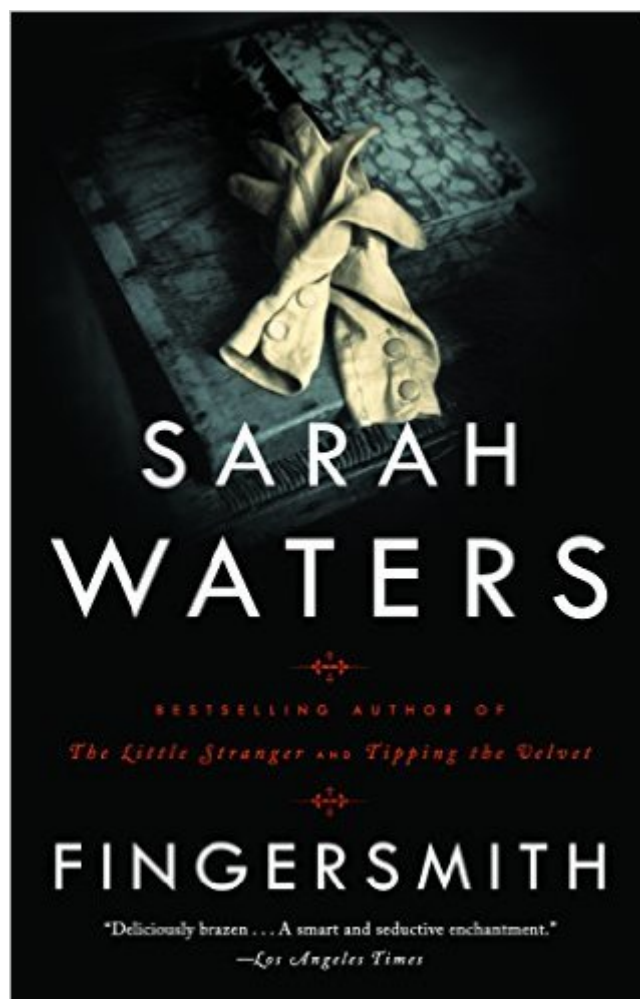


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# Fingersmith



## Synopsis

Oliver Twist with a twist | Waters spins an absorbing tale that withholds as much as it discloses. A pulsating story. "The New York Times Book Review Sue Trinder is an orphan, left as an infant in the care of Mrs. Sucksby, a "baby farmer," who raised her with unusual tenderness, as if Sue were her own. Mrs. Sucksby's household, with its fussy babies calmed with doses of gin, also hosts a transient family of petty thieves "fingersmiths" for whom this house in the heart of a mean London slum is home. One day, the most beloved thief of all arrives "Gentleman, an elegant con man, who carries with him an enticing proposition for Sue: If she wins a position as the maid to Maud Lilly, a naïve gentlewoman, and aids Gentleman in her seduction, then they will all share in Maud's vast inheritance. Once the inheritance is secured, Maud will be disposed of "passed off as mad, and made to live out the rest of her days in a lunatic asylum. With dreams of paying back the kindness of her adopted family, Sue agrees to the plan. Once in, however, Sue begins to pity her helpless mark and care for Maud Lilly in unexpected ways...But no one and nothing is as it seems in this Dickensian novel of thrills and reversals

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Sarah Waters' third novel begins simply enough. Sue Trinder is a teenage orphan who lives amongst a group of confidence men, thieves, baby farmers and fingersmiths (a 19th-century term for a pickpockets). An unscrupulous man commonly and ironically known as Gentleman compels Sue to join in his plot to win the heart of an elderly bookish man's niece named Maud. Maud is heiress to a fortune, but she can only claim it if she marries. The plan is: win the lady, ditch the wife

in an insane asylum and split the fortune. Sue becomes Maud's maid and when the plot is reaching its timely conclusion is the exact point where it is fractured and split like a forest path into numerous twisting paths revealing long held secrets and hidden strife. Sue and Maud are made to endure separate trials in their journey including the incarceration in a mad house, the subjection of reading and transcribing appalling pornography to a perverted old man and a dangerous journey through treacherous London in search of a friend in order for them to discover what their true pasts consist of and what predestined traits may tweak their futures. It is fitting that at the beginning of this novel a reference is made to Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. *Fingersmith* is a novel descended from Dickens voluminous library as well as much 19th century sensualist fiction. Waters skilled use of language to evoke characters and a sense of place through physical detail and psychological mapping of experience is a distinct characteristic of this descent. She also has a tremendous ability to use fabulous names such as (Mrs Sucksby and Miss Bacon) as Dickens did to mark poignant traits of her characters. Where Waters veers from Dickens is in her conjuring of robust female characters who can dominate the novel, not through the circumstances of their plight and their representation of certain social injustice, but through the powerful voice they use to assert their individual positions. Of course the great descriptions and plotting Waters uses to conjure this tale of a 19th century English plot to capture a family fortune makes a great many statements about the ways in which women were marginalised and the bizarre social positions they were forced to inhabit. However, the great strength of her brilliant protagonists Sue and Maud is in the way their actions are guided more by their impulsive desire to survive rather than to spur the trim, thrilling plot or subscribe to any societal roles presented to them. Their struggles led by these natures produces a longing for a happy resolution built not out of sentimentally contrived conventions, but a deserved reward for revealing to us their faulty human natures. Sue and Maud are not angels. They both deceive and betray each other, but they discover in this Darwinian world a rare affection for each other and a chance to share confidence when one's closest family is apt to betray you. The curious mirroring effect Waters uses with them, mixing pasts and characteristics of them, is descended from a more recent literary genius, Angela Carter. There are elements of her ideas (particularly realised in her novel *Wise Children*) on the way identity can be splintered, performed and reimagined which correspond to the ways Susan and Maud's fates are intertwined. Their relationship is drawn out as a struggle to express their mutual love and define their suppressed lesbian desires. But this is also presented as an arduous task to realise the aspects which make them powerful individuals. This novel makes the remote past enticingly familiar and relates a harrowing story that makes you wish it to continue on and on.

After reading and enjoying Sarah Waters's previous novels, I knew *Fingersmith* would meet my expectations. However, I had no idea! *Fingersmith*, as usual, had the gorgeous, atmospheric qualities that I think is Sarah Waters's trademark. And of course, the writing is simply genius. But more than that, *Fingersmith* is fantastic -- this novel told a darn good story. Set again in 19th century London, *Fingersmith* begins with Sue Trinder's tale as an orphan and a thief. She lives in a house filled with other orphaned babies and an assortment of pickpockets, or "fingersmiths," along with the lady of the house, Mrs. Sucksby, who took care of Sue since she was an infant. Now 17, Sue's opportunity to show her appreciation to Mrs. Sucksby finally comes -- in the form of Gentleman, a seedy con man and friend of the household. Gentleman is armed with a plan to make them all rich and enlists Sue as his helper. But things aren't always what they seem, and as the plan unfolds, all sorts of secrets and twists come unraveled. *Fingersmith* is everything I had hoped it would be -- beautiful writing, a stunning cast of characters, and a riveting, compelling storyline. I was helplessly drawn into the slums of London as well as the drab, solemn English countryside where Sue and Gentleman spend their days spinning their treacherous web. I will admit that there weren't as many shocking surprises (for me, anyway) like *Affinity*, but this novel was much like *Tipping the Velvet* in how it pulls in the reader from the beginning with a rousing good story. I can't say enough good things about Sarah Waters, her novels, and her talent. She's exceptional, and *Fingersmith* is nothing less than stellar.

Sarah Waters' third novel "*Fingersmith*" is both a critical and popular favourite. It has been shortlisted for several book awards including the Booker Prize. Waters herself has attracted much attention from literary circles since the publication of her first two novels "*Tipping The Velvet*" and "*Affinity*", both of which have won her many accolades. The former has even been made into a TV movie by the BBC. So what's the fuss about? I'd say it's down to the fact that Waters has created a niche for herself writing fiction the way the old masters used to. Her style cannot be further away from the rabid excesses of many contemporary writers who try to pass off bad for inventive writing. Waters' eloquent and long flowing sentences recall the style of classical writers like Charles Dickens. Her craft lies in pure storytelling - about petty criminals, thieves, pickpockets, damsels in distress, etc all in a Victorian setting - but with a strong dash of the new feminist sensibility that brings her story bang up-to-date.....and it works! "*Fingersmith*" at more than 500 pages long may be overwritten but it is superbly crafted and a truly compelling read. Sure, there's drama, mystery, suspense and great characterisation but it isn't the fearsome mindbender the blurbs make it out to

be. After you have recovered from the jaw dropping shock that Waters has laid in store for you at the close of the first segment, the other twists and turns that ensue aren't that difficult to follow. In fact, they're fairly predictable but that's a compliment, not a criticism, because it shows Waters cares more about her story's integrity than delivering cheap shocks. By the time you get to the end of it, our heroines, Sue and Maud, must seem like two peas in a pod or spiritual twins from opposite sides of the track. While Waters has been labelled a lesbian fiction writer, she's careful to keep her touch light in order not to alienate the general reading public. "Fingersmith" is one of the best novels this season. It deserves and is destined for the widest readership possible. Highly recommended.

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