



The Forgotten Seamstress

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It is 1910 and Maria, a talented young girl from the East end of London, is employed to work as a seamstress for the royal family. As an attractive girl, she soon catches the eye of the Prince of Wales and she in turn is captivated by his glamour and intensity.

But careless talk causes trouble and soon Maria's life takes a far darker turn. Disbelieved and dismissed she is thrown into a mental asylum, shut away from the real world with only her needlework for company.

Can a beautiful quilt, discovered many years later, reveal the truth behind what happened to Maria?

The Forgotten Seamstress Details

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Author : Liz Trenow

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From Reader Review The Forgotten Seamstress for online ebook

Liz says

My 5 Question Review

Share a one sentence synopsis, please?

Modern-day characters take so long to solve an inane and obvious historical mystery that they come across as being a bunch of bumbling idiots.

What did you like?

Hmmmmmmm...it was a fast read?

Dislike?

It's a tie between uninteresting one-dimensional characters and the completely predictable plot-line.

Actually, you know what I really hated? A scene in which a woman makes a few assumptions then gets really mad at the love interest and doesn't allow him an opportunity for explanation. What year is it? Aren't we over the portrayal of women as irrational hysterics?

Why this book?

It was suggested on a sewing blog I read.

Did anything stick?

I sincerely hope not.

Mary - Buried Under Romance says

Like patchwork, this novel is a composition of seemingly incongruous parts - via cassette recordings with the first-person narrator, Maria Romano, that weaves a fascinating history of her life as a seamstress for the Royal Family, of her affair with the Prince of Wales (and the later abdicated King Edward VIII). As Maria, now seventy-four, tells her story in an interview book while being confined at a mental hospital, we see into her wistful memories of love and lost, and the sadness perpetrates throughout the book as the second protagonist, Caroline, finds herself confused about her life, and the uncertainty that looms in her future.

What brings these dual plotlines together is a discovered heirloom of a rare silk, one tinged with both the happy and tragic times of Maria's life, and one which propelled Caroline to conduct a research for its origins, all the while learning about her own strength.

While I hold no knowledge of sewing or quilt-making, I was nonetheless impressed and enthralled with the meticulous detail by which the intricacies of Maria's designs and sewing were created, and it was told in such a manner that I could easily visualize the creations through these pages.

Ultimately, while this book has had its share of humorous moments, it is at the core a heartrending historical fiction, a woven account of two women's lives, one tragic and resilient, and one with the capacity for change. Readers will, I hope, find much to take away in this story; perhaps courage, perhaps inspiration, and perhaps a belief in the threads that bind and connect people as a catalyst for great change. Even more, this seamlessly

written tale is one that lovers of sewing could enjoy, if you don't find your heart breaking with the story itself.

Liz Barnsley says

Thank you to Avon Books for the copy via a Goodreads Giveaway.

It is 1910 and Maria, a talented young girl from the East end of London, is employed to work as a seamstress for the royal family. As an attractive girl, she soon catches the eye of the Prince of Wales and she in turn is captivated by his glamour and intensity.

I had heard good things about this one so despite it being slightly out of my reading comfort zone, I was very pleased to receive a copy. And it is indeed a terrific and compelling story.

Multi-layered storytelling at its best we follow Maria, telling her story via cassette tape sometime in the past, alongside Caroline who has discovered a beautiful patchwork quilt in the present - as she investigates its origins, the trail leads her back towards a hidden love story..

Quite haunting in places - especially with a view to the outcome for Maria - hidden away she does indeed become "The Forgotten Seamstress" of the title and there are many intriguing aspects interwoven into the story. The descriptions of sewing and quilting are truly fascinating and now a subject I want to know more about - alongside that we have intriguing soundbites on psychiatric care and the institutions of Maria's time and place.

I loved both the women for different reasons - and the quilt is a whole character in and of itself - the three of them make for an excellent and evocative reading experience. Recommended for those who love Historical fiction and a past/present interwoven narrative with heart.

Happy Reading Folks!

Lindsay says

'Her history was held in the fabrics she'd used, the designs, and the appliqued figures.'

I read some super reviews of Liz Trenow's first novel, *The Last Telegram*, which I then bought though sadly have not yet read. I was therefore really pleased to have the chance to read this second novel; it was a very enjoyable, absorbing and well-paced read which I escaped into and became immersed in the lives that were described to me.

Maria Romano has grown up in an orphanage after the death of her mother when she was very young. Close friends with Nora there, the two girls are selected due to their needlework skills to go and live and work in a wonderful, large house for a very wealthy family. This turns out to be none other than Buckingham Palace and the royal family. Maria soon notices the handsome Prince of Wales, and he in turn is attracted by her beauty. He encourages her attentions and there is a passionate affair, then, during his lengthy absences, she

is left alone and bereft, and it's at this time she begins working on what will become a very special quilt; her needlework skills are her comfort, the thing she turns to in order to escape her situation; as she says, 'it was a way of escaping my loneliness.' She longs for the Prince to return, to rekindle their love, yet there is of course no future for the two of them together; there never could be. Events turn from bad to worse for Maria, and she is sent off and locked away in an asylum, where she experiences great despair and confusion, losing most of her sense of herself, until she again eventually finds solace in her needlework.

We meet Maria and here her story via the text of audio cassette recordings that were made when she was much older, seventy-four, when a lady was researching the history of mental health care. This was a clever device for telling Maria's story and I liked how this was incorporated into the novel, bringing her days back to life through her own voice. I was moved by her story, the intense joys and the terrible lows Maria experienced during her life, and by her mourning the loss of what her life might have been; 'how would my life be now, I wondered, had I never set eyes on him, nor he on me? What could I have made of myself, do you think...?'

Almost in the present day, we meet Caroline Meadows. At thirty-eight, she has just come out of a relationship and wonders whether she will find love again, is at a turning point in her career - working in a well-paid yet soulless job in London, she dreams of using her creative, artistic talents once again - and she cares for her elderly mum whose health is being to fail, sadly she is beginning to forget things. Whilst helping tidy her mum's home, they come across an item that was intended to be passed on to Caroline by her Gran Jean; a beautiful old patchwork quilt. Caroline starts to look in to the background of the quilt, and as she does so, more details emerge as to the provenance of it and the incredible story behind it, and she begins the journey following a fascinating trail into her past.

The past is vividly evoked through Maria's recollections of her memories and her life. It is sad to read how she isn't believed, her true past buried for so many years, her life reduced to being held a virtual prisoner in the hospital. The present day story is engaging too, a woman aware of her age, rethinking her life and looking back at what her ambitions were when she was younger, wondering if she can bring them to life before it is too late; the reader wondering if she can find the inspiration to do so.

The novel's title is apt; talented seamstress Maria does indeed seem to have been forgotten by history, until now. Liz Trenow has written an imaginative, touching, romantic, sad historical story and combined it very well with a modern day strand that slowly reveals the connections between past and present.

Carla says

Another book club book that I wouldn't have picked up if I wasn't in a book club. It started out quite good, a poor girl from an orphanage learning seamstress work at the orphanage from the nuns...then being employed outside the orphanage at...we later learn is a castle. It only gets worse from there.

The redeeming part of this story to me is the description of the state of the Mental Health System from the early 1900's. When there was no psychotropic drugs for those that were mentally ill. An age of people being committed and judged "insane", because they were poor, were "different", were placed in State hospitals because they could be kept against their will. The strait jackets, hoses used, solitary, injections, probably a whole bunch of experimentation going on. Surprisingly lobotomies weren't discussed.

Anyway, it was a good depiction of how fortunate we are now to have access to drug therapies, and community homes rather than state hospitals.

The rest of the story, particularly the end was way too unbelievable!

Certainly not a favourite of mine!

Dale Harcombe says

Four and a half stars.

This story revolves around a quilt, the woman who made it and the woman who discovers it in her mother's attic. Maria is the woman who made the quilt. She is a talented seamstress who ends up working for the royal family. There she attracts the interest of the Prince of Wales. But life certainly turns out a far cry from the way she daydreamed and expected it would. What happens to her is heartbreaking. Her one solace is the quilt she makes, which tells of her love and her life. Caroline Meadows, the woman who finds the quilt, is dealing with guilt over her mother while at the same time trying to uncover the story behind the quilt. Over time and after a few dead end leads, with a bit of help, she eventually finds out the truth.

I found this to be a very readable story. It grabbed me from the beginning. Even before I started the book though I had to smile at the comment some other library user had written in neat, careful writing. 'A very unusual book, quite entertaining really, I even wondered if t was true, I guess not.' That intrigued me to start with and so did the start of the book. It maintained my interest throughout. I did have to chuckle at the input from library users though. Later in the book another reader printed their comment about a line to do with eyelashes mentioned in the book. But what really got me was the word which had been almost completely inked over and obliterated on page 297. Of course being an absolute sticky beak I had to find out what word been so strongly crossed out. It was the f word. Obviously the other reader took exception to it. It is the only time the word is used throughout the book. So yes, I enjoyed the book immensely but also the little insights from other readers.

This is an interesting historical novel with a mystery at its heart. It deals with truth, lies, friendship, family and romance. All in all, it is a highly entertaining read. This is the first book I have read by this author but I would be keen to read more.

Melissa says

Beautifully written and hard to put down. Perfect for fans of Sarah Jio's novels. Felt like it ended too quickly though. I wanted more!

Marguerite Kaye says

Once again I seem to be in the minority of people whose heartstrings were not plucked by a book. I don't know if it's just my mood at the moment, but I've been reading an awful lot of books that were that dreaded thing, not bad, but not outstanding, and though I've enjoyed them-ish, I've found it difficult to say very much about them. Sadly, I found this was another one.

It's a good story. It's a very horrible story in a way, with a woman who was locked up in an asylum for being inconveniently pregnant and then pretty much has her life destroyed by experimental procedures. I know this happened, and it's horrific, but somehow in the context of this story I remained - well, dry-eyed. Am I hard? Party I know it was the fact that she got pregnant to the Prince of Wales. I totally had no sympathy for her there, and even though the situation was an enormous abuse of trust, I still couldn't feel sorry for her. Instead, I was repelled and while there is no way I would go so far as to say she deserved all she got, I did find her continued utter lack of resistance really irritating.

And in fact, this was the problem a bit with the modern protagonist, who was all 'woe is me' and not very much 'I'm going to sort myself out'. She drifted, and stuff happened, and lots of people helped her out, but she didn't do very much of helping herself. In fact, she came over to me as one of those people who has huge ambitions but expects them to land on a plate without much effort. She wanted to start up an interior design business, but all she did was make a few phone calls and call in a few favours. She started on a project and gave it up almost the next day. She thought she was fantastic, her friends thought she was fantastic, so why had she been festering away in a city job for so many years (and I don't buy the money thing).

Now, I'm making it sound as if I hated her and I didn't. It was a good story. I finished the book, even though I guessed the connections about half-way through. It held me, but it didn't stay with me. But as I said at the start, I'm very much in the minority here.

Antoinette says

4.5 Stars.

This was simply an enjoyable read. Totally lost myself in the story. Well written. Two story lines which were seamless and both interesting. The historical aspects of mental institutions and how easily a woman could be placed and detained against her will was very enlightening. How a quilt is put together and the story behind the quilt was well depicted. I loved this book. Will definitely read more by this author.

Megan Readinginthesunshine says

I was originally introduced to Liz Trenow's novels when I had the opportunity to read her first book *The Last Telegram*, which is a truly stunning book, so if you haven't read it already then please do! Knowing how much I'd enjoyed *The Last Telegram*, I was very much looking forward to *The Forgotten Seamstress*.

Caroline Meadows discovers a stunning quilt whilst she is clearing her mother's attic, and begins a search to find out the origins of this mysterious quilt, who made it? And what is the meaning of the message embroidered into the quilt? Many years earlier – Maria, an extraordinary seamstress, is employed to work for the Royal Family. Maria is young and attractive, and soon catches the attention of the Prince of Wales, and she is equally as intrigued by him. But this connection soon leads to trouble for Maria and her life takes a sudden unexpected turn. Will Caroline be able to find out about the quilt and discover what happened to Maria?

I LOVED this ever so much. The detail in this story is STUNNING. It is rich with description and the historical aspect is so very well written, I felt as though I had been transported back in time with Maria.

The concept of the quilt was fantastic. The descriptions were so beautiful and I could almost feel the textures of the quilt and I could picture it so vividly in my mind. I was so fascinated by the quilt and the history and meaning behind it, and I was hooked to the story wanting to read on to find out how the quilt came to be made, how it came to be in Caroline's mother's attic – I wanted to know everything about it, and then hold it close to me and never let go!

Maria was such a great character, even though we were reading things in the form of old cassette tapes and taped interviews, I felt very close to Maria and it was like I was sat next to her, hearing her talk about what had happened in her life. There are so many emotions that I went through whilst reading this. Maria's story is so intriguing, fascinating and heartbreaking at the same time. There came a point in the book where I went from shock to tears in my eyes to full-on sobbing in a matter of minutes, my heart ached so much for her.

Liz Trenow is SUCH a talented writer, she effortlessly weaves in many characters and connects their lives together to create a story that is truly exceptional. I would thoroughly recommend this.

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

A quilt with a history. A quilt containing royal cloth. A quilt spanning a number of years. A quilt that told a story.

This mysterious quilt, a seamstress, stolen patches of material, royalty, and Caroline tell the tale of the beautiful, lovingly handmade quilt that connects Maria the seamstress to Caroline the present day character through flashbacks and recorded tapes. You will LOVE the connection.

Maria's story began in an orphanage where she learned the skills of a seamstress and then moves to her being a seamstress in Buckingham Palace along with her friend, Nora. Both girls did impeccable stitching for the royal family.

In her spare time at the castle, Maria made a quilt from royal cloth and told the story of her life in every patch and stitch. Her quilt was handed down through the generations with mysteries and a story of its own.

Maria's life was changed for the worst, though, after the Prince summoned her to do some mending for him. This beautifully told story continued from that point and back to the present.

If you enjoy reading family history and the history of family heirlooms created by a past generation and found by the present generation, you will definitely enjoy THE FORGOTTEN SEAMSTRESS.

The writing is flawless, the characters are lovable and unforgettable, the storyline will definitely hold your interest until the last page. And...the last few pages will have you glued to each word. 5/5

This book was given to me free of charge by the publisher in return for an honest review.

Beth says

I had been through a very dry spell where no book was grabbing my attention. This book broke that dry spell. I really enjoyed how it was written and the characters. To me it was a book of hope and never giving up. A book that reinforced that while we never know where the road we are traveling will take us, you can find joy in the journey and be sure that at the end of the road you will be where you are suppose to be.

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

Liz Trenow's debut novel, *The Last Telegram*, made a significant impression on me. I found her ability to convey such poignant emotions against the tumultuous backdrop of WWII highly appealing and couldn't wait to read more of her work. As you might well imagine, that anticipation made waiting for *The Forgotten Seamstress* something of a challenge.

Now I can't say Maria's story struck the same chord as Lily's, but I feel that actually worked in Trenow's favor as this is an entirely different kind of narrative. *The Last Telegram* was a relatively linear piece, but *The Forgotten Seamstress* is as layered and diverse as the patchwork quilt around which the story unfolds.

Take for example, the novel's title character. Despite being the central figure of Trenow's narrative, the reader never meets Maria face to face. Her story comes to us piecemeal in a series of half-remembered family histories, personal letters and audio cassettes. One feels naturally distanced from this character, but the manner in which we come to understand the events of her life is remarkably intimate. The contrast that created, the inherent sentimentality of it, translates beautifully and becomes, I think, one of the strongest aspects of the entire narrative.

Another interesting facet of this piece is that it is a multigenerational story, a feature that allowed Trenow to explore evolving social norms in a very unique fashion. Separated by decades, Maria and Caroline share a very similar personal experience. The resulting parallel produces nice symmetry between both portions of the novel, but the variation highlighted by the side by side comparison of their situations is also quite fascinating.

Last, but certainly not least, I love the historic details Trenow worked into the fabric of this piece. Her foray into the world of twentieth century psychiatrics offered an unexpected twist that sparked my interest and encouraged me to research a topic I knew very little about. For me, this is the difference between good and great historic fiction. The good is entertaining, but the great inspires you to look between the lines of text and absorb those details that inspired author to put pen to paper in the first place.

A definite addition to my list of personal favorites, *The Forgotten Seamstress* is a moving tale of lost love, enduring hope, and renewed faith.

Eileen says

Oh wow, I loved this book so so so much. I loved the overall story itself, and the way the two story threads in the book were intertwined and eventually merged. The author also used an interesting way of telling the older story, via cassette tape interview. It really made you feel as if you were listening to Maria tell her tragic

tale.

The book is a love story, but also an historical mystery, and the plot is even royal-adjacent! What's not to love. What is interesting is that even though the resolution of the book was obvious from early on, I still enjoyed the journey getting to the end. I hardly wanted to put the book down; I loved every bit of reading this book. Very well done.

Definitely going to check out the author's first novel.

Kimberly says

You'll certainly want to keep a box of tissues close at hand while reading Liz Trenow's latest novel, *The Forgotten Seamstress*! Told from the perspective of two very different narrators from two completely different time periods, *The Forgotten Seamstress*, is a story of love, loss, and self-discovery that immediately captures the reader's heart and marks the beginning of an unforgettable emotional journey. Trenow has certainly proven herself to be a very talented writer of historical fiction and one who has done her research extremely well. Throughout, the novel slips back and forth between the past and present, and is done so with such smoothness and natural grace that it all blends together very well and not once did it feel "choppy" or disconnected from the novel as whole in any way...brilliantly written! The characters are extremely well-developed and I felt as though each were a life-long acquaintance. But ultimately, it's Maria's story that tugged on my heart and left me with tears in my eyes on more than one occasion. As she tells her story from the confines of a mental institution, I questioned her reliability as a narrator. Is she telling the truth or are these just the delusional fantasies of a very unstable woman? Caroline's determination not only unravels the mysteries of Maria's quilt but also of Maria's life; a life that left me heart-broken and reaching for a tissue. *The Forgotten Seamstress*, would make an amazing book group selection and is accompanied by several questions for discussion as well. An amazing story and one that will not be soon forgotten....FIVE STARS!
