



The Milliner's Secret

Natalie Meg Evans

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London, 1937. A talented young woman travels to Paris with a stranger. The promise of an exciting career as a milliner beckons, but she is about to fall in love with the enemy...

Londoner Cora Masson has reinvented herself as Coralie de Lirac, fabricating an aristocratic background to launch herself as a fashionable milliner. When the Nazis invade, the influence of a high-ranking lover, Dietrich, saves her business. But while Coralie retains her position as designer to a style-hungry elite, Paris is approaching its darkest hour.

Faced with the cruel reality of war and love, Coralie must make a difficult choice—protect herself or find the courage to fight for her friends, her freedom and everything she believes in.

The Milliner's Secret Details

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Author : Natalie Meg Evans

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From Reader Review The Milliner's Secret for online ebook

Tracy says

The Milliner's Secret surprised me. I didn't think I was going to like it - how wrong I was.

Cora Masson works in a hat factory in England; her life holds few pleasures. She works long hours to save money and invariably has all that she has earned taken by her drunken violent father.

During a rare day out at the races with her friend Donal, she encounters a handsome stranger, Dietrich von Ebling; to escape her home life she travels to France with him. Once there she reinvents herself as Coralie de Lirac, fabricating an aristocratic background to launch herself as a fashionable milliner.

Set in Paris from 1937 through to 1944 the Evans weaves in the political turmoil of the war years, black market gangsters, conspiracies, revenge and love into a detailed multifaceted novel. She successfully creates a story that is bigger than just the relationship between Coralie and Dietrich and engages the reader thoroughly with the secondary characters.

The real surprise for me was that when I started this book I thought I was going to hate it. The book opens in a seedy, smoky, French nightclub complete with sleazy bar owner (who's a criminal), the requisite SS and other German military. There is nothing wrong with beginning like this, but it reminded me of so many movies and clichéd ridden books that already exist, that it had me worried for what was to come.

I KEPT READING and I am so glad that I did. This became a book that I couldn't put down and I wound up loving it.

Evans writes great characters. They are complex. They make mistakes. Coralie is impetuous and, at times, appallingly naive, and this often causes her great problems. There were moments when I wanted to scream at her and times I just loved her – all because Evan's writing hooked me. Dietrich himself is a flawed hero who is, however, endlessly forgiving of Coralie. (The number of times they break up and get back together must be some kind of record.)

What I really liked is that, romance aside, the subplots and detail of the other characters is excellent. Very occasionally I was aware I was being "told" information, which lifted me out of the story – namely historic details, which perhaps were needed for some readers. However those moments were very brief. The horrendous political events of WWII – arrests, concentration camps, starvation and daily struggle to survive, the rise of the resistance, courage, endurance and inevitable loss are all very skilfully woven together. Evans covers a lot here and it doesn't feel like she's trying to do too much in one story.

I was well aware as I read what direction story was going to take in regard to its end point, but I HAD to finish and when I finished I felt a profound sense of sorrow that the journey was over. I haven't felt that way about a book in long while.

Thank you Natalie Meg Evans.

Four Stars!

Amanda says

Absolutely loved this book. Natalie Meg Evans is fast becoming one of my favourite authors. Definitely not 'just another book set in occupied France' this book has everything from beautiful hats, industrial espionage and serious danger.

Lisa says

Wow this book was an emotional roller coaster of emotions. WWII in Paris trying to survive and helping others. Cora seemed to put everyone before herself. There were many characters and different story lines going but they always seemed to connect easily.

The author does a wonderful job making you feel as if you are there in the story. You can see her making her hats. I loved it.

Emma Crowley says

The Milliner's Secret is the second novel from Natalie Meg Evans. Following on from the success of her début novel The Dress Thief (which won an award) the author takes us back in time to late 1930's London and to Paris during the German occupation in what was the horrific World War Two. I have to admit The Dress Thief is still sitting in my T.B.R and having heard several characters from the first book make a reappearance I was bit apprehensive about reading this one. I don't like reading sequels without knowing the background to characters but the author reassured me on Twitter that both books are distinctly separate despite a crossover of some characters and the time frame. That said I began this book in anticipation as the cover and blurb alone really had spiked my interest. Being honest I found it very slow to get going, I was enjoying it but felt we weren't getting to the real action. There was too much description in the first part of the book based in London, it was only well into the book at over 260 pages did I really begin to sink my teeth into it and from that moment on I couldn't put it down staying up late into the night to finish what turned out to be a brilliant, brilliant unputdownable book. Which goes to show you should always persist with books as they must just surprise you and if I hadn't kept going with this book I would have missed out on a fantastically told story.

The prologue opens with three women in a nightclub in Paris. They are on edge the Germans are all around and it seems the women are up to something. The scene is full of tension and dramatics. But suddenly we move back three years earlier to London and Cora Masson is once again being beaten by her father Jac for money. But she has the upper hand and despite her bruises goes on to enjoy the rare treat of a day at the Derby with her friend Donal. Here she meets the enigmatic Dietrich Graf Von Elbing and Ottilia his companion. Little does Cora know this encounter will forever change her life and take her far from everything she has known. Cora knew working in a hat factory was not the life for her. She is ambitious and realises there are better opportunities out there and she will take advantage of every one presented to her. Circumstances force her to escape from London and Dietrich comes to her aid although now living in Paris she is forced to adopt a new identity and history. In the romantic city she is simply called Coralie de Lirac. Coralie and Dietrich have this connection and bond instantaneously and there were so many ups and downs

to their story that I wouldn't blame you for getting lost. Their love is wrong considering everything that is going on during the war. But world wide events should not get in the way of love even if your lover is from the opposing side.

Coralie goes through so many tough times as she attempts to find work and maybe establish her own millinery business. This proved a riveting storyline in itself as there was betrayal, secrets and nastiness galore with fellow workers in the industry. Alongside that we have the romance of Dietrich and Coralie although other men do make a reappearance. We have her friends Otilia, Una, Violainne and many more and of course World War Two and all that it entails. I couldn't even begin to tell you any more so much happens it would only confuse you. Thank god I took some notes because at the pace I was reading I would have struggled to keep track of everything. But the author has done an amazing job of weaving everything together to produce an exciting story full of scandal, corruption, murder, collaboration, tension, betrayal and above all else the power of love. I think this quote perfectly sums up the character of Coralie more than I ever could 'a working class girl who dared to reach for her dreams found plenty of people ready to shove her back down. Down she must go only to bob back up again like a champagne cork'. I was with Coralie every step as she worked to achieve her dreams and thoroughly enjoyed her journey.

There were so many layers and aspects to this story. Not just that of Coralie and her friends but of bigger events ongoing apart from the struggles and deprivation in their lives. Finely balanced alongside the characters issues were the resistance groups in France struggling to achieve freedom and to win the war. We are given a detailed, insightful view into the German occupation of Paris and how ordinary French people had to survive on a daily basis alongside the Nazi's, the Gestapo and the army. Corruption, brutality and abuse were rife and Natalie has certainly opened up my eyes to an aspect of the war which I hadn't given much thought to. The historical factual information was slotted in at just the right time updating us on what was going on a world wide scale at various points during the war. It seemed natural to read of it and these paragraphs helped move the story on a couple of months or so.

The Milliners Secret is a story of a journey and a complete transformation for our main character not just in terms of her appearance and her personal details but how her guts and determination pull her through the most testing time of her life. Her love for her child always came first but yet her business brain always kicked into action when needed the most because she knew her talents, skills and know how were what would make her survive all the war was throwing at her. At times her heart did rule her head but I can't really blame her as Dietrich was a character I genuinely fell in love with myself. Working for the Germans and having such a high position in the army and the things he had to I suppose I wasn't meant to like him but there was something drawing me to him just like what happened to Coralie. Natalie made me root for a character I wasn't supposed to which is a sign of her astonishingly good writing and her way with words. She inspired emotions in me that I rarely feel for characters.

Further into the book Coralie takes on a challenge that many people would shy away from which further shows the reader her strength and ambition. What struck me most about this was although I know this was a fictional story balanced alongside true facts and events there must have been women at the time who like Coralie put their lives on the line. Women who for the good of their country and for the war effort did whatever was necessary to help their men secure victory and freedom. Where would be now if these brave women had not such played a pivotal role does not bare thinking about? The astonishing climax of the novel had me shouting out and it took an awful lot for Natalie to write that but I can't say I liked what happened considering everything we had read.

As I have mentioned before I couldn't get into this book in the beginning but just like they say with an album the more you listen the more it grows on you. That was the case for me here the further I read the more the

story began to affect me and I was enthralled right to the very last page. Although I found the last chapter before the epilogue needed a bit of stretching out I felt there was a piece missing in Coralie's story that I would have liked to read more about. The epilogue did rap up the story nicely though. To keep so many strands of a story going and to keep my interest for over 560 pages was a massive undertaking from Natalie Meg Evans but she has succeeded with style. I had forgotten about minor characters mentioned in the first few chapters not thinking there were necessary to the story but the author knew what she was doing. Every character, every scene, every little detail was essential and could have not been left out otherwise huge holes would have appeared in the overall plot. I was thinking there are way too many characters to keep track of but every one of them had a role to play and by god did they play it well. I never finish books and think oh I want to turn back to page one and start rereading it again immediately (I believe there are way too many books out there that I will enjoy) but I so wanted to do that here this book was that good.

This book is simply a stunningly told tale that hopefully will win Natalie more awards. In her acknowledgements she mentions how tears were wept over the keyboard but rest assured Natalie those tears were not shed in vein you have produced a phenomenal book. Thankfully I can now go back and read The Dress Thief and discover who does make a reappearance in book two and soak up what I know will be another wonderful story. This reader is now most certainly a firm fan of the work of Natalie Meg Evans

etherealfire says

Kindle Unlimited e-book

Sarah says

I was first drawn to this book by the cover. The gorgeous colors and figure dressed so prettily caught my attention while browsing future Amazon titles. When I saw it offered on NetGalley, I jumped at the chance to read and review. For the most part, expectations were met.

The character of Coralie took some getting used to. In the beginning, she read as a shallow diva out only to further her dreams and poo to everyone else. I found myself feeling no sympathy for her at all. Yet, once the crap hit the fan and everything happened to her in Paris, my opinion of her did a turn around. Her tenacity, pluck, and intelligence shined as she conquered the fashion world of Paris during the dark days of WWII, survived multiple brushes with danger, and built a life for herself.

I also enjoyed the overall storyline. The shifting alliances, shadowy Resistance activities, and the daily life in a war-torn city kept me engaged throughout. She balances the intimate of her character's inner thoughts with the broader spectrum of events like the deportation of Jews and the assassination plot against Hitler to create a well-balanced whole. That's a rare gift with a book this size and was well-appreciated by this reader.

The one thing I didn't appreciate was how much melodrama was packed into the story in the second half, especially around Coralie's and Dietrich's relationship. It's "off again, on again" pattern happened so many times that I lost count. There was enough drama with the spy/Resistance thriller elements that this constant soap opera quality was unneeded.

I also felt that the ending was rushed, due to the amount of page space dedicated to the melodrama. This

book would have benefited from more resolution than one wimpy epilogue and final chapter and less see-sawing relationships.

An engrossing tale of resistance and love in Nazi France, this book looks to please all lovers of the genre. You'll get behind the characters as life happens and grow to love the amazing story. While melodrama and a lackluster resolution do bog down the works a bit, I'd not let that stop you from checking out this book. I look forward to checking out the author's other work, which I hear ties into this one.

Note: Book received for free from publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Debbie says

This is my second book by this author and I am hooked. While they most definitely can be read as stand alone's, you will notice that several of the same characters show up in both The Dress Thief and this one.

Mostly set in Paris during German occupation, it provides a very entertaining story. Love, intrigue, secrets, lies, adultery, plagiarism, spies, hat making, danger, and abuse come together to make this a story you will long remember.

I love historical fiction about London or Paris during the wars. Not only do you learn things, but it's a great story to be read as you go along this journey with Cora (Coralie). I definitely recommend this book.

Huge thanks to Bookouture and Net Galley for giving me the chance to read and review this awesome book!

Jennifer says

I received this book from NetGalley and Bookouture in exchange for an honest review.

I am not sure how this book is getting so many rave reviews and I am clearly in the minority here. The Milliner's Secret was a very long, very drawn out novel that never really went anywhere. For the first 100 pages or so, I was very captivated and very interested in where this story was going, but then it got so convoluted and the author spent way too much time going into detail about the war.

Understandably, the war was an important character in this novel, but I was more interested in Coralie and what was happening with her. I found myself skipping paragraphs and pages at time, skimming until I found the nuggets of the story. About half way through, I toyed with the idea of not finishing, but in the end I continued on.

Unfortunately, I would not recommend this book as it moved at much too slow a pace and quite frankly, I am not even sure what the Milliner's Secret was.

Kobby Gyampoh says

also on <http://chicklitpad.blogspot.co.uk>

My Synopsis

Imagine This: It's 1940s in Paris. You make hats for a living. But your dad is beating the life out of you and taking back all your hard-earned money. How's that living?

A Londoner, you always imagine yourself living your dream in Paris. You'd escape your dad's fists. You'd run to Paris and begin a whole new life out there. Paris, the city of lights with many possibilities.

Except you had no idea how dark your future would turn if you make it into Paris. A one-chance opportunity presents itself, and before you know it, you are waking up in bed in the arms of a married man. In the City of Love, you become a mistress. Ahh, bliss.

Then the Germans invade, sending your life into turmoil. They'd kill any Jew, any Gypsy and definitely any Englishwoman masquerading as French with a new identity. The secret of your nationality, you'd die to keep. Because if you reveal it, you'd die anyway.

But whoever said, this secret is your biggest problem? Soon, you'd have to face devious fashion-rivals, Gestapo, a scorned lover fighting for the enemy, helping friends escape brutality and lots of danger in a city dominated and run by die-hard Nazis. When all this is accomplished, your life, if you ever have one, would never be the same again.

Coralie de Lirac/Cora Masson's treacherous life summed for your delight.

MY REVIEW

I loved this book! So in my review, you'd know I'd be yelling at you to go buy the hell out of it along with lots of vintage hats!

Yet again, Natalie Meg Evans wows with a wild storyline set in '40s Paris—a time of war, resistance, and love if you ever have the time! Stunning! I'm fiercely very scared for debut authors releasing a sophomore title. A sophomore title which might not outrun or even match the success of their debut novel. This storyline is a winner, carving out an image for Natalie Meg Evans as a historical romance author who breaks (fashion) boundaries, destroys enemies and neatly weaves romantic plots in Paris during the second world war! I fear no more for Natalie Meg Evans' inevitable success. A star.?? ★

I loved the lead! SO, SO much! Very ballsy, very daring, the kind of historical heroine that would grab you right from the start! You'd love Coralie, for the tough decisions she has to make to save herself, her little daughter, and her friends. Her struggle to make it in Paris is so engaging. Then when she finally makes it, her struggle to keep all she has from falling apart would reel you in further. A star!?? ★★

Other characters are amazing! You'd love Una Kiplin, the American fast-talking, fashionista who has lots of lovers falling at her feet. You'd love Dietrich, the German-lover who would stop at nothing to protect our lead (then make love to her). You'd also adore, Ramon, our lead's husband, who's quite the charmer, given he's an anarchist (are those types charming at all?). You'd also fall in love with Teddy, the flamboyant art

dealer who takes a liking to our lead. Lots and lots of characters in this book you would adore. Even the ones, you'd have to hate—Serge Martel, the shady club-owner who loves to bite off ears in the throes of love-making; Lorrienne, the scorned milliner who would do anything to destroy our lead's business; Hiltrud, the wife of Dietrich, who would take a journey of vengeance that would leave readers gasping. A star!??

★★★

There's something about this book I cannot help but bring up. The dialogue! It's sharp, fast, and very... different. I didn't really realize that was one of the engaging features of Nat Meg Evans' writings till I remembered her debut. The Dialogue embodies the beauty of the age Nat Meg Evans writes about—an age of fine sarcasm, an age of witty comebacks and innuendoes stronger than a fist. A star!?? ★★★★

There's suspense that would keep you holding this book. I can vouch that you'd only drop this book only to go get yourself a hat... after you are done reading. There's also humour to keep you chuckling. A star.??

★★★★★

Very few writers do this: make you forget how excellent their previous title—which was also their debut—was after reading their latest! If you have read The Dress Thief (—if you haven't, I highly recommend it!), after reading this, you'd be thinking: Debut? What debut?

I recommend this to anyone who wants something historical to get cosy with this summer. Anyone who's been a fan of Hitler-themed novels should grab this off the shelves. If you also love couture in Paris in the forties, this book is for you. Most importantly, if you want a book with an amazing plot, an engaging heroine, do not hesitate to get this. This is not your average historical romance with leads worrying about how tight their corsets are fancying and not-quite-fancying rogues and knights—if you would pick this title expecting a standard historical read you'd be disappointed! This, is one of the many reasons I love Nat Meg Evans!

Grace says

Read on Kindle.

Tracy says

The Milliner's Secret surprised me. I didn't think I was going to like it - how wrong I was.

Cora Masson works in a hat factory in England; her life holds few pleasures. She works long hours to save money and invariably has all that she has earned taken by her drunken violent father.

During a rare day out at the races with her friend Donal, she encounters a handsome stranger, Dietrich von Ebling; to escape her home life she travels to France with him. Once there she reinvents herself as Coralie de Lirac, fabricating an aristocratic background to launch herself as a fashionable milliner.

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a story that is bigger than just the relationship between Coralie and Dietrich and engages the reader thoroughly with the secondary characters.

The real surprise for me was that when I started this book I thought I was going to hate it. The book opens in a seedy, smoky, French nightclub complete with sleazy bar owner (who's a criminal), the requisite SS and other German military. There is nothing wrong with beginning like this, but it reminded me of so many movies and clichéd ridden books that already exist, that it had me worried for what was to come.

I KEPT READING and I am so glad that I did. This became a book that I couldn't put down and I wound up loving it.

Evans writes great characters. They are complex. They make mistakes. Coralie is impetuous and, at times, appallingly naive, and this often causes her great problems. There were moments when I wanted to scream at her and times I just loved her – all because Evan's writing hooked me. Dietrich himself is a flawed hero who is, however, endlessly forgiving of Coralie. (The number of times they break up and get back together must be some kind of record.)

What I really liked is that romance aside, the subplots and detail of the other characters is excellent. Very occasionally I was aware I was being "told" information, which lifted me out of the story – namely historic details, which perhaps were needed for some readers. However those moments were very brief. The horrendous political events of WWII – arrests, concentration camps, starvation and daily struggle to survive, the rise of the resistance, courage, endurance and inevitable loss are all very skilfully woven together. Evans covers a lot here and it doesn't feel like she's trying to do too much in one story.

I was well aware as I read what direction story was going to take in regard to its end point, but I HAD to finish and when I finished I felt a profound sense of sorrow that the journey was over. I haven't felt that way about a book in long while.

Thank you Natalie Meg Evans.

Four Stars!

Avi says

This book was brilliant. I love historical fiction in this period. The plot was great and the characters came alive for me. I didn't want it to end. One of the best books I've read this year :)

Karen says

I went into The Milliner's Secret with great hopes. I enjoy novels set in Paris during World War II and saw its 4+ stars. While the premise is intriguing, the result did not live up to its potential. It is quite beautifully written, with a nice use of French and German names and places. However, this book is in dire need of serious editing. It is too long and convoluted, with too many situations that are unnecessary to the story.

Trish at Between My Lines says

This review was originally posted on [Between My Lines]I absolutely adored the concept of this book and the pretty cover didn't hurt either. In a nutshell, it was a GOOD read with a FAB setting and a FIERCE main character. I enjoyed it but not quite as much as I had hoped for.

Balancing the books is a quick fire review where I list the assets and liabilities of a book (as I see them) and leave you decide if you think this book is worth investing in.

The Assets of The Milliner's Secret by Natalie Meg Evans:

The Setting : Paris during the occupation of World War 2 is one of my favourite settings in books. And the setting here is vividly described and came to life within the pages.

Cora the main character was intriguing! She is straight forward and says exactly what is on her mind. And she is one TOUGH NUT! She seizes every opportunity life throws at her and runs full speed ahead with them. It is impossible to squash her, no matter how bad things get.

The romance: Nothing like a hot, forbidden romance to spice things up a little. And lots of will they, won't they see-sawing.

The fashion: I really enjoyed the glimpses of haute-couture and just how cut throat the high fashion milliner business in Paris was. And the hats, be still by beating heart, they sound amazing.

Historically Accurate: This is so important to me. It's obviously meticulously researched and it shows.

The Liabilities of The Milliner's Secret by Natalie Meg Evans:

The pace: For me personally it was too slow. There was so much description that I got bogged down and it made me lose my connection with the characters. I did love the characters but I feel they got lost in the detail. Because I felt the pace dragging, my enjoyment of the book went down in proportion to this. Which hurts me to say as there were so many other elements that I did enjoy.

Lots of sub-plots: There is an abundance of connected sub-plots – the fashion industry, domestic abuse, murder, hiding identities, complex romances and friendships, the occupation of Paris, deportation of Jews, the rise of the resistance, espionage, a forbidden love affair. It felt a bit over ambitious and I don't think it fully delivered because of this.

Investment potential of The Milliner's Secret by Natalie Meg Evans:

Overall it's romantic and engaging and has some terrific characters. BUT the pace is slow. If you love historical romances with a World War 2 setting, I would recommend it to you. Not so much for those who aren't already dedicated followers of this genre.

Thanks to Quercus Books for sending me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest, unbiased review.

Erica Parker says

Confession time: I'm tired of books and films that deal with World War II and the Holocaust. I tend to actively avoid them.

I know. I know.

I'm terrible, right?

It's not that I avoid them because I don't think the period is important. There's other reasons: 1) I feel that we tend to completely ignore other wars and genocides of the 20th century & 2) often, the period is used cheaply.

Let me explain: The events of World War II and the Holocaust are extremely important and ought not be forgotten. However, in the US, we tend to be taught about this period in school from elementary school on down while so many other important wars and genocides are never even touched. With so many books and films that center on or use WWII as its setting, we neglect the other wars/genocides and their horrors fade away. If we don't at times focus on, say, the Yugoslav Wars, the Armenian genocide, the Ottoman Greek genocide, the reign of the Khmer Rouge or the Sierra Leone Civil War, just to name a few, we run the risk of forgetting about them. Think about those conflicts I named. How much do you know about them? Exactly. It's only been 20 years since the start of the Yugoslav Wars and I am constantly shocked at how little my fellow countrymen know about the wars or the aftermath.

Secondly, I find that often, authors and filmmakers do not have the talent to use WWII/the Holocaust properly. It becomes painfully evident that for some of them, they really could have set the story in damn near any other timeframe in the 20th century, but simply chose that period for its narrative heft and emotional punch. When this is done, it totally cheapens both the story and the events. What happened to real people should not be used simply because you have no idea how to craft conflict and pain.

So, when I selected Natalie Meg Evans's "The Milliner's Secret", I have to admit that I did not have high hopes. I chose the book primarily because I enjoy historical fiction and because I wish to read more female writers. I was expecting that it would be a quick, insubstantial read. I'm pleased to say that I was wrong.

"The Milliner's Secret" begins in 1937 London, where Cora Masson toils in an unappreciated life. A chance meeting with a dashing German man, Dietrich, leads to a new life in Paris where Cora reinvents herself as a master milliner, Coralie de Lirac.

On the surface, "The Milliner's Secret" seems like it's going to be a fairly frothy romance, even as the synopsis promises that we will see Paris "approaching its darkest hour." The cover and title reinforce that idea. Happily, the novel becomes much more.

While this isn't my favorite work that I've read recently, I know that it will be a re-read for me. As I re-read anything I like, that's a compliment. There's many things I enjoyed about "The Milliner's Secret".

Coralie is an intensely flawed creature. She has many lovely qualities - she loves wholly and fiercely; she helps as much as she can; she risks her life to help those marked by the Nazis as undesirable. However, Coralie is also hot headed and brash and these qualities -and her inability to tame them - get her into trouble and cause her pain at times. Her temper causes her to do and say things that rain trouble upon her - and her loved ones - heads. (view spoiler)
