



## Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew

*Susan Fletcher*

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No one knows the name of 'the painter' who comes to the asylum in St Remy in the south of France, but they see his wild, red hair and news of his savaged ear soon circulates in the village and comes to the notice of the wife of the asylum's doctor. She feels herself drawn to him and learns that his presence is disturbing - and not just to her either. But back she goes - again and again. Until she is banned, but still she makes her way over the wall, through the garden to talk to this apparently mad and passionate man. And the consequences of her indiscretion, of what van Gogh comes to mean to her, of what it will do to her marriage, her life once she has touched danger and passion will have far reaching effects - both surprisingly catastrophic and tender.

## Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew Details

Date : Published May 31st 2016 by Virago Press Ltd

ISBN :

Author : Susan Fletcher

Format : Paperback 272 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Cultural, France, Art

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## From Reader Review Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew for online ebook

### Renita D'Silva says

Beautiful and haunting. A brilliantly imagined window into the little known history of Van Gogh when he was hospitalised in France.

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### Deborah Pickstone says

Another historical hero of mine. Van Gogh is possibly the most original painter in history (my opinion) and certainly one of the most influential. How surprised he would have been to know that! The novel is a fairly quiet story in which he features almost as an aside - it tells the story of the resolution of the marriage of Jeanne and Charles Trebuc, whose portraits Vincent painted during his stay at the asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. This is of course purely a fictional account though the details involving van Gogh appear to be mainly accurate and include direct quotes from his letters. As an examination of what does not get said between a couple in the course of a long marriage and the effect when it finally gets said this is a quiet but meaningful psychological picture. Jeanne and Charles are both very real characters and likable too.

No fireworks here but worth reading even if van Gogh means nothing to you.

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### Rebecca Griffiths says

A truly beautiful book about loss and love and the grief that is the human condition. Reading it saved me during a truly dark few weeks in my own life, and for this, I shall forever be grateful to this wonderful author.

Reading about Jeanne, and being able to live alongside her in that sun-filled part of France all those lifetimes ago, gave me somewhere to go in my head ... her world and her life, was, for a little while, a better place than mine to dwell. I felt so deeply for this ageing woman, that I know she will stay with me long after finishing this beautiful, tender, and poetically-written novel.

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### Lizzi says

A really beautiful book. My review (plus a Q&A with the author) is here:  
<https://theselittlewords.com/2016/06/...>

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### Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I think one of the reasons that I enjoyed this book so much is that Susan Fletcher manages to write a story about Vincent van Gogh's stay at the hospital of Saint-Paul-de Mausole and his meetings with Jeanne

Trabuc, and yet Fletcher doesn't let Vincent take over the story. That could easily have happened, he is a charismatic man, but the book is pretty much Jeanne's story, her recollections about her childhood, her marriage life as she steals away moments to talk to the mad painter. Meetings she is forbidden since her husband doesn't want her to meet the patients, but she does it anyway.

And through the book, we get to know Jeanne, the girl she was, and the woman she is now. Her life with her husband, and her three now grown children. It's the meetings with Vincent van Gogh that makes her realize what she is missing in life, he brings the world to her and Jeanne starts to change, and suddenly the silent woman isn't so silent anymore. But, can she make her husband see that the changes are for the good that she is turning into the woman she used to be?

This is a book I'm very glad I read. Fletcher has a way of writing that makes the story come alive, there is a flow in the text and I can easily image everything she has written. She describes the houses, the people, the country, and the paintings well,

I liked this book very much. I liked that the story is about an ordinary woman that for a short while knew one of the greatest painters that have ever lived. I loved the cover to the book with Jeanne and the painting of Starry Night, I didn't know that Vincent van Gogh painted some of his most famous work at the hospital of Saint-Paul-de Mausole including Starry Night.

*I want to thank Virago for providing me with a free copy for an honest review!*

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## **Lynn Williams says**

<https://lynns-books.com/2016/07/30/le...>

My primary reading these days falls into the SFF bracket without doubt, however, there are certain authors that I really enjoy that step outside that field that I always want to read and Susan Fletcher is one of those authors. I first fell in love with her writing after reading *Witch Light* (which I think is also known as *Corrag*). Fletcher has a way of writing things that simply make them stand out from the page. Her writing is beautiful and evocative and this title is no exception.

*Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew* brings to us a story about Jeanne Trabuc. Jeanne's husband runs the hospital at Saint-Paul-de Mausole and the hospital is about to receive a new patient who will certainly stir things up a lot. Not to beat about the bush the patient in question is Vincent Van Gogh and this book brings to us a fictionalised account of his time spent at the hospital in Provence following the troubled period in which he cut off part of his ear.

To be clear, this is very much Jeanne's story but the arrival of VvG is definitely the catalyst that sparks a change in Jeanne during which she reflects on her own life. Jeanne and her husband are at a quite stage of their life. Their sons have grown and left home to start their own life stories and Jeanne finds herself a little lonely and at something of a loose end. Her interest is sparked by this new addition to the hospital and she finds herself visiting him in spite of her husband's express wishes that she have no contact with any of the patients.

This story is a slice of introspection during which Jeanne looks back at her life as a young girl and a mother reflecting on her own and her children's hopes and wishes.

Why I liked this. I loved reading those parts of the story in which VvG made an appearance, his description and the imaginary conversations with Jeanne were really intriguing, enough in fact to make me go and read

up a little more of VvG's life story and take a look at the pictures he painted during his time in Provence. Also, and unsurprisingly for me, I loved the writing. Fletcher is a beautiful writer and Provence is a beautiful place that provided this author with some wonderful material to work with. The startling sunshine, the intensity of the flowers, the striking starlit sky and so much more. The writing is, put simply, evocative.

This is only a fairly short story but it really caught my attention. Jeanne and her husband may not be the most dynamic characters that you'll ever read about and there's certainly no swords and sorcery to be found here, but nonetheless this story captured my attention and in fact kept it long after I finished the book.

A quiet and thoughtful story, beautifully written and with an intriguing glimpse into the life of a brilliant and influential artist.

I received a copy of this courtesy of the publishers through Netgalley for which my thanks. The above is my own opinion.

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### **Gem BookEater says**

It is 1889 and the hospital of Saint-Paul-de Mausole, home to the mentally ill, has a new patient. A passionate artist with copper-red hair but only half an ear.

The warden of the hospital has rules for his wife to keep her safe from the patients. She must never stray from their little white cottage next door into the grounds without him by her side. But tales of this man's odd mixture of insanity and self-awareness are too intriguing for Jeanne Trabuc to resist. Especially when she has nothing else to occupy her, her children are grown and her only friend gone.

She climbs over the hospital wall, watches him while he paints in the heat of the day, and starts a relationship that will change her life.

Let Me Tell You About A Man I Knew is the perfect holiday read. It winds its way gently through the inner workings of Jeanne Trabuc's life in Provence while letting you feel the heat on her skin, hear the buzz of the bees and taste the sweet honey that only such a verdant blanket of land can produce.

It lulls you to doze but gives you the wisest dreams. I was drawn back to this hypnotic read every spare second I had. To be completely frank this has very little action, if you like high octane thrillers or chilling ghost stories this probably wouldn't do it for you. But if you want to really get to know what makes a character tick, and you want to feel like you are living in the country in the summer, then this is perfect!

It's real message is how love and life can change over time, and Susan Fletcher writes this exquisitely.

NB I received a free copy of this book from the publishers in return for an honest review. The BookEaters always write honest reviews

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### **The Book Whisperer (aka Boof) says**

This weekend I sat in the garden, the sun shining, and read the most beautiful, lyrical and vividly written book – Let Me Tell You About A Man I Knew. This isn't the first book I have read by this author (more on that later) so I knew that I was in for a treat and I wasn't let down in the slightest.

This book is a feast for the senses. From the very first sentence, I was whisked immediately away to the Provençal countryside as a new spring is dawning and I was immersed in colours and fragrances and sensations that can only be brought about by the most talented author. I was there under the lime tree, I felt the breeze lift the hem of my skirt, and heard the parched earth drink the water from the upturned pail.

The man of the book title is, in fact, Vincent van Gogh, however, he isn't the protagonist; that is Jeanne Trabuc. Van Gogh is more of a supporting character to enable Jeanne to evolve and blossom, and the story is really hers. The year is 1889 and set in the Saint-Paul Asylum, Saint-Rémy, where Van Gogh admitted himself and was a patient for a year, painting some of his most loved paintings during that time before he became more well known. Jeanne lives with her husband Charles in a little white cottage next to the asylum in the French countryside as Charles is the Manager there. Jeanne, whose three grown up sons have all left home, lives by the rules she has become accustomed to over the years and is forbidden to enter the asylum grounds but she finds a way to meet with Vincent often and through their conversations while he paints, she learns to remember the woman (and child) she was; the playful, independent girl who grew up with just her beloved Father and wore yellow silk dresses, wore her hair unpinned, and who did handstands in the square. It's an incredibly moving story as Jeanne considers her life and contemplates her future. Van Gogh's paintings awaken something in her; a desire and a longing for something more than the life of conformity and routine.

Seven years ago, I interviewed this author about her book Corrag (which is now re-published as Witch Light and is still one of the most perfect books I've ever read) and in this interview, she explained about spending half-an-hour of watching a bumble bee visit foxgloves, writing down how it looked and sounded, and I can completely see this. The scenes of nature in both books are exquisite; full of vibrancy and sentiment. Just stunning.

When I read a book I want to believe I'm right there in the pages. Few authors make me feel this as well as Susan Fletcher. Others that have had a similar impact are Joanne Harris (particularly the Chocolat series) and more recently Sealskin by Su Bristow.

This book was a joy to read from start to finish. Susan Fletcher can write. I mean, REALLY write. If you love beautiful storytelling and pitch-perfect prose, you need to read this book. I cannot recommend highly enough.

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## **Erin says**

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

As I write this commentary, only fourteen readers have rated Susan Fletcher's Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew on Goodreads. Seven have issued the book a flawless five stars, while another six have issued appreciative fours. Only one reader has gone lower and in all honesty, I'm quite comfortable being a lone dissenter. What works for one reader doesn't always work for another and there's nothing wrong with that so long as we can respect the subjective nature of reviews and the diverse opinions they represent.

Getting back to the story at hand, I found Fletcher's prose beautiful and thought her descriptions of the asylum of Saint Paul de Mausole in Provence strikingly original. I was familiar with Van Gogh before reading this piece, but this is the first time I've seen any part of his life fictionalized and I found a lot of merit in Fletcher's characterization of the famed artist. That said, I struggled with the author's tone and found it incredibly difficult to get lost in her narrative.

Fletcher's work is intensely introspective. The approach holds a lot of appeal for some readers, but my tastes

are a little different. I liked Jeanne well-enough, but her marital problems and personal trials didn't interest me. I found the development and pacing ponderous and often caught my mind wandering to more immersive fiction. There's something to be said Fletcher's themes, the oppressive loneliness of an empty marriage and the fragility of broken souls, but I favor more energetic fiction with overt movement and dramatic intrigue.

In sum, Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew was not my kind of book. I liked the story, but wasn't inspired by it. The characters didn't take up residence in my mind's eye or capture my imagination. I appreciate the piece for its historic scope, but don't think I'll be recommending it to other readers very often.

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## **Breakaway Reviewers says**

Emotionally touching and beautifully crafted.

Set in the town of St Remy in the south of France, 'Let Me Tell You About a Man I Know' tells the story of Jeanne Trabuc, wife of the warden of the mental asylum Saint Paul de Mausole. With her 3 sons having grown up and left home and her husband Charles absorbed in his work at the hospital, Jeanne is lonely. However, when a new patient arrives at the asylum - a Dutch painter who was sent over from the nearby town of Arles after viciously cutting off his own ear - Jeanne can't help but be intrigued by this strange man. Despite her husband's rules that she doesn't enter the hospital grounds or interact with the patients, Jeanne finds herself drawn to the artist and begins visiting him as he paints around the hospital. The two strike up a friendship and the consequences of this will change Jeanne's life, her marriage and her world.

I found this a really lovely book to read. The character of Jeanne was one of the most multi-dimensional depictions I've encountered in a book and I really felt that I began to know her and her life from reading this story. The portrayal of Van Gogh - as, of course, the 'mad' Dutch artist is him - was also very well done, allowing a unique insight into his troubled mind but not distracting entirely from the main story, which was of Jeanne and her faltering relationship with her husband. I found the story progressed well and there were never any dull points, and it also didn't feel rushed despite covering the entire year that Van Gogh spent in St Remy. The descriptions of the Provencale countryside and the lives of the people who live there were also very beautifully written and I particularly liked the references made to some of Van Gogh's well known paintings, many of which I did not realise were created during his time in the asylum. It was also interesting to look up the paintings of Jeanne and Charles themselves and the knowledge that they were real people made the emotional impact of the story all the stronger.

I gave this book 5 stars as it was genuinely enjoyable to read and very touching in its depictions of relationships of all sorts - husband and wife, mother and son, friends. I would recommend it to anyone interested in history or art and would very much like to read more from this author.

Daenerys

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.

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## **Camille de Fleurville says**

More detailed review to come. Meanwhile...

I had doubts about this fictionalised life of Van Gogh during the year he spent at the asylum of Saint-Rémy-de Provence after the crisis during which he cut his ear in Arles. The press advert claimed it to be family with "Girl with pearl earring" and the last Donna Tartt's because they both dealt with other Dutch painters - Vermeer and Fabritius.

No need to be cautious and no real family links with the other books. Most of all, no need to claim for some. The book is good. Good story, good structure, good style. It is sensual in the sense that you feel the heat of Provence, you smell the warm wheat and olive trees, you breathe the dust, feel the baked earth, touch the bark of the trees or the spear-like leaves of irises, listen to the howl of the mistral, taste the juicy fruits in your mouth, see the colours of Van Gogh's paintings as well as the colours of what he painted. All senses are awake.

Or they are awoken or re-awoken.

Near the asylum, in a white cottage, live the warden, Charles Trabuc, and his wife, Jeanne, born and raised in Arles, nearby. Jeanne and Vincent meet. Through Vincent's paintings and through his talks with him, Jeanne will rediscover and re-appropriate her past to herself. From this past, she will understand her present and be able to create a future as Van Gogh creates a world from the smallest things around him - a moth - or those landscapes seen through the bars of his room.

A very good book that starts slowly and slowly grows upon the reader. Van Gogh's story is known and true to the facts as shown by his letters to his brother Théo. Jeanne's story is mostly fictional but it is a powerful study of a woman's life.

And again, I would praise the structure of the book and the style - images, details, metaphors, nothing is gratuitous; all has a sense and tends to the building of the story.

This is a new title released from Virago Press. I thank them for the complimentary copy that I received in exchange of a fair and true review.

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## **Mairead Hearne (swirlandthread.com) says**

A very gentle story of a marriage that struggled and how a change in the wind can bring about something rather special.

Reminiscent of Joanne Harris or Kate Mosse

Read in two sittings ~ I was temporarily transported to Provence 1889.....colours, descriptions!!

My kind of book.....

Full Review as published on **Tripfiction..**

*'Provence ~ May 1889*

*He's foreign. Dutch I think. A strange man. Wild. And self-wounded, I hear – violently so'*

*Let Me Tell You About A Man I Knew* is a beautiful novel written by Susan Fletcher. Published by Virago Press in 2016, I immediately knew that here was a book I would love..

Before I begin my review of this novel I would like to share with you an excerpt from Susan Fletcher.

*'The idea for this book grew as I read a few of the many letters that passed between Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo. This contemplative, tender writer seemed so different from the man I'd assumed van Gogh to be. His year at Saint-Remy specifically intrigued me – the asylum, the landscape around it and how he produced his finest work when he was perhaps, at his most ill. Charles and Jeanne Trabuc existed (as did Peyron, Poulet and Salles).....'*

Here is a novel that gently sweeps you along through the landscape of Provence.

Jeanne and her husband Charles live beside the hospital of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole. Surrounded by olive groves, with the scent of herbs tormenting your senses, this is a hospital where those with matters-of-the-mind are institutionalised for a stay, some longer than others.

Charles and Jeanne Trabuc have lived in the vicinity all of their married life, as Charles is the curator of the facility. Living in the shadow of these people with fragile minds has taken its toll on their marriage. With the children long moved on, Jeanne struggles to raise her head every day as the hours all seem to blend into one.

With the most stunning scenery on her doorstep, it's very hard to believe how anyone could be so unsettled but Jeanne is frustrated. She has been looking at the same scene day in day out. As issues have arisen at the clinic Charles work keeps him away from her for longer and Jeanne is lonely.

Originally coming from Arle, Jeanne is used to the hub-bub of people going about their daily lives. Here on the foothills of Les Alpilles, all Jeanne hears is the cicadas clicking and the beginnings of The Mistral, *'Mistral in the local tongue. Wind of change, of shallow sleep'*

News of an impending arrival at the clinic is met with curiosity and excitement. There has been nobody new for quite some time and this visitor brings a change, like the changing wind itself.

Vincent van Gogh, with his fiery red hair, his fox like appearance and his very distinctive smell opens up a whole new world for Jeanne.

*'There isn't a colour on his palette that's brighter than his own...His eyebrows too. They're thick, almost blond. And his eyes themselves might have matched the sky above the Camargue if she'd ever seen that sky – the bluest blue, with birds and shadows blowing through, and yet she can imagine these eyes growing dark.'*

Charles leads a very strict life after coming back from the Crimean War and he has invoked many rules over their married life. With the arrival of 'The Dutchman', Jeanne starts to open her eyes a little more to the life she has been leading. She begins to see the beauty in the landscape around her and takes time to properly look at the sway of a leaf, the colour of a flower, the scent of an herb.

The more of this she is exposed to, the hungrier Jeanne gets. Her innocent, yet forbidden, meetings with van Gogh has her greedy for more. No longer satisfied with the secluded life she leads, Jeanne returns to the memories of her youth. She was an excitable daring child always up for adventure, but this sense of spirit has been knocked out of her over the years, Van Gogh is the catalyst that shakes her up out of this reverie.

Susan Fletcher has written a glorious novel, where every page turned takes your senses on a trip.

While this novel is a story made up of both historical fact and fiction, it is also an escape for the reader to Provence. I suspect, the landscape is no different today than it was in 1889. The story of Jeanne and Charles Trabuc is a beautiful love story. Two people who have grown apart over the years, who struggled to see what had become of them, suddenly have their eyes opened.

Vincent van Gogh comes into their lives like The Mistral and causes chaos as he paints but yet, like The Mistral, he moves on, with devastation in his trail followed by hope and the rediscovery of oneself and of love.

*Let Me Tell You About A Man I Knew* is a tender, compassionate tale, with Provence and its surroundings as a stunning backdrop. I love historical fiction and without doubt this book ticked all the boxes for me.

## Ana Ovejero says

Nobody knows the name of the painter that has arrived to the Monastery in Saint-Rémy, which has become an assylum for the troubled mind.

However, soon gossip about the painter savage red hair and the story of his severed ear fills the talking of the women in the market of the village. As you soon see, the painter is not other than Vincent Van Gogh.

After the turbulent life with Gaughin, who is accused of sending Vincent to madness, he looks for refuge in the French countryside.

Jeanne Trabuc is the wife of the warden of the assylum. Although she knows that entering the hospital is prohibited, she feels attracted by the painter, who leads her to start questioning her life, to try to understand the world from a different perspective.

His full-of-painted overalls, his erratic behaviour, his troubled and intense personality, change the life in the asylum, This is the time of a prolific production, being the most famous painting that he paints there 'The starry Night', which has been reproduced to the infinitum.

The power of this narrative is centred in the portray of the life of this woman, who gradually becomes more aware of her own world and the possible lives she could have had if she had taken other actions. Vincent is the the background. However, his presence is imposible to shade, his influence in Jeanne powerful and unforgettable.

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## Rebecca says

This historical novel about the year Vincent Van Gogh spent at the mental hospital of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole (1889–90) is from the perspective of the warden's wife, Jeanne Trabuc. Now 55 and with three grown sons, Jeanne fears life's adventures and sensual pleasures are over for her. Yet a friendship with this volatile new Dutchman makes her think that maybe she can reclaim an attitude of excited anticipation.

If what you actually want is a book about van Gogh, you'd be better off reading Barbara Stok's graphic novel, Vincent, and dipping into his letters. This is only peripherally about van Gogh; it's more a picture of women's circumscribed life in the late nineteenth century. I'd compare it most closely to Tracy Chevalier's *The Virgin Blue* and Susan Vreeland's *Lisette's List*. I was drawn into Jeanne's history enough to keep reading, but I didn't always find the staccato style very pleasant, e.g. "As Laure had done. Not a feathered flight, and not seen. But she had left here all the same. Four years ago, exactly. In her dark-red travelling coat. She'd been gone by first light."

*Portrait of Madame Trabuc*

*Portrait of Trabuc, an Attendant at Saint-Paul Hospital*

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## Daphne Sharpe says

The story of Vincent Van Gogh who was confined to the asylum of Saint Paul de Mausole in Provence as seen through the eyes of Jeanne Trabuc who was the wife of the warden. Jeanne and her husband Charles are as much prisoners of the asylum as the inmates as they struggle to find staff and money to maintain this dilapidated building, along with the ageing nuns who help treat and nurse the patients.

Jeanne found her hopes and dreams crushed on the outside of the asylum as much as those on the inside suffered. Her children have left home and she feels neglected by her husband, who is consumed with the urge to keep her safe and kept away from the horrors of the world and she is forbidden to visit the asylum. Charles fought at Sebastopol and he is haunted by these war experiences. When Vincent becomes a patient, Jeanne rebels against her husband and talks to and encourages Vincent in his painting and together they heal each other. Then Jeanne can make peace with Charles, as the threat of leaving him forces him to open up about his war years.

Vincent committed suicide once he left the asylum and tried to rejoin the modern world, perhaps the stresses and cares were too much for his fragile mind and spirit.

I greatly enjoyed this book, both undemanding yet strangely compulsive to read. The sunshine and sights of Provence were so beautifully described and lifted the heart and spirit of this reader. Certain phrases almost told the story of Vincent Van Gogh as in the song by Don Maclean.

This is a story of love being rediscovered and the recovery of both marriage and health through the power of Art and paintings. I have read this book from NetGalley and Little Brown Book in exchange for my honest opinion and I do recommend this to you.

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