs will find highly enjoyable. Four stars.

Rowena Holloway says

Anyone looking to escape into Paris's past can't go wrong with *The Sixth*, the new offering from Avery Hays (the collaboration of A. M. D. Hays and W. S. T. Hays). The title refers to a district on the bohemian Left Bank which in 1910 housed many of modern art's collectors and creative spirits.

Displaced from her native Portugal, her beloved father imprisoned by a despotic King, Florbela Sarmentos arrives in Paris ready to embark on her artistic career. But 1910 is a turbulent year and soon Florbela must confront more than the rise of modern art, ardent suitors and the absinthe-fuelled parties of this new world. She is pulled into a web of intrigue that may help free her homeland from tyranny – if she can stay alive long enough to do what she must.

Told in a memoirist style by the protagonist, Florbela's life in La Ruche – the actual abode of Modigliani, Rivera and Chevall (to name a few) – provides insight into the modern art movement. These secondary characters are well-fleshed and Hays blends them effortlessly into Florbela's story; there are some wonderfully realised scenes as Florbela is drawn into the licentious world of these brilliant free spirits. The mystery surrounding Florbela's roommate offers plenty of intrigue until the danger ramps up with the murder of a close friend and confidante of her father's. Some of the pace is lost as the story stays true to a realistic timeline, and there are moments where the greater mystery becomes obscured by Florbela's concerns with her art, her suitors and her enigmatic roommate. This is natural enough from the point of view of the narrator – a twenty-one year-old who has lived a largely sheltered life.

The Sixth enthralls from the very first page. Florbela is a strong-willed and decisive heroine and the inclusion of real and important figures from the art world add delight to a beautifully written story.

Calamus says

It's 1910 Paris. Florbela Sarmentos has moved to the City of Lights to become a painter. Living in the height of bohemia, she befriends the most elite of Parisian artists. However, becoming an artist is not her only goal. Shortly after arriving in Paris, she receives a letter from her father, who is a very famous political prisoner held captive in Portugal under the despot rule of King Manuel II. The letter provides her with a path toward freeing her father, but she must go through many dangers on the way.

I adored Florbela. Being 21, she is quite naturally very self-involved; however, she is so sweet and brave that you cannot help but love her. While freeing her father is her main focus, you do meet the multiple secondary characters and learn their stories. In her short time in Paris, she manages to make three men fall in love with her. Her roommate, Irene, is surrounded by a mystery of her own, and the artistic night life is very prominent. While there are a lot of things going on, the subplots are seamlessly intertwined and are easy to follow.

I truly enjoyed reading this book. Avery Hays provides just enough detail so that I felt like I was there, but not so much that I'm bogged down with details and historical facts. In fact, this book piqued my curiosity so much that I've already found some books to alleviate it. I want to know more about the history of Portugal

and early 20th century life in Paris. I want to visit Paris and Lisbon. I want to go back in time to 1910 and stay in Florbela's building and meet all the other artists. This book has left a lasting impression.

Erin Pallott says

I won this book in a FirstReads giveaway. I'm so glad I got the chance to read this and it was really worth my time.

This is my favourite way to learn about different time periods and countries. I don't need hard facts to get clear images in my head. I love it when creativity meets history.

Throughout this whole novel I was indulged with vivid description. I loved the really clear language and style. It is told from the memories of Florbela Sarmentos and it was told in the same way she actually speaks so it is like I was being told her account of events from her own mouth. This means nothing could be irrelevant. If I didn't feel as close to her I would have found quite a few of the chapters pointless and empty. However, in the end I didn't feel this after thinking about the writing style more closely.

I found a number of characters intriguing. Many were simply charming to read about. There was the main plot line which was to do with Portugal's history during the reign of King Manuel II. However there were also several side plots which were her relationships with the new people she met. There was no short amount of friendship and romance to keep me interested.

I feel that I should mention that at points I was confused as to where this plot was going (and not in a page turner away). However, in this case, I was very happy to be led blindly by Avery Hays writing in this first novel. I am now looking forward to reading more historical fiction and I will also be looking for the next novel by this author.

(I apologise for this really poorly worded review. I had problems with trying to get across what I wanted to say.)

Lauralee says

Set in Paris in 1910, Florbela is the daughter of a Portuguese rebel, and decides to have a life in exile as an artist in Paris with her sculptor roommate, Irene. There she meets Diego Rivera, his first wife Angelina, and Amedeo Modigliani. She is also next door neighbors with Marc Chagall, whom she calls by his real name Moishe. However, her blissful life is turned upside down when she stumbles upon a dying man, who is a rebel for a Portuguese rebel cause, and gives her a painting that has a crypted message. She makes an alliance with the Freemasons, and a secret organization of rebels. She finds out that the King of Portugal has sent an assassin to kill her and to get her painting. Florbela reluctantly realizes that she must make a choice to either to live her life in Paris as an artist or to aid the rebellious cause to overthrow the king and save her father.

Most of the story is about the daily life of the painters. Florbela spends most of the novel painting and going to parties. It shows how the painters get discovered by going to parties of great benefactors, who if they like a work, they will buy it and promote it. The book focuses a great deal on Moishe's rise to fame from a penniless painter. He is portrayed to be a talented painter whom all these famous artists admire and benefactors are thoroughly invested in his work. Florbela, on the other hand, struggles for no one is

interested in her work.

Florbela is stubborn, often prone to jealousy, and also very nosy. She likes to get involved with the other characters' situations that doesn't concern her. She is also very self-centered. She also doesn't give a thought to the dangers surrounding her or even to her father, who is languishing in a Portuguese prison while she paints and goes out to parties to have a good time.

Overall, this story is slow-paced. The plot of the story takes place at the end of the novel. There is very little action until the last few chapters of the book. Until then, the author goes on a pace reminiscent of the way an artist brings a painting to life. The background and sketchings often take a long time to form, but in the end, a clear and nice painting is created. For there is mystery, romance, adventure, and a thriller included in these last few pages. I recommend this book to fans of mysteries, thrillers, art history, and to fans of Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code.

(Note: I read an Arc copy of this book in courtesy of NetGalley.)
