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The Milliner's Secret



Synopsis

June 1940. As Paris, the City of Light, approaches its darkest hour, a young woman treads the line between survival and collaboration. Londoner Cora Masson has reinvented herself as Coralie de Lirac, using a false claim to aristocratic birth to launch herself as a fashionable milliner. When the Nazis invade, the influence of a high-ranking lover protects her business. But the cruel demands of war - and of love - cannot be kept at bay forever. Soon Coralie must find the courage to do what's necessary to protect her friends, her freedom and everything she believes in.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 18 hours and 18 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Quercus

Audible.com Release Date: July 30, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B011VUZYKI

Best Sellers Rank: #139 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Romance > Historical #496

in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Historical Fiction #1530 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Family Saga

Customer Reviews

Smashing! Simply smashing. I received an ARC of *The Milliner's Secret* in exchange for an honest review. It's difficult to review this book because I loved it so much and would enjoy discussing it, but I don't want to cause any spoilers. Let me say this though, this author has done her research, and she never patronizes the reader. Never over-explains. The details in this story are spot on and yet the story flows from its core: the romance that threads throughout the war years. This is indeed a story of a young woman's survival in one of the greatest tragedies of our time. Cora escaped London, in the pre-second world war era, after continued physical abuse from her father, and traveled to Paris with a stranger. There, with his help, she reinvented herself as a milliner. The story takes many twists and turns and the reader is left questioning who are Coralie's true friends and protectors. Who are her enemies? With protection from a high-ranking German lover her life becomes more complex with his sudden disappearance, reappearance, the friends she makes in

between. She struggles against the jealousies of competition in her industry, fights to protect her daughter, survives however she can against German invasion, assists those in need, and never forgets her German lover, or the fact that her Parisian life and identity is built upon lies. This is Ms. Evan's second novel, the first, *The Dress Thief*, is a stand alone but does have a couple of returning characters in *The Milliner's Secret*. They can easily be read out of order. I look forward to more from this wonderful author.

The Milliner's Secret is a follow on to *The Dress Thief*, set in pre-war Paris but can absolutely be read as a stand alone. Cora is a Bermondsey girl through and through, with a dad who, at the drop of a hat (no pun intended) would beat seven bells out of her (in other words, thrash her to within an inch of her life). She works in a lowly position at milliners Pettrew and Lofthouse. Through her work she wins a ticket to attend Epsom Downs Races and duly takes her friend Donal. A bit of betting and socialising make it an enjoyable day out until she meets Dietrich in the company of Ottilia, and somehow there is a spark. Before long she is at the station fulfilling a long held dream of travelling to Paris, now with him, with no prospect of a job other than the patronage of the rather handsome German man. Cora does not wait for life to unfold – she rides after it, like a gaucho roping a steer. And that is certainly how the spirited heroine negotiates her way in the new city as war unfurls. However, she soon finds herself on the verge of destitution because Dietrich has disappeared and she needs to work fast to keep her head above water. She thus assumes the persona of Coralie de Lirac – of course, she has knowledge of French through her Belgian father. Various encounters later she is running her own hat shop whilst war is escalating and soon she is in a new relationship with Ramon Cazaubon. Pregnancy ensues to complicate her life and little Noëlle arrives. As she actively engages in the Resistance during the war years, whilst keeping her hat business afloat, Coralie is definitely a working class girl who dares to reach for the stars! Wheels within wheels, people of all nationalities populate the storyline and those who have disappeared soon reappear. But who can Coralie trust? Paris remains unscathed in the early years but the inevitable hardships of the time descend. The Germans take up residence in The Crillon at the heart of the city; and is that a Swastika atop the Eiffel Tower? It is clear that Natalie has done a lot of research and has taken a great deal of care to set the developing storyline against a backdrop of monumental unfolding history. Enjoy! The author talks to us about books, writing and hats:

<http://www.tripfiction.com/milliners-secret-novel-set-in-paris/>

Thank you NetGalley for the ARC. I think the best word I can describe this book with is "human". This story starts as a domestic struggle and enters worlds of vogue, intrigue, betrayal, love, tragedy and hope. As frustrated as I got with Coralie's decisions waivering among bravery, weakness, and selfishness, I realized that of course it had to be that way. If she was always steadfast and resolute or even lucky, then it just wouldn't be believable. There would be no connection, yet the author shows you so much a part of the character's soul that you see her as a person and not as a story. I loved the analogy of the onion that the author highlights in the book because you get to see a different side of WWII than I think typically gets portrayed. Those stuck between unwillingness and necessary collaboration with an evil world must have been depths of despair I could not imagine. Do not expect this to be a quick, light read. It definitely took some time to get through because there are so many avenues of plot woven together, so very thoroughly connected but certainly worth it. I think I was most kept off-guard by Dietrich and appreciate him the most even if I liked other characters better. Bravo!

I just love the realness of this book. Cora Masson has reinvented herself as Coralie de Lirac, a way to get into high society without anyone knowing her past. I love the time piece, nothing is more exciting than WWII in Europe. I loved reading Coralie make life changing decisions and hoping it would all work out for her. This is a hauntingly beautiful ode to a strong and wonderful woman.

This book sucked me in. I bought it because it was a sequel to A Dress Thief and it wasn't that expensive so I thought why not. I could not put this book down and the plot kept twisting and turning it was captivating. This is one of those books that you read and when you are done, you are left wishing there was more. I won't say more because I don't want to give anything away, but this will keep you absolutely riveted.

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