



The Seven Letters

Jan Harvey

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When Claudette Bourvil is recruited to the French Resistance the last thing she expects is that she will be sent to work in the heart of Paris to spy on senior Nazi officers.

Claudette learns how to survive in a city ravaged by war, where the citizens are murdered on the whim of the occupying force. Constantly under threat of discovery, and in danger of losing her life, Claudette risks everything when she falls in love with the wrong man, the worst kind of man.

Over seventy years later, in rural Oxfordshire, Connie Webber discovers seven letters linked to a famous playwright, Freddy March. The letters will eventually lead her to Paris where she discovers the horrific reason behind Freddy's life long depression. As his mother's story unfolds Connie uncovers a dark past that the city has tried to erase from history.

The Seven Letters Details

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Author : Jan Harvey

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From Reader Review The Seven Letters for online ebook

Betty says

I finished this book a couple of days ago, and I still feel drawn back to the lives of the characters in this book. What a powerful, gripping story. I was hooked from the first page.

I don't want to give away the storyline by going on about the plot, but seriously, read this, you will not be disappointed. This is a really beautifully written book, even the grittier parts were told with a gentleness that held you captivated by the story

Well done to Jan Harvey on her first novel. Hurry up with the next one.....

Tina Milledge says

Received this morning from a Goodreads Giveaway. I've read the Prologue and I'm already hooked! Sounds terrifying. Vividly described. Can't wait to read on. I think I'm going to be totally absorbed by this so I'm leaving 5 stars now and will be back to update my review when I've finished the book.

7/3/17 almost a third through and it really is very good. The switching between WW2 France and the 21st Century. Both time periods interesting, can't wait to read the connection between Freddy and Claudette.

11/3/17 page 243. Still gripped by the time switches. Two love stories emerging, mystery, suspense, wartime Paris. Fantastic!

11/3/17, a couple of hours after my last review....well, I'm sad that I've finished the book! A cracking read. I am impressed that this is Jan's first novel published. I cannot imagine the thought processes and time that go into creating such a complex story creating the elements I mentioned above. I've read thirty something books so far this year and this one is up there in the top two. I'm going to struggle to find one to read next where not a single page has not captivated me. It would be an understatement to say that I'm looking forward to hearing that this author has published more novels, can. not. wait!! 10/10 Absolute pleasure to read and review.

Laura says

After a few lacklustre reads, this book was a breath of fresh air that kept me riveted throughout. I couldn't read it quick enough, I was that desperate to unravel the many threads of the complex storyline.

I've always found wartime Paris to have an essence of romance within the fiction world - this was just that but a whole lot grittier and showed a side of the heavily occupied city rarely discussed in history. The story is told both in modern and historical chapters and the stories weave together as the plot develops - something I have found can only be achieved well within this genre by a gifted writer.

Part of the modern day setting is based on the very village I live in in the Cotswolds, so that was a pleasant surprise and made me feel closer to the protagonists.

The writing here is incredibly vivid and I was able to paint scenes in my mind as I read. It's a dramatic, romantic and features everything I enjoy about historical fiction, albeit based on actual events. I would recommend this to just about anyone.

Katz Nancy from NJ says

I must admit I knew little about this author but did know some aspects of the subject matter. I thought the book was well written and the characters stood and were characterized quite well. This author used a device that has become quite popular in recent years. The author tells the story of a historical event, a secret in a family or even the story of an area and how it has changed. One character is in present time, the other is from a number of years back. It is a clever device and in most cases lets the contemporary character find out what was kept from her family, what event took place which changed the fabric of a relationship or somebody's life. The character may have found old letters or a diary to help them pursue some information.

I did ultimately enjoy this book but it was a rather slow read for me. The one objection I did have which led me to rate this with 3 stars. The book has two stories - one taking place and one from 60 odd years ago. But each chapter focuses on one of the stories so for me this read was very broken up. I no sooner got into one story than the chapter ended and the next story was being related.

Nancy says

I am a person who finds a certain romance in the World War II era and I chose this book for that reason. If that era calls to you also then you will like this book.

This book takes place during World War II and in the present day. The World War II storyline is about Claudette, a member of the French Resistance who goes to Paris to work in a brothel as a maid to spy on the Nazi officers who patronize the establishment. The present day storyline is set in Britain where a woman sees her friend and neighbor, Freddie, commit suicide and goes on a quest to find out why. The author does a very good job of moving the story along between the two different time lines and making the two different stories relevant to each other.

While working undercover for the French Resistance, Claudette comes into contact with Keber, a German officer, who she believes is a cut above the other Nazis and falls in love with him. She has a very difficult time balancing her feelings for Keber without compromising her mission for the Resistance. Their relationship has consequences that will continue through to the present day.

After the death of her friend, Freddie, Connie assists his housekeeper, who is also a friend, in cleaning out his house and preparing it for sale. While sorting through Freddie's personal effects, she finds letters written by Freddie to his father. These letters spur her on to try and find out the circumstances of Freddie's life that caused him such pain and help her to understand why he would take his own life. Her quest for answers leads to her discovery of the secrets of Freddie's origins and early life.

This novel was very well written and researched. The author was able to treat some of the difficult issues of the Nazi Occupation of Paris such as the status of women who worked in the brothel with respect and compassion.

This was the author's first book and I will look for more of her work in the future.

I was gifted with this book by Net Galley in return for an honest review and I thank them for the opportunity to read this book.

Karen Kay says

I received this ARC from netgalley.com in exchange for a review.

Good story! 1940's France, Claudette is secretly working with the French resistance and is sent to work as a maid in a bordello to spy on senior Nazi officers, but she unexpectedly falls in love with one of 'them'. Present day England, Connie witnesses her friend Freddy March commit suicide by falling in front of a train.

The story unfolds in layers with alternated chapters between present day Connie who desperately wants to understand why Freddy killed himself, and Claudette in Nazi occupied France.

4 stars

Melanie Long says

What an amazing first novel. This book had me gripped from the very few sentences in the prologue. Such a thought provoking subject yet it is written in a very sensitive way. I definitely want to find out more about the "Horizontal Collaborators" I felt such sympathy for them and their part in WW2. A wonderful blend of history and fiction mixed with romance, what more could you want in a book. I am looking forward to Jan's second novel.

Jo Kirk says

The Seven Letters by Jan Harvey is a book with a double storyline, one set in Paris during the war and the other story set in modern times. The modern storyline uncovers the background of a famous playwright, which the storyline set during the war reveals. It is beautifully written and captivating from the opening lines. I felt the author used the dual storyline method really well and was able to keep you interested in both parts of the story throughout. You felt a connection with each of the characters in both eras and the mood and difficulties of the times were portrayed very well. The French Resistance aspects were well researched and very descriptive and it was refreshing to have the work of women in the French Resistance portrayed. Overall it was a thoroughly enjoyable read, it kept me captivated throughout and will look forward to reading more from Jan Harvey.

Eileen says

Knowing that this tale encompassed several of my favorite themes, including WWII and intelligence, I promoted it to the top of the pile. The novel is presented in dual time periods, laced with a bit of a mystery linking the two. Much of the past action in is set in a brothel in occupied Paris, where a Resistance member poses as a maid. It was fascinating to realize that such a place actually existed, a whore house catering to the Germans! Imagine the potential, and author Jan Harvey has done just that! I will say that the segments occurring in the present were somewhat less engaging, but things did come together well. It's obvious that the book has been carefully researched, and that accuracy enhances the appeal. The head shaving of the 'horizontal collaborators' for instance, and the seething rage of those meting out the mob vengeance are horrifyingly vivid!

Ann Taylor says

What a brilliant first novel. From the first shocking line of the prologue to the very last satisfactory line this is an excellent read.

It's a love story, a detective novel, a travelogue and it's full of fascinating historical detail. I have to confess I know very little about the French Resistance during World War II, except that it was tough, especially if you were caught. This novel explores the flip side, what happened when your compatriots thought you a collaborator.

I just love a book where I can empathise with the main protagonist and this novel has two, separated by time and distance but double the pleasure.

The characters are well drawn, from the lovable Matt, the eccentric Bertie and the sympathetic Hat in the present to the calculating Madame Odile, the charismatic Fritz and 'the girls' in the past. I fell in love with some and was disappointed in others, as in life.

I loved the twists in the tale, the ending was not what I expected at all but it was still very satisfactory. From the shocking beginning, through the engaging middle to the unexpected end, this is a story that engages, entertains and informs, my very favourite type of book.

Anne says

I adore books with a dual time-frame – a modern story, a well researched historical one, with links between the two. The historical thread to this book was enthralling, a slice of hidden social history I'd never come across before, the story of the wartime "horizontal collaborators". But it's far more than just a slice of history well told – there's a strong heroine at its centre in Claudette, working as a maid in a brothel to help the Resistance, a moving and engrossing love story and one of exceptional bravery.

Every character in this story is magnificently drawn, vividly described, their back stories richly detailed, and in many cases those background stories are emotional and harrowing. There are moments throughout this

excellent book that will long remain with me, searing and stark images that are indelibly etched in my memory. The research is exceptional, the detail included but the narrative wears it lightly, and the writing has an ease and flow that makes it easy to become totally immersed in the story.

The modern story is equally strong – the shocking scene at its start, Connie's sad history, her quest to discover playwright Freddy's history, alongside a developing love story running far from smoothly. I liked the way the stories converged – and, although I'm not always a fan of stories told in alternating chapters, both stories were strong enough to support the structure and keep my attention and interest.

This was a book I really enjoyed, a page-turner with real originality, the strongest of story-telling, and a historical background that was just fascinating. A book I'd highly recommend.

Heather Donovan says

Solid 4.5 stars.

This was an excellent book. Kept me intrigued for the entire story. A few plot points I felt weren't necessary, but not enough to detract from the story as a whole. Many thanks to Netgalley for providing me with an advance copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Courtney Stuart says

At least 34,000 women were involved in prostitution, be it by choice or forced upon them during World War Two. There were brothels even in the concentration camps and the Germans took over many of the existing brothels around Europe to 'service' their troops.

This book is about a brothel in Occupied Paris at 12 Rue Ercol. An easy way for a man to know it was a brothel was the colourful number plate above the front door, which differed greatly from the staid blue and white number plates on 'respectable' houses.

We are introduced to Claudette, a young woman in the Resistance who is sent to work as a maid in the brothel, to spy on German officers who were partaking of the services there. Swept up into the life of the brothel, Claudette falls in love with a German Officer and begins a dangerous sexual relationship with him. Secrets and choices are made culminating in the end of the war and the further humiliation of the women who were publically shamed by means of rape and having their heads shaved for 'horizontally collaborating' with the occupying force.

Alternating chapters introduce us, 70 years later, to Connie, who wants to untangle the web of lies and explain the all encompassing depression of her friend Freddy, who commits suicide in the first chapter. Unravelling the mystery surrounding Freddy's mother and the truth of her role in the brothel during the war becomes more apparent. There is a minor love story explored in the contemporary section of the book. Historical fiction and contemporary fiction blend together beautifully in this novel. A fascinating book delving into a part of World War Two that is, to this day, still an uncomfortable part of French history. The characters and scenes are well drawn, the mystery is engaging.

Quite simply, I couldn't put this book down.

Elizabeth says

Wow, just wow! My feelings are all over the place. Review to follow after I get myself together.

Days later: I took quite awhile to think about this book, partially because I was sick, but mostly because I wanted to spend some time to rethink some of my preconceptions. I found this book extremely readable and beautifully written, but it opened my eyes to the importance of the French Resistance in France during WWII. I now want to read more about that portion of the war.

This book made me curious, which is very important. It made me want to know more about what I was reading, to dig deeper into a subject that I had spend very little time getting to know and that is a good thing!

The story itself is very well told and very readable. I will be re-reading this book. I have recommended it to numerous friends (including my husband). Thank you to NetGalley and Troubador Publishing for the opportunity to read this amazing book!

Alison Cairns says

This really gripped me, I was shocked by the prologue and had to keep reading without putting it down to find out how we got to that shocking scene, and how the characters moved on from there. I'm not sure I was entirely satisfied at how the modern day story unfolded and whether it seemed truly feasible how Connie pieced together the wartime story. Nor did I feel I truly grasped Connie's story. I always felt there was something odd about Matt, although I thought he was going to turn out to be someone cashing in on Freddy's story. Those niggles aside, I couldn't put this down and had to know what happened, if or how the past would intrude on the present, but more so how the wartime story unfolded. It was a sad and sorry tale. I read this for my book club and am looking forward to tonight's discussion (I like to read the book right before we meet so it's all fresh in my mind).
