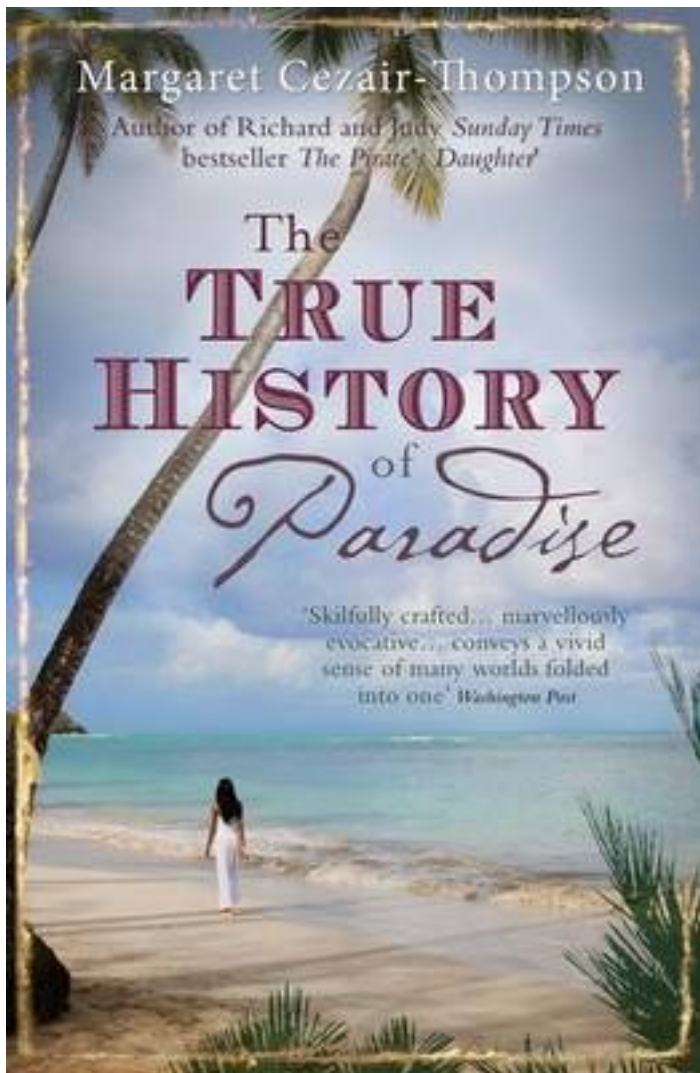


The True History of Paradise



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It's 1981 and Jean Landing is about to flee her disintegrating homeland, Jamaica, but first, she must bury her sister. Lana, a pop singer in the early days of Reggae, has immolated herself in a moment of madness and must be buried immediately "because, as someone explains to Jean, burned bodies decompose quickly." The funeral takes place in the morning; that afternoon, Jean is on her way across the mountains to a rendezvous with a private plane that will take her to the States. Accompanied by her childhood friend, Paul, she drives across her island nation, noting the increasingly violent confrontations between political factions even as she retreats into memories of her own fractured past:

Ghosts stand on the foothills of this journey. She smells their woody ancestral breath in the land's familiar crests and undulations. She has heard them all her life, these obstinate spirits, desperate to speak, to revise the broken grammar of their exits. They speak to her, Jean Landing, born in that audient hour before daylight broke on the nation, born into the knowledge of nation and prenation, the old noises of barracks, slave quarters, and steerage mingling in her ears with the newest sounds of self-rule. On verandas, in kitchens, in the old talk, in her waking reveries and anxious dreams, she has heard their stories.

From her own mother, the light-skinned, "selfish and adamant" Monica, sister Lana, and deceased father, the black nationalist Roy Landing, to her white ancestor Rebecca Crawford, they are all here, sometimes in Jean's memory, other times telling their stories in their own voices. It's a complicated weave of story lines and voices, but Margaret Cezair-Thompson carries it off with aplomb. The True History of Paradise explores both the political and the personal as Jean's childhood remembrances play out against the war-torn landscape of Jamaica. Near the end of the novel Jean reflects, "To leave one's country. It is not a complete sentence, a complete anything. Its infinitive possibilities leap from loss to promise and back again from promise to loss." This promising first novel makes those leaps with nary a stumble. --Margaret Prior

作者介绍:

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